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Constructing a national identity in Timor-Leste: some reflections

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Timor-Leste

An officially independent state since 2002





Timor in the Southeast Asian Archipelago



Timor Leste:

Area 14,874 km²; 2019 1,350,000 inhabitants; HDI 132/189.



“Se somos um país pequeno, ainda por cima sem recursos, porquê não investimos em ser diferentes?” (Mari Alkatiri)

Cit. in: Monteiro 2017: 25.



Eastern Timor and foreign supremacy

Portugal until 1975;

Indonesia 1975-1999;

[UN (transition period) 1999- 2002].

20 de maio 2002 :

Republik Demokratik Timor Leste

“East-Timorese identity”



Motives for developing a national identity in the case of Timor Leste:

- Creating a sense of a common project;
- Recognition of the role of the central government;
- Overcoming conflicts and avoiding future conflicts;
- Affirmation of the new state on the world stage;
- Differentiating from other states.

“Identity-building consolidates and legitimises a new nation-state and mitigates the risk of further state failure or collapse” (Shiosaki 2018: 54).

Identitarian politics: The state and institutions have a main role in instilling values, feelings, attitudes (education and language policies; official narratives).

Identity has various dimensions, which may be manipulated, according to context and situation.

(Some authors on identity: Barth 1969; Eriksen 1993/2010; Maalouf 1998).



Dimension 1: perceived origins



Luís Peres. <https://luisperes.wordpress.com/2009/07/24/timor-ilha-crocodilo-timor-crocodile-island/>





Dimension 2: history and memory (1)



Fonte: Observatório da
Língua Portuguesa
(2015)
Via
Daniel de Lucca

Portuguese colonial era

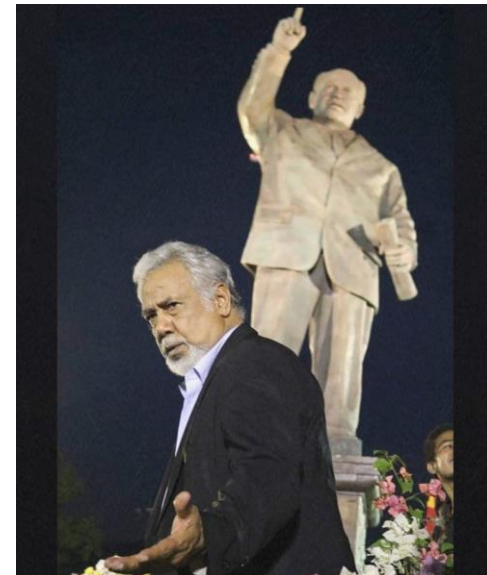




Dimension 2: history and memory (2)



Anna Voss, Watch Indonesia



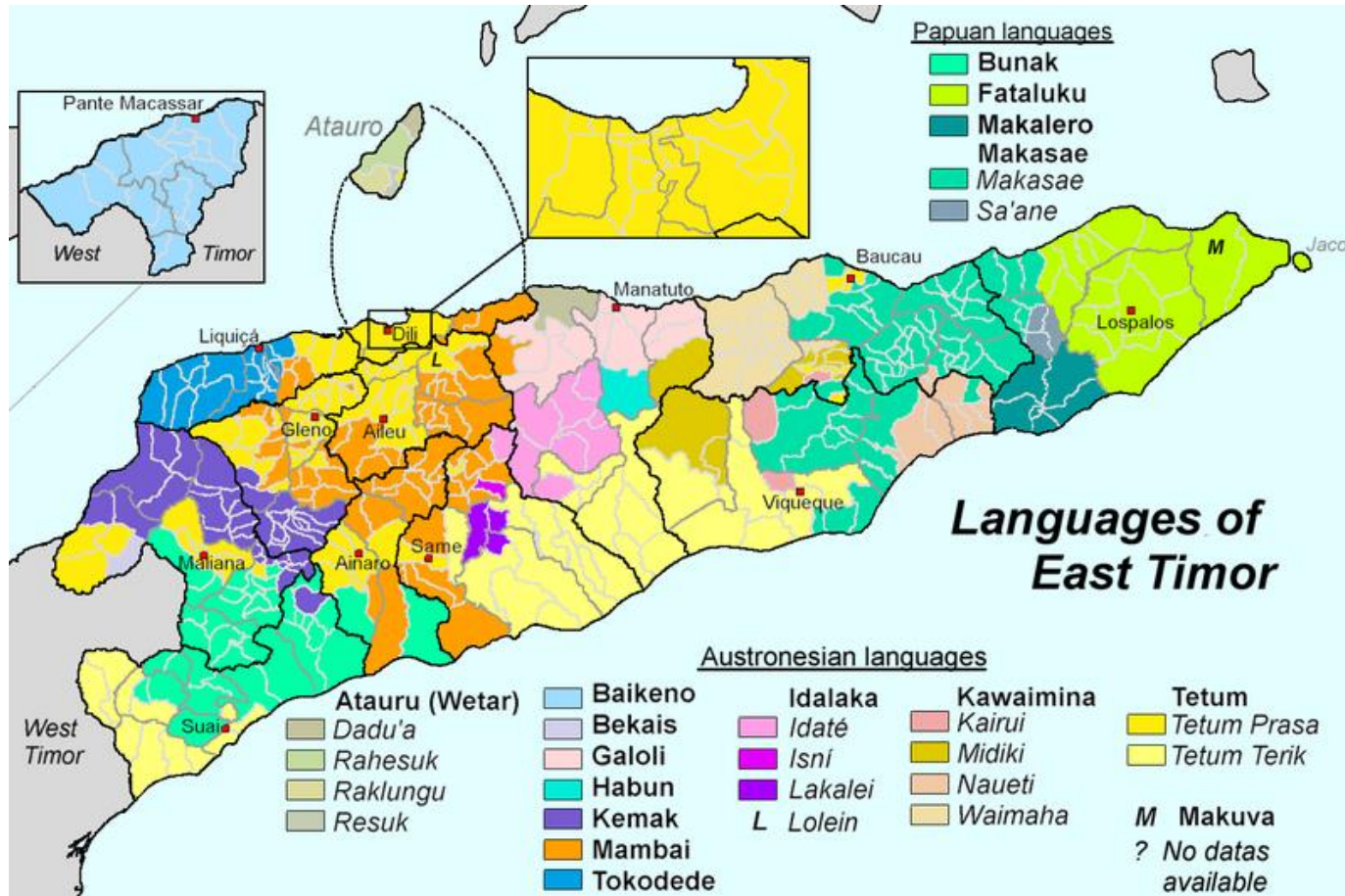
Dimension 3: ethnicity

a. Phenotype and b. Culture





Culture: ethnolinguistic groups



Source: Fischer 2010



Dimension 4: language

In Timor-Leste:

A. Indigenous languages (N = 15+)

B. Official languages:

- Tetum-Prasa
- Portuguese.

C. Working languages:

- Indonesian
- English

Language (written word) and generation:

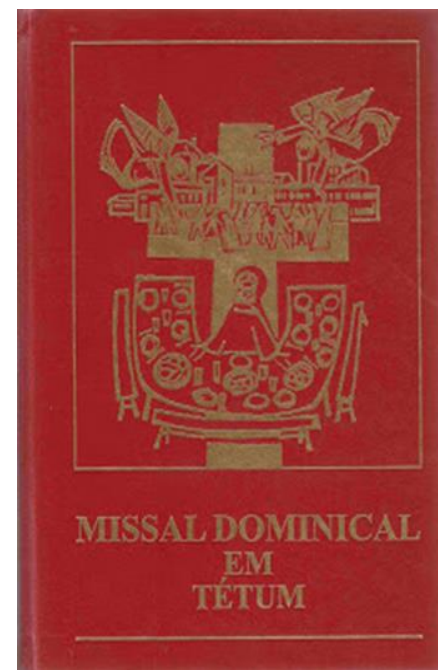
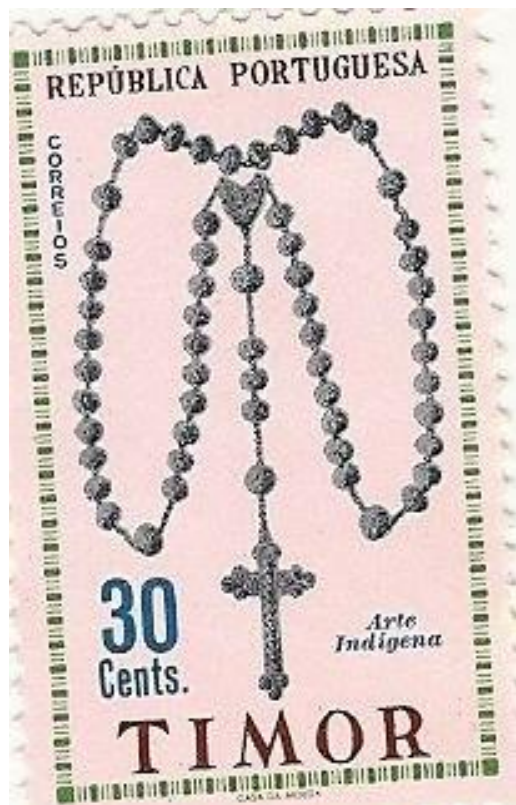
Generation of 1975: Portuguese;

Generation four: Indonesian;

Generation of Independence : + +



Dimension 5: religion



Percentage of Catholics:

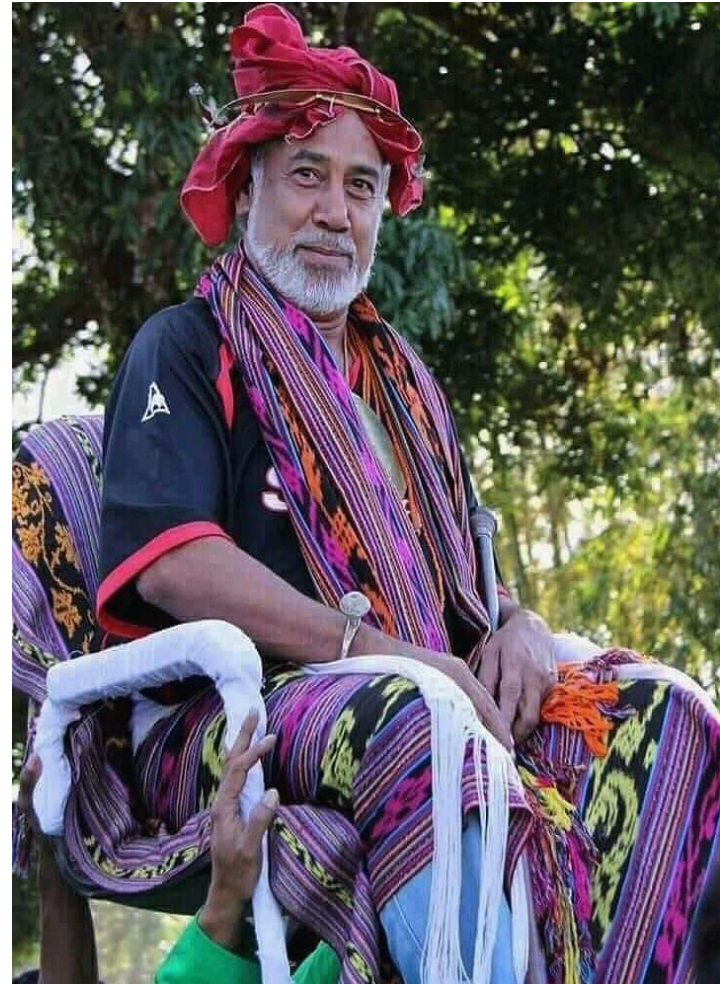
1974 27.8

1989 81.4

1999 90



Reconfigured tradition



The National Identity Survey

among students of Higher Education
2002, 2007, 2010



Question of survey (adapted from IPSS):

Some people say the following things are important for being truly East Timorese. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is?

- a. To have been born in Timor-Leste?
- b. To have East Timorese citizenship?
- c. To have lived in Timor-Leste for most of one's life?
- d. To be able to speak Tetum?
- e. To be able to speak Portuguese?
- f. To be a Catholic?
- g. To respect tradition and adat?
- h. To respect Timor-Leste's political institutions and laws?
- i. To feel East Timorese?

as in Leach 2012: 235-237

The National Identity Survey

2002



% of respondents; N = 320

	very important	fairly important	not very important	not at all important
Speak Tetum	83	9	7	1
Speak Portuguese	24	31	26.5	17
Be Catholic	81	5.5	9.5	2

(as in Leach 2012: 235-236)



The National Identity Survey

among students of Higher Education, 2007
% of respondents; N = 250

Indicator	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important	Not at all important
Speak Tetum	88.5	7.5	3.5	0.5
Speak Portuguese	52	28	14	6
Be Catholic	84	7	8	1

Leach 2012: 237



The National Identity Survey

among students of Higher Education, 2010,
Percentages of respondents; N = 365.

Indicator	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important	Not at all important
Speak Tetum	88.5	8.5	2.5	0
Speak Portuguese	52	31	12.5	2
Be Catholic	78	11	8	1



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Construction and reconstruction processes go on.

The end. For now.

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