

The *serimónia* network: economic mobilisation through rituals in the hamlet of Faulara, Liquiçá

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Abstract

This chapter addresses some economic aspects of the ritual exchange regime in Timor-Leste. Drawing on quantitative data gathered in the village of Faulara (Liquiçá municipality) through a household survey and a qualitative case study on the marriage rituals involving a particular household, we show how ceremonies structured around fertility-giver/fertility-taker (*umane/mane-foun*) relations constitute only a small part of ritual activity in which other types of relationships such as neighbourhood and friendship play a central role as well. Building on that and considering the ritual exchange regime in a broader way, we show how the ritual exchange regime can work as a credit and savings union as well as a safety and solidarity network. In a broader theoretical perspective, we analyse how people use rituals as an economic mechanism and propose that they serve to ensure the economic security and redistribution embedded in kinship and everyday social networks.

Keywords: Timor-Leste; economic anthropology; household economies; ritual exchange regime; ritual revitalisation

Ever since the first social scientists became interested in Timor, the exchange of gifts involved in alliance and mortuary rituals have been a dominant focus, particularly among those working in the last years of the colonial period (Forman 1981; Friedberg 1989; Hicks 1984; Traube 1980a, 1986). Recently, the issue of ritual exchange has gained renewed traction as a topic of interest among social scientists in Timor-Leste, with anthropologists focusing for the most part on mortuary and alliance rituals (Bovensiepen 2014; Hicks 2010; Silva 2018). Other research streams have analysed different ritual aspects, such as linkages with resource management (Alonso-Población et al. 2018; Palmer 2010, 2011; Palmer and Carvalho 2008; Thu, Scott, and van Niel 2007), conflict resolution (Babo-Soares 2004; Simião 2017; Trindade 2008, 2014) and the motivations of people to attend small rituals connected with the *Uma Lulik* (origin house) outside the common ritual cycles (Silva 2019).

Initially, researchers drew attention to the apparent revitalisation of these types of practices (Bovensiepen 2015; McWilliam 2011; Palmer and Carvalho 2008); later, new discourses around ritual practice were identified (Alonso-Población, Pena-Castro, and Fidalgo-Castro 2018; Silva 2017).

Among the first set of researchers, Palmer and Carvalho (2008) explained ritual revitalisation around resource management as an attempt, in part, by communities to play a role in state formation. Bovensiepen (2014) suggested that the expansion of ritual practices enabled communities to deal with past conflicts in a context of post-independence construction and identity formation. In contrast, McWilliam (2011), taking an economic standpoint, suggested that ritual revitalisation arose as a response to the collapse of the market economy after Indonesia's withdrawal from Timor-Leste.

Following this initial focus on ritual revitalisation, other researchers called attention to the emergence of a new discourse that portrayed rituals as a burden for economic development. This issue has been approached from both an interpretive and objectivist viewpoint (Alonso-Población, Fidalgo-Castro, and Pena Castro 2018; Silva 2017). Among objectivist works, policy-oriented development agencies stand out, and, according to Silva and Simião (2012), have played a role in amplifying such discourses. A policy brief published by a local NGO, Belum, and the Center for International Conflict Resolution (CIRC) of Columbia University, have explicitly endorsed the representation of culture as 'burden' (Brandao et al. 2011). Brandao et al. (2011) expressly state that culture is an expense that deprives families of basic resources such as access to education. However, their conclusions are driven by a narrow conceptualisation of 'culture' that focuses solely on rituals in which marriage exchange relations become effective, with special emphasis on ceremonies of alliance (*barlake*) and death.

Based on a case study in the Faulara, we show that ceremonies structured around fertility-giver/fertility-taker (*umane/mane-foun*) relations constitute only a small part of ritual activity (Palmer 2015). However, as we show in this chapter, when seen in a broader temporal perspective, the ritual exchange regime can work as a credit and savings union as well as a safety and solidarity network that goes beyond the *umane/mane-foun* relationship. We highlight this function to discuss some of the hypotheses formulated about the revitalisation of rituals in independent Timor-Leste, specifically McWilliam's (2011) view of rituals as an economic strategy used to mitigate economic uncertainties and grant security after the fall of the market economy at the end of Indonesian occupation.

In a broader way, we also contribute dense ethnographic descriptions to Gibson et al.'s (2018) call for more elucidation of the "community economies of monsoon Asia". This chapter analyses how the people of Faulara mobilise goods and money by mechanisms other than market transactions, specifically by rituals. We propose that rituals serve to ensure the economic security and redistribution embedded in

kinship and everyday social networks. By exploring how a particular household deals with their ritual activity, we uncover the ways in which they enable their wellbeing through relations with others (Gibson et al. 2018, 6).

Methodology

This research is based on a case study in the village of Faulara. Information gathering was undertaken through mixed research methods, both quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative data was gathered through a household survey carried out in June 2011 that aimed to elicit information about the number of rituals a respondent's household attended and/or organised between January 2010 and June 2011. Additionally, the survey was used as a tool to help us understand the economic impact and importance that rituals had on household economies in the hamlet. The questionnaire was developed through an iterative process of test and refinement.¹ It consisted of nine series of open-ended questions, four of which are analysed here:

1. What ceremonies did you attend between January 2010 and June 2011?
2. What assets and animals did you bring to the ceremony?
3. What assets and animals did you bring back from the ceremony?²
4. Where did the ceremony take place?³

A total of 67 respondents were selected randomly among the 159 domestic units that, according to the *livro de aldeia* (hamlet book), resided in the area.⁴ After the data gathering process, responses were codified and classified.

Table 5.1: Name and type of ritual recorded

Name of the ritual	Type	Classification
<i>Ai-funan midar/moruk/rahun</i> (different moments of the mourning ritual)	4/1	1. Funerary
<i>Barlake</i> (marriage)	2	2. Marriage
<i>Kasamento</i> (Catholic marriage)	4/2	3. <i>Uma Lulik</i>
<i>Krisma</i> (Catholic confirmation)	4	4. Specifically Catholic
<i>Eskola</i> (school)	5	5. School
<i>Halibur maun-alin/Kumpul</i> (gathering of people)	7	6. Other
<i>Halo rate</i> (construction of a grave)	1	7. Cooperation
<i>Hasai fetu</i> (marriage)	2	
<i>Hasai krus</i> (last stage of the construction of a grave)	4/1	
<i>Hatun fatuk-ain</i> (construction of a grave)	1	

Name of the ritual	Type	Classification
<i>Husu misa/Selu misa</i> (pay for a Catholic mass)	4/1	
<i>Kore metan</i> (end of one year of mourning)	1	
<i>Lere dalan</i> (marriage)	2	
<i>Asiste mate</i> (go to a funeral)	1	
<i>Mate ruin</i> (second burial)	1	
<i>Prenda/Bua-malus/Ko'alia fetu-foun</i> (first stage of the marriage ritual)	2	
<i>Raut fatuk rahun</i> (construction of a grave)	1	
<i>Riba fatuk-ain</i> (construction of a grave)	1	
<i>Sarani</i> (Catholic baptism)	4	
<i>Sunu metan</i> (end of one year of mourning)	1	
<i>Uma Lulik</i> (sacred house)	3	
<i>Halo koran</i> (blood brotherhood ritual)	7	
Other	6	

Ethnographic research was conducted by the lead author between 2007 and 2013 for 42 months (18 of them in Faulara). For this case study, the lead author followed a particular household through two marriages in which they were a main actor between 2009 and 2011 (both as fertility-givers and fertility-takers). The aim of the case study was to show how a particular domestic unit engages with ritual exchanges and mobilises economic resources through them.

The household in this case study has its roots outside Faulara, in a *suku* (village) called Asumanu, although the house of origin (*Uma Lulik*) is based in Hatuquessi. Both *suku* share borders with Leotelá, the *suku* where Faulara is located.⁵

Julião was born in Asumanu, the place where his parents established their residence, matrilocally, after getting married. Mariana was born in Hatuquessi. They married after the Indonesian invasion and established their temporal residence in the village of Liquiçá, where Juanito, Pepito, Benedita, Leomar, and Josito were born (Pepito and Benedita died young).⁶ Afterwards, the family moved to Asumanu where the rest of the children were born at a house they constructed on the land Julião inherited. They decided to move to Faulara in 1997 when the Indonesian administration announced the opening of Faulara's transmigration site. The first one to move there was Julião, along with his sons Juanito and Alsino. Shortly after his arrival he was assassinated and his children were sent back to Asumanu. Even after that, in 1998, Mariana decided to move to Faulara with her children, apart from Juliana, who had been adopted at the age of two by Mariana's elder sister.

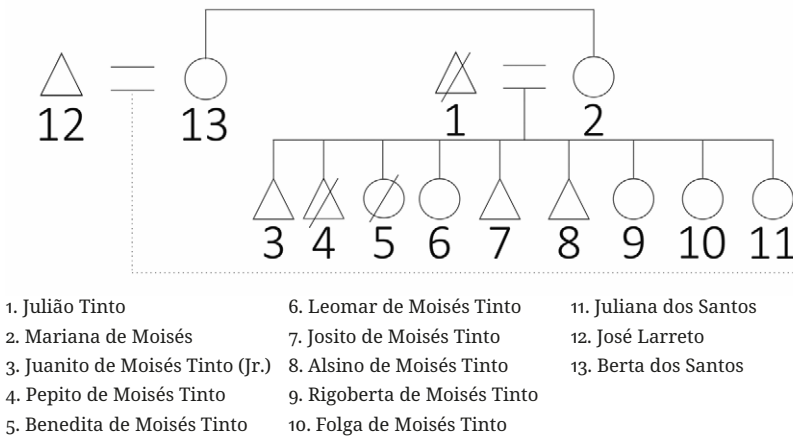


Figure 5.1: Family tree of the household in 2009. Credit: Alberto Fidalgo-Castro and Enrique Alonso-Población.

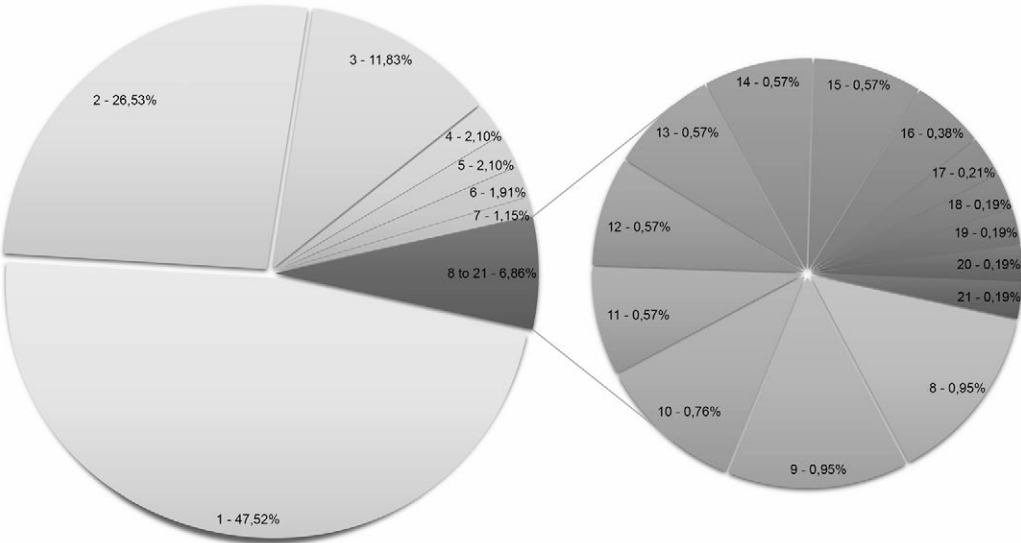
In 2009 the household owned one property in Faulara with an approximate total area of 0.45 hectares. Five sons and daughters were permanently living at the house, and two others were living with Mariana's elder sister and husband in the *suku* Lauhata, close to Liquiçá, attending senior and junior secondary school. Juanito Jnr had discontinued his studies and was taking care of the agricultural work along with his mother. Leomar, the woman getting married (see below), was still living in the house after finishing secondary school. Josito had just finished his studies at the Agricultural Technical School of Maliana (Bobonaro district). Folga was finishing her studies at the primary school in Faulara.

The family did not own any rice fields, but they normally planted some each year through agreements with other families (called *lisuk*) who had land titles, or by payments in kind after working in somebody else's fields.⁷ They cultivated cassava and corn in the house garden for household consumption, and also used cassava as a cash crop from time to time.⁸ Though settled at Faulara, the family kept their land, inherited from Julião, at Asumanu, where they owned 2 hectares of coffee plantations from which they received some money. They had owned two cows, but both had died and the only animals they were raising at that time were two pigs, as well as many chickens. None of the members of the household had a formal job and they carried out different tasks for money. Mariana cooked and sold pastries (*dosi*) during market days.⁹ She also had an agreement with two women traders who sold products in the Dili markets. Other economic activities included occasional infrastructure maintenance works carried out by the men of the household.¹⁰

Results

The relevance of rituals of cooperation

When analysing the frequency of responses regarding the types of rituals attended during the previous six months, three types represented 86.16 per cent of all rituals attended. As can be seen in Figure 5.2, most of the cases (47.5 per cent) corresponded to a ritual called *halibur maun-alin*, which we classified as a ‘ritual of cooperation’.



1 - Halibur maun-alin/Kumpul (gathering of people)	2 - Asiste mate (go to a funeral)
3 - Kore metan (end of one year of mourning)	4 - Hasai feto (marriage)
5 - Uma-lulik (sacred house)	6 - Kasamento (Catholic marriage)
7 - Prenda/bua malus/Ko'alia feto-foun (first stage of the marriage ritual)	8 - Al-funan midar/moruk/rahun (different moments of the mourning ritual)
9 - Raut fatuk rahun (construction of a grave)	10 - Husu misa/Selu misa (pay for a Catholic mass)
11 - Krisma (Catholic confirmation)	12 - Riba fatuk-ain (construction of a grave)
13 - Halo rate (construction of a grave)	14 - Hasai krus (last stage of the construction of a grave)
15 - Halo koran (blood brotherhood ritual)	16 - Mate ruin (second burial)
17 - Hatun fatuk-ain (construction of a grave)	18 - Eskola (school)
19 - Lere dalan (marriage)	20 - Sarani (Catholic baptism)
21 - Sunu metan (end of one year of mourning)	

Figure 5.2: Percentage of total ritual movements (names in Tetum) Credit: Alberto Fidalgo-Castro and Enrique Alonso-Población.

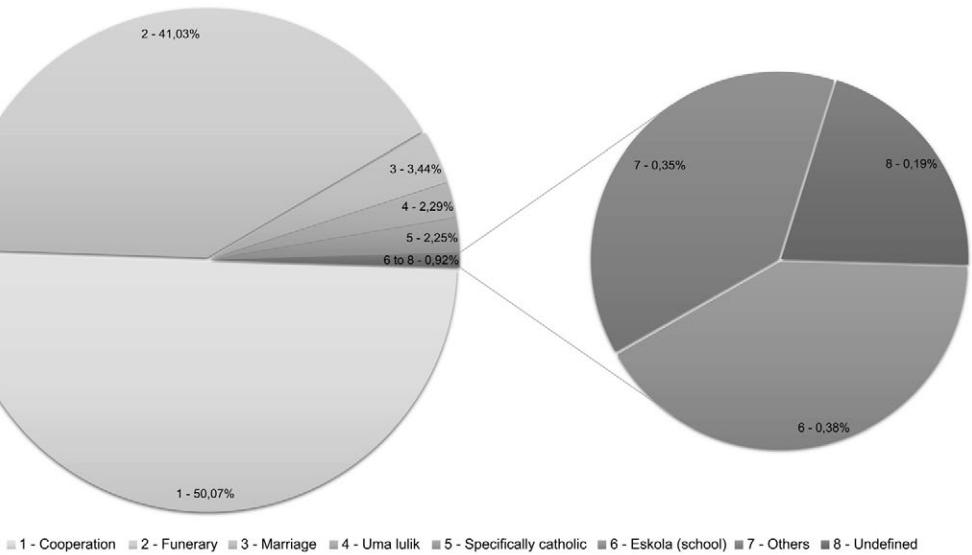


Figure 5.3. Percentage of ritual movements by type (according to Table 5.1). Credit: Alberto Fidalgo-Castro and Enrique Alonso-Población.

Figure 5.3 represents the frequency of rituals mentioned in Table 5.1 sorted by type. The frequencies point to a consistent trend: most of the rituals attended by the participants of the questionnaire were those that we have called ‘rituals of cooperation’, particularly the ones called *halibur maun-alin* and *kumpul*.

The reason to classify these *serimónia* as rituals of cooperation is because they are usually celebrated for the purpose of gathering the support of neighbours, family and friends in order to acquire a certain amount of money, animals and goods to carry out, or attend, another more expensive ritual (mainly marriage or funerary). These rituals of cooperation are the ones referred to as *halibur maun-alin* rituals (gather the older brothers and the younger brothers), although sometimes they are also referred to as *kumpul* (Indonesian: together) or *kafana* (warm coffee, as it was called in Tokodede according to the accounts of local villagers).

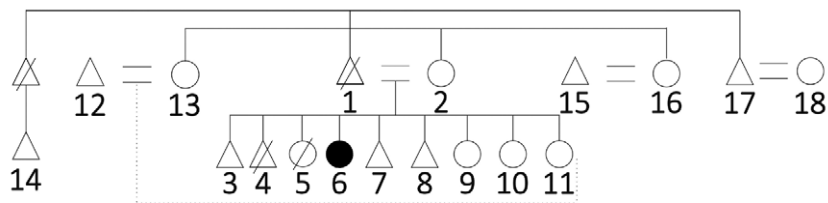
The household that organises or attends a costly ritual (such as a marriage or funeral)—especially as a fertility-taker—usually organises another small ritual in which commensality is the central element and a variable number of animals are sacrificed to offer food to the people attending (among other foodstuffs). Those attending, in turn, make monetary, goods or even animal donations that are carefully registered and kept by the household, for they need to be returned when those attendees organise a ritual of this kind themselves. This monetary exchange

is conceptualised as *matak* (raw) or *tasak* (cooked), a classification in which ‘raw’ is the first of the donations, and ‘cooked’ refers to the donation that is returned in exchange. It is expected that the monetary refund, called *osan funan* (flowers of money), will be higher than the money received (usually double). The described reciprocity cycle is restarted each time it is completed. Consequently, these rituals could be considered as an investment (with a 100 per cent return rate).

Following the exchange of goods – Part 1: La’o umane—walking the path of the fertility-giver

In August 2009, the household held a marital ritual they referred to as *prenda*. Leomar was getting married to a man from Darulete, a bordering *suku*. The fertility-takers arrived at Faulara the day before the celebration, staying overnight at some of their relatives’ houses. After lunch, the fertility-givers started to get ready to receive them. The household’s front garden was crowded with people, many of them neighbours. The people who played the central role in the fertility-giver group are shown in Figure 5.4.

The fertility-givers’ representatives (*lia-na’in*) for the ceremony were José Larreto, *Siñor* (Mister/Mr) Antonio, *Siñor* Lorenço da Silva and *Siñor* Domingos (12, 14, 15, and 17). Although two of them were not members of the descent group (*uma lisan*), they were asked to act as their representatives because the men of the house



- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Julião Tinto (F) | 10. Folga de Moisés Tinto (yZ) |
| 2. Mariana de Moisés (M) | 11. Juliana dos Santos (yZ) |
| 3. Juanito de Moisés Tinto (eB) | 12. José Larreto (MeZH) |
| 4. Pepito de Moisés Tinto (eB) | 13. Berta dos Santos (MeZ) |
| 5. Benedita de Moisés Tinto (eZ) | 14. Sr Antonio (FeBS) |
| 6. Leomar de Moisés Tinto (EGO) | 15. Sr Lorenço da Silva (MyZH) |
| 7. Josito de Moisés Tinto (yB) | 16. Sra Amelia dos Santos (MeZ) |
| 8. Alsino de Moisés Tinto (yB) | 17. Sr Domingos (FyB) |
| 9. Rigoberta de Moisés Tinto (yZ) | 18. Sra Teresinha (FyBW) |

Figure 5.4: Family tree of the fertility-givers’ group (*ego* is 6). Credit: Alberto Fidalgo-Castro and Enrique Alonso-Población.

were considered to be too young (*labarik*) to carry out that task. Apart from the people consigned in the diagram, the godparents and the chief of the village and his spouse had important roles during the celebration of the ritual.

The fertility-takers arrived at 6.00 pm. After greeting each other in ritual language, they were received with refreshments in the front garden. After this, the *lia-na'in* of the fertility-taker's group went into a room inside the main house prepared for bridewealth negotiations where they met the representatives of the fertility-givers. There they asked for the blessing of the ancestors from both houses to keep the ceremony going (*hasé matebian*). The fertility-takers handed over US\$190, two bottles of *tuak* (wine/liqueur) and a goat—a gift reciprocated with one *tais* and a pig by the fertility-givers. Right after exchanging gifts, the fertility-givers informed the fertility-takers that it was time for them to have a break for dinner. This first contact between both groups was called *tuku odamatan* (knock on the door). Neither the groom nor the bride took part in this first meeting.

Once this first stage of the negotiations was complete, the bride went outside, dressed in a bridal gown, to receive her future in-laws. She offered them betel and areca (*bua-malus*) and kissed their hands (*hola bensa*) as a sign of respect. Then the couple went back inside and paid their respects to the bride's family in a similar fashion. Shortly afterwards, the fertility-givers served dinner, consisting of a banquet of food (rice, pork, noodles, salad and fries) and drinks (beer, soft drinks and bottled water). The next stage of the ceremony was the *kaben* (marriage). Lorenzo da Silva acted as the master of ceremonies and some Catholic prayers were offered. After cutting the wedding cake, the groom gave the bride a necklace and they performed the first dance.

Dancing continued until dawn and, while most people took part (particularly the young ones), the representatives of the houses and other adults completed the bridewealth negotiations (which they called *biti ho mama*).¹¹ The *lia-na'in* of the fertility-givers called the fertility-takers back into the house to present the *bee-manas ai-tukan* (one of the parts of the bridewealth payments). Although they had previously agreed upon an amount of \$US500, the fertility-takers presented only \$US430, along with betel and areca, some sticks of goat meat, a metal breast plate (*belak*) and one Mexican coin (*pataka*).¹² The fertility-givers rejected these offerings, so the fertility-takers added an *ulsuku* (hairpin made with a Dutch coin). The *lia-na'in* asked Mariana to bring the liver of the pig that had been sacrificed at the beginning of the ceremony; divining its signs (*halo urat*) settled the negotiations.

Once the negotiations were over, both groups wrote a document in which they registered two new deferred bride wealth payments that should be provided before the end of 2011. In the first, the fertility-takers agreed to pay \$US250, one metal breast plate (*belak*), one goat and eight bottles of wine/liqueur.¹³ In the second, which they considered to be the *barlake* (bridewealth) narrowly speaking, the fertility-takers

agreed to provide \$US2,500, five goats, one buffalo or cow and 40 bottles of wine/liquor.¹⁴ After writing the document, two of the *lia-na'in* from each group signed it and the fertility-takers were asked to give a dollar as a token representing their commitment to fulfilling it. This marked the end of the negotiations, after which people scattered to rest or continued to party until dawn.

Following breakfast, which was served at around 7.00 am, some participants expressed the intention to leave. Mariana then called a number of people into the house and began redistributing the gifts presented by the fertility-takers. This redistribution was registered, as shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Redistribution of ritual gains

Person	Receives
Marriage godmother	\$150
Baptism godmother	\$40
Mariana	\$100 + 1 <i>belak</i> (metal breast plate)
Juanito	\$14
Josito	\$30
José Larreto	1 <i>pataka</i> (Mexican coin)
Berta dos Santos	\$50
Antonio	\$20 + 1 <i>belak</i> (metal breast plate)
Lorenço da Silva	\$40
Domingos	\$20
Teresinha	1 <i>ulsuku</i> (hairpin)
Hamlet chief	\$10
Hamlet chief's wife	\$20
TOTAL	\$494, two <i>metal breast plates</i> , one Mexican coin and one hairpin

The redistribution of money and goods was explained as a means of compensating people for their fatigue (*kolen*)—either for their services during the ceremony or because they had helped to raise Leomar.¹⁵ In the case of the hamlet chief (*xefe de aldeia*), this fatigue was conceptualised as governance (*kolen tanba Ita-nia oan feto nia mak ukun*). The rest of the money the household received was redistributed among neighbours and other family members in varying amounts (\$10, \$5 and \$1). This was because of the belief that ‘nobody can leave empty handed’ (*labele bá ho liman-mamuk*).

Following the exchange of goods – Part 2: La’o mane-foun—walking the path of the fertility-taker

Hamanas kafé – ‘Heating the coffee’: Problems retrieving the deferred bridewealth

In September 2010 the household was getting ready to attend another marriage. Juanito was going to marry a woman from a neighbouring *suku* in Ermera.¹⁶ He and his bride had already been living together for some months both at his and her families’ houses, moving back and forth to help with farming work. The two houses had agreed upon a total bridewealth of US\$4,500, and the fertility-givers would allow the couple to establish their residence patrilocally after the ‘clearing the path’ (*lere dalan*) ceremony. For that ceremony, the household would have to meet the economic requirements of US\$500 and a cow.

With the intention of gaining economic support from their familial neighbours (*maun-alin vijiño*) and their fertility-takers (*mane-foun*), the household organised a ritual of cooperation called *hamanas kafé*. They sent a messenger (*manu-ain*) to notify the fertility-takers about the economic requirements. The ceremony took place in October 2010 during the rainy season (*tempu udan*), which is considered to be ‘the time of scarcity’. The household’s expenditure consisted of a pig (raised by themselves) and US\$20 to buy beer, soft drinks and some bottles of palm wine.¹⁷

When the ceremony started, the people arriving entered a small room in the house where the *lia-na’in* received their contributions. The people who acted as *lia-na’in* were an elder brother of Julião—who could not be a part of the ceremony the year before—and Lorenzo da Silva (see Figure 5.4). Josito recorded the contributions in a notebook. The contributions made by the familial neighbours are shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3. Neighbours’ contributions

Name	Contribution	Note	Name	Contribution	Note
1. Avelina da Costa	\$10		22. Jorge Pereira Pinto	\$10	
2. Armando Alvis	\$5		23. Olandino da Costa	\$5	
3. Raimundo Serrão	\$5		24. Julião Martins	\$5	
4. Umberto da Costa	\$5		25. Sezario Alberto	\$8	
5. Albino Manekas	\$5		26. Tomas Pereira	\$9	

Name	Contribution	Note	Name	Contribution	Note
6. Domingos da Costa	\$5		27. Valentin da Silva Martins	\$10	<i>Tasak</i> US\$4 <i>Matak</i> US\$5
7. Antonio Alves	\$5		28. Calistro José Marçal	\$5	<i>Tasak</i>
8. Sonsitanção da Silva	\$5		29. Martinho Sampaio	\$5	
9. Domingos Babo	\$10		30. Alcina da Silva	\$5	
10. Moisés	\$20		31. Julio Soares	\$5	
11. Duarte da Silva	\$5		32. Carlos Nunes Correia	\$5	
12. Gilberto Pereira	\$5		33. Manuel José Manus Marçal	\$5	
13. Joanico Aniceto	\$10	<i>Tasak</i>	34. Alberto Fidalgo	\$10	
14. Saturnino da Silva	1 metal breast plate (<i>belak</i>)		35. Egido da Costa	\$10	
15. Martinho da Costa	\$10		36. Agostino Marçal	\$5	
16. Francisco da Silva	\$5		37. Nelson da Costa	\$10	
17. Victor Berrão	\$4		38. Gaspar de Jesus	\$5	
18. Alberto da Silva	\$5		39. Angelino dos Santos	\$10	
19. Andino Pereira	\$5		40. Loreça da Silva	\$5	
20. Manuel Barros	\$5		41. Rafael da Silva	\$5	
21. Napolião da Silva	\$5		42. Julito Alves Ataide	\$10	
TOTAL			\$281 and one <i>belak</i>		

The contributions made by the fertility-takers were recorded separately from those made by familial neighbours. Even though they were informed by the household of the amount of money and goods to bring to the ceremony, they were not able to comply. That day, they brought a small part of the goods and money demanded by the household, and committed to bringing the rest in the dry season (*bailoron*).

Of all the negotiations with the fertility-takers, that with house Betrema took the longest to settle. House Betrema was establishing a second fertility-taking relationship with the household, and the other *mane-foun* were the original ones of the house—the ones that established marriage alliances with them in the ‘age of the ancestors’.¹⁸ Consequently, Betrema would carry a heavier burden, as they were asked to present the payment of the *bagi* (see footnote 120), as agreed upon in a document they signed in 2009.

When it was time to make his offering, the spokesman for house Betrema—in this case Leomar’s husband—presented US\$25, a goat and four bottles of palm wine (*tua*). The *lia-na’in* refused Betrema’s offering and mentioned that they had been instructed to bring US\$250, a goat and four bottles of palm wine. Leomar’s husband replied that the messenger (*manu-ain*) had informed them that they had to deliver *dua puluh dollar* (Indonesian: twenty-five dollars). However, the messenger confirmed that he had asked them to bring *duaratus lima puluh dollar* (Indonesian: two hundred and fifty dollars). One of the *lia-na’in* commented that the fertility-takers may have thought the figure was in rupees, not dollars, since it was not uncommon for some people to refer to ten cents (around 1,000 Indonesian rupees) as *seribu dollar* (1,000 dollars). This comment served to relieve tensions and caused much hilarity among the *mane-foun* and the *umane*.

However, the *lia-na’in* of the house reiterated that they still had to deliver the US\$250. The fertility-takers’ spokesperson explained that the economic situation of the people on the mountain (*foho*) was very complicated at that time; had they performed the ceremony two months earlier (when the economic returns from the coffee harvest came in), it would have been less difficult to make their contribution. The response of the givers was sharp: when an *umane* calls their *mane-foun* to give what was agreed upon, they have to comply with it whether they are prepared or not. The *umane* repeated that the amount was immovable and warned about the dangers of not delivering what was fixed and, therefore, being ‘rejected by the fertility-givers’ (*umane la simu*): “*Bele akontese azar oin-oin, ita bele halai soke kareta, dala ruma trabaun la di’ak*” (‘Anything can happen, there may be a car accident, the brakes may not work’).

The fertility-takers’ spokesperson maintained long periods of silence, but did not leave. After a while, he pointed out that the pig the fertility-givers had gifted them the year before at the marriage ceremony had died on the way back to his house, suggesting that they had been given an animal in poor condition. The *umane*

replied that it was true that the pig issue was something to talk about, but not on that occasion, since, in his words: “*Buat ne’e iha nia dalan. Ida ohin dalan ida, fahi nian ketak fali*” (“This has its own path. Today is a path, the pig is another”). However, the *umane* immediately proposed a new contribution different from the one originally stipulated: the *mane-foun* could donate US\$200 and one cow instead of US\$250 and one goat. The fertility-takers’ spokesperson did not accept this. A long pause followed during which there was no conversation between the two groups; the silence was only interrupted by the *lia-na’in* of the fertility-giving group who made funny comments and jokes.

After a while, one of the *lia-na’in* asked for a bottle of *anggur merah* (Indonesian: red wine). He opened it and offered its contents to some of those present; he then invited people who were outside the house to come inside and drink a glass. But he did not invite the *mane-foun* to drink. Two hours after the negotiations had started, lunch was called. The representatives of the two lineages were served separately in the place where they were negotiating. Leomar’s husband refused to eat, but the *umane* told him that he should not be concerned about breaking any taboo when eating, because the meat was not *lulik*, it was conceptualised as breakfast (*matabixu*).¹⁹ After much convincing, he agreed to eat.

The negotiation continued well into the night. The next morning the lead author returned to the house to ask how it had been resolved; he was told that the parties had agreed to an up-front contribution of US\$50, one goat and four bottles of wine and a deferred contribution, in the dry season, of an additional US\$150.

Table 5.4: Fertility-takers’ contributions

Group name	Contribution (US\$)	Deferred contribution (US\$)	Goat	Belak	Wine/ liquor
Talibela	10	40	-	-	-
Craeleki Bercoli	5	45	-	-	2
Mau-Meta	5	45	-	1	1
Betrema	50	150	1	-	4
TOTAL	70	280	1	1	7

At the end of the *hamanas kafé*, the domestic unit had gathered a total of US\$350 (US\$280 from neighbours and friends and US\$70 from the fertility-takers), a goat, two metal breast plates (*belak*) and seven bottles of wine/liquor (*tua*). Apart from the expenditure of the goods needed to hold the *hamanas kafé*, the rest of the earnings would be used to present their own offerings for Juanito’s *lere dalan*.

Lere dalan: 'Clearing the path': Problems in the accords for the bridewealth payments

One and a half months after the celebration of the *hamanas kafé*, a *lere dalan* (one of the different stages of the marriage, the *barlake*) took place. In that ritual, the people of the domestic unit delivered part of the bridewealth payments they still owed to their own fertility-giver. Mariana sent her son Alsino (see Figure 5.4) to buy a male goat (*bibi aman boot*) from a neighbour, which was going to be handed over in the ritual, since they could not afford a cow, which was what their fertility-givers had stipulated. Not reaching an agreement on the price, the family went to another neighbour to buy a goat on credit. At around four in the afternoon, once everything was ready, we left to go to the house of the fertility-givers, arriving there an hour and a half later.

After asking the fertility-givers for permission to enter, the goat was presented. We were then taken to a house to wait to be called by the *lia-na'in* to begin the ceremony. The initial process that followed was similar to that of the marriage ceremony accounted above. While we waited, two women from the giver group presented us with offerings of betel, areca and tobacco, following the local etiquette. Later on, the woman who was going to marry Juanito, the *feto-foun* (new woman), presented herself to her future in-laws and expressed her respect by kissing each member's hand (*hola bensa*). After this, the first ceremonial exchange took place, in which the *lia-na'in* of both groups carried out the *hasé matebian* (ask permission from the ancestors), presenting the fertility-givers US\$50, a bottle of palm wine, betel and areca, which was reciprocated in exchange for a *tais* from the fertility-giver.

After the exchange, we were taken to a space where a snack consisting of pastries, coffee, soft drinks and palm wine was served. Before feasting, some Catholic prayers were conducted and the bride and groom cut the wedding cake and started the dance, which lasted all night.

Later on, the fertility-takers' group was called to attend the *biti ho mama* (the mat and chewing of betel and areca), to which they had to present part of the bridewealth. They presented US\$500, a metal breast plate, two bottles of palm wine, betel and areca. The fertility-givers did not accept (*la simu*) the offering, as it had been agreed that a cow (*karau*) and not a goat (*bibi*) should be the item offered. This led to a negotiation of more than an hour; eventually, the fertility-giver agreed to accept the goat if US\$50 was added to the total. After this, the fertility-takers were ordered to leave the room where the *lia-na'in* were gathered and were told that they would only be allowed to return when they presented the additional US\$50.

Mariana got angry and commented '*umane ne'e explora ita*' ('these fertility-givers take advantage of us'). Nonetheless, they made a new collection from among

the family and neighbours who had accompanied them to the ritual—more than 30 people—obtaining the amount asked by their fertility-givers (see Table 5.5).

Table 5.5 Collection made during the negotiation of the bridewealth in Ermera

Name	US\$
1. Alberto Fidalgo	10
2. Mãe Meri	5
3. M. Izak	1
4. B [unreadable]	2
5. T. Delfina	2
6. Ama Ensa	4
7. Amatoni	1
8. Azinha	1
9. Ama Teza	2
10. Elvis	1
11. Nona Britis	1
12. T. Dulce	2
13. T. Zito	1
14. T. Samu	1
15. T. Rozita	2
16. Sonistancio	1
17. Pai Joy	5
18. M Maku	2
19. Kera Bel	1
20. Tio Mario	5
TOTAL	50

When the *umane* agreed upon the offerings of the *lere dalan*, the fertility-takers group retired again and was served dinner. Subsequently, a new meeting was held to determine a future date on which the *mane-foun* should deliver the offerings related to the *bee-manas ai-tukan* of the bride. Those negotiations lasted nearly two hours. The fertility-givers intended to set a specific day in August the following year when the fertility-takers would bring the stipulated items for the payment of the bridewealth. However, the fertility-takers refused to agree, arguing that it was impossible to foresee possible shortcomings in the harvest that might prevent

them from fulfilling the agreement and, thus, creating a problem between the two houses.

This negotiation was carried out in metaphorical terms in which the delivery of this part of the bride exchange was expressed as the delivery of *isin ho been*.²⁰ Once the *umane* showed their intention to establish a specific day in August for the payment, and the *lia-na'in* of the *mane-foun* group expressed doubts about their ability to meet that deadline, there was a long period of silence in which the negotiation was halted. Then Mariana intervened, arguing that the fertility-takers were willing to make Juanito reside matrilocally (with the *umane*), working for the family of the bride (bride service) while the payments were not made, and that the fertility-givers had agreed to postpone these negotiations until a year after the celebration of the marriage. Her intervention was answered almost instantly by the elder woman (*ferik*) of the fertility-givers' group, who said: "we won't accept the offerings of the *isin* and the *been* if it takes too long". This warning implied that the failure to comply with the payments of this stage of the *barlake* could have unforeseen and dangerous consequences for the fertility-takers.

This crossing of statements raised tensions that were finally eased by the comical remarks of a *lia-na'in* of the *umane* group. Once the hilarity ceased, the negotiations resumed. Berta dos Santos (Mariana's eZ) intervened, saying that it was irresponsible for the fertility-takers' group to agree on a specific amount with a deadline. They could not anticipate the economic results of the harvest and the production of palm wine (*isin ho been*) and if they arrived in August without the agreed payment, they would be accused of being liars. She proposed to meet again in August and to defer negotiations until then. Her proposal was widely debated for more than an hour by the *lia-na'in* of both groups, who finally agreed that they would meet in August, and would not specify what items had to be delivered on that date. The *ibun ho nanal* (mouth and tongue, spokesperson) of the fertility-givers stated:

La fuiik, la leet, mesak umane-mane-foun kedas.
Atu to'o la to'o, aban-bainrua nia sei to'o iha ne'e.
Atu isin la isin, aban-bainrua nia sei isin iha ne'e.
Atu been la been, aban-bainrua nia sei been iha ne'e.
To'o isin ona, isin
Been bá mak been.

Neither savages nor strangers, we are already *umane-mane-foun*.

Whether it will be enough or not, tomorrow he will come here.

Whether or not there will be a body, tomorrow he will come to bring it here.

Whether or not there will be juice, tomorrow he will come to bring it here.

When there is a body, there will be a body.
When the juice comes out, there will be juice.

This last intervention put an end to the negotiation. An agreement was reached to postpone the delivery of the *bee-manas ai-tukan* until August of the following year, (2011) at which time it would be stipulated what would be delivered.

In the morning, members of the fertility-takers' group began preparing to return to Faulara, accompanied by the woman whose marriage had been celebrated. The bride and groom dressed in traditional clothes (*tais*) and coral bead necklaces (*morteen*). Before leaving, the *mane-foun* met one last time with the *lia-na'in* of the fertility-givers and gave them US\$5 which they referred to as *hiit umane nia ain* (raise the foot of the *umane*). After this, the women from the fertility-takers gave two offerings of US\$5 (one for each of the hearth fires used) to the women of the donor group in the kitchen, as a recognition of their work cooking for the ceremony. In exchange, they received half a sack of rice and a *bornal* (backpack) with uncooked pork meat.

Following these last exchanges, the Faulara entourage set off towards the village. When they left the patio of the house, the women from the *umane* started a *halerik* (stylised wail), lamenting the departure of their daughter. Along the way to the river, people cheered for Juanito and for Faulara, calling out "Long live Juanito! Long live Faulara!" When we reached the riverbank, the bride and groom changed their ceremonial clothes so as not to spoil them. On the other side of the river, the entourage stopped at the mechanical gate for the irrigation channel to the rice fields. There, one of the entourages who belonged to the local elite of the village made a speech in which he congratulated Juanito and congratulated himself on Faulara winning (*manan*) a new woman and a new member of the community. This was followed by another round of cheers in honour of Juanito and Faulara, after which the march resumed and people began to disperse in the direction of their houses, bringing the ceremony to a close.

Discussion

Among anthropologists who have focused on the economic dimensions of the exchange regime in Timor-Leste, the work of Andrew McWilliam (2011) is key. He argues that, in the context of post-conflict Timor-Leste, the revitalisation of ritual activity among Fataluku communities is a strategy to mitigate economic uncertainty and reinforce human security following the collapse of the market economy that accompanied the end of the Indonesian occupation. His research emphasises the redistributive character of ritual exchange, a fundamental element that Traube

(1980b, 1980a, 1986) had previously analysed. Yet, 10 years after that economic collapse, and with Timor-Leste increasingly immersed in the market economy, rituals continue to have a strong presence.

We agree with McWilliam's depiction of ritual exchange as an institution that helps to mitigate economic uncertainty. As we have shown, rituals can sometimes involve expenses (especially when attending as fertility-takers), but can give profits too (when attending as fertility-givers). Also, when a household is facing contingent payments for their own ritual activities, they can mobilise neighbours, family members and fertility-takers to redistribute their economic burden (which will always need to be repaid). In this way, the ritual exchange regime as a whole can work as a credit system. In a context in which access to credit is otherwise limited to local moneylenders who impose exploitative clauses (Lundahl and Sjöholm 2019, 222), formal jobs are scarce and few state-sponsored support networks exist, ritual exchange can be seen as a primary practice of local economic life that can be utilised as an economic network and safety mechanism.

Boosted by foreign policy-oriented development agencies (Silva 2017), a discourse that conceptualises rituals as an economic burden has gained prominence. Elsewhere (Alonso-Población, Fidalgo-Castro, and Pena Castro 2018), we have interpreted this phenomenon as a tension between fields, understood as a social space of forces and struggles in Bourdieu's (1991) terms, derived from the interest of certain social groups (e.g., an aspiring consumer class [Alonso-Población, Pena Castro, and Fidalgo-Castro 2018]) in questioning, under certain discursive contexts, the very basis of power acquisition in contemporary Timor-Leste.

Moving to a more grounded discourse, this case study shows that rituals can be both an economic burden—especially when attending them as fertility-takers (e.g., when the household attended a *lere dalan*)—and a profitable venture—when attending as fertility-givers or even as holders of a ritual, as Traube (1986, 204–220) has pointed out. Further, we show that the fulfilment of ritual obligations depends largely upon webs of solidarity that go beyond networks, making household economies strongly reliant on their relationships with neighbours and friends.

We described two sets of rituals performed in 2009 and 2010. In the first set, a domestic unit held a ritual in which one of their female members got married. That ritual established (or renewed) the fertility-giver/fertility-taker relationship between two houses. Once the marriage was consolidated, the household then prepared for the marriage of one of its male members, which we tracked through two ritual moments (October 2010 and December 2010). The first was a cooperation ritual called *hamanas kafé*—a specific type of *halibur maun-alin*—that the domestic unit celebrated with the aim of gathering resources from neighbours, friends and fertility-takers in order to meet the costs of paying for part of the bridewealth of one of its male members. The second ritual was about the marriage event itself; the

household travelled to the fertility-givers' house to deliver the *lere dalan* and agree upon future payments of the *barlake*. We suggest that facilitating the marriage of a female member of the house first is a strategy that is used to gain capital (mobilisation of resources and people) and leverage in future negotiations over bridewealth payments for male members' marriages.

By taking a household as the unit of analysis, and by lengthening the time span under consideration, we have been able to widen our view of particular rituals within a gift regime of exchange. The selected household was not a rich landowner household, but a *la'o rai* or newcomer house (Alonso-Población and Fidalgo-Castro 2014) with no property rights in rice producing areas. During the period under review, this household benefitted from their position as fertility-givers and carried the economic burden of being the fertility-takers. By making the strategic decision to marry the woman first, they were able to mobilise the postponed payments of their fertility-takers to pay their *barlake* obligations. Along with everyday economic collaboration with other houses, especially with neighbours, through cooperation rituals, this helped them to cope with their own *barlake* payments. In this way, ritual exchange can be seen less as a 'burden' and more as a savings fund subject to the fluctuations of the life cycle of different houses and households.

Through our analysis of the redistribution of ritual gains and losses, we have shown how, far from simply enriching or impoverishing households, the ritual exchange regime connects people through family and neighbourhood relations (among others), creating a complex, nuanced and wide support web. Unlike previous anthropological works, which have tended to focus on the economics of rituals that engage people through kinship, we have shown, through our focus on what we call 'rituals of cooperation', how relationships of neighbourhood and friendship are essential for social reproduction. This required a methodological approach that did not isolate kinship rituals as discrete units of analysis.

Conceptualisations of the exchange regime as a 'burden' derive mostly from discursive analyses that lead to reductionist understandings of the phenomenon. These not only remove from sight the nuanced complexities and flexibility involved in ritual negotiations (e.g., taking into account the time of the year and the outcomes of the agricultural activity, historical debts between house groups, the patrilocality-matrilocality interplay, etc.) but also neglect the very sources of income that enable the continuous flow of goods and the prevalence of exchange regimes in new contexts (e.g., a market economy).

Conclusion

Several studies have depicted the revitalisation of tradition in Timor-Leste as a mechanism to cope with social and historical change. In present day Timor-Leste, in a context in which access to credit is regulated by exploitative clauses when borrowing from local moneylenders (something that may produce chain debts and thus dependency), opportunities for formal employment are limited and there are few support networks from the state or supra-local entities, ritual practices can be seen as a primary practice of local economic life, as they can function as an economic network and safety mechanism. In this paper, we have shown how, when a household needs to observe their ritual obligations with their fertility-givers, or face some contingency, they can mobilise neighbours and agnatic kin through cooperation rituals, redistributing the burden they are facing. We have also shown how ritual gains are shared back to them. Taking a broader perspective of the economy linked to ritual practice, and avoiding an approach that considers kinship-related rituals as discrete units of analysis, we have been able to tease out some of the hitherto unseen ways in which the ritual exchange regime shapes sociality. In sum, we contend that, from this broader perspective, ritual life can be interpreted as a mechanism that provides a social safety net, ultimately shaping the way the market economy functions and is displayed.

Notes

- ¹ Among the first challenges faced, the selection of words to refer broadly to ‘ritual’ was crucial. We decided to use the Portuguese-loaned *serimónia* instead of *halo-lia* or *halo-lulik*, among others, as that would narrow the responses. We found that *serimónia* was the word that referred to a wider range of rituals. However, this caused some rituals to remain outside the responses of the participants. Specifically, those related to the annual cycles of the Catholic religion (All Saints’ Day—*Loron matebian*) and agricultural-related rituals (*sau-batar*, *nahe-biti*, etc.).
- ² For the complete list of items recorded under questions two and three, see Fidalgo-Castro (2015, 230).
- ³ For the complete questionnaire, see Fidalgo-Castro (2015, 443).
- ⁴ The hamlet chief keeps the *livro de aldeia* up to date, registering all the domestic units and people living there.
- ⁵ All the names of people have been modified to protect their true identity.
- ⁶ During the first years of the invasion and until 1985, the year in which the “pacification campaigns” ended, forced population movements to areas controlled by the Indonesian military were common. The Liquiçá district was “pacified” around 1979.
- ⁷ That year they obtained eight sacks of unhusked rice (50 kg each) through one of these arrangements.

- ⁸ In Faulara, cassava can be harvested six months after planting. From that year's harvest they got five sacks (35 kg each) of husked corn.
- ⁹ The weekly gross profit of this activity was variable but, according to Mariana, it ranged between \$7 and \$8.
- ¹⁰ During the time the fieldwork was carried out, there was a plan called *serbisu dólar tolu* (three dollar work), promoted by the government and several aid agencies. It was used as a way to create jobs through engaging people in maintenance activities both on the roads and in the irrigation canals for the rice fields.
- ¹¹ Sitting down on a mat (*biti*) while chewing betel leaves and areca nuts was understood as a metonym of the negotiation.
- ¹² In previous private negotiations that took place a week before the ceremony.
- ¹³ This payment was registered under the name of *bagi* in Tokodede, *banin* in Tetum. It was made in honour of Mariana's FZ, which was the woman that 'opened the path'—that is, the one that established the fertility-giver/fertility-taker relation between the two groups.
- ¹⁴ This payment was called *hine-heu* in Tokodede and *feto-foun* in Tetum, meaning 'new woman'.
- ¹⁵ In the case of women's fatigue, this was called 'breastfeeding' (*fô-susun*).
- ¹⁶ The case study was witnessed by Alberto Fidalgo-Castro during his fieldwork. For that reason, in part of the texts, we decided to keep the first-person in the description.
- ¹⁷ Contrary to the ceremony they held the year before, they didn't need to rent an electric generator, because the lead author lent them a small one of his own.
- ¹⁸ This reveals the recent commencement of marriages of choice, as the norm for some houses is to get married within the narrow range of houses with which the house has previous marriage alliances (from the time of the ancestors).
- ¹⁹ The notion of *lulik* meat refers here to meat that can only be consumed by the fertility-givers (goat meat) or fertility-takers (pork) once the ritual exchange has been successfully completed.
- ²⁰ This expression refers to two productive activities from which the items delivered at the bride-wealth were obtained. *Isin* means 'body', both referring to living animals and people as well as crops (in the case of corn, e.g., the cob is called *batar-isin*). In the case of *been*, it refers to the activity of producing palm wine (*ko'a tua*, cutting *tua*), in which *been* (liquid) is consumed.

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