Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States

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5 Nation-building and state-building and the challenge of fragility

In chapter 2, I investigated the discourses about nation and state and concluded that in today’s globalizing world the intertwined reality of both must be the starting point. I took position in the constructivist scientific discourse, which considers nations, even if they revert to history for identification, as social constructs open to change over time. In chapter 3, I investigated the recent concept of fragility and chose to align myself with the definition of this concept as framed by fragile states themselves, acknowledging the challenges and problems without a judgmental bias. I pointed at the fact that also in the definition used by fragile states the attention for the sociocultural issues of belonging and identity remain too limited. Based on the above, this chapter explores the concepts of nation-building and state-building, the relationship between the two, and the urgency of nation-building for fragile states.

In a 2008 paper, the OECD defines nation-building as:

Actions undertaken, usually by national actors, to forge a sense of common nationhood, usually in order to overcome ethnic, sectarian or communal differences; usually to counter alternate sources of identity and loyalty; and usually to mobilise a population behind a parallel state-building project. May or may not contribute to peacebuilding. Confusingly equated with post-conflict stabilisation and peacebuilding in some recent scholarship and US political discourse.¹

The World Bank, acknowledging that it has no formal definition for nation-building, describes state-building as ‘the centrality of efforts to build state capacity and accountability, including strong attention to the most basic state administrative and delivery systems, complementing capacity investments with robust efforts to improve accountability, and balancing state capacity-building efforts with support for civil society and the private sector.’²

The two definitions relate to what has been said about the nation and state discourse in previous chapters by respectively emphasizing nationhood and identity-related issues (nation-building) and the importance of building institutions and systems (state-building). A problem I find with the OECD definition is its instrumental notion of nation-building, which is defined as a ‘supportive’ process that has its value in mobilizing people behind the primary, state-building objectives. In my opinion, nation-building has values in and of itself that should be explored and developed. The OECD’s instrumental notion is not helpful if we wish to take, as I will argue, a genuinely intertwined approach that considers both nation-building and state-building as equal components in the process of building stable nation-states in fragile contexts. As it stands, most academic and policy discourse fails to address the challenges of an intertwined approach to nation-building and state-building.

Nation-building and state-building in international political discourse

The OECD, in its definition of nation-building, points at the confusion that has crept in over the last fifteen years, mainly since the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and which means that the term nation-building is loosely used as the label for processes of building peace and stability. The overwhelming attention, at the same time, has gone to state-building. Fueled by the terrorist attacks of 9/11, there was a broad consensus that addressing the problem of international terrorism was doomed to fail unless proper functioning states were created in places where terrorists were successfully hiding (Afghanistan and Somalia) or where regimes were thought to be outright supporters of international terrorism (Iraq). The acts of terrorists were considered a legitimate reason to intervene in countries to bring about regime change and to install a government and state institutions that would abide by the norms of the international community, as interpreted by the self-appointed only superpower at the time, the United States.

The international relations discourse about state-building focused on the technical and institutional aspects, following the analyses of think tanks and policy advisers based in the West. They took the model of well-established Western nation-states as the desired end stage of building the nation-state and asked themselves: What are the first steps that need to be taken to make this state-building process irreversible and avoid the proliferation of failed states (and the subsequent threat of international
terrorism) in the future? It was not only Western advisers who embraced this approach. Ashraf Ghani, who took office as the new president of Afghanistan in June 2014, together with Clare Lockhart wrote the book *Fixing Failed States* during his time at the World Bank. The book presents a list of ten functions of the state that mirror the model of the social-capitalist state as we know it in Europe, the US, Japan and Australia.³

The politically driven focus on state- and institution-building is strongly backed by recent research. Acemoğlu & Robinson in *Why Nations Fail*⁴ base themselves on an extensive historical overview of state-building to argue that well-functioning institutions are crucial for flourishing states and are the solution for the predicament of failing states. Their analysis is as relevant and convincing as the agenda for state- and institution-building that Ghani and Lockhart present, however, both publications fail to address the issue of nationhood: What makes people believe in the credibility of institutions as theirs, what gives the state legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens? As we saw in chapter 3, failing states are confronted with three main challenges: The challenge of legitimacy, the challenge of authority and the challenge of capacity. From the international donor community's perspective effectiveness and legitimacy are related in a cause-effect way: Lack of effectiveness generates lack of legitimacy. And solving the problem of effectiveness will solve the problem of legitimacy. Referring to the model of chapter 3, effectiveness is the result when authority and capacity are in place. According to this model, legitimacy cannot be seen as a result of effectiveness.

Legitimacy and effectiveness are different categories. Authority, legitimacy and capacity are basic competences of the nation-state; effectiveness, integrity and validity are the result when two of the basic competencies are in place.

Legitimacy in essence has a different source: It is rooted in the affirmation of belonging by the people, as was shown in the previous chapter where the issues of citizenship and sovereignty and their pivotal role in the nation-state were discussed. A lack of effectiveness of the state undeniably exacerbates the problem of legitimacy, but it is not the root cause of failing states. A lack of effectiveness may lead to people aiming for a new government that can guarantee a better functioning of institutions of their country with which they identify. A lack of legitimacy in the fundamental sense of nationhood is more likely to lead to efforts to either break away

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³ Ghani & Lockhart 2008. See also Kaplan 2008.
⁴ Acemoglu & Robinson 2013.
from the nation-state, or to try to capture the state in order to establish the possibility of identification.

The connection of legitimacy and effectiveness in the discourse of donors is rooted in a rather materialist view on the nation-state. In Why Nations Fail Acemoğlu & Robinson take this connection as their central pillar: ‘Central to our theory is the link between inclusive economic and political institutions and prosperity’.\(^5\) What they say is that the main challenge is prosperity and the conditions for that are inclusive economic and political institutions. The problem with this and similar studies lies not with what they say but with what they do not say. The authors are right in addressing the lack of well-functioning institutions as a key element in why nations fail. The extractive policies of elites who build their wealth at the cost of the poor and who are unchecked by institutions based on justice and inclusion, are among the root causes of poverty. Most poor citizens of Afghanistan, South Sudan and the DRC will support the conclusion that well-functioning institutions are central to development and stability. They suffer on a daily basis from the lack of fairness and justice in the sharing of resources and the application of the rule of law. However, by making the building of inclusive economic and political institutions the one and only response to fragility, such research unduly keeps silent about identity matters that are behind the institutional problems of fragile states. It is from this economically and politically focused discourse that effectiveness and legitimacy are connected in the cause-effect way.

I believe that this donor perspective on fragility that focuses exclusively on institution-building mirrors the reality of donor countries more than that of developing countries. Over the last decades this prosperous part of the world has shifted its focus more and more towards the economic and financial aspects of the functioning of society. A rapid economization and financialization of public life and public discourse has taken place. Most societal issues – not only economic issues but also health and education – are translated into cost-benefit analyses. It has led to a strong materialist worldview. The belief in the rational choice as the basis for the organization of society further strengthens this trend. It is my conviction that this trend in the history of the donor countries is at the basis of the current donor approach to solving fragility: If we can create the institutions that in a materialist perspective will yield the most effective (cost-benefit) results people will choose these solutions out of a rational choice attitude. That will solve the problem of fragility. This institutional/materialist approach has

\(^5\) Acemoğlu & Robinson 2013, p. 429.
as its objective to make the issues of identity (ethnicity, religion, regional) redundant.

In this materialist view of the nation-state and the creation of economic and political institutions as the essence of the solution of fragility, and by that marginalizing issues of identity, donor countries are forgetting the history of the nation-state and are denying the current struggle on identity at home.

The historical reality that the nation-state, as it came into being after 1648, was meant to also solve problems of identity by creating religiously coherent nation-states besides establishing political and military sovereignty, is no longer part of current discourse. Issues of identity (religion, ethnicity) are marginalized in the societal and political discourse of donors. Identity is a problematic concept, whether it is ethnic, religious or national. From the enlightened perspective of Western governments and policymakers it is seen as irrational, backward and troublesome. But not only history tells us a story about the relevance of identity. Currently, political parties in donor countries in Europe that profile themselves as driven by concerns about the identity of the country (UKIP in the UK; Front National in France; PVV in the Netherlands; AfD in Germany and; the Swedish Democrats) advocate closing the borders for migrants in order to preserve this identity. Immigration politics in Western Europe has increasingly focused on assimilation: How can we transform the identities of Algerians, Bangladesh and Turks into French, British or German? Governments in Western Europe are embarrassed by identity politics. By avoiding to speak frankly about identity issues Western countries fail to organize a countervailing identity discourse and leave this subject to be hijacked by the primordialist perspective on national identity as promoted by these parties, who contend that there is an eternal Swedishness, Dutchness or Germanness that must be protected and preserved against the waves of migration. The farewell to multiculturalism as explicitly announced by leaders in Western Europe has strengthened the focus on assimilation. Increasingly, European governments have put themselves in an impossible contradictory position to promote identity-free materialist policies based on a silently accepted primordial view on identity. Through this position and by refusing to develop a constructivist

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6 Jackson-Preece 2010, p. 22.
perspective on identity as response to new influences like globalization and migration, these governments have paralyzed themselves politically and created the basis for increasing antagonism in the field of national identity. There is need for critical self-reflection in order to understand the bias of the donor countries in its policies for fragile states by this marginalization of identity issues and to what extent our condescending attitude towards identity at home is part of the approach to fragility.

The one-sided focus (both in motive and design) of the international community on building the systems and institutions of the state has also obscured the perspective on the domestic reality and the domestic resources in fragile states. The international community’s external interventions appear to take the fragile state as a blank slate on which a new and effective state can be built, disregarding the presence and importance of local actors that have power and influence. In this institutional approach, international actors look whether there are ‘up-to-standard’ state institutions and systems that fit into their framework of institution-building. If not, they go to the drawing table and start designing them from scratch. This means they miss out on local realities and power structures, be it tribal, religious or informal, which escape the state-building framework. By discarding these existing institutions international actors fail to factor in the norms, convictions and traditions like leadership culture and informal rules that prevail in these states and that carry meaning and importance – be it positive or negative – for people locally.8

Even more problematic is the way the current discourse, completely disregards the need for nation-building in state-building programs. Francis Fukuyama does not make an effort to understand the difference between the two. He writes:

Nations – that is to say communities of shared values, traditions, and historical memory – by this argument are never built, particularly by outsiders; rather, they evolve out of an unplanned historical-evolutionary process. What Americans refer to as nation-building is rather state-building – that is, constructing political institutions, or else promoting economic development. This argument is largely true: ...9

By conceptualizing nation-building as a process that happens outside of any influence or control, Fukuyama legitimizes the neglect of it and equals it to

state-building.10 I fully acknowledge that nation-building escapes the current planning culture of interventionism in international relations (see also chapter 10, p. 166). And then there is also the reference issue: Nation-building is self-referential. National cohesion and a sense of belonging cannot be defined outside of the involved community and there is no template with indicators to measure (see table 1). But it would be an error to think that it is a process that cannot be consciously worked on. The histories of the European nation-states show that strong policies (education, language) have been critical in forging nationhood and building a national sense of belonging. Fortunately there are quite a few authors and organizations that do acknowledge that there is more to be done than only building the institutions of a well-functioning state. Sonja Grimm11 acknowledges the need to create a sense of belonging and to build trust in order to overcome ethnic cleavages. She deems this process, labeled as creating a political community, ‘a long-term process traversing several generations’. Seth Kaplan refers to the need to work on social cohesion as a necessary component within the overarching efforts of state-building.12 The Dutch organization PAX, focusing its efforts on peace-building in fragile and conflict-ridden countries, points at the need for a social contract between state and people, identifying the lack of trust between both as one of the key elements causing fragility.13

My intention is not to belittle the efforts of the international community to build the capacities of the state in countries like Afghanistan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti or the Central African Republic, nor to delegitimize their involvement and interventions in this domain. In a globalizing world where persons, goods and services move around almost unhindered, the international community has to be able to count on the capacity of the state to take responsibility for what goes on within the borders of its country. States have to fulfill minimal internationally shared functions in the globalized world, but that does not mean that states can be built by imposing an outside design. The challenge is to build states using domestic capacities, knowledge and traditions. That will make the institutions of the state more legitimate, better rooted in society and therefore

10 Another example is the Beginners Guide for Nation Building, published by the Rand Corporation of which one hopes no beginner will ever read it.
12 Kaplan 2008.
13 IKV Pax Christi 2009.
stronger and more robust – and it will corroborate identification with and ownership of the nation-state and thus legitimacy.

The international community and most of the recent publications underestimate the need for nation-building. At best they consider nation-building an instrument for state-building: To make state-building effective, a certain level of nation-building (often defined as social cohesion, societal trust) is needed. I believe, however, that nation-building has to be an integrated part of the agenda for effective state-building. The relation between the two cannot be described as instrumental: They are intertwined while both processes have their own logic and dynamic.

### Table 1  The differences between nation-building and state-building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nation-building</th>
<th>State-building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leading actors</strong></td>
<td>Community and group leaders, representing identity groups.</td>
<td>Political representatives, elected by the population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruments</strong></td>
<td>Stories. Myths, statues, heroes, cultural traditions.</td>
<td>Laws, state organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>Building commitment and mutual understanding; adding and enriching.</td>
<td>Offering solutions by setting rules, regulations and policies: Codifying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results</strong></td>
<td>Mutual understanding between different groups, a shared sense of belonging: The ‘we’-feeling.</td>
<td>Well-organized state institutions that deliver without discrimination security, justice and social services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time frame</strong></td>
<td>Open-ended, constantly evolving.</td>
<td>Results within time frame of political election cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reference</strong></td>
<td>Self-referential: Internal domestic process of selecting and forgetting.</td>
<td>Reference found in international community of states, international laws, treaties, conventions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nation-building is an open process that does not have a predefined result and therefore there is no straight way forward to attain that result. The open-ended character of nation-building requires a mindset different from state-building for domestic people and international partners: Nation-building is process-led, not results-led. The process of nation-building is self-referential: Only the people involved in the process can decide what the meaning is of their sense of belonging and their shared identity. Although they are intertwined and complementary, they are different in nature and dynamics.
I fully acknowledge the challenges of nation-building and the fact that nation-building lies largely outside the framework of development cooperation and international interventions. Different authors have referred to the problematic nature of nation-building: It is difficult to plan, it lies beyond the planning and control mode of development agencies or military forces; it is a long-term historical process, implicating that it takes generations; it concerns very subjective issues like ethnic identity, religion, or the feelings and aspirations of minorities. The nation-building process of the European nation-states is seen as the benchmark model. Compared to that centuries-long process of nation-building in Europe, it seems unrealistic to think about nation-building in fragile states as a doable process. In a globalized world states like Afghanistan or Somalia are not granted centuries to gradually build their identity in an iterative process. Nation-states have to be present in the international community and they have to take responsibility for security, justice and basic social services for their citizens and in their relation to other states. That reality blocks the possibility of emulating the European nation-state process and presents us with the challenge to find truly new answers and concepts that fit today’s reality of the fragile states of the global South.

In chapter 10, I will present a program of nation-building with interventions that can be supported also by the international community. Even though I emphasize that national actors should lead the process of nation-building, the reality of today’s globalizing world is that no nation-state is built in isolation. International actors, even if they do not lead the nation-building process by intervening in the domestic reality, do have options to stimulate and facilitate this process. At the same time, domestic actors will be looking for international support to build their nation-state as part of the globalizing world.

The intertwined nature of nation-building and state-building

Against this backdrop, the question of the intertwined relation between nation-building and state-building needs to be answered: Are they inextricable in the same way that nation and state are? And if they are indeed interlinked, closely related but not the same, how can we describe and define their distinct dynamics? Is there a hierarchical relation between nation-building and state-building in importance or in time? I will discuss two perspectives. The first, defended by Hippler, considers nation-building the primary and overarching process. The
second perspective, presented by Hobsbawm and Gellner, sees nation-building and state-building in the modern reality of the nation-state as inextricably linked processes.

Hippler identifies three interrelated aspects in the overarching process of nation-building:

1. creation of an integrating ideology: A ‘nation’ as one of the preconditions of nation-building requires some form of ideology that legitimizes and justifies a ‘national’ self-interpretation of the respective community;
2. creation of an integrated society: Besides a common identity and ideology, nation-building requires many practical preconditions, requires the integration of society on a practical level (communication, of economic exchange, of traffic, public debate);
3. creation of a functioning state apparatus.

According to Hippler, who defends an integrated approach, the process of state-building must correspond to the above-mentioned processes of identity building and societal integration. State-building in this context has two interconnected aspects: Firstly, it means that the respective society has constituted itself (or has been constituted by a dominant actor, including the state itself) as a political entity, or even as the key political entity. Secondly, this implies many very practical and often organizational needs: The state has not just to be proclaimed, but it has to be functional.14

Hippler sees nation-building as the overarching framework and considers state-building one of the three constituting elements of this overarching framework. State-building will lead to a sense of belonging and to a shared narrative only if it is accompanied by the two other processes. By claiming nation-building as the overarching process, Hippler suggests that the nation is the aspired end result of that process, which in effect puts nation-building and state-building in a hierarchical relation. One could even say that the relation between the two becomes instrumental: Realizing state-building is an instrument in order to contribute to the end result, nation-building.

Hobsbawm and Gellner both argue that the nation is a modern construct that can only be understood in its intertwined relationship with the state. They coined the ‘nation-state’ as the term to be used to understand this recent phenomenon. The authors convincingly argue that the nation can only originate in a situation where the state is able to establish its authority and power over the citizens and the territory: There is no nation without a

state. The opposite is equally true: To build a stable and sustainable state, a sense of belonging, a collective identity of being Kenyans or Afghans, is a necessary condition. I follow Hobsbawm and Gellner in their nation-state theory and will approach the problem of nation-building and state-building as two interrelated processes that have no hierarchical relation to each other.

The international community in the last fifteen years has not taken this approach. Instead, it has focused on state-building as the key issue to solve the problem of fragility and to provide stability. After ousting the Taliban in 2001, the strategy of the international community was to build the Afghan state as the institution that will deliver security, justice and social services to the Afghan people. In this way the Afghan state would create the legitimacy and credibility necessary to be accepted by the people as the sovereign authority in the country. Based on this approach, the international community invested in building the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, the judiciary and the ministries of health, education and rural development. Policy makers assumed – even if unspoken – that building effective state institutions would create the feeling of nationhood and togetherness that could serve as the basis for solving the problems of ethnic division and competition. The same strategy was deployed in Iraq and in South Sudan. There too, the focus was on building institutions, organizing structures and drawing organigrams for efficient and effective policies and public services. It is telling that the notion of ‘fixing the state’ became a label for this type of programs. It is as if the international community believed that by bringing in technical experts to repair and/or build a state that is broken or non-existent, in the same way that a home owner may call on a plumber or carpenter, all problems would be solved. Considering what has happened in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries in the past decade, it seems to me that this belief in external, technical solutions for failed or fragile states is problematic – even more so if there is no sense of ownership or appropriation of such a state-building program on the part of the people and their leaders who are the alleged beneficiaries.

The prevalent state-building strategy of the past fifteen years strongly reflects the good governance strategy of the World Bank as designed since the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{1516} This strategy focuses on the effectiveness of public institutions in order to make them respond better to the needs of people


\textsuperscript{16} Santiso 2001.
in poverty-ridden countries. In countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and South Sudan, the problem of ethnic division was acknowledged and identified as a serious threat to stability, but it was not addressed as such in the intervention logic. By creating a strong and well-functioning government the international community sought to solve the problem of ethnic tensions by bypassing the issue. Making all ethnic groups dependent on and satisfied with a delivering state was to create the necessary sense of togetherness. As we know, in all three countries the results of this state-building strategy have been mixed at best. Iraq is plagued by an ongoing conflict between the Shia and the Sunni Muslims. In the newly independent state of South Sudan a violent ethnic conflict was reignited between the Nuer and the Dinka in 2013. In Afghanistan, issues of both religion and ethnicity – Muslim fundamentalism by the Taliban and ethnic tensions between Pashtun and other ethnic groups – have created an ongoing situation of conflict with major insecurity problems.

Nation-building and state-building: Trust as the linking pin

The linking pin between nation-building and state-building is trust. Trust is the outcome of the intertwined processes of nation-building and state-building. Trust is not a luxury good, it is indispensable for a viable nation-state. The sense of belonging and the recognition of the other as part of the definition of a broader ‘us’ will breed trust. Peacemaking, nation-building and state-building start out from the recognition of a shared interest, even if this shared aspect is minimal or even negatively formulated: Sometimes there is no more basis than the acknowledgement that it is impossible to defeat the other groups and that therefore one has to find a solution for living together. But for a state to become viable and flourishing, shared interests have to transform into trust.

The state needs the nation to be able to define the ‘us’ in an inclusive way as covering all the different groups and communities living on the territory. Identification at the level of the nation-state is the process that makes it possible to recognize others as belonging to the broader ‘us’. This broader ‘us’ refers to the ‘imagined community’ of Anderson (see chapter 2). Creating this imagined community makes it possible to have a ‘pre-reflective’ sense of belonging that one can count on. It is the experience of meeting a fellow

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17 The Dutch PRT in the province of Uruzgan employed a ‘tribal adviser’ to make the Dutch PRT and the military forces sensitive to the ethnic divisions in the province.
countryman/woman in a foreign country. There is a pre-reflective sense of relationship that gives the confidence to ask a question or try to solve a problem: We understand each other by language but also by culture, values, accepted behavior.

But the nation also needs the state to let this trust grow. Trust needs to be nurtured by deeds and acts. Trust is more than a feeling or an emotion. Being part of the imagined community as an emotional quality requires policies in which one recognizes the shared interest of this ‘us’. Here the state comes in as an important actor in the nation-building process: It makes the trust real and tangible by underpinning it with policies and laws that convince each group that it is part of the broader ‘us’ of the nation-state. Nation-building without state-building will make the imagined community a short-lived community.

Why is state-building not good enough in fragile contexts?

Over the years I have had many discussions with policymakers, members of think tanks and practitioners who felt that building the state is a challenge tricky enough to not want to take the open-ended, hard to manage, nation-building process as an additional issue on the agenda. I heard them argue over and again: Are the problems of Afghanistan, Sudan and the DRC not first and foremost due to ‘not good enough’ policies, the malfunctioning of governments, the judiciary and the military – and is therefore strengthening these systems not the best answer? Is the building and strengthening of institutions not the most realistic and achievable goal – and moreover one that the populations of these fragile countries crave for? Would it not be wise to leave the complex identity/culture/history stuff aside, at least for now? Should we not take the identity issue out of the political arena and leave it in the private domain? It may be important for people, but should it really interfere with public political life?

My answer to all these questions is ‘no’. I strongly believe that nation-building, or forging ‘a common sense of nationhood’, should be an essential element in all of our efforts in fragile states. There are four main reasons why nation-building should be on the agenda.

First, a viable state needs a national identity as a framework that holds people and communities together despite the religious, cultural and regional differences. It would be risky to build exclusively on the power (military, economic, political) of the state as the basic foundation to keep people together. What is more, it is exactly because of the power of the
state that a sense of nationhood is necessary: Without a national identity as shared togetherness and as a sense of belonging for all groups (religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural), the power of the state will easily become the focus of rivaling communities that will want to capture the state to seize power and dominate others. If power is the sole mechanism to make the state function, without having an inclusive legitimacy, the state with power (authority) and capacities will fail on legitimacy and is very likely to remain fragile or to relapse into fragility. This dynamic was perhaps never better illustrated than in the battle for Kabul in the mid-1990s. Different factions fought fiercely against each other from different parts and neighborhoods of the city in an attempt to seize the capital as symbol and source of power. Rather than withdrawing to their respective regional heartlands, the different groups (Pashtun, Usbeks, Tadjieks and others) all were set on ruling the country. It shows the awareness of each group that they were sure to be marginalized if one of the others was to prevail. The battle was fierce and fanatic. None was willing to give, knowing the consequence of losing or winning Kabul for the division of power relations at the national level.

In short, even power-sharing arrangements in a newly formed or rebuilt state are usually not good enough, at least not in the long term. More will be said about this in the next chapter where I discuss the relation between peace-building, nation-building and state-building. Here it suffices to say that power-sharing agreements are always compromises, seen as political agreements of give and take that reflect the current power balances of the different groups involved. This means that rivaling groups will always continue to create opportunities to change the power-sharing compromise to their advantage. Power-sharing is always a strategic outcome and strategic agreements in general only last as long as they are beneficial to the involved parties. A viable state can therefore never depend on power relations and power-sharing agreements alone. The nation-state requires a framework that is more solid. Nation-building, a shared identity and a sense of belonging that surpass ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural boundaries is the necessary complementary framework to hold people together in a sustainable relationship.

The second reason for including nationhood is the issue of loyalty. In fragile contexts especially, loyalty is organized along identity lines. Often the state is absent or, worse, contributes to conflict and insecurity. It makes sense that people organize their loyalty along ethnic, religious or regional

identity lines: No one and no institution takes care of their security and the basic necessities except their own identity group. Why should they shift their loyalty from their identity group to the state if there is no shared feeling of belonging? Loyalty and trust are based on more than a contractual relationship, they reflect Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ (see chapter 2) where I recognize the other, even if I do not know him, as someone belonging to my community, as someone for whom I’m willing to take responsibility.

Even if one could imagine a nation-state that is viable purely due to the contractual relation with its citizens, this is certainly not feasible in fragile states. In such contexts, building a state that is able to deliver and live up to the expectations of its people will never happen in a short period of time. The Afghanistan experience has shown that even with an enormous amount of money and external support the ability of the state to deliver is still only partial and limited. Given this reality of limited capacities and resources of fragile states, it is an illusion to expect that a mere contractual approach of state-building will be enough to build a stable nation-state. Without the presence of an ‘imagined community’ disillusionment with the state is always just around the corner. The reality of limited capacities requires a strong legitimacy and nation-building as building the sense of cohesion and a shared narrative is therefore indispensable.

Thirdly, a well-organized and just state is not enough to let a community flourish. In her recent book Political emotions Nussbaum argues that, besides well-organized institutions that provide justice, the sense of belonging, and based on that an emotional commitment, is necessary. She defends her well-known position of advocate for a just society where respect for rights and equality is the basis, but adds the need for a deeper, emotional relationship that binds people together. By doing so she makes an important connection between political philosophy and psychology: The human psychology has to be factored into the political discourse. Nussbaum puts forward love for the nation as an important political emotion, the reality that ‘(w)e grieve for people we care about, not for total strangers’.

She calls this the ‘eudaimonistic thought’: the reality that we cannot have equal love for all human persons, and that our emotional connectedness to the nation runs deeper. Nussbaum clearly states that eudaimonism is not egoism and does not exclude solidarity on a global scale, however, global solidarity has a different emotional basis. We don’t necessarily fall victim to blind patriotism if we accept that our commitment to our own group, whether it is the family, the

19 Nussbaum 2013, p. 11.
20 Nussbaum, ibid, p. 144.
tribe or the nation, is stronger than our connectedness to those outside our group. Love for the nation, Nussbaum argues, is a necessary complementary element for a just society. The contractual relationship between state and citizens is based on a theoretical premise of mutual self-interest. Especially in fragile states, where crises occur frequently, a commitment deeper than that of the contractual relation between people and the state is necessary. Building a state requires people who feel responsible for the development of the nation-state even if they cannot pinpoint their immediate self-interest. Solidarity and sacrifice are necessary ingredients of the process of building a viable nation-state. When the sun is out, focusing merely on state-building perhaps can do, but this is most certainly insufficient when the weather gets rough.

Fourthly, the reality of fragility in a globalizing context also prompts the need to invest in nation-building. In some ways, the presentation of fragile states today resembles the imaging of indigenous people during the colonial era: Powerless, incapable of solving their own problems, needing to be taught how to organize themselves and behave in the modern world. The definition of fragility used by most donors, which as we saw in chapter 3 is highly judgmental and stresses the deficiencies of fragile states, resembles – even if not consciously – that colonial picture. The problem of fragile states is the new 'White Man's Burden'. Following the theory of dominance, as developed by Edward Said in his groundbreaking book *Orientalism*, people of these fragile states run the risk of internalizing the idea of being not good enough to participate in the world and having a culture that is not up to modern standards. Therefore, in today's world, nation-building is a necessary process for fragile states to become self-confident and create autonomous space and power for people to position themselves in this globalizing world. Building a culture of being proud of the history, the culture, the language, and the social systems of society is necessary to take a self-confident position in the globalizing world. With an internalized negative self-image, fragile states will remain at the lower end of the supply chain, the providers of cheap labor and raw materials for the globalized economy. Nation-building makes nation-states able to be a countervailing power to strong and powerful nation-states and to global corporations.

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21 This basic position of Nussbaum is also reflected in the 2005 encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI 'Deus caritas est' in which he states that even the most just society needs love (*Deus caritas est*, par 28b).
The challenges faced by fragile states will not be resolved if we are not prepared to address the issue of nation-building that can foster a shared love for the nation as the community of people living together. It goes without saying that this is a complex process. The core elements implicated in nation-building (identity, togetherness, loyalty, belonging, love) are more elusive, less concrete and much more difficult to grasp in a logical framework or an intervention logic than constructing state institutions. A process of nation-building cannot be designed in a ‘fixing-the-nation’ approach and implemented by external technical support and knowledge. Nor does this process have a clear and fixed timeframe. But these difficulties should not keep us from trying – instead they should challenge us in a positive way to come up with new approaches to nation-building (see chapter 10).

Nation-building in fragile states: History never repeats itself

Much of the research on nation-building and nationalism has concentrated on Europe. The centuries-long process of building the nation-state in Europe is a fascinating one for historians and political theorists. The differences in how these processes evolved in England, France and Germany have yielded libraries. The dissolution of the Habsburg Empire and the emergence of the Eastern European states, the process of nation-building in Poland, squeezed in history between the German, Russian and Austrian powers, are all generously documented. It is of course tempting to look at nation-building in the fragile states of Asia and Africa with the European perspective in mind, using the European nation-states as learning examples. The colonial imprint on the formation of the new states in Asia and Africa and their institutions has corroborated this Eurocentric perspective. However, there are four important elements that should make us cautious in doing so.

**Time.** The process of nation-building in Europe took several centuries. By the end of the 19th century, people in many parts of France were still not speaking the common French language. In Germany it took several not very successful processes to get a nation-state by the end of the 19th century. The comment allegedly made in 1861 by one of the pioneers in the unification of Italy, ‘we have created Italy, now we have to create Italians’, reflects the time-consuming process of establishing a shared national identity. In most of Europe, building a state and building a nation were parallel processes that in the end resulted in a rather consistent nation-state, where a common institutional setup matched with a common identity. Fragile states today
cannot indulge in such a long-term process. The state is already there by sheer virtue of the international order that has left no part of our planet’s landmass undefined. In most fragile states, one or more groups actively aspire to get hold of this state and establish their power over the territory. At the same time, the international community expects states to act as a responsible member of that community. Both internally and externally the pressures are too high to allow fragile states a centuries or decades-long process of forming a national identity in a more or less organic way.

**Violence.** The formation of the nation-state in Europe has not been a peaceful process. From military violence to cultural oppression to forced adoption of a common language and forced conscription of soldiers, the nation-building process was rife with violence committed by the powerful majority group or the ruling elite to bring minorities and the less powerful into the nation-building process. There was little romance in this process – and little democracy, too, for that matter. However, in the post-World War II world, violence is no longer an accepted way of solving conflicts, at least not in the moral rhetoric of the international community. Despite the ongoing violent conflicts all over the world, violence has come to be seen as morally wrong. Ever since the creation of the United Nations and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties and conventions to regulate the international and national behavior of states, the legitimacy of violence has been reduced to the case of self-defense and a number of other strictly delineated instances. Negotiations and mediation are seen as the default approach to solve conflicts, whether internal or external. An entire ‘industry’ of institutions and professionals has sprung up, busy offering their services to solve internal and cross-border conflicts in and between countries. The non-acceptance of violence is not limited to military or physical violence. Also cultural violence, for instance forcefully imposing a national language, will spark international condemnation based on the general acceptance of people’s right to self-determination. And so it seems that the European road to nation-building, paved as it was by violence, is not a very feasible road for fragile states today.

**Homogeneity.** The process of nation-building in Europe was based on forming homogeneous nation-states. Internal differences were wiped out by strong pressure and often violence (see above). Induced by the Westphalian peace treaty the idea of homogeneity was at the basis of the European nation-building. In the 19th century the emergence of mass education and mass media created the opportunity to mold the national identity. And the
emergence of the manufacturing industry strongly triggered this process. As I will discuss in chapter 9, homogeneity will not be the outcome of the process of nation-building in fragile states. Here it suffices to say that in the modern globalizing world homogeneity can no longer be a goal of the process, simply because it cannot be achieved. Nation-building has to be realized in a fundamentally diverse reality.

**Modernity.** In 18th- and 19th-century Europe building a nation-state was part of the process of modernity. Fighting for the nation-state was a way of revolting against autocratic rulers (dukes, princes, kings, emperors) and promoting the sovereignty of the people. It was part of the promotion of the vernacular: Granting ordinary people access to education and public debate. Currently, fragile states that want to foster nationhood and construct a national narrative and national identity, addressing and incorporating culture, religion, traditional language, will fight an uphill battle. The dominant discourse is that we need a modern state in the modern world, and that focusing on nation-building is tantamount to pulling us back into the darkness of identity-discourses that are connected to those who embrace a primordial concept of identity.

Following the European road of building a nation-state is not feasible for current fragile states. We need to find an fundamentally new concept of and approach to nation-building that is less time-consuming, that does not seek refuge in violence, that accomodates diversity and that includes dealing with the modern world. Part of that modern world is today’s global interconnectedness. At the time when the European nation-states evolved, only political and intellectual/cultural elites and merchants took part in international exchange – the ordinary people were much more isolated than they are today. Communication and migration create an interconnectedness that is no longer the privilege of elites. Nation-building therefore takes place in an unprecedented international reality, that creates challenges and pressures, but also offers opportunities. In chapter 10, we will elaborate on the influence of globalization on nation-building.
Vignette

Transitional Justice in Afghanistan

Building a justice system is one of the three cornerstones of state-building, besides providing security and basic social services. When the ISAF mission started in Afghanistan in 2002, after ousting the Taliban, justice was one of the key components of the efforts of the international community.

A couple of years later, in 2010, I paid a visit to Tarin Kowt, the capital of the province of Uruzgan. Due to the security provided by the Dutch military, it was safe to be in the city. During my first visit to Tarin Kowt in 2007 the intelligence of the Dutch mission strongly advised me not to visit the hospital of AHDS, supported by Cordaid, because of information that the Taliban targeted the NGOs that manifested themselves too visibly in the province. But in 2010, I could stay in the Cordaid guesthouse in Tarin Kowt. An Australian soldier at the entrance of Camp Holland was flabbergasted when he saw me leaving the compound without military protection to sleep outside the camp.

During that visit I had a conversation with a group of local leaders about the development in the province. And we touched the subject of justice. I knew that there was a large program of ISAF, under the leadership of the Italians, to roll out a modern system of justice with attorneys, judges and lawyers, which was meant to create justice in a lawless land. It is exactly this idea of lawlessness that hampers international organizations to be effective, that hampers them to see what is already in place. If one thinks that there is nothing, that no systems are in place, so that people are suffering from injustice, one can pretend that one is making a huge step in offering a sophisticated system that has proven to be reliable in the Western world. But reality in Afghanistan was different. The image in the outside world was primed by the atrocities of the Taliban regime with stoning-to-death adultery cases. But reality in the communities was different: Local elders and imams, known and trusted by the community, were approached to get justice.

The local leaders explained to me that ordinary people had no confidence in the new system. They did not approach the newly established juridical system, but still put their juridical problems forward to the traditional mediators like the imam and local elders. They had the experience that a trial in the new system could take months before a verdict was out, whereas in their traditional system they got a decision within days or weeks. And they knew that bribes are part of the process: If their adversary paid more to the judge, he would win. Why should they trust the new system?