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Propositions

Theoretically, it is important to “localize” local theories of state, peace and nation-building, for example by looking at the life stories of people involved in post-conflict reconstruction.

The international community needs to produce forceful decisions when it concerns the general interest of the local population and internationals.

In state-building, the focus should shift, at least partly, from the goal of institutional reconstruction to assisting society to maintain (or recreate) a functioning social fabric. At the same time, the positive social practices that existed before the conflict should be preserved as much as possible.

The international community should prioritize education, rather than only capacity building, in order to succeed in contextualized state-building in the longer term.

In nationbuilding, it is important to reconcile ethnic and civic nation-building, for example by re-incorporating nationalism.

Pursuing ethnic nation-building in addition to civic nation-building may contribute to sustainable nation-building and peace.

In peace building, more focus should lie on instrumental reconciliation, which fosters living together rather than living as separate communities.

Promoting reconciliation through projects targeting specific sectors (health, education, banking), marginalized group (women, children and youth), and profitability in disputed zones could be more acceptable to the local population and un-cooperative local elites. This could facilitate access to these areas for the international community.

Providing opportunities for different ethnicities to work together on a project towards a common concrete goal could be a good way to promote gradual reconciliation (amongst individuals at least).

The local social fabric consists of various local social practices that must be identified, respected, and incorporated in an overall strategy of state and peace building.

International institutions and local governments can integrate life story research in fragile contexts to improve their understanding of local priorities for each country.