Building states without building nations:
Understanding urban citizenship in Dili, Timor Leste

Alix Valenti[1]

Development Planning Unit, University College London, Gower St, London WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom[1]

Abstract: State and nation building, although often used interchangeably in international relations policy and literature, are in fact two distinct, although closely intertwined, processes: the (re)construction of a state cannot be reduced to a technical exercise, that is, state building; rather, it needs to focus just as significantly on the (re)construction of the country's social fabric in order to develop the sense of citizenship upon which its sovereignty and legitimacy rest, that is, nation building. This research note introduces urban spaces as interesting contexts to explore the relationship between state and nation building, arguing that their diversity is both a challenge and an opportunity for the state to create a sense of citizenship amongst its population. The case of Dili, the capital of Timor Leste, where a violent past and rapid urbanisation have combined to shape extremely diverse social, political and economic urban spaces, is used here to explore how the population of three case study areas perceives the impact of state policies and to question how these perceptions influence the scales at which people build their identity as well as how these scales affect the construction of local, urban or national citizenship in Timor Leste.

Timor Leste has no pre-colonial state history. Before the arrival of the Portuguese and, subsequently, the Indonesian military, the territory on which Timor Leste now stands was divided into several kingdoms with their own leaders, dialects and customs, and whilst the long struggle against external rule contributed significantly to uniting the hearts and minds of the population in the hope for self-rule, substantial obstacles persist today for the creation of a population bound together toward a common goal. Indeed, in addition to traditional – pre-colonial – and historical – during Portuguese and Indonesian times – differences, new socio-economic and power issues have emerged as side-effects of the state building project, and the recurrent episodes of violence witnessed in Dili, the capital, since independence – urban riots in 2002, a three weeks long demonstration in 2005, and the political crisis of 2006 (dos Santos Monteiro 2010) – show that there is still some way to go in fostering the cohesive society necessary for building a nation. The objective of the field research carried out in Timor Leste, over a period of eight months within the framework of a PhD, was to understand how the decisions made as part of the state building process of the young country had an impact on building a national identity. The choice of Dili's urban space, as opposed to other parts of the country, fit within the research framework where the role and potential of urban space, to create either common or fragmented identities, are central to the analysis of the relationship between state building and nation building. As such, the research explored the following issues: (a) how do people perceive the impact of the state's market-oriented and social policies on the social, economic and built environment of Dili; (b) how do these changes affect the scale at which people build their identity; (c) what is the impact of these different scales on nation building and, consequently, the state building process.

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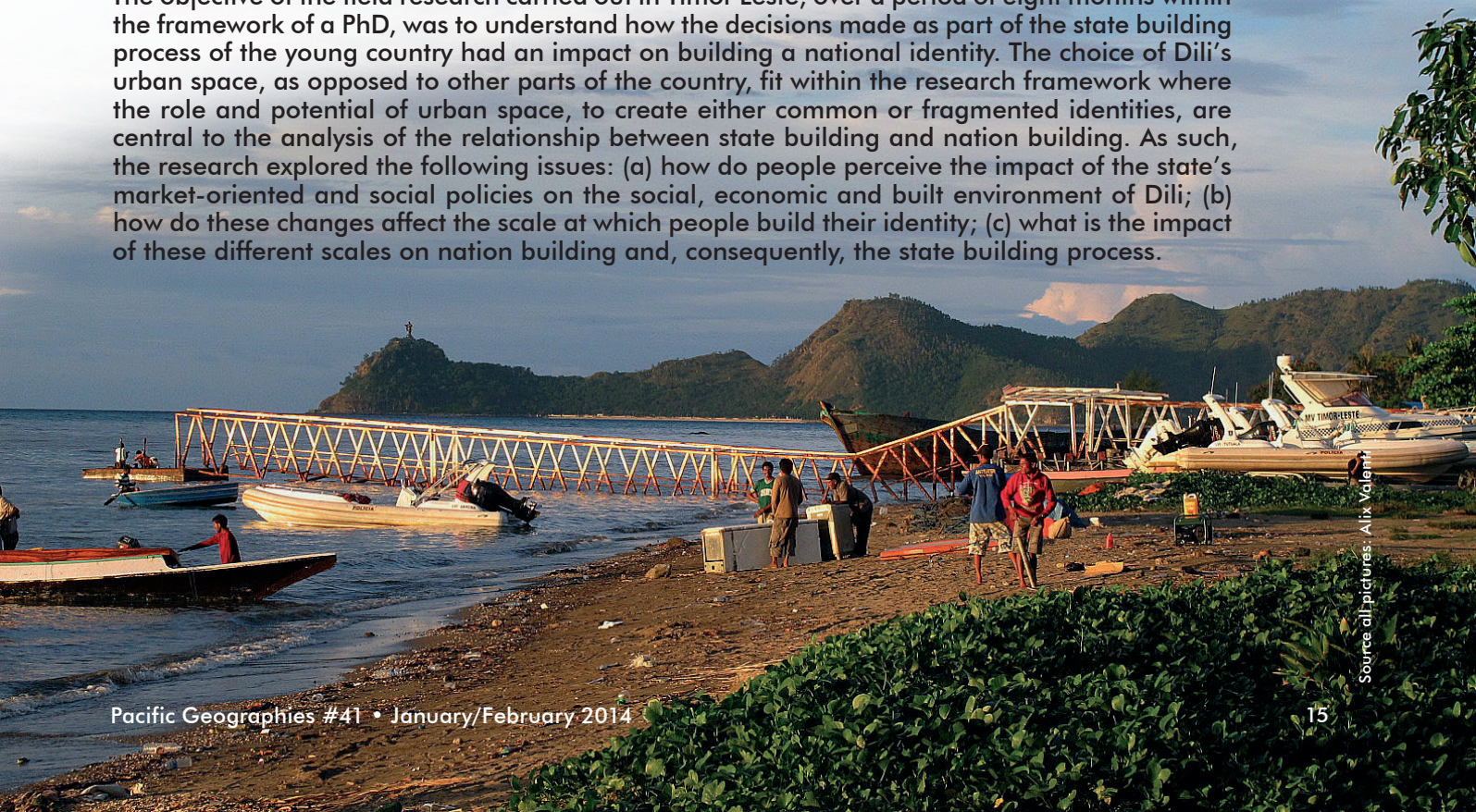
The relationship between state and nation building

Although international relations literature and policies often use the terms 'state building' and 'nation building' interchangeably, an overview of the relationship between 'state' and 'nation' demonstrates that they are, in reality, two distinct though interconnected processes. The use of social contract theory is very useful here to understand that states do not emerge in a vacuum; rather, states are the product of a group of people, within a given space, that choose to form a body politic where the protection of a community's interests is considered more just than everyone protecting their personal interests, and where these interests are protected by a government, the form of which is chosen by the community (Locke 1952; Rousseau 1923). The emergence of the body politic, commonly referred to as the nation, is therefore at the basis of state sovereignty and requires a constant negotiation of different identities and interests in order to form one common social identity. As such, the ability of the state to remain in power, once formed, resides in its capacity to build adequate institutions that facilitate the dialogue necessary for these negotiations, for if the state is perceived as promoting unjustly some interests over others, common will to be governed by this state is undermined and a new body politic can emerge. This capacity is what is commonly referred to as state legitimacy.

The relationship between state sovereignty and legitimacy, as articula-ted through the lens of social contract theory, is underpinned by the notion of citizenship – both relational and juridico-legal. Indeed, citizenship in its relational sense is 'linked to various notions of identity, attained through action, not only vis-à-vis the state, but in other sites of politics as well, be they in the home, acts of cultural resistance or social movements' (Gaventa 2006), and is at the heart of how the nation is formed. Nonetheless, as noted above, the ability to maintain these relations lies within the state and is ensured through the fair implementation of rights – protection – and duties – common values and civic culture – that is through juridico-legal citizenship. Consequently, a state's sustainability resides in the quality of its citizens' interaction on a daily basis, and whilst these interactions take place at the local level within a variety of spaces, it is the capacity of the state to foster good relations between these spaces, where communities emerge, that enables it to create a wider national social identity, extending state sovereignty and legitimacy over a wider territory.

In the context of state and nation building, however, the relationship described above has been undermined by the introduction of an external element: international assistance for (re) building "functioning and durable states capable of fulfilling the essential attributes of modern statehood" (Dinnen 2007). State building has implied that sovereignty is now conferred to the state by international organisations through the fulfilment of certain priorities, whilst legitimacy is gained by electing from a list of parties that may not represent the interests of the whole population. As such, new states are faced with the immense challenge of building a national social identity – a nation – within a socially fragmented citizenry, and failure to do so – through unjust application of citizenship rights and duties, corruption – can lead to the emergence of new, more local forms of citizenship that "often run counter to the dominant images given to them" (Isin 2002 in Secor 2004).

Cities, as opposed to rural areas, provide a very good opportunity for analysing how citizenship is developed in the context of state building. First, their position as centres of attraction for international aid and investment, and as poles of development for a new labour force organised around a market economy, makes them attractive to a wide variety of population migrating from rural areas in search of a role to play and a better situation in the new country. Consequently, urbanisation and sudden increases in investment converge to produce spaces of difference within cities. Furthermore, the creation of these new spaces has a significant impact on the relationships between different groups of citizens. The urban fabric produced by the implementation of state policies creates new spaces of difference as some areas become richer, others appear to stagnate whilst others yet seem to become increasingly ostracised as their inability to participate to the new state project contributes to rising unemployment and economic insecurity. Thus, in the relationship between state building and nation building, urban spaces articulate how state policies have an impact on how 'ideas are formed, actions are produced, and relationships are created and maintained' (Marston, 2005; p.427) and how, in turn, the way in which such relations are framed, organised and lived in the everyday spaces of urban life has an impact on the creation of a national identity.

Fieldwork research in Dili, Timor Leste

Dili is particularly interesting compared to other urbanised or rural areas of the country because, as a result of its position as the capital, it has been the heart of administrative decision-making since Timor Leste's indepen-

Net Lifetime Migration to Dili

▬	12.000
▬	6.000
▬	2.000

Net Migration, Lifetime

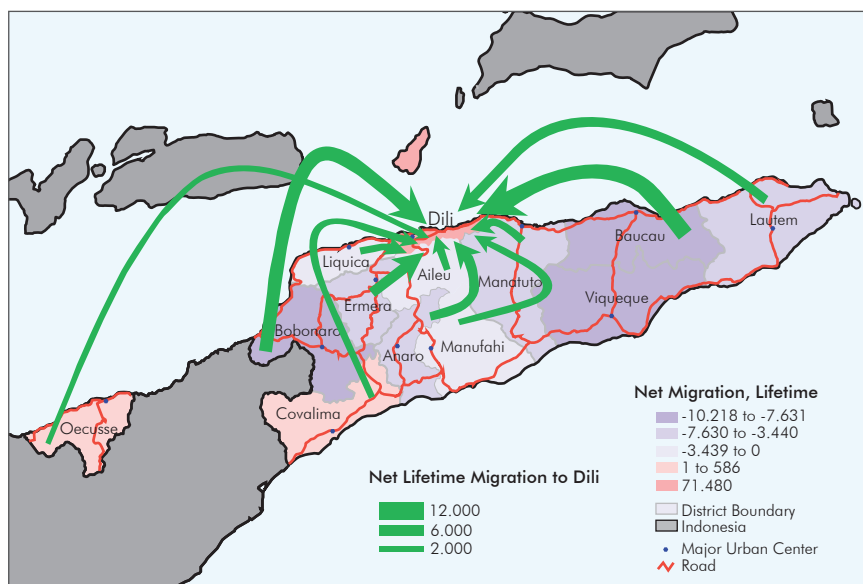|	
	-10.218 to -7.631
	-7.630 to -3.440
	-3.439 to 0
	1 to 586
	71.480
	District Boundary
	Indonesia
•	Major Urban Center
⌁	Road

Figure 1: Population flows between districts

Culao

Church in Liriu

Metin IV police post

dence in 1999. As such, in the past twelve years it has become host to a wide variety of international organisations that have contributed, with the significant presence of their staff, to the development of the urban area – e.g. infrastructure, housing, businesses, etc – and has attracted, as a consequence, a significant level of rural-urban migration stemming from people moving to the capital in search of a better life for themselves and their families.

Consequently, Dili has attracted significantly more migrants than any other district in the country – as the 2004 statistics show (National Directorate for Statistics – DNE 2004) – reaching, in 2010, a total population of 234,026 inhabitants (NDS 2013), that is 21% of the population of Timor Leste (NDS website 2013), and becoming, as such, Timor Leste's most diverse district – the data on population flows between districts shown in the table (DNE 2004) is the most recent available, nonetheless the continued absence of development in other areas of the country suggests that these patterns are likely to have remained unchanged since 2004. However, to date Dili remains without a master development plan to manage the high levels of migration and urbanisation that have been taking place in the past decade (Soares Reis Pequinho 2010), leading to the emergence of informal settlements and extremely uneven levels of development across the whole urban area.

The aim of the fieldwork in Dili, therefore, was to understand how the contexts in which people interact – affected by history, development, socio-economic differences and conflict – affect the way in which different groups perceive government policies and, as a result, the scales at which they construct their sense of social identity – lo-

cal, urban, national. For this purpose, the research methodology was designed following a social constructivist view, that is, a methodological perspective based on the assumption that people's identities are shaped by their interactions with other people and by the milieu in which they live and work (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). By interacting with others, people create subjective meanings that are negotiated to become social identities, and renegotiated socially and historically (Creswell 2009) as new milieux come to create new interactions and, therefore, the need for new identities. Thus, the field research focused on two elements: (a) asking interviewees broad questions related to their environment, their interactions with other people, their movements and their perceptions of their governments since 2002, in order to understand how they construct their sense of belonging; (b) a mapping and analysis of the urban

spaces in which they interact, to gather an overview of the milieu shaping their identities. In this context, no specific state policy was selected for discussion with the interviewees; rather, interviewees were left the freedom to highlight what they believed to be the main issues with their government and community, thus revealing patterns within and across communities that pointed to determining factors in the construction of their social identity. Furthermore, three areas presenting very distinct characteristics were selected in order to ensure that people's perceptions were constructed in different environments and, by cross analysing, investigate whether these have an impact. The following criteria were chosen: history of violence, development, and socio-economic characteristics. Finally, the research aimed at ensuring variety amongst interviewees, thus people spanning across these categories were selected for interviews:

District	In- Migration	Out- Migration	Net- Migration	% Living in District of Birth
Baucau	5,692	15,91	-10,218	94
Viqueque	3,727	12,845	-9,118	94
Bobonaro	4,853	12,484	-7,631	94
Lautem	1,726	6,515	-4,789	97
Manatuto	2,92	7,113	-4,193	92
Ainaro	4,137	8,111	-3,974	89
Ermera	6,223	9,663	-3,44	94
Liquiçà	3,879	5,505	-1,626	93
Aileu	6,117	7,452	-1,335	84
Manufahi	4,975	5,324	-349	89
Covalima	4,942	4,785	157	91
Oecusse	3,094	2,508	586	95
Dili	79,757	8,277	71,48	54

Table 1: Net lifetime migration, by District

Source: Census Atlas, 2004; p.30

Figure 2: Map of the three research areas in Dili

age, gender, level of education, employment status and community leaders.

Main findings

The following three areas were selected for the case study research: Culao, Liriu and Metin IV. For the purpose of this article it is not possible to present all the findings of the eight months fieldwork – including area characteristics – therefore the following findings represent only two aspects of the issues uncovered in the three areas – the ones most highlighted by interviewees – and only the areas' characteristics relevant to those issues are presented when necessary.

One of the main questions interviewees were asked was to explain what they believed the main causes of conflict – or absence thereof – in their area to be. The answers to this question, left intentionally open-ended, were interestingly very similar in all three areas: people appeared to be relating the absence of, changes in, or presence of conflict in their area to levels of education and employment of the population. In Culao, for example, the majority of interviewees asserted that episodes of violence started decreasing since youth started attending school more regularly and had better access to employment – a result, in their view, partially due to international and national programmes responding to the 2006 political crisis. In their view "education and employment keep young people off the streets and keep them busy", which prevents them from getting involved with street gangs or from drinking and

causing trouble. As a result, there is a higher sense of security in the area, clearly visible from the high levels of activity on the main road – e.g. children playing, women interacting and playing bingo.

Conversely, in Metin IV, interviewees noted that violence in their area was the heart of a vicious circle. Indeed, violence in the area – stemming originally from a variety of causes, including land property rights and gangs formed during Indonesian times – has meant that few teachers want to teach in the school, unfortunately situated where much of the violence happens, resulting in low quality of education – which is not facilitated by the school often closing when episodes of violence occur. In people's views, this has meant that youth are unable to attend university, thus contributing to high youth unemployment levels in the area and resulting in a disenfranchised youth that enters gangs or drinks and causes trouble – many episodes of stones being thrown at high-income houses have revealed significant levels of social jealousy, as noted by Metin IV's inhabitants themselves. For many people in Metin IV, the way in which the government has been handling these issues has been conveying a very negative message. First, rather than attempting to understand the root causes of violence, the government has either responded with strong repression or, lately, has addressed the issue by expediting condemnations of perpetrators, rather than hearing them out. Second, many interviewees have lamented the absence of statistical data revealing both the number of un-

employed and the skills lacking in the labour market. In their view, this type of actions would facilitate training for the right skills, decrease unemployment and, consequently, decrease violence.

Another interesting finding across the three areas was the analysis of people's patterns of movement in their area and across Dili's urban space. In Liriu, the central position of the area and its numerous transport connections allow most of the population to move around in the surrounding areas quite regularly. Similarly, in Culao, despite the somewhat external position of the area, the good transport connections revealed that most people travelled at least to other immediately neighbouring areas. In contrast, Metin IV is quite isolated: bad roads and bad area reputation mean that taxis seldom accept to travel there, whilst a walk to the nearest bus stop takes between twenty and thirty-five minutes in an often unsafe environment. Furthermore, people's employment status appeared to make a difference to their movement: unable to afford transport, and without the necessity to move, low-income people appear to remain within their area, whereas employed people travel more often across Dili.

Implications for state and nation building

The findings briefly highlighted above revealed important patterns regarding the construction of citizenship in Dili. People in Liriu, and to a certain extent Culao, with better access to education, employment and infrastructure – roads, transport –

showed, when asked about their perception of the government, the ability to critically put their problems into the wider perspective of the city and the country as a whole. This seemed to result both from the facility to move to other areas, which gives people the ability to put their situation into perspective, and from access to good education and employment, which offer people the opportunity to interact with other groups and therefore form a more comprehensive picture of the challenges facing the population as a whole. Their views on government policies were consequently more nuanced and demonstrated legitimacy of the government – through ability to participate in the economy and/or in open discussion of government issues.

Conversely, the situation in Metin IV showed that people perceive state's repression of violence as a "de-politicisation" (Dikeç 2002) of the issues at hand, that is, a refusal to see the episodes of violence as a direct contestation and response to some of the state's policies, thus leading to a strong sense of injustice and disenfranchisement. Furthermore, lack of movement outside the area showed a strong emphasis on issues immediately at hand, and a stark lack of perspective regarding government policies. As a result, much of the issues in the area – e.g. lack of infrastructure, conflict resolution – are being increasingly addressed by local leaders, whilst there is strong distrust of state institutions.

These perceptions regarding the perceived impact of state policies within different communities bear important consequences for the legitimacy and sovereignty of the state. Indeed, the lack of adequate infrastructure, access to education and employment and the de-politicisation of violence are perceived by the people who suffer from them as an inability of the state to provide for their basic needs. In this sense, juridico-legal citizenship is perceived as unfulfilled by these groups, who subsequently turn to the leaders in their community for support – for instance, people in Metin IV indicated that much of the existing infrastructure is the result of community efforts, e.g. wells. Consequently, in these areas the legitimacy of the state is severely undermined. Conversely, in areas such as Culao and Liriu, with better infrastructure and socio-economic conditions, the legitimacy of the state is less questioned. Moreover, the analysis of people's movements reveals that that "every story is a travel story – a spatial practice" (De Certeau 1984 in Secor 2004), and the ability of the state to facilitate, or not, movement across areas affects significantly the relationships between different communities and groups of people. In this context, whilst good ties may emerge within communities, the socio-economic and infrastructural contrasts between areas may contribute to creating a gap between different groups, which may be further increased by the lack of movement across certain urban spaces. Consequently, the impact of state policies on the relationships between different areas and groups of people within Dili may have important consequences on the sovereignty of the state as different perceptions of the state emerge and there are no opportunities or mechanisms in place to foster a renegotiation of identities to create an urban, then national, citizenship. These processes therefore lead to the creation of fragmented forms of urban citizenship, for "who we happen to see regularly as we move through the world has an influence on who we think of as citizens and who we think to engage with as citizens" (Bickford 2000); and if these new, more local, forms of citizenship run counter to the national image the state is trying to promote, they can significantly hinder the functioning of the state.

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Corresponding author: Alix Valenti [a.valenti@ucl.ac.uk] is a PhD Candidate at the Development Planning Unit of UCL. She has just finished an eight months fieldwork in Dili, Timor-Leste and is currently writing-up her thesis. Previously, she worked for three years as a consultant for the European Commission on matters of justice and home affairs.