

Austronesians in linguistic disguise: Fataluku cultural fusion in East Timor

Andrew McWilliam

This paper explores the relationship between language and cultural practice in the Fataluku language community of East Timor. A Papuan language and member of what is referred to as the Trans New Guinea Phylum (TNGP) of languages, Fataluku society nevertheless exhibits many cultural ideas and practices suggesting a long period of engagement and accommodation to Austronesian cosmopolitanism. The idea that Fataluku speakers are 'Austronesians in disguise' points to the significance of cultural hybridity on the Austronesian boundary.

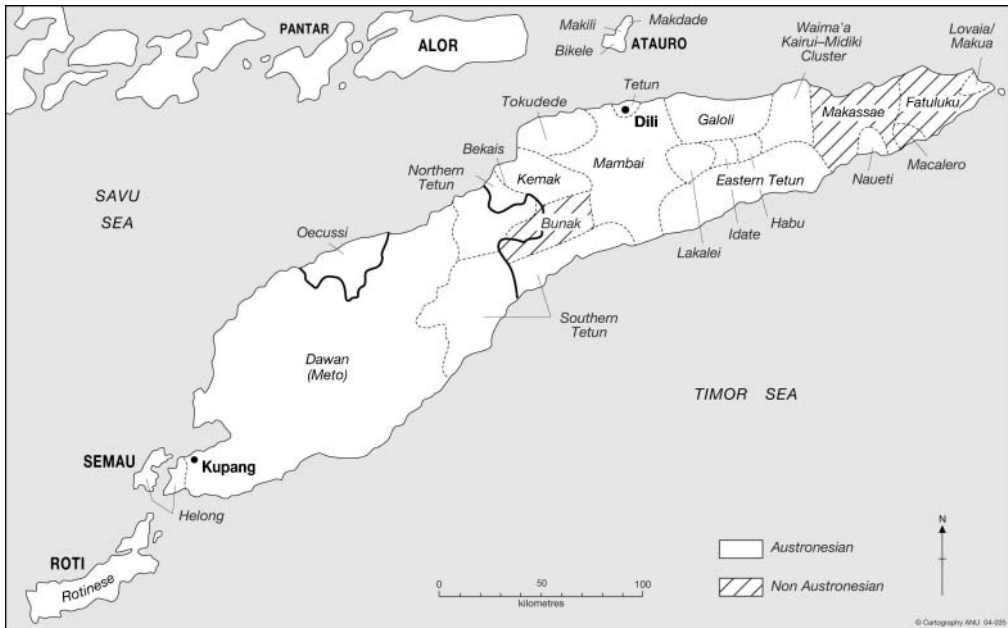
Introduction

In most general depictions of East Timorese society, reference is made to a major linguistic division between resident indigenous populations. This division contrasts an Austronesian family of languages or more specifically, a Central-Malayo-Polynesian sub-group of Austronesian languages, with a 'Papuan' (non-Austronesian) Trans New Guinea Phylum (TNGP) grouping of language communities.¹ The former and

Andrew McWilliam is a Fellow in the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University. His publications include *Paths of origin, gates of life: A study of place and precedence in southwest Timor* (KITLV Press, 2002). Correspondence in connection with this paper should be addressed to andrew.mcwilliam@anu.edu.au.

Ethnographic field research in Lautem and East Timor was made possible through the sponsorship of the Australian National University during 2001–4. This paper has benefited from comments and advice from colleagues in the Australian National University. I thank Andy Pawley, Sue O'Connor and John Bowden as well as Louise Baird and Aone van Engelenhoven. Comments from two anonymous reviewers were welcome. My thanks also extend to a number of Fataluku advisers especially Almeida and Arlindo Fernandes Xavier, Francisco Valela, Mario Dos Santos Loyola, Edmundo da Cruz and Justino Valentim. A version of this paper was presented at the 15th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, Canberra 29 June–2 July 2004.

1 See Andrew Pawley, 'The Trans New Guinea phylum hypothesis: A reassessment', in *Perspectives on the bird's head of Irian Jaya, Indonesia: Proceedings of the conference*, Leiden, 13–17 October 1997, ed. Jelle Miedema, Cecelia Ode and Rein A.C. Dam (Amsterdam, Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1998), p. 683. Revisiting earlier work of Stephen Wurm, 'Papuan languages and the New Guinea linguistic scene', *New Guinea Languages and Language Study*, vol. 1 (Department of Linguistics, Research, School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University. *Pacific linguistics series* C-No, 38, 1975), and others, Pawley provisionally assigns the Timor-Alor-Pantar group of New Guinea languages to the (West) TNG Phylum on lexical grounds but he acknowledges that the evidence remains slender and that the TNGP grouping is lexicostatistically highly diverse. Ross finds evidence for pronoun linkages and common innovations between the New Guinea Bomberai coast languages and those of East Timor (see Malcolm Ross, 'Pronouns as markers of genetic stocks in non-Austronesian languages of New Guinea, Island Melanesia and Eastern Indonesia', in *Papuan languages and the Trans New Guinea family*, ed. A Pawley, M. Ross and M. Osmond (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics), forthcoming.



Linguistic map of Timor

Source: Australian National University Cartography 2004

numerically dominant grouping of Austronesian speakers includes such languages as Tetum, Mambai, Galoli, Tokodede, Vaikeno and Kemak groups, as well as smaller populations of Waima'a, Kairui-Midiki, Habu, Lakalei/Idate, Nauoti, Bekais and Lovaia (Makuva). The main non-Austronesian TNGP languages include Bunak, Makasai, Makalero, and Fataluku (see map).² A large number of poorly defined and named dialects of these languages are also spoken.

While drawing attention to this fundamental linguistic division in East Timor, rarely do any commentators extend their analyses to explore its internal diversity or significance. The distinction simply serves as a shorthand marker of ethnic or cultural diversity in Timor. This idea is based on a generalised assumption that linguistic differences encode and express cultural differences. It follows that we might expect to find a greater degree of shared cultural concepts and practices within, rather than between the Austronesian (AN) and non-Austronesian (NAN) groupings, or so it may seem.

² See James J. Fox, 'Tracing the path, recounting the past: historical perspectives on Timor', in *Out of the ashes: Destruction and reconstruction of East Timor*, ed. James J. Fox and Dionisio Babo Soares (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2000), pp. 4–5. Fox has suggested that Adabe on Atauro Island might also be included in this grouping. However, I note Geoffrey Hull disagrees strongly that Adabe is a Papuan language, arguing that Atauroan languages are all 'unmistakably Austronesian' in structure and in their lexemes and grammatical form, see, Geoffrey Hull, 'The languages of Timor 1772–1997: A literature review', *Studies in languages and cultures of East Timor*, 1 (1998): 1–38.

In this paper I seek, in a preliminary and exploratory way, to disrupt the inferred cultural boundary between this language family divide in East Timor. By focusing on the example of the TNGP language community of Fataluku in Lautem district, I seek to draw attention to aspects of linguistic and cultural fusion that, in certain respects, dissolve or blur the conceptual distinction implied in the terms Austronesian and non-Austronesian. This is not to dispute the status of Fataluku as a TNGP language in derivation and form, at least in general terms. The morphology and phonology of the language locates it within the group and it shares many features with its Timorese linguistic counterparts, Makasai (Baucau district), Makalero (Iliomar area) and Bunak (Bobonaro district).³ These distinctive linguistic markers include the characteristic ‘sentence object verb’ (SOV) construction, cognate personal pronoun expressions, and postpositions (as opposed to prepositions).⁴

Despite these indicators of a characteristically non-Austronesian linguistic typology,⁵ I argue in this paper that Fataluku communities appear to have more in common with their Austronesian speaking regional neighbours than they have differences; so much so, in fact, that they may be thought of as ‘Austronesians in linguistic disguise’:⁶ a notion that speaks to the remarkable cultural blending of this East Timorese language community where distinctive Austronesian cultural forms and ideas are expressed and articulated in a clearly non-Austronesian language. This particular combination is unusual in a region where conventional views hold that pre-existing non-Austronesian language communities were gradually but irresistibly overwhelmed by the relentless and opportunistic spread of the Austronesians across insular Southeast Asia and Oceania.⁷ The prehistoric and wholesale adoption or transplantation of Austronesian languages and their cultural toolkit of ideas, concepts and practices appears to have been the common

3 See also the Oirata language of Kisar Island off the north-east coast of Timor in J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, *Oirata: A Timorese settlement of Kisar, studies in Indonesian culture* (*Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam: Afdeeling Letterkunde Nieuwe Reeks, Deel XXXIX, 1937*).

4 C. L. Voorhoeve, ‘Contact-induced change in the non-Austronesian languages in the north Moluccas, Indonesia’, in *Language contact and change in the Austronesian world*, ed. Tom Dutton and Darrell T. Tryon (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 649–74. See also A. Capell, ‘The West Papuan phylum: General and Timor and areas further west’, in *Papuan languages and the New Guinea linguistic scene*, ed. S.A. Wurm (New Guinea Area Languages and Language study, vol 1, Pacific Linguistics Series C, No 38, Australian National University, 1975), pp. 667–711, 672–3. Hull also notes that [a] common non-Austronesian core is still discernible in the basic vocabulary of the four languages. Most basic adjectives, pronouns, nouns and formatives are still of Papuan origin. Geoffrey Hull, ‘The Papuan languages of Timor’, *Estudos de língua e culturas de Timor-Leste*, 6 (2004): 23–99.

5 More specifically, Nikolaus Himmelman refers to ‘a fairly complex morphonology which tends to obscure the quite substantial (and completely non-Austronesian) morphological apparatus involving affixes as well as clitics’, in Nikolaus Himmelman, ‘A report on the current sociolinguistic situation in Lautem (East Timor)’, *Estudos em línguas e culturas de Timor Leste*, 4 (2001): 88–97.

6 A phrase I have borrowed from a reported observation of Geoff Irwin referring to a similar blurring of language and cultural forms in Papua New Guinea.

7 Peter Bellwood *et al.*, *The Austronesians: Historical and comparative perspectives* (Canberra: Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1995).

direction of these linguistic transformations over vast areas of Southeast Asia and the Pacific.⁸

Austronesian cultural categories

The relationship between 'Austronesian' as a grouping of communities with shared linguistic origins and a corresponding set of shared cultural forms and ideas, is one that has developed (at least in part) out of the ethnology of eastern Indonesia. From an earlier focus on predefined Dutch structuralist models that sought comparisons within a conceptual 'field of anthropological study' (FAS), more recent ethnography has turned toward comparative analyses of indigenous social categories and metaphors to identify shared cultural concepts and features across the region. James Fox, in a foreword to Lewis' ethnography on the Tana' Ai peoples of Flores,⁹ listed a series of distinguishing features that might be thought to comprise the collective signature of this predominantly Austronesian speaking area.

They included:

- (1) A concern – indeed an obsession – with the specific knowledge of origins, which establishes not only personal and social identity but the very foundations of life.
- (2) An elaborate register of dual symbolic categories, focusing on complementary categories of gender, symbolic space and relative relation.
- (3) An analogic identification of life processes in a botanic idiom.
- (4) A conception symbolically developed in various ways of the person composed of opposing elements of blood and flesh and/or semen and bone.
- (5) A variety of patterns of symbolic diarchy predicated on the delegation or usurpation of authority.
- (6) A social organisation based on the House as a primary descent group and on a variable clan system as an intermediate structure in the formation of larger political or ceremonial groupings.
- (7) A reliance on marriage alliance as a means of linking Houses through the intermediation of the clan system.
- (8) A conceptualisation of alliance as part of a continuing 'flow of life'.
- (9) An elaboration of life-enhancing rituals initiated by the conjoining of male and female and continued in an extended series of ceremonies joining predecessor to descendant in a cyclical translation of life.

While these distinguishing features may be found elaborated to a lesser or greater degree across the region, the key point here is that what defines or distinguishes Austronesian cultural practice is not the singular occurrence of one or more of these characteristics but their collective presence and mutual interrelationship within a language community. This cluster of distinguishing features has been further elaborated and developed, most notably during the 'Comparative Austronesian Project', at the Australian National University (1989–91). The project brought together anthropologists, linguists and archaeologists exploring multidisciplinary aspects of the broader grouping of Austronesian language communities in Southeast Asia and the

⁸ Peter Bellwood, 'The Austronesian dispersal and the origin of languages', *Scientific American*, 265, 10 (1991): 88–93.

⁹ James J. Fox, 'Foreword', in *People of the source: The social and ceremonial order of Tana Wai Brama on Flores*, ed. E. Douglas Lewis (Dordrecht-Holland: Foris, 1988), p. xii.

Pacific. Its goals were to fashion a general framework and common vocabulary with which to define the distinguishing features of an Austronesian heritage.¹⁰ Subsequently, a variety of research publications have tended to confirm the utility of this comparative approach. These studies have consistently identified a range of shared normative categories, values and practices reflecting a cultural heritage based around common linguistic origins.¹¹

A further element of the comparative Austronesian approach has been the elaboration of the concept of precedence. Precedence may be defined as the practice of applying significant asymmetric categories in a recursive fashion.¹² It characterises the negotiated quality of social status in Austronesian societies whereby claims and assertions to pre-eminence or priority are based upon orders of relative seniority recursively applied. One example is the following sequence based around relative age categories – Elder > Younger/Elder > Younger/Elder > Younger – but other binary distinctions can also be utilised to create orders of precedence.

The significance of precedence as a dynamic and relative process is that it extends Fox's distinguishing features approach by introducing possibilities for the contested histories and strategic personal claims that characterise much of Austronesian social life. An example of its application can be seen in Peter Bellwood's exploration of the possible mechanisms for the prehistoric expansion of Austronesian settlers across the Pacific.¹³ Bellwood develops an analysis around the terms, 'founder focused ideologies' and the role of 'founder rank enhancement'. He speculates that one of the attractive motivations for Austronesian expansion was the opportunity for junior ranking (sibling) groups to move from their homelands into relative and absolute isolation through the settlement of new islands or regions and thereby establish themselves as senior line founders. Their claims then become one of senior origin status and thus a basis for retaining settlement founder privileges for their genealogical inheritors. Bellwood's argument is a prehistoric take on the precedence accorded the discourse of origins and the articulation of socially contested rank and status that it produces.

This generalised set of connections between Austronesian language groups and corresponding cultural forms nevertheless remains loosely correlated and to some extent only heuristically defined within an Austronesian classification. Based on this, I am interested to explore the extent to which they might apply across the linguistic boundary. In other words, to what extent might these core 'Austronesian' cultural

10 *Inside Austronesian houses: perspectives on domestic designs for living*, ed. James J. Fox (Canberra: Australian National University, 1993), p. 5.

11 See for example, James J. Fox and Clifford Sather, eds., *Origins, Ancestry and Alliance: Explorations in Austronesian ethnography* (Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1996); Andrew McWilliam, *Paths of origin: Gates of life: A study of place and precedence in southwest Timor* (Verhandelingen 202) (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002); Thomas Reuter, *The house of our ancestors: Precedence and dualism in highland Balinese society* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002); *Transformations of hierarchy: Structure, history and horizon in the Austronesian world*, ed. Margaret Jolly and Mark Mosko (History and Anthropology, vol. 7, Chur and Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994); *Precedence: Processes of social differentiation in the Austronesian world*, ed. Michael Vischer (Canberra: Pandanus Press), forthcoming.

12 McWilliam, *Paths of origin, gates of life*, p. 292.

13 Peter Bellwood, 'Hierarchy, founder ideology and Austronesian expansion', in *Origins, ancestry and alliance*, ed. Fox and Sather, pp. 18–40.

concepts apply in a non-Austronesian speaking context, in this case, among the Fataluku speaking community of East Timor. The exercise tests the limits and reach of the comparative Austronesian project and the extent to which the Austronesian linguistic family contains and defines a corresponding cultural heritage. What follows is a discussion of general features of Fataluku social and cultural practice that can be compared explicitly to the distinguishing cultural patterns of Austronesian societies. I am not attempting an exhaustive comparison here, but one that draws on 'thematic correspondences to facilitate analysis' following the approach pursued by Strathern and Stewart¹⁴ comparing aspects of Melanesian and eastern Indonesian societies.

Locating Fataluku

Contemporary Fataluku is expressed and reproduced by some 35,000 native speakers. They form the predominant linguistic community of Lautem district in far eastern East Timor. Lautem itself is composed of five sub-districts, and Fataluku speakers form the dominant population group in the three most easterly areas (Tutuala, Fuiloro and Lautem). In the remaining sub-districts a number of other indigenous languages are spoken, all of them non-Austronesian in form and origin. Makalero is the principal language of Iliomar sub-district (southwest Lautem), while in Luro the languages of Makasai and its dialect form, Sa'ané, predominates. Within the Fataluku language area there are numerous dialects, reportedly up to seven varieties, which are nevertheless mutually intelligible. Lexical and phonemic variation represent two prominent areas of difference.

The ascription, 'Fataluku', derives from the composite phrase *fata* (plain or straight) and *luku* (speech). It forms the language of everyday social life and although the national language, Tetum, has become more popular in recent years, especially since 1999, the latter is mainly used for the language of officialdom or by younger people with experience of schooling and life in Dili.¹⁵ An alternate term for the language, *Dagada*, is found widely in the literature, especially in Portuguese records dating from the nineteenth century. However, based on my enquiries, most contemporary speakers of Fataluku disavow knowledge of the term *Dagada*, or express uncertainty over its provenance. My own view is that *Dagada* is likely to be an exonym used to refer to Fataluku deriving from neighbouring Makasai speakers in Baucau district.¹⁶

Of relevance to a contextualised understanding of Fataluku, is the existence of a remnant island of Austronesian language speakers known as Lovaia (or Makuva). Located in the far eastern extremity of Lautem, this language now has few (if any) fluent speakers. However, there is evidence that fifty years ago the language was quite widely spoken and many contemporary, self-identifying Fataluku people claim to have

14 Pamela Stewart and Andrew Strathern, *The Python's back: Pathways of comparison between Indonesia and Melanesia* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2000).

15 During the period of Indonesian rule in East Timor (1975–99), Tetum was discouraged in favour of Bahasa Indonesia. Portuguese is only spoken by older people with experience of former colonial times.

16 This view is one asserted by Sa'ané language speakers living in the highlands of Luro in western Lautem. Another commonly heard idea is that *dagada* or an alternate term, *sokolori* is a dialect form of Fataluku spoken widely in areas such as Daudere and Lai vai (north-western Lautem). Capell refers to the language as 'commonly but wrongly known as Dagoda', 'The West Papuan phylum', p. 672.

been conversant in this language in the past.¹⁷ It is therefore apparent that the Fataluku language, at least in this area, has expanded into or infiltrated former Austronesian speaking areas and is now the dominant language of everyday communication. The historical relationship between Fataluku and Lovaia speaking communities is poorly documented, but the existence of an island of Austronesian language within a general non-Austronesian linguistic field is a relevant issue to the present discussion, and one that offers a potential source of ‘Austronesian’ ideas and practice.¹⁸

Lexical borrowing and cultural meanings

Given the history of the Timor region it comes as no surprise that Fataluku exhibits extensive lexical borrowing from clearly Austronesian languages. Capell¹⁹ has noted that Austronesian loanwords are commonly found in non-Austronesian languages across the region. The long history of Austronesian and non-Austronesian language proximity and engagement especially in East Timor, and the centuries of inter-island trade networks and interaction with traders from Moluccas, Sulawesi and Java, often using Malay as a *lingua franca*, have contributed to extensive cross-fertilisation of language forms and lexical categories.²⁰ Fataluku words such as *tahi* (sea), *kaka* (elder sibling), *la’a* (to go),²¹ *limé* (five) and *lipa* (textiles) are examples of relatively straightforward borrowings. Most of these and other loanwords are unremarkable in terms of their presence within Fataluku speech registers. However, there is a small selection of Fataluku words of clearly Austronesian origin that are nevertheless associated with fundamental or central conceptual categories within Fataluku society. The prominence of these terms and their semantic significance points to a more thoroughgoing integration of Austronesian concepts.²²

The first of these terms is *ratu*, a word clearly cognate with a variety of Austronesian forms generally translated as ‘lordly’, ‘ruler’ or ‘pre-eminent’. Terms such as *ratu* and its reflexes, *dato* and *datuk*, are found widely throughout Austronesian speaking populations and point to the shared origins and heritage of the concept among its diverse speakers. Among Timorese Tetum (Austronesian) speakers for

17 John Hajek *et al.*, ‘Lovaia: An East Timorese language on the verge of extinction’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 160 (2003): 155–67.

18 The same might be said of Makasai communities in neighbouring Baucau district, who appear to have expanded across extensive areas of eastern Timor supplanting former Austronesian speaking communities. As the naturalist H. O Forbes noted over one hundred years ago, ‘In the eastern extremity of the island the people, I am told, resemble Malays, and they speak the Malay language’, in ‘On some of the tribes of the island of Timor’, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 13 (1884): 402–30.

19 ‘Capell, ‘The West Papuan phylum’.

20 Peter Bellwood, ‘The archaeology of Papuan and Austronesian prehistory in the Northern Moluccas, eastern Indonesia, in *Archaeology and language II: Correlating archaeological and linguistic hypotheses*, ed. Roger Blench and Mathew Spriggs (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 128–40.

21 This Fataluku term is likely to be a direct borrowing from the Austronesian word **lakaw*. The term *la’a* (to go), for example, is identical to the same Austronesian Ngada language term in central western Flores.

22 Himmelman comments that the four non-Austronesian languages in Timor have lost many of their grammatical and lexical features and have become largely assimilated to the surrounding Austronesian languages, although he suggests that Fataluku may be the most conservative in this regard; Himmelman 2001, p. 4.

example, the term *dato*, along with *liurai*, represented the senior leadership of indigenous political communities across Timor Leste. *Dato* is still widely in use as an honorific for people inheriting that rank.

For Fataluku speakers, the word *ratu* describes a key institution of social life, glossed here as a dispersed patrilineal clan whose members comprise male kinsmen, their in-married spouses and children. The unity of the Fataluku *ratu* is articulated through affiliation with common male ancestors and myths of origin, shared spiritual and ritual obligations particularly in relation to the consumption of sacrificial meat (*leura tei*), and access to inherited communal property in clearly defined localities.

Ratu collectivities form the most senior of three broad categories or castes of person in Fataluku society. *Ratu* forms the highest grouping and the settled landscape of Lautem proliferates in named *ratu* groups (Konu Ratu, Cailoro Ratu, Latu Lohu Ratu and so on). *Paca* represent a subordinate ‘younger sibling’ (*noko*) clan category who maintain a complementary status within the *ratu* collectivity, and *akan(u)* represents the third and lower ‘slave’ caste whose members derive from ancestors who became war captives or who were sold or bankrupted into slavery in former times. Conventionally, inter-marriage between these levels is proscribed and although modernist pressures over recent decades have challenged the basis of these hierarchically ordered cultural categories, with many people adopting the *ratu* as a more generic label of social and familial identity and denying affiliation to *paca* or *akan(u)* groups, their persistence continues to influence social practice in a variety of ways. The question arises here: how is it that a semantically rich and key Austronesian concept comes to lie at the ideological centre of the non-Austronesian Fataluku linguistic community?

A second exemplar of an Austronesian loanword that carries significant semantic weighting in Fataluku society is the term, *malai*. In the Timor Leste *lingua franca*, Tetum (Austronesian), *malai* means ‘foreign’ or ‘stranger’ and, in recent years, has been commonly directed towards workers from United Nations and other European contractors resident in Timor. The term itself probably derives from the word, *malayu*, and its connection to the centuries old trading language in the region. Tetum makes a distinction between white *malai* (*malai mutin*) and black *malai* (*malai metan*), the latter a reference likely deriving from immigrant Africans to Timor during Portuguese colonial times. Fataluku language speakers also recognise this distinction between ‘white’ and ‘black’ foreigners (*malai pitine* and *malai lakuwaru* respectively). However, there is a third and perhaps more fundamental meaning of the word *malai* in Fataluku which carries the sense of ‘ruler’ or ‘*raja*’. An example is the title accorded executive rulers of Fataluku customary political domains known as *Cao Hafa Malai* (literally: Head Bone Ruler). These figures originate from early treaties or alliances forged between Fataluku groups and the Portuguese colonial authorities, generically referred to as *Monagia* (Monarchy). The phrase and title, *Malai*, still has currency in Lautem even though contemporary village leadership formally uses the modern equivalent of *Xefe do Suku*²³ (village head). More than this, however, the term, *malai*, has been widely adopted within Fataluku clans (*ratu*) as customary personal names. Examples include

23 Tetum spelling of the still widely used Portuguese phrase, ‘Chefe do Suco’.

terms such as *Zen malai*, *Sinas malai*, *Opo malai* and many others, creating the unusual situation of an ‘indigenous’ *malai* category of people.

The evolution and process of incorporation of this similarly distinctly Austronesian concept within Fataluku society cannot be directly charted, but it is suggestive of several possibilities. Firstly, the semantic convergence of the term *malai*, as both ruler and foreigner, has strong resonance throughout the Austronesian world with the mythic origins of stranger kings. This pervasive cultural theme and its variants typically revolve around an original transfer of power to the immigrant prince signified by the surrender (usually in marriage) of a native or autochthonous woman of rank.²⁴ The fact that Fataluku are themselves, *malai*, reflects this Austronesian cultural motif and may well point to their origin status as immigrant groups into a pre-existing Austronesian society in this part of Timor.²⁵ The term subsequently has been indigenised and modified to emphasise its high status value rather than its ‘foreign/outsider’ connotations. Some support for this idea of a subsequent Fataluku arrival into a settled Austronesian landscape can be inferred from comparative data drawn from other ethno-linguistic groups in Timor. For example, among Austronesian Meto (Dawan) speakers, the dominant language community of West Timor, the category of foreigner is designated by the term *kasé*. Individuals with non-indigenous origins are typically referred to by this term which, over generations, may come to signify a distinct descent group or clan identity.

Origins and ancestry

As Fox has noted, ‘ideas of origin are themselves a matter of concern in most Austronesian societies’.²⁶ This orientation to origins invariably includes a conception of ancestry, tied to significant places, which in turn provides a basis for tracing the relative seniority and identity of individuals and groups in relation to one another over time and space. Context-dependent assertions of social and temporal precedence derive their legitimacy and claim from the patterns of the past and the various authorising insignia of derivation or origin. Origins may be conceived of as multiple and access to them diverse. What makes them distinctly Austronesian is the particular combination ‘often phrased in terms of common metaphors based on recognisable cognate expressions’.²⁷

Fataluku communities present similar intense concerns with ideas or discourses of origin. Ancestry, the mythic origins of settlement and the memorialised spatio-temporal trajectory of the clan provides an enduring basis for contemporary social practice and claims to resources. For the great majority of Fataluku clan groups,

24 See Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of history* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 87. Elizabeth Traube, writing on Mambai cosmologies in East Timor presents another version of this theme where the Portuguese ruling power is conceived of as the returning younger brother; *Cosmology and social life: Ritual exchange among the Mambai of East Timor* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986). See also Jukka Siikala, ‘The Elder and the younger – foreign and autochthonous origin and hierarchy in the Cook Islands’, in *Origins, ancestry and alliance*, ed. Fox and Sather, pp. 41–54.

25 It is noteworthy in this respect that one of the AN Lovaia (Makua) collective references to the Fataluku people is *Sa malai*, or so I am told.

26 Fox, ‘Introduction’, in *Origins, ancestry and alliance*, ed. Fox and Sather, pp. 1–12.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

founding myths are associated with the maritime journeys of the settler ancestors in the distant past.²⁸ Mythic evidence of their origins is signalled in the landscape by sacrificial altar sites (known as *calu ia mari* or *ia mari tuliya* – ancestral footprints), located around the coastal fringe of Lautem. Characteristically, these sites form that most iconic of eastern Indonesia cultural structures, the ‘rock and tree’, a forked wooden post set in a stone base.²⁹ The ancestral landscape and coastal hinterland is also marked by the existence of striking limestone outcrops that are associated with the mythic sailing boats (*matar loiasu* = stone boats) of the ancestors who beached on Timor leaving the fossilised remnants as permanent sites of orientation for their respective groups.³⁰ The fossilised hearths (*lafuru tei*) and material evidence of first settlements may also be marked in stone at significant locations.³¹

A further important set of ancestral sites are found in the many stone barricaded forts (*pamakolo* or *laca*) and hilltop settlements (*lata paru*) that litter the landscape and preserve the memory of ancestral settlement in megalithic form. Within these crumbling fortifications, many now overgrown with vegetation, massive stone graves of the ancestors (*calu luturu*) are maintained and periodically visited for sacrificial blessings.³² The large concrete graves of present times reflect Catholic sentiments but are equally venerated.

These and other representations of the past are intimately linked to contemporary settlements through the maintenance of family group house shrines (*aca kaka*). Ritual hearths are sources of spiritual protection for the health and well-being of lineage members through sacrificial invocations for ancestral blessings and protection. Sacrifice among Fataluku typically involves conceptions of ‘feeding’ (*fanê*) the ancestors³³ with gifts of boiled offal and rice along with the shared consumption of the

28 I have recorded two exceptions to this general view, namely the self-identifying groups Kati Ratu near their ancient settlement high on the Plain of Nari, and Tutuala Ratu, on the far eastern tip of East Timor. Both their mythic histories assert autochthonous origins, and lay claim to settling other immigrant Fataluku speaking groups arriving within the territory. This may suggest an affiliation with prior Austronesian speaking settlers in the region pre-dating Fataluku settlement although clear evidence is weak.

29 See, for example, Traube, *Cosmology and social life*.

30 Not all Fataluku claim affiliation to one of these ‘stone boats’ referring instead to alternative ancestral arrivals via marine creatures such as shark, crocodile, turtle and dolphin among others; see, for example, Andrew McWilliam, ‘Harbouring traditions in East Timor: Marginality in a lowland entrepot’, *Modern Asian studies* (in press).

31 The first settlement of the ancestors on Timor may also be indicated by the emplacement of two carved figurines (male and female) or altar posts known as *ete uru ha’a* (heartwood). They represent the first ancestral couple and are said to guard ‘the path of ancestors’. Customarily, they were placed facing the direction of their origins. However, during the period of Indonesian rule in East Timor, they were subject to desecration and looting so that many have been moved to locations within or closer to present settlements.

32 See Andrew McWilliam, ‘Fataluku forest tenures and the Konis Santana National Park (East Timor)’, in *Sharing the earth, dividing the land: Territorial categories and institutions in the Austronesian world*, ed. Thomas Reuter (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2006), pp. 253–75. Graves and other ancestral markers are visited to overcome illness and ill-fortune among members of the patrilineal group. Periodically major ceremonial gatherings involving multiple sibling sets or lineages of the *Ratu/Paca* clans are undertaken to reaffirm group prosperity and solidarity.

33 The characteristic invocation to ancestors uses the phrase *calu ho papu*. These terms refer to ego’s second and third ascending generation of forebears but they invoke the collective ancestry.

‘sacred meat’ (*leura tei*) among male kinsmen within a *ratu* segment.³⁴ The use of accompanying auguries (*ari toto*) and divination (*lonia, mu’ufuka totole*) to determine the efficacy of messages conveyed through rituals are also commonplace.³⁵

This abiding orientation to ancestral origins is intimately linked to the collective claims of patrilineal *Ratu* over inherited common property, especially land and its resources. The landscape of Lautem has been long divided among dozens of named clan groups whose boundaries (*kei kei ho varuku*) are clearly demarcated. The present configuration of *Ratu* lands reflect the outcomes of dynamic histories of settlement, alliance and the endemic warfare that characterised earlier periods of political life and inter-group relations.

In terms of settlement history, Fataluku expresses precedence in a variety of ways. The distinction, before and after (*emeré – urané*) may be used as shorthand for the relative standing of *ratu* and *paca* groups respectively. Claims to founder settler status are critical to establishing priority and subsequent rights over land and forest resources. The historical vesting of ownership in land by a particular *ratu* group is denoted by the title *mua ho cawaru* (literally: land and lord). In the more formal parallel language of Fataluku the phrase is rendered: *mua cao vele ocawa: horo cao vele ocawa* (land head skin lord: gravel head skin lord).³⁶ This phrase speaks to the Fataluku idea of a conceptual distinction between the ‘body’ of the earth and its ‘skin’ (*vele*), which is cultivated for staple food crops. The title of ‘lord of the land’, held by a particular *ratu* in relation to a defined area of land, is one that confirms and honours their status as founder settlers and their primary rights of claim to the ‘body’ of the land and its wealth. Subsequent settlers gain access to land through devolution from the ‘land lord’ usually by cementing marriage alliances with the founder group. One example of this process can be seen in the cultural history of the lower Vero valley (eastern Lautem) where the senior founding group, *Renu Ratu*, is generally acknowledged as the ‘great mother’ (*nalu lafae*) by virtue of its founder settler status and the marriage of its daughters to migrant settler *ratu* groups. The latter are referred to as the ‘little women’ (*tupurmoko*). In this way *Renu Ratu* reproduces a ‘progenitor’ status for named subsidiary affinal groups who receive nested communal rights in land. Later arrivals or more recent immigrant groups are said to lack these abiding ties and rights to land and live as ‘passengers’ (*micane horu ne*) on the land of others. They may cultivate the ‘skin’ of the land and enjoy its fruits but may not alienate it or assume title from the relevant owners.³⁷

Ratu affiliations to their ancestral ‘sacred land and the sacred garden’ (*mua tei ho pala tei*) are based around complex protocols of ritual practice and extended intimate

34 Women and young children of the *ratu* may not consume the sacrificial meat because of its spiritual heat (*timiné*). Younger daughters of the *ratu* are explicitly excluded because of their intended incorporation within their future husband’s ritual group.

35 Andrew McWilliam, ‘Healing and medical pluralism in post-independence East Timor: Anthropological perspectives on Fataluku ethno-medical practice’, Paper presented to the Australian Anthropological Society Conference, Cairns, Queensland, September 2006.

36 *Horo* is a reference to the stony coralline surface of land characteristic of this part of East Timor.

37 Historically, the senior landholder and ritual authority of Fataluku domains (*mua ho cawaru*) sometimes co-existed with the executive mediating rule of the *Cao hafa malai*, to effect a diarchic structure of politico-religious authority, a feature prevalent among neighbouring Austronesian language groups. Both titles, however, were sometimes held by a single *ratu*.

association. Attempts to usurp the authority of the ‘land lord’ (*mua ho cawaru*) are spiritually sanctioned and decisions over the use and cultivation of new garden areas ultimately remain under the authority of the senior generation of the male siblings of the *ratu* group. An example of the inter-relationship between land, identity and ancestors is expressed in the elaborate funeral rites for deceased senior members of the *ratu*. At one point in this process, a ritual chant, known as *nololo*, may be recited by a specialist known as the ‘master of the chant, master of the words’ (*nololonocawa: lukulukunocawa*), in order to send the spirit/soul (*huma’ara*) of the deceased along the path of the ancestors and re-unification with the ancestral origins.³⁸ *Nololo* chants may vary in length and elaboration but they combine genealogy with topogeny (sequences of ancestral places of settlement) and in this way reaffirm the collective connections of the Fataluku descent group, the itineraries of their forebears from earliest settlement and the lands over which they assert claims.³⁹ As Maria O.L. Campagnolo has observed, Fataluku may sometimes say of the death of someone, that ‘they have gone to plant coconuts in the land of the first village’.⁴⁰

Conceptual categories of orientation

Another general feature of Austronesian speaking societies in eastern Indonesia is the prominence of a two axis conceptual system for symbolic spatial coordinates.⁴¹ The primary orientation follows the east–west axis, the path of the sun, with a secondary orientation utilising an upstream/downstream, seaward/landward or right/left axis. In Timor the latter distinction is typically made between the (northern/left) female sea (*tasi fetu*) and the (southern/right) male sea (*tasi mane*). Fataluku cultural practice also reflects these Timorese framing coordinates of sun and sea. The terms for sunrise and sunset in Fataluku are *vacu hia sukana* and *vacu isinu* respectively, and while these phrases can refer to the cardinal coordinates, Fataluku more typically employ the complementary designation ‘head of the land’ (*mua cao*) and ‘tail of the land’ (*mua ulafuka*). This distinction also connotes the pan-Timorese symbolic conception of their island as a half-submerged crocodile, wary and waiting, with its head to the east and tail to the west.⁴²

Similarly, the Fataluku designation of north and south is represented in relation to coastal waters. Their terms, *tahi tupuru: tahi calu*⁴³ (female sea: male sea) represent a composite linguistic construction of Austronesian and Papuan terms. A common view

38 These chants may be preceded by forms of song dances (*sau fa, sau ia mari*) which recount the life and deeds of the deceased. Fataluku distinguish between dead shades and living spirit. The latter is known as *hutu* or *hutu teino* (sacred spirit) which is the animating life force, and one’s dreaming being.

39 The names of the first ancestors are highly proscribed and are usually only uttered in connection with invocation or prayer.

40 Maria Olimpia Lameiras Campagnolo, *L’Habilitation des Fataluku de Lorehe (Timor Portugais)*. These de Doctorat de 3eme cycle (Academie de Paris, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Université Rene Descartes, Paris, 1975) [‘The final (third) stage of the Doctoral thesis’ (Paris Academy of the School of Advanced Studies, University of Rene Descartes, Paris, 1975)], p. 75.

41 James J. Fox, *The poetic power of place: Comparative perspectives of Austronesian ideas of locality* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1997).

42 Fox, *Out of the ashes*, p. 1.

43 Here the term itself refers to the category of ‘grandfather/male ancestor’ and reflects a greater sense of respect.

of this distinction is that it refers to the calm or ‘tame’ qualities of the northern seas in contrast to the rough, ‘wild’ nature of the seas to the south.⁴⁴ The designations, however, have semantic resonance that expresses a more generalised classificatory schema. Conventionally the directions east and south are associated with symbolic male properties such as right-handedness, sunlight, life, whiteness and the sky, in contrast to the symbolically female directions of west and north, with their intimations of left-handedness, night, darkness, death and the earth.⁴⁵ Many ritual practices make explicit acknowledgement of these directional qualities. Fataluku graves are typically oriented with the headstone to the east, the direction of the ancestral origins. The principal point here, however, is that Fataluku symbolic orientation and implied meanings are highly consistent with their Austronesian neighbours in Timor and the wider Austronesian speaking region.

Metaphors of alliance and relation

The formal pairing of complementary categories noted in passing in the previous examples highlights another persistent feature of Fataluku cultural expression that is highly consistent and comparable with the use of paired or dyadic language found throughout the general Austronesian language regions of eastern Indonesia. Dyadic language is a stylised mode of communication, in which paired sets of formal parallel verse are expressed, typically to mark ritual or ceremonial performance. The practice is demonstrably a prominent feature among the local Austronesian languages,⁴⁶ and points to what Forth has suggested might be a general Austronesian tendency.⁴⁷ More than a special mode of communication, Fox has argued that paired speech is a vehicle for the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge in which ‘fundamental metaphoric structures of culture’ are embedded.⁴⁸ This notion is readily appreciated in Fataluku contexts where linguistic parallelism is pervasive and provides a conventional framework for linguistic representations of cultural ideas. The use of formal paired sets of concepts is referred to by a variety of phrases, all cast dyadically. People speak of ‘the words and chants’ (*a ta’a: a lolo*), of ‘speech and word’ (*luku: a ta’a*) or sacred speech, sacred words (*lukun teinu: hopon teinu*). Another version of this pairing is the phrase, *a lolo a laki*, that alludes to the complementary process of connecting a beginning with an end, a cause and a consequence. Here the term *lolo* is said to be like a rope or path and *laki* a botanical reference to the relation between root and tip. Hence *lolo* and *laki* speak to analogous processes of linking beginnings with ends as in the funereal chants (*nololo*) mentioned above.

This concern with dyadic classification, in common with all other language groups in eastern Indonesia, can be seen in the practice of Fataluku marriage alliance and its

44 Traube, *Cosmology and social life*, p. 29.

45 For examples, see H. G. Schulte Nordholt, *The political system of the Atoni of Timor (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, vol. 60)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), pp. 238–9.

46 James J. Fox, ‘Introduction’ in *To speak in pairs: Essays on the ritual languages of eastern Indonesia*, ed. James J. Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 1–28.

47 Gregory Forth, ‘To chat in pairs: Lexical pairing as a pervasive feature of Nage mundane speech’, *Canberra Anthropology*, 19, 1 (1996): 31–51.

48 Fox, *To speak in pairs*, p. 2.

metaphoric representation. The spatial metaphor of the pathway or journey is one example. When a new alliance is forged between groups, it may be characterised as opening a new pathway between previously unrelated families. Here, the newly created 'path' of marriage exchange is referred to as, the 'new path, new trail' (*ia miri: vaku miri*).⁴⁹ This is contrasted to the 'wide path, wide trail' (*ia rata: vaku rata*), that represents the, often literally, well-trodden path of marriage alliance where the reciprocal flow of goods and people maintain the track and broaden the trail. Simultaneously a metaphor and a physical marker of marriage exchange, the image of the path is deeply embedded in Fataluku cultural representations.⁵⁰

Fertile images of marriage and alliance are also drawn from botanical idioms of growth and renewal. Botanical idioms form a central motif in Austronesian cultural practice (Fox's distinguishing feature 3),⁵¹ an idea supported by Roxana Waterson who suggests they be seen as distinctive Austronesian features.⁵² In Fataluku society references to alliance relationships in terms of botanical tropes are equally redolent. Within the deeply male ordered organisation of social and ritual practice, women and daughters of the ancestral kin group (flower and fruit 'of the agnatic tree' – *icipi imana*) must marry out of their natal origin group and into their husbands' kin group (*ratu / paca*). Women are said to be like maize gardens (*mua un i temur cele*), that are impermanent and moved frequently. Marriage is conceived of as a transfer of women, and the reproductive fertility they bring from one group to another. In these terms the progenitor group, the wife givers, are referred to as the *ara ho pata* (the base and post, trunk and stem). Groups that receive wives in marriage are the cultivated field, 'the planted sugar cane and the planted banana stem' (*i hupa tuana: i mu'u tuana*). Thus in the gifting of life through marriage, progenitor groups provide the conditions for the fertility and reproduction of their affines. The idea is expressed in the following narrative segment that illustrates the botanical idiom in parallel verse:

49 The term *vaku* is used in relation to a path made by livestock, or undomesticated animals.

50 Protocols and status strategies that inform the relationship between sibling groups, can be seen in a marriage practice known as following 'the little path' (*i ia moko*). This term refers to a strategy of reciprocal marriage exchange between two named clans, conventionally proscribed according to the asymmetric conventions of Fataluku marriage. However it is acceptable for clans to exchange their daughters and sisters in marriage when an internal differentiation is sustained between elder and younger sibling groups. In other words, a senior segment (*kaka*) from Cailoro Ratu may marry a woman from Pai'ir Ratu. Subsequently, the junior or younger sibling segment (*noko*) of Cailoro may bestow one of its daughters or sisters in marriage as a gift to a man from Pai'ir Ratu. This practice enables the material gifts of marriage, buffalos, gold, land and cloth, to circulate within two allied Ratu groups. It represents a contrasting strategy to marriages of 'the great path' (*i ia lafae*) which maintain a unidirectional exchange of women and gifts. The male gender bias in this characterisation reflects common Fataluku formulations of the nature of marriage exchange. Fataluku kinship terminology prescribes marriage between matrilineal cross cousins (MBD/FZS) who are referred to as *ia tupuru* and *ia nami* (the female and male path respectively).

51 See also James J. Fox, 'Sister's child as plant: Metaphors in an idiom of consanguinity', in *Rethinking kinship and marriage*, ed. Rodney Needham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 219–50; Andrew McWilliam, 'Trunk and tip in West Timor: Precedence in a botanical idiom', in *Precedence: Processes of social differentiation in the Austronesian world*, ed. Michael Vischer, forthcoming.

52 Roxanna Waterson, 'Houses and the built environment in island Southeast Asia: Tracing some shared themes in the use of space', in *Inside Austronesian houses: Perspectives on domestic designs for living*, ed. James J. Fox (Canberra: Australian National University, 1993), pp. 220–35.

<i>i hupa tuana</i>	the planted sugar cane
<i>i mu'(u) tuana</i>	the planted banana stem
<i>sei' taru lanu</i>	the affinal vine
<i>a'ca taru lanu</i>	the affinal liana
<i>a na enahu kokole</i>	I ask that you grow straight and strong
<i>a na enahu lahute</i>	I ask for abundant shoots
<i>a na enahu cipi fai</i>	I ask for flowers to bloom
<i>a na enahu mana fai</i>	I ask for fruit to appear

Marriage exchange and the alliance between groups that it creates, establishes life long reciprocal obligations between the protagonists. Thus a married man is beholden to his wife's father (*paienu*) and in the face of his criticism or objection, may 'wilt like a leaf in the sun'. The wife givers of man's father and their natal group, who may well be the same *ratu* as his wife if the favoured asymmetric pattern of matrilateral cross cousin marriage is reproduced, are similarly venerated and respected as the *a pal(u) i ara ho i pata* (my father's trunk and stem). In this complex web of reciprocal obligations and relations, it is tempting to view Fataluku marriage and exchange relationships as reflective of that common Austronesian concern with the 'flow of life'. They maintain and reproduce the cultural obligation and expectation that clan segments (*ratu/paca*) must give away their sisters and daughters in order to obtain wives and mothers for their children.

House structures and hearths

Hauser-Schäublin in her study of northern New Guinea cult houses has ventured the view that '[t]he hut on piles with supports carrying both the roof and the built-in floor seems to belong to Austronesian cultures'.⁵³ Despite the evident and striking diversity of Austronesian architectural styles, the ordered physical arrangements of posts, beams, platforms and thatched roofs as well as the symbolic properties they encode, are strongly suggestive of a shared and enduring heritage of built forms. More than this, the notion of the 'House' is also simultaneously a social construction, and a ritualised focus for the articulation of social relations and exchange among 'House' members. It is in this double image of the house as a physical construction and as a metaphor for the social collectivity, that we can observe the distinctive Austronesian legacy.⁵⁴

The generic Fataluku term for house is, *le*, or *le ia valu* (lit: house with legs). It is used to describe a wide range of designs and decorated residential structures.⁵⁵ Although not cognate with common Austronesian names for the house (such as *rumah*, *uma*, *balay*, *lepaw* and their reflexes), the structural styles and significance of

53 Hauser Schaublin, *Kulthäuser in Nordneuguinea*, 2 vols. (Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Völkerkunde Dresden no. 43) (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989), p. 618, cited in Fox, *Inside Austronesian houses*, p. 13.

54 See, for example, Traube, *Cosmology and social life*, p. 46; Reimer Schefold *et al.*, *Indonesian houses: Tradition and transformation in vernacular architecture* (Leiden: KITLV Press 2003); Roxanna Waterson, *The living house: An anthropology of architecture in South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993).

55 See examples from Campagnolo, *L'Habilitation des Fataluku de Lorehe*, pp. 91–5.

traditional Fataluku architectural designs are strikingly consistent with Austronesian examples. The classic and distinctive Fataluku houses (*sei mecen le, fata sirik le, fia le*) comprise tall, four-posted structures with elaborately carved beams and timber cladding all meticulously tied and pegged. Thick arenga palm thatch covers a lattice of roof spars and the structure is decorated with sea shells (*le lilire, le poke*) and comb fans (*fia*). All *ratu* clan houses have distinctive names, expressed in paired language (for example, the double house of Uruha'a Ratu in Parlemto is referred to as *Puafainara: Moro malai'ara*). The construction of these fine houses requires affiliated members to assemble substantial economic resources. Special hardwood forest timbers and the sequence of elaborate ritual sacrifices conducted to ensure the physical and spiritual health of the occupants means that only groups with significant status and resources can build these structures.⁵⁶ Most people make do with simpler houses known as *cu* which nevertheless retain the four posted platform design and encompassing thatched roof. Since the destruction that accompanied the Indonesian withdrawal from East Timor during 1999, many local Fataluku have also moved to the 'modern' style of housing with cinder block or partial bamboo cladding (*le pitine* or *varaca* respectively). In most cases however, attention to protective ritual observance in construction is maintained.

Key ritual elements of the traditional Fataluku house include the posts (*tutu*), ridge pole (*pui ina*), ladder (*ke'eru*) and hearth (*lafuru – aca kaka*). As in the study of Austronesian house designs, these structures may be referred to as principal 'ritual attractors'.⁵⁷ The ritual planting of the initial 'elder sibling post' (*tutu kaka*) inaugurates the process of construction. Ideally this post forms the eastern corner of the house and orients the subsequent construction to the 'head of the land' (*mua cao*). The emplaced sacred hearth (*aca kaka*), and the focus for ritual sacrifices of House members, is located directly above the *tutu kaka* within the eastern corner of the interior. Formal installation of the *aca kaka* follows the consecration of the access ladder (*ke'eru*) and the placement of sacrificial offerings and protective devices (forked *sikua* wood objects) within the lattice of house beams.⁵⁸

The construction of the house and the installation of a sacrificial hearth is a general expectation of young Fataluku couples upon marriage. Its consecration provides protective ancestral blessings to the immediate household members and for wider patrilineal members of the *ratu/paca* clan during times of life-cycle transitions and commensality at the house. However, each household sacrificial hearth (*aca kaka*) forms part of a network of ritual sites linked to the main *ratu* sacrificial hearth

56 Although many of these and similar houses were destroyed during the violence that characterised the end of Indonesian rule in East Timor, as elsewhere across the country the high value placed on their cultural and political significance means that reconstruction of these customary house styles has begun. See Andrew McWilliam, 'House of resistance in East Timor: Structuring sociality in the new nation', *Anthropological forum*, 15, 1 (2005): 27–44.

57 Fox, *Inside Austronesian houses*, p. 1.

58 The *aca kaka* hearth is a ritually and symbolically potent structure which includes three hearth stones (*lilivana*) representing the male siblings and children of the group (*noko kaka ho moco*) while two small wooden altar posts (*saka*) within the hearth stand for the female and male members of the House group respectively (*saka tupuru* and *saka calu*). Often a third *saka* is secured above the doorway to the house providing a protective field for the occupants (known as the *le o'o hana*).

(*aca kaka lafae*) (great hearth) ideally managed by the eldest first born male of the group (*moco kaka*), and ultimately to the spirit sphere (*tei*) of the ancestors. Many households rely on the hearths of their older kinsmen to make sacrificial invocations.

The key idea of the sacrificial hearths of the house is that they provide a shared focus for the ritual celebration and ancestral protection of the collective patrilineal membership. These issues are not esoteric remnant practices of a fading traditional religion, but a vital part of the continuing orientation of House and hearth members to social life and the health and well being of its members. One example is the practice for younger Fataluku people, many of whom have migrated to Dili for work opportunities, to return and seek ancestral blessings at the sacred hearths of their father or elder brothers, before embarking on new ventures or travel. In these and other ways, membership to Fataluku 'Houses of origin' contributes to contemporary social identity and prosperity, while providing organisational guidance for inter-group political and economic exchange relationships.

Fataluku: Austronesians in linguistic disguise

The extensive linguistic and anthropological literature on Austronesian societies and the thesis of a long-term expansion outward from mainland Southeast Asia into the Pacific around 5000 before present,⁵⁹ finds much evidence for the existence of what I would label, 'Austronesian cosmopolitanism'. This phrase speaks to the persuasive colonising character of Austronesian peoples and their linguistic impact on multiple non-Austronesian speaking language communities they engaged in the process. The high number of Austronesian-speaking Papuan communities found throughout the lowlands and islands of Melanesia and the western Pacific is a case in point. The prehistoric and wholesale adoption or transplantation of Austronesian languages, and their many cultural ideas and concepts appears to have been the common direction of these linguistic transformations. Capell, for example, has made the point that all non-Austronesian languages (NAN) have had contact with Austronesian languages (AN)⁶⁰ and also notes that '[t]here is a whole pre-AN linguistic world swamped beneath the later AN flood, only parts of which may be possible to recover now'.⁶¹ Non-Austronesian languages, by and large, appear to have given up the linguistic ground and may or may not have retained core cultural elements and principles of their ancestral 'non-Austronesian' origins. Spriggs makes the point more poetically, invoking Rupert Brooke, by noting that there is (always) a corner of an Austronesian field that is forever non-Austronesian.⁶²

By contrast, evidence for linguistic conversion in the opposite direction, namely from Austronesian to non-Austronesian language adoption, is comparatively rare, while acknowledging that limited lexical borrowing and the diffusion of cultural

59 Peter Bellwood, 'Austronesian prehistory in Southeast Asia: Homeland, expansion and transformation', in *The Austronesians*, ed. Bellwood, Fox and Tryon, pp. 96–111.

60 Capell, *The West papuan phylum*, p. 699.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 709.

62 Matthew Spriggs, 'The Lapita culture and Austronesian prehistory in Oceania', in *The Austronesians*, ed. Bellwood, Fox and Tryon, pp. 112–33, 127.

vocabularies are not uncommon.⁶³ For this reason, one conventional view of the existing pockets of putative TNGP languages in areas of the eastern Indonesian archipelago, is that they represent remnant populations of a western expansion of Papuan languages that predated Austronesian intervention.⁶⁴ Hull is also of the view that the non-Austronesian societies of East Timor constitute ‘Aboriginal’ languages.⁶⁵ Precisely why and how these languages have persisted and even flourished within the interactive sea of Austronesian languages, remains unclear and requires further explanation. The main idea, however, is that Papuan TNGP languages like Fataluku, are very much prehistoric and pre-Austronesian in their origins of emplacement in the Timor-Alor-Pantar group of islands.

In this paper, however, I am suggesting an alternative scenario, at least in the case of Fataluku.⁶⁶ This interpretation places the introduction and expansion of the Fataluku language into a pre-existing Austronesian speaking context and culture. Furthermore, if Bellwood is correct, that large-scale language family shifts are more likely to occur through colonisation rather than diffusion or borrowing,⁶⁷ it follows that it was Fataluku speaking populations that settled far eastern East Timor with or without the acquiescence of the Austronesian speaking residents. This view is one also proposed by the linguist Stephen Wurm, who was among the first to distinguish the Trans New Guinea Phylum (TNGP) group of languages, and supported the idea of the westward migration of Trans New Guinea Phylum speakers to Timor possibly preceding but also post-dating Austronesian settlements.⁶⁸

Although unusual, such a sequence is not unheard of in the wider region as Platenkamp (1990), Voorhoeve (1994) and Bellwood (1998)⁶⁹ have all argued for the West Papuan Phylum languages found in northern Halmahera (Moluccas).⁷⁰ Recent archaeological evidence also supports a sequential post-dating of Papuan cultural

63 See, for example, Malcolm Ross, *Proto Oceanic and the Austronesian languages of Western Melanesia* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics C-88, 1988); also ‘Pronouns as markers of genetic stocks in non-Austronesian languages of New Guinea, Island Melanesia and eastern Indonesia’ in *Papuan languages and the trans New Guinea family*, ed. A. Pawley et al. (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 1996).

64 Pawley, *The Trans New Guinea phylum*, pp. 684–5.

65 Hull, ‘The languages of Timor 1772–1997: A literature review.’

66 The neighbouring non-Austronesian language of Makasai and its variants represents a comparable case, given the significant numbers of linguistic islands of Austronesian languages that are found across the Baucau district. The evidence of a recent expansion of Makasai speakers can be seen in the prevalence of Austronesian placenames in Makasai language areas, a feature less apparent in Fataluku areas.

67 Bellwood, ‘The archaeology of Papuan and Austronesian prehistory in the northern Moluccas’, p. 130.

68 Stephen Wurm, ‘Papuan languages and the New Guinea linguistic scene’, p. 950.

69 See Jos Platenkamp, *North Halmahera: non-Austronesian languages, Austronesian cultures* (Leiden: Oosters Genootschap in Nederland, 1990); C.L. Voorhoeve, ‘Contact-induced change in the non-Austronesian languages in the north Moluccas, Indonesia’, in *Language contact and change in the Austronesian world*, ed. Tom Dutton and Darrell T. Tryon (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 649–74; Bellwood, *The archaeology of Papuan and Austronesian prehistory in the northern Moluccas*, p. 138.

70 For a PNG example see Tom Dutton, ‘Borrowing in Austronesian and non-Austronesian languages of coastal south-east mainland Papua New Guinea’, in *Papers from the third international conference on Austronesian linguistics*, vol. 11, ed. Amran Halim, Lois Carrington and S.A. Wurm (Department of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, *Pacific Linguistic Series C-No 74*, 1982), pp. 109–77.

influences, through rock art analysis and evident similarities in motif designs with art forms from the Bomberai–McClure Gulf in present day West Papua.⁷¹ Interestingly the Bomberai coast is also the area identified by Ross as the likely linguistic origins for the Fataluku and other Papuan languages of the Timor-Pantar-Alor region, based somewhat tenuously, it must be said, on the evidence of shared innovation of pronouns.⁷² However, whereas the corresponding patterns of West Papuan languages and Austronesian cultural forms found in Halmahera are supported by plausible linguistic, historical and archaeological evidence of contact and exchange, the comparable research data for Timor remains weak. Hull's recent lexical analysis of Papuan (Bomberaic) and Timor languages provides an exception with strong supporting evidence of shared linguistic forms and concepts.⁷³ He also now supports the idea of a Trans-New Guinean language community expansion west and south that post-dated Austronesian settlements. Importantly he argues that these migrations occurred after the Papuans of the Bomberai-Onin Peninsula had absorbed Austronesian language and cultural influences in New Guinea:

This explains the pronounced Austronesian characteristics central to Fataluku culture; if they were not acquired in Timor, but introduced from New Guinea, this would solve the puzzle of typically Austronesian institutions and crafts being more developed among the Fatalukus than among their Austronesian-speaking neighbours.⁷⁴

Whether this does in fact solve the puzzle or not,⁷⁵ and leaving aside the question of cultural derivations and forms, Fataluku cultural practices and social organisation are indeed remarkably similar to their Austronesian speaking neighbours. They look like 'Austronesians in linguistic disguise', where a Papuan or specifically a TNGP language has been grafted onto an Austronesian cultural base. Although linguistically non-Austronesian, the Fataluku would appear to fully qualify as a language community whose customary ideas and practice are 'indicative of the sharing of fundamental cultural conceptions that constitute some of the epistemic ideas of the Austronesians'.⁷⁶

71 Sue O'Connor, 'Nine new painted rock art sites from East Timor in the context of the Western Pacific Region, *Asian Perspectives*, 42, 1 (2003): 96–128; Chris Ballard, 'Painted rock art sites in western Melanesia: Locational evidence of an Austronesian tradition, in *State of art: Regional rock art studies in Australia and Melanesia*, ed. Jo McDonald and Ivan Haskovic (Occasional AURA Publication no. 6, Melbourne: Australian Rock Art Research Association, 1992), pp. 94–106.

72 See Ross, 'Pronouns as markers of genetic stocks in non-Austronesian languages of New Guinea', forthcoming; Andrew Pawley, 'Recent research on the historical relationships of the Papuan languages, or, What can linguistics add to the stories of archaeology and other disciplines about the prehistory of Melanesia?' Paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists for Podium Symposium; *The second garden of Eden – Island Melanesian genetic diversity*, p. 21.

73 Hull, 'The Papuan languages of Timor'.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 66. The statement would make more sense if Hull meant to write, 'than among their non-Austronesian speaking neighbours', but the observation remains pertinent.

75 Aone van Engelenhoven and Justino Valentim Cailoru, 'The Makuva Enigma: Locating a hidden language in East Timor', Paper presented at the 2nd Conference on Austronesian Languages and Linguistics, Oxford, 2–3 June 2006, pp. 1–17 (Access at www.fataluku.com). The authors suggest that 'many of the awkward Austronesian features of the Fataluku language and society could be explained as originally (local) Makuva features that survived' Fataluku settlement.

It might also be argued that this ‘reading’ of Fataluku culture and society privileges or overvalues Austronesian markers, and elides other cultural forms which might be more characteristic of a Papuan or non-Austronesian tradition. The difficulty with this question is the absence in the literature of something that might be characterised as a set of distinctly non-Austronesian (Papuan) cultural practices. The negative classification, ‘non-Austronesian’, in this context, is simply a description of languages that lack defining attributes, both lexical and structural, of Austronesian languages.⁷⁷ There is no sense in which they should constitute some linguistic or, for that matter, cultural unity. Rather, as Foley has argued, an understanding of non-Austronesian (Papuan) languages requires more than a search for the ‘platonic essence’ through the classification of cognate sets.⁷⁸ It requires analysis of the full range of historical processes that have given rise to the language in its present form.⁷⁹ However elusive that exercise, the same point may be made for understanding the development of cultural ideas, dispositions and practices. Whether such an investigation would yield evidence of a clearly definable set of Papuan cultural practices within Fataluku society remains an open question.

That said, a number of cultural possibilities suggest themselves in this regard. Bellwood has pointed to a series of features or principles drawn from the anthropological literature of Papuan speaking societies that may serve to differentiate them from Austronesian speaking societies. Among these features is the ‘general lack of concern...with descent or ascription of rank’.⁸⁰ Classically, this is also associated with a preponderance of achieved or ‘big man’ forms of political leadership. Further broad distinguishing features of what might be considered part of the ‘prototypical structure’ of Papuan/ New Guinea society include the marked ritual separation of men and women and a strong emphasis on male initiation ceremonies.⁸¹

Even taking these schematic markers of a non-Austronesian or Papuan cultural identity into account, it is evident that Fataluku society and cultural practice exhibits significant divergence. Rank or status is clearly ascribed by birth and hierarchically ordered position within defined agnatic kin groups. While there are constraints on women’s participation in ritual performance, and a higher value placed on male ceremonial participation, this is more a case of the relative weighting accorded gender roles and the cultural understanding that women enact significant complementary and supportive performative activities. If there are residual or mainstream features of Fataluku practice that resonate with a Papuan (non-Austronesian) heritage, something

76 Fox, *Out of the ashes*, p. 4; see also Bellwood’s analysis of West Papuan phylum language and cultural forms in Halmahera (Moluccas), suggesting the blending of genetically Asian population with Papuan languages may offer a relevant line of enquiry here; ‘The archaeology of Papuan and Austronesian prehistory in the northern Moluccas’, 1998.

77 William A. Foley, ‘Toward understanding Papuan languages’, in *Perspectives on the bird’s head of Irian Jaya*, ed. Jelle Miedema, Cecilia Ode and Rien A.C. Dam (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V 1998), pp. 503–18.

78 This being the principal criteria for the genetic classification of language.

79 Foley, 1998, p. 504.

80 Bellwood, *Hierarchy, founder ideology and Austronesian expansion*, p. 22.

81 Cited in P.G. Rubel and A. Rosman, *Your own pigs you may not eat* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978), pp. 320–3.

that may be identified through further research, they remain for the most part subsumed and largely invisible in the contemporary context.⁸²

By way of contrast, in this paper I have sought to analyse aspects of non-Austronesian speaking Fataluku cultural practice through the comparative lens of common Austronesian cultural themes and found this to be a fruitful approach. Rather than undermining the utility of the comparative Austronesian project, however, this case study would seem to re-affirm its value as a framework for interpretation. Fataluku provides a linguistic exception that proves the rule, or at least demonstrates that 'Austronesian' ideas and practice may extend well beyond their linguistic limits and provide a productive analytical framework for social and cultural analysis.

82 In this regard, I have also considered the character of Fataluku kinship terminologies which exhibit many regular Austronesian features, such as the reciprocal marking of MB/ZS relationships and the central role of sibling relationships. As a recognisably asymmetric prescriptive terminology, it is not out of place in the wider region. Furthermore, the high prevalence of the number 'seven' (*fitu*) in Fataluku cultural schema, suggested possibilities of Papuan links in this regard but I found no strong evidence to support this idea. Seven is a significant number in all world religions as well as in Austronesian mythologies and cultural forms. As it happens, Fataluku 'seven' (*fitu*) is also an Austronesian term although in this regard, Gomes suggests that the archaic and possibly original Fataluku term for 'seven', is *nunu-muli* (Francisco de Azevedo Gomes, *Os Fataluku* (Doctoral thesis, Instituto superior de ciências sociais e política ultramarina. Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, 1972, p. 176).