

STORIES ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF HUMANKIND, LISAN
AND SOME CONTROVERSIES IN A COMMUNITY ON THE
ATAURO ISLAND

HISTÓRIAS SOBRE AS ORIGENS DA HUMANIDADE, LISAN
E ALGUNAS CONTROVÉRSIAS EM UMA COMUNIDADE DA
ILHA DE ATAÚRO

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STORIES ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF HUMANKIND, *LISAN* AND SOME CONTROVERSIES IN A COMMUNITY ON THE ATAURO ISLAND

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Abstract: This paper is an exercise in analysing the similarities and possible contrasts between the narratives of an anthropogonic myth of the Humangili community, residents of the island of Atauro, Timor-Leste. Furthermore, I consider how these mythological stories influence tensions over the recognition of land ownership by a local community. To this end, the analyses were based on ethnographic observations, as well as in the dialogues with 16 *Haha Opun* from the community about the Myth of the Three Brothers, which describes the origin of their patriarchs.

Keywords: Atauro; mythology; *Lisan*; alliance system; ancestral stories.

HISTÓRIAS SOBRE AS ORIGENS DA HUMANIDADE, *LISAN* E ALGUMAS CONTROVÉRSIAS EM UMA COMUNIDADE DA ILHA DE ATAÚRO

Resumo: Este artigo é um exercício de análise sobre as semelhanças e possíveis contrastes acerca das narrativas de um mito antropogônico da comunidade Humangili, residentes da ilha de Ataúro, Timor-Leste. Além disso, faço algumas considerações sobre como estas histórias mitológicas influenciam as tensões acerca do reconhecimento à propriedade da terra de uma comunidade local. Para tal, as análises foram baseadas em observações etnográficas, bem como em conversas com 16 *Haha Opun* da comunidade sobre o Mito dos Três Irmãos, que relata a origem dos seus patriarcas.

Palavras-chave: Ataúro; mitologia; *Lisan*; sistema de alianças; histórias ancestrais.

This article presents some observations about the similarities and possible contrasts in the mythical stories of the humankind origin among the Humangili, a community on Timor-Leste's island of Atauro. Located north

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of the capital city of Dili, Atauro has approximately 10,213 inhabitants², divided into five communities or *suku*: Makili (Hresuk speakers), Makadade (Raklungu speakers), Beloi and Bikeli (Rasua speakers). The fifth *suku*, Vila Maumeta, is the island's administrative post, and has people from different parts of Atauro and Timor-Leste, with Tetun being its main linguistic variant. There is also the Manroni group, who speak the Dua or Dadu'a³ and live in the Ili Timur village, which today is part of the Makadade *suku*. The Manroni are descendants of an ancient and extinct kingdom.

The Humangili, as the inhabitants of the Makili *suku* identify themselves, are approximately 2,506 people living in the south-eastern part of the island, divided into four villages: Hatulela, Masilihu, Maulaku and Maumeta.

LISAN, HAHA OPUN AND THE STORIES OF THE ANCESTORS

Social relations among the Humangili – as well as in all Timorese social groups – are influenced, among other factors, by the *Lisan*, word in Tetun, which is usually translated as 'tradition' and, in anthropological studies, has been associated with the concept of *House*⁴. However, *Lisan* among the Humangili has a more fluid and dynamic definition, as it can be used to designate rituals, norms, moral patterns, stories, common practices between different groups, political alliances, places, objects, and even to define the psychological profile

² The numbers were provided in May 2021 by the director of the administrative post of Atauro.

³ Although the different *suku* share some common stories, they are quite heterogeneous. In addition to language variants, there are other differences in access to natural resources, religious systems (the island's population is mostly adept of the Assembly of God, except for the Humangili and the people of the Ili Timur village, who are predominantly Catholic), systems of marriage (Makadade is matrilineal, Humangili is patrilineal, *suku* Beloi and Bikeli have the habit of marrying among their church members), and exchange/economic system, etc. For a more detailed analysis of the marriage system, religion, exchange of goods, reciprocities, and economics among the Humangili see Boarccaech (2013).

⁴ For an analysis of the meaning of the *Lisan* and the relationship with the concept of *House* among the Humangili, see Boarccaech (2011; 2013; 2020). For further studies on the concept of *House*, see Lévi-Strauss (1986); Fox (1993); Carsten & Hugh-Jones (1995); Lea (1999); Gillespie (2000); McWilliam (2005).

of people, explain certain types of behaviour, and differentiate individuals and their families, among others.

Lisan has a subjective dimension, by placing people in a ‘belonging’ group that shares certain moral codes, symbols, stories, sensibilities, cosmogonies and mental patterns – that, despite being apparently uniform for each *Lisan*, present nuances from one individual to another within the same *Lisan*. The concept of *Lisan* also has a practical dimension as it is used for establishing hierarchies, social positions, inheritance and property rights, political alliances, as well as to determining rules for conflict resolution, punishments, economic relations, marriages, and so on. *Lisan* can, at the same time, refer to the practices and customs endogenous to the group, or to something more general and exogenous to it.

Due to the different levels of understanding, feelings, ideas, influences, and meanings that the *Lisan* may take on in people’s lives, I tend to observe them as a *sign*, where possible definitions – tradition, culture, *House*, clans, and so on – would be heuristic concepts that provide clues to their multiple forms of manifestation. According to Peirce’s (1977) semiotic theory, the *sign* or *representamen* is something that makes sense and represents something to someone through the triadic relationship with the *object* – what is referred to by the *sign* – and the *interpretant* – the mental effect of the *sign* on the interpreter –, being the cause and consequence of the *semiosis* process. This way of analysing the *Lisan* does not diminish, on the contrary, highlights the complexity of it – and that is the point.

The Humangili community has 12 *Lisan*, each with its own subdivisions or ramifications, called *Rumanan* or *Ruma Kotenan*, and its *Ruma Luli* (Sacred Houses). In alphabetical order, the *Lisan* Humangili and its ramifications are presented as follow⁵:

Hatauk: Korarek, Rulele, Dakokon, Masilihu I, Masilihu II, Mauranga, Maulele, Maulolo, Kiri Plohun, Ruma Oe, Ruma As, Lakupua, Mauruik, Ilikan I, Sesidi, Ilikan II, Tua-keduan, Tualete, Suraknao, Lekidaik.

⁵ In a previous study I presented a list of the main *Rumanan* (Boarcaech, 2013). Here, to register and preserve the names of the *Rumanan*, I have added some that have only few members and even the ones that have already disappeared.

Hatudalas: Lemenaru, Mau Hu'u, Kenakeu, Mautada, Kailaik, Humaheuknian, Nusapireti, Kalatohak, Ahlelehunian, Pikero, Mauruik, Hatumanu, Oealikor.

Hnelak: Hatukla'e, Pleden, Lo'o, Tulipeun, Ngesorun, Hatukmetam, Meturu, Ló.

Hnua Le'en: Masilihu, Atareti, Sulikrai, Lengesi, Rarepolik, Maurika, Takrae Marad, Pau'uak, Ahle'en, Ngesorun, Rumatakraemarad, Rumatua, Nusalei, Huhilok, Pasurak, Rerenian.

Lulopun: Kanapou, Kanumau, Maurika, Rumadorek, Lo'anan, Opratu, Ruma Ko'in, Pisin, Pikolo, Kola, Mauranga, Ruma Ngeok, Kanumau, Ruma Heru.

Maule'ek: Dudunian, Maurika, Ngleten, Leok'nan, Nusapireti, Oetata, Samalete, Damanian, Maupela, Meturu.

Mausera: Matakera, Dudumram, Manlohan, Ilimanu, Ahmetua, Lampia, Lohirik, Ilidauk.

Mautuda: Isahe, Tulipeun, Oe-mula, Tuahata, Mautuda, Selenga, Suru'asa, Rumangeok.

Rumamaru: no ramifications.

Soluan: Meturu, Hatutá, Isaik, Dah-Nohon, Maunua, Rumaharu, Rerein, Meniku, Hatupelak, Ko'inram, Hirikle'en, Ku'u Pirak-kola, Ahle'en Koin, Mu'u Tutun, Idoru Daii'ek.

Tetoha: Laularan, Noklete, Tuatele, Tuahata, Maunua, Maulaku, Le'un.

Tutunopun: Inunu Ngliran, Kahisipak, Kilukatin, Laudai, Lemenaru, Manrate, Nusa-Helin, Rum-Amaru, Rulele.

Rumamaru and Tutunopun originally were one *Lisan*, which split after an internal disagreement, so Rumamaru would have no ramifications. According to most Humangili I talked to, *Lisan* Mausera also doesn't have ramifications. However, the elders and *Haba Opun* Mausera claimed that they do have their own *Rumanan*, but those are unknown to most people because their *Lisan* has decreased over the years to having just a few members. There was also a 13th *Lisan*, called Tulai, that disappeared over time, and would have the following *Rumanan*: Rupileki, Lekisopa, Ididi and Loihirik.

In this ancestral system, the *Haha Opun* (in Tetun, *Lia Na'in*) are responsible, among other attributions, for preserving and narrating the stories of their ancestors, and the norms and customs of their respective *Lisan*. The stories about the genesis, important events, wars, ancestors' heroic deeds and the spirits of nature are considered assets of the *Lisan* and the *suku*.

The *Haha Opun* often keep these stories shrouded in mystery. As a result, it is common to find people who do not know, or only know fragments, of their own *Lisan's* stories. The *Haha Opun's* position as keeper of the words and the only one authorized to tell local stories, is one of the diacritics of power and social status among the inhabitants of Atauro, which increases according to the number of stories that a *Haha Opun* knows or claims to know (including about other *Lisan*). This control by the *Haha Opun*, along with variations in narratives between different interest groups, and the lack of written records to preserve and compare versions, are some of the factors that explain the discrepancies found in the collected stories.

In the past, these disagreements were mediated by *Haha Opun* Menuunu, who determined which version of the same story was correct. Menuunu, as a young man, allegedly died in an accident and came back to life during his burial. After returning from the world of the dead, Menuunu would have acquired special powers of healing, strength, premonition, and communication with the spirits of nature and ancestors. This contributed to him becoming, over time, the *Lela'it Pera'ik* of his *Lisan* and the most respected *Haha Opun* and *Mataplolon* of Atauro⁶. However, his death in 2010, at (allegedly) 112 years old, left a void in the *Haha Opun* Humangili power dynamics that, so far, has not been filled. This is because no other *Haha Opun* has managed to gather the necessary *capital* – in the sense that Bourdieu (1986; 1989) attributes to the term – to occupy this position. Not every generation has an elder who belongs to a lineage of ancient leaders and has returned from the world of the dead with supernatural powers.

⁶ *Lela'it Pera'ik* are the chiefs of the *Lisan* and the *Rumanan*. The *Mataplolon* are the healers, sorceress, and establish the relationship with the spirits of the ancestors. The *Haha Opun*, in turn, can also be called as *Klungubahan Opun* or *Li Opun* (see Hresuk-Portuguese Dictionary, in Boarcaech, 2013, pp. 240-302).

THE CREATION OF THE ISLAND AND THE MYTH OF THE THREE BROTHERS

Humangili stories have an internal structure that alternates between an elliptical narrative and repetitions. These are figures of speech and narrative strategies that, in a way, contribute to the narrator-listener's memorization, to highlight passages considered important, to maintain attention and interest in the story, to circumvent certain topics considered controversial, contradictory, or possible lapses of memory and logical gaps in the narrative. Another reason associated with these may be the attempt by *Haha Opun* not to reveal the whole story, omitting some details and information.

Below, I present a brief compilation of one of the island's origin myths narrated by different *Haha Opun* Humangili⁷. This story was chosen for a number of reasons: the *Haha Opun* authorized me to talk about it, and it doesn't belong to a specific *Lisan*, which means that it can be narrated by all *Haha Opun*. This, in turn, allows for observation of any contrasts and similarities emerging as the story is narrated by different *Haha Opun*. Finally, this story is related to a conflict over territoriality and recognition of the Manroni group, which I will analyse in the next section⁸.

The different narratives presented here are not intended to point out which one is 'correct' or 'original'. The objective is merely to illustrate the tensions and *language games* (Wittgenstein, 1994) or *truth games* (Foucault, 2010), where meanings do not have a predetermined essence, but have multiple possibilities that arise from the uses of words, everyday relationships, power struggles and the socio-historical context.

The story of the creation of the island and its first inhabitants considered official by the 16 *Haha Opun* I talked to – as well as by most Humangili –,

⁷ My first contact with the Humangili was in 2008. Since then, I have been conducting research and constantly visiting the community. The information here was collected over those years, as well in observations carried out between November 2020 and May 2021.

⁸ Territoriality understood as a collective effort by a given social group to occupy, use, control and identify with a specific portion of its biophysical environment, converting it into its territory (Little, 2002).

presents the following core narrative: in the beginning, everything was submerged by water, so Meromak, the demiurge god, created the islands, mountains, plants, and animals. It was at this time that the Manukoko mountain appeared, which is also the original name of the island. The Manukoko mountain was connected by a strip of land to Dili⁹ until, one day, a giant sea eel struck the sea and caused a cataclysm with floods and winds, separating Manukoko from the rest of Timor.

There is another version that – although considered apocryphal by the current *Haha Opun* – still circulates in the community. It states that, in the beginning, everything would be a single, immense land. The eel, in search for food, would have hit the ground, that split with the force of the impact, causing the sea, the Manukoko mountain, and the other neighbouring Indonesian islands – Wetar, Alor and Lira – to emerge. According to all the *Haha Opun* I spoke with, this version originated from a misunderstanding, and the person responsible for disseminating it has already been identified¹⁰.

To populate the island, Meromak created the first man, named Domateu. However, Domateu was sad for living alone. It was then that Meromak allowed a fish to transform itself into a pig, and then into a woman, to marry Domateu. This woman was named Inarika. They had three sons named Kutukia, Lekitoko and Komateu, respectively, the patriarchs of the Manroni, Humangili and Makadade groups. However, three *Haha Opun* mentioned – and some other people I spoke with corroborated this version – that the names of the patriarchs Manroni and Makadade would be Kolikey and Kolikey. To solve this supposed contradiction, the other *Haha Opun* claim that: a) the names are wrong as they would not conform to Menunu's and most *Haha Opun*'s version; b) the *Haha Opun* who 'changed' the names do not know the stories very well; c) these would be names belonging to some *Lisan* Humangili and not to the linguistic variants of the communities of the other patriarchs; d) some elders have difficulty in

⁹ For four *Haha Opun* the entire south coast of the island would be connected to Dili. For the others, there would be a narrow strip of land that would connect Atauro to the hill where the *Cristo Rei* statue is currently located in Dili.

¹⁰ This version of the story was recorded by Duarte (1984, p. 211).

correctly pronouncing the names due to advanced age and lack of teeth, and this different pronunciation would have been reproduced by some people who do not know the story, causing the confusion.

On the origin of Domateu and Inarika, two of the *Haha Opun* said that two sea eels, after receiving authorization from Meromak, have left the sea, and transformed into a man and a woman. These *Haha Opun*, while recognizing the first version as the one more vastly accepted in the community, asserted that the second story “can also be true”.

Another point of controversy is over when the giant eel would have separated the island from the rest of Timor. For five *Haha Opun*, the eel hit the sea because it was looking for food, but for the remaining 11, the eel was defending itself from the attack of people who wanted to kill it. To reconcile the two versions, seven *Haha Opun* said the attack could have happened while the eel sought food. Still on the separation of the island, for 12 *Haha Opun* this would have occurred before the three brothers/patriarchs were born, but for four *Haha Opun*, this would have occurred after. The *Haha Opun* are also divided over who are the people who tried to kill the eel. One of the versions states that the attackers were inhabitants of Atauro themselves, but another version – more widely accepted by the *Haha Opun* – states that these people were from other parts of Timor as, for the Humangili, their ancestors respected the animals and weren't aggressive.

Along with the factors mentioned above, there are other reasons for these discrepancies. As Todorov (2006) mentioned, there are no “primitive narratives”, because every narrative is a construction and a choice, they are part of a discourse and not a series of events. On the other hand, myths, although describing events that would explain the world, are not committed to materiality or the description of the facts themselves, as myths transcend the limitations of reality as we know it (Eliade, 1989; Barthes, 1999; Campbell, 2010). Another aspect to be considered is that the narrative about the creation of the island, and the one on the origin of the first humans, are two separate stories that, although being directly related, have specific objectives and intended messages. Over time, these stories intertwined, highlighting the logical gaps and inconsistencies in the narratives.

The version most accepted by the *Haha Opun* and the Humangili states that the birth order of the three brothers was: first, Manroni's patriarch, followed by Humangili's patriarch and, lastly, Makadade's patriarch. However, there are versions that say that the Makadade's patriarch was the first son, and Manroni's the last, or that the Humangili's patriarch was the youngest. All these versions are considered apocryphal by *Haha Opun* and by most Humangili. They claim not to know exactly how these versions came about, but they usually attribute it to the fact that some people disobey customs and speak without authorization, or without knowing the story. According to *Haha Opun* Kalisuk, sometimes "people talk without knowledge. (...) They don't know the story and talk about what they don't know".

One day, after the separation of the island, the three brothers were advised by their parents to look for new land to cultivate, as they were already adults and the place where they lived was too small for everyone. The most common version tells that the brothers gathered at the top of Manukoko mountain and shot arrows into the air. The arrow of Manroni's patriarch fell at Pihapan (Akrema), of Humangili's patriarch fell at Liangun (halfway between Humangili and current *suku* Vila Maumeta), while Makadade's patriarch arrow fell at Hirikron-Mera, near Maker.

After this, each of the brothers moved to the place where the arrows fell, giving rise to the Manroni, Humangili and Makadade communities. There is a tension among *Haha Opun* about whether people already lived in these places when the patriarchs arrived. These people would have been birds, fishes, plants, and other animals that were turned into humans to help the three brothers building their communities and having descendants. For 11 *Haha Opun*, it would be a contradiction for these people to exist before the three brothers moved to their respective lands, as: a) it would have been the three brothers who chose which animals would transform into people; b) there could not have been people before, as they had no way of knowing that the brothers would live in those places. However, six *Haha Opun* stated that the existence of people before the arrival of the patriarchs would not diminish their importance, as these people would have been created with the aim of helping the three brothers.

Another focus of tension is on the patriarchs' descendants. Although there is a 'list' of names considered official, it can change depending on which *Haha Opun* tells the story. While the unanimity of *Haha Opun* – and of Humangili people – say that *Lisan* Lulopon was the only one created by Lekitoko himself, three *Haha Opun* present their *Lisan* as descendants of Lekitoko. By using alleged connections by marriage of their ancestors, some even identify members of their respective *Lisan* – or themselves – as so.

The basic genealogy, approved by *Haha Opun* Menunu and accepted by all *Haha Opun* Humangili, is as follows:

Hatauk: Ketikia, Kurakia, Dapuli, Hareti, Retikeli, Surakoko, Apakngi, Apaknga, Kurukoli, Karakolik, Kiamatak, Mesina, Kuknae, Kaknae, Karateku, Karapauk, Hareleu, Haresera, Memelok, Karamelok, Mehelo, Koratara.

Hatudalas: Kaidu, Kisolik, Kidois, Kaladois, Kutu-Uma, Koli-Uma, Kutusalik, Mesalik, Kurata, Kauheru.

Hnelak: Kiasonik, Kakisonik, Huroni, Karoni, Kopakula, Kasukula, Ketikai, Kirikai, Daholo, Dahopa.

Hnua Le'en: Klima Mauhare, Harekuru, Harekera, Ketata, Kelata, Kirikisu, Pekisu, Pekoli, Palakoli, Penghuin, Mauhuin, Ketihuin, Huinloli, Huinkaki, Kurukaki.

Lulopon: Lekitoko, Pekau, Peku, Kianara, Kahinara, Kiripeng, Kolopeng.

Maule'ek: Tuakoli, Kolirosin, Penge, Maudara, Kirikuli, Maukuli, Sopateu, Lahirika, Dorika, Domasuk, Kirikoe, Palakoe, Klingahloi, Domasin.

Mausera: Ketu, Ketahe, Kasukai, Mepais, Kasose, Kasahe, Koritutun, Korimetan, Kurametam, Sopametam, Koridauk, Keradauk, Kelakia, Kelaliang.

Mautuda: Pa'okia, Pa'odai, Kiamatak, Karasura, Lekeu, Kahilou, Pa'oreti, Pa'onae, Pekila, Kopakila, Ketikori, Kalekora, Tuakela, Korikela, Tuadam, Pasura.

Soluan: Kumalou, Komalou, Semea, Melipan, Karakena, Komakolo, Kelakolo, Komareti, Metak, Roma, Kumata, Kasata.

Tetoha: Sermauk, Lakumauk, Kirikanu, La'ukanu, Lekuti, Leklalak, Selekudu, Saupan.

Tutunopun and Rumamaru: Kurukai, Paukaki, Turusua, Sea-sua, Sea-Plao, Sea-Amat, Kirireti, Sailoli, Koikera, Palakera, Kutu'uma, Koluma, Kutupais, Kolipais, Kolikose, Palakose, Kutusali, Mehali.

Rumamaru and Tutunopun have the same ancestral lineage, as in the past they were a single *Lisan*. Tulai, which disappeared over time, would have the following ancestors: Hatu, Melarak, Dilele, Kopalele, Mau'uak, Maukai, Teularak, Melarak, Lehatak, Ome.

The Manroni community had the largest territorial extension. Their domains comprised more than half of the island, stretching from the top of Manukoko, passing through Maker, Uadalu, Tulai, and Vila Maumeta to Akrema, at the far east of the island.

The relationship between the brothers was not peaceful. On the contrary, it was marked by many conflicts and tensions. There is one episode that tries to explain this disharmony: it says that one day the three brothers, after passing through Akrema, feeling tired and hungry, practiced cannibalism. As a result, they would have been cursed by the nature spirits, causing all the disagreements and tensions between them.

The story above currently generates a lot of controversy among the Humangili, who generally prefer to avoid it. Amongst the possible reasons for this story to be gradually 'forgotten' are that it directly affects the community's self-image – who describe themselves as peaceful and friendly; their relationship with the spirits – as acknowledging the episode would mean that their patriarchs were cursed; and their Christian sensibilities, which grew among the Humangili with the strengthening of the Catholic Church and the introduction of the Assembly of God, mainly from the end of the 1970s. Some *Haha Opun* even accuse the evangelical community and certain Catholic leaders of creating these stories to denigrate the image of their ancestors in an attempt to weaken their belief in spirits¹¹.

The main war came after the patriarch of the Manroni sold part of his territory to people from neighbouring Indonesian islands and other parts of Timor-Leste. The Humangili and Makadade patriarchs considered this an act of treason, as they believed that the island belonged to them and could not be sold. After a long and bloody fratricidal war, the Manroni group was defeated. The few Manroni's nobles and warriors who survived would have taken refuge in Ili Timur village, on the upper part of the mountain, where

¹¹ For studies on Christianity and local beliefs in Atauro see Duarte (1984), Durand (2004), Boarcceach (2011; 2013; 2020).

was their administrative headquarters. Thus, the remaining Manroni land on the Midwestern side of the island was divided between Humangili and Makadade, while the lands located in the eastern region gave rise to the Beloi and Bikeli *suku*.

Although not considered the official story, this version is widespread, and inhabits the collective memory of the Humangili and other communities in the island, portraying the Manroni as cheats, greedy and envious¹². Despite this, *Haha Opun* Menuunu and Chief Ketemean describe the Manroni as explorers, prosperous, enterprising people, what would have caused the envy of other groups on the island. According to Menuunu and Ketemean, the Manroni never sold their land, as they knew and respected local customs. They say that the Manroni maintained commercial and marriage relations with people from the neighbouring islands, thus allowing – upon payment of taxes – people from other places to live on their land. To manage their domains, the Manroni divided their territory into three parts: Beloi, Bikeli, and the central administration, in Ili Timur. Therefore, in this version, Beloi and Bikeli already existed before the war and were created by the patriarch Manroni himself to organize his community¹³.

The story goes on, but for the purposes of this article, the fragments presented illustrate the tensions surrounding the Humangili narratives. As I mentioned earlier, myth of the Three Brothers is directly connected to a contemporary conflict over land rights, and the recognition of the Manroni as an independent group.

CONTROVERSIES: ANCESTRAL CAUSES AND PRESENT CONSEQUENCES

Among the Humangili, all community spaces – and the island in general – have human or non-human owners. Nobody can use these spaces without authorisation. This includes the trees, fruits and even the sea used for fishing.

¹² On collective memory and how it influences the way people perceive themselves and others, see Pollack (1989; 1992) and Halbwachs (2013).

¹³ For an analysis of territoriality on Atauro and the conflicts between the Manroni and other communities on the island, see Boarcaech (2013).

Each *Lisan* and their respective *Rumanan* have a specific place where they can fish. At times, collective fishing involving different *Rumanan* are organized, when fishing in each other's areas is allowed. However, this is part of a negotiation, depending on reciprocity relationships and the alliance system among the *Lisan*. Each *Lisan* has its own boats that, in the past, were used in a rotating system by its households. However, currently, some households and *Rumanan* have their own fishing boats. According to *Lela'it* Kasata, the *Lisan's* boats have the following names:

Hatudalas uses the boat Kau-Lolo, Soluan uses Manluan, Mautuda uses Telan, Mautera uses Sailero, Tutunopun and Rumamaru use boat Maulatik, Hnelak uses Bibi Deli, Lulopun uses Reremanu, Hnua Le'en and Maule'ek use the boat Molai, Tetoha uses Samaliu, Hatauk uses Terimanu.

In 2009, there was a fishing competition held at *suku* Beloi. This was an initiative of the Office of the President of the Republic, jointly with the Ministry of Tourism, to promote the country's economic and touristic development. It gathered fishermen from Atauro, other regions of Timor-Leste, as well as some foreigners. The Humangili leaders objected to the competition and did not participate, claiming it was disrespectful to their ancestors and harming to local fisheries.

On this occasion, some residents of the Ili Timur village decided to make a protest. They brought in a boat for the competition, and, in a small piece of cardboard, they identified it: *hakail ikan husi suku Manroni, Subdistritu Atauro, Distritu Dili* (Manroni *suku*, Atauro sub-district, Dili district line-fishing [*team*]). The protesters were making their request, as alleged members of the Manroni community, to have back their land and become a *suku*. This generated resistance and indignation from some of the people and leaders from Atauro who attended the event. The PNTL police tore up the cardboard sign and proceeded to arrest the protest leader, a 28-year-old young man, who claimed to have the right to be there and make his demands known.

Confusion escalated and four police officers, two of them Humangili, began beating the leader of the group of protesters with punches, kicks, and tried to take him to a place out of sight. The young man, without fighting back, pressed his arms to his body to avoid being handcuffed. Another police

officer, a member of the maritime police, approached and, with the base of a rifle, hit the young man. All of this was watched from a distance of a few meters by other police officers and local and national political leaders. Finally, the young man, in pain, began to scream as a sign that he would no longer resist, and the PNTL officers removed him from the scene.

After this incident, I talked to several people from Atauro who attended the event. All were unanimous in attributing responsibility for the aggressions to the protesters' group. According to them, that was not the time for protests, as it had been agreed that the leaders of all communities would set a date for the Manroni group to present their demands. However, as they decided to act without authorization, they should pay for their disrespectful attitude. Other comments were in the sense of attacking the protesters, accusing them of being irresponsible, agitators, of just wanting to create confusion, and not being from the Manroni group, having got involved in the *suku* creation movement just to acquire land for themselves.

Ketemean, leader of the Manroni community, claims that restoration of their kingdom/*suku* was being prepared when, in the mid-1970s, Indonesia invaded Timor-Leste, halting the process. Also, according to him, from 2002 onwards, several attempts to negotiate with local leaders were made, without success. Ketemean added that, since 2007, the Manroni have been claiming their autonomy directly to the State as well, thought the Ministry of State Administration and other State institutions. Nonetheless, by 2021, this issue hasn't been addressed, and the situation remains unchanged.

There are two different narratives about the war against the Manroni. The first, as we saw earlier, is mythological: the Manroni's patriarch would have sold part of his land, what outraged his brothers. The second narrative supposedly has a more factual basis: according to the *Haha Opun* Kalisuk, Kasata, Kurureti, and Menunu, among others, the war against the Manroni has taken place at the beginning of the last century, after the Portuguese government determined that some *Liurai* – governor, king, leader – associated with the Portuguese would collect the taxes from other kingdoms. The *Liurai* Manroni disagreed submitting to another counterpart, triggering a war where a group of warriors formed by Humangili, Makadade, and warriors coming from

other areas of Timor-Leste joined forces to face the Manroni¹⁴. According to the leader Manroni Ketemean, in line with the version narrated by eight *Haba Opun* Humangili, after the war, the Manroni had lost most of their leaders, and their population was dramatically reduced. So, it would have been agreed among the leaders of Atauro that the Manroni would no longer constitute a kingdom at that time but would be allowed to retake it when their leadership and population was restructured.

This conflict had repercussions among the Humangili. In addition to expanding their lands, the Humangili also had a *Lisan* extinguished, named Tulai, and the appointment of a new *Eran* – word in *Hresuk* for *Liurai*. According to Karakoli, a 42-year-old man who claims to be one of the Tulai descendants, due to the war, part of the members of *Lisan* Tulai – which he claims was a Manroni group that lived nearby, and controlled, the headwater of the same name – were enslaved, killed, ran away or were incorporated into other *Lisan* through marriages. This version was confirmed by different *Haba Opun*, including Menunu, Kasata, Kurureti, among others.

According to Menunu – and the *Haba Opun* of nine other *Lisan* –, after the war, the Portuguese government named one of the leaders of *Lisan* Soluan as the Humangili's *Eran* because “he spoke Portuguese”. In this sense, Karahuin – who occupies the positions of *Lela'it* and *Haba Opun* of *Lisan* Soluan – told me that their ancestors were the *Eran* but, with the Indonesian invasion, the Humangili were forced to choose new leaders.

The mythology of *Lisan* Soluan's origin says that its patriarch was from Manatutu, having arrived in Humangili after spending several days adrift at sea. Soluan means ‘the owners of the prison’, ‘those who arrest’. The question I asked the *Haba Opun* was: how a *Lisan* whose patriarch was a *Pena'e* (Timorese from another region) can become an *Eran* over *Lisan* whose stories go back to the origins of the creation of the world and humankind, such as the Lulopon or the Tutunopun, Hatudalas and Hatauk? The unanimous answer was that the

¹⁴ This narrative finds correspondence with the political-administrative context of Timor-Leste in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During this period, the Portuguese government carried out an extensive administrative and tax reform, in addition to facing constant revolts from the local kingdoms. On the conflicts and administrative changes in this period, see Gunn (1999) and Oliveira (2004a; 2004b). For an analysis of this conflict in Atauro, see Boarccaech (2013).

Soluan had taken the *Eran* role to negotiate with the Portuguese government, but the community always had other leaders. This helps us to understand the reasons leading the Humangili to readily accept the Indonesian determination, which in the early 1980s forced the Timorese to choose new *suku* chiefs.

Returning to the Manroni issue, a central question remains. How to solve this cognitive dissonance where, according to local stories and rules, the Manroni would have the right to land and to build a kingdom – nowadays, *suku* – of their own? The Humangili use some logical strategies, such as: a) acknowledge that the Manroni have rights, avoiding the logical-rational conflict with their stories and beliefs and maintaining the self-image of being respectful of ancestral customs, without, however acting towards enforcing it; b) evoke moral aspects and transfer the responsibility for having the issue still unsolved to the Manroni¹⁵, accusing them of disrespecting ancestral rules and agreements, and acting without authorization from leaders and elders. Often, this strategy is paired with statements like “this is our culture”, “the rules are inherited from the ancestors”, “it has always been like this” or, “these are rules to keep order” and so on; c) they resort to some logical fallacies, promoting the disregard of arguments contrary to their own. Among these fallacies, the most common are the *ad hominin*, to attack the honour and motivations of the ‘other’; the *scarecrow*, to circumvent the merits of the problem; or the *appeal to prejudice* and the *appeal to authority* (*argumentum at verecundian*)¹⁶.

As I tried to demonstrate, among the Humangili, the stories considered ancestral are not static, but are part of the social dynamics and, while they influence, they are also influenced by the logical patterns, sensibilities, and sociocultural context. In a way that may seem non-intuitive and even apparently contradictory, the ancestral-mythological explanations (about the world and reality), and those supported by alleged factual events and practical experiences, coexist, in a movement of approximation and distancing, depending on the circumstances.

¹⁵ The Humangili’s manifest discourse evokes moral arguments that, paradoxically, claim to be both empirical (culturally learned), innate (notions of right and wrong are born with the person), and rationalist (elaborated in the relationship between personal experiences and cognitive maturation). For a debate on the bases of moral decisions and arguments – innate, empirical, rational, or intuitive –, see Haidt (2020).

¹⁶ See Boarccaech (2013) for an analysis of the possible factors involved in the resistance of Atauro’s leaders to recognize the *suku* Manroni (territorial, political, religious reorganization, distribution of natural resources, among others).

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