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# MASTER-SLAVE, TRAITOR-NATIONALIST, OPPORTUNIST-OPPRESSED: POLITICAL METAPHORS IN EAST TIMOR

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Most East Timorese hoped that the long-awaited declaration of independence in May 2002 would mark a new beginning. Curiously, however, they continue to conjure up the spirits of the past. Over the last three years, the Dili press has published a host of articles reporting widely divergent views about the country's history, parliament has engaged in heated historical debates, and a Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation was established to research and report on the history of human rights violations. On the surface there is nothing terribly surprising about this. Following the August 1999 popular referendum, in which the population voted overwhelmingly to reject Indonesia's offer of broad autonomy, and the subsequent establishment of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), the people of East Timor could openly discuss their history for the first time. And there was much to discuss.

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The territory that is now East Timor fell within the Portuguese orbit in the early sixteenth century and remained under Portuguese control for the next four hundred years. During the Second World War, Portuguese Timor was invaded and brutally occupied by the Japanese. Following the war, the Portuguese reoccupied the colony, declared it an overseas province, and belatedly began to develop a modern bureaucracy, an educational system, and basic infrastructure. The overthrow of the Salazar-Caetano *Estado Novo* in April 1974 opened the way for decolonization at the furthest reaches of the Portuguese empire. But while Portuguese attention focused on domestic affairs, Indonesian intelligence agencies became increasingly involved in Timorese affairs, leading first to a coup d'état by the Timorese Democratic Union (União Democrática Timorense, UDT), then a counterattack by the Revolutionary Front of an Independent East Timor (Frente Revolucionário do Timor Leste Independente, Fretilin) and a brief period of political violence, and finally to the Indonesian invasion of Dili on December 7, 1975. Over the next twenty-four years, the Indonesian military conducted a horrific military onslaught and brutal occupation of what legally remained Portuguese Timor. Despite internal ruptures and continued Indonesian military campaigns, the resistance survived and even broadened. Although never powerful enough to expel the occupying forces, the resistance was sufficient to hold out until political change in Jakarta, coupled with international attention, would make possible a double decolonization.

Remarkably, historical debates in East Timor's parliament and press have focused almost exclusively on the events of 1975: the August coup and counter-coup, the formation of the Fretilin's National Liberation Army of East Timor (Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor Leste, abbreviated Falintil), the three-week period of violent conflict between the nascent political parties, covert Indonesian military operations in October and November, and, finally, Fretilin's declaration of independence on November 28, 1975. "The tradition of all the dead generations," Marx wrote, "weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." For East Timorese, however, it would seem that the nightmare on the brain of the living is largely limited to a single generation—half of which perished during the late 1970s and the other half of which remains to help build a new future. Marx continues:

And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the extremely narrow scope of current historical debates in East Timor, opinions about 1975 reflect a more general view of history—be it Portuguese colonialism, Timorese kingdoms, the heyday of the coffee economy, the aborted process of decolonization, or the dark days of the Indonesian occupation—in which the classical metaphor of masters and slaves is central. This raises the obvious question: How did slavery, "the root metaphor of Western political philosophy, connoting everything that was evil about power relations," become entrenched in East

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York/London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978, second edition), p. 595.

Timorese political thinking?<sup>3</sup> This essay will trace the curious permutations of the master-slave metaphor in East Timorese political thinking about the past and suggest some of the implications this may have for politics in the newly independent East Timor.

### Portuguese Masters and Timorese Slaves

Today, East Timorese universally agree that the East Timorese nation was colonized by Portugal for 450 years. This view is found in the few Indonesian language history books, is cited in the press, and is repeated by students throughout the country. The nation's colonial history is generally conceived in terms of the classical metaphor of masters and slaves: Portuguese "masters" colonized and exploited East Timorese "slaves," and these "slaves" responded by struggling for freedom with the objective of becoming "masters" of their own destiny. In the words of Xanana Gusmão, "The people of East Timor were oppressed by Portuguese colonialism for 450 years, a century longer than the Dutch colonization of Indonesia."<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere he writes that the East Timorese were "enslaved by Portugal and kept in complete underdevelopment for centuries. . . ."<sup>5</sup> Although it is not surprising, there are three problematic features of this view.

First, in stating that they were colonized for 450 years, East Timorese ignore certain facts: that the first permanent Portuguese settlement on Timor was not established until the 1640s, when a Dominican friar began the construction of a fort at Kupang; that the Solor and Timor islands did not become part of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* until 1681; that the first Portuguese governor based on Timor was not appointed until 1702; that Dominican friars expelled the Portuguese governor from Timor in 1721 and again in 1742; and that the capital was only moved from Lifau (Oecussi) to Dili in 1769. Furthermore, between 1769 and the mid-nineteenth century Portuguese control was limited to the tiny settlements of Dili, Manatuto, Laleia, Vemasse and a few other points on the northern littoral. Serious efforts to establish direct control over the interior did not begin until the mid-nineteenth century and were not completed until the end of the Manufahi war in 1913. In sum, Portuguese naval dominance dates from the early sixteenth century and commercial dominance from the late eighteenth century, but the establishment of clear administrative divisions, the appointment of administrators, and the creation of a bureaucratic apparatus did not occur until the early twentieth century.

The second feature of this view concerns the notion of exploitation. According to East Timorese, Portuguese "colonialism" was driven by the search for spices and the desire to spread the Catholic faith. This idea originates from the famous statement attributed to Vasco da Gama on his arrival in India at the end of the fifteenth century that he had come in search of "Christians and spices."<sup>6</sup> Today, East Timorese consider

<sup>3</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry*, no. 26 (Summer 2000), pp. 821-865.

<sup>4</sup> Xanana Gusmão, essay written on the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of H. J. C. Prinsen, in *To Resist is to Win: The Autobiography of Xanana Gusmão*, ed. Sarah Niner (Richmond, Victoria: Aurora Books, 2000), p. 208.

<sup>5</sup> Xanana Gusmão, "A History," in *To Resist is to Win*, p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> C[harles]. R. Boxer, *Four Centuries of Portuguese Expansion, 1415-1825: A Succinct Survey* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1968), hlm. 13.

economic goals to have been primary, with proselytization and the civilizing mission understood as a means to achieve them. But the profits of the famous sandalwood trade generally accrued to the city of Macau, not the Portuguese monarchy, and despite some early successes, Catholic proselytization on Timor stalled for the greater part of three centuries.

Third, this view is commonly predicated on the assumption that the East Timorese nation has always existed. This is not unique to East Timor: most nationalist movements have claimed their nation to be eternal. The most remarkable example of this view is found in a message titled, "A history that beats in the Maubere soul," written by Xanana Gusmão, who assumed leadership of Falintil in 1981; the message was written for East Timorese youth in 1986. The argument pivots around the master-slave metaphor. Against the "false history" that "speaks of the people of Timor as 'obedient and faithful' and loyal to Portugal" and the "perpetual colonial slavery" imposed by the "military expansionists from Jakarta," Gusmão asserts that "participation in the struggle for national liberation is a moral duty, and above all it is a political and historical obligation," an obligation accepted so that Timor can become "master of its own destiny and the Maubere People free themselves from the eternal chains of colonial slavery . . . ." But then Gusmão's argument takes an unexpected twist:

The historical identity of East Timor dates back to long before the arrival of the Portuguese. If it had not been for the intrusion of Portuguese colonialism, the people of East Timor would have followed their own path; they would have created a socio-political structure defined by the essence of one people and one nation. With the arrival of the colonists, this march was halted because the necessity of exploring [sic; exploiting] our wealth caused a war of pacification that put a stop to the struggles between the diverse kingdoms, each one wanting to take a position of ascendancy and domination over the others. The ascendancy of one of these tribes would have determined the formation of a great kingdom—the embryo of the Maubere Homeland!<sup>8</sup>

But Gusmão's own struggle demonstrates that a glorious past is not a precondition for nationhood. So why conjure up the spirits of an imaginary past? The answer may lie in the problematic history of Timor. Benedict Anderson has highlighted the curious tendency of many nationalist movements to claim ancient, even eternal, roots. More recently, he has suggested that for early nationalists in the Philippines, where there were no centralized and literate states, "folklore substituted for Ancient Grandeur."<sup>9</sup> For East Timorese, appeals to a glorious past are doubly complicated: not only are there no court records or chronicles, but the most important center of pre-colonial power, Wehale, lies in what today is Indonesian West Timor.<sup>10</sup> Unable to appeal to

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from Gusmão, "A History," pp. 92, 89, 86, 124.

<sup>8</sup> Xanana Gusmão, "A History that Beats in the Maubere Soul," dated May 20, 1986, in *To Resist is to Win*, p. 103.

<sup>9</sup> See Benedict Anderson, "The Rooster's Egg: Pioneering World Folklore in the Philippines," *New Left Review* (March-April 2000): 47-62.

<sup>10</sup> On Wehale, see Gerzon Tom Therik, "Wehali: The Four Corner Land: The Cosmology and Traditions of a Timorese Ritual Centre" (PhD dissertation, The Australian National University, 1995).

“Ancient Grandeur,” and lacking access to “scientific” folklore, Gusmão conjures up an imagined alternative: the greatness that would have been if not for colonial domination.

Despite the prominence of the master-slave metaphor in East Timorese nationalist discourse, East Timorese are silent on real slavery. Yet Portuguese interest in Timor was also driven by the slave trade. Writing on the sandalwood trade in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese historian de Carvalho Branco notes that “[l]ike the Moors of Macasse [Macassar], in addition to sandalwood they [Portuguese merchants based in Malacca] also collected slaves in the ports of Manatulo [Manatuto] and Aden.”<sup>11</sup> In the sixteenth century, slaves were obtained from Lomblen, Alor, Roti, Wetar, Kisar, and Timor, and the Portuguese settlement on Solor, and later at Larantuca on Flores, which was the “key marketplace for the archipelago-wide trade in slaves.”<sup>12</sup> During the seventeenth century, according to Charles Boxer, “slaves for the Batavia and Macao markets were the next most profitable commodity” after sandalwood.<sup>13</sup>

There were several reasons for the prominence of slavery “at the end of the world,” as the Solor-Timor region was called. Portuguese captains sought to remedy the enormous loss of human life suffered on the outward bound voyages from Portugal to Asia through slavery. With a maritime empire stretching from Lisbon to Pernambuco and from the Algarve to Timor, the Portuguese also had limited capacity to ship bulky commodities such as sandalwood from Timor. Furthermore, while the Portuguese sandalwood trade was carried out on a seasonal basis and limited to a ship or two per year, the sale of slaves within the archipelago could proceed year round. The Dutch East India Company’s ban on the enslavement of Javanese also meant that slaves were sought further east, most commonly from Sulawesi, Bali, Buton, and, of course, Timor.<sup>14</sup>

Slaves were procured by a variety of means. Both Portuguese and Dutch ships engaged in slave raids. More commonly, however, the Topasses (or Black Portuguese<sup>15</sup>) of Larantuca conducted slave raids throughout the Solor-Timor region and then sold their chattel to the Portuguese and Dutch, as well as to Chinese merchants.<sup>16</sup> Local rulers on Timor were also active participants in this trade—selling not only slaves captured in war but also their own subjects. Slaves were a prominent feature of the early Portuguese settlements on Timor during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1770, one year after the capital was moved from Lifau, there were reportedly 375 slaves in Dili out of a total population of 750.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it appears that the institution of slavery was one of the primary vehicles by which Catholicism was spread in Portuguese Timor. In 1856, for example, slaves constituted one-third of the

<sup>11</sup> João Diogo Alarcão de Carvalho Branco, “A Ordem de S. Domingos e as Origens de Timor,” trans. Janet Gunter, *Independência* 5 (1987): 37.

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey C. Gunn, *Timor Loro Sae: 500 Years* (Macau: Livros do Oriente, 1999), p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Boxer, *Fidalgos of the Far East, 1550-1770* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 189.

<sup>14</sup> C[harles]. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 269-270.

<sup>15</sup> The Dutch referred to the mestizo community of Portuguese speakers in the Solor and Timor region as “Black Portuguese.”

<sup>16</sup> Boxer, *Fidalgos*, p. 189.

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Gunn, *Timor Loro Sae: 500 Years*, p. 113.

Catholic population of Dili.<sup>18</sup> And in 1861, the Governor of Timor was sufficiently concerned about rebellions to call on the Capitão Cina to “arm all Chinese, their children and their slaves.”<sup>19</sup>

Given the prominence of the master-slave metaphor, one would expect East Timorese to mention the second most important trade commodity from the Solor and Timor islands during at least the first two centuries of the Portuguese presence as part of the national history. But they do not.

### *Liurai and Atan*

The reason East Timorese avoid any mention of real slavery is not simply the lack of historical information or inability to access historical materials in foreign languages. Instead, this silence on actually existing slavery reflects the legacy of Timorese social stratification. There was certainly considerable variation across the island, but in general pre-colonial societies on Timor were divided into three classes: chiefs and nobles (*liurai* and *dato*), commoners (*emar*, later *reino*), and slaves (*atan*).<sup>20</sup> According to the Portuguese poet and ethnographer of Timor, Ruy Cinatti:

At the bottom of society lived the slaves, prisoners of war (*lutuhum*), or people bought (*ata*). Slavery, not very rigid, often permitted serfs to become free men. Osório de Castro wrote: “I dare say that among the Timorese there is an adoption, perhaps more in disguise at present to the eyes of the Portuguese authorities, of slavery. In olden times, wars between kingdoms or even villages furnished slaves from the vanquished peoples. It was called, and is still called, *lutuhum* ‘the ones inside the fence’ (from *hitu* meaning “to pay,” and *hum* meaning fence), valued at five buffalos for a child slave, or creature, as they were called, and one or two buffalos for an adult slave.” That was the organic structure of Timorese society at the beginning of the twentieth century. . . .

[With] the prohibition and persecution of slavery, the *lutuhum* class totally disappeared, aside from one or two sporadic cases. Still today the language continues to reflect former times, when the Timorese insulted themselves by calling one another “son of a slave,” a treatment that was considered to be profoundly offensive to remind one of a shameful ancestry.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In 1856 the Christian population of Dili was 1,491, of which 556 were Christian slaves. The total population of Dili was 3,017. Gregorio Maria Barreto, “Timor,” *Annaes do Conselho Ultramarino, Serie 1, Parte não official*, 1858, pp. 478-481, cited in René Pélissier, *Timor en Guerre: Le Crocodile et Les Portugais (1847-1913)* (Orgeval, France: 1996), pp. 37-38.

<sup>19</sup> Gunn, *Timor Lorosae*, p. 162.

<sup>20</sup> According to John Villiers, “a more or less clearly defined social structure of village chiefs and nobility, commoners and slaves obtained in most of the islands of the Solor group...” John Villiers, “As Derradeiras do Mundo: The Dominican Missions and the Sandalwood Trade in the Lesser Sunda Islands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *II Seminário Internacional de História Indo-Portuguesa* (Lisboa: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, 1985), p. 576. West Timorese social stratification is discussed in A. D. M. Parera, *Sejarah Pemerintahan Raja-Raja Timor: Suatu Kajian Peta Politik Pemerintahan Kerajaan-Kerajaan Di Timor Sebelum Kemerdekaan RI*, ed. Gregor Neonbasu (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1994), esp. pp. 76-82. Social classes in pre-colonial eastern Timor and Portuguese Timor are discussed in Geoffrey Gunn, *Timor Loro Sae: 500 Years*, pp. 31-50.

<sup>21</sup> Ruy Cinatti, *Arquitetura Timorense*, ed. Leopoldo de Almeida and Sousa Mendes (Lisboa: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, Museu de Etnologia, 1987), p. 31. The possibility of slaves being freed is

But indigenous social structure was also fundamentally reshaped by the slow expansion of Portuguese colonialism. During the eighteenth century, the Portuguese granted military titles to members of the indigenous elite, and during the nineteenth century waged a series of brutal military campaigns to subordinate rebellious chiefs to the colonial administration. This transformation was the central theme of a pioneering Marxist history of Portuguese Timor written in 1975 by Abilio de Araujo, himself the son of a *liurai*.<sup>22</sup> In another work titled "Timorese Elites," Araujo argued that Portuguese colonial rule had

. . . succeeded because [it] had the support of the *liurais* who in the meantime rose within the colonial order to the rank of major and lieutenant colonel of the second rank! This first elite was basically made up of *liurais* and *datos* who little by little submitted to the colonial yoke.

This elite did not lose anything when it made a pact with colonialism. On the contrary, in addition to the powers which the traditional society recognised or was forced to recognise—judicial, administrative, military, etc.—new powers were conferred on them by colonialism.<sup>23</sup>

Araujo thus extended the master-slave metaphor beyond that of colonizers and the colonized to highlight the parallel division in Timorese social structure between chiefs who collaborated with the colonial rulers and the "oppressed" population. But in doing so, he also collapsed the categories *emar/reino* (subjects) and *atan* (slaves), with the result that actually existing slavery disappeared from the analysis.

Despite the old tripartite division of society into chiefs, commoners, and slaves, Timorese today most commonly think of indigenous social structure in terms of the stark dichotomy between *liurai* and *atan*, chiefs and slaves. East Timorese are acutely aware who is a descendant of a legitimate traditional ruler, who is a descendant of a Portuguese-appointed chief, and who obtained positions by collaborating with the Indonesian occupiers. They also know who was a commoner and who was a slave. But most people are reluctant to discuss traditional social status in public. When I asked the seventy students taking my course on nationalism at the National University of East Timor if any were descended from *liurai* families, not a single student would answer. But when assigned to write essays on their family background and nationalism, a quarter of all students wrote that they were descended from *liurai*, and if we include those who said that they were descended from village heads (*chefe de suco*), hamlet heads (*chefe aldeia*), and traditional leaders (*ketua adat*), 40 percent of the class were from what might be classified as indigenous elites. By contrast, only three students stated that their ancestors were slaves (*atan* or *budak*), and none provided any details.

Several students descended from *liurai* families wrote that their ancestors had owned slaves. One student wrote: "My ancestors were feared because they liked to go to war and liked to buy and sell people. In that era they ruled over a large area, and

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also discussed in H. O. Forbes, "On Some of the Tribes of the Island of Timor," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 13 (1884): 417.

<sup>22</sup> Abilio de Araujo, *Timor Leste: Os Loricos Voltaram a Cantar* (Lisbon: 1977).

<sup>23</sup> Abilio de Araujo, "Timorese Elites," pamphlet, ed. Jill Jolliffe and Bob Reece (n.p. 1975), p. 3.

they were the elite in the social structure, with the status of Dato."<sup>24</sup> Another student described how his ancestors had given slaves to the Liurai of Vemasse in return for an official title and sacred objects.

In the past my ancestors received sacred objects from the Dato of Kelikai [Quelical], who was directly under the supervision of the Liurai or Don of Vemasse. Each [sacred] object that was passed down to followers had to be reciprocated for by giving slaves to the chief, to symbolize that the sacred objects had been paid for with human beings. But because the people receiving the sacred objects loved their family and relatives, they looked for slaves to trade to the chief. The slaves were obtained from the people who lost in wars between different villages. The losers were captured and taken home by the winners of the war. My ancestors received a sacred object called Setmoko Isin Asin as a symbol that Waimane village was part of the area under the Liurai of Vemasse.<sup>25</sup>

Although rarely discussed, most East Timorese know such stories and can readily identify the descendants of chiefs and slaves alike. This awkward history is perhaps the most important reason why East Timorese today so readily cite the "fact" that they were colonized by Portuguese for 450 years: by focusing on colonial rule and exploitation—Portuguese masters and Timorese slaves—they can avoid the uncomfortable fact that East Timorese enslaved other East Timorese.

### *Sociedade and Asuliar*

While East Timorese employ the master-slave metaphor when speaking of both indigenous social structure and colonial rule, there is an additional permutation of this theme specific to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Portuguese first began to establish a territory-wide colonial administration in the mid-nineteenth century. The depletion of sandalwood on Timor led to a concerted effort to develop coffee as an export product, first under Governor Afonso da Castro during the 1860s and then more vigorously under Governor Celestino da Silva between 1894 and 1908. The fundamental problem for the new plantation economy was not the availability of land, but the securing of a reliable and inexpensive supply of labor.

In 1875, the Kingdom of Portugal banned slavery in all areas subject to Portuguese civil law, including distant Timor. Although the trade in human beings ceased, slavery did not disappear from the Timorese landscape. In fact, the establishment of coffee plantations in Portuguese Timor was accompanied by widespread forced labor. Each kingdom was required to supply laborers for a specified number of days each month, with orders then passed down to village heads who were responsible for recruitment. In 1906, the colonial government established a head tax, ostensibly in order to raise revenue to cover the cost of administration, but more importantly, perhaps, in order to compel subsistence peasants to seek wage labor. Individuals unable to pay the head tax were forced to work as *auxiliar* (auxiliaries), some allocated to civil servants and traditional chiefs as domestic servants, others to the handful of companies, called "Sociedade," engaged in the cultivation and processing of coffee. Portuguese authorities apparently viewed labor, even if forced, as part of the civilizing process.

<sup>24</sup> Luis Lobo da Costa, paper written for course on "Nationalism," June 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Manuel Freitas, paper written for course on "Nationalism," June 2003.

But there were dissenting voices. In 1909, the Portuguese journalist Antonio Padua Correia published a blistering attack against José Celestino da Silva, who had completed his long tenure as governor the previous year, with the sub-title "Highway Robbery, Assassinations, and Persecutions." The introduction to the 1911 Lisbon edition charges da Silva with "exercising slavery on his plantations by cunning means and maintaining, with the excuse of civilizing, harems [*serralhos*] in what he calls schools."<sup>26</sup> Later the author writes:

The enormous plantation of Tatu-Bessi [Fatubessi, controlled by the massive Sociedade Agricultora Patria e Trabalho] needs a greatly enlarged personnel. To this farm Celestino I sent the prisoners of war, because war was made to steal and for Celestino to obtain slaves. There they lived, in perpetual servitude. But as these hands weren't enough, Celestino ordered to muster up, from long distances, indigenous people. A "regulo" or chief was ordered to send two hundred or three hundred strong men to Tatu-Bessi. They worked in the plantations, carried the coffee and goods to the port of departure, Liquica, ten hours away by foot. For free, and regarding food . . . they had to eat the corn cobs they brought from their lands! Note that the public works wore out the natives. . . . A colonizer and administrator of brilliant capacity!<sup>27</sup>

Neither the Sociedade nor forced labor as modern slavery are themes in contemporary East Timorese politics. Nevertheless, the Portuguese use of forced labor during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed indirectly to the Fretilin ideology that developed in 1975. In particular, "Maubere," a common Mambai name, was taken by Fretilin leaders as a symbol of the nation. Most authors have argued that Maubere represents the poor, ignorant, downtrodden East Timorese peasant, analogous to Sukarno's Marhaen.<sup>28</sup> But this figure may have a more precise political origin. Maubere (and his female counterpart, Bui Bere) first emerged as the Portuguese characterization of *axuliar*, or "*asuliar*," as it is used by people today.<sup>29</sup> This origin sets Maubere apart from Marhaen: while the latter was created by Sukarno to represent the common peasant in Indonesia, the Portuguese term, Maubere, was appropriated and broadened by Fretilin to refer to the exploitation of all East Timorese.

Although forced labor is not a theme of current nationalist discussion in East Timor, older villagers (particularly in the western districts) readily discuss the "Sociedade" and their own former status as *asuliar*.<sup>30</sup> Here Sociedade fills in for

<sup>26</sup> *Timor: O governo do general de brigada do quadro da reserva José Celestino da Silva durante 14 annos: Latrocinios, assassinatos e perseguições* (Lisboa: 1911, second edition), p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Timor*, p. 56.

<sup>28</sup> See Helen Mary Hill, *Gerakan Pembebasan Nasional Timor Lorosae* (Dili: Yayasan Hak and Sahe Institute for Liberation, 2000), pp. 91-92.

<sup>29</sup> During a discussion in Jakarta during the late 1990s, former Fretilin President Francisco Xavier do Amaral noted the link between *asuliar* and Maubere. I am grateful to Nugroho Katjasunkana for this information. It has not been possible to determine the date on which the discussion was held.

<sup>30</sup> The younger, urban population is often unaware of the origin of the word *axuliar*, and many university students believe it to be an insult derived from the words *asu*, meaning "dog" in Tetun and Javanese, and *liar*, meaning "wild" in Indonesian. Further corrupting the spelling of the original term, one student argued that *asulear* meant "many dogs"!

"master" and *asuliar* for slave. But as with *liurai* and *atan*, the pair of terms, *Sociedade-asuliar*, has become detached from the history of real slavery in Timor. Yet, as Padua Correia argued in his attack on Celestino da Silva, slavery continued throughout the heyday of the agricultural *Sociedade*. Similarly, according to Clarence-Smith "[c]hiefs, headmen, and leading warriors disposed of considerable numbers of slaves long after the export trade in slaves had been stopped, and it was only in the mid-1900s that the Portuguese made hesitant moves to abolish domestic slavery."<sup>31</sup>

### Traitors and Nationalists

For the people of Portuguese Timor, the April 25, 1974 coup d'état by the Movement of the Armed Forces in Lisbon finally opened the possibility of ending their "eternal slavery." In the following months, East Timorese were free to establish political parties for the first time. Among the tiny community of educated Portuguese, mestizos and *assimilados*, there was also an outpouring of artistic expression in which, not surprisingly, slavery was a prominent theme. In 1974, the poet Francisco Borja da Costa and Abilio Araujo, both of whom were members of the Timorese Association of Social Democrats (*Associação Social-Democrata Timorense*, which in September 1974 became *Fretilin*) wrote a song called "Foho Ramelau," the second stanza of which reads:

Why, Timor, is your head always bowed?  
 Why, Timor, are your children enslaved?  
 Why, Timor, are your children asleep like slaves?<sup>32</sup>

In another poem titled "The Maubere people will no longer be anybody's slave," Borja da Costa wrote:

We will shout with the greatest effort  
 For the people of Timor  
 For the Maubere people  
 So they will no longer become anyone's slave  
 No more  
 No more  
 No longer become anyone's slave.<sup>33</sup>

The same theme is central to a poem titled "Maubere" written by José Alexandre Gusmão in 1975. The fifth stanza reads:

MAUBERE People,  
 clench your fist,  
 shout out loud,  
 The hour is YOURS, MAUBERE!

<sup>31</sup> W. G. Clarence-Smith, "Planters and Smallholders in Portuguese Timor in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Indonesian Circle*, no. 57, March 1992, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> Francisco Borja da Costa and Abilio Araujo, "Foho Ramelau," in Helen Mary Hill, *Gerakan Pembebasan Nasional Timor Lorosae* (Dili: Yayasan HAK and Sahe Institute for Liberation, 2000), p. 93.

<sup>33</sup> Translated from the Tetun by Janet Gunter.

and your defiance will bring down  
the walls of your own enslavement!<sup>34</sup>

But in August 1975, political tensions between the nascent East Timorese political parties led to a major permutation of the master-slave metaphor. On the night of August 10, 1975, members of the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) under the leadership of João Carrascalão sought to arrest members of the police who supported Fretilin, and the following day staged a coup d'état. UDT made hundreds of arrests in Dili and smaller towns and conducted sweeps to confiscate Fretilin membership cards from the rural population. Two days after the UDT coup, the Fretilin Central Committee called for "a general armed insurrection against the *traitors* of the homeland and for the genuine liberation of the Maubere people."<sup>35</sup> As fighting between Fretilin and UDT raged in Dili and several districts, the Portuguese governor General Lemos Pires fled to Ataúro Island.

With the abdication of the colonial master, the central metaphor of politics shifted from masters and slaves to "traitors" and "nationalists." Interviewed in October 1975, Fretilin Central Committee member Nicolau dos Reis Lobato explained that "Fretilin is a broad front that unites all nationalists [and] anti-colonialists and therefore has the principal objective of liberating our people."<sup>36</sup> At the same time, effigies of UDT leaders were hung from buildings in Dili and graffiti on bullet-pocked buildings read "Burn the traitors," and "Vigilance against traitors."<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Fretilin leaders continued to recognize Portuguese sovereignty and demanded the establishment of an internationally recognized mechanism of decolonization. But in the face of increased covert Indonesian military operations in the western districts, Fretilin felt compelled to declare independence. On November 28 Francisco Xavier do Amaral read the one sentence-long declaration of independence, and the following day he was inaugurated as the first President of the new Democratic Republic of East Timor. In his inaugural address, Amaral explained:

Here are the reasons why the Maubere people take up arms to expel all mongers [*vendilhões*] of our beloved Fatherland, all traitors to our liberty, all lackeys of imperialism and colonialism, all exploiters of our riches.

To deny the people of East Timor the right of independence is to deny them the right of liberty, and to transform them into eternal slaves.

To affirm that the people of East Timor never aspired for their total and complete independence is to negate purely and simply the history of a people. The history of Portuguese colonialism in East Timor over four centuries is too dramatic for one to close one's eyes to incontestable facts.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Xanana Gusmão, "Maubere," in *To Resist is to Win*, p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> Gusmão, *To Resist is to Win*, p. 25. My emphasis.

<sup>36</sup> Video footage of Portuguese journalist Adelino Gomes, October 1975.

<sup>37</sup> Effigies are seen in video footage of journalist Adelino Gomes, October 1975; photographs of graffiti reading "Fogo aos traidores" and "Vigilância contra os traidores" are in the Jill Jolliffe microfiche collection.

<sup>38</sup> "Discurso do Presidente da República por Ocasião da Investidura," in *Timor-Leste: Uma Luta Heróica* (Lisboa: no date or publisher [probably 1976]).

Amaral's argument is constructed around "incontestable facts," among which are four hundred years of colonialism and, echoing the writing of Padua Correia, "eternal slavery." On top of the master-slave metaphor is layered the new pair, "traitor" and "nationalist." But the Republic was to be short-lived: nine days later Indonesia launched a massive, but poorly planned, invasion.

Fretilin put up staunch resistance, and for the next three years retained control over most of the territory. But under the strains of the Indonesian military onslaught, in 1976-77 the pair "nationalist-traitor" was turned inward against people within Fretilin. Nationalists were replaced by "revolutionaries," traitors by "reactionaries." In late 1976, Fretilin began to arrest "traitors" within its own ranks. For example, Aquiles Freitas, a prominent military commander and son of the *liurai* of Letemumo, and several chiefs in the Viqueque region were arrested on charges of being "counter-revolutionary" and "reactionary" and were eventually executed. In September 1977, Fretilin President Francisco Xavier do Amaral was arrested by the Fretilin Central Committee and tried for planning to negotiate with the Indonesian military, disregarding the struggle, and behaving in a "feudal" manner. He was convicted of treason.<sup>39</sup>

For older East Timorese, the labels "traitor" and "nationalist," "reactionary" and "revolutionary" remain powerfully alive. By contrast, the generation schooled under Indonesia, most of whom were infants or had not yet been born in 1975, hold a radically different view of the 1970s. Most university students today believe that the "little people" were the victims of conniving political parties. One student, for example, wrote:

My family is from an ordinary background in society [*masyarakat biasa*] and wasn't involved in any kind of politics. But at the time of the civil war between several political parties in East Timor, as ordinary people [my family] didn't understand the goals of the political parties. Everyone fled to the forests because Falintil [Fretilin's military] told them to. [My family] didn't understand the meaning of *ukun rasikan* [self-sufficiency, a Fretilin theme]. But certain people spoke in the name of political interests [*mengatasnamakan kepentingan politik*] to obtain power. In general, the people of Timor Lorosae are not enemies with one another. But because of different political interests, the parties rose up against each other and the people, who were not at fault in any way, were the victims. The parties, which had political interests, were seeking support so that they could achieve their political goals.<sup>40</sup>

On the one hand, this analysis is an admirable effort to escape the black and white dichotomy between nationalists and traitors and create new historical space. On the other hand, this analysis unconsciously replicates Jakarta propaganda: that Indonesia was forced to invade East Timor in order to end the "civil war" and create stability for the ordinary East Timorese who were the victims of manipulative political leaders.

<sup>39</sup> See Xanana Gusmão, *To Resist is to Win*, p. 49, and Fretilin, *Relatório da Delegação do Comité Central da Fretilin*, p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> Martinho do Rego, paper written for course on Nationalism, June 2003.

### Pro-autonomy and Pro-independence

The Indonesian military onslaught of the late 1970s forced the surviving Fretilin leadership to reassess its strategy. Abandoning the base areas, Falintil slowly reorganized on the basis of smaller, more mobile units and developed clandestine networks linking Falintil with the population living under Indonesian control.<sup>41</sup> “As the actual situation developed,” writes Xanana Gusmão, “[we] came [to] the gradual understanding that, deep down, the true problem was the internal political problem which remained in our thinking and action.”<sup>42</sup> In early 1983, meetings between Xanana Gusmão and local Indonesian military commanders led to a temporary ceasefire. Gusmão also met with Governor Mario Carrascalão and appealed for a strategic alliance: “*You take care of the people, I’ll take care of Bapak-bapak* [the Indonesian military].”<sup>43</sup> Following advice from the Catholic church, in 1984, Fretilin jettisoned its Marxist ideology. And in December 1987, Gusmão declared that Falintil would be politically neutral and announced his own resignation from Fretilin. These moves were all aimed at broadening the resistance. In the words of Mario Carrascalão: “When Xanana said that he wasn’t Fretilin, only the commander of Falintil, that’s when the war started to be won. Apodeti (Associação Popular Democrática de Timor, Timorese Popular Democratic Association) and UDT people who had been enemies of Fretilin could also join the movement.”<sup>44</sup>

As seen in Xanana Gusmão’s writings and autobiography, these moves led to new permutations of the master frames “traitor-nationalist” and “reactionary-revolutionary. In a 1982 message to the United Nations General Assembly, Gusmão discussed “the incompetent Portuguese colonial government that collaborated with internal reaction” and “traitors of the nation.”<sup>45</sup> But in a 1987 letter outlining the “ideological turn-around,” Gusmão speaks of Fretilin atrocities without the use of metaphor: “Since the beginning of 1976, the purging waves of massacres of nationalists [by Fretilin]—purgings that have continued since 1978—have placed many in a dilemma.” Writing from Cipinang Prison in Jakarta in 1994, two years after his capture, he further distanced himself from the revolutionary language of the late 1970s, explaining that at the time he only understood the word “traitor,” not “reactionary,” and he placed quotation marks around the phrase “feudalist oldies” that he “swept away.” By 1999, the word “traitors” had disappeared altogether, replaced by “our thorny civil war” and “problems of our early years in the mountains and the related acts of revenge.” But Gusmão’s shift is not simply a rejection of the revolutionary language of the late 1970s; instead it marks a return to the master-slave metaphor as he attempted to broaden the resistance to include people from all political backgrounds. But while Gusmão returned to the master-slave metaphor, the political opening for people from Apodeti and UDT backgrounds to “join the movement” led to the emergence of a new variation on this theme during the 1990s: “pro-independence”

<sup>41</sup> Although information is sketchy, several informants have suggested that clandestine organizing first emerged among former slaves (*atan*) in the Viqueque district in 1980-1981.

<sup>42</sup> Gusmão, “Ideological Turn-around,” in *To Resist is to Win*, p. 132.

<sup>43</sup> See the interview with Mario Carrascalão in this issue.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> This and the following quotations in this paragraph, are all from Xanana Gusmão, *To Resist is to Win*, pp. 75, 77, 134, 46, ix.

became the new key word, particularly for East Timorese youth who came of age under the Indonesian occupation.

Suharto's resignation in May 1998 and President B. J. Habibie's offer in June of "broad autonomy" for East Timor marked a deepening of this new theme. In response to the upsurge in open political demands for independence during the second half of 1998, the Indonesian military and East Timorese collaborators stepped up militia organizing. In January 1999, President Habibie made the surprise announcement that he would recommend that East Timor be allowed to separate from Indonesia if the people so chose. Staunchly opposed to this decision, the Indonesian military stepped up militia organizing and direct military involvement to terrorize the population prior to the popular referendum. This campaign of terror cemented "pro-autonomy vs. pro-independence" as the central frame that characterized East Timorese political thinking during 1999.

Despite the large body of research on the military-militia violence in East Timor in 1999, there is still no in-depth study on the social background and recruitment of militia members. Most accounts treat the militias as lackeys of Jakarta, either forced to join or bribed with counterfeit Rupiah, alcohol, and drugs. But there is good reason to think that such a portrayal is overly simplistic. In general, the militias were recruited from the lumpenproletariat—*preman* (thugs), gamblers, and the ever growing number of jobless migrants to the urban centers. In the course of community reconciliation processes in 2002-2003, a number of deponents have argued that they cannot simply discuss their involvement as militia members in 1999, but instead must begin with 1975. They explain that during the late 1970s they had been "Fretilin" or even members of Falintil, but following their surrender they were forced to participate in paramilitary organizations or become informants for the Indonesian military. In other words, they are arguing that the phrase "militia member," used to tag an individual, is not necessarily synonymous with "pro-autonomy" or "traitor."

There are also indications that, at least in certain locations, militia recruitment was based on particular social backgrounds. In Lautem district, for example, where Fataluku speakers make up the only caste-based society in East Timor,<sup>46</sup> interviews suggest that there was a tendency for militia members to be from the *akanu* (slave) caste. In some of the western districts, a different dynamic may have been at work.<sup>47</sup> In Liquica district, which is dominated by large-scale coffee plantations, the *Besi Merah Putih* militia was recruited primarily from two locations. On the one hand, the District Administrator (*Bupati*) encouraged recruitment from his own hamlet, Caicasa, situated directly below the largest coffee plantation in the Maubara sub-district. There is strong reason to believe that most of militia members from Caicasa who terrorized the area are the descendants of plantation laborers (*asuliar*) from the late Portuguese period. The second site of militia recruitment was from the new *kampungs* surrounding the town of Liquica, many of the inhabitants of which are descendants of people who had previously been forced laborers on the coffee plantations in Liquica and the neighboring

<sup>46</sup> Fataluku society is caste-based, meaning that members of different castes are not supposed to intermarry. Other ethnic/language groups in Timor have social hierarchies, but do not have strict rules about marriage.

<sup>47</sup> The material in this and the following paragraph are based on numerous interviews in Lautem and Liquica in 2002-2003.

Ermera district. Without land or social position in the surrounding communities, these *asuliar* drifted to the town of Liquica when their contracts expired, and there, during the Indonesian occupation, many of the younger men worked as market vendors, gamblers, thugs, and, of course, informers for the military. In both Lautem and Liquica, those at the bottom of the social scale may well have feared that independence would mean the reassertion of *liurai* or landlord power, and hence the revival of internal social stratification.

For East Timorese today, “pro-autonomy” and “pro-independence” parallel the master-slave metaphor. Pro-autonomy does not simply connote a political preference, but also an inferior relationship to a foreign master. And the term is not restricted to high-level collaborators and militia members. People in East Timor now often refer to the “pro-autonomy clinic” and the “pro-autonomy newspaper”! Pro-independence, of course, means freedom from colonial “slavery” and becoming “masters” of one’s own future.

### Opportunists and the Oppressed

From late 1999 until May 2002, East Timor was administered by the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), which was mandated to reestablish order, maintain security, and prepare the territory for independence. Despite the large salaries paid to UN and international staff, the inefficiency and often unclear aims, most people were grateful for the UN presence and looked forward to a smooth transition to independence. Meanwhile, tensions between East Timorese heightened, in part because UNTAET carefully limited its interaction to a select elite, in part because of the problematic transformation of Falintil into the national defense force, and in part too because of the establishment of political parties and ensuing electoral competition.

However virulent were the East Timorese criticisms of UNTAET, their most damning criticisms were leveled against fellow East Timorese. In 2001-2002, young East Timorese activists could joke that they had achieved independence too soon, adding that they should have waited until the older generation had passed away. Similar sentiments were expressed in graffiti on walls in Dili: “Traitors are still traitors,” and more recently, “Independent but not free.” Criticisms of the new government came from both the left and the right. From the right (including people who had been pro-autonomy prior to the August 1999 referendum), the new government was criticized for seeking to establish a “leftist dictatorship” modeled on Mozambique. From the left there were criticisms that the government was allowing international monetary institutions to run the country. In July 2002, for example, the cover of the socialist publication *Vanguarda* read “Timor Leste in the handcuffs of imperialists,” and a year later the journal *Libertasaun* ran a cover story titled “To free the people after obtaining a homeland.”<sup>48</sup>

In July 2003, I asked the students in my class at the National University of East Timor what they thought about the current political situation. Their initial responses focused on political leaders (unresponsive), the performance of the government

<sup>48</sup> See *Vanguarda*, “Timor Leste dalam borgol imperialis,” vol. 1, July 2002, and *Libertasaun*, “Memerdekakan rakyat setelah memperoleh tanah air,” no. 2, July 2003.

(unsatisfying), and party competition (unhealthy). When pressed to think about power relations more generally, the students unanimously concluded that society is divided between “opportunists and the oppressed” [*oportunis dan kaum tertindas*]. During the subsequent discussion, one student explained that opportunists are “people who didn’t participate in the struggle [for independence] but immediately enjoy independence.” He was quickly shouted down by a flurry of voices. “No,” one student explained, “people who participated in the struggle are also opportunists—after winning [independence] they have received positions and want to force their will on others.” This statement was greeted by widespread approval.<sup>49</sup> A similar view is seen in the following opinion piece written a few days before independence and subsequently published in the *Suara Timor Lorosae* daily:

We did not obtain independence as a present that just fell from the sky or as a free gift from Indonesia, Portugal or the United Nations. Independence was achieved through the long struggle during 450 years against Portuguese colonialism and during twenty-four years of the Indonesian occupation. Independence is now within our grasp. [But] our leaders are now busy happily dividing power among themselves. Meanwhile the gap between them [national leaders] and the people is becoming wider.<sup>50</sup>

The divide between the powerful and powerless is also reflected in an apparently new usage of the word *malae*, which means “foreigner” in Tetun. This word has always been used to refer to foreigners (without indicating skin color or place of origin), but the expression *malae boot*, meaning “big foreigner,” is now used to refer to East Timorese in positions of power. Something similar is at work with the distinction that some of my colleagues at the National University make between *malae* and *hitam* (black). In this instance, *malae* is intended to highlight the fact that many of the most-senior national leaders are mestizos or of wholly foreign descent (Arab and Goan), in opposition to darker-skinned East Timorese without foreign ancestry. Despite the apparently racist nature of the labels, this distinction is primarily intended to highlight social status and, of course, opportunity.

The pairs “opportunist-oppressed” and “foreign-black” (*malae-hitam*) are clearly permutations of the master-slave metaphor that is central to East Timorese political thinking. Both “opportunist” and “foreigner” stand-in for master, “oppressed” and “black” for slave, or more precisely perhaps those who are not yet free.

## Conclusion

Over the past two years there have been repeated public statements about the importance of history in independent East Timor. In late 2002, for example, parliamentarian Leandro Isaac argued that “[t]he writing of history invites resistance from the people because what is written doesn’t accord with the facts. Timor Leste is

<sup>49</sup> Discussion on July 15, 2003. The statements: “orang yang tidak ikut perjuangan tapi bisa langsung menikmati kemerdekaan” and “orang yang berjuang juga termasuk oportunis—setelah menang dapat jabatan dan maksa kehendak terhadap pihak lain.”

<sup>50</sup> Rui Viana, “Mengakui para pejuang adalah menghargai sejarah (Refleksi dibalik acara dialog para mantan tahanan ‘tragedi hotel Mahkota’ di Aula Yayasan HAK),” dated May 16, 2002, published in *Suara Timor Lorosae*, June 6, 2002.

now an independent and sovereign state, so history has to be written truthfully so as not to create problems in the future."<sup>51</sup> Similarly, while visiting a site where UDT supporters murdered twelve members of the Fretilin affiliated Timorese Student Union in 1975, Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri explained: "We will not be embarrassed by the dark history of our past. As the backbone of the struggle for independence, Fretilin will not be afraid to reveal the true historical facts. If in the past mistakes were made, Fretilin will say so because independence was won by the people of East Timor with blood and tears." These are admirable sentiments with which many would agree.

The problem, however, is the framework within which historical debates are conducted and the uses to which they are put. For regardless of the period in question, when East Timorese gaze back across their long and often tragic history, they do so through a highly dichotomous lens. Despite the permutations—*liurai* and *atan*, *Sociedade* and *asuliar*, traitors and nationalists, reactionaries and revolutionaries, pro-autonomy and pro-independence, opportunists and the oppressed—the master-slave metaphor remains central to how East Timorese understand their history. And this dichotomous view is projected forward to politics today. Yet at the same time, East Timorese continue to conjure up the spirits of the 1975 resistance to the Indonesian invasion. In an October 2002 interview, for example, Mario Carrascalão commented:

Never again format or shape the people of East Timor as happened in 1975, when [they] wanted everything to be Marxist. That's already obsolete, and contradicts the East Timorese political paradigm. People prefer democracy now and want to create a democratic atmosphere . . . . I know that President Xanana [Gusmão], in his entire soul, heart and mind, is a true democrat. Compassion is the dominant value in his politics. And Xanana's performance is not his political specialty alone, but it is the performance of the entire people of East Timor. The people truly understand what freedom is, what independence means, what oppression means.<sup>52</sup>

For many East Timorese, democracy is not simply a matter of political rules and procedures, political ideologies and party programs, official positions (including salaries, vehicles, foreign travel, and so forth) and opportunities to skim from state coffers. Instead, for many people (particularly those outside Dili), democracy is understood in terms of who "determines" history and who must remain silent.

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<sup>51</sup> "Leandro" Jangan manipulasi sejarah," *Suara Timor Lorosae*, December 3, 2002. [Q: Should there be single quotes around "Leandro?"]

<sup>52</sup> "Wawancara khusus dengan Mario Carrascalao [sic] (1): Rakyat jangan dikembalikan ke tahun 1975," *Suara Timor Lorosae*, October 21, 2002.

