State building and nation building: Exploring a complex relationship through the construction of urban citizenship in Dili, Timor Leste

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Introduction

A survey of the literature on international interventions in post-conflict countries reveals that the terms 'state building' and 'nation building' are often used interchangeably, when they are in fact two quite distinct processes, and their use as interchangeable notions in the literature and international interventions can have significantly negative consequences on the sustainability of the reconstruction efforts for countries recovering from conflicts or having recently gained their independence.

Based on the initial findings of nine months' fieldwork carried out in Dili, Timor Leste, this paper explores this relationships by highlighting some of the impacts that state building policies have on the challenging process of nation building in a newly independent country. In a brief theoretical review of the research's key concepts, the first part of this paper sets out to present a framework which articulates the interaction of the processes of state building and nation building within the context of urban spaces, arguing that to be effective and sustainable a state needs to win the hearts and minds of its population by ensuring not only contractual state-citizen relations – defining rights and duties to build its legitimacy – but also facilitating peaceful and cooperative relations amongst its citizens – fostering a basis for its sovereignty. Analysing these dynamics within urban spaces, this paper explains, is particularly interesting as their different history, position and migration flows create unique spaces where the encounter of diversity, politics and economic activity – shaped by state policies – produce specific opportunities and challenges for the negotiation of different identities into that of a nation. The second, empirical, part of this paper uses the research carried out in Dili to analyse how people's perceptions of the state building process, influenced by different narratives of history, migration and development, produce fragmented forms of citizenship that 'constitute themselves differently from the dominant images given to them' (Isin 2002 in Secor 2004, 353), thus potentially undermining the construction of a national identity.

State building and nation building

In order to understand the relationship between state building and nation building, it is useful to take one step back to look at the relationship between states and nations through the lens of social contract theory. Although there are various strands of social contract theory[1] arguing, simply put, for either a general common will guided by morals or a more individualistic approach to society guided by protection of private property, what these theories have in common is their conceptualisation of the existence of a state based on the consent of individuals willing to negotiate their differences in order to form one body politic to be governed by their chosen form of state. Individuals' willingness to remain within one body politic is what is commonly referred to as state sovereignty. But to maintain its sovereignty, the state needs to build its legitimacy by developing institutions and promoting policies that reflect the body politic's basic virtues and encourages social cooperation (Paz-Fuchs 2011, 3) so as to facilitate the dialogue necessary for the constant negotiation of differences[2], for if individuals perceive that they are being governed by a state that promotes only certain groups' interests, the sovereignty of said state can be severely undermined.

The key element of the relationship between the state and the nation, therefore, is citizenship: if people recognise that it is in their best interest to form a body politic under one state – i.e. relational

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[1] Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, John Ralws.

[2] Here again the aim of the state differs according the different strands, ranging from equality to protection of property and equal opportunities. It does not, however, fall within the scope of this paper to discuss these in details.

citizenship - and if the state is capable of developing the institutions that will peacefully manage the constant renegotiation of identities necessary to form a nation – i.e. juridico-legal citizenship – then the government can function effectively. Citizenship, in its relational sense, entails the construction of 'a degree of sameness within a universe of difference' (LiPuma 1995, 57) in order to transform a previously fragmented territory, characterised by different narratives of history – not only those related to the conflict, but also more traditional differences –, into a nation with a sense of national social identity. As such, it requires a careful analysis of both the perceived impact of state policies on everyday life – with its challenges and opportunities – and how these perceptions affect the relationships between the state and the individuals as well as between different groups, for citizenship 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, 24).

In the context of the relationship between state building and nation building, however, the dynamics between sovereignty, legitimacy and citizenship outlined above are now heavily influenced – and at times dictated – by international institutions, which propensity to understand the concepts of state building and nation building interchangeably often has resulted into an overemphasis on jurido-legal citizenship to the detriment of the development of relational citizenship. This has been particularly the case in the framework of state building processes focused on (neo)liberal strategies (Barbara 2008, 308) which promote a 'roll-back' of state social policies[3] and 'roll-out' of pro-market policies[4] (Peck and Tickell 2002 in Purcell 2008, 15) based on the perception of the citizen as an individual who 'is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities [especially the capacity to labour], for which he owes nothing to society' (MacPherson 1969 in Foster 1995, 19). This very juridico-legal and individualistic understanding of citizenship, however, can have a significant impact on the ability, and willingness, of citizens to perceive themselves as part of a bigger community and may, therefore, contribute to the creation of more local forms of citizenship undermining the functioning of the state.

The significance of urban spaces

In this context, urban spaces, as opposed to rural areas, provide a very good opportunity for analysing how people's perceptions of state policies impact on how 'ideas are formed, actions are produced, and relationships are created and maintained' (Marston 2005, 427) and how, in turn, these relations shape and are shaped by the everyday spaces of urban life, thus impacting on the creation of a national social identity[5]. Indeed, cities – and in particular capital cities – are particularly interesting case studies because the significant infrastructure investments they attract, the work they create – through infrastructure development and the international aid industry – and the new opportunities they offer – e.g. jobs, education, alleged better quality of life – constitute pull factors on the rest of the country's population, increasing significantly rural-urban migration patterns and resulting in fast, often uncontrolled, urbanisation. This fast urbanisation, compounded by uneven investment in infrastructure – dictated by market development policies and private investment priorities – produces an urban fabric characterised by stark social and economic differences that shape a wide variety of urban spaces where rich areas become richer whilst others stagnate or become increasingly ostracised, trapped into a vicious circle of rising unemployment, economic insecurity and inability to participate to the project of the new country. Consequently, the gap between these new spaces of difference continues to increase, significantly affecting the relationships between different groups of citizen.

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[3] Such as welfare and other variations of social security nets available to the most deprived populations

[4] Direct privatisation; Public-private partnerships; Outsourcing, i.e. tendering; Creating new markets; Making internet markets; and, Creating new conditions for competitive success (Clarke 1999 in Clarke 2004, 35)

[5] The use of the terms 'actual' and 'virtual' is borrowed from Deleuze (1994 in Marston 2005, 425); they refer respectively to 'bodies actualized in sensible composites' and the 'vast regime of differential potentialities through which those actualisations resolve themselves'. In other words here, the materialization of state practices (actual) has an impact on the different ways the state can be perceived (virtual) through citizenship, which consequently has an impact on how the state, through the nation, functions (actual again).

But capital cities are not only economic hubs; they are also the centres of decision-making – especially in countries recovering from conflict where decentralisation has either not yet been envisaged or proved unsuccessful – and as such, they have also become the centre for the contestation of power. Indeed, the type of governance resulting from the neoliberal emphasis on public/private partnerships and private investments[6] results into a type of decision-making – as regards infrastructure, labour market, etc – that is both essentially market-driven and thoroughly undemocratic: citizens have no leverage for protesting against the social and economic impacts of these decisions because they are carried out by private entities. Accordingly, as frustration mounts within some spaces of difference, met only by state repression[7], the disenfranchised citizens are left with two options: resorting to violence or creating new, more localised forms of citizenship.

The case of Dili, Timor Leste

The role of Dili in Timor Leste goes beyond that of the capital of the country. Historically, its position as an important place of residence and commerce started developing during the centuries of Portuguese colonisation, whilst it gained most of its symbolic significance as a key strategic point for decision-making and control during the Indonesian military rule. As a result of its symbolism and importance, Dili has also been 'seized by paroxysms of collective violence on several occasions over the past six decades: in 1942, 1975, 1980, 1991, 2002, 2006 and 2006' (Jütersonke et al 2010, 10). Finally, the subsequent official designation of Dili as the capital of Timor Leste after independence has played a crucial part in continuing to develop the significance of the city for the country. Indeed, the arrival of the United Nations mandated mission[8] and its establishment in the capital – from whence it organised its transitional administration – marked the beginning of a long succession of other international organisations and donors that settled in Dili, and contributed significantly – through the constant flow of international aid money and the business opportunities represented by international aid staff – to attracting a vast number of people from rural areas who sought their chance to improve their economic situation, living standards and, as such, contribute to the building of the country.

As a result, Dili's population doubled in less than ten years, going from 123,474 inhabitants in 2001 to 234,026 in 2010 (National Directorate for Statistics – NDS 2013), that is 21% of Timor Leste's population (ibid), and attracting people from all other twelve districts in the country, thus becoming the most diverse district in Timor Leste, as shown in Figure 1 below.[9]

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[6] Which often result in infrastructure and other development projects being carried out by private investors, NGOs and INGOs through complicated and often less than transparent tendering processes
[7] In neoliberal states the use of violence by the state to repress social movements is legitimised by the need to maintain security for the production of capital
[8] UNTAET and its follow-up missions
[9] The NDS has not yet published the statistics for migration flows in 2010, therefore it was only possible to use those for 2004. Nonetheless, the persistent absence of significant development all other districts suggests that these patterns are likely to have remained unchanged

Figure 1 – Population flows between districts (Source: Census Atlas 2004, 31)
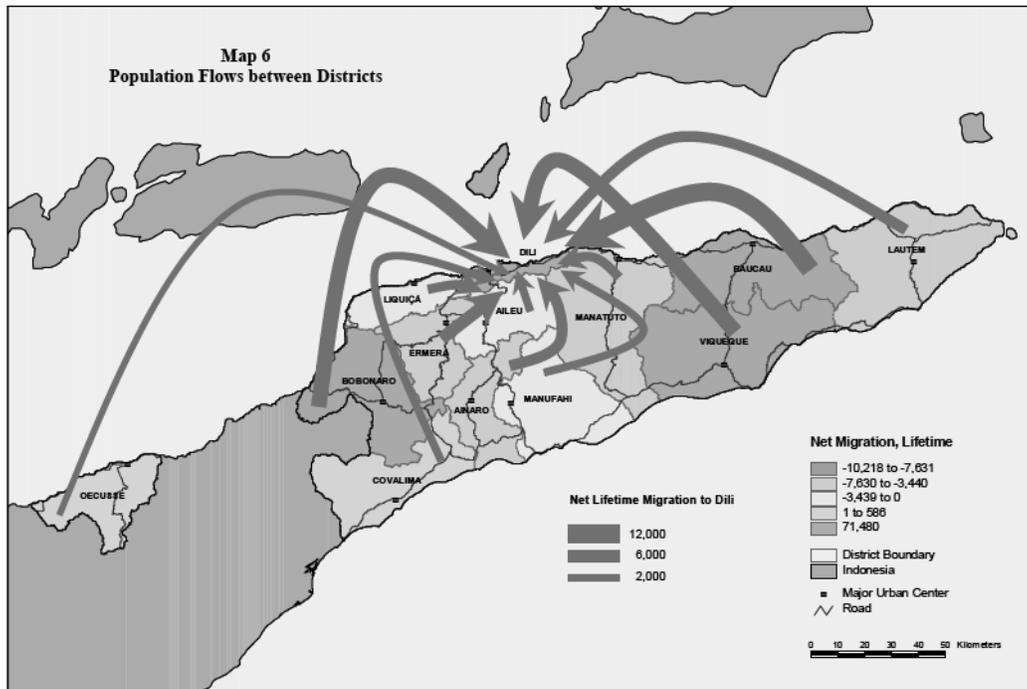
The fieldwork revealed, however, that despite the increasing urban population and the concentration of infrastructure development projects, Dili remains to this day without an urban development plan to manage the fast and scattered urbanisation, resulting in the emergence of very different and contrasted urban spaces within the same urban area.

Therefore, Dili is a very interesting case study to analyse how people's perceptions of the impact of state policies on their urban environment affect their interactions within and between different urban spaces across the whole urban area and, as a result, contribute to shape their sense of social identity at different scales. To this end, the fieldwork for the research was carried out in three areas presenting different characteristics as shown in Table 1 below. Interviews[10] in the areas were conducted in a semi-structured manner, guiding participants' answers through specific topics related to their interactions with other people in their aldeia, their perceptions of the causes – or absence – of violence in their area, their movements within and outside their area and their perception of state policies since independence.

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[10] To ensure a variety of points of view, the interviewees spun across the following categories: communities leaders – *xefi suku, xefi aldeia, xefi juventude, lian nain* and de facto community leaders; employed and unemployed; male and female; youth, middle-aged and elderly; level of education – primary/secondary school, university

Table 1 – Characteristics of selected areas

Aldeia	History of violence	Development	Socio-economic	Location in Dili
Culao	Violent until 2006; calmer since IDP dialogues	Developed during Indonesian times; site of resistance	Increase in level of education and employment	By the mountain but good transport connections
Liriu	Very little violence since independence	Developed during Portuguese times; administration staff residence	Generally high level of education and employment, with pockets of lower income	Centre of Dili, good transport connections
Metin IV	Much violence since independence, still ongoing	Developed during Indonesian times; Indonesian military & Timorese	Low level of education and high unemployment	Isolated by the river, no transport connection

Main findings

Table 2 below presents an overview of the main findings gathered in the research areas on the basis of the four main topics approached with interviewees.[11]

Table 2 – Main area findings

Topic	Culao	Liriu	Metin IV
Interaction at aldeia level	Attendance but little participation in aldeia meetings; people feel they cannot make difference and do not discuss issues	High participation to aldeia meetings and initiatives; open debate between neighbours	Attendance and participation, but reliant on aldeia leaders' efforts; open debate between neighbours on areas' main issues
Mobility within Dili	Majority travel at least in neighbouring aldeias; employed travel farther	Majority travel to most aldeias around Liriu and to markets; employed travel farther	Mostly only employed travel outside aldeia; majority leaves once a week/month
Causes of violence	Decreasing unemployment and increasing education engender more peaceful relations	Little violence resulting from high levels of education and employment	High levels of violence resulting from unemployment and low level education; leaders' involvement is key
Perception of state	Little presence of government; most issues addressed locally	Little presence of government but have seen changes in urban fabric	Violence repression, no changes in urban fabric, feel forgotten

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[11] For the purpose of this paper the author has chosen to highlight only certain aspects of the findings from the field research. It is important to note, nonetheless, that the nine months fieldwork yielded more complex and intricate findings.

The most striking finding from the analysis of the information gathered through case study area interviews is that, regardless of the urban fabric in which people live, work and interact on a daily basis, the vast majority of the participants believe that the presence, or absence, of violence in their area is very often related to levels of education and unemployment in those areas. Indeed, participants from the area of Culao have generally indicated that prior to the 2006 crisis, school attendance was still quite low whilst unemployment levels, especially amongst youth, were high leading, they believe, to many of these young people joining gangs or simply 'hanging out' with their friends in the streets, drinking and causing trouble. However, government and international programmes implemented in the area in response to the significant levels of violence in the area during the crisis, appear to have inverted these tendencies, bringing with it more peaceful relationships between different groups. Conversely, participants in Metin IV stressed the feeling of being caught in a vicious circle marked, according to them, by the fact that the continuing high levels of violence in their area badly affect the quality of education offered by the local school[12], resulting in a lack of opportunity for its numerous youth and, consequently, in many of them joining gangs or getting drunk and participating in social jealousy related violence.[13]

Additionally, combining the interview findings with the characteristics of the areas previously outlined, another interesting finding emerges: long terms patterns of violence, or absence thereof, appear to be correlated with population involvement in aldeia matters. In fact, on the one hand, Liriu has a long history of connection to state and governance structures[14] and conversations with the participants revealed that there was a significant level of participation by the aldeia's population in both official meetings as well as other activities organised by leaders and non-leaders alike. Many of these activities were targeted at keeping youth engaged and occupied in order to ensure that they kept out of trouble outside school times. On the other hand, participants in Metin IV emphasised the important role played by leaders and *de facto* leaders in ensuring participation to aldeia activities as well as providing conflict resolution and mediation. Thus, although historically Metin IV is not related to the presence of strong state governance structures[15], the needs of the aldeia's population have nonetheless contributed to creating strong community ties. Finally, the violence and socio-economic changes experienced by Culao appear to have left a vacuum where strong aldeia leadership is no longer key to maintaining peace, but a new leadership maintaining strong ties amongst the population has not yet emerged, thus leading to a lack of engagement in the area.

Lastly, an analysis of people's movements within and outside their area reveals two key points. Firstly, that participants living in areas better connected with the rest of Dili's urban area are more inclined to move around, at least to neighbouring areas to go to the market and visit friends, whereas participants in Metin IV were deterred, by both the insecurity of the long walk to the main road and the taxi fares, to leave their area more than once a week or month. Secondly, employed people are more likely to travel across Dili than unemployed, since they need to travel to their workplace.

Implications for the construction of citizenship in Dili

The findings outlined above demonstrate that the urban fabric characterising people's everyday spaces of interaction has a significant impact on the way in which people interact with other areas' inhabitants and how they perceive their state institutions. Indeed, participants living in Liriu, an area with a longer history of state governance and a good urban fabric[16], said that they do feel the state could be more proactive in anticipating and solving certain problems – e.g. issues with drinking water – but they are aware that the past

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[12] Metin IV's school is located on the main street where most of the violence happens. As a result, it closes whenever there are episodes of violence, disrupting education, and many teachers refuse to work there.

[13] A number of participants have indicated that the presence of higher income houses in their area raises feelings of social jealousy, especially amongst the disenfranchised youth, and episodes of stone-throwing against those houses are not uncommon

[14] Since the area used to host Portuguese administration staff and, subsequently, Indonesian military staff

[15] The control exercised by Indonesian military in the area does not fit within the realm of governance; it is military control.

[16] i.e. good infrastructure and transport connections, generally higher socio-economic background, better security

three governments have been on a learning curve and there have been significant improvements for people in the country in the past decade. Furthermore, whilst their aldeia there appears to show a good level of leadership to solve local issues and create a community through different activities, participants' ability to move around Dili's urban space – whether employed or not – appeared to contribute to giving them more perspective on the issues in their area and the urban area as a whole. In contrast, Metin IV's participants' perception of their aldeia's urban fabric and its development in the past decade[17] reflect very poorly on their perception of the state, which they feel has abandoned them. Furthermore, many participants indicated that state's approach to security in the area, that is, repression, clearly sends them a message that the state would rather get rid of a problem rather than understanding its root causes, thus depoliticising violence (Dikeç, 2002; p.95). Finally, lack of movement across Dili's urban area appeared to affect people's perceptions of the issues at stake and their relations with other areas, limiting them mostly to focusing on Metin IV's issues rather than understanding them within Dili's wider context.

Consequently, these findings reveal that in certain areas of Dili, such as Metin IV, people's perceptions of the impact of state building on their urban fabric is seriously threatening its legitimacy, whilst state inability to create the adequate conditions for interactions between different groups across aldeias is threatening the creation of a wider social identity, thus undermining its sovereignty. These gaps, however, are being filled by local leadership and the emergence of strong, inward-looking community ties that seem to create new spaces for a more local form of citizenship; for indeed, '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, 363). These different, more local forms of urban citizenship demonstrate that the state is currently failing to renegotiate these identities and, as such, hindering the nation building process.

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[17] Participants indicated that there have been no developments to build a new, better and better lighted road to reach the main streets; most of the running water is a result of community efforts to build wells; and much of the electricity is illegally taken from the main cables. Socio-economic conditions in the area have also remained unchanged since independence.

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