Timor-Leste: From the Lens of Binary Oppositions

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Outline

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Binary opposition is the system by which, in language and thought, two theoretical opposites are strictly defined and set off against one another. **Dualism**: the division of something conceptually into two opposed or contrasted aspects, or the state of being so divided.

Anthropologists used the idea of dualism or binary opposition to analyze social structures. Among them Van Wouden, Levis-Strauss, James Fox, etc.
Binary Opposition in Anthropology

- Van Wouden (1935 [1965]): cross cousin marriage is ‘pivot’ to social organization represented two opposed system of a finál relationship between groups’ which provided the basis for all-embracing cosmological classification – formed the foundation for the dualistic and triadic patterns of classification – interwoven in the cosmologies of eastern Indonesia.
Binary Opposition in Anthropology

• Levi-Strauss (1956) in his ‘Do dual organizations Exist’ aim to look at comparison between American Indian and Indonesian type of dual structure.

• James Fox (1989): Analyzed three case studies of dualism (Savu, Rote and Atoni).
Binary Opposition in Timor-Leste

*Kaibauk* - Masculine

*Belak* - Feminine
Binary Opposition in Timor-Leste

Political House (Masculine)

Ritual House (Feminine)
Binary Opposition in Timor-Leste

Ritual Language – Naueti:
1) "Wono Malae ne lo ---- It is foreign war
2) Le’a Malae ne lo ---- It is foreign conflict
3) Uka la watu o ---- Run on the rocks
4) Uka la kai o ---- Run on the trees
5) Horo la baha o ---- Hide on the mountains
6) Horo la ba'a lale ---- hide in the valleys
7) Buikia toto'o, Anakia toto'o ---- [we are] indeed the little chickens without their mother, [we are] indeed orphans without parents
8) Otarae-wailita gamama'a lebati --- girl-boy are all here today
9) Uma'ana-Oasae gamama'a lebati --- wife giver - wife taker are all here today
10) Ware-Kaka gamama'a lebati --- Younger - older brothers are all here today
11) Ana ulu - Ana Iku gamama'a lebati --- Younger - older sisters are all here today
12) inatua-amadae* gamama'a lebati --- aunties - uncles are all here today

*Inatua (in Naueti): Father’s sister; amadae: Father’s sister’s husband
Binary Opposition in Timor-Leste

Tasi-Feto (North)

Rai-ikun (West)

Tasi-Mane (South)

Rai-ulun (East)
Timor-Leste Cosmology

Masculine world

Feminine world

Lulik

Physical/material/real World (Masculine)

Spiritual/conceptual World (feminine)
**Timor-Leste Cosmology**

* **Lulik**: the ritual center, the concept, the cosmos, the divine, the spiritual world, the ancestors, the root of life, the moral standards, **the core values**

### Feminine world (silent, Immobile, passive, cold)

1. Nature
2. Wife Giver (*Umane*)
3. Ritual Power
4. Ritual Sacred House
5. Ritual Leader
6. Older
7. Old Values
8. Indigenous
9. Earth
10. Insider
11. Water
12. Pig, bird, snake (feminine animals)

### Masculine world (noisy, mobile, active, hot)

1. People
2. Wife Taker (*Fetosan*)
3. Political Power
4. Political Sacred House
5. Political Leader
6. Younger
7. New Values
8. Foreign
9. Sky
10. Outsider
11. Fire
12. Water Buffalo, cattle, goat (masculine animals)

**Feminine world**
- Silent
- Immobile
- Passive
- Cold

**Masculine world**
- Noisy
- Mobile
- Active
- Hot
Symbolism
Lulik, Symbolism and Cosmology

Masculine world

Feminine world

Star (white color)

Birds, moon, women breasts, sea shell (green color)

Buffalo horn (black color)
Duality in Belief System
Indigenous – Foreign Dualism
Dualism in Marriage Relationship
1. The closer you are to the center [of the diagram] the more superior/powerful you become because the center controls the most important value for the society, which is life itself.

2. **Feminine** world is ritually superior but politically inferior to **masculine** world and it represents the idea of peace, fertility and tranquility; while masculine world represent the idea strength, security and protection.

3. In real life the two worlds of **masculine** and **feminine** must complement each other in order to create a balance society to achieve peace and tranquility.

4. The categorization of **masculine** and **feminine** worlds, does not necessarily means the **feminine** world is solely for women or **masculine** world equals men, rather it emphasizes that both sexes operate in both worlds.

5. People value one part of a binary opposition over another
Matak-Malirin For us all
Thank you