

"Nahe Biti Boot" As Instrument of Overcoming Conflict to Create Peace and Reconciliation in Timorese Society: A Literature Review

Augusto da Costa, Martinho da Costa, Angelmo

Department of Education Psychology, Faculty of Science of Education, Instituto Superior
Cristal, Timor Leste

Corresponding Author: seltomia@isc-tls.org, martinhodacosta89@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This literature review examines "Nahe Biti Boot" a traditional Timorese conflict resolution mechanism that serves as a crucial instrument for overcoming social conflicts in Timor-Leste. Through systematic analysis of scholarly literature, policy documents, and empirical studies from 2002 to 2024. This review explores the historical foundations, procedural mechanisms, sociocultural significance, and contemporary applications of this Indigenous practice. The findings reveal that NBT operates through deliberative dialogue, community participation, and symbolic rituals that prioritize reconciliation over retribution. The review identifies key themes including the integration of customary and formal justice systems, the role of traditional leaders, gender considerations, and challenges of maintaining authenticity while adapting to modern contexts. This analysis contributes to broader discussions on indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, legal pluralism, and culturally appropriate PB strategies in post-conflict societies. It concludes that "Nahe Biti Boot" represents a valuable model for restorative justice deserving greater recognition in international PB discourse.

Keywords: nahe-biti boot, conflict resolution, local wisdom, reconciliation

INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste emerged as an independent nation in 2002 after enduring centuries of Portuguese colonization (1515-1975) and 24 years of Indonesian occupation (1975-1999). This prolonged history of conflict, violence, and systematic human rights violations left profound wounds in the fabric of Timorese society. The struggle for independence claimed an estimated 200,000 lives and displaced significant portions of the population, creating deep social divisions and trauma that threatened the new nation's stability and cohesion (Rostiawan, et al., 2025, Braithwaite et al., 2012; Kent, 2012).

Timor-Leste faced monumental challenges in establishing peace, promoting reconciliation, and rebuilding social relationships fractured by decades of violence (Saputra et al., 2020). While international actors and the United Nations (UN) transitional administration introduced formal judicial structures and transitional justice mechanisms based on Western models, these systems often proved inadequate for addressing the complex social conflicts and reconciliation needs rooted in Timorese cultural contexts (da Costa et al., 2022; Costa et al., 2019; Grenfell, 2009; Hohe & Nixon, 2003). Formal courts struggled with limited capacity, geographic inaccessibility, cultural alienation, and inability to address the relational and spiritual dimensions of conflict that matter deeply in Timorese worldviews (Núnes et al., 2023).

Against this backdrop, traditional conflict resolution and reconciliation mechanisms, particularly "Nahe Biti Boot" (NBT), have emerged as crucial instruments for PB and social reconstruction at the community level. The term NBT derives from Tetum, the most widely spoken indigenous language in Timor-Leste, where "nahe" means mat, "biti" means to unroll or spread out, and "boot" means big or large (Babo-Soares, 2004; Hohe, 2002). The phrase

symbolizes the convening of community members in a ceremonial gathering where conflicts are discussed, truth is revealed, relationships are repaired, and reconciliation is achieved through dialogue, ritual, and consensus-building.

Understanding NBT as an instrument for peace and reconciliation carries significance across multiple dimensions: (1) provides insights into how Indigenous knowledge systems and traditional practices can contribute meaningfully to post-conflict PB and social reconstruction (Cummins, 2010; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). As international PB increasingly recognizes the limitations of top-down, externally imposed approaches, there is growing interest in bottom-up, culturally rooted mechanisms that engage local agency and knowledge (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Richmond, 2011).

(2) Illuminating practical pathways for achieving reconciliation in societies deeply divided by violence. Reconciliation remains one of the most challenging aspects of post-conflict reconstruction, requiring not merely cessation of violence but active rebuilding of relationships, restoration of trust, and creation of shared social narratives that acknowledge past harms while enabling future coexistence (Bloomfield et al., 2003; Lederach, 1997). Traditional mechanisms like NBT offer culturally appropriate approaches to this complex process.

(3) offering practical guidance for international development and humanitarian actors seeking culturally appropriate approaches to PB (PB), justice, and reconciliation (Nixon, 2012; Simião, 2009). As donors and international organizations increasingly prioritize local ownership and cultural sensitivity, understanding indigenous peace mechanisms becomes essential for effective program design and implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding NBT as an instrument for peace and reconciliation requires first clarifying these concepts and how they relate to indigenous justice systems. Peace scholars distinguish between negative peace (absence of direct violence) and positive peace (presence of justice, harmony, and right relationships) (Galtung, 1969). NBT aligns more closely with positive peace, aiming not merely to stop conflict but to restore harmonious relationships and social cohesion.

Reconciliation represents an even more complex concept with multiple dimensions. Lederach (1997) describes reconciliation as creating space where truth, mercy, justice, and peace meet, enabling former adversaries to build new relationships despite painful histories. Bloomfield et al. (2003) identify multiple forms including political reconciliation between former warring groups, social reconciliation within divided communities, and interpersonal reconciliation between individuals. Literature on NBT reveals it primarily addresses social and interpersonal reconciliation at the community level, though it contributed to political reconciliation in post-independence Timor-Leste (da Costa et al., 2019; Braithwaite et al., 2012; Babo-Soares, 2004;).

Restorative justice provides another key conceptual framework. Zehr (2002) defines restorative justice as a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense, to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations to heal and put things as right as possible. Braithwaite (2002) emphasizes restorative justice's focus on repairing harm, engaging stakeholders, and reintegrating offenders into community. While these concepts emerged from Western criminal justice reform movements, scholars note striking parallels with indigenous practices worldwide, including Timorese traditional justice (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016 (Da Costa et al., 2019) ; Dinnen, 2003).

To understand NBT contemporary role in PB, it is essential to examine its historical foundations and evolution through periods of colonization and conflict. Pre-colonial Timorese societies developed sophisticated mechanisms for managing conflicts and maintaining peace between different kingdoms, villages, and kinship groups (Hicks, 2004; Traube, 1986). These

mechanisms operated within broader systems of alliance, exchange, and ritualized relationships that created webs of interdependence and mutual obligation across social boundaries.

During Portuguese colonization, traditional PB mechanisms adapted to new political realities while maintaining cultural foundations (Gunn, 1999; Hicks, 2004). Colonial authorities sometimes recognized and utilized traditional structures for maintaining order, creating hybrid forms where indigenous and colonial systems coexisted. Traditional mechanisms continued to operate at local levels, particularly in rural areas where colonial presence was limited.

The Indonesian occupation period (1975-1999) brought intense suppression of Timorese cultural practices and traditional authority structures, as Indonesian authorities sought to eliminate bases for resistance and impose Indonesian cultural and political frameworks (Babo-Soares, 2004; Hohe, 2002). However, traditional PB and conflict resolution mechanisms persisted, often operating clandestinely. Indeed, some scholars argue that maintenance of traditional practices became a form of cultural resistance and identity preservation during the occupation (Braithwaite et al., 2012).

The violence and social disruption of the occupation period created immense needs for reconciliation and PB. Communities used traditional mechanisms to address conflicts that arose during the resistance period, including disputes between different resistance factions, conflicts over collaboration with Indonesian authorities, and various social problems exacerbated by war conditions (Kent, 2012; Pigou, 2004). This experience of using traditional mechanisms during extreme conflict conditions shaped their application in the post-independence transitional justice and reconciliation process.

Following independence in 2002, Timor-Leste faced enormous transitional justice challenges. The Indonesian occupation had resulted in widespread human rights violations including killings, torture, sexual violence, forced displacement, and destruction of property (Pigou, 2004). The violence surrounding the 1999 referendum on independence caused additional trauma and displacement. Establishing accountability, revealing truth, and promoting reconciliation became critical imperatives for the new nation.

CAVR's Community Reconciliation Process (CRP) represented the most significant institutionalization of traditional mechanisms for peace and reconciliation (Pigou, 2004; Wandita et al., 2006). The CRP adopted elements of NBT and similar traditional practices to create a process where perpetrators of lower-level crimes could return to communities through public hearings involving acknowledgment of wrongdoing, apology, community testimony, and agreement on acts of reconciliation or reparation. These hearings explicitly drew on traditional formats including the symbolic unfurling of mats, facilitation by traditional and community leaders, community participation, and integration of ritual elements.

Evaluations of the CRP reveal complex outcomes. Research found that many community members viewed these processes as more legitimate, accessible, and appropriate than formal court proceedings (Braithwaite et al., 2012; Kent, 2012). The CRP completed over 1,400 reconciliation processes, enabling many perpetrators to reintegrate into communities and helping repair relationships damaged by conflict. Participants reported satisfaction with opportunities to tell their stories, hear acknowledgment and apology, and participate in determining appropriate responses (Pigou, 2004).

Despite its significance, detailed documentation of how NBT specifically creates peace and reconciliation remains limited in published literature. Existing accounts describe several interconnected mechanisms through which the practice promotes PB and relationship repair (Babo-Soares, 2004; Brown, 2009; Cummins, 2010).

NBT creates safe spaces for truth-telling and acknowledgment. The ceremonial unfurling of the mat symbolizes opening a space where truth can be spoken, heard, and acknowledged (Brown, 2009). This ritual framing establishes expectations that participants will speak

honestly and listen respectfully. Truth-telling serves multiple reconciliation functions including validating victims' experiences, enabling perpetrators to acknowledge responsibility, creating shared understanding of what occurred, and establishing factual foundation for addressing harms (Pigou, 2004).

The practice facilitates public apology and expressions of remorse. In Timorese cultural understanding, genuine reconciliation requires perpetrators to publicly acknowledge wrongdoing, express remorse, and request forgiveness (Babo-Soares, 2004). The public nature of these expressions matters significantly, as it creates collective witness, restores perpetrators' moral standing through humility, and enables communities to evaluate sincerity. Research suggests that victims often consider sincere apology more important than material compensation for achieving emotional closure and willingness to reconcile (Braithwaite et al., 2012).

NBT provides opportunities for victims to express pain, anger, and grief in socially sanctioned contexts. Reconciliation requires not just perpetrator acknowledgment but victim voice and validation (Lederach, 1997). The deliberative format allows victims and their families to narrate suffering, express emotional impacts, and articulate needs for repair. This public expression serves healing functions for individuals while educating communities about conflict consequences (Pigou, 2004).

Community participation creates collective ownership of PB processes. Unlike Western legal proceedings that focus on individual victims and perpetrators, NBT involves extended families, neighbors, and community members as active participants rather than passive observers (Cummins, 2010; Simião, 2009). This collective engagement reflects understanding that conflicts and reconciliation affect broader social networks. Community participation also creates collective responsibility for monitoring agreements, supporting reintegration, and preventing future conflicts.

Practice employs material and ritual exchanges that symbolically restore relationships and social balance. Material reparations create tangible acknowledgment of harm and reestablishment of reciprocal obligations between individuals and families (Bovensiepen, 2014; McWilliam, 2005). Ritual elements including shared meals, ceremonial offerings, and animal sacrifices serve multiple functions including marking the transition from conflict to peace, invoking spiritual sanction for agreements, creating collective memory, and reestablishing harmony between human and spiritual realms.

NBT emphasizes perpetrator reintegration rather than exclusion or punishment. The goal is returning offenders to rightful place in community social fabric after making appropriate acknowledgments and reparations (Braithwaite, 2002). This reintegrative approach reflects cultural values prioritizing community cohesion and practical recognition that permanent exclusion is neither possible nor desirable in small face-to-face communities where people must continue living together (Cummins, 2010).

Consensus-building processes ensure that reconciliation outcomes have broad legitimacy and support. Rather than imposed decisions, NBT works toward agreements that all parties and the broader community can accept (Brown, 2009; Hohe, 2002). This consensus orientation increases likelihood that agreements will be respected and implemented, reduces resentment that might undermine reconciliation, and creates collective investment in successful outcomes principal objectives.

The principle of collective over individual identity shapes reconciliation approaches (Cummins, 2010; Simião, 2009). Timorese traditionally understand identity primarily through kinship, clan, and community membership rather than Western individualism. This collective orientation means that conflicts affect not just immediate parties but entire social networks, and reconciliation similarly requires collective processes. Individual decisions to forgive or

reconcile occur within and depend upon broader family and community contexts, including elders and traditional authorities.

Respect for elders and traditional authority enables PB leadership (da Costa et al., 2022; Hicks, 2004; Hohe, 2002). Traditional leaders derive authority not from formal positions but from cultural knowledge, moral character, lineage connections, and community recognition. Their guidance in reconciliation processes draws upon accumulated wisdom, knowledge of precedent, and ability to interpret cultural norms. Trust in traditional authority enables communities to accept difficult reconciliation decisions and supports reintegration of offenders including spiritual and cosmological dimensions.

Spiritual and cosmological dimensions of reconciliation reflect beliefs that conflict creates imbalance not only between people but in broader cosmic order (Bovensiepen, 2014; Traube, 1986). Ancestors and spiritual forces have stakes in community harmony and capacity to punish violations or bless resolutions. Ritual elements in NBT address these spiritual dimensions, seeking ancestral approval, appeasing offended spirits, and restoring balance between human and spiritual realms. These cosmological dimensions give reconciliation processes significance beyond merely human relationships.

Research examining the effectiveness of NBT and similar traditional mechanisms for achieving peace and reconciliation reveals complex and sometimes contradictory findings. Evidence of positive impacts includes prominent levels of community participation and ownership (Braithwaite et al., 2012). Studies document that traditional reconciliation processes typically engage large numbers of community members as active participants, creating collective investment in outcomes that formal legal proceedings rarely achieve. This broad engagement contributes to legitimacy and social reinforcement of agreements.

Evidence suggests that traditional mechanisms often successfully facilitate perpetrator reintegration (Braithwaite et al., 2012; Cummins, 2010). Follow-up studies indicate that many individuals who participated in community reconciliation processes have successfully returned to communities, resumed normal social relationships, and avoided further conflicts. Community members report accepting reintegrated individuals, though tensions and complete healing sometimes remain elusive.

Questions persist about whether traditional mechanisms can appropriately address serious human rights violations beyond ordinary social conflicts (Kent, 2012). While NBT may effectively reconcile community disputes, critics argue that systematic torture, mass killings, and other grave violations require stronger accountability than traditional reconciliation provides. The emphasis on forgiveness and reintegration may be inappropriate when crimes are exceptionally serious.

African contexts provide additional comparative insights. Rwanda's gacaca courts adapted traditional conflict resolution mechanisms for post-genocide reconciliation and accountability, creating community-based processes where survivors and perpetrators confronted each other with facilitation by respected community members (Clark, 2010). While gacaca operated on much larger scale than Timorese traditional mechanisms and faced significant challenges including power imbalances and trauma traumatization, it similarly sought to combine accountability and reconciliation through culturally rooted, community-based processes.

Sierra Leone's truth and reconciliation commission attempted to incorporate traditional purification and reconciliation rituals, recognizing that Western-style truth-telling alone could not address spiritual dimensions of violence or achieve reconciliation in communities where traditional beliefs remained strong (Kelsall, 2005). This experience parallels Timor-Leste's recognition that formal transitional justice needed supplementation with culturally appropriate mechanisms.

Comparative perspective also highlights strengths of the Timorese approach. The successful integration of traditional mechanisms into formal transitional justice through CAVR's CRP represents a positive model that other post-conflict societies might learn from (Braithwaite et al., 2012). The continued vitality of traditional practices and authorities in Timor-Leste, despite colonization and occupation, provides stronger foundation for Indigenous PB than exists in societies where traditional structures were more thoroughly disrupted.

RESEARCH METHODS

This literature review employed a systematic approach to identifying, selecting, and analyzing relevant scholarly and grey literature on NBT as an instrument for peace and reconciliation in Timor-Leste. The search strategy involved multiple stages utilizing diverse sources to ensure comprehensive coverage. The initial search phase focused on academic databases including JSTOR, Google Scholar, ProQuest, Web of Science, and specialized databases for peace and conflict studies, anthropology, and law. Given the interdisciplinary nature of PB and reconciliation research, the research encompassed multiple academic fields including peace and conflict studies, anthropology, law, political science, development studies, transitional justice, and psychology. This broad approach was necessary because research on traditional peace mechanisms appears across diverse scholarly literatures.

Materials were included if they: (1) addressed traditional PB, reconciliation, or conflict resolution in Timor-Leste, (2) provided substantive analysis, empirical data, or theoretical insights rather than superficial mention, (3) met basic quality standards including clear methodology and appropriate evidence, and (4) were relevant to understanding Nahe Biti Boot's role in creating peace and reconciliation.

The primary temporal focus was 2002-2024, though earlier sources providing historical context were included. Materials in English and Portuguese were included. Materials were excluded if they only mentioned traditional justice tangentially, focused solely on formal systems without addressing customary mechanisms, or lacked relevance to PB and reconciliation themes.

The analysis employed thematic synthesis methodology involving iterative coding and analysis moving from descriptive to interpretive levels. Initial coding identified key themes, concepts, and arguments. These codes were developed inductively from the material while informed by relevant theoretical frameworks including restorative justice, PB, and legal pluralism.

Descriptive themes were organized into higher-level analytical categories capturing major areas of scholarly attention regarding Nahe Biti Boot's role in peace and reconciliation. The analysis-maintained attention to how different source types approached the topic and tracked how understanding has evolved over time.

All sources were critically evaluated for quality, credibility, and potential biases. Academic sources were assessed for research methodology, evidence quality, logical coherence, and acknowledgment of limitations. Organizational reports were evaluated for institutional perspective, transparency about methodology, and balance in presenting complex issues. Special attention was given to positionality, noting whose voices were centered or marginalized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of literature reveals that NBT functions as an effective instrument for peace and reconciliation through two interconnected mechanisms. Most fundamentally, it creates culturally appropriate spaces for truth-telling, acknowledgment, and dialogue that enable communities to address conflicts in ways that resonate with Timorese worldviews and values (Babo-Soares, 2004; Braithwaite et al., 2012). The ceremonial unfurling of the mat carries deep

symbolic significance, marking the opening of sacred space where honest communication can occur, relationships can be examined and repaired, and social harmony can be restored.

Research consistently documents that NBT prioritizes relationship restoration over punishment or exclusion, aligning with restorative justice principles while emerging from indigenous cultural foundations (Braithwaite, 2002; Cummins, 2010). This restorative orientation proves particularly valuable for post-conflict PB because sustainable peace requires not merely stopping violence but actively rebuilding social relationships, trust, and cooperation necessary for communities to function.

The literature reveals that community participation constitutes a crucial strength for PB effectiveness (Braithwaite et al., 2012; Pigou, 2004). Unlike formal legal proceedings that involve only lawyers, judges, and immediate parties, NBT engages extended families, neighbors, and community members as active participants. This broad engagement creates collective ownership of PB outcomes, collective responsibility for monitoring agreements and preventing future conflicts, and collective investment in reconciliation success.

Research documents that NBT effectively facilitates perpetrator reintegration into communities, which proves essential for sustainable peace in small societies where permanent exclusion is neither feasible nor desirable (Cummins, 2010). The process enables perpetrators to acknowledge wrongdoing, express remorse, make reparations, and earn forgiveness, creating pathways for restored social relationships rather than permanent stigmatization.

Evidence suggests that traditional mechanisms address conflicts that formal systems cannot effectively reach due to geographic, economic, cultural, and capacity barriers (Grenfell, 2009). This broad reach means traditional PB addresses many conflicts that might otherwise fester and threaten stability, contributing significantly to overall peace even when formal transitional justice mechanisms receive more international attention.

Analysis reveals that NBT demonstrates differential effectiveness for various dimensions of reconciliation. The practice proves most effective for interpersonal and community-level social reconciliation (Braithwaite et al., 2012). Research documents numerous cases where traditional mechanisms successfully resolved conflicts between individuals, families, and community factions, enabling former adversaries to rebuild relationships and coexist peacefully.

For political reconciliation between broader social groups divided by conflict, evidence is more mixed (Kent, 2012). While NBT contributed to local-level reconciliation that supported broader political peace, scholars question whether community-level mechanisms alone can address systematic political violence and large-scale human rights violations requiring national-level accountability and institutional reform.

Regarding psychological healing and trauma recovery, literature suggests traditional mechanisms provide important but incomplete responses (Pigou, 2004). Ritual elements, community validation of suffering, and perpetrator acknowledgment can support healing processes. However, serious trauma may require additional therapeutic interventions beyond what traditional mechanisms provide, particularly for victims of severe violence and sexual assault.

For structural reconciliation addressing underlying inequalities and injustices that fueled conflict, NBT shows limited capacity (Hohe & Nixon, 2003). While it effectively addresses interpersonal conflicts, traditional mechanisms do not tackle broader structural issues including poverty, inequality, political exclusion, or resource competition that create conditions for conflict.

The literature identifies several factors that significantly affect Nahe Biti Boot's effectiveness for PB and reconciliation. Community cohesion and social capital prove crucial (Cummins, 2010). Traditional mechanisms work best in communities with strong social bonds, shared values, and effective social sanctions. In communities fragmented by conflict,

migration, or rapid social change, traditional PB faces greater challenges. Legitimacy and authority of traditional leaders significantly influence outcomes (Hohe, 2002). When leaders are respected and viewed as impartial, their guidance and facilitation enhance reconciliation effectiveness. When leaders are viewed as biased, corrupt, or lacking moral authority, their involvement may undermine rather than support PB.

The nature and severity of conflicts affect appropriateness and effectiveness of traditional mechanisms (Kent, 2012). NBT proves most effective for conflicts within normal community experience including land disputes, family conflicts, theft, and interpersonal violence. For grave violations including torture, massacre, or systematic sexual violence, questions arise about whether traditional mechanisms can provide adequate accountability and justice.

Power relationships between party's influence fairness and satisfaction with outcomes (Nixon, 2012). When power is balanced, negotiated solutions may be mutually acceptable. When significant power imbalances exist, stronger parties may dominate processes and impose outcomes that weaker parties resent, undermining genuine reconciliation.

Gender dynamics critically affect effectiveness for women versus men (Swaine, 2003; Wandita et al., 2006). Traditional structures typically privilege male voices and interests, potentially marginalizing women's experiences, and needs. Reforms enhancing women's participation and ensuring attention to gender-specific harms improve effectiveness for women's peace and justice.

Integration with formal justice systems shapes effectiveness through complementarity or conflict (Grenfell, 2009). When traditional and formal systems work complementarily, with clear division of responsibilities and mutual respect, effectiveness is enhanced. When systems compete or contradict each other, confusion and conflict undermine both.

Despite documented strengths, significant limitations affect Nahe Biti Boot's capacity to create sustainable peace. Literature consistently identifies power imbalances as a fundamental challenge (Hohe & Nixon, 2003). Traditional authorities may be influenced by wealth, kinship, or political allegiances. Powerful perpetrators may escape accountability while vulnerable victims receive inadequate justice. These inequities can perpetuate resentments that threaten long-term peace.

Gender inequality represents the most serious limitation for creating peace that serves all community members (Niner, 2011; Swaine, 2003). Women's systematic exclusion from leadership roles, marginalization of women's voices, inadequate responses to violence against women, and prioritization of family unity over women's safety all limit effectiveness for women's peace and justice. Peace that does not serve women equally is incomplete and unsustainable.

Social pressure toward forgiveness can become coercive, forcing premature or superficial reconciliation that does not reflect genuine healing (Kent, 2012). When victims feel compelled to forgive due to community pressure rather than genuine readiness, reconciliation remains shallow and vulnerable to eventual breakdown. Coerced reconciliation may increase victim suffering rather than promoting healing.

Urbanization and social change weaken community foundations necessary for traditional PB (Brown, 2009). As Timorese society becomes more urban, mobile, and individualistic, the face-to-face community structures that enable NBT to function effectively may erode, requiring evolution of PB approaches.

The literature extensively examines how NBT relates to formal transitional justice mechanisms, revealing both productive synergies and ongoing tensions (Braithwaite et al., 2012; Kent, 2012). Timor-Leste's experience incorporating traditional mechanisms into CAVR's Community Reconciliation Process represents a successful model of integration that other post-conflict societies might learn from.

Research documents four ways traditional and formal approaches can complement each other (Grenfell, 2009). Formal mechanisms provide accountability for serious crimes beyond traditional system capacity, establish historical record through truth commission documentation, and assert state commitment to rule of law. Traditional mechanisms provide accessible justice for majority of conflicts, culturally appropriate reconciliation processes, and community-level PB that formal systems cannot replicate. When working complementarily, the systems can address broader range of post-conflict needs than either could alone.

Analysis of NBT contributes important insights to broader PB scholarship and practice. It demonstrates that sustainable peace requires culturally appropriate approaches that resonate with local values, worldviews, and social structures rather than universal templates imposed externally (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Richmond, 2011). While international PB often emphasizes formal institutions and universal standards, the Timorese experience reveals that Indigenous practices can play crucial roles in creating lasting peace.

The case illustrates the value of restorative approaches that prioritize relationship repair over punishment (Braithwaite, 2002; Lederach, 1997). In post-conflict societies where people must continue living together, exclusionary punishment may prove less effective for sustainable peace than processes enabling acknowledgment, forgiveness, and reintegration. Nahe Biti Boot's success supports arguments for restorative transitional justice even while raising questions about appropriate scope and limitations.

The literature reveals the importance of community participation and ownership for PB effectiveness (Cummins, 2010). Top-down processes imposed by state authorities or international actors often lack local legitimacy and fail to engage grassroots agency. Nahe Biti Boot's strength derives significantly from community ownership, suggesting that effective PB must be locally driven even when supported by external actors.

The Timorese experience illuminates the significance of ritual, symbolism, and spiritual dimensions in PB (Bovensiepen, 2014; Lederach, 1997). Western PB often focuses narrowly on political, economic, and legal interventions while overlooking symbolic and spiritual dimensions that matter deeply in many societies. Nahe Biti Boot's integration of ritual elements suggests that effective PB must address multiple dimensions of human experience.

CONCLUSION

This literature review synthesizes scholarly knowledge on NBT as an instrument for overcoming conflict and fostering peace and reconciliation in Timorese society. The analysis demonstrates that this traditional practice constitutes a sophisticated peacebuilding mechanism that is deeply embedded in Timorese cultural values, social structures, and spiritual beliefs. NBT operates through core principles that emphasize communal participation, the restoration of social relationships, acknowledgment and truth-telling, symbolic and material exchanges, as well as the reintegration of perpetrators into the community, thereby reinforcing collective harmony and social continuity.

The literature further highlights the significant strengths of NBT for peacebuilding and reconciliation, including its cultural appropriateness and local legitimacy, high accessibility for rural populations, and holistic orientation that addresses not only social but also spiritual dimensions of conflict. Its restorative approach facilitates effective perpetrator reintegration, encourages strong community ownership and participation, and promotes social cohesion by prioritizing healing and reconciliation over punitive measures.

At the same time, the review identifies serious limitations and challenges associated with NBT. Power imbalances within traditional systems, particularly those related to gender inequality, raise critical concerns regarding fairness, inclusivity, and justice for all members of the community. These structural inequalities may limit the ability of NBT to fully protect the rights and interests of marginalized groups, especially women and vulnerable populations.

The relationship between traditional mechanisms such as NBT and formal justice systems is also shown to be complex and contested. Ongoing debates surround issues of autonomy, integration, and reform, as well as the extent to which traditional practices can or should be incorporated into state-based legal frameworks. While constructive complementarity between the two systems is possible, achieving this requires careful navigation of philosophical differences, power dynamics, and practical jurisdictional challenges. The Timorese experience thus offers important lessons on both the potential and the difficulties of integrating indigenous practices into formal transitional justice processes.

Ultimately, NBT should be understood neither as a romanticized solution to all post-conflict challenges nor as an inherent obstacle to modern justice and human rights. Instead, it represents a living cultural practice that continues to evolve over time, offering genuine strengths while simultaneously confronting real and persistent limitations. Its effectiveness depends on context, implementation, and the extent to which its shortcomings are critically addressed.

More broadly, the implications for peacebuilding theory and practice underscore the necessity of culturally appropriate approaches, the value of restorative and community-based mechanisms, the importance of local ownership, and the inherent complexity of managing legal pluralism in post-conflict societies. Timor-Leste's experience with NBT contributes meaningful insights to global discussions on indigenous peacebuilding, transitional justice, and the pursuit of sustainable reconciliation.

Recommendations for Future Research: Detailed ethnographic documentation of actual NBT proceedings using participant observation to understand specific mechanisms creating psychological and social change, youth-focused research examining generational differences in attitudes toward traditional reconciliation and possibilities for evolution and psychological research examining trauma recovery, forgiveness processes, and healing mechanisms in traditional reconciliation. Timorese government: develop clear legal frameworks recognizing traditional, provide appropriate support for traditional authorities including capacity building, resources, and platforms for dialogue with formal justice officials. Establish referral mechanisms enabling appropriate collaboration between traditional and formal systems, support gender-sensitive reforms through dialogue with traditional authorities and women's rights advocates. Traditional authorities: Remain open to dialogue about reform particularly regarding gender equity and women's participation. Develop appropriate relationships with formal institutions maintaining autonomy while enabling beneficial cooperation. Adapt practices to remain relevant for younger generations while maintaining cultural foundations. Ensure fairness for vulnerable community members including women, poor families, and marginalized groups.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This literature review was conducted to contribute to understanding of traditional PB mechanisms and their role in post-conflict reconciliation. The author acknowledges the valuable work of scholars whose research forms the foundation of this synthesis and particularly recognizes Timorese scholars and communities who have maintained cultural practices through periods of colonization and conflict while generously sharing knowledge with researchers. The resilience and wisdom embedded in traditional practices like NBT offer valuable lessons for PB worldwide. Any errors or misinterpretations remain my own responsibility.

REFERENCES

Babo-Soares, D. (2004). Nahe Biti: The philosophy and process of grassroots reconciliation (and justice) in Timor-Leste. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 5(1), 15-33.

"Nahe Biti Boot" As Instrument of Overcoming Conflict to Create Peace and Reconciliation
in Timorese Society: A Literature Review

- Blagg, H. (2008). *Crime, Aboriginality, and the decolonization of justice*. Hawkins Press.
- Bloomfield, D., Barnes, T., & Huyse, L. (Eds.). (2003). *Reconciliation after violent conflict: A handbook*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.
- Bovensiepen, J. (2014). Installing the insider 'outside': House reconstruction and the transformation of binary ideologies in independent Timor-Leste. *American Ethnologist*, 41(2), 290-304.
- Braithwaite, J. (2002). *Restorative justice and responsive regulation*. Oxford University Press.
- Braithwaite, J., Charlesworth, H., & Soares, A. (2012). Networked governance of freedom and tyranny: Peace in Timor-Leste. ANU Press.
- Braithwaite, J., Charlesworth, H., Reddy, P., & Dunn, L. (2010). *Reconciliation and architectures of commitment: Sequencing peace in Bougainville*. ANU Press.
- Brown, M. A. (2009). Security, development and the nation-building agenda: East Timor. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 9(2), 141-164.
- Clark, P. (2010). *The gacaca courts, post-genocide justice and reconciliation in Rwanda: Justice without lawyers*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cummins, D. (2010). Local governance and justice in Timor-Leste: The political economy of postconflict rule of law programs. In Y. Matsuno & M. Bessho (Eds.), *Fostering the rule of law in post-conflict states through security sector reform* (pp. 99-120). United Nations University.
- Cunneen, C., & Tauri, J. (2016). *Indigenous criminology*. Policy Press.
- Costa, A. da, Goncalves, A. D. S., Pereira, S., & Hitipeuw, I. (2019, March 25). *The Impact of Smartphone on Universitarian Psychological Wellbeing*.
<https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.21-11-2018.2282266>
- Da Costa, A., Goncalves, A. D. S., Pereira, S., & Moreira, P. D. J. (2019). Investigating The Values of Guidance and Counseling in Eleganaboi. *Jurnal Kajian Bimbingan Dan Konseling*, 4(1), 13. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um001v4i12019p013>
- da Costa, A., Hanurawan, F., Atmoko, A., & Hitipeuw, I. (2019). The model of grade point average academic of timor-leste S in Indonesia. *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*, 8(6), 213–216.
- da Costa, A., Ximenes, M. D. J., da Conceição, D. V., Soares, A., & da Conceição, J. (2022). Investigating the Value of Counseling in Salala-Aisisagadai: A Local Wisdom Approach of Guidance and Counseling. *Proceedings of Siliwangi Annual International Conference on Guidance and Counselling*, 1(December), 12–19.
- Dinnen, S. (2003). *Law and order in a weak state: Crime and politics in Papua New Guinea*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-191.
- Goddard, M. (2009). *Substantial justice: An anthropology of village courts in Papua New Guinea*. Berghahn Books.
- Grenfell, D. (2009). Reconciliation: Violence and nation-formation in Timor-Leste. In D. Grenfell & P. James (Eds.), *Rethinking insecurity, war and violence: Beyond savage globalization?* (pp. 200-215). Routledge.
- Gunn, G. C. (1999). *Timor Loro Sae: 500 years*. Livros do Oriente.
- Hicks, D. (2004). *Tetum ghosts and kin: Fertility and gender in Timor-Leste* (2nd ed.). Waveland Press.
- Hohe, T. (2002). *Totem polls: Indigenous concepts and 'free and fair' elections in East Timor*. International Conflict Resolution Programme, University of Bradford.
- Hohe, T., & Nixon, R. (2003). *Reconciling justice: 'Traditional' law and state judiciary in East Timor*. Report for United States Institute of Peace.

- Kelsall, T. (2005). Truth, lies, ritual: Preliminary reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 27(2), 361-391.
- Kent, L. (2012). *The dynamics of transitional justice: International models and local realities in East Timor*. Routledge.
- Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Leonardsson, H., & Rudd, G. (2015). The 'local turn' in peacebuilding: A literature review of effective and emancipatory local peacebuilding. *Third World Quarterly*, 36(5), 825-839.
- Rostiawan, F.F., et al., Ximenes, M. d. S. Da Csota, A. (2025). Pastoral counseling in Christian schools: A hidden force in shaping professional teachers' roles beyond the classroom. *Journal of Professional Teacher Education*, 3(1), 33-45.
<https://doi.org/10.12928/jprotect.v3i1.1610>
- Núnes, I., De, J., Cristal, I. S., Leste, D. T., Gomes, M., Margareta, C., Costa, A., & Castro, A. D. De. (2023). *JEDUCIH: Journal of Education, Science, and Humanities*. 4, 53-59.
- Mac Ginty, R., & Richmond, O. P. (2013). The local turn in peace building: A critical agenda for peace. *Third World Quarterly*, 34(5), 763-783.
- McWilliam, A. (2005). Houses of resistance in Timor-Leste: Structuring sociality in the new nation. *Anthropological Forum*, 15(1), 27-44.
- Merry, S. E. (1988). Legal pluralism. *Law & Society Review*, 22(5), 869-896.
- Niner, S. (2011). Hakat Klot, narrow steps: Negotiating gender in post-conflict Timor-Leste. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13(3), 413-435.
- Nixon, R. (2012). *Justice and governance in East Timor: Indigenous approaches and the 'new subsistence state'*. Routledge.
- Philpott, D. (2012). *Just and unjust peace: An ethic of political reconciliation*. Oxford University Press.
- Pigou, P. (2004). *Crying without tears: In pursuit of justice and reconciliation in Timor-Leste: Community perspectives and expectations*. International Center for Transitional Justice.
- Richmond, O. P. (2011). *Post-liberal peace*. Routledge.
- Simião, D. S. (2009). Customary law and legal pluralism in Timor-Leste: A convergence or collision of justice systems? In M. Leach & D. Kingsbury (Eds.), *The politics of Timor-Leste: Democratic consolidation after intervention* (pp. 252-272). Cornell Southeast Asia Program.
- Swaine, A. (2003). *Traditional justice and gender-based violence in Timor-Leste*. International Rescue Committee.
- Saputra, W. N. E., Supriyanto, A., Astuti, B., Ayriza, Y., Adiputra, S., da Costa, A., & Ediyanto. (2020). Peace counseling approach (PCA) to reduce negative aggressive behavior of students. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(2), 631-637.
<https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080236>
- Traube, E. G. (1986). *Cosmology and social life: Ritual exchange among the Mambai of East Timor*. University of Chicago Press.
- Trindade, J., & Castro, B. (2007). *Rethinking Timorese identity as a peacebuilding strategy: The Lorosa'e-Loromonu conflict from a traditional perspective*. European Union.
- Wandita, G., Campbell-Nelson, K., & Pereira, M. L. (2006). Learning to engender transitional justice: Participatory action research on gender and cultural sensitivities for the Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation (CAVR) in Timor-Leste. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 1(1), 113-138.
- Zehr, H. (2002). *The little book of restorative justice*. Good Books.