
Preserving and documenting the endangered cultural heritage of the Fataluku people

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Every nation has a culture that underpins the way of life. According to the traditions of Lautem, our culture enables us to have strong unity and friendship. If we lose our culture, we lose our identity.

All the information we have collected in this project informs us about the original culture of our ancestors.

Sr Justino Valentim, Senior Researcher, 1954-2014

Introduction

This article presents the findings of a research project to document the endangered cultural heritage of the Fataluku people. It sought to contribute to the preservation of Fataluku cultural heritage by:

- recording endangered forms of traditional cultural expression;
- providing Fataluku people with opportunities to learn more about their cultural heritage, and
- building local capacity to preserve cultural heritage.

The article opens with information about Timorese culture overall and discussion of both its integrity and issues for survival and demographic information about the Fataluku people. Methodology of the research project is documented before a brief overview of the 65 cultural elements that were recorded in written form, photos and videos. The article concludes with recommendations for future research.

Background

Cultural practices are vital for the sustainment of a life that is meaningful and promoting of wellbeing. This is so for all peoples, but particularly so for those whose cultures have been impacted by negative external forces, particularly colonisation in all its forms. The people of Timor-Leste have been subject to the most extreme forms of colonisation over centuries, with its concomitant impact on culture. Despite these overwhelming odds, the Timorese people have a remarkable story of survival. Their success in resisting far more powerful nations provides their strongest base of shared identity (Trindade & Castro, 2007). Their culture offers an abiding source of identity and stability throughout their turbulent history and into the present day (Brandao, 2011). This includes the flourishing of “many different language groups, fiercely independent family units, complex marital and commercial exchange systems, animist religious practices and effective health treatment and cures” (Connelly, 2003, p. 2). At least 20 local languages are still in use, which most children speak at home (Lewis, 2009). Culture and traditional practices still provide the primary means of conflict resolution and peace building in most Timorese communities (Brandao, 2011).

Cultural expression is evident in artefacts still produced by hand around the country (Tatoli ba Kultura, 2012). The most prolific of these are hand woven fabrics *tais* that form the basis of traditional clothing and costume. *Tais* designs and colours illustrate the environmental, cultural and linguistic differences between communities. These are considered very valuable because of their cultural associations, such that one set could be worth as much as six cows (Oxfam, n.d.). Other cultural artefacts still in local production include carvings, ceramics and basketry. Traditional music played on a range of locally made percussion instruments and cultural dance forms continue to play a strong role in Timorese ceremonial life (King, 1963; Dunlop, 2012).

There is also concern for the survival of traditional culture, given the very significant negative impacts of colonisation and oppression during Indonesian and Portuguese occupation. Loss of connection to traditional structures, particularly the anchorage of extended family is a growing problem, as young people increasingly move to Dili in search of scarce education and employment opportunities (Scambary, 2012). The current experience of globalisation continues to impact culture and values. Given the nascent stage of Timor's media industry and public cultural production, influences from overseas, particularly Indonesia, are very significant (Sloman, 2009).

National and international frameworks for cultural preservation

In recognition of the need to support and preserve its unique cultural heritage, the Timor-Leste Government has just ratified the international Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003. In support of this, the State Secretariat of Tourism, Art and Culture (SETAC) is establishing a register of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as required by the Convention. SETAC is collaborating with UNESCO to assist its staff, other professionals and community members to develop skills related to the safeguarding of ICH.

About Fataluku people

Fataluku population demographic information

There are four distinct language groups and cultures within the District of Lautem, with Fataluku the largest percentage, at 69%, with 48,910 speakers. Fataluku culture and language is predominant in the four eastern-most sub-districts of Timor-Leste: Lospalos; Lautem, Lorehe and Tutuala. A fifth language group Makua/Lovaia is in danger of disappearing with the recent deaths of the last speakers of Makua (Timor-Leste Census 2010).

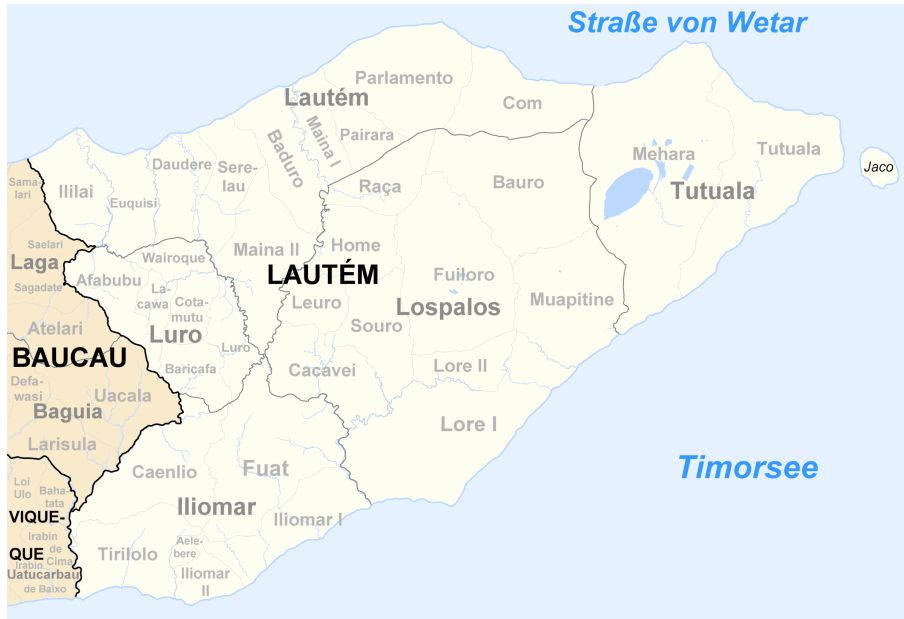


Figure 1: Lautem district showing sub-districts Lospalos, Lautem and Tutuala

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laut%C3%A9m_District#/media/File:Sucos_Lautem.png

LANGUAGE GROUP	CULTURE	NUMBER OF SUKU RELATED TO LANGUAGE GROUP	TOTAL LANGUAGE SPEAKERS IN LAUTEM DISTRICT	PERCENTAGE OF EACH LANGUAGE IN LAUTEM DISTRICT
Fataluku	Fataluku	19	48,910	69%
Makalero	Lero	6	9,687	14%
Makasai'Na'ini	Makasa'e	6	8,481	12%
Sa'ani	Makasa'e	3	4,207	5%
Makua/Lovaia	Lovaia	-	-	Endangered

Table 1: Language and cultural groups in Lautem district (Timor-Leste Census 2010)

Methodology

Project partners

The project was initiated by Many Hands International (MHI), an Australian-based NGO that promote the role of culture in sustainable development. It was undertaken in partnership with the State Secretariat of Culture (Government of Timor-Leste) and supported by the Lautem Municipality; Department of Education, Lautem District and community organisation, the Council for Fataluku Culture. UNESCO Jakarta contributed technical advice and staff training.

Recruitment and permission process

MHI's research team sought permission to undertake research in each district, first from each District Administrator and Sub District Administrators. Then, the team approached Sefi de Suku and Sefi de Aldeia for permission to research, and also to locate and recruit cultural knowledge holders. Participants were asked for permission to record information and this was documented in writing, including the level of access they recommended (public; for specific audiences, secret).

Research participants

Researchers made a deliberate effort to collect at least one element from all suku and aldeia in sub-districts Lospalos, Lautem and Tutuala. Information was gathered from seventeen suku in twenty-three aldeia. 64 male and 84 female research participants who self-identified or were identified by local leaders as cultural knowledge holders provided this information.

Research questions

Participants were invited to share information they held about endangered cultural heritage elements including elements they believed were important to record and practices they were involved in. Questions were based on the UNESCO requirements for recording intangible cultural heritage. These were:

- Name of cultural element
- Community to which it is related
- Geographic location
- Elements with which it is associated (tangible and intangible)
- Speech level involved
- Perceived origin
- People involved: their names, ages, gender, tribe, social status, professional category
- Other participants (knowledge holders)
- Access: what are access issues for this element?
- Modes of transmission
- Viability of the element: threats to enactment and transmission
- Availability of associated tangible elements and resources.
- Viability of associated tangible and intangible elements
- Safeguarding measures in place.

Interviews were conducted in Fataluku and later translated into Tetun and English. Information was recorded in writing and via photos, video.

Findings

As reported in detail below, the project successfully addressed all three major objectives:

- recording endangered forms of traditional cultural expression;

- providing Fataluku people with opportunities to learn more about their cultural heritage, and
- building local capacity to preserve cultural heritage.

Recording endangered forms of traditional cultural expression;

65 elements of Fataluku cultural expression were recorded across UNESCO's five domains: Oral traditions and expressions; Performing arts; Social practices, rituals and festive events; Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and Traditional craftsmanship. Participants also provided cultural materials for safekeeping. These elements are documented in a database that includes a short description, photos and videos of each element are available from Many Hands website (www.manyhands.org.au).

Elements included:

Performing arts: musical instruments including kakal, oi-oilu, ke'ko, pepur, fara fara

Kakal/ kalal uta: Traditional xylophone played by hitting horizontally suspended strips of wood. This instrument is played in mountain fields both for enjoyment and to keep predators (such as monkeys) away from crops. Players of this instrument were found in Lospalos and Lautem sub-districts. Knowledge of both the music and how to make and play the kakalu are now endangered.

- **Oi-oilu:** Bamboo whistle played for pleasure, especially when tending livestock. Some performers can play two oi-oilu at a time.
- **Ke'Ko/Koke:** A trumpet-like instrument. The shaft is made from bamboo, the bowl from akadiru (leaf) and the mouthpiece from buffalo horn.
- **Pepur/uta:** A bamboo mouth harp instrument played for pleasure. Players of this instrument were found in Lospalos and Lautem sub-districts.u.

Fara fara: Bamboo trumpet found played in Lautem\Moro.

- **Puhu puhu:** Conch horn. Players of this instrument were found in Lautem Moro.
- **Tipalu:** Traditional drum made in varying sizes. While their use is common in ritual, music and dance, knowledge of how to the tipalu is endangered with similar drums now being sourced from Indonesia.
- **Pira-titir:** A traditional gong played by women and commonly used in ritual, music and dance. Knowledge of how to make the pira titir, including where to find the material, is endangered with gongs now sourced from Indonesia.

Knowledge of the music and how to make and play these instruments in largely endangered given the small number of people who can still make and play them.

Oral traditions and expressions

Vaihoho: Traditional poems either spoken or sung, often in call and response format. When sung, this is done a capella by choirs of varying sizes. Vaihoho range

in length from one to many stanzas. Poems are used either as part of ritual or for pleasure. Both the poems and music are endangered. It is estimated that approximately 30 per cent of vaihoho poems have already been lost, and the remaining 70 per cent are critically endangered because knowledge of them is held by only a few elders.

A range of vaihoho were documented, including *oron tafa*, rice husking songs found in Lautem and Lospalos; *lipal vaihoho nu*, a brideprice song found in Lospalos; *iharala vaihoho*, an orphan song found in Lautem; a love song found in Lospalos and a war song found in Lospalos.

- **Social practices, rituals and festive events** including inauguration of Uma Lulik and associated ceremonies, rituals for health and healing, and rituals of divination.

Ritual

Ueutana aia Leleira: a rain ritual performed in Lautem (Pairara).

Lipal Fa'i: bride price negotiation documented in Lospalos (Kakavem).

- **Tei Hau-pela'a:** This ritual invokes the ancestral spirits for a variety of purposes (family health and wellbeing, protection of family and livestock from danger, resolving of problems etc). The ritual takes place at the tei - two figures (one representing man, one representing woman) carved from stone or wood. Animals and other goods are sacrificed to the tei and prayers made.
- **Lutur Hau Pela'a:** Traditional grave of ancestors (maybe up to eight generations) which can be prayed at for help and is an intermediary between people, tei and uruvatxu (uru – sun, vatxu - moon) or otxava ma'arau (ma'a- god, rau – good) god is good.
- **Masule:** This ritual of spoken words and animal sacrifice is performed a blessing over the harvest before eating the first of the corn from the new harvest. A few cultural elders will take corn from people's fields, sacrifice animals and eat the new corn.
- **Vata-ira Fa'i:** This ritual is performed before slaughtering a cow. It is performed at the location where the cow is to be slaughtered so that the location doesn't become lulik (sacred). If the ritual is not performed, the rest of the herd will run away and never re-enter that place.
- **Mamunu Fa'i:** Ritual for healing and health, practiced by both women and men. Secret words/phrase are spoken internally, with spit on hands rubbed on body.

- **Traditional Knowledge**

- **Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe**

- Several of these practices were documented but not able to be shared because of their lulik nature.

Rata-Lolo: Traditional creation stories that are told in the home. These stories usually take around two to three hours to recount and tell of the origins of a range of animals, natural phenomenon, human behaviour and values. 13 rata-lolo were documented including *Rata tu Zenlai iimoco moko lolo*, a story about a baby of the Zenlai ratu, found in Tutuala; *Rata lolo Puinorili ha Maunorili*, a story about Puinorili and Maunorili from Lautem (Moro); *Rata lolo nere ca'a nu*, an origin story from Lospalos (Lore II); *rata lolo*, a women's story from Lautem (Muapitine); *Tupur un i tu lesu me vale* from Tutuala and *Rata Pokoloi-Lavanu*, the story of Pokoloi-Lavanu,

from Lautem/Moro (Kom), both stories about a woman who gave birth to a handkerchief; *Serelau ira-ina i rata*, the origin of Serelau Spring water story from Lautem (Serelau); *Iharala mocoru*, a orphan's story from Lautem/Moro (Kom); *Rata lolo la Timor lui'l I nere caa'nu*, a creation story from Lautem/Moro (Kom); and *Rata lolo moco pupur i ari una*, story about a father eating his daughter's heart from Lautem (Pairara).

- **No-Lolo:** Creation stories of the seven tribal groups of Lospalos. These take several hours to tell and relevant story is recounted at the cemetery as part of the funeral ritual for a deceased elder.
- **Ete-Lari:** Knowledge of traditional medicine practices, including use and harvesting of ingredients from the forest. Traditional medicine has a range of uses, from healing wounds, broken bones and mental illness, to curing malaria and other illnesses.
- **Traditional craftsmanship**
- **Traditional craftsmanship** including traditional hunting tools and weapons, pottery production, spinning cotton and basketry.
- **Hunting tools and weapons:**
- Several types of *hi'il*, snare traps, were documented, including *pai ho vaka hi'il*, for catching wild deer and pigs from Lautem (Parlamento, Kom and Kakavem); and *cua hi'l fa'l*, a mouse-trap from Lautem/Moro (Kom). Knowledge of how to make and use the *hil* is now endangered with the introduction of guns. A *roso*, fish trap was found in Lautem (Kom).
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- Weapons documented were *Coro*, a harpoon documented in Lospalos (Kakaven); *Fei-Fa'i*, an arrow found in Lospalos (Fuiloro); *Tutufa*, a bamboo spear found in Lospalos (Lore II). *Cain fa'i*, traditional matches, or a firestone were found in Lospalos (Kakavem)
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- **Pottery:** *Puhu fa'i*, pottery, was documented only in Lospalos (Fuiloro).
- **Basketry:**
- **Leu:** Woven baskets made from the leaves of the akadiru plant. *Leu lafai* are large baskets used for carrying goods (fruit, vegetables, wood). *Leu moko* are small baskets used for carrying personal affects. These smaller baskets are made aesthetically pleasing through the application of natural dyes, whereas *leu lafai* are not dyed. Men carry these baskets slung over their shoulders, while women wear them slung from their foreheads and down their backs.
- **Neru:** Shallow rice winnowing baskets made in large (*neru lilana*) and small (*neru moko*) sizes. These are difficult to make due to the curved shape of the baskets.
- Seven types of *Nian fa'i*, woven items, were documented, including *leu hina*, storage baskets from Lautem (Baduro); *pari pari hina*, woven fans from Lautem/Moro (Baduro); *neru moko hina* and *leu hina*, baskets for tossing grain from Lospalos (Lore I). In Tutuala, *meci leu moko hina*, baskets for catching sea worms, *likas hina*, a wide shallow basket and *rai soko hina*, a woven basket for carrying food while travelling and *ulu halivan hina*, a small woven palm leaf container for the umbilical cord were documented.

Toy: *Ililaka sese*, a wooden spinning top was found in Losplaos (Fuiloro).

Handicrafts: *Ke'u ke'u fa'l (raranu fa'i)*, *ratan itu / ipit karan me fa'l*, turtle shell accessories were made in Tutuala (Pitileti).

Cotton spinning: *Anukai ii* was documented In Lospalos (Leuro).

Increased awareness of value of cultural heritage and dissemination of information

Given that the purpose of the project was increased awareness of the value of cultural heritage, a high priority was placed on dissemination of information gathered, particularly to Fataluku communities themselves. Research findings have been shared at many public events including the Lautem Cultural Festival in April 2013, the Baucau Festival in May 2013 and the TLSA Conference in July 2013. A film made from the digital documentation was screened to 2500 people in 19 aldeias across three sub districts whose members had contributed to the research. MHI staff made a presentation at UNESCO training workshops on ICH in Jakarta and Dili in late 2013.

Building local capacity to preserve cultural heritage

A major focus of the project was the capacity development of team members, who were Lospalos locals with strong interest but little previous experience, except for Senior Researcher Justino Valentim who was a senior cultural leader with previous research experience. We sought to introduce best practice in our research methods, so that staff gained skills that could be useful in future related projects. The forms used to collect information were based on the national inventory of ICH from the UNESCO convention. Skills shared included community consultation methods shared with staff by Justino Valentim. Researchers learned how to approach community members, to co-ordinate meetings and in culturally appropriate ways, consult and gather information. Staff members also had skill development workshops in photography, camera skills and editing. This enabled them to shoot and edit all films made for the project made so far, and have the capacity to make other films in the future from the materials collected.

Future research

The project is conceived as the initial phase of a longer-term project dedicated to recording and sharing intangible Fataluku cultural heritage. While this project documented many cultural elements, there is much still undocumented. Elements that required large groups of people, such as dance and other performances, are particularly underrepresented. Many Hands intends to continue this process of documentation and inclusion of additional elements as an ongoing initiative for the Lautem Cultural Centre.

Conclusion

This paper presents the findings of a research project to record forms of traditional Fataluku cultural expression that are critically endangered. The project was a collaboration between INGO Many Hands International, the State Secretariat of Culture and the Council for Fataluku Culture. Data was collected through interviews, photos and video recordings across the sub-districts of Lospalos, Lautem and Tutuala where Fataluku is the predominant culture. 65 intangible cultural heritage elements were recorded across five domains (Oral Traditions and Expressions; Performing Arts; Social Practices, Rituals and Festive Events;

Knowledge and Practices Concerning Nature and the Universe; and Traditional Craftmanship). Examples of forms of cultural expression documented include *Vaihoho* (traditional poems spoken or sung), musical instruments including *Oi'oil* and *Moto Me'e-me'e* (small bamboo flute) and *Rata-Lolo* (traditional creation stories told in the home). Ongoing efforts to catalogue, display and disseminate this material are also discussed, along with recommendations for future research.

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Appendix 1: Form used for recording cultural elements

1. Identifikasaun: Elumentus Kultural

Identification: cultural elements

<p>Elemuntus nia naran ne'ebe mak comunidade ka groupu uza. <i>Name of element. As used by community or group</i></p>
<p>Titulu Titulu informativu badak mak inclui categoria(s): Tradisaun no expressaun oral; arte performancia; practica social, ritual and eventu festival; matenek no practica konaba naturaiza no universe; halo sasaan traditionale. <i>Title . short informative title including domain (s) : oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices; rituals and festive events; knowledge and practice concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship</i></p>
<p>Comunidade/s ne'ebe iha relasaun <i>Community (ies) related</i></p>
<p>Lokalizasaun(s) Geografica elementus nian (fatin nia naran/diresaun no ponta GPS) <i>Physical location (s) of element (name and GPS reading)</i></p>
<p>Diskrisaun Badak <i>Short Description</i></p>

2. Elementus nia Karakteristikas

Elements and characteristics

Elementus material asociadu	<i>Associated tangible elements.</i>
Elementus immaterial asociadu	<i>Associated intangible elements.</i>
Nivel lian	<i>Speech (level) involved</i>
<p>Matenek nain hanoin katak elumentus nia orijen hosi ne'ebe? <i>Perceived Origin.</i></p>	

3. Involvementu pesoal kona ba elementus
 People involved in the component identified

Matenek nain (sira)/ema mak apresenta.	
<i>Practitioner (s)/performer (s):</i>	
Naran(sira) <i>Name (s)</i>	
Tinan <i>Age</i>	
Sexu <i>Gender</i>	
Ratu <i>Tribe</i>	
Status Sosial <i>Social Status</i>	
Kategoria Profesional <i>Professional Category</i>	
Kontaktu <i>Contact</i>	
Kontaktu <i>Alternativu (naran no numeru)</i> Alternative <i>Contact (names and numbers)</i>	

Partisipantes seluk (e.g. matenek nain) <i>Other Participants</i> (e.g. knowledge holders/custodians).
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Assesu Practica traditional mak governu assesu ba elementus ka elemuntus nia aspectivu (inclui sensitivu konaba tinan, sexu, klase, ratu).

Access Customary, governing access to the element or to aspect of it (Including age, gender, class, tribe, sensitivities).

Meius transmisaun *Modes of transmission.*

4. Elementu nia status: viabilidade. *State of the element/component: Viability.*

Ameasa ba elementus *Threats to the enactment*

Obstakulu ba transmisaun *Threats to the transmission.*

Disponibilidade elementu kultura material no rekursu mak asociadu

Availability of associated tangible elements and resources.

Viabilidade elementu material no imaterial ne'ebe asociadu

Viability of associated tangible and intangible elements

Sira halo buat ruma ona atu koko hodi salvaguarda?

Safeguarding measures in place.

5. Kolekta dadus Data Collection

Formulario kousiente asina ona?

Consent form signed?

Limitasaun, karik iha, konaba uza dadus. *Restrictions. If any, on use of inventoried data*

Nominaun ba ema ne'ebe bele simu informasaun aban bainrua?

Nominated inheritor (s) of cultural knowledge (names, addresses, ratu)

Descripsi atu identifica matenek nain iha foto.

Description for identify the lian nain photo.

Video komesa husi numero: *The number of video:*

Data (loron/fulan/tinan) kolekta dadus (karik different ba elementus nia locasaun)

Date of data collection.

Peskizador nia naran no asigna:

Researcher's name/s and signature

: