

# 5

## New track, new path

The resettlement site of Sulit—a word that in the Indonesian language means ‘difficult’—was indeed not easy to find. We had to make a real effort to reach the site in the village of Kereana in Belu district. Kereana is 53 km from Atambua. After more than an hour of motorbike riding along the main road from Atambua to Betun (via Halilulik), we had to turn west and ride downhill over a loose and stony dirt road towards the village market. From there, we turned south and crossed several creeks. We then rode uphill again before finally reaching Sulit resettlement site. The journey might have been difficult, but it was worth the effort when we reached the site. Surrounded by hills and on the edge of the We Mer forest protected area, the large shady trees of the resettlement provided a peaceful environment. Its remoteness and limited access meant it received few uninvited visitors. It was in this place that the Mambai people from the Holarua region of Manufahi district in East Timor had settled. Rosario Marcal, a former member of the Sasarus team, a Holarua-based militia that operated during the 1999 referendum, explained:

The Indonesian Government built our resettlement. However, our arrival at this place would not have been possible without the marriage of one of our sons to the daughter of local people here. In their [local people’s] terms, we are their *fetosawa* [wife-takers] and we are part of them now. After the wedding, they advised us about this place. The land on which we have settled forms part of the gifts they gave us; we now belong here.

In the previous chapter, I examined the significance of origin narratives among East Timorese groups who have previous experience of migration to West Timor. For the Tetun, the Bunaq and the Kemak peoples, displacement and resettlement in West Timor were understood not as separation, but as return to and reunification with their ancestral land of origin. In this chapter, I examine what happened to other East Timorese groups who shared few migratory and ethnic relationships with West Timorese prior to 1999. I discuss case studies of displacement and resettlement processes for two East Timorese highland groups, the Mambai and the Idate. I argue that the notion of a land of origin remains a significant feature of belonging among these East Timorese groups. What differentiates them from the Tetun, Bunaq and Kemak is their understanding that displacement and resettlement are not a reunification with one's land of origin; rather, they represent the expansion of that origin land.

This process of expansion is exemplified in two forms: first, through the building of alliances with local people by integrating into existing cultural categories; and second, through the rebuilding of one's subsidiary symbolic cultural identities to represent the significance of the land of origin. To explain this argument, I divide this chapter into two parts. The first examines modes of social integration among the Mambai. I begin by continuing the story of Rosario Marcal and his fellow Mambai of Holarua origin in the Sulit resettlement site, who were accommodated by the Tetun of Fialaran as wife-takers. The following narrative discusses another marriage perspective and practice, among Mambai people of Maubisse, who took on the symbolic role of a returning male ancestor when engaging with the Tetun people in Wehali. Moving from integration into local cultural categories, the second part of this chapter examines how cultural authority is restored outside the ancestral land of origin. Here, I use the example of the resettlement of Idate people and the reconstruction of their sacred houses in West Timor, along with the restoration of their sacred leader.

## Mambai of Holarua

Earlier I noted how a group of Mambai people from Holarua (Manufahi district) married into a local Tetun group and secured land.<sup>1</sup> Comprising more than 200 households, these people arrived in Belu district in mid-September 1999. They immediately camped in the Sukabitek and Naitimu areas of West Tasifeto, 30 km south-west of Atambua. After remaining in the camps for nearly four years, in 2003, under the coordinating effort of Julio do Carmo from Naitimu camp, they attempted to find land on which to settle.<sup>2</sup> This effort was initiated in part because the local people no longer considered them ‘outsiders’. Although coming from different ethnic stock, the Tetun people of Fialaran—their hosts—perceived the displaced Mambai as insiders because one of their members, Francisco Araujo de Jesus, had married Christina Dahu, the daughter of Nimrot Fahik, a traditional leader of the neighbouring village of Dubesi. More than a civil union, the marriage of Francisco and Christina was seen in cultural terms as the integration of Mambai people into the realm of the Dubesi Tetun people.

Traditionally, Dubesi and its surrounding lands were part of the ancient domain of Naitimu. According to their oral narratives, Naitimu was made up of four subdomains led by the *sasekin hat*, *tatanen hat*—a metaphorical expression of house-based alliance that means ‘the four supports, the four base supports’ (lit., the four roasters, the four containers). These four leaders (*temukung*) were named as Leki Fahik in Seo, Ek Fatu Tabene in Maktaen, Kadus Nanaenoe in Halilulik and Balau in Haliserin. In their traditional political order, Naitimu was known as Timu Mauk, one of the four ‘sons’ from the western side of Tasifeto. Their three kindred domains were Lidak (Lida Mauk), Mandeu (Reu Mauk) and Jenilu (Lilu Mauk). This form of alliance is expressed in the following narrative:

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1 Practising wife-takers are not exclusive to the Mambai of Holarua origin. I noted a similar arrangement among the Mambai of Hatu Builico, one of whose son married a Bunaq woman and who were subsequently gifted land for settlement in Lakekun village in Malaka district. East Timorese living in the eastern area of Kupang district experienced similar arrangements when one of their men married a Meto woman. Some 55 households from Viqueque and Dili were gifted land in Nekon village and 53 Fataluku households from Lautem village in Luro received land in Oebelo village. While this sort of incorporation provides access to land and other resources, it is important to recognise that such access lasts only as long as the alliance and exchange obligations are maintained.

2 This story of Mambai people in Naitimu camp was reported by Dadilado (2006: 3–8).

<i>Oan natar hat, oan laluan hat</i>	Four groups of children, four stables of children
<i>Basa isin hat, kaer kadu hat</i>	Four taps on the body, four pulls on the teat
<i>Taka ulu hat, sabeo ulu hat.</i>	Four heads covered, four hats on the head.

These four groups traced their origin to the larger domain of Fialaran, which encompasses both the eastern and western sides of Tasifeto in Belu. By acknowledging their roots (*husar kotu*: lit., ‘cut from the same navel’) in Fialaran and Naitimu domains, they followed Fialaran patrilineal tradition—in contrast with the neighbouring south Tetun people in Wehali, who are resiliently matrilineal. There are two kinds of preferred marriage alliances among the Naitimu people. The first is called *inuk tuan//dalan tuan* (lit., ‘the old track, old path’). This is a kind of endogamous alliance whereby members of an established *umamane* (wife-giver) clan and *fetosawa* (wife-taker) alliances form a union. But, as Francisco is a Mambai, the marriage to Christina was recognised by the northern Tetun people as *inuk foun//dalan foun* (lit., ‘new track, new path’), meaning an initial marriage or new alliance—in this case, with outsiders. During the gift exchange rituals, which are an essential part of the marriage process, the *fetosawa* group usually offers livestock and money to the *umamane* lineage or extended agnatic group representing the bride. In return, the *umamane* offers gifts of traditional male cloth (*tais mane*) and containers for men to store betel catkins (*koba mane*). In the case of Christina and Francisco, however, the Naitimu people, as the *umamane* group, offered their land to accommodate the displaced Mambai, who had been accepted as their *fetosawa* (wife-takers).

Initially, Nimrot Fahik, as the father-in-law and leader of the *umamane* alliance relationship, agreed to offer a parcel of land only to Francisco for his new family. But in June 2005, Nimrot gathered his whole family together for a discussion and they agreed to offer an additional 8 hectares to the displaced Mambai so they could all settle there. The land was given without reciprocal expectations and without any time limit, although there were two conditions: under no circumstances should the land be sold to outsiders and, if the Mambai people decided to return to Holarua, they should hand back the land to Nimrot and his group. Three months after receiving the land, nearly 30 Mambai households built their houses and moved on to the land. Here we can see that the gifting of land is provisional on the persistence of the alliance.

In addition to their house site, each household has access to an area of at least 1 hectare on which to plant their crops. These households were still living and working on the land when I visited the area in 2013. Despite their lack of a previous social relationship, the displaced Mambai people from Holarua have been able to integrate themselves among the north Tetun people through a key marriage. The marriage of Christina and Francisco had a domino effect for the remaining displaced Mambai from Holarua who were still camped in Sukabitetek, a neighbouring area of Naitimu. In late May 2004, Cornelis da Costa Marcal, the coordinator of the Mambai in Sukabitetek, approached Herman Besin Luan, the local landowner, to sound out the possibility of acquiring some of his land. Although their village administration differs, Herman is a member of the house of Lisu Aman Fahik, which is led by Nimrot Fahik, Francisco's father-in-law. This association placed Herman in the *de facto* position of *umamane*—in a complementary way—to the displaced Mambai from Holarua as *fetosawa*. After a series of negotiations and clarifications, in early August 2004, Herman offered 1.8 hectares land as a settlement site to 13 displaced Mambai households from Holarua. As a form of exchange, Herman allocated his land on the condition that the displaced Mambai remain and work the land for a limited period of eight years (see Solvang 2005).

Herman and the local people also advised the displaced Mambai about evidence of pre-1999 Mambai displacement in Sulit, a hamlet at the edge of the We Mer-Kateri protected forest area. Rosario da Costa Marcal, the younger brother of Cornelis, followed up on the information and began his mission to trace the possible presence of their predecessors. 'The locals were scared of the site. They said it was haunted', Rosario explained of the situation in Sulit before he arrived. Without hesitation, Rosario hiked through the bushland before arriving at a hilly site where he found two unmarked graves. He confirmed with the locals the existence of the graves and they acknowledged that they belonged to 'the elders from Manufahi'. As Rosario recalled:

When I arrived here [in Sulit], there was nothing but two graves. According to the locals, they were the graves of a couple of elders from Manufahi. They [the locals] were not sure when they [the elders] arrived in the area. What they knew was that the couple originally came from Manufahi and they came due to a violent conflict there a long time ago. This land was probably their campsite, which then turned into their settlement. As no other people lived nearby, I immediately built my camp and stayed here.

Moving beyond claiming to belong to the land in relation to the graves of his predecessors, Rosario began to negotiate the possibility of making the land a resettlement site for the rest of his people from Holarua who were staying in Sukabitetek camp. The locals who considered the Holarua people their *fetosawa* agreed to give away the land. Eventually, almost 10 hectares was offered and 50 households moved into Sulit in late 2004. Similar to their brothers and sisters in Naitimu, they were given a time limit to stay on the land—in this case, 15 years as a kind of probationary period. During these ‘probationary’ periods, the Mambai have rebuilt their livelihood towards making a permanent settlement. When I asked Rosario about the time limit, he calmly responded: ‘We are their *fetosawa*. We also have our predecessors who lived, died and [are] buried here. We belong here.’



Plate 5.1 The Mambai from Holarua in Kereana village, Belu district

Source: Andrey Damaledo.

## Accepting the male host: The Mambai of Maubisse

The idea of marriage was articulated in a different fashion by the Mambai of Maubisse origin during their resettlement among the Tetun people in Wehali land. In 1999, 160 East Timorese households from Maubisse,<sup>3</sup> a predominantly Mambai-speaking area in the Ainaro highlands, arrived in the Wehali area and immediately camped around We Malae, near Betun. Mambai is one of the main Austronesian languages of East Timor and shares linguistic similarities with Tetun and Kemak. Geographically, Mambai are inhabitants of the East Timorese districts of Aileu and Same and parts of Ainaro and Ermera, which makes them the largest ethnolinguistic group in East Timor. Although their population is significant, records of Mambai displacement into West Timor prior to 1999 are limited. There are, however, verifiable accounts of relations between Mambai and West Timor recorded in the time leading up to the 1911–12 rebellion. These accounts recognised an extensive kinship and alliance network between the Mambai people and the people of the surrounding areas. This included the Tetun people from Camenaça, an eastern domain that claimed origin from Wehali in Belu, West Timor. A former Portuguese military officer reported to Governor Filomeno da Câmara about this network, which exemplified the alliance of Dom Boaventura, the *liurai* of the Mambai domain of Manufahi:

Turiscaí, Camenassa and Tutuluro should not be trusted because of the intimate connections between their respective chiefs ... Viqueque has kinship connections with Dom Boaventura (who is the nephew of the deceased *regulo* [of Viqueque], Dom Matues). [Dom Boaventura is] married to the niece of Nai-Clara, *regulo* of Aituto; the *regulo* of Alas also has kinship connections with the rebels ... and while Bibisuco is not believed to have joined the rebellion nor to have kin connections with Manufahi, they are nonetheless on very friendly terms. (Davidson 1994: 263–6)

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3 I adapted this story of the Maubisse people in Wehali from Olkes Dadilado (2005b: 3–6), an officer of CIS Timor, who recorded it for the *Lorosae Lian* bulletin. Lado wrote that these people's origin was the Ainaro subdistrict of 'Maubesi'. I tried to clarify this information during fieldwork, including having a further discussion with Lado himself, who eventually clarified that the spelling in the original was incorrect and should have been Maubisse.

This kinship and alliance network might not have worked effectively during the 1911–12 rebellion, but it was helpful during the displacement and resettlement of Mambai people in 1999. The surrounding area of We Malae in Betun was controlled by the Indonesian Government and was managed by the local police station at Betun. Settling on land owned by a state institution was disconcerting because of the uncertainty. ‘At any time, additional housing for police officers could be proposed and would automatically mean relocation for us’, recalled Romaldo Lopez, a member of the Indonesian army who had acted as the coordinator for displaced East Timorese camped at We Malae. For this reason, Romaldo and his group had been trying to find and negotiate for land they could purchase, own and eventually resettle on.

Having searched the area for some time, in 2003, Romaldo and Dominggus Mendoza—both of whom were considered elders able to represent the nine villages in Maubisse—approached the traditional (*adat*) leaders as well as the landowners of Fatisin hamlet in the village of Kamanasa. Kamanasa was named in reference to the Camenaça domain in East Timor from which most residents of Kamanasa village originated. Following the meeting, Romaldo and Dominggus approached Nikolas Nahak and his wife, Petronela, who had considerable landholdings in the area. To their surprise, the landowners had been expecting this approach. Nikolas disclosed that he had anticipated their move because the night before he had dreamt about a visit by ancestors from Maubisse who advised him that a group of Maubisse people who were searching for land on which to settle would soon approach him. The ancestors then asked Nikolas to give up his land because these people were members of his family. As members of the family, they deserved to stay on the land.

When Romaldo and Dominggus arrived at his house, Nikolas offered to gift his land to them. The notion of a kin relationship was further elaborated by Petronela, who stood by her husband to greet the expected families: ‘We [the Tetun people in Wehali] are the female and our brothers and sisters from the other side [East Timor] represent the male side’ (*Ami nêe feto, mak husi raibelan nêe ba nia mane*). For Nikolas and Petronela, and the Tetun people generally in Wehali, the giving away of land is seen as the reestablishment of a kinship alliance with the East Timorese. In this respect, an appropriate ritual treatment is necessary because the gift could be beneficial but could also cause harm to both the hosts and the newly arrived. When Romaldo and Dominggus asked about

the price, Nikolas replied: 'If I put a price tag on it, I will be cursed by the ancestors' (*Kalo ha'u fa'an, ikus mai ha'u bele kona moruk tan ne'e lulik*). As a result, 2 hectares of land was given away to the Maubisse people.

In this exchange, the displaced Mambai from East Timor have been accommodated into Tetun cultural categories and mythic associations to meet their need to rebuild their lives on Wehali land. At the same time, the returning male 'category' has reconfirmed the symbolic and historical precedence of Wehali and (symbolically) restored the spiritual power of the land. By facilitating this reunification, Tetun people avoid the anger of the ancestors and, at the same time, expect, in return, blessings for the land. This process of accommodation is further related to the notion of a cosmological order and apical authority. A few weeks after the meeting, a ritual ceremony was performed to transfer the land. Under the shade of a banyan tree, representatives from the Maubisse applicants offered betel nut and betel to Nikolas and Petronela. While the ritual was proceeding, it began to rain, which was taken as an auspicious sign. Nikolas stated that the ancestors approved and had shown their blessing towards the land. There are now 153 Mambai households living in Fatisin hamlet.

## The Idate in West Timor

Another variation of social integration among the East Timorese in West Timor is exemplified by a case of Idate displacement and resettlement. Idate is also an Austronesian language. It is closely related to Tetun Terik and is spoken by the inhabitants of the subdistrict of Laclubar in Manatuto. The Idate-speaking people were among the major supporters of the pro-autonomy option of East Timor remaining within Indonesia. Some claimed they had maintained a pro-Indonesia stance since their Idate kinsman José Osório Soares founded the Apodeti party in 1975. His younger brother, Abílio Osório Soares, had served two terms as governor of East Timor up to the time of the 1999 referendum (Bovensiepen 2011: 49). As the Soares family's position as proponents of Indonesia became cemented, their role in the social life of the Idate assumed a cultural dimension. Traditionally, Osório Soares was recognised as the sacred ruler (*liurai lulik*) of the Idate people whose sacred house in the Laclubar village of Manelima is located near Mount Liambau and called Ba Hera (Bovensiepen 2017: 156). The dominant political role of the Soares

family during the Indonesian period encouraged many Idate-speaking people to join the Indonesian military and police or become public servants in the Indonesian administration of East Timor. A complex mix of history, ethnicity, politics, culture and economy led more than 3,000 East Timorese from Manatuto district—mostly Idate-speaking people—to leave their homeland in 1999 and settle in West Timor.

In April 2013, I visited the Idate resettlement site in the village of Oekfoho in Belu district and met a panel of elders, who told me:

People may say that we decided to stay here in West Timor because we were afraid to return. But you know the destruction in Manatuto in 1999 was not as massive as [in] other areas in East Timor. In fact, the Mahadomi militia group was formed rather late because we got the news that the BMP [Besi Merah Putih] militia group from Liquiça as well as the Aitarak group from Dili were going to attack Manatuto if we did not immediately form our own militia. But, frankly speaking, we never had any involvement in taking people's lives. We do not have blood on our hands.

I asked: 'If your hands were clean, why didn't you just return? Don't you miss your homeland?' One elder replied: 'Of course we miss our homeland in Laclubar. And, yes, our land is there in Laclubar, but now our home is here in Oekfoho.' The elder pointed to the two decorated timber and thatch houses standing across from our meeting place. Explaining what he meant about the houses, the elder continued:

Our [origin] house was there in Laclubar, but it is nothing but a physical house now. When we came to West Timor in 1999, we brought along all of our ancestral sacred regalia from the origin house. In addition, we brought along the one who has the proper authority to sit in and consecrate the ritual in that house, our sacred leader [*liurai lulik*]. With these in hand, we have built our new house of origin [*uma lulik*] here and therefore here is our new home.

The Idate people came to West Timor in two ways. Some joined the early evacuation effort that took place immediately after the announcement of the result of the independence referendum. Most, however, walked from Laclubar to Manatuto and then took a truck to Dili. From Dili, they embarked on a ship that eventually landed them in Kupang. Here, they initially camped in two major sites in Kupang district, Tuapukan and Naibonat. Mateus Alves, an Idate elder from the Manelima hamlet of Lakenu, recalled:

Upon our arrival, some of us were camped in Tuapukan. But my family joined the rest of our kin who were camped around Naibonat military station. After living in camps for more than three years, most of the Idate households joined the Indonesian Government resettlement program in Kupang district in 2002 and were resettled in Naunu village, in the subdistrict of Fatuleu. Others remained in camps until 2004 and 2005, when another resettlement site, in Raknamo village of Kupang district, was offered to the East Timorese. The Idate people who first moved into Raknamo resettlement area were retired military personnel. They joined the predominantly Tetun Terik-speaking people from Viqueque and the Makasae people from Baucau. A year later, my group joined another resettlement facilitated by the Indonesian Department of Public Works. Currently there are around 1,000 Idate-speaking people in Kupang district. We are dispersed in two main locations, about 150 Idate households in Naunu and more than 50 households here in Raknamo.

The first group of refugees arrived in Kupang by boat, while the rest came overland. By the end of 1999, almost all of the East Timorese evacuees who came across the border had ended up in Atambua, except for those who joined the military truck convoys that went through to Kupang. With no previous social relationships with West Timorese, settling in the border area was not an option for the East Timorese from the central regions such as the Idate. The most feasible sites for these people to build their camps were in the western area of Belu district. Here, there were two sites allocated to the Idate group, Tirta and Labur. Tirta camp is 3 km west of the Belu district capital of Atambua. In 1999, 3,000 displaced East Timorese people, mainly from Manatuto district and including Idate-speaking groups, were accommodated in Tirta. The rest of the Idate refugees were camped 20 km further west in a village called Labur. Numerically, Mambai settlers from the East Timor district of Aileu dominated Labur. In 1999, the site sheltered more than 2,500 displaced East Timorese.

## Reconciling calamity

The displacement of Idate groups into West Timor was not only a physical shift, but also a spiritual one. It was spiritual because Idate elders in the group carried all of their ancestral sacred regalia into West Timor. These sacred heirlooms included a reputed manuscript (*manuscrito*) of the house of Ba Hera written in golden ink, a sacred golden dagger (*espada lulic*), a spear (*dima lulic*), an arrow (*rama lulic*), a sacred gong (*tambor lulic*),

the flag of the house of Ba Hera (*bandeira lulic*) and a sacred sculpture called ‘Estatua Rei Moises’ (*Estatua Lulic–Ai Maior*). In her discussion of the spirituality of the internally displaced Idate people who returned to their origins in the Laclubar village of Funar, Bovensiepen (2009: 323) remarks that ‘the returning villagers were keen to “re-inspirit” the material environment, restoring reciprocal relations with the spiritual realm and thus ensuring the economic and social benefits flowing from this’. These intentions and actions led Bovensiepen (2009: 323) to view the spiritual nature of the landscape hence:

[T]he returning villagers are involved in a two-fold process aimed at achieving the right balance in their relationship with the spiritual landscape: attempting to restore and revitalise their reciprocal relations with it whilst also establishing a safe distance by detaching themselves from its threatening aspects.

Arguably, in a similar fashion to their brothers and sisters in Laclubar, the displaced Idate people in West Timor are also involved in a twofold process to claim the spiritual potency manifest in their ancestral sacred items—understanding their threatening aspects while restoring their authority.

The threatening aspects of the *lulik* unfold in many ways. Idate elders admitted that although the Mambai outnumbered them in Labur during the period 1999–2001, the Idate people were the ones who suffered the most from various illnesses. Their worst fear was realised when those recognised as the bearers of the ancestral heirlooms—Magdalena Soares, Mateus V. Soares, Mau Lequi, Jorge da Cunha, Eugenio Casimiro and Celestine Sibae—passed away, one after another, in 2001. In addition, many Idate people claim to be haunted by spirits of their ancestors through recurring nightmares. In his remembrance of the symbolic events surrounding the death of Raimundo Soares, Coli Mau recounted:

The leaders of the house-group [*dato*] came and told me that they dreamed about the coming of a big flood that would sweep away the Idate people in West Timor. Others expressed different kinds of natural disasters such as tornadoes, drought and fire that led to the extinction of the Idate people. In addition to these disasters, some also depicted the death of the Idate people when in their dreams they saw a future where the people are not living on a fertile land but on human faeces. These signs of death were also exemplified by incidents of spirit possession whereby our people could no longer speak Idate but other languages such as Galole, Mambai, Tetun Dili, Makasae, Waima’a, Kemak and Bunaq. The situation was more frightening when some actually spoke out in Meto, Indonesian, Portuguese and even English.

The Idate thought these strange diseases, natural disasters, living in disgrace and losing one's identity were signs from their ancestors about a tragic future for their people. In response to this seemingly imminent catastrophe and to distance themselves from future threats, in early 2002, Abílio Osório Soares—then the *liurai lulik* of the house of Ba Hera—gathered the leaders of the eight *dato* that made up the traditional order of Ba Hera. The meeting resolved that ancestral sacred houses should be built immediately in West Timor to hold all the sacred items. As most of the Idate people were camped in Belu district, they decided to build the houses (*uma lulik*) in Labur. Although more Idate people were camped in Tirta, it was deemed culturally unsuitable because it also contained a public swimming pool and recreational area. In late November 2002, the ancestral sacred houses for the Idate in West Timor were constructed and a water buffalo was sacrificed to sanctify the houses during the ritual ceremony.

## Restoring life

Idate people recognise two sacred houses, *ada Timor* and *ada Malae*. Neither house is designed as a residence, so no guardians actually reside there. They are similar in construction, with the exception of an additional layer of palm fibres (*ijuk*) in the thatched roof of *ada Malae*. Each house has only one entrance door made of a carved wooden panel. Like other Austronesian societies, the Idate pay much attention to the orientation of their houses. In this case, both Idate houses face east—ostensibly in remembrance of their origins in Laclubar. In another form of classification, *ada Timor* is also known as the upper house, the dark house and the older house. This is the place for the sacred leader of the Idate people and is designated only for sacred life and death rituals (*lisan mean* and *lisan metan*). To complement it, *ada Malae* is known as the lower house, the brighter house and the younger house. This is the place for the executive leader of the domain and the place where guests are welcomed (*uma makerek*).<sup>4</sup>

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4 For a comparative discussion of the Mambai dual houses classification, see Traube (1980: 295–300); and for the Fataluku people, see McWilliam (2011). For other house categories among Austronesian societies, see Fox (2006a: 9–14).

Although both houses are similar in shape and size, they differ in purpose. *Ada Malae* functions as an office for the *liurai* of Ba Hera and is where the day-to-day matters of the people are attended to and where meetings of elders are held. Traditionally, the house also served as the court where people's disputes were resolved. *Ada Timor*, on the other hand, is designated for sacred rituals such as life-cycle rituals of childbirth (*tau naran moris foun*), marriage and particularly the arrival of a daughter in-law (*hasae fetu foun*) and death (*hasae naran matebian*). *Ada Timor* is also the place for conducting rituals related to the agricultural cycle, such as corn and rice planting (*kuda batar-kuda hare*), harvesting (*hasau batar-hasau hare*), appeals for rain (*haturu wari dusu udan*) and refusal of rain (*hasae wari duni udan*). During conflict, *ada Timor* was also the place where Idate warriors conducted their rituals for immunity (*hasae biru*) before they went into battle and the place for purification rituals (*fodame malu*) following victory.

The newly built sacred houses were expected to take away death and bring life to the Idate people in West Timor, but this was not immediately the case. Narratives of death remained prominent among the people. The sacred houses' spiritual potency for life seemed to have faded. This was partly related to the crowded and limited land in Labur camp, which made a complete and regular tributary ritual in the houses impossible. The once consecrated sacred houses were now nothing but storage places for ancestral items. Reflecting on this situation, Idate elders began to search for a new place in which to settle. Between Tirta and Labur lies the hamlet of Oekfoho in the village of Naekasa. Oekfoho lies on a plain 16 km from Atambua. The majority of people in this hamlet speak Meto. Topographically, it is not a highland region—recalling Laclubar—but Oekfoho was appealing because of its proximity to various economic and social facilities in the Belu subdistrict of West Tasi Feto. The Idate people did not want to miss an opportunity and approached the Meto landowner. For this collective land acquisition effort, each household agreed to contribute IDR250,000 (A\$25). After a series of negotiations, the Idate elders managed to seal the purchase of 2 hectares with a total payment of IRD20 million (A\$2,000).

Four years after the initial modestly sized sacred houses in Labur were built, death threats still lingered in people's dreams. In 2006, after securing the land on which to settle, the Idate group was ready to conduct a culturally appropriate rebuilding of their sacred houses. In a sense,

this reconstruction was perceived as a process of reclaiming the ancestral authority of life that had been missing since their arrival in West Timor. The process of sacred house reconstruction involved several stages.

- A coordination meeting was led by the sacred *liurai* of Ba Hera with the leaders of eight named houses called Besi Lisan Walu.<sup>5</sup> One of many, this meeting discussed the site of the house and the responsibilities of each descent group in each reconstruction phase. There were several restrictions imposed on the eight people assigned to seek the beams and building materials: they should not smoke cigarettes, they should not consume alcohol, they should not cut their hair or shave their moustache and beard, and they should not have sexual intercourse.
- After the meeting, the next stage was called *kasa air in*, which literally means ‘hunting for the beam’. This involved a quest for housing materials, and eight people were assigned to this task. They were to be first blessed by the elders and then given some food and drink, as well as a dog to accompany them in their endeavours. The building materials should comprise only specified natural products such as timber, bamboo, *alang* grass for the thatch and rattan from the forest. The most important element is the central beam, which should only be taken from the Timorese white gum tree (*Eucalyptus urophylla* ‘S. T. Blake’), or *ai ru*, as the Idate people call it. When they notice an *ai ru* tree, they will mark it by firing an arrow into the trunk. A sacrificial ritual is then conducted in which a dog is killed and its blood is spread around the tree. The tree will also be offered betel and betel nut and the dog’s liver. For the Idate, eight is their sacred number—referring to the eight clans (*dato*) that made up the ancient house of Ba Hera. The significance of the dog is expressed in their classification of the eight clans as ‘the dogs that guard the gate’.
- Following the sacrifice, they will cut the tree into eight pieces—four for the main posts and four for the adjoining posts.
- Another ritual is held to accept the beams and other housing materials on the reconstruction site. The ‘accepting the beam’ ceremony will continue in the carving of the post as well as in lining up the walls made from bamboo (*fafulu*).

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5 These eight named houses are: Rin Besi Lalang, Rin Besi Hohon, Asutalin Ada Ina, Ada Telu, Lisu Hoho, Dole Walu, Suhu Rama Ahoti and Matan At. Each house has its designated roles and responsibilities during the ritual processes. The house of Ada Telu, for example, is the one responsible for cooking. The house of Asutalin Ada Ina deals with water provision.

- A ritual 'planting' of the four base pillars is performed following the 'accepting the beam' ceremony. Before each of the pillars is planted, the elders put eight gold coins as well as betel and betel nut in each hole.
- After the base pillars, there will be another ritual for planting the ridge-pole, with a similar process of first placing eight gold coins as well as betel and betel nut in the hole.
- There will also be a ritual for construction of the roof, which includes installing the door and sacred chamber (*laleur*).
- Although at this stage the house has been fully reconstructed, prior to the inauguration ritual, the house should be cleansed (*dasa foer*).
- The final stage is the inauguration of the house. In this celebration, each clan prepares eight water buffaloes, eight pigs, eight roosters, eight sacks of rice and eight jerry cans of local gin (*sopt*).<sup>6</sup>

The rebuilding process took almost a year to complete and, in early October 2007, the Idate ancestral sacred houses were finally inaugurated. People danced all night long in this celebration. Like the Meto ritual of cooling the house (*haniki*) (McWilliam 2002: 243), this celebration is designed to reclaim the authority of the ancestors to protect and provide an opportunity for the Idate to celebrate the abundance in their lives. After their sacred houses were built, the Idate people received support from the Indonesian Government to fund the construction of 93 residential houses around their sacred houses. For their livelihood activities, each household managed to secure from the Meto landowner a minimum of 1 hectare on which to plant their crops. This cultivated land was located along the border between Belu and TTU districts, some 3 km west of Oekfoho. It takes one hour from Oekfoho to reach their cultivated land on foot, but, as Raimundo proudly reminded me before I left, 'After we completed the reconstruction of our sacred houses, now we are feeding the local people with our abundant harvests of corn, beans and cassava'.

The selective and appropriate efforts to rebuild their sacred houses in West Timor convinced the Idate people to see their displacement and resettlement in a different light. For them, Laclubar had always been their land of origin. However, as their sacred houses were now standing in West

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6 The costs are very substantial from the first stage to the final inauguration feast. With the influence of Abílio Soares, the Idate received support from the Belu district government and the Indonesian military.

Timor, a new point of origin had also been created. The strong emphasis of the role of the sacred house as a point of origin is a common feature among different East Timorese ethnolinguistic groups (Fox 2006a: 16; McWilliam 2005: 32). The neighbouring Mambai of Aileu, for instance, stressed the significance of their sacred houses as symbolic representation of their division and unity. As Traube (1995: 46) observes:

Individuals belonged to male-ordered units known as houses, *fada*, a term that designated both a group and its dwelling. The socially significant dwelling was not an everyday residence, but a named ancestral origin house where the group's sacred heirlooms were stored. House members or 'people of one house' were scattered for most of the year, living in what Mambai represented as the 'outer realm of space' but they reconvened at their origin house on ritual occasions to re-enact their mythical unity.

Makasae-speaking people also express this idea of collective origin and unity through their concept of *ome bese* or 'big house' (Forman 1980). In a similar vein, Kemak-speaking people invoke the notion of a core house that binds dispersed Kemak groups into a shared origin and unity (Clamagirand 1980). If the reconstruction of the Idate sacred houses in Oekfoho has unified the dispersed Idate people living in the West Timor districts of Belu and Kupang, a second concern has coalesced around the relationship between these sacred houses and the ones left behind in Laclubar. Since independence there has been a widespread 'resurgence of traditions' (Hicks 2007: 14) across Timor-Leste. This cultural recovery is exemplified by the reconstruction and inauguration of sacred ancestral houses that were burned, destroyed and/or abandoned during the Indonesian occupation and post-referendum exodus. The Idate in Laclubar are no exception. For some time, the sacred houses of Ba Hera fell into disuse after most of its members were displaced into West Timor. With the support of the Government of Timor-Leste, the Idate finally managed to repair their sacred houses in Laclubar in 2010. However, various attempts to conduct rituals in the houses have failed, in part because the people who acted as sacred leaders are deceased or no longer present in the area. It is considered culturally inappropriate (*tidak layak*) for the community to sit in the houses because the real sacred leader and sacred ancestral heirlooms are held in West Timor.<sup>7</sup> Without their sacred leader and appropriate rituals, the renovated sacred houses are nothing but physical structures.

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<sup>7</sup> For a similar phenomenon among the Meto people of West Timor, see McWilliam (1999: 138).

To have their sacred houses in Ba Hera properly inaugurated, a delegation of elders was sent to West Timor to seek out suitable spokespeople (*futu lenso*). Among the Idate elders in Belu and Kupang, two prominent figures were first approached to be the spokespeople for the sacred houses: Manuel Saldanha or Nai Liurai Amanu, the guardian of *ada Timor*, and Francisco Cornelio Pinto Lequi or Nai Liurai Sico, the guardian of *ada Malae*. Although the guardians had no reservations about accepting the invitation to return to Timor-Leste, their ultimate decision was in the hands of their leader, João Sino Osório Soares, the younger brother of the former governor of East Timor Abílio José Osório Soares and the most senior ritual authority of the Idate community. João Soares had previously been head of the East Timor Department of Public Works and, at the time of the inauguration, was a civil servant in the Indonesian Ministry of Mining and Energy in the NTT government. He readily acknowledged:

I never wanted to become the sacred leader of the Idate people because I actually know little about our traditions and rituals. But after the death of my older brother [Abílio José Osório Soares] in June 2007, the elders told me the ancestors had appointed me to be the *liurai lulik* of Laclubar. Sometimes you just can't escape your destiny.<sup>8</sup>

As their sacred leader, only João had the authority to sit in the sacred houses of Timor in Laclubar for its inauguration. In his words:

They [the Idate from Laclubar] came and told me that Laclubar has lived in misery for the last 11 years. The land has lost its spirit. The body has lost its soul. Now they have renovated the sacred houses, but they always fail to conduct a proper ritual because the spirit custodian of the land has moved to West Timor. For this reason, they asked me and the elders to return to Laclubar for the house inauguration. I would not mind at all because they are also my people.

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8 Among Austronesian societies, it is not uncommon for the leader 'to know nothing' because the succession counts on who the person is, not on what he/she knows. See Sudo (2006: 60) and Lewis (2006: 163) for comparison.



Plate 5.2 *Ada Malae* and *ada Timor* of the Idate people in Oekfoho village, Belu district

Source: Andrey Damaleda.



Plate 5.3 The author (in white T-shirt) with Idate elders in Oekfoho village, Belu district

Source: Andrey Damaleda.

In late 2010, João, the house guardians and a handful of Idate elders from West Timor returned to Laclubar for the inauguration of their sacred houses. They spent two weeks there to complete all the necessary rituals. João recalled people expressing their belief that ‘the ancestors were blessing the land again after years of drought’ when rain poured down following completion of the rituals. Although this was implicitly understood as an open invitation for the Idate people in West Timor to return and reside again in Laclubar, João and the elders decided to go back to West Timor after the rituals were completed. ‘Laclubar has always been our origin, but they need to understand that now we also have our sacred houses in Oekfoho to be looked after,’ João explained. Although they have rebuilt their new sacred houses in West Timor, the Idate people insisted there is only one origin that matters and it remains in Laclubar. According to their cultural understanding, the sacred houses in Oekfoho are recognised as *ada Kiik* or subsidiary houses to that of *ada Los* (the true origin house) in Laclubar. Through the reconstruction of their new sacred houses in Oekfoho, the Idate people in West Timor have kept alive their relationship with their ancestral land and relatives in East Timor. This phenomenon illustrates the typical Timorese idea of dispersion from the central origin (Traube 1986: 66).

## Processes and results of integration

From a political point of view, the 1999 displacement of East Timorese into West Timor was seen largely as an exodus of pro-Indonesian loyalists. As such, these people are generally perceived as supporters of East Timor remaining a constituent part of Indonesia. But, as I have pointed out in this chapter, this integrationist idea is less obvious among the Mambai and the Idate, as exemplified in their displacement and resettlement processes. What is more obvious is ‘integration’ in a cultural sense whereby the Mambai have formed new alliances with the West Timorese and, at the same time, maintained their attachment to their land of origin in East Timor. They are doing this by embracing the Wehali ‘male’ category and becoming wife-takers to north Tetun people. There are two striking similarities in this process. First, the integration has taken the symbolic and actual forms of marital union and the Mambai are represented by the male category. This should be understood as being beyond a mythic or civic union because the Mambai concept of men marrying out is perceived as the initiation of a ‘new path’ or new alliance (Traube 1986: 87).

The second point is related to land. In both instances of alliance building, the gifting of land is the outcome. Edmund Leach (1951: 44), in his classic essay on marriage and alliance building, has argued that ‘the procedure for acquiring land rights of any kind is in almost all cases tantamount to marrying a woman from the lineage of the lord’. In this view, land is categorised not as a commodity, but as a spiritual catalyst that brings people together. Land becomes a place of encounter between outsiders and insiders, newcomer and host, centre and periphery, wife-givers and wife-takers and unity and division. Extending this into ritual exchange obligations, however, the male category puts the Mambai in a subordinate status to the local people and causes them to strive to fulfil their alliance role. This includes working the land gifted to them and providing assistance and gifts to the local people.

The story of the Idate exodus exemplifies a common phenomenon. While the Idate are generally identified as major proponents of East Timor’s integration within Indonesia, their knowledge of Indonesia remains vague. They know they are living in Indonesia, but it is attachment to their ancestral sacred houses and their sacred leader that seems to matter more. And when their sacred houses and sacred leader were not bound to a fixed locality, Laclubar remained just another possibility for the future. As many Idate told me:

If one day our sacred leader orders us to take our ancestral heirlooms and return to our origin land, then Laclubar is where we go ... besides, we have our original sacred houses there waiting anyway.

It was not my intention in this chapter to suggest that the Mambai and the Idate do not recognise Indonesian nationalist symbols. In fact, during my visit to their resettlement areas, I found many households still raise the Indonesian flag. In Sulit resettlement site, in particular, the flag was planted next to the tombs of their acclaimed predecessors. The Idate people have also kept the flag in their sacred houses. What I am considering is another perspective for understanding the nature of East Timorese ideas of belonging. In a political sense, they belong to Indonesia because of the political choices they made. However, in a cultural sense, they have always claimed belonging to a place of origin in East Timor and to their ancestral sacred houses and sacred leader as the principal sources of their identity. In this sense, their displacement and resettlement in West Timor are not about loss and separation, but about the expansion of their land of origin. As the Mambai of Aileu express this metaphorically: ‘Its trunk

sits there. The little pieces of its tip go out again and again. It has but one trunk. It is the bits of the tip that are many' (Traube 1986: 81).<sup>9</sup> In the next chapter, I will examine another form of East Timorese belonging by moving from this 'origin epistemology' (Fox 2008: 201) to the ideas of sacrifice, suffering, purity and silence among former militia and military personnel now living in Kupang, Belu and Malaka.

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9 I note that in early October 2015, five Mambai from Holarua finally decided to return to their origin land in Timor-Leste. Many others who have managed to rebuild their lives were encouraged to stay in West Timor. They are the 'new paths' of Mambai people in West Timor.

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