Restitution over coffee: truth, reconciliation, and environmental violence in East Timor

Joseph Nevins *

Department of ESPM/Society and Environment, 135 Giannini Hall #3312, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-3312, USA

Abstract

Truth commissions have become an almost obligatory component of the process by which national societies attempt to reconstruct themselves in the aftermath of, and recover from, periods of violent, authoritarian rule, and/or war, especially of the civil variety. Proponents of truth commissions see them as indispensable to promoting reconciliation between former adversaries as well as a transition to a more just, democratic, and peaceful political order, while serving as an important component in nation-state-(re)building. This paper analyzes and critiques the boundaries that typically define the tasks of truth commissions with a focus on East Timor’s. It contends that commissions achieve less than they might in terms of their goal of facilitating a justice-infused notion of reconciliation between conflicting parties because of their tendency to focus on individual acts or events of violence, while giving relatively little weight to systemic or structural forms of violence. To substantiate this argument, the paper analyzes the relationship of coffee—East Timor’s primary export commodity—to the violence and terror that the country’s truth commission addresses. In doing so, the paper illustrates the dynamic links between violence and the environment and how said environment comes to embody that violence and to reproduce it in various forms. It also demonstrates the limits of truth commissions as conventionally defined as they relate to matters of social justice. In doing so, it potentially points the way toward more ambitious, and more successful, truth-telling and reconciliation processes—if we assume the goal is to promote a just and peaceful coexistence between former adversaries. The framework employed is one of a Third World political ecology of violence, one that understands violence not only in terms of direct acts of physical brutality, but also in terms of indirect acts and social structures that cause injury.

© 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Environmental violence; Coffee; Political ecology; Truth commissions; Reconciliation

* Tel.: +1-510-643-0319; fax: +1-510-643-2504.
E-mail address: jnevins@uclink.berkeley.edu (J. Nevins).
Introduction

Truth commissions, as they are popularly and generically known, have become almost obligatory components of the process by which national societies attempt to reconstruct and recover after periods of violent, authoritarian rule and/or war, especially of the civil variety. These formal processes of truth-telling typically have multiple goals, including: gathering of testimony and documentation regarding the period and/or events covered by the commission; writing a public report based on the information collected; allowing victims an opportunity to recount their experiences; promoting national reconciliation while sometimes contributing to the realization of legal justice; recommending institutional reforms; and providing information regarding possible reparations.

Many prefer truth commissions over and/or in addition to formal judicial proceedings. While providing a certain measure of justice (of the law-based variety), trials in the aftermath of wars or regimes responsible for gross atrocities have an inherently symbolic aspect to them as a relatively small number of individuals are tried as a way of holding accountable a much larger number that such conflicts or regimes typically implicate (Bass, 2000). Trials are also limited in what they can accomplish, due to their high cost, time- and resource-consuming nature, and the difficulties of obtaining convictions. It is in part due to these limits and “partly out of a recognition that even successful prosecutions do not resolve the conflict and pain associated with past abuses” that authorities in countries transitioning from conflict-ridden or authoritarian societies have increasingly opted for truth commissions as part of a larger effort to come to terms with an ugly past (Hayner, 2000: p. 14).

In one sense, truth commissions are much more limited than a formal judicial process, given the latter’s legal power. In other ways, however, truth commissions are more ambitious. Because their mandate is broader, commissions examine events as part of a larger history of conflict and/or repression, along with the causes and consequences of the violence. This enables and obligates commissions to conduct more encompassing investigations and to draw broader conclusions than judicial processes (Hayner, 2000).

Proponents of truth commissions see them as indispensable to a transition to a more just, democratic, and peaceful political order and an important component in nation-(re)building, in addition to facilitating the construction of a viable state. It is for these reasons and more that such bodies have become so popular: there have been 21 that have completed their work since 1974, and numerous others are currently active in countries ranging from Sierra Leone to Panama.¹ As a result, there has been a proliferation of academic and political interest in these endeavors, spawning a wide and growing body of literature (e.g. Hayner, 2000; Minow, 1998; Rotberg & Thompson, 2000; Tepperman, 2002; Tutu, 1999; Wilson, 2001).

This paper analyzes and critiques the boundaries that define the tasks of truth commissions. In doing so, it argues that commissions tend to concentrate on individ-

¹ For an overview of the various commissions, see Hayner (2000).
ual acts or events of physical violence and give relatively little weight to indirect or structural forms of violence, while paying insufficient attention to actors and institutions on the international scale that contribute to and benefit from the violence in question. As a result, commissions achieve less than they might in terms of facilitating a justice-infused notion of reconciliation between conflicting parties. The paper thus potentially points the way toward more ambitious, and more successful, truth-telling and reconciliation processes—if we assume the goal is to promote a just and peaceful coexistence between former adversaries and/or between the victims and beneficiaries of gross injustices.

In developing its line of argument, the paper draws upon and addresses the growing literature examining the links between environmental resources and mass violence (e.g. Collier, 2000; Homer-Dixon, 1999; Kaplan, 1994, 2000; Le Billon, 2001; Peluso & Watts, 2001). While utilizing very different analytical frameworks and drawing diverse conclusions, the various contributions to this literature tend, primarily, to explicate how environmental resources contribute to the outbreak and/or perpetuation of violent conflict and, secondarily, how violence shapes the physical environment. This paper expands the framework through which we view the nexus between violence and the environment, the focus herein being on commodified environmental resources, rather than ecological phenomena. It thus analyzes how violence helps to shape environmental resources and their associated social relations and how, in turn, such resources come to embody and reproduce violence.

The approach of the paper is one of an explicitly political political ecology (see Blaikie, 1999; Bryant & Bailey, 1997; Peet & Watts, 1996). It demonstrates how the employment of social power over time and on various geographical scales relates to the production of environmental resources and the distribution of benefits and detriments that derive from their exploitation and sale. In addition, it draws and builds upon a “political ecology of violence” (Peluso & Watts, 2001), extending the conception of violence beyond physical acts of brutality that cause direct harm to humans so that it includes social structures and indirect practices that also cause injury (see Galtung, 1969; Nevins, 2002b). Simultaneously, it exhibits an appreciation of the Third World-specific nature of the political ecology of East Timor-like situations, ones shaped to a significant degree by inherently unequal political–economic relations constructed during formal colonialism and a post-independence global order built upon colonized peoples and spaces (see Bryant & Bailey, 1997). Various mechanisms—international markets that constrain (as well as enable) Third World actors, linkages between international actors and Third World elites, and unequal power relations between Third World governments and international actors—serve to reproduce this inequality (Stallings, 1992). In this regard, the paper has a dependency theory-inspired perspective (see Frank, 1967), one that perceives the global political economy as fundamentally unjust, as structured violence involving relations

---

2 This is an admittedly anthropocentric view of violence. In putting forth such a conceptualization, I am not suggesting that we might not also appreciate harm to other species as violence. Political ecology and, by extension, a political ecology of violence should arguably extend its moral priorities to non-human organisms and ecosystems. See Clapp (2002).
of dominance and subordination between social groupings, especially nation-states (see Galtung, 1972).

The paper substantiates its argument through a case study focusing on East Timor. East Timor has become one of the most recent countries to adopt a truth commission, formally establishing a Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation with the swearing-in of its seven national commissioners in January 2002. The paper analyzes the relationship of coffee—East Timor’s primary export commodity—to the violence and terror that the country’s truth commission addresses.

East Timor, at first glance, might not seem like the most appropriate choice for such a study, especially since the work of its truth and reconciliation commission is not yet complete. Nevertheless, there is sufficient information about East Timor’s body to put forth an analysis and critique. More importantly, however, what makes the case of East Timor worthwhile is its extreme nature: while international actors have played noteworthy roles in facilitating the violence or authoritarianism in most of the countries that have undertaken processes of truth and reconciliation, it is in East Timor that the role of the “international community” in perpetrating and aiding violence was most pronounced. Unlike other countries that have undergone truth-telling processes in the aftermath of war, East Timor’s conflict was not primarily a civil war. Rather, it was an international one that involved not only the direct aggressor—Indonesia—but a whole host of countries that supported Jakarta. As such, the case study lends itself easily to an analysis that moves beyond the nation-state “territorial trap” (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995), and focuses on the dialectical relationship between the local/national and international actors that brought about and have benefited from the violence. It thus contributes to a multi-scalar framework for analyzing the interrelationship between the environment and violence as well as that between truth-telling and reconciliation in the aftermath of conflict and gross injustices.

Background

East Timor was a colony of Portugal, which exerted varying levels of influence and control over the territory and its people beginning in the early 1500s. Its colonial status seemed permanent until April 24, 1974, when a relatively non-violent coup d’état overthrew Portugal’s fascist Caetano government. A group of left-leaning military officials known as the Armed Forces Movement took power and immediately announced a policy of democracy within Portugal and decolonization of all its overseas territories. Soon thereafter, Indonesia’s military, which had previously shown little interest in East Timor, determined that it could not allow an independent country to exist in its midst. It thus decided to launch a campaign of subversion, called Operasi Komodo, or Operation Komodo Dragon, aimed at convincing the East Timorese of the wisdom of “integrating” with Indonesia or, failing that, forcibly annexing

---

3 The CRTR’s website is located at http://www.easttimor-reconciliation.org/.
Indonesia’s machinations eventually provoked a brief civil war in August 1975 between East Timor’s two largest political parties, both of which supported independence for the territory. Immediately following the conflict, Indonesia began staging military attacks from neighboring (Indonesian) West Timor. This culminated in a full-scale military invasion of East Timor on December 7, 1975 (see Dunn, 1996; Jardine, 1999; Taylor, 1999).

Over the next several years, over 200,000 East Timorese—about one-third of the pre-invasion population—lost their lives as a result of Indonesia’s invasion and subsequent occupation. Many scholars have characterized the outcome as genocidal in nature (see Clark, 1981; Dunn, 1998; also see Silove, 2000). The occupation came to an end in 1999 following a United Nations-run vote that allowed the people of East Timor to choose between continued association with Indonesia or independence, the latter option turning out to be the choice for an overwhelming majority of the population. In response to the result of the August 30, 1999, ballot, the Indonesian military and its paramilitary proxies (or “militia”) launched a final horrific wave of terror. In approximately three weeks, they destroyed an estimated 70% of the territory’s buildings and infrastructure, forcibly deported about 250,000 people to Indonesia, raped large numbers of women, and killed what is conservatively estimated to be 2000 people (see BBC, 2000).

From October 1999 until May 20, 2002, East Timor was under United Nations administration (in the form of the United Nations Transitional Administration for East Timor, or UNTAET). Among the various projects undertaken by UNTAET was the establishment of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CRTR).

The CRTR is charged with establishing an authoritative historical record regarding human rights violations that took place between 1974 and 1999, while reporting these violations and the factors that contributed to their occurrence. In this regard, the Commission investigates not only individual cases of rights violations, but also the extent to which the violations were part of a systematic pattern of abuse. Allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity will thus form part of the Commission’s investigations. The CRTR is also empowered to examine the role of international actors—such as foreign governments—in its attempt to provide a full picture of why gross human rights abuses occurred. Responsibility for East Timor’s plight involved actors far beyond Indonesia. Many of the world’s wealthiest countries played a key, if not decisive, role in facilitating Indonesia’s illegal war of conquest.

---

4 For an explanation of the validity of the death toll figure, see Australian Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee (2000).

5 For a thoughtful analysis of the complexities of trying to apply the term “genocide” (as an international legal concept) to East Timor, see Silove (2000).

6 War crimes are violations of the laws of war—or international humanitarian law—as defined most famously by the various Geneva Conventions and associated protocols. Crimes against humanity comprise atrocious acts committed against civilians in a systematic and large-scale manner. Whereas war crimes can only take place during times of war, the concept of crimes against humanity applies to acts committed in times of both war and peace. See Robertson (2000) and Gutman and Rieff (1999).
and occupation (see Clark, 1980). These countries ranged from Japan to the United States to the United Kingdom to Australia. The United States, for example, actually authorized the invasion and worked to prevent effective United Nations action to put an end to the conflict, while providing billions of dollars worth of economic aid and military equipment and training to Indonesia (Jardine, 1999; Nevins, 2002a).7

The CRTR has limited resources for investigations, however. And it does not have the power to bring charges against those who refuse to cooperate, nor to compel testimony or evidence from Indonesia or other national governments. Consequently, those most responsible for gross human rights violations from 1974 to 1999—Indonesia’s military and political leaders and their foreign backers—will only participate in the truth-telling process if they possess sufficient goodwill. Such a prospect seems highly unlikely at this point (The La’o Hamutuk Bulletin, October 2001).

The CRTR also assists “in restoring the human dignity of victims”, in part by providing them with the opportunity to tell their stories publicly. It will also seek to promote reconciliation amongst East Timorese by “supporting the reception and reintegration of individuals who have caused harm to their communities” for what are deemed as relatively minor acts of violence (such as killing a few livestock or burning one or two houses). This will entail holding perpetrators of such crimes accountable to their victims. The Commission does this through “Community Reconciliation Procedures” (CRPs) by which perpetrators agree to perform acts of restoration that are meaningful to the survivors and their communities. For example, the crime of burning a house down might require the offender to rebuild that house. The resulting “community reconciliation agreement” is registered at a district court, which is supposed to ensure that acts of reconciliation are proportionate to the original crimes, are carried out, and do not violate human rights. The Commission is charged with referring what are called serious crimes (genocide, war crimes, torture, and crimes against humanity—irrespective of when committed—as well as murder and sexual offenses perpetrated between 1 January and 25 October 1999), which are ineligible for CRPs, to the country’s General Prosecutor for possible prosecution. Finally, the Commission will issue a report of its findings, one that will include recommendations concerning reforms and other measures to respond to the needs of victims of human rights violations. The Commission, having formally begun its work in January 2002, is required to do all this in a two-year period, with the possibility of a six-month extension.8

---

7 The United Nations General Assembly and Security Council passed a total of 10 resolutions related to East Timor from 1975 to 1982. Taken together, these resolutions criticized Indonesia’s invasion of the territory, called for the withdrawal of Indonesian troops, and affirmed the right of the East Timorese people to self-determination. For a discussion of the United Nations and East Timor, see Gunn (1997) and Jardine (2000).

Truth versus justice

Many present truth-telling and reconciliation, as embodied by the various commissions, and justice, in the form of trials and tribunals, as distinct, and sometimes mutually exclusive, processes, whereby the pursuit of justice is sacrificed for the sake of achieving commission-related purposes (see Gutman & Thompson, 2000). And, indeed, this has often been the case, as many commissions possess or have had the power to grant amnesty (as, most famously, in South Africa) or are the result of a political compromise between the ancien régime or the perpetrators of terror and the forces of change. Such compromises typically trade justice for truth by decreeing a blanket amnesty in exchange for the establishment of a truth commission (e.g. in Sierra Leone) (Brody, 2001; also see Neier, 1998).

But such tradeoffs are not necessarily inherent in the realization of truth commissions. To the contrary, truth commissions can actually facilitate justice by gathering information that prosecutors can later use to try those accused of committing or directing atrocities—as has happened in the cases of Argentina and Chad (Brody, 2001; Hayner, 2000). And it is this more positive relationship between truth gathering and legal justice that the Commission in East Timor would seem to embody—or this is the hope at least. Indeed, the Commission explicitly presents its work as complementary to that of the formal justice system.9

Nevertheless, even where there is no explicit quid pro quo in terms of exchanging truth-telling and justice (again, as typically understood), there does often appear to be a de facto trade-off. Not surprisingly, those who would potentially sit in judgment in a would-be criminal proceeding frequently have a preference for a truth-telling process that excludes the possibility of trials as the latter are deemed as more punitive. Various international actors also often favor truth commissions over trials. In the case of Haiti, for example, international donors explicitly stated that they would not fund a special prosecutor’s office because they had already funded a truth commission, one that merely confirmed what most people already knew about coup-era atrocities (Brody, 2001).

There are a variety of reasons why international actors might support such a trade-off, but undoubtedly an important one is that truth commissions are generally far less threatening to the powerful (or the formerly powerful) than trials. Such a motivation is especially relevant when important international actors have somehow been involved in the acts and period in question and/or have strong ties to those who would face prosecution. In this regard, truth commissions have become a manner by which to avoid legal justice (Tepperman, 2002).

This would seem to be the situation in East Timor. Efforts thus far to ensure judicial prosecution of those responsible for the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity in East Timor have been seriously flawed and limited to those that took place in 1999, excluding de facto those that occurred in the 1975-1998 period. Although a United Nations official body of inquiry recommended in

9 See the Commission’s website at http://easttimor-reconciliation.org/justicesystem.htm.
January 2000 that the Security Council establish an international tribunal for East Timor, it did not happen and appears extremely unlikely to materialize (see Nevins, 2002b). Instead, East Timor is resigned to trying to find justice in two other “sites”.

The first is that of the internationally mandated courts in East Timor known as the Serious Crimes Panels. These courts are in the process of prosecuting individuals accused of committing “serious crimes” in 1999. Established by the United Nations during its post-Indonesian-occupation administration of the territory, the courts can potentially try those accused of pre-1999 atrocities, but they are grossly under-resourced, materially as well as politically. At the same time, almost all of the key players involved in the terror are in Indonesia. While Indonesia has signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations obligating both parties to provide maximum assistance in areas such as the execution of arrests, interviewing arrestees, and providing information, Jakarta has failed to live up to its obligations. To date, Indonesia has not extradited a single individual under its jurisdiction indicted by the Serious Crimes Panels. As a result, the Dili-based courts have thus far only prosecuted only East Timorese individuals, all of whom have been relatively low-level perpetrators (see Nevins, 2002b; Reiger, 2002; The La’o Hamutuk Bulletin, October 2001).

The second alternative to an international tribunal is within Indonesia. Jakarta had requested that it have the chance to prosecute individuals accused of responsibility for atrocities committed in East Timor before the United Nations seriously considered the matter of an international tribunal. The Security Council acquiesced. After more than two years of delay, Indonesia finally began to carry out prosecutions in March 2002 through a special, ad-hoc human rights tribunal. A decree signed on August 2, 2001, by Indonesian president Megawati Sukarnoputri, however, limits the scope of the ad-hoc court for East Timor to crimes committed in the months of April and September 1999 only. At the same time, the decree restricts the court’s jurisdiction to crimes committed in only three of East Timor’s 13 districts. Such restrictions mean that the Indonesian court is not empowered to address the vast majority of crimes committed in 1999—to say nothing of the crimes carried out during the 1975–1998 period (Nevins, 2002b).

Given the court’s limited mandate, combined with the poor quality of the indictments, a likely consequence of the trials is little justice, but instead a near-universal perception within Indonesia that the 1999 violence was a result of a conflict between two opposing East Timorese factions, rather than a military-orchestrated terror campaign (International Crisis Group, 2002). Indeed, thus far (as of December 2002), the court has acquitted the 10 police and military officials (all Indonesians) who have come before it, while convicting the only two indicted civilians—both East Timorese (see Collins, 2002). While some speculate that Jakarta’s less-than-satisfactory efforts may invigorate efforts to establish an international tribunal, there is little evidence that the handful of powerful countries that dominate the United Nations—most of which have strong relations with Indonesia’s military–political establishment—have a desire to see any sort of international court for Jakarta. For such reasons, it appears that the people of East Timor will receive little law-based justice for their suffering (see Nevins, 2002b; Reiger, 2002; The La’o Hamutuk Bulletin,
October 2001, April 2002, and May 2002). To the limited extent possible, it thus falls to East Timor’s truth commission to try to fill the resulting vacuum by gathering information and validating the suffering of victims of atrocities, while laying the evidentiary groundwork for potential prosecutions in the not-foreseeable future.

East Timor’s predicament is emblematic of the often-present trade-off of truth for law-based justice. The promise of truth commissions like that of East Timor, however, is that they provide a form of justice that is arguably more appropriate to societies attempting to recover from wars and/or despotism than that of a conventional judicial mechanism, in large part through the attempt to realize reconciliation.

“Reconciliation” is a slippery term. For some, it seems to mean a simple burying of the past with the goal of erasing any real or would-be present-day tensions related to the period and actions under scrutiny (see Neier, 1998). In its more serious forms, one hears terms like “healing” and “coming to terms with the past” as definitions, with the goal implicitly being one of forgiveness between former adversaries (see Minow, 1998; Tutu, 1999). Behind such explanations seems to be the notion that “reconciliation” means an acknowledgement of wrongdoing by the guilty party along with some sort of appropriate reparative action—ranging from a formal apology to material reparations—as a concrete manifestation of that acknowledgement. This would seem to entail an agreement by the aggrieved that the acknowledgement and reparation are sufficient. In this regard, truth-telling, reconciliation, and restitution—defined here not simply as the return of that which has been taken but as something that includes “the entire spectrum of attempts to rectify historical injustices” (Barkan, 2000: p. xix)—are inherently linked. The goal of reconciliation, ideally, is thus not to forget the past but to make it possible for those wronged and those who have committed wrongs to live together in a manner that is respectful and healthy through the provision of justice, one broadly conceived.10

For many, South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is the model (Rotberg, 2000). While it did not offer justice in either a legalistic or material manner, some argue that it provided another form of justice, a restorative one that seeks to mend the broken relationships between victim and perpetrator, a form of justice that is more appropriate to the new South Africa (see Tutu, 1999).11

Whether the resulting form of justice is retributive or restorative, truth commissions tend to focus on individual acts or events of violence (see Hayner, 2001)—what some have called personal or direct violence—as opposed to more indirect or structural forms (see Galtung, 1969; Nevins, 2002b). In doing so, they help to reify the notion that the worst injustices were those brought about by individual atrocious

10 I would like to acknowledge and thank Harvey Weinstein of the Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley, for numerous conversations on related matters. His insights and criticisms helped greatly in my effort to strengthen my analysis of reconciliation in theory and practice.

11 Tutu helps to reproduce one of the most frequent misconceptions about truth commissions—that they lead to group and personal “healing”. For proponents of this position, participation in a truth commission is almost akin to therapy. Research on the “healing” effects of commissions is far from conclusive, however. In fact, there is much evidence that such bodies can actually heighten inter-group tensions (see Hayner, 2001; also see Wilson, 2001).
acts perpetrated by the state or anti-state actors. In the case of South Africa, for example, one effect of the commission’s focus on individual acts and events was to downplay (by default) the fact that apartheid was a system, one in which certain groups accrued great socio-economic benefits, and others were impoverished. While a few thousand victims, or families of those killed during the apartheid regime, have received some monetary compensation as a form of reparation (see Hayner, 2001), the TRC’s form of justice did not help to “restore” the very real socio-economic deficiencies experienced by millions of South Africans as a result of apartheid as a political–economic system. This limits the realization of “restorative justice” for those who continue to suffer from post-apartheid apartheid—the structural continuities of apartheid not simply as a political regime, but as a socio-economic system (see Marais, 2001; also see Hayner, 2001; Wilson, 2001).

Arguably, reconciliation—in order to lead to successful reconstruction of a society—requires an approach that moves beyond a paradigm of criminal justice, one that focuses on individual perpetrators and victims. Instead, what is needed is a paradigm of social justice that is concerned more with beneficiaries and victims (in a collective sense) (Hayner, 2001; also see Brooks, 1999; Mamdani, 1996; Marais, 2001; Wilson, 2001). Such a paradigm would embrace the notion that reconciliation and redistributive justice are inextricably tied.

While East Timor’s commission does not explicitly use the language of restorative justice, such a conception of justice significantly informs the work of the East Timor commission—at least implicitly. The restoration is to flow from the Commission’s efforts to provide dignity to individual victims by granting them an opportunity to tell their stories and by rebuilding frayed social ties through the formal reconciliation mechanisms. At the same time, the Commission will help to restore various forms of loss through the provision of justice—through the local community reconciliation procedures and by referring those thought to have committed “serious crimes” to East Timor’s General Prosecutor for possible formal trials. In this regard, the justice foreseen by the Commission’s architects is both retributive and restorative in nature.

East Timor’s commission, however, is unique in that it is covering a period and set of events for which almost all those most responsible are found outside the national territory. Because what took place in East Timor was the result of an international conflict, the vast majority of the perpetrators of the crimes in question and their political architects are abroad, largely in Indonesia. Thus, to the extent that the CRTR sees itself as facilitating reconciliation between former adversaries, it is only between the victimized population and relatively low-level perpetrators within East Timor’s national territory—in other words, only among East Timorese. Moreover, as its mandate makes clear, East Timor’s commission seems destined to focus almost exclusively on personal or direct forms of violence. While it is charged with examining the role of international actors in aiding, abetting, and/or facilitating the violence (in this regard, there is arguably a structural aspect to the Commission’s conceptualization of violence), the focus is on physical acts visited directly upon human beings, not on how such violence relates to the creation of political–economic structures that cause harm to humans. For such reasons, the restorative capacity of East
Timor’s official truth and reconciliation process will fall short of what it might have achieved otherwise.

The case of coffee helps to illustrate this. Indonesia’s invasion and occupation had a profound effect on East Timor’s coffee sector and the peasant households and regions highly involved in the commodity’s production and trade. Coffee has long been by far the most important source of foreign exchange earnings for East Timor, and its production currently involves approximately a quarter of the territory’s households. Given the numbers of people involved and coffee’s importance in the territory’s economy, the deleterious effects of Indonesia’s war and occupation on coffee resonated throughout East Timorese society. In this regard, coffee embodies the structural violence of Indonesia’s crimes and thus serves as a concrete case study for interrogating reconciliation as it applies to violence embedded in the country’s production base, social fabric, and cultural landscape.

Coffee and the making of a violent environment in East Timor

_The past is never dead. It’s not even past._—William Faulkner

Competition over resources is a highly significant factor in contemporary international relations and arguably a growing one in the post-Cold War era (Klare, 2001), a factor that underlies and/or informs a wide variety of contemporary inter- and intra-state conflicts, albeit to very different extents. Concomitantly, the relationship between the environment and violence in the form of socio-political conflict is a growing area of inquiry in the social sciences.

The resulting literature has thus far focused largely on how environmental resources give rise to violence. Analysts have argued that over-reliance on primary commodity production and/or the availability of considerable amounts of environmental resources can be a contributing factor to conflict (e.g. Collier, 2000), and that scarcity of such resources, whether such scarcity be perceived as a manifestation of structural factors or as the outgrowth of a Malthusian-like population–resource equation, can and does facilitate conflicts throughout the world (see Homer-Dixon, 1999; Kaplan, 1994, 2000). While having something to offer, these analyses are somewhat deterministic and are overly reductionist, failing to provide an adequate picture of why conflicts occur and how they relate to environmental resources. In this regard, they do not exhibit appreciation for the socially constructed nature of environmental resources and, in failing to do so, do not make a convincing case that either resource abundance or scarcity is sufficient for explicating, or necessarily leads to, conflict (Le Billon, 2001). In so far as conflict and the environment are interrelated, we need to analyze and understand the violence as “a site-specific phenomenon rooted in local histories and social relations yet connected to larger processes of material transformation and power relations” (Peluso & Watts, 2001: p. 5).

Most conceptualizations of the environment–conflict nexus, however, implicitly
understand violence in narrow terms, limiting it to individual physical acts or events of physical brutality. While such phenomena are undoubtedly examples of violence, so, too, are social practices not typically conceived of as violence, but which also lead to the harming of human beings. In this regard, we need to include in our conceptualization of violence not only acts that involve physical brutality, but also institutionalized and indirect practices that contribute to physical injury and/or create, maintain, or exacerbate social injustice. This moves us beyond a focus on the intent of the perpetrators of violence, requiring that we accept the premise that individuals and social entities are responsible for the likely or predictable consequences of their actions. Thus, our concern is first and foremost with outcomes—ones that are avoidable—as opposed to intent. To the extent that control of, access to, and distribution of environmental resources (and their associated benefits and detriments) are institutionalized in such a way as to harm human beings in that they contribute to the denial of basic human rights (such as that to adequate food, shelter, clothing, and medical care or the right to fair and just remuneration for work), they are examples of structural violence (see Galtung, 1969; Nevins, 2002b). Just as all politics are environmental practices and all environmental practices are politics (Bryant & Bailey, 1997), there is a dynamic interrelationship between mass violence—as a particular form of politics—and environmental resources. In this regard, environments shaped by violence come to reproduce it in various forms.

Some analyses (e.g. Homer-Dixon, 1999) define environmental resources to encompass only renewable natural resources such as cropland, forests, fresh water, and fish stocks. This paper employs a larger conceptualization of the category so that it includes primary commodities (see Peluso & Watts, 2001), as their production alters and directly derives from the physical landscape while becoming part of a transformed “nature”.

Commodities embody social relations. They have a history that traverses, reflects, and shapes different historical durations and a geography that is multi-scalar (see Braudel, 1987; Rowling, 1987). In this regard, conflicts over resources and/or primary commodities reflected and informed the nature of the almost-quarter-century Indonesia–East Timor war. At the same time, there was a dynamic interrelationship between the production, export, and marketing of various resources from Indonesian-occupied East Timor and a constantly restructuring global political economy, an

---

12 Johan Galtung (1969) includes in his definition of “violence” anything that prevents us from achieving realizable social goals deemed by most people in the world to be desirable. Such goals might include a healthy diet, access to potable water, or adequate healthcare and housing for all. Thus, hunger in a world of plenty is a manifestation of violence, as is homelessness in the United States. When an identifiable actor commits the violence, Galtung calls it direct or personal violence. When there is no actor present—or, I would add, when violence is the outgrowth of the seemingly acceptable, institutionalized practices of organizations deemed as legitimate—Galtung characterizes the violence as indirect or structural (see Nevins, 2002b).

13 Bryant and Bailey draw on Harvey (1993).
interrelationship that affected and was impacted by East Timor’s physical and socio-economic landscape.\textsuperscript{14}

There were a number of natural resources and primary commodities exploited by the Indonesian military and their political allies during their war and occupation, including East Timor’s sandalwood and marble reserves. But the most important commodity during this period was coffee. Coffee had long been linked to processes of domination and subordination as part of the imperialist conquest of East Timor (Aditjondro, 1994; Jardine, 1999; Nevins, 1993; Taylor, 1999).

The Portuguese first introduced the coffee plant to East Timor in the early 1800s. It was not until the 1860s, however, that coffee suddenly came to dominate the colonial economy. The Portuguese colonial governor from 1859 to 1869, Afonso de Castro, ordered numerous areas of East Timor to be planted with the coffee plant, imposing a regime of forced cultivation. Working through the \textit{liurai} (local kings), the Portuguese authorities coerced the indigenous population to grow coffee through methods ranging from the use of forced labor to the imposition of a head tax. The authorities would also “buy” traditionally held lands from compromised local rulers (in effect, confiscating them), which they would then close off and convert into plantations for the production of commodities such as coffee (Clarence-Smith, 1992; Lains e Silva, 1956; Mubyarto et al., 1991; Taylor, 1999).

These efforts were a success from the perspective of the Portuguese as coffee soon replaced sandalwood as the colony’s primary export commodity. During Portuguese colonial rule, coffee’s share of the total export value was never less than 51.8% after 1862, with the exception of one year (1909, when sandalwood exports rose dramatically). In most years, coffee comprised more than three-quarters of the total exports. By the mid-1970s, Portuguese Timor’s dependence on coffee was greater than ever. At that time, about 60% of all coffee production was in the hands of East Timorese smallholders (\textit{liurais} and peasants), with the rest produced by small Portuguese farmers and a Portuguese company, the SAPT (Sociedade Agricola Patria e Trabalho), 40% or so of which was owned by the colonial government (Clarence-Smith, 1992; Dunn, 1996; Hartley, 1975; Lains e Silva, 1956; Taylor, 1999).\textsuperscript{15}

During the Indonesian era, practices and changes on two scales—within East Timor itself and on the global scale—resulted in a significant loss of income to and the de-development of East Timor’s coffee sector. The East Timor-specific phenomena were directly related to Indonesia’s invasion and occupation, while those on the global scale were indirectly related to the war and annexation, part of a larger effort by the West to weaken the so-called Third World. The global developments negatively impacted upon producers throughout the world, not just those of East Timor. But within East Timor, they combined with phenomena brought about by Indonesia’s

\textsuperscript{14} These changes also flowed from and manifested themselves in differential manners on the local and household levels, but an analysis of these transformations is beyond the scope of this paper.

\textsuperscript{15} Given the colonial nature of East Timor’s political economy during the Portuguese era, the benefits of coffee production were undoubtedly distributed in an unjust manner from the perspective of smallholders. However worthy of investigation, this matter is beyond the scope of this paper, which limits itself to the period covered by East Timor’s official truth commission, from 1974 to late 1999.
war and occupation to exacerbate the already dramatic depredations suffered by the territory’s coffee producers.

In terms of the East Timor-specific phenomena, Indonesia’s military, through a company it owned—P.T. Denok—simply took over the SAPT, all other coffee plantations, and even some smallholdings, as well as the larger coffee trade in the aftermath of the 1975 invasion. East Timorese farmers were now obligated to sell all their coffee through Denok. Because of its monopoly, Denok—through the local government—was able to set prices, ones that were always significantly lower than they would have been had there been other buyers (Budiardjo & Liem, 1984; Dunn, 1996; Jardine, 1999; Mubyarto et al., 1991; Taylor, 1999). Farmers in neighboring Indonesian West Timor, for example, were receiving two to three times the price received by their counterparts in occupied East Timor (Aditjondro, 1994). Given such factors, East Timorese coffee farmers were thus effectively compelled to finance the very military that was oppressing them. This alone led to a loss of income to farmers of many millions of dollars over the course of the occupation. While, in theory, cross-boundary, “black market” transactions resulting in higher incomes might have been possible, the nature of life under military occupation meant that movement was heavily circumscribed. The Indonesian military imposed strict restrictions on the transport and hoarding of coffee, confiscating the crop of and imposing jail time on those caught transporting relatively large amounts (Soesastro, 1989; Taylor, 1999).

In addition to unjust prices received by East Timorese coffee farmers, Indonesia’s war resulted in the destruction of many coffee trees and processing facilities. The restrictions on mobility led to a reduction in coffee harvesters, thus limiting the availability of labor on coffee plantations. And, following Indonesia’s invasion, there was a period during which the International Coffee Organization, which used to assign export quotas, did not recognize East Timor as part of Indonesia and refused to provide the territory an export quota allocation. This compelled East Timor to sell its coffee in non-quota markets, typically at highly discounted prices. Such factors, combined with the low prices caused by Denok’s monopoly, led—in addition to lower incomes for coffee farmers—to a significant decline in East Timor’s overall coffee production from the time of the invasion through at least the late 1980s (Aditjondro, 1994; Soesastro, 1989). Thus, a significant result of the “Indonesianization” of East Timor’s coffee sector was the “decapitalizing” of the rural economy.

---

16 The government justified the low price of coffee by arguing that coffee producers had a tendency to use increased income for festivities (Soesastro, 1989).

17 In the mid-1990s, Denok’s control of the coffee sector began to disintegrate as other companies were able to gain export licenses from the government, resulting in higher prices for East Timorese farmers (see DAI, 2001; Moxham, 2001).

18 See Aditjondro (1994). While Aditjondro’s larger point seems correct, close examination of his data and analysis raises many questions as to how he arrived at the monetary amount of the subsidy from East Timorese coffee farmers to the Indonesian military.
and the stymieing of the long-term potential of coffee production and overall economic development in the former Portuguese colony.\(^{19}\)

Besides these East Timor-specific developments that led to a loss of income for coffee producers, global phenomena were also negatively impacting upon the territory’s coffee sector—in the form of larger transformations of the international coffee market that took place during the years of Indonesia’s occupation. One of the most significant related to the 1962 International Coffee Accord (ICA)—the signatories to which included not only most of the coffee-producing countries, but also most of the consuming countries. The ICA led to the establishment of a regulatory system that, through the resulting International Coffee Organization, set a target price for coffee and assigned export quotas to each producing country. Although there were problems with this system, most analysts agree that it led to stable coffee prices and higher incomes for coffee farmers than would have existed had the ICA system not been in place (Akiyama, 2001; Bates, 1997; Ponte, 2001).

Key to the ICA’s birth was the support of the United States, which, at the time of the accord, constituted the world’s largest market for coffee, accounting for more than 50% of all coffee imports. The early 1960s was a time of deep anti-communist sentiment and fear among US political elites, Latin America being the focus of their concerns. Brazilian and Colombian officials successfully played on these fears in gaining Washington’s support for an international coffee agreement (Bates, 1997). Washington’s “Alliance for Progress”, a development assistance program, was geared toward undermining support for left-oriented politics through mild reforms of the status quo (Black, 1977, 1999). From the perspective of Washington, coffee prices were key to the outcome of this process. As then president John F. Kennedy stated,

A drop of one cent a pound for... coffee costs Latin American producers $ 50 million in export proceeds—enough to seriously undermine what we are seeking to accomplish by the Alliance for Progress (Bates, 1997: p. 126).

Thus, while a would-be accord would exact higher economic costs for consumers, retailers, and roasters in the United States, the administration was willing to trade such costs for the perceived gains in political stability brought about by higher coffee-related incomes for Latin American countries. Congress, despite being convinced of the benefits of the agreement for US political–economic interests in Latin America, initially opposed the accord. It eventually reversed its position, however, after receiving assurances that the accord would not significantly hurt domestic consumers and thus exact costs in terms of re-election (Bates, 1997).

For a variety of reasons, the ICA system fell apart in 1989. These included arguments between producing countries over quotas, the growing volume of coffee traded

\(^{19}\) Practices by Indonesian actors that resulted in greater income for themselves at the expense of East Timorese coffee producers are arguably acts of plunder of property. Given the nature of Indonesia’s presence in the territory, these activities are thus possible war crimes (see Gutman & Rieff, 1999).
outside the ICA system, and a significant increase in transnational corporate control and associated changes within the international coffee market (Akiyama, 2001; Bates, 1997; Pendergrast, 1999; Talbot, 1997). But also significant was a shift in Washington’s assessment of the wisdom of continued support for the ICA, a result of the growth in strength in market fundamentalist policies among American political elites and changes in US policy toward Latin America in the 1980s (Bates, 1997; Dicum & Luttinger, 1999). Among other things, what facilitated these changes in policy were shifts in the political–economic terrain of various Latin American countries—shifts not unrelated to an aggressive American policy aimed at creating a regional and international environment favorable to US interests as defined by Washington.

The political–economic stability of Latin America, and specifically and especially of Brazil—which, in the early 1960s, was producing roughly half of the world’s coffee—was highly significant in Washington’s decision to support the ICA in 1962. At the time when it held hearings on the coffee accord, the US Senate’s Committee on Foreign Relations, under whose jurisdiction the treaty fell, had just completed a study on Brazil that showed that a shortage of foreign currency reserves was a major source of political and economic instability in the country (Bates, 1997; also see Pendergrast, 1999). Washington was profoundly concerned with what it saw as “anti-American” and “communist” political–economic developments in Brazil during this time and, for that reason, backed a military coup that overthrew the country’s civilian government in 1964. The military ruled for the next 20 years, effectively crushing opposition while bringing Brazil firmly within the US sphere of influence (Black, 1977; Chomsky, 1993).

For such reasons, Washington no longer saw the Left in Brazil, and Latin America more generally, as a threat by the late 1980s. If US Senator Hubert Humphrey felt compelled in 1963 to characterize the raising of coffee prices as “a matter of life or death, a matter of Castroism versus freedom” out of fear that “Castroism” would “spread like the plague through Latin America unless something is done about the prices of raw materials produced there” (Bates, 1997: p. 128; also see Dicum & Luttinger, 1999), American elites felt no such pressure by 1989. At the same time, in Mexico and Central America, the United States wanted to increase coffee imports from countries whose governments it regarded as friendly to US geo-political and economic domination—such as El Salvador—and decrease imports from countries regarded as unfriendly to Washington’s regional agenda, especially Nicaragua (see Bates, 1997; Dicum & Luttinger, 1999; Pendergrast, 1999). Coffee export quotas undermined US government interests in this regard. Added together, these various factors made Washington less inclined to support the ICA system.

That Washington no longer felt pressure to do so was in large part because of the “success” of US policy in thwarting left-leaning socio-political movements and governments not only in Latin America, but throughout the world. In this regard, we can understand the breakdown of the ICA system to be, in part, an outgrowth

---

20 By the late 1990s, Brazil, still the world’s largest producer of coffee, was responsible for about 28% of the global output (Ponte, 2001).
of a larger war against the “Third World” that the United States and its allies waged against countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—especially those that overtly challenged US and/or “Western” hegemony (see Chomsky, 1993; Kolko, 1988; Shalom, 1993; also see Bennis, 2000). US support for the bloody military coup in 1965–1966 that brought the Suharto regime to power in Indonesia (Kadane, 1990; Kahin & Kahin, 1995; Robinson, 1995), in addition to the backing of the regime’s takeover and occupation of East Timor (Jardine, 1999; Nevins, 2002a), was part of this effort to maintain and enhance American political–economic hegemony. In this sense, it contributed to the impoverishment of East Timor’s coffee sector.

The effects of the breakdown of the ICA system—combined with the growing power of coffee transnationals (see Talbot, 1997)—have been largely negative from the perspective of coffee farmers and producer countries. Prices have become much more volatile, and there has been a significant shift of coffee revenues away from farmers and producing countries toward traders and retailers (Oxfam International, 2001, 2002; Ponte, 2001).

During the 1970s, coffee growers received an average of 20% of the total international income from the trade and sale of coffee—a percentage that remained roughly constant through 1989 while the ICA was still in place. During this time, coffee roasters, traders, and retailers in consuming countries received between approximately 53 and 55% of the total income. By 1994–1995, coffee growers were receiving only 13% of the total revenues, while consuming countries were receiving 78%. Thus, coffee traders and retailers have become increasingly wealthy relative to coffee farmers, who have become increasingly impoverished (Ponte, 2001).

In an absolute sense, international coffee prices declined by 50% from 1998 through 2001 (Oxfam International, 2001). The 2001 prices were the lowest they had been in real terms compared to the previous 30 years. And, if we take price inflation into account, those coffee prices were the lowest that they have ever been. As a result of such prices and the resulting diminished incomes for coffee workers, it is estimated that millions of people in 45 coffee-producing countries are facing “economic ruin” (Oxfam International, 2002). The price downturn on the international commodity markets has not resulted, however, in lower coffee prices for consumers. Instead, the profits of coffee traders, roasters, and retailers have increased, while income for coffee bean producers has declined dramatically.

The East Timorese population—about 25% of which is partially dependent on coffee (with an estimated 16% dependent on coffee to a significant degree) (see Planning Commission, 2002)—paid a very high price for these changes during the Indonesian occupation, and continues to do so in the post-occupation era. (The World Bank (2001) estimates that an average coffee producing family in East Timor—about six people—has an annual cash income of about US$ 200. Ninety percent of this income derives from the sale of coffee beans.) Given the highly distorted nature of East Timor’s coffee sector prior to the collapse of the ICA system, it is impossible to know with certainty just how great a loss has been suffered as a result of the global-scale changes, but if we assume that it is similar to what coffee farmers across the world have experienced, the loss in coffee-related income has undoubtedly been significant.
In present-day East Timor, about 40,000 families are engaged to varying degrees in the coffee sector (Planning Commission, 2002). Coffee production takes place on about 50,000 hectares of land, the vast majority of which is farmed by smallholders averaging 1–2 hectares. Large coffee estates, now picked by farmers who live on their perimeters, have fallen into almost total disrepair in the aftermath of the Indonesian withdrawal and provide a very small part of total production (NCBA, 2000). Although the Indonesian military is gone and East Timor’s coffee farmers are “free” to sell their coffee to whomever they want, the prices they receive are abysmally low. For this reason, East Timor’s official five-year development plan characterized the coffee industry as “non-viable”—at least in its present state (Planning Commission, 2002). And, while there are national- and local-scale factors that impinge on East Timor’s coffee-related income, the low prices are first and foremost a result of international-level dynamics.

East Timor’s share of the world coffee trade is less than one-tenth of one percent. Such an insignificant share, combined with the effective breakdown of any sort of effective international cartel-type mechanism to increase the price among producer countries and the growing power of coffee transnationals, makes East Timor a “price taker” (NCBA, 2000; also see Stallings, 1992), not a price setter. These prices have profound implications for the socio-economic health of East Timorese peasants and, given the importance of coffee in the national economy, for the society as a whole.

Typically, peasant households experience what Bernstein (1988) has characterized as a “simple reproduction squeeze” in the face of developments such as falling commodity prices. Households adapt to such developments through a number of means, including: reducing consumption; intensifying commodity production; diversification; the selling of assets; and/or incurring ever greater levels of debt. How East Timorese farmers have responded in the face of the steep decline in coffee income is a matter in need of systematic investigation. Preliminary research, however, suggests that one response on the part of East Timorese peasants has been to reduce the amount of labor time dedicated to coffee production (The World Bank, 2001), dedicating the time saved to other forms of economic activity. Some have even stopped picking their crops (UNDP, 2002). The decline in income has also led many to reduce overall consumption, resulting in an increase in malnutrition in rural areas and a decline in primary school enrollment because families cannot afford the modest school fees (see Moxham, 2001).

The loss in coffee-related income over the last few decades has contributed to East Timor’s designation as Asia’s poorest country by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in a May 2002 report. It is also one of the 20 poorest countries in the world. According to the UNDP report, the annual per capita gross domestic product is US$ 478, and more than 40% of the population lives below the national poverty line of US$ 0.55 per day. More than half of East Timor’s population

21 Nevertheless, the plan advocates and foresees dramatic growth of East Timor’s coffee sector over the next several years (from US$ 5.2 million in exports in 2002 to US$ 24 million in 2007). This increase is supposed to happen through the improvement of the quality of East Timor’s coffee, the expansion of overall production, and marketing of specialty coffee (Planning Commission, 2002).
is illiterate, and approximately 45% of its children less than five years of age are underweight. For such reasons, incidents of death from preventable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and diarrhea are common. East Timor also has one of the world’s highest rates of maternal mortality (UNDP, 2002).

Such factors are the concrete manifestations of the “silent violence” (Watts, 1983) or the “violence of everyday life” (Schepers-Hughes, 1993) that structures and is embedded in East Timorese society—specifically the country’s coffee sector—and in the global political economy to which it is linked. They are reflections of the real-life dangers of heavy dependence on external markets and agents that, given the nature of the commodity in question and the transnational power relations involved, East Timorese society is in a very poor position to influence—at least in the foreseeable future.

The prices paid to coffee producers and the increasingly upstream flow of coffee-related revenues in the world economy (Talbot, 1997), to the extent that they provide an income to East Timorese farmers that does not allow them to realize basic human needs, are also forms of violence. It is a violence created on multiple geographical scales and over various historical time spans, and, as such, one intimately linked to Indonesia’s invasion and occupation of East Timor, as well as to the construction of a larger global political economy that is built upon and reproduces tremendously unequal power relations that profoundly inform human living conditions (see Galtung, 1972).

While East Timorese coffee farmers have protested over their plight, they have focused their limited public expressions of anger on what they suspect is corruption by local coffee brokers, whom they see as conspiring with international players to short-change them (see Dodd, 2001; The La’o Hamutuk Bulletin, August 2001). Neither they nor international advocates for East Timor have made concerted demands for compensation from Indonesia, nor from the international actors associated with Jakarta’s crimes or with the making of the larger structural violence that shapes East Timor’s coffee economy. The lack of demands upon international actors might be due in part to insufficient collective understanding of the historical and political–economic factors that have shaped the local and international coffee economy. But it is also perhaps a manifestation of an appreciation of the unlikelihood of East Timor as a whole receiving significant justice for the multiple forms of violence visited upon the society from 1975 to 1999. One effect of power is its ability to shape the perceptions of the weak as to what is possible and pragmatic. Thus, the relatively weak might decide not to make a demand of the powerful for fear of suffering sanctions and/or because they perceive the making of such demands to be an exercise in futility (see Gaventa, 1980; Lukes, 1974). In the case of an international tribunal for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by Indonesian authorities and soldiers during the occupation, for instance, important elements of East Timor’s political leadership have let it be known that they are moderating their demands due to the perceived need to have good relations with Jakarta (see, for example, ABC Radio, 2002). Thus, various forms of violence limit the ability of victimized populations to even speak.
Conclusion: implications for truth-telling and reconciliation

One of the explicit goals of East Timor’s truth commission is to respond to the needs of the victims of human rights violations. The Commission’s definition of human rights is very broad in that it is based upon international humanitarian law and human rights standards. The definition would thus include socio-economic and collective rights, rights systematically undermined by the Indonesian war of conquest and more than 23 years of occupation. The loss of coffee-related income brought about by Indonesia’s actions has contributed to these violations of human rights, with some of the actions clearly meeting the definition of a violation of the laws of war. This loss is embedded in post-occupation East Timor’s landscape. East Timor’s coffee producers and the national society as a whole continue to suffer the consequences of the resulting underdevelopment of the national coffee sector and the country’s economy as a whole.

At the same time, this “violent environment” (Peluso & Watts, 2001) is the product of international actions in the form of the support afforded to Indonesia’s occupation by various countries. It is also the outgrowth of the weakening of a third worldist Third World that might have otherwise been in a better position to continue the International Coffee Accord system, or to create a viable alternative to it with the goal of maintaining and/or increasing the income of coffee farmers and producer countries, while at the same time endeavoring for a world economic order that facilitates greater levels of social justice.

The practical implications of this analysis for East Timor are limited in the immediate and short terms—especially in terms of the country’s formal truth and reconciliation process, which is scheduled to complete its work in early- to mid-2004. Nevertheless, we should still pose some questions regarding the unfolding process that have not yet been asked. They include: With whom must/should East Timor reconcile? What should be the geographical extent of this process? What is the relationship between justice—in the material/political-economic sense—and reconciliation? and, If the benefits received and to be received by East Timor from coffee are less than should have been and are likely to be, what are the implications for the truth and reconciliation process?

These questions, while applying directly to East Timor’s official truth-telling process, have potential implications for the larger quest for truth and justice undertaken by East Timorese civil society and advocates abroad—a quest that will surely endure beyond the temporal limits of the official commission. More broadly, such questions relate to the work of truth commissions in general and to more extensive pursuits of historical truth and justice in the aftermath of repressive regimes, conflict, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and massive institutionalized injustice.

In the case of East Timor, for example, one could imagine a commission chron-

22 For an overview of the various efforts of East Timorese civil society organizations and international advocates, which have largely focused on the establishment of an international criminal tribunal for East Timor, see the various issues of The La’o Hamutuk Bulletin.
icling and quantifying the direct losses to the country’s coffee sector caused by the Indonesian war and occupation—losses brought about by factors such as the below-market prices given to producers, the destruction of coffee trees and processing facilities, and the expropriation of coffee farms—while making specific recommendations regarding reparations on that basis. Restitution—a non-vindicative form of post-injustice retribution—has become increasingly common in the post-World War II era. But determining what constitutes an appropriate form of such is a complex process, one resolved through negotiation and political struggle (see Barkan, 2000). In any case, the purpose of this paper is not to provide a blueprint for the appropriate steps for East Timor to receive restitution for the depredations its population suffered as a result of the Indonesia-waged war. Rather, its goal is to enlarge our collective imagination in thinking about matters of violence and justice. The losses incurred by East Timor’s coffee sector are only one manifestation of a much larger set of damages caused by the crimes of Indonesia’s military and its supporters. In that regard, coffee serves as an example for thinking broadly about matters of restitution in the context of truth and reconciliation processes.

Beyond East Timor, these matters dovetail with growing efforts within various countries and at the international level aimed at gaining reparations for gross injustices. Such reparations could take many forms, including material compensation for direct victims of violence or a radical reworking of relevant social structures so as to eliminate institutionalized injustices (i.e. structural violence) (see Mann, 2002; Robinson, 2000; also see Barkan, 2000; Oxfam International, 2002). This is admittedly a slippery slope, and it is intended as such.

Scholars who research truth and reconciliation processes matters can contribute to these justice-seeking efforts by interrogating a more broadly conceived violence (and on multiple geographical scales), such as that embodied by the global political economy and commodified environmental resources. This entails examining the dialectical relationship between violence and the socio-physical environment of victimized populations and how such violence weaves itself into the global political-economic fabric and its various expressions, such as the profoundly unequal power relations between rich and poor. Efforts to establish authoritative accounts of periods of mass violence should thus question temporal, social, and spatial boundaries that conventionally define truth commissions and other justice-seeking mechanisms—assuming the goal is to come to terms with a horrific past, and its inextricably linked present, in terms of all its significant manifestations and roots.

23 Germany, for example, provided restitution to Israel—standing in for the Jewish victims of the Nazi-perpetrated genocide—after the two sides formulated an agreement. In the late 1980s, the US government provided compensation to Japanese-Americans interned in camps during World War II. And more recently, the government of New Zealand has provided various forms of restitution to the indigenous Maori population. See Barkan (2000).
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Nancy Peluso of the University of California, Berkeley, and J. Christopher Brown of the University of Kansas for their comments on earlier article drafts. I would also like to extend my deep appreciation to Joshua Muldavin of Sarah Lawrence College for his extensive comments on two different versions of the paper. Finally, I am very grateful for the constructive comments made by three anonymous reviewers and John O’Loughlin.

References


