Cultivating Plantations and Subjects in East Timor: A Genealogy

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Abstract
This article traces the emergence and institutionalization of plantation systems and cash crops in East Timor over two centuries. It examines the continuities, ruptures and shifting politics across successive plantation styles and political regimes, from Portuguese colonialism through Indonesian occupation to post-colonial independence. In following plantation agriculture from its origins to the present, the article explores how plantation subjects have been formed successively through racial discourse, repressive discipline, technical authority and neoliberal market policies. We argue that plantation politics have been instrumental in reproducing the class distinctions that remain evident in East Timor today.

Keywords
East Timor, plantations, history, governmentality

we should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects.
(Foucault 1980: 97)

Introduction
In 2008, civil society organizations in East Timor got wind of secret dealings between the Timorese government and an Indonesian company concerning plans to establish a number of large sugar-cane plantations on East Timor’s south coast. A controversy between civil society and government quickly erupted. Over the ensuing months, arguments around employment
opportunities, economic benefits for the nation, environmental impacts, the track record of the company in question, and the effect of similar plantations in neighbouring Indonesia, were thrashed out in public meetings before the issue subsided. For the time being, it appeared that Timorese civil society had sufficient influence to thwart the ambitious plans.

Despite the market-based economic models that multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank have sought to foster within state-building processes of East Timor export-oriented plantation agriculture has been unable to develop in the country since the former SAPT\(^2\)—the country’s largest and oldest plantation company dating from 1897—was run into bankruptcy for a second time during the Indonesian period. There remain, however, substantial areas of smallholder coffee plantations in East Timor covering an estimated three per cent of the territory (Reis 2000).\(^3\) Now widely incorporated into producer and exporter cooperatives, these plantations reflect the contemporary postcolonial political situation as much as they recall, and in many respects entail, layers of past agricultural regimes, both state and private, that were institutionalized over successive colonial orders and successive phases within those orders. Indeed, East Timorese have been growing coffee since the early nineteenth century, especially from the 1860s when it was vigorously promoted under the governorship of Afonso de Castro (1859-1863); sometimes they were forced to do so by the colonial authorities or by their own indigenous rulers; at other times they did so voluntarily with a keen awareness of the benefits that coffee could deliver.

In this paper we trace the emergence and institutionalization of various plantation systems and crops from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, charting the continuity, ruptures and ongoing politics of plantation agriculture in East Timor. From the time of the pacification wars (1890-1912) to the end of Portuguese colonialism in 1975, through the subsequent quarter century of Indonesian annexation and East Timor’s eventual

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\(^2\) Soceidade Agrícola Patria e Trabalho.

\(^3\) Precise data is unavailable. This is a conservative figure given that coffee production expanded over the previous decade. As a comparison Gouma and Kobryn (2004: 5) estimated that up to 7% of East Timor (575sqkm) could be classified as forest/coffee cover based on a measure of the favoured coffee shade trees Casuarina equisetifolia and Albizia falcataria providing 30-70% of cover. The World Bank has estimated that a somewhat larger area of 52,000 ha is cultivated with coffee (2010).
independence, we encounter many plantation types. They include autonomous tribute-paying indigenous smallholder plantations, private plantations of indigenous and mestizo elites, communal plantations, state-military plantations, penal plantations, European and Indonesian plantations. In following plantation agriculture from its colonial origins to the present, we explore how plantation subjects were constituted, regulated and reproduced through various discourses and disciplinary practices.

The notion of ‘subjects’ recalls the work of Michel Foucault (among others) who has analysed the emergence and operationalization of power-knowledge in various institutions—schools, asylums, prisons—as the production of normalized subjects through the definition and isolation of individuals and the routine surveillance, control and discipline of their human bodies. Foucault’s ideas have been widely applied to both colonialism (Anderson 2006; Said 1979) and international development (Crush 1995; DuBois 1991; Escobar 1984, 1995; Ferguson 1990). They have also been widely critiqued, particularly in the anthropology of development where ‘the new ethnography of development’ (Mosse 2005) reveals more complex and multifaceted development encounters that challenge the totalizing implications of the Foucault-styled development critique ( Gow 2008; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Sardan 2005).

Yet Foucault’s ideas continue to resonate across the field, even as scholars grapple with the theoretical limitations of poststructuralism and postdevelopment in the face of an active local agency and flexible appropriations of interventions that go beyond the question of resistance. The level of agency and appropriation point to development subjects who are acutely aware of the conditions that oppress them (Li 1999; see also Ortner 2006 and Scott 1995). Without reprising these theoretical debates, this article signals the continuing relevance of Foucauldian ideas to understanding colonial and postcolonial development, in this case, in East Timor. With a focus on plantation cultivation and plantation subjects, we explore the shifting power relations that informed the strategies and mechanisms of sequential regimes which were, and remain, productive of plantation subjects, just as plantations themselves formed a potent site for the making of colonial and postcolonial social relations. The monocultural impulse of plantation regimes, we argue, offers an ideal technology for regulating and disciplining recalcitrant colonial subjects. The prospects of plantation agriculture, both as a source of efficient and profitable land use and as a vehicle for engaging
a compliant labour force in relatively low cost productive work was, and remains, a favoured strategy of state regimes. In producing a genealogy of plantations subjects, we identify in each stage of plantation development different forms of ‘bio-power’; those strategies that work to produce a supply of docile human bodies that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved (Foucault 1979: 136). Without presuming the total and necessary subordination of subject peoples to colonial (or postcolonial) authority, we enquire into the nomenclatures, meanings and expectations attributed to the embodied individuals who laboured on plantation coffee, and later, coconut, rubber, cacao, sisal, candlenut and cashew fields. In highlighting the productive disciplinary and normalizing conceptualization of power that pervades the social body (DuBois 1991), we do not dismiss the negative, repressive power of the state, which has been present since early colonial times and continues today through international and peacekeeping enforcement against Timorese subjects. Indeed, we demonstrate how these two forms of power operate in concert.

We define plantation agriculture as forms of broadacre agriculture that require the reorganization of land and labour; where the import of material and social technologies is routine; and produce is commoditized and destined for export. A special note needs to be made in regard to irrigated rice, which was heavily promoted under Portuguese and Indonesian rule but only exported for very brief periods, and never in large quantities due to a lack of surplus production. As a predominantly import-substitution cultivar it only fulfils the first two criteria and we therefore limit our discussion of rice in this article, suffice to say that it exhibited many of the same qualities and structural relations that ordered the main plantation crops.

The Emergence of Indigenous Plantations 1860-1894

It is likely that coffee was introduced to Portuguese Timor from Dutch-controlled Maubara in 1815. But until 1860 coffee had a marginal presence as one of many exports in a colony that struggled financially. As sandalwood exports declined, pressure mounted to find substitute export commodities (Cinatti 1950). Under the governorship of Afonso de Castro (1859-1863), plans were forged to promote the widespread cultivation of coffee in 30 of the 50 recognized reino or ‘kingdoms’ that had well-established relationships with the Portuguese authorities. Castro adapted elements of the
coercive Culture System (*Cultuurstelsel*) that had been implemented in the Dutch East Indies in 1830. As in the Dutch system, one justification for forced labour regimes can be sourced to the prevailing racial discourses around the idea of lazy and indolent native peoples, where improvement of the flawed native character could be rectified through the civilising benefits of labour (Alatas 1977; Philpott 2000; Li 2007). Military control in Portuguese Timor, however, was too weak to enforce cultivation as it had been in Java, where indigenous cultivators had to give up two fifths of the harvest in tax.\(^4\) Castro thus set substantially more lenient terms, asking that just one fifth of the harvest be offered up as tax (Castro 2010 [1867]: 431). Furthermore, local rulers, known as *régulo* or *liurai*, who subscribed to Castro’s requirement of making each family plant and maintain 600 coffee bushes, would also be exempt from the agricultural tax known as *finta*—a tax that had been imposed on vassal kingdoms since the previous century (when Lifau, now situated in the enclave of Oecussi, was the principal Portuguese settlement). Castro’s management structures, however, ultimately had too limited a reach for his grand scheme to succeed across the colony, but some coastal *liurai* were tempted by the offer and coffee exports from Portuguese Timor rose from 22 tons in 1860 to 145 tons by 1865 (Carvalho 1937; Figueiredo 2000: 724-8). Emboldened by his success, subsequent governors followed Castro’s initiative and the area under cultivation expanded quickly. Extra revenue allowed for promotion efforts in other *reino* and by the 1880s coffee had spread to the eastern parts of the island.

It is important to note that during the second half of the nineteenth century, coffee cultivation proceeded as a negotiation between the Portuguese and the *liurai*. The Portuguese had little direct control over land and labour (see Gunn 1999). However, the precise conditions under which local rulers forced or enticed their subjects to plant coffee is far from clear. If the Portuguese generally cast the indigenous rulers as ruthless ‘tyrants’ who mercilessly exploited their own, counter-evidence suggests that *liurai* relied on the support of subsidiary groups and *datos*—chiefs of smaller polities known as *suco*—to endorse their decision making and provide legitimacy. Either way, an indigenous slave class was also roped into plantation

\(^4\) After the 1830’s Dutch Governor General Van Den Bosch (1830-33) increased taxation to two fifths of the crop, doubling the earlier and more lenient system of one fifth. Castro favoured this new approach but in the light of conditions and the ‘backwardness’ of Portuguese Timor, opted to emulate the pre-1830 taxation model.
agriculture, slaves that were for the most part acquired through endemic head-hunting and pillaging raids between reino and suco (Roque 2010a; Hicks 2004).

The remarkable increase in coffee output attained by the early 1880s, when exports peaked at around 2500 tons, must be attributed to the way local rulers (liurai) coveted the riches and carnal pleasures that accompanied coffee. Apart from enjoying it as a stimulating beverage, coffee wealth allowed them to afford more weapons and gunpowder, to raise more buffalo, stage more feasts, marry more wives, wage more wars, plunder enemy settlements and accumulate more human heads and slaves. Liurai also enjoyed the military rank that vassalage (and its attendant finta and coffee tax benefits) bestowed on them, and in identifying with the Portuguese crown they prized the Portuguese flag and made it a sacred (lulik) symbol of authority (Correia 1935; Schlicher 1996). Coffee thus bolstered their position, improved their assets, furthered trade and strengthened their status and renown.

At this incipient level, coffee was a significant agent in the colonial constitution of Timorese subjects, yet it relied more on a negotiation over desired rewards and the ability of Timorese and colonial officials to recognize and shape the desires of the other (see Anderson 2008). In the absence of stronger disciplinary technologies, desire was inconsistent, subject to shifting reciprocities, fickle parasitic inter-dependencies and the potentially alienating (anti-colonial) self-interest of indigenous polities (see Roque 2010a). So it was that the more coffee production expanded, the more the liurai were tempted to dispose of their coffee outside official structures and channels. They generally received a better price for their coffee on the black market, selling it to corrupt officials or to the Chinese, who traded directly with mountain producers and slipped across the porous western border to the port of Atapupu, or took their purchases to Suai on the south coast where it was picked up by Dutch ships (Fox 2000; Roque 2010b). The more the Portuguese sought to control coffee through military excursions into the reino, the more they incited widespread rebellion in the west, generalized disobedience in the east, and a combination of the two in reino of the central uplands. In the 1880s, social instability drove coffee production into decline, and Portuguese coffee revenues fell accordingly (Gunn 1999; Péli ssier 2007).
Governor Celestino da Silva came to Portuguese Timor in 1894 with instructions to pacify the indigenous population and make the colony productive. The ensuring ‘pacification campaigns’ corresponded with a concerted push to assert control over indigenous agricultural processes and institute more intensive forms of rule. Scott has described similar processes in terms of the political rationalities of colonial power. That is, ‘a form of power…which was concerned above all with disabling old forms of life by systematically breaking down their conditions and with constructing in their place new conditions so as to enable—indeed, to oblige—new forms of life to come into being’ (Scott 1995: 193).

The prevailing racial ideology that naturalized the assumed superiority of the Portuguese ‘race’ over that of the ‘native’ (indígena) (see Roque 2010a) was more than a justification that served the colonial ‘will to power’. Rather, it was built into the hierarchies that enabled the military and disciplinary practices of bio-power to serve both military and agricultural ends. Using many thousands of loyal Timorese warriors, known as arraiais and moradores, Silva’s bloody pacification campaigns ushered in a significant shift in the history of Portuguese colonial relations in East Timor, even as its effects unfolded gradually and unevenly across the colony. In the western interior, in particular, Silva abolished some reino and divided the land among loyal Timorese and government allies, with a view to augmenting coffee plantations (Silva 1997). He sacked, had murdered or sent into exile disloyal liurai, and installed his puppet loyalists. He extended the network of military bases and military posts and at the same time restricted the ambulatory commercial activities of the Chinese by fixing their residence. All produce had now to be sold through official channels at prices set by the government (Schlicher 1996).

But Silva longed for a system of large plantations owned by Europeans rather than having to rely on liurai and smallholder production. New labour laws instituted in 1899 obliged liurai to provide workers for the state and for private plantations. In principle, these workers or auxílios received a minimum wage and food rations (usually maize and rice), yet only enough to afford bare survival (Magalhães 1909). Private European-owned plantations were set up on the lands of the submissive reino. Roads were built connecting the plantations to Dili, and the buffalo-drawn cart was introduced. Just
before the turn of the century, Portuguese control of the mountain district of Ermera led to the founding of the Sociedade Agrícola Patria e Trabalho (SAPT). This plantation estate\(^5\) became the private property of Governor Silva and would soon cover two thousand hectares of plantations in the highlands of Ermera, much of which had previously operated as indigenous smallholdings. The SAPT’s principal crop was coffee, but rubber, cocoa, coconut, tea, and cinchona were also imported and trialled. New land concession regulations instituted in 1901 (Fitzpatrick 2002) drew additional metropolitan investors and military men to plantation agriculture and half a dozen more incorporated plantation estates were established in the opening years of the twentieth century. The forced labour system provided short-term labour needs, while captives from pacification wars served illegally as plantation slaves and covered long-term needs (Clarence Smith 1992; Gunn 1999).

Just as Silva was planning his retirement, social technologies in the service of Foucauldian bio-politics—in particular the registration of births, deaths and marriages and refinements in census-taking—gave rise to the abolition of the *finta* in 1906, and its replacement with a head tax (*capitação*), first collected from all adult males in 1908. This put pressure on every household to produce a marketable excess of food over and above subsistence needs, fomenting dissent and rising disenchantment among taxpayers. Their resistance was typically met with punitive expeditions to oblige compliance, and by the time Silva departed Timor in 1908, it appeared that the East Timorese populations were completely pacified (Magalhães 1909).

**The Republicans in Timor, 1910-1925**

The collapse of the monarchy in Portugal in 1910 and the rise to power of the republicans had a profound effect on the development of plantation agriculture in Portuguese Timor and the colonial possibilities for harnessing bio-power. The republicans in Timor accorded the state a central role in a system of *granjas estatales* (government farms) and state plantations that had already begun to emerge, albeit on a small scale, during Silva’s

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\(^5\) We use the term ‘estate’ to distinguish European-managed plantations from indigenous ones.
governorship. What was to become the first large-scale farm, the Granja ‘Eduardo Marquês’, was founded in 1908 in the military command of Liquiçá and would soon employ 5,000 indigenous labourers. A new ‘ethical idealism’ promised better conditions for the labour force (Magalhães 1909).\textsuperscript{6} In practice, while the government eliminated slavery on the European plantations, they refined and expanded the forced labour system without any appreciable difference to the working conditions (Clarence-Smith 1992). In response to increases in the head tax and an erosion of \textit{liurai} privileges, the last great insurrection in the history of Portuguese Timor erupted in 1911.\textsuperscript{7} Under Governor Filomeno da Câmara, the Manufahi uprising was only quelled by a colonial army of some 12,000 men at a cost of many thousands of Timorese lives.\textsuperscript{8} In dissident kingdoms, state farms and plantations operated as quasi-prison camps for plantation agriculture. The extensive ‘Granja Republica’, set up in 1914 on the plain of Raimera in Manufahi, is a case in point.\textsuperscript{9} In loyal kingdoms, by contrast, the usual system of (poorly) remunerated labour continued to operate.

Under Câmara (1911-1917) the Repartição de Fomento Agrícola e Comercial (Allocation for Agricultural and Commercial Development, henceforth Fomento) was established. Marking a return of emphasis to supervised indigenous smallholder production not unlike what Castro had envisaged half a century earlier, one of the Fomento’s tasks was to implement a territory-wide system of ‘communal plantations’ that, if effective, would represent the apotheosis of bio-power. The category of ‘communal property’

\textsuperscript{6} The approach reflected a wider trend mirrored in the emergence of the Dutch colonial liberalist discourse, known as the ‘ethical policy’ which favoured a more accommodating and cultural-relativist position towards development and the place of local tradition (see Hooker 1978; Kahn 1999:90; Moon 2007).

\textsuperscript{7} A number of factors contributed to the growing discontent that resulted in the Manufahi rebellion: the 1906 dismantling of an indigenous tax known in Tetun as \textit{rai-teen}; the heavy toll of forced labour conditions; and the prospect of a communal plantation system that would dramatically reduce the share of produce and profits received by the \textit{liurai} (see Olivier and Schlicher 1996; Davidson 1994; Pelissier 1996: 280-291). Gunn (1999) goes so far as to suggest that the doubling of the head tax served as a pretext to mobilise rebellious opposition.

\textsuperscript{8} Estimates vary greatly; Gunn (1999: 177-85) puts the figure at 25,000 while Figueiredo’s (2004) estimate is 4,000.

\textsuperscript{9} See \textit{Boletim de Comercio, Agricultura e Fomento da Provincia de Timor} 1917(1): 12. (Henceforth BCAeF)
(plantações comunais) was created for the purpose of reducing the dominance of the chiefs and giving participants the confidence to cultivate coffee, knowing that four fifths of the harvest would be theirs to sell. Military commanders were placed under the jurisdiction of the Fomento to carry out its instructions—building nurseries, germinating seeds, and transplanting seedlings to any place deemed appropriate for coffee or coconut production. A colony wide ‘planting fury’ ensued and within two years more than half a million coconut palms and 12 million coffee trees had been planted across the military districts, mostly on these so-called ‘communal plantations’.10

These programs, however, were executed without much attention to the agroecological specificities of location. Many of them failed for this reason. There were, moreover, too many to be executed under the direct supervision of military commanders, who relied instead on a chain of command from local rulers to suco chiefs and hamlet heads.11 All too often, lapses in reporting and insufficient commitment at the lower end of the echelons meant that communal plantations were implemented half-heartedly or not at all. Later, when military commanders were required to enumerate, measure and register plantations, their attempts to do so were frustrated because the ‘plantations’ were widely dispersed, poorly demarcated and mixed up with the swidden system.12 Moreover, the obligations surrounding communal plantations were often deeply resented by local Timorese. Tellingly, they referred to them not as ‘communal’ but as ‘state plantations’ (plantação de estado). Indignation intensified when officials ordered the clearing of sacred lands (rai lulik) for cash cropping. In these circumstances the production yields of the ‘communal plantations’ tended to fall well short of the grandiose Portuguese expectations.13 Many nurseries of seedlings were never transplanted, the recommended spaces between plants were not respected, communal plantations were often abandoned and some even burned in protest. After the departure of Câmara from Timor in

10 BCAeF 1917(1): 82. 1 Clarence-Smith (1992); Lencastre (1929).
11 Military command slowly gave way to Civil administrations. Martinho, for example, notes that Baucau, Manatuto and Liquica first became civil Circunscrição in 1920 and 1921 (1943: 89).
12 BCAeF 1919(1): 80-81.
13 BCAeF 1919(1): 91.
1917, the forced planting regime posing as ‘communal’ production began to languish (Carvalho 1937; Schlicher 1996; Silva 1956).

In what amounted to a volte face of the new policy, those ‘communal plantations’ that were worth maintaining were then turned over to individuals, usually once again to favoured liurai and clan chiefs as private property. In fact, all along this elite class had been benefiting disproportionately from government interventions into cultivation, providing that they demonstrated their fealty to the colonial authority. Since the introduction of the head tax in particular, liurai had expanded their estates under Portuguese patronage in exchange for sacrificing local tribute and relinquishing their authority as autonomous rulers. Liurai were effectively transformed into individual benefactors and, paradoxically, the institution of communal plantations had only served to contribute to this concentration of land-use and the privileged status of a class of higher-ranking indigenous subjects (Carvalho 1937).

Favoured liurai still relied on indigenous labour, but with the Timorese domains now cowered and pacified, slaves (atan) were no longer sourced through warfare. Rather, it appears that the introduction of the head tax had the effect of augmenting traditional patterns of enslavement as trading in vassals enabled some to meet the mandatory head tax where abled bodied individuals might be worth anything from two to ten buffalo. Other unfortunates unable to pay the tax, submitted themselves (or their sons) to the liurai or clan chiefs to become bonded workers in their master’s households and fields rather than be caught evading taxes and sent to prison. As effective slaves (atan), their masters paid their head tax for them. This kind of de facto slavery was widely held to be less harsh than what we usually understand by the term; slaves were absorbed into their host families and often treated with a level of dignity and respect.

Prison plantations became more common after 1921 when the new policy allowed government plantations to form the basis of a Colónia Penal Agrícola under a new ethos of ‘agricultural correction’. Henceforth, the government would draw on a surplus of ‘justly condemned prisoners’—mainly indigenous Timorese but also Chinese Timorese and exiles (deportados)

15 Tax obligations led to a proliferation of prostitution (see Correia 1944) and had long term consequences as descendants of bonded workers are still accorded slave status in contemporary social relations.
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arriving from Portugal, Macau, and the African colonies. The cost savings were clear, and the initiative could be justified as redemptive work for criminals. The slave-like and oppressive conditions under which all prisoners worked these plantations were occasionally recounted by visitors (see Shepherd and McWilliam forthcoming). An article published in the Australian Smith’s Weekly reported for example that,

... prisoners of Portuguese Timor, guilty of no greater offence than that of inability to pay their taxes, are put to forced labour in chains, under the superintendence of native guards, and if they weaken in their tasks are flogged with long bamboo rods until they fall exhausted and bleeding... (cited in Gunn 1999: 212).

Tidings such as these fed the growing scepticism with which Portuguese colonialism was regarded internationally, and inside Portugal this news may have contributed to the fall of the republican government in 1925 (Clarence-Smith 1985).

Portuguese Timor under the Estado Novo, 1926-1974

With the 1926 rise to power of what in 1933 become known as the Estado Novo, authorities in Lisbon became even more determined to make the colonies pay their way (Clarence-Smith 1985). Inside Portuguese Timor, the head tax was trebled and new taxes were introduced (see Gunn 1999; Lencastre 1929). There is clear evidence that the expansion of an indigenous penal labour force was integral to plantation development; one rubber plantation in Viqueque had 1,200 ‘criminals’ at their disposal (Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino 1930). It is also likely that prison labour extended to other public works, especially during the fervent road-construction years of the mid- to late 1920s when motorized transport became common (Gunn 1999; Shepherd and McWilliam forthcoming). Increased penal labour marked a shift in the colonial conception of the native population (indígena), who more than ever was closely monitored for law-breaking behaviour with a view to expediting the passage of the convicted to the labour camps. Prison plantations were critical to what under Governor Teófilo Duarte (1926-1929) amounted to a new ‘planting fury’ similar to that unleashed by Câmara. By

16 BCAeF 1921(1): 54-5.
this stage, however, there was no pretence of communalism and its purported distributive benefits. Rather, the government favoured propertied chiefs who were fast becoming conspicuously wealthy. There were now about a dozen major indigenous planters of the ‘high born’ class, even as the reino (‘kingdoms’) and régulos (‘minor kings’) had officially ceased to exist (Correia 1935, 1944). Attempts to attract European settlers to Portuguese Timor were, as ever, unsuccessful. No one wanted to come to this remote and disease-prone destination. Nevertheless, Duarte managed to turn a number of exiles (mainly from Portugal) and reformados (civil servants or military men already in Portuguese Timor) into planters by granting them land holdings (Duarte 1944). (Their mestiço offspring were destined to play a central role in subsequent national(ist) politics). Complementing this process, the system of state farms and plantations was absorbed into the private European plantation system, while the configuration of forced and prison labour for large plantations—European and indigenous—prevailed until the Japanese occupation in 1942.

Japanese rule in Timor was brief, harsh and largely preoccupied with matters of warfare and the logistics of provisioning 20,000 occupying troops. Timorese populations were subject to punishing demands for corvée labour and the supply of foodstuffs for the occupying troops. When the Japanese eventually surrendered in 1945, Portugal repossessed a devastated colony. As many as 70,000 East Timorese had perished (Gunn 1999). Dunn (1983: 27) notes that,

[m]ost of the population was close to starvation, there was virtually no commercial activity, (and) the plantations of coffee, cocoa and rubber—the colony’s most prosperous economic sector—had nearly all been abandoned and…degenerated into bushland…

Over the first decade of the post-war period, authorities were mainly concerned with the restitution of the colonial system of governance, the rebuilding of destroyed infrastructure, and the revival of overgrown plantations. In respect to the latter, funds were quickly allocated to European plantation owners to promote productive plantations, and the system of forced indigenous labour was reinstated and even increased (Molnar 2010). The rehabilitated SAPT soon employed 3,000 Timorese labourers cultivating coffee, rubber, and cocoa and now covered some 11,000 hectares. In response to rising commodity prices, a new group of entrepreneurs emerged, attracted
to plantation agriculture, and a number of new plantation estates sprung up (Reis 2000). At the same time ‘Agricultural Correction Centers’ deploying prison labour under slave-like conditions were also re-established after the war (Joliffe 1978). They operated until at least 1960, but forced labour for the state was maintained until the final days of Portuguese colonialism (Clarence-Smith 1985). Outside these labour regimes, taxes remained oppressively high and Timorese smallholders of the post-war period were thus placed under enormous pressure to cultivate cash crops for export and regular subsistence crops for regional markets.

After World War II, a modified concept of indigeneity emerged in the metropole and this had some effect on the Portuguese colonies including Timor. The concept was informed less by race than by an appreciation of culture that was taking shape within anthropology (see Anderson 2006; Cadena and Starn 2007; Young 1995). Although cultural hierarchies remained implicit, cultural improvement carried strong emancipatory overtones compared to the previous biological framing of racial difference. This moral shift was also consistent with the American-led post-war ideology of Third World development that likewise had some bearing on the colonial practices of the Portuguese (Escobar 1995). Post-war development in Portuguese Timor was therefore not simply a matter of remaking the plantation patterns and plantation subjects of the interwar years. Rather, a new emphasis was placed on the proper treatment of indigenous subjects, encompassing a critique of the nefarious and counter-productive effects of coercion prevalent in methods of agricultural extension. More emphasis on indigenous well-being was accompanied by an increased focus on science. Hélder Lains e Silva emerged as a leading advocate of agricultural extension based on proper scientific methods of variety trials (Silva 1956, 1964). Coffee and rice came to dominate scientific research over the final quarter century of Portuguese rule (Reis 2000).

A key institution at the time was the Mission for Overseas Agronomic Research (Missão de Estudos Agronómicos do Ultramar, or MEAU). The MEAU scientific preoccupation with coffee leaf rust gave rise to the discovery of a group of Arabica bushes that appeared to be resistant to the disease. The variety came to be called the Híbrido de Timor or the Timor Hybrid. Considered a discovery of international significance, much research was conducted jointly between the MEAU and the Coffee Rusts Research
Center (CIFC). The Timor Hybrid was a key aspect of subsequent extension efforts: as many as 1,000 coffee nurseries were established between 1964 and 1973 to provide some 20,000 coffee growers with almost two million coffee seedlings (Reis 2000).

By this stage forced cultivation by the state was no longer an integral or official feature of coffee growing, although much would have depended on the particular proclivities of local administrators (see Metzner 1977). Reports insisted that coffee seedlings and technical assistance were to be delivered only to those interessados (MEAU 1973). Incentives, particularly seeds and tools, were now one of the main ways to influence growers (Reis 2000). Yet it must be noted that the indigenous population remained notoriously submissive to Portuguese authority. Dunn (1996: 35) for example, remarks on the persistent manifestations of colonial servility reflected in the actions of ordinary Timorese towards the authorities. It is therefore unlikely that Timorese peasant farmers perceived a choice when confronted with officious European extension agents directing their activities. Timorese assimilados and mestiços, however, employed in the lower echelons of the administration (usually in the more remote 'sub-districts' or posto), were known to be more sympathetic to their ‘uncivilized’ Timorese brothers (see Landman and Plant 1948). Over and above these particulars, the systemic properties of colonial governance ensured dominance and the ongoing pressure of bio-power extension: taxes were high and householders had to find a way to pay them. In effect, monetary taxes equated to a tax on labour and with the entire territory under Portuguese control and every indígene accounted for and registered, bio-politics was firmly institutionalized.

This new approach must explain the success of coffee cultivation, as measured by the state. At the level of the household, East Timorese smallholders had integrated coffee into their seasonal farming livelihoods. In 1970, farmers were responsible for at least 60% of the colony’s total coffee output, and for the first time export figures surpassed those attained nearly a century earlier (1879-1881) and exceeded the 5,000 ton mark. In the final three years of Portuguese possession (1972-1974) coffee accounted for as much as 94% of all exports (Gunn 1999; Reis 2000).

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17 Centro de Investigação da Ferrugens do Caeceiro.
The cash-cropping of coconut experienced a resurgence in the late 1950s when the price of copra increased on the world market. The relative ease with which indigenous planters could process coconut made it attractive to smallholder households. By the mid-1960s, seedlings sown in 1958 were in production, and by 1969 Viqueque district alone was exporting some 400,000 kgs of copra annually. Baucau was also an important production area. In the late 1960s Metzner (1977) observed that suco chiefs (village headmen) were becoming increasingly prominent commercial agriculturalists, living in solid brick houses, operating around markets with other suco members working for them ‘free of charge’. Across Portuguese Timor at this time, the position of suco chiefs remained a predominantly inherited office based on the enduring emplaced authority of senior clan groups (Hicks 2004).

Although not an export crop, rice deserves mention here. High yielding varieties from the Philippines became available in mid-1960s, and following positive trials were extended to farmers. Metzner (1977) observed huge discrepancies in equity in the development of south coast paddy around Uato Lari. One of the factors driving this regional development of over 2,500 hectares was the close relationship between the district administrators, the agricultural services, and the village chiefs. The scheme tapped into three classes of indigenous subjects. Firstly, there was a mass of some 1,500 peasants who were each allocated one or two hectares of land for cultivation. Secondly, there was a large pool of seasonal labourers drawn predominantly from the upland area of neighbouring Quelicai, who came to the lowlands with their buffaloes (for use in land preparation) and their rice cultivation skills. Thirdly, there was a small elite class of local leaders, who each held up to 100 hectares of irrigated riceland and benefited from ancillary features of the program, such as education for their children and new medical facilities (Metzner 1977). The rice program elucidates what was the case for plantation agriculture more generally in post-war Portuguese Timor. Whether in coffee, coconut, or rice, development tended to consolidate the power and comparative wealth of the indigenous liurai and clan chiefs, whose dominance over subordinate, often displaced and landless, indigenous households had emerged over the course of a century of Portuguese intervention into local agricultural production.

With the fall of the Salazar-Caetano regime in Portugal and the beginnings of the colonial withdrawal from Portuguese Timor, three main East Timorese parties quickly emerged, all of whose leaders were drawn from
mestiço and liurai families, and who had been educated at the seminar-
ies and worked within the colonial civil service (Kammen 2010). UDT was
a pro-Portugal party, and represented the interests of plantation owners.
Fretilin (formerly ASDT)—was of a socialist orientation, and drew up plans
for agrarian reform that would seek the redistribution of wealth. Indeed,
Fretilin was largely responsible for bringing the inequities of existing land
ownership and plantation cultivation—including the entrenched privi-
leges of liurai—to national consciousness (Aditjondo 1994). A third party,
APODETI, stood for integration with Indonesia and provided something of
a pretext for the Indonesian covert operations in September 1975 and full
scale invasion in December. In the turmoil that followed large numbers of
mestiços and assimilados fled the country. Many from this group pursued
higher education abroad, particularly in the Lusophone countries, subse-
quently returning in 1999 as a Portuguese speaking elite (see Hill 2002).
The deeply ingrained contrast between Portuguese ‘whites’, their favoured
Timorese elites and allies, (including civilizados and mestiços) and the bulk
of the indigenous peasantry would not so much disappear with the hasty
retreat of the Portuguese. Rather it would hibernate for the next quarter
century as a new system of bio-power was imposed.

Indonesian Occupation, 1975-1999

The military invasion of East Timor by Indonesian armed forces in late 1975
embroiled the territory once again in a prolonged period of destructive
warfare, displacement and deprivation for its long-suffering population.
The declaration of East Timor as the twenty-seventh province of Indonesia
resulted in the transplantation of most nationally-based government pro-
grams as part of the broader strategy to integrate East Timor into the wider
nation. The use of military force to eradicate resistance and produce obedi-
ent Indonesian citizens was combined with sustained efforts to promote
increasing economic development and the provision of state-based serv-
ices. Like the development programs of Portuguese colonial governments,
strategies were directed towards economic ends as well as forms of ideolog-
ical integration within the nation state. These efforts encompassed a focus
on agricultural intensification, especially the preferred sectors of irrigated
rice production and tree crop commodity production (perkebunan) as part
of a broader national initiative to promote the non-migas (non oil and gas) export sector of Indonesia.

Despite a state rhetoric of liberation from the yoke of colonialism, the efforts of the Indonesian government to re-order and re-settle large numbers of Timorese communities close to roads and lowland irrigated infrastructure, replicated in many respects the approach of their colonial predecessors, albeit on a grander scale. Colonial capitalism, as Young (1995: 170) has argued, entailed a double movement of which ‘the territory and cultural space of an indigenous society [had to be] disrupted, dissolved and then reinscribed according to the needs of the apparatus of the occupying power’. Unlike the Portuguese period where there was substantial if selective respect for, and even colonial mimicry of indigenous traditions (see Lencastre 1929; Roque 2011), the new occupiers found little merit in traditional systems as they relocated the majority of the population away from their ancestral lands and placed them in camps. Thus, in the territory that was renamed Timor Timur, the camps became the starting point for sustained coercive policies of de-facto military rule; a regime that sought to render a recalcitrant and resistant population of Timorese subjects into a compliant citizenry eager to embrace what Philpott describes as, the ‘state articulated goals of prosperity’ (2000: 173) that characterized the New Order Suharto regime. In the process however an estimated 100,000 Timorese people lost their lives, the majority to starvation under the repressive conditions and a food supply crisis in early 1980s.

In time however, a Timorese-Indonesian citizenry was fashioned around a new set of subject positions. The category of indigeneity had no place within the Indonesian state (see Merlan 2009) and was therefore of no great significance within East Timor itself while under Indonesian control. Of greater significance was the strategic division of East Timorese into ‘collaborators’ and non-collaborators (effectively ‘enemies’). At the same time, the category ‘East Timorese’ (and the terms Maubere / Buibere)18 re-emerged to become de facto identity labels and a rallying cry around which nationalist aspirations coalesced and intensified in the face of Indonesian annexation (Anderson 1993); the ‘cultural and religious commons’ of Catholic

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18 Mambai language terms for male and female peasants, with derogatory connotations under Portuguese rule that were subsequently popularized by Fretilin in 1974-1975.
East Timor was highlighted against the ‘cultural invasion’ of Indonesian Muslims. In contrast to this growing ethno-nationalism, the concept of ‘East Timorese’ signalled to Indonesians something of an ‘ethnocality’ inferior to their own, with connotations of backwardness, poverty and ‘primitive’ practices (Boellstorff 2002). The centralist state perspective was one that also extended to other regions of remote Indonesia under the Suharto’s New Order regime, where the conditions of its inhabitants, variously defined as suku terasing [isolated peoples] or perambah hutan (forest dwellers), were considered politically and morally suspect. The liberating benefits of state-based education and a centrally directed economic development were thus part of the philosophy of territorial governance and the making of national citizens (see Li 1999). In East Timor, the influx of large numbers of Javanese civil servants and military personnel, Bugis and Butonese traders as well as Javanese and Balinese transmigrant rice farmers positioned themselves as a cut above the local population (see Robinson 1986). In the agricultural sector, these distinctions could be seen reflected in the attributions of agro-technical knowledge and in the privileges that Indonesians received via resource allocation and access to formal land titles (Fitzpatrick 2002). This new social dynamic played out in the plantations, just as the plantations constituted a site for the realization of the ethno-social distinctions. Indeed, throughout the 24 years of occupation, plantation agriculture was a cornerstone of Indonesian development programming. Intervention focused on the more fertile lands where camps were converted into readily accessible ‘settlements’. Sponsored by international aid agencies and banks (whose physical presence was generally limited), these initiatives were geared towards the production of cash crops in places that had previously been farmed by semi-subsistence hamlet groups (Taylor 1999). Cash cropping proliferated during the 1980s, and alongside a province-wide campaign to develop agriculture, forestry, health, education and infrastructure, the initiatives enabled Jakarta to promote its developmentalist agenda and, to a degree, appease international concerns about the prevailing social conditions and well-being of East Timorese. In the heavy handed Indonesian strategy to win hearts and minds, one could discern beneath the surface of activity, following DuBois (1991: 10), ‘the actions of bio-politics and disciplinary power harnessing the energy of the social body and molding the individual bodies into subjects’, effectively translating their Portuguese-era subjection to service the needs of Indonesia. Under such conditions, and in
Cultivating Plantations and Subjects in East Timor

distinction to the relatively benign post-war Portuguese colonialism, even small manifestations of Timorese resistance, such as those discussed by Scott (1985), would have been a dangerous undertaking. The fact that the East Timorese resistance movement nevertheless grew and flourished over the period highlights the ultimate failure of Indonesian indoctrination and its bio-political, corporate aspirations.

Within the East Timorese plantation crop sector, coffee retained its status as the most important and lucrative commodity produced. The main production areas were in the districts of Ermera, Manufahi, upland Liquiçá and Ainaro. Initially, Indonesian agro-military interests focused on the appropriation of existing, if lapsed, Portuguese colonial coffee assets, due in large part to the immediate revenue possibilities (Fitzpatrick 2002). The extensive former coffee estates of the SAPT under Portuguese rule (11,000 hectares in Ermera), for example, were taken up by an army-backed Indonesian company, Pt Salazar Coffee Plantations (Aditjondro 1994: 59; Taylor 1991: 125-7). Military interests in the plantations precluded any re-assertion of local East Timorese claims to the coffee lands and harvest yields, and ushered in new kinds of oppressive labour regimes on the large plantations and the market manipulations that favoured military financial interests. Timorese prisoners were also sent to the plantations (Taylor 1999: 104), although precise details of the extent and organization of this system are not available. With an eye to maximizing immediate returns and thus avoiding the reinvestment of profits, the larger estates ignored productivity challenges, and in the 1990s neglect and mismanagement sent them into inexorable decline.

Smaller plantations, however, remained in the hands of local households, and during Indonesian rule became the dominant form of production for tree crops as smallholder famers benefited from technical improvements and government promotion of smallholder production. However, and despite the significant involvement of Timorese households in coffee harvesting, it is apparent that monopoly pricing and restrictive trading opportunities still worked against the efforts of East Timorese famers to the benefit of larger and more powerful Indonesian investment interests. Even in a relatively compliant anthropological survey undertaken in East Timor in 1990 (Mubyarto et al. 1992: 50-1), the authors were openly critical of trading arrangements of a private company (Denok Hatimas) as well as government collusion over pricing, the combined effect of which undermined...
local farmer cooperatives, exacerbated local financial hardship and resulted in the ‘stagnation of the coffee economy’ (see also Soesastro 1991).

Military monopolies began to weaken after the province was opened to other Indonesians in late 1988 (resulting in an influx of Bugis settlers from Sulawesi) and temporarily to foreigners in 1989, under the more moderate Governorship of Mario Carascalão. In respect to coffee in particular, the monopoly of military companies was broken in 1994 when the Indonesian government, under pressure from the US, deregulated the industry and allowed the US National Co-operative Business Association (NCBA) and a number of other buyers to enter the market. The NCBA, with backing from USAID, worked in unison with the Cooperativo Café Timor (CCT). The arrival of open competition instigated an immediate fourfold increase in the purchase price for coffee and initiatives to expand the areas under production were evidently successful (BPS 1996: 229; Oxfam 2004: 4). Production of coffee in 1996 was reportedly as high as 11,000 tonnes, with around half of that sourced from Ermera (Dalam Angka 1996: 219). Much of this production derived from a core of 13,000 of the estimated 45,000 smallholder coffee producers (Columbia University 1999: 23). For coffee and other plantation crops alike, promotion measures encompassed the community- or village-based programs that at different times and under various auspices included the provision and distribution of seedlings, fertilizers and pesticides as an inducement to promote village (desa) production. To the extent that government-sponsored plantations of commodity tree crops were promoted in East Timor, they formed part of a generalized set of ‘subsidies’ to rural communities under one or another development program.20

In Timor Timur in particular, government programs like these were part of the broader campaign to foster Timorese allegiance and acceptance of

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19 A policy subsequently revoked in the face of continuing internal security concerns.
20 The penghijauan (‘greening’) program, for example, was one such initiative which applied a top-down approach to distributing seedlings and extension advice, often on the basis of annual development planning schedules, which gestured towards participatory consultation with village communities. The intention and scope of the program was directed to the broader household-based farming community, but the implementation of the various schemes suffered from multiple problems of supply and support. As one account notes, key problems included low productivity and yields from the various crops, limited extension services and the chronic problem of low farmer investment capital for expanding tree crop production (Badan Pusat Statistik 1992: 172).
Indonesian state authority and promote farmer participation in economically productive activity. The programs were therefore believed to be paramount for the successful integration of the province. Thus we need to temper views of rampant exploitation of local resources by the occupying power (e.g. Aditjondro 1994) with the emergence of science-based development programs that, to a significant degree, pursued real material benefits for Timorese farmers and were arguably more effective than the earlier Portuguese interventions casting East Timorese peasants as ‘beneficiary’ subjects.

Indonesian development planning for tree crop agriculture sought to provide adapted crops for Timor’s low soil fertility and highly variable monsoon conditions. Over the years a variety of diverse commodities was promoted in different areas. This reflected a better understanding of the variable conditions and seasonal factors that favoured some crops over others. The knowledge derived in part from province-based experimentation, but also from the circulation of agricultural expertise and methods that had developed across Indonesia; the experience of development programs in eastern Indonesia was particularly pertinent to Indonesian East Timor. The efforts of government in this area proved quite effective in terms of raising production of the key estate crops including, coffee, bananas, coconut, clove, cashews, and cocoa, along with more limited efforts in vanilla, pepper, candlenut and kapok.21 From the 1980s, the plantation crop sector was second to food crops in production terms, and contributed as much as 30% of total food crop production to East Timor’s GDP (Saldanha 1994: 217). Rubber production, however, which at one point was the third largest export under the Portuguese, ceased during this period, principally due to disruptions caused by the sustained military campaigns against armed resistance (Fitzpatrick 2002: 25).

Demonstrating continuity with the first decade of the post-World War II Portuguese period, coconut development was another of the favoured crops and included smaller plantings of shorter variety hybrids. Certain areas of East Timor were clearly targeted for coconut and copra production—areas which were also popular during Portuguese colonial efforts to increase

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21 The introduction of candlenut (*Aleurites Mollucana*) in the late 1980s reflected programs undertaken elsewhere in Indonesia in consideration of both the improved market prices for candlenut and its adaptability to conditions in Timor.
revenue from the districts. The eastern districts of the island—Viqueque, Baucau and Lautém—dominated production. Importantly, most of this was privately owned by local farmers and their extended family networks which, one may assume, were those that had excelled in copra production during the Portuguese period.

Finally, we note that the Indonesian government implemented a major program of expanded irrigated rice production as part of its efforts to improve self-sufficiency of the staple and its ideological attempts to promote rice consumption. Extensive infrastructure works and irrigation improvements in areas such as Manatuto, Maliana, Manufahi, Suai, Luro and Viqueque complemented provincial resettlement programs to sedentarize mountain Timorese populations and facilitate internal security arrangements and the provision of services. As part of this process Javanese and Balinese transmigrants were settled into irrigation areas to act as role models and trainers for their Timorese neighbours.

Despite the inequities that afflicted Indonesian plantation and rice development, many young Timorese were educated in Indonesia and found employment in government. Some of this group was absorbed into the provincial Ministry of Agriculture as agricultural technicians, and it is noteworthy that by the 1990s two thirds of the 'PPL' field extension workers were East Timorese. Ironically, it was this new generation of Indonesian-era nationalists who were prominent agitators for independence and lent the necessary support to the small but powerfully symbolic contingent of Falintil guerrillas in the mountains (personal comments, V. Ximenes 2008). With the end of occupation in 1999, the politics of plantation development would pivot around a three way intersection between this group of 'stay-at-home' Indonesian-speaking nationalists, the repatriated Portuguese-speaking Timorese elite and an influx of international development bureaucrats housed under UN auspices, the World Bank, a host of bilateral development agencies, and more than two hundred INGOs (Wigglesworth 2012).

Postcolonial Development, Democracy, and Plantation Politics, 2000-2013

The remarkable achievement of sovereign independence for East Timor, fully effective on 20 May 2002, ushered in a wholly new era of democratic politics and a renewed orientation to economic development. It also ushered in a renewed struggle for political power and influence between
and among different groups as they navigated their passage within the nascent postcolonial landscape. As before, ethnic categories constituted ‘local identities’, but they tended to be subsumed under broader regional and political affiliations. Examples include the potent distinction between pro-autonomy versus independence alignments, the related firaku (easterners) and kaladi (westerners) distinction, and the enduring political divide between Fretilin (the major political party in opposition since 2007) and other parties (including those of the former AMP ruling coalition and the present ‘Fifth Constitutional Government’, Kintu Governu). While these divisions and coalitions underpin the impulses and periodic expressions of communal violence, they also provide clues to understanding the dynamics of postcolonial development politics (Shepherd and McWilliam 2011). Cutting across these regional identities and party politics, four distinctions have assumed prominence in the post-independence period: (1) that between national elites and peasants (ema bo’ot and ema ki’ik) which speaks primarily, but not exclusively, to the mestiço groups that have assumed contemporary political power; (2) that between the governing and well-connected Portuguese-speaking elite and the aspirational and disaffected, younger generation, the ‘geração foun’ educated within the Indonesian system; (3) that between foreign development experts (malae) and the generally subordinated national development employees (ema rai Timor); and finally (4) between ‘indigenous’ traditional authority (lisan, lian na’in, liurai) and democratic forms of representation promoted by the state (estado/ governu) including, at the local level, the suco council (Consehlo das Katuas).

Contemporary plantation politics are presently negotiated across all four of these divides. Plantation policies, particularly in relation to coffee, have signalled the continuance of a semi-autonomous plantation approach, albeit subject to growing degrees of technical intervention and incorporation

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22 These terms are stereotypes that emerged during Portuguese Colonial times when an alleged distinction was made between the talkative and excitable firaku of the eastern districts (lorosa’e) and the closed, taciturn kaladi from the western half (loromonu) of East Timor. In 2006 the distinction was subject to cynical manipulation for political ends and resulted in a period of destructive communal violence, particularly in the capital, Dili (McWilliam 2007; Independent Special Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste [2006]).

23 An alternative version of this binary is that between ema Dili (people of Dili) and ema Foho (rural people—literally: people of the hills).
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into an ‘industry model’ of larger scale, export market-oriented production with wage labour employment generation. The perceived market advantages of organic Café Timor have attracted the attention of various amalgams of national and international cooperatives and commercial groups, networks of INGOs, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, not to mention the national government.

The prevailing mode of authority exercised predominantly by *malae* experts over rural people, who are now referred to as *ema to’os / to’os na’in sira / ema foho* (‘small-scale farmers’ or ‘people from the mountains’), poses as ‘technical authority’. To this effect, and in the case of coffee, *malae* experts point to much the same range of problems that the Portuguese found in indigenous plantation cultivation in the first half of the twentieth century—weeds, pests, diseases, absence of pruning, ageing bushes, issues with shade trees, poor processing, and low and variable quality despite the acclaimed taste of Timor’s Arabica coffee (cf. Carvalho 1937). The basis of ‘technical problems’ lies not simply in the absence of knowledge but in cultural and historical deficiencies: farmers pick coffee not for profit maximization but to meet immediate cash needs; their inattention to quality is perceived to be rooted in the Indonesian economy where blending of variable quality product obviated the need for careful selection, timely transporting, and ‘proper’ processing (Oxfam 2004). Farmers are therefore positioned within intellectual hierarchies as subjects to be refashioned by technical know-how, while remedial action goes well beyond the delivery of knowledge to include disciplinary strategies, delivered through training, that impinge on how farmers should understand themselves, their work and their role as active ‘participants’ within a free-market economy.

Notwithstanding fair trade sentiments, the equity of small producers remains a key issue in the emerging neoliberal economy. While in the mainstream this issue appears to be depoliticized to the extent that ‘the market determines value’, national NGOs have voiced various objections: they classify coffee as a ‘crop of poverty’ and note the injustice of the international coffee trade. In remarks reminiscent of Foucault’s idea of bio-power, La’o Hamutuk in particular has alleged that the primary motive behind the health clinics, which have been set up to accompany small holder coffee

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24 An approach that promotes trade equality, social and economic justice, particularly for smallholder producers.
development, has been to create a healthy and productive workforce. In general, the politics of coffee cultivation within a broader donor system determined to exert a market based development model has been vigorously critiqued by NGO actors of the *geração foun* as well as a cohort of foreign academics (see Grenfell 2005, 2008; Gunn 2003). Meanwhile, alternative development models, promoted by the same NGOs, have sought to divert coffee cultivation away from monocultural cash-cropping, repositioning it instead within a mode of terraced polyculture and permaculture where coffee is intercropped with maize and a range of subsistence foods; the training and disciplining of farmer bodies—to dig terraces, make mulch and take ideological issue with chemical inputs—is no less a formation of subjects than the monocultural directives of mainstream rural developers.

Coffee, like other plantation commodities, is subject to the continuing fluctuations of international market supply and demand. As most East Timorese coffee production is low-grade and lightly managed, the contribution of production to local livelihoods and national revenue is considered important. Whether farmers take advantage of the coffee still growing ‘wild’ on the former coffee estates (the ownership of which remains in contention) depends on the current market price and on the immediate needs of farmers to supplement their subsistence farming with small cash incomes. The ‘encouragement’ of the development industry and the state, who find ‘the subsistence mentality’ problematic, does not necessarily exert a great deal of influence. On the one hand, farmers are free to pick the coffee or leave it unharvested, both in their own plantations and in former estates. On the other hand, the development industry persists in its efforts to strategically mould farmers to market ‘imperatives’ and to maximize output. If farmers are unresponsive to the development interventions, they are quietly pathologized or openly chided for their supposed lack of initiative, their aversion to work, and their ‘passive resistance’. Despite these criticisms, the great bulk of coffee production is still derived from smallholder production. An estimated 67,000 rural households—around 30% of the population—cultivate coffee on some 50,000 hectares of plantations (half of which are the ‘abandoned’ plantation estates), mostly in the poorer upland regions of Ermera, Ainaro, Ailieu and Manufahi (World Bank 2010: 39, 41).

Most donors and businesses remain focused on the possibilities for market-oriented smallholder production, but some sectors of government harbour grander visions. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) has been drawn to prospects for larger agro-industrial estates with their potential for revenue gains for the state as well as electorally strategic employment opportunities, particularly for unemployed youth. As indicated in the introduction to this article, the mooted 2008 Memorandum of Understanding for GT Leste Biotech to develop the USD100 million, 100,000 hectare sugar cane plantation with an integrated ethanol plant and power generation facility is a case in point.  

Another example is the South Korean 2008 Komor Enterprise Ltd agreement to develop a 100,000 hectare area of maize and jatropha for agrofuels—all destined for export—in Lautém, Bobonaro, Baucau, Same and Viqueque. These agro-industrial visions are typically dressed in impressive economic projections. It is clear that the old Portuguese-era imaginary of an underdeveloped and under-populated south coast and foothills continues to fuel dreams of a fantastic southern modernity of freeways, a gleaming new capital city, port developments and diverse industry infrastructure including a petroleum refinery. Now in 2013 Fretilin opposition promulgates its counter-vision of a supermodern Oecusse exclave including an international airport. The more realistic of these projections extoll the virtues of creating employment and their associated multiplier effects, yet they tend to underplay or ignore the opportunity costs and livelihood impacts on local communities, assuming instead that a radical transformation and proletarianization of Timorese subjects will flow from the ‘self-evident’ superiority of the modern system. There is ample evidence in neighbouring Indonesia that such transformations are both exaggerated and often entail repressive state action, particularly where customary land tenures are at stake (Booth 1988; see also McCarthy on oil palm dynamics 2010). But in East Timor, it is hard to imagine that threats of violence and intimidatory tactics would be tolerated, and farmers themselves would be reluctant to embrace yet another grand scheme that promises much but delivers little.

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26 See http://www.laohamutuk.org/Agri/08Agrofuels.htm#sugarcane.


28 A long standing point of contention between the government of East Timor and the Australian petroleum company, where Woodside operating in the Timor Sea has resolutely opposed building a refinery on Timorese soil.
Conclusion

In postcolonial Timor-Leste, just as one is struck by the suppression of racial categories, race resurfaces through everyday development encounters that traverse the divide between international developers and East Timorese ‘beneficiaries’. The relation is mediated by an elite class of *mestiço* nationals who maintain an historically privileged position now empowered through democratic means. Clearly, plantation agriculture in its various historical forms has not only reflected these social divisions, but been critical to their re-production. Plantations have been implicated in the production of criminal subjects, of *mestiço* and *liurai* privileges, and colonial attempts to turn ‘lazy’ natives into plantation-labouring subjects. Plantation politics and the particular forms of exploitation that prevailed therein, moreover, animated the nationalist political ruptures that emerged in the 1970s, while Indonesian aggression was extended to plantation prospects and the construction of a relatively disenfranchised body of Timorese farmers who, paradoxically under the system, still found avenues to extract benefit.

It is ironic that while independence has delivered an apparent liberation from colonial forms of plantation agriculture, those same forms are reprised and smuggled back in through proposals for industrial-scale agricultural monocultures, enhanced government revenues and proffered solutions to the problem of youth unemployment. As in colonial times, the motivations and rationalities for promoting broad-acre plantation development in the interests of the nation might be seen as part of the political economy of statecraft. They reconfirm the observation of state practice in which local resources are seen by governments primarily through the narrow ‘fiscal lens of revenue needs’ (Scott 1995: 11-2). In the contemporary period where the state is attempting to expand its control over the rural hinterlands, biopower remains as crucial to governance and statecraft as it was to Portuguese and Indonesian colonialisms. Examined over the longue durée, historical continuity manifests in the will of colonial and postcolonial elites to develop plantation agriculture in order to pursue national goals and to foster a peasantry economically useful to the state. This has only been achievable through the organization of specific kinds of subjects within fields of power that have themselves emerged through plantations and the economic promises they have offered.

Timorese plantation subjects have of course undergone substantial permutations over the course of history. At one end of the spectrum violence and force have been strongly implicated while peasant resistance has
been a recurrent theme. Prison plantations and state plantations located in defeated rebel kingdoms represented exemplary sites for the making of these kinds of subjects. In the middle of the spectrum have been plantation regimes that relied on law (including taxes), colonial authority, and peasant servility for their implementation. These mandated plantation regimes could never have come to pass without the pacification campaigns that preceded them, but they did not entail violence at the level of everyday execution. Indeed they very often provided incentives, exemplified in the failed communal plantations of the 1910s and the extension methods characteristic of the late Portuguese period. The provision of incentives, moreover, did not preclude resistance, which flourished to counter both Portuguese and liurai dominance. At the other end of the spectrum, illustrated in the current period, plantation promotional efforts offer ‘technical assistance’ and use ‘soft persuasion’ to achieve their aims, making credible the claims that construe subjects as ‘beneficiaries’ and ‘participants’ within a voluntaristic system of knowledge sharing and training. Even here, resistance to change is possible, but penalties for doing so are negligible or non-existent. The neoliberal positioning of Timorese plantation subjects in a global economic order mediated by coffee wholesalers has left little room for political action or, indeed, a broader political consciousness (see Grenfell 2005). Across the broad spectrum of constituted plantation subjects, disciplinary, regulatory and normalizing practices have been central, but their importance is underscored in the postcolonial period where repressive state violence has mostly been limited to one of enforcing peace.

All subject types have relied on the shaping of social categories and specific subject positions: racial others such as ‘natives’ or indígenas (ethnic/primitive) such as ‘the Timorese’ of the ‘outer islands’ (vis-à-vis ‘central’ Indonesians); rural folk (ema foho), farmers (to’os nain sira), and ‘little people’ (ema ki’ik). Similarly, intellectual hierarchies and instrumental rationalities are built into the social relations that define plantations, becoming more pronounced as the violent and authoritarian dimensions of agricultural dominance have receded. If in Portuguese times, the location of the indígena was a racial-cum-cultural one (see Young 1995), ‘farmers’ today are framed as agents with greater or lesser degrees of ‘progressiveness’ measured according to knowledge (matenek) which is inhibited, and occasionally resourced, by various conceptualizations of ‘culture’—culture that may be synonymous with a denigrated ‘traditionalism’, ‘underdevelop-
ment’ and ‘backwardness’, or with a neo-valorization of ‘traditional culture’ reinserted into developmentalist authority (McWilliam 2003; Palmer 2010, 2012; Palmer and Carvalho 2008; Shepherd 2009, 2010; Traube 1986). Finally, plantation subjects have not only been formulated in hierarchical divisions between East Timorese and outsiders, but ‘horizontally’ among East Timorese themselves; the social divisions produced, reinforced, and modified through colonialism were those that divided liurai (rulers) from povo (commoners) and both from ata / atan (slaves). These divisions remain current today, and are now re-enacted ceremonially, economically, and politically within current plantation relations: the common farmer who today and without compensation harvests the coffee of a village chief (xefi suku) who is, not coincidentally, of liurai descent, provides a vivid illustration of this phenomenon (compare Kammen 2003, 2010). More than a cultural legacy, such everyday plantation relations are constitutive of the very makeup of Timorese rural ‘classes’ and the opportunistic spaces they occupy vis-à-vis broader national and international polities.

When seen over the course of history, smallholder plantation production has been the most enduring, equitable, least oppressive and successful of the plantation models, while plantation estates, including those of the liurai, have tended to re-produce privilege and exacerbate conflict. Given the still precariousness of peace in East Timor, it is the view of the authors that planners in the postcolonial and democratic world of East Timor would do better to discard their industrial-scale visions of the plantation sector, and focus instead on the practices and potentials of the thousands of existing smallholder producers to improve their productivity, production and market success.

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