

[Re]constituting the Ritual Domain of Ina Ama Beli Daralai Babulu Mane Hitu

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Abstract

The chapter authored by Susanna Barnes and Josh Trindade, explores the intricate web of social, spiritual, and territorial relationships within the ritual domain of *Ina Ama Beli Daralai Babulo Mane Hitu*, a predominantly Naueti-speaking community in the south-eastern sub-district of Uato-Lari. A communal ceremony known as *Babulo Mane Hitu* (The Seven Brothers of Babulo) acts as a focal point for exploring the dynamic interplay of human and more-than-human elements within specific landscapes, illustrating the reconstitution of reciprocal obligations and interdependencies among human and more-than-human entities against the backdrop of specific landscapes. The ceremony, commemorating the domain's founder-ancestors, embodies the community's efforts to sustain and negotiate its social and moral frameworks amidst historical upheavals and contemporary challenges. Through detailed ethnographic insights, the chapter unveils the dynamic processes of renewal, contestation, and affirmation of communal identities, emphasizing the pivotal role of ritual in maintaining the continuity of the social fabric. This narrative not only highlights the community's dedication to preserving ancestral ties and managing communal harmony but also reflects on the broader implications of such practices in shaping Timor-Leste's socio-cultural landscape in the post-conflict era.

Keywords: Timor-Leste, Ritual house, custom, Naueti, Makasae, governance

This chapter is concerned with the performance of emplaced sociality in post-independence Timor-Leste. Drawing on an exegesis of a communal ceremony in honour of the founder-ancestors of the ritual domain of Ina Ama Beli Darlari performed in 2003 and 2015, we provide an ethnographically grounded example of how human and more-than-human relations of reciprocal obligation and interdependency are [re]constituted in relation to specific landscapes. The ceremony called Babulo Mane Hitu takes place every 10 to 15 years and involves the ritual re-enactment and representation of histories of origin, migration, and settlement that underpin social and spatial relations within the domain. It provides a vivid visual medium for understanding the role, function, and status of each house-based group and the nature of the relationships within the 'spiritual landscape' that constitutes the ritual domain.

In 2003, ritual reconnection with the founding ancestors was deemed essential to restore the ‘proper order of things’ after decades of conflict and displacement. The sustained commitment seen in 2015 emphasises the community’s apparent dedication to preserving the social and moral framework that defines the various house-based groups, along with their emplaced rights, responsibilities, and duties. We argue that the Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony constitutes a site of renewal and sometimes contestation of the intricate web of rights and obligations that sustain the social fabric of house-based communities in the face of changing times and historical challenges.

The ritual domain of Ina Ama Beli Daralari Babulo Mane Hitu

The ritual domain (N: *rea luli*) known as *Ina Ama Beli Daralari Babulo Mane Hitu* (Mother, Father Beli Daralari Babulo Seven Brothers) is centred on the paired sacred houses of the Daralari origin group: the *Uma Buta* (N. White House) and *Uma Ita* (N. Black House) located at a settlement called Uato Soba on *Baha Liurai* (lit. The King’s Mountain) in Uato-Lari sub-district.¹ Distinct ‘origin’ groups or lineages, each sharing a common ancestor (either through real or fictive links) and centred on a common *uma luli* (sacred house) comprise the core membership of the ritual domain. These core origin groups include the hamlets of Beli, Daralari, Aha Bu’u, Kota Nisi, and Roma.² Naueti is the predominant language spoken in these communities although Makassae is also spoken. Each origin group is sub-divided into a number of lineages or sub-lineages (N/T: *uma kain*), often with their own ‘branch’ or subsidiary cult-house.

The people of Beli and Daralari share common ancestors, the ‘Seven Brothers of Babulo’ (T: *Babulo Mane Hitu*), who are the founders of the ritual domain of Ina Ama Beli Daralari Babulo Mane Hitu. As direct descendants of the Seven Brothers of Babulo, male members of the most senior or ‘eldest’ (N: *kaka*) houses of Daralari are sometimes addressed as *rea netana* (N.) meaning ‘Centre’ or ‘Source’ of the land. As Source of the Land, they claim ritual authority over the domain and over-arching stewardship rights over its land and natural resources. These claims to power and authority are grounded in the histories of arrival and settlement of the founder-ancestors who provided the first harvest and continue to provide for their descendants (see Amaral 2001; Barnes 2017a, 2018).

¹ Throughout this chapter, we refer to this domain as the ritual domain of Babulo or *Babulo Mane Hitu*. *Mane Hitu* is the Tetun for ‘Seven Brothers’ or ‘Seven Men’. In Naueti ‘Ana Hitu’, ‘Seven Children’ is used (Amaral 2001).

² The names of the origin groups that underpin the hamlet structures are sacred and not spoken in public.

Daralari elders affirm that originally, the territorial boundaries of the domain stretched from the north coast to the south coast, encompassing large territories to the east and west of the present-day suku or administrative village of Babulo. However, as the Portuguese colonial authorities extended their control over the territory, often with the support of powerful neighbouring kingdoms, they slowly encroached upon the land, making it increasingly ‘narrow’ (T: *klot*) and obliging the ancestors to go to war to secure their borders. Eventually, the ancestors decided to ‘retreat into darkness’ and delegated the tasks of ‘ruling over the land’ and ‘governing the people’ to the descendants of the Burmeta. Since that time, the descendants of the Babulo Mane Hitu founder-ancestors have maintained ritual authority over the domain, and the descendants of the Burmeta have exercised political power. Today, the ritual domain of Babulo Mane Hitu is overlaid by the administrative village unit of Babulo, and a member of the house of Aha Bu’u holds office as village head.

The descendants of the Burmeta are the people of Aha Bu’u and Kota Nisi and derive from a common ancestor called *Boru Buti*. The people of Roma hamlet are migrants from Quelicai brought into the village by a descendant of Burmeta (see Trindade and Barnes 2018). Although representatives from Liasidi, Abadere, and Asa Muta (which now form part of the administrative village of Babulo) participate in ritual ceremonies at Uato Soba, they do so as affines and are collectively referred to as *ki itana* (N. people of the black). Another group of affines, who also participate in these communal rituals, are collectively known as *ki butana* (N. people of the white), comprising various origin houses from Baha’o Baha Buga and Balabasiba (Wailabasiba) pertaining to the administrative village of Vessoru.

Almost half of the population currently residing on the lands that are considered to form part of the ritual domain of Babulo Mane Hitu are originally from the neighbouring village of Afaloicai, also in Uato-Lari sub-district. The majority of people from Afaloicai were forcibly displaced from their upland settlements following the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975. Nevertheless, a sizable minority was part of earlier migratory movements from the Matebian region to the coastal plain. Although many of the people from Afaloicai have long been settled in the area, they continue to maintain links to their own ancestral lands (returning on a regular basis to their place of origin to participate in collective rituals or house-based activities) and make a clear distinction when speaking about their place of residence and place of origin. Despite the fact that they also ‘officially’ live within the territorial boundaries of the administrative village of Babulo, the people of Afaloicai remain under the jurisdiction of their own hamlet and village officials.

Since 1999, the Daralari elders have been at the forefront of a revival of customary relations and practices, investing heavily in rebuilding their main sacred houses, re-invigorating ceremonial relations of exchange, renewing rituals

associated with the agricultural calendar, and celebrating their ancestral attachments to land. Daralari elders lament the fact that many people living on their land, including members of subsidiary houses of the Daralari origin group, do not perform the necessary rituals to ensure the continued fertility of their land and prosperity of its people. They also claim that many people do not know the history of the land or the correct invocations to be made, and some ‘outsiders’ continue to invoke ancestors from their places of origin rather than the local emplaced ancestors and more-than-human entities. According to the elders, this ‘chaotic’ situation has been the cause of so many trials and tribulations over the past thirty years.

Locally, some people have criticised the Daralari and accused them of being motivated by a desire to achieve social enhancement and political influence for their own economic benefit. It is possible to suggest, however, that the Daralari are motivated by something greater than the pursuit of power, prestige, and wealth. Daralari elders describe the sacred knowledge bestowed on their lineage by the ancestors as both a privilege and a burden. Through this knowledge, they have become privileged intermediaries between the ‘light’ (N: *meena*) and open world of the living and the ‘dark’ (N: *itana*), hidden world of the ancestors. They affirm that this knowledge binds them to the community and compels them to serve. The effort and resources invested by the Daralari in the process of post-conflict recovery and renewal of customary relations and practices reveals a commitment to their role as intermediaries between those who live on the land, the ancestors, and the non-human forces that reside in it, to ensure the prosperity of their domain and its people as a whole.

[Re]constituting the domain

Key to the revival of customary forms of relations and practices in the ritual domain of Babulo Mane Hitu has been the reinstatement of domain-wide ceremonies centred on the Uma Buta/Uma Ita house complex on Baha Liurai.³ Rituals undertaken at these sacred houses are performed on behalf of all groups living within the ritual domain and are directed towards the founder-ancestors who are responsible for providing for the wellbeing of subsequent generations. There are two main types of ritual performed at this ritual centre. The first is the less frequent and more exclusive ceremony called *Babulo Mane Hitu*. This is a ceremony that brings together the core origin groups of the domain and select affines ‘to serve and

³ In common with dualistic forms of organisation found across the Austronesian world (see Fox 1996), the Uma Buta (White House) represents ritual authority, and the Uma Ita (Black House) represents political power.

pay homage' (N: *serbi, hanai*) to the founder-ancestors. The second are the more inclusive rituals in which all origin groups that farm and live off the land of the domain partake. These ceremonies are associated with the agricultural calendar, the most important being the rice harvest (N: *masi hare*, to sweeten the rice) and the maize harvest ceremony (N: *masi eka rae*, to sweeten the maize).

Both types of ceremony involve invocation, sacrifice, commensality, and the [re]distribution of ancestral blessings in the form of ritually transformed areca nuts and betel-pepper leaves (N: *iluwai malubu*).⁴ The Babulu Mane Hitu serves to organise and reaffirm the organisation of core origin groups that historically made up the domain (compare to Lewis 1988). Critically, it constitutes the 'renewal' of the bond that exists between these groups, the founder-ancestors of the domain, and their descendants. In return for their service and tribute, the people of the domain receive ancestral blessings and spiritual protection. The emphasis of the agricultural rituals is on closing a period of prohibitions characterised by heat and danger and inaugurating a period of prosperity and peace associated with coolness and fertility. These rituals include members of all origin groups and their constituent houses whose livelihoods depend on the bounty of the land of the domain. This type of ceremony is replicated at the origin group and individual house level throughout the domain.

In this chapter, we first provide a description of the Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony to explore how social hierarchies and relationships are performed and manifest in the ritual setting. We then examine the nature of relations that bind the core origin groups that are the main protagonists of the Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony. We describe how, historically, these groups were incorporated and accommodated by the Source of the Land into the ceremonial order of the domain. In particular, we draw attention to the way in which strategies of keeping and giving serve to simultaneously draw origin groups into the ritual domain, while reaffirming the social, political, and ritual distinctions that exist between founders and newcomers. Second, we turn our attention to those groups excluded from the Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony who nevertheless take part in the agricultural ceremonies of the maize and rice harvest, as 'those who farm the land' and/or by virtue of marriage exchange relations (N: *oasae/uma-ana*). We argue that ceremonies held at the ritual complex of the White House and the Black House constitute a site of renewal and sometimes contestation of the intricate web of rights and obligations that sustain the social fabric of house-based communities in the face of changing times and historical challenges.

⁴ The expression *iluwai malubu* in Naueti, literally meaning spit (*iluwai*) betel nuts and leaves (*malubu*), is equivalent to the Tetun matak-malirin. It refers to 'a state of good health and productive life energy'.

The Babulo Mane Hitu Ceremony

The ceremony called Babulo Mane Hitu takes place every 10 to 15 years and involves the ritual re-enactment and representation of histories of origin, migration, and settlement that underpin social and spatial relations within the domain. It provides a vivid visual medium for understanding the role, function, and status of each house-based group and the nature of the relationships with more-than-human beings that constitute the ritual domain. In 2003, ritual reconnection with the founding ancestors was deemed essential to restore the 'proper order of things' after decades of conflict and displacement. The sustained commitment seen in 2015 emphasises the community's dedication to preserving the social and moral framework that defines the various house-based groups, along with their emplaced rights, responsibilities, and duties.

In November 2003, hundreds of people converged on the White House and the Black House to take part in a domain-wide ceremony that had last been performed in 1974. The central part of the ceremony consisted of a pilgrimage to the ancestral burial ground of the founder-ancestors of the ritual domain of Babulo Mane Hitu located on the summit of Baha Liurai. The central rituals of the ceremony featured animal sacrifice, an overnight vigil, and a shared communal meal. Only members of the 'core' origin houses of the ritual domain and select 'witnesses' were involved in this part of the ceremony. Members of affiliated 'commoner', servant, and client houses who 'farm and live off the land', were not part of the ceremonial activities at the ancestral burial ground. However, they did receive ancestral blessings in the form of holy water and betel nut spittle at the end of the ceremony at the White House and the Black House.

Before the ceremony began, the spokesperson (N: *Makai Luliki*, T: *Mak Kaer Lulik*) for the Source of the Land, sitting with a group of senior Daralari men and women (all 'people of the source of the land'), explained to a camera crew from the national broadcaster Radio Televisão Timor Leste (RTTL) that the purpose of the ceremony was threefold: to visit the burial site of the ancestors and communicate with them; to thank the ancestors for watching over the people living on their sacred land; and to ask for their continued protection and generosity. To the cameras of RTTL, the spokesperson emphasised that those participating in the ceremony were not there to fulfil obligations relating to marriage exchange or kinship ties, but to pay homage to the sacred king of the holy mountain (T: *liurai lulik*, *foho lulik*), overlord of the ritual domain of Babulo.

The ceremony began during the early hours of the first day. Women played a central part in these initial stages of the ceremony, handling elements, objects, and foodstuffs, all associated with generative power. At dawn, a woman from the Black House (N: Uma Ita) took a special ceramic pot (N: *cova*) to draw water from the



Figure 9: Mole Etu. Senior Daralari women wearing distinctive *krabi wa'i mee*, woven tube-dresses prepare rice for the ceremony in 2015. Credit: Josh Trindade.

spring at Luka Nu. A portion of ceremonial rice was cooked in this pot. The same woman then went to fetch wood from an area of old-growth forest at the foot of Baha Liurai.

As participants began to arrive at the White House and the Black House, senior Daralari women pounded ceremonial rice, also a symbol of fertility, in the 'sacred space' between the White House and the *kai bira* (N. sacred post, lit. *kai*—wood, *bira*—magic)—the sacred post on which offerings of betel nuts and ears of maize are hung prior to ritual transformation.

As groups continued to arrive at the ritual centre, a careful account was made of who brought what for the ceremony. Each participant was 'marked' on their chest and forehead with betel spittle and 'blessed' with holy water. These blessings were to ensure ancestral protection for all participants during the course of the ceremony.

Once prepared, cooked rice, betel nuts, and betel leaves were carefully redistributed into baskets representing first the 'sibling' Beli and Daralari origin groups and then other core houses of the domain. When the baskets had been filled, those participating in the central part of the ceremony—representatives from the senior houses of the core origin groups of the domain and select neighbouring affines who acted as witnesses—were summoned in a specific order by the *Kaburai* (E:

overseer of the land), who is responsible for protocol and order during the event. During the early phases of the ceremony, discussions emerged around the 'order of things', including the order of precedence (see Vischer ed. 2009; Barnes 2017a) among the different house groups present. This disagreement was partially due to the absence of the elders who had previously guided the ceremony, leading to uncertainty about the proper sequence of events. But it also reflected the complex dynamics and latent tensions between origin groups and sub-groups residing within the domain. As such, the ceremony at Baha Liurai served as a stage where representatives from different origin groups sought to renegotiate their roles within the larger community.

Before proceeding to the ancestral burial site, the Source of the Land, the appointed elder known as the 'Iron Rod of the Earth' and 'Stone of the Land' (N: *Rea Mumu* and *Rea Watu*), along with the guardian of the sacred house at Burlalu, guided by the insights of senior women, delivered brief speeches on the rules and prohibitions to be observed during the course of the ceremony. Out of respect for the ancestors and the potent more-than-human guardians of Baha Liurai, participants were instructed to walk in single file, avoid slipping on rocks or snapping twigs and branches, maintain silence during the walk, and speak only softly or in whispers during rests. In order to 'follow the path of the ancestors' (N: *to'osi dala bu'u luli*), no 'modern' items, clothing, or adornments were permitted. Everyone was dressed in 'traditional' woven cloth, even foreign guests. The high-ranking women wore distinctive red and black striped tube-cloths (N: *krabi wa'i mee*), while the men wrapped men's cloth (N: *no'o ló*) around their waists over their shorts.⁵ Only 'traditional' tools and implements could be carried.

At a clearing where paths converged, the procession originating from the White House and Black House was joined by delegates from the Beli and Burmeta origin groups, reminding participants of the role that the Burmeta played in reconciling the elder and younger brothers of Beli and Daralari in the past (see Barnes 2017a). Entering the *lulik* or sacred burial site of the founder-ancestors involves crossing into another dimension of reality, necessitating the ceremonial 'opening of the door and gate'. At a site known as 'the door and gate' (N: *ita mata, kai hene*), the sacred keeper (N: *Makai Luluki*) from the Daralari sub-house of Burlalu, alongside the Source of the Land, took charge of opening and closing this gateway, respectively. This ritual involved cutting bark from a specific tree and tying it around the thighs of the Makai Luluki's representative, who then led the procession, escorted by

⁵ For the 2015 ceremony, a specially designed men's cloth was worn for the first time. Daralari elders told me that they wanted to be able to distinguish between the *rea netana* (source of the land) and other origin groups of the domain. Two designs were made: one for the source of the land houses and another for subsidiary houses and allied origin groups (see Barnes 2017a).

two acolytes from the Daralari sub-houses of Asurate Renu and Asurate Liurai. Following them were the Source of the Land, the Bu Dato (chief) of Beli, and the representatives of the Burmeta origin group, including the liurai (ruler) of Aha Bu'u and the headman of Kota Nisi.

During the 2015 ceremony, at this critical juncture, prior to entering the sacred and ancient burial ground of the ancestors, the spokesperson for the Source of the Land addressed the founder-ancestors by reciting the names of the origin groups that had come to pay homage:

<i>Ata Daralari, Beli</i>	Your servants, Daralari, Beli
<i>Wulana – Ta'ana natadeba</i>	The moon (the time) has come
<i>Mai</i>	Come hither
<i>Mai mhutu laa estasi Uarula</i>	Come together to this place Uarula
<i>Serbi, hanai niana</i>	Serve and pay homage
<i>Nua ata</i>	with your servants
<i>Kaburai, Asurati</i>	Kaburai, Asurati
<i>Kaburea Makailuluki</i>	The keeper of the sacra of Kaburea
<i>Gama'a lati</i>	All here present
<i>Oeleu Wemata</i>	Oeleu Wemata
<i>Ana Hebana, Ana Tadana</i>	Eldest and wisest son
<i>Gama'a Lati</i>	All here present
<i>Itana, Butana</i>	Black and White
<i>Asa wuu, Asa woke</i>	Asa wuu, Asa woke
<i>Baha'o, Baha Buga</i>	Baha'o, Baha Buga
<i>Bobosa Kaburai</i>	Bobosa kaburai
<i>Gamama'a la weleseti</i>	All in this place
<i>Gamama'a lebagati</i>	All in this place
<i>Mai serbi hanai</i>	Come serve and pay homage

Ceremonial order of precedence as recited by the eldest son of the Source of the Land, October 2015, as recorded by Josh Trindade.

Upon reaching the summit, a section of the forest was promptly cleared to make preparations for the overnight vigil and communal feast. Two altars were set up in honour of the *Ina Ama Beli Daralari* (Mother and Father Beli Daralari), regarded as the 'original' couple and progenitors of the seven brothers of Babulo (*Babulo Mane Hitu*).

Descendants of these ancestral figures, belonging to the Daralari and Beli origin groups, presented and then sacrificed a buffalo (from the Beli group), followed by a pig (from the Daralari Source of the Land) dedicated to the ancestors. Before the sacrifice, the *Makai Luluki* solemnly addressed each animal, invoking

the founder-ancestors and asking them to receive the gifts being offered by their descendants. With each invocation, he cast earth and stones towards the animals, a ritual meant to ensure the Makai Luluki's words are transmitted through the offering, with augury used to discern the ancestors' acceptance. The pig's spleen and the cow's spleen and liver were removed and taken to the elders. The Source of the Land, keepers of the White House and Black House and the *Makai Luluki* all examined the organs to determine whether or not the ceremony would be successful. Notably, markings on the cow's spleen were interpreted as references to the recent political unrest (the 2006-2007 crisis in Timor-Leste), acknowledging the trials of Indonesian rule and the call to 'return to custom'. The meat was then traditionally cooked in bamboo (N: *toki*) and arranged on the altars alongside cooked rice, betel nuts, and betel leaves, completing the ceremonial preparations.

According to custom, everyone present was obligated to remain awake and vigilant throughout the night, engaging in a solemn vigil to honour the ancestors and absent community members. Representatives from the Daralari Source of the Land sub-houses periodically patrolled among the gathered men and women, ensuring that no one succumbed to sleep or violated any of the set prohibitions. To ward off malevolent spirits, men from the Asurate Renu and Asurate Liurai houses occasionally struck the sides of the altar with bamboo sticks, reinforcing the protective barrier around the congregation.

At dawn, the offerings from the altar were distributed among those in attendance, following an order of precedence. The heart and tongue of the sacrificial meat were specifically allocated to the elders of Daralari, while the tail and flanks were shared with the other groups. The Daralari Source of the Land's spokesperson, together with the *Kaburai*, who is responsible for overseeing ceremony protocol, reminded everyone of their duties towards the ancestors and their earthly representatives, the Source of the Land. This proclamation included behavioural norms and practices regarding the social interaction between men and women as well as origin groups, and regulations governing access to certain lands, forests, and other natural resources. Additionally, it covered land use protocols, including the timing for agricultural activities like clearing, burning, planting, and harvesting. After reiterating these guidelines, known collectively as N: *luli* (*bandu* in Tetun), the participants prepared to depart from Baha Liurai in an orderly, silent procession, without looking back towards the summit. The final individual to leave was the Liurai Source of the Land, who symbolically 'closed' the *ita mata* (N. door) behind them, marking the end of their passage through this sacred space.

Back at the White House and the Black House, those not permitted to take part in the main ritual activities waited to receive ancestral blessings (N: *iluwai-malubu*) before returning to their homes and fields.



Figure 10: Returning from the summit to redistribute the sacrificial meat and dispense ancestral blessings at the White House and the Black House (N: *Uma Buta*, *Uma Ita*). Photo Credit: Josh Trindade.

The unfolding of the ceremony at Baha Liurai and materials used during the ritual carry meaning and serve to tell the history of the domain and changes in authority and power. Although invocation and oratory have a place, they are not the principal mediums through which meaning is communicated. In essence, the Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony is the re-enactment and representation of key events in the narratives of origin and precedence that underpin the social and spatial organisation of origin groups within the ritual domain of Babulo. During the course of the ceremony, key notions of ancestry, attachment to place, histories of migration, and changes in power and authority are all acknowledged within a single visual narrative.

While the ceremony clearly celebrates the ties that bind the various origin groups of the domain in co-operative action, it also articulates and emphasises the differences in rank and status that exist between them. By taking part in the ceremony and investing considerable resources in it, the various origin groups involved appear to accept their position of relative subordination in relation to the Daralari as direct descendants of the founder-ancestors or at least acknowledge that it is in their best interests to do so (see Rappaport 1999). Acceptance, however, is often circumscribed. Although the roles and duties of various groups typically

reflect narratives of origin, they are nonetheless open to negotiation, contestation, and multiple interpretations (Vischer 2009).

Beli and Daralari houses

During the Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony, specific references are made to key events in the narratives of origin of the domain. Evoking the history of the split between their sibling ancestors, representatives from the Beli and Daralari origin groups approach the ascent to their ancestral burial ground on Baha Liurai from the separate ritual centres.⁶ Consistent with the history of inversion of precedence and loss of ritual power described by Barnes elsewhere (2017a), representatives of the senior Beli house play a largely subordinate role in relation to the Daralari throughout the ceremony. Both Beli and Daralari provide animals to be sacrificed and two baskets each of rice and betel nuts; two altars are also erected on site to represent the two lineages. Nevertheless, it is the Daralari *Liurai* Source of the Land who leads the way to the ancestral burial ground. Daralari ritual specialists, who make the necessary invocations to the founder-ancestors of the domain and Daralari houses, perform key ritual tasks during the ceremony.

The ceremony also reaffirms the nature of relations among Daralari core and subsidiary houses. Daralari narratives of origin describe how, early on, the ancestors created two wooden canes (N: *kai ua*, T: *rota*) called the *kaiua kaburai* and the *kaiua asurate* (Amaral 2001). The house that was granted the *kaiua* or, as it is most commonly referred to, the *rota kaburai*, was given the task to monitor the use of land and natural resources (N. *lai bosa lai wai*: guard the fields and the paddies and the water). The headman of Uma Kaburai, who carries the title of Kaburai,⁷ is charged with the task of overseeing the application of seasonal prohibitions on the harvesting of various products, inform the origin groups of the domain of upcoming rituals and ceremonies, coordinate the collection of tributes for collective ceremonies conducted at the White House and the Black House at Baha Liurai, and exact fines for the infringement of prohibitions. During collective rituals held at the White House and the Black House or Baha Liurai, the *Kaburai* is responsible for ‘keeping order’ and ensuring that participants follow the necessary protocols.

The *rota asurate* was given to another house with the task of ‘assisting’ the King of Babulo (*Liurai Lulik Babulo*, Sacred Lord of Babulo, i.e., the Liurai Source of the Land). This house eventually split into two lineages. Both retain the name of the original cane but are distinguished as *Uma Asurate Liurai* (House of the

⁶ See Barnes (2017a) for an explanation of this rupture.

⁷ *Kaburai* is a term derived from both Portuguese *cabo* and Tetun *rai*.

assistants to the King) and *Uma Asurate Renu* (House of the assistants of the people). Representatives of the houses of Asurate Liurai and Asurate Renu assist the *Kaburai* in matters relating to land management. During collective rituals, representatives of these two houses also assist the *Kaburai* and perform specific tasks in relation to the preparation of food. The houses of *Kaburai*, *Asurate Liurai*, and *Asurate Renu* have been incorporated into the Daralari origin group and refer to the Daralari headman as *Ama Kaka* (literally 'Father-elder brother'), the title commonly used to address the head of an origin group. These links, however, are assumed or prescriptive rather than demonstrated.

An altogether more complex set of arrangements governs relations between the Daralari Source of the Land and two groups associated with ritual authority and secular power within the domain. The delegation of authority to these groups and the dualistic structures created in the process reflect common patterns observed throughout Austronesian societies (Fox and Sather 1996). What is significant is that in Daralari narratives of origin, in the process of granting symbols of office to these groups, the emphasis lies on the locations where these objects were placed to be 'watched over' by ritual specialists called *Makai Luluki* (keeper of sacra) rather than the specific groups to whom they were granted, reinforcing the emplaced nature of power and authority that is derived through relations with the land.

The sacred house of Burlalu

In one version of Daralari narratives of origin, the keeper of the *rota Kaburai* asked the ancestors of the Source of the Land, to grant his house something that those under his jurisdiction could 'fear' (N: *thaku*).⁸ As a result, some garments belonging to the Mane Hitu ancestors were placed in a sacred house located in Burlalu; and a *Makai Luluki* was appointed as keeper of the sacra and a ritual specialist to work with the *Kaburai* to 'watch over' the sacred objects and preside over rituals associated with the rice fields of Babulo (N: *Ia la Burlalu, lai hai bosa lai hai wai la Babulo*); [the clothes] were given to Burlalu and the task to monitor the paddy fields of Babulo.

Members of the sacred house at Burlalu (*uma luli Burlalu*) asserted that the *Makai Luluki* of their house was responsible for determining the end of the prohibition on harvesting certain crops like maize and rice. They stated that in the past, the *Makai Luluki* accompanied by the *Kaburai* and representatives from the houses of Asurate Liurai and Asurate Renu would walk the boundaries of the ritual domain announcing the end of the prohibition and collecting tribute to present to the Source of the Land.

⁸ The version of the Daralari origin narrative documented by Amaral does not go into the details of the relationship between the house of *Kaburai* and the *Makaerluli*.

In 2003, the *Makai Luluki* and senior members of his house (his eldest son in particular) played a central role in the Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony. Dressed in special ceremonial garments, the eldest son of the *Makai Luluki* led the ceremony to the place called the door and the gate (N: *ita mata kai hene*) and was instrumental in providing safe passage to the summit of Baha Liurai.⁹ The *Makai Luluki* himself was responsible for key invocations to the ancestors immediately prior to the ritual slaughter of the live animals presented by the Beli and Daralari origin groups. In 2015, the eldest son of the *Makai Luluki* reprised his ceremonial role, but the keeper of the white house (N: *Uma Buta*) performed the key invocations as the former *Makai Luluki* had passed away.

While the 'garments of the king' were placed in the house at Burlalu, the ancestors placed a 'hat' (N: *taka ulu* (*taka* = to close, *ulu* = head), or *sapeo* derived from the Portuguese *chapéu*) representing the symbol of office of those whose role it is 'to guard the people and the land of Babulo' (N: *lai renu lai rea*) in a house at a place called Borulaisoba. The principal sacred house at Borulaisoba is called the House of the Mighty Lord (N: *Uma Liurai Hebana*). The sacred house at Borulaisoba is associated with the descendants of the Burmeta¹⁰ a warrior (T: *asu wa'in*) in-migrant clan from the Matebian region.¹¹

Daralari elders recount that the Burmeta were on their way to offer vassalage to the domain of Luca, when they stopped and camped on Waimatamesa, land near Buntua, close to Baha Liurai.¹² Rather than let these warriors join forces with their strong neighbour, the Daralari ancestors offered the Burmeta some land on which to settle and in exchange asked them to protect the borders of their domain.

To the Burmeta

To the Burmeta, the Daralari ancestors gave the prescriptive title of 'eldest, wisest son/child' (N: *ana bo'ona, ana tadana*). This group was given the task of guarding the people, guarding the land (N: *lai renu, lai rea*), ruling over the people,

⁹ The garments worn by the son of the *Makaerluli* are reminiscent of those of a Catholic altar boy. It was not clear to me whether these garments were meant to represent the origin garments placed by the ancestors in the sacred house of Burlalu.

¹⁰ Burmeta or Beremeta is also the name of the highest tip of mount Matebian Mane (the male mount Matebian). It is derived from the Makasae word *buru* or *bere* meaning big, and *meta* meaning black, e.g., the big black-skinned warrior (Trindade pers comm).

¹¹ The Burmeta trace their origins to Mount Matebian and their founding fathers known as Matebian Mane Hitu (Seven brothers of Mount Matebian). The seven graves of the seven brothers of Mount Matebian still exist today in Mount Matebian and are known as Soru Ilu Wai (N. soru, to gather, ilu wai, spit). Soru ilu wai is a pile of stones, where every person who passes one of the seven graves (seven piles of stones) will have to spit on a stone and throw it to the grave.

¹² This land is where the origin settlement and sacred houses of Aha Bu'u are located.

and protecting the borders of the domain. The hat stored in the sacred house at Borulaisoba is their symbol of office. As with the garments stored in the sacred house at Burlalu, however, Daralari elders state that their ancestors appointed a ritual specialist to ensure that the Burmeta do not try to harness the power stored within them independently of the Source of the Land.

The Burmeta became known as the ‘gatekeepers’ (*ita mata, kai hene*, door and gate) between the autochthonous ‘inner’ community of origin groups and ‘outsiders’, in particular the colonial authorities. The Portuguese granted the title of Tenente Coronel to the head of the Burmeta clan and, historically, Chefes do Suco have been chosen from this origin group. Members of this group also possess a *rota*, a rattan staff that serves as a symbol of office to rule (T: *ukun*) over the people of Babulo. The origins of this *rota* are said to lie not in Babulo, but in Viqueque.

During the Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony, the descendants of the Burmeta are acknowledged in a number of ways. The headmen of the houses of Aha Bu’u and Kota Nisi approach Baha Liurai from the sacred house of Borulaisoba. They meet representatives from the Beli and Daralari origin groups and other origin groups of the domain at the place called ‘the door and gate,’ an act that acknowledges the role their ancestors played in reconciling the Beli and Daralari origin groups.¹³ From this location, they join the procession taking their place behind the Bu Dato (grand-father lord) of Beli and the Source of the Land to complete the pilgrimage to the ancestral burial ground on the summit of Baha Liurai. During the ceremony, their role as ‘oldest and wisest son’ is publicly acknowledged by the Source of the Land, and they sit with the Beli and Daralari elders and ritual specialists. They do not, however, perform any ritual tasks.

Descendants of the Burmeta often describe their role as rulers of Babulo in terms of local governance in relation to the State. In the past, this entailed specific duties and responsibilities regarding the settlement of local disputes, the collection of taxes (for the colonial authorities), and the recruitment of labour for colonial or state projects. In 2010, during the most recent village-level elections, a younger man from the hamlet of Liasidi was elected village chief. Although related by marriage, he was not a direct male descendant of the Burmeta, a development that has not been welcomed by some of the elders of Babulo, including the Daralari elders. The fact that the former village head, who held office during the late Portuguese colonial period and throughout the Indonesian occupation, fell ill and died in 2012 has been interpreted as a ‘sign’ of the displeasure of the ancestors who exclusively appointed the Burmeta to this role. In the following elections, the son of the former village head was elected.

¹³ In narratives of origin of Daralari, Beli and Aha Bu’u references are made to the role that the Burmeta had in reconciling the descendants of the brothers who fell out over the harvest celebrations.

The account of the incorporation of the Burmeta exemplifies the process of 'installing the outsider inside', a pattern typically found in many Austronesian societies (Fox 1995; Sahlins 2008). The Burmeta can be described as 'stranger-kings' who came from outside and entered into a compact with the Daralari Source of the Land. As warriors, the Burmeta were a potential threat to Daralari continuity. However, this potentially life-taking relationship was transformed into a life-giving one through gift exchange. Sahlins views the relationship between indigenous insiders and 'stranger-king' outsiders as conceptually akin to those between affines (Sahlins 2008: 196). If existence involves a dependence on external sources (encoded in the incest taboo), then stranger-kings share the same life-giving properties of fertility givers and consequently command a position of superiority in relation to indigenous insiders (Sahlins 2008). While the Burmeta are socially superior within the sphere of secular authority and draw their power from external sources, this power is kept in check by the ritual authority of the Daralari Source of the Land whose authority is based on proximity to 'origins' (see Trindade 2008).¹⁴

As with the sacred house of Burlalu, tensions exist between the Daralari Source of the Land and certain descendants of the Burmeta. Daralari Source of the Land claims to over-arching politico-religious authority over the land and people of the ritual domain of Babulo sit uncomfortably with the claims to exclusive political power by descendants of the Burmeta. Like the sacred house of Burlalu, the keepers of the house at Borulaisoba have attempted to seek sacred objects from alternative sources (Trindade pers. comm.), and stories circulate amongst the descendants of the Burmeta that call into question Daralari Source of the Land claims to exclusive knowledge of the land and emplaced authority.

At particular points in time, these tensions have come to the surface. During the early 1970s, for example, when the various political parties sought members among the local population, the then Source of the Land and his sons joined the pro-independence Fretilin party while the village chief and his brothers became prominent supporters of Apodeti. There were clear historical resonances behind the political choices of the local leadership. The village chief of Babulo was closely tied to key figures involved in the 1959 anti-colonial revolt, who were among the founders of the pro-integration party Apodeti, while the message of self-determination appealed to the Source of the Land who had experienced Portuguese colonialism as a loss of power and authority. However, it is also noted that, like in other parts of Timor-Leste at that time, aligning with different political factions was a strategy for families to safeguard their interests and ensure mutual protection. Despite the intensification of these tensions during the Indonesian occupation, contemporary narratives within the community focus on the complementary

¹⁴ See Trindade's description of ritual-political diarchy in Trindade 2012.

relationship between these groups, often highlighting the sacred oath (T: *hemuran*, P: *juramentu*) that unites them. This bond is credited with enabling the former village head to protect Daralari members from being deported to Atauro Island during Indonesian rule. Moreover, in the aftermath of the 1983 Kraras Massacre, when Falintil contemplated attacking the Indonesian military in Aliambata and targeting collaborators, the eldest son of the Daralari Source of the Land, involved in the clandestine resistance, proposed himself as a sacrifice to spare the village, demonstrating the profound commitments and complex interdependencies that characterise these relationships.

From the perspective of the Daralari Source of the Land, assigning responsibilities to subsidiary and immigrant groups, along with the conferment of symbols of office, land, and ceremonial duties, is seen as a strategic act of gift-giving designed to forge bonds of interdependence between the grantor and the recipients (cf. Godelier 1999). For those receiving titles and symbols of office, accepting these honours entails taking on roles in managing interpersonal and human-land relations, positioning them in a relationship of relative subordination to the Source of the Land within the ritual hierarchy. The representatives of the Uma Liurai Hebana at Borulaisoba and Uma Luli at Burlalu, often metaphorically referred to as the right and left hands of the Source of the Land, respectively, manifest aspects of legal and ritual authority within the Babulo ritual domain, Ina Ama Beli Daralari. Nevertheless, the Daralari elders emphasise that the influence of these groups remains contingent upon, and subordinate to, the supreme authority of the Liurai Source of the Land, underscoring a complex system of ritual governance and interdependence.

The incorporation of settlers

Two groups currently living within the domain of Ina Ama Beli Daralari are excluded from the central rituals of the Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony that takes place on Baha Liurai. They are the people who make up the new hamlet of Roma and in-migrants from Afaloicai. At the start of the ceremony in 2003, the spokesperson of the Source of the Land specified that those participating in the ceremony were not there to fulfil obligations relating to marriage exchange or kinship ties, but to pay homage to the sacred King of the holy mountain (T: *liurai lulik*, *foho lulik*), overlord of the ritual domain of Babulo Mane Hitu. As such, only those groups that received 'gifts' from the Beli/Daralari ancestors could participate.

While people from Roma hamlet and Afaloicai village are excluded from the rituals that take place on the ancestral burial ground at Baha Liurai, members of these groups do partake in the distribution of ancestral blessings that occurs the

following morning at the White House and the Black House. They also regularly participate in agricultural rituals, in particular the maize harvest (N: *masi eka rae*) and the rice harvest (N: *masi hare*) where they receive ancestral blessings in the form of holy water, betelnut spittle, and bua malus. They do so as people who ‘use the land for farming and gardening’. Their limited participation in the Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony is connected to histories of settlement within the domain.

The population of Roma hamlet are sometimes referred to by other groups in Babulo as ‘the aldeia without land’. The aldeia of Roma was established after independence. Unlike the majority Naueti speakers, the people of Roma hamlet are largely mother-tongue Makassae speakers. According to one history of the origins of this group, the Roma ancestors served a leader (*liurai*) of the Burmeta, who lived in exile near Quelicai. When this liurai was invited to return and rule over the people of Babulo, he agreed on condition that he could bring his own people who stuck to him like ‘the seeds of a long grass’.

The Roma were not granted specific areas of land on which to farm or settle by the Source of the Land but served the chiefly houses of Babulo. In the past, one of the main tasks of members of this group was to watch over the buffalo herds of Burmeta descendants. In time, the descendants of the Roma started farming land near the animal enclosures that they guarded or land where they regularly took the animals to pasture. Now members of this group claim these areas of land as their own, based on long-term occupancy rights.

Historically, the people of Roma hamlet have been strong supporters of Fretilin, and there can be no doubt that the aspirations of the people of Roma resonated with Fretilin’s rhetoric concerning putting an end ‘to all forms of domination of our people’ (Jolliffe 1978: 331). After formal independence was declared in 2002, the Fretilin government approved the creation of a new hamlet (aldeia) called Roma. For many in the village of Babulo, this was interpreted as a sign of recognition for the loyalty of the people of Roma to Fretilin during the occupation. Yet, despite this formal recognition, prejudice against the people of Roma continues. For example, one of the younger sons of the Source of the Land explained to Barnes that the Roma people who ‘served’ his uncle’s house were treated like family, yet he lamented that like members of some of the ‘commoner’ (N: *renu*) houses, they ‘no longer know their place’.

The people of Afaloicai

The largest group of in-migrants to Babulo are originally from the neighbouring village (T: *suku*) of Afaloicai. Located to the north of Babulo, the former domain of Afaloicai encompassed a large territory that stretched across the southern

slopes of the Matebian mountain range, from Baguia to Uato Carabau. Afaloicai, with its ritual centre in Buibela Lena, is also known as *uluku-watu* (N. mountain stone) in relation to Babulo *wai-tasi* (N. water and sea) reflecting upland/lowland distinctions.

People in Babulo recall three distinct movements of people from Afaloicai to Babulo.¹⁵ The first group, mainly from the hamlets of Buibela and Lena, arrived sometime in the 1930s in search of land with their leader, Liurai Gregorio. The second group came during the post-Second World War period, at first seasonally to work in the rice fields that were being ‘developed’ on the Uato Lari coastal plain, but later to settle more permanently in the area. The third group were forcibly displaced from their settlements of origin as a result of the Indonesian invasion and ‘relocated’ to Babulo following the ‘surrender’ of the civilian population from the resistance stronghold at Matebian in 1978.

The way in-migrants from Afaloicai gained access to land on which to farm and settle in Babulo depended on the circumstances of their arrival and the level of engagement with different origin groups and in the case of the ritual domain of Babulo, the Daralari Source of the Land. Within the ritual domain of Babulo, the people of Afaloicai were not incorporated into the local social order in the same way as previous immigrants. They were not ‘installed on the inside’ in the same way as the Burmeta by taking up a specific ritual or political role and function (Fox 1995b). They remained organised according to their own house-based origin groups, hierarchically ranked and ordered in accordance with their own histories of origin and precedence. Their settling on lands within the ritual domain of Babulo is viewed by the Source of the Land as temporary and in the context of communal rituals; whether held at Baha Liurai or Borulaisoba, the people of Afaloicai are often referred to as ‘the people who use the land for farming and gardening’ (see Barnes 2017a).

Daralari elders recount that a group from Afaloicai, led by Liurai Gregorio, migrated to their area in the 1930s. Through a key marriage alliance, Gregorio’s group gained conditional access to land under a fertility-giver/fertility-taker arrangement, which required ongoing contributions in exchange for use rights. Elders stress that this was a formal oath-based agreement, and that ultimate control of the land remained with the original custodians and the Source of the Land.

The capacity of the Daralari Source of the Land to negotiate or determine land allocation to immigrants was increasingly challenged after the Second World War. From the 1950s onwards, colonial policies aimed at ‘developing’ local agriculture led first to seasonal and later to more permanent migrations from the upland areas

¹⁵ There may well have been earlier migrations from the highlands to the coast. Narratives of the opening of the Uato Lari rice fields suggest that people from Afaloicai may have been involved prior to the 1930s.

around Matebian, including Afaloicai, to the lowlands. In the 1950s and 1960s, the *Chefe do Suco* and *Chefe da Povação* from the entire *concelho* (P. council/district) of Uatolari were ordered to organise work-groups and ‘open up’ the coastal plain for rice cultivation (Metzner 1977: 283-286). For those who arrived in Babulo during the post-war period, access to land was no longer necessarily mediated through marriage into local origin groups, but rather through their relationship with other family members from Afaloicai previously settled in Babulo and neighbouring Vessoru-Uaitame.

It was the Indonesian invasion and occupation that most severely restricted the possibility of negotiated access to land. Following the initial internment of the local population, those from isolated upland populations of Uatolari sub-district, most notably Afaloicai, were relocated to administrative centres or linear settlements in lowland areas of Babulo such as Naedala, Kampung Baru, and Uato Lari Leten. Although Daralari elders claim that the local leadership, hamlet, and village chiefs of Babulo played a significant role in the relocation of the population during the Indonesian occupation, they were nevertheless acting upon the instructions of the Indonesian military.

While Daralari elders acknowledge that their ancestors granted access to land to certain groups from Afaloicai, they also feel that land and natural resources (forest products and fuel in particular) available to their own people are becoming scarcer. Daralari elders expressed their concern regarding access to land and natural resources by suggesting that some ‘outsiders’ do not partake in communal thanksgiving rituals and continued to maintain strong links with their own ancestral settlements. One elder commented that many people from Afaloicai who had been displaced during the Indonesian occupation were now prospering and as a consequence taking over more land. He noted that more and more people from Afaloicai were building houses on Daralari land using concrete blocks and zinc roofs, which suggested that they planned to stay permanently. The same elder stated that the presence of people from Afaloicai on Daralari land was not the issue, but rather that little by little, the Daralari themselves were being ‘pushed out’ of their own land and in the future might have to look for land elsewhere. He also made a connection between the increase in numbers of people from Afaloicai and the perceived decline in the Daralari population, which was one of the main motivations for rebuilding sacred houses and revitalising ceremonial life through collective ceremony.

Although many people from Afaloicai recognise the emplaced authority of the Daralari Source of the Land, this recognition certainly does not extend to acknowledgment that the Daralari could evict Afaloicai migrants from their land, or prevent them from building permanent housing and transferring those houses to their children (Fitzpatrick et al. 2012: 142). Relations between Daralari landowners and Afaloicai settlers are in general cordial. Many individuals and families from these communities are bound by networks of reciprocal exchange and alliance through

marriage. They also remember the agreements (T: *juramento*) made between their forefathers regarding land allocation (see Barnes 2017a). Nevertheless, since independence, tensions over access to land and natural resources have increased. Whenever these tensions have surfaced, the Daralari local leaders and elders have tended to reassert their rights as Source of the Land (see Barnes 2017b).

Conclusion

The Babulo Mane Hitu ceremony exemplifies the dynamic and complex fabric of social, spiritual, and territorial ties that define the ritual domain of Ina Ama Beli Daralari Babulo Mane Hitu in post-independence Timor-Leste. Through the detailed examination of the ceremony and its participants, we observe the renewal and negotiation of relationships not only among the core origin groups but also between these groups and the wider community, including outside the traditional social hierarchy. This ritual serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring power of ancestral ties, the importance of land and natural resources, and the ongoing efforts to maintain communal harmony and identity in the face of historical upheavals and contemporary challenges. By articulating the contested matters and the collaboration within local orders of social organisation, the ceremony reveals the delicate balance between maintaining tradition and adapting to change. It underscores the ritual domain as a living, evolving entity, where the past informs the present, and the community collectively navigates its future. The dedication to rebuilding sacred houses and revitalising ceremonial life, especially in the post-conflict and post-occupation context, highlights a community's commitment to preserving its social and moral framework, a testament to the power of ritual in reaffirming social ties and hierarchies, and a vivid illustration of the community's ongoing dialogue with its land, ancestors, and each other. This ceremony, therefore, stands not just as a ritualistic event but as a pivotal moment of communal reflection, renewal, and affirmation of identity and belonging in Timor-Leste's evolving socio-cultural landscape.

Acknowledgments

The authors respectfully acknowledge the land and Rea Luli Babulo, and give thanks to the late elders of the ritual domain of Babulo Mane Hitu, keepers of the Uma Kaibela, Uma Buta, and Uma Ita: Senhor Carlos Amaral, Senhor Anacleto, and Senhor Gaspar Menezes. We are grateful to the ritual community for welcoming us to their ceremony. Susanna Barnes further thanks Miguel Fernandes and Felismina Amaral for their patience and generosity in sharing their knowledge.

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