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**Localizing local theory : a comparison between local and international perspectives on state and peace building in Kosovo through life stories**  
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## **An Overview of the Theoretical Approaches**



Localizing Local Theory:  
A Comparison between Local and International Perspectives  
on State and Peace Building in Kosovo through Life Stories

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## Summary

The importance of state and peace building is as high as ever: latest estimates classify over 60 states as either fragile or failing (Krause, 2010:6), encompassing more than two billion people. State failure entails massive flows of refugees, internally displaced people, child soldiers and grave abuses of women. The *UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* (2004) identified failing states as one of the main threats to global peace and stability. Yet, despite the increasing attention given to state building, the international community operating through international institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the Office for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), have been criticized for its lack of legitimacy and consistency as well as its ‘top-down’ approach to the reconstruction. Prominent examples of post-conflict societies include Afghanistan, East Timor, or Kosovo (Jashari, 2007:76). It is claimed that such approaches do not accommodate the specific needs that arise from local contexts (Nagy, 2008). Wilde (2007, 2008) even identifies similarities between international state building policies and historical colonial arrangements.

This research revisits this criticism, exploring to what extent international narratives about the priorities, successes, and failures of state and peace building efforts experientially compare to local perspectives and what lessons these insights hold for future state and peace building processes in Kosovo. Put more simply, what are the local and international perspectives and how do they compare? The main methodological and substantive innovations are guided by the following research sub-question: what do the experiences of local people in Kosovo as reflected in their biographies tell us about the process and the limitations of state and peace building? This research question mirrors the two-fold objective of this study, namely to explore local theories of state and peace building and to compare international and local perspectives on the subject. To answer the question, both local actors and international stakeholders are considered, featuring a comparison of the views of different groups, as well as between the established literature on the topic and the firsthand experience of local and international stakeholders. While it has not been applied in this field, the life stories approach deepens the understanding of the theoretical concepts and their varied meanings on the ground on the basis of diverse and large amount of data collected in Kosovo. Researching state and peace building through life stories and grounded theory represents an authentic, innovative and interdisciplinary methodological approach.

Turning to the findings, the chapter on state building suggests that more emphasis must lie on societal rather than institutional state building. The chapter on nation building suggests reconciling ethnic and civic nation building by re-incorporating nationalism. The chapter on peace building proposes to focus more on instrumental reconciliation fostering living together rather than living as separate communities. Theoretically, the thesis suggests to “localize” local theories of state, peace and nation building in two ways. On the one hand, the word refers to developing specific and concrete local theories rather than just hinting at their possibility at the meta-theoretical level as suggested by postliberal approaches. On the other hand, it means to be able to identify local theory in a place, thus “to localize” it, by using a life stories approach. The research finally deepens the understanding of the foreign policies and development strategies of post-conflict states and informs a set of innovative and empirically grounded recommendations to state and peace building policies. More concretely, this means that international institutions could integrate life story research in fragile contexts to improve their understanding of local priorities for each country, especially in early phases of their arrival.





## Samenvatting

Staatsvorming en vredesopbouw zijn belangrijker dan ooit. Recente schattingen geven aan dat ruim zestig staten als zwak of mislukt worden beoordeeld (Kraus, 2010:6). Dit komt neer op gebied met een gecombineerd inwonersaantal van meer dan twee miljard mensen. Het mislukken van staten veroorzaakt enorme vluchtelingenstromen, binnenlandse bevolkingsverplaatsingen, het fenomeen kindsoldaten en ernstig vrouwenmisbruik. Het *High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* (2004) van de Verenigde Naties beoordeelt tekortschietende staten als een van de grootste bedreigingen voor vrede en stabiliteit op wereldschaal. Ondanks de toenemende aandacht voor staatsvorming is de internationale gemeenschap - dat wil zeggen internationale instituties als de Verenigde Naties (VN), de Europese Unie (EU) en de Organisatie voor Veiligheid en Samenwerking in Europa (OVSE) - zowel bekritiseerd vanwege een gebrek aan legitimiteit en beginselvastheid als vanwege haar 'top-down' benadering bij de wederopbouw van voormalige conflictgebieden als Afghanistan, Oost-Timor en Kosovo (Jasari, 2007:76). Er wordt gesteld dat dergelijke benaderingen geen aandacht hebben voor de specifieke noden van plaatselijke contexten (Nagy, 2008). Wilde (2007, 2008) bespeurt zelfs overeenkomsten tussen internationaal beleid ten aanzien van staatsvorming en koloniale arrangementen uit het verleden.

Dit onderzoek richt zich op deze kritiek en onderzoekt in hoeverre het internationale beeld van de prioriteiten, de successen, en het falen van vredes- en staatsopbouw experimenteel te vergelijken zijn met de lokale perspectieven, en welke lessen hieruit getrokken kunnen worden voor de vredes- en staatsopbouw in Kosovo. In andere woorden, in welke opzichten zijn de lokale en internationale perspectieven te vergelijken? De belangrijkste deelvraag is de volgende: in hoeverre geven biografieën van Kosovaren inzicht in het proces en de limieten van staatsopbouw? Deze onderzoeksvraag omvat de twee doelstellingen van deze studie, namelijk het onderzoeken van lokale theorieën over vredes- en staatsopbouw en het vergelijken van internationale en lokale perspectieven van dit onderwerp. Om deze vraag te beantwoorden zullen zowel lokale als internationale actoren worden beschouwd. Ook worden zowel de standpunten van verschillende groepen vergeleken, als de literatuur over dit onderwerp en de ervaringen van internationale actoren. Hoewel het nog niet eerder toegepast is op dit onderwerp kan deze biografische benadering het begrip van theoretische concepten en hun verschillende betekenissen verdiepen op basis van de grootte en diversiteit van data verzameld in Kosovo. Het onderzoeken van vredes- en staatsopbouw met zowel een biografische als een theoretische benadering is daarom een authentieke, innovatieve en een interdisciplinaire methodologische benadering.

Wat de onderzoeksresultaten betreft, stelt het hoofdstuk over staatsvorming dat meer aandacht moet gaan naar maatschappelijke dan institutionele staatsvorming. Het hoofdstuk over natievorming stelt voor om etnische en burgerlijke natievorming te verzoenen door nationalisme opnieuw te integreren. Het hoofdstuk over vredesopbouw stelt voor om meer te focussen op een instrumentele verzoening die samenleven aanmoedigt, en niet het leven in gescheiden gemeenschappen. Op theoretisch vlak stelt deze thesis twee manieren voor om lokale theorieën over staat, vrede en natievorming te 'lokaliseren'. Dit woord verwijst enerzijds naar het ontwikkelen van specifieke en concrete lokale theorieën, in plaats van slechts te alluderen naar die mogelijkheid op metatheoretisch niveau, zoals post-liberale benaderingen doen. Het betekent anderzijds de mogelijkheid om lokale theorie te identificeren in een plaats, om het dus te 'lokaliseren', door het gebruik van de *life stories* benadering. Het onderzoek verdiept ten slotte ons begrip van het buitenlands beleid en van ontwikkelingsstrategieën van post-conflict staten en meldt een reeks innovatieve en empirische gefundeerde aanbevelingen voor

staats- en vredesoverleg. Concreet betekent dit dat internationale instellingen onderzoek gebaseerd op *life stories* kunnen integreren in fragile contexten om zo hun begrip van lokale prioriteiten voor elk land te verbeteren, voornamelijk in de vroege fase van hun aankomst.

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