René Grotenhuis

Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States

Amsterdam
University
Press

Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States

Nation-Building as Necessary Effort in Fragile States

René Grotenhuis

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: Supporters of Afghan presidential candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah listen to his speech in Kabul, Afghanistan on 27 September 2009. Afghan Independent Election Commission announced on 26 September 2009, the preliminary results for 357 provincial lawmakers, while there was still no exact date for final results of hotly disputed presidential elections.
© EPA/S. Sabawoon

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 94 6298 219 2
e-ISBN 978 90 4853 212 4 (pdf)
DOI 10.5117/9789462982192
NUR 754

Creative Commons License CC BY NC (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0)

© René Grotenhuis / Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2016

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Table of contents

Prologue: The urgency of reality

In the Afghan presidential elections of 2014 the ethnic identity of the candidates and their running mates appeared to be the key issue in the electoral campaign. Candidate Abdullah Abdullah was perceived as someone of the Northern Alliance and candidate Zalmai Rassoul as the representative of the Pashtun. Ashraf Ghani as a Pashtun selected Abdul Dostum (an Uzbek) as his running mate to strike a balance between the south and the north, notwithstanding the history of Dostum as a warlord (or a war criminal according to the standards of the International Criminal Court).[1]

In South Sudan, 22 years of joint struggle to win independence from the North of the country failed to produce a feeling of South Sudanese national identity and a shared national interest. Barely two years after independence was celebrated in 2011, simmering hostilities and a leadership struggle between the Dinka and Nuer once again turned the country into a battlefield. I remember my visit to South Sudan in 2006, a year after the government of Sudan and the southern liberation army signed the Naivasha Agreement for peace. I was at the Kiir river, the border between North and South Sudan in the province of Bahr el Gazal. International organizations were discussing and planning how to organize the return of the millions of Southern Sudanese who had fled their villages and had been living in camps for the displaced and on the outskirts of Khartoum in North Sudan. Cordaid supported the operation by providing transport and medical care. But people did not wait for the organized return. They started the journey home spontaneously and with their own means. Trucks brought them to the northern banks of the river, which they crossed with improvised rafts. I spoke with a woman who, together with her four children, was returning to her home village; the place that she had fled years before when her husband was killed by the North Sudanese forces. She carried with her nothing but the longing for a safe place to call her own and the dedication to give her children a better future. There is no doubt she voted for independence in the 2011 referendum. In 2013 her hopes were shattered; the new nation that she entrusted with her future is in tatters.

In the Kenyan presidential elections of 2013, the issue was not which candidate would be best suited to lead the country, but whether Uhuru Kenyatta, from the country's largest ethnic group the Kikuyu, or Raila

1 Due to allegations of fraud the presidential elections ended in a deadlock and only after intensive mediation by the US both candidates agreed to form the government in tandem.

Odinga, a Luo from western Kenya, would win. Both candidates organized their support on their ethnic ticket, starting among their own ethnic groups and then pulling others into their alliance. The elections were fought along ethnic lines and Kenyan politics today are still very much led by ethnic issues.

Fragile and failing states are among the most frightening realities for the international community. We all know of Syria and Iraq, Mali and Afghanistan, Somalia and Libya, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their predicament is spelled out in newspaper headlines and tops the agenda of the UN Security Council. Much less visible are Chad and Cameroon, or Myanmar and Laos, countries that are equally vulnerable to fragility. In Central America, states have lost control over criminal groups that are operating unchecked and autonomously, causing more casualties among the population than many of the well-known violent conflicts. In the above-mentioned examples identity plays a dominant role in the stability of nation-states. Afghanistan is suffering from instability and constantly threatened by internal conflict; South-Sudan is suffering from internal war; Kenya (after the post-elections violence of 2007-2008) happily could avoid new ethnic driven post-elections violence.

The concepts central to this book are 'nation' – or 'nation-building' – 'fragility' and 'identity'. All three are contested concepts of which no singular, agreed definition exists. As for nation, there are different opinions on the nation as modern or historic concept, whether a nation is, or should be, congruent with a state. As for fragility, scholars dispute whether this one term can cover the diverse realities and challenges of the states that suffer the predicament. Others point at the fact that the term 'fragile state' is a derogatory label that serves no other purpose than to put people down or further alienate their governments from the world community. And identity could be approached from so many different perspectives (community, individual, ethnicity, class, religion) that it is hard to formulate a clear definition, let alone answer the question whether identity is a fixed or a flexible concept.

This book has its origin in the urgency of the reality of millions of people like the woman at the Kiir river, whose lives are marked by instability and insecurity, who are living in nation-states where identity conflicts are affecting society and who cannot count on a government to protect them against violence, hunger or disease, nor offers them a prospect of a better, more stable and more dignified future. I was confronted with this reality time and again during the ten years of my leadership of Cordaid, one of the largest Dutch development organizations. Most of my traveling in those

years was to the complex, confusing and conflict-affected destinations that this book is about: Palestine, Afghanistan, the DRC, Colombia, South Sudan, Central African Republic.

At the time when governments signed the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* in 2005, it was already clear that fragile states posed a specific challenge to the international community. Since then the problems of instability and fragility have been high – even if arguably not high enough – on the international political agenda. In 2012, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in its future scenario of development cooperation, *Horizon 2015*, stressed that fragile states will remain the hardest nuts to crack for the international community.[2]

That fragile states are a special case is also illustrated by their performance on the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Since the launch of the MDGs in 2000, absolute poverty as a percentage of the world population has declined and the lives of many poor people have improved. However, progress on the MDGs has been very slow, if not stagnant, in fragile low-income countries. The progress noted in a recent World Bank[3] report is largely due to the broad definition of fragility used, which includes countries like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Nepal. For countries like Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the DRC and South Sudan the picture is much bleaker; few of them will meet any of the targets set for 2015. In these fragile countries, fundamental human needs continue to go unsatisfied. With the even more ambitious agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recently adopted by the general assembly of the UN for the 2015-2030 era, fragile states will be even less likely to meet these ambitions.

In 2011, the G7+[4] launched a new initiative to harness renewed awareness and support for dealing with the issue of fragile states, the International Dialogue for Peace and Stability (IDPS).[5] This initiative marks the begin-

2 http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7723.pdf (accessed 3 September 2014)

3 http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1327948020811/8401693-1355753354515/8980448-1366123749799/GMR_2013_Full_Report.pdf (accessed 3 September 2014)

4 The G7+ is a group of 20 countries affected by conflict and in transition to stability and development: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Sao Tome Principe, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Timor Leste, Togo, Yemen. According to the OECD *State of Fragility report 2015*, 18 of them (all except Papua New Guinea and Sao Tome Principe) figure on the list and 15 of them have been continuously on the list since 2007.

5 http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/about/origins/ (accessed 3 September 2014)

ning of a period of new reflections on the meaning of fragility and how to tackle it. In the last fifteen years, the international community has invested billions of US dollars in the process of state-building. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the idea was to create a new and better government by joint efforts of military and civil engagement: First ousting the Taliban and Saddam Hussein by military force, then building a well-functioning and representative government to provide security, justice and basic social services to its citizens. However, the results are modest at best. Thousands of military and civilians lost their lives, billions of US dollars were spent, but stable and secure countries have not materialized. Moreover, the support of the people, their 'hearts and minds' were not won. Many citizens in Iraq and Afghanistan may have welcomed the toppling of the regimes of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban, but somewhere down the timeline their support for the international community's state-building project evaporated. A new approach is needed if we really aspire to contribute to building a more stable, secure and prosperous future for the women, men and children living in fragile states.

This book aims to offer a different perspective on how fragility can be approached and tackled: The process of nation-building should be considered an urgent issue and a complementary challenge to that of state-building. The international efforts at state and institution-building of the last decade have been underpinned by the work of scholars like Douglas North, Darren Acemoğlu and James Robinson, who all used historic evidence to prove the importance of institutions for the well-functioning of states. This book does not contest the importance of state-building and institution-building for overcoming fragility, however, it contends that these are only half of the solution. I argue that nation-building, seen as the process of building a shared identity as the basis for people to live together, to accept laws and to share resources is often overlooked in the strategies of donors to address fragility. Yet building a national identity is an indispensable element for solving the problem of fragility. The challenge of nation-building – referring basically to the shared identity of people – addresses the role that ethnicity, religion, language and culture play in overcoming, or reinforcing, fragility. In the international political discourse these issues are at best marginalized and at worst seen as spoilers: Stressing the importance of issues like religion, language, cultural identity is seen as not being constructive or are seen as creating conflicts. It is telling that the World Development Report 2011, *Conflict, Security and Development*, does not address issues of identity. It does stress the need to build 'inclusive enough coalitions' and the importance of including community leaders and marginalized

groups, but solely looks at them as political or economic interests groups,[6] not as identity groups per se. The international community, in its response to fragility, seems to have adopted a materialistic view on how to build a stable state: Political and economic power interests are the issues to be dealt with. I do, however, believe that we need to address the complex issues of identity (ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural) head-on as relevant themes in and of themselves in the process of nation-building.

This book is an answer to the urgency of reality. It makes use of the academic research that has been conducted on issues of fragility, state-building and nation-building without having the ambition to settle scholars' disputes. This book also for a large part builds on the experiences of practitioners working in fragile areas around the world. We do not pretend to have the silver bullet for solving fragility. The reality of fragility is always messy and solutions and strategies will have to be adapted to the ever-changing realities on the ground. That is not to say that we have to be satisfied beforehand with second-best solutions, however, solutions will have an eclectic character, choosing elements from different theoretical approaches and practical experiences in order to find responses that work. The complexity of the issue and the diversity of the fragile contexts require humility. I believe we need to open a new window, deepen our insights into the defining factors of fragility by including issues of identity, and invite people to look through that window at the urgent and dire realities of people living in fragile contexts – and inspire them into action.

The structure of the book is as follows. In the first chapter I present the complex reality of the nation-state as an entity that may seem self-evident in the current global world, while acknowledging that the process of building a nation-state is like walking an unpaved road. Chapter 2 to 4 take stock of the three discourses that are fundamental for our research: The nation, state and nation-state discourse, the concept of fragility and the discourse on sovereignty. We discern three dominant modes of fragility, based on a model in which authority, legitimacy and capacity are the critical factors.

With these three conceptual pillars clarified, I turn in chapter 5 to the nexus of nation-building and fragility, arguing why nation-building is needed in fragile states as a complementary effort to state-building. Chapter 6 briefly turns to the issue of peacemaking, which I consider a necessary precursor to nation-building and state-building. In chapter 7, I elaborate on the debate on nationalism and the broad shadow hanging over the concept of identity as exclusionary and discriminatory. Chapter 8 discusses the

6 WDR 2011, p. 13.

concept of national identity and identification, and makes the case for considering diversity as the basis of national identity; nation-building is not about achieving homogeneity or uniformity.

Based on the foregoing, in chapter 9, I present a model for the nation-building concept that includes four different elements of national identity (civic, religious, cultural, ethnic).

Chapter 10 unfolds a program for nation-building: How can theory be put into practice? Nation-building is overarching and requires specific processes, specific institutions and a specific role of domestic and international actors. I explore the possibility of this nation-building program in relation to the three modes of fragility that were presented in chapter 3. Finally, in the epilogue, I will formulate two challenges: One as a conclusion of our research, one as an agenda for future multidisciplinary work for scholars, policymakers and practitioners together.