

## Lorosae versus Loromonu

*Alex Tilman analyses the origins of the perceived east-west division in the culturally and linguistically diverse Timor-Leste*

During the crisis last year which nearly paralysed Timor-Leste, a couple of Tetum words became a prominent feature in many people's attempt to explain the root causes of that crisis. The words are lorosae and loromonu, literally sunrise and sunset, meaning east and west respectively. Somehow Timor-Leste, a half-island occupying the eastern half of Timor, with the rest forming part of Indonesia's East Nusa Tenggara, became a country with two main ethnic rivals, the Easterners and the Westerners. Although as an East Timorese I have always been aware of this "division" and have often referred to those coming from the eastern half of Timor-Leste as Easterners and the other half as Westerners, it never crossed my mind that this dichotomy would one day translate into such a depth dividing the East Timorese into two ethnicities. The division is only as relevant as speaking about a Sydneysider and a Melbournian.

For me the use of the words lorosae/loromonu is no different to saying, Shinzo Abe and Manmohan Singh are Asians and Thabo Mbeki and Olusegun Obasanjo are Africans. The use of these tags has no connection with anyone's cultural or ethnic inheritance. Actually, if you lived in Dili, the lorosae/loromonu tags don't even apply to you, an interesting point which will help me explain how these words came to be used the way they are. In my opinion, it is arguable that the Dili residents, and to a large extent the Dili elites, are responsible for introducing the new meaning and use of the terms lorosae and loromonu.

But how did the East Timorese begin to employ these tags to label each other the way they do? I think the answer lays in the way Timor-Leste is shaped geographically. It is a long half island with Dili situated near the centre. As the capital of Portuguese Timor, Dili was the centre of colonial and religious administration, trade, education, etc. People from all over Portuguese Timor would have flocked to Dili regularly to deal with each other as it was also the most central location in that half island. Although I would not attempt to guess what someone from Lospalos would call his brethren from Baucau to Maliana, I would suspect that to Dili residents it would not have been too difficult to refer to these outsiders in a most simplistic way. Those coming from the east of Dili are lorosae or Easterners, and those from the west of Dil are loromonu or Westerners. To the east of Dili are the areas of Manatuto, Baucau, Viqueque and Lautem. To the west,

are the areas of Ermera, Cova Lima, Liquica, Ainaro, Bobonaro and so on. So the east/west division took shape and became an essential part of Tetum vocabulary.

I don't know if there is any recognisable trait in the East Timorese population that would make it possible to describe someone as a typical lorosae or loromonu. Although if you speak to an East Timorese they would say that someone from Lospalos is typically tall, fair skinned, etc. In my experience this is nothing more than a popular myth. If you put two East Timorese together there is no way of knowing who is from where. In fact, you wouldn't even be able to tell the difference between any two populations from the different islands in the Lesser Sunda. An East Timorese look no different to a West Timorese, a Florinese or a Wetarese.

In addition, the East Timorese population has also over the years taken on genes imported from Portugal, Africa, India, China and Indonesia and lately Australians. This makes it even more difficult to distinguish between East Timorese from the different regions of Timor Leste.

Linguistically, distinction within the East Timorese population is more visible and relevant, yet this subject actually contradicts the premises supporting an ethnic divide instead of reinforcing them. The languages spoken in Timor-Leste are divided into two main language families, the Austronesian and the Papuan. The Papuan family includes the languages of Fataluco, Makasa'e, Makalero and Bunak of Lospalos, Baucau/Viqueque regions, Iliomar (a sub-district of Lospalos) and Bobonaro respectively. The rest of the languages belong to the Austronesian family. To the east of Dili you have Austronesian language speakers coexisting with the Papuan speakers side by side. In Baucau and Viqueque districts, there is a large population of Austronesian speakers (the Kawaimina language group and Tetum). In fact, the main language in Viqueque is Tetum Terik of which Tetum Dili (the lingua franca) is derived from. To the west of Dili you have the Bunak speakers, a Papuan language enclave surrounded by Austronesian speakers.

So if there were to be any division at all based on ethnicity, the existing linguistic differences in Timor-Leste would present a more tangible point for which anyone can turn it into a rallying point. Maybe something like the Papuan speakers against the Austronesian speakers? Quite to the contrary, there is just no sign of any division of this kind. Bobonaro is a district made up of Kemak and Bunak speakers while Ermera is composed of Mambae and Kemak. Yet the Kemak speakers would say that they are either from Ermera or Bobonaro. The same goes for the Makasa'e speakers of Viqueque and Baucau. Therefore, when we take a closer look into how the simple

lorosae/loromonu tags could have caused such a deep crisis which threatened to plunge the country into an irreversible cycle of violence, it can only leave us with a conclusion that it indeed has nothing to do with ethnicity. The cause is something else.

One other thing worth noting is the fact that lorosae/loromonu is not the only contrasting tag circulating in Timor-Leste. If you speak to the Dili residents, in particular those who have always lived there until 1999, they would talk about the influx of "ema foho" into Dili. "Ema foho" is the name given to anyone who live outside of Dili, in particular those living in remote and inaccessible parts of Timor-Leste. Dili residents regard themselves as "ema Dili" in contrast to "ema foho". The label "ema foho" connotes traits associated with the non-Dili resident rural dwellers such as being uncivilised, illiterate, backward, etc. Today's Dili residents would admit privately that after 1999 events, as these "ema foho" settled in Dili, the city quickly degenerated. Many even suggest that the only solution would be to send them all back to their villages in "foho" (mountain). And of course another notorious label is the firaku/kaladi pair. But for this I will need to write a different entry altogether and hopefully soon.

In general almost every district or every linguistic region has their own tags which stereotype them. The Maubisse are known as fehukropa, the Tetum name for potato. Maybe this is due to the amount of potato grown in Maubisse, but being called a potato is not a compliment. Potatoes are grown by peasants who are perceived as illiterate, backward and uncivilised, so that to be associated with a potato is to be associated with these qualities. The Atsabe people are referred to as lipadois or smelly sarong. I don't know why. The Bobonaro people are called kudaulun or horse thieves. The Makasae people are known as masters, the Bahasa abbreviation for mahasiswa terminal meaning bus station university students. It is said that the Makasa'e youths tend to mill around at the bus terminals which also doubles as their "school." The Makasa'e people are also called muturabu. It is a Makasa'e word that describes anyone with violent tendencies. Interestingly there is no such tag reserved for Dili residents.

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