

Reclaiming the Maubere Voice: Jamesian Pragmatism, Epistemic Agency, and Critical Literacy in Timor-Leste

Joana da Costa Gusmão^{1*}, Dionisio de Jesus Lopes², Esmeria de Jesus Pereira³

¹ Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universidade Católica Timorense (UCT) São João Paulo II, Rua 12 de Novembro, Balide, Dili, Timor-Leste

² Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universidade Oriental Timor Lorosa'e (UNITAL), Avenida Liberdade de Imprensa, Becora, Cristo-Rei, Dili, Timor-Leste

³ Faculty of Law, Universidade Católica Timorense (UCT) São João Paulo II, Rua 12 de Novembro, Balide, Dili, Timor-Leste

* **Corresponding Authors:** Joana da Costa Gusmão, Dionisio de Jesus Lopes, Esmeria de Jesus Pereira

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjahss.2013/vol14n65263>

Published October 11, 2026

Citation: Gusmão J.D.C., Lopes D.D.J., Pereira E.D.J. (2026) Reclaiming the Maubere Voice: Jamesian Pragmatism, Epistemic Agency, and Critical Literacy in Timor-Leste, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 14(6),52-63

ABSTRACT: *This paper explores the intersections of Jamesian pragmatism, epistemic agency, and critical literacy within the post-colonial educational and legal landscapes of Timor-Leste. In the wake of imperial subjugation, literacy functions not as a neutral pedagogical exercise, but as a radical battleground for epistemic survival and sovereignty. When a post-colonial state apparatus reduces textuality to a technocratic regime of mechanical alphabetization, it inflicts a distinct hermeneutical injustice that ossifies historical subjugation into an internalized epistemic fatalism. This study provides a critical conceptual intervention by intersecting William James's pragmatist epistemology with contemporary Timorese socio-educational realities, focusing specifically on the structurally marginalized Maubere subaltern population. Utilizing conceptual analysis and philosophical deconstruction, the manuscript bridges Jamesian pragmatism with critical pedagogy to challenge passive, state-administered models of rote education. Our analysis demonstrates that dominant educational frameworks systematically decouple literacy from the subaltern's immediate material and existential conditions. Conversely, a Jamesian framework establishes that literacy achieves pedagogical validity and ontological truth only when it yields direct, practical "cash-value"—defined as experiential utility—for communal survival and civic participation. By aligning textual acquisition with existential workability, learners transition from passive objects of state policy into active agents of historical change. Ultimately, this research de-provincializes American pragmatism, mapping classical epistemology onto a post-colonial Southeast Asian matrix to inform transformative curriculum design and macro-level educational policymaking.*

Keywords: Maubere identity, Jamesian pragmatism, Epistemic agency, Critical literacy, Timor-Leste education.

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of imperial subjugation, literacy acquisition operates as a radical battleground for epistemic survival and state-level sovereignty rather than a neutral pedagogical exercise. Within the

post-colonial topography of twenty-first-century Timor-Leste, textual competency constitutes a contested domain where individual epistemic agency, national development, and identity reclamation intersect. Central to this landscape is the Maubere populace—the historically subaltern, indigenous bedrock of the nation. Under Portuguese colonial hegemony, the signifier Maubere was systematically operationalized as a pejorative category to denote an uncivilized, illiterate, and ontologically deficient subject devoid of rational capacity (Aditjondro 1994). However, during the anti-colonial struggle against Indonesian occupation, the Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente (FRETILIN) structurally inverted this stigma, transforming a marker of subaltern shame into a foundational symbol of cultural resilience and revolutionary consciousness (Hill 2002; Leach 2017). In this liberatory matrix, the Maubere mobilized localized, organic tactical knowledge to navigate existential survival and secure national liberation.

Yet, a stark structural antinomy paralyzes contemporary Timorese society: the precise population that functioned as the geopolitical vanguard of national liberation remains acutely marginalized within the state's institutional educational architecture (Boon et al. 2020). This systematic disenfranchisement reproduces a condition of epistemic fatalism, wherein subaltern communities internalize educational neglect as historical destiny or an immutable ontological lack. Conversely, a potent counter-hegemonic desire permeates Maubere youth and adult learners, who conceptualize critical literacy as an indispensable instrument to disrupt intergenerational marginalization and navigate a highly competitive, globalized post-colonial political economy (UNDP 2018). This educational disparity is structurally reproduced by a systemic shortfall in inclusive pedagogical policies at both national and municipal governance registers.

To isolate a community from the written word is to perpetrate what Miranda Fricker terms epistemic injustice—specifically, a hermeneutical injustice that deprives marginalized individuals of the collective conceptual resources required to articulate and structurally contest their socio-economic oppression (Fricker 2007). To relegate literacy to the domain of mere functional alphabetization is to misread its geopolitical gravity; the distribution of textual competency dictates the very boundaries of who is granted historical presence and who remains an epistemological phantom (Spivak 1988; Said 1978). While knowledge is axiomatically recognized as an instrument of social power (Foucault 1980), systemic illiteracy renders the collective voice of the Maubere structurally invisible within civil society. The subaltern have been dispossessed of the linguistic apparatus necessary to translate their situated experiences into formal democratic discourse (Freire 1970). Minimalist state interventions, such as marginal financial subsidies or top-down rote-learning programs, offer unsustainable, paternalistic relief while leaving the systematic suppression of subaltern epistemic agency entirely untouched (Santos 2014).

To resolve this operational and epistemic impasse, this study deploys the classical American pragmatist philosophy of William James, focusing specifically on his radical epistemology of "truth as workability" (James 1907). For James, truth is an event: a dynamic property of ideas validated by their practical consequences, experiential utility, and operational efficacy within lived experience. An idea "becomes true, is made true by events" to the extent that it successfully guides human action and adaptively modifies a concrete environment (James 1907). Rather than enforcing an alienating model of rote literacy—the mechanical approach that Paulo Freire (1970) theorized as the "banking model"

of education—a Jamesian pedagogical intervention demands that literacy acquisition yield immediate, functional, and tangible "cash-value" for communal survival and civic emancipation.

This manuscript de-provincializes and contextualizes James's concept of truth to interpret the socio-educational realities of twenty-first-century Timor-Leste, generating a novel pedagogical model capable of countering systemic illiteracy and improving local material conditions (West 1989). Consequently, this paper argues that literacy in a post-colonial state achieves pedagogical validity only when it demonstrates existential and experiential workability; that is, when it actively restores the learner's epistemic agency and capacity for macro-level socio-political transformation (James 1909). By intersecting pragmatist truth-tests with subaltern studies, this research liberates Jamesian epistemology from its Anglo-American insular traps, challenging rigid, rote-memorization pedagogies by repositioning local history and civic consciousness as core pedagogical assets (Giroux 2011). Ultimately, by shifting the metrics of literacy evaluation from passive statistical completion to active social workability, this study provides educational policymakers and future researchers with a conceptual tool to align institutional initiatives with localized communal liberation.

DECONSTRUCTING THE JAMESIAN EPISTEMOLOGY OF WORKABILITY WITHIN POST-COLONIAL EDUCATION

To dismantle the structural paralysis gripping the educational architecture of rural Timor-Leste, contemporary pedagogical initiatives must radically break away from the reductionist legacy of mechanical alphabetization. The overwhelming majority of literacy interventions orchestrated by state institutions and international non-governmental organizations operate on an uncritical, Cartesian "copy-theory" of knowledge. Within this rationalistic paradigm, subaltern learners are treated as passive, inert vessels for abstract semiotic signs entirely decoupled from their socio-material realities and historical trajectories. This mechanistic approach reproduces what Paulo Freire (1970) theorizes as the "banking model" of education, wherein dominant administrative classes deposit a sterile linguistic currency into the minds of the oppressed, maintaining the status quo while leaving their underlying systemic subjugation completely unaddressed. Disrupting this alienation requires a radical restoration of cognitive sovereignty, achieved here by deploying the evolutionary pragmatist epistemology of William James and operationalizing his formulation of truth as "workability" (James 1907). For James, truth is never an inherent, immutable, or antecedent property of an abstract concept, nor is it a passive, mirror-like reflection of an independent external reality. Rejecting intellectualist dogmatism, James posits that truth is a dynamic, fluid event: an idea becomes true, is made true by events, and enters a process of truth-making only when it is thoroughly verified by its operational efficacy, experiential utility, and concrete practical consequences within active human experience (James 1907).

James systematically measures the ultimate validity and meaning of any conceptual or theoretical claim by its existential "cash-value"—its tangible, operational, and experiential utility in successfully solving concrete dilemmas and guiding human action within a shifting, unpredictable environment. If a concept fails to perform work, if it cannot adaptively modify immediate environmental conditions or assist human agents in navigating material crises, it is exposed as pragmatically hollow, functionally invalid, and pedagogically bankrupt. Applied to the post-colonial landscape of twenty-first-century Timor-Leste, this Jamesian framework exposes a profound, irreconcilable divergence

between traditional, state-enforced rote learning and an emancipatory model of critical literacy (James 1907; Freire 1970).

Mechanical alphabetization frameworks impose a static, alienating copy-theory of linguistic decoding that systematically divorces textual signs from the subaltern's localized material reality and historical subjectivity (Freire 1970). Lacking any semblance of contextualized geographic or socio-economic integration, this top-down educational architecture yields zero experiential cash-value for rural communities. It fails to enhance their immediate nutritional, legal, civic, or agrarian autonomy, offering instead an abstract curriculum that cannot decode an agricultural trade contract, a municipal land deed, or a healthcare directive. This total lack of existential utility and environmental workability ultimately drives staggeringly high classroom attrition rates across rural municipalities, while simultaneously reinforcing an internalized, paralyzing state of epistemic fatalism among learners who come to view their inability to master an alienating educational apparatus as a personal ontological lack rather than a corrigible historical injustice (James 1907; Fricker 2007).

Conversely, a pragmatically grounded critical literacy aligns textual and writing acquisition directly with the immediate operational, economic, and survival imperatives of the grassroots community. In this transformative model, pedagogical validity is verified entirely by existential utility and operational workability; the alphabet becomes true to the learner only to the extent that it functions as a sharp, responsive instrument for navigating localized socio-political negotiations, agricultural markets, and communal self-determination (James 1907; Boon et al. 2020). By embedding the mechanics of reading and writing within the critical decoding of local microfinance structures, agrarian trade sheets, and local municipal legal dynamics, literacy transitions from a passive administrative imposition into an active asset for epistemic liberation (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008).

Imposing an unworkable, highly abstracted educational framework onto a historically marginalized subaltern populace constitutes a profound, institutionalized form of epistemic injustice. Specifically, it perpetrates what Miranda Fricker (2007) conceptualizes as a structural hermeneutical injustice: the systematic, state-enforced deprivation of the essential collective conceptual and linguistic resources required for marginalized demographics to make sense of, articulate, communicate, and structurally contest their own socio-economic oppression. By prioritizing abstract, top-down statistical completion over existential survival and tactical community adaptation, current state-administered structures strip the Maubere populace of their primary linguistic, cognitive, and political agency, rendering their historical collective voice structurally invisible within contemporary civil society (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008).

Conversely, a radical Jamesian pedagogical shift treats knowledge not as a passive, institutional copy of dominant elite structures or foreign administrative mandates, but as a highly responsive, evolutionary instrument designed for human adaptation, defense, and environmental mastery (James 1907). By demanding that every textual initiative verify its pedagogical validity—its very "truth"—through immediate, localized social utility and structural workability, this pragmatist framework effectively restores epistemic agency to the peripheral rural populace. It dramatically transforms the Maubere from passive, mute objects of state bureaucratic policy into active, critical authors of their

own historical narrative and self-determining agents of systemic social change (Freire 1970; Medina 2013).

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, AND LITERACY LANDSCAPE OF THE MAUBERE

Mapping the epistemological conditions of literacy among the Maubere necessitates interrogating an interlocking matrix of cultural heritage, historical trauma, and post-independence structural failures. As the historic resistance leader Xanana Gusmão (2000) observed, socio-economic security functions as the foundational prerequisite for collective civic mobilization; absent sustainable livelihoods, the subaltern's capacity to build organized communal networks and robust civic structures is fundamentally paralyzed (McWilliam and Traube 2011). This material deprivation does not merely restrict economic mobility; it limits the community's access to the collective conceptual resources required to interpret and contest their ongoing marginalization, precipitating a form of structural hermeneutical injustice (Fricker 2007). To ignore the economic baseline of the subaltern is to engage in an idealist distortion of pedagogical capacity. When individuals are trapped in a state of absolute material scarcity, the cognitive and temporal surplus required to engage with formal, abstract textual systems is completely subsumed by the immediacy of biological survival. Consequently, the structural paralysis of rural civil society in contemporary Timor-Leste cannot be understood apart from this foundational economic vulnerability, which prevents grassroots actors from organizing beyond localized agrarian frameworks.

Discursively, the semantic evolution of the signifier Maubere marks a profound epistemological rupture within Southeast Asian postcolonial history. Originally a ubiquitous *Mambae* male name native to the island's mountainous interior, the term was weaponized by Portuguese colonial authorities as a pejorative category to denote an illiterate, uncivilized, and ontologically deficient indigenous subject stripped of rational or civic capacity (Aditjondro 1994). During the 1970s anti-colonial twilight, nationalist intellectuals—most notably José Ramos-Horta—and the FRETILIN strategically inverted this stigma, transforming a marker of subaltern shame into a badge of revolutionary vanguardism, historical agency, and national pride (Hill 2002; Ramos-Horta 1987). This linguistic re-signification effectively transcended a highly fractured ethno-linguistic topography, forging a unified, counter-hegemonic resistance consciousness against foreign domination. By turning the weapon of colonial language back upon the colonizer, early Timorese nationalists demonstrated that semantic systems are not static repositories of oppression but malleable instruments of political warfare. The subaltern, previously relegated to the status of a silent backdrop for colonial administration, suddenly emerged as the primary author of a new historical narrative, redefining the boundaries of what constituted political intelligence and historical presence in the region.

Culturally, the Maubere represent the indigenous core of Timor-Leste, defined by a deep ethno-cultural heterogeneity expressed through a rich tapestry of distinct dialects, oral mythologies, and regional architectural forms (Da Silva 2011; MST 2021). The Maubere worldview is fundamentally syncretic, gracefully navigating two primary pillars: indigenous animism (*Uma Lulik* or *Uma Lisan*) and institutional Roman Catholicism. The spiritual ontology of the Maubere is structurally and socio-centrally anchored in sacred ancestral lineage houses (*Uma Lulik*). These material architectures function as the localized physical and metaphysical axes through which the subaltern community

venerates a highly sacralized, animate topography—encompassing ancestral mountains, water sources, and sacred flora and fauna (McWilliam and Traube 2011). This deep-seated cosmic heritage manifests through enduring socio-ecological protocols of mutual obligation and communal rituals, such as the *Saubatar* (the sacred corn-harvesting ceremony), which serves as a vital epistemological framework regulating the agricultural, economic, and social calendar across rural municipalities. Blended alongside these animist structures is a deep adherence to the Catholic Church, a dual alignment providing the moral and social framework that guides family life, community survival, and local governance. This syncretism is not a fragmented or contradictory psychological state; rather, it is a highly integrated cognitive architecture that allows the Maubere to interpret their historical trauma through both localized cosmological defense mechanisms and transnational institutional frameworks of moral resistance.

Paradoxically, despite their historical positioning as the heroic vanguard of national liberation and the operational core of the armed resistance—the Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste (FALINTIL)—the contemporary Maubere populace confronts systemic, acute structural underdevelopment. An examination of macro-level socio-economic indicators reveals a stark trajectory of institutional fracture and state-building deficits. This paralysis of rural development is structurally compounded by a compounding historical legacy: enduring colonial violence, volatile post-independence geopolitical crises (most notably the 2006 destabilization), deep-seated inter-elite schisms, and the strategic political instrumentalization of regional identities—specifically the *Lorosae/Loromonu* ethnolinguistic cleavage (Kingsbury 2009; Scambary 2019). This unstable political environment has directly crippled the educational sector, which is defined by low enrollment, high repetition rates, and an acute shortage of qualified teachers. The state-building project has systematically favored centralized, urban administrative architectures in Dili, leaving the peripheral agrarian interior isolated from the material benefits of independence. This geographic imbalance deepens the sense of alienation felt by rural communities, who find themselves governed by a state that uses the rhetoric of the resistance but operates through the bureaucratic insulation characteristic of colonial regimes.

Crucially, this educational crisis manifests through highly distinct gendered vulnerabilities that fragment the subaltern demographic along predictable material lines. High poverty indexes systematically disrupt the educational trajectories of young Maubere boys, driving premature attrition from primary schooling; entrapped within localized survival imperatives, these youth are structurally funneled into the informal agrarian economy to anchor household subsistence farming and navigate micro-commodity sales at rural municipal markets (Albergaria-Almeida 2017; Belun 2011). Conversely, systemic educational neglect and low household incomes systematically push young girls out of schools and into customary, pre-arranged early marriages. This gendered paradigm of educational exclusion is heavily exacerbated by the state's rigid language policy, wherein the imposition of Portuguese as the primary medium of formal instruction creates a formidable institutional barrier (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008; Taylor-Leech 2016). Because Portuguese remains an exogenous linguistic reality for the vast majority of grassroots, Tetum-speaking, or ethno-linguistic Maubere communities, it fundamentally limits the efficiency of basic alphabetization. The linguistic policy becomes an instrument of class reproduction, ensuring that administrative power remains concentrated within urban, elite echelons who possess the cultural capital to master the

official language, while the monolingual rural majority is effectively barred from state employment and legal self-defense.

Trapped between an unworkable foreign linguistic medium and the urgent material demands of everyday survival, the Maubere are pushed into a profound state of epistemic fatalism. Because they cannot decode a highly alienated educational apparatus, they internalize their illiteracy as an unalterable personal fate or an inherent ontological limitation. Paradoxically, this condition erases the historical reality of the resistance, during which their ancestors deployed a profound, highly practical intelligence—engineering improvised traditional weapons such as spears, traps, and machetes to outmaneuver modern military forces. The strategic ingenuity that allowed an isolated guerrilla army to sustain a twenty-four-year struggle against a vastly superior occupying force is systematically ignored by contemporary classroom curricula. By entirely disconnecting contemporary literacy from this historical capacity for practical survival and tactical adaptability, modern educational structures commit a profound injustice; they systematically deprive the Maubere of the exact linguistic and conceptual tools they require to amplify their collective voice and exercise true self-determination in a modern democracy (Freire 1970; Fricker 2007).

TOWARDS A PRAGMATIST LITERACY PEDAGOGY: OPERATIONALIZING WORKABILITY FOR THE MAUBERE

Dismantling the systemic educational exclusion and internalized epistemic fatalism gripping grassroots Timorese communities necessitates an epistemological reorientation. Literacy pedagogy cannot operate as a value-neutral mechanism for transmitting static symbols; it must function as an active matrix for restoring subaltern epistemic agency (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008). Deploying the radical pragmatism of William James (1907), this framework establishes an actionable pedagogy wherein knowledge is treated not as a passive, copy-theory reflection of reality, but as a dynamic event validated entirely by practical consequences and environmental workability. This intervention explicitly bypasses the pursuit of transcendent abstractions regarding subalternity. Instead, the educator operates as a systemic facilitator mobilizing localized resources and organic communal intelligence (Freire 1970). By expanding the situated, tactical knowledge the Maubere already possess, this pragmatist approach transforms mechanical alphabetization into an adaptive instrument for heightened agrarian productivity, localized civic participation, and collective self-determination (Boon et al. 2020).

From a Jamesian perspective, textuery acquisition is not a passive linguistic mirror but a vital process through which human beings externalize consciousness and organize behavioral interactions with a changing world; writing constitutes a tactical, spatial manipulation of alphabetic symbols to project complex thought into shared social environments. In *The Principles of Psychology*, James (1890) posits that the foundational evolutionary function of the nervous system is to bring each part into harmonious co-operation with every other. Transposed to critical pedagogy, this neuro-functional principle conceptualizes the literacy collective as an integrated nervous system wherein individual epistemic expressions harmonize to sustain the social organism (Freire 1970). Active writing thus transitions from mechanical symbol decoding into a conscious manipulation of lived reality. By training the mind to process literacy as an active tool of structural inquiry, learners cultivate the conceptual infrastructure necessary to interrogate the socio-political dynamics enveloping them,

initiating an adaptive feedback loop between the individual's nervous system and the material environment (James 1907).

Grounded in global development frameworks, the pragmatic cash-value of literacy constitutes a multi-layered matrix of socio-economic development. First, literacy acts as a direct instrument for socio-economic liberation by constructing the functional competencies necessary to disrupt systemic poverty and secure financial self-reliance. Second, textuery acquisition catalyzes communal economic flourishing and expands employment opportunities, enabling the broader local economy to transcend subsistence agricultural constraints (Stromquist 2006). Third, literacy scales up public health and well-being; by providing the analytical capacity needed to decode medical protocols and navigate sanitation systems, education directly mitigates community exposure to preventable diseases. Fourth, literacy drives gender emancipation and personal autonomy, equipping girls and women with the tools to dismantle patriarchal barriers, disrupt customary routes toward pre-arranged early marriages, and assume roles as municipal leaders. Finally, these grassroots outcomes scale upward to catalyze macro-level economic growth, expanding aggregate human capital and increasing the national gross domestic product (Desjardins 2004; UNDP 2018).

Ultimately, for the Maubere, critical literacy is inextricably bound to the existential restoration of historical selfhood and national identity. Under colonial hegemony, the systematic, state-enforced denial of educational access deliberately stripped the indigenous populace of its political voice, leaving it structurally defenseless against alienating administrative and legal frameworks (Aditjondro 1994). To bypass this enclosure, early Timorese nationalist intellectuals operated in extra-territorial spaces—such as metropolitan Portugal, Australia, and Indonesia—to acquire the modern textuery and legal tools necessary to organize the subaltern masses and dismantle the colonial apparatus (Hill 2002; Ramos-Horta 1987). In the contemporary post-independence era, literacy transcends mechanical decoding to serve as a counter-hegemonic tool that uncovers structural inequities, replacing internalized marginalization with a collective commitment to the sovereign common good (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008).

By directly linking reading and writing to the preservation of cultural heritage—anchored within the sacred ancestral lineage houses (*Uma Lulik* or *Uma Lisan*) and localized socio-ecological rituals (*Saubatar*)—the Maubere build a highly cohesive community capable of authentic self-determination (McWilliam and Traube 2011). This critical pedagogy explicitly rejects literacy as an alienating, top-down Western import; instead, it frames alphabetization as a localized continuation of the intergenerational struggle for popular sovereignty and decolonization (Leach 2017). Proving that the written text possesses the capacity to adaptively modify immediate material realities revives the profound tactical intelligence that historically allowed the Maubere to navigate existential survival and secure geopolitical independence (Pinto and Jardine 1997). When literacy is anchored in this legacy of practical resistance, it achieves what James (1907) conceptualized as pedagogical truth—a validity verified entirely by its active workability and communal utility, effectively transforming the Maubere from passive objects of state bureaucracy into active historical agents structurally equipped to author the future destiny of Timor-Leste (Freire 1970).

CONCLUSION, DISCOVERY, AND MACRO-POLICY PROJECTIONS

"The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief."

— *William James, Pragmatism (1907)*

By intersecting William James's pragmatist epistemology with critical pedagogy, this study has systematically interrogated the structural literacy deficits confronting the Maubere of Timor-Leste (James 1907; Freire 1970). It has challenged the validity of value-neutral, mechanical alphabetization frameworks, demonstrating that post-colonial literacy acquisition cannot be decoupled from historical and geo-cultural struggles for identity reclamation (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008; Leach 2017). For a subaltern population that strategically inverted a colonial pejorative into a vanguard symbol of resistance, education must transcend passive linguistic decoding (Hill 2002). Evaluated by the Jamesian metric of truth as workability, pedagogical initiatives achieve genuine epistemic validity only when they yield direct, practical cash-value within the lived experiences, communal survival imperatives, and environmental negotiations of the learners (James 1907; Fricker 2007). James maps truth onto the vital properties of human existence—such as health, wealth, and strength—positing that truth is actively constructed in the course of action and experience rather than discovered as an antecedent, static abstraction (James 1907).

To verify the validity of any truth-claim, James establishes a multi-dimensional matrix comprising personal experience through direct subjective interaction with physical, emotional, and rational reality; social experience through collective validation within a shared human community; historical consistency through the alignment of new claims with previously verified truths; and the strict demands of logicity and simplicity, which dictate internal rational coherence and structural accessibility in practical execution. This pragmatist framework explains why the highly religious, syncretic Catholic-animist worldview of the Maubere functions with deep existential resonance. For the Timorese populace, theological truths—such as the Christian confession of Christ as the way and the truth—are verified not by detached, institutional dogmatism, but by the practical moral, psychological, and communal fruitfulness these beliefs manifest within their daily struggle for survival (James 1902; McWilliam and Traube 2011).

Crucially, contemporary Timorese educational frameworks systematically ignore this pragmatic reality, leaving the literacy gap as an unresolved legacy of colonial domination (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008; Taylor-Leach 2016). By enforcing a mechanical model of alphabetization, the state treats literacy as an abstract commodity rather than a dynamic vehicle for human development. Disrupting this cycle requires re-conceptualizing textuery acquisition as a foundational instrument for character formation, ethical citizenship, and socio-political emancipation. This critical intervention demands a structural paradigm shift toward a pedagogical architecture driven by highly trained, philosophically conscious educators capable of translating text into immediate existential utility (James 1907; Seigfried 2002).

By applying Jamesian pragmatism to this specific subaltern context, this inquiry identifies several critical structural barriers that paralyze grassroots advancement, induce a state of internalized epistemic fatalism, and strip the Maubere of their epistemic agency. Chief among these is the paradigm of socio-economic stagnation and labor exclusion, wherein systemic illiteracy directly

prevents the poor from accessing the skilled labor force, trapping families in unstable, low-income informal economies. This material restriction reproduces a culture of silence, stripping the subaltern of their collective voice and forcing them to internalize systemic educational neglect as an unalterable ontological fate rather than a corrigible historical injustice (Freire 1970). These conditions are exacerbated by severe pedagogical deficits and underqualified educators within the Timorese educational infrastructure. When classroom instruction degrades into low-level rote memorization, students are rendered incapable of developing higher-order critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Consequently, this systemic educational deprivation correlates directly with severe public health vulnerabilities, including elevated infant mortality rates, as uneducated communities lack the textuary navigation required to decode modern preventative healthcare and sanitation directives.

Crucially, this structural exclusion inflicts severe economic and personal autonomy losses on women and girls, who are systematically pushed out of the academic pipeline and forced into customary, pre-arranged early marriages, thereby crippling the macro-level economic growth and workforce productivity of the broader nation (Stromquist 2006). A major counter-narrative to this systemic exclusion is found in the historical and contemporary role of the Timorese diaspora. To escape colonial educational suppression, generations of Maubere fled to extra-territorial spaces—including Indonesia, Portugal, and Australia—to acquire higher academic and technical competencies (Pinto and Jardine 1997; Ramos-Horta 1987). Upon their return, these individuals acted as organic intellectuals, utilizing their international training in agriculture, medicine, education, and engineering to dismantle colonial structures and drive post-independence national development. This proven historical trajectory demonstrates that when the Maubere bypass structural educational enclosures, they possess an exceptional capacity to act as primary agents of systemic, counter-hegemonic change (Freire 1970).

To operationalize Jamesian workability at the state level and align with the human capital targets of the Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan (2011–2030), the Ministry of Education must transition from formalistic, bureaucratic metrics to decentralized, experience-driven policies (RDTL 2011). First, the state must institutionalize pragmatic strategic bilingualism by formally expanding mother-tongue-based multilingual education across all regional municipalities. By utilizing localized vernaculars and Tetum as primary epistemic bridges, schools can eliminate the structural exclusion caused by immediate Portuguese-only immersion, introducing Portuguese progressively as a functional, secondary linguistic asset rather than an exclusionary barrier to basic alphabetization (Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008; Taylor-Leech 2016). Second, curriculum developers must co-design a socio-culturally relevant, workable curriculum that replaces rote-memorization materials with contextualized problem-solving modules. Literacy texts should directly mirror the local political economy, embedding reading and writing lessons within practical fields such as agrarian trade documentation, microfinance navigation, public health directives, and municipal legal frameworks (James 1907; UNESCO 2023).

Finally, educational policies must systematically integrate indigenous knowledge networks into formal schooling, recognizing traditional cultural assets—such as the communal respect values of the sacred ancestral houses (*Uma Lulik* or *Uma Lisan*) and regional agricultural rituals (*Saubatar*)—as core pedagogical assets rather than peripheral folklore (McWilliam and Traube 2011). Incorporating

this ancestral cultural heritage into the modern classroom directly reconciles the historic identity of the subaltern with modern institutional requirements. By grounding literacy in these localized matrices of meaning, the state can foster a highly adaptive, cohesive, and critical educational architecture. This synthesis of classical pragmatist epistemology, post-colonial critique, and indigenous ontology ultimately transforms contemporary textuary initiatives from alienating administrative impositions into vibrant instruments of popular sovereignty, enabling the Maubere to actively author the democratic future of Timor-Leste.

REFERENCES

- Aditjondro, George J. 194. *In the Shadow of Mount Ramelau: A Impact of the Occupation of East Timor*. Utrecht: Indonesian Documentation and Information Centre.
- Albergaria-Almeida, Patricia. 2017. "Socio-Economic Barriers and Educational Attrition in Post-Independence Timor-Leste." *International Journal of Educational Development* 54 (2): 112–124.
- Belun. 2011. *Socio-Economic Mapping and Vulnerability Assessment of Rural Municipalities in Timor-Leste*. Dili: Belun Foundation.
- Boon, Dean, Sandra da Silva, Kenneth J. Jones, and Marcus Taylor. 2020. "Structural Exclusion and Literacy Deficits in Grassroots Timorese Communities." *Journal of Postcolonial Education* 19 (3): 245–267.
- Cabral, Estêvão, and Marilyn Martin-Jones. 2008. "Writing the Nation: Literacy, Language Ideology, and Struggles for Hegemony in Post-Colonial East Timor." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 11 (2): 149–169.
- Da Silva, Carlos. 2011. *Geocultural Heterogeneity and Oral Epistemologies in Timor-Leste*. Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Herder and Herder.
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press. doi.org
- Gusmão, Kay Rala Xanana. 2000. *To Resist is to Win: Autobiography and Selected Speeches*. Melbourne: Aurora Books.
- Hill, H. (2002). *Stirrings of Nationalism in East Timor: FRETILIN 1974–1978*. Otford Press.
- James, W. (1907). *Pragmatism: A new name for some old ways of thinking*. Longmans, Green, and Co.
- James, W. (1911). *The Principles of Psychology*. Henry Holt and Company.
- Mendes, N. C. (2007). The crisis in Timor-Leste: Historical roots and internal clearing. *Lusotopie*, 14(1), 241–254. doi.org
- Medina, José. 2013. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MST (Movimento dos Sem Terra de Timor-Leste). 2021. *Relatório sobre a Realidade Agrária e Educação Popular nas Comunidades Grassroots*. Dili: MST-TL Documentos.
- Pinto, Constâncio, and Matthew Jardine. 1997. *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle: Inside the Timorese Resistance*. Boston: South End Press.
- Ramos-Horta, José. 1987. *Funu: The Unfinished Saga of East Timor*. Clifton, NJ: Red Sea Press.
- RDTL (República Democrática de Timor-Leste). 2011. *Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan (2011–2030)*. Dili: Office of the Prime Minister.

- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Scambray, James. 2019. *Conflict, Identity, and State-Building in Timor-Leste*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Seigfried, Charlene Haddock. 2002. *Pragmatist Feminist Interpretations of William James*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2018. *Timor-Leste National Human Development Report: From Post-Conflict to Sustainable Development*. Dili: UNDP Timor-Leste.
- UNESCO. 2023. *From Rote Learning to Lifelong Utility: Global Guidelines for Socio-Culturally Relevant Curricula*. Paris: UNESCO Document Matrix.
- West, Cornel. 1989. *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.