



Nation-building and National Identity in Timor-Leste (Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series)

Michael Leach

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East Timor continues to be an example of a state built from the ground up, a society rebuilding itself after almost a quarter of a century of profound trauma, and consecutive eras of colonialism. The impact East Timor has had, and continues to have, across a range of fields, belies the small size of its population and territory.

This book examines the key challenges of national building in Timor-Leste in the ten years since the 1999 independence referendum. It addresses key issues in the development and reconstruction of an independent East Timor, highlighting its successes and its failures, as well as a set of unresolved issues confronting the state. East Timor provides a clear example of the challenges of post-conflict nation-building. Following the 1999 violence which precipitated institutional collapse within the territory, East Timor was often described as a 'nation without a state'. Prior to the resurgence of violence in April 2006, the UN-led mission in East Timor (UNTAET) was considered one of the most successful examples of international state-building intervention.

The author examines the history of debates and conflict over issues of national identity, national history, cultural heritage, language policy, and relationships between distinct regions, generations, and language groups. Interdisciplinary in its approach, the analysis links qualitative studies of cultural nationalism with quantitative analyses of popular attitudes to national identity. The book argues that nation-building - in the sense of creating the conditions for social cohesion, political stability and identity formation - is a neglected dimension of the state-building process in post-independence Timor-Leste, and that these national 'faultlines' have been key sources of civil conflict since independence.

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