

## **AID as Gift: an initial approach**

### **A cooperação internacional como dádiva. Algumas aproximações**

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#### **RESUMO**

Este texto propõe que aspectos relevantes das práticas de cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento são melhor compreendidos à luz do regime da dádiva. Para tanto, confrontam-se dados etnográficos relacionados com o *modus operandi* do campo da AID em Timor-Leste com os legados de Marcel Mauss e a recente produção do M.A.U.S.S. Indica-se que as políticas internacionais de doação são veículos privilegiados de construção de hegemonia em arenas *glocalizadas* de negociação, mediante as quais diferentes atores constroem identidades e vínculos de aliança, honra e precedência. Neste debate, sugere-se que a maior contradádiva de Timor-Leste à comunidade internacional seja a de se colocar como um instrumento por meio do qual valores caros aos seus doadores, expressos nos mitos ocidentais de boa sociedade, possam mais uma vez ser cultivados no processo de edificação de um novo Estado-nação.

**Palavras-chave:** Cooperação internacional, Dádiva, Estado-nação, Política, Timor-Leste

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## ABSTRACT

The article proposes that some of the key practices in the area of international cooperation for development can be better understood in terms of a gift regime. To this end, it compares ethnographic data relating to the modus operandi of the aid sector in East Timor with the legacies of Marcel Mauss and the recent production of M.A.U.S.S. International aid policies are shown to be important means for establishing hegemony in *glocal* negotiation spaces in which different actors construct identities and relations of alliance, honor and precedence. In this debate, it is argued that East Timor's biggest counter-gift to the international community has been to function as an instrument through which values cherished by aid donors, expressed in Western myths of good society, can once again be cultivated in the process of building a new national state.

**Key words:** AID, Gift, Nation State, Politics, East Timor

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Societies progressed to the degree that they themselves and their subgroups [...] learned to stabilize their relationships, to give, receive and finally to reciprocate. To engage in commerce it was first necessary to learn the rules. [...] It was only later on that people learned to mutually create and satisfy interests and defend these without recourse to weapons. The clan, the tribe and peoples thus learned how to oppose one another without engaging in massacres and how to give without sacrificing oneself to others. And it is this that classes, nations and individuals must learn today in our civilized world (Mauss 1974).

Assistance to the victims of natural disasters such as tsunamis in southern Asia or the hurricanes which have devastated wide swathes of the Gulf of Mexico, has situated AID (Assistance for International Development) dynamics as an important topic of discussion in today's global media. Apparently, nation-states, multilateral institutions, non-governmental organisms (both local and international) and other entities band together to aid the thousands of people who have been affected by these catastrophes.

In January 2005, the United Nations pointed out how exceptional the world's response was to the appeals for aid coming from the countries around the Indian Ocean which had been devastated by tsunamis. At a meeting in Geneva, 70% of

the US\$ 977 million solicited by the UN was raised in one fell swoop (ONU 2005). This situation, however, did not just spontaneously occur: it only happened after a speech by Jan Egeland, the UN's chief of aid operations, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 2004, in which the rich countries of the world were accused of being miserly. Up until that point, the U.S., for example, had declared that it could only release some 15 million dollars in aid to the tsunami victims. Following Egeland's speech, a competition slowly developed among donor nations to see who could become the greatest giver, with daily rankings published by the global media charting the amount of resources which had been offered up. After Japan declared that they would donate US\$500 million in disaster relief, Germany chimed in with an offer of 674 million. The next day, Germany's lead was lost to the Australians, which put 765 million American dollars of aid at the affected countries' disposal. It was in this context, that the U.S. raised its initial offering from 15 to 350 millions of dollars (Governos 2005).

In September 2005, it was the U.S.' turn to be the recipient of foreign AID. The commotion caused by the back-to-back disasters of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita mobilized millions of dollars of resources for the U.S. By September 11<sup>th</sup> of that year, the total aid raised had reached 739 million dollars (Grupos 2005). Even poor states such as Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic and Sri Lanka (among others) chipped in. The U.S., however, didn't accept all offers of aid. The 1,500 doctors which Cuba put at the Americans disposal, for example, were rejected as was Venezuela's offer of cut-rate fuel. Cuba, in turn, rejected USD\$ 50,000 in U.S. aid when the island was later hit by Hurricane Dennis.

The present article discusses the nation-state donation policies which are executed by different agents active in the field of international development assistance (AID) and humanitarian aid. This topic is dealt with here via a case study. I analyze how aid policies were configured and implemented by the *community of donors* in East Timor between 2002 and 2003.<sup>1</sup> I use Mauss' (1974) concept of *the gift* to discuss this situation and it is my hope that this analysis will bring to light as yet unexplored dimensions of what is at stake in these "aid giving" practices. I propose that the giving of these international gifts involves strategies of definition of political status and the cultivation of national identity on the part of donors. Consequently, such practices delimit relations of precedence among donors in *glocalized* arenas where the construction of hegemony is being negotiated.

Obviously, this point of view does not deny that humanitarian aid and development assistance are privileged vehicles of international politics, used by donor nations to express implicit and explicit interests (Mason 1964). More than a century ago, Mauss (1974) already had shown that gift-giving is a strategy for cultivating power relations. It must be understood, however, that it is not simply commercial interests or the desire for political subjugation which motivates actors in this field: gift-giving is also a tactic related to the construction of identities,

alliances and honor among these agents. What I analyze in the text below are some of the means through which these objectives are negotiated and reached.

The present article is divided into three sections and a conclusion. In the first part, I contextualize the Timorese case within the international scenario and discuss some of the paradigms of the gift as formulated by Marcel Mauss (1974) and certain integrants of today's Anti-Utilitarian Movement in the Social Sciences (M.A.U.S.S.), particularly Godbout (1999) and Caillé (2002).

The second section dives into an analysis of the Timor-Leste and Development *Partners Meeting (TLDPM)* which occurred in June, 2003. This meeting is dealt with here as a specific variation of a characteristic event in the AID field – the *donor conference* – in which the many entities active in this field participate, including the World Bank, the United Nations, bilateral cooperation agencies and AID beneficiaries, among others. Donor conferences are ritual phenomena in the international aid universe and, for this reason, are condensed and expressive manifestations of this universe's symbolic repertoire and modes of functioning. As a ritual, the meeting is a solemn occasion in which values and institutions which operate in the aid donor field are renewed.<sup>2</sup> Here, I use it to anchor and expand upon certain reflections regarding the implications of international donation policies.

In the third section of the article, these implications are explored via a discussion of the facts and processes which are involved in preparing for such a meeting. Here, I place special emphasis upon the capacity construction policies which currently constitute the fundamental vehicles of foreign policy used by donor nation-states. In the ethnographic context dealt with here, programs which seek to develop capacities are privileged objects for donations and this gives them particular cognitive potential as objects of analysis. Finally, I conclude the article by bringing together my previous arguments and discussing the nature of the counter-gift provided by East Timor to its donors.

The data analyzed below was produced over 11 months of intensive fieldwork in East Timor between 2002 and 2003. During this period, I worked as a volunteer at Capacity Development Coordination Unit (CDCU), an organ linked to the Prime minister's cabinet whose function was to link and monitor the flows of international technical assistance which were directed towards improving State institutions. This institutional insertion in public administration allowed me to interact on a privileged and daily basis with donors and the local civil service elite in both formal and informal spaces. It also gave me access to exclusive events, of which the donor conference, discussed below, is probably the best example.

## **East Timor, its *development partners* and the gift**

East Timor is the newest country in the world and also the most recent memberstate of the United Nations. Its construction as a state used to be considered an exemplary process by a certain portion of the international community. In 2002, the independence of East Timor, which had been unilaterally declared in 1975, was restored after approximately 430 years of Portuguese colonization, 24 years of Indonesian occupation and 30 months of transitory administration by the United Nations. From the last months of 1999, resources donated through international aid have been responsible for a significant part of the new state's technicians, equipment and budget, and have provided for emergency services and assistance to the Timorese population in general.<sup>3</sup> The goods offered as aid can be divided into three categories: financial, human and technological resources. The first sort of aid is deposited in different funds or may be immediately channeled to the budget of the Democratic Republic of East Timor (DRET).<sup>4</sup> The other forms of aid are distributed by the State in response to bi- or multilateral development and cooperation projects and agreements.

The nation-states and their respective international cooperation organs which are involved in aiding East Timor are known as *development partners*, as are the agencies of the UN System and its peace-keeping missions, the various non-governmental organizations active on the island, the contributing financial institutions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank) and the religious organizations which pass along resources to the DRET. The resources which are released by the *development partners* are deposited in the name of East Timor as donations and, given this, these actors are also known as *donors*.

The international donation system can be understood as a total social fact in the context of the formation process of the Timorese state as it "sets into motion [...] all of society and its institutions [...]" (Mauss, 1974: 179). This system is present in all the faces and phases of the state-building process, affecting such diverse phenomena as the consolidation of a national language, the definition of budgetary models to be adopted by the State and the construction of administrative legislation among many other things. Up until 2003, close to 3/4ths of the State's public expenditures were paid for by resources deposited by donors in the name of East Timor.<sup>5</sup>

Among the representatives of the donors who are active in East Timor, such "free" gifts of resources are publically justified as acts of solidarity and social commitment. However, NGOs which monitor this field claim that political and economic interests are behind this international cooperation. I would suggest, however, that when we look beyond these motivations, we see that the obligation to give and some of the implications of this obligation are weighty forces which also contribute to the construction of this field. East Timor (and, indeed, any country which is largely dependent upon AID) is obliged to receive and to take upon itself the weight of a certain debt, even though this aid is offered with supposedly no strings attached. We are not speaking here of a monetary debt, but of a moral one which

places the Timorese state, in a certain sense, as subservient to foreign interests. This is what gives the so called "logic of the gift" its heuristic power. The often chaotic overlapping of humanitarian and development aid projects which exists in East Timor and in other parts of the world is an indicator of the force that the obligation to give that often imposes itself on the rational management of AID (cf. Hancock 1989).

I am not arguing here that the field of international cooperation in East Timor operates along exactly the same lines as the exchange systems described by Mauss (1974) and others in Melanesian or Native North American indigenous societies. What is of interest to me here is the recovery of interpretations attributed to gift-giving systems by the author and later expanded by the members of M.A.U.S.S. to certain problems. I suggest that such interpretations are very appropriate tools, by revealing little-explored dimensions of the relationships among those institutions which compose East Timor's donor network.

Mauss (idem) believed that the gift relation was basically made up of three different kinds of obligations: to give, to receive and to reciprocate. In an attempt to understand just what was implied by each phase of this phenomenon, he identified that in the course of exchanges, people, institutions and things become confused and that exchanged objects acquire great moral strength or impact. These become animated by a sort of spirit (the *hau* or *mana* of the giver) which, among other things, ensures that these items return to their place of origin. Aside from this, such objects become the expression of the donor's identity or that of the entity which he represents. The *kula* discussed by Malinowski (1978) and the *potlatches* analyzed by Mauss are effective instruments which produce social hierarchies that define positions of precedence and honor among a given set of subjects. In this sense, one can say that the exchange systems which Mauss discusses are means by which power is constructed and exercised, facts through which political relationships are defined. These systems are also imbued with a particular etiquette in which the appropriate time for the offering of a counter-gift is an important rule.

Caillé (2002), following Lévi-Straus (1982), points out that gift-giving is an instrument for the construction of alliances. In Godbout's terms (1999), the gift, as part of a political economy of gifts, is a good which is at the service of a set of social linkages. Because of this, to deny a gift is also to deny interaction with the giver. Both authors highlight the fact that gift-giving is not synonymous with free donation. What a gift implies is a strategy which seeks to constitute and cultivate the identities of the subjects who exchange gifts (Caillé, 2002:72).

The moral code of the gift is also informed by the co-existence of two pairs of motivations whose terms are contradictory: 1) interest and disinterest; and 2) obligation and freedom. From these come the heuristic potential of what Caillé (ib.idem) calls the gift paradigm, though Mauss never systematized his analysis in these terms. The explicatory categories constructed by Mauss in order to make sense of these forms of exchange highlight the

variability and ambiguity of the motivations which call them into existence. Such categories are simultaneously interested and disinterested and are practice as a sort of *free obligation*. Mauss has thus proposed a multidimensional perspective of action (Caillé, idem) which is also polyvalent (Godbout, idem). In fact, it is for this very reason that the *kula* and other Exchange systems analyzed by Mauss can be denominated as total social facts: within their scope, one discovers the involvement of several different social institutions which impose upon action varied and overlapping meanings.

In a gift regime,<sup>6</sup> the value attributed to the goods exchanges is thus always contextual: it is indissolubly linked to the identity of those who give and those who receive. It is noteworthy, in this context, that Godbout suggests (ib.idem) that the goods which circulate in a gift economy should be measured according to a specific order of value which is different and apart from the concepts of use or exchange value: the worth of a gift shall be measured by its relatedness *value*. It is the product of the present's capacity to express, connect and feed social relations, whether harmonious or conflict-ridden, egalitarian or hierarchical in nature.

## **The Timor-Leste and Development Partners Meeting**

Management of foreign aid to East Timor is conducted via several different activities: individual meetings with each donor, appeals for cooperation in specific development projects, strategic cooperative dialogs. Project evaluation missions, resource availability monitoring, the presentation of financial accounts and etc. One of the most important of these, the *Timor-Leste and Development Partners Meeting* (TLDPM), also known as the *donor conference*, is promoted by the government of East Timor and by the local section of the World Bank. <sup>7,8</sup>

The TLDPM is a periodic ritual. From 1999 to May 2004, it occurred every six months. From 2004 on, it has been happening once a year. From the point of view of the Timorese state, the meeting is a time of summing up government expenditures over the preceding period for donors. It is also an opportunity to exchange information regarding the conduct and progress of the country's development projects. During the meeting, the government and its donors utilize a specific etiquette to consolidate their partnership for the construction of the Timorese state and the development of the country.

The meeting is split up into different sessions, each of which formally deals with a specific objective. During the opening ceremony, the main event is a presidential speech which is followed by commentaries from the Special Representative of the UN General Secretary (SRGS) in East Timor. The meeting then goes through the following steps, which are organized into different sessions:

- 1) Presentation and justification of bills and expenditures incurred or made by the government since the last meeting and the presentation of strategies for the future implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP).
- 2) Analysis of the mobilization and use of the resources liberated by donors and their future perspectives.
- 3) Discussion of the partnership panorama (in other words, a look at what resources are being donated) and its implications for the implementation of the NDP for the following semester.

Though each session has its own objectives, analysis of the activities of the Timorese state as a whole, on the one hand, and those of the development partners, on the other, indicates a repetition of certain discursive forms which bring to light certain functions of this ritual which are not made explicit.

The activities of donor nations take pride of place in this analysis because, at the limit, it is their institutions which maintain the entire intergovernmental AID field rolling along – even the U.N. is ultimately sustained by these nations. As we continue along in our analysis below, it will become necessary to clarify some of the procedures involved in preparing for this event, as these indicate with greater precision just what is at stake in this ritual and in the AID dynamic as a whole.

## **Evoking the gift**

With the exception of the opening ceremonies, the meeting's working dynamic is organized in the following way: each session is initiated by a presentation from the table's president, who explains to the participants the objectives of the activities which will take place during that session.<sup>9</sup> The floor then passes to a government representative whose speech is followed by those of the representatives the large-scale international cooperation agencies such as the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Following this, other donors are invited to talk. Before we point out the structural forms of the speeches which are proffered at these sessions, however, we should take a look at their contents, as evidenced during the first part of the June 2003 meeting.

The first session of the conference was entitled *Development since the last meeting and plans for the implementation of the national development plan* and it was presided over by José Ramos Horta, then Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and the winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize. The table coordinators included the Prime Minister of the DRET, the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (DSRSG) in East Timor and the Vice President of the World Bank for Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

First, the meeting's agenda is submitted to the development partners for approval. Mari Bin Alkatiri, who was the Prime Minister of the DRET at the time, then took to the floor. He described to the members of the meeting what the government



was doing with the resources earlier liberated by the donors and delineated probable future scenarios for the country, taking into consideration the progressive withdrawal of the international community. His speech was given in Portuguese and was basically a presentation and a recounting of the affairs of the past semester:

[...] As you know, we assumed the government of this country with little experience in government per se. Worse, we took under our care a country which had no State memory and which lacked competency, discipline and institutional life and culture. However, bit by bit, we have been able to develop planning for our activities, creating institutions and capacitating our cadres. We still have much to do. We have begun the implementation of planned activities. Considerable progress has been made in the institutional and capacitational realm. But we also recognize that we have only made modest advances in terms of implementing a plan for the provision of basic services. Much work and time are still needed in order to improve our performance. For this reason, your help and assistance continue to be indispensable.

Alkatiri also discussed themes such as *economy and employment, security and stability, development of institutions and capacities; the relationship between the government and the people; and good governance and the managing of petroleum and gas resources*. In each of these areas, he cited the initiatives which had been taken by his government and the needs which still needed to be met, highlighting future perspectives if the international community were to rapidly withdraw its support. He also intermittently suggested that the continuation of aid was a necessary condition for the establishment of good public policies.

Following the Prime Minister's speech, the resident representative of the United Nations Development Program (and also DSRSG) Sukehiro Hasegawa, took the floor. He thanked the meeting for opportunity to speak and then launched into a recital of advances that the government had made during the previous year, after the restoration of independence. He emphasized the importance of the *National Development Plan* and of the *Annual Action Plans*, characterizing these as the foundation stones for national planning and budgeting. He indicated *progress* which had occurred in the areas of *infrastructure* and *planning*. In spite of this initial praise, however, he also pointed out the difficulties facing the country, suggesting to the meeting that activities needed to be quickly reoriented in order to focus primarily on local development in the Timorese countryside and the cultivation of the practices of good governance.

The World Bank's representative followed Hasegawa. He also praised the results achieved by the government of East Timor in

the area of planning, citing the *National Development Plan* and the *Stability Plan* as important tools for the allocation of resources in the struggle to *reduce poverty* and *promote economic growth*. He affirmed that the trajectory of the DRET's state in the area of planning was an example which other countries should follow. He then raised some questions for debate, expressing the Bank's concerns and priorities in the process of Timorese reconstruction.

After these scheduled speeches, the floor was opened for questions and debates. The speeches then given during the meeting were proffered by the highest representatives of the donor nations. The nation-states thus made their interests and positions clear through these representatives. In this fashion, Canada would speak through its representative while the U.S. talked through its delegation. For this reason, when I talk about these speeches below, I refer to them by the identity of the representative's country, a resource which will help us to better see the functioning of gift logic in this field. Before this, however, I must point out that donor manifestations during the meeting are highly regulated. Most of these reproduce, during the ritual, previously-elaborated discourses which are printed and handed out to the public.

The first donors to take the floor were Australia and the Asian Development Bank. Both initially praised the progress achieved by the Timorese state and then suggested that priority be given to certain areas of public investment. But it was with Canada's presentation – the third *partner* to take the floor – that donor behavior began to show signs of a certain structural conformity.

Canada thanked the Timorese government and the World Bank for the opportunity to participate in the meeting. Like the two earlier partners, it celebrated the quality of the documents which had been distributed, citing in particular the Road Map (a guide and evaluation document produced to implement the National Development Plan [NDP]). In this way, Canada highlighted the competence of the Timorese state. After this praise, however, Canada affirmed that much still needed to be done and that the country was still taking its first steps towards development. It described East Timor as a poor place in order to indirectly affirm how much foreign donations are necessary and valuable. The donor then described the resources which had been offered by Canada to the Timorese state since 1999, at the same time making suggestions as to how public policies should be executed in the country, as well as which activities should be given priority and etc. Canada concluded its presentation by celebrating its commitment to the Timorese people.

After brief interventions by the Prime Minister and UNIFEM (the United Nations' Women's' Fund) the United States took to the floor. This country began its presentation by registering its thanks for the opportunity to participate in the conference and by praising the Timorese government for the *extraordinary progress* obtained during the transition from UN to independent rule. It referred to the importance of the documents produced by the government – the NDP and the The Road Map–

classifying them as key documents in the definition of the cooperation strategies which were to be formulated by the U.S. government. Following this, the United States mentioned a series of problems which it felt the Timorese government needed to deal with. These included the high rate of unemployment and the inefficient provision of basic services. It suggested the adoption of a specific policy initiative to meet these problems, which would: 1) prioritize support for the establishment and development of the private sector as a means of reducing poverty; and 2) reinforcing commitment to maintaining an open and democratic political system.

In this same session, Japan asked to have the floor. Following the structures of the previous speeches, Japan demonstrated gratitude for the opportunity to be at the meeting and expressed its support for the *National Development Plan*. Japan orientated its statements in order to show how the country had participated in the construction and maintenance of stability in East Timor. It declared that the Japanese aid plan gave priority to the policies defined in the *Stability Plan* such as the creation of jobs for vulnerable groups. Japan also affirmed the infrastructural recovery was of fundamental importance to East Timor's development and that Japan would continue to give support to this area, in which they had already invested 500 thousand dollars.

Following the Japanese, Portugal spoke up, giving the same sort of structured discourse as the earlier speakers. Portugal thanked the DRET government and praised it for its achievements to date, before bringing up what it considered to be some things which were lacking in the current efforts. Portugal also took the opportunity to showcase those areas which it felt were its priority sectors of cooperation: security, justice and education. Portugal highlighted the importance of defining legislative diplomas in order to stimulate foreign investment as well as the strengthening of the State.

New Zealand took the floor after Portugal and, like the other partners, praised the results obtained by the government over the last 12 months in the implementation of the *National Development Plan*. New Zealand also listed what it considered to be the key challenges for the upcoming year: the establishment of an adequate judicial system; the strengthening of capacities in the public, non-governmental and private sectors in order that better services could be given to the population; the development of a dynamic private sector; the reduction of poverty. New Zealand then reiterated the commitments it had assumed in bilateral accords with the Timorese government. It emphasized the donations it has made, reminding listeners that it had contributed an additional NZ\$500,000 for the 2002/3 fiscal year, raising the total amount of aid which it had passed along to the Timorese state over the last year to NZ\$1,000,000. Responding to the government's worries about the low slow of new projects, New Zealand repeated its plans for future investments in the areas it defined as priority and claimed that it was open to new partnerships.

Following New Zealand, Brazil, the European Community, Finland, Norway, Ireland, China, France and Germany all took a turn at the stage. For an adequate understanding of the meaning behind the donors' declarations, however, one must

understand the atmosphere in which these were offered up. With each speaker, the pronouncements gained in vigor and aggressiveness. Each new donor progressively increased the emphatic tone of their voice, emphasizing more vigorously certain specific points, in particular their description of the goods and services which they had given to East Timor. Parallel observation of the partners' performances during the meeting indicated the existence of a competition between them: there was obviously some sort of dispute going on between the various nation-states and UN agencies seated around the table. Each new speaker increasingly emphasized what it had done in East Timor in an attempt to garnish symbolic capital for itself.

The meeting thus slowly became transformed into an arena of ritualized dispute for political status among the donors. In this battle, gifts of financial, human, or technological resources were the primary munitions expended. This was what caused the need for each new speaker at the table to constantly explain and outline the benefits that it had brought to the country as a donor. The product of this competition was the establishment of a ranking among the donors which would define relations of precedence among them in certain social spaces (Tomass, 2001), such as the dinner offered to the partners by the Timorese government the day before the conference opened. On this occasion, the countries which had passed along the greatest quantity of resources to East Timor were given the honor of sitting at the Prime Minister's table, among other things.

We can see this evocation of the gift in the speech by the European Union, following the customary praise given to East Timor for the goals achieved and the discussion of critical points for the upcoming year: [10](#)

The European Commission (EC) has been working closely with East Timor since 1999. It has been and will remain a major donor to East Timor. From 1999 to 2002, EC assistance totaled 143 million euros. For 2002-2004, the European Commission's assistance strategy for Timor-Leste foresaw commitments for 46 million euros, and then increase to 61.5 million euros, as a special effort of the EC towards the needs of Timor Leste in two sectors: 1) basic health services provision at appropriate levels of technology and infrastructure; and 2) rural development, including capacity building in civil society and public institutions. (...) For the year 2003, support to the rural development sector will amount to 25.5 million euros.

[...]

The European Commission has been a durable and substantive partner for Timor Leste, offering significant development aid. It hopes to continue

working with Timor Leste as it moves toward ensuring sustainable development for the Nation.

Functioning in a manner similar to the *tanarere*<sup>11</sup> in the *Kula* cycle as described by Malinowski (1978:291), the donor conference is a ritual in which gifts to East Timor are publically exhibited and in which relations of precedence of one donor over another are periodically redefined. The European Union, for example, waves about the 143 million euros it has offered to East Timor since 1999. New Zealand makes public how many dollars it has sunk into the country over the same period. Portugal, in turn, describes the projects it's involved in and its future plans for cooperation.

The atmosphere of competition around the topic of "who has given more" is evoked in the daily life of public administration by local government employees themselves. Below is an example of a typical dialog of this sort between two employees of the Timorese government after their participation in a ceremony in which Malaysia donated weapons to the DRET in 2003:

S: Now that the other countries have seen what Malaysia's done, they'll all come running after.

M: Did you see the face of the Portuguese Ambassador? He looked like a child with his thumb stuck in his mouth.

S: Ah, now Portugal will also want to donate trucks.

M: Those things? They don't even have those themselves, much less enough to give away to East Timor.

### **The personality of the gift**

During the meeting and during the daily routine of foreign assistance management activities, one can observe donors embarking upon a strategy of personalizing the goods offered to East Timor, which become identified according to the national origin of the resources which allowed for them to be acquired. During the conference, the various modalities of cooperation are quantified in monetary terms (they are mercantiled, in other words), which allows each donor to affirm in front of everyone the volume of the resources which his country has given in such a way as to allow this to be easily compared with other countries' contributions. However, a large part of the funds which reach Timor arrive in the form of people and/or objects, which are characterized with the identity of the partner who donated them. Association between the donor and the goods donated is a compulsory rule in the AID field and these associations are publically recognized both in quotidian life and in ritual events. This linkage is often expressed by stickers which identify objects as having been acquired via the funds donated by given institutions. Associations between donor and goods are also made explicit by government declarations at official events and in State documents which discuss the

execution of public policies, to mention only two of several ways in which this identification is publically acknowledged.

Some of the cars used by the President's Office during 2002-3, for example, had large USAID (United States Agency for International Development) stickers on their doors. The furniture in the Training Division of the Finance and Planning Ministry was marked with the AusAID (Australian Agency for International Development) symbol. Computers offered by the UNDP and other donors to different organs in the Timorese public administration were all identified on the cover (in the case of laptops) or CPU (in the case of desktops) with large logotype stickers that informed passers-by of the institutional origins of the funds utilized to acquire the machines. When the generators which would permit the capital to have 24-hour electricity arrived in December 2002, the government prepared an event in which the main guest of honor was Norway, the country that donated the equipment. Even a reading of the web-pages of the main agencies of the UN System in Timor will reveal the (national) origin of the financial and human resources which made possible the multilateral projects that are showcased on these pages. This information is always highlighted.

We can thus see that a sort of personification of the relationship between donor and donated object occurs. The goods offered become understood by all agents working in the AID field (both donors and beneficiaries) to be part of the personality of the subject that donated them. In this context, diverse types of resources such as people, technological equipment, and even money become gifts in Mauss's sense of the word and act as instruments which construct and mediate identities (of both people and things) and social relations.

In the case of the human resources donated to the capacity development programs, this association is quite literal. In the projects which are set up to train local civil servants, for example, donor nation-states generally bring in professionals of their respective nationality. Thus Australia finances the presence of Australian advisors in the local administration, while Japan pays for the Japanese and Portugal the Portuguese. These technicians, in turn, reproduce in Timor the administrative procedures and work habits which are recognized as being typical of their home country, a fact which will become more evident below.

Aside from exhibiting the quantity and quality of the gifts offered to East Timor in the past, present and future, donors also indicate during the meeting the political agenda which is to be prioritized by the government in the months which follow the conference. Different prescriptions for state-building and the maintenance of stability are aired at these events. There are elements of convergence and divergence among these many different proposals. When one considers the climate of competition which occurs at the meetings, which I have described above and which imbues the donors' speeches, we can interpret the conference as a space where different civilizatory projects for East Timor are aired

and disputed, a phenomenon which is also present in the quotidian implementation of AID, as we shall see below.

In spite of the large number of agents who take part in these conferences, the speeches presented all follow the same basic structure with little variation. On the one hand, we find a discourse that is typical of donors and, on the other a discourse typical of the recipients of AID. These are characteristic elements of etiquette in the field of international cooperation in East Timor and elsewhere. To observe this decorum is an important procedure which impacts on the reach and effectiveness of the event.

The donors organize their presentations according to the following structure:

- 1) They thank the local government.
- 2) They praise the activities developed by the Timorese state since the last meeting.
- 3) They criticize the government's work in managing public policies.
- 4) They describe in detail their contributions to the country's development.
- 5) They reaffirm their commitment to aiding East Timor.

The partners' criticisms of the local government's activities serve to introduce the celebration of the historical models of development which each partner champions. In this way, donors show off the gifts they have offered to East Timor as fundamental ingredients in the *poverty elimination* formulas which they have concocted.

The Timorese authorities' speeches follow a complementary structure:

- 1) They thank the donors for the aid offered to the country.
- 2) They relate what they have done in each of the different fields supported by the donors, explicitly describing the procedures adopted by the government.
- 3) They describe the limitations of the policies which have been executed up to then.
- 4) They present prognoses – generally pessimistic in nature – regarding the future of the country.
- 5) They ask that foreign aid to the DRET be maintained.

By placing each phase of both of these structures side by side, one can easily see how they complement one another. Thanks to the government are reciprocated with thanks to the donors. The government then describes its activities which are initially praised by the partners, who emphasize the "importance" of these steps in the state construction process. The government recognizes that, although it has done much, there is still much to do. The donors agree and waste no time in showing how far away East Timor still is from achieving minimum patterns of development. The government then peers into the future and declares that it sees a catastrophe looming if aid were to be

suddenly withdrawn by the international community. Countries and agencies then sum up their donations to Timor and present their historical formulas for successful development. The government asks that aid to East Timor be maintained, if not increased. The donors then commit themselves to keeping the aid flowing.

It is important to note here that in each session, between the government's initial report and the donors' presentations, one of four institutions manifest themselves. These are the World Bank, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations Development Program. These agencies give speeches praising the State's efforts and the management of the development projects, acting as underwriters for the Timorese state in the eyes of the donors and guaranteeing to the partners that all resources given to East Timor will be adequately employed. This is the case because these agencies not only monitor the State's use of resources (given that they are understood in the AID field to be the experts on development), but – with the exception of the IMF – are also the depositories of a significant part of the resources offered up by the donors. Said resources are then used in the execution of multilateral development and humanitarian aid programs.

This ritual game involving the donors and recipients of international aid denudes one of the meeting's crucial functions: to create the conditions for the maintenance of foreign assistance to the country. In an atmosphere of intense competition, donors affirm their commitments to maintain cooperation with East Timor. In order for this goal to succeed, the State's performance will be judged throughout the conference and this is measured in large part by the background papers which it produces and which are distributed in a folder to participants moments before the event begins. Because of this, we must now turn to a discussion of the procedures involved in preparing for the meeting. These will reveal, among other things, new aspects of the relationship between the economy of the gift and AID.

## **Producing the meeting**

Preparation for the conference implies a complex set of procedures which demonstrate important characteristics of how AID is put into action, both in East Timor and elsewhere. This is because the meeting is the apotheosis of the investments made by the donors and the local government in the good management of international aid. In this context, the Timorese state's ability to adequately organize and conduct the event serves as an icon of its capacity to create a public administration in accordance with donors' criteria of good governance.

During the meeting, absolutely all of the nation-states which are East Timor's partners praised the high quality of the documents distributed by the government. These were *the Government of*



*Timor-Leste Background Document, The Road Map, The Stability Plan, the Combined Sources Budget, the Ministerial Capacity Development Profiles*, so forth. Given the recurrent citation of these documents, we may rightly consider them to be important characters of this ritual. Their presentation has a decisive effect upon whether or not the meeting attains its desired objectives.

The set of documents which are distributed in the participants' folder set out the objectives which the TLDPM seeks to achieve: the divulgence of information regarding government activities during the preceding six months; the launching of agenda proposals for the construction of the nation-state in the six months which follow the meeting; and an overview of international cooperation carried out in various areas of state formation which emphasizes the need for a continuous flow of resources.

The first section of the folder is composed of two reports: The Government of Timor Leste Background Document and The World Bank Background for TLDPM. Both emphasize what is understood to be progress in civic incorporation policies, in financial balancing and in the maintenance of the country's stability. They show indicators which express how the areas of education, health, administrative decentralization, planning and budgeting have evolved. Following this section come the *The Road Map* and the *Stability Plan*. Both of these are schedules for the implementation of public policies. They indicate which actions and programs would be implemented by the government, year by year, up to 2007. This schedule is concocted by State's technicians according to a set of priorities decided upon by the government. For each activity described in these documents, available financial resources are clearly laid out. The *Combined Source Budget for East Timor* comes next, delineating the available funds for the 2003-4 fiscal year and emphasizing the deficits which the State expects to incur. The government exposes these budgetary gaps in the hopes of receiving more resources from the development partners. In the following section we find the Transition Support Program implementation reports. After that, the *Ministerial Capacity Development Profiles* and, finally, the Registry of External Assistance. These last two documents are particularly important in terms of the analysis which I am proposing in the present paper.

The *Ministerial Capacity Development Profiles* consists of a register of all technical cooperation given by donors for the training and formation of the human resources of the Timorese state. The document indicates the type of technical assistance offered to each agency of the government, its expected duration and its donor. The report thus shows who East Timor's largest donors are in the field of capacity development. It also shows the different types of gifts which are offered: training, technical assistance, resources to multilaterally contract the same and etc.

The Registry of External Assistance is, as the title indicates, an inventory of the foreign cooperation which East Timor has received since 1999 up until the end of the 2003 fiscal year. It also traces the ways in which donated resources were supposedly put to use, quantifying by donor the final destination of the monies deposited in the country's name. This document demonstrates, for example, that from 1999 until the end of the 2002/2003 fiscal year, 37

donors – including nation-states and non-governmental multilateral cooperation agencies – offered approximately US\$1 billion to East Timor in the form of *budgetary aid*, *humanitarian aid* and *emergency and developmental aid*. One table stands out in particular among the many presented in the document: this is the table that lists East Timor's partners in hierarchical order according to the volume of resources which they have given to the country. Here we find that Australia, Japan, Portugal, the European Union and the United States were (up until 2003) the five largest donors to the Timorese state.

Given the atmosphere of completion between partners which characterizes the meeting, the reports listed above possess great illocutionary power. They set up a hierarchy of donors, affirming who among these has precedence over the others and greater power and prestige within the DRET<sup>12</sup> in terms of influencing the policies which the government will adopt.

In this context, it's worth pointing out that, up until the end of fiscal year 2003, four of East Timor's five biggest donors were countries which had some degree of political responsibility for the territory's historical destiny. Portugal, of course, was the original European colonizer and ruled the island for some 430 years. Australia and Japan both invaded what was then Portuguese Timor during the Second World War and Australia was one of the few states which recognized Indonesia's annexation of East Timor as legitimate. The United States supported the Suharto regime in Indonesia and its military occupation of Timorese territory, providing the Indonesians with arms and equipment. When members of the government and local and international NGOs speak about the large volume of resources which these four nations have pumped into East Timor since independence, they inevitably refer to these facts of the past. From the point of view of these actors, these countries' international gifts are interpreted as a way of paying off historical debts, a means certain countries use to *recompose their image* for the world, given their past acts or omissions with regards to East Timor.

It's important to observe that the documents which the donors so highly praise, though consumed as if they had been produced by the Timorese, are in fact largely elaborated by foreign assistants who have been hired with AID resources and who are placed in different institutions of the local civil service. Thus, when donors compliment the quality of the documents, they are in fact celebrating their own actions in the construction of the Timorese state. By praising the Ministry of Planning and Finances in its performance in producing planning documents and reports, the donors are actually praising their own intervention in the Timorese public administration. At the time of the 2003 meeting, all directing positions in this ministry were held by foreign employees.<sup>13</sup> The budget system itself had been concocted by an Australian cooperation mission and the woman responsible for the budget up to the moment of the meeting analyzed here was an advisor on loan from the Australian state.

The frequency with which public policy planning documents and other reports are cited indicates that these are typical components of the organizational culture that currently holds

sway in the field of international cooperation. This can be identified both by the political agendas which it elaborates and also by the fact that it operates via its own particular forms of planning, action and information circulation. The guides and recipes for public policies which it produces are excellent examples of this culture, as well as symbols of the supposed impersonality and rationality which characterize the modern State. <sup>14</sup>

The bluntness of these documents is notable and the arguments which orientate their celebration show that, for the actors involved in the meeting, these documentary objects are symbols of what is understood to be an adequate process of *state formation* and *institution-building*. More: the guides for the execution of public policy which are presented at the conference are considered to be the state formation process itself. Thus, one might say that they are more than symbols and are in fact icons of State building, a building which is itself understood as the capacity of public administration to plan policies and produce documents. <sup>15</sup>

As icons of the State, the documents also have illocutionary and perlocutionary power: they produce a reality, in this case, a competent State at forming public policies in accordance with the donors' criteria of "good governance". They also recharge the international community's faith in the development formulae which it elaborates and celebrates. In this sense, one can think of these conference modalities as spaces in which significant aspects of the rules and values which structure the dynamics of the AID field are reproduced.

The data presented in the *Ministerial Capacity Development Profiles* permits us to identify, among other things, traces of the bureaucratic culture which each unit of the State will acquire over time through the influence of the different donors which are active in these units. This interpretation becomes possible when the data reveals the *modus operandi* of and implications that the capacity construction programs have for defining the institutional profile of local public administration. The capacity development projects are privileged donations and are vehicles through which the donors impose their presence, in multiple ways, upon the daily functioning of the Timorese state. Among other things, the *Donors' Conference* can be interpreted as a space for the solemn and ritualized celebration of this presence – the legitimate moment in which donor activities in the construction of a new State are made visible and are reaffirmed in front of all actors in the AID field. But it is the analysis of certain aspects of the processes that constitute development practices which demonstrate how the hegemony of the donors over the local administration is (re)created and disputed in daily life. We will thus now look at how this phenomenon configures itself.

## **Capacity Building and State formation in East Timor**

As I affirmed above, the international donor system on display in East Timor must be understood as a total social fact when we take as our object for reflection the process of state formation in that country. By making available human, technological and financial resources, the AID system makes itself present in all areas of the incipient local public administration. From 2002 on, a significant part of these resources were applied to programs which were supposed to develop or construct the capacities of civil servants and state institutions. These programs are executed through a series of different activities: seminars, workshops, training programs in East Timor and the donor nations, on-the-job training, language courses, technical studies, law projects and etc.

Between 2002 and 2004, the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET) and the United Nations Development Program (PNUD) managed two large projects: the *100 Stability Posts (or Civilian Support Group)* and the *200 Development Posts*, both of which contracted foreign technical advisors. These international counselors were distributed throughout the State's institutions and worked (with differing degrees of priority, depending upon the case) to elaborate instruments which would structure, manage and implement public policies such as legislation, development programs and etc. These, in turn, were to normalize the functioning of the State and improve the capacities of local counterparts who would in due time assume full control of the public administration. Many of these counselors were directly responsible for the creation and administration of the new country's important sovereign organs, such as the Banking and Payments Authority (an institution which is effectively Timor's central bank), the Appeals Court (the highest level of the local judiciary), the directorates of the Ministries of Justice, Planning and Finances and so on. Other foreign counselors were tasked with creating the documents which were distributed to the donors at the Timor-Leste and Development Partners Meeting.

Contracted by the United Nations and by bilateral cooperation agencies, these advisors came from a very diverse set of countries: Portugal, Australia, Brazil, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Spain, Ecuador, The Philippines, New Zealand, South Africa, Jamaica and the United States, among others. As they were to work directly on the formation of the Timorese state, priority was given to the contracting of technicians who had great prior experience in public administration, either in their home countries or overseas.

In their activities in the State formation, the majority of these advisors tended to reproduce, *in locus*, the foundational management principles of their countries of origin or of the countries where they had acquired their professional experience. This is why, for example, East Timor's budgetary process is so similar to that of Australia: it was, of course, elaborated by technicians who had graduated from Australian schools and who had the majority of their experience in working in that country. The same causal network can be used to explain the similarities between the Timorese Penal Process Code and that which is

currently in operation in Portugal. In this case, the Code was put together by a group of Portuguese jurists. This is also the reason why the Timorese constitution so closely resembles that of Portugal: the highest law of the DRET was based upon a legal project formulated by a Portuguese magistrate with the collaboration of a Portuguese bilateral mission which had been sent to the island by the Lusitanian parliament at the request of the Timorese authorities.

Though I have privileged above those cases where the bi- or multilateral contracting of international technicians has influenced the legal profile which the Timorese state has taken on during the nation-building process, it must be recognized that these men and women operate as mediators in other aspects of the civilizatory process which the country is now undergoing. The ways in which foreign advisors train local civil servants to deal with certain bureaucratic routines, such as the formulation of official documents or memoranda, and the idiom used in these endeavors are all related to the country of origin or to the national territory where the advisor was trained or acquired their professional experience.

Few foreign advisors were willing to learn Tétum, the vernacular of East Timor. For this reason, most of them carried out their responsibilities in English or Portuguese (in the case of the Lusophone advisors), in spite of the difficulties that this might cause in the capacitation process. In this manner, Timorese civil servants who were directly or indirectly subordinate to, say, an Australian advisor who used English in the workplace and who had played an important role in setting up the State bureaucracy in which he worked, were probably learning to deal with routines and management within a common-law based system and frequently found themselves communicating in the English language. Meanwhile, those Timorese civil servants who were subordinated to Portuguese advisors faced the same tendency, but with a different socio-linguistic content. These individuals would tend to use the Portuguese language and be trained to reproduce administrative routines that are what we might call typically Lusitanian.

These cases indicate how the practices of international technical aid ended up operating as political instruments in the formation of state identities in newly independent countries. This is what permits to interpret the data present in such documents as the *Ministerial Capacity Development Profiles and the Registry of External Assistance* as indicators of the hegemony that different donors and their respective national cultures exercise in the diverse institutions that make up the incipient East Timorese public administration. It is thus probable that in those organs which have a strong presence of advisors from Commonwealth countries (Australia, Canada, Kenya, India and South Africa, among others), the bureaucratic instruments of state management and, consequently, the domestication of the conduct of the Timorese and the work language utilized will have a distinctly Anglo-Saxon cast. In this context, the advisors end up playing an important role in the success or failure of the implementation of the country's official languages (Tétum and Portuguese) through their active

participation in the nation-building process. In this way, since 1999, East Timor has become a stage for disputes between the several different civilizatory projects which inform the activities of the AID agents.

Aside from the technical implications this bureaucratic and linguistic Babel has for the construction of a minimally coherent and articulate set of state machinery, it is important to also note that the day-to-day construction of the State has also become polarized by these different administrative cultures. This is the case among the foreign advisors and said polarization then extends among their Timorese counterparts, the beneficiaries and recipients of AID. Among the internationals, these disputes are mainly polarized between Anglophone and Lusophone projects of state building.

Many Anglophone advisors consider the expressive presence of advisors from the CPLP (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa / Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries) within the Timorese state to be inadequate. According to some English-speakers, Portugal and its ex-colonies are saddled with an inefficient public administration whose *modus operandi* should not be reproduced in East Timor. The efficiency of the Portuguese-speaking advisors and the techniques and laws suggested by them for the Timorese state were thus often questioned by the Anglophone advisors. In many cases, the English-speakers evaluated Lusophone suggestions and individuals in the light of what the Anglophones presumed to be the historical development of the Portuguese State and its old colonial empire.

Anglophone interventions in the local public administration were also not appreciated by many of the advisors from Portugal or from countries with a tradition of Latin-style administration, such as those of Central and South America. The English-speakers were characterized as inflexible, excessively bureaucratic and pushy by many of the *Latinos*, who saw them as incapable of perceiving and respecting the peculiarities of Timorese culture. Furthermore, the Portuguese saw the Anglophones as unable or unwilling to grasp what the Portuguese considered to be the fundamental question of the nation-building process in East Timor: the Portuguese language. In particular, the Portuguese set themselves up as a counterweight to the English-speakers, characterizing themselves as more open to contact with and tolerance of diversity. As one Portuguese advisor put it "the Brazilians are living testimony of this, being the product of a hitherto unheard of miscegenation between *Europeans*, *Amerindians* and *Africans* which was created by the Lusitanian colonization of America". Because of this so-called tradition and also because of the fact that they had ruled East Timor for over four centuries, the Portuguese believed themselves to be the mentors who were most capable at overseeing the construction of the local State.

We can thus observe that, in the dynamics exposed in the AID field in East Timor, the activities of foreign human resources on temporary loan to the new nation (whose actions are made manifest in public policy proposals and practices) are interpreted

in light of the ways in which various groups evaluate the historical process of identity formation in these technicians' countries of origin. In this fashion, the value of a donated good (in this case the technical advisor) is also measured as a function of its national origin and is perceived as such by different agents throughout the field. In this way, people (the technical advisors), institutions (the donor countries) and facts (capacitation practices and public policy projects) intermingle and mix.

## **The spirit of things and the specialization of the gift**

The discussion above demonstrates how capacitation programs can act as ways of relating things, people and institutions. In the final analysis, this mechanism cannot be detached from the process of hegemony construction. The disputes between donors over hegemony become materialized in the activities of international advisors (which the donors themselves provide) through training practices and proposals for the political and legal structuring of the Timorese state. We can thus see that these phenomena (laws, work languages, public policies, the types of documents used by bureaucracies and etc.) are far from being merely technical in nature. They are associated with a set of symbolic values and national identities which propitiate in favor of their very existence. From the native point of view, they are seen as being strongly associated with the country of origin of the advisor who proposes and executes them.

If the link between the given item and the giver is more evident in those projects which employ human resources, this general situation can also be observed in a more subtle form when we analyze the cooperation priorities of the different partners. The diverse policies which are undertaken by the several donors present in the AID field express the donors' vision of the world and the interests which are manifest in their distinct civilizatory projects. Each country thus privileges specific types of projects and specializes in different areas of cooperation which, in turn, are linked to the image which these countries wish to cultivate of themselves in the eyes of the world.

This "specialization of the gift" often leads back to the national ideologies of the donors. Linked to narratives of national formation, the specialization of a given country's gifts expresses the images of itself and the interests which said country seeks to project. Said specialization is a product of the different priorities for cooperation which are, in turn, defined in dialogue with the parliaments and governments which run each donor nation and which inform and are informed by the narratives of national formation in each of these countries. Portugal is an interesting case in point regarding this phenomenon. Why does Portugal have so many projects which deal with the Portuguese language? This state of affairs is related to the fact that the Portuguese language has been, for Portugal, both a strong source of national identity and a way of constructing linkages with the countries and territories which make up its long-lost

colonial empire. It is thus not surprising that the political block which has been formed by Portugal and its old overseas territories is known as the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP).

When I speak of the identity of things, I want to emphasize the fact that donations in the AID field do not simply have a self-evident use value. The value of donations is often relationally established, taking into consideration the profile and interests of those who give and – especially – those who receive. In this way, for example, the projects developed by Brazil and Portugal are much more valued by the Timorese elite who currently hold power in the state. These projects contribute to consolidation of this elite's nation-building project at the same time that they feed the elite's interests of tying East Timor more tightly into the CPLP. This is in direct contrast to the contributions of the Anglophone nations, and especially those which originate in Australia, a country which disputes with Timor the rights to the exploitation of the oil reserves which lie off the island's coast.

In this sense, then, it seems that the *value of the linkage* is what is most important in local recognition of an AID project. The direct consequence of this is that, in the *glocalized* spaces of political relations formed by countries like East Timor which are highly dependent upon AID, the perception (or recognition) of those who receive a gift counts quite a bit in the establishment of the moral value of the donation and, consequently, for its effects upon the prestige and the image of the donor. This phenomenon confirms L. Cardoso de Oliveira's suggestion (2005:4) with respect to the place recognition holds in social relations. Though dealing with an entirely different ethnographic context, this author also affirms that recognition is the flip side of the *hau* in reciprocal relations.

## **Final considerations**

I began this text by detailing some aspects of the behavior of certain countries when faced with the destruction caused by the south Asian tsunamis of December 2004. We saw that the U.S. and other countries rapidly increased their aid packages for tsunami relief after Jan Egeland criticized them as misers. Among other things, this event demonstrates how the obligation to give is a moral force that imposes itself upon different agents who, in turn, subvert it as a condition for the exercise and negotiation of political relations. In this sense, it does not seem to be due to chance that East Timor's greatest donors (with the exception of the European Community) have all been responsible to one degree or another for that country's historical destiny. In this way, AID has been converted, over time, into a field where nation-states perform historical catharsis and (re)construct their identities in the eyes of the world.

International aid policies are also used by many donor nations as a means of constructing hegemony. The discussion above



regarding capacity development projects shows how the dominance of different donors in local administration is disputed in daily life through the actions of human resources and the techniques which these offer to the State. A specialization of donation policies thus occurs among AID partners, who end up offering goods and services which best express their cultivation of national identity, their "spirit" in the eyes of the world, as it were. Donor identities are ostentatiously emphasized in modes of exchange which exist in the AID field. It is as if the spirit of the donor circulates through the resources which are given to the beneficiary of aid.

Furthermore, the gifts offered by donors tie East Timor (or any other AID dependent country, for that matter) into obligations which are manifest in such global spaces of political negotiation as the U.N. General assembly, for example. In these arenas, it becomes almost impossible for East Timor to sustain positions which are at odds with those of its primary donors without suffering sanctions in the AID field.

Gifted international assistance also increases donors' capacity to exert influence on the internal politics of East Timor. In times of crisis or great political challenges, the largest *development partners* are often called in to meet with the government.

Donations also figure prominently as a source of prestige and power for agents involved in regional arenas such as ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations). This prestige also has reverberations on the global political stage. The gift economy can thus not be considered to be a vehicle for the management of political relations which only functions in micro-societies.

Finally, we have seen that the donor conference is a space in which different actors celebrate their own interventions in the construction of local political administration. In this sense, we may be able to affirm that East Timor's greatest counter-gift to its partners is its configuration as a space in which the values dear to the donor nations – most prominent of which are the western myths of what constitutes a good society, i.e. equality, liberty and democracy – can once more be cultivated during the process of building a new nation state.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A discussion of the functions attributed to international cooperation policies can be undertaken from several different angles. One could, for example, privilege the parliamentary debates which spring up around these policies in many countries where the theme has already become consolidated as a question of public policy. One could also investigate how these policies are seen by their beneficiaries. From one extreme to another, however, one must remember that the practices of international cooperation are interpreted and appropriated in different ways

by the executive powers of each donor nation-state, by their respective agencies for international cooperation, by the employees of these agencies and by the elites of the recipient states, among other actors. Because of this, the analytical perspective which I have adopted in the present article is only one possible way of approaching this phenomenon.

<sup>2</sup> In order to better analyze the Timor-Leste and Development Partners Meeting, I have oriented myself according to the definition of "ritual" presented by Tambiah (1985). According to this author, rituals are symbolic systems of communication which are made up of ordered sequences of words and acts that make use of multiple means of expression and have defined degrees of formality, stereotypes and redundancy. The semiotic analysis of rituals is inspired by three main principals: 1) one should analyze rituals as happy or unhappy events in accordance with whether or not they achieved the functions for which they were proposed; 2) one should pay attention the various functions of each ritual act according to the classificatory criteria of linguistic acts presented by Jakobson (1965); and, finally 3) one should observe the various types of signs which make up the ritual according to the trichotomies presented by Pierce (1999) as to whether the signs involved are symbols, icons, or indexes.

<sup>3</sup> Aside from causing hundreds of deaths, the dismantling of the Indonesian administration in East Timor in 1999 (following a UN-organized referendum in which 78.5% of the population voted in favor of the territory's independence from the Republic of Indonesia) caused the destruction of approximately 70% of Timor's infrastructure, (World Bank 1999), the forced migration of 75% of the population (idem) and the mass flight of the province's high-level human resources, which were generally from other parts of the archipelago. Given the vacuum of authority which followed these events, the UN installed a hitherto unheard of mission of state administration, the UNTAET (United Nations Transition Administration in East Timor). In 2002, with the restoration of independence, the United Nations reformulated its mission in the country, removing itself from the stage to the wings, so to speak. UNTAET became UNMISSET (the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor). UNMISSET was made up of three main components – military, police and civil – which gave technical support to the DRET state, strengthening the institutions of the Timorese security and administrative apparatus. The adoption and execution of capacity development policies was one of the main strategies adopted in order to meet these goals. UNMISSET's mandate ended in May 2005. This mission was replaced by the UN Office in East Timor (UNOTIL).

<sup>4</sup> Over the last few years, the financial resources to the reconstruction of East Timor has been deposited in funds such as the CFET (Consolidated Fund for East Timor) and the TFET (Trust Fund for East Timor), or directly in the accounts of the UN mission and its agencies or the agencies of the Timorese government. These funds are administered by specific agencies and have specific objectives, as have had every mission which the UN has established in the country. The TFET, for example, is

under the tutelage of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which invest it in development and infrastructure reconstruction projects in the country. For an analysis of the application of each of these funds, see the publications of the *Lao Hamutuk* organization, available at [www.laohamutuk.org](http://www.laohamutuk.org).

<sup>5</sup> A significant part of the funds formally donated to the Timorese state by *development partners* are in fact deposited in the accounts of the World Bank and other multilateral agencies and are used for the administration of projects in Timor. The use of these funds is thus under the tutelage of the donors themselves. Aside from this, another significant part of the resources donated do not even reach the country, given that they are applied by donors to finance the AID bureaucracy.

<sup>6</sup> According to Appadurai (1986), the circulation of objects and services in a given society occurs through differentiated regimes of value which impose themselves upon goods in a distinct fashion in time and space over the course of their life histories. The author also suggests the existence of at least three different regimes of particular value: 1) the barter regime; 2) the market regime; and 3) the gift regime. The first of these regimes is defined by Appadurai as one in which exchanges take place without the mediation of money, with the greatest possible reduction in terms of the personal and social investments involved in the exchange. The market regime exists when a good's value can be calculated in the language of monetary exchange. In a gift regime, the value of goods is calculated based upon how they relate to personal and collective identities in such a way that their value is associated with the linkages through which they circulate.

<sup>7</sup> The donation system for East Timor that was active in 2002-03 was set up in 1999 when the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) launched an appeal to the world's governments and development agencies to raise funds to reconstruct East Timor. This was known as the Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal (CAP). Later, at a donor conference in Tokyo the CFET (Consolidated Fund for East Timor) and TFET (*Trust Fund for East Timor*) were created and the destiny of part of the committed resources was finally defined. Currently, the DPGAE (Divisão do Plano e de Gestão da Assistência Externa – Division for the Planning and Management of External Aid) is the government agency responsible for the administration of international humanitarian and technical cooperation with the Timorese state

<sup>8</sup> From 1999 to 2002, donor conferences were organized by the World Bank. From the restoration of Timorese independence on to mid 2004, this work was undertaken via a partnership between the World Bank and local government. From mid-2004 on, the Timorese government has been solely responsible for the event.

<sup>9</sup> All development partners who contributed resources for the reconstruction of the country at some point from 1999 on are invited to the donor conference. Thus nation-states, multilateral development agencies, multilateral development Banks and other agencies all find themselves sharing space around the table at the conference. In the June 2003 meeting, the following donors were present: Australia, Brazil, China, the European Union, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain. Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labor Organization (ILO) the World Health Organization (WHO) the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Support Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB).

<sup>10</sup> "We would like to commend the government's progress so far, especially in the creation of institutions as well as the establishment of the legislative framework and management systems. These timely achievements are prerequisites for efficient, equitable and pro-poor service delivery and indicate that Timor Leste is clearly committed to the National Development Plan [...] Much remains to be done. The judiciary, the police and financial sectors, all of them highly significant, appear to be evolving slowly. [...] Slow budget execution impacts on the financial aid given by the EC and brings to the forefront the issue of the limited capacity on the ground of Timor Leste to absorb further large financial inputs effectively. Attention should be paid to administrative and financial efficiency and transparency."

<sup>11</sup> Malinowski (1978:291) defines the *tanarere* as an episode of the *Kula* in which objects obtained by exchange are competitively displayed.

<sup>12</sup> Locution, illocution and perlocution are qualities of given enunciated terms and are classified as such by Autsin (1999). Locution is a type of enunciate that is referential in quality. Illocution is an enunciate that, when proffered under adequate conditions, does something at the same time that the sentence is pronounced. Austin denominates this as *performative utterances*. Finally, perlocutionary sentences are those that obtain effects which were not foreseen in the act of speaking.

<sup>13</sup> I refer here to those posts within public administration which are denominates as *National Directorships* and which, in the hierarchy of the local civil service, correspond to level 6 positions. These are second echelon positions.

<sup>14</sup> For a systematic discussion regarding aspects of bureaucratic and organizational culture in the AID field, see Stirrat 2000.

<sup>15</sup> I use "icon" and "symbol" in the sense proposed by Pierce (1999). Icon is a sign whose signifying potential comes from its direct similarity to that which it represents. Symbols, by contrast, are signs whose representative capacity comes from a relationship that is established with the represented object via the strength of convention.

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