Commerce as 'total social fact': Fair trade practices in Dili[1]

Kelly Silva[2]
Andreza Ferreira[3]
Lucivania Gosaves[4]

This chapter considers strategies for commercializing artifacts aimed at empowering vulnerable populations in Timor-Leste by analyzing the narratives accompanying such practices. We discuss the form and content of shops, product-information folders and labels in order to understand the moralities, meanings and effects that are attributed to buying and selling in particular contexts. We argue that these marketing strategies can potentially turn acts of buying into explicit 'total social facts' (Mauss 2003),[5] by articulating the effects of justice, power, identification, and so on. Moreover, we suggest that narratives introducing artifacts are apparatuses for ascribing their purchase in at least two simultaneous exchange regimes: one based on the market, the other on the gift. The chapter describes the mediations through which such effects are produced.[6]

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2. Associate Professor at Universidade de Brasilia and Visiting Senior Fellow at London School of Economics and Political Science. Email: kellysa67@gmail.com

3. PhD candidate in Social Anthropology at Universidade de Brasília. Email: andrezabenila@gmail.com

4. Undergraduate student at Universidade de Brasília. Email: lucivania gosaves@gmail.com

5. The notion was developed by Marcel Mauss in his essay "The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies" (2003). A total social fact aggregates and affects dimensions of collective life that modernity projects have typically imagined as being autonomous, such as politics, religion, economy, arts, law, and so forth. "In … [total social facts], everything is mixed … In such 'total' social phenomena, as we propose to call it, several institutions are expressed at once: religious, legal, moral …" (2003, 187).

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In the case discussed here, marketing devices, such as folders, labels and the shops themselves, can be regarded as part of an apparatus of mediation and production of heterogeneous effects. Such apparatuses connect the sphere of exchange with the sphere of commodity production – the reverse of orthodox market transactions that render invisible the sphere of production at the moment of circulation. These apparatuses associate the act of purchasing a commodity with providing a gift to the artisan who made the object, they connect global markets to local production, and they define the act of purchasing as a way of effecting justice and politics. These effects are generated through a synergy in the narratives about Timor-Leste and its so-called underdeveloped populations, stories which are reproduced globally through multiple media.

Shops, information folders and labels mediate practices of distribution in a particular market niche, one that is focused on the commercialization of handcrafted products made locally on a small scale, and based on the deployment of local resources, knowledge and aesthetic patterns. Even though not all the objects we discuss were officially certified as fair trade,[7] their production, circulation and consumption were strongly inspired by the modus operandi and moralities underlying this market niche.[8] It has involved the articulation of networks of artisans, brokers and consumers with a common purpose: to bring about social and economic justice, and

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7. The main elements in fair trade's moral economy are: "a price premium, a guaranteed price floor, long-term trading contracts, easier access to credit, and shorter supply chains. In turn, the cooperatives growing these products must be democratically organized and utilize the fair trade premium for the benefit of members. Also, producers commit themselves to improving the environmental conditions of production by reducing or avoiding pesticide use. For many small farmers, they are often organic by default because of their historically marginal position and levels of poverty" (Goodman 2004, 897).

8. For an analysis of the criteria and modus operandi of fair-trade certification, see for instance the website of Fairtrade International on https://www.fairtrade.net/about-fairtrade/fairtrade-system.html.

mitigate negative effects on the environment and human health, through commerce. In this context, consumption is understood as a consciously ethical action.

Historically, this market niche emerged as an alternative form of international cooperation, and in opposition to free trade. Pioneer institutions promoting fair trade first appeared in Western Europe, North America and Australia (Lyon 2006, 454). Despite this genealogy, a number of critical analysts have suggested that the politicization of consumption cannot be a solution to problems of global inequality. They affirm, on the contrary, that fair trade is itself a neoliberal response or solution, and therefore premised on the reproduction of inequalities between producers in the South and consumers in the North (Khamis 2015, 494, and others).

The arguments put forth in this chapter stem from a long-standing research trajectory aimed at making sense of the processes of invention, transposition and subversion of modernity in Timor-Leste (cf. this book's Introduction). They were also developed as part of the research project that led to Andreza Ferreira's honours dissertation titled 'Transformation of and for *tais*: Traditional textile, East Timorese women and conversations with Ofélia' (2015). The dissertation was an early effort to analyze the moral and discursive potential of labels. The recurrent presence of labels on objects made from *tais* (a textile woven by Timorese women) called for deeper analysis, which we seek to develop here. Thus, the empirical data that we bring to bear on this discussion have multiple origins. Some data were collected during fieldwork Ferreira carried out in 2014 while Silva's trips to Timor-Leste between 2014 and 2018, and Lucivania Gonsaves's stay in Díli between September 2018 and January 2019, were sources for the rest.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first presents the moral context in which narratives accompanying the artifacts in multiple publicity media are produced. These narratives attach the objects to notions of underdevelopment to justify the intervention of international cooperation. Based on Silva (2012), we analyze how a gift regime has imposed itself in international cooperation practices. The second section focuses on the material mediations that underlie the presentation of certain objects in Díli. The third approaches how projects of economic empowerment have

(re)articulated gender, development and *kultura* in Timor-Leste. We then move on to an analysis of two shops in Dili where fair-trade principles have been foregrounded: the *Alola* Shop and Things and Stories. Against this background, we interpret some of the marketing content printed in information folders and on labels in order to show how these devices have helped cultivate commercial practices as total social facts in an explicit and conscious manner.[9]

International cooperation as gift

Appropriately understanding the advertising of products whose commercialization is inspired by fair-trade principles must take into account the broader narratives and contexts in which it operates. Assuming that discourses construct realities, the underdevelopment narrative may be regarded as the first great story, the first broad mediation, from which the kinds of advertisements addressed here stem. As is widely known, the trope of underdevelopment has played a major political part in mobilizing multiple actions and moralities around a defense of development.[10]

Narratives of multiple origins, produced by numerous agents, such as activists, development institutions and Timorese elites, both within and outside the country, have long cultivated the notion that Timor-Leste is underdeveloped. Images broadcasting the violation of political, social and cultural rights during the Indonesian occupation and, later on, the construction and diffusion of technical knowledge and indicators (such as UNDP's Human

9. For the anthropologist, many facts of collective life are total in Mauss's sense. Modern practices tend, however, to obscure this fact, due to anxieties about purification (Latour 1994). In this context, the fair-trade market niche may appear as an exception to modern ideology. It seeks to articulate that which narratives hegemonic in the Euro-American world seek to separate.

10. In this chapter, we understand development and underdevelopment as floating signifiers, whose genealogy harks back to the praxis of transnational governance that emerged in the aftermath of World War II. Both evoke multiple practices of governance aimed at expanding economies of and for the market, combined with institutions securing political, social and cultural rights.

Development Index), audiovisual narratives and other kinds of media, have converged towards turning material precarity, inequality and violence into the country's chief predicates. As a result, Timor-Leste's people have been consistently represented as demanding or in need of international aid and intervention (Silva 2012; 2012a). Responses to such narratives have initially resulted in the formation of a wide institutional assemblage geared towards humanitarian aid. Since 2002, this assemblage has progressively given way to institutions aimed at promoting development – a term which may be highly polysemic.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork with international cooperation agents working in the reconstruction of Timorese public administration between 2002 and 2003, Silva (2012) showed how the individual and institutional behavior of those involved in development programs and projects has been oriented by a gift exchange regime (Mauss 2003). In this regime, the circulation of persons, objects, practices of recognition and other aspects has been guided by an obligation to give, to receive and to reciprocate freely. Here the nature of the thing given relates to the identity of the giver, generating multiple effects. More recently, Silva has characterized this regime as follows:

> Through the exchange of goods, words and gestures, a gift regime engages people in relationships that fall beyond the act of transaction (Strathern 1992). Persons and things are treated as persons and the valued objects lend support to produce and reproduce long-term relationships. To a certain extent, there is unity, consubstantiality between the circulating object and the persons who make it circulate. This fact renders these objects animated and inalienable things, as they contain some sort of agency. Their value is gauged by their rank rather than by their price. Parties engaged in exchange are mutually dependent and stand asymmetrically to each other (Gregory 1982). The gift is often regarded as mandatory (Silva 2017, 195).

Silva (2012) claims that the international cooperation involved in Timorese state-formation is a total social fact. It conditions and encompasses the multiple government arenas where the state exercises its power, and structures governance practices of both secular and religious non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Most NGOs operating in Timor-Leste receive foreign resources,

and act as privileged mediators for modernizing and developing local populations.

A great deal of the financial, technological and human resources that support development projects in Timor-Leste and elsewhere comprise donations from civil society from so-called developed countries. These donations may be direct or indirect, voluntary or not. One may, for instance, make a direct and voluntary deposit into the account of an NGO operating in developing countries; or, one may contribute indirectly to development projects overseas through the compulsory payment of taxes that are allocated by the state to international cooperation; or, one may collaborate with this kind of activity through voluntary consumption choices, privileging, for instance, the acquisition of fair-trade products. It is therefore important to emphasize that development-oriented actions are gifts that circulate all over the world, and are present in the daily lives of people in both the global North and South.

Since at least 2007, governance practices aimed at restoring and intensifying a market economy in Timor-Leste have received growing support through investments. In this country and elsewhere, development has been increasingly associated with the expansion of markets, and effective participation in them is considered to be a key index of empowerment and civic inclusion.

Different narratives have approached gender inequality as one of the main causes of underdevelopment in Timor-Leste and elsewhere. They claim that women are always the poorest citizens due to the cultural constraints to which they are subjected, and that material scarcity compromises or even precludes their active social participation in the communities to which they belong. Based on this diagnosis, projects aimed at 'developing' women economically have proliferated across the country, promoting a re-articulation between gender and *kultura* by privileging the commercialization of artifacts handcrafted by women.

Women and *kultura*[11]

Around 2007, new ways of associating *kultura*, women and gender began to emerge in Timor-Leste. In contrast with the hitherto hegemonic discourse put forth by national and transnational elites, which saw themselves as being in charge of the mission to champion the country's development – where *kultura* (in all is semantic hues) figured as the chief cause of gender inequality and domestic violence – efforts have emerged aimed at exploring the esthetic manifestations of *kultura* as drivers of women's economic and domestic empowerment (Silva and Simião 2017).

Different governance institutions have encouraged the commodification of certain artifacts manufactured by women so that, through their sale, they would be able to amass their own resources. The motto, "help turn traditions into livelihoods and empower lives!", displayed prominently on the NGO *Empreza Di'ak*'s website, encapsulates the spirit of this kind of praxis.[12]

As a result of these efforts to commodify, local knowledge involved in the manufacturing of textiles, bags, basketry and jewelry – traditionally female activities – have been encouraged and reformulated. In tandem with the reconstruction of the artifacts' production dynamics, knowledge techniques and moralities concerning the management of people and things with high potential impact on these populations were disseminated.

Against this background, certain artifacts have become commodities (Appadurai 1986) and were sold in specific spaces. Access to these products has been mediated by specific narratives characteristic of the environment where they circulate – they exist

11. In this chapter, *kultura* denotes a heterogeneous set of practices and representations associated with Timorese local knowledge. It is a native, emic category, which has been mobilized by multiple actors in order to justify governance practices, or to demarcate local particularities vis-à-vis forms of organizing and thinking experienced in the Euro-American world. For a broader discussion of the genealogy and political uses of this category in postcolonial Timor-Leste, see Silva (2014).

12. Empreza Di´ak is an NGO in Timor-Leste that aims to improve commodity production stemming from local knowledge in order to empower vulnerable people in the country. See Silva and Oliveira's chapter in this book for a discussion about Empreza Di´ak's governance practices.

in order to promote development – and of the materialities that make their purchase meaningful. As Rocha (2011, 88) put it, these mediations operate like marketing strategies, attributing content, representations, names and meanings to the objects in order to render them unique.

One enlightening example of how commodities are produced to enhance gender equality is the economic empowerment program implemented by the Alola Foundation since 2011, an institution established by the then first lady of Timor-Leste Kirsty Sword Gusmão. The economic empowerment of women has been at the center of this organization's self-ascribed objective from the very beginning. In many ways, the Alola Foundation has been a reference for other efforts to promote female economic empowerment in the country. In particular, it is worth remarking on the part this NGO has played in creating and popularizing a market for tais-made products in Díli. Given the organization's pioneering role in developing female economic empowerment projects in Timor-Leste, we discuss certain elements in its shop. We approach it as an exemplary space where the production, distribution and consumption networks guided by fair-trade principles have been articulated in the country.[13]

The Alola Shop

For analytic purposes, our discussion is based on aspects of the Alola Shop as it operated in 2014 when Ferreira did her fieldwork. The Alola Shop adjoined the foundation's headquarters in the Mascarenhas neighborhood of Dili. It sold numerous kinds of tais and tais-made objects, besides movies and other products featuring Timor-Leste and its *kultura*. Most artifacts in the shop were produced within the scope of the Alola Foundation from the *Sentru Suku Taibese* (Taibese Sewing Center), a workshop run by the NGO,

13. In 2014 Andreza Ferreira carried out an informal survey of shops in Dili that claimed to be guided (even if partially) by fair-trade principles: ARMT Shop, Things and Stories. Alola Shop, Joia Gallery, Arte Cultura, Loja Arte Vida and Kor Timor. These sites sold objects produced by the following organizations and groups: Alola, Bonecas de Ataúro, Jeitu, Rui Collection, Arte da Montanha, Arte Vida, Women's Woven Art and Kor Timor.

where the tais and tais-based artifacts were made (Ferreira 2015). Many of the objects were bags of multiple styles.

When a consumer entered the Alola Shop in 2014, s/he encountered a table covered by a tais, probably from the municipality of Lautém, judging by its brownish hues. On this table, there were folders containing information advertising the organization's economic empowerment project, and an invitation for consumers to write down their impressions of the shop.

The sales assistants in the shop were ready to answer questions about the commodities' biographies: who made them, which project they were part of, and so forth. As the shop's customers mostly consisted of foreigners, one of the assistants was expected to speak Portuguese, and the other English. If the consumer showed interest in going beyond the shop, the assistants suggested the possibility of visiting the Sentru Suku Taibese, to see how the artifacts were made.

Several posters on the shop's walls contained messages directed to consumers, such as the following:

> Dear Customer!
>
> All profits from Alola Esperansa [the shop's name] sales contribute to our weavers from the districts, supporting women and children throughout Timor-Leste.
> Your purchase will help provide education for children, support mothers' health and promote gender equality.
> We kindly ask that you not request discounts from our shop.
>
> Thank you! (Partial transcription of a poster in the Alola Shop, 2014)

Note above that the poster advised clients not to ask for discounts. This was justified on the grounds that sales did not accrue to the shop's profits but to supporting the weavers and their children. The poster also displayed a kind of commercial pedagogy aimed at producing two different effects: a) to introduce consumers to the principles of fair-trade practices; and b) to confine their commercial practices to a sensu stricto market economy, rather than a "bazaar economy" (Geertz 1978). In a market economy, objects have a fixed value; their prices are not supposed to be negotiated at each transaction, as they are in a bazaar economy.

The poster also informed the consumer that the shop and its products were part of a broader project run by the organization on multiple fronts, such as mother-child health, education and other areas. The Alola Shop narrated the foundation's own history and that of the artifacts available for sale. Directly below the poster, another one presented the tais-weaving process in the enclave of Oecusse.[14]

Another folder in the shop illustrated the multiple steps involved in making tais, the role the commercialization of tais played in Alola's political projects, and general fair-trade principles. Written in both English and Indonesian the folder's esthetic quality was appealing to potential readers: the cover image was of hands touching cotton in a basket set against the background of an Oecusse tais. The photo signified that women produced not just the tais but also the threads from which they were made. Photographs illustrated the different stages of tais production, such as collecting and spinning cotton, dying threads using local vegetable pigments, and weaving the tais on a loom. All the images depicted the leading role of women and the folder showed women working in the Sentru Suku Taibesse, sewing bags and other products decorated with tais. Therefore, it was possible to identify the NGO's significant narrative investment for rendering visible the conditions for producing the artifacts it sold in order to add value to them.

The folder illustrated several areas of Alola's work with local partners. It claimed that the Alola Shop was the latest business in Timor-Leste to be accredited as fair trade at the time, and informed the consumer of its ten chief principles, as listed below in the Alola Shop pamphlet:

14. The store also had movies on sale about tais weaving and other dimensions of *kultura* in Timor-Leste, and sold materials, such as books and films, produced by another national NGO, Timor Aid.

Photo 1: page 3 of the folder

The folder presented the trade in tais and tais-made products as a means of culturally and financially empowering the women who made them. The narrative underscored the profit -free character of this commercial enterprise, depicting it as a means of generating resources and income for vulnerable women, and for funding other Alola Foundation projects.

Following a global marketing trend for products labeled as fair trade, the Alola folder represented its products as expressions of local cultures and identities (Goodman 2004, 905). It pictured the tais as typical and exclusive of Timor-Leste, even though similar techniques for weaving this kind of textile are found all over eastern Indonesia. The folder also illustrated the regional traits of tais

produced in different parts of the country: different esthetic patterns are associated with particular clan identities. The tais was thus raised to the paramount symbol of the *kultura* of Timorese peoples.[15]

The Alola Shop's interior in 2014 comprised messages in different media. Its products were accompanied by discrete labels, sewn to each item, displaying the foundation's logo. Given that the shop's multiple media already narrated the organization and its products' trajectories, the Alola image on the labels required no narrative translation.

The Alola label and brand synthesized what was displayed in the shop, as well as the political aims orienting the organization's practices and projects. They conveyed the organization's commitment to the ten fair-trade principles included in the folder, binding potential clients as collaborators in their efforts. The shop circulated messages inducing consumers to apply specific meanings to their acts of purchase: buying something there meant to act politically towards promoting economic justice, gender equality, etc.: thus, turning the act into an explicitly cultivated total social fact.

At least twice a year, Alola organizes an open market, where buyers can purchase artifacts directly from the women who make them. These markets are usually held close to religious holidays such as Easter or Christmas. Alola then buys any items the women have remaining after the market. This seems to be part of a governance tactic for keeping women engaged in market production (Ferreira 2015), similar to what Empreza Di'ak does in Arlo/Ataúro (see Silva and Oliveira, this volume).

The Alola Shop is therefore a scenario where stories of action and transformation are narrated. The narratives produced and shared in the store call for the engagement of clients in an agenda of equal opportunities for women and children: the act of buying becomes a way of supporting Timorese women and children. Moreover, to purchase a manufactured product encourages fairer labor relations.

15. For a discussion of how tais has been constructed as a national symbol in Timor-Leste, see Silva and Ferreira (2016).

Things and Stories

In contrast to the Alola Shop, the Things and Stories (TS) stores are part of a private, profit-driven business enterprise. In 2018, there were four such shops in Dili located in Hotel Timor (the first), the airport, Timor Plaza and the Timorese Resistance Museum and Archive (AMRT). This chapter analyzes the configuration of the TS shop located in Hotel Timor between 2014 and 2018.

Hotel Timor is one of Dili's more established hotels. Centrally located, it services mostly foreigners and members of local elites. The TS shop sells artifacts of multiple origins and types, produced in various places by different artisans, using diverse raw materials. In 2014 it was possible to purchase miniature versions of wooden doors from sacred houses; silver earrings, necklaces and other jewelry inspired by local esthetical forms; tais from different regions and from individual or collective weavers; and pottery, musical instruments, bags, dolls, stationery, among other local artifacts. The shop thus distributed artifacts produced by artisan cooperatives or individual workers, and claimed to provide assistance for innovating the design of local handmade products. It received funds from organizations seeking to expand and strengthen a market economy in Timor-Leste, channeling Australian overseas aid.[16]

The shop displayed the objects on multiple shelves and counters, or elegantly arranged them on the floor. The shop's door was surrounded by larger statues and artifacts. At its center lay a fishing boat, on which numerous other objects were presented. Besides artisanal artifacts, the shop also sold books and videos addressing the local knowledge involved in their production.

In contrast to the Alola Shop, there were no notices directed at consumers about the company's commercial practices. Information about products was written on their labels, and placed in a folder describing some of the activities involved in the creation and production of artifacts.

16. On this point, see for instance http://marketdevelopmentfacility.org/content/where-we-work/timor-leste/greenfield-industries/things-stories/

The store's product folder, featuring the slogan "100% made in Timor-Leste", highlighted the objectives of quality and selectivity.[17] It comprised thirteen photographs; seven of which foregrounded women, and five depicted artifacts. There was only one picture, showing jewelry-making, in which it was not possible to discern the artisan's gender. The folder stated:

> Our control policy has witnessed the growth of a new dynamic of product selectivity and quality control.'
> …
> We believe that a sustainable future for East Timorese handicraft involves investing heavily in the artisanal products' **quality**, **creativity**, and **added value**. In this process, not just the ethical norms associated with fair trade are essential: the artisan's story and age are an integral part of the product's identity and marketing. (Partial transcription of the folder in the TS shop in 2017)

Although the folder mentioned fair trade in reference to the company's practices, it did not list the ethical norms. It presented the company's distinctive trait of promoting collective and collaborative production practices, attention to family and community conditionings involved in artifact production, and sustainability and market expansion for handicrafts from Timor-Leste. Although the literature on fair trade suggests that the association of products thus labeled with expressions of identity is part of a common promotional strategy in this market niche (Goodman 2004), the TS folder presented this association as a distinctive characteristic of its products: "the artisan's story and age are an integral part of the product's identity and marketing". This association was further reinforced by narratives printed on its 2018 labels:

> Behind each product there is someone's stay and identity. At Things and Stories, recognizing and promoting this identity is part of growing side by side with the artisan, the weaver, the artist, the designer. Each creator, each community has a story to share. (Sic, Partial transcription of a product label in the TS store)

It is also notable that the TS narratives portrayed artifacts manufactured in Timor-Leste as products of cultural encounters

17. This folder was viewed in 2017.

between the West and the East, as "a story for you to be part of". In Alola's narratives, by contrast, local knowledge is understood exclusively as Timorese local practices.

Each label included a biographical narrative about the object sold in TS. The artifacts had at least two labels: one addressing the object's group/place of origin, and the other about the store itself. Both were in harmony with the store's visual identity. The labels, echoing the folder, reasserted claims about the objects' high quality. As the shop comprised products made by a range of individuals or production groups, these labels varied. Let us now focus on some variations.

Labels

At this point, we finally get to the aspect that triggered the analytical anxiety which gave rise to this chapter − the labels presenting commodities aimed at empowering so-called vulnerable populations. As remarked above, TS sold merchandise produced by various organizations, one of which was *Jeitu*. The label accompanying Jeitu products in 2014 presented the potential consumer with the following narrative, both in English and Portuguese:

> Producer Jeitu
>
> The Tetum translations of Jeitu – beautiful and 'skill' − say it all. The varied range of high-quality and innovate products produced by Jeitu's young team are inspired by genuine, locally woven Tais and natural materials.
> Creative designs, attention to the market and on-going skills training is part of a community enterprise with a positive future.
>
> Your purchase contributes to developing economic opportunities for artisans in Timor-Leste. By using traditional skills and techniques, Timorese artisans participate in the preservation of their culture. (Partial transcription of label attached to a tais-covered notebook bought at TS AMRT [Timorese Resistance Archive and Museum] Shop in 2014)

These statements conveyed multiple messages. First, they explained the meaning of the Tétum word 'Jeitu', thus associating

the brand itself with a fragment of local life. The label then emphasized the commodity's high quality, drawing attention to its local production, based on traditional knowledge and raw materials. However, these products were not presented as the mere replication of whatever existed locally. The label claimed that these were authentic creations, developed through designer and marketing knowledge, the outcome of investment in capacity building for sustainable business. The label informed the potential buyer that his/her purchase would mean more than a simple market transaction. The consumer would be contributing towards developing economic opportunities for the artisans while supporting the preservation of local culture. The act of buying was thus portrayed as something broader than an economic phenomenon. The transaction was approached as a political act for empowering local communities, a way of contributing towards maintaining and accessing local *kultura*.

The mobilization of *kultura* as a differential in fair-trade-inspired commodities was also present on the labels attached to products from the *Bonecas de Ataúro* (Atauro Dolls) cooperative. One such label affirmed that the vibrant colors of Timorese culture inspired the development of the cooperative's products. Curiously, it did not highlight the fact that this was a female cooperative. Rather, it stated that the products were developed in partnership with the Swiss designer Piera Zürcher. In all cases, the labels attached to Bonecas de Ataúro, and other objects sold at TS, were accompanied by a second label presenting the store and the production practices it encouraged.[18]

The TS label claimed the products were unique, exclusive to Timor-Leste, and collectively manufactured with joy and fulfillment. Such an attribution of exclusiveness may be interpreted as a strategy for conveying a sense that, by acquiring the object, the client would be engaging in some kind of relationship with local people. Labels therefore presented the purchase as much more than a market transaction: it was a way of relating to phenomena regarded as authentic expressions of local *kultura*.

18. As Bonecas de Atauro has had its own shop in Dili since 2017, TS no longer sells their products.

One label attached to a tais acquired in 2014 at Things and Stories referred to *Liman* (Tetum for hand) Selected Products, an associated branch of TS, and it included the phrase "From TL to the world". This statement implies that the product was expected to have a global biography: it was destined to circulate in the wider world while maintaining its connection to its origins. It was from Timor-Leste.

The second TS label on the same tais carried a handwritten classification to "certify" it. The tais was categorized in terms of its regional origin and of the group responsible for its production. It was also classified according to the weaving technique, the thread colors used and the choice of raw materials, including the yarn. The range of classificatory options suggested the imposition of a potential hierarchy, with some artifacts considered to be more or less authentic, more or less cultural than others. Thus, there were tais produced with hand-spun local cotton or industrial cotton, as well as three techniques for dying the cotton – "hand-dyed natural color", "hand-dyed synthetic color" or industrially produced and colored cotton, for instance. Besides a technical description of the product, another kind of narrative on the label thus described the tais:

> Traditional textiles woven in Timor-Leste are called Tais. They are an integral part of Timorese culture and carry great meaning and value for Timorese people. Tais are still worn today or exchanged during traditional and official ceremonies. Every line, color, design is unique in its significance and tells a story. (Partial transcription of a tais label, at TS in 2014)

Here, Tais is presented as an artifact pregnant with meaning in all its details, with an active social life among contemporary Timorese peoples. Our previous analysis discussed how the tais was raised to the status of national symbol in Timor-Leste (Silva and Ferreira 2016). As a consequence of such a symbolic biography, we would like to stress how access to tais may be resignified through the mediation of narratives conveyed by labels – a way of establishing a relationship, of making one feel like s/he is actually contacting with local *kultura*. In these contexts, culture is objectified for the consumer in the form of tais-making techniques.

Finally, we get to the labels attached to commodities produced by Protestant mission projects, also sold in Things and Stories.

These included artifacts from *Projeto Montanha* (Project Mountain) and *Casa Vida* (Life House). There are two chief traits shared by these labels: 1) the eclipsing of religious proselytism supporting these initiatives' social assistance practices. The consumer was not informed that by purchasing these products, s/he was also funding missionary practices aimed at promoting Christianity; 2) local *kultura* was not celebrated as a way of adding value to the products.

One hypothesis is that these two characteristics are interrelated. As is well known, Protestant conversion practices in the region have generally required that local peoples abandon their engagement with local knowledge and institutions (Keane 2007). It is no coincidence then that labels accompanying products from these two projects lacked the celebration or valorization of local knowledge narrated as *kultura*. The latter typically evokes mystical forces that compete with the monotheism championed by Christianity.[19]

The Project Mountain label for a product purchased in 2018, bearing a picture of an anonymous Timorese child, had the following narrative:

> Project Mountain. For hundreds of boys and girls who wander around the villages of Timor-Leste with nothing to do, no dreams nor hope! For those who end up caught by drugs, violence, abuse, and teenage pregnancy. Project Mountain works by opening DOORS so that young East Timorese have a chance to develop themselves fully and with dignity, thus becoming channels of blessings for their families, communities, and the nation.
> ...
> Thank you for taking part in the challenge of giving these kids hope and a bright future. (Partial transcription of label attached to a necklace at TS in 2018)
> ...
> Inspiring products from an inspiring project! Casa Vida is one of the most successful social intervention projects in Timor-Leste. Casa Vida provides shelter, support and a range of new skills to women and children victims of abuse, while preparing their return to full health, families and communities. These products' signature is hope, for better lives, for a better future. (Partial transcription of a label attached to a cow horn at TS shop)

19. Further analysis of the kinds of artifacts promoted by these projects is needed. Our hypothesis is that there may be more investment in the production of artifacts with no connection to esthetic patterns evoking local mystical forces in projects premised on conversion to Christianity. The chapter by Silva and Oliveira (in this volume) includes similar questions for the context of Ataúro.

Photo 2: A Projeto Montanha´s label attached to a pair of earrings.

Ethnocentrism and authoritarianism mark the narrative through which Project Mountain presented itself to the public. Its discourse eclipsed all positivity from local life and suggested that those who live it have no activities, hopes or dreams. It claimed instead that by acquiring that product, the customer would be fostering hope and better lives for those involved with the project. Similarly, the labels that accompanied the Casa Vida artifacts suggested that their purchase was a way of securing a future for the women involved in its projects. According to these labels, to buy is to pass on hope and a future to those assisted by these projects. What was not told, however,

is that in these future plans there is little or no room for reproducing local knowledge and cosmologies.

Closing Remarks

In this chapter, we discussed some of the mediations through which acts of buying and selling certain artifacts in Dili become polythetic, implicating political action in favor of greater economic justice, gender equality, valorization of local knowledge, and so forth. We sought to underscore the narrative devices that have, at different scales and in a conscious and explicit manner, enabled sellers and consumers to experience trade as total social fact.

Of such mediations, we underscored the discourses that have circulated across the global South and North representing certain countries and populations as underdeveloped, and, therefore, in need of international aid. Another common element in these narratives involves the expansion of markets and participation of women. This kind of rationality has, more recently, nourished a positive association between women, *kultura* and the market in Timor-Leste, and oriented many governance actors. If, at other historical moments, *kultura* was regarded as the chief cause of gender inequality in the country (Silva and Simião 2017), today it is seen as a shortcut to achieving gender equality.

We analyzed some of the marketing devices involved in the production of fair-trade practices in Dili. We discussed certain features of the Alola Foundation and Things and Stories shops, as well as the folders and labels that accompanied products sold in these spaces. Affirming the authenticity of products sold as typical of Timor-Leste, and that their purchase is a way of acting politically for developing local peoples, are common traits to all devices mediating the distribution of artifacts classified as fair trade, whether or not they are internationally certified as such.

Another shared characteristic of such narratives is the attachment of products to elements of Timorese *kultura*. The production group's name, an esthetic trait, the kind of product all seem to be ways of prompting a consumer fantasy that by acquiring such products s/he is engaging in a form of contact with Timorese peoples and *kultura*. In this sense, the place of cultural difference in

fair-trade production in Timor-Leste seems to follow a wider global trend Goodman identified as the fetishization of culture:

> Cultural difference also plays a role in the functioning of this moral economy. This is precisely where the re-worked fetish and the sale of cultural and social difference, the Otherness of indigenous producers and tropical nature vis-a-vis the North, is used to the benefit of the networks. (Goodman 2004, 905).

On the other hand, our analysis of labels for objects made by production groups organized by Christian missionary projects introduced an interesting disjunction. These projects seem to have avoided involvement in the production of artifacts evoking knowledge bequeathed by ancestors, related to local spiritual forces. Rather, investment is placed in the creation of products that do not concern local knowledge, such as bookmarks, key ring, and dolls. Finally, we also stress the fact that labels for these products do not refer to the religious proselytism involved in the organizations' relations with producers.

But beyond these differences, the diverse narratives and devices discussed here converge to make consumption an ethical fact, a means to act in other people's lives, producing effects of fairer economics, justice and political relations. In these contexts, commerce is a total social fact.

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