Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States

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9 National identity: A model and its content

The process of nation-building boils down to ‘forging a sense of common nationhood’. How can we make sure that Luos and Kikuyus identify themselves as Kenyans and that the Kenyan nationhood is an important aspect of their identity? The same challenge goes for people of different ethnic and tribal affiliations in Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Pakistan and Mali, in Sri Lanka and the Central African Republic.

As stated earlier, in many fragile contexts the state is absent or, worse, a perpetrator of acts of violence. In such a reality, people look towards their family, tribe, clan or religious community to find protection and to access basic needs like food, shelter and medical care. In times of real crisis even international NGOs and multilateral agencies tend to withdraw their staff from dangerous areas. People living out of their reach are left to rely on their traditional networks. In South Sudan and Eastern Congo, the churches have played an important role in times of acute crisis in maintaining social networks that were able to provide the bare minimum of basic needs. In Afghanistan, tribal and ethnic communities have oftentimes served as the cornerstones for people to survive. These realities make that issues of ethnicity, religion, language, region, etc. are important and often strong markers of people’s identities. This also means that the process of forging a sense of common nationhood is anything but straightforward: The contours of a national identity are not drawn on a blank sheet of paper. Actively trying to create a national identity can even be perceived as a threat to existing networks that provide security and livelihoods. This is reinforced when different markers of identity come together, as was the case in Sudan where the southern part of the country had a different ethnic identity (Dinka, Nuer, etc.) from the North, a different linguistic identity (they did not speak the Arab language), and had a different religious identity (they were predominantly Christian) and felt that, as a region, they were different from and marginalized by Khartoum and the dominant Arab/Muslim groups. In many fragile situations at least two identity-aspects

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come together, as is the case in Afghanistan (ethnicity, region) and Mali (religion, ethnicity, culture).

Most sociologists and political theorists in the 1960s to 1980s expected that identity markers such as ethnicity or region would lose their salience. The process of modernization, bolstered by growing migration, international relations and communications, was to make people open to relations outside their traditional circles of tribe, church and country. Economic processes were expected to create new group structures through which people would organize their joint political and economic interests, sidestepping traditional divides. However, even though all kinds of new relationships have indeed been created, it is evident that in our 21st century identity markers such as ethnicity and religion are still very present and significant in people’s lives, perhaps most strongly so in fragile states. They will thus have to be taken into account in the process of building a national identity, or the complementary process of nation-building that this book argues is essential for building stable, viable states in fragile contexts. In this chapter we present a model for understanding national identity and the elements that constitute this identity.

A better understanding of national identity may help to take away the reluctance among policymakers and politicians to tackle this issue in their programs for fragile states. It is true that identity is a sensitive and tricky issue, an ever-changing reality in people’s lives that can hardly be managed or controlled. And yet I believe that the issue of forging a national identity should be tackled head-on in any fragile-states strategy. We should stop mystifying national identity as something mysterious that shows up without us understanding how it developed. Globalization does not and will not offer a replacement for national identity. I am even inclined to posit that globalization has enhanced the prominence of identity discourses by creating a confusing world, where people have lost their sense of belonging and identification. Pretending that national identity is irrelevant and empty means cutting out part of people’s identity without offering something tangible and meaningful in return. And lastly, we should stop hiding ourselves behind the argument that national identity is a domestic issue that lies outside the competence of international actors (bilateral, multilateral, NGOs). Yes, it is a domestic issue, but so are many other issues in stabilization and development programs. Making an artificial distinction between domestic and international issues, it seems to me, is most of all an alibi for not wanting to attempt to understand the complex reality of how national identity can contribute to stability.
National identity: The model of Shulman

Developing a model for national identity starts, as stated above, with carefully avoiding a zero-sum debate and accepting that many building blocks complement each other to construct the national identity. As the title of this book indicates, our aim is to broaden the scope of what needs to be done to bring stability to fragile states by complementing the state-building efforts with new initiatives that support nation-building. In this complementary approach we perceive the intertwined relation of state-building and nation-building as two sides of the same coin. We start our approach from the model developed by the American political scientist Stephen Shulman, who identified three key elements in the national identity (civic identity, cultural identity and ethnicity) and a couple of constituting components for each of the three:

Table 3  Shulman's Elements and components of national identity

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<tr>
<th>Elements of national identity</th>
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<td>Race</td>
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Shulman developed this model in response to the civic/ethnic dichotomy introduced by Hans Kohn in his research and publications of the 1940s about European nationalism. Kohn distinguished a civic national identity in Western Europe and an ethnic national identity in Eastern Europe. His model presents civic and ethnic as opposed frameworks with the tacit connotations attached of modern versus traditional, liberal versus illiberal, or civilized versus non-civilized. This covert judgment is still often present in the public and political identity discourse. In programs for fragile states, especially, this judgment brings in a bias in program design: Everybody

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wants to be perceived as modern and as trying to make also fragile states fit for modernity.³

Shulman criticized Kohn’s dichotomy not only conceptually (like Brubaker, see p. 106), he also referred to the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) of 1995-1996 that conducted a survey in 23 countries of Europe and Northern America to explore the constituting elements of national identity.⁴ He found a clear and consistent pattern that confirms the dichotomy East/West as ethnic/civic was not evident. Civic elements were highly valued in both regions of Europe, and in some issues certain Eastern European citizens emphasized the civic components of national identity more than people in Western Europe.

Shulman then developed a new model, which presents national identity as explicitly multifaceted. People have multiple identities that are dear to them and that play a role in the building of their national identity. The model, developed through his reflections on the European and North-American nation discourse, makes space for notions that are very salient in the nation-building discourse of fragile states, like ethnicity, language, traditions, religion, ancestry. It brings together the elements of civic identity that the international community promotes in its state-building programs with the cultural and ethnic elements that define many of the identity struggles in fragile states. Shulman’s three main elements (civic identity, cultural identity, ethnicity) and their underlying components are the building blocks of a national identity, but their relative importance of weight is not defined in advance. It is an open model that leaves space for a contextual and diverse understanding of national identity.

It is important to stress that I adopt this model because our central question is: How do people define their national identity? What is at stake is not the objective truth about the different elements and components and their relative importance, but the extent to which people actually use these labels to define their national identity. The question of national identity in fragile states is not an ‘expert problem’ that can be solved by policymakers or scientists, but a problem for communities to solve. If, in line with the identification discourse of Brubaker (see chapter 8) national identity is about identification, self-understanding and commonality, the essence is how people identify each other and themselves in social relations and how

they shape their communities. If we want to build a national identity, this will have to be a bottom-up process.

**Is Shulman’s model applicable to fragile nation-states?**

Shulman developed his model based on his research about national identity in Europe and the United States. That the same model is also applicable to fragile states is therefore not self-evident. In fragile states, cultural and ethnic identities are often strongly developed, while a civic identity is generally weak. We will look at the relevance of the three elements in more detail below.

**Civic identity** is a crucial element in national identity because, even if in fragile states this civic identity is not strongly developed, it will always have to be the basis of the nation-state. Fragile nation-states, too, are built on the people as their sovereign and their source of legitimacy. There certainly are indications that people in fragile states are well aware of their power as legitimate basis of the nation-state. The high turnout at elections in countries like Afghanistan (2004) and the DRC (2006) are one example. It shows that people see elections as an important opportunity to express themselves about national politics. It reflects their belief in an elementary form of citizenship. **Territory**, the second component of civic identity in Shulman’s model, is a more complex issue. Most fragile states have experienced large-scale forced migration. Millions of Afghans, Somalis, Rwandans and Syrians live outside their country of origin, their home territory. Do they still see themselves as belonging to that territory, and what about those who stayed behind, do they still view their compatriots who fled and migrated as fellow citizens? The component of consent and will is relevant to building national identity in fragile states because there, as anywhere, identifying oneself with the national identity of the country requires a positive expression of will: Identifying with an Afghan national identity is not a default consequence of living within the borders of Afghanistan.

Regarding the fourth and fifth components of civic identity, political ideology and political institutions and laws, the question is which lenses we apply. Most state-building programs, from the time of decolonization onwards, have been built on the political ideology and political institutions of European/Western nation-states: Parliamentary systems, electoral codes, and the division of powers. Often, a critical reflection on whether these models are an adequate response to the political reality of non-western
(fragile) nation-states has been entirely lacking. The Western political ideology of individual rights, equality and freedom is often not part of the traditional political systems in fragile countries, where the interests of the community are dominant over the individual, and where equality and freedom are limited by different systems of authority (men-women; parents-children; clan leaders-clan members, religious leaders-believers, etc.). The extent to which Western-style political institutions are rooted in society is questionable, and the same holds for political ideology that often lacks broad support. While the high turnout at elections (especially after a peace agreement [DRC and South Sudan] or the toppling of an oppressive regime [Afghanistan, Iraq]) reflects, as said, some notion of citizenship, I doubt that it can be interpreted as an embracing of Western-style liberal democracy. To my knowledge no research as yet has focused on how to interpret the large turnout of voters at these occasions. Perhaps it is an expression of people’s eagerness to be heard and accepted as members of the polity after times of oppression. Or perhaps the large turnout shows that people, encouraged by community leaders, used the elections as a means to ensure that their specific group interest would be safeguarded. And then there is the steep decline in voter turnout in Afghanistan. The presidential elections of 2004 brought 83% of the population to the ballot box; the elections of 2014 only 38%. Does this show that the adherence to the political institutions and systems is not overwhelming? Or did people want to express their disappointment about what Western-style democracy had done for them? When we look at other political institutions like the judiciary, the Afghan example does not appear very promising. The ordinary Afghans continue to put much more trust in their traditional and customary systems that give powers to religious and community leaders to resolve disputes, than in the official Western-style judicial system that has been established with help from the international community. Widespread corruption within this official judicial system only reinforces this trend. In brief, given the current weaknesses of public political institutions, they can hardly serve as the litmus test for people’s sense of civic identity.

What about alternative political ideologies and political institutions? In Africa, the Ubuntu philosophy can be considered as a basis for a political ideology: the ‘I am because we are’ principle is an important source of

5 Voter turnout at elections in Iraq in 2005 was 79%, http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=107; in the DRC turnout at the 2006 parliamentary elections was 70%, http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=39 (accessed 16 January 2015)

ethical positions. The current South African judicial system has provisions that are derived from the Ubuntu philosophy, but it has not been developed into a full political theoretical system. The Gacaca system in Rwanda, loosely translated as ‘justice on the grass’, that was set up to deal with the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide is another example of an institution built on the Ubuntu philosophy, which sees the individual always as part of the community. In Afghanistan, the Loya Jirga as the national gathering of representatives of (ethnic) communities is a political institution that does not fit the representational democracy model. In African countries, hybrid models exist where traditional hereditary systems of leadership go hand-in-hand with modern election-based models. In Islam, leadership inspired and bound by the faith in Allah has a much more central role in the political system. All these political philosophies and institutions, even if they have not been developed as alternatives to the Western-style political ideologies or institutions, play a role in people’s lives and the organization of their communities. To suppose that the political ideology and institutions as developed in the western world, are fit for purpose in fragile states and that they are to fill the void is showing a lack of understanding of the diverse reality of political ideologies and institutions.

British citizens in the ISSP survey about political institutions were asked whether they endorsed the statement: ‘To be truly British it is important to respect British institutions and laws.’ Given the reality of ineffective, corrupt and generally weak political institutions in most fragile countries, this question would be difficult to answer for, for example, Afghans or Congolese. Their answers would be even more difficult to interpret because they may well be referring not to the official ‘modern’ state institutions, but to the informal, customary institutions that are still very present and important in their daily lives.

Cultural identity, the second element in the Shulman model is relevant in the process of building a national identity in fragile states. The components of language and tradition are indeed important pillars of cultural identity, however, I question whether the component religion is also best placed there. The connection between culture and religion is very applicable to the European

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7 Metz 2011, p. 523-559.
8 See also this master’s thesis by Katherine Elizabeth Furman: Exploring the Possibilities of an Ubuntu-based Political Philosophy, http://philpapers.org/rec/FURETP (10 October 2015)
context due to the specific history of European state formation (*cuius regio, eius et religio*). In Afghanistan, nearly 100% of the population is Muslim (with an important Sunni/Shia divide), while the cultural diversity in the country is enormous. And although the religious practices can differ between different ethnic groups, there certainly is a strong sense that the Islamic religion is a shared identity for all people living in Afghanistan. The same goes for Christianity in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Religion is not part of the cultural diversity. People of different cultural identities (language, traditions) are very likely to all answer that the Christian religion is important for the national identity of the DRC. For these reasons, I suggest to include religion as a separate element in an adjusted version of Shulman’s model (see below).

**Ethnicity**, the third element in Shulman’s model, and its two components *ancestry* and *race* are both relevant categories that are applicable to fragile states. As we will see below, they are complex issues too, given the reality of diversity in fragile states that is partly caused by large-scale migration.

### A modified model for fragile nation-states

Based on the above, I propose a slightly adjusted version of the Shulman model that I believe better reflects the reality of fragile states and the way people living there identify themselves. I limit the components of civic identity to citizenship, territory, will and consent, leaving out political ideology and political institutions and laws. Instead, I add the issue of rights and obligations to the component of citizenship. It is important to analyze to which extend people in their civic identification, include the rights and responsibilities towards the nation-state. Secondly, I introduce religion as a separate constituting element of national identity, rather than grouping it under cultural identity.

In addition to these adjustments, and based on the notion that identity is an ever-changing social construct, I moreover consider one component with two new elements that may possibly be relevant to the forging of national identity. I would call the component ‘nature & resources’ covering the idea that the physical reality of a country is shaping its identity in two ways.

The first way is that of *geography*. Geographical circumstances to a certain extent shape the national identity. As a citizen of the Netherlands, for instance, I am aware of the important role that our geographical reality has played in defining our identity. The continuous struggle against the threatening water and our efforts to reclaim land from the sea are defining aspects of who we are. Part of the Dutch institutions came out
of this struggle against the water and so did the famous Dutch consensus decision-making culture referred to as ‘polderen’. The identity of Bangladesh is shaped by its delta structure, which results in frequent flooding of large parts of the country. The national identity of the small island states in the Pacific is defined by their geography and the same goes for the Sahel countries that are perpetually challenged to live with drought and dust.

Economy is a second possible new element constituting national identity. All nation-states today are challenged to define their position vis-à-vis other states in response to globalization and the fact that global trade is the prevailing avenue for the relations between nation-states. Given that identity is about social boundaries, it may be worthwhile to explore to what extent the position of a nation-state in the global economic order of comparative advantages shapes its national identity. Some countries have had a rather constant position in the economic world order: Germany has a long history of cutting-edge manufacturing, the Netherlands and Brazil have both long been agricultural giants, Great Britain prides itself on its long tradition of trade and financial services. Some countries deliberately choose an economic strategy that gives them a distinct profile in their region or globally. Rwanda’s strategy to become a digital hub in Africa is first and foremost an economic strategy, but the identity-shaping power of this strategy could prove to become important. At the same time, economic identities may either be too volatile or too much infused by opportunism to be considered long-lasting elements of national identity. However, it is not unthinkable that in the long run more stable patterns of economic identity and comparative advantages will emerge globally.

I conclude that, though it is certainly worthwhile to keep exploring the relevance of both geography and economy to shape national identities, it is too early to include these elements in an adjusted model for the nationhood of fragile states. The adjusted model of Shulman that I present here thus looks as shown in the table. I will discuss its elements and components below.

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<th>Table 4</th>
<th>Elements and components of national identity in fragile states</th>
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<td><strong>Elements of national identity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Components</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td>Religion as social practice</td>
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<td><strong>Cultural identity</strong></td>
<td>Language</td>
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Nationhood and civic identity

The importance of civic identity as one of the pillars of a national identity is without dispute: The nation-state needs an identification of people with the basic components of this civic identity. In fragile states, the components of civic identity are often ‘under construction’ rather than an already solid part of people’s identity.

Citizenship. Civic identity is first and foremost based on the concept of citizenship, which dates back to ancient Greece, where the relationship between the citizens and the polis and belonging to the polity was the essence of political identity. The nation-state that gradually developed in Europe since the mid-17th century and presented itself in full force with the French Revolution, became a partner of the citizens. Le citoyen became a powerful label for people who carried both rights and duties towards the state.

Many people in fragile states do not feel that they are citizens in the modern sense of the word. Due to the absence of the nation-state in their lived reality, they do not feel a relationship with the state, nor accountability towards that state. At the same time, there is an increasing awareness that citizenship is the necessary entry ticket to hold the state accountable for providing protection, security, basic social services and investing in economic development, thus creating the basis for people’s welfare. The Indian government has started to provide all its citizens with an identity card to confirm their status of citizen, which gives specific entitlements.11 In Western countries, too, citizenship is crucial for getting access to services and entitlements as can be seen in the situation of migrants without legal permits of residence. Citizens are in, non-citizens are out. There clearly is a reason why the green card in the US is such a coveted object and why the citizenship issue of migrants in Europe causes such heated debates. One would expect that the notion of citizenship will become more important to people in fragile states when these states start to take the responsibility for

delivering basic goods and services to their citizens. A specific challenge is the double-nationality issue: People who are accepted as citizens of more than one state. Some countries like Morocco stipulate that people can never lose their Moroccan citizenship and even second- and third-generation migrants remain citizens. Attempts by second- or third-generation Moroccan migrants to become exclusively Dutch, or German or French citizens failed: By international agreements civil authorities have to maintain the double nationality in its civil registration. Turkish second- and third-generation migrants have to fulfill their military service, based on their double nationality. Fragile states with a large number of citizens as migrants outside the country, have still to address this issue.

**Territory.** Is identifying national identity with territory a tautology? The definitions of nation and state after all are based on the notion of sovereignty over a certain territory. However, how people define their national identity does not necessarily coincide with where they live. Labor migrants often identify themselves as belonging to their nation of origin even though they are fully integrated into their host country. For refugees, who were forced to leave their home country due to war and insecurity, this identification may be even stronger. The recent history in the eastern part of Ukraine illustrates the problematic relationship between territory and national identity: People who are officially citizens of the Ukraine, presented themselves as Russians aiming for secession to connect their territory with Russia. For people in fragile states where the sovereignty of the state over a certain area is not self-evident, the issue of territory is real: Do they see their territory as part of the nation-state?

Regional identities are a factor to take into account when considering civic identity in fragile states, as regional identity is often very relevant to people who feel marginalized and excluded. Regional identity is a rather modern phenomenon provoked by the borders drawn during colonial rule (Berlin Conference, 1884/1885) and the subsequent formation of nation-states within these colonial borders. Combined with other identity components (ethnicity, language, religion) territorial identity can be quite powerful. The Touaregs who live in the northern part of Mali, for instance feel excluded not only as an ethnic group with their herdsman culture, but they also feel marginalized in geographical terms by the central government in Bamako.

**Will and consent.** National identity is more than a mere administrative or juridical act of registration in the civil administration. It requires a positive commitment by the people to identify themselves as citizens. Republican
citizenship (see chapter 4) belongs here: The citizen affirms his or her role as the sovereign who legitimates the nation-state s/he belongs to. This declaration of belonging entails responsibilities. In immigration countries, migrants can experience a feeling of 'living in-between': No longer in their home country, their sense of belonging to the new country has to be appropriated in a process of identification that may take generations. First, second and third generations of migrants show different levels of identification and affirmation with the new nation-state that they belong to.

**Nationhood and religious identity**

Religion is often identified as a source of fragility and therefore a thorny matter in the building of the nation-state. Religion as source of fragility is manifest in either religious extremism (e.g. Taliban, Islamic State) or religious intransigence (e.g. the conflicts between Christians and Muslims in the Central African Republic). Discussing the role of religion in nation-states and nation-building must start from the acknowledgement that for people in the global South, where most fragile states are located, religion is highly important. 84% of the world population defines itself as religious.12 If we would correct that figure for (mostly) secular Europe and communist China it would reach more than 90%. For religious people, life has a meaning – often its most important meaning – beyond the material world and beyond a physical understanding of space and time. To them, the spiritual world is real (and interacts with the physical world) and there is a future beyond earthly time.

For most people in the secular world, life has no meaning outside itself: People are challenged to get the most out of the time they are granted in this world. The marginalization of religion in public life that has happened in most donor countries, has positioned religion outside the development discourse. If there is attention for religion at all in the fragility discourse, this is mostly instrumental: how can religious communities or leaders be helpful in solving the problem of fragility? An in-depth understanding of religious identity as of fundamental importance for people’s sense of belonging is unduly lacking.

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Religion as social practice. In our modern world, the relation between religion and nation is generally seen as problematic. In history, their connection has been very prevalent. In the Old Testament, David is the King of the Jews but also the religious leader, anointed by Samuel in the name of God. The spread of Christianity was often a top-down process: If the ruler of the community converted to Christianity, large parts of the population followed. The Westphalian Peace Treaties strongly connected religion and the formation of nations (cuius regio, eius et religio) in order to create stability within and peace between nations.

The connection between religion and leadership was, before Enlightenment and the French Revolution, also politically important in order to legitimize the authority of the ruler. By invoking God as the basis for their powers, Kings, Emperor and Dukes created a legitimate basis for their decisions. When through the process of democratization the legitimacy of the state was transferred from God to the people, the relation between religion and the nation-state weakened, but the connection has not disappeared, even in modern society. Still today, the king of the Netherlands is officially ‘King by the grace of God’ and promulgation of all laws and regulations starts with that announcement. The Queen of England is the head of the Anglican Church and the same goes for Denmark. In Sweden and Norway the direct relation between the church and the king or queen was only dissolved in 2000 and 2012. Different but also relevant examples are Italy and Russia. The Italian government carefully takes into account the opposition of the church to gay marriage. In its strategy to strengthen the Russian identity, Putin’s government links itself in tandem to the Russian Orthodox Church. The recent history of Russia since the collapse of the communist USSR shows how, after more than 70 years of a secular ideology, religion resurged as an important pillar of the national identity. Of course, governments and leaders will often use religion in a very instrumental way, which should be judged critically, but this does not negate its continued importance in people’s and nations’ identities. In the debate on migration politicians in Western Europe refer to the judeo-christian foundations of the nation-state as underpinning for the cultural and social identity of their countries.

Religious belief. For religious people, their relation to the divine (irrespective of how this is described, labeled or named) is a fundamental aspect of

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13 In 2016 the Dutch social liberal party D’66 presented a proposal to the parliament to delete this sentence in the promulgation of laws
their identity. Their ultimate destination is in the divine and is created by the divine. Religion touches the essence of who we are and influences how we position ourselves in the world. From a religious perspective the state is always a temporary destination. This attitude puts the commitment to the concept of the nation-state and national identity in perspective.

Both Christianity and Islam merit a closer look where it concerns potential conflicts between religious and national identities. Unlike other large religions like Buddhism and Confucianism, both Christianity and Islam have a global mission: It is their ambition to convert all people of the world and make them believers of God or Allah. This ambition can easily be at odds with the concept of, and identification with, the nation-state. This may explain why Christianity and Islam are involved in cases where religion is a source of fragility. The rivalry between Christians and Muslims was one defining feature of the civil war in Sudan and currently plays a role in the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. Muslim extremism is at play in Mali, Somalia, Afghanistan and the Caliphate, recently proclaimed in Iraq/Syria and in Nigeria.

Both Christianity and Islam have a tradition of merging spiritual and worldly power. Since the rule of Emperor Constantine the Great, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and in the Middle Ages bishops often ruled over vast regions of Europe. The caliphs on the Arabic Peninsula who claimed succession from Muhammad, merged spiritual and worldly power by conquering vast areas in North Africa, the Middle East, stretching out to Asia and south and Eastern Europe. However, in modernity, with the formation of the nation-states in Europe, Christianity and Islam have taken a different approach.

For the Christian religions, this side-by-side existence of worldly and divine power is not a fundamental problem. In Matthew 22: 12-22 Jesus, in a dispute with the Pharisees about the relation between God and the Emperor, says: ‘So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.’ Apostle Paul also hints at the acceptance of worldly power as separate from the spiritual world. Perhaps the beginning of Christianity as religion persecuted and oppressed by the Roman Empire is relevant in this respect. For Christians there is no doubt that at the end of time the Kingdom of God will make all earthly kingdoms redundant and that the Kingdom of God is the real future we should care about. For the time being, as pilgrims in this earthly world, Christians can adapt to the rules of the state. The Roman Catholic Church, at the Second Vatican Council in the constitution

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14 See also Pope Benedict in his encyclical Deus Caritas Est, paragraph 28a.
Gaudium et Spes formulated its position towards the state and the worldly authorities as follows: ‘Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic or social order. The purpose which He set before her is a religious one. (...) But out of this religious mission itself comes a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law.’ Nonetheless, many Christians have the ambition to let their faith be the source of inspiration in their social and political engagement. They do not accept the position of religion as confined to the private domain. The criticism of Pope John Paul II on communism in Eastern Europe and the active engagement of Pope Francis in the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean and the climate change debate are signs of this ambition.

In Islam, accepting a system of stately rulers parallel to the rules of Allah is more contested. Strict interpreters and Islamic fundamentalists repel the state as the rule-setting entity. Only the rules set by Allah and handed down through the Prophet, peace be upon him, can organize society. In this perspective there is an unbridgeable divide between ‘dar al-Islam’ (the world of Islam) and ‘dar al-harb’ (the world of hate). This antagonistic approach was mirrored in Samuel Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations and Benjamin Barber’s Jihad vs McWorld. Both authors see the confrontation between Islam and the Western democratic political system as the defining struggle of the 21st century.

More moderate Muslims are developing a new discourse that disentangles the religious, the cultural and the political in Islam. It creates space for the acceptance of diversity of civilizations as the basis for acceptance of a political realm that does not coincide with Islam. Especially for Muslims living in (European) countries, where they find themselves in a minority position, such a new discourse could create the space to live as true believers and as loyal citizens at the same time.

The theocracy of the Islamic State

In the debate on religion and state it is interesting to look more in depth at Iran. The Islamic State of Iran has adopted religion as the defining identity for the state. The revolution in Iran that took place in the second half of the 1970s brought a theocratic regime to power; the Council of religious leaders

15 Vaticanum II, Constitution Gaudium et Spes, paragraph 42.
16 Castells 2010, p. 16.
is the supreme authority to assess rules and legislation of parliament against the Islamic religion and rules as set by the Prophet. The judiciary is not independent but subordinated to this Council. Iran tried to harmonize the Islamic concept of the state with the modern concept of the nation-state: It accepted the nation-state with its borders and limited territory as the framework even though the political concept of Islam is universal and disregards borders and distinct territories. It is the same step the Bolsheviks took when, despite the universal claim of the Marxist ideology, they decided to build communism within the borders of the state. In contrast, the new phenomenon of the Islamic State (IS) proclaimed in 2014 in Iraq and Syria disregards national borders and does not recognize nation-states as legitimate entities.

Nationhood and cultural identity

The third element of national identity is cultural identity. Part of who we are as a nation is shaped by our culture: The amalgamation of our habits, the way we celebrate, the way we mourn, the stories we share, the heroes we adore, the holy places we visit.

Language is a strong carrier of identity. It is our main instrument to express who we are, what we feel, what we think and what we aim for. As Anderson shows, the print technology, combined with the use of vernacular to replace traditional Latin, has had an enormous impact in Europe on the formation of national identities. Language is a natural cleavage between ‘them’ and ‘us’: ‘We’ can’t even understand ‘them’. By creating a common vernacular that was increasingly the preferred mode of expression for rulers and religious leaders, a feeling of togetherness was created and strengthened. In the course of this process, many vernaculars were downplayed to the status of dialects. In Spain, the Catalan and Basque languages remain very important identity markers, driving the agenda for autonomy or even independence.

In Africa, where territorial borders were drawn disconnected from any cultural or anthropological logic, the language of the colonial power became the official language until independence. The missionaries played an important role in setting language standards because they chose certain oral languages to become the written language for their translations of the

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19 Castells 2010, p. XXV.
Bible. They thus saved languages that would otherwise have been lost, but at the same time sentenced other oral languages to disappear (see also chapter 8 on nation-building as nation-destroying). Some countries have been successful in creating a unifying language (e.g. Kiswahili in Tanzania), but in many other former colonies people have become experienced polyglots. Many Kenyans for instance speak English and Kiswahili for official and professional purposes, learn one or more neighboring languages to be able to communicate within their regions, but favor their ethnic language as the vehicle to express their emotions.

If language is the verbal expression of our identities, convictions and beliefs, traditions express the same in a non-verbal manner. Through traditions we show how the social relations in our society organized: Especially initiation rites (entering puberty, wedding ceremonies, burials) are strong markers of social relations and social positions. Rituals are also often imbued with religious significance in terms of relating ourselves to the world of the invisible, and through them we build the bridge between past and future.

While tradition is a strong marker of identity, traditions are never absolute: There are always members of the community or the nation-state who do not participate, and certain traditions are shared with other communities or nation-states. The same goes for language. Although English is an international language, the differences between the English spoken by Australians, Scottish people, the Irish, Indians or Canadians create distinctions that are recognized as part of distinct national identities.

**Nationhood and ethnicity**

The international community often considers ethnicity the main spoiler of orderly processes of nation-building in fragile states. Ethnic identity is seen as a dysfunctional competitor of national identity. Ethnicity is one of those concepts that is fiercely debated and lacks a definition that is widely agreed on. I follow the definition of Schermerhorn (in the history of Weber’s definition), as cited by Cornell & Hartmann: An ethnic group is ‘a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood.’ Ethnicity is about

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21 Cornell & Hartmann 2007.
historical roots in bloodlines and memories, it is about self-identification where objectivity is not the yardstick (but instead: Selecting, forgetting and inventing) and ethnic identity becomes relevant in relationship to others within the larger society.

Ethnicity is seen as an important factor in the building of a national identity. For those who adhere to a primordial theory of the nation, it represents the decisive historic roots of the nation: The lineage of blood and ancestry ultimately defines who belongs to the nation and who does not. But also researchers with a constructivist outlook consider ethnicity an important part of identity, be it that they consider ethnicity the result of a deliberate process of selecting and forgetting and sometimes even of inventing the defining features of the group’s identity. Ethnicity, like religion, is a powerful aspect in identity discourses. A political entrepreneur who knows to strike the right chord, will resound a whole set of notions and feelings that are dear to people’s hearts and able to evoke their commitment. The power of ethnicity is deepened in contexts of fragility, where people often heavily depend on the reliability of their ethnic community for both physical security and economic survival. Distrust towards other ethnic groups is often part and parcel of this. Fragile states looking for stability are confronted with an even stronger presence of ethnicity.

I will look at the role of ethnicity from the ‘social boundaries’ approach developed by Katherine Verdery and Andreas Wimmer. According to Verdery,22 ethnicity is a function of organizing society rather than a structure to preserve a certain fixed cultural content. She stresses the importance of situationalism in our approach to ethnicity in order to rid ourselves of a determinist perspective and allow for the logic of difference. The model of ethnicity as social boundaries does away with ethnicity as a ‘once and for all’ static and timeless identity. Instead, it promotes a much more dynamic perspective of identity and the role identity plays in societies, as argued by the sociologist Andreas Wimmer.23

It is not difficult to see how important a dynamic approach to ethnicity is for fragile states, where people often organize themselves politically along these social-ethnic boundaries, and where social closure is high. At the same time, we should realize that these realities are situational, i.e. a response to the circumstances of fragility, the brokenness of society and the lack of trust. Because they are situational, the boundaries can always be changed.

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22 Verdery 1994, p. 34-35.
A situational approach could be seen to suggest that only if the situation of fragility is changed for the better, this will automatically lead to making ethnic cleavages redundant. Most state-building strategies are based on this instrumental and consequential perspective: By building an effective state and just institutions the need for social boundaries based on ethnicity will vanish. Such a strategy is based on the assumption that it is possible and recommendable to make ethnicity redundant in the public life of the nation-state. If this were to be true then we should be able to define at which point in the process of state-building the circumstances are conducive enough to make the social boundaries of ethnicity redundant. And even if such a moment could be defined, the question remains how to tackle the ethnic divisions in the meantime. In fragile states, that ‘meantime’ can take a very long time. There is thus no other option than to actively engage with the issue of ethnicity as social boundaries.

Verdery adds another important element to the discourse about ethnicity and nationalism by defining both as: ‘... names for two closely related forms of social ideology. Both are means of social classification, classifying on the assumption that certain types of differences are significant’.24 The social boundaries of ethnicity can easily be translated to physical borders, defining the territory and the polity anew as belonging to the ones who share the same characteristics. In a fragile context, where distrust and increased in-group cohesion can be observed, the connection between ethnicity and nationalism is easily made: The only future we believe in, is based on the social boundaries that have proven to be our best shield against the vicissitudes of life.

Equating ethnicity with social boundaries means creating an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ divide, which can have severe divisive consequences for a society. Marking ethnic identity as a social boundary means attributing a label of ‘otherness’ to those who do not belong to the ethnic group – and in the same act labeling one’s own ethnic group as different, special, distinct.25 It is in this ‘us’ versus ‘them’ scheme that the fuse of ethnic conflict lies: It invites all sorts of enemy imagery and accusations and offers the perfect opportunity for political entrepreneurs to mobilize the ethnic groups behind claims of power and superiority. The Peace Research Institute in Oslo in a study on international conflicts between 1946 and 2008 found that 90 of the 174 were ethnically motivated.26 The combination of strict social borders, the

24 Verdery, p. 49.
25 Castells, p. XXV.
26 Routledge author or editor?, p. 3.
NATION-BUILDING AS NECESSARY EFFORT IN FRAGILE STATES

competition over limited resources, lack of trust and the temptation to strengthen the group’s position in a messy situation, are bound to provoke violent conflicts.

This dynamic is reinforced by the ethnicization of political power structures: Government officials are appointed based on their ethnic identity, partly to defend the own ethnic group against rivals and partly for channeling resources to the ‘us’ community. Ethnicization of political power directly influences the state-building agenda and undermines the agenda for fair and equal distribution. In this problem of ethnicity the institutional and the identity components of the nation-/state-building agenda come together.

Our program on nation-building presented in chapter 10 does not pretend that it can rid societies of the problems of ethnic divides. Ethnic identities define social relations and social belonging and do not cease to exist. Our program of nation-building is in line with Horowitz’ statement: ‘It is, as I shall suggest, both fruitless and undesirable to attempt to abolish ethnic affiliation, but not at all fruitless to attempt to limit their impact.’ By constructing a layer of national identity, which serves as an overarching sense of belonging and responsibility for the nation-state, I believe we can reduce the negative impacts of ethnic affiliation and processes of exclusion.

Ethnicity as an element of national identity has two components.

**Ancestry** relates to the primordial orientation within the body of literature on the nation: The nation is born out of a historic presence and our national identity therefore is based on a lineage with our ancestors. It is the *ius sanguis* approach to national identity: The bloodline that connects us through history defines our national identity. The issue of ancestry plays a role in both non-Western and Western countries. In Europe, for instance, ancestry continues to play an important role in defining the national identity of Germans. German ancestry gives access to German citizenship, even if it relates to ancestors who moved to Russia or the Ukraine over a century ago. Following the same logic, Hungarian minorities in Slovakia and Rumania were offered Hungarian citizenship based on their ancestral roots.

In fragile states, plagued by internal conflicts and civil wars, the ancestry issue is paramount and relevant from a loyalty-perspective: Ancestry defines to which group you belong. It also serves as the basis for two-way loyalty claims: Ethnic leaders call for loyalty in times of conflict to gather

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29 Kertzer & Ariel 2002, p. 4-5.
support (military, logistic, emotional) and ordinary people in turn may call upon their leaders’ loyalty (protection, food and care). In many cases, this loyalty is based on ancestry functions as the replacement of an absent state that has relinquished its people.

_Race_, the second component of ethnicity, is a sensitive category in social relations. It originates in the 15th and 16th century, when the European explorers for the first time were confronted with people so different in physiognomy. The definition and categorization of race throughout history is not consistent.⁴⁰ A telling example are the very diverse categories used for race in the censuses of different countries. We now know that there is no biological basis for race. The differences in human DNA fall short to explain the differences labeled as racial. What remains is race as a social category that serves to define and highlight distinctions between groups. This is why ethnicity and race sometimes overlap, e.g. African-Americans can be labeled as a race as well as an ethnic group. The main differences between race and ethnicity as social constructs are that ethnicity is based on descent and history, race is based on physical differences; race typically originates in the assignment by others, ethnicity is often based on self-identification; and race always refers to intrinsic differences in human worth, ethnicity can but does not need to do so.³¹

_Race_ is a very powerful notion and racial categories when applied have a profound impact on social relations. In Rwanda, the history of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict is partly due to the racial labels introduced by the Belgian colonial authorities. While defining the difference between the two groups as an ethnic difference would have meant labeling the others as different but familiar, defining the difference as a racial one meant that the other group became labeled as strangers, aliens, from outside, and not worthy of loyalty or compassion.

**From open to ascribed identity**

The adjusted Shulman model presented in this chapter which discerns four elements of national identity (civic, religious, cultural, ethnic) is useful because it comprises both open and ascribed aspects of identity. The four elements and their nine components can be placed on a continuum from open to ascribed: ‘Citizenship’ and ‘will and consent’ at the one end,
‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’ at the other end, and the other components somewhere in between (e.g. territory more towards the ascribed end and language more towards the open end).

The civic element of identity is the most open. People can access the civic community by embracing citizenship, the political institutions and political ideology of the state. It requires will and consent, one has to respond explicitly and positively to the civic identity, but the hurdles to take are mostly in the mindset, convictions and values of the person, not so much in the rules and regulations of the state.

The cultural element of identity is in theory accessible to anyone living within the borders of the state, but acquiring new languages and traditions is not necessarily easy. Time plays an important role. Often, first-generation migrants have lasting difficulties in mastering a new language, while their children and grandchildren will much more easily become fluent speakers. Language is an important, but at the same time often an impeding factor in facilitating participation in society; migrants who do not speak their host country’s language are at a disadvantage and will experience limited access to the economic, cultural and political life. The same goes for traditions. Immigrants from Islamic countries can adopt the typical Christian feasts like Christmas or St Nicholas, but really engaging in these is more difficult. But also in the aspect of tradition the divide will be bridged over time.

The religious element of identity is open for change and personal choice, even though religion is often part of the social fabric, which makes change having potentially important consequences for the social network of people. In Islam changing your religion can be threatening as some Islamic groups see apostasy as unacceptable. For scheduled casts in India changing religion is sometimes seen as a possibility to escape the oppressive and denigrating structure of the caste system. Christian missionaries have shown capacities to create a mixture of their Christian message with traditional religious symbols and rituals, thereby making it easier for people to change religion. The rapid spread of autonomous churches in Africa and Latin America has created a crowded ‘market’ where people are selecting their favorites and are easily changing their religion. Migration of Muslims to (dominantly) Christian Europe has lead to a narrative of the familiarity of Christianity and Islam, creating a joint platform for religiousness for the existing different religions.

The ethnic element of identity is the most difficult to get access to, with race being more difficult than ancestry. African-Americans, whose ancestors came to the country in the 17th and 18th century, remain blacks in racial terms. For most migrants in Western Europe it is almost impossible
to identify themselves in ancestral terms with the host nation. Also here, time is an important factor. After generations, migrants can rightly claim to have ancestral roots. Another increasingly important factor is intermarriage, which in a very poignant way makes society aware that the strict boundaries we tend to draw between groups can in fact become much more fluid. On personal and family level homogeneity in ethnic or racial terms is increasingly contested.

National identity is a composite of elements, some of which are more open and others more closed. Addressing the issue of national identity in fragile states requires taking all these different elements into account. A real awareness of the different constituting elements of national identity, both open and closed, and an understanding of identity as social construct to define social boundaries in response to changing social contexts create entry points to tackle the challenge of nation-building. National identity is not a mysterious, thick, reified reality – it is fluid and malleable and a most significant part of building stable, secure, inclusive and fair states. When Fukuyama and US-based think tanks, like the Rand Corporation, claim that nation-building is not doable for the international community, it is because they have not taken the time to really deconstruct what national identity entails.
Case

Bangsamoro nation
Since 1971, a low-intensity conflict is raging on Mindanao, an island of the Philippines where most of the country’s five million Muslims, belonging to the Moro ethnic groups, live among a majority of Christians. The Islamic Moro community started an armed struggle for independence in response to the systemic discrimination and marginalization they were facing. Regional marginalization (the Mindanao periphery vis-à-vis the Manila-Luzon center) as well as religious and cultural discrimination (the Islamic Moro community as a minority in a dominant catholic country) created the basis for this conflict.

The conflict between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the main movement for Moro self-determination, and the government is quite different from the other low-intensity conflict in the Philippines, the one between the communist New People’s Army and the government. While the New People’s Army attempts to overthrow the government to establish a socialist regime, the Moro liberation movement focuses on self-determination. It does so in response to the unwillingness of the government and the dominant culture to be inclusive towards the Moro community in all aspects (religion, culture, socioeconomic position).

Since 1971, between 120,000 and 150,000 people died and more than two million people were internally uprooted. The economic costs of the conflict are estimated between US$ 2 and US$ 3 billion. Although the Philippines does not appear on any of the fragile states lists, the conflict has made Mindanao a pocket of fragility in a stable low middle-income country.

In March 2014, after seventeen years of negotiations, a peace accord was signed between the government of the Philippines and the MILF. The 2014 peace deal orders the creation of an autonomous political entity in western Mindanao, called Bangsamoro. Bangsamoro will receive a fairer share of revenues from the region’s natural resources, as well as having budgetary autonomy, a parliamentary form of governance and shariah courts. In exchange, the MILF agreed to give up arms as well as its demand for a separate state.

Although a proper nation-building strategy has not yet been developed, the case of Bangsamoro underlines several issues that are at stake in the nation-building agenda.

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Firstly, the political agenda of identity is dominant over the socioeconomic agenda. The leadership of the MILF has repeated time and again that the problems of religious and cultural discrimination and regional marginalization cannot be solved by socioeconomic development. They deem socioeconomic development outside a framework of political recognition of identity and self-determination and even interpret it as a counter-insurgent strategy to undermine the legitimate aspirations of the Moro community. There is no underestimation of the urgent socioeconomic needs of the Moro (part of Bangsamoro would rank very low in the Human Development Index), but they are convinced that socioeconomic development without political autonomy and recognition of the Moro-identity will not bring sustainable solutions.

Secondly, the Moro movement is the result of the failure of the Philippine government to create a national identity that includes the Islamic Moro community as an equal group within the nation-state. The Americans at the beginning of the 20th century after the Paris Treaty with Spain, by which the US bought the Philippines) defined the Moro problem as a question of ‘method or form of administration by which the Moros (…) can be governed to their best interest (…) for their gradual advancement in culture and civilization, so that in the course of a reasonable time they can be admitted into the general government of the Philippine islands as qualified members of a republican national organization.’ This patronizing attitude based on the notion of the Moro as backward, has remained dominant since. The Philippine Human Development Report in 2005 added that ‘One might say that the post-colonial Philippine government’s definition of the Moro problem remains essentially the same including its corresponding policy solution of national integration.’ The fact that the Philippine government has allowed the discrimination and marginalization of the Moro population and not spoken or acted against their portrayal as second-class citizens and an insignificant minority in the country, has made the struggle for self-determination unavoidable. It is telling that the government never tried to develop a comprehensive and inclusive answer to the legitimate grievances of the Moro. From the beginning of the peace negotiations (Tripoli agreement 1976), the government took the autonomy path as the way out of the conflict.

Thirdly, the autonomy agreed upon by the government and the MILF is, from the Moro perspective, accepted as the next-best solution if independence is

34 Ibidem.
35 The first peace agreement of 1976 (the Tripoli agreement) states as first agreed outcome of the negotiations: ‘First: The establishment of Autonomy in the Southern Philippines within the realm of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines.’ (my italics)
not possible by negotiations nor by a military victory. This autonomy was the basis of the Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro (FAB, 2012) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). As an autonomous territory with a parliament and a cabinet, with the responsibility to collect taxes and have its own police and shariah law institutions, autonomy was maximized. The peace agreement clearly acknowledges: ‘Underlying the CAB is the recognition of the justness and legitimacy of the cause of the Bangsamoro people and their aspiration to chart their political future through a democratic process that will secure their identity and posterity and allow for meaningful self-governance’.

Fourthly, the ambition of the Bangsamoro can be characterized as building a nation-state in the modern sense. The Moro people took the position that a national identity without a state structure would not solve the problem. And like all nation-states they trace back their history and existence to the precolonial times. The notion of the Bangsamoro Homeland is connected to that. To create space for the Moro identity and culture and for their Islamic values, the connection to state-building is deemed necessary. The intertwined reality of nation and state is the basis of the Bangsamoro.

Fifthly, for both the Bangsamoro nation and for the Philippine government the issue of nation-building will remain on the agenda: For autonomy as political and institutional solution is not the final answer. For the autonomous Bangsamoro government the challenge will be to create an inclusive national identity. The reality of demographic changes, due to internal migration, has led to diversity of the people in the Bangsamoro territory: Settlers and indigenous people have to be included in the nation-building process to avoid new majority and minority issues. For the government of the Philippines the challenge remains to make Bangsamoro an integral part of the republic. If they do ignore this challenge, the process of autonomy and nation-building will undoubtedly lead to new secessionist dynamics.

The government and the future autonomous Bangsamoro government will have to jointly deal with the issue of the Moros and indigenous communities that are not included in the autonomy process. These communities can use an opt-in provision in the autonomy agreement if a majority in a plebiscite will decide so. This could lead to scattered communities being officially part of the Bangsamoro without being physically connected to it. The government of the Philippines has promised that it ‘shall ensure the protection of the rights of the Bangsamoro people residing outside the territory (…). And undertake programs for the rehabilitation and development of their communities’. Even the new

Bangsamoro government may provide assistance to these communities in their economic, social and cultural development. Which could lead to programs by the Bangsamoro government outside their territory. It will be of interest to see whether the Philippine society will be more aware of the Moro/Muslim community as part of their national identity that deserves space or whether the implementation of an autonomous Bangsamoro will be seen as a solution of the problem ‘outside’, no longer affecting the Philippine identity.