

Indexing social space: A marketplace in Timor-Leste

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Abstract

Between 1967 and 2007 powerful political, economic, and social events profoundly changed the lives of the people of Timor-Leste. Every *suku* was affected and though some changes were common to all *sukus*, or local communities, each *suku* has its own history to tell. This essay compares changes in the economic lives of the local people in one *suku*, that of Caraubalo, which is located in the municipality of Viqueque, on the southern coast of Timor-Leste during that period.¹

Keywords: Viqueque; Caraubalo; market; gender

My principal intention here is to show how space and time indexed social identity in the marketplace of one of the larger ‘towns’ of Timor-Leste (or ‘East Timor’), Viqueque, during the years 1966–1967 and to examine their relevance for the social personality and economic character of Viqueque town today.² The space occupied by the weekly emporium offered a forum in which ethnicity, social hierarchy, gender, a pastime (cockfighting), and religious affiliation visually played themselves out and presented a physical replication of social distinctions that defined the character of the town and the sub-district it served. The marketplace (*basar*) also provided space enabling persons of different social identity to interact more readily and regularly there than anywhere else.³ The temporal dimensions of life alternately waxed and waned as six days of relative somnolence were interrupted by a day of excitement filled with commerce, gossip, cockfighting, and—in the case of the few Christians in the locality—celebrating the weekly mass.⁴ As was true for other towns in the former Portuguese colony, Viqueque’s market contributed substantially to its social life and economy.⁵ As such, my comments complement other discussions of the Timorese *bisar* in certain other chapters, e.g., that of Sousa.⁶

A secondary purpose motivates this study. In evaluating the respective merits of the ‘Polanyi School’ of economic anthropology (Polanyi and Arensberg 1957; see also our editors’ remarks in the present volume) whose adherents regarded theories derived from the discipline of economics as inapplicable to primitive

and peasant societies, and the ‘Formalist School’ (Cook 1966), which asserted their relevance, Raymond Firth (1972, 468) roundly declared the dispute to be “largely futile”. The issue, he argued, was not “*whether* economic theory could be applied to primitive economics” but “*where, how far, and with what modifications and additions*, economic theory could be found appropriate to interpret ‘primitive’ systems”. In demonstrating how economic values, such as rational calculation, scarcity, and demand, are ‘embedded’—as George Dalton (1971), the foremost of Polanyi’s followers might put it—in non-economic aspects of communal existence, this study seeks to support Firth’s argument.

Focusing on gender, ethnicity, social class, and social identity, and their economic implications, also enables us to gain insight into the process whereby post-colonial nations transform themselves after gaining independence. By comparing the use made of social space at two periods of time separated by four decades during which momentous developments took place in Timor-Leste, we can see in sharper relief the kind of changes urban spaces experience when they are subject to colonial authority, pressures resulting from independence, and—ultimately—the tortuous process of nation-building.

Social identities

The present study is based on a field stay of 15 months in Viqueque town during the aforementioned period, and shorter visits conducted in 1999, 2005, 2007, and 2009.⁷⁸ Viqueque town was the largest settlement and commercial hub in the *Posto Sede*, or ‘home’ sub-district in which it was located, and the sub-district itself consisted of 10 socio-political units known as *suku*, each *suku* consisting of a varying number of villages (*povoações*).⁹ Geographically, the town is sited at the edge of what the geographer, Joachim K. Metzner (1977, 22), defined as the “Southern Foothill Zone”, where it abuts the “Southern Littoral Plains Zone”. Sociologically, Viqueque town was, and remains today, located in the *suku* of Caraubalo and its boundaries overlapped with Cabira Oan, one of the seven villages in that *suku*.¹⁰ Leadership of *suku* was invested in officials known as *xefes de suku*, or *suku* chiefs, who would always be literate Timorese men who possessed a working knowledge of the Portuguese language.

The market nearest Viqueque was that at Ossu, which was about nine miles distant and smaller, while other markets were situated at Lacluta, Uato Carabau, and Uato-Lari. All were held on Sundays only. Viqueque was the largest and most popular market because 1. there were more Chinese Shops in Viqueque; 2. there were more *ema malai* (foreigners, strangers), and educated Timorese families, who needed vegetables and fruits and the Viqueque areas could not provide sufficient supplies to meet their needs;¹¹ 3. the town and its environs had the highest

population density in the district; and 4. the town was conveniently situated near the geographical centre of the district and served by a north-south road that was passable most days even in the wet season. Baucau market rivalled Viqueque's in the number of its participants and its prominence, and was also held twice weekly, on Sundays and Wednesdays. According to Metzner (1977, 213) Baucau's was "undoubtedly" the most important marketplace east of Dili as a result of its strategic location at the crossroads of the entire system of transportation in that region.¹²

The highest order of social classification divided the inhabitants of Viqueque district into two basic categories, *ema timur*, Timorese, and *ema malai*.¹³ The former term, *ema timur*, in the Viqueque region at least, incorporated two categories of person, *ema fehan*, or lowlanders—a gloss that included the coastal populace of the southern region—and *ema foho*, or uplanders. *Fehan* denoted Timorese who spoke the indigenous form of the Tetum language (*Tetun Terik*) and resided, for the most part, on the coastal plains of the south.¹⁴ The term *fehan* was a little ambiguous in that some Tetum speakers lived in the uplands, for example, the people of Lacluta sub-district (Viqueque district), while some villages near the coast, especially in the sub-district of Uato-Lari, were home to non-Tetum speakers. But language was privileged over location, upland Tetum speakers being referred to as *ema fehan* and non-Tetum speakers who lived as inhabitants of the plains as *ema foho*.¹⁵ The category *ema foho* included speakers of a number of languages: Makassae, Waimaha, Naueti, Kairui, and Midique.¹⁶ Most *foho* participants in market activities were Makassae or Waimaha, people living in the mountainous sub-districts of Ossu (Viqueque district) and Venilale (Baucau district).¹⁷ Altitude and the availability of water played a major part in determining which crops could be grown as the cooler temperatures and abundance (in some areas) of water were more conducive to the cultivation of fruits such as tangerines (*sabraca-lotuk*), oranges (*sabraca*), lemons (*derok*), and pineapples (*anana*); and green vegetables such as lettuces (*alfase*), cabbages (*repollu*), and spinach (*kankun malai*) than the much hotter area around Viqueque town. The town itself, however, was overwhelmingly *fehan* in its ethnic make-up, such *foho* as there were being members of families which usually provided the incumbents for the position of *xefe de suku*, each of whom (*fehan* and *foho* alike) owned a house in town. Of the 10 chiefly families in the town some were members of the social rank of *liurai*, or royalty, while others belonged to the second social rank, that of *dato*. Administration regulations obliged each *xefe de suku* in the sub-district to have a pied à terre in town, the consequence of this regulation being that nine of the ten chiefs owned two homes, one in the town and the other in their respective *suku*. Unlike the chief of Caraubalo, whose town and *suku* homes were the same, they thus divided their time between two houses.

The exchanges that took place within the category of *ema timur* in the marketplace at Viqueque reflect, to some degree, the widespread Southeast Asian

opposition between the produce specialisations of the coastal populations and those of the upland. *Fehan* and *foho* were far more numerous than any other ethnic category participating in the market and most *fehan* who attended the weekly gatherings generally resided in *suku* located no more than a few miles from town, which was surrounded by *suku* whose majority population was *fehan*. Most *foho* resided at greater distances, sometimes dozens of miles away, a circumstance which meant some participants in the market would leave their upland *suku* on Saturday and camp overnight on the way to town or sleep in the market building itself at nightfall. For them the occasion was an event marking an important disjuncture in their daily routines of village life. Apart from the occasional marriage (whose preliminary terms might be negotiated on a market day), relatively little interaction took place between *fehan* and *foho* during the other six days, but once a week in the market they had the opportunity for mutual engagement. Partly owing to the greater distance they had to travel, *foho* would usually only come to market if they had something to sell or a pressing need to buy some specific commodity and would frequently travel as a family. *Fehan*, on the other hand, tended to be more regular buyers and sellers. In contrast to most *foho*, whether as buyers, sellers, observers, or socialisers, *fehan* women and men from the nearby villages would be more likely to come alone or with a couple of relatives and take advantage of the occasion to chat with other *fehan* relatives from other *suku* whom they would not otherwise get a chance to encounter.¹⁸

Hierarchy, a pervasive feature of Timorese social classification was no less influential a determinant of social identity in Viqueque, and was indeed implicit in the very terms '*fehan*' and '*foho*', in which the former connotes superiority and the latter suggests inferiority, another local expression of a widespread Southeast Asian contrast, that is, the ascription of superiority to coastal cultures and relative inferiority to upland cultures. In Timor-Leste this contrast is reinforced by the superordination accorded to town dwellers over people residing in the countryside and is made verbally explicit in the contrast, *kota/foho*. Hierarchical classification was further contained within each ethnic category since there were four social ranks, which in descending order of prestige comprised *liurai* (royalty), *dato* (aristocrats), *ema reino* (commoners), and *ata* (slaves) (see Chapter 4, this volume).¹⁹ In *suku* Caraubalo five villages were inhabited by *ema reino* while two (Mane Hat and Mamulak) were *dato* communities. Somewhat complicating this allocation of status was the presence of half a dozen or so Timorese, some from other districts, who worked in the colonial bureaucracy. These included policemen (*sapaio*), an interpreter for the administration, a meteorological officer, and a veterinarian nurse (*pecuário*). The policemen played an executive role on market days. Among their duties was walking, baton in hand, among the sellers ready to quell any disturbance or resolve any dispute that might have arisen between patrons. The

ability of these officers of the administration to read and speak Portuguese and their prestigious occupations as members of the administration and—more often than not—members of *liurai* or wealthy *dato* families classed them with Timorese of elevated social standing. Educated Timorese, who invariably employed servants to take care of regular purchases for the table, only carried out their own buying when personal judgement was called for, as might be the case in buying a fighting cock (*asuwa'in*), for example, or a piece of cloth of unusual quality (*tais*). Occasionally groups of buyers from the *Segunda Linha* would arrive en masse at the market from their barracks in a military vehicle and descend upon the sellers.²⁰ Decidedly wealthier than most commoner Timorese, their arrival was met with dismay by the Chinese buyers who knew sellers would be encouraged by the presence of these more liberal spenders to raise prices.

The second basic category, *ema malai*, consisted of the *ema mutin*, the Europeans, and the *ema cina*, the Chinese (including Chinese Timorese), who were for the most part Hakka immigrants from Canton, Fukien, Kwantung, Hong Kong, and Macao. In Viqueque town, where their families owned half a dozen shops (*cantinas*), they numbered several dozens and, as they did throughout the colony, controlled local trade. The Chinese sold very little in the market—they were primarily buyers—but cakes made by one family in the town were sometimes available for purchase, and teenage Chinese boys and girls from that family would walk between the rows of sellers calling out their wares. The European residents were far fewer in number and consisted of a Portuguese schoolteacher and the administrator of the district and their respective wives, and my wife and me.

Religion and gender differences also contributed to the definition of social identity in Viqueque and made their influence apparent in the spatial and temporal dimensions of the market. Although a substantial majority of Timorese in the sub-district comprised non-Christians, the Catholic mission in the town of Ossu had made converts over the years sufficiently numerous for the priest based there to come fairly regularly on Sundays to say mass in the building that arose from the market plaza. Few men attended. Apart from trading and socialising, their interests centred around the weekly cockfighting, an event women never attended. Those men who did partake of the communion were for the most part members of the administration who took advantage of the occasion to consolidate their claims to a Lusitanian identity.²¹ During the transactions in the marketplace the activities of men and women could, as we shall see, significantly differ according to context, and although it cannot be said, as happens on the island of Lembata, that “In a crowd of several hundred, women far outnumber the men, making up perhaps ninety percent of those present” (Barnes and Barnes 1989, 405), women were a dominant force in the Viqueque market, especially if one takes into account the Chinese women buyers.

Then there were the itinerant traders, all men of various Timorese ethnicities, who visited Viqueque about four times a year from as far away as Bobonaro and for whom the town was but one stop among several outlets for their non-comestible produce.²² No space in the marketplace was assigned them. The itinerants would move anywhere there might be prospective buyers for their wares, which included cloth from Bobonaro, Suai, and Atsabe; personal ornaments (such as combs and pins) made from aluminum; and other lightweight items, stopping when accosted.²³

Market space

The principal watercourse in the region is the river Cuha, which descends from the mountains to the north—Metzner's 'Central Uplands Zone'—and wends its way down the slopes of the Southern Foothill Zone; after a brief crossing of the Southern Littoral Plains Zone, it enters the Timor Sea about 12 miles further on near a place called Be-Asu. As the river reaches the interface between these last two zones its progress is impeded by extensive strata of hard rock that forces it to meander into a half-loop before swinging back into its southerly course for Be-Asu. Inside this half-loop, on the right bank, the town of Viqueque was founded and developed. At certain stretches of the river sedimentary deposits have accumulated to form alluvial terraces, on one of which the Portuguese administration constructed the aforementioned market building for the purpose of accommodating transactions between sellers and buyers.²⁴ A cruciform white-washed structure topped by a red galvanised roof, the building's main entrance faced south-west and on the three sides around the entrance was a clearing with bare soil interspersed with scattered grasses which formed the plaza that functioned as the principal forum for market commerce (Figure 2.1). From the south-western side of the plaza rose a stone wall several yards high which supported an embankment carrying the road that connected Be-Asu with the towns of Ossu, Venilale, and Baucau to the north. The purpose of the building was to shelter participants in the market during the wet monsoon, which would be expected in November-January and then again from March-July.²⁵ So when rain was not falling, sellers would sit outside where there was more space for them to display their commodities. With the onset of rain, sellers abandoned the plaza, moved into the building, and returned to their places outside when it ceased. The building was also where mass was celebrated after trading and before the cockfighting started. Access to the plaza was gained by means of a stone ramp descending from the road.

The hand of the colonial administration was also evident in the spatial accommodations made for the sellers, the majority of whom were aggregated into rows extending across the north-western, western, and southern sectors of the plaza.²⁶

Although the actual composition of the rows was determined by those occupying them, sellers were expected under administrative fiat to remain in the rows and keep walkways between them uncluttered while the market was in session. In practice, though, almost as soon as trading started rows would begin to disintegrate and walkways would quickly fill in so that the neat order shown in Figure 1 would vanish. The 'L-shaped' rows shown in the figure were occupied by the *foho* and *fehan* and that sector of the plaza they occupied was the central area for trading. Generally speaking, sellers of the same ethnicity sat together. *Fehan* numerically dominated the inner 'Ls', which were situated nearer the building, and *foho* dominated the outer 'Ls' (Figure 2.1). Exceptions, however, occurred.²⁷ Thus, while *fehan* sold tobacco (*tabako*) and betel (*malus*), some *fehan* sellers would sit in '*fehan* rows' while others would sit with *foho* facing fellow *fehan*.²⁸ Other commodities also provided a focus for sellers, who would cluster together in a group, and this accounts for the fact that one could never be certain that a '*foho* row' might not harbour some *fehan* sellers, or, of course, vice versa. The number and size of the rows were a function of the number of sellers. In June through August sellers might be packed shoulder to shoulder on some days, but in November (when families were sowing their gardens) or February (when they were harvesting maize [*batar*]) rows would be less compact. Social identity was further indicated in the contrast between the relative immobility exhibited by these sellers, who until they had disposed of their produce remained seated, and the mobility of the *ema cina* or *ema malai* who circulated around the plaza as buyers and the itinerant traders who circulated as sellers.

Although as few as 150 persons might patronise the market, on a busy Sunday the number could rise to as many as 500 especially in the period from June through August. This was the time taxes fell due and households had to raise cash, in the form of the Portuguese escudo. Taxes comprised an annual head tax (*imposto domiciliário* or *imposto de capitação*) of 190 escudos on physically healthy males aged from 18 to 60 and a tax on buffaloes, horses, and Bali cattle at 10 escudos a head (Metzner 1977, 6, 183, 211). Of this sum, 150 escudos went to the provincial government and 30 escudos to the local municipality (*Comissão Municipal*), for example, Viqueque town. The tax had been introduced in 1908 by Governor Eduardo Marquês and replaced a tax called *finta* for which—either in cash or kind—the whole *suku* had been liable. Metzner (1977, 211) points out that since the *finta* was collected by the chiefs of the *suku* and village they were able to skim off a lot of the money and that the head tax was intended to do away with this practice. One result of this innovation was to help nudge the country towards a market-orientated economy since it obliged farmers to raise money either by growing an agricultural surplus—which they were loath to do—or else work for cash. By the mid-1960s, cash had come to replace barter in most economic exchanges in the Viqueque market and it is this form of economic activity that is discussed in this article.²⁹

Identities and commodities

Market commerce was mainly determined by the availability of agricultural produce. This, in its turn, depended upon the vagaries of rainfall and constant local variations in such geographic factors as altitude, slope, soil, and groundwater supply as well as various human variables, for example, the decision whether to focus on growing subsistence or cash crops or the need to raise cash.³⁰³¹ Prices responded to scarcity, such bargaining as did occur being effective only when a commodity was abundant, or as the market drew to a close, or in the case of obviously below-par merchandise.³² They would usually remain firm for about an hour and a half and a buyer who considered a price excessive would simply shift to another seller; but when the most desirable items were gone and Chinese and European buyers (or surrogates) had departed, prices might soften. Thus, whereas the asking price for an average sack of rice could start at around 30 escudos it might eventually fall to six. Or while one escudo might have bought nine tangerines shortly after the drum sounded, the same sum might buy a few more towards closure. Protracted haggling, though, was rare, sellers preferring to take unsold produce home rather than settle for an amount they considered unacceptably low. In any case, bargaining for comestibles was limited to Timorese, since Europeans would not generally haggle, and Chinese buyers would have already decided upon their upper limit, that is, the minimum possible in light of the trading circumstances of a particular Sunday.³³ The determination of the Chinese women not to give more than their pre-determined maximum extended to taking advantage of a seller's lack of education by snatching up the selected item, quickly thrusting a pile of small change into the seller's hand, and immediately darting away before the seller—unaccustomed to counting so many coins under pressure—discovered she had been swindled.

Certain vegetables and fruits were sold by both *fehan* and *foho*, but just as the allocation of the different spaces they occupied and the mobility or relative lack of mobility in the market plaza indexed the social identity and gender of the sellers, so did the category of commodity they sold.³⁴ This was even the case with commodities that belonged to a general class of object, such as ceramics or cloth. Thus, while both categories of *ema timur* sold ceramics, the character and style of their products differed. *Fehan* manufactured undecorated, thin-walled clay pots (*lolon*) in addition to clay plates (*hanek*);³⁵ *foho* made thicker, decorated pots, but no plates.³⁶ Likewise with cloth. While both categories of Timorese brought pieces of cloth to sell in the market, and though they were woven from the same raw material, *fehan* cloth and *foho* cloth differed markedly in style.

Commodities can be conveniently listed under the rubrics 'comestibles', 'live-stock', and 'non-comestibles' and are displayed in Table 2.1.

The commodities of Caraubalo *suku*

Most *fehan* sellers were residents of Caraubalo villages or those comprising the neighbouring *suku*, of Uma Kik, and their propinquity to the market may have encouraged them to regard the plaza proprietarily. Members of other *suku* would come to the market mainly to trade, and only after their business was concluded, socialise. Villagers in these two *suku* would often come specifically to network. In another respect, Caraubalo held a distinct standing in these commercial activities since its seven villages specialised to some extent in the commodities they sold (see Table 2.1).³⁷

Table 2.1: Commodities bought and sold in Viqueque market

<i>Fehan</i> commodities
Comestibles
Maize, dry rice (<i>hare to'os</i>), cassava (<i>ai farinha</i>), a variety of yams (<i>uhi</i>), many varieties of banana (<i>hudi</i>), breadfruit, melons, papaya (<i>aidila</i>), many varieties of pulses (including beans (<i>fore</i>) and peanuts (<i>fore rai</i>)), cashew nuts, dried pork (<i>fahi</i>), eggs (<i>manu tolu</i>), pancakes made of unleavened bread.
Livestock
Suckling pigs (<i>fahi</i>), hens (<i>manu</i>), fighting cocks, a fawn (<i>bibi rusa</i>) (one occasion), doves (<i>faluk</i>), parakeets (<i>loriku</i>), cockatoos (<i>kakatua</i>), civet cats (<i>laku</i>).
Non-comestibles
Tobacco, areca, betel, lime (<i>ahu</i>), cotton (<i>cabas timur</i>), a species of vegetable that provides a castor-oil plant termed <i>ahi oan</i> ('little fire') and which is used by the Timorese as a lamp, women's cloth (<i>tais feto</i>), a variety of items made from palm leaves (baskets, pouches (Lachuta sub-district)), coloured palm-leaf strips, mats, leaf mats, ropework saddles (<i>sela</i>), harnesses), black rope (made from the fibrous outer covering of a palm tree), personal ornaments (hairpins, rings, bracelets, and combs), agricultural tools and other products made from iron (<i>besi</i>) (knives (<i>tudik</i>), machetes (<i>katana</i>), digging sticks (<i>ai suak</i>), spears (<i>diman</i>)), clay pots, clay plates.
<i>Foho</i> commodities
Comestibles
Wet rice (<i>háre natar</i>) especially from Ossu and Uato Lari, sweet potatoes (<i>uhi midar</i>), European potatoes (<i>fehuk europa</i>), pumpkins (<i>lakeruk</i>) from Ossu and Venilale, 'Japanese' pumpkins (<i>lakeruk japonese</i>), lettuce, cabbages, spinach, watercress, tomatoes, cucumbers (<i>caban</i>), asparagus (<i>kamua</i>), onions (<i>liis</i>), garlic (<i>liis-asu</i>), oranges, and tangerines sold by Uato Lari people, lemons, pineapples, grapefruits, mangos (<i>has</i>), strawberries (<i>morangu</i>), sugar cane from Ossu, dried octopus, dried buffalo meat (<i>na'an carbau</i>), salt (<i>masin</i>).
Livestock
On occasion a man would bring a fighting cock to sell; but otherwise <i>foho</i> rarely brought livestock to market.
Non-comestibles
Women's cloth from Ossu, Venilale, and Uato Carabau, leaf-woven hats, fishing nets made from palm leaves, conical hats made from palm leaves, personal ornaments (hairpins, rings, bracelets, and combs), clay pots.

Commodities of Caraubalo *suku*

Cabira Oan village: maize, manioc, tobacco.

Vessa village: manioc, clay plates.

Lamaclaran village: manioc, tobacco, iron implements, spears.

Has Abut village: maize, manioc, ropework (rope (*tali*), saddles), iron implements.

Identities, space, time

Trading officially commenced at 9:00 a.m. sharp with the beating of a drum by a uniformed *sapaio*, smartly attired in a cap, khaki tunic, shorts, long socks and soft boots, standing on the road looking down upon the expectant crowd below.³⁸ Sellers and buyers waited in the building in anticipation of the first roll of the drum and when it came—with an avalanche of Chinese women and their children, baskets in hand in the vanguard—launching themselves upon the sellers in a robust, but targeted, onslaught.³⁹ In contrast to the Chinese, Timorese never went in for team assaults. On some Sundays, while the sellers quietly chatted in their places below, the administrator, accompanied or unaccompanied by his wife, would be present, checking to see if official protocols were being observed; but in contrast to the Portuguese teacher's wife neither he nor his wife ever made a purchase, what weekly provisions they might require being bought by a servant.⁴⁰ The *liurai* families and members of the bureaucracy would from time to time come down into the plaza on a whim or out of curiosity but for regular items, particularly comestibles, like the administrator, they preferred delegating this chore to servants. Especially for men, trading was considered too undignified for someone with an elevated social status to safeguard or self-esteem to uphold.⁴¹

Among the Timorese themselves, most transactions occurred between the two categories of *ema timur* but so dominant was the *foho* commercial presence that had they shifted their produce to the emporia at Venilale, Ossu, Uato Carabau, or Uato Lari, the result would have been seriously detrimental to the Viqueque economy. Trade between households was not a dominant economic practice among the *suku*, and so trading in the market served to satisfy wants and slough off surpluses. *Foho* traders came to market principally to earn the cash to pay their taxes and buy produce in the *cantinas*, but to a more limited degree they also depended upon *fehan* to supply them with maize, yams, coconuts, the three ingredients for use in betel-chewing (areca, betel, lime), salt, ropework, and metal implements (knives, machetes, spearheads, digging stick heads, arrowheads).⁴² *Fehan* traders would purchase wet rice, green vegetables, and fruits from *foho* and maize and root crops from other *fehan*, who because of local agricultural circumstances had a surplus. This was especially important in the wet months of December and

January before the short dry season arrived in February and maize and root crops could be harvested, since by the turn of the year *fehan* stocks would be depleted in a number of *suku* of the sub-district (Hicks 2004, 49). Agricultural possibilities were determined by factors of physical geography and human decisions. As with altitude and climate, soils decisively influenced agricultural potential in the 10 *suku* of the sub-district of Viqueque, and this was reflected in the type of crop and time when it was available for sale. Some soils were predominantly clay; others sandy; and others marl. The soils of Luka *suku* were especially fertile, yielding handsome maize harvests in a good year in contrast to the *suku* of Caraubalo and Balarauain, which cultivated coconut palms as a cash crop instead of subsistence crops. These geographical factors also influenced the times of seeding and harvesting among the *suku*. Because Bibileu was in the northern uplands, the maize harvest in that *suku* came several weeks behind that on the more southerly Balarauain plains, and so in early February the farmers in Balarauain would sell maize to Bibileu buyers while in late March—by which time their supplies were dwindling—the people of Balarauain would purchase maize from Bibileu sellers.

Gender was apparent in the way in which the market operated. As a rough generalisation, most *foho* sellers were men, whereas most *fehan* sellers were woman. In the parallel rows displayed in Figure 2.1, therefore, the *foho* rows had more males than females while the *fehan* rows tended to have more females than males. Various exceptions and nuances modified this broad allocation of gender function. *Fehan* men sold ornaments, metal implements, and ropework, which members of both sexes bought; *fehan* women sold papaya, eggs, maize, pots, cloth, and ceramics. Men and women sold cloth, but while only men sold agricultural tools women sold ceramics for which they were also buyers. *Fehan* men might sometimes sit with their womenfolk as the latter sold their produce, and when the mood struck get up and amble around looking at what was on offer elsewhere in the plaza. For her part, when a woman of either ethnic category was satisfied with what she had sold she might leave what produce that still remained in the care of a relative and take a look around. In social interaction, too, gender distinction was apparent: women generally conversed with women; men with men.

No prescribed ritual closed the market, but after trading ended the marketplace continued to index social identification. Even as the last of the sellers began gathering up their unsold commodities and prepared to depart, members of the Christian community would already have begun preparations for the mass, and some time before the priest arrived they would have taken their places in the building. For an hour or so, refined, yet culturally assertive, liturgical sounds filled the air as the small, almost exclusively female, congregation recited the sacred words while their menfolk—most of whom looked for guidance in the teachings of their ancestors rather than the priests—chatted outside among themselves and anticipated

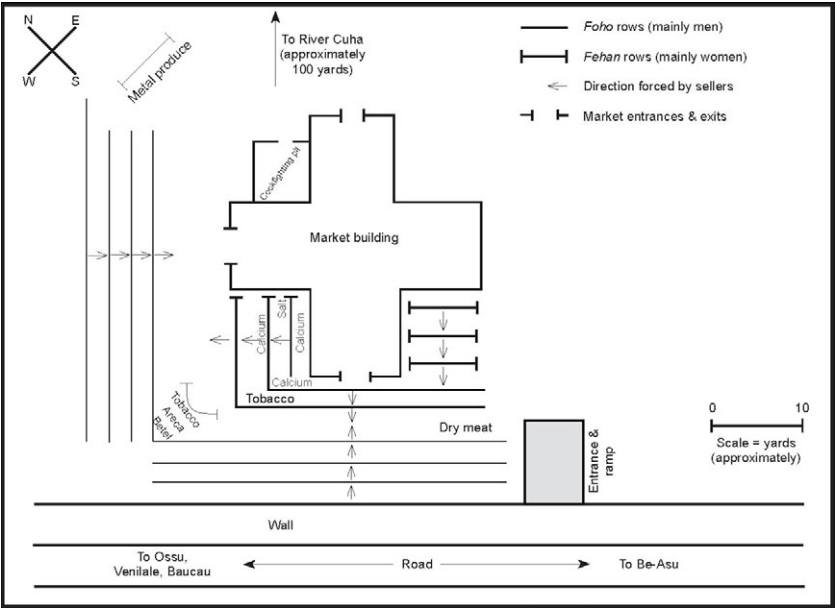


Figure 2.1. Marketplace. Image Credit: David Hicks.

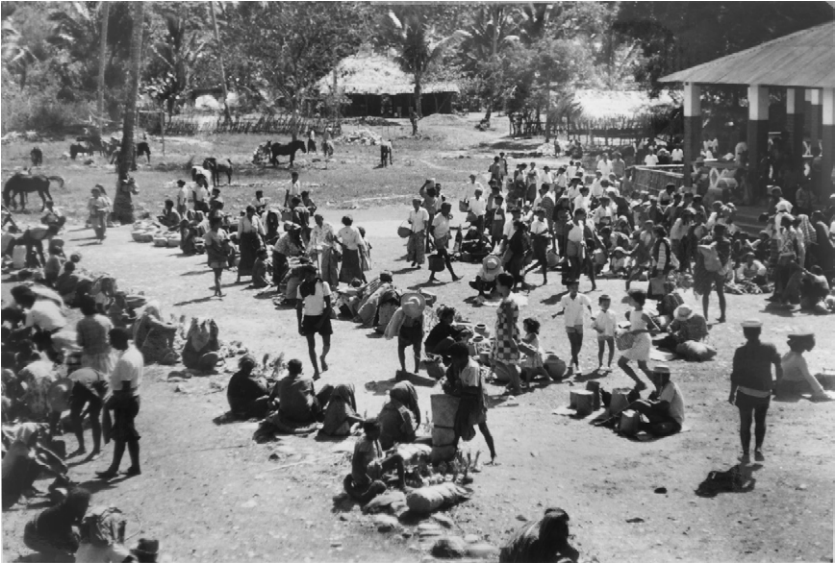


Figure 2.2. Market in 1966 showing selling rows. Image Credit: David Hicks.

the enjoyment soon to be derived from the cockfights. When, finally, the priest dismissed the faithful, the men claimed the plaza for themselves, and at around 3:00 p.m. the weekly avian battles began in an enclosure adjoining an outside wall (Figure 2.1). As men spent the next few hours betting some of the cash the market had brought in, women would look to see what the Chinese *cantinas* offered that day or—on occasion—begin a spontaneous session of dance in the plaza opposite to the place from which the raucous sounds of the cockfight issued.

In contrast to the other six days, then, Sunday was a day dedicated to a dynamic bustle. From the moment of the drummer's signal the little town was abuzz with noise until, with the fall of night, Viqueque's habitual tranquillity returned.

Viqueque 2007

During the period described above, market activities were focused almost entirely on the physical marketplace, and buyers and sellers were still attempting to accustom themselves to the use of cash. Since then, a fully developed system of commerce has evolved while Viqueque's version of itself has undergone a series of avatars.⁴³ With the incorporation of Timor-Leste into the Republic of Indonesia as its twenty-seventh province, profound changes were unleashed upon the populace. Those Chinese who had not been slaughtered by the armed forces left the country, while huge numbers of *ema timur* were obliged by the Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (ABRI, Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia) to leave their *suku* and resettle into concentrated settlements. Viqueque town was not spared. Villagers from the nine outlying *suku* were crammed into the town and the excess population overflowed into every available space in Caraubalo *suku*. Almost overnight Viqueque became seriously urbanised and as part of its social transformation came commercial adaptation as Indonesian immigrants established *warung* (small shops or stores) and *kios* (kiosks or stalls) while the rupiah replaced the escudo.^{44,45} Although social coordinates of ethnicity and gender contributed to the shape of Viqueque market in the mid-1960s they were complemented by factors of an economic nature. Even as Timorese women and men were cognisant of the cultural context in which they traded, they were also conscious of the necessity of adjusting their expectations to accommodate the supply and demands of the commodities they traded. Goods that were scarce, whether as the consequence of seasonal changes, or unforeseen contingencies, saw their market values rise just as goods in abundance witnessed a decline in their market values. Illiterate though most were, traders deliberately increased or decreased prices accordingly. In today's Timor-Leste, literacy and the level-ing out of cultural differences have served to bring into sharper relief the economic calculations at play in Viqueque

commercial life, and the operation of a self-conscious rationality Raymond Firth discerns at work wherever individuals go about satisfying one another's economic needs regardless of the nature of their society is even more evident than at that earlier period.

With Timor-Leste's liberation in 1999 and the Indonesian exodus, changes in Timorese lives took another turn as international agencies (spearheaded by the United Nations, World Bank, and USAID, and supported by a host of NGOs) replaced the ABRI. The *malai* had returned, energised by new directives and propounding new strategies for implementing them.

In Viqueque today the presence of the *ema malai* is unobtrusive. They are no more numerous than in the old days, except at national elections when outside observers descend into the sub-district engaged in the discharge of their various mandates. Now, though, when they do arrive the *ema malai* come as a considerably more ethnically diverse cast of characters as Indians, Japanese, and other nationalities share space with *ema timur*. The district administrator is Timorese, though in 2007 this office had failed to attain the imposing presence it once held during the time of the Portuguese regime. The Chinese have not returned to the town, however, and the marketplace, eviscerated by the accumulation of population under the Indonesian occupation and the shops that Indonesian merchants established to accommodate the increased demand for products, is covered by houses, *warung*, and *kios*. The road from which it once dominated life on Sundays in Viqueque is today crammed on either side by these trading enterprises, many of which are run by Timorese. To these *warung* and *kios*, *fehan* and *foho* men and women bring their surplus garden produce for daily sale. As for the market building itself, its dilapidated space now serves as a handy place for stockpiling firewood and hanging up clothes to dry. Whereas in the past the building was a physically conspicuous representation of European presence and served as a space in which ethnicity, gender, social hierarchy, pastime, and religion were physically marked out, today its barely visible outline merges into those of the buildings adjoining it as though symbolising the changes in social identity that are currently underway.⁴⁶ Once clear-cut, identities have grown increasingly diffuse as *fehan* and *foho*, though still discriminable by language, have merged into a more integrated recasting of the category *ema timur* while the distinctions between the ranks of *liurai*, *dato*, and *ema reino* are receding.

In a temporal sense as well, continuum has submerged disjunction. Commerce, formerly characterised by weekly gatherings of social effervescence, has given way to routine. Daily commerce in shops and kiosks and the cycle of six quiet days interspersed by one day of sustained socialising has been superseded by a lineal sequence in which each day follows much like another. The mass no longer visually marks off the faithful as a minority community enclosed once a week within the

confines of the multifunctional marketspace. A church has now been built and the town has a resident priest who celebrates daily mass. In a formal sense virtually all Timorese profess to be Catholics and the religion has now been assimilated into the daily lives of both women and men, though to what extent this reflects conviction, particularly on the part of the males, is an altogether different matter.⁴⁷ Like the Sunday market itself, cockfights have ceased to provide a focal event for the week and have been displaced from the weekly space they formerly shared with ritual. The cockfighting pit is presently located on the margins of the town where the cocks battle each other every afternoon.⁴⁸

Religion, pastime, ethnic differentiation, social hierarchy, and gender have thus grown more diffuse in their overt manifestations during the last four decades in Viqueque town and their diffusion complicates the ready assaying of cultural identities, a challenge rendered all the more difficult because of the social changes wrought by the dynamism of a developed peasant market that has now become integrated into the national economy. Thus, even were the physical and temporal coordinates still available to mark social and cultural discriminations in today's Viqueque, these would only be of limited value compared with the 1960s, a period when space and time served as plangent indices of social identity.

In conjunction with the United Nations, World Bank, other large international agencies, and the aforementioned cluster of non-governmental organisations, the Timorese populations in the interior of this newly emerged nation-state, like those of Viqueque, are already engaged in advancing along a path that is transforming their identities from that of parochial-minded villagers into nationally conscious citizens. Local governance, as seen more particularly in institutions such as the *suku* council and the executive position of *xefe de suku* (*suku* chief), is now being populated by women, 'youth' (that is, young men and young women over the voting age of 18 years), and persons who previously were debarred because of their subordinate social pedigree in a society dominated by hierarchy (Hicks forthcoming).

Comparison between the two 'time frames' offered by the period 1966-1967 and the contemporary post-colonial nation-state of Timor-Leste suggests that among the consequences of colonisation (whether by other nation-states, international agencies or by non-governmental organisations), invasion, and the process of nation-building itself, is a tendency for ethnicities, social class, social status, gender, and social identity to become much less differentiated in the face of the more assertive demands of state-wide imperatives, the evolution of a sense of national identity, and the values newly assimilated from a world both external and hostile to parochial concerns.⁴⁹

Notes

- ¹ This article was first published at *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* Vol. 168, No. 1 (2012), pp. 55-73. The editors are grateful to Brill editors for the authorization to republish it in this volume.
- ² The term 'town' (*vila* in the Portuguese language and *kota* in the Tetum language) refers to settlements in Timor-Leste which are of much smaller size than the term signifies customarily and one could argue that Viqueque's population of roughly 1000 in the 1960s hardly justifies that characterisation; nevertheless, it is usual to characterise it as such and I do so here. As of the national census year 2004, with a population provisionally set at 5,105, however, the appellation is more defensible; see <http://www.citypopulation.de/EastTimor.html> (accessed 21 February, 2012).
- ³ From an analysis of his data from the Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh in India, Alfred Gell (1982) has also suggested that the market can, in effect, serve as a vehicle for delineating social identity and bringing together persons of different identities.
- ⁴ A Thursday market was also held, but this was sparsely attended with only *fehan* from local villagers and townsfolk participating. The more intense atmosphere of the Sunday market was absent and officers of the administration did not bother to oversee the proceedings. Few Chinese came and those that did had bought the most desirable comestibles by 9:00 a.m., even though—as on Sundays—buying was not officially permitted until that time. Although some local people might turn up as casual buyers, there were fewer commodities for sale and sellers would tend to keep to the vicinity of the entrance ramp. Such trading as there was terminated by about 11:00 a.m. These Thursday markets tended to be patronised by no more than about 150 persons.
- ⁵ Anthony Forge (1991) discusses markets in the *kabupaten* of Timor Tengah Utara and Timor Tengah Selatan in 1989, though his study is not concerned with issues of social identity.
- ⁶ I thank the following organisations for their help in funding my research at various times in Timor-Leste: the London Committee of the London-Cornell Project for East and South-East Asian Studies which was supported jointly by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Nuffield Foundation; the American Philosophical Society; and J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. I wish to express my appreciation to Andrew McWilliam and the two anonymous readers who read the manuscript for their incisive suggestions for its improvement.
- ⁷ Then as now Viqueque town was the administrative centre for the district (*concelho*) bearing the same name.
- ⁸ My wife and I, who had been working among the Makassae in Baucau since March 1966, when we arrived in Timor, settled down in our Viqueque house in June, and I remained there until early September the following year. Other than the two or three occasions upon which my wife and I paid short visits to Dili, we probably participated in just about every market session during the period we lived in the town. We were thus able to follow the cyclical trade of commodities month by month and record how price fluctuations responded to abundance or scarcity of commodities, an aspect of Viqueque market I hope to describe elsewhere.
- ⁹ Also referred to as Viqueque-Sede. The sub-district of Viqueque was made up of 10 *suku*: Caraubalo, Uma Kik, Balarauain, Uma Ua'in Craik, Luca, Uai Mori, Uma Ua'in Leten, Bibileu, Fatu Dere, and Maluro.
- ¹⁰ The other villages were: Mane Hat, Mamulak, Vessa, Lamaclaran, Has Abut, and Sira Lari. All were *fehan* except for Sira Lari, the residents of which were Makassae.
- ¹¹ The term *ema* itself has as its prime referent 'people' and *malai* derives from Malay or *Malayu*.

- ¹² Compared with such local Indonesian markets as that described for Java's 'Modjokuto' by Alice Dewey (1962), the markets in Timor-Leste before the Indonesian Occupation were simple enough: systems of credit had not been devised, the key market day was on a once-only-in-a-week cycle, and the day on which it was held was not identified with any special designation. On the other hand, we see certain parallels. Dewey's depiction (1962, 69) of the Modjokuto market as "a place to meet people ... sit and watch life go by while gossiping about the latest news and gathering information about crop conditions and prices" holds true for Viqueque and other contemporary Timorese markets as does her allusion to itinerant traders "traveling constantly back and forth between the various markets" spreading news.
- ¹³ Alternative renderings: *ema Timor* and *ema Timór* (Hull 2002, 71).
- ¹⁴ *Fehan* = lowlands, southern coastal plains, refined; *foho* = uplands, countryside, unrefined.
- ¹⁵ Andrew McWilliam (pers. comm.) has noted that this opposition is suggestive of another verbal opposition indicating the spatial indexing of others, namely, that of *ema lorosa'e/ema loromonu*, a contrast that received some attention in the press over the course of recent years. Indeed, its interest is so compelling in regard to its relevance for the social classification of identity that I have devoted an article to considering whether it indexes an authentic distinction or is largely specious (Hicks 2009).
- ¹⁶ The *Posto Sede* included both highland and lowland/coastal areas, and certain villages on the lowlands/coastal areas consisted entirely of Makassae and Naueti.
- ¹⁷ If we exclude the itinerant traders, the catchment region for the Viqueque market extended as far as Venilale, Uato Carabau, Uato-Lari, the village of Uma Liurai in *suku* Wai Mori, Lacluta, and Luca.
- ¹⁸ "Since a visit to the market will usually consume an entire day, it is obvious that the cash return and small purchases are not the only consideration. For most, a considerable social dimension is involved. Villagers at markets chat with each other and with Timorese small merchants, but their relationship with other dealers, mainly Bugis and Chinese, is more limited." (Forge 1991, 167)
- ¹⁹ These are the denotations employed in the Tetum language. By the 1960s the category *ata* had been displaced by a category of servant identified by the Portuguese term *criado*. For a lengthier discussion of these ranks in the 1960s, see Hicks, "Unachieved syncretism".
- ²⁰ The local militia which was composed entirely of conscripted Timorese men.
- ²¹ Legally, Timorese were Portuguese citizens.
- ²² Women were not travelling traders in contrast to Guro Land, in West Africa, where their role as itinerant traders in markets was very useful for communities during periods of warfare since unlike members of the male sex, women "could travel freely ... and continue the trading activities of which they were active agents" (Meillassoux 1962, 283).
- ²³ Unlike in the markets described by Forge, *papalele*, that is, traders who purchased small quantities of produce to resell later, were not present in the Viqueque market.
- ²⁴ I was unable to discover when the building was erected, but from the evidence of an Australian map it was already standing as early as September 1942.
- ²⁵ The influence on the market by the European administration is further evinced by the rumour that circulated in 1967 that the administrator was going to compel buyers and sellers to wear trousers and shoes. Two Timorese told me that the policy would result in sellers switching their allegiances to the Uato-Lari market. The logic driving this inspiration remains unclear, but whatever the veracity of the rumour participants continued wearing—or not, as in the majority of instances—their customary footwear.
- ²⁶ The itinerant sellers did not have any special location on the plaza. After the market commenced they simply wandered about in search of buyers.

- ²⁷ In the figure I give some indication of a few of the sites where the same produce (salt, calcium, tobacco, and so on) tended to be sold from Sunday to Sunday.
- ²⁸ I should point out that Figure 1 is a schematic composite of the many Sunday markets we witnessed. Some variation in the seating could and did occur so that individual Timorese, whatever their wares, might, as the need or whim took them, sometimes settle into a row mainly composed of individuals of a different social identity. Most often, however, their seating arrangements accorded with the pattern shown here.
- ²⁹ A substantive account of barter in the wider region is given in Barnes and Barnes (1989) in their discussion of exchange in Lamalera. They also discern a connection between social groups and the allocation of space (Barnes and Barnes 1989, 405).
- ³⁰ Metzner (1977, 70-72) considers in some detail this aspect of Viqueque's climate.
- ³¹ Copra was a major cash source for the Timorese living near Viqueque town.
- ³² Bargaining, however, took place with ceramics, metal goods, cloth, fighting cocks, or an unusual luxury item such as a cockatoo or civet cat.
- ³³ On one occasion a Chinese woman friend of ours robustly counselled my wife to demand more than two eggs for her escudo, which up to that time she was content to accept.
- ³⁴ Ceramic objects were bought only by Timorese. It might be remarked that wet rice was much sought after by the *fehan*, who for the most part cultivated only dry rice in gardens and who lacked the flat fields and terraces of the *foho*. Uato-Lari was a richly productive wet rice subdistrict.
- ³⁵ *Fehan* pots were made in Macdean village in Uma Kik *suku* and plates in Vessa village in Caraubalo.
- ³⁶ In Venilale sub-district.
- ³⁷ In what might be regarded as a kind of sub-set of exchanges between *foho* and *fehan*, in Caraubalo *suku*, Sira Lari *foho* provided wet rice, buffalo meat, fruit, and vegetables and the six *fehan* villages provided maize, coconuts, ceramics, ironwork, and ropework.
- ³⁸ Chinese buyers, however, would often strike clandestine deals with sellers before the market opened.
- ³⁹ The rule that buyers must assemble in the market building to await the sound of the drum had been decreed by the then administrator on the grounds that it made the market transactions fairer for everyone. He probably thought this up to militate against the Chinese monopolising buyers.
- ⁴⁰ My wife, while occasionally employing a servant, would more often carry out the job of buying herself.
- ⁴¹ For a somewhat similar, though not identical, parallel in a part of the archipelago remote from Timor, see Alexander (1998, 211) in her discussion of the Javanese marketplace. She, too, remarks on "the prominent economic roles of women" in the marketing system (Alexander 1998, 211).
- ⁴² Coconuts were not often sold in the market. Most families grew their own.
- ⁴³ "The primitive world which for so long has dominated the anthropological imagination is inevitably on the wane, being displaced by the world of the peasant and proletarian" (Cook 1966, 338).
- ⁴⁴ The term *warung* comes from Javanese.
- ⁴⁵ The term *kios* comes from Persian via Turkish and Dutch, as one reader of my manuscript noted.
- ⁴⁶ The contrast between the orderliness imposed by the Portuguese and what appears to be—and in many instances is—the disorder evident in Viqueque market activities may, as elsewhere in Timor-Leste, be traced to the Indonesian influence but also to some extent to the prior struggle for power between the contending forces of the *União Democrática Timorense* and those of FRETILIN. The Indonesian army and the Timorese political elite together helped reduce towns, including the capital, to a shambles from which they have yet to recover. Dili, more particularly, bears little resemblance to the Dili of the mid-1960s: dynamism has supplanted tranquillity. But at a price.

- ⁴⁷ Indigenous rituals and the ideological attitudes attending them continue to play very important roles in local community life. Hicks, "Afterword", 166-180.
- ⁴⁸ Whereas in the 1960s attendance could reach around 100 men, the fights I witnessed in 2007, though well attended enough, were not as large, perhaps because cockfighting had by then become a daily pastime.
- ⁴⁹ Or, in the apt terms of one reviewer of a draft of this article, 'homogenised' or 'flattened'.

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