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**Labor domination in Indonesian plantations: how control of workers' private lives  
creates subordination**

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**Abstract**

In large estates, permanent labor control includes two dimensions: control of work itself and control of workers' private life, including that of their families. Historically, plantation companies have always provided accommodation, which is central in the expression of corporate domination within the domestic sphere. This communication presents a monograph of the forms of control regarding the private lives of workers and their families in Indonesian palm tree plantations. It aims to characterize the specific aspects of these technologies of power that explain workers' subordination to authority. The results are based on participant observer sessions in workers' dwellings at six Indonesian plantations over the duration of one year.

Supervision of private life covers several dimensions. Rules and regulations set up by the leadership strictly define what is allowed, tolerated or forbidden. These sets of rules and regulations could be seen as oppressive, and therefore criticized. On the contrary, the way in which the prescriptions are stated, gently and with a moralistic tone, leads to their acceptance and legitimization. A general process of infantilization of workers and their families explains the absence of criticism among them. This is a strong drive of the current expansion of plantation capitalism in Indonesia.

**Introduction**

Over the last 150 years, large plantations have been established in Indonesia. From the early 1860s to the 1940s, European and American companies colonized the province of North Sumatra, producing mainly tobacco, rubber and palm oil. The country has experienced a

second boom in large estate production, especially for palm tree plantations, since the 1970s. This form of agrarian capitalism is now common on most of the “outer islands” where forested land is available. This article focuses on palm tree plantations, and addresses labor issues through examining the ways in which workers' private lives are also subject to control, how this leads to subordination and to an absence of criticism of the plantation system.

Labor control has always been a central issue for plantation companies: each production unit consists of approximately 20 000 to 30 000 hectares and harvest, the main operation, currently relies on a number of permanent workers that ranges between 2000 and 4000. Historically, plantation companies settled in scarcely-populated areas and the leadership organized migrations from overseas (firstly from China and then Java since the 1920s) in order to fulfill labor requirements. Resorting to migrant labor facilitated control as newcomers were not accustomed to the ecological and social environment. At first, the planters organized migrations of young single men. After a few decades they realized that this had been a costly choice, because of the development of prostitution and venereal diseases that came with it. This is why, since the 1930s, migrations have been orientated towards the recruitment of married workers, and organization of labor control has expanded into the private sphere of workers' familial life. This control comprises supplying accommodation (a *pondok* or wooden plantation house), health care, rice distribution, access to credit services, education for the children and access to a place of worship (Stoler, 1985). All these guardianships are considered here as extra-capitalist tutelage that aims to establish plantation companies' domination.

Even though workers' families benefit from a wide range of protections by way of these guardianships, current income is not sufficient to cover their daily needs or anticipate their future retirement. The retirement system changed in the 1970s, and workers must now anticipate the economic needs of their pension. Before this change, companies financially supported workers until their death: even though no longer working, the worker and his family were provided with accommodation and a monthly subsidy. Now, retiring means workers have to quit the *pondok* and support themselves. In order to do so, they supplement their income by working elsewhere in their free time, setting up saving and investment strategies. Field surveys show that where workers in recent plantations successfully address this new challenge the situation in North Sumatra's ex-colonial plantations is much more precarious (Barral, 2012). Nevertheless, guardianships remain the same in all plantations, whether the workers and their families manage to raise their living standards or not. What are the structural elements of the domination framework that explain its acceptance by workers?

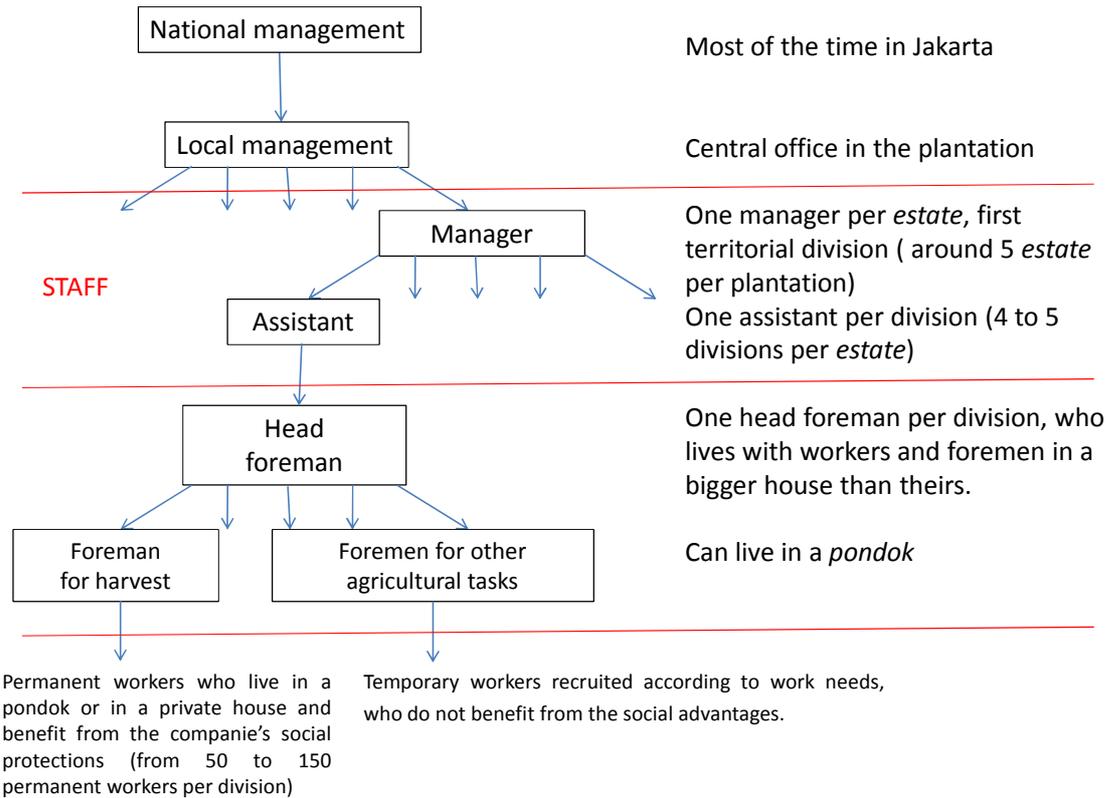
The following analysis is based on a one-year field study in six Indonesian palm tree plantations. The survey consisted in living as a participant observer within workers' *pondok*, conducting interviews with workers and company leadership, and witnessing interactions between them. The results are presented here in two points: first, the domination system is analyzed: *pondok* is shown to be the central element of the expression of hierarchical domination as all the rules that prevail there are defined by the leadership; the permanent supervision of workers' families' private life is detailed as well as the moralistic and hygienist

propaganda under which workers' lives are managed. Second, the communication shows how authority is personified according to a paternalistic feature, and how punishments and rewards favor this. This helps to understand the process of infantilization at work. The combination of these different elements explains the difficulty workers have in expressing criticism of plantation capitalism.

**A. The structural frame of domination**

**1. Hierarchical organization and information circulation**

Organization of the workload and of private life is integrated to a bureaucratic hierarchy within which communication lines are strictly vertical. Hierarchy, a form of communication typical of what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello define as the “second spirit of capitalism” is based on a strong vertical domination (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999). Studying the way it is effectively carried out informs on specific aspects of social control in the plantations. The following figure is a first step for this, as it draws the typical organization of the production department of a plantation.



*Figure 1 : Typical organization chart of a production department of a plantation company*

This organization chart distinguishes the direction, partly located in a city center, and partly located in the plantation. Underneath stand the staffs who set up the production executive tasks and relay orders and information to foremen. They live in plantation houses in the surroundings of the *estate* offices and *pondok*. This category is divided into several grades (up to five grades of assistants and three grades of managers) to which are related status, wage and social welfare conditions of each employee. Underneath stand foremen, permanent workers as well as temporary workers (not considered here as they do not benefit from a *pondok* and of in-kind social advantages). Apart from the head foreman, permanent workers and foremen benefit from the same in-kind protections; mainly, they share accommodation in *pondok* and thus sharing the domination system daily exerted on their private lives. This is why the *pondok* monograph presented here takes into account permanent workers' as well as foremen's families into account.

The organization chart shows an important bureaucratization and a strong hierarchical integration on which a strictly vertical circulation of information is based. The making of any decision requires to be taken at least with the agreement of the immediate superior. Most of the time, decisions require the manager's agreement. This is the expression of an intense control of information, and it also stems from the structural and spatial organization of the production: regarding harvest for instance, practical reasons underlie the segmentation of working units within the estates, which limits communication among harvesters or foremen. A foreman in charge of harvest is responsible for a subdivision that can reach up to one thousand hectares. Each foreman travels it all over every day by himself in order to check the execution of the tasks and to collect data about harvested quantities. The head foreman then collects this information, passes it on to the assistant who passes it to the manager and then up to the central office. There are barely any computer devices in the estate offices and most of the data or descending orders circulate by the way of printed letters.

Initiatives that do not respect these precepts are considered negatively, reproached and eventually punished. For instance during field work in a North Sumatran plantation, a human resource department employee unexpectedly drove me to an estate office in order to pick up some data. This unannounced visit was considered as a rude behavior and the employee had to justify it in front of his superior. When questioned about this formalism, other employees considered it normal so that the organization can work. These codes manifest respect and consideration for the leadership, and questioning it appeared surprising for them. The slowness related to it and what may be considered as a lack of efficiency is also barely criticized. This is a first demonstration of the acceptance of hierarchical power, within working hours. The hierarchy of each plantation company is thus functional and also accepted for the government of private lives. The following monograph shows and explains this.

## **2. *Pondok* as a central element of control, discipline and supervision**

*Pondok* are considered here as the central element of control of workers' private lives since their structural agency and the way they are ruled create dependence, discipline, infantilization and subordination. Housing and infrastructure layouts and aspects remind of military bases. The houses are identical and placed on lines. The size of housing depends on hierarchical rank. In some plantations, lines and rows are notified by numbers and letters. Historically, lines were elected as the best spatial organization of the settlements in order to supervise labor in colonial plantations in Southeast Asia (Breman, 1990), Africa and Latin America (Fenoaltea, 1984). Each settlement comprises collective infrastructures such as a place of worship (mainly a mosque), sports ground (for football and volleyball), a polyclinic and a meeting area, as shown on the following illustration:

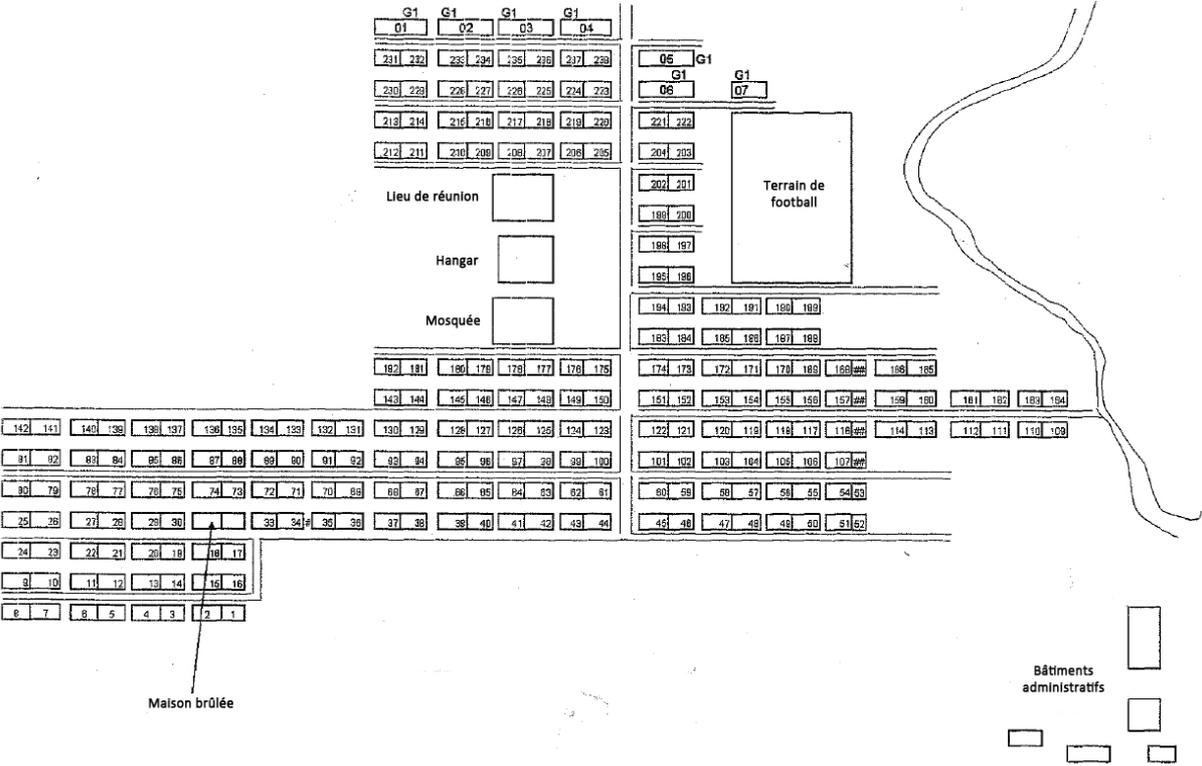


Figure 2 : Map of pondok in a palm tree plantation<sup>1</sup>

The most frequent housing model is commonly called “G2 type” or “semi-detached cottage” and fits two families. Each family disposes of approximately 35m<sup>2</sup> that comprises two bedrooms, a living room, a bathroom, a kitchen and a cellar. Walls are thin and windows have no panes. Due to this, promiscuity is marked; one can hear conversations, domestic noises or TV shows from one home to another. Everybody knows everything about their neighbors, and permanently lives under their watch. This goes along with the leadership’s supervision and inspection practices. Individual “G1” houses are inhabited by foremen and located among the G2s. Their presence in the *pondok* is compulsory: a foreman cannot build

<sup>1</sup> Translation of the legend from left to right side: meeting place, football playground, warehouse, mosque, burnt house, offices.

his own house in the surroundings of the plantation. As a consequence, workers' families live permanently under his supervision. Supervising and regularly inspecting the *pondok* is indeed one of the functions of the foreman. He is in charge of the implementation of rules and regulations.

The rules and regulations that organize collective lives are imposed on workers' families; they discipline and standardize their behavior. They affect general as well as anecdotic aspects of daily life. For instance, the following box is a translation of some *pondok*'s written regulations in a North-Sumatran plantation.

1. It is forbidden to change the shape of the house, to extend it or to reduce it.
2. Watch out cleanliness, orderliness and tidiness of the garden.
3. One has to plant a coconut tree, flowers and to install a clothes line. Once it is done, it is forbidden to uninstall them.
4. Dig a new garbage hole in a new spot of your garden once the first one is full.
5. It is forbidden to throw garbage elsewhere than in the garbage hole.
6. It is forbidden to rear poultry.

The foreman is the first person in charge of the implementation of rules and regulations. He also deals with conflicts between workers or families. When a situation is not conform he informs the hierarchy; the manager then takes measures in order to restore normality. The manager also travels all over the *pondok* by car in order to check them every week.

Regulation of collective life, which in Indonesian villages is traditionally the task of the *adat* council (Mac Carthy, 2006) is managed by the leadership in the plantations. For example, they have their word to say when domestic conflicts occur. In an interview, a foreman reports:

“When there are ... problems between husbands and wives ... if it remains gentle, we do not want to bother, so the problem is managed by the Imam, the security guard and I. No need to bother the manager. Sometimes the couple even comes to us in order to solve the problem. When the problem grows, it starts to bother the neighborhood and if I cannot solve it, then I report to the manager. But ... poor of them ... I try not to do so as much as possible.”

These examples show how the behavior of workers' families is shaped by formal and informal rules and regulations. Part of these precepts deal with what is forbidden and imply two types of behavior: accepting or refusing. It is forbidden to rear poultry, and one can choose to respect this order or to overstep it. Other precepts aim to orientate the behavior toward a maximization of what is required from workers and families. This is the case of the moralistic and hygienist propaganda developed in the following point.

### 3. Moralistic and hygienist propaganda

The importance given to cleanliness and hygiene in *pondok* is reminiscent of the “hygienism” current of thought that shaped European authorities between the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. These leanings are linked to a strong moralistic trend of the conception of a society. The doctrine of “hygienism”:

« presupposes (...) an intimate link between the physique and the moral, and the determination of the second one by the first. (...) The doctor is in charge of the definition of the ways to preserve physical and moral health of biological individual bodies, which is related to a conception of society treated on an identical way. Scientific guarantee makes him responsible of the definition of rules of life, may it concern private or public sphere » (Cichelli-Pugeault, Cichelli, 1998 : 8).

In plantations, the leadership does not express so clearly this link between body hygiene and moralization of collective life, but this historical reminder suggests a link between companies’ hygienist policies and the moral dimension of workers’ management. Government of bodies and spirits, in Michel Foucault’s sense of the word (Foucault, 1975) is based on an implicit legitimacy of the capacity for the leadership to draw up precepts that appear as good ones for workers’ families and thus to establish rules for group life. Understanding the practices that lead to this legitimatization is a pre-requisite of the analysis of the acceptance of hierarchical domination.

Group life rules are thus based on a strong hygienist policy: several examples underlie this statement. The following box lists the main hygienic prescriptions showed on notice boards among the *pondok*:

- Beware of order and cleanliness
- A clean environment, a healthy body, and the production increases
- Beware of the cleanliness of environment: cleanliness is health, cleanliness is beauty, and cleanliness belongs to faith.
- Save up water and electricity
- My house is clean, my garden is green, my mind is healthy

Summons for cleanliness are not only posted on wooden boards; they are also integrated to the rules and regulations of group life in *pondok*, defined by the leadership and mainly implemented by head foremen, assistant and managers. The following quote expresses the intensity of the domination on the decision process in everyday life.

« It used to be forbidden to rear poultry here. But when you think about it, the workers need to eat proteins. So we asked them to

rear fish instead of poultry. This is why you can see a lot of fish ponds around here. (...) Before we had problems with bird flu here, you know bird flu ... And from another point of view when they rear poultry it stinks. So this is the rule here, we ordered them to build cages for the poultry. But the hen coops cannot be too close from the dwellings. So we decided of a minimal distance between the dwellings and the hen coops. If they do not want to do so, then they can just rear fish. » (Conversation with an employee of the human resource department of a Sumatran palm tree plantation during a field visit in a *pondok*)

These measures appeared to me as completely insane regarding the autonomy of the workers. Quite the reverse, the employees that explained all this always seemed to find this completely normal and were proud of such a well-organized and well-thought out system.

The organization of the *pondok* also plays a role in the standardization of the family unit. Each house is planned for a married couple and their children, and comprises two bedrooms, which limits the number of family members. Moreover, the national birth control policy is relayed within the companies on large wooden boards marked with the motto of this campaign: « *Dua anak, cukup* » which means « Two children is enough » as shown on the following picture. Every settlement is equipped with a small hospital where married women can have free access to contraception.



*Illustration 1: Companies relay the national birth control policy in the plantations*

Some rules and regulations also aim to develop a feeling of property for the families: if they feel at home in the *pondok*, this reduces their perception of domination and the reasons

for them to leave the plantation. Some companies organize housing beauty contest during which the *pondok* with the most beautiful flowers is elected and the inhabitants win a prize. Some employees of the human resource department can also be in charge of the organization of women groups so that they can manage the cleanliness of the communal parts of the settlements. They propose group activities in order to make it as a game. For instance the following picture shows a monument built by a women's group with old production equipment such as tractor wheels in order to decorate the *pondok* area.



*Illustration 2: Women's group participation to collective fitting out*

During one of the field visits, I saw a very large board at the entrance gate of the plantation, specifying: « An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure ». Concerning this recommendation, the head director explained that it aimed to prevent the plantation employees from having accidents. According to him, workers must live a sane life, be healthy and thus more concentrated on their work. All this limits accidents. This is also why sports grounds are built in all the settlements. This means that sports equipments are not built for entertainment but in order to look after workers' physical force and to fulfill production goals. The motto of another company, « *Utamakan keselamatan dan kesehatan kerja* », is marked on boards at the entrance of every *estate* offices. It literally means « The most important is health and safety at work ». These prescriptions help to make a link between health and productivity.

This information shows how work is central in the conception of policies and in the implementation of regulations in private lives. It is also related to salvation, as somehow the leadership expresses the idea that work is what brings salvation. As usde to be the case for European paternalistic companies during the nineteenth century (Castel, 1995), involvement in capitalism is linked to religious values and salvation. Religious worship is intensively

present in workers' lives as a place of worship is built in each settlement. As it is located among the dwellings, one can easily see who goes and who does not; in other words social pressure incites one to go. Furthermore, workers get paid every two weeks, in cash. During the distribution, a member of the leadership, sitting by the head foreman that delivers the wages is in charge of collecting donations from the workers in order to contribute to the mosque's maintenance.

The moralization of workers' lives in order to maximize production is strong. It reveals the will of the leadership to secure workers' commitment. Whereas the social relations were confrontational during the first century of plantation development in Indonesia (Stoler, 1985), domination is now expressed smoothly and is reminiscent of the words of a coach encouraging players. The following picture illustrates this:



*Illustration 3: Board with moral precepts of a plantation company*

These examples help to figure out to what extent the companies express a domination power over workers' and their families' in order to discipline them. Measures are taken in order to control bodies and impulses so as to manage workers' health and equilibrium and make them fit for work. Each aspect of life is not let down to chance but well-considered in the objective of a maximization of workers' potential. Domestic sphere then becomes the

basis for a Foucauldian biopolitical management of behaviors to adjust human forces toward a production objective (Foucault, 2004).

This first level of definition of the control of private lives shows that it is organized within a strict hierarchy and it is based on the structural organization of the *pondok*. In order to understand the absence of criticism from workers and their families, it is now necessary to go deeper in the analysis of the ways authority is expressed by the leadership and of the infantilization of workers' families that results from this.

## **B. The process of workers' infantilization**

Workers' environment, housing, sports grounds, hospitals and boards posted all over the settlements compose the structural outlines of labor subordination. The leadership not only uses inspection, supervision and surveillance as ways to ensure rules and regulations are implemented; the management also orientates families' behavior by way of prescriptions. The previous analysis of rules and regulations enlightens the intense intrusion of the company and hierarchy within workers' and families' lives and the strong control and authority that stems from it. But what is the nature of this authority? Is the feature of authority expressed in an individual manner as it used to be in the European paternalistic enterprises during the XIXth century (Noiriel, 1988)? What are the means at work in order to maximize the acceptance of this authority by workers?

As a participant observer, examining interactions between workers and the leadership helped me to understand that families are supervised not in a coercive and peremptory way but in a gentle one: orders are imposed softly by way of moralistic talks, incentives and a personification of the hierarchical link. The second part of the demonstration presents here the analysis of the relationship between workers and management, the tone used by the latter when talking to the former, and the reward, incentive and punishment system at work that explains the fact that control is not being questioned by the workers.

### **1. Personification of authority**

Personification of authority comprises two dimensions: the individual and personified relationship that the management keeps up with workers and their families, and the representative role they play in order to create a family spirit and to bring employee closer together. These aspects are reminiscent of the expression of managerial authority in European paternalistic firms (Gueslin, 1992 ; Lallement, 2009 ; Lamanthe, 2008).

The size of a production unit is such that it appears impossible for head directors to personally know all the employees personally. A manager, in charge of one *estate*, that is to say five to six divisions (approximately 5000 hectares), is also not always able to name all the employees under his supervision. However authority appears personified and segmented, closely and individually applied in the sense that the foremen and assistants of one division know each worker and his family. The head foreman is the closer representative of authority, and knows all the workers under his supervision well, from their ability to work to their

familial issues. “His workers” as one usually says, are in Indonesian his “*anak buah*”. The first meaning of this term is “subordinate” or “man”, and comes from the grouping of the word “child” (*anak*) and the word “fruit” (*buah*) which reveals the important symbolic meaning of the family in the management and control of workers in the plantations.

Workers feel recognition and gratitude from this form of acknowledgement. The behavior of the head directors can also favor these feelings, in a different manner. As stated above, the top leadership cannot objectively know all the employees and their families since they are too numerous. However some of them consider playing a representative role from time to time in front of the workers as part of their status. They aim to embody the feature of authority as a good, benevolent and protective boss thus aiming to bring the employees closer together. Local and head directors like to visit *pondok* unexpectedly, to enter workers’ houses, shake their hand, chat briefly with them and provide moralistic advices. Another example of this is the “Safari Ramadan” that the director of one company performs every year during the Muslim fast month. At the head of more than 150 000 hectares of palm tree plantations (that is to say about 25 000 permanent workers and their families) he makes a tour of all the estates in order to attend the “break the fasting” ceremonies held in the late afternoon. He evokes this period of the year as a burdensome duty but does not try to avoid it. Indeed, it makes a strong impression on workers and families who take pride in these visits.

Another example of the direct implication of top leadership and of the personification of authority in order to bind employees together is the inauguration of the new training center in one of the studied plantations. It had taken place before I arrived but employees proudly showed me pictures. Some of them showed attendees raising their fist. When I asked explanations, I was told that at some point the head director and the training center director chanted pep sentences that everybody then repeated in order to “give spirit” (*kasih semangat*) to the employees.

Developing a family spirit appears to be a strong will of the leadership. In order to enforce this, they also incite directors’ and managers’ wives to participate in several group activities such a sport and cultural events, be they regular or occasional.

These examples show that personification of authority appears as an element of subordination and acceptance of hierarchical domination. Acquaintanceship is not symmetrical along the hierarchical lines of these triangular organizations. However the management acts so that everybody can feel that he counts for it and gains recognition. This feeling appears to create and shape attachment toward the company, as well as to maintain a corporate spirit that links employers and employees on the basis of a familial feature. This corporate link creates acquaintance because employees are not anonymous individuals but well-known subjects, and this acquaintance takes part in the process of subordination of workers. It appears as a way to establish asymmetrical relationships and domination.

The tone used by the leadership when talking to the workers and their families also reveals the way the management tries to impose authority and domination in a gentle and hard-to-oppose manner. This tone is very condescending and moralistic, which positions

workers in an infantilizing relationship in front of their superiors. The latter, as they represent authority, have monopoly of speech and their talks legitimate the dominant norms and values. Workers do not directly speak to them but only answer their questions. These interactions are not coercive or authoritarian; quite the opposite, they are smooth-spoken. Orders are expressed without vehemence, and are mainly strictly respected. Direct violence and authoritarian enforcement of decisions are rare and marginal; domination is mostly expressed by a symbolic and insidious violence. It appears then that it is more complicated to conceive and to voice a criticism of this domination system. Subordination results from this gentle expression of domination.

These incentive measures that aim to orientate behaviors are numerous and diverse. They express the implicit potency of a company on workers' privacy. They are implemented in order to serve a productive rationality. Even though all the workers are subjected to these rules and regulations, they can be voiced individually from the superior to the worker and his family. Directors and managers, when visiting the *pondok*, not only give a public talk, but also take time to stop by each house and exchange words in small groups. This configuration of power relations is similar to what Michel Foucault defines as a "pastoral concept of power" (Foucault, 2004): he considers pastoral power as the art of governing people individually and collectively together at the same time. This art becomes a policy if deliberate and calculated. This definition helps understanding to what extent control in plantation creates individuality and a sense of community, treating everybody alike but with a specific relationship for everyone. Workers feel acquaintance as individuals but they do not feel lonesome. Included in a group of fellow beings, they individually work and face their future, trying to do their best to increase their well-being.

## **2. Punishments and rewards**

Lastly, the analysis of punishments and rewards enhances the idea that control measures are more incentive than coercive, and aim to orientate and valorize behaviors so as to maximize work performance. Punishments are not very severe and barely implemented whereas individual rewards aim to reinforce workers' bond toward the company. Notably the specific case of remuneration demonstrates how dependence is created insidiously.

Punishments remind the ones of school time: during an interview on this matter, the manager of a processing plant explained how the punishment system is gradual. It starts with an oral admonition. If this proves ineffective, it is then followed by a warning letter (*surat perintah*) and then by one to three reprimand letters (*surat teguran*) if one's behavior (worker or family member) is still not appropriate. After three reprimand letters, a worker can be dismissed. However this particular manager pointed out that he never gave more than warning letters, and that he usually only employs oral admonition. This is not only due to the fact that workers and families are wise, but also that he does not want to stigmatize any of "his kids". Some of the sources of admonition or warning letters are leaving the *pondok's* garden unclean, growing vegetables on the edge of the road, riding a motorcycle too fast around the mill, charging a mobile phone on the electric panels of the mill, not wearing security clothes.

Oral admonition and warning letters do not have major consequences for workers. They have no effect on wage advancement and barely ever lead to lay-off. The previous manager's comments are globally shared by the leadership of the companies: facing a problem with an individual, managers and directors would rather look for a compliant compromise in order not to provoke resentment and critic. If this strategy is inefficient, they will use a much more radical way and force the worker to quit, by sending him to work in very hard conditions and remote areas for instance.

Punishment appears to be a trifling system required in order to provide legitimacy to the rules and regulations but it is barely implemented so that control does not seem so coercive. This is also reinforced by the rewarding measures that aim to boost workers' performances and to strengthen the link between them and the company they work for. Some are based on the will to valorize long term commitment in a company. This is for instance the case of seniority bonus: after twenty-five years and then thirty years of work in a plantation, a worker receives an extra month's salary and a present such as a clock with the company's logo. Some other rewards are linked with the moralistic values of work and salvation. In one of the visited companies, the leadership selects four employees (workers or foremen) every year with the help of the imam and on the basis of their work performances and their engagement in religious life, in order to finance their pilgrimage to Mecca.

This pattern of performance promotion in order to create attachment and subordination is also revealed by the structure of remuneration: permanent workers receive a minimal wage that is completed by performance premium. They have a daily target of palm bunches to harvest and whenever they reach it, they receive a bonus per extra-bunch or extra-kilo harvested. Michel Lallement analyses the historical evolution of wages in Europe and explains how the transition from piecework wage to performance premium (that also took place historically in Indonesian plantations) recomposes work relations:

« With performance premium, workers' autonomy withers and becomes institutionalized subordination<sup>2</sup> » (Lallement, 2007: 152).

Indeed, for workers this form of incentive pay can be associated with the idea that everyone carries individually the means of his economic success, whereas the condition of success are imposed by the leadership who defines targets and premium. In plantations the same process occurs: workers may imagine and plan their economic success as a consequence of their individual will, but strong and insidious mechanisms actually define the limits of their vision of future.

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<sup>2</sup> « Avec le salaire au rendement, l'autonomie ouvrière s'étiolé et la subordination s'institutionnalise. »

## **Conclusion**

The organization of plantation companies is not only based on a strict hierarchical functioning during the working hours but also regards the conception and implementation of rules and regulations of private life. This communication shows how workers' private lives are strictly defined by the hierarchy, and how the means and the manners used in order to do so are gentle and insidious and foster subordination and absence of criticism. Control policies are based on a productivity pattern and private life is included in this pattern. The paternalistic feature of these control policies lead to the acceptance of these dominated living conditions. Authority is intense in the sense that workers obey a system entirely defined by others, but an authoritarian tone is not appropriate: subordination stems from an ethos of family kindness and gentleness. Punishments are seldom applied, few coercive measures are at work, and talks are moralistic and not peremptory. The value of work is central in this productivity pattern, in correlation with religious assiduity and salvation. May they have lucrative secondary activities or not (Barral, 2012) workers accept this tight surrounding and entrust its definition by hierarchical superiors. The success of the plantation model in Indonesia is noteworthy: the land covered by palm tree plantations has expanded from 400 000 hectares to more than four million hectares over the last forty years. The labor domination system implemented is one of the explanatory factors of this success. The present analysis of labor subordination questions the possible development of workers' collective action such as labor unions and the evolution of labor laws related to the economic issues they can face. More generally speaking, it questions the implementation of a democratic system in capitalist firms where workers are intensively dominated.

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