

Understanding the tipping point of urban conflict:
violence, cities and poverty reduction in the developing world

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Understanding the tipping point of urban conflict: the case of Dili, Timor-Leste

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Abstract

This Working Paper seeks to analyse the 2006-07 Crisis in Dili through the lens of the urban tipping process of violent conflict. The conceptual framework of this project furthers our understanding of how different aspects of the urban environment are interrelated, and acts as a guide to the organised complexity of the city. In the case study of Dili, the notion of the “tipping point” is used to generate new insights about the Crisis and to question popular narratives, both domestically and internationally, about the role of the security sector and organised youths in the collective violence that marked it. The participatory research conducted in 2011 uncovered a number of common themes that interlocutors identified as underlying recent events in Dili: these include the discrepancy between traditional forms of authority and the values of liberal democracy, the discursive role of the “east-west” divide, the presence of martial arts, ritual arts and other youth groups on both the city and sub-city levels, the importance of past conflicts and disputes among the political elite in shaping conflict in present-day Timor-Leste, and the on-going stand-off and competition in the formal security sector. Along these themes, the Working Paper offers a synthetic account of the environment in which the petitioner issue within the armed forces came to tip into collective urban violence in 2006. According to the findings, and as elaborated in the adjoining Policy Brief, it may be worthwhile to consider Dili as a genuinely urban space with its own particular security dynamics, competing political and ritual authorities, acute land insecurity, and specific planning needs.

Keywords: Urban tipping process, 2006-07 Crisis, Traditional authority (lisan), youth groups, sacred houses (uma lulik), security sector governance, community policing

1. Introduction

On 24 February 2011, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1969, extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) for another year. The Resolution reaffirmed the UNMIT recommendations of the UN Secretary-General, who in an earlier report had called for the need to review and reform the country's security sector (UNSG, 2010). In particular, the Resolution stated that a continued UNMIT presence was needed to "delineate between the roles and responsibilities of the Falintil-Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste (F-FDTL) and the Polícia Nacional de Timor-Leste (PNTL), to strengthen legal frameworks, and to enhance civilian oversight and accountability mechanisms of both security institutions" (UNSC, 2011: 3).

Indeed, security sector governance has been one of the main challenges facing Timor-Leste since its independence a decade ago. What the consequences of failure in this regard can be was vividly portrayed in the dramatic events of the so-called "Crisis" of 2006-07, when a dispute over unequal treatment within the armed forces tipped into a frenzy of collective violence in the capital Dili. When the dust settled, dozens of people had been killed, thousands of houses torched, and tens of thousands of residents displaced.

This case study seeks to analyse the 2006-07 Crisis through the lens of the "urban tipping point" of violent conflict. This conceptual tool, underlying the present project, focuses on the process through which the complexities of the urban environment come together and foster the transformation – that is the "tipping" – of interpersonal conflict into collective violence. The analysis seeks to further our understanding of how different aspects of the urban environment are interrelated, generate new insights about the 2006-07 Crisis, and question popular narratives, both domestically and internationally, about how this dark episode of Timor-Leste's recent history materialised in a setting marked by high youth unemployment, social jealousy, historical rivalries within the political establishment, land insecurity and a fragmented security sector.

The overall aim of this Working Paper is to give a synthetic, and at times provocative, analysis of the environment in which the petitioner issue within the armed forces came to tip into collective urban violence. Ultimately, the project seeks to identify entry points for local and international stakeholders seeking to foster the long-term political stability of Timor-Leste. Such recommendations for the practitioner community are elaborated in the Policy Brief that accompanies this study.

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2. Approach, key terms and methods

While numerous studies have examined the reasons for the Crisis (notably ICG, 2006; USAID, 2006) and analysed its consequences (e.g. Scambary, 2009; Robinson, 2010), none have looked in any detail at the dynamics of the conflict itself. That is, no study has offered an explanation as to why an administrative dispute over travel costs between a group of soldiers and the government “tipped” into large-scale collective violence. The Dili case study of this project seeks to unpack precisely these dynamics through the lens of the **urban tipping point**.

The events of 2006-07 in Dili, like similar ones around the globe (e.g. Nairobi in 2008), give credence to common perceptions, in particular among the wider public, that uncontrolled urbanisation correlates with violence and a breakdown of social order. Yet while on the aggregate interpersonal relationships within urban settings tend to take on an impersonal style of social interaction, micro-level anthropological studies have shown that within urban neighbourhoods, city dwellers continuously produce “urban villages” – that is, small-scale community forms of living through repeated interaction with only a limited number of individuals within a localised territory (Rodgers, 2010: 6). Just as the 2009 World Bank mandate on which the present study builds (Geneva Declaration, 2010), the research conducted thus distinguishes between **city-level** and **sub-city-level** data and analysis.

A related aspect guiding this research is the insight that urban environments can best be described as **complex yet organised** – in the sense that they present “situations in which half a dozen or even several dozen quantities are all varying simultaneously *and in subtly interconnected ways*”; “the variables are many, but they are not helter-skelter; ‘they are interrelated into an organic whole’” (Jacobs 1961: 433; emphasis in the original). Thus, rather than assuming that urban settings by themselves facilitate collective violence, conflict should be seen as a constant factor, with attention having to shift to the reasons why in urban settings it sometimes transforms from low levels of interpersonal conflict to acute levels of collective violence.

In light of this reasoning, the assumption underlying this project is that such a transformation is the product of urban complexity and is best understood through the lens of the “tipping point”. While the notion of the tipping point will be explained in more detail in Section 3, it is important to stress here that it is a process through which the complexities of the urban environment come together and foster the transformation – that is the “tipping” – of interpersonal conflict to collective violence. This “urban tipping process” can increase our understanding of how different aspects of the urban environment are interrelated, and can act as a guide to the organised complexity of the city – in this case Dili. Consequently, the present case study uses the notion of the “tipping point” to generate new insights about the 2006-07 Crisis and to question popular narratives, both domestically and internationally, about the role of the security sector and organised youths in the collective violence that marked it.

In many studies on urban violence, the definition of the term “**urban**” is simply assumed, rather than defined explicitly. For the most part, this is the result of a general assumption that one knows what the label “urban” is attached to – visions of skyscrapers, traffic jams, and swarms of people on the go. While urban planners, social geographers and municipal administrators have developed a complex set of indicators for how to determine the urban in counter-distinction to the rural (see Jütersonke et al, 2007: 169), for the purpose of this project it is sufficient to follow Louis Wirth’s classic depiction of urban settings as constituting

"relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement(s) of socially heterogeneous individuals" (Wirth, 1938: 8). This minimal definition of urban space brings to light the fact that cities¹ are both social and physical entities, and that while they might not be inherently violent, as Louis Wirth assumed, they are at the very least antagonistic (Rodgers, 2010: 10).

"Tipping" refers to a process through which a phenomenon becomes increasingly generalised rather than specific. For the purpose of this project, the focus will be on the generalisation and spread of violence within the urban environment. The transformation of urban conflict into large-scale collective violence is what is meant by the **"urban tipping process"**. This process is triggered when a combination of quantitative and/or qualitative factors alters the status quo of the urban environment (the steady level of conflict) and facilitates the spread of a phenomenon (a specific kind of violence such as youth violence) through the urban setting – significantly changing that environment in the process. The spread of this phenomenon proceeds through the urban setting at varying speeds, yet it is only when a **"conflict tipping point"** is reached that large-scale change occurs.

For the purpose of this case study, and in line with the urban tipping point project documents, **"conflict"** is taken in a broad sense to refer to societal tensions resulting from aspirations of power and authority by political leaders, business entrepreneurs, the security sector and a variety of societal actors and stakeholders in the public realm. Such conflict is an ever-present phenomenon in every society, and it does not necessarily have to entail or result in violence. In terms of Dili, such a conceptualisation of conflict will take the focus away from its simple violent manifestation during the Crisis, and will offer a structural account of the conditions leading to the outburst of violence as well as on the repercussions of this episode on contemporary society.

While the primary focus of this project is thus on the actual "conflict tipping point" (i.e. the Crisis), this case study will attempt to offer a more general, and sensitively contextualised picture of the entire "urban tipping process". This includes the role of fault lines, conflict drivers, key actors, and population thresholds. Instead of thinking about violence in Dili in terms of a "strong vs weak" state apparatus – and thus instead of focusing on deviance from institutional ideal types of modern statehood – the heuristic framework applied places the emphasis on the concrete structural and socio-economic dynamics of governance in Timor-Leste. In particular, the focus is on **security sector governance**, and on services that are possibly also provided by alternative social and political forces and groups, which thereby are resisting and challenging governmental structures.

This case study is the result of in-depth desk-based and field research carried out in the spring and summer of 2011. The field work was conducted at the city, community, and sub-community levels. Specifically, the field research entailed participant observation and around 50 key informant interviews and group discussions, including with youths in a cross-section of Dili's neighbourhoods (and involving current and former "gang" members), community and religious leaders, local business owners, public transport employees, local civil society organisations, Timorese academics, students and university staff, government officials and ministers, city authorities, members of the formal and informal security sector (including police officers and leaders of martial arts groups), international NGOs, UN agencies and the donor community.

¹ The concepts 'urban' and 'city' will be used interchangeably in this study.

What is more, the research conducted for this case study builds on a World Bank study on urban violence in Dili, in which one of the authors was involved in 2009. The study, which has fed into the World Bank's report on *Violence in the City* (2010) and was also published separately as a working paper of the Secretariat of the Geneva Declaration (2010), conducted household surveys and focus groups in four neighbourhoods of Dili – Fatuhada (pilot), Perumnas, Delta III and Ai Mutin. A series of key informant interviews were also undertaken. Noting that "urban violence in Dili can often shift from collective to interpersonal forms in dramatic fashion", the study found that due to "the weak state of crime and health surveillance and the fact that most minor incidents are dealt with through customary means, if at all, it is difficult for international and domestic authorities to anticipate the onset of acute forms of urban violence" (Geneva Declaration, 2010: 11).

The present project seeks to take this observation to heart when exploring the dynamics that led to the 2006 Crisis. But instead of engaging in a further round of survey research (Dili residents already suffer from "survey fatigue" as it is), the participatory research undertaken for this case study primarily involved narrative conversations with the underlying aim of questioning the presuppositions of the development community, public authorities, civil society actors and ordinary residents regarding the prevailing public discourse about the "problem" of youth unemployment, violence, and the assumed link between the two. The field research itself, as well as the present report and subsequent presentations and stakeholder meetings in Dili and Geneva, seek to stimulate people to think "outside of the box" and critically assess the environment (especially in relation to the presence of a plurality of competing authorities and a mushrooming of official and unofficial security providers) in which societal conflict and interpersonal violence occurs.

Apart from reviewing the data and insights derived from the World Bank study, the first phase of the research conducted for this case study involved an extensive review of both the academic and practitioner literatures. The aim here was to analyse the historical development of violence in Timor-Leste, tease out current socio-economic trends, and identify standard narratives and assumptions of the "development discourse". This secondary material was further supplemented by data obtained from various UN agencies, local and international NGOs, and Timorese government ministries.

Against this backdrop, the second phase of the research involved participatory field work seeking to engage in a more iterative approach to understanding the "onset of" or "tipping into" collective violence. The research was conducted through what can best be described as a basic version of "grounded theory", or the sequential reformulation of tentative arguments. Rather than using theory to develop a set of hypotheses that are then tested by means of empirical analysis, the work was conducted "backwards" by first collecting information and then inductively reorganising it into categories, patterns, themes, and narratives (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 238-9). As the fieldwork progressed, the researchers tested the emerging narratives and reoccurring themes – by asking multiple actors similar questions to see if the answers matched – and then repeatedly refined them in a series of reflective feedback loops. This process of triangulation increases the credibility of the research by basing claims on multiple viewpoints (Cresswell, 1994).

The aim of the participatory approach was not just to get a sense of how different stakeholders experienced the Crisis, but also to see how individuals from various backgrounds interpreted the violence and its causes almost six years on. Have

the public authorities learned any lessons from the Crisis? Have the underlying fault lines been addressed? Could the violence of 2006 be repeated?

There was considerable disagreement amongst the participants in terms of interpreting past, current and anticipated levels of violence. Views also diverged on the issue of how episodes of collective violence are triggered, and what could or should be done to avoid them in the future. Generally, however, a number of common themes soon emerged, particularly the discrepancy between traditional forms of authority and the values of liberal democracy, the discursive role of the "east-west" divide, the presence of martial arts, ritual arts and other youth groups on both the city and sub-city levels, the importance of past conflicts and disputes among the political elite in shaping conflict in present-day Timor-Leste, competing land claims and the on-going stand-off and competition in the formal security sector. The analytical narrative offered in this Working Paper is largely structured along these themes.

3. Conceptual framework: the urban tipping process

In sociology, the term "tipping point" refers to a unique or previously rare phenomenon that all of a sudden becomes rapidly and drastically more common. The sociological use of the phrase was brought into existence by Morton Grodzins in his study of integrating neighbourhoods in the USA. In his 1958 work entitled *The Metropolitan Area as a Racial Problem*, Grodzins found that most of the white families remained in a neighbourhood as long as the comparative number of black families remained low. However, when the number of black families became too high, the white families would move out *en masse*. This rapid exodus from the neighbourhood was labelled "white flight", and the moment when it happened was termed the "tipping point" (Grodzins, 1958).

In a number of studies dealing with interracial neighbourhoods in the USA, Thomas Schelling (1969, 1971, 1972, and 1978) came up with two distinct models of residential segregation between whites and black. These included the "proximity model" and the "bounded-neighbourhood" model. The proximity model shows segregation through simulation, while the bounded-neighbourhood model explains at which point segregations starts to occur – that is, the point at which the neighbourhood "tips".

The bounded-neighbourhood model, or, as it is better known, the "neighbourhood tipping" model, is perhaps the more important of the two given the subject at hand (Schelling 1971: 143-86). According to Schelling, the phenomenon of "neighbourhood tipping" occurs when a neighbourhood dominated by white residents, after a number black families move in, suddenly begins the process of transforming into a neighbourhood increasingly dominated by black residents. Schelling emphasises the fact that this process of moving out/in is not steady or linear – rather, once it is "triggered", it appears to accelerate until a tipping point is reached.

According to Schelling, individuals have different thresholds of acceptance when it comes to the number of individuals of the opposite colour residing in the neighbourhood. The moving out process is "triggered" by the individuals with the lowest tolerance level. Once these individuals have moved out, a void in the neighbourhood needs to be filled. If this void is filled by black individuals, then the proportion of blacks in the neighbourhood may reach the next threshold and trigger the moving out of the next group of white individuals who are only slightly more tolerant than the first group(s). This process continues, accelerating at each stage until the neighbourhood becomes predominantly, or completely, black. It is important to mention that this pattern also happens the other way around. That

is, an all-black neighbourhood may be “tipped” into an all-white neighbourhood. Prejudice goes both ways.

“Tipping” is thus described by Schelling as a process that occurs when an original equilibrium is disrupted by something (such as mass migration of one ethnic group into a neighbourhood previously occupied by another ethnic group) causing a change in the environment and the emergence of a new equilibrium (Schelling 1971: 143). Moreover, for the tipping process to be triggered, this “something” *does not need to be a significant or large change*. It might instead only have a small effect on the system, but this effect in turn triggers a chain reaction that moves the system away from the original status quo and towards a quantitatively and/or qualitatively new one. Schelling’s work highlights the fact that an outcome such as collective violence can certainly be triggered by what might appear to be a trivial matter – such as, during the 2006-07 Crisis in Dili, a disgruntled group of soldiers (the so-called “petitioners”) claiming they were being unfairly treated.

As insightful as the bounded-neighbourhood model may be, Schelling himself would later admit that it tells us very little about the behaviour that leads to a particular outcome such as neighbourhood segregation or even collective violence (Schelling, 2006: 259). In order to address these shortcomings, Schelling proposes that *the process* which brings about an outcome such as segregation or collective violence has to be taken into account as well. But while Schelling places emphasis on the incentives of individuals and the behaviour that the incentives motivate (Schelling, 2005: 259), the present case study takes a more structural approach and focuses on the fault lines and conflict drivers (described below) in society that set the stage for certain key actors to engage in violence, and lower the thresholds or tolerance of individuals to behave in a violent manner within the urban environment.

Perhaps more directly related to the phenomena of collective violence in urban environments and “tipping” is the work of Mark Granovetter who, in 1978, published a paper entitled *Threshold Models of Collective Behaviour*. In this paper, Granovetter took the notion of “tipping” as described by Schelling and applied it to “paradoxical” phenomena such as riots or revolutions. For Granovetter, “paradoxical” phenomena are those for which the observable macro-outcomes do not seem to be intuitively consistent with what is going on at the micro-level (i.e. with the preferences and desires of individuals). The “threshold model” of human behaviour thus supposed that individual preferences are unrelated, or even opposed to, the observable outcomes such as collective violence (Granovetter, 1978: 1420-43).

For Granovetter, key is the environment within which people find themselves, and not their individual preferences. He argues that individuals need “different levels of safety” before making a decision, with the “level of safety” not necessarily implying that the environment is safe, but rather that the individual receives benefits as a result of the action, and the he or she will not necessarily be reprimanded for taking it – especially if this action involves breaking the law such as rioting or engaging in other forms of collective violence. What determines an individual’s decision to engage in collective behaviour is thus not necessarily his or her preference for that behaviour, but the “safety” of action. This safety is a product of “thresholds”, which Granovetter defines as the proportion of the group an individual would have to see making the same decision to engage in a particular action before doing the same (Granovetter, 1978: 1422).²

² This does not mean that what is going on here is simple contagion, i.e. the mere imitation of the last individual observed. Contagion does not take into account that more than one person might have to make a decision before an individual feels compelled to make the same one. Thus, in the broader

What this means for collective behaviour is that the macro-level outcome – such as collective violence – depends on the thresholds of the population. But while Granovetter focuses on individual thresholds, he does not explain what determines the threshold. For him the only influence is the presence of other people engaging in the same action. While this is important, it is very hard to determine outside of a controlled environment what the number of people would have to be before a single individual decides to engage in an action that he or she might not necessarily have a preference for. As a result, and as mentioned previously, this study assumes that the structural environment also has an effect on the population threshold. For instance, if violence is taken to be a normal way for dealing with conflict in a population (both in the private sphere where it might manifest itself as domestic or gender-based violence, and in the public sphere where it may take the form of state, or state-sponsored, oppression), then given the opportunity (when there is a level of safety, such as a sense of “lawlessness” during the 2006-07 Crisis) people are likely to engage in collective violence even if individually they do not prefer to act in a violent manner.

What can be taken away from the work of Schelling and Granovetter is that different sociological phenomena – be they neighbourhood segregation, riots, or revolutions – spread through an environment in a similar pattern. The same point was made more recently by Malcolm Gladwell, whose book *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference* (2000) inspired the development of the present project and consequently this study. Drawing on the academic literature of the “tipping point”, Gladwell’s main claim is that an outcome, or presence of a phenomenon in society is determined by a critical juncture, threshold, or “tipping point”, which signals a key moment in the evolution or spread of the phenomenon. In line with Schelling’s theory, this moment is characterised by the “coming together” of isolated events into a significant and accelerating trend or trajectory. Importantly, and unlike Schelling and Granovetter, Gladwell does not focus solely on the tipping point of a phenomenon, but on the actual process that brings it about. For him, the process is made up of three interrelated parts: the “law of the few”, the “stickiness factor”, and the “power of context”.

The “law of the few” stipulates that the attainment of the tipping point, which transforms an event into a significant outcome, usually requires the intervention of a number of influential types of people. There are three types of such people that act as catalysts of the “tipping point” (Gladwell, 2000: 30-88). The first are called *connectors*, individuals who know a lot about other individuals, and act as conduits among all of their acquaintances, helping them to create connections and relationships that might not have otherwise happened. In this sense, connectors are those select people who have access and opportunities to worlds to which average individuals do not belong or have access to – they are the ones that spread information or make previously unknown information known. The second group of people are labelled *mavens*: individuals who are experts on particular subjects. Such people not only have a desire to give other people the benefit of their expertise and advice, but they also have a strong desire to assist other individuals by helping them make informed decisions. Finally, the third group of people are the *salesmen*. Gladwell describes salesmen as individuals who are highly charismatic, approachable, and sociable. They are usually well-spoken and are extremely persuasive in inducing or convincing other individuals to behave in a certain way.

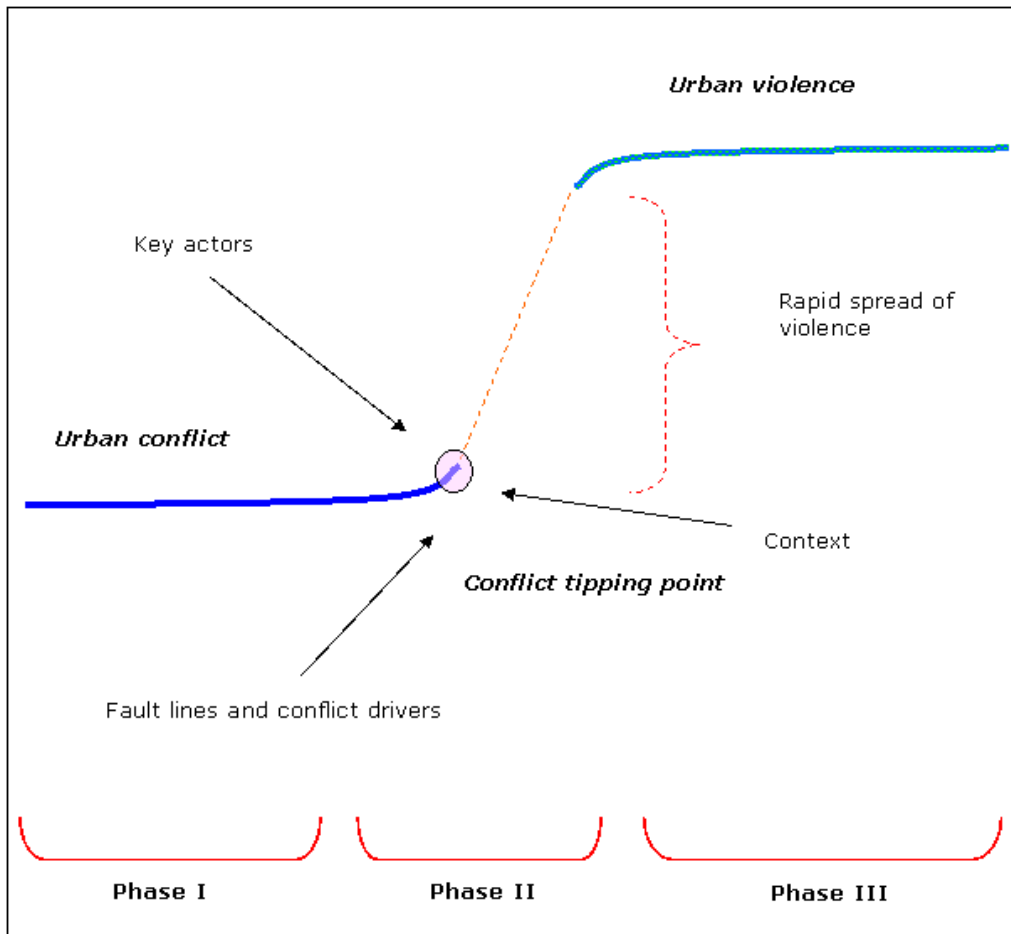
context of threshold models and collective behaviour, as Granovetter himself recognises, contagion alone seems inappropriate.

Another key factor that facilitates the attainment of the tipping point is what Gladwell calls the “stickiness factor” (Gladwell, 2000: 89-139). This refers to the unique quality of an item, idea, or act to stay with an individual long after it has been bought, read, or acted upon. In other words, it “sticks” in the minds of individuals and influences their future behaviour. The final factor that facilitates the attainment of the tipping point is the effect of the environment on the phenomena at hand – this is called the “power of context” (Gladwell, 2000: 133-192). Gladwell argues that the historical context and contemporary environment are important for the tipping point to occur. Here small but necessary changes in the environment have to happen in order for the trend to “tip” and become drastically more prevalent. These changes are usually marginal, and alone would not create the desired effect. However, when they occur in unison their accumulated power is enough to facilitate the “tipping point”.

Taking the work of these authors as the starting point, the main goal of this case study is to understand the dynamics of conflict that led to the 2006-07 Crisis in Dili. Specifically, the aim is to examine how the petitioner issue “tipped” into large-scale collective violence – could such scenarios potentially reoccur in the future? Much of the tipping point literature operates within a rational choice framework and identifies three inter-related factors that may influence the likelihood that low levels of interpersonal violence in a conflict will “tip”: context, key actors, and thresholds/preferences (Gladwell, 2000). While the focus of the analysis is thus primarily on agency (and individuals’ beliefs and preference systems), this case study will instead offer a more structural examination focusing on the actual process – of which the tipping point is a piece of the puzzle but not the whole picture.

For the purpose of the present study, this **“urban tipping process”** (see the figure below) can be subdivided into three phases. Phase I is marked by the presence of conflict and societal tensions in the urban environment. Conflict at this stage is relatively stable, in the sense that it is confined to (albeit potentially high levels of) interpersonal violence, and can be analysed by drawing on the fault lines in the urban and national environments. Phase II is the “conflict tipping point”: this is where conflict drivers interact with the fault lines and together increase the magnitude of the conflict, causing it to spread through society and bring about collective violence. Phase III is characterised by a change in the urban environment itself. Here the effects of collective violence during the tipping point can be drawn upon to shed light on the current status quo.

The Urban Tipping Process



A **fault line** can be defined as an empirically observed or subjectively perceived societal (and usually more long-term) division along which the tensions among individuals and groups are structured and interests are defined (Jütersonke and Kartas, 2010: 10). The major fault lines identified in Dili leading up to the 2006-07 Crisis are those between the urban and rural parts of the country, between traditional and modern modes of governance, the disembedded nature of Dili's urban environment, and the supposed ethnic difference between the "westerners" and "easterners". A **conflict driver**, by contrast, is an imminent condition that has the potential of producing social unrest, oppression, or open confrontation. The resulting violence may subsequently be structured along specific fault lines, but is not necessarily causally related to them (Jütersonke and Kartas, 2010: 10). The conflict drivers that were drawn out from the fieldwork included social jealousy, historical problems and disputes among the political elite, high youth unemployment, land insecurity and competition between various security providers.

The presence, and interaction, of fault lines and conflict drivers creates an environment in which the "thresholds" of individuals to engage in usually sanctioned actions potentially decrease. The assumption here is that different forms of violence are inherently connected and constitute the **context** in which collective violence can occur. In Dili, this may entail the exposure of children to domestic violence, the arguable prevalence of "collective" post-traumatic stress disorder within East Timorese society, and high membership levels for martial

arts groups and gangs that construct their identity around and ritualise certain forms of violence. Together, this creates an environment in which the “level of safety” (Granovetter, 1978) to engage in violence is possibly lower than it would otherwise have been.

The occurrence of fault lines and conflict drivers alone is not enough for an interpersonal conflict to tip into large-scale collective violence, however. Instead, together these factors contribute to the context within which the tipping point occurs. They are not the “something” that Schelling was talking about, and that actually induces a conflict to tip. The conflict tipping point is usually characterised by an event that takes place within this context (such as the dispute with the petitioners) and is brought about by certain **key actors** as outlined above: these include the *first-movers* (the individuals to first engage in violence); *connectors* (those individuals who know a lot of other individuals in the group, and perhaps even outside it, and are likely to influence other individuals to follow the lead of the first movers); the *experts* (individuals who are seen to be especially qualified for the task at hand); and *charismatic personalities* (individuals who are likely to convince a large number of individuals to behave in a certain way).

4. A brief history of Timor-Leste

Various known as Timor-Leste (*leste* meaning “east” in Portuguese), Timor-Timur (*timur* meaning “east” in Malay); and Timor Lorosa’e (*Lorosa’e* meaning “rising sun” in Tetum), the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste is located on the eastern half of the island of Timor. It is the largest and easternmost of the Lesser Sunda Islands in the Malay Archipelago. The island is 640 kilometres northwest of Darwin, Australia, and surrounded by the Ombai and Wetar Straits to the north, and by the Timor Sea to the south. The country shares a border with the Indonesian province of East Nusa Tenggara, and also includes the enclave of Oecussi as well as the islands of Ataúro and Jaco.

Previously a Portuguese colony, the territory of Timor-Leste enjoyed a very brief period of independence from April 1974 to December 1975, when an invasion by Indonesian forces eventually led to it becoming the 27th Province of Indonesia on 17 July 1976, (see Section 8 below; also Saldanha, 1994: 100-101; Cummins, 2010: 93). The invasion and eventual annexation of Timor-Leste has been characterised as brutal, savage, and indiscriminately violent. This set the tone for the future widespread use of torture, extrajudicial killings, politically created famine, rape, and other atrocities that were committed by Indonesian forces and anti-independence militias during the 24 years of Indonesian occupation (Dunn, 1983: 283-84; CAVR, 2005). It is estimated that between 1975 to 1999 there were anything between 102,800 and 183,000 conflict-related deaths, with the higher estimates taking into account indirect deaths through conflict-induced hunger and disease – all this out of a population of about 700,000 in 1975 (CAVR, 2005).

In a referendum on 30 August 1999, the people of Timor-Leste overwhelmingly voted in favour of independence (78.5%, with a turnout of 98.6%). A wave of violence ensued as the retreating Indonesian forces, in collaboration with Timorese militias, went on a rampage, looting and pillaging the island. A UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) was hastily established and sought to oversee the state-building process that culminated in the creation of the independent Republic of Timor-Leste on 20 May 2002. The over-emphasis on *de jure* independence – with little knowledge or consideration of political cleavages, historical allegiances and rivalries, and various societal dimensions within the Timorese population (Federer, 2005; Kammen, 2009) – arguably set the scene for the 2006 “Crisis” and continues to haunt the country to this day.

The Crisis, which officially refers to a period of instability in Timor-Leste between April 2006 and December 2007, actually started on 11 January 2006, when a group of 159 soldiers from the East Timorese military (F-FDTL) put forward a formal complaint with President Xanana Gusmao and Brigadier-General Taur Matan Ruak, claiming that they were being discriminated against due to the fact that they were “Westerners” – the claim being that their longer and more expensive journeys to see their families in Western districts were deliberately not being taken into account. By the middle of February, the number of petitioners grew to 593 – making up about 40% of the total national force. By 16 March 2006 the petitioners had still not returned to the barracks, and as a result, Brigadier-General Taur Matan Ruak ordered all of them to be dismissed. This decision led not only to a rift within the political elite – Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri supported the decision, while President Gusmao did not – but also to the fault line between “Easterners” against “Westerners” once again appearing in the wider population.

The terminology of “Easterners” and “Westerners” refers to the Tetum words “*lorosae*” and “*loromonu*”, literally meaning “sunrise” and “sunset”. In today’s Timor-Leste, “*lorosae*” generally refers to people who are from parts of the country east of Dili, while “*loromonu*” signifies people from the western parts of the country. Confusion reigns over the origins of the distinction, with some arguing that it refers to ethnic differences that were already present in Timorese society since the time of Portuguese rule (Soares, 2003: 266), while others use it to draw a political distinction between pro-independence persons from the eastern hills, and pro-Indonesian people (including those making up the militias deployed by Indonesia to pillage the country prior to independence) residing more in the west (Gonzales Devant, 2008). During the Indonesian occupation, the western half of modern day Timor-Leste was controlled almost completely by the Indonesian military, whereas the rest was more volatile and in the hands of the FRETILIN resistance movement. This was subsequently reflected in the structure and composition of the FALINTIL military and its political wing, the FRETILIN party, in which individuals from the east form the majority (Carey, 2007).

Suffice it to say that there seems to be a general consensus that the distinction was coined by people in Dili, where it has come to take on very sinister, “us-versus-them” proportions. The distinction was studied in depth by the present project. The split between the Westerners and Easterners once again became politically salient after President Gusmao addressed the nation in a television broadcast on 23 March 2006. Gusmao took it upon himself to publically denounce the dismissals of the petitioners as incorrect and warned that unless the root of the problem was addressed, it would lead to more divisions. His main claim was that what was going on within the F-FDTL was not just a matter of discipline, but an inherent characteristic of the defence forces and the wider society. As a result, he argued that unless the issue was properly resolved, it would give the impression that the national defence forces were only meant for Easterners (those who were part of FRETILIN), and all the others “from Manatuto to Oecusse” were simply “militias’ children” (ICG, 2006: 7). Not surprisingly, coupled with the grievances of the petitioners, the speech helped characterise East Timorese society as geographically and politically divided.

By late April 2006 it appeared that the petitioners had the support of the President as well as much of the population of Dili. The dismissed petitioners consequently asked for and received permission from the Minister of the Interior at the time, Rogerio Lobato, to voice their grievances publically and hold a demonstration in front of the Government Palace, the main government building in Dili. The sense of insecurity before the demonstration was high, with the head

of the petitioners, Lieutenant Gascao Salsinha, promising that the demonstrations would be peaceful, while Lobato warned that if they were not the police would open fire. Meanwhile, the Police Commander, Paulo Martins, tried reassuring the public that everything was under control. The demonstrations began on 24 April 2006, and while they were initially supposed to represent the voices of the petitioners against discrimination, they quickly turned into a protest against the Government led by Prime Minister Alkatiri (ICG, 2006). The result was that a large number of the civilian population joined the demonstrations – among them a significant number of disgruntled youths and youth groups – thereby considerably augmenting the ranks of the petitioners and their sympathisers (UNSG Address, 2006).

Soon, the demonstrations turned violent. The description of the events that followed varies from source to source, but there is overall agreement that the violence that ensued not only led to the immediate fragmentation of the military and police forces, but also pitted Dili neighbourhoods (and their youth groups) against each other. The Crisis ultimately left anywhere between 37 to 200 individuals dead, about 2,000 destroyed houses, and more than 150,000 people displaced. As a result of the violence and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Dili, a 1,542-strong contingent of United Nations Police (UNPOL) and an International Stabilizing Force (ISF) of 920 troops from Australian and New Zealand were brought in to control the situation. This subsequently led to the creation of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT), a mission that is still on-going.

5. Socio-economic characteristics of Timor-Leste

Today, Timor-Leste has a nominal non-oil per-capita income of USD 594.50 (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011b: 55), making it one of the poorest countries in the world. In 2007, 49.9% of the population lived below the national poverty line (raised to USD 0.88 PPP per day since 2007), although government figures now place this number at 41% (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011b: 55). According to UNDP's human development indicators, 23% of the population has been suffering from undernourishment (UNDP, 2011). The country ranks 120 out of 169 on the global Human Development Index (HDI= 0.502), making it lag behind all the other East Asian and Pacific countries (with an average HDI of 0.650).

According to the country's Ministry of Finance, the population doubled between 1980 and 2010 from 555,350 to 1,066,582 (Government of Timor-Leste, 2010). The World Bank gives a slightly higher figure for 2009 of 1,133,594 (World Bank, 2011). Currently, the annual population growth rate stands at 2.41%, the highest in the region. Indeed, Timor-Leste's fertility rate of 6.53 per family is among the highest in the world, and today more than 50% of East Timorese are under the age of 18.

According to the UNDP (2009: 20), 80% of the population of Timor-Leste depends on the agricultural sector for their income. Indeed, the country has traditionally been an agrarian society, largely dependent on small-scale, family-centred agriculture, cattle rearing, and modest cash crops (such as coffee, sandalwood and teak). During the 1999 violence, much of the society's means of subsistence were pillaged by the Indonesian military and colluding militias. The World Bank website estimates that more than 70% of basic infrastructure was destroyed, while an OXFAM report states that 90% of Timor-Leste's infrastructure was either destroyed or damaged (OXFAM Australia, 2008: 10): the agricultural sector was devastated and two-thirds of the population displaced. Since then,

bilateral and multilateral aid agencies have spent approximately USD 5.2 billion on programmes related to Timor-Leste's development (La'o Hamutuk, 2009).

While many geological reports on Timor-Leste were destroyed during the 1999 violence (ESCAP and UNDP, 2003: 25), a mapping of Timor-Leste's natural resources in 2002 suggested that the country possessed significant mineral and hydrocarbon resources. A Joint Petroleum Development Area (JPDA) was subsequently set up with Australia to tap into the off-shore oilfields in the Timor Sea, and although disputes continue as to the fairness of the agreement (see Lundahl and Sjöholm, 2006), today about 95% of the country's revenues in 2011 and 2012 come from petroleum, according to the 2011 Timor-Leste State Budget.

The 2010 Timor-Leste Labour Force Survey states that the country has an official unemployment rate of 3.6%. This figure is highly misleading, however. According to the report, "a person is considered as employed if they did any work at all (paid or unpaid) during the reference period, which was taken in this survey as being the previous week (Monday to Sunday). Even if the person only works for one hour, they are counted as being employed" (ILO, 2010: vii). As the report itself acknowledges, such an approach will obviously mean that the calculated unemployment rate is severely under-inclusive, as practically every survey respondent will have earned some sort of irregular or ad-hoc income during the previous seven days. Indeed, as pointed out by the UNDP (2009: 20), only 10% of the country's labour force are paid workers. The survey thus concludes that "the unemployment rate should not be considered as a very useful indicator for policy purposes" (ILO, 2010: vii.). Yet it may well be that the high rates of youth unemployment, particularly in Dili, are an important factor in understanding the tipping point of conflict – not just for the 2006-07 Crisis, but potentially also for the years ahead.

6. Dili basics and current violence trends

The major urban centre of Timor-Leste is Dili, on the northern coast of the island. Originally the capital of Portuguese Timor and then of the Indonesian province of Timor Timur, Dili was for most of its existence a shabby port town catering to passing-through sailors, and as a shipment point for primary goods, notably spices, timber, and coffee. Already in 1915, Joseph Conrad called Dili a "highly pestilential place" in his novel *Victory*, a description that for many still resonates today. This characterisation of Timor-Leste's capital is not surprising given that for the first half of the twentieth century Dili still had no water supply, electricity, telephone lines, or paved roads. Indeed, it was not until 1970 that the city dwellers (apart from top officials) were provided with electricity (Cummins 2010: 87).

As commentators have frequently pointed out, from an urban perspective Dili is not much of a city at all, but instead constitutes a series of interlinked local *barrios* (neighbourhoods) or *aldeais* (hamlets or villages), straddling the swampy and arid lowlands in the shadow of a coastal mountain range (Philpott, 2007; Geneva Declaration, 2010). Located approximately 60 kilometres east of the border with Indonesia, the city was limited to the small area in and around what is now referred to as "central Dili" until well into the 1970s. It is only in the last three decades that acute population growth and unregulated urbanisation have led to the rapid expansion of the city. As a result, the district of Dili has come to encompass a 12-kilometre stretch of land bounded by sea to the north, and with mountains rising rapidly just three kilometres south of the coastline.

In line with current urbanisation trends, the district of Dili has by far the highest rate of annual population growth in the country: 4.80% (Government of Timor-

Leste, 2010). Today, about 22% of the total population lives in Dili, the only district with a genuinely “urban” centre (of 193,563 people, with a population density of about 639 persons per square kilometre). Dili also has the largest household size (6.7) in Timor-Leste.

Urban population growth appears to have been driven by a combination of factors, including the centralisation of economic activity in the capital, forced displacement during repeated episodes of collective violence, a spiralling fertility rate, a kind of “capital fetish” among many Timorese – exacerbated by a growing of young professionals returning from their studies abroad. The demographic transition was unprecedented: the overall population grew 13-fold in less than 35 years, leading to a dramatic youth bulge. Indeed, according to the Timor-Leste Labour Force Survey 2010 (ILO, 2010), 30% of the population currently living in Dili fall into the 15-29 age bracket. Specifically, the urbanisation trend is such that far more males than females are moving to Dili, with a current sex ratio of 113.18 males to every 100 females.

Owing to their purported influence in shaping patterns of urban violence, the specific dynamics of population growth warrant a closer look. In 1966, Dili reported a population of just 17,000, with permanent settlements located in the 3-by-3 kilometre area consisting of the Caicoli, Vila Verde, Farol, Bidau, Lecidere, and Santa Cruz neighbourhoods. Traditional village settlements were scattered around the periphery of this “urban” core. By 1975, the population had almost doubled to 28,000 residents (CAVR, 2005: 2). During this period, the “modern” neighbourhoods of Ailok Laran, Bairro Pite, Bebonuk, Becora, Delta (I, II, III, and IV), Fatuhada, Manleuana, Pantai Kelapa, Surik Mas, and Tasi Tolu (among others) were only just emerging as permanent urban settlements, and some did not yet exist at all (Durand, 2006: 64–65). It was only from 1975 onwards that the population of Dili exploded, taking on the peculiar urban-rural mix that characterises the place today.

Another striking feature of Dili’s “chronic” violence is high levels of gender-based violence and domestic abuse (JSMP, 2009; TLAVA, 2009b). According to the most recent Demographic and Health Survey of Timor-Leste (2009-2010), 48% of females between 25 and 29 experienced physical violence over the survey’s 12-month period, with more than a third of all women and girls reporting to have been subjected to physical violence repeatedly within the year. Women living in urban settings are also more likely to experience physical violence than women living in rural areas, with the report indicating that more than half of all females living in Dili district have reported experiencing violence since the age of 15 (Government of Timor-Leste, 2010: 230).

The linkages between gender-based and domestic violence, and other forms of violence in Dili, are unclear, although a number of patterns may be discerned. One of these is the fact that only about 6% of women subjected to such violence subsequently sought help from the police, while the majority seek the assistance of friends, neighbours, and even in-laws (Government of Timor-Leste, 2010: 245). This practice may foster further violence at the community level: the World Bank report on violence in cities found that physical and sexual violence in some parts of Dili would at times escalate into violence between martial arts groups, when victimised females and girls would turn to their boyfriends, brothers, and other male relatives or friends for help (Geneva Declaration, 2010).

Linked to the aforementioned point, much attention in both the media and academic circles has been paid to the prevalence of gangs and martial arts groups in Dili, and to the observation that East Timorese society appears to be factionalised into a diverse array of groups. These groups include localised street-

corner gangs, ritual arts and veterans groups composed of ex-resistance fighters and impoverished migrants from the districts, and large-scale, hierarchical martial arts groups. Overall, there are about 15 of these martial arts groups, with membership spanning the country's 13 districts. The two principal groups have up to 10,000 members each, and some estimates put total membership at more than 90,000 (TLAVA, 2009a). Importantly for this project, public discourse has declared that these actors played a significant part in the 2006 violence. Since then, martial arts groups and gangs have figured prominently in conflict assessments and briefings and are described as posing a threat to Timor-Leste's stability (see Section 11 below). Perceptions on the local level of the community, however, tell a somewhat different story. Indeed, the World Bank data found that while some community members in Dili do view gangs and martial arts groups as a threat to their security, about two thirds of them also indicate that youths and martial arts groups have a positive impact on their community (World Bank, 2010: 131).

Such positive roles in local communities are not surprising in light of the fact that each suburb of Dili is divided into separate "villages", or "*aldeias*". Each village roughly corresponds to the territory of one extended family, and it is not unusual for an entire village to belong to one particular martial arts group. Indeed, it seems that most conflicts in Timor-Leste are between *aldeias*, not within them. What can sometimes appear to be a martial arts group dispute is often a communal dispute, as each community mobilises its youth to inflict revenge or defend territory – indeed, many of the disputes in Timor-Leste appear to be related to land rights and conflicting land claims, an understudied issue that will be discussed further in the next section (see also ICG, 2010). Violence in Dili is thus a curious mix of highly ritualised gang battles, sometimes involving hundreds of people, and vendetta-style revenge killings targeting a particular individual. This pattern occurs throughout the country, and longstanding feuds between individuals and families are sometimes masked as martial arts group or gang conflicts. Indeed, this was a feature of the 2006-07 gang and communal violence as well, with many appearing to have used the "level of safety" (Granovetter, 1978) of the general mayhem to settle old scores. In such a setting, martial arts group and gang conflict remains highly unpredictable and notoriously difficult to mediate (Geneva Declaration, 2010: 51).

7. Traditional authority versus liberal democracy

As so many countries of the global South, Timor-Leste finds itself caught between traditional modes of authority (as stipulated by *lisan*) and the values of liberal democracy. From the first are derived deeply rooted governance structures of East Timorese society, while the latter embody the aspirations of a fledgling nation trying to consolidate on its independence after centuries of foreign rule and oppression. The tensions between the two, and the consequent setting described by the Crisis States Research Centre as "institutional multiplicity" (see, for instance, Beall, *et al.* 2004; Esser, 2009), constitute a crucial fault line along which the dynamics of conflict play themselves out, particularly in the capital Dili (Cummins and Leach, 2012; see also CEPAD, 2010: 34).

For at least the past five hundred years, the history of the East Timorese people has been characterised by foreign occupation – by the Portuguese colonial power, as Indonesia's 27th Province, and more recently as a protectorate of UNTAET (see Fox, 2008). The presence of external rule did not, however, diminish the importance of local and traditional institutions in the day-to-day lives of the population. Though often played down or occluded by political leaders, the traditional institutional structures of society are omnipresent, and often run in parallel (and even at cross-purposes) to the governance structures put in place

by successive external rulers (Cummins, 2010: 75). While “national” institutions have changed depending on which ruling elite had control over the island at a specific point in time, the traditional authority stipulated by *lisan* continues to be the “red thread” holding East Timorese society together, even a decade after independence. Understanding these traditional structures is thus also the crucial backdrop to any analysis of the 2006-07 Crisis and contemporary security dynamics in Dili.

Lisan refers to the traditional form of custom that dominates social relationships at the *suco* and *aldeia* levels in Timor-Leste.³ While it is usually translated as “traditional law”, it actually relates more generally to everything that is considered to come from the ancestors (Hohe and Nixon, 2003: 16). It encompasses a broad array of social relationships that structures the daily lives of most individuals – especially in rural areas of Timor-Leste but also in the capital. As the fieldwork confirmed, the mechanisms through which norms and rules stipulated by *lisan* are implemented are central to, and are usually the first point of call for solving, conflict or communal tensions.

In the tradition of *lisan*, social order is created through adherence to the rule of “first settlers”, which in Timor-Leste works similarly to the legal principle of “first possession” – a mechanism in the common law tradition that is used for establishing initial ownership for something that was previously deemed to be unowned (Fitzpatrick and Barnes, 2010: 216-8).⁴ The concept of origin or first settlers, as articulated in oral history and represented by *uma lulik* (“sacred house”), continues to provide social order among groups. Especially in circumstances of demographic flux, as found in Dili’s neighbourhoods in particular, it is central to the negotiation of marriage arrangements, as well as to stipulating divisions of labour and the use of land and other resources. It is also of key importance in conflict mediation, particularly when it comes to competing claims to land ownership. Ultimately, the rule of “first settlers” is a traditional mechanism for dealing with conflict (particularly over land claims) by incorporating newcomers, migrants or externals into a broadly understood hierarchical system for allocating and managing resources and authority (Fitzpatrick and Barnes, 2010: 218).

The tradition of *lisan* is thus central to East Timorese society, yet potentially at loggerheads with the modern democratic institutions that have been set up in independent Timor-Leste. Unsurprisingly, the country’s emergence from colonial rule and the subsequent struggle from Indonesia’s occupation are “intimately tied up with [the East Timorese people’s] conception of themselves as an independent, democratic nation” (Cummins, 2010: 4). Yet already a decade after independence, there appears to be an increasing trend towards sidestepping these institutions in favour of traditional modes of governance. Indeed, interviewees repeatedly stated that in the years leading up to, and following, the Crisis, modern institutions were continuously perceived by the East Timorese population as failing to live up to their expectations, and the resulting disenchantment appears to have led to significant recourse to other, more familiar forms of conflict mediation and resolution.

³ The term “*suco*” refers to the lowest administrative unit used by the municipal authorities in Timor-Leste since the colonial period. “*Aldeia*”, by contrast, is the local Timorese term for hamlet or village that still appears to be the defining unit in daily life. There are typically several *aldeia* within a particular *suco*.

⁴ In their anthropological study of land ownership in the East-Timorese village of Babulo, Fitzpatrick and Barnes describe the legal principle of “first possession” by referring to examples in the common law (e.g. *Pierson v Post*), where a person who finds an unowned object becomes its owner by implication of the law.

One of the key reasons for this, as Tanja Hohe (2004) has also argued, may have been the international community's focus on establishing centralised national institutions without ensuring the participation of the local community and recognised traditional leaders. The unprecedented attempt of state building by UNTAET was:

...mainly focused on nation institution building. *Within 30 months* it had established some basic institutions for governance and administration. The Transnational Administration twice appointed transitional cabinets. Eighty-eight Constituent Assembly members were elected, and they drafted a new *constitution in five months*. *The Assembly became a parliament*. On 20 May 2002 the country's administration was transferred from international supervision to Timorese control (Hohe, 2004: 45; emphasis added).

Not only did UNTAET work to create a central administration at remarkable speed, but it also did so on the assumption that, at the time, Timor-Leste lacked any sort of domestic actors of authority and thus constituted, as one interviewee aptly expressed it, a "governance ground zero". Such criticism against the blueprint approach to state building adopted by the United Nations is, of course, nothing new and has been extensively recorded elsewhere. But it is unfortunately the case that UNTAET needs to be added to the list of UN missions that did not recognise certain key aspects of traditional value systems – thus repeating, in a way, the approach taken by the Portuguese and Indonesian administrations. As a result, the people's trust in the formal institutions of the state seems to be subsiding after the initial euphoria of independence.

One of the main issues over which the East Timorese population has resorted back to traditional beliefs of *lisan* is the inability of the formal institutions of post-independence Timor-Leste to provide land security, an inability that remains a key conflict driver. Particularly in Dili, dealing with the issue of land rights is complicated and related to the formal titles issued under Portuguese and Indonesian rule. Often constituting the only existing documentation, these titles continue to form the basis of many land claims, thus coming into direct conflict with traditional notions of land ownership. Three further issues are exacerbating the problem of conflicting land claims. The first is the fact that the majority of records were destroyed in the 1999 referendum violence. The second is the large influx into Dili of individuals from the eastern parts of Timor-Leste after the withdrawal of the Indonesian army and militias. The third is the violence and displacement of people that occurred during the 2006-07 Crisis. All of these aspects make the verification and cross-checking of land titles in Dili difficult if not impossible (ICG, 2010).

The problem in Dili has further exacerbated by the plurality of authorities and land scarcity in the capital. In this context, traditional forms of signalling relating to the rule of first settlers (usually found in rural areas) have broken down and created an environment in which competition for control over territory, rights and land became increasingly conflictual and often violent. For many interviewees, the lack of land and other services in the capital is seen as a major source of conflict, both in the years leading up to the Crisis and those following it. What is more, there appears to be very little transparency and dialogue between the East Timorese government and local communities and civil society. This has made some local NGOs argue that it is "politically undesirable and impossible to solve land rights" in Timor-Leste. It is undesirable because in the post-independence environment, land is seen as an important economic asset, and uncertainty or ambiguity with respect to its ownership (as a result of multiple and often contradicting claims) allows the political elite to manipulate the system. According

to some interlocutors, this is evidenced by the inability or unwillingness of the various political actors to actually follow the law – indeed, they are even charged with completely ignoring it in order to serve personal political objectives. One of these objectives seems to be the transformation of the capital into a predominantly administrative town, with the concomitant aim of reversing the urbanisation trend.

Land in Dili continues to be appropriated by the government without much consultation or prior notice and, it appears, without taking the needs of the local population into account. According to the Parliamentary Law 1/2003, *Regime Jurídico dos Bens Imóveis, I Parte: Titularidade de Bens móveis* – passed on 10 March 2003 and granting the State of Timor-Leste most of the land in Dili that had previously belonged to Portuguese and Indonesian civil servants – the government has the right to appropriate land and construct administrative buildings irrespective of the fact that there are people living on it. This, it seems, was the cause of much conflict leading up to the Crisis. The fieldwork confirmed that individuals at the sub-community level feel they are given very little, if any, warning about their evictions from state-owned land, and if a warning was given, it was in Portuguese – Timor-Leste's legal language that is not spoken by the majority of the urban population, and almost by no one in rural areas. Moreover, when evictions did occur, interviewees claim that they tended to be implemented with force and at night.

Recent survey data has confirmed that land insecurity constitutes one of the main causes of concern for the East Timorese – with the issue considered to be of acute importance in Dili and Baucau, the two urban areas that have been the sites of most of the strategic planning, development-based evictions, and conflict-related displacement (Haburas Foundation 2012). And in light of the new Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan (2011-2030), which reflects the government's desire to implement its conception of a “modernised” countryside, that insecurity is unlikely to decrease anytime soon. According to the Plan, resettlement is the solution to the problem of underdevelopment in rural areas. Resettlement in this context does not mean more rural-urban migration (the predominant pattern in Timor-Leste), but rather the opposite. Indeed, the government clearly states that “Dili is already experiencing rapid population growth – from 175,730 people in 2004 to 234,026 in 2010 – and [as a result] housing and other infrastructure have not been able to keep up with demand”; the solution to rural development and to lowering the influx of rural-urban migrants in Dili is thus “to encourage economic activity in regional centres and rural areas” (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011b: 107). This process of “rural-rural resettlement” involves the building of new towns and villages, and forcing local populations from leaving their secluded (and often single-kin) hamlets in favour of more structured communities that can be attached to basic infrastructure, electricity lines and road networks. Inspired, it was claimed, by the order admired on trips to the Bavarian countryside, the Plan seeks to transcend “unorganised traditional modes of living” in favour of organised modernity. As one interviewee argued, it is not possible to “talk about rural development if you want to keep the current structure... people are living, like a family, on top of a hill, in a river bed. If you want to provide public services properly, you need to resettle.”

A key aspect of the modernisation of Timor-Leste's countryside, an initiative entitled the “Millennium Development Goals *Suco* Program”, is to build “agricultural business centres” that will not only foster the development of social services and infrastructure in rural areas, but will also help the most vulnerable. The idea is that the government would provide five houses in each

of the [country's] 2,228 *aldeias* every year, resulting in more than 55,000 houses being built by 2015. The housing will include solar energy, water and sanitation. Local communities will be able to work together and help their most vulnerable neighbours by ensuring they have adequate housing (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011b: 109).

While the concept may itself be sound, its implementation leaves much to be desired. For a start, the houses will not actually be built in Timor-Leste by the local population, but will come in the form of prefabricated housing imported from one of the country's big regional neighbours – employment generation is thus minimal. Equally problematic is the allocation of these houses within each *aldeia*: it appears that the *xefe suco* will unilaterally identify the most “vulnerable” households in his or her community. The initiative thus seems destined to be instrumentalised, and is further undermined by the fact that the population of an *aldeia* can range dramatically from only a few hundred to tens of thousands of people.

Despite the fact that the housing allocation strategy is questionable, there is nonetheless a positive side to the government's modernisation attempt: it does *not* seek to tackle land rights. Given the fact that the Strategic Development Plan was a product of two foreign consultancy firms, any such attempt would probably have suffered from a lack of knowledge with respect to local land usage.⁵ Moreover, by asking *xefe sucos* to decide on the allocation of the houses within each *aldeia*, it could be argued that the government is indirectly recognising the prevalence of *lisan* in the countryside. Acknowledgement of *lisan* and the importance of traditional leaders was also reflected in the fact that in order to ensure the Strategic Development Plan had local support, the Prime Minister, Xanana Gusmao, had to “socialise” it. “Socialising” a plan or project in Timor-Leste implies a consultation with all 64 of the sub-district elders. Whether the consultation that took place was an open dialogue, or whether it simply constituted an empty exercise conducted after all decisions had been taken,⁶ is a mute point. The fact remains that regardless of who rules in Dili, be it a coloniser, occupier, or a democratically elected government, life in rural areas generally continues as it has for generations, based on the rules and values of *lisan*.

Primary loyalty of individuals in Timorese society is owed to small kin-based groups (*uma kain*) bound together by *uma lulik* or sacred houses (Cummins, 2010a, 2010b; Hohe 2002; Fitzpatrick and Barnes, 2010: 218). The *uma kain* does not only include the family nucleus (parents and children), but also broader family relations. Indeed when talking about the immediate family, respondents usually referred to it as “wife and kids” or “parents and grandparents”. The term “family”, however, was used more broadly to include the whole kin-based group. Moreover, and even though the international community tends to see the urban population of Dili as disconnected from their rural roots and the *uma lulik* found there, the reality is that there are strong connections between the family in rural districts and those individuals who migrate to Dili. Persons working in the capital, from the poorest labourer to the highest echelons of society, regularly send money back to the districts, and in return the family transports small quantities of agricultural produce to those in Dili. It is this system of remittances that ensures that even in times of food shortages – such as the annual rainy season from January to April – most individuals in the city are able to survive, even though they might not have regular work or a source of income. Group discussions with youths in a poorer Dili neighbourhood confirmed that while most of the residents

⁵ Indeed, the authors of the present report make no claim of having fully understood local land rights and practices themselves!

⁶ Such was evidently the case for President Marc Ravalomanana's Madagascar Action Plan (MAP); see Jütersonke and Kartas, 2010.

live permanently there, they regularly visit relations in the districts at weekends or for religious holidays – and this even though they insisted on the improbable claim that their “family” was originally from Dili.

All *uma lulik* were traditionally ordered hierarchically, according to their sequence of arrival on a specific territory or piece of land. The first settlers or “older houses” are seen to be a much closer relation to the ancestors and thus have authority over houses that arrived second or third. Even though these “younger houses” are recognised as late arrivals, they are nonetheless considered “sacred houses” as well, given that they are much closer to the ancestors than those, usually referred to as “immigrant houses”, that were established even later (Ospina and Hohe, 2002). Thus, members of each *aldeia* within a *suco* recognise the authority of specific groups over particular territories, domains, or areas. The hierarchical order of houses also defines the social relationships – especially marriage relations between “wife giving” and “wife taking” houses – within and between groups. The fieldwork demonstrated that the role of *uma lulik* in defining social relationship is even of great significance in Dili, especially in terms of marriage arrangements. Group discussions (with both men and women of various ages) confirmed that people in Timor-Leste represent their *uma lulik* wherever they reside, and if an individual wants to marry they are able to make the marriage arrangements because he or she represents his or her *uma lulik*. This is important because according to *lisan* a marriage is not only a tie between two individuals, but an establishment between two families (Hohe and Nixon, 2003). Ultimately, while to the external observer it might appear that there are no traditional controls on the urban population of Dili – and indeed this is the image participants of group discussions wanted to convey – reality appears to be starkly different.

The first house, which is traditionally connected to the land and is recognised as representing the oldest ancestor, has the responsibility of providing and safeguarding the fertility of land and the society (Hohe, 2002: 572). To ensure the fertility and prosperity of land and society the members of the first house have to be skilled in “using their words” or being able to communicate with the ancestors – who in East Timorese society are still seen to have a stake and impact on the living world. The members of these houses thus have *ritual authority* and play a crucial role in spiritual and ceremonial activities. In opposition to the first house and the ritual authority of its members stand the other houses whose descendants have *political authority* and deal with issues of collective action in the present. The members of the second house, in particular, hold political authority within a settlement and are seen as the *liurai* – the king or political leader of the community (Hohe, 2002: 572).

These political authorities are also the ones who define the borders of the community (both in terms of territory and belonging), engage in the mediation of conflict between other kingdoms, and have the duty to defend the territory and community (Traube, 1986; Hohe, 2002: 572). Political authorities are those who “later became the active executives, responsible for the maintenance of jural order, while the old rulers retained ritual authority over the cosmos” (Traube, 1986: 98; also see Hohe and Nixon, 2003: 14). Although there is a separation of authorities, political leaders need the support of the ritual leaders to maintain their position. In order to be a political leader, the individual must come from a “royal” house with political authority and be appointed by a ritual leader. If a political leader happens not to be ancestrally legitimated – that is, recognised and appointed by a ritual authority – great misfortune will hit both the land and society (Hohe, 2002: 573).

This notion that political authorities have a certain “responsibility” within the community became evident during the course of the fieldwork. Despite the fact that there were repeated claims that the importance of *lisan* for the youths of Dili is diminishing, households in urban neighbourhood continue to maintain traditional structures and relationships. Indeed, discussions with a *xefe aldeia* as well as group discussions with youths from another *barrio* neighbourhood illustrated that at the sub-community level in Dili, there are multiple authorities and a division of duties and obligations. For instance, there are those authorities responsible for spiritual and religious matters, those responsible for the education and betterment of the youth population (who tend to be elected by the youths of the community), and those responsible for the community as a whole – the *xefe aldeia* (if the community in question is a single village) or *xefe suco* (if the community in question is a group of villages). It is these various authorities that, due to the nature of their socio-political roles, act as connectors in the community, facilitate the spread of ideas, norms, and beliefs, and set the standard for appropriate modes of behaviour.

The observed plurality of authorities shows that despite the fact that *lisan* continues to be salient in contemporary Dili, it does not mean that authority relationships within and between groups and communities are static. Rather, the fieldwork conducted for this case study supports the findings of Daniel Fitzpatrick and Susana Barnes (2010), namely that traditional authorities have a capacity to react to their environment in terms of demographic change or political circumstances, and moreover that they amend the customary structures in society (for example in terms of land arrangements) in a way that protects the authority of traditional leaders but also delegates a certain amount of it to arriving migrant or politically powerful groups. In this sense, the plurality of actors in Dili claiming to have either political or ritual authority – the political elite and Church, the formal security sector (PNTL and F-FDTL), and the informal security providers (gangs, martial arts and ritual arts groups) – can be seen as a distinctly urban manifestation of the changing nature and interaction of traditional beliefs with more modern conceptions of governance and authority.

Understanding the dynamics of ritual and political authorities is key for an analysis of the conflict fault lines in East Timorese society. Needless to say, the situation is not unique to Timor-Leste; Madagascar, for instance, works in strikingly similar fashion (see Jütersonke and Kartas, 2010, particularly 34-51). What is more specific about Timor-Leste is the relationship of the two types of authorities with *uma lulik*, illustrating that conflict is not only the result of a breakdown of social order, but can also result from continuous negotiation, implicit or explicit, violent or verbal, over the terms of social arrangements as stipulated by *lisan*. In the case of Timor-Leste, conflict is always a conflict of authorities – between the “ritual” ones who are able to interpret the words and wishes of the ancestors, and the “political” ones who are able to proclaim war. What happened during the 2006-07 Crisis at both the national and community levels in Dili is that an interpersonal conflict between the political authorities emerged – at the national level this was a conflict within the political establishment, whose members aligned themselves with different parts of the security sector (to be discussed in more detail below); at the community level this was a conflict between the traditional local leaders and those who aimed to dispose of them (this included other East Timorese as well as elements of the international mission). The interpersonal strife was situated in a discourse of “easterners” versus “westerners” and then escalated into collective violence due to the *uma kain* nature of social relationships within the community and recognition of, and respect for, political authorities.

8. The east-west distinction and historical divides

As mentioned in Section 4 above, one of the dominant narratives given for the events of 2006-07 is that it was an “ethnic conflict” pitting easterners against westerners. In the course of the participatory fieldwork undertaken, however, it became clear that regardless of the identity of the interlocutor (be they underprivileged youths, community leaders, or parliamentarians) there was a clear sense that this “ethnic dimension” of the conflict was simply a “mechanised division”, constructed by the political elite in order to mobilise support (see CEPAD, 2010: 37).

One of the most detailed examinations of the origins and the distinctions between easterners/*firaku/lorosae* and westerners/*kaladi/loromonu* is an unpublished PhD thesis by Babo Soares (2003). According to his fieldwork, the two terms *firaku* and *kaladi* stem from the time of the Portuguese administration, where they were used to refer to the different mentalities or attitudes of the eastern and western populations of Timor-Leste. As a result, it is very likely that the terms have their origins in the Portuguese words *calado*, meaning silent or quiet, and *vira o cu*, implying defiance by describing the action of turning one’s back to the speaker. The former was used to describe the populations of the western parts of Timor-Leste because of their slow, quiet and obedient mentality. The latter was reserved for the populations of the east because of their defiant nature, stubbornness, and hot temperament. As a result, Soares argues, the Portuguese terms have been adopted and internalised by the East Timorese population “whereby *calado* is pronounced *kaladi*, and the term *vira o cu* pronounced *firaku*” (Soares, 2003: 266).

According to Soares, the distinction between *firaku* and *kaladi* became salient in Dili during the 1940s, when the inhabitants from eastern parts of Timor-Leste (those coming from Baucau and Viqueque and who speak Makassae) got together with inhabitants from the western part of the country (the Bunak-speaking inhabitants from Bobonaro) and began occupying traditional markets in mainly Mambai-speaking Dili (Soares, 2003: 267-9). Soon these migrants came to control small-scale retailing in the city, including the sale of food and household supplies. Market competition between the groups was exacerbated following the introduction of public cock fighting in Dili during the late 1940s and early 1950s, and it is during this time that the terms *loromonu* (westerners) and *lorosae* (easterners) also started being used interchangeably with *firaku* and *kaladi*. The terms no longer implied a simple designation of origin, but instead constituted a fault line along which conflict was organised. Moreover the “level of safety” (Granovetter, 1978), which was the result of the lack of law enforcement at the time, allowed the rivalry between the *loromonu* and *lorosae* to crystallise and manifest itself in the segregation of neighbourhoods along those lines. From then on it became common for migrants coming from the districts to associate themselves with one or the other group, depending on the geographical area from which they came and where their family had originally settled. The districts that were originally associated with *loromonu* include Dili, Aileu, Ainaro, Same, Ermera, Bobonaro, Suai and Liquica, and Oecussi. The *lorosae* were in general associated with eastern parts of the island, but more specifically referred to the migrants speaking Makassae and coming from Baucau and Viqueque.

Ultimately, it appears that the easterners/*firaku/lorosae*–westerners/*kaladi/loromonu* dichotomy, which has received so much attention as the result of the 2006-07 Crisis, was the product of Dili’s urbanisation during the first half of the twentieth century (Nixon, 2012: 136). While the fieldwork conducted for this case study confirms the findings of Soares at the community and sub-community levels, at the city and national levels it appears that the east-west divide has little

to do with “cultural” differences or the “business mentality of the easterners”, as many interviewees expressed it. Instead, it is related to the continued salience of past conflicts among the political elite and the perceived commitment to, and sacrifice for, independence. Thus, the east-west divide was (and arguably continues to be) used as a macro-level cleavage in order to hide the undercurrents of conflict which play themselves out within the armed forces, the police and political parties. The first is the long-standing conflict between the political leaders themselves, the origins of which can be traced back to the end of Portuguese rule in 1974. The second is the conflict between the “old generation” of freedom fighters and the “new generation” of East Timorese citizens, students, and activists – the claim being that the former (including those referring to themselves as “veterans”) had sacrificed themselves by actively participating in the struggle for independence and was thus somehow now owed more by, or be entitled to privileges from, the newly created state (see also CEPAD, 2010: 71).

The unwillingness of the post-independence political elite to deal with “the problems of the past”, as one interlocutor phrased it, is a prevalent narrative in East Timorese society, one that is also reflected in the makeup of the armed forces and the police (see Section 10 below). It appears that there is a link between the Crisis of 2006-07 and conflicts from the time when “the old generation were still in the forest. Even the *lorosae/loromonu* [distinction] is coming from there”. According to this view, the problems of political competition that have persisted in post-independence Timor-Leste, both at the level of high politics and within and between the security providers, and that have taken on the guise of “easterners” against “westerners”, were ones that emerged during the surfacing of East Timorese political parties as Timor-Leste gained its independence from Portugal (April 1974 – December 1975), as well as during the 24 years of Indonesian occupation.

A sound and extremely detailed analysis of the political divides that marked Timor-Leste’s first stint of independence is provided by Rod Nixon (2012: 50-75), who describes how the period following the 1974 Carnation Revolution in Portugal led to “a political awakening” in Dili, which was characterised by a plurality of political aspirations and the use of paramilitary wings of political parties in reaching them. Since Dili was the capital of Portuguese Timor, it naturally became the site of political competition and political violence both during the brief period of Timorese independence and throughout the subsequent Indonesian occupation. The period from April 1974 to August 1975 not only witnessed the formation of political organisations in Dili, but it was also characterised by political differences that were not only going to bring down the newly formed state, but also influence the political landscape of Timor-Leste into the twenty-first century. The political organisations that emerged during this period included: the *Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente* (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor, FRETILIN, successor of the *Associação Social Democrata Timorese* or the Timorese Social Democratic Association (ASDT)); the *União Democrática Timorese* (Timorese Democratic Union (UDT)); the *Associação Popular Democrática Timorese* (Popular Democratic Association of Timor (APODETI)); *Klibur Oan Timor Asuwain*; and *Trabalhista*.

Even at their inception, the ideologies and tactics used by the various parties to attain their goals foreshadowed some of the key fault lines that were to characterise the events of 2006-07. One of the first and most dominant parties at the time was the UDT, which came into existence on 11 May 1974. The party drew its base of support primarily from privileged administrators in Dili, as well as coffee plantation owners in the districts west of the capital. Not surprisingly, with the help of plantation owners and their links to traditional leaders in the western districts, the UDT enjoyed high levels of local support there. The party platform of

the UDT at the time can best be described as social-democratic, and according to some scholars (e.g. Dunn, 1996: 53), in the early days of political awakening in Dili the views of a number of the founding members of the party (such as Domingos de Oliveira, Mario Carrascalão, and Francisco Lopez da Cruz) differed very little from the moderates within FRETILIN. The main distinction between the two parties, however, appears to have been that the UDT wanted the path towards independence from Portugal to take place at a much slower pace than FRETILIN (Cummins, 2010: 90).

Nine days after the formation of the UDT, FRETILIN came into existence and was headed by Francisco Xavier do Amaral – a descendant of traditional leaders in the central western highlands. Contrary to the ranks of the UDT, “a large proportion of [FRETILIN founders including Nicolau and Rogério Lobato, Francisco Borja da Costa and Vicente Sa’he] came from families of *liurais* or other local rulers who had access to better educations for their children than that provided by the local *suco* or *posto* schools” (Jolliffe, 1978: 69; see also Nixon, 2012: 52). Moreover, compared to the UDT leaders, FRETILIN members were much younger, with an average age of 27 at the time. This not only provided FRETILIN with the sense of representing the new generation of East Timorese nationalists, but would also set the stage for these party members to occupy the same role in the years following independence from Indonesia. The political platform of the FRETILIN party was much more complex; it included more moderate individuals with a social-democratic outlook and favouring a slow separation from Portugal (most importantly Nicolau Lobato and José Ramos-Horta, the current President), as well as more “radical” members leaning towards the left of the political spectrum. In contradistinction to the UDT, FRETILIN described itself as a “front” rather than a political party, in an effort to take on the guise of a broad-based social movement dedicated to Timorese independence (Hill, 2002: xviii). This ideology would again become salient in the years of political competition following independence in 2002, when the leaders of the movement argued that due to their large support base and nature as a movement of the people (and not a political party restricted to the Dili elite) it had the natural right to govern (Nixon, 2012: 54).

The third noteworthy political player was APODETI (formed 27 May 1974), a party that tried to distinguish itself from the other two by proclaiming a desire to become an autonomous state within Indonesia (Cummins, 2010: 90). Despite the fact that APODETI’s platform was so different from the other two parties, it failed to exert significant influence at the time. Instead, the desire for independence allowed the UDT and FRETILIN to overlook their differences (which were caused mostly by the increasing radical element within the latter) and form a coalition and a transitional council on 21 January 1975 – one not much different from the one created 25 years later by UNTAET. The coalition was short-lived, however, and on 27 May 1975, the UDT withdrew, arguing that the increasingly popular and radically leftist partner was threatening the internal stability of the state (Nixon, 2012: 61). The climax of this politically turbulent period between the two parties came on 10 August 1975 when, with the instigation of the Indonesian government under *Operasi Komodo*, a “civil war” broke out between FRETILIN and the UDT. On that day, in a pre-emptive strike against their former partner, the UDT launched a coup. Ten days later, on 30 August 1975, FRETILIN launched a counter-coup from the Taibessi military barracks in Dili. Fighting between the two lasted in Dili for about a week, at which point the UDT retreated towards the border with West Timor, and FRETILIN took hold of political power.

This period of political awakening in Dili also saw the emergence of political organisations that had military backing. Indeed, all three major parties of the time began developing paramilitary capacities. APODETI primarily focused on increased military capacities in the border regions with Indonesia. UDT sought to

consolidate support from the army barracks in Maubisse and by garnering support from the police. FRETILIN focused its attention on the army barracks in Taibessi. As a result of the increased militarisation of the political parties – or rather the politicisation of the army and police (phenomena that would also come to dominate the 2006-07 Crisis) – the month-long civil war that broke out between UDT and FRETILIN in August 1975 ultimately took the lives of 1,500 to 3,000 people (including the execution of hundreds of political prisoners), and displaced up to 50,000 individuals into Indonesian West Timor (CAVR, 2005: 43). With a large number of armed men, FRETILIN, and its military wing FALINTIL, eventually defeated UDT and became the nominal governing authority. The events that followed (the three-month government of FRETILIN, the proclamation of independence on 28 November 1975, and the conspiring of the UDT, APODETI, KOTA and Trabalhistas parties with the Indonesian government and the subsequent invasion of Indonesia) all continue to shape the political landscape of contemporary Timor-Leste. They also constitute the historical backdrop to the discourse in which the tipping process of the 2006-07 Crisis was embedded. Indeed, the 1975 civil war and subsequent Indonesian invasion not only left physical and psychological scars on the East Timorese population, but it also saw the emergence of political parties and a concomitant politics of hate among the more charismatic personalities. These rivalries seem to have survived the test of time, and continue to mark contemporary political dynamics.

9. Disembedding Dili

Central to the narrative of the 2006-07 Crisis in Dili are the stark discrepancies between the rural and urban areas of Timor-Leste. While the population of Dili is busy integrating itself into global networks, rural communities, particularly those in the secluded mountain regions, continue to be locked in a different age. Indeed, one need not venture far out of Dili before remarking the lack of investment in basic infrastructure and road networks. What is more, Timor-Leste suffers from the third highest level of malnutrition in the world after Yemen and Afghanistan (IRIN, 2011), a challenge that is particularly striking in rural areas. Many interviewees make a link between the two, arguing that the primary source of food insecurity in Timor-Leste's rural areas is the lack of roads, clean water, and electricity, which facilitates the production and sale of food.

According to some, malnutrition in rural areas is also linked to the high prevalence of mental illness and violence there – in the words of one interlocutor: “malnutrition causes brain damage, which impacts conflict resolution [capacity]”. Malnutrition and related mental illness is perceived as a source of tension in rural areas not only because those suffering from it may be prone to violence, but perhaps more importantly because they are subjected to violence and mistreatment themselves. This problem, however, is largely hidden from the sight of Dili and most of the international community. Not only does this make it harder for such individuals to seek treatment and social services, but it also hints at a lesser-known reason for the “capacity drain” witnessed in Timor-Leste's rural areas.

Despite the prevalence of malnutrition and mental illness in rural areas, the main reason for the “capacity drain” is evidently rural-urban migration itself. Simply put, “Dili is where the money is”, and even though the unemployment rate there is extremely high, most youths are still willing to give it a try, engaging in odd jobs in the informal sector ranging from selling phone credit, cell phones, cigarettes and souvenirs on street corners, to washing taxis. As Conroy (2005: 5-6) writes, already in the early years of Timor-Leste's independence there were “severe limits on the capacity of the non-farm sector to offer wage employment to job seekers”, and as a result the majority entered the informal urban economy

that, while providing a minimum source of income, was nevertheless “stagnant and derivative”. Today, there are as many as 20,000 school leavers annually, and despite being boosted by a variety of rural development programmes, the rate of rural job creation is vastly outpaced by the number of school leavers. While some are (increasingly) going abroad as overseas guest workers, the vast majority of these youths thus end up joining their frustrated brethren in Dili, where they constitute easy prey for the political elite embroiled in various feuds, and a source of members for martial arts and ritual arts groups, all looking for ways in which to swell their respective ranks.

A further aspect working against rural development appears to be the commonly held view among the younger generation, particularly in Dili, that “there is something wrong with being a farmer”. Indeed, most of the youths and community leaders interviewed talked about a desire to work in government or in business, and expressed their disdain for agricultural work – despite the country’s dependence on it. As a result the sentiment in the capital is that “that everyone should develop as they did” or that the whole country should resemble Dili. However, the problem is that it is not always clear which kind of Dili people aspire to export to the rest of the country. Indeed, the fieldwork indicates there to be two different, and at times contradictory, conceptions of “urban Dili” existing in parallel and interacting only at the margins. On the one hand, there is, to borrow from Daniel Esser’s (2009) analysis of Kabul, a Dili marked by “over-determined” political deliberation, involving “ad hoc axes of governance” shaped around the short-term incentives of the country’s political establishment and the international community. This is a Dili of the 21st century, with shiny buildings, shopping malls, fancy cars, and visions of growing tourism. On the other hand, there is the Dili in which the majority of the urban population lives, one marked by violence, land insecurity and a plurality of security providers – including a whole host of private security companies, martial arts groups, ritual arts groups, and informal street-corner youth gangs.

The disjuncture between the two visions of the urban is also evident in the commonly heard assertion, by locals just as much as by members of the international community, that “Dili is not Timor-Leste”. While the phrase is usually meant to highlight the differences between the urban and rural areas of the country, in reality even the conception of “Dili” people have in mind is disembedded from the actual physical space that delineates the capital. While the kind of spatial segregation in the form of fortified enclaves present in many cities of the global South has not yet materialised in Dili (primarily for the simple reason that it is far too small), there is still a sense of a distinction between a *private sphere* in which the political elite resides and operates, and a *public sphere* in which the majority of the urban population lives.

The private sphere involves activities that relate to securing the necessities of a common life – one that is most often associated with the family and is characterised by personal relationships, intimacy, economy and property (Owens, 2008: 981). As discussed in Section 7 above, primary loyalty of individuals in East Timorese society is owed to their *uma kain* as represented by their *uma lulik*. Social order among groups is maintained by the principle of origin or first settlers, and the hierarchical order of houses. The traditional ruling families that can be found in Timor-Leste’s history continue to exert influence today. One interviewee put it in perspective when asserting that just as there are “five families of New York, there are 50 families of Dili”. These families are profoundly interlinked due to the exchange of wives between the “wife giving” and “wife taking” houses. The only difference between the exchange relationships of old and those of today is that while different families or “houses” previously tended to stay on their own land, today they are predominantly in Dili. It is for this reason that the conflicts

that occur in Dili are primarily not the result of some grand and abstract divide in the population (such as the supposed ethnic distinction between “easterners” and “westerners”), but instead reflect multiple political authorities struggling for political influence and financial gain. In a sense, the political and socio-economic landscape of Timor-Leste is characterised by close inter-personal relationships, and this is also a main reason why the country is simply “too small for any level of abstraction to apply”, as one interlocutor aptly put it: Dili’s political dynamics are all about personal ties, not popular representation.

Interpersonal political strife is thus a constant and almost “normalised” aspect of life in Dili. But despite the plurality of actors vying for political power and influence, the political elite manages to live quite comfortably in the capital – away from the general public. One of the best indicators of this is the huge gap in salary levels. In the years leading up to the Crisis (between 2001 and 2004), real wages for professional workers in Dili fell by 15 percent (World Bank 2005: 24). Moreover, the ratio between the lowest and highest paid workers is in the region of 1:150. The higher salaries of the political elite become even more inflated if one believes the charges voiced among the general public and civil society that government employees are personally benefiting from Timor-Leste’s oil wealth. While it is certainly true that one of the main problems faced by the current government administration is a lack of capacity to actually spend the annual budget derived from the Petroleum Fund, it is frequently charged that not only are procurement contracts given out to insiders, but that unspent money is not channelled back into the Fund.

Another indicator of the disembedded nature of the political elite and their families from the rest of the urban population is the existence of only two institutions for higher education – the National University of Timor-Leste and UNPAZ (*Universidade da Paz*). UNPAZ is a private university that is so far the only one that has managed to obtain official accreditation, in 2007. The university offers undergraduate degrees in a number of fields, including law, economics, the social sciences and peace studies, and charges USD 115 per semester – compared to the National University, which charges USD 5 per month. What is interesting about UNPAZ is that despite the fact that the national “legal” language of Timor-Leste is Portuguese, courses are only taught in English, Tetum, and Bahasi – and this despite the fact that interviewees claimed that the government had just passed a law in 2011 that all official correspondence with the authorities (and this includes exchanges with the international community) had to be in either Tetum or Portuguese, and no longer in English. UNPAZ’ stated reason for the lack of education in Portuguese is that the teaching staff and student body is not fluent in that language, although the political leanings of its board may also be a factor. It was also claimed that the lack of Portuguese does not deter the majority of graduates from finding employment (around 85%, according to UNPAZ), and most of those in state institutions.

At the National University, by contrast, graduates appear to have fewer prospects. Apart from a lack of government financing for higher education, the National University and its student body seems to be a thorn in the government’s eye. Fearful of student demonstrations, the admission process is strictly controlled by the state authorities, and a new plan is now underway to move the university away from the city centre (where it is directly opposite the parliament) to a new location in the suburbs (in Hera). Indeed, the case of the National University is exemplary of the reality of urban Dili for the majority of those living there. If the private sphere is characterised by activities that relate to building a common life for the family, the public sphere is marked by activities that relate to building a common world (Owens, 2008: 981). The problem in Dili, however, is arguably that too little is being undertaken to consolidate on the common world of the

general urban population; instead, all forms of public space are systematically undermined. What is more, the limited number of jobs available in the capital typically goes to those with the better connections, who more often than not are also those who have either studied abroad (in places such as Australia, Ireland or Indonesia) or who have at least had the opportunity to receive a multilingual education at an institution such as UNPAZ.

On a lower skill level of employment, the dynamics are comparable, although here it is not the East Timorese elite that crowds out any potential aspirants, but a better trained and hard working immigrant population from China, Indonesia and the Philippines. The majority of young East Timorese flooding into the capital from rural areas cannot compete with the vocational skill sets of these migrant workers – what is more, it is often claimed that the migrant workers are prepared to work for lower wages, while the East Timorese are not willing to engage in the “dirty work” that may be available to them. Whether this account is accurate or not, the result is a degree of resentment and social jealousy that is prone to violence. Indeed, Chinese shopkeepers were targeted during the Crisis of 2006-07, and the majority of interviewees believed that should there be any sort of public disturbances during forthcoming elections, “revenge” attacks on immigrant property would again occur. In sum, the disembedded nature of Dili’s urban environment has resulted in serious discrepancies between the employment opportunities available in the city, and the expectations of a bulging young population striving to modernise.

Apart from tensions with immigrant groups and increasing social jealousy, the urban environment as experienced by the majority of city dwellers is also one of heightened pressure on traditional institutions. The dilution of traditional structures of authority became apparent in the years leading up to the Crisis, when rising reliance on international aid and monetary benefits to individuals (as a result of participation in humanitarian aid projects) offered people in Dili’s neighbourhoods the ability to fend for themselves and no longer rely on the protection and support of traditional leaders (Cutter *et al.*, 2004: 20). This did not mean, however, that *lisan* ceased to be an important aspect of everyday life for the urban population. On the contrary, and as elaborated in Section 7 above, primary allegiance in Dili is to the *uma kain* – but importantly, this does not necessarily translate into the traditional or formal authorities of an individual’s neighbourhood. During the course of the fieldwork, especially at the sub-community level of Dili, a commonly heard assertion was that the freedom of the city undermines traditional values and in particular affects the “mentality” of the youth. The argument offered is that youths no longer see themselves as having to respect traditional leaders and instead look for other sources of identification and belonging. This, in turn, is said to make them more susceptible to negative influences and increases the likelihood that they will engage in delinquent behaviour – from drinking, doing drugs, gambling, and fighting, to possibly accepting bribes to loot and burn during times of political crisis.

Against this backdrop of weakening traditional authority in the city, the standard narrative in Dili (and even of some of the academic and policy literature on the subject) is that youth involvement in martial arts and ritual arts groups is linked to the lack of employment opportunities, education and recreational activities. This narrative could even be heard in group discussions with youths and community leaders, many of whom blame the city’s bad influence and manipulation for the high levels of delinquent behaviour. Such behaviour, it is argued, brings with it instances of interpersonal violence, and because those involved in a dispute or brawl are more often than not members of a youth group, the clash soon takes on much larger proportions. This is coupled with high levels of trauma from the years under Indonesian occupation, which manifests itself

primarily in an inherent distrust of public law enforcement. As a result, the population does not turn to the police for protection. As one interviewee put it, "in an advanced society, if something happened, the police is coming. Here I have to call my brothers, my cousins, or my friends...for example, I am 7-7 [a ritual arts group]. I call my friend who is 7-7. He comes immediately". As will be argued in the following sections, all of this has led to a further fragmentation of the security sector and a proliferation of experts in security provision in the city. The main dilemma in Dili appears to be the fact that the security sector has become the theatre in which the elite carries out political struggles, and the ensuing security vacuum is precisely the disembedded urban reality that carries with it the "tipping" potential.

10. Formal security providers

Even though it is commonly reported that gangs "perpetuated the bulk of the destruction" during the 2006-07 Crisis (Scambray, 2006: 1), the conflict tipping point was political in origin. It came about when the Prime Minister at the time, Mari Alkatiri, and his FRETILIN government came head to head with President Xanana Gusmao and opposition parties, which included his National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) party and its coalition partners in the Alliance of Majority in Parliament (AMP). As the International Crisis Group (ICG) report made clear, the "entire crisis, its origins and solutions, revolve around less than ten people, who have a shared history going back 30 years" (ICG, 2006: 1). As outlined in Section 8 above, there is a link between the Crisis of 2006-07 and the events of the past, particularly to the mid-1970s following the departure of the Portuguese. The Crisis was marked by political feuds, shrouded in a discourse of "easterners" versus "westerners", that emerged during the time of Indonesian occupation and have persisted in post-independence Timor-Leste.

Elite competition is further manifested in the relationships between the two main security providers in the country: the army and the police. Indeed, in their 2006 report on the causes and events of the Crisis, the UN Commission concluded that "the violent events of April and May [2006] were more than a series of criminal acts." Rather, they should be seen as an "expression of deep-rooted problems inherent in fragile State institutions and a weak rule of law." The report argues that the Crisis exposed not only the conflict fault lines in society, but particularly within the security sector – where the two key institutions in the events that followed the complaints of the petitioners were the *Forca de Defeza de Timor Leste* (F-FDTL) and the *Policia Nacional de Timor-Leste* (PNTL). Moreover, apart from the formal security actors of the East Timorese state, the report also places considerable responsibility for the violence of the Crisis in the hands of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior (UN, 2006: 74-5).

Despite the fact that considerable changes had been made since the inception of the PNTL in 2000 and the F-FDTL in 2001, the concept of security sector reform (SSR) did not gain much traction until the events of 2006-07 (CIGI, 2010; Peake, 2009). Indeed, the slow pace of reform, the militarisation of the national police, the continued division within the military and the increased salience of private security companies in Dili have led some analysts to argue that there has been no effective SSR at all in Timor-Leste, but simply security sector expansion (CIGI, 2010: 4; Wilson, 2009). In a similar vein, the fieldwork conducted for this case study indicates that the fragmentation and expansion of the formal security sector is a key conflict driver in the newly independent state – one that most often plays itself along the fault line of the east-west discursive divide.

According to the ICG analysis of the security sector in Timor-Leste, the problems between and within the security forces, which came to a head during the events

of 2006-2007, can be attributed to decisions taken on the formation of the security sector in the early years of independence (ICG, 2008: 4). The main problem, it is commonly asserted, was that when the Indonesian military and associated militias withdrew into West Timor in the summer of 1999, the eastern part of the island was left without the presence of working state institutions. This not only set the tone within the international community that Timor-Leste was a “clean slate” or “ground zero” that had to be built rather than reformed, but it also provided the reasoning behind UNTAET’s mandate of establishing a transitional administration over the territory – the key component of which was the provision of security and the maintenance of law and order (UNSC, 1999: 2-3). The security vacuum left behind by the exodus of the Indonesian military was initially filled by the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) on 20 September 1999. INTERFET was an Australian-led intervention force with troops coming from 22 different nations and at its peak consisted of about 11,000 troops. The emphasis on security provision within the UNTAET mission and mandate crystallised against the backdrop of a broader international debate about the link between security and development, and was coupled with a rapid turn to security sector governance and the formation of a national police force.

The PNTL was created in March 2000, when the UN’s civilian contingent began training Timorese recruits in the newly established Police Academy in Dili. The F-FDTL was created one year later when the *Forças Armadas da Libertacao Nacional de Timor-Leste* (FALINTIL), the former armed resistance movement, was transformed into the national defence force. A significant challenge, however, was that both the PNTL and F-FDTL ultimately came out of the Indonesian occupation (Funaki, 2009), and as a result continued to serve as a reminder of past atrocities and societal cleavages. Thus, from the beginning the composition and structure of the PNTL and the F-FDTL were contentious, and reflected the fault lines present in East Timorese society. Specifically, there existed two sets of problems:

1. Within the army itself, there emerged a split between “western” and “eastern” soldiers, the distinction being based primarily on assertions of economic and generational inequalities;
2. Between the army and the police, with the former seeing itself as the true protector of the East Timorese population, while the latter had its roots in the much-feared Indonesian police.

Coupled with the contentious makeup of both the police and army, the UNTAET administration also failed to establish the necessary administrative groundwork for the oversight of the newly created security sector. Not only were the two main security providers formed before the East Timorese state actually came into existence, and thus also before its first government was elected, but there were also no formal mechanisms for quasi-independent oversight of the security forces by East Timorese government institutions (ICG, 2008: 5). Consequently, by the time official independence came around in 2002, there was no national consensus on security policy, civil oversight, or budgetary capacities relating to the police and army (Hood, 2006). Following presidential and parliamentary elections in 2002, UNTAET’s mandate ended and a much smaller UN Mission in Support of East Timor (UNMISSET) was established. In 2005, the mission was again handed over to an even smaller mission, the UN Office in Timor-Leste (UNTIL). Indeed, by the time of the Crisis, the number of foreign experts in security provision, including military observers and UN Police (UNPOL), had shrunk to around 60 (ICG, 2008: 5). In hindsight, not only did the UN not pay sufficient attention to societal fault lines when creating the police and military, but it also scaled back its presence in Timor-Leste before the state institutions and governmental capacity were sufficiently consolidated for an effective takeover.

Following the outbreak of collective violence in Dili during the Crisis, UNMIT was established on 25 August 2006. The 1,635-strong mission was to be responsible for the creation of peace and security and for assisting the government with SSR (UNSC, 2006). Just as during the initial stages of security sector development following independence, the key aspect of UNMIT's mandate was "the restoration and maintenance of public security in Timor-Leste through the provision of support to the Timorese national police (PNTL)" (UNSC, 2006: 3). The fact that the UN aimed to tackle security sector governance by starting with the police was a sign to some that it "repeats previous security sector work rather than building on its previous engagement" (Funaki, 2009: 7). This has not only undermined the reform efforts (given that the underlying divisions that had result in the Crisis remained), but also generated a substantial amount of criticism from the East Timorese government (CIGI, 2009, 2010).

With respect to the PNTL, UNMIT's mandate was to "assist with the further training, institutional development and strengthening of the PNTL as well as the Ministry of Interior" (UNSC, 2006: 3). In order to reform the police, UNMIT, in agreement with the government, set out a certification process whereby PNTL officers were to be screened and their roles in the events of 2006-07 examined. Certification entailed passing an evaluation in front of a panel of national, international, and civil society experts as well as completing a six-month long training course under the guidance of an UNPOL mentor. The goal of the certification process was to prevent the type of institutional breakdown that that had ushered in the Crisis.

While the aims of the process were well-intended, it was nevertheless criticised for being ineffective (CIGI, 2009: 8). Indeed, the process was largely ignored by the East Timorese political elite and was seen as merely playing lip service to the international community. This is evident by the sidelining of both UNMIT and the certification panel with respect to certifications (ICG, 2008: 7). Moreover, because the screening process mostly took into account police involvement in the violence during the Crisis, and only later was extended to be a general review of officers, it did not necessarily reflect the realities in the districts nor the underlying tensions. Police officers from the districts who were not involved in the 2006-07 violence were tainted by association and had trouble understanding why their credentials were being reviewed. This led some fieldwork interlocutors to conclude that the PNTL certification process was out of touch with reality – both in the capital and beyond.

The mentoring process was also deemed ineffective (ICG, 2008: 8). But perhaps an even bigger criticism of UNPOL's track record is not that, according to some, they find it hard to communicate with the PNTL, or that they have a high turnover rate, or even that the mentoring process comes down to filling out a series of forms, but rather that the PNTL continues to focus primarily on the *maintenance of order* when an incident occurs, and not on *law enforcement* and the *prevention of crime* as such (see also Belo and Koenig, 2011). Of course, such a one-sided approach is not solely the result of UNPOL's inabilities, as is frequently claimed, but may also be linked to the "task force mentality" of the Portuguese *Guarda Nacional Republika* (GNR), which has also been present in the country since the end of the Indonesian occupation and is involved in training PNTL recruits. But the approach could also (and perhaps even primarily) be the consequence of competition between the police and the army, as will be explored below. Suffice it to observe here that such a minimal level of engagement and emphasis on the use of force has not only been detrimental to the professional ethos of the police and the likelihood of it stepping out of its jurisdiction, but has also generated the overall perception that UNPOL constituted an ineffective partner in security sector reform. Even though the PNTL has been under the guidance of UNPOL for the

past decade, it is still seen as lacking the capacity to do basic police work such as investigating a crime or writing a coherent report.

One of the main challenges facing the PNTL – one that continues to dominate police-society and police-military relationships to this day – is the fact that when the institution was created by UNTAET, about 350 to 400 officers from the Indonesian National Police (POLRI) were recruited for the job (Hood, 2006; CIGI, 2009). The reasoning for this was that rather than putting in the effort to create a “professional and impartial police service” – a key component of UN Security Council Resolution 1272 – the UNTAET staff was preoccupied with recruiting and training a large number of officers in a relatively short time, about 2,800 in little over two and a half years. Even though the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) had approved the incorporation of these officers into the PNTL, the fact that these officers received little training prior to their incorporation (about four weeks compared to the somewhat longer training of non-POLRI officers of nine months), and that they were either directly or indirectly involved in the violence the POLRI instigated against the East Timorese population during and prior to 1999, has led many international observers and the local population to distrust their new national police force.

The incorporation of former POLRI officers into the PNTL had another side-effect: it blurred the lines between the PNTL and F-FDTL in terms of who is to provide internal security. The fieldwork conducted suggests that while in theory the PNTL should be responsible for internal matters and the F-FDTL for external security, the distinction is far from being as clear-cut in practice. There is a need to be “realistic in the field”, it was said, and that the involvement of F-FDTL in internal security matters is sometimes the result of the population’s fear or mistrust of the police due to its makeup. According to interviewees in the security sector, which security provider is involved in a particular case “depends on the people”: distrust of the PNTL can lead to circumstances in which those in need prefer to call someone from the army instead; an act that is possible given the country’s small population and intricate network of family relations. When a heavily-armed soldier arrives on the scene of an interpersonal dispute, however, accountability for any subsequent use of force is severely limited, and the media and Dili’s street talk is awash with anecdotes of soldiers shooting people and not suffering any consequences.

A further, and perhaps even more significant element is the politicisation and militarisation of the PNTL. The former began with the transfer of oversight from UNMISSET to the Ministry of Police and Interior on 20 May 2002. The person chosen for the post was Rogerio Lobato, who had been the first East Timorese Defence Minister in 1975 and was also associated with a range of illegal activities including diamond smuggling in Angola, maintaining contact with the Khmer Rouge during the 1970s, and illegal sandalwood trading in Timor-Leste (Nixon, 2012: 131-132). The choice of Lobato as Minister of the Police and Interior is another instance showcasing how conflict at the level of high politics in Timor-Leste is also the result of a plurality of political authorities (see Section 8 above). The appointment had direct and immediate consequences: with the encouragement of Lobato, about 500 veterans who had been rejected from the F-FDTL were recruited for the PNTL in September 2002 (Sahin, 2007: 265; Nixon, 2008: 131-132). In turn, many FALINTIL veterans who were not incorporated into the newly formed F-FDTL complained that the structure and composition of the PNTL left them marginalised and without adequate employment opportunities. Specifically, the incorporation of POLRI officers into the higher ranks of the PNTL created a sense among the veterans and the wider population that those benefiting from independence were not necessarily those who sacrificed and fought most for it. As a result, and under growing public pressure, an additional

150 former FALINTIL members were incorporated into the police force in March 2003 (Myrntinen, 2009).

The significance of such a politicised police force at the hands of Lobato becomes apparent when it is recognised that he is the brother of Nicolau Lobato – a charismatic figure and high-ranking FALINTIL officer during the time of the Indonesian occupation. What is more, Lobato and his brother are the decedents of traditional leaders, the sons of a *liurai* from the western part of the country, the Bazartete locality in Liquica (Nixon, 2012: 52). This endows them with traditional political authority and the supposed right to govern. It was thus not surprising that the moment Rogerio Lobato became the Minister of Police and Interior, he used the state's resources at his disposal to create a paramilitary force out of the PNTL and even attempted, in the words of one commentator, to "establish a state of his own within the state of Timor-Leste" (Sahin, 2007: 265). This marks the beginning of the militarisation of the PNTL, a process that has persisted to this day.

Five months after Timor-Leste's new government took over control of internal and external security from UNMISSET, the Ministry of Interior purchased around 450 automatic and semi-automatic small arms. In addition to the firepower the PNTL already had in its stockpiles, and according to an anonymous two-page leaflet that began circulating in Dili short afterwards (fittingly entitled "The Guns of Timor"), the weapons purchased were seven F2000 machine guns for the protection of the Minister and other senior police officers; 66 semi-automatic FNC military rifles required for an urban riot control unit; 180 semi-automatic HK-33 military rifles; and 200 semi-automatic Steyr military rifles (Nixon, 2012: 133-134). The image of the PNTL as a paramilitary unit, and one that could rival the fire power of the F-FDTL, was even publicly announced when Lobato stated that the Border Patrol Unit was to take on the characteristics of a "full battalion", and that its mandate would be to provide internal security and policing using military weapons (Nixon, 2012: 133-134).

Overall, Lobato set up three special units of the PNTL – a Police Reserve Unit (URP), a Border Police Unit (UPF), and the Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR). Particularly controversial was the establishment of the URP, which was deployed as a counter-insurgency unit after several cross-border incursions by Indonesian militias. The URP was established with the help of the UN and training was provided by the Malaysian contingent of UNPOL. The creation of the URP, the involvement of the UN in the decision, and its mandate to provide border security caused additional tensions between the PNTL and F-FDTL, who saw the former's mandate as strictly falling within the domain of the military. The fact that the URP was largely drawn from "western" districts further increased the F-FDTL's belief that those who sacrificed most (the "easterners", who largely made up the military) were not being rewarded and that the PNTL was increasingly becoming Lobato's private army (CIGI, 2010: 14). The implication of a number of URP officers in the violence of the Crisis (especially the attack on the F-FDTL in May 2006), and the fact that none of those involved have been prosecuted or penalised for their actions, shows that the security sector in Timor-Leste – like the political domain – is defined by a plurality of actors and blurred boundaries between them, resulting in an increasing overlap of competencies and internal competition.

Establishing a well-functioning police force thus constituted only one side of the challenges of security sector governance in Timor-Leste; the other was transforming FALINTIL from a guerrilla organisation into a modern standing army (CIGI, 2009: 10). The problems facing the transformation, however, cannot simply be attributed to the duration of the struggle against Indonesia and the

guerrilla tactics used, but may also have something to do with the international community's marginalisation of the organisation. Indeed, when INTERFET arrived in Timor-Leste in 1999, its stance towards the resistance was ambiguous at best. The speed with which INTERFET was organised and dispatched meant that it arrived in Timor-Leste not as a "blue helmet force" with a peacekeeping mandate, but more like an ad hoc "coalition of the willing" (Cristalis, 2009: 237). Although UN Security Council Resolution 1264 stated that the mandate of the international force was to enforce a ceasefire, it did not adequately specify what – if anything – was to be done with FALINTIL (UNSC, 1999). When INTERFET arrived in September 1999, FALINTIL personnel were expecting to work with the foreign force; in reality, they were treated as armed civilians in need of being disarmed and disbanded. With the support of Xanana Gusmao (Cristalis, 2009: 249), the leaders of the resistance agreed to a single cantonment in Aileu (under the command of Taur Matan Ruak) where they were to wait for demobilisation. This group of "rising FALINTIL commanders were Gusmao/Ruak loyalists – and [later] formed the officer corps of the F-FDTL" (Reese, 2004: 45).

Beyond a probable lack of local knowledge on the side of the incoming international force, a further and perhaps more important reason for the inadequate treatment of FALINTIL may be due to the "inflexible rules governing the activities of donor organisations vis-à-vis armed groups", which resulted in the exclusion of FALINTIL from receiving international assistance while in the Aileu cantonment, and without a coherent demobilisation plan (Reese, 2004: 46). Thus, despite the historical importance and moral legitimacy of the resistance force, the international presence saw FALINTIL as too contentious and in need of being marginalised. Consequently, this led to an increase in the sentiment among FALINTIL combatants that their sacrifice for the nation had been ignored, which in turn led to a decline in discipline and cohesion of the group. The problem got so out of hand that on 23 June 2000 Gusmao, then Commander in Chief of FALINTIL and President of the CNRT, expressed his fear that the force was "almost in a state of revolt" (Reese, 2004: 46). As Edward Reese argues, however, it is misleading to reduce the problem facing the transformation of the FALINTIL into a modern standing army as one having to do with it being "sidestepped". This ignores the more substantial issue the force was already facing long before the cantonment in Aileu, namely that FALINTIL had never been in one place and under one hierarchical structure before. Despite the fact that Gusmao tried to bridge the gap between different opinions within the resistance movement in the 1980s, the fact that these individuals now had to live within close proximity to one another brought their differences to the surface and renewed political competition for control.

In response to increasing demands by FALINTIL members that they be recognised for their worth, and due to the fact that the force was increasingly becoming an internal security threat, calls were heard for transforming the "guerrilla force" into a national defence force. The original plan for the F-FDTL was based on a report entitled "Independent Study on Security Force Options and Security Sector Reform for East Timor", which was commissioned by UNTAET and conducted by consultants from King's College London. The main goal of the study was to examine the feasibility of setting up a national defence, and from the start it assumed that FALINTIL members would be the backbone of the new armed forces. Despite the fact that in the months leading up to the creation of the armed forces many argued that Timor-Leste had no need for a standing army "because [it] does not want any more war" (La'o Hamutuk, 2005), the *FALINTIL-Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste* (F-FDTL) had officially been established on 1 February 2001 by UNTAET Regulation No. 2001/1.

As the name suggests, the establishment of the F-FDTL relied heavily on the history and prestige of the former pro-independence guerrilla force FALINTIL, and was largely made up of former guerrilla fighters. Under the new regulation, the national defence force was to provide for the external security of Timor-Leste and would “not be mobilized or utilized in matters linked to internal public order, police issues or social conflicts” (UNTAET, 2001: Section 2). Prior to the events of 2006-07, the armed forces consisted of about 1,500 personnel: two battalions (of about 600 troops each), a small naval component (which was based in Hera and made up of about 65 personnel and commanded by Major Alfredo Reinado), and headquarters and staff (based in Tasi Tolu, about 10 kilometres west of Dili) (Myrntinen, 2009: 21).

The first battalion, named “The Heroes Battalion,” was based in Bacau and was majority *firaku*. It consisted mostly of veteran FALINTIL fighters who were recruited from the cantonment site in Aileu and were loyal to the then President Xanana Gusmao and the F-FDTL chief Taur Matan Ruak (Shoemith, 2003: 246-50; Nixon, 2012: 131). It is important to emphasise that only about 650 FALINTIL members were recruited (mostly from the high command) for the first battalion while another 1,300 were excluded from the recruitment process – the majority of these would become the disgruntled veterans who joined the PNTL and/or became members of a number of clandestine veterans organisations such as *Segrada Familia*. This process of deciding who would “join the First Battalion of F-FDTL versus those who would be demobilised via the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) implemented and World Bank/USAID/Japan funded FALINTIL Reinsertion Assistance Program (FRAP) was a key and flawed turning point in the development of the security sector in Timor-Leste” (Reese, 2004: 47). This not only directly led to the tipping point of violence that was reached with the Crisis of 2006-07, but continues to undermine the authority of the armed forces in the country.

The second battalion was based in Metinaro (about 30 kilometres east of Dili) and was made up of new recruits who came mostly from the western or *kaladi* part of the country. Due to the fact that there were very few veterans in the western part, and that surviving veterans from the east who were not loyal to President Xanana Gusmao were excluded from recruitment, the individuals who eventually made up the battalion tended to be youths from the western districts. As such, from the moment the new defence force of Timor-Leste came into existence, it was not only directly identified with Gusmao instead of with the government of Timor-Leste, but also with only one sub-group of society (the easterners), rather than with the whole population (Shoemith, 2003: 236-47).

Not surprisingly, given the make-up and salience of the high command in the first battalion, the F-FDTL felt they were the “heirs” of the resistance force and the true guardians of Timor-Leste. This sense of supremacy created problems within the F-FDTL – specifically between the two battalions. The second battalion (being made up of new and much younger recruits, most of whom could not relate to the older generation of the first battalion except in the spirit of independence) increasingly felt left out and marginalised within the armed forces. Their sentiments were catalysed by the “east/west” divide that was becoming prevalent in society and in the armed forces, as well as the financial burden they faced for being stationed so far away from home (coming from the other end of the island meant they had further to travel to see their families when they were off duty).

The divisions within the F-FDTL were already present before the Crisis, and in December of 2003, 42 soldiers were discharged after they had complained that they were being unfairly treated. They also complained about poor communication, and about the fact that they had to travel much further distances

with small amount of funds. Similarly, on 26 February 2005 a number of soldiers raised issues of discrimination and mistreatment with President Gusmao, foreshadowing the complaints of the 159 soldiers, or “petitioners”, that were to trigger the Crisis in 2006 (ICG, 2008: 2).

The events of 2006-07 focused subsequent international and domestic attention primarily on the institutional problems of the PNTL, but not so much on the army. The F-FDTL’s force strength fell from 1,435 in January 2006 to about 700 after the Crisis, with the proportion of “westerners” within the institutions dropping almost three-fold from 65 percent to 28 percent (CIGI, 2009: 11). In the wake of the events that led up to and occurred during the Crisis, army commander Taur Matan Ruak formed a team that was to come up with a long-term strategic vision for the armed forces. The document was named FORÇA 2020. Completed in 2006 but only made publicly available in 2007, it was an East Timorese perspective on the make-up and function of the national defence forces (Government of Timor-Leste, 2007; CIGI, 2009: 10). The report emphasised the importance of Timor-Leste having two land units (45 percent of the force), a light navy (35 percent), a support and service component (15 percent), and the command unit (5 percent). It also raised the force ceiling from 1,500 to 3,500 full-time troops, thus creating a ratio of around 1 soldier for every 346 citizens (ICG, 2008: 8).

In order to reach the figure of 3,500 personnel, the report recommended the introduction of conscription. The use of conscription was also an argument in favour of getting youths off the streets and controlling gang violence in Dili. To some international observers, this seemed problematic, as they did not see the added value of taking violent young men off the streets and placing them into an intensive six-month training course where they learned how to be better fighters and how to use weapons. In addition to making better “specialists of violence”, the criticism against the idea of conscription – especially conscription of young men – was that it would increase the number of martial arts and ritual arts members being associated with the armed forces, and as a result increase the possibility of the defence forces being undermined by these groups (Myrntinen, 2009: 30). Moreover, while “conscription may be politically attractive as a way of employing and instilling discipline in Timor’s youth”, the role of the armed forces is not to “provide jobs and education and would be overwhelmed by the challenge of managing a fast through-put of conscripts” (ICG, 2008: 8).

The first post-Crisis recruitment process for the F-FDTL was conducted in May 2009, which increased the strength of the armed forces back to the level before the events of 2006-07. The process, which was able to attract 579 new recruits, was a success in the sense that it was designed to reach out to individuals from both “eastern” and “western” parts of the country. The problem, however, was that the majority of the candidates were from the eastern parts, with more than 60 percent of the recruits coming from the districts of Baucau, Viqueque, and Los Palos (CIGI, 2009: 11). While the fieldwork conducted confirmed that the issues that led to the disarray in the security forces in 2006 were discursively constructed by the political elite, the fact remains that easterners once again dominated the recruitment process. This suggests that the make-up of the F-FDTL and the presence of regional influences continue to shape the population’s perception of the armed forces today, and entails serious implications for the representativeness and integrity of the F-FDTL, as well as for its relations with the PNTL.

11. Informal and private security providers

So far in this Working Paper it has been argued that conflict in Timor-Leste is generally a conflict of political authorities, one that plays itself out at the national

level along the fault line of the east-west divide. Leading up to the 2006-07 Crisis, the conflict was enflamed by two key conflict drivers: the historical problems among the political elite, and the fragmentation and competition within the security sector. What happened during the Crisis at the community level in Dili mirrors these developments. In the wake of the confusion and competition regarding the provision of security and who was to hold political authority nationally, individuals and groups within communities took the opportunity to expand their own influence and consolidate their political leverage. After the petitioner protests on 24 April 2006, interpersonal conflict between competing political authorities (in the form of social jealousies mapped onto the east-west discourse) spread through the urban environment due to the kinship (*uma kain*) nature of social relationships within the communities. It was in this setting that societal tensions tipped into large-scale collective violence.

The cultural stereotypes and regional influences elaborated in Section 8 above were confirmed by fieldwork conducted in a long standing *barrio* (neighbourhood) in Dili. Indeed, in order to explain the events of 2006, one community leader and local businessman again evoked the difference in mentality between “easterners” and “westerners”. According to him, the distinction is a cultural one that became salient during the Portuguese period. Those in the “west” had a “yes mentality” in the sense that they did what ever the Portuguese told them to do. Those in the “east”, however, “have every time to discuss” or continuously question the Portuguese directives. It was further argued that this cultural distinction was then used to refer to the East Timorese population during the Indonesian occupation as well in the form of *lorosae* and *loromonu*. Furthermore, and in order to explain why violence occurred against their neighbourhood in particular, interviewees maintained that it was driven by jealousy. For instance, those from Baucau, who are often considered to be adept in business and appear to dominate commerce in Dili markets, argue that others resent their success. The same argument is being used to explain attacks on Chinese and other Asian minorities during the Crisis.

Such examples illustrate how everyday social jealousies are mapped onto the east-west divide at the community level in Dili. This becomes even more apparent when it is seen in light of the high rates of (particularly youth) unemployment. Young people are forced to look for a variety of ways to meet their needs – most often income is supplemented by entering the informal economy or engaging in illegal activities. Moreover, it is perceived that the system works only for a privileged few and their families – particularly those who have links to persons in state institutions. Interviews and group discussions at the sub-community level showed that there is a feeling among the poorer population that the government continuously puts in place policies and laws that benefit the political elite, their families and friends – most of whom, it is claimed, are veterans of the rebellion or come from eastern parts of the island (especially Baucau and Viqueque). In fact, there is a strong sense at the sub-community level that the system is inherently against the majority of the urban population, and that instead of the “rule of law”, East Timorese society is dominated by the “rule of deals”.

As such, it is perhaps not all that surprising that a lot of the 2006-07 violence appears to have been directed against the people from those districts that were perceived to have benefited most from the nature of governance in Timor-Leste. Indeed, at the beginning of the Crisis it seems that it was the easterners (along with the Chinese) who were attacked, and had their houses and shops burned down first. A further reason may lie in the fact that the easterners were the first to arrive in abandoned Dili neighbourhoods and occupy land in the city when the Indonesian army and militias retreated westwards in 1999. It is in these areas

that the majority of violence and house torching occurred in 2006 – especially in areas where easterners did not have control or inhabit the whole neighbourhood.

Despite the fact that individuals from eastern districts were targeted in the early months of the Crisis, many of them resorted to kinship ties in order to organise and respond to such attacks. Family “reinforcements” arrived from the districts to protect the *barrios* of their kin, and thus while some of the rumours about handouts of money, alcohol, and drugs to youths in exchange for violent acts need to be taken seriously, this may only be one part of the story. When the ISF troops arrived in July 2006, however, they were in no position to distinguish between those “gangs” who had gone on a rampage and those “youth groups” that were fighting back to protect their extended families and their residences.

The events of the Crisis again illustrate that the strength of *lisan* in Dili must not be underestimated. But it also draws the attention to a plethora of informal experts of security provision that the state authorities and the international community, for a variety of reasons, struggle to deal with. On the one hand, ritual and martial arts groups, mostly originating from the period under Indonesian occupation, play an important role in East Timorese society – most youths are part of one of these groups, and their leaders have links with (or indeed are part of) the political and economic elite. On the other hand, and in line with a globalised security discourse that sees the presence of large populations of young (especially male) individuals as a threat to the social order of a city or state, the “gangs” of Dili have been (conveniently) portrayed by some international observers and local stakeholders as the source of violence and disorder in the city.

Although no one would disagree with the fact that these groups and their members do engage in violent acts – either individually as in cases of domestic violence or revenge killings, or collectively in episodes of gang warfare – focusing on these acts alone does not tell us much about their emergence and continuing perseverance in Dili. Rather, the “gang problem” needs to be situated within the broader fault line of easterners versus westerners, and in light of political and ritual authorities. Another important factor worth highlighting is that, contrary to the way incidents of violence are often portrayed in media reports, membership in a martial arts or ritual arts groups does not necessarily imply that an act of violence had something to do with the group itself. Since most young males in Dili are part of a particular group, almost every act of inter-personal violence will also be one between two “gang members”.

Before going into the types of groups found in Dili and their origins, it is worth reiterating that while the presence of these potential “security providers” is important for understanding the events of 2006-07 at the community level, this is not necessarily the case at the level of high politics. Despite the fact that these groups played an active role in the collective violence that characterised the Crisis, the “conflict tipping point” was political in origin and involved the breakdown of the security sector as described in the previous section. At the community level, however, the crisis took on a more violent face with the engagement of groups (either through bribes or actual allegiance) on both sides of the political, and subsequent east-west, divide.

The fieldwork confirmed that there are predominantly three types of community-based security providers present in Dili (martial arts groups, ritual arts groups, and street-corner gangs) whose origins differ remarkably. Martial arts groups and ritual arts groups are the product of the “historical structure” of Timor-Leste. They originated during the Indonesian occupation and some were even part of the clandestine movement that supported the FALINTIL resistance through the

gathering of information and by acting as couriers. In particular, there are about 15 **martial arts groups** whose members are dispersed throughout the country's 13 districts (Scambary, 2006: 6; 2009; TLAVA, 2009a; Arnold, 2009: 380, 390; CEPAD, 2010: 72; Myrntinen, 2010: 234-270; Streicher, 2011). The two principal groups – *Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate* (PSHT) and *Kmanek Oan Rai Klaren* (KORKA)⁷ – have up to 10,000 members each, and some estimates put total membership of all martial arts groups at more than 90,000. These groups are hierarchically organised in chapters of national martial arts clubs, they tend to be affiliated (formally and informally) with political parties, and have branches that go down to the community and even *aldeia* level. Their membership tends to be holistic, with individuals being of all ages, both genders, and coming from different socio-economic backgrounds (including academics and government ministers). Moreover, these groups often have close relations with their Indonesian counterparts (indeed many of the leaders in Dili began their training in Indonesia) and personally claim that the goal of the group is the practice of martial arts and not “street fighting”.

Ritual arts groups, or *Kakalok*, meaning “magical” or “mystical” (Scambary, 2006), are a further product of the Indonesian occupation. However, unlike the martial arts groups, which have their origins in the martial arts clubs found in Indonesia, these groups are home grown and tend to have few links to the former occupier. Indeed, one of the most well known ritual arts groups, 7-7, is locally referred to as the “land lady” in some neighbourhoods of Dili, hinting at the status it enjoys there. While these groups also practice martial arts, they are distinguished from martial arts groups through their emphasis on mysticism and syncretism, which combine *lisan* with Catholicism. Interestingly, the distinction between the martial arts groups and ritual arts groups also falls along the distinction between political groups and ritual authorities. Indeed, many of the members of martial arts groups have university degrees and are employed in government institutions. Conversely, ritual arts groups are seen as “cultural” or “ideological” organisations whose beliefs, practices or “codes of conduct” revolve around communicating with spirits and asking them for protection in times of crisis or combat. The members of ritual arts groups tend to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Their members can be identified by a collection of cuts or scars running along their arm – the number of scars corresponding to the group they belong to. The main ritual arts groups in Dili are 5-5, 7-7, 12-12 (Scambary, 2006: 6; 2009; TLAVA, 2009a; Arnold, 2009: 380, 390; Myrntinen, 2010: 234-270; Streicher, 2011).

Unlike the martial arts and ritual arts groups, **street-corner gangs** in Dili are predominantly neighbourhood-based and are mostly a reaction to the presence of martial arts and ritual arts groups, as well as the product of the post-independence socio-political environment. In cases where these groups are a reaction to the presence of rival martial and ritual arts groups in the neighbourhood, they take on the name of “0-0”, thus identifying themselves as non-aligned with the bigger, more established, groups (Scambary, 2006: 6, 2009; Arnold, 2009: 380, 390; Myrntinen, 2010: 234-270; Streicher, 2011). It is not unusual for these groups to find themselves in a middle of a “turf war” between groups such as PSHT and 7-7, or to be involved in the protection of their neighbourhood during more serious times of insecurity – such as the 2006-07 Crisis. Indeed, it was during the Crisis that “youth groups” (often just a group of young individuals that come together to play sports, conduct social services, hold language classes, or just hang out on the street and drink) crystallised into “neighbourhood watch” security providers.

⁷ “Brotherhood of the Sacred Heart Water Lily” and “Sacred Children of the Land”, respectively. Another large martial arts groups is *Kera Sakti* (KS), meaning “Powerful Monkey”.

Keeping in mind the previous sections on the east-west divide and the importance of traditional authorities (especially with reference to the difference between ritual and political authorities), one way of depicting the youth group phenomenon in East Timorese society is to see it as the result of a struggle to draw the boundaries of belonging (Robson, 2008; see Arnold, 2009: 386). Unlike during the Indonesian occupation, where there was a clear sense of “us” (the Timorese) against “them” (the Indonesians), in the post-independence period, where the majority of the population have difficulty directly associating with the independence struggle and sense of nationalism it invokes, other identity markers came to be established. Membership in youth groups was one of these markers. Indeed, during the 2006-07 Crises, the involvement of martial arts and ritual arts groups as well as street-corner gangs in collective violence was a way for distinguishing “who is a friend, and who is an enemy” (Arnold, 2009: 386) in an environment in which political authorities were being contested, the formal security sector was fragmented, and East Timorese identity was being socially (re)constructed. Ultimately, four youth groups – two western (*Sintu Kulao* and *Gaya Anak Sadar*) and two eastern (*Lito Rambo* and *Lafaek*) – were the most prominent in the initial stages of the conflict and set the tone for the rest of the Crisis (Scambary, 2009: 274).

The presence of these martial and ritual arts groups, as well as street-corner gangs, can thus be seen from two angles – as the potential harbingers of violence, but also as a significant source of communal security and a sense belonging. At the sub-community level, they thus contribute to the increased plurality of and greater competition between political authorities. This is especially the case when it is recognised that in parallel to the emergence of community-based security providers, Dili has also witnessed the growth and increased reliance on **private security companies** (PSCs). As Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams argue in their recent book *Security Beyond the State* (2010), it is the rise of PSCs, as well as the hybrid orders of security governance that are currently emerging out of a whole host of public-private partnerships, that constitute the new frontier of security provision. Timor-Leste is certainly no exception to this trend, although PSCs are one of the least studied aspects of Dili’s security sector. A recent review of the security sector commissioned by the UNDP has found that despite the fact that “private security guards or non-state actors in Timor-Leste outnumber police and military combined, and are a far more visible presence in cities and towns... little is known about this part of the security sector” (UNDP, 2008: 5). Indeed, it appears that only one attempt has so far been made to document the sector in East Timor (Sarah Parker, 2009).

While the rise of PSCs is a phenomenon that can be found in most cities around the world today, their role takes on an even greater significance in a place such as Dili, which registers continuously high levels of damage to property through arson, slingshot antics, and lots of stone throwing. Add to that the threat of outbursts of collective violence as witnessed during the 2006-07 Crisis, and it is of little surprise to see that today the door or gate of every house or building whose inhabitants can afford it does have the sign of a PSC on it. In a way, it is somewhat astounding that there are only three PSCs to choose from in such a setting: APAC (Asia-Pacific Assurance Company) Security, Maubere Security, and Gardamor Security. While Maubere began its operations in 2000, the other two were formed in 2007 and 2008 respectively, thus after the violent 2006-07 Crisis.

Each of the three PSCs has its own interesting dynamics, although the accuracy of the claims voiced about them are difficult to verify. According to fieldwork interlocutors and the very limited secondary literature, it appears that the two foreign-owned companies are meanwhile each aligned with a particular martial arts group, meaning that individuals not part of that group may not be hired (see,

for instance, Myrtinnen, 2008). The third, locally-owned PSC, which operates in all provinces, is run by veterans of the former resistance movement, and has set up regional control centres that mirror the territorial and hierarchical boundaries of FALINTIL. In a way, it seems to be the old military set-up and interface, now used for a different purpose.

Although it remains unclear what the linkages are between youth groups and PSCs, and whether these had any bearing on the way the Crisis unfolded, such alignments could in theory have huge impacts on security dynamics in the neighbourhoods in which these PSCs operate, especially during an outbreak of collective violence. Indeed, such alignment may itself be a potential factor in the tipping process, given that these PSCs will thus strengthen their respective “control” over particular areas. It also means that non-aligned persons or those with a different affiliation will not call on these security providers in times of need. In the case of Gardamor, the logic would even go a step further in the sense that it deems to have the right to political authority (and thus security provision) on the grounds that it is precisely not foreign-owned and has its roots in the resistance. This dynamic is nicely portrayed in the company’s slogan portrayed on its website: “We are different”.

12. Concluding overview

The aim of this case study was to analyse the dynamics of the urban tipping point of violent conflict by means of a detailed examination of the 2006-07 Crisis in Dili. While the city continues to suffer from chronic inter-personal violence, it remains unknown what makes one incident tip into collective violence, while others do not. What was so specific about the events of early 2006? And could such a tipping point reoccur?

The Crisis began in April 2006 when a group of soldiers (who mostly came from the western districts and came to be called the petitioners) voiced their discontentment to the President at the time, Xanana Gusmao, and Brigadier-General Taur Matan Ruak, about the lack of advancement opportunities and economic benefits in the armed forces (F-FDTL). On 28 April, the petitioner protests turned violent, and unleashed a wave of devastation that left between 37 and 200 people dead, over 2,000 houses destroyed and more than 150,000 inhabitants displaced. The events of that time witnessed the fragmentation of the formal security sector, intense competition among the political elite (especially between the President and the then Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri), mob violence and arson at the community level, turf wars between various martial arts and ritual arts groups, and the use and consolidation of neighbourhood defence and informal security provision.

Building on the work of Thomas Schelling, Mark Granovetter, Malcolm Gladwell and others, this case study sought to make sense of the Crisis by analysing it through the lens of the urban tipping process. By examining the context that leads up to the tipping point (Phase I), the event that ushered in the transformation from inter-personal to collective violence and the circumstances surrounding it (Phase II), and the effects attainment of the tipping point has on the urban setting (Phase III), the urban tipping process constitutes a conceptual tool for understanding the factors that can induce an interpersonal conflict to transform into large-scale collective violence. While it is useful to synthesise the findings along the three phases here, it must be emphasised that the report itself was not structured along these lines because it would wrongly give the impression that the tipping of a phenomenon is temporally deterministic. As discussed at length in the conceptual framework in Section 3 above, individual actions or decisions cannot be mapped directly onto observed behaviour at the

collective level. Instead, it is the interplay between these events (even if they are perceived to be of only marginal importance) that facilitates the transformation of interpersonal conflict into collective violence. Only in hindsight are these events able to produce an image of an organic whole (Jacobs, 1961).

Phase I of the urban tipping process is characterised by a steady level of societal tensions in the urban environment. At this stage in the process, conflict is thought to be a normal aspect of everyday life, and while it can lead to acts of violence, these do not tend to become collective in nature. The presence of conflict in the urban environment in this phase can be explained by looking at the conflict fault lines in society. Fault lines are (real or perceived) cleavages or divisions that influence the interests of individuals and groups and shape tensions among them. According to the fieldwork conducted, the main **fault lines** in Dili present at the time of the petitioner issue were (and continue to be) a stark discrepancy between traditional forms of authority and the values of liberal democracy; a discursive distinction between “easterners” and “westerners”; and the disembedded nature of the urban space. Together, these fault lines provide the setting in which the city has been “operating” since independence a decade ago.

The second phase of the urban tipping process deals with the environment surrounding the “conflict tipping point”, which is usually a single event or issue (i.e. the violence emanating from the petitioner demonstration on 28 April 2006) that *in hindsight* can be attributed as the moment at which the petitioner issue transformed into collective violence. This violence played itself out at both the state and community levels under the guise of the east-west divide and involved the conflict in and between the formal security sector and a plethora of informal security actors. The tipping point is usually brought about by key actors that can be divided into four categories: the first movers, connectors, experts, and charismatic personalities. The fieldwork has shown that at the time at which the tipping point occurred, all of these actors, to some degree, played a role in the transformation of the petitioner issue into a broader, societal problem.

The **first movers** in the 2006-07 Crisis were a group of army petitioners who voiced their discontent to their superiors – the argument being that personnel from the western part of the country were being discriminated against. The dismissal of the petitioners from the East Timorese armed forces (F-FDTL) led to the staging of protests in front of the Governmental Palace in April 2006. Another set of first movers were the youths and youth groups that first engaged in violence during the protests and set off a chain reaction that led to property destruction and displacement of residents throughout much of the city.

The spread of violence was made possible by the presence and role of **connectors** – based in Timor-Leste on the kinship nature of social interaction as stipulated by traditional custom (*lisan*). Primary loyalty in East Timorese society is to one's extended family network or clan that traces its origin back to a sacred house (*uma lulik*). These kinship ties not only give individuals migrating to Dili access to a social network, but it also allows for rapid organisation of that network in times of insecurity. Individuals and groups coming from the same district thus organised and sought to protect themselves during the breakdown of social order that characterised the Crisis, a process which led to a further fragmentation of urban space in the city.

A range of **experts** were involved in the violence. First, there exist a large number of individuals who had ties to the resistance movement but in the post-independence environment faced social and political exclusion. Broadly known as “the veterans”, these individuals banded together to form the various clandestine

and ritual arts groups that can be found in Dili. The second set of experts falls under the heading of martial arts groups, many of which can also be traced back to the Indonesian period. The third type of experts can best be described as street-corner gangs. These groups are community-oriented and often formed as a response to rivalries between and among the first two types. The proliferation of such groups clearly fuelled the violence that spread throughout the city.

At the same time, however, the research conducted suggests that these various martial and ritual arts groups and street-corner gangs were not directly involved in the organisation of violence. Rather, their involvement was very much instrumentalised, and a function of rivalry within the East Timorese political elite, including in particular certain **charismatic personalities** enjoying almost a cult-like following among the population. These revived a traditional discourse about *lorosae* and *loromonu* (easterners and westerners), in order to foster a context of polarisation within which different actors could be more easily mobilised and roused to violence.

The presence of the conflict tipping point, however, tells us little about how and why such a transformation or “tipping” occurred. For this reason, the broader focus of Phase II is the examination of the environment that surrounds the tipping point. This environment is characterised by a presence of conflict drivers – which are conditions that have the potential of producing a clash of interests, and which are usually structured along a series of fault lines. The **conflict drivers** that were drawn out from the fieldwork conducted include social jealousy, historical problems among the political elite, high youth unemployment, land insecurity and a fragmented security sector. By taking on shape along the fault lines described, these conflict drivers provided a context within which key actors could exploit individual and group interests and pit them against each other.

Phase III of the urban tipping process primarily focuses on the change the tipping point produces in the urban environment. Arguably, the biggest changes in Dili as a result of the violence that occurred in 2006-07 are not societal, but institutional. At the national level, and in an effort to prevent the reoccurrence of collective violence, the government has put in place a plan, in the form of the “Joint Command”, that seeks to maintain collaboration between the main formal actors within the security sector – the police (PNTL) and military (F-FDTL). While the “Joint Command” itself does not solve the rivalries between the formal securities providers (as was evident during *Operasaun Ninja* of 2010⁸), it does at least provide the appearance of a “unified front” to the population in times of crisis. This has gone hand in hand with the denunciation of the supposed “ethnic” distinction between easterners and westerners as a “mechanised division”.

As this Working Paper has tried to highlight, however, the tensions between the army and the police constitute only one, albeit crucial, side to the story. Contemporary security provision in Timor-Leste needs to be viewed in light of a plethora of private and informal community security providers that contribute to the expansion, complexity, and competition within the security sector. While their capacity to engage in violence must not be underestimated, it must also be pointed out that they nonetheless play a key role in conflict mediation. While PSCs are a common feature of urban security provision worldwide, the fieldwork in Dili suggests that due to the constraints faced by the PNTL (both material and

⁸ On 22 January 2010, the PNTL launched *Operasaun Ninja* in the western border districts of Cova Lima and Bobonaro. It was designed to capture illegal armed groups, or “ninja gangs”, that were allegedly responsible for two unrelated murders in the area at the end of 2009 and beginning of 2010, as well as to deal with the Committee to Defend the Democratic Republic of East Timor (*Conselho Popular pela Defesa da Republica Democratica de Timor Leste Popular*, CPD-RDTL), a dissident group whose members were thought to belong to some of these gangs. See CIGI, 2010.

in terms of legitimacy with the local population), the police also continuously engages with (or at least tolerates the presence of) martial and ritual arts groups, and various other street-corner gangs. Nevertheless, recent years have seen a number of legislative initiatives seeking to curtail some of the martial arts activities, and even to ban practice and training during the entire pre and post-election period (December 2011-December 2012) (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011a; 2008).

A pragmatic justification for this stance on the part of the police may simply be the realisation that a lack of capacity (and local legitimacy) means that they are unable to patrol and effectively provide security for every one of Dili's *sucos*. It appears that there is at times an informal agreement between the PNTL and individual *xefe suco* that the latter are responsible for providing security on their own. In some instances, the *xefe suco* opt for PSCs, and in other cases they align themselves with a local martial arts or ritual arts group, or depend on the youths in their neighbourhood for protection. Indeed, as some interviewees argued, the reliance on these organisations for protection at the community and sub-community level stems from the fact that during the 2006-07 Crisis, these groups were able to provide neighbourhood security and as such were perceived to have more authority than the local *xefe suco*. This is the feeling that still predominates in Dili's neighbourhoods today, especially in times of political uncertainty or crisis. Of course, this is not meant to imply that these groups are able (or have an ambition) to suspend to replace the jurisdiction of the PNTL. Rather, they work within their sphere of influence, and the implicit argument of police officers goes some way towards saying that should a problem at the community level escalate to a point where the PNTL must intervene, it is the informal security providers (rather than the actual perpetrators), that will be held accountable – almost as if implying that if there is need for the police to intervene at all, this is because the first line of informal security provision did not function properly.

Another justification for the interaction between formal and informal security providers could lie in the acknowledgement that these groups represent political actors in East Timorese society – ones that, on the one hand, contribute to the chronic levels of violence and conflict; but on the other, decrease urban complexity. Indeed, the majority of interviewees claimed that while the various “non-state” security providers do at times cause trouble, the levels of violence would be much harder to deal with were they not to exist. The choice then, as one interlocutor expressed it, is that between the “organised violence” of identifiable groups with internal structures and hierarchies, and “unorganised violence” that cannot be solved by negotiating with a leader. Despite the fact that at the level of high politics such groups are only marginal, at the community and sub-community level they are (along with kinship networks) one of the only actors able to organise collective action and enforce rules. Their ability to do this increases drastically when village or *suco* chiefs are also members of these groups or leaders. In this respect, they should be seen as key political authorities in the local communities of Dili.

Against this backdrop, and as elaborated in the adjoining Policy Brief, the findings of this Working Paper suggest that it would be worthwhile to consider Dili as a genuinely urban space with its own particular security dynamics, competing political and ritual authorities, acute land insecurity, and specific planning needs. While this might appear to be stating the obvious, it is not an optic that has so far been adopted by the international development community, nor by government institutions – both have privileged the severe levels of malnutrition and lack of basic infrastructure in rural areas, and have generally taken a nationwide perspective on policies related to both development and peacebuilding. Yet given Dili's status as Timor-Leste's “theatre” of conflict in which divers political and

socio-economic interests collide, violence prevention and reduction would need a Dili-specific approach with which to tackle competing claims to authority. The recent establishment of an umbrella organisation for martial arts groups constitutes an important step in this endeavour, as it provides a forum for discussion and possibly also conflict mediation among the largest and most visible “type” of social actor in the city. Missing from these conversations, however, have so far been the less “institutionalised” organisations such as 7-7 and the other youth groups found at the community level (see the adjoining Policy Brief). Maintaining a continuous conversation with and among all formal and informal, public and private authorities and security providers – particularly in the **urban** setting of Dili – constitutes a crucial element in assuring that Timor-Leste remains on its path of gradual political stability and socio-economic prosperity.

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