Paulino, Vicente – Writing and translating Timorese oral tradition.
*Configurações*, vol. 17, 2016, pp. 79-98

# Writing and translating Timorese oral tradition*

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**Resumo**
***Escrever e traduzir a tradição oral timorense***
Este trabalho examina a tradição oral e a evolução do conceito de escrita na sociedade timorense, tendo em vista a compreensão da identidade histórica e cultural de Timor-Leste. Uma vez que não é possível resolver todos os problemas relacionados com os temas mencionados, avaliamos e sintetizamos o que nós consideramos fundamental para a consolidação da história do povo de Timor Leste, em aspetos relacionados com a tradução de tradições orais e a origem da escrita.

**Palavras-chave:** sociedade timorense, Kes – escrita timorense, tradução, história.

**Abstract**
This work examines oral tradition and the evolution of the concept of writing in Timorese society in order to understand the establishment of the historical and cultural identity of East Timor. Since it is impossible to address all of the relevant issues, we evaluate and synthesize only those aspects related to the translation of oral traditions and the origins of writing which we consider to remain fundamental to the consolidation of the historical people of East Timor.

Keywords: Timorese society, Kes – Timorese writing, Translating, History.

* The research was supported by Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian from 2009 to 2012. This text is a product of the project "As ciências da classificação antropológica em Timor Português", funded by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) of Portugal, coordinated by Ricardo Roque, ICS-UL 2009-2013. Thanks to Emanuel Braz and Isabel Graça for reviewing the English text.
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**Résumé**
***Écriture et traduction de la tradition orale timoraise***
Ce travail examine la tradition orale et l'évolution du concept d'écriture dans la société timoraise, en ordre à la compréhension de l'identité historique et culturelle du Timor Oriental. Puisqu'il n'est pas possible d'aborder toutes les questions liées aux sujets mentionnés, nous tenterons d'évaluer et de synthétiser ce que nous considérons comme fondamental pour la consolidation du peuple du Timor Oriental, du point de vue des aspects liés à la traduction des traditions orales et à l'origine de l'écriture.

**Mots-clés:** société timoraise, Kes - écriture timoraise, traduction, histoire.

## Introduction

Following a historical perspective, the term "text" binds "to a set of institutions: law, church, literature, education. The text is a moral subject and it is the written itself as part of the social contract. It demands observation and respect, but in return it endows the language with a rare trademark, which it did not possess: its irrevocability. As Mallarme wrote: 'It happens alone: 'done it is', so as to say a definite 'being there' while the oral narrative always comes as a 'been there' (Barthes & Marty, 1987:55), and as, also, warns us J. Burrow (1982: 47):

> The normal thing to do with a written literary text, that is, was to perform it, by reading or chanting it aloud. Reading was a kind of performance. Even the solitary reader most often read aloud, or at least muttered, the words of this text – performing it to himself, as it were – and most reading was not solitary. The performance of a text was most often a social occasion. These occasions took many forms, depending upon the social setting and the nature of the text.

The relationship between the written and the oral text can be summed up as: "the written works in relation to that, which is identical, the oral in relation to the other; the relationship with the identical, the repetition, the re-enunciation the reader does during the act of reading; the relationship with others, oral communication that originates from change, through the produced deviation by the presence of another one" (Barthes & Marty, 1987:49). That is, for example, in the Middle Ages the "written work" was read or narrated by an individual and, at the same time, heard by one or more individuals and recorded in memory, thus giving another version of the term called "aurality". Aurality means that someone reads the text in the public sphere and others hear it:

> Aurality, in particular, combined the two poles of 'orality' and 'literacy' in a unique way whose implications cannot properly be perceived if most of the critical energy is devoted to pulling aurality into line with a superimposed Great Divide.

> Aurality is distinguished from 'orality' – i.e., from a tradition based on the oral performance of bards or minstrel – by its dependence on a written text as the source of the public reading (Coleman, 1996: 27-28)

*Orality* and *writing* are very restricted, they had been at the service of the Enlightenment arguments of the *bourgeois* public sphere to spread in more light and reason; since the invention of Guttenberg, the book comes as a "new secular and dreaded cure of souls" (cf. Ayala, 1984); herein, disclosure in writing discourse of the Enlightenment arguments follows the same path. However, speech and writing are tools for communication in our current society and therefore, men have them much into account in their communication with other human beings.

Taking into consideration these arguments on such assumptions, trying to understand origins, characteristics and evolution of the orality and writing phenomena in East Timor seems unreasonable, without resorting to the contribution to history narrated by rituals authorities and the texts of Portuguese literary authors, who among others contributed to restore Timorese oral cultures in written texts. This estimable contribution to the understanding of the central issues of Timorese oral cultures in written texts is an issue of pride and, at the same time, a challenge.

Concerning the Timorese writing, its symbols, the distributions of signals like putting rocks, branches of plants or trees along the way are considered writing, as the Timorese wisely say 'these symbols and these signs are our writing'.

## 1. Oral tradition in Timorese society

> "Culture is the memory of a people that never dies – A cultura é a memória de um povo que não morre"
>
> (*Manifesto Maubere*, Fernando Sylvan)

In a society without a writing system, where the use of the written form is unnecessary, oral language has been used as the instrument of communication processes. Oral expressions have been used to identify the existence of an observed object immediately. In the society's oral tradition – as in the case of Timorese society, or other African societies, or in the Asian region, or even of Latin America region – words are directly linked to events, meetings and things that take place. Societies without a written culture referred as "oral tradition corporations", or what Malinowski described as "primitive", their communication system concern more the immediate action rather than transmitting a thought into writing.

The word carries the memory of the testimony of human existence, the ontological power of speech that the name does exist, the transmission of values and prohibitions governing the societies. The Word given by God, the Word is Divine and is simultaneously sacred because it is through the myth of man's origin that it is maintained, a copy recreation, as a privileged instrument that ensures the *ab origine ad eternum* (at the beginning to eternity).

In oral cultures, words have great power over things, a power that is greatly related to magic. For example, in Timorese society, oral tradition still weighs heavily and every spoken word is associated with the ritualized world of things. We can infer then, the enormous value and functional importance of orality in all areas of everyday life in East Timor, both in the pre-colonial context, characterized by a strong traditional understanding, or even after the changes resulting from the colonial contacts and even post-colonial.

For the Timorese world, oral tradition played a key role in the development of its literary language. The anthology of Timorese legends, myths and folk tales, was first collected and collated by Ezequiel Enes Pascoal (1967), Eduardo dos Santos (1967) and Correia de Campos (1967). In the ontology of these authors, we can find the importance of myths and symbols conveyed by oral tradition in the genesis of a collective imagination, particularly with regards to the origins of the different Timorese peoples. East Timor is unusually rich in oral traditions – legends, myths and stories – and it indicates a consciousness of an ancient community.

It is not surprising that the oral tradition of East Timor, its legends, myths and folk tales have their realistic interpretation, more or less in accordance with what will be explained in some of them, thus leaving the cues for the interpretation of all the others so plentiful in the island. But for the readers convenience, some legends that have historical facts can be already mentioned, including "*Os Irmãos Páran* – The Brothers Páran"[1], the "*Mulher Cacatua* – Women Cacatua" and the "*As Sete Irmãs Cetáceas* – Seven Cetacean Sisters" that those who may be interested can read in the East Timor Catholic newspaper *Seara* (1972).

Furthermore, some legends of the Bunak people: 'Mau Sirak and Bui Sirak' and 'Mau Raun and Bui Raun' (What follows is an excerpt from the oral tradition, narrated by *Mátas* Alípio da Conceição Marques – Tapo, and compiled by Nuno da Silva Gomes)[2]. The first story states like this:

1 This legend was published in *Seara* – Boletim Eclesiástico da Diocese de Díli, in the year 7-N.º 225 on the 1972. But this document of their number is not in the collection of the "Lisbon Geographical Society.

2 These original narratives legends are described in Tetum language. The original legend title: "Mau Sirak and Bui Sirak" is presented in Tetum language: "*Lalehan ho Rai* – Heaven and Earth" (see Gomes, 2008: 46-47).

"Nos tempos idos, quando o mar ainda era bravo, só havia seis pessoas. Bui Sirak e Mau Sirak, Bui Guzu e Mau Guzu, Sesu Mau e Dudu Mau moravam juntos numa montanha chamada *Bekali Annola*. Eles viviam miseravelmente, porque ainda não havia luz, a terra era seca, só existia aquela montanha, e não havia água para beber. Por isso, Mau Sirak subiu ao céu para pedir ajuda ao *Hot Gol*, e deu lhe três feixes de lanças (instrumento de guerra) para resistirem ao dono do mar. Mas eles não conseguiram derrotar o dono do mar e o mar continuava a ser bravo. Mau Sirak subiu outra vez ao céu e disse que o mar ainda continuava bravo, e *Hot-Gol* ofereceu-lhe mais sete feixes de lanças, levou-os para combater o dono do mar, e finalmente, o mar começou a acalmar e eles ganharam a batalha. Mas ainda viviam na miséria e na escuridão, porque ainda não existia o dia. Bui Guzu e Mau Guzu subiram ao céu e pediram ao *Hot-Gol* para lhes oferecer o clarão. E a partir daí, começaram a ter o dia e noite. Mesmo assim, eles continuaram a viver na miséria, porque só existia uma fonte de água, e ainda mais o céu e a terra estavam demasiado perto. *Sesu Mau e Dudu Mau* com a ajuda do *Hot-Gol* empurram o céu para cima, e cortaram o "*Lete bul e Malas bul*", e desse modo o céu e a terra ficaram separados "

"In the past times, the sea was still angry, there were only six people. Bui Sirak and Mau Sirak, Bui Guzu and Mau Guzu, Sesu Mau and Dudu Mau lived together in a mountain *Bekali Annola*. They lived miserably, because there was still light, the earth was dry, there was only one mountain, and there was no water to drink. So Mau Sirak ascended to heaven for help to Hot-Gol*, and gave him three bundles of spears (instrument of war) to resist the owner of the sea. But they failed to defeat the master of the sea and the sea was still angry. Mau Sirak rose again to heaven and said that the sea was still angry, and Hot-Gol offered him another seven bundles of spears, led them to fight the owner of the sea, and finally, the sea began to calm down and they won battle. But the life of the six people to continuo in misery and darkness, because there was not the day. Bui Guzu and Mau Guzu rose into the sky and asked the Hot-Gol to offer them the glare. And from there, began to take the day and night. Yet they continued to live in misery, because there was only one water source, and even heaven and earth were too close. Sesu Mau and Dudu Mau with the help of Hot-Gol push up the sky, and cut the 'Lete bul and Malas bul', and thereby were separated heaven and earth"

* In the literal translation: the "o Filho do Sol e considera-o como o seu ente supremo – The Son of Sun" and considers it as Supreme Being".

This legend is known as to relate to the origins of the world and man's struggle against the evil lord who was ever-present in rough seas. The angry sea symbolizes Evil, because it had been inhabited by the lord of darkness. This oral culture involves a strong presence of religious and moral prohibitions, links the present to the past and builds up a social environment for the individual and the community.

Man exists, as it sees itself as the guarantor of the traditions that transmits and passes them from the father to son, forming a continuous chain of learning. We can then see that in East Timor elderly people and children are the ones who have greater importance; the elderly state as bearers of wisdom heritage and children as the hope of the continuity of the group. Not having children is the possibility of anonymity, the death of the social group, the erasure of one own existence. This example, can be seen in the narratives of the legend of 'Mau Sirak and Bui Sirak', three couples find the *Hot-Gol* as it's Supreme Being, or consider him as 'Father' and perform tasks from *Hot-Gol*.

About the origin of the world it identifies three universes: the celestial universe (*heaven* – inhabited by *Hot-Gol*), the earthly universe (earth – inhabited by creatures of God *Hot-Gol*) and the spiritual universe (inhabited by evil spirits and good spirits). The evil spirit in this legend is the lord of the rough seas who tries to destroy the garden of Lord *Bekali Annola* entrusted to three couples. The Mountain *Bekali Annola* will continue to be – for the Bunak people of East Timor, including the people who live in the area of Bobonaro (Tapo, Leber, Holsa, Saburai, and other areas near Bunak-speaking lands) – the 'paradise Eden'.

In East Timor, there are several stories of interpretation on the creation where heaven and earth merge. "The earth and heaven are bound together" – as some mythological Timorese legends refer, for example the mythological legend 'Bagnut' [3] narrated by Manuel (ritual authority of Letefoho) – as is the case with the legend of 'Mau Sirak and Bui Sirak'. It is known in almost all regions of the Timorese territory, of a time when man crossed to and from heaven to earth through the *Lete* and *Malas*[4]. *And that it was because of evil caused by the ruler of the rough sea and misery which he brought upon the people of the Bekali Annola*, that *Hot-Gol* helped Sesu Mau and Dudu Mau sever heaven and earth and since then earth and the skies have been apart forever.

The place *Bekali Annola* is, for us, "earth from heaven", that is, the earth that came from heaven. In other words, it can be designated as the battlefield were evil spirits are fought. Considering this, it can be stated that there is a

3 This legend has been collected and published by father Ezequiel Enes Pascoal in his book *A alma de Timor vista na sua fantasia* (1967).

4 *Lete* is a bridge, *Malas* is stairs. The typically terms *Lete* and *Malas* are presented here as a metaphor for an object that enables the man to go to heaven and come down from heaven to earth. The *lete* and *malas* have the same meaning; this is a "creeper".

common belief to all the peoples of the world – Christians, Jewish, Islamic and other religious groups – that is, the application of that which might be referred to as a basic principle of the imaginative thinking of people, where an event is simulated leading up to its realization.

The question of *lete bul* and *malas bul*, can not only be seen in the tradition of the *Bunak* ethnic group but also in the history of other peoples, like the case of the peoples of the Ramelau High Lands who believe in the existence of a 'creeper' – Tetum called *calêic* – linking it to the ground. According to tradition these peoples tell that in long gone days; a woman who went up 'there' one day to fetch fire – a common habit for the people of earth – she took so long getting back that her husband became angry with her, so he cut the creeper before her return. Since then, earth and the heavens have been parted forever (Pascoal, 1967:66).

The term 'there' referred to in this narrative serves to refer the infinite space beyond human existence, that is, *Lalehan* (heaven). At some point – say the *lia-na'in* of the peoples of the Ramelau High Lands – the "creeper" (calêic) sits on top of one of its hills to Mount Lau-Daro of Atsabe, and that the root is still kept at the site, considered *Lulik*. According to the oral tradition, told by some *kukun na'in* (ritual authority), the inhabitants of much of the south coast believe the "creeper" to have risen from Ria-Tu, a place still marked with a slab. But those from Matebian and the villages that surround it say it is in Quelicai, where the root of the creeper is located. People from the eastern tip of the island, in turn, say the root of the creeper is located in the *Muapitine* in Lautem, from where man climbed from earth to heaven.

However, these mythological and prehistoric narratives are not unique to the Timorese people, but are also common to certain prehistoric peoples of Polynesia – whom some archaeologists and anthropologists consider as probable Timorese ancestors (Almeida,1968 [1994]; Correia, 1944) – these people believe the most natural thing would be heaven and earth to be close to one another.

The family is the primary community, is the mainstay of tradition and its there and, in more or less complicated kinship systems, which is based on the law, not the written rule of law but the right *gerontocratic* (see Weber, 1994)[5], commanded by the Word, by usual and customary. And here, in a customary norm, orality is probably the element with the highest weight in the characterization of Timorese culture. On the assumption, it will be consider the narratives of the legend of "Mau Raun and Bui Raun":

5 According to Weber perspective, *gerontocratic* is a traditionalism power system, without any kind of political administration. It is based on the belief that older people know more about the sacred tradition.

"Naqueles tempos idos, o homem chamado *Mau Raun* vivia sozinho na terra. Ele visitava diariamente a sua horta para limpar as plantas venenosas para não estragarem as boas plantas. Na sua horta já tinham crescido muitas plantas de alimentação e etc. A história repetiu-se muitas vezes, um dia era da manhã, ele visitava a sua horta para ver as suas plantas que foram plantadas. E a tarde já chegou, regressou a sua casa e ficou surpreendido quando encontrou os alimentos bem preparados. Mas não viu ninguém, aconteceu assim até ao sétimo dia. Quando chegava o sétimo dia, *Mau Raun* fez um propósito de não visitar a sua horta, mas ficou em casa para tentar descobrir o verdadeiro facto de acontecimentos, entretanto, ele saiu e ficou escondido numa árvore perto da sua casa. A árvore estava densamente coberta pela folha de betel, e por isso ele se escondeu dentro das folhas de betel, para espreitar com objecto de saber o que é se passava dentro de sua casa. Tardou muito, pelo menos meia hora, ele viu um *cacatua* a voar perto da sua casa, pousou-se na mesma árvore onde o *Mau Raun* estava pousado. Julgava ela que não havia ali ninguém e desceu. Antes de entrar na casa do *Mau Raun*, despiu as asas. O *Mau Raun* viu tudo isto e observou de que a *cacatua* se transformava numa mulher bonita. Ele desceu da árvore, afinou os passos devagarinho, com o fim de a seguir à mulher que acabou de entrar na sua casa. Ele apanhou as asas da *cacatua* que estavam mesmo junto da sua porta e escondeu-as de baixo da lareira. E depois cumprimentava-a – oh mulher, o que tu estás aqui fazer, e aquela mulher ficou assustada e correu para a porta para ver as

"In those bygone times, the man named *Mau Raun* lived alone on earth. He visited his garden every day to clean the poisonous plants to avoid damaging the good plants. In his garden had grown many plants for food and so on. History repeated itself many times a day was the morning he visited his garden to see that your plants have been planted. And the evening has arrived, returned to his home and was surprised when he found the food well prepared. But he saw no one happened just before the seventh day. When it was the seventh day, *Mau Raun* made a resolve not to visit your garden, but stayed home to try to discover the true fact of events, however, he left and was hidden in a tree near his home. The tree was thickly covered by the betel leaf, and so he hid inside the betel leaves, with a peek at the subject to know what was going on inside your house. Before long, at least half an hour, he saw a *cockatoo* (in Portuguese language – C*acatua*) flying near his home, landed in the same tree where the *Mau Raun* was sitting. She believed that there was nobody there and went down. Before entering the house of the *Mau Raun*, stripped the wings. The *Mau Raun* saw this and noted that the *cockatoo* was transformed into a beautiful woman. He climbed down the tree, tuned steps slowly, with the aim of following the woman who has just come to your home. He picked up the *cockatoo's* wings that were right next to your door and hid them underneath the fireplace. And then he greeted her – oh woman, what you're doing here, and that woman was frightened and ran to the door to see their wings, but it was not there. Asked

suas asas, mas já não estava lá. Perguntou aquela mulher ao *Mau Raun*, viste as minhas asas, respondeu o *Mau Raun*, não, eu não vi. Ela ficou a chorar, porque já não conseguiu regressar novamente à sua origem, e então, a partir daí, *Mau Raun* recebeu-lhe como sua esposa e deu-lhe o nome de *Bui Raun*. Tiveram quatro filhos, dois do sexo masculino e dois do sexo feminino. Os seus filhos já foram crescidos e eles viveram em harmonia e paz. Mas a sorte do Mau Raun não durou muito tempo, porque num certo dia, ele foi trabalhar na sua horta, como fazem normalmente os agricultores, e a Bui Raun que estava sozinha com os quatro filhos, mandou-os brincar para fora da casa e ela começava fazer limpeza da casa, ao mesmo tempo resolveu procurar as suas asas, encontrou-as debaixo da lareira, e ficava contente por ter encontrada, daí Bui Raun transformou-se de novo numa *cacatua* e poisou-se em cima do telhado de sua casa. Ao ver este acontecimento, os filhos começaram a chorar, mas a cacatua não lhes ligou e nem pensou o futuro dos filhos. À tarde, quando *Mau Raun* regressou a casa, encontrou os filhos a chorar, e procurou as asas debaixo da lareira e não as encontrou, e resolveu sair de casa à procura de *Bui Raun*. Já era meio-dia, o Mau Raun chegou a uma aldeia, mas não sabia de nada o que se passava daquela aldeia, na verdade que aquela aldeia ter sido conhecida como *aldeia divina* – ou seja, *o mundo divino*. E quando *Mau Raun* chegou à frente do portão da entrada à aldeia, viu os seguranças em todo o lado. Mas, ao entrar, um dos seguranças da porta não o deixou. Então, *Mau Raun* disse-lhe que 'eu posso fazer tudo aquilo que você manda'. O

the woman to the *Mau Raun*, visit my wings, the *Mau Raun* replied, no, I did not. She was crying, because I could not return back to their source, and then from there, *Mau Raun* received him as his wife and gave him the name *Bui Raun*. They had four children, two males and two females. Their children were already grown and they lived in harmony and peace. But the bad luck of *Mau Raun* did not last long because one day, he was working in her garden, as they normally do farmers, and *Bui Raun* she was alone with her four children, had them play out of the house and she began doing house cleaning at the same time resolved to seek his wings, found them under the hearth, and was glad to have found, there *Bui Raun* became again a *cockatoo* and landed on the roof of your house. Seeing this happening, the children began to cry, but not the *cockatoo* called them and did not think the future of their children. In the afternoon, when *Mau Raun* returned home, found the children crying, and looked under the wings of the fireplace and could not find them, and decided to leave the house looking for *Bui Raun*. It was noon, the *Mau Raun* reached a village, but knew nothing about what was happening in that village, in fact that this village was known as *Village of God* – that is, *the divine world*. And when *Mau Raun* reached the front gate of the entrance to the village, he saw the security guards everywhere. But upon entering, one of the security door would not let him. So *Mau Raun* told him: 'I can do whatever you have'. The security guard heard what was said *Mau Raun*, then one of the security men told him that

segurança ouviu o que o Mau Raun estava dizer, então, um dos homens da segurança disse-lhe que 'se queres encontrar a tua esposa antes do pôr-do-sol tens de apanhar todo o arroz que vamos despejar em breve. Esta tarefa não era muito fácil, mas uma tarefa dificílima. Então, ele começou pedir uma ajuda ao *Manu-lin* (pequena ave que, em bandos, devasta os arrozais). Antes da noite, *manu-lin* apanhou todo o arroz, e por isso, *Mau Raun* deu-lhe a autorização para comer primeiro arroz dos agricultores. Depois acabou de apanhar o arroz espalhado na terra, o segurança deu-lhe ordem para entrar e ao mesmo tempo deu-lhe um sinal que lá dentro tem outro segurança, para lhe identificar novamente. Entretanto, *Mau Raun* conseguiu entrar e encontrou-se com outro segurança do portão, o segurança identificou-o e autorizou-o entrar, mas proibiu-o de pegar em coisas lá dentro, e quando ele entrou e viu logo o ouro espalhado no cão, eram muitos. Ele não conseguiu evitar à tentação, e como não havia ninguém, então, apanhou-o e escondeu-o dentro do '*táis*' (traje timorense). Ao sair, o segurança passou revista e encontrou o ouro dentro do seu '*táis*'. E desse modo 'Hot *Gol*' não lhe deu *Bui Raun*, mas apenas o '*táis*' para os seus filhos e descendentes. Assim anos a anos de espera e pedir a compaixão do 'Hot Gol' para lhe entregar *Bui Raun*, mas isso não foi atendido por 'Hot Gol', até o dia em que *Mau Raun* morreu e os seus filhos já foram adultos e já tinham esposas e tiveram filhos, assim eles cresceram e multiplicaram e ocuparam a terra inteira".

'if you want to meet your wife before a sunset you have to take all the rice they'll dump soon'. This task was not easy, but an overwhelming task. Then he began asking for aid *Manu-lin* (small bird, in flocks, devastates rice). Before the night, *manu-lin* took all the rice, and therefore, *Mau Raun* gave him permission to eat the first rice farmers. Then just pick up the rice scattered on the ground, the security guard ordered him to enter and at the same time gave him a sign that there is no other security, to identify him again. However, *Mau Raun* got in and met with another security gate, the security guard identified him and allowed him to enter, but forbade him to hold things inside, and when he came in and immediately saw the gold lay in the dog were many. He could not avoid the temptation, and as there was no one then took it and hid it inside the 'táis' (Timorese vesture). When leaving, the security has reviewed and found gold within its 'táis'. And so 'Hot-Gol' did not give *Bui Raun*, but only the 'such' for their children and descendants. So years and years of waiting to ask the compassion of the 'Hot Gol' to give him *Bui Raun*, but that did not pick 'Hot Gol' until the day he died *Mau Raun* and his children were already adults and had wives and had children, so they grew and multiplied and filled the whole earth".

The narratives of the legend 'Mau Raun and Bui Raun' may be interpreted as follows: first, for the Timorese peoples, the *divine village* or the *divine world* assumes the notion of infinity and of a distant place, or the celestial world. This is true in the application of the rite of *Aihun Ancia* annually performed by *lulik na'in* of the Bunak ethnic group: *Ama nita oa Eme no esen; bai bin dele sa'e dele debel; no'mil no tolo nón no tchula*[6] (Soares, 1998: 51).

Yet we have another example in the application of rainfall annually carried out by *lulik na'in* of the people speakers of the *tetum language*, including the kingdom of Samoro (now Soibada) (in newspaper S*e*ara, 1972, nº226: 3).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Oí, ohin loron, ohin wáin, | Hoje e neste momento, | Today and this time, |
| ami hodi hasa'e ibun, hasae lia, | nós oramos e imploramos | We pray and plead |
| ba nai fitun-oan, nai fulan-oan, | aos ínclitos filhos das estrelas e da Lua, | The sons of the stars and moon, |
| iha leten ai, iha as ai, | que estais lá em cima, nas alturas, | Who are up there on high, |
| iha metan ai, iha láwat ai… | na escuridão, negrume celeste. | In the darkness, darkness in heaven. |
| Tanbá ohin loron, nudar iha rai claran, | Neste tempo, cá na terra | At this time, here on earth |
| ne'e nudar hodi loro at, ai, anin at ai, | um sol abrasador, um vento impetuoso | A blazing sun, a strong wind |
| sunu deit ami, lohi dei ami, | queima-nos, abrasa-nos. | Burn it in, burns us. |
| batar lai dikin o la matac ona, | as bandeiras do milho já não enverdecem, | Flags of the corn no longer greening, |
| fore lai diki o la matac ona, | as de feijão estão ressequidas. | The beans are parched. |
| ne'e foi ami hacau cabu sai-fini, | por isso, trazendo as sementes, | Thus bringing the seeds, |
| mai hamruhan ba Ita, hacmácin ba Ita, | vimos implorar, interceder junto de vós, | We have to beg, plead with you, |
| lole ibu sae, lolo lia sae, | vimos rezar e rogar, | Come to pray and pray, |
| ba liu iha leten ai, iha as ai, | às alturas celestes mais remotas. | The most remote celestial heights. |
| iha metan ai, iha láwat ai, | Sitas lá na escuridão espessa, | Perched there in the thick darkness, |
| halo tulun uit, halo dodan uit bé, | Para que nos deis alguma ajuda, tenhais pena, | For that we bear some help, I'm sorry, |
| halo cus-etu Maromac ai turu uit ba ami, | Fazendo com que a comida de Deus nos dê nos beneficie, | Making the food God gives us the benefits, |
| lun-etu Maromac halo dai uit baa mi bé, | a chuva divina chegue até nós, | Rain God comes to us, |

6 "The Father is in heaven and the mother is in paradise; appears and falls with seeds of life on the world, put in my hand and my heart".

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| halo batar láic icin o matamatac, | que as bandeiras do milho se enverdeçam, | The flags of the corn is greening, |
| fore láic dikin o matamatac bé, | as do feijão vinguem, | The beans flourish, |
| tinan ai tóo, mamenon ai tóo, | no tempo devido do ano, | In due time of the year |
| ami hodi hanái dei, hahulu dei, | a fim de que possamos, descansadamente, honras, | So that we can ease, honors, |
| hatetu dei, harani dei, | oferecer sacrifícios e adorar, | Offer sacrifices and worship, |
| halo iha leten neba é as nebá, | dirigindo tudo para as alturas, | Directing everything to the heights, |
| iha metan nebá é láwat nebá | para o negrume do alto, | For the blackness of the high |
| Hé, nai fitun-oan, na fulan-oan, | a vós, ínclitos filhos das estrelas e da Lua, | To you, sons of the stars and moon, |
| Imi iha leten, iha as, | vós que habitais as alturas, | Ye that dwell in the heights, |
| Açu la tabic, manu la souruc, | onde não tendes que afugentar cães e galinhas, | Where you do not have to chase dogs and chickens, |
| Lalar la beça é néhec la buti, | incomodar-se com moscas e formigas, | Bother with flies and ants, |
| Atan ami, emar ami tanáat, | a vós a quem levantamos as cabeças, | To you who raise their heads, |
| ulu-heti namecaçi é fuc-láin namdahur, | tanto que se soltam as amarras dos cabelos, | Much to loosen the bonds of the hair, |
| Lolo liman la tóo é bi ain la dái. | a vós que não podemos atingir fisicamente. | You who cannot physically reach. |
| Lolo liman la tóo é bi ain la dái. | | |

*Heaven,* referred to during rainfall rituals, is a place far from earth, in the beyond, part of the dark celestial, while the *divine village* or the *divine world* of the legend 'Mau Raun and Bui Raun' is a space outside the world, is the celestial world. God inhabits this space as far from humans that their prayers are not heard directly by him but are mediated through the 'sons of the stars and the moon' (in the rainfall rituals). In the legend 'Mau Raun and Bui Raun', the prayers of the people are mediated by the Child of the Sun, and in the application of *Aihun Ancia*, humans pray directly to God.

In fact, heaven, or the *divine village* or the *divine world* inhabited by the *cockatoo-woman* is, surely, the heaven of the "illustrious sons of the stars and moon", or "illustrious son of the sun". Only the Timorese people know the winged can climb to heavens, and they also know that among the birds there are some that look like man, they can easily imitate human words. Of these winged beings, there is a *cockatoo,* that due to the whiteness of "her" legs, a symbol of spiritual purity, could be understood by the primitive hyperbolic interpretation, as coming from above, or the world beyond, just like one of the beings who inhabit this place in safety, where peace reigns, as well as happiness and wealth. The transformation from a denizen of heaven into a *cockatoo*, which then turns into a woman who comes into the world of single men to support them with the domestic chores, is in a figurative language, a pristine

and virtuous woman that sometimes leaves her kingdom in search of earthly perfection.

In the legend 'Mau Raun and Bui Raun', a sentence informs the reader of the origins of 'táis': "(...) upon leaving the guard searched her and found gold within its 'táis'". And so 'Hot-Gol' did not give Bui Raun, but only the 'táis' for their children and descendants". This legend makes us believe that the origin of 'táis' is also associated with one or more mythological legends of Timorese people.

The 'táis' is the Timorese cloth made with cotton woven in crude domestic handlooms by East Timorese women throughout Timor. The 'táis' is typically two to eight feet in length. Its colors and motifs have an artistic quality, where legends figures are depicted, for example, the figure of the crocodile, bird or the rooster.

The 'táis' is appreciated by the Timorese and classified as a mark of their identity, because according to Paulo Castro Seixas (2008: 15): "is the 'skin' of the ancestors that is continuously woven to cover the living, to link them in alliance, and to act in their turn".

In Timorese marriage, the 'táis' is a compulsory object of gift with which a bride's family gives in return for the dowry that was given by the groom's family. Because its 'táis' has an exchange value above the use-value, it values over time and has a high symbolic value, namely the use of 'táis' is a practice and artistry representation.

The 'táis' is a domestic product of East Timor, currently in vogue concerning those who visit the territory for the first time. Typically, scholars or analysts of ethnographic art are interested in this particular Timorese garment and question the representations of the colors, the style of writing and even the figurative woven depictions.

## 2. "Kes"[7]: Timorese Writing and its evolution

The written form is used to preserve local history, the history of the local context and as well it is an instrument of communication. We should consider that all known people, without distinction, have or had a written tradition, that is, they have historical footprints (symbolic), although in some cases, primitive people consider as writing the symbols drawn on the rocks, trees, palaces. So to say, they are lights that indicate the adventurous journey of human beings.

Man lives in a world of signs, because one live in a society and traditional societies cannot live if they had not developed their own codes, their own systems for the interpretation of hard data. The discipline of semiotics does not concern itself with the study of a particular type of common purpose but covers the relationship between structure and interpretation of the text and aims to research,

7 "*Kes*" is an expression of the Bunak ethnic group, which means "writing".

not only the linguistic element, but also every manifestation of language as a meaningful whole that represents the communication between people.

The human culture is built upon symbolism; this means, a person cannot live if codes and information systems, through the natural data, are not developed. Historically, symbolism has always followed the acts of people, the attitudes, language and science as their religion. That's why the human being from the beginning used the object as a description of memory for storing information. Thus, '*Kes'* seems designed by the symbols of artistic and technical matrix.

We know that the index of symbolism is physically connected with the object, for example, the depiction of a crocodile is an object, or something that symbolizes something else. The sound of '*nowa'* symbolizes the entrance of the dry temp, and '*Aquitou'* symbolizes the end of that season and the arrival of the rainy one. So does the *Uma-Lulik*[8] as a product of culture, despite having some complexities in terms of functions.

For the Timorese people, orality or the spoken word is the most important instrument of communication discursive, although one must acknowledge that speaking, to them, has an undisputed chronological preeminence in the transmission of their messages. The truth is that both the spoken and the written in the context of East Timor are indispensable elements of speech. Indeed, by speaking one can say anything about the existence of things and writing helps to understand specifically the degree of relevance of the fundamental arguments of the speech. Such practices explain that the relationship between them is put on an ongoing socio-historical and typological shift, which is evident in the Timorese writing called 'Kes'.

Some *lia-na'in* (Keepers of the word) of the Bunak group say: 'Kes' is as a rule, i.e., a law that guides the activities of each family member. At the same time, it is a symbol of the presence of the ancestors. In the representation context, 'Kes' is a set of symbols that carries with them certain meanings that only elder people know how to interpret. On what concern rituals, 'Kes' has an important role in the context of the history of Timorese origin of man and his descendants; from there arises the most prestigious cultural and historical Timorese man's characters.

'Kes' is all that is described by the symbols and it can be taken as a representation of things and is a sign or writing based upon cultural convention. Therefore, the criteria of 'Kes' code are its formality and conventionality. This is interesting at many levels, as in 'Kes', the key position of interpreting the code underlying formation discursive where the rules of each symbolism and / or sign represent a description of life. In this case, we consider 'Kes' as an ordering of objects (paintings, drawings, and among other instruments), which not only represent groups of signs, but also the power relations (Foucault, 1972: 48-49).

8 'Uma-lulik' – sacred house.

In this sense, 'power' coexists with the social embodiment; power relations are intertwined with other types of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality) and can be seen in cave paintings that symbolize human presence in a given space. Thus, power relations are entangled and their interconnections delineate general conditions of domination by organizing it in a strategic way, more or less coherent and unitary.

All figurative paintings and depictions in the caves, walls, doors and tiles are imaginary descriptions of the old Timorese man about its existence. And these are the first media of the Timorese and are updates of the past. The figurative writing on the walls, doors and in the caves, figures as a support of carried items encoded by their shape or the materials they are made with, due meanings that determine who interprets them. Thus, one can say the various writing systems of East Timor are based on pictograms and ideograms, in semiotic marks of various kinds and even the Phoenician alphabet which, although similar to the writing true, had no representation of sounds of vowels but have its own meaning nonetheless.

We find the figurative written Timorese traditional arts, such as "pottery, basketry, wood working, weaving, and work of metal. These forms of art act as Timorese culture symbols, which at the same time highlight and hide, therefore and due to the fact that they overcome the specific artistic process, the very object of revelation" (Seixas, 2008: 15). In the Timorese artistic pottery references are made to humans and animals, which usually decipher the origins of God, land, water, or man. As Castro Seixas argues: "The figure is a symbol of courage to confront the secret of life, the secret of the double look on life in the palm of the hand of God and in the palm of Man" (Seixas, 2008: 16). Writing in figurative pottery art is a way of representing what is finite and not finite, depending on your second finite function of the narratives of each ethnic group. From the media studies view point, figurative drawings (better known as figurative writing) in the Timorese art motifs are elements that guarantee the truly *original writing* of Timorese people.

In most Timorese traditional artistic production, masculine and feminine principles can be found. These principles often connect with each other, a male can meet up with a woman's breasts, and a human head intersects with the body of a mystical legendary animal.

The Timorese people have their own forms of abstraction and representation, including to abstract iconography and art to religious or ancestral. Typically, used geometric ornaments present a wide range as evidenced by the different artistic Timorese manifestations, knowing that there are characteristic of certain regions themes.

In the context of iconic symbolic representations there is something of the other that is transmitted to the human mind and also here is something within the human being that passes to the other. This means that there is an

area of trade – the transfer, physical and symbolic, emotional and communicative – between the 'self' as a man and the "other" as the representation of the spiritual. That is, according to Habermas (1994: 144), what starts in the nature is the only state of things we can learn according to their nature: language and with the language structure is put to us emancipation. With the first proposition expressed clearly the intention of a common consensus and without restrictions. In self-reflection, knowledge, information comes to coincide with the interest in the majority. The emancipator interest concerns the consummation of reflection as such. Undoubtedly, only an emancipated society, which had carried out the majority of its members, is that communication would unfold in the free of domination dialogue, the idea of true consensus.

However, it is through figurative writing that mankind has always had a need to try to understand its origins, its end, the phenomena of nature, and the complex feelings that are inherent to the human soul. The figurative writing on the doors (see Figure 1 and 2) are worked with anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and geometric elements and these represent the cultural heritage of the Timorese people and one of the most sought after by scholars, especially those who appreciate the artwork.

In the figurative writing in the doors, animals are usually mystic, clan legends, and fertility cults, naturalistic and abstract geometry. Usually doors are used in the Timorese sacred houses to represent the memory of our ancestors, that is, the iconic elements that mark the power lines. All representations vary as a function of vertical or horizontal position, which demarcates the different approaches to the sacred space of the *Uma-Lulik*. The object of Timorese ethnographic culture has been looted or forged, and in the 1980 of the twentieth century, when the multiplication of these figurative doors was fueled by a growing demand for museums and collectors, mainly students of art, anthropology and ethnography.

In the doors and panel of Timorese sacred houses, there are figurative writings of the geometric kind, mimicking the motif of snakes, crocodiles, a woman's womb or a human head (see Figure 1, 2 and 3 – see Sousa, 2001a). In particular in what refers to house panels, it seems the similarity of this type of mimics writing to the motion of ocean waves. Realistically, all the decorated icons or writings on the doors or panels of sacred houses symbolize and / or secure a sacred iconography of the local lineage.

The door of each 'Uma-Lulik' (sacred house) has, at least, one or more figurative writings, as it is the holy place and the contact between man, god and spirits indeed, and even their reproduction, in that it shows the body and the soul of those who live there, without any need to replacement. Through the sacred house, Timorese people get a new ability to communicate with the environment that surrounds them. And it seems that within this communication system the very figurative writing sets and reflects the past culture of Timorese






1 2 3

1 House door (collection of Regents of Porto University, 2001).

2 Barn door (collection of Faculty of Arts of Porto University, 2000). This type of door is somewhere in the sacred house of Suai/Tilomar (twentieth century). The function of this port is to close the space reserved for the rice barn in a sacred house. The representation of the heads of the rooster symbolizes power to protect the house where they keep the rice. The rooster is a symbol of masculinity and power. The door closes with this symbol that the space reserved and forbidden to forbid entry to women particularly. The rice is kept in the sacred houses used as offerings in various cults and festivity directed to the ancestors.

3 Panel home, Timor-Leste, Los Palos (twentieth century) (collection of Regents of Porto University, 2001) .

ethnics, which are still alive. This practice is as a kind of translating from oral culture to written culture.

In fact, this synthesis may sustain or strengthen the collective identity of the several "parallel societies" in East Timor; therefore, it rests upon the Timorese state and civil society the goal to create a "community system", or a model that Paulo Castro Seixas (2006) calls far-sighted "bridge building". Then, the new dimension of communication of cultural translation can lead the country development in various sectors of the state (including civil society) in order to build a 'perpetual peace' (Kant – Perpetual Peace) in the territory (of national scale) and worldwide (of international scale). Although we might realize that in a globalized world, the modernization of culture implies a strong cultural policy of systematic translation of tradition.

The presented figurative style of writing (Figure 1) is a metaphor symbolizing fertility which represents human life in the universe. In the large rectangular central panel, decorated with inlaid geometric spirals symbolizing the universe and at the top and bottom one can see a two-piece is carved with two breasts of a woman and a human head, respectively connected by a rope from sisal. The figure is purely feminine, the central rectangular panel can be interpreted as the woman's womb, and the head is a metaphor for the human newborn. What seems more important from this perspective is the figurative role – for most Timorese – representing or indicating the true path of his 'Bei Gua' (the passageway of the

ancestors). As such it is not classified as mere ornament or decoration, but first, a precise language, states Ruy Cinatti "The important thing to him [Timorese] and the general consensus is to have defined a communication system" (Cinatti, 1987: 66). And we know that, for example, "the houses of Timorese Lospalos have numerous similarities with its counterpart of the Bronze Age in Japan. Many earlier years refer to such a possible origin" (Cinatti, 1987: 164).

The following Cinatti's statements legitimize Osorio de Castro's description of the house: "The Governor, himself, showed me a depiction that he had taken showing a sketch of a singular '*uma Lulic*' (sacred house) belonging to the kings of Laga, and told me that it reminded him of a rustic building in Japan hinterlands. Sitting above stilts, holding in the middle an open wooden platform, with a roof shaped as an irregular truncated pyramid, (...) Going up a ladder to a door with carved ornaments, of a half-toke on the shutters, of a snake in the other. The construction of the roof finishing is decorated with large univalve shells" (cited Cinatti, 1987: 164).

In a biological or naturalistic order, the sort of figurative drawings on the doorstep (see Figure 1), begins with man presence in the physical world and with what (animal or vegetable), it seems, and indeterminate by their nature are illustrated information concerning any aspect of the human interaction with its environment, i.e., "the world to which he came creates, produces and provides its own 'Environment'. However, by this process of transformation of the world, tailoring it to their needs, the more Man respects the nature, he is part of, the more he will respect himself" (Paulino, 2009: 4). Thus, for Timorese people the binomial "tree-house", establishes the relationship between man and his metaphysical world, and the binomial "man-house" establishes the symbolic world with the social order of its most static order and that in despite of differences between the houses – in the opinion of Cinatti – represent the conceptual dualism of Timorese religion (Cinatti, 1987: 164-165). Thus, "the house and, by extension, the resort, is thus an open book in which Timorese 'read with the lines that sew'" (Cinatti, 1987: 165-167).

In short, the *house/knua* is constituted by multiple borders. These borders are both horizontal (male/female) and vertical (the male represents heaven and the female symbolizes the earth). This concept varies according to the myths of origin in different ethno-linguistics groups constituting Timorese society. Nonetheless of note is the particularity that houses reserve specific symbolic places for animals and at the same time, the *house/knua* is the center of the cultural contacts and the breeding place for the family and for social relationships. It is the political and economic center. The "*house* or *knua*" constitutes itself as a sort of super-family imaginary and it is the background of the nation (Smith, 1997, p. 25). Thus the house can be classified into three imaginary dimensions: Community, Nation/State and World, which is rooted in the notion of home as defining and representing identity.

## Conclusion

In this work we have dedicated ourselves to addressing the source of the Timorese writing and the first written texts on Timor.

We acknowledge that oral language is of paramount importance, both for societies of oral culture tradition and for societies of written cultures. The legends, myths, folk tales and traditional songs of East Timor were first published in the 50s of the XX century, starting a new cycle of Timorese literature – the majority of which is written in Portuguese language.

We have seen that there are two dimensions in orality: the "primary orality" and the "secondary orality". The first refers to the culture of an untouched by writing society – as Timorese prehistoric society – or any knowledge of writing or of the press, or even the people totally unfamiliar with the writing. The second one refers to the contemporary culture full of high technology, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television and other electronic devices. These new instruments of oral and writing work depend on the culture and the press.

In the current technological world, there is a culture of primary orality, in the narrow sense, in which all cultures get to know different people's writings and experience its effects through technological globalization. That is what one sees when crossing from the oral culture to a written culture. Now newspapers, magazines and books are indispensable means for human development, especially to inform, educate and entertain.

This paper also discussed the artistic motifs symbolizing a kind of figurative writing such as the use of a lizard or crocodile, which is a dominant element in Timorese mythology and culture. This kind of figurative writing through the use of art motifs is common to other cultures of the Asian region and the South Pacific. In Papua, Australia, Melanesia and the Philippines the crocodile is also considered a theme and an icon – which is suggestive of a collective mythology of the peoples of those parts of the world. By ensuring that pieces like these are protected and displayed by the *State Department* and the *National Museum of Culture in East Timor*, it is a support which not only shows, but promotes, the culture of East Timor, seeking to understand the connection it has with the cultures of the neighbors' states.

For countries recovering from prolonged periods of conflict and violence, the preservation of cultural property, as the pieces in this collection, provides a basis for identification, which helps to rebuild shattered communities, restoring identities and connect the past of peoples with their present and future. This has a particular relevance for the population of an emerging economy. In post-conflict, cultural identity is a driving force for development, not only with regard to economic growth, but also as essential for individuals to live a life of intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual satisfaction. For a country like East Timor, in which even today the divisions remain evident, preserving and

celebrating these objects may be the mortar of inclusion and respect which are central to the creation of the framework of the new nation.

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Submitted: 17-02-2016
Accepted: 03-06-2016