



# Mot nini Tradition: Dialogue with Ancestors in Noemuti Village

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**Abstract:** This study aims to describe the dialogue with the ancestors in traditional events mot nini (burning candles), which is usually done by indigenous peoples in Noemuti Village, North Central Timor. The method that was used for this study is ethnographic analysis. The research used a qualitative research method by direct observation and interviews. The description of this study is also based on a realist ethnographic analysis. From the research results, it was found that the people of Noemuti Village dialogue with their ancestors to ask for help and assistance regarding the difficulties they face. People believe that their ancestors will help. The implication is that people believe more in the strength and help of their ancestors, even though people have a religion they believe in. People always take the time to carry out this traditional ceremony. In conclusion, the people of Noemuti Village believe that their ancestors have supernatural powers and also a strong inner connection with the community, so the community believes that what they ask for and convey to their ancestors will definitely be given and helped. More than that, this traditional ceremony is also a form of respect and an unbreakable brotherhood between the people of Noemuti Village and their ancestors.

**Keywords:** Ancestral Spirits, Dialogue, Ethnography Communication, Indigenous, Traditional Ceremonies

## 1. Introduction

The *mot nini* ceremony, accompanied by a dialogue with ancestors, remains an enduring cultural custom within Noemuti Village, North Central Timor, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. This ritual involves the community's pilgrimage to traditional houses, where they engage in dialogue and perform the *mot nini* ceremony. Through this tradition, the community seeks ancestral assistance in order to realise their expressed intentions conveyed during these dialogues. The belief among Noemuti villagers is that their ancestors possess spiritual prowess and influence capable of aiding and fulfilling the community's wishes (Nenohai, 2014). The practice of pilgrimage embodies the cultural belief that deceased ancestors retain the power to support the living.

Mumfangati (2007), examining pilgrimage to graves in Javanese tradition, depicts it as a spiritual journey undertaken for communal prayer, expressing gratitude to ancestors, and seeking blessings from the divine. This underlines the continued importance of ancestors even after their passing, with their support and guidance remaining pivotal for the living family. Mróz and Mróz (2013), discussing pilgrimages to saints' tombs from a religious perspective, emphasise communal prayers with the deceased. Similarly, the Noemuti people conduct the *mot nini* ceremony and dialogues within traditional houses to pray alongside their ancestors and seek their guidance and protection for the community's well-being. Therefore, the pilgrimage to traditional houses in this ceremony encompasses various beliefs, intertwining ancestral support with religious elements.

This paper will focus on a realistic ethnographic exploration of the *mot nini* culture and ancestral dialogues embedded in the customs of the Noemuti Village. The author will delineate the forms of communication and verbal exchanges witnessed during this traditional ceremony, drawn from direct observations and interview findings.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Ethnography of Communication

Communication, as defined by Littlejohn and Foss (2008), acts as a bridge between the specifics of life and broader concepts, creating connections between different elements. It serves as a means to elucidate and imbue meaning into otherwise incomprehensible aspects. Rogers and Kincaid (1981) described communication as the exchange of information between two or more individuals, fostering mutual understanding through this interchange.

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In the context of ethnography, communication delineates the intricate process between message senders and recipients, employing both verbal and non-verbal languages. Encapsulates the transformation of information into a comprehensible narrative, offering an interpretation of the intended message (Mulyana, 2007).

Ethnographic studies of communication delve deeper into cultural values, recognising that every society's culture acts as a medium for interpersonal interaction. Such research attempts to unearth the rich nuances inherent in each culture, serving as a foundational framework for further exploration.

The ethnographic research method often employs the SPEAKING model introduced by Dell Hymes in 1962. This model dissects the constituents of a communication event, unveiling the fundamental rules governing communication scenarios. The model encompasses Setting and scene (S), Participants (P), Ends (E), Act Sequence (A), Key (K), Instruments (I), Norms (N), and Genres (G), providing a comprehensive framework for understanding communication dynamics (Littlejohn, 2009).

S: The setting and scene are related to the context in which communication takes place. Setting refers to the time and place where the conversation takes place, while scene refers to the time, place, and psychology of the conversation.

P: Participants refer to the parties involved in speech or conversation, namely the speaker and the listener, the greeter and the greeter, or the sender and the receiver.

E: The end refers to the meaning and purpose of speech as well as the role of each participant in a conversation situation.

A: The act sequence refers to the form of speech or words used, and how they are used, and the contents of the utterance or the relationship between what is said and the topic of conversation.

K: Key refers to the tone, manner, and spirit in when the message is conveyed

I: Instruments refers to the language path delivered.

N: Norms refer to norms or rules in interacting, and also refer to the form of interpretation of the speech of the other person.

G: Genres refer to the type of delivery form, in the form of narrative, poetry, etc.

Nenohai (2014) further explores the Mot nini tradition, indicating that this research seeks to elucidate the cultural impact and beliefs about spirits and ancestral powers. The community believes that honouring and venerating ancestors leads them to assist and fulfil the desired intentions. Through this study, the researcher aims to understand the dialogues and communications within traditional Mot nini ceremonies, shedding light on how these interactions influence the lives and perspectives of the people of Noemuti Village, North Central Timor, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia.

## 2.2 Traditional Ceremony mot nini Noemuti Village

According to Andrew (2017), culture is a very important part of people's lives because culture also includes the norms of life. Traditional ceremony mot nini. What exists in the Noemuti community is an activity carried out to respect and, at the same time, pray for the spirits of deceased ancestors. The Noemuti believe that their ancestors who have passed away are with them, so this traditional ceremony is held to honour those who have gone before and to pray for their souls so they can rest in peace.

The traditional mot nini ceremony is usually carried out in groups or small families by visiting the graves of the ancestors or visiting traditional houses. In the traditional house of the Noemuti people, the belief is that all ancestors who have died will gather in the traditional house. The Noemuti people believe that a traditional house is a gathering place for all people who are related, both people who are still alive and ancestors who have died.

The definition of a traditional house is a house that has characteristics that are different from other houses and functions as a shelter for one particular ethnic group so that the traditional house becomes evidence consisting of objects from the highest culture of ethnic groups that take refuge in it (Pramono, 2017). Traditional houses are symbols, signs, and characteristics of a cultural tribe (Sacco et al., 2014).

The traditional house is a symbol of the tribe because there are various historical items, and the traditional house also has a symbol that represents the style of thinking and ideas of a tribe. The style of the traditional house and the purpose of each traditional event held in the traditional house are a symbol that represents an ethnic group with its own uniqueness (Pramono, 2017).

The *mot nini* ceremony is usually done by praying together, followed by slaughtering animals such as chickens and pigs (only on special occasions). Before the animal is slaughtered, usually, the head of the family or traditional leader will communicate or have a dialogue with the ancestors.

## 2. Dialogue of the Ancestors in the Traditional Candle Burning Ceremony

Andrew (2017) highlights the significance of culture in people's lives, encompassing essential norms that guide their existence. The traditional mot nini ceremony in the Noemuti community is a practice deeply rooted in honouring and praying for the spirits of deceased ancestors. According to the Noemuti belief system, departed ancestors remain present, prompting the observance of this traditional ceremony to pay homage to those who have passed and to offer prayers for their peaceful rest.

The traditional mot nini ceremony typically takes place among small family groups who visit ancestral graves or traditional houses. Within the traditional houses of the Noemuti, it is believed that all departed ancestors congregate. These houses serve as communal spaces where both living and deceased members of the community gather, as perceived in the Noemuti cultural context.

Defined by unique characteristics, a traditional house serves as a refuge for a specific ethnic group, encapsulating the cultural essence of its occupants (Pramono, 2017). These houses embody symbols and traits distinctive to a cultural tribe (Sacco et al., 2014), exhibiting historical artefacts and bearing symbols representative of the tribe's thought processes and ideas.

The architecture and purpose of the traditional events held within these houses symbolise the distinctiveness of an ethnic group (Pramono, 2017), reflecting the identity and values of a tribe. The ceremonies within these traditional settings often involve communal prayers and the ritual slaughter of animals, predominantly chickens and occasionally pigs, for special occasions. Before a sacrifice, it is customary for the head of the family or the traditional leader to engage in communication or dialogue with the ancestors.

## 3. Research Restrictions

This study adopts a descriptive research methodology employing a qualitative approach grounded in an interpretive paradigm. In this paradigm, reality is comprehended as an integrated entity, indivisible into distinct variables. Qualitative research perceives its object as a dynamic entity formed through cognitive construction and the interpretation of observed phenomena. It emphasises holism, considering every aspect of the object as an interconnected unity that cannot be isolated (Sugiyono, 2017). Consequently, in qualitative research, reality extends beyond mere observation by delving into the underlying aspects that are not readily visible.

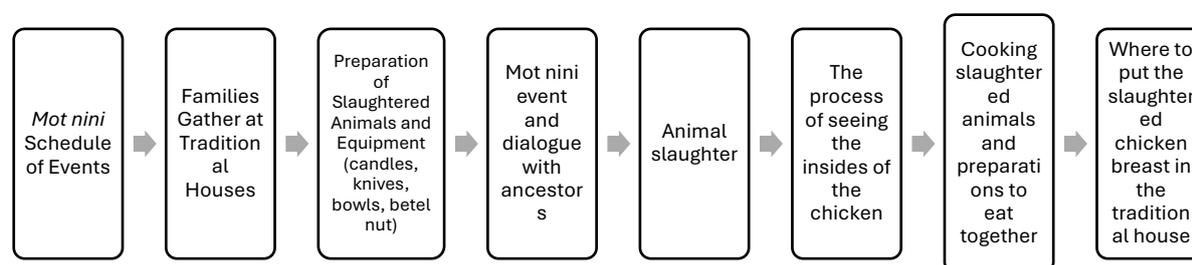
The focus of this study is the ceremonial dialogue with ancestors during the mot nini event within the traditional houses of the Dawan tribe in Noemuti Village. These traditional houses, also revered as gathering places for departed ancestors, hold profound significance and are replete with symbolic representations.

## 4. Data Collection Techniques

Field research will be conducted in Noemuti Village, located in the north-central Timor region of East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. The research procedure encompasses the collection of both verbal and observational data.

- a. Observational data will be collected by direct observation, involving the customary practices of mot nini.
- b. Verbal data will be collected through two primary methods: interviews and group discussions.

Timeline Event of Traditional event Mot nini



**Figure 1:** Timeline Event of Traditional event Mot nini

## 5. Research Results

Hymes developed a set of tools for analysing units of social analysis called components of social units, that is, components: Setting, Participants, Ends, Act sequences, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre (SPEAKING).

**Setting:** The traditional candle-burning ceremony and the dialogue with the ancestors took place at the traditional house of the Mokos tribe, Noemuti Village, North Central Timor, East Nusa Tenggara. The event occurred at 4 pm. Attendees included individuals with intentions, families, and traditional elders. Initially, those arriving first gathered near the house while waiting for other families. Only people with intentions and traditional elders entered the traditional house once the event began.

**Scene:** The traditional candle-burning ceremony and the dialogue with the ancestors is a cultural practice in Noemuti Village, TTU, NTT. It is an act of respect and a request for ancestral assistance. The Noemuti people view it as a form of respect for their ancestors, believing that they possess powers to help and must, therefore, be respected. In addition, the ceremony serves as a means of family reunion.

**Participants:** Those attending include traditional elders leading the ceremony, individuals with intentions, and specific family members such as fathers, mothers, female and male siblings, grandmothers, aunts, and caretakers of traditional houses. As this was a family-oriented event, attendance was limited. However, for tribal ceremonies, representatives from several tribes were present, such as the Rusae and Mokos tribes.

**Ends:** The objective of this ceremony is to seek blessings and assistance from the ancestors for the intentions conveyed through dialogue with the traditional elders. The community trusts in the spirits of their ancestors to help realise their expressed intentions.

**Act Sequences:** The preparation activities involved inviting traditional elders and their families, setting the ceremony schedule, and gathering at the traditional house. Participants engaged in small talk while preparing necessary equipment such as candles, slaughtered animals, and betel nuts. Subsequently, the traditional elders engaged in dialogue with the ancestors, followed by burning candles and slaughtering animals. The animal's entrails were then examined to seek approval or disapproval from the ancestors. If approved, cooking began, and the food was offered symbolically before a shared meal.

**Purpose and Outcomes:** The ceremony aimed to seek ancestral assistance for individuals' intentions, ultimately leading to the realisation of their desires. The outcome was favourable, with the ancestors approving of the intentions conveyed and committing to assist in their realisation.

**Message Form:** The traditional candle-burning ceremony involves verbal dialogue from the traditional elders to the ancestors. Ancestors' responses are interpreted through signs shown by the slaughtered animals. The dialogue involves traditional elders conveying intentions to ancestors, whose responses are inferred by signs presented by the slaughtered animals. For this ceremony, the intentions conveyed were approved by the ancestors.

**Message Content:** The preparation involved inviting families and traditional elders, preparing equipment, and formulating intentions. The intention conveyed for this study was to achieve success in academic endeavours.

**Key:** The tone of speech during the ceremony was calm and conversational, with emphasis placed when addressing the ancestors by name, highlighting respect.

**Instrumentalities:** The language used was informal, employing local customary language, evident in the traditional elders' communication with the ancestors.

**Forms of Speech and Speech Style:** The language style was the local customary language of Noemuti Village, East Nusa Tenggara. The traditional elders who led the ceremony wore appropriate traditional attire.

**Norms: Rules of Interaction: Rules Governing Speaking:** The norm requires that only traditional elders engage in dialogue with ancestors. Additionally, the ritual requires the slaughtering of specific animals, particularly red roosters, as mediums for the ancestors' response.

**Norms of Interpretation: Rules Governing Cultural Belief Systems:** The choice of a red rooster for sacrifice symbolises courage, strength, and leadership. The ceremony at the traditional house signifies the belief that ancestors reside there, while the central pillar of the house of the house symbolises family unity. Candles symbolise illumination and love, while communal meals represent family unity and tribal brotherhood.

**Genre:** The ceremony involves direct dialogue, but responses from the ancestors are interpreted through codes or signs observed from the slaughtered animals.

### 5.1 Traditional Ceremony Mot nini

The traditional practice of burning candles and engaging in dialogue with ancestors is a form of reverence carried out by the indigenous people of Noemuti Village and the broader community of North Central Timor (Nenohai, 2014). This tradition, known as Mot nini, involves placing burning candles on the tombs of ancestral grandmothers, as well as within traditional houses, accompanied by dialogues conducted by traditional elders to convey specific intentions.

Based on research findings, interviews, and direct observations, this customary practice has been prevalent since ancient times among the initial members of the Mokos tribe in Noemuti Village, who are now revered as ancestors invited for dialogue. The interviews revealed that this tradition originated from the beliefs of ancient ancestors who recognised the presence of spirits or entities capable of assisting in problem-solving, residing in haunted places, trees, and rocks. As time passed and these ancestors passed away, the practice of respecting these spirits transitioned into honouring the spirits of the ancestors. People believed that respecting and worshipping these ancestral spirits could grant wishes. The ancestral spirits are believed to dwell within traditional houses. Hence, the tradition of showing respect and worship is observed through the traditional Mot nini ceremony, involving dialogue with the ancestors led by traditional elders, requesting the fulfilment of desired intentions.

In essence, the ancestors or individuals summoned for dialogue in this traditional candle-burning ceremony were the earliest members of the Mokos tribe, residing in the village of Noemuti. The deceased grandparents of the Mokos tribal family are also revered, and the villagers believe that they are still living within the traditional house. These individuals are regarded as ancestors, as they were the original figures in the genealogy of the Mokos tribe, establishing and laying the foundation for the culture of traditional houses. They are respected, respected, and believed to possess supernatural powers capable of helping society.

Participants attending the Mot nini traditional event gather in front of the traditional house at the agreed-upon time. The attendees include traditional elders, close family, and relatives with a purpose for the event. Once assembled, participants engage in conversation while preparing the necessary items for the Mot nini ceremony and dialogue with the ancestors. These preparations include betel nuts, candles, slaughtered chickens, a knife, and a bowl to collect the blood from the slaughtered animal. When all the equipment is ready, the event begins with the traditional elders summoning everyone near the traditional house.



**Figure 2:** The family gathered near the traditional house before celebrating the mot nini event and dialogue with ancestors at the traditional houses.

Source: Picture by Inosensius Enryco Mokos

Only traditional elders and individuals with intentions for their ancestors, along with a close family member, are allowed to enter the traditional house. During the customary Mot nini event and the dialogue with the ancestors, only the traditional elders engage in dialogue. This is because the regional customary language is used, and the traditional elders are specifically chosen by the ancestors themselves to act as representatives of the living family, initiating dialogue with the ancestors.

As the event commences, candles and betel nuts are placed on the primary pillar within the traditional house, symbolising someone's arrival and desire to commune with the ancestors. Eight candles, accompanied by betel nuts, are arranged. One candle, designated as a light, signifies that, despite the ancestors' passing, they continue to serve as protectors and aides. The betelnut is of symbolic significance as a traditional food and serves as a unifying symbol during visits to others. This long-standing tradition honours those who are respected by offering them betel nuts.

Following this, the candles are lit, and the traditional elders speak in an honorable manner, summoning the ancestors to join the Mot nini ceremony. During this time, the traditional elders convey the significance and purpose of the candle-burning ceremony. In the local customary language, the traditional elder Hendrikus Mokos addresses the ancestors, saying:

“Lassi nen ma mutnin, nao net ma tel net. Utiab Toni ma lasi neubaha in kanan ma in bonin es na’si about Peur Thein nok in mone ma in naijuf es tua Sintu Rusae es na keten ma nat noebon nok be’e nok mnaes in Fatu baine ma Haube baine ma Tubu baine. Nene esa a tua Antoin Mokos nok in fe naije ma in kato es about Iku Manhitu nok in tataf ma in onif atoin olf sin ok-oke.

Nane neuba a in sufan ma in ka 'un es ane Ryco Peur Mokos he mbinskole nanan nane in afoat ma a fainekat ma fainekan bin in nekan ma in ansaon, he nait na pane na hiki he anbin in a noen in es ama ma ainan Dosen sin. Nane a hoin tin ma a likin, a pean he esam mtaone lasi ma toni neu fun na tuin a beuketin ma kon haet he in napanam na hiki le ilmu sa’sa es ama ma aina Dosen na noen’e.

Lasi nala le ia ma heuba leia, nane hi esam mitiab mifinib mikonob hi toni ma lasi neu a mo eta ma a pakaet, fun amaneote es in, ama Sinte es in, a moeto es sin, a pakaeta es sin. Toni one and lasi to him, toni stop him and heuta. Nesimo manekan.”

“Our respected ancestors, Grandfather Sintu Rusae, Grandfather Peur Mokos, and also all the ancestors, we come to this traditional house to burn candles and have a dialogue with you. We come to this traditional house because we want to talk about our son, Ryco Mokos. Here, the whole family has gathered, and together they want to invite our beloved ancestors to be present to listen and also help with the requests that will be submitted for the success of our son Ryco Peur Mokos.”

The words mentioned above are in the local customary language, where the traditional elders begin speaking and invite the ancestors to join the traditional house. Gleichzeitig, they convey the intentions requested by the family or the individual conducting the Mot nini event and the dialogue with the ancestors. Following this invocation, the ritual of animal sacrifice is carried out. After the sacrifice, the dialogue with the ancestors continues.

“Nane neuba a ini sufan ma in ka’un es anah hit, he bin skole nanan, nane in afoat ma a’faibekaat, he poan ma fainenkan bin in nekan ma in ansaon, he nait na paneuka hiki. He au bau in a neon in es ama dosen sin nane a hotin ma aliki apean hi esam nitaone lasi ma toni neu fun natuin a beukutin ma akon haet he in napanm na hiki le ilmu sasa es dosen na noen e.

He abeketam ma kon hasi hei esa senan ma bebeu neu in nekan ma in ausa’ou he kaisa nikan ma kaisa e’na fun hi esan mtaone neup ma.”

“Our son (Ryco Peur Mokos) will continue his studies, pay attention to him, and take good care of him wherever he goes to school. Always pay attention to him so that he is always protected from any trouble that could disrupt his studies. Ancestors, please help him always.”

The above sentences represent an utterance made within a dialogue between traditional elders and their ancestors. The purpose is to implore the ancestors to listen and respond to the intentions expressed.

During these rituals, the chosen slaughtered animal was a rooster, selected based on the gender of the individual who had the particular intention. A hen would be chosen if the person making the request were a woman. Chickens were preferred for smaller events due to their affordability. On the contrary, the pigs were reserved for larger events, especially when the entire tribal community was present. However, pigs were considered expensive and required a significant amount of money to purchase. In such cases, it was usually a collaborative effort among tribal members to acquire a pig. The author observed traditional ceremonies conducted by smaller families, where only chickens were used as sacrificial animals.

“Neuba nekan neu in ansaon, fun natuin hi esan fene foat ma fainekat ofa, he afaot ma a fainekat of ka mi sasaontom ma ka ninenebton, fun hi makana ke bone ma kesokima luli ki.

Lasi ntala le ia ma heuba leia, nane hi esam mitiab mifinib mikonob hi toni ma lasi neu a mo eta ma a pakaet, fun amaneote es in, ama Sinte es in, a moeto es sin, a pakaeta es sin. Toni one and lasi to him, toni stop him and heuta. Nesimo manekan.”

“Dear ancestors, we hope you all listen to this request. Don't underestimate your grandson; always strengthen and look after him so that he can succeed in his duties in the future. There are also red chickens here that will be slaughtered. Please provide an answer to our request.”

The above statement marks the conclusion of the dialogue between the traditional elders and the ancestors. Traditional elders earnestly ask and implore the ancestors to provide help and attention, ensuring that all the intentions expressed by those seeking assistance unfold smoothly, without any hindrances.

The traditional mot nini ceremony and the dialogue with the ancestors serve various purposes. In the observed events, they aim to achieve educational success, but they can also seek success in employment, business endeavours, marriage, and other areas. These intentions will subsequently be conveyed by the traditional elders to the ancestors, and the responses from the ancestors will be revealed later through observations of the stomach strings of the sacrificed animals.

**Table 1:** Events Table Mot nini.

Events Name	Slaughtered Animals	The venue	Traditional Event Purposes	Event Time
Traditional <i>mot noni</i> ceremony and dialogue with ancestors in the Traditional House	Red rooster, hen, and pig	Traditional House	Special Intentions for One Person, Protection Intentions for Ethnic Groups	For personal intention, once a year. For group and tribal intentions every three years.
Traditional <i>mot nini</i> ceremony and dialogue with ancestors in graves/graves	Red rooster, hen, and pig	Grave	Specific personal intentions (educational success, getting a job, finding a partner, for health).	For individuals and families, it is carried out once a year as needed. For tribes, once a year, every November 2,

Events Name	Slaughtered Animals	The venue	Traditional Event Purposes	Event Time
Traditional <i>mot nini</i> ceremony and dialogue with the ancestors at the Pemali Tree	Red rooster, hen, and pig	A special river where there is a special tree (Kusambi tree) is chosen as a pemali tree.	For groups, namely tribes, to ask for protection and unity. Unity and protection for all members of the tribe	according to the Catholic Church calendar. Every three years, it is carried out by all members of the tribe, once a year, for small groups, namely their respective families.

Source: By the author

### 5.2 The purpose of the ceremony *mot nini* is respect and Regards

According to Yakobus Rusae, the main purpose of the traditional *mot nini* ceremony and the dialogue with the ancestors is that they are the parents and also the first generation of the tribe that has died, so they are so respected as protectors and also companions of every child and grandson of the tribe.



**Figure 3:** The traditional house for the *mot nini* event and dialogue with the ancestors.

“Nane neuba a in sufan ma in ka’un es ane Ryco Peur Mokos he mbin skole nanan nane in afoat ma a fainekat ma fainekan bin in nekan ma in ansaon, he nait na pane na hiki he anbin in a noen in es ama ma ainan Dosen sin. Nane a hoin tin ma a likin, a pean he esam mtaone lasi ma toni neu fun na tuin a beuketin ma kon haet he in napanam na hiki le ilmu sa’sa es ama ma aina Dosen na noen’e.”

“That’s all we want to convey at this time. Give us all the strength to live our next days, especially for our grandson Ryco Peur Mokos. Hopefully, with this meeting at the traditional house, everything we have planned can be achieved.”

Yakobus Rusae said to his ancestors that at this time, children/grandchildren/great-grandchildren come asking for help and protection in their efforts to be able to continue their studies. Hopefully, the inclusion of the ancestors can strengthen him so he can complete his studies quickly and accurately.



**Figure 4:** Traditional houses, traditional stones, and main pillars.

The process continued with the sacrifice of the red rooster. Yakobus Rusae elaborated, emphasizing that the red rooster is important as a symbol of courage and acts as a protective measure for the sons or grandsons.

Throughout history, red chickens have been traditionally chosen as sacrificial animals for ancestors within traditional houses.

After the sacrifice, the initial blood flowing from the chicken must be carefully dripped onto a specific stone, underneath which ancient coins lie, symbolising the ancestors who laid the foundation for this traditional house. This act signifies reverence and serves as a plea to the ancestors, seeking their response to the conveyed request, whether it is approval or otherwise, or if any hindrances may arise along the path of the one seeking help in achieving their desires.



**Figure 5:** Red rooster slaughter process.

### 5.3 Ancestral Communication Process and Ancestral Responses

After slaughter, the chicken's stomach will be immediately dissected to reveal its stomach strings, allowing for observations of its appearance. This examination aims at interpreting the signs that indicate the ancestors' responses to the conveyed intentions.

Inspection involves checking for any anomalies or black spots on the chicken's stomach strings. If such markings are observed, it could indicate that the ancestors foresee the requester facing numerous trials and challenges in achieving the intended goal. On the contrary, the absence of these abnormalities suggests a positive outcome.



**Figure 6:** The process of seeing the strings of the strings of the chicken stomach after splitting.



**Figure 7:** Image of a nail or a speck that is a sign of an ancestral response seen from the intestines of slaughtered chickens.

Another significant sign observed in the stomach strings of the slaughtered animal is the presence of a protruding white spot, often likened to a nail. A prominent and sizable protrusion is perceived as a positive sign, indicating the ancestors' approval and willingness to aid the requester in achieving their intention. Conversely, if the spot appears small and inconspicuous, it signifies obstacles and suggests that the ancestors have not approved of the requester's intention. This situation might arise if the requester infrequently visits the traditional house, leading the ancestors to express their discontent through subtle signs observed in the slaughtered chickens' stomach strings.

If the signs on the chicken's stomach strings are favourable, the event can be deemed successful, as it signifies the ancestors' approval of the event's intention. Consequently, the requester can proceed with his intention, having received approval.

The slaughtered chicken is then prepared for cooking, strictly avoiding the addition of any ingredients. It is either boiled or roasted alone. After processing, the chicken's breast and thighs are returned to the traditional house and placed on a stone as an invitation for the ancestors to partake first. The cooked chicken, along with rice, is

then placed on a special tray inside the traditional house. The traditional elders initiate another address, inviting the ancestors to view the prepared food.

Gabriel Mokos addresses the ancestors: "Usi, pah, come with us to this traditional house. Thank you for listening to and responding to our intentions. Now that the chicken is ready, grant us your blessings to consume this food, granting us the energy needed to fulfil our intentions properly."

Once the food receives the blessings of the ancestors, it must be entirely consumed by the traditional elders who lead the ceremony and the requester, leaving nothing behind. The leaving of leftovers is considered taboo and disrespectful to the ancestors. The food inside the traditional house symbolises the consumption of the ancestors, and spilling or wasting it would be considered disrespectful. Similarly, meat and rice taken from the house have specific recipients, intended to receive the full blessings symbolised by the ancestors through eating food from inside the traditional house.



**Figure 8:** The joint meal after the dialogue ceremony with the ancestors at the traditional house.

After consuming the food placed in the traditional house, the traditional *mot nini* ceremony proceeds to a communal meal. Everyone who gathered for the ceremony, forming a united family, shares this moment of togetherness, joy, and camaraderie. They partake in a meal together, relishing the bonds of brotherhood and unity. During this communal feast, families enjoy the company of each other, sharing a meal that may include other slaughtered animals brought to the gathering, although it is important to note that only red roosters are slaughtered within the confines of the traditional house.



**Figure 9:** Yakobus Rusae carried out a dialogue with the ancestors in the traditional house.

#### 5.4 Traditional event *Mot nini*

According to the insights shared by traditional elders during interviews, the traditional *mot nini* ceremony and the dialogue with the ancestors can take place within the confines of a single household, led by the family head. Similarly, these ceremonies can extend to encompass a larger family unit, namely, the entire tribe gathered within the traditional house.

Marselinus Mokos emphasised that these traditional ceremonies and dialogues with ancestors aren't constrained by a specific limit on occurrences; rather, they are contingent on the needs and intentions of the family or tribe. It is customary for a family to conduct the *mot nini* ceremony and dialogue at least once a year, while the tribe is expected to hold this traditional ceremony once every three years as a collective group involving all its members. The primary objective behind these recurring ceremonies is to perpetuate reverence for the ancestors and to maintain the bonds of unity among tribe members.

The important pillar within the traditional house stands as a symbol of unity among members and families of the tribe. It signifies a rule that emphasises the necessity for families and the tribe to remain together, serving as the custodians of ancestral legacy and demonstrating a cohesive lifestyle. Ancestors, as the originators and role models of communal living within tribes and small family units, play a pivotal role in these traditions.



**Figure 10:** Marselinus Mokos, Hendrikus Mokos, and Yakobus Rusae (left to right) being interviewed.

## 5.5 Ethnic and Family Communication

Yakobus Rusae emphasised that the primary objective behind engaging in dialogues with ancestors during the traditional mot nini ceremony is to fortify the bonds of kinship among family members, connecting them with the deceased ancestors and other relatives in the village. The location of the traditional house in the native area signifies the hometown or the place of origin. Although there may not be explicit consequences for not conducting these ceremonies, there may be obstacles encountered in the lives of families or tribes that neglect their ancestral traditions. These obstacles could manifest themselves in difficulties in securing employment, difficulties in finding suitable partners, and obstacles in education. Essentially, the idea revolves around acknowledging that the blood ties among tribe members and families trace back to their ancestors, who reside within the traditional house. Therefore, it is regarded as essential to visit and pay respects to these ancestors at least once a year or once every three years, following the tribal calendar.

These insights underscore the importance of maintaining and preserving family connections between living and deceased ancestors. Engaging in dialogues with ancestral relatives during the traditional candle-burning ceremony represents a demonstration of fraternity, reverence, and an ongoing effort to maintain communication and connections, whether with the living or those who have passed on.

## 5.6 Meaning of Traditional Ceremony Mot Nini and Dialogue with Ancestors

### 5.6.1 Ceremony mot nini

The traditional mot nini ceremony and the dialogue with ancestors are a ceremonial tribute paid to the deceased ancestors. In the beliefs of the Noemuti people, the ancestors are perceived to remain with them, residing within the traditional house where the mot nini ceremony and dialogue are conducted. The community views these ancestors as spiritual forces capable of safeguarding and supporting the community; therefore, it seeks protection and empowerment from the ancestors through these traditional rituals.

Both small families and large tribes perform traditional mot nini ceremonies and dialogues in traditional houses to seek help and transmit requests to their ancestors.

### 5.6.2 Slaughtered Animals

The primary animal used in the traditional mot nini ceremony is the red rooster, traditionally reserved for men who host the event due to its symbolic representation of courage and strength typically associated with men. On the other hand, hens are used for women in accordance with a long-standing tradition, symbolising protection and nurturing characteristics aligned with women. Pigs are reserved for significant events where the entire tribe convenes for the mot nini ceremony, but this is limited due to the high expense involved in slaughtering pigs, necessitating additional contributions from participating tribe members.

### 5.6.3 Interpretation of the Examination of the Chicken's Belly String

Examination of the chicken's belly strings serves the purpose of determining whether the ancestors approve of the intentions conveyed. If any marks on the chicken's belly string indicate disapproval or an anticipated obstacle, the traditional elders might advise performing the mot nini event a few days later. Symbolically, this represents the ancestors initially refusing yet potentially granting approval upon further inquiry, although instances of non-sanctioned actions are infrequent.

### 5.6.4 Placing Chicken Breast in Traditional Houses Before Consumption

The symbolic significance of placing the chicken breast in the traditional house before consumption pertains to offering the slaughtered animal to the ancestors. Symbolically, it signifies that the ancestors must have chicken breasts before eating. Only those actively involved in the traditional event, particularly those with intentions and knowledge of customary leadership roles, are allowed to participate in the eating of the chicken breast, symbolising a portion of ancestral blessings reserved exclusively for those conducting the ceremony.

### 5.6.5 Shared Meals

The joint meal event within the traditional mot nini ceremony and the dialogue with the ancestors symbolise unity and family bonds. It signifies a traditional ceremony in which families gather, including both living members and deceased ancestors, fostering a sense of togetherness and solidarity among all participants.

## 6. Conclusions

Traditional mot nini ceremonies are revered as a mark of reverence and a request for assistance from the ancestors by the people of Noemuti. The community firmly believes that their ancestors, regarded as spirits, possess the ability to grant aid for every intention conveyed to them. It is perceived that the ancestors bless these intentions, making their fulfilment smoother, yet the individuals conveying these intentions are also expected to persevere in their efforts.

During the traditional candle-burning ceremony within the traditional house, the community, along with traditional elders, engages in verbal dialogue with the ancestors. This dialogue, one-sided with only the traditional elders speaking, occurs in the local customary language. The elders convey the purpose of the ceremony, addressing the ancestors by name, expressing hopes for their assistance, conducting animal sacrifices, interpreting the ancestors' responses through the stomach strings of the slaughtered animals, and concluding with a communal meal. The signs deciphered from the slaughtered animal's stomach strings determine whether the intentions were accepted or rejected, concluding the success or failure of the dialogue and candle-burning event.

Ethnographically, the significance of the ceremony lies in its communication elements, which combine sacredness and respect for the ancestors who are believed to help the community. The dialogue involves elements like local language, slaughtered animals, candles, and betel nuts, ending favourably if the ancestors' response, manifested in the animal's stomach strings, is positive, a sign of their approval.

The values inherent in the ceremony encompass deep respect for the ancestors, viewed as foundational figures in the tribe whose blessings are of immense significance. Furthermore, the ceremony serves as an opportunity for families to gather and collectively communicate with their ancestors, strengthening family bonds. As the ceremony occurs yearly, it acts as a unified bridge, fostering a sense of brotherhood within the tribe.

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