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Edited by Andrew McWilliam and Michael Leach

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PATHS TO INFINITY

Ancestorship, origin narratives and differentiation

Susana de Matos Viegas

In November 2016, Rui Graça Feijó and I organized a round table in the Archive and Museum of the Timorese Resistance in Dili, centred around a photo exhibition we both curated. It comprehended a number of images of funerary posts named in Fataluku *arapou cau*[1] (Fat: buffalo head), consisting of several metres high wooden posts with skulls of buffalos sacrificed at mortuary ceremonies (Figure 18.1). In the ensuing debate, two of our Fataluku interlocutors insisted that putting such funerary posts next to a tomb was not universal amongst Fataluku-speaking peoples. Amongst the variety of reasons aired by them and the audience, the social status of the deceased, the material wealth of his family, and the fact that some Fataluku were baptized (a condition that could militate against this possibility) have generated wide acceptance.

Our two Fataluku friends participating in the round table, whom we talked to on several occasions over the years, also mentioned that only people from certain origin groups or *ratu* – agnatic origin groups or clans amongst the Fataluku – [2] would put *arapou cau* next to their tombs. They were publicly expressing the idea we had so often heard during our fieldwork that funerary posts with animal skulls are effectively only erected behind the tomb of a person who belongs to certain *ratu*/origin group and are even forbidden amongst other specific origin groups. In this chapter, I show that this difference in funerary practices meets differences in origin narratives and should be understood as a tendency to what James Fox (2005) called a 'celebration of spiritual differentiation', sustained in a 'multiplicity of origins', which he argues to be widespread across Southeast Asia and the Austronesian world (Fox 1996: 231).

In his numerous writings on the centrality of the origins amongst Austronesian peoples, Fox underlines one aspect that will be the main focus of this chapter, that '[t]he population of many of these societies regard themselves as derived of different ancestral origins or even of different classes of creation' (2005: 8651). Across ethnolinguistic groups in Timor-Leste, houses and clans have emerged from a considerable diversity of origins: from the sky or a specific geological format where the sky and a high mountain were linked; from the sea, travelling by boat sometimes helped by a crocodile; or emerged from beneath the land. Myths of origin are in Timor-Leste as in so many other parts of the world a reference to experiencing history (e.g. Gow 2001). They belong to a field in which religiosity and sociality strongly intersect. Amongst the Fataluku in Lautém, as McWilliam (2007a) has commented, 'endemic inter-clan rivalry and warfare' marks history. This rivalry is clearly sustained in

'their frequently contested histories of segmentation, dispute and dispersal' (McWilliam 2007a: 1125, 1119).

Elizabeth Traube who first did fieldwork in Timor-Leste in the early 1970s and later during the phase of consolidation of independence and freedom in the new millennium, gives an inspiring insight into how history is lived in Timor-Leste by either emphasizing or downplaying diversity between different origin groups. Traube (1986) shows the importance of difference between origin groups amongst the Mambai in the colonial period. But she also notices that by then they downplayed such differences in many instances, insisting that they were all part of a 'single story', and investing in a 'mythology of common origin', maintaining a collective self-image that 'shapes their view of their relations to other ethnic groups' (Traube 1986: 27; 2011: 120). When she returned to Timor after 2000, Traube admits she was surprised to not find the same expressions of unity, but rather the 'proliferation of radically diverse, conflicting accounts' (Traube 2011: 120).

In this chapter, I propose to think about the role of 'radical' diversity between origin narratives in Timor-Leste as an ethnographic perspective on ways of experiencing history. The aim is to explore the value of difference as a chain in the understanding of historicity for the Timorese, and the entanglements between spiritual differentiation and subsequent configurations of sociality in contemporary Timor-Leste.

Differentiation and origin narratives across Timor-Leste

Several ethnographies written in different historical periods have shown how origin narratives express key features of life and its diverse origin in Timor-Leste. Louis Berthe and Claudine Friedberg in the 1960s underlined the existence of a structural differentiation amongst origin narratives in several Papuan language Bunak speakers' villages. They called this phenomenon 'village particularlism': 'The inhabitants of each village tend to consider their own myths as unique, secret, and belonging exclusively to them; they have no interest to articulate them with those of neighbouring villages' (Friedberg 1972: 21). Louis Berthe proposes a direct identification between the diversity of origin narratives and unilinear descent groups or 'lineages' (*lignages*) (Berthe 1972: 51–83). A perspective of diversity as a field of variations over a unified original myth marks Berthe's theoretical thinking. Although he acknowledges that 'every lineage possesses its own cultural patrimony in correspondence with particular myths', Berthe ends up arguing that such differences in the narratives of each lineages ought to be interpreted as 'complementary parts of a whole' (Berthe 1972: 85). Berthe (1972) ends up treating differentiation amongst Bunak mythical texts as variants of the same people or ethnolinguistic group, integrating differences as part of the Levi-Straussian paradigm. Both underline, however, that origin narratives are more than a source of symbolic inspiration, and constitute a significant mark of Bunak everyday life. As Claudine Friedberg wrote, 'their real territory is that of their myths' (1972: 35).

As we shall see, one of the common features of Bunak narratives is that they are founded on the idea that the earth/world emerged from a sequence of events that took place in a 'superior world' (Berthe 1972: 87). In his recent ethnography on the very same speakers of the Papuan language Bunak, Lucio Sousa shows that amongst them a narrative of origin exists which can be unified around a quite well-defined axis – 'the mountain, the highlands, towards the sea and the plains' (2010: 98). The very name of the Tapo population is replaced in ritual contexts by a Bunak language expression – *pan po: mug po* – which means 'the holy heaven and the holy land, the navel of heaven, the centre of the earth' (Sousa 2010: 100). Just as in the origin narrative 'Ancestors Itineraries', collected by Berthe and Friedberg in

the 1960s, the emergence of human beings amongst contemporary Bunak results from the creation of dry land at such an high altitude that brings heaven and earth close together. The gap that was 'bridged by means of a bamboo stepladder (...) making it possible to travel from the one to the other side' (Sousa 2010: 100). The first dry land was made of mountains around which the Bunak people still live today. In the case of the Bunak from Tapo in Timor-Leste, the mountain that originally linked heaven and earth is known as Lakus, 'around which the first house and the first field were established, and where were located the initial feats of their superior ancestors' (Sousa 2010: 102). Lucio Sousa maintains that the geographical location of Lakus indicates a way, an orientation for a mountainous chain 'somewhere' (cf. Sousa 2010: 100). The primeval world emerging from this geological constellation related to the emergence of the first portion of dry land. It is, for the Bunak, a world originally 'out of order' in which 'everyone speaks – men, animals, plants, and the earth itself', order being achieved by means of silencing all beings except the humans (Sousa 2010: 102; see also Palmer and Kehi 2012: 459).

Sousa (2010) argues that contemporary Bunak, in sum, do acknowledge a unity in their origin narratives associated with the mountains surrounding them. At the same time, however, he emphasizes that competing stories are maintained and disputed amongst different houses. As I have referred above, Traube has shown that in the 1970s, amongst the Mambai, there was also a 'insistence on wholeness' (1986: 35) in the different origin narratives, as Mount Ramelau, precisely located in the middle of Mambai land, is identified by all as the original place of the ensemble of Mambai speakers:

> Mount Ramelau in the central interior, which Mambai call Tat Mai Lau, is identified as the first dry land. Originally surrounded by 'water and sea', the mountain centres the cosmos, and there at the centre Mother Earth brings forth the diverse inhabitants of the land.
>
> *(Traube 2011: 121)*

Traube also acknowledges that secrecy is a key political discourse between different Mambai houses that assert different version of mythic narratives. As I have already mentioned, she was surprised that in 2007 she had not found the same expressions of unity amongst the Mambai that was so clearly stated in the colonial period. On the contrary, she found an accent on diverse, conflicting accounts of origin stories (Traube 2011: 120).

Contemporary ethnographies on Timor-Leste also allow us to think of transformations arising from different historical contexts (cf. Viegas and Feijó 2017). Judith Bovensiepen carried out fieldwork amongst the Idaté-speaking people in Funar (sub-district of Laclubar) in 2005–2006. When the Idaté returned to their place of origin in the 1990s, which they had been forced to abandon under the Indonesian rule in the late 1970s, a 're-enactment of people's mythic unification with the land took place' (Bovensiepen 2015: 163). The Idaté conceive their origins as an emergence from the land, implying dynamics of firstcomers versus newcomers: 'The various origin narratives are in competition with one another, yet they are all versions of a foundation myth based on interactions between autochthonous original inhabitants and immigrants or late arrivals who are connected to an outside realm' (Bovensiepen 2015: 34).

Bovensiepen also stresses, however, that 'these autochthonous groups are thought to have separate origins, having been generated from different ancestral siblings at different sites in the landscape' (2015: 31). Such differentiation sustains her questioning of the final validity of the concept of ethnolinguistic group as a relevant unit of sociality and identity in Timor-Leste – a concept that I address in the concluding section of this chapter. She wrote,

> The anthropological literature concerning Timor-Leste frequently divides the population into a number of ethnolinguistic groups. In many cases, such as those of the Mambai or the Tetum, this seems to coincide with the self-identification of the given group. However, even though they share a common language (Idaté), the people in the Laclubar subdistrict did not use their language as a self-selected identifying label. They did not, therefore, call themselves the 'Idaté' or 'Idaté people'.
>
> *(2015: 30)*

Clearly building on the paradigm of House Societies (cf. Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995), Bovensiepen argues that the divergence amongst houses create, in her opinion, an 'heterotopy', where one single physical location can be disputed by various groups (Bovensiepen 2014: 66).

A structuring aspect of differentiation emerging from several passages of Bovensiepen's argument is addressed from the standpoint of the secrecy as an axis of dispute of power between different houses. She makes clear that it is not possible to join people together from different houses to spell out their own versions of the origin narratives. She, for instance, described a moment in which she followed the advice of a female field assistant and organized 'a communal meeting with all the important ritual speakers of Funar' in order to find 'the most truthfull account' (Bovensiepen 2014: 64). They of course did not come to the meeting, which she convincingly shows is a result of the fact that they were perfectly aware of their diversity of origin narratives and did not wish neither to collapse that difference nor to confront each other with narratives that were in themselves conceived as universal. Later on, she would listen to their narratives without any problem – but always in individual conversations with each one of them. As Traube (1986) has also argued, secrecy and dispute over the firstcomers is of course meaningful here. But another dimension resulting from this type of situations of concealment is connected to what I am calling here a plea for differentiation. It implies maintaining history as a source of diversity, instead of trying to conciliate diversity into one single story.

An origin from underneath the land has been widely acknowledged for a large area from Funar to Laclubar, Viqueque and Baucau, encompassing different ethnolinguistic groups. According to Lisa Palmer, who did research in different villages in that region, in the primeval time, which is frequently described as 'a time before languages' all was water until the first lands emerged in Timor-Leste in the mountains (cf. Palmer 2015: 63). Locating her analysis in a narrative, she was told in the village of Bahu (Baucau region) by an important *lia na'in* (lit.: lord of words), Palmer sheds light on the intense relation between the underground world, the sea and the emergence of the world from underneath which is transversal to Makassae and Waima'a speakers. She writes, 'In the beginning Timor was created by a foot sparring pair of brothers and sister birds (M: Ketu). Their sparring kicked back the sea and so created the first dry land in the form of three mountains: Ramelau, Cabalaki and Matebian' (Palmer 2015: 63). The argument advanced by Lisa Palmer, centred on a concept of a 'hydrosocial cycle' (2015: 46) formed by 'spiritual ecologies connected to spring water' (2015: 48), is important to understand a web of relations between various villages and different ethnolinguistic groups in this region. Some arrived from across the sea and others emerging from underground.

When Palmer considers the origin narratives of each of the origin groups or Houses, she emphasises principles of differentiation between each origin group. The origin House Kai Leki has emerged 'through the water out of the ground' (2015: 71). In this case, 'at a time in the distant past, three brothers emerged from the earth clinging to the back of a buffalo' (Palmer 2015: 72). In the House Wai Riu, which benefits from detailed analysis in her

narrative, people have emerged 'from the ground through a cave', whilst the members of the origin House, Wani descended from Mount Matebian when the world was all darkness bringing with them 'water in bamboo lengths' (2015: 84). Just like in Funar, the diverse contexts analysed by Palmer emphasize the dispute for precedence, giving voice to the widespread importance of origins and dynamics of hegemony sustained in the 'stranger king' complex (cf. Sahlins 1985). In Timor-Leste, this is sustained, as Fox puts it, in a dynamic of making the outsider the (inside) ruler, frequently through a process in which 'an earlier ancestor who left for a period of time and on his arrival is received back into society as a "returning outsider"' (cf. Fox 2008: 202). The exercise of compared ethnography developed in this section can bring insights on the relevance of the multiplicity of origins. This is of course complementary and not a substitute to the meaningful outsider/insider dynamics discussed in the 'stranger king' literature, where precedence and autochthony are emphasized (cf. Fox 2008).

A multiplicity of origins is, however, relevant to explore further Timorese senses of historicity, whilst also having important regional resonances across Southeast Asia. To give one emblematic example, Gregory Forth describes the Sumbanese Rindi as people who descend from one kingdom, and yet regard themselves as having multiple origins deriving originally either from the sky or from overseas (Forth 1981: 105). As the typical Austronesian case would dictate, 'The Rindi seem to have no single comprehensive myth that describes the creation of the world, and what I managed to record comprised various, sometimes disparate accounts of different aspects of the establishment of the present order of things' (Forth 1981: 89). Forth's perspective contributes to the conclusion that there is 'no single' myth for one specific linguistic speaking area. To think of the different origin narratives signals the importance of differentiation and also, as the next section explores, highlights the connection between life and death, of origin and destiny, which was also at issue in the debate on funerary posts amongst the Fataluku-speaking people mentioned in the introduction.

Source and destiny: mortuary rituals and differentiated origins

Ethnographic approaches to Timor-Leste converge on the idea that the identification of the origins of life is articulated with the path of the dead. In his analysis of a vast corpus of origin narratives from the Tetum region, David Hicks considers that a common feature to all those is the 'coincidence of birth and death in the same place', which for the Tetum case would be the underworld (1988: 808). The identification between life and death has been widely analysed in terms of the articulation of death with the regeneration of life (e.g., Fox 1980; Hicks 1988). Gregory Forth in his classical monograph on Rindi also argues that life derives from death, which is a return to a point of origin (1981: 201). Forth puts forwards the idea that

> [a] dead person is said to have gone to the one who made and planted him that is, to the divinity and the first ancestors (...) and the cycle closes only when the deceased later returns-life renewed-to the world of the living.
>
> *(Forth 1981: 202; see also Hicks 1988: 814)*

As for the Tetum of Timor-Leste, Hicks states that '[t]he first human beings are believed to have issued from the underworld, and to have returned there after death in a cycle reaffirmed symbolically in the rites of passage embracing birth and death' (Hicks 1988: 809; see also Molnar 2010). Regarded in this light, Hicks continues, 'locating birth and death in the same place, whether underground, underwater, the west, over the sea, or across the river might

then be interpreted as a device intended to make death seem equivalent to life' (Hicks 1988: 814 also referring to Barnes 1964: 203, 304–307).

Traube calls our attention to the ambivalent identification of origin and destiny amongst the Mambai and showing that if the dead are sent 'on their journey to Nama Rau' (1986: 41) – one of the origin mountains – 'my impression was that many people (were) not sure exactly where a spirit goes on its first foray' (1986: 201). In the Kora Meta ceremony realized amongst the Mambai between one and seven years after an episode of death, the relatives 'ship the dead'– they send them to be 'dispatched (*toil*) to the sea'. There the dead take on 'different ears/different faces' (Traube 1980; 1986: 203). Parallel to this, Bovensiepen notes that amongst the Idaté, 'burial is perceived as a return' as human beings are considered to have emerged from the land (Bovensiepen 2015: 9). Part of the explanation for the symbolic power of the land – '*lulik* land' – and its capacity to transform people into prisoners ought to be viewed in this perspective (cf. Bovensiepen 2014: 125). Amongst the Papuan-speaking Bunak who view the creation of the land as the peak of a dry mountain, a ritual is performed many years after one's death. At that time each House resends its dead to *Mot Po* – 'a place on the very top of the neighbouring mountain of Bekali where the ancestors supposedly inhabit' (Sousa 2010: 214). This action of resending the dead implies a projection in an upward direction, facilitating their return to the origins of the world and to the ancestors. Sousa did not find, however, any detailed descriptions of the sort of existence ancestors enjoy in *Mot Po* in the sense of an afterlife. He only came across some references of their return to their place of origin, marking very strongly the upward direction they have taken.

If death and the origin of life are key axes of sociality, what these ethnographies show is that different mortuary performances correspond to differences in origin narratives. In this regard, Bovensiepen calls our attention to the fact that the members of one of the houses (Lawadu) in Funar were recognized as the 'owners' of a specific 'custom' (*lisan*), which consisted of burying the dead in the ground (2015: 36). Integrating the stranger king model, the Idaté in Funar consider that in the remote past the members of this house who had returned to Funar were able to become rulers (*liurai*) of Funar. The reason they became rulers should however be highlighted. Members of the Bamatak House, who were by then established in the region, did not have the 'custom' to bury their dead in the ground, that is, they actually were not able/allowed to do it: 'they used to hang their dead from trees because, they said, the earth had started shaking when they had buried them in the ground' (Bovensiepen 2015: 36). In sum, they recognize that the Lawadu House as rulers because the Lawadu own the traditional right to bury the dead underground. Here is an explicit example of how the origin story is articulated with a diversity of burial performances and how important it is to integrate origins (underground) and burial practices.

Fataluku differentiation – *ratu* with and without *arapou cau*

During fieldwork carried out amongst the Fataluku,[3] the significance of funerary posts *arapou cau* (lit.: 'buffalo heads' – see Figure 18.1) was a focus. *Arapou cau* are widely disseminated in the landscape of the district of Lautém, the easternmost part of Timor-Leste. Their sculptural relevance and the hollow gaze of the buffalo, and sometimes also horse and oxen skulls, pierced by a wooden post that often reaches several meters high above tombs, catch the attention of foreigners and Timorese from other parts of the country alike. Moreover, mortuary ceremonies and tombs occupy a particularly important role in the lives of the Fataluku, reinforcing the centrality of the relations between the living and their ancestors – *calu ho papu* (lit: grandfather and great-grandfather).

Figure 18.1

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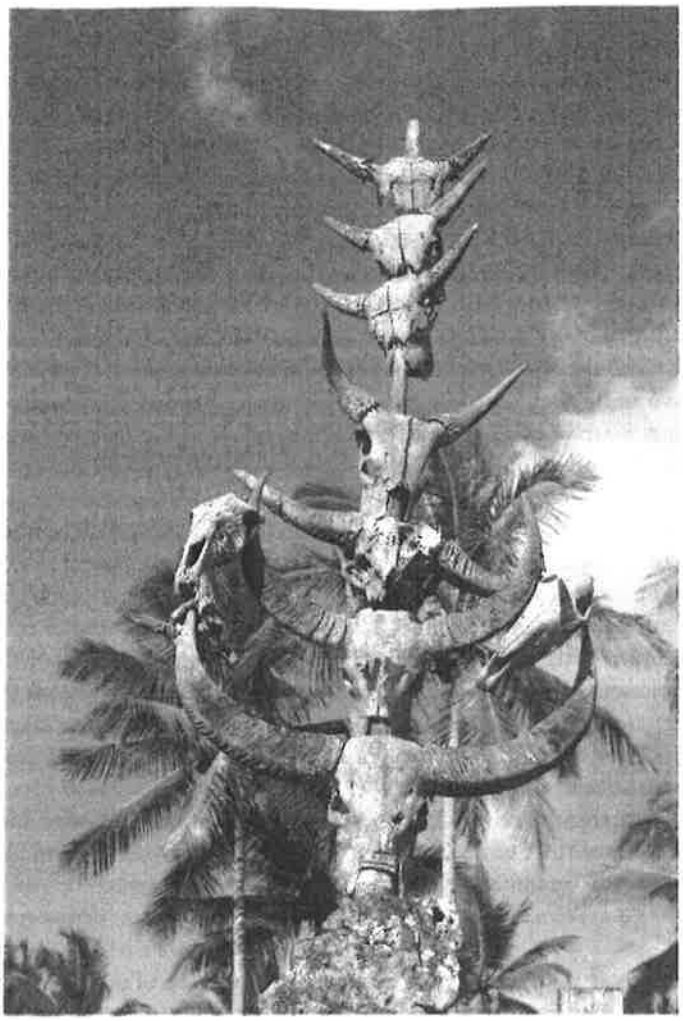

Figure 18.1 Arapou cau

The region of Lautém integrates a district with the same name, covering 1,813 sq km, and inhabited by roughly 65,000 people, half of which (39,685 according to the census) are Fataluku speakers (Pereira *et al.* 2015: 2, 22). The district of Lautém has 151 *Aldeias* (hamlets). Fataluku live in 105 hamlets in three different sub-districts: Tutuala, Lospalos and Lautém. The other 46 hamlets are inhabited by a majority of Makassai- and the Makalero-speaking people, in the sub-districts of Iliomar and Luro (Pereira *et al.* 2015: 3).

One of the clear results of my fieldwork was to realize that only people who belong to certain *ratu* whose narratives of origin are associated with the beginning of life and the world in an upper level – at the peak of a mountain or a celestial platform – use these funerary posts in their tombs. These are very prominently people from Cailoru, Vacumura, Latuloho and some from Katiratu. McWilliam came across 'dozens of named *ratu* in Lautem (with names such as Cailoro Ratu, Latuloho Ratu, Naja Ratu, Lavera Ratu and so on)', all with 'contested histories of segmentation, dispute and dispersal across the landscape'. They include some that are but 'little branches' of major ones, summing more than 60 named *ratu*

or *ratu* branches (McWilliam 2011a: 65; 65-fn 6) – a conclusion that my own field material substantiates.

Amongst the Fataluku, one finds representative cases of all three types of origins that Fox identifies as common in different Southeast Asia contexts where 'humans either descended from a heavenly sphere or emerged from earth or sea' (Fox 2005: 8649). The Fataluku-speaking inhabitants of Tutuala, on the very tip of the island, possess narratives of origin implying their emergence from underground, close to those one finds as predominant in the area of Laclubar, Viqueque and Baucau. The works of O'Connor *et al.* (2013) and Pannell (2006: 206) amongst the Fataluku of Tutuala point to the fact that 'people emerge with the land and their sacred animals' (O'Connor *et al.* 2013: 211). The Fataluku-speaking people from Cailoru *ratu* did not emerge from the underground. On the contrary, their symbol is *Noipi*, the morning star, and they came from the first portion of dry land that is a high mountain located nearby Tutuala, named Nofitu. Those from Naja and from Pairu *ratu* arrived in Timor across the sea, on a sinking boat assisted to shore by a companionable crocodile.

In 2014, in conversation with two men from Assalaino, a village where the great majority of men are from the Cailoru *ratu*, they explained the fact that the star identifying the Cailoru relates to their origin story, which involves the top of *Nofitu* mountain.

G.: According to our great-grandfathers (*calu ho papu*), we did not come from outside the island of Timor. Many others came by boat, but that is not the case with us. Our first place is located in the easternmost tip of the island. It is called *Nofitu* [*No*: ancient or preceeding; *fitu*: seven]. Our great-grandfathers that remained there were seven in all. Seven men. They stayed there in the mountain that is called *Nofitu*. We just do not know what year that occurred.

S.: Does that mountain still exist today, or is it a mountain that only existed in those days?

G.: Our ancestors have their tombs up there. (...) Just like a myth, they told us that there is the place our great-grandfather ascended to [*van ene van va la*]

(Assalaino, Julho 2014)

In this narrative, a very explicit reference is made to the value of precedence and being autochthonous, when my friend said 'we did not come from outside the island of Timor'. But the very same narrative highlights another aspect that is equally frequent in diverse versions of the Cailoru narrative of origin, that is, the forefathers of the Cailoru survived a flood precisely because he/they could find shelter on top of a mountain or hill – *Nofitu*. Numerous versions I heard of the Cailoru narrative of origin refer the fact that, in the beginning, the world was in a state of mud or water. In some of those versions, the first creature was saved by the fact that it stood on the top of a high mountain; in others, the original creature is identified as a celestial being – the morning star Noipi. Such is case in an episode from an origin narrative a Cailoru man from Bauró village once told me:

> There is a woman who... Well, the great grandfathers [*calu ho papu*] had no children and the woman was on top of the house, one of those typical houses. She was on top of the house. The man went out to work far from this woman. Everyday, the eastern star, when it rises, Noipi, comes to sleep with this woman. When my grandfather returned from his work, the woman was pregnant. She was pregnant and gave birth to a man. Then the star appeared again... and in the end that is the star, which is the sign of Cailoru – *Noipi*.

Here we have again parallels to the stranger king dynamics, even if the outsider is a star. Again, a complementary aspect to be highlited, however, is the reference to the upper level of the sky and the stars. The correlation between the narrative of origin of each *ratu* and the specific origin events occurring in an upper level is significant to understand differences in mortuary rituals, including the placement (or not) of *arapou cau* next to the tombs. In the case of the Cailoru, therefore, *arapou cau* are actually placed next to the tombs of Cailoru men seven days after the internment in the course of a ceremony called *Cipi Cipi Lemessu* (bitter flowers), and are considered as propitiatory devices to help in the ascending trajectory of the deceased back to the origin world.

The same origin/destiny complex explains that friends from Pairu and Naja *ratu* alike frequently asserted to me that they couldn't use *arapou cau*. The founders of the Pairu *ratu*, as once a Pairu friend from Moro – a village located in the north coast of Lautém – told to me, 'came by crocodile' (i.e. on the back of the animal), and he added he had also 'heard they had come from India'. His latter comment took me by surprise, but he confirmed it and continued, 'Yes, from India. They came by crocodile and when they arrived here, they landed over there where the [present day] village of Ira-Ara stands. We have a marked place over there, right where they landed'. He is referring to places locally known as *ia mari tuliya* that, as McWilliam puts it, are 'ancestor footfall/footprint sites, located at different points along the coast, which represent the mythic landing place of the original ancestor(s) of the group' (McWilliam 2006: 267).

Pairu *ratu* recognize that descendants from the same origin spread and now inhabit in different regions in the district of Lautém: some on the northern coast, others on the southern side in Loré and still others in the region of Luarai/Somoco located inland. In her monograph based on fieldwork in the 1960s in the southern coast, Maria Olimpia Lameiras-Campagnolo mentions the *ia mari* of Pairu's branch *ratu* Pitileti: 'the "ship" of *ia-mari* (...), the place where the big ship and the rowboat that brought the ancestors to the beach have been turned to stone' (1975: 72). Another of my Pairu interlocutors from inland Somoco village explained the Pairu of his region came from Moro/Lautém on the north coast. Instead of attributing, however, the origin of his forbearers to India, he explained that they arrived from Indonesia, but still from the sea, by boat and helped by a crocodile:

> Our greatgrandfather (*calu ho papu*) parents came by crocodile with a Meraputi flag... They tied it round their head [he raises his arms and simulates it] (...) like the Indonesian flag (...) Our greatgrandfather tied that flag round his head [he repeats the gesture] and then, he came by crocodile...riding a crocodile!

When they perish, people from the Pairu *ratu* do not use *arapou cau* behind their tombs. Moreover, just like those from Naja *ratu*, as I already mentioned, they clearly state they cannot put it. They use symbols of their own origin story to accompany the dead in their burial. As the wife of my friend from Somoco once told me, 'when someone dies, be it a man or a boy, but if he is a male, a crocodile is painted in his coffin (...) it is painted on the coffin, a crocodile with a boy riding it'. The crocodile – which helped the Pairu to arrive on the island – is drawn, she continued, 'outside the coffin. It is said that this is the signal, so that when he goes the greatgrandfathers recognize him immediately and say he is from our generation'.

This conversation came as a sequence, when we were talking about a workshop I had organized in Lospalos with students whom I had asked to draw ancestors sites. Boys from Naja *ratu* had drawn a crocodile accompanied by a description of the narrative of origin of the founder of their *ratu*.

In his work amongst Fataluku-speaking people from Konu *ratu*, whose members inhabit the north coastal village of Com in Lautém, McWilliam attests to the fact that 'in death the spirits of deceased members of the Konu *ratu* are believed to return to the sea' (2007a: 1123). This shows, McWilliam argues, a 'cyclical interdependence of ancestral origins narratives and contemporary living members of the group' (2007a: 1123). Again, in funerals, this connection is made in a very objective way. Just as the Pairu invoke the scene of origin to the funeral by drawing a crocodile on the coffin, the Konu whose 'originary ancestor takes the form of a dolphin (*roinu*), sprinkle a handful of beach sand (*iniku*) in the coffin to accompany the deceased on their spirit journey to join their elder (*kaka*) marine siblings' (McWilliam 2007a: 1120).

Paths to infinity

Description and debate developed above make clear that the *arapou cau* that the Cailoru put behind their tombs is their specific form of *lisan* connected to their origin, and the trajectory the deceased should take towards a high platform on the top of a mountain and the sky. Mortuary ceremonies amongst the Fataluku seem to stress more forcefully aspects of aggregation with the world of ancestors than to the separation from the living. Recommendations to the deceased about the route they should take are given in many different forms during the funeral. In Lautém, in the mortuary rituals, the deceased is encouraged towards meeting their ancestors. When we consider deceased from Cailoru or Vacumura *ratu* which most frequently put *arapou cau* on the tombs, they also clearly indicate a direction to this aggregation upwards. *Arapou cau* indicate a very precise direction to this journey: the chain of skulls in the funerary posts are very consistently regarded as a stairway leading to the upper world where life began. Horses are sacrificed and their skulls added to the funerary posts so that the animal can also help the deceased in his journey to meet ancestors.

From several people I heard that the deceased follows an ascension that goes towards infinity, *enee l'a* (without end). In ritual, parallel language, *hula pali, ara pali* (straight ahead, no beginning and no end). In diverse Timorese contexts, just like others in Southeast Asia, it is thought that tombs themselves indicate forms of propitiating the ascending relations with the ancestors, amongst which one should mention the existence of 'stairs' (*ke'eru*) – which is sometimes made to correspond to the stairs of the traditional house. It is frequent to hear Fataluku say, regardless of their own *ratu*, that the process of transformation set in motion by dying implies travel by way of those stairs to meet the ancestors (*Uru ke'eru: vacu ke'eru* – stairs to the moon, stairs to the sun). In this case, there are very frequent references to divine-like entities of the sun and the moon, a feature shared in many different Southeast Asia contexts (e.g. Forth 1981).

In the Cailoru case, amongst the Fataluku, however, the ascending trajectory of the deceased has a suplementar meaning: it is related to a path to the top of Nofitu mountain and towards the morning star *Noipi*. For this reason, funerals are often performed in the early morning. As I heard many times described by different Cailoru, funerals begin before 4 am, 'before the rise of the morning star' and the coffin is transported 'in such a way as to simulate a voyage'. As a man from another *ratu* described to me about Cailoru funerals he attended with the eyes of an external acurate observor,

> One may scream and shout, sometimes run here and there. No one is sorry for the deceased anymore. Elders surround the deceased and speak to him describing their trajectories from place to place and their way back to Nofitu. They tell the deceased about the passing of life: from beginning to the end. [They tell them] they came from Nofitu. From Nofitu they came to Heler'u [a place near Lospalos]. From Heleru they passed by

> here [i.e., Lospalos, the place where this conversation took place] until they reached Raça [another village of Cailoru *ratu*]. Then, they count from there, go through the places they have travelled till they reached Heler'u, up until Nofitu...to deliver them. They deliver them there where the first man came.

Cailoru burials begin when the morning star rises, so that, I have been told by another friend, 'the trajectory of the deceased is attracted by the light of the morning star'.

These references to the trajectories to the upperworld and a path to infinity, the source for the title of this chapter, was also mentioned to Francisco Gomes working in Lautém in the 1960s (Gomes 1972). People from Assalaino told him that the origin of the Cailoru world was a piece of dry land named *Herin* located near Tutuala, the same area where Nofitu is located. He also attests that the trajectory was described to him as a path to 'infinite':

> Genealogies and sacred toponyms are spelled out by the deceased's heirs time and again, so that he will not forget one single name of the grandfathers who he will meet in the hereafter, and will not go astray in the long path that he will have to travel in search of 'infinity' [inverted commas in the original].
>
> *(Gomes 1972: 130)*

Infinity is also mentioned by Francisco Gomes as meaning 'the cradle of the generation, the beginning and the end of life' (1972: 71). Gomes also refers the narrative of origin of Katiratu, according to which the first beings, 'Ona-Kei, Mau-Kei' survive the deluge by escaping to the top of a mountain (*Nunu-Cenu*, presently Nari), where they climbed up a coconut tree. The water was rising too, touching their feet, and the coconut tree grew faster until it reached the celestial platform. From there they came down and lived in a grotto (Gomes 1972: 18–19). Katiratu also claim to have been the first to inhabit the earth, and to implement a division of land destined to the other peoples who had to address them as 'owners of the land' (cf. Gomes 1972: 19). This division is described by Gomes as originating by the first creatures arriving from 'Jaro-o' – the 'infinity' (Gomes 1972: 72).

The identification between infinity and the destiny of the Cailoru and Katiratu deceased who become ancestors seems to imply a substantiation of the agnatic succession of generations. If, on the one hand, this association is tied to the relation between genealogy and topogeny (Fox 1997; McWilliam 2007b: 366), the meaning of infinity seems to emphasize the value of continuity and of direction that creates a coincidence between the origins of life and its destiny.

Andrew McWilliam has indicated that the generational cycle amongst the Fataluku extends across seven categories, and he provides an observation that, when people told him about the names of each one of the generations, they could only go as far as the seventh, namely, *calu* (grandchild), *moco* (son), *palu* (father), *calu* (grandfather), *papu* (great-grandfather) *cuci* (great-great-grandfather) and *macua* (great-great-great-grandfather). After that the names become taboo (*tei*) and are collectively described as the *Calu Arafura* (McWilliam 2011a: 72, fn27; 2012: 154). This reference is similar to the one I heard time and again from my interlocutors. Relevant to the present argument is that on some occasions the expression that was mentioned after the seventh generation (*macua*) is the Portuguese *infinito* ('infinity'). In sum, the seventh generation does not indicate just one more generation. Rather, the seven stands for a sequence or continuity under one name, infinity or *eneene l'a* (without end). As McWilliam noticed, the number seven (*fitu*) 'is the most important in Fataluku cultural cosmologies, representing the idea of completion or wholeness' (2008: 227). As Lisa Palmer

(2015) argues, a number that propitiates a sense of wholeness subsequently reproduces continuity in cycles. In her research in Baucau and Viqueque, she argues that 'seven generations or cycles' constitute a sense of history through a 'hydrosocial cycle' constantly renewed and transformed (Palmer 2015: 47). The number 7 amongst the Fataluku and in the Makassae and Waima speakers studied by Palmer seems to be equivalent to the role of number 8 amongst the Nage of Flores who associate completeness, death and the deceased with number 8, 'a symbols of completeness' (Forth 1998: 250). Amongst the Fataluku in many aspects, number 7 appears as a round number, creating wholeness in cycles of renewal and continuity. For instance, several tombs have seven steps in their stairs, traditional houses are described as having seven levels, and the ideal for an *arapou cau* is to have seven buffalo skulls. It is conventionally stated that marriage exchanges in higher status families (T: *barlake*; F: *lipale*) must include 77 buffalos (cf. also McWilliam 2011b: 751). I heard people saying that, however, such request could be seriously dangerous, bringing misfortune, namely, infertility to the couple. Seventy seven (77) is ambivalent as is typical the case with key cultural symbols. Amongst the Fataluku, these days no one asks such a high number of buffalos. However in Dili, as Kelly Silva reports, one of the references to sustain the widespread idea that Fataluku are one of the most traditionalist linguistic groups in Timor-Leste is that 'depending on the status of the ritual house/family involved', the wifes's family would ask the extravagant number of 'approximately' 77 buffalos for *barlake* (Silva 2011: 129).[4]

This interpretation of the number 7 as both wholeness and renewed continuity is also sustained in another situation I came across in one of the villages of Cailoru *ratu*. This was a limestone figure that is well known at least by people from Assalaino, by the name of *Totolufitu* (lit.: all seven). This figure is slightly hidden in the bushes in the old village (*lata matu*)[5] of Assalaino, where are located the tombs of three genealogical generations of siblings from patrilineal descendants of a named common ancestor. This is one of the places where rituals are performed that connect different sibling sets to their ancestors. As the friend who took us to this old village explained, 'that figure... there are seven figures in one', and thus it is 'dangerous and potent'. *Totolufitu* is an anthropomorphized limestone around which, we were told, particularly important blessing ceremonies are performed. In subsequent conversations elucidating the meaning of 'seven figures in one', the idea of 'infinity' emerged again. What I am suggesting, in sum, is that the idea of infinity indicates, on the one hand, the destiny of the dead moving in the direction of their origin, but also the interdependence between origin and destination, a sense of continuity between the destination of the dead and the origin of the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted two instances that contribute to ethnographic perspectives on the way history is lived and experienced through an emphasis on spirit differentiation and configurations of sociality in contemporary Timor-Leste. First, we see that the identification of origin and destiny is described as cyclical (Hicks 1988; McWilliam 2007a; Molnar 2010; Palmer 2015). I propose to consider the idea of infinity as an ethnographic concept that fruitfully evokes that cycle. Infinity is both a spatial and temporal trajectory. Even when that direction is also identified as a locality – the Mount Po for the Bunak, Ramelau for the Mambai, Nofitu for Cailoru *ratu* Fataluku or Nari for Cailoru *ratu* Katiratu – they do not indicate a site where a replication of life – an afterlife – takes place. This is unsurprising in Timor-Leste, where 'ancestor worship' – to use the classical expression by Meyer Fortes (2008 [1987]) – is a key religious fact. As Meyer Fortes argued so long ago, '[w]orship in

rituals of prayer and sacrifice, (...) may all be validated by reference to what we describe as spiritual beings, be they gods or ancestors or nature deities. But evidently none of this necessitates a circumstantial cosmography of a "spirit world"' (cf. Fortes 2008 [1987]: 71). Instead of imagining how the dead live in origin places where the world also originated (an afterlife), I have shown that across Timor-Leste the dead travel in the direction of origins and infinity helps to express this idea.

A second instance of how history is lived results from the entanglements between origin myths and sociality – in this case, emphasizing the role of diversity in several histories across Timor-Leste. I have shown the Fataluku clearly assume a multiplicity of origins between different *ratu*, and therefore claiming irreconcilable narratives of origin, which not only dictate the origin of a specific group or clan, but the origin of the world. This holds not only for the Fataluku, but is also a strong proposition across contemporary Timor-Leste. Timorese scholar, Vicente Paulino in his reflection on narratives of origin across Timor-Leste, identifies different origins corresponding to different 'people' (*povo*). This identification refers to both ethnolinguistic groups and clans: 'Each people (*povo*) has its own way of conceiving the World, that is, the Earth and its origin'; accordingly, 'people' who have different origin narratives may be either a linguistic group or 'those of their clans' (Paulino 2013: 103). He also highlights, however, webs of alliances between different ethnolinguistic groups (Paulino 2013: 104). This would fit my interpretation of the plea for differentiation. It does not deny or nullify the value of certain sociolinguistic configurations, be they ethnolinguistic groups or orders of precedence in dispute amongst Houses. It does, however, highlight different categories emerging across Timor-Leste – from clans, to segments of clans, to houses, to linguistic groups and the important alliances established through webs of exchange. Certain points in the landscape may frame life in one way, whilst funeral practices invoke other framings. The plea for differentiation is, I argue, a precious route in the understanding of historicity in the contemporary world, around the central idea of the multiplicity of origins. As I show in this chapter, this creates a condition for experiencing history, which is founded in irreconcilable stories, which are not only different versions of a 'true' original narrative, but a founding principle of being through a permanent longing for the differentiation in origins.

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Notes

1 In this chapter, I follow the orthographic convention using letter 'c' for Fataluku words which are pronounced as 'ch' (see also McWilliam 2011a: 66).
2 McWilliam accurately describes the *ratu* as an affiliation of people to 'common male ancestors and myths of origin, shared spiritual and ritual obligations with access to inherited common property and land in clearly defined localities' (2007a: 1119).
3 My fieldwork covered three periods of between two and four months each, totalling nine months in all, in the years 2012–2016.
4 Kelly states that amongst her interlocutors in Dili, 'It was suggested that the most expensive barlake in Timor was among the Fataluku of Lospalos (the country's easternmost district) who demanded approximately 77 buffalo for a marriage, depending on the status of the ritual house/family involved' (Silva 2011: 12). Amongst the Idaté (Personal communication by Judith Bovensiepen), the idea exists that it is impossible for a local man to marry a Fataluku woman, considering that her family would require an exaggerated number of 77 buffalos for her *lipale*.
5 Old villages are places visited only for the practice of powerful rituals, usually on top of the tombs of deceased forebears in the agnatic line who inhabited them (see also McWilliam 2006, 2008, 2011a).

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