



## Reducing conflict based on history education and oral traditions of *Atoin Pah Meto* in West Timor

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores how the historical education and oral traditions of the *Atoin Pah Meto* people of West Timor serve as cultural resources for conflict reduction and local history learning. Using a qualitative historical approach, data were gathered through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with traditional, community, and religious leaders, and analysis of relevant documents. The data were processed through heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography to ensure credibility. Findings show that the *Atoin Pah Meto* sustain a rich repertoire of rituals and oral narratives that embody collective memory and moral guidance. Central to their worldview is the philosophy *nekaf-mese ma ansaof-mese* "one heart, one soul" which reinforces solidarity, mutual responsibility, and peaceful coexistence. Practices such as the *Oko Mama* betel-nut ceremony and ritual speech acts illustrate the principles of symbolic interactionism, revealing how shared symbols and interaction continually produce social cohesion. Integrating these traditions into history education can strengthen identity, environmental care, and culturally rooted peacebuilding.

### KEYWORDS

Reduce Conflict, Social Harmony, Learning Resources, *Atoin Pah Meto*, West Timor

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## Introduction

Like a giant building, the Indonesian state was built from the stones of various ethnic cultures, which differ in quality. Each ethnic group contributes its rich cultural values to perfect the physical and spiritual building of the Indonesian nation. Of the many stones used in these buildings, there are also stones from the Timorese ethnic group on the western part of Timor Island, with their cultural characteristics. As a system, *Atoin Pah Meto* culture is a totality with individuality, meaning, and uniqueness.

Why are ethnic residents called *Dawan*, even though the letter *D* in the local language vocabulary (*Uab Meto*) does not exist? *Dawan* was originally the name the Portuguese gave to only three kingdoms: the Anfoan Kingdom, Fatuleu, and the Amarasi Kingdom. In the Tetun language, "*Dawan*" means mountain or mountain people, which is still commonly used to refer to the Timorese ethnic group who inhabit the districts of North Central Timor, South Central Timor, and Kupang district (Benu & Benu, 2021; Pandin & Nor, 2022).

Furthermore, the name *Dawan* is taken from the term *Atoni*, which is commonly used among members of this ethnic group (Sili, 2025). This name is part of the typical term for the *Atoin Pah Meto* ethnic group, which means dry land residents or island residents (Ajito & Ratoe Oedjoe, 2020). A similar thing also happens to the Dayak people in northern Kalimantan, who call themselves 'we continent', meaning we are continental or island residents (J. Garang, 1974).

In the Timorese language (*Uab Meto*), if a noun stands alone as an independent word, then the word does not experience a change or shift in pronunciation. However, when combined with other nouns or adjectives, the noun being described changes when written, and likewise results in a shift in its structure. In linguistics, such a sound shift is called metathesis, the exchange or transposition of letters or sounds in a word. For example, when the word *Atoin* stands alone, the vowel sound *i* is replaced with the consonant sound *n* so that the pronunciation becomes *Atoni* (Benu et al., 2025; Nuryaman & Sugianto, 2019).

The word *Atoni* itself means 'person or human'. Therefore, it is a wrong or unnecessary repetition if people call this ethnic group the name "*Orang Atoni*" (Manafe et al., 2024). However, it is unclear when the term was used verbally among the ethnic Timorese population. Meanwhile, *Pah* means 'land' (supernatural). The people of West Timor respect the land as the place where they stand or the foundation of their lives. Because of this, the word *Pah* is always associated with a god; usually, they refer to land as a god (*Uis Pah*).

Meanwhile, *Meto* means 'dry or dry environment'. The Timorese people believe that the dry environment is where they carry out activities to fulfill their living needs. Moreover, this can refer to the carrying out of daily life activities, no matter how small their value is for human life.

As the largest tribal or ethnic group in the West Timor region, the Timorese people have their own particular way of life (Amsikan, 2024; Andaya, 2010). This view still often finds influence and is also used by its members as guidelines and norms for living together religiously and socially in kinship environments and the wider community. Everything exists, is owned in oral form, and is passed down orally to subsequent generations in various meetings.

A short expression caught the author's attention for further analysis in this article, namely *Nekafmese-Ansaofmese* (one heart-one soul), or often formulated as an imperative: *nekmes ma ansaomes!* This expression is understood as the philosophy of life of the West Timorese people, which significantly influences people's ways of living. However, before analysing these expressions, it is necessary to mention the influence of oral traditions in the lives of the Timorese people, especially in mountainous and inland areas.

This article is inspired by the National Education System Law Number 20 of 2003, which provides opportunities for the community to develop formal education according to the characteristics of their culture. One of the characteristics of the West Timorese ethnic group is a desire for a strong sense of identity. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce local values in schools so that students do not lose their identity and make the school not only function as a means of conveying modern knowledge but also as a vehicle for preserving the culture of the community

where the school is located. Apart from that, it enables students to obtain all the knowledge needed for progress, but all of this knowledge is grounded in the context of local culture. This phenomenon is believed to have the potential to build local concepts that may help to preserve history and oral traditions, influencing and producing learning designs based on local wisdom appropriate to local culture and physical conditions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Foundations of Symbolic Interactionism***

Symbolic interactionism provides a sociological lens for understanding how people create and negotiate meaning in everyday life. Emerging from the pragmatist tradition of the early Chicago School, it views reality as socially constructed through interaction rather than as an objective given (Bruce & Blumer, 1988; Mead, 1934). George Herbert Mead laid the groundwork by analysing the dynamic relationship of mind, self, and society, proposing that the self develops only through communication. Individuals learn to see themselves from the standpoint of the “generalized other,” internalising communal expectations to guide their own conduct (Mead, 1934).

Bruce & Blumer (1988) formalised this perspective and coined the term “symbolic interactionism,” summarising three central premises: (a) humans act toward things based on the meanings those things hold for them; (b) those meanings arise out of social interaction; and (c) meanings are continuously modified through interpretive processes. These propositions shift sociological analysis from deterministic structures to the negotiated character of social life (Carter & Fuller, 2016; Maines & Charon, 1981).

Language and other shared symbols are fundamental in this framework. Symbols are not mere tools of communication but the very means by which reality is constituted. Through language, people conduct “inner conversations,” imagine the perspectives of others, and adjust behaviour accordingly (Bruce & Blumer, 1988; Mead, 1934). Culture is not static; it is recreated each time individuals interact (Fine, 1993; Sandstrom et al., 2002).

Several core concepts deepen these ideas. Mead (1934) distinguished between the “I” and the “Me,” where the Me represents internalised community expectations and the I embodies spontaneous, creative responses. Their interplay explains both conformity and innovation (Denzin, 1992). The generalized other refers to the shared perspective of the broader group that individuals adopt to participate in collective life. At the same time, role-taking captures the capacity to see oneself from another’s standpoint, enabling cooperation and mutual understanding (Stryker & Vryan, 2006).

### ***Key Developments and Contemporary Perspectives***

Since Blumer’s formulation, scholars have extended symbolic interactionism in various directions while maintaining its core concern with meaning-making. Identity theory integrates role concepts to explain how stable social networks shape the self (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Dramaturgical approaches, most famously Goffman’s (1959) analysis of the presentation of self, emphasise the performative aspects of everyday interaction and the strategic management of impressions. Cultural and collective memory studies highlight how rituals, narratives, and symbols sustain group identities and transmit moral orders across generations (Fine, 1993; Snow & Anderson, 1987).

These strands collectively reinforce the principle that social reality is an ongoing accomplishment. They illustrate that meanings are neither fixed nor merely inherited; instead, they are negotiated, contested, and renewed whenever people engage with one another. Whether examining small-group encounters, community rituals, or large-scale cultural narratives,

symbolic interactionism focuses on the interpretive processes through which humans construct and reconstruct their social worlds (Carter & Fuller, 2016; Maines & Charon, 1981).

## Method

This qualitative research was conducted among the people of West Timor (*Atoin Pah Meto*) of East Nusa Tenggara. The reason for choosing this location is that *Atoin Pah Meto* is still developing and maintaining its history and traditions to reduce the conflict that occurred in the West Timor region. Informants were chosen purposively, with clear inclusion criteria such as age (above 25 years), active involvement in community rituals, and recognised knowledge of local history and traditions. That is, they were chosen based on the researcher's considerations in order to obtain accurate data. The number of informants was determined through data saturation, and recruitment continued until no significant information emerged.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with key informants. The interview aims to obtain data about how efforts to reduce conflict are based on education of the history and traditions of *Atoin Pah Meto*. Participatory observation is carried out to observe and listen to the behaviour and words of informants for some time without manipulating or controlling, as well as recording findings that meet the requirements for use at the interpretive level of analysis. This technique collects data by following and observing events, mainly traditional rituals related to efforts to reduce conflict based on historical education and the *Atoin Pah Meto* tradition. Document studies were carried out to examine documents such as treatises, papers, or books that discussed efforts to reduce conflict based on historical education and the *Atoin Pah Meto* tradition.

Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity through pseudonyms, and securing approval from the relevant local community leaders before fieldwork commenced. Data validity was realised through observation and interview data triangulation to determine consistency.

Data analysis refers to Moleong's steps (2017): data reduction, display, and verification. The researcher does not subtract or add data at the reduction stage level. The data must match the data obtained from the informant. This means that researchers on this occasion must check and group the field data, compare, relate, differentiate, and store it correctly and adequately. In the data display, the researcher displays all the data. Meanwhile, at the data verification stage, the researcher re-examines the data provided to determine the truth or validity of the data.

Next, the data is interpreted using symbolic interaction theory, where humans form meaning through communication and focus on the importance of self-concept and individual perceptions based on interactions with other people. In this way, the themes and meanings of a data set can be described.

## The Influence of History and Oral Traditions on the *Atoin Pah Meto* Community

### *Oral History and Tradition*

In the science of national and ethnic culture, apart from oral history, oral tradition is also a way of having, receiving, and passing on culture. Oral traditions are generally still owned and maintained by community groups still strongly influenced by historical values and traditional norms of life (Bao, 1969; Wati, 2023). The word tradition comes from the Latin *traditio* (noun), which means inheritance, which is related to the verb *tradere*, which contains the meaning of passing on, continuing, or retelling. *Traditio* is related to the Greek word *Paradosis* (noun), which also has the same meaning. Traditions are divided into two parts: verbal and non-verbal, written and spoken, print media, and oral speech or behaviour. Non-verbal traditions include traditional arts, such as

icons, sculptures, monuments, symbolic objects, habits, gestures, customs, institutions, and totems, legends, myths, fairy tales, and tribal history.

One of the non-verbal traditions is oral tradition. Oral tradition is one of the many research objects of cultural anthropologists and ethnologists, which must be reconstructed to find its origins. Obtaining sufficient information about oral traditions requires a lot of patience and perseverance. If these attitudes are developed correctly and adequately, a researcher can quickly enter the gates of understanding the cosmos (Gregor, 2021).

The Timorese ethnic group also has and maintains oral history and traditions. Almost all the oral history and traditions in the *Atoin Pah Meto* culture are lived and passed down orally using various tools. The people's lives are still strongly influenced by historical socialisation and oral traditions. The results of the interview with the informant, Willem Silab, on 11 May 2022 stated that:

The substance of history and oral traditions, such as behavioural norms, and moral and ethical-religious values, is beneficial for each member in his interactions with fellow group members and other group members in various formal and informal meetings.

This informant's statement shows that historical education and oral traditions, in the eyes of the *Atoin Pah Meto* community, are still essential in social interactions and daily life activities within their group. A person will not feel alienated from their group through optimal behavioural norms, moral values, and religious ethics. Moreover, someone will not lose their identity if they always maintain the existence of a group that finds it difficult to leave the circle of tradition. The colour of local people's views is still framed by residential space. Therefore, it is not wrong for (J. Garang, 1974) to highlight from the perspective of the spatial arrangement of the circle-shaped architecture of the *Atoin Pah Meto* community settlement, which depicts 1) the concept of self-defense; 2) the concept of ethnic brotherhood; 3) the concept of observance of tradition; 4) traditional spirituality concept; 5) the concept of cultural adaptation; and 6) the concept of being one with nature. This means that the intensity of built interaction is considered better and more critical with one's own group than with other ethnic groups. Not many of these patterns of interaction and communication reveal their negative consequences. Concepts like these are not universal for the various ethnicities in the 'sandalwood world' today.

However, research data from Benu et al. (2025) show that the *Atoin Pah Meto* community is classified as closed and finds it challenging to receive updates. In general, all life activities are centered on the tribal family. Individual roles are often less striking and less meaningful. Behind that, some elements burden life, such as the habit of taking revenge, conflict between tribes, and fear of supernatural forces. This kind of ethnocentrism quickly appears in closed tribes. Remember that any group can indeed provide positive value and social capital, which is meaningful for the progress and welfare of the community, provided that the community is able and has the wisdom to manage it. However, if the people cannot manage it, it will be a disaster and even become a significant threat to integration in national and state life.

The persistence of oral history and tradition within the *Atoin Pah Meto* community concretely illustrates the three premises of symbolic interactionism (Bruce & Blumer, 1988). First, narrating and performing tradition shows that social action is guided by meanings collectively constructed through interaction. The repeated telling of myths, legends, and clan histories does not merely transmit facts about the past; it continually re-creates the significance of these stories for present relationships, confirming Blumer's claim that humans "act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them." Second, these meanings arise in interaction.

As elders recount tales and participants respond, listeners negotiate the relevance of moral and spiritual values for contemporary life, exemplifying Mead's idea that the self emerges only in communication with others. Third, meanings are subject to constant interpretation and modification. Each retelling allows for subtle shifts in emphasis—adapting to new audiences or present challenges—demonstrating that tradition is a living, negotiated reality rather than a fixed relic of the past. Through this lens, the circle-shaped village architecture and the prioritisation of

intra-group interaction can be understood as symbolic expressions of a collective “generalised other,” shaping how individuals perceive themselves and guiding their conduct within and beyond the community.

### ***Aspects of History Education and Oral Traditions***

History and oral traditions form customs, folklore, popular discussions, historical stories or tales, esoteric speculation, and various practical applications of religion in everyday life, including other manifestations of traditional mentality. However, at this level, only two main things related to history education and oral traditions are explained.

The first aspect of history and oral tradition education is language as the substance of history and oral tradition. Language is vital in interacting with members in a limited environment and the wider community. In the language, all the richness of the ethnic views and thoughts of the island of West Timor are implied. Timorese, or in local expressions called “*Uab Meto*”, which various European and American publications often call West Timorese, is used by the majority of the population in three administrative regions of the Republic of Indonesia called East Nusa Tenggara Province, namely North Central Timor district, Middle East district, South, and Kupang district, except Kupang city. The same language is also used in the Ambenu region of the República Democrática de Timor-Leste, although the name used for the language is Vaikenu. However, most of his vocabulary is *Uab Meto* (Riedel, 1887).

The results of field observations and in-depth interviews with Aleks Usfinit on 12 May 2022 stated that:

Oral expressions are often used in connection with religious matters to describe God's motherhood and fatherhood in nurturing, protecting . . . loving, and caring. Parents always use spoken or traditional language to convey their views or thoughts to their children when choosing life partners and social friends. Also, people always verbally convey things worth paying attention to when accepting any reasonable offer.

Aleks Usfinit's statement illustrates that people are taught to know how to entertain guests and be friendly with other people. However, feelings of misgivings cannot be hidden in advice on traditional weddings and church matters. Married couples are expected to accept their new social status and try to live and behave according to it. The bride and groom must get used to remaining responsible for meeting their household needs. This new social status demands consequences, responsibilities, and changes in attitudes and mental life as a husband and wife. Both must be able to assess that their marriage is happy, their family experiences are satisfying, and they can adjust to each other well. Therefore, the success of married life is the final result of satisfaction, happiness, and adjustment in married life (Booth et al., 1983).

The second aspect of historical education and oral traditions is the custom of eating betel nuts. This habit is widely used to create open communication or interaction between members in the group and with other members outside the group to strengthen ties of brotherhood, friendship, and interpersonal unity. This can be seen clearly, and is no different from that found in the data from the interview with Pina Nope, 29 May 2022, who said:

*Oko Mama* is a tradition of offering or sharing betel nuts; a person interacts with others, shares various information, and moments to serve and get to know each other. The positive impact of the opportunity to implement this tradition is the creation of good relationships with other people, for example, with the closest neighbours and with people from faraway places, which can sometimes be helpful for the individuals concerned.

Traditions like this are still alive and are continuously passed on orally to others and the next generation, mainly through active participation in the various opportunities provided. Frequent

attendance at traditional events shows that people care about local cultural values. Such a person will know many things related to the oral traditions of life together.

One of the oral histories and traditions still very influential is the procedures or etiquette for conveying opinions and invitations to other parties (namely people who are not from their group, including people who hold a certain social status). Etiquette also has another social function: maintaining fraternal and friendly contact with other people. The *Okoko Mama* or *Kabi* tradition is expressly stated (Langkameng & Latupeirissa, 2020; Samdoko & Adhari, 2022). Oral history and traditions like this are clearly visible in the field: In official meetings in villages or inland hamlets, *Okoko Mama* or *Kabi* (betel nut place) containing betel and areca nut, money, and/or a bottle of village wine is a widespread facility among the *Atoin Pah Meto* to ask permission to speak or convey something.

In general, it is known that if an *Okoko Mama* or *Kabi* is placed on a table or hall, then the party that placed it wants to convey a particular purpose or subject of discussion. Betel nuts and a bottle of village wine are two components that are always used. At the same time, a limited amount of money is a complement, which really depends on the habits of each *Atoin Pah Meto* dialect group. Village communities have used this betel nut tradition since ancient times at every official meeting. The habit started when *Atoin Pah Meto* discovered the habit of eating betel nuts. This tradition lives on and is carried on by almost all residents from generation to generation in the East Nusa Tenggara region, especially among the *Atoin Pah Meto* people, with varying intensity from island to island. These two facilities are always used together and have a significant meaning for the *Atoin Pah Meto* group. This simple tool gets a higher meaning because it is always used in various official meetings at the village level.

History and tradition also record that in the district of South Central Timor, the *Okoko Mama* or *Kabi* approach has always been used to bring together elements of traditional society with elements of the government. This tool is used to convey and ask for community participation in the success of government programs. It is acknowledged that this mechanism takes up a lot of time and opportunity. Still, the results are generally much better and very effective because traditional communities are also asked to take responsibility and participate in development.

The history and tradition of using *Okoko Mama* or *Kabi* are still practiced by people of the same rank or social status to convey information to others. Evidence of the existence of Piet Alexander Tallo in 1990, when he served as Regent of South Central Timor for two periods (1983-1988 and 1988-1993), was both new and a significant breakthrough. The *Okoko Mama* or *Kabi* approach is practical and has a deep, uplifting power for society. In fact, the government must use such practices more if it wants to embrace and inspire the people to participate in various development plans (Ngadilah et al., 2020; Rade & Lay, 2024).

In the *Okoko Mama* or *Kabi* approach, the community feels the government appreciates and respects their customs. In this way, approaches that were previously only horizontal or vertical, one-sided in practice, become complete (Amsikan, 2024; Andaya, 2010). This means that this approach is practiced vertically from both sides, namely from bottom to top and vice versa from top to bottom. The practice of this approach is also an effort to actualise the philosophy of the *Atoin Pah Meto* community, namely *nekaf-mese ma masoaf-mese*, as well as an invitation to participate actively (*nekmes ma ansaomes*). Such an approach must be carried out objectively and free from all personal interests so that people do not get the impression that the values and meaning of their history and traditions are being manipulated and degraded, including the dignity and honor of cultural owners and traditional holders.

*Atoin Pah Meto*'s philosophy guides direction and outlook in organising life and resolving every plan and problem together. The expression or view of life is *nekaf-mese ma masoaf-mese* (Fernandez, 1990). Expressions are always the primary focus in togetherness and efforts to reduce conflict, often threatening social collectives. The *Atoin Pah Meto* community always prioritises social-collective and harmonious thinking. According to Nesi et al. (2019), this is found in local wisdom values in the oral tradition of *takanab*, a type of lyrical prose commonly spoken by traditional elders during traditional rituals. The traditional speech of *Takanab*, *Atoin Pah Meto* is a performance of ritual communication within the local community, which carries socio-

historical cultural meaning, including the cultural meaning: of cooperation, of living a religious life, and of reconciliation. *Takanab's* traditional speech in this position serves as an introduction and advice to provide meaningful input, harmony in the implementation process, and the achievement of work results.

The use of *Uab Meto* language and the ritual of *Oko Mama* likewise reflect the symbolic interactionist view of culture as an arena of meaning-making. Shared language provides the primary symbols through which community members define situations and construct collective identity. Advice given in traditional weddings, for example, is not merely instructive but forms a dialogic space where individuals internalise the expectations of the generalized other and shape their own self-concept (Mead, 1934). The betel nut offering exemplifies how interaction produces and reinforces social bonds: the physical objects—betel (areca nut), village wine—acquire significance only because participants agree on their meaning as tokens of respect and invitations to dialogue. In Blumer's terms, the tradition is sustained not by its material elements but by the ongoing interpretive acts through which villagers reaffirm fraternity, negotiate harmony, and adapt customary etiquette to new circumstances.

### **Nekaf-Mese Ma Ansaof-Mese: One Heart and One Soul**

If we examine each expression or traditional greeting, it is not just used. In fact, these traditional expressions create certain ethnic groups or clans, which certainly have a historical and socio-cultural context. This inspiring expression is a chain of experiences of a group of people living together (Haukilo, 2021). This experience crystallized sufficiently through a very long process before reaching its current state. This experience is not owned by oneself but is passed on to the next generation with the intention of living and owning it. By verbalizing such thoughts, they also create an aspect of life that further develops the educational value of history and its oral traditions (Afeanpah et al., 2024).

The expression *nekaf-mese ma ansaof-mese* consists of two compound words and one conjunction. First, *nekaf-mese*. *Mese* means one. *Ma* means and (conjunction word). *Nekaf* comes from the primary word *nekan*, which means loving each other, working together, helping each other, and loving each other in a limited and comprehensive environment. *Laat manekan* means a place where life is ruled by love. The development of the basic word is *nek amanekat*, meaning a heart that usually loves, a heart that likes to love, a person who loves peace, likes to unite and embrace. Meanwhile, *nekaf* contains the meaning of his heart, or is often called *nekne*. The consonant *f* at the end of each word refers to the third-person possessive meaning. The *nekaf* form is a substitute for another series of words: *innekan* or *innekné*. Both contain the same meaning, namely, the heart. Often, the consonant *f* also means "related to". For example, *amaf* and *ainaf* are related to father and mother. If the word is combined with *mese* (*nekaf-mese*), then the word is understood as one heart, a big heart.

Second, *ansaof-mese*. The meaning of the word *nekaf-mese* also applies to the word *ansaof*, which relates to the heart and soul. The basis of the word is *ansaon*, meaning heart. *Ansaof-mese* means one soul, one heart. So, *nekaf-mese ansaof-mese* can be understood as being as alive as one, one in one, one in one action, one in one heart, and one in one soul. Based on this understanding, this expression and view is interpreted as one heart, which means united together to overcome life with all its demands. The concrete expression is *nekaf-mese ma ansaof-mese*. According to the results of interviews with informants, Fallo, 7 May 2022:

*In matters of customary marriage, death, gardening, building a house, and other similar matters, the attitude of solidarity between members of the family or tribe is realized as best as possible for the sake of the good name of the tribe, and trust between residents is guaranteed. Tribes are collective property and cannot be owned by individuals. Each member is responsible for the common property, such as heirlooms and sacred objects (tools of war, jewelry, and betel nut containers).*

On the other hand, almost the same expression (not an invitation), but in a more emphatic form: *nekmes ma ansaomes!* These words have the same basic meaning but differ in form. The formulation put forward here takes the form of an obligation to be of one mind in life and work, in both physical or material and spiritual matters. The *Atoin Pah Meto* community should use these expressions to improve their lives and maintain harmony. Selan (2023) said that *neka mese ma ansaof mese* is a culture that is inherent in the daily life of the *Atoin Pah Meto* people. They must always be of one mind and the same mind in their daily life practices, regardless of social status, whether in the family, community, church, or government environment, so that *Atoin Pah Meto* can build an inclusive Christian life.

### ***Crystallization of an Experience***

In the phenomenology of history education and oral traditions, experience is an essential element that can be used to search for and discover the essence and purity of historical feeling. As van Manen (1997) emphasizes, lived experience is a primary source for understanding cultural meaning and shared values. This discovery was obtained through personal vision, where the person experienced two ambivalent feelings, frightening and unique, which were inspiring to know, analyze, and document for others as something profitable that could be used in organizing life. Here, experience is essential in tracing the essence and purity of the feeling of kinship and togetherness in the past. The *Atoin Pah Meto* ancestors who lived in ancient times were not without struggle and hard work to maintain their existence and provide content and meaning to their lives as a social group. This aligns with Fenn & Geertz's (1973) argument that symbols and collective rituals provide a "web of meaning" through which communities continuously interpret their historical experiences. The fact that the Timorese ethnic group has maintained its existence until now is historical evidence that their ancestors, who lived at that time, struggled to find an appropriate system of life and cooperation in the face of all difficulties. Also, a system that helps them organize the lives of their group with individuals with different characteristics is needed.

Reality proves that small groups of inner (nuclear) and extended families occasionally live, interact, and develop within a limited scope. The village pattern in the past was very distinctive and unique compared to the current form, where kinship is highly emphasized. In that limited and narrow environment, various life experiences slowly take shape. The process of taking shape from a life experience, which is actualized over time regularly, becomes that experience as a practice of significant value.

Togetherness and cooperation between community members and their leaders are always sought to ensure success. For example, success in defeating and expelling enemies, organizing people's parties, or other successes all require attention, cooperation, unity, sincerity, and determination to make sacrifices. This resonates with Turner's (1971) concept of "communitas," the intense feeling of social unity that emerges during ritual and liminal experiences, binding group members emotionally and morally. Spiritual values are visible here. This value is reflected in the belief of the existence of supernatural forces outside of nature that influence all living creatures in this universe. This value can also be seen in a permanent offering place for "Hau Teas and Lopo Leu" in the middle of the village and in temporary activities. This offering place is a container where offerings are placed to the Highest to ask for His help for success in human endeavors.

However, this view of life is much deeper than just a request for one heart, which is a general and constant appeal from and for the group. Here, sacrifices are required for the sake of life, even death. This view is the driving force behind motivation to live and work in society, which members of the extended family mostly form. In the present era, when the constellation of social life has become more heterogeneous, pluralist, and pluralistic, this view of life still applies and still has its strength and actuality. This outlook on life has social, economic, political, religious, and ethical values, which help shape the mentality and character of the Timorese people (*Atoin Pah Meto*). This outlook on life has inspired the ancestors to build pleasing cooperation to protect their group

from every difficulty and challenge. Based on the results of an interview with Faot on 25 May 2022:

In this way, all community members agree in words and actions to appoint only one person as speaker. They are all responsible for this assignment, aiming to prevent divisions and commotion between them and allow other parties to pit them against each other.

The election experience is only a spokesperson for building a positive image in the eyes of the people of *Atoin Pah Meto*. The function and role in the *Atoin Pah Meto* traditional community cannot be separated from specific individuals who carry out this task. Every gesture, behavior, and problem of emotional turmoil in daily life should be integrated into the function placed on its shoulders in social practice. Therefore, when someone is given a specific task, they immediately try to organize their personal preferences to improve themselves to perform that function adequately and perfectly. Therefore, they must ensure that their authority always flows throughout the *Atoin Pah Meto* area as "*tetus-nit ma manikin oetenen*". This means they must always be alert and ready to carry out their obligations for the benefit of society. Its function and role are consistently recognized and carried out for harmony in the entire *Atoin Pa Meto* area. Here, the value of harmony is visible, which is clearly reflected in the relationships between families, the natural environment, and the supernatural or the Creator (Manafe, 2016). The feeling of unity is so strong that no reason can separate one brother and sister from another "*feto-mone and olif-tataf*". The sense of unity is also reflected in coexistence, which is always beneficial, where helping each other and working hand in hand is a requirement for the survival of life together in society.

### ***An Imperative for Today***

There is no need to deny that experience in the philosophy of science is a source of knowledge. As Dewey (1938) argued, experience is the foundation of learning and the continuous reconstruction of knowledge. Past positive experiences guided by the above view of life have become a solid foundation for current authority holders to actualize this view. Here, this view is modified into an "imperative", a necessity for every community group in making every joint plan and activity a success. *Nekmes ma asaomes* can be understood as "be of good faith and be faithful", not only a motto but a call that awakens the fighting spirit and hard work of clan members and the community in particular, and the *Atoin Pah Meto* community in general, to make it concrete in practice. This reflects Freire's (1970) notion of praxis, where reflection and action combine to transform social reality through collective commitment. He spoke more profoundly and was relevant to every *Atoin Pah Meto* resident.

Suppose this outlook on life is translated into natural and social life today. In that case, its substance becomes essential in implementing every development program at every level and aspect of life. This expression can be used as an appeal, slogan, or important propaganda to awaken people's awareness of building unity and agreement in words and actions to carry out every physical and spiritual development program.

Embracing and living this view presupposes that people must free themselves from personal interests and profits and abstain from corruption, nepotism, and collusion. Embracing and living this view means not paying attention to social and political status differences. Such communal ethics echo Durkheim's (2008) concept of collective conscience, a shared moral order that binds individuals into a cohesive social whole. All of this must be relative so that this view can be realized. Understanding and living this view means that people are determined to collectively fight for the interests of their group and the physical and spiritual welfare of its members. *Nekmes ma ansaomes* also means following what is said or is called *hanaf-mese ma etmese*, which means one voice, one action. That is, united in one word and united in action. The same thing was emphasized in an interview with Koro on May 9, 2022:

This mandatory expression *hanaf-mese ma etmese* can also be a guideline, or encouragement generally needed by anyone in facing common difficulties in every society group, whether it concerns socio-political, socio-religious, socio-historical, or socio-cultural.

This view is a general attitude established for living together, and it is hoped that this attitude will find an echo in the next generation through education. This attitude requires the participation of the *Atoin Pah Meto* community to comply with their rights and obligations. Because psychologically and morally, this function is binding, in the sense that it must be carried out for the sake of integration and unity as well as the unity of the collective order, to live a better, more humane life.

### **Socio-Historical Value**

As is generally known, in traditional society, the influence and attachment to cultural values are decisive. There is almost no clear separation between historical and profane matters. Every activity carried out by the community is considered a social-historical activity involving magical religious figures from the past. *Atoin Pah Meto* knows the phrase *nekaf-mese ma ansaof-mese* as a life motto and encouragement to build quality cooperation (Selan, 2023). If this expression is translated, it means one heart, one accord, one word. Hence, the expression no longer belongs to a limited group but instead means encouraging anyone in various aspects of life.

This expression refers to the value of togetherness, which can be clearly understood at the core of the betel nut eating ceremony, which symbolizes brotherhood and is used as the basis for distributing new garden locations to all members of the tribe (Afeanpah et al., 2024; Selan, 2023). This value is also reflected in cooperation (*lasi-mafiti* or *lasi-mnaut*) as a source of labor at the cleaning and picking stages of garden produce. This is also reflected in the prayer said by the tribal chief at the beginning of the ceremony, which involved eating betel nuts. This prayer shows the sincerity of a farmer to accept the portion of land that will be distributed to him for cultivation without complaining, as other farmers also accept.

Traditional and modern societies, which are still strongly influenced by tribal, ethnic, or clan traditions, will continue to connect these aspects, namely spiritual and physical, religious and socio-historical. From there, the hope is that a good work ethic can be produced with the socio-historical value that concerns specific individuals and individuals as an ethnic group, tribe, or clan. In *Atoin Pah Meto*'s life practice, the essence of this expression is evident, and it is hoped that its concretization will continue to be practiced in everyday life (Benu et al., 2025). During early life, the essence of the statement was propagated and became an imperative that had to be heeded and implemented. What is meant here is the existence of a one-hearted attitude in responding to every message conveyed by the gods, *Uis Neno*, or the ancestors, which in the end helps form a good and prosperous life together. This does not mean there are no challenges in living and appreciating the essence of this thought. In fact, by considering all these possibilities, it is hoped that this view of life will be lived out. A strong foundation accompanied by commonality and unity of motivation is always a reasonable and necessary step for success.

Furthermore, it must also be understood that the request for *nekmes ma ansaomes* must come from an integral personal testimony to move other people to unite with one heart and soul. United we stand, divided we fall. To emphasize this expression, certain symbols are used, such as a broomstick, which shows the success of a group (Fernandez, 1990). This understanding does not have to be a monopoly on the historical and social aspects above, but applies to all aspects of living together.

Based on the basic demands of *nekmes ma ansaomes*, the optimal atmosphere created in the functional relationship network of historical and social values is unmasked bonding. This can be seen in the attitudes and daily life actions of social groups expressed by Bana, 8 June 2022:

Usif or Kesar will always sincerely act as the ruler of the cosmos-ritual by always giving *tetus-nit ma manikin-oetenen* to all the kingdom's residents.

He has to organize the cosmos always to bring blessings to society. With other royal work apparatuses, every role and function must always be oriented towards unity and integrity, as well as within the body of the community. They, therefore, must be carried out sincerely without any disguise. This concept refers to every person who occupies a specific function or role in society, who automatically obeys their rights and obligations. Psychologically and morally, this function is bound by the fact that it must be carried out for the integration and unity of the social community order.

Relations between members of society, individuals and groups, both between the authorities and the grassroots (subordinates), must be built based on fraternal relations (*feto-mone*) in a climate of unlimited mutual trust. In daily living practices, the people give the first harvest to the king, Hu Sufa or Mau Sufa, or Tulu Maus. Socio-historically, this action expresses obedience and an attitude of trust in the ruler as the custodian of the peaceful life of the cosmos, including the welfare of society at large. There is no suspicion.

The philosophy embodied in the expression *nekaf-mese ma ansaof-mese*—"one heart, one soul"—offers a vivid example of symbolic interactionism in practice. First, it demonstrates how meaning is created and sustained through collective interaction. The phrase is more than a linguistic artifact: a shared symbol whose significance is continuously negotiated as families gather for marriages, funerals, gardening, or house building. In Bruce & Blumer's (1988) terms, members "act toward" the expression based on its agreed meaning of unity and solidarity.

Second, that meaning emerges through interaction. Ritual use of the greeting during communal decision-making requires each participant to take the role of the generalized other (Mead, 1934), imagining how the group defines loyalty and mutual responsibility. Third, the concept is not static. Informants describe contemporary uses—such as mobilising collective action for government development programs—as evidence that the phrase is continually reinterpreted to address modern challenges. Through this process, individuals internalize the group's moral expectations, shaping their self-concept around communal harmony and the willingness to sacrifice personal interests for collective welfare. Even the symbols associated with the saying, such as the broomstick signifying collective strength, reinforce this negotiated meaning. Seen through an interactionist lens, *nekaf-mese ma ansaof-mese* thus functions as a cultural repository of historical experience and a dynamic tool for constructing social reality in present-day *Atoin Pah Meto* life.

## Efforts to Preserve History and Oral Traditions

In this era of globalization, technological developments have been fast and sophisticated, making it easier for humans to access all information, which has also brought about changes in human history and oral traditions. We cannot deny that humans in this modern era do not want to be left behind. They are flocking to abandon ancient, old-fashioned lifestyles and do not want to be left behind in terms of history and oral traditions, namely: 1) priceless ancestral treasures; 2) the identity of the Indonesian nation, including *Atoin Pah Meto*; 3) unique oral history and traditions that can elevate the honor and dignity of the Indonesian people, known to other countries because they are rich in history and traditions.

All humans must understand that every history and oral tradition has a factual, empirical basis. Generally, the original history and existing oral traditions educate and teach the goodness and wisdom of *Atoin Pah Meto* (Benu et al., 2025). Moreover, beyond that, history and oral traditions are full of characteristic social messages. The problem is utilizing and/or manifesting ancestral heritage to preserve it for today's younger generation. At least it can discuss historical education themes and oral traditions according to the local cultural context. This is important because any historical pattern and oral tradition refers to a value held in high esteem. Moreover, that value can be in the form of an "ideal type" of a society. Therefore, a cultural approach to building history and oral traditions can start from the ideal type desired by each history and oral tradition in the area.

With an approach such as history and oral traditions, they are no longer considered old-fashioned and out of date.

The younger generation, in this case, students who live and develop in urban and rural areas, are starting to study local history and traditions through learning local content, character education, historical literacy, and oral traditions, retracing local cultural festivals, performing arts, and performances. The younger generation of students is now getting used to using technology as a medium to introduce local culture, especially history and oral traditions, at national and even international levels. Finally, researchers interested in collecting data about the *Atoin Pah Meto* culture will document and publish. In its implementation, each educational unit can create a curriculum and collaborate with parents and the local community to help and support the implementation process. Essentially, education is an effort to elevate human life to a human level, namely, to make humans humane.

The impact is that love and respect for the natural environment (macrocosm and microcosm) are always rooted in history and oral tradition. This means they do not behave and act arbitrarily towards nature and fellow humans. It is also known that, generally, the *Atoin Pah Meto* community has principles that regulate the use and maintenance of the environment. Because history and oral traditions teach about maintaining the balance of nature, the environment is carefully regulated in life and living. So, in turn, historical messages and oral traditions oriented towards preserving nature and the environment must depart from the original views of the local community, especially *Atoin Pah Meto*. This clearly shows that history and oral traditions are open to change because the most important thing is the complete and comprehensive development success in all sectors.

The community's contemporary efforts to sustain history and oral traditions illustrate how meanings are continuously reconstructed through social interaction, a central premise of symbolic interactionism. As young people employ digital media to document festivals, retell ancestral narratives, and design local-content curricula, they engage in an interpretive process that updates the significance of ancestral symbols for a modern audience. In Bruce & Blumer's (1988) terms, these actions show that cultural objects—songs, rituals, and ecological taboos—retain influence only because participants collectively reaffirm and reinterpret their meaning.

Technology becomes not a threat but a new arena for interaction, allowing *Atoin Pah Meto* youth to negotiate the value of tradition with peers, educators, and global audiences. Through this ongoing dialogue, individuals form a self-concept rooted in heritage and modernity, exemplifying Mead's (1934) argument that identity emerges through the role of the "generalized other." Environmental stewardship, likewise, reflects negotiated meanings: ancestral rules about forest use and water sources are sustained because present-day actors continue to attribute sacred significance to these practices while adapting them to contemporary development goals. Thus, preserving tradition in a globalised context is an interactional achievement, showing that cultural continuity depends on the dynamic, meaning-making processes emphasized by symbolic interaction theory.

## Conclusion

The *Atoin Pah Meto* of West Timor sustain a rich cultural heritage in which history and oral traditions remain central to collective life. Their guiding philosophy, *nekaf-mese ma ansaof-mese*—"one heart, one soul"—encapsulates values of solidarity, mutual responsibility, and harmony that help the community manage conflict and maintain social cohesion. These values are transmitted primarily through oral narratives, ritual speech, and practices such as the *Oko Mama* betel nut ceremony, allowing each generation to internalize shared meanings and responsibilities. Although foreign scholars have documented portions of this heritage, preservation efforts are still limited. Current local initiatives to introduce these traditions into schools and community learning represent an important step toward safeguarding intangible cultural assets, yet they require stronger scientific grounding and sustained collaboration. Strengthening historical

education rooted in these oral traditions offers cultural continuity and practical strategies for conflict reduction and environmental stewardship.

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