

## Chapter 4: Water pathways

To understand the ongoing import of localized social relations enabled through and with water, I now turn to a consideration of specific subterranean pathways which configure relations between groups in or across particular zones in this region. These pathways also give us insights into both regional settlement and subsequent localised dispersal patterns. They are pertinent to processes of social and political identity formation and integration and enable some understanding of power and local governance configurations across time and space. It is, I will argue, these relational, dynamic and opaque watery pathways which create a thoroughly material basis for engagements between people, ancestral spirits and place. This actual and metaphorical fluidity of movement highlights the multiple life giving qualities of springs and the dependencies of people on them.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the mythic narratives which recount the movements and settlement stories of people across the landscape prioritise relationships—their making, severance or continuance—over linear time. As these relationships change they may also recalibrate the mythscape making space for new connections and eliding others in their re-configurations of socio-political power. In these dynamic relational narratives aspects of ancestral names will usually be retained (if secreted and expanded upon) though time, while the particular origins, characteristics and actions of these same ancestral protagonists may change. For example, many of the stories relating to the origins of Baucau town revolve around the area's springs and the actions of three brothers named Tai Loi, Leki Loi and Wono Loi (see also Correia 1935; Spillett 1999). In these tellings, which were first recorded in the early twentieth century, the cultural origins and historical trajectory of the three brothers changes according to the time period of the telling as well as the socio-political locatedness of the teller(s).

Along with three brothers, another constant trope is that of people travelling through underground waters to emerge and make connections with other communities. These stories, which are found across the region, will usually have as their narrative base a protagonist male who is led to a previously unknown water source by an animal (usually a dog) and a trail of ash.

Upon entering the subterranean waters the protagonist will have encounters with trickster eels and pythons which guard the world below. After these misadventures the protagonist will emerge in the new locality where he will be found by a local woman who he later marries. This underground journey often connects the two communities in ongoing ritual exchange relations. In contrast to the three brothers' stories, I have no written sources with which to compare the present day tellings of these subterranean narratives. However, research carried out by Fox on the island of Roti (to the immediate west of island Timor) shows that similar local 'histories' about the discovery of springs (and people's subsequent rights to that water) are subject to the vagaries of time and social situatedness. Demonstrating that such 'true tales' or historical narratives are 'intended to communicate the present as well as the past', Fox concludes that ironically this category of tales are more unstable than plain (ahistorical) tales (Fox 1980: 65). Hence while various tropes and motifs in these historical narratives remain constant through time (male ancestors, dogs, ash, tricksters), the sequencing of events or particular relationships between protagonists shifts through time to reflect dynamic socio-political relations.

It is both this ongoing flow of water and the flow of words between people that gives these narratives their currency and their magic. Recounting these mytho-historical narratives in written form risks flattening them out and decontextualising them from their unique specificities of time, place, teller and audience (Gow 2001). To avoid this, I carefully draw out both the entangled historical contexts and the socio-ecologically located 'streams of talk' (Gow 2001: 36) that characterize these multiple tellings and retellings and their present day meaning and significance.

### **The descent: The story of Wani Uma and their water**

While, as we saw in chapter two, the founder of the central Wai Lewa spring in Baucau town descended from Mundo Perdido (referred to occasionally on the coast as Wai Ba'i), we are not told in this story if this ancestor arrived to an empty or already occupied land. Such details are provided in the stories told by the Waima'a speaking elders of Wani Uma, a sacred house complex (see Figure 4.1) and sub-village in the present day village of Caibada (Waima'a), a few kilometres to the north west of central Baucau (see Map 4.1). When their ancestors arrived in this

coastal region the land, they say, was bereft of people. It was also, as in the Wai Lewa narrative, an area largely bereft of surface water.<sup>1</sup> The Wani Uma elders recount that when the earth was still dark, clan groups moved down into the region from the mountains of Matebian. These people came in three main waves over an unspecified time period (to specify this is forbidden (*lulik*)). The first two waves came down via rivers and travelled along the coast west to Baucau. The third wave came down by travelling via the central zone (Mau Koi Mako Leki) via the Mundo Perdido range (see Map 2.1). In each of these waves particular clan groups carried with them water in bamboo lengths drawn from their origin springs in the mountains. Upon arrival at their chosen settlement site, this water was ritually poured into the ground (usually in places with an extant, if very meagre, water source) and a powerful spring would then emerge from the ground.

The story told to me by Joao Ximenes (Ossu Watu), the Wani Uma ‘historian of the light’, is summarised below:

Wani Uma came from the peaks of Matebian. This land here was wild. We were the first to arrive, there were no people living here. The clan of Watu Naru came first, together with Boile Mauduku. These houses have three parts—the older house, the middle house and the youngest house. It is always like this.

These first clans of Wani Uma left their origin houses at Afalokai [near to Baguia below the eastern peaks of Matebian]. They came together with Wai Luo and Wai Hau [the first peoples of Caisidu. In other accounts Wai Luo are said to have arrived from Alor].

Wani Uma came in three main stages. Each major house group travelled together with their own. Originally we followed the rivers to the coast but in the third stage people came through the central corridor. Wani Uma’s path has branched overtime from Afalokai, south to Watu Carabau, west to Watu Lari and then north to Waukau [Baucau]. Later a branch went from Waukau to the island of Atauru.

Our spring water was brought with us from Matebian. We carried it here and established springs here. Wai Hau brought the source water for many of our springs. They put it in bamboo and carried it down where they threw it on the ground. Then they dug the ground and recited sacred words and a permanent water source appeared. There were three groups that carried water with them.

Much later another group came from the south from Luca, they also went via Illi Manu [a mountain range to the west] and brought water with them from there. This spring is called Wai Naha. There is also a spring called Wai Luca [nestled beside the original Wani Uma sacred house complex].

In the stories of Wani Uma (as well as those of other clans across the region), subsequent dispersals from those living together in the new settlements were triggered by intra-group or clan conflict (usually between older and younger brothers). These disputes resulted in new settlements being founded elsewhere and in many cases those that moved out took with them specific clan sacra and/or water sources:

There is a spring on Atauro [the island opposite Dili] called We Krang. There was a dispute between two brothers from Wani Uma. The younger was coming to participate in a ceremony, but then he and his group saw the smoke rising from the sacred fire at the sacred house complex and they knew their kin had decided to carry out the ritual without them. They decided they must leave. They fashioned a canoe and set off with a bamboo length full of water and settled on Atauro. This water became a spring on Atauro called We Krang.

Wai Luo and Wai Hau settled at Bundura [near the present day settlement of Caisidu]. That is their place. They share the custodianship of area's *luli* (W: sacred, forbidden) complex with Watu Naru. Boile Mauduku was originally together with them, but after a dispute over buffalo they set off on their own and made their own *luli*. Together these groups created their sacred 'rock and tree' (ancestral offering places) and called the names of the land and the waters and made them sacred. They built their sacred houses

by the springs to make the water sacred (*luli*) and ensure the continuation of a permanent water supply.

While their ancestors augmented these water sources with their own ancestral waters from the peaks of Matebian, it is also said that subterranean waters flow like rivers through the area and originate from Mundo Perdido. Each of these flows have with their own particular paths:

Baucau's water comes from Wai Lia Wai Lobi [the Wai Lia Bere complex on the Baucau plateau]. Its source is Mundo Perdido. Wani Uma's water also comes from Mundo Perdido. Through this path we receive a little water here, but most of it is lost to the sea. The water from Matebian goes to the south coast. Both mountains give water. But it was the water that was brought from Matebian that we 'planted and grew' (W: *diku*) here.

It is clear then that there are multiple material-symbolic associations at work in these accounts, each layered with the meaning derived from specific historical contexts. While water is said to circulate underground between the mountains of Matebian and Mundo Perdido and the sea, where this water emerges to form springs is dependent on the connections between in-migrating groups of people and their origin spring or *hun* (trunk). Water from ancestral origin springs is known as the 'mother water' (*bee inan* or main source of water), and it is this water that is carried with migrating groups to new places. When it is subsequently thrown onto the ground, it is its ancestral essence of this 'mother water' which connects with the subterranean sea or 'other world'. Accessing its origins in this 'other world', the 'mother water' draws forth a 'child' spring to the new location. The spirit agents of this 'other world' are typically eels and great snakes and together it is they who forge the subterranean pathways between mother and child springs.

### **The expansionary presence of Luca**

As we have seen in chapter two, in spring narratives across the region the ritual-politico kingdom of Luca is repeatedly reported as the 'mother' or power source for many springs. However, in

these watery narrative journeys, Luca's influence over or creation of specific springs is usually subsequent to earlier ancestral movements of both people and water. During this earlier time, house specific ancestral sacra also emerged. As people (and water) spread out across the region settling in new places and inter-marrying, the sacra connected to particular centres of ritual power also spread through the region. As we have seen above, all these waters are understood as being connected to the 'other world', a world often identified with the sea. Yet it was because of Luca's pre-eminent relationship with this other world of the sea that it emerged as the ritual centre of the eastern region of the island (see chapter two). During this period it was sacra (such as betel leaves and gold) and *lulik* waters drawn from the springs of Luca which gave its emissaries the right to (re)create new centres of power. Dominion was frequently established in localities now associated with lush spring groves and irrigated rice production (see Figure 4.2).

This sequence of events is also suggested in changes in the 'origin' and 'conquest narratives' told about present day Baucau, a rich spring grove with hundreds of irrigated rice terraces. In the early twentieth century Armando Pinto Correia (1935: 126-128), the famous Portuguese administrator of Baucau district, recorded an origin story for Baucau linked to three sons of the local patriarch. In this narrative, the patriarch divides the area between his three sons named Wono Loi, Tai Loi and Leki Loi and the sons found the town's present day villages of Bahu (Wabubo), Caibada and Tirilolo respectively (see Map 4.1). Yet by the 1980s when the historian Peter Spillett visited Baucau, in the accounts he heard these same three brothers had transformed into invaders from the south (Spillett 1999: 275).<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile in the nearby village of Buruma, these same three brothers were characterised as founding ancestors of the coastal region who had subsequently set out across the north sea to the island of Roma. One of them, Loi Leki, later returned to Buruma on the back of a crocodile (Spillett 1999: 275; see also chapter 3). In the course of my own research, I have been told versions of all of these stories. While confusing for an ethnographer in search of historical insight, what became clear to me over time was that the trope of these three named brothers, the one constant in all of these stories, enabled all tellers to connect people, differentiate groups and shift hierarchical relations across great distances and time periods. What was being prioritised was the forging of dynamic relationships.

Like Peter Spillett, Correia (1935: 129-133) was also told a story of the conquest of Baucau. However, his story features three un-named brothers from Makadiki in Viqueque on the southern side of the central ranges. These brothers, who lived by a spring, came into dispute and two of them migrated away in search of a new home and spring. As they travelled north across the landscape others joined their party. They arrived in the north and found Baucau's (now) six villages at war with each other (two against four). These southern newcomers were fierce warriors and because of this they were asked to join one of warring parties. The southern warriors joined the battle as requested and the war was won. While the southerner's ferocious battle tactics shocked their new allies, the locals were pleased with the victory and asked the newcomers what they sought in return. Their reply was that they only sought the rights to drink the waters of the region. The right was granted and a victory party was held. However, during these festivities the local (presumably Waima'a speaking) inhabitants were tricked by the southerners into participating in a ritual during which iron spikes (brought from the south) were plunged into their heads. With the local leadership now dead, the southern newcomers settled in to rule the region.

The similarities and differences between the stories told firstly to Correia (1935) and later to Spillett (1999) are perhaps best explained by the fact that by the 1980s much had changed in Baucau. The in-migration of many Makasae speakers (discussed below) meant that many of the original Waima'a speaking houses of the area had either left the region or had, by then, long inter-married with Makasae speakers. In one of these origin narratives relayed to Spillett (1999: 270), the first king of Baucau was said to be a Makasae man named We Lewa who had three sons Tirilolo, Bahu and Caibada (although a fourth brother Buruma is also mentioned). This king was killed by a warrior from Viqueque whose own sons then divided up the area between themselves. In another conquest narrative told to Spillett, a party of 600 invaders attacked the area led by three brothers from Luca whose names were Tai Loi, Leki Loi and Wono Loi (Spillett 1999: 270-272). To try to repel these attacks the local (presumably in this version Makasae) inhabitants of Baucau sought the assistance of a group of 80 neighbouring newcomers who hailed from the Waima'a speaking area of Vemasse (and whose leader's names were Bahu, Caibada and Tirilolo). These southern invaders defeat the Waima'a newcomers, killing their

leaders and driving them out. After this the brothers from Luca took control of the water supply (from the extant Makasae rulers), married with local women and acquired livestock.

While all these trans-generational accounts of origin and conquest have a stable core of three brothers, they vary according to the situatedness of the teller and the time period of the telling. In 2010, the people of Wani Uma also relayed to me their own story of the arrival in Baucau of three brothers named Wono Loi, Tai Loi and Leki Loi. These arrivals occurred in a period referred to as '*tempu monarchia*' ('the time of the monarchy', which I take as referring to the rise of Luca's expansionary power linked to the Portuguese crown). Following the arrival of these brothers, changes in locally configured rights to land and water meant that they were forced to 'buy' (*sosa*) their own water through ritual and land exchange. While this period will be explored in detail in chapter six, the people of Wani Uma characterise their ancestors at this time as 'stupid people' with no comprehension of politics. As a result they simply gave away a significant amount of their rice fields and rights to water to the newcomers. It is said the invaders came and settled by the main water source of Wai Lewa in Baucau, eventually expanding extant irrigation canals and taking control of the water.

Meanwhile, in Baucau the people descended from the ancient village of Boile (now a part of the village of Bahu) trace their lineage back to the ancestor buried in the spring of Wai Lewa. While Boile is said to have descended from the central ranges, the first group of arrivals sojourned westwards to Wai Cuha near Vemasse before later returning to settle at the Wai Lewa spring (see Map 4.1). The name Boile is derived from the Waima'a and Makasae verb '*boi*', the practice of gathering together in a circle to dance and sing and 'make place' (*le* is said to derive from the Waima'a *le'he* meaning 'a place in the spring groves').

According to Boile elders, the pre-eminent origin house of Baucau's central spring complex is the house of Boile Komu (W: *komu*=to gather together) (see Figure 4.3). One of the elders of Boile Komu explained to me that in the beginning their ancestors came from the central ranges:

They came down in groups, everyone around the same time. Some descended to Laga, some went to the female sea, some to the male sea, some went to the west. Today we call one of these mountains Matebian, ‘the mountain of spirits’, because our ancestors are buried there. It is also called Umu Rafa in Makasae. Across Timor some of us say we are descended from eels, others say they are from crocodiles. It is like this. The ancestors of Boile Komu gave to us the sacred identity of eels and civet cats. These we can not eat. All of Ana Ulu (the eldest brother houses of the village of Bahu) are descended from Loilau Katilau (civet cat and eel respectively). This is what belongs to Liurai and Resirai<sup>3</sup> (the ancestors who descended from the peaks of Matebian).

### **Emergence and Division: The house of Loi Leki**

As noted above, overtime many of the original Waima’a speaking houses of Baucau either departed the area or inter-married with Makasae speakers. This historical shift is also evident in the narratives associated with the house of Loi Leki, a once prominent Waima’a speaking house in the spring grove and village of Wailili (ten kilometers south of Baucau) (see Figure 4.2). Taken as a whole these stories recount how in ancestral times people emerged out of springs ruling themselves, until later coming under the rule of Luca and finally intermarry with incoming Makasae speakers<sup>4</sup>. Yet even when these ‘houses’ now pre-dominantly speak Makasae, in the realm of *lulik* an earlier cultural and linguistic footprint is acknowledged as remaining in their ritual language and practices. This suite of stories, which were told to me by the elders of houses descended from the origin house of Loi Leki are glossed below.

In a ‘plain tale’ of their ancestors, a tale largely devoid of the specificities of place or time (Fox 1980), one elder recounts how in the beginning a woman ancestor of the house of Loi Leki emerged from the earth below and turned herself into a beautiful deer. Later, a man descended from the sky and married this deer which then transformed back into a woman. As a result of such connections the descendents of the house of Loi Leki continue to worship wild animals. An elder from another branch house tells how, in the dark earth period, each night eels would emerge from a spring called Wai Lakulo and turn themselves into civet cats feasting on the fruits

of the land. By morning they would return to the spring as eels. Eventually when the first people of the house of Loi Leki also emerged from the waters of Wai Lakulo, their preeminent ancestral spirit or *dai* was both the eel and the great snake, another manifestation of the eel. In past times, it is said these eels would emerge from the spring and change into people, with ears like civet cats, or else they might change into snakes.

Other stories told by the descendents of the origin house of Loi Leki tell about the coming of Luca. In the beginning the various origin houses of Wailili<sup>5</sup> (which would later come together with others under the rule of Uma Medai from Luca) comprised only one house, Loi Leki. These descendent houses are still considered the mother-father clans of the area (M: *ina-bobo*) and have ritual preeminence as custodians of Wailili's spring groves, land and waters. However, their political pre-eminence was overthrown at some point by the arrival of a man from the kingdom of Luca. Denied marriage with a local woman, this man returned to Luca to collect a bamboo length of water. On his arrival back to Wailili he threw this water on the ground by the woman's family home. This triggered an eruption of subterranean waters which swallowed the hamlet in its entirety, drowning the people and creating a new spring known as Ira Luca<sup>6</sup>. This man, Dukai from Luca, is characterized in ritual verse as seeking to control everything from the mountains to the sea.

### **The making of relationships: The story of Wai Lia**

Meanwhile in present day Baucau, the spring complex surrounding the founding Wai Lewa spring is now known as Wai Lia (W: 'cave water') (see Map 4.1). The story of this spring complex is both connected to the story of Wai Lewa and a more 'recent' story. As we shall see, over time the narratives and ritual practices connected to this spring complex have also undergone significant change. At their core, however, these stories function to connect through sacred relationship disparate and changing agricultural communities from across the Baucau plateau and marine terrace zone. One of these communities is Wailili.

The more ‘recent’ story of the Wai Lia spring, the so named headspring in the complex now also known as Wai Lia<sup>7</sup>, gave the original impetus to my research on water in Baucau (see preface). While it continues to be a poignant story demonstrating the connectedness of sacred houses and whole communities through spring complexes and subterranean water pathways, it has also turned out to be a far less straightforward tale than I originally thought (see Palmer 2010). But this is to jump ahead of myself. First I need to tell the story of the Wai Lia spring as told by senior ritual leaders (*lia na'in*) of the spring connected communities.

While I have been told a number of versions of this narrative, taken as a whole what they highlight is the way in which the management of this water source is intimately embedded in the most important organising principle of Timorese social life: the marriage exchange between fertility takers and fertility givers (*fetosaa omane*) and older sibling–younger sibling (*maun–alin*, *bin-alin*) traditions. A man from the parent water source on the drylands of the Baucau plateau marries a woman from the Wai Lia spring grove in Baucau, creating an ongoing asymmetrical ritual and exchange relationship between the peoples from the two areas and linking together their water resources. This actual and symbolic marriage ensures a generative inter-generational exchange of gifts and counter-gifts throughout the (agricultural) ritual cycle of both communities, who in this case are linked not so much by specific houses but by specific waters. Hence in order to ensure the ongoing gift of fertility and life giving (a plentiful supply of water, crops, animals and children), ceremonies must be carried out at both water sources. The people of the four Baucau villages must provide these sacrifices (and as we will see in chapter six, annual tribute) to their water’s *hun* (trunk, origin, source) and the custodians of the water from the plateau must also carry out their own ceremonies. Each of the versions I have heard of this story varies in relation to the genealogies and marriage arrangements of the protagonists as well as the time scale involved (this is discussed to some extent below and in chapter six). What follows is a summary of one account told to me early in my research by Major Ko’o Raku, the *lia na'in* of Bahu village:

Wai Lia spring has its *fu* [M: trunk, origin, source] on the Baucau plateau near a place called Darasula [see Map 4.1]. In the beginning there were two brothers there tending

buffaloes. One day they were hungry so they decided to dig, cook and eat some yams. But then they were very thirsty. While they were sitting down wondering where they could get water they remembered the day when their dogs went missing and came back all wet. They wanted to know where the dogs got this water. So they made a plan. They cooked some more yams to give to the dogs, but before they gave them to the dogs they made a bamboo collar—tied with string—for one of the dog's neck. Inside the hollow piece of bamboo they placed ash from the fire and made a small hole in the bamboo. Then they gave the yams to the dogs to eat. The dogs were thirsty and headed off. In about one hour they returned all wet. Now the brothers had a way to find the water. They followed the ash that had trickled from the bamboo collar until they came to a big cave with water inside. They both went down into the cave and drew water, which they carried back out of the cave to drink.

After this they were still thirsty so the younger brother then went down again to fetch water. Inside the cave there were two places to draw water. On one side was a big cave; on the other side was a small cave. From the large opening the younger brother could hear the water flowing very loudly. He went in to have a look at what was making such a loud noise and suddenly he fell down into the water. He was under water a long time [in other versions this is specified to be a period of seven days and seven nights during which time he encountered two eels, one white and one black/yellow. Both offered to help him find his way out. He chose to go with the white eel] and eventually he emerged in the still water of another cave—Wai Lia in Baucau [if he had chosen the black eel he would have followed the waters underground path to the sea (the 'other world') and never re-emerged in this world again]<sup>8</sup>. During his long journey he had eaten his clothes [the white eel had warned him that if he had eaten the fruits of the gardens he encountered under the water he would never have emerged from that world]. Arriving in the spring waters of Wai Lia he was now naked, and so he decided to stay there beneath the surface and wait.

Then to the spring came two women, the daughters of a woman from Bahu. The older sister entered the cave and drew water from a very clean source. The man from Darasula

was crouching beneath the surface and saw this woman drawing water but decided not to do anything. Then the younger sister came in to draw water, but when she exited the spring she saw that in contrast to her older sister the water she had drawn was dirty. She drew water two more times and each time it was dirty. ‘What is making my water dirty’?, she thought with frustration. She looked down into the water and beneath it she made out a naked man. The naked man explained: ‘I am from the savanna; I was tending buffalo there when I was thirsty and went down into a cave to draw water. Then I somehow ended up here.’ ‘But what do you want?’ asked the women. ‘Could you go and ask your brothers to bring me some clothes to wear?’ asked the man. So the women went to ask their older brothers to take the man a *tais* [woven cloth] to wear. They did this and he got dressed in the water.

When he came out of the water the two sisters and their older brother who had brought the *tais* were still there. It was decided that the younger sister would now marry this man. So they got married and lived together at the woman’s home and they had a child together. And then the woman said, ‘Now it is time for us to go to try to find your place so I can see where you come from. Do you still have family there, I wonder?’ So they set off to look for this place, telling his story along the way and asking people if they knew of his brother and if he was still alive. Eventually they found some of his possessions hanging in a tree: his carry basket, cotton spinning stick, spear and digging stick. ‘This is the place where I was tending buffaloes the day I became lost’, he said. He got down his possessions and they kept walking.

They kept asking people they met about his brother and finally one man responded: ‘Yes, it is me, I am your older brother. I thought you were lost forever.’ The two hugged each other and cried together. The older brother explained that now as the younger brother had returned to his *fuu* [M: trunk/origin], they would now make a sacred house here at this place by the cave with water. The house was needed so that offerings could be made to the water and the story would not be forgotten. ‘When the time comes for us to make offerings to give thanks to the water which we both found together, the people from

Bahu, Caibada, Buruma, Tirilolo [the four villages in Baucau that receive water from Wai Lia] must also come together to kill goats, buffalo, pigs and chickens and then also bring some of them here for us to make our offerings at Darasula.’ ‘You must also make a sacred house at Wai Lia,’ said the older brother. This was so the four villages could also make the same collective offerings at Wai Lia spring in Baucau.

After this they made their sacred houses in both places so they could remember this story and give thanks to the water. Each year the local population would carry out ceremonies so that the two springs would never be dry. This meant that they could make fields and plant rice and have plenty to eat.

However, eventually the people from the four villages sharing the water from Wai Lia forgot to make their sacrifices. The water stopped flowing and many animals, crops and trees began to die. The people from Baucau went to the custodians of the water on the plateau and asked, ‘Why is our water dry?’ The custodians of the water explained the reason: ‘You have not been making the sacrifices and you need to start doing this again.’ So the people in Baucau started to make the required sacrifices again and after this their rice could grow again<sup>9</sup>.

This story is emblematic of the ways in which place and place making in the region is both ‘aquatically conceived’ (cf. Jennaway 2008: 26) and aquatically enabled. It also shows how caves, springs and their water flows constitute a domain of ritual and spiritual ecology which continue to make and connect water sharing communities. The broader Wai Lia complex in Baucau town is in fact made up of seven inter-related springs which includes the origin spring of Wai Lewa. The water from this complex feeds the irrigation channels running east and west to rice fields of the villages of Bahu, Caibada, Tirilolo and Buruma. The basis for the sharing of this irrigation water is fact that these villages are in a sibling relationship, as established in the (wildly divergent) stories of the three brothers Wono Loi, Tai Loi and Leki Loi. As such the specific custodians of the water and the ritual leaders of these villages (particularly Bahu, Caibada and Tirilolo), are expected to carry out the ceremonies required to properly manage the

springs in the complex. These sacrificial processes—known in Tetun as *'fo han'* (feeding)—involve small-scale annual sacrifices to ensure that the irrigation waters travel down the man-made water channels to the fields below. They also involve the larger collective seven-yearly ceremonies (*'tinan hitu dala ida'*) which involve all the water-sharing communities over a period of seven days. In both ceremonies, ritual experts will call forth and commune with the sacred eels that inhabited the springs. While the seven yearly ceremonies have been highly irregular in recent times (this is discussed in chapter six and seven), they are considered critical community events involving much communal singing and dancing (*tebe*).

The cave on the plateau which is said to feed the flow of water to Wai Lia in Baucau, is known in Makasae as Wai Lia Bere ('the great Wai Lia') and similarly in Waima'a as Wai Lia Oli ('the great Wai Lia'). This cave is also understood to be a gateway or 'door' for water flowing to other springs in the region, and as such is considered a critical source for springs across the marine terrace zone (see Map 4.2 for a cartographic representation of this knowledge). Underwater springs in the ocean are believed to be the final exit points for much of this subterranean water.

### **Custodians of the savanna: Wai Lia Bere and Wai Lia Mata**

The ritual custodians of the Wai Lia Bere spring on the Baucau plateau are the Makasae speaking house of Ledatame Ikun (see Figure 4.4). They are a plains people, also characterized by Major Ko'o Raku as being intermarried with Butu migrations from the peaks of Matebian (see chapter 3). During water increase rituals carried out at Wai Lia Bere the sacrifices of larger animals (buffalo, goats) will take place outside the entrance to Wai Lia Bere, while the sacrifice of additional smaller animals takes place at Wai Lia Bere's *wii*, or wife, a cave water source known as Wai Lia Mata (M: *mata*=small) which is located two kilometres away. While the main ceremony and sacrifice is carried out above ground (see Figure 4.5), a portion of the cooked meat and rice will be placed on plates fashioned out of bamboo lengths and carried by ritual leaders down into the water cave where it is left on a ledge as an offering to the *ira gauhaa* ('custodians of the water') who are manifest as pythons (as discussed in chapter two).

As a past and present focal point for the coastal region water increase ceremonies, the Wai Lia Bere and Wai Lia Mata cave springs are critical to the organization of a regional water ritual ecology. Yet the sub-village of Darasula (M: ‘the edge of the savanna’) in general and Darasula’s Ledatame Ikun sacred house have only a few hectares of wet-rice cultivation themselves. Irrigated by a small seasonal spring called Wai Lobi these rice fields are known as the ‘plate’ (M: *ra’u*) which feeds the ancestors of the Ledatame sacred house. With their water predominantly subterranean, the Waima’a and Makasae speaking peoples of Darasula are largely dryland agriculturalists of rice, peanuts and other vegetables. In addition to tending candlenut plantations they also graze many livestock across their unfenced lands. According to the Ledatame ritual custodians of the water, one of the conditions of the sacred oath between the Ledatame ancestors and those from other communities connected through ‘downstream’ subterranean water flows, is that these latter communities can only farm the very edges of escarpment zone and the marine terraces below it. As the underground water from the plateau descends to feed and make fertile the lush spring groves of the marine terrace zone, this sacred agreement ensures that the coastal populations refrain from grazing their livestock on the savanna proper (see Figure 4.6). The savanna is the domain of dryland agriculturalists of Darasula and surrounds.

### **Complicating things: Wai Lili-Wai Wai and Wai Husu-Wai Lewa**

Yet the story of this ritual ecological relationship forged through water gets more complicated the further one probes into these regional narratives. While I was used to hearing what I imagined were disparate or contested accounts of people’s relations to particular springs, it later became clear to me that what they also reflected were changes through time and socio-historical circumstance. Hence a story which is widely asserted to precede the current narrative of Wai Lia, is based on the relationship between two rice growing communities and also contains similar assertions of an underground journey. These communities in this story are those connected to the spring groves of Wai Husu-Wai Lewa (present day Baucau) and Wai Lili-Wai Wa (present day Wailili) (see Map 4.1).

Prior to the version of the Wai Lia narrative relayed above, the ritual centres of Baucau and Wailili had also been linked together in a ritually binding fertility-giver and fertility-taker relationship. The catalyst for this relationship was the accidental fall of a son of Wailili (from the house of Loi Leki) into a cave containing water. Following this he travelled through the underground waters emerging, as we have seen above, at Wai Lia spring. In this account the connections forged by this event extended into networks much denser than simply the Ledatame Ikun sacred house in Darasula. Ledatame is in fact a branch house of Loi Leki and this earlier story relates to a time when the origin house of Loi Leki was still at the peak of its ritual and political power in the village of Wailili.

In this story, after the marriage of a son of Wailili to a daughter of Bahu, other daughters of Bahu also began marrying into the houses of Wailili. The two spring complexes and ritual centres known respectively as Wai Lili-Wai Wa and Wai Husu-Wai Lewa became focal points for collective post-harvest rice rituals with each centre expected to actively participate in the rituals of the other. Overtime as these relations entrenched themselves, the two ritual centres held a ceremony in which they exchanged the respective ancestral names of their spring complexes.<sup>10</sup> This exchange gave each spring community the right to invoke each other's ancestral names to harness their power and protective blessing in community rituals. This relationship then transformed into a shared approach to the regional ritual regulation of land and resources and the two centres began gathering at each other's spring complexes for major seven yearly ceremonies. At these ceremonies it was the Baucau villages' responsibility as fertility-givers to contribute rice and pigs. Buffalo and goats were expected as the contribution from the fertility-takers of Wailili. The purpose of these ceremonies was to cement the ties between the centres, maintain peaceful relations, and respect each other's boundaries, fields, produce and livestock. Today this type of ritual relationship is glossed as *tara bandu* (see chapter 7).

Yet it was not long after their ancestor had travelled through the water to Wai Lia, that a now unknown (or undisclosed) dispute divided the house of Loi Leki, a division that continues to this day. While subsequently the political power of the various houses of Loi Leki became subservient to the dominion of Luca, in later periods these houses divided again between

northern and southern zones known as Fatumaka Leten and Fatumaka Kraik (this was also to become the key colonial administrative division of the former Wailili kingdom in the nineteenth century). By this period, the houses of Wailili had also become places for the in-migration of Makasae speaking houses from the Matebian foothills. Bringing with them ‘knowledge of fire’ and stores of gold, from these early beginnings the Makasae language spread throughout the region of Fatumaka.<sup>11</sup> By the twentieth century as Portuguese colonial control increased and the Catholic Church installed a grotto by the spring of Wai Lakulo, Wailili had diminished as a centre of ritual power. By the end of the World War Two Japanese occupation, the ritual relationship between the rice growing villages of Baucau and Wailili was in disrepair.

Yet throughout this time the number of branch houses derivative of Loi Leki had grown and they had spread throughout the region to establish sacred houses elsewhere, including on the savanna of the Baucau plateau. Sometime during this migration from the spring groves of Wailili to the drylands of the plateau, the most recent version of the connection between Wai Husu-Wai Lewa and Wai Lili-Wai Wa emerged: this time configured through the connection between Wai Lia and Wai Lia Bere (see chapter six for more)<sup>12</sup>.

While the stories associated with the Wai Lia spring in Baucau differ slightly, all feature underground water channels which carry with them men from the plateau who are received by and marry women from the coastal zone. The purpose of all these stories is to make connections and shared governance relations between people. In yet another story relating to this period, Augusto do Rosario Xavier (Anu Watu), an elder from the Loi Leki branch house of Neligia in Wailili tells the story of the near demise of the house of Loi Leki. At an unspecified time when all that remained of the house was one childless couple<sup>13</sup>, a man suddenly descended [from where is not specified] to live with them and later the elderly woman produced a child. When this child reached adulthood it was he who discovered, fell into and travelled through the underground water to Wai Lia. One of his names was Belu Mau (‘my friend Mau’, *mau* can also refer to brother) meaning to makes friends with people. This man, asserts Major Ko’o Raku, was a descendent of the (in-marrying) Butu generation.

In this connection between Wai Lili-Wai Wa and Wai Husu-Wai Lewa, the latter are represented by the settlements of Bahu, Tirilolo, Caibada, Buruma, and by some accounts Bucoli (see Map 4.1). In these stories of the relation between the two regions, the house of Boile Komu is said by Major Ko'o Raku to be one of parent houses of Wai Lewa<sup>14</sup>. The other, as we will see below, was a house connected to the ancestors of the people of Tirilolo, a group who now live largely in Caisidu.

### **The exodus: The movement to Caisidu**

As Makasae speaking clans became increasingly widespread in the eastern part of the marine terrace zone, around central Baucau a new wave of population shifts began to occur. In Bahu there is a story of a snake entering the village in the guise of a pale skinned man (we can assume that this is a son of Luca). He impregnates a woman who produces two sons. When these human offspring find out that their father is a snake they are incensed and the father offers his own reptilian body to them. In death his body turns to gold<sup>15</sup>. This gold then gives the sons the powerful basis from which to marry and extend their local rule. However, later the people from the powerful Makasae speaking houses of Afagua near Wailili steal this golden sacra from the people of Bahu. These incursions lead to a war at the frontier of the two ritual centres, during which time both Boile Komu and Luca are defeated.

Around five generations ago, it is said that many of the original Waima'a speaking peoples of Teolale [W:'inside the gully'] in Tirilolo were compelled to move out of the area as a result of the increasing presence of Makasae newcomers. While these Waima'a houses moved westward as far as Vemasse, they finally returned to settle in the barren plateau of Caisidu near Bundura [Ponte Bondura] (see Map 4.1). In Caisidu they were welcomed by the origin clans of Wai Hau and Wai Luo (the mother-father clans of the area or *woi-ba'a* in Waima'a). As the ritual custodians of the land and resources, these mother-father clans carried out rituals and initiated the newcomers into the traditions of the area. Even in the independence era, the people of Caisidu assert that they defer to Wai Hau and Wai Luo in all rituals or dispute mediation that concerns the land, water or other natural resources in the area (but see also conclusion).

Meanwhile the exiled population of Teolale, continue five generations on to return each year from Caisidu to Baucau to carry out ancestral rituals at the spring of Wai Lewa. They also descend to another spring, Wai Husu, to carry out other rituals to feed the spirits of that spring in Teolale (see Map 4.1). The story of this exodus and their ongoing connection to Wai Husu was told to me by one of the area's *lia na'in* Joao Graciano Simoes (Tetu Noko):

The house of Caime went from Teolale to live at Caisidu. The younger brother house of Loime in Tirilolo stayed in Baucau [and intermarried with the Makasae]. First they travelled west to Vemasse, Lenau, Wai Wono and then back to Ossu-Wa [near Caisidu]. The owners of the land (Wai Luo and Wai Hau) received them and said you can not return to Teolale you must stay here. They had a ceremony and killed many animals. They were told that they must respect the sacred water, rocks, forest, potatoes, yams and trees. We respect their custodial jurisdiction over these things until this day. They are the mother-father clans. Our main house is Kotalale.

Water is scarce here. We must travel to the springs of Wai Haulale, Tuo Ho'o Oli, Aubaca, Caibada and Wani Uma. When we fetch water we use bamboo and measure its use carefully. This is a dry land.

Where we came from in Teolale there is a spring called Wai Husu [whose spirit guardian originates from Luca]. This does not belong to the Makasae, although they live in that area now. At this spring we always offer pigs to the water spirit from Luca. The people from Kotalale, Caisidu return each year to carry out these ritual offerings at Wai Husu. The Makasae people living there now can not carry out these rituals. We carry out the ritual feeding. When it is time for the ceremonies we will always take pigs for the sacrifices.

Meanwhile atop the barren drylands of Caisidu there was once a spring. Known today as Wai Taka (W: closed water) a decision was made (presumably by Wai Hau and Wai Luo) at some point to close it over and ensure that outsiders would not be tempted to settle there.

## Discussion

Similar to the story of the ongoing ritual relations at Wai Husu, movements of Waima'a speakers to the west of Baucau mean that the original ritual custodians of many springs across the marine terrace zone are now absent from the area<sup>16</sup>. As we have seen in Wailili the disruptions to its land and waters through the twentieth century has meant that ritual activity at this once prominent centre of power has now retreated back into the darkness and the guiding fertility-giver fertility-taker relationship between Wai Lili-Wai Wa and Wai Husu-Wai Lewa is now something of the past. Yet it is also clear that in its place other manifestations of these intra-community relationships have emerged (this is discussed further in chapter six and seven). History in this sense is valued primarily for what it can tell us about 'the making, living out, and unmaking of kinship' (Gow 2001: 290).

As incoming migration patterns resulted in origin communities spreading out from lush coastal spring groves to the dry savanna, the changing divisions of labour and resources resulted in the need to regulate a new suite of socio-ecological relationships. New ancestral connections emerged to regulate the waters teaming under the dry lands of the Baucau plateau (see Map 1.2). This resulting ritual ecology of water characterized in the most recent Wai Lia story encouraged both socio-ecological co-operation and co-reliance between what were emerging as otherwise separate 'agricultural' communities (cf. Peterson 1978). They signified a new era of ritual exchange relationship between dry-land agricultural communities and escarpment edge and coastal wet-rice cultivators (cf. Traube 1986, this is further discussed in chapter six). These emerging relations (and conflicts) between dry and wet land communities across the ecotone—a transitional or threshold socio-ecological zone—are encoded in these dynamic watery pathways of connection. As Chen argues '[m]apping watery place is best practised by taking multiple perspectives into account' (Chen 2013: 293) and realising that 'we practise and imagine the past and future only through continuing iterations' (Chen 2013: 287).

In the past it is claimed that the whole of the region from Matebian to the Baucau coast was the domain of the Waima'a, who received waves of newcomers over time and continue to do so. As

we will see in the next chapter when these newcomers integrated themselves into and respected the local moral economy of fertility-givers and fertility-takers they were generally embraced by the extant community. Those who did not show this respect or who lapsed in their commitment to these sacred arrangements were eventually repelled. In the accounts of these processes, springs are central agents of change and enablement. Even the power of warriors was sourced from these sacred springs, creating debts which must be repaid across the generations.

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<sup>1</sup> Wai Ma'a-means empty of water.

<sup>2</sup> In Correia (1935) Baucau stories are told by Belmiro Belo from Tirilolo. Spillett (1999) was also told his story by a Belo from Tirilolo.

<sup>3</sup> Which can be translated in Eastern Tetum as 'bigger than the land' and 'can not fit into the land'.

<sup>4</sup> As discussed in chapter three, Waima'a is a part of the Kaiwaimina language group said by Hull (1998) to be both potentially alloglot and substantially influenced by the 11<sup>th</sup> century Fabronic wave which emerged from the Celebes/Sulawesi. See Map 3.1.

<sup>5</sup> Neligia, Ledatame, Baduno, Duruwa.

<sup>6</sup> I know of at least four other similar stories from localities in the central eastern region (in Venilale, Cairiri, Wailili, and Lacluta). The protagonist in such stories is always a son of Luca or connected to it through one of its subkingdoms, Vemasse and Vessoru (characterized as the buffalo horns of the Kingdom of Luca). In connection to Vemasse see the story of We Tasi in Lacluta (Thomaz & Soares 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Once known as Wai Husu-Wai Lewa (see below).

<sup>8</sup> White is synonymous across Timor with the sun (and all it represents), yellow and black with its opposite. Eels, or glass eels, are translucent when they first migrate inland from the sea to inhabit freshwater. In freshwater they pigment turning yellow or brown before sexually maturing (signified by a silver belly and darker head and body) and returning to spawn (and die) in the sea (Lecomte-Finiger 2003).

<sup>9</sup> This is an amended version of a narrative was previously published in Palmer (2011).

<sup>10</sup> The ancestral names of the eels and civet cats connected to both spring complexes were called out in ritual verse at these ceremonies, one of these names, that relating to the civet cat ancestor, is the same for both springs.

<sup>11</sup> In some accounts the Makasae speaking clans of the northern Matebian foothills were invited into the region by Waima'a speakers to drive back the expansionary power of Luca and force their retreat from the north coastal zone.

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<sup>12</sup> However, the descendents of the Waima'a speaking area of the Wai Daba spring in Bercoli assert that these first underground travels from the plateau to Wai Lia involved a man from the hamlet of Cairiri on the edge of the savanna just south of Gariuai (which was also once a part of Wai Lili) (see Map 4.1). This hamlet (which in some accounts is a branch house of Loi Leki) had a long association with Luca (its *rota* (septre) and water were received from there). The man who entered the cave system and emerged in Wai Lia is said to have been a son of a marriage exchange relationship between Wai Daba and Cairiri. According to this version of events, Wai Lia has a direct connection to Wai Daba and these ancestral travels created marriage exchange relationships between them and the Baucau villages.

<sup>13</sup> While it is not specified by the teller, this near demise of the Loi Leki house may have occurred in the wake of the arrival of rulers from elsewhere, possibly Luca.

<sup>14</sup> The house of Lakudarabaha is another parent house of the Wai Husu-Wai Lewa complex. In the accounts from the spring of Wai Mori Bere in Buibau, the various Makasae custodian houses of the spring recognize that these waters as the domain of Lakudarabaha (see Map 4.1). In the account of the house of Alawa'a they, and their sibling house Lalabu, were requested by Lakudarabaha to settle at the spring many generations ago and establish a '*guarda*' or staging post for Makasae speakers visiting Baucau from Matebian. In the account of the neighbouring Makasae speaking Lebalaku Fofa house their ancestors came to the area from Utabailema in Fatumaka and married with a woman from the house of Lakudarabaha establishing an ongoing fertility-giver and fertility-taker relationship. While the houses of this spring community now have their own ritual relationship with Wai Lia Bere (and the house of Ledatame Ikun) the pathway to this relationship was through Lakudarabaha, the true 'owners' of the spring. In 2010 a large collective ceremony was held at the Wai Mori Bere spring to re-establish the relationship with Wai Lia Bere and ensure that the post-independence flow of water would be strong.

<sup>15</sup> As noted in chapter three a similar golden reptilian patrimony is found in the origin story from Cabalaki and Matebian recounted by Almeida (1976: 346-347) and in a story about the founding of the kingdom of Vemassee (see dos Santos 1967).

<sup>16</sup> Wai Kinari in Caibada (Makasae) is another spring where a Makasae speaking house is the present day custodian (see Map 4.1). At certain ritual events the original Waima'a custodians of the spring who now live in Caisidu will be asked to return and carry out the ritual prayers.