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# "Plantation"

Chao, Sophie

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Patricius, an Indigenous Marind elder, is teaching me how to listen to plantations. We are standing in a 50,000-hectare oil palm concession in the Indonesian-controlled region of West Papua. Before oil palm, this land was home to many of Patricius's kin—cassowaries, possums, birds of paradise, sago palms. Now, an uncanny silence presides in the plantation, interrupted occasionally by crashing bulldozers, roaring chainsaws, and effluents spewing from the mill. There are no animals to be heard or movements detected. Rows of identical, equidistant oil palms extend into the horizon. Every so often, a gentle breeze animates the canopy. A senescing frond creaks. An invisible cicada stridulates in the overstory. Otherwise, only silence and singularity. My gaze follows Patricius's arm as it unfurls slowly, capturing within its span the regimented landscape before us. "Welcome to the plantation," my companion declares, "welcome to the forests of the future." (From the article)

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