

“Prêt-a-Porter States”: How the McDonaldisation of State-Building Misses the Mark in Afghanistan

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1. Introduction¹

The lead article’s question of whether it is states that are failing or those who are trying to (re-) build them sparked my interest, as I have been trying to understand the utility of a top-down approach to state-building ever since I got involved in the ‘Afghanistan project’ (Schmeidl 2007a, 2007b). While it may be impossible to eliminate biases completely, I want at least to make my own transparent.

From the onset I would like to highlight that I am commenting on state-building from the perspective of a social worker and sociologist who has spent most of her career working with people at the grass-roots level. Secondly, at least in the Afghan case, I am not at all a detached observer but an involved practitioner, who may have been inadvertently promoting and developing “hybrid state-building” without thinking of it as such. I have been working on peacebuilding in Afghanistan – which, according to Susan Woodward, *is* essentially state-building² – since 2002. Between 2002 and 2005 I worked with the Afghan Civil Society Forum on giving civil society a voice and role in the peacebuilding process, among others in the constitution-making process and both elections (presidential and parliamentary). In 2003, I also helped

¹ This article has been informed profoundly by my work in Afghanistan, especially with The Liaison Office, which I helped co-found in 2003. I would like to acknowledge in particular that conversations with Masood Karokhail have greatly influenced my own thinking. In addition, I have greatly benefited from insights gained while conducting research with several TLO researchers, notably Shafiqullah Ziai, TLO’s Head of Research. Most of TLO’s research findings are not yet published, but should become available to the public in 2009. Nevertheless, the arguments in this article are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of The Liaison Office, other than *Box 1* which is based on internal TLO documents and contributions by Masood Karokhail.

² Statement during a panel she chaired at the International Studies Association, San Francisco (2008). Boege et al. also seem to use state- and peacebuilding interchangeably.

develop the Tribal Liaison Office (TLO, nowadays The Liaison Office), which I have since worked for in an advisory and development capacity (Karokhail/Schmeidl 2006). The TLO's mission is somewhat akin to the hybrid state-building proposed by Boege and his colleagues, proclaiming "to differ from state-building that directly or indirectly only emphasizes modernity" by aiming at "facilitating the formal integration of communities and their traditional governance structures within Afghanistan's newly emerging governance, security and reconstruction framework".³

In light of the above, this short comment focuses on lessons drawn from Afghan state-building from the perspective of a hybrid scholar-practitioner looking at states from the bottom-up, rather than from the top-down. The focus on Afghanistan is not only fitting due to my own experience, especially while working with The Liaison Office. The country also seems to provide some perfect examples of hybrid political orders, albeit ones that have been frequently associated with state failure (i.e. when the communist government fell in 1992 and when the Taliban fell in 2001; see Stahel 2007, 42).

2. The State of Afghanistan

According to the "quantifiable" index of state failure tracking the performance of 177 countries – linked to four social, two economic and six political and military indicators – Afghanistan was recently ranked as the seventh-least stable country in the world, coming in high above the warning range for imminent failure (Fund for Peace 2008). A state that actually provides services (and controls the means of violence and territorial integrity) – something that we take very much for granted in the west – does not currently exist in Afghanistan. The average Afghan citizen's lack of trust in his/her state is most easily illustrated by the reluctance (even resentment) to pay taxes to an entity that seems to be neither representative nor able to provide security or other basic needs (such as electricity, employment, education or health care).

Unlike the Afghan public and some Afghan experts, it took many international actors several years to realize that the Afghan state, which is mostly limited to Kabul and a few other major cities anyway, was not doing so well; something I have previously compared to Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale of *The Emperor's New Clothes* (Schmeidl 2007a). Today, seven years into the Afghan state-building project, everybody seems to agree on one thing: the Emperor has caught the flu, and it might prove to be fatal. Yet, instead of trying to objectively diagnose the causes of the illness and search for a possible cure, the blaming game has started. While successes are readily claimed – even if they are short-lived – failures are always seen as the responsibility of somebody else; be it the neighbours of the Afghan government, the insurgency, poor governance and corruption, ill-advised external state-building efforts or the backwardness of rural Afghanistan, which is presumably simply too pre-modern, wild and unruly to come together into an orderly state project.

One of the conditions (or ailments) of the Afghan state seems to be an 'infestation' of what Boege et al. call hybrid political orders, accompanied by a mismatch between *de jure* and *de facto* state power (Wilder/Lister 2007). The latter is currently not only exercised by localised strongmen but markedly also by the Taliban insurgency (see Schetter 2007; ICOS 2008). According to Andreas Wimmer and Conrad Schetter (2002, 8-9) this is not a new development, as the Afghan state historically was largely restricted to cities, with the vast rural areas lying under the control of non-state power holders. Amin Saikal (2005) calls the phenomenon "Afghanistan's weak state and strong society". Yet it begs the question how the modern state in Afghanistan can be considered to be failing if it historically never really existed outside the country's cities to begin with.

³ TLO DRAFT Constitution (2008; first drafted in 2003, first revised in 2007 and currently under review).

It is here that the lead authors' argument comes into focus: the source of state failure possibly does not lie within the states (or societies) themselves, but rather in the western-centric Weberian ideal-type *model* of a state, which hardly exists outside the west (or more narrowly the OECD region), but which the international community nevertheless tries to sell to the Global South with a 'prêt-a-porter' mentality.

2.1 State-Builders' Blindness or Bankruptcy?

Even if there are debates on what to call it, a lot of attention and resources have been spent on the post-2001 international engagement in Afghanistan, which is clearly marred by a conflict of interests (building peace vs. fighting terrorism, cf. Schmeidl 2007a). Both Astri Suhrke (2006) and Andrew Wilder and Sarah Lister (2007, 85) consider it to be state-building, albeit largely top-down and without a coherent overarching strategy. Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart (2008, 12), frequently cited experts on state-building who both worked on the Afghan project between 2001 and 2005, on the other hand, argue that "the international community was resistant to the concept of state building" in Afghanistan, focusing instead on "old approaches [...] wrapped in the language of state building". These old approaches or state-building 'clothes', whether invisible or ill-fitting, are what Wilder and Lister (2007, 85) call manageable technocratic solutions rather than coherent strategies. I would call it a 'McDonaldization' of state-building (Schmeidl 2007a).

This McDonaldization emphasizes not so much the quality of the end product but the speed in production (fast vs. slow food). While western states have had decades, if not centuries, to form, new states are expected to shape up essentially overnight. Yet "building state and security takes *time*, and it is not clear that the wider world is prepared in all cases to make the commitment" (Maley 2007, 12; original emphasis). Lakhdar Brahimi (2007, 17) contends in retrospect that the "'light footprint' never meant for us a 'rushed footprint'". The international community must understand that state-building efforts require long-term commitments of human and financial resources". Nevertheless, as Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, a post Brahimi held from 3 October 2001 to 31 December 2004, he not only assisted in crafting the Bonn Agreement, but also oversaw the race to complete it: constitution (2003), presidential elections (2004), parliamentary elections (2005) – to mention just a few milestones. Such a speed may not only lead to burn out among some of the hard-working aid workers, but also exhaust the population that has to sprint through a societal formation process.

'Prêt-a-porter' state-building also seems to take little pride in exporting the kind of state that those delivering it would likely prefer themselves, rather settling for second or even third best (the fine difference between *haute couture* and *prêt-a-porter*). Boege et al. (in this volume, 19) point out that colonial authorities acted by and large in an authoritarian manner abroad, even if they themselves came from democratic states. The constitution-making process in Afghanistan is a fitting current-day example. Those involved judged it as "reasonably successful" in retrospect (Brahimi 2007, 8; Rubin 2004; Brandt 2005), but had been far more optimistic at the time of involvement. Observers were more critical all along; and one particular Crisis Group report (2003) drew intense criticism by Brahimi, who later on conceded: "in hindsight, I strongly believe that it would have been much better to keep that [i.e. the 1964] constitution for a few more years rather than artificially decide (as it was done under strong external pressure) that a brand new constitution had to be produced barely two years after the adoption of the Bonn Agreement" (Brahimi 2007, 8). In hindsight, Brahimi also argued that "*elections* are not the ultimate aim of a peace process and must be used as a mechanism

to engender deliberation, participation and national reconciliation; they should not be turned into a superficial and hurried public demonstration of doubtful democratization” (Brahimi 2007, 4; original emphasis). Still, while treating elections as a logistics exercise rather than a democratic process only reached its peak after Brahimi had left (during the 2005 parliamentary elections run by Peter Erben), it was Brahimi who oversaw the (hastily called) 2004 presidential elections.

Furthermore, there seems to be some disagreement on the final vision of the ‘ideal state’ to be built, leading to rather diverse assistance models and possible contradictions. The pillar approach adopted for Afghanistan, where “different donor countries were given lead responsibility for reform of different sectors”, has painfully illustrated this point (Nixon 2007, 9). More profoundly, there might even be disagreement within pillars. Thus, Afghanistan was modelled according to the presidential system of the US (organised around the figure-head of President Karzai), when in fact its regional and cultural diversity may perhaps rather have called for a parliamentary system à la federal Germany or canton-orientated Switzerland. Similarly, the European engagement in Afghanistan (EUPOL) has tried to emphasize civilian policing, while the US has been happy to have military and private security contractors train the police force.

Finally, there has also been a strong focus on modernity (Suhrke 2007) and urban centres, arguably creating “one of the most highly centralised states in the world” (Wilder/Lister 2007, 86). The East Timor case presented in Boege et al. (in this volume, 25/26) as “misguided ‘state-building from scratch’” creates a chilling feeling of *déjà vu* in Afghanistan, giving the impression of state-building as an exercise where lessons seem neither to be observed, learned nor transferred. This gives some merit to the argument that peace and state-building are being McDonaldized: how else can one explain the similarity in misguided approaches between Afghanistan and East Timor? Here are just a few examples of what could be observed in both countries:

- Centralized state-building in the capital cities – the islands of Kabul (and Dili) – ignoring the vast rural areas, which leads to a marginalisation of local culture and rural communities: “the vast majority of Afghans interact with the state institutions at the provincial and district levels, yet the near exclusive focus of state-building efforts from 2002-2005 was to strengthen central government” (Wilder/Lister 2007, 85);
- Crucial misperceptions of external actors and political elites who had spent a long time in (western) exile about issues such as the importance of rural communities, traditional structures, tribal police and sub-national governance;
- Ignoring the existence and functioning of ‘traditional’ governance institutions and assuming that state-building could start from scratch (only because the Taliban system had been toppled).

The outcomes are rather similar as well: in both countries there is now a difficult security situation, leading some to interpret that democracy and the local culture are antagonistic (with a condescending undertone of “they just don’t get it”). Democracy appears imposed, far from what had been promised to the Afghan people (what respectable democracy allows warlords to be elected into parliament?). The state which the international community propped up – and which is considered to be failing again – is not seen as inherently Afghan (or East Timorese). Hence many Afghans now feel caught in a war between two entities who do not represent them (the insurgency vs. the Afghan government in Kabul), but who still expect the population to pay the bill (in taxes and casualties). Finally, there has been a resurgence of customary practices that were initially repressed (in Afghanistan both the communist government and later the Taliban tried to do this and failed). Currently about 80-90

percent of all disputes are resolved through informal mechanisms (Barfield et al. 2006; Centre for Policy and Human Development 2007).

2.2 The Difference between Traditional Customary Institutions and Warlords

While I am in general agreement with Boege and his colleagues, I would like to ensure that the idea of hybrid political orders does not end up being adopted as an uncritical fad, where the pendulum swings from one extreme (“modernise everything”) to the other (“embrace everything that appears even remotely traditional”). The discussion so far has demonstrated that Afghanistan actually serves as a good case for questioning whether hybrid state-building in itself is *always* a desirable outcome, especially in the judgement of the country’s citizens, or whether in certain situations a ‘new state’ indeed needs to be created.

The biggest issue might be how to deal with strongmen and warlordism. Boege et al. could come across as inadvertently endorsing hybrid models with warlords in the ‘driver’s seat’ by arguing that “warlord systems are embedded in the local societal structure of clans and tribes (as witnessed in Afghanistan or Somalia)” (in this volume, 23). This is an extremely tricky issue in Afghanistan, as I have met no Afghan whose preferred choice is to live in a state run by warlords (cf. Wilder/Lister 2007). While Afghans initially looked to the Taliban for security, they only reluctantly do so nowadays, as the insurgency itself has changed to comprise more arbitrary and criminal elements that seem to impose highly skewed governance in their own favour.⁴

Furthermore, a clear distinction needs to be made in Afghanistan between what was there before the war, when indeed “tribal and religious leaders created ‘micro-societies’ that related to central and other powers on the basis of negotiation and patronage” (Lister 2007, 3), and what exists now. It is crucial to understand that tribal structures have been damaged and fragmented through the years of wars. In particular, the leadership has changed: tribal actors who gained their legitimacy through being supported by communities and linked to customary institutions have been slowly supplanted by *jand salar* (gunmen, warlords) who tend to be powerful because of their military might (ibid; Wilder/Lister 2007). Apart from some cases where traditional leaders have become strongmen, warlords have mostly risen to power more arbitrarily than tribal elders, who either inherit or achieve their status through specific qualifications. Warlords thus often disregard (or go against) traditional law (*pashtunwali*) and are hence often considered to be criminals within customary systems (Schetter et al. 2007; see also Guistozzi 2005; Guistozzi/Noor Ullah 2006). In such a situation it is very difficult to simply ‘rebuild’ what once was when looking for hybrid political orders, although this is advocated by some in a desperate attempt to find a solution for Afghanistan’s plight (Johnson/Mason 2008).

The rule of strongmen in Afghanistan is associated with near anarchy, as it was post 1992 when the Communist government finally fell: *mujahideen* factions were unable to reach power-sharing agreements, with most commanders running their area of influence as private fiefdoms. Infighting and the elimination of competition were common, as were extortion and human rights abuses. Only direct clients of warlord patrons stood to benefit from the hybrid political orders during these times, and not the general population, which was one reason why the Taliban was initially warmly welcomed. They effectively put an end to the rule of *mujahideen* factions in 1996, pushing them further and further north until they only held about ten percent of Afghanistan’s territory. At this point, rural areas were ruled once again by hybrid political orders that had existed prior to the war and tended to be based on customary institutions. Similarly to Afghan kings, the Taliban had

⁴ Ongoing research by The Liaison Office in Southern Afghanistan, to be published in 2009.

power-sharing arrangements with these hybrid political orders, which allowed them to provide relative peace and security nation-wide, albeit as an authoritarian regime (that nevertheless had regional variations due to this arrangement).

The post-2001 intervention changed this, when the US army utilised the Northern Alliance as a ground-force to oust the Taliban (Andres et al. 2006). A new period was ushered in, where the international community arguably handed victory not to the Afghan people, but to a minority of armed militia. William Maley (2006) describes how the 2001 Bonn agreement accommodated strongmen by handing out ministries as war bounty to different factions, starting the new “‘big tent’ approach to government” (Wilder/Lister 2007, 88) which inadvertently endorsed hybrid political orders that most ordinary Afghans would have opposed.⁵ International military actors also strengthened *de facto* power holders in their war against terrorism (ibid). Wilder and Lister (2007, 85) argue that the failure to develop a state-building strategy, which would have attempted to systematically engage subnational institutions and “bring them back under the authority of central government”, created the current impasse. A vicious circle thus began, where a weak central state relied on co-opting *de facto* power holders to run its affairs in the provinces (largely without checks and balances or any reprimand for human rights violations), allowing these power holders access to development resources that in turn increased their control and status.

Considering how Afghanistan has inadvertently emerged with strong hybrid political orders of this kind while the small central state appears to be failing does indeed call for “more research [...] on the potential capacities (and limits or deficiencies) of hybrid political orders, to determine in more detail how hybridity can be utilised for peacebuilding, good (enough) governance and development” (Boege et al. in this volume, 30/31). Such research may also help to identify actors within hybrid orders that should be treated as absolute spoilers and hence neither be accommodated nor co-opted, but sidelined.

3. Finding Appropriate Forms of Complementarity and Interaction: A Role for Civil Society

Boege and his colleagues state that “the best outcome of the novel approach to state-building [...] would be that new forms of governance emerge: combining state institutions, customary institutions and new elements of citizenship and civil society in networks of governance which are not introduced from the outside, but embedded in the societal structures on the ground” (in this volume, 31). Figuring out how to achieve this, however, means reaching out into the ‘great unknown’, something many are afraid of. In Afghanistan, the assumption that it would be better to deal with the ‘devil you know’ (by co-opting warlords) than the ‘devil you don’t know’ (customary institutions) turned out to be wrong. In the end, warlords and strongmen seem to have hijacked the international agenda for their own purposes, rendering the embryonic central state powerless.

Working out organic approaches to hybrid state-building necessitates the involvement of civil society, both modern and traditional. But while abundant lip service is being paid to participatory approaches (see for example Brandt 2005 on the constitution-making process), civil society engagement in the Afghan state-building process so far can be considered symbolic at best, and a fig leaf approach at worst. Even though civil society has played a role throughout the past years, it has never been meaningfully engaged in the state-building exercise (Schmeidl 2007a, 2007b), with both the Afghan government and the international community in fact trying to control and instrumentalise civil society, even seeing it as a threat to a strong state. In the constitution-

⁵ One of the questions raised most frequently during nation-wide civic education outreach campaigns by the Afghan Civil Society Forum and its partners during 2003-2005 was when there would be an end to warlord rule.

making process, for example, civil society involvement was seen as a potential threat to a modern constitution – or the kind of constitution that external actors and Afghan elites found appropriate. In this instance, a true opportunity for arriving at a hybrid social order was missed.

The experience of The Liaison Office⁶ (TLO), which started work in late 2003, illustrates further the difficulty of endorsing hybrid political orders (Karokhail/Schmeidl 2006). In the beginning, a lot of work had to be done to convince donors to support a project that did not deal with modern structures but engaged with traditional institutions, attempting to link them to the emerging modern state. There was great resistance for three reasons. First, there was a fear of generating processes that ran parallel to the modern state-building effort – international actors seemed unable to envision the existence of hybrid state forms. This continues to date: working with traditional tribal *shuras*, for example, is seen as competing with (or even contradicting) the National Solidarity Programme’s approach of working through the newly set-up community development councils (CDCs).

A second source of resistance were fears that structures violating international human rights law (especially the rights of women) would be strengthened. Indeed, traditional customary structures are all male and tend to treat women as secondary citizens, which goes against a modern outlook. Such opposition, however, was voiced far less when it came to accommodating strongmen, although their treatment of women is similar. Nevertheless, if we try to work with organic hybrid political orders, we may need to accept that their ethics system differs from ours, emphasizing community over individual rights. Yet engagement does not necessarily mean endorsement, as long as one enters into dialogue with existing structures on the different views regarding individual and women’s rights, which TLO has done. And with continuing development and education, the ‘modern’ in hybrid political orders is likely to win the upper hand.

The third reason was that traditional structures were equated with the Taliban; this issue was largely raised by USAID representatives, who ended up not providing funding. This is an intriguing objection from a country that had no problem with arming militia elements in its fight against terrorism and that is currently considering arming tribal elements in its fight against the insurgency.⁷ Nevertheless, one has to broach the issue that in Afghanistan the search for a hybrid political order could include elements that may at one point have been part of the insurgency. This is because the cost of exclusion may be even greater, as the current situation shows (the Taliban were excluded from the Bonn Agreement). The Liaison Office’s approach promotes dialogue that tries to encourage linkages; such an inclusive approach should encompass all parties that are interested in a peaceful future for Afghanistan. Currently this includes, among others, communities that have been alienated and disenfranchised by the Afghan government, and often associate themselves with the insurgency due to grievances and for lack of better options.

Despite these early criticisms, however, donors have started to see The Liaison Office as a viable partner for engagement in rural Afghanistan, especially in less secure areas. At times it appears as if the pendulum has swung from a fear of too uncritically embracing collaboration with traditional structures to literally ‘leaping’ onto the tribal bandwagon. While this has assisted TLO in increasing its work beyond the southeast, where it originally emerged from, it has also raised it to a level where the Afghan government has started showing concerns about competition, nearly closing down the organisation in mid-2008.⁸

⁶ The Tribal Liaison Office was recently requested by the Afghan government to drop the word ‘tribal’ from its name, which was considered inappropriate.

⁷ “US may rely more on Afghanistan’s tribal militia: report”, in: AFP, 11 October 2008 (available at http://rawstory.com/news/afp/US_may_rely_more_on_Afghanistan_s_t_10112008.html); “To fight Taliban, US eyes Afghan tribes”, in: *The Christian Science Monitor*, 16 October 2008.

⁸ The Afghan Civil Society Forum had a similar experience during the constitution-making process, although this fell short of attempted closure, when it was barred from doing consultations due to the government’s fear of losing ownership of a politically sensitive process (Schmeidl 2007b).

Box 1 – Some Lessons from The Liaison Office on the Search for Hybrid Political Orders

- TLO bases its work on the understanding that traditions in rural areas, although affected by three decades of war and social upheaval, still matter more than external actors may be willing to admit (cf. Boege et al. in this volume and Hagmann/Hoehne 2009). Networks built on traditional structures, among others, have functioned as an important survival mechanism and point of reference for the Afghan population during the long years of war. Understanding the Afghan experience acknowledges that introducing accelerated change while systematically eroding traditional structures runs into an impasse at best, while igniting long-lasting conflict at worst. Thus, TLO looks for linkages between customary and modern institutions that can ease a transition period – or possibly lead to an organic hybrid political order.
- The Liaison Office itself emerged out of research (Karokhail/Schmeidl 2006) and accordingly, research has become one of its core activities underpinning all others. TLO works within the do-no-harm framework and uses evidence-based programming calling for research prior to any engagement in order to increase knowledge and understanding of traditional structures, their decision-making processes and customary structures. This research especially tries to identify conflict-generating factors between communities (conflict mapping) and the major actors involved (stakeholder mapping), but also local capacities for peace.
- TLO emphasizes a participatory and non-judgemental approach to peace- and state-building, which means including traditional civil society structures and rural elites just as much as modern structures, women and minorities. This means entering into dialogue with traditional leaders without judging their different set of ethics, while nevertheless being aware of such differences and working with them to mutual advantage (e.g. community orientation can help with mobilizing ideas). In such dialogue, one can remind traditional leaders that external actors they wish to engage with have different sets of standards and that collaboration may mean that both make concessions.
- An important element of TLO's work is consultation, which means listening to people's needs and views, but also their solutions. This approach focuses on identifying areas of community contribution and resilience that could be strengthened by external efforts, while trying to fill gaps that may exist as well.
- TLO focuses on working with traditional communities that do not neatly overlap with existing administrative boundaries. This may necessitate some flexibility among donors to collaborate across the geographic spaces they concentrate on (e.g. the Dutch on Uruzgan, DFID in Helmand, the Canadians in Kandahar). TLO has worked on coordinating donor engagement across district and provincial borders. Understanding that geographic spaces of traditional communities are often different from those of states (and, for example, adopting the smaller *wand* or *mantega* system instead of districts) can help development actors channel funds more effectively and with more equity.
- Assistance and development is crucial for addressing community needs (both modern and traditional). In instable regions, however, where local complexities are not understood, development funds may not be channelled adequately and may strengthen alternative power holders (military ones), reinforcing their power (cf. Wilder/Lister 2007).

Here, TLO has tried to ensure linkages between donors and traditional institutions that can prevent a sidelining of funds. This, however, may also endanger TLO, as *de facto* power holders may come to see them as a nuisance.

- A negative experience of TLO has been that its work with existing traditional structures can be and has been seen as a threat to a weak and controlling state. This is especially pertinent when national programmes, such as the National Solidarity Programme with its newly established community development councils, compete for political space with traditional customary structures. If the Afghan state-building approach would allow for hybrid state-building, such a threat would be minimized. Interestingly, the Commission on Conflict Mediation shows that some aspects of hybridity may be acceptable (e.g. in the justice system), depending on the architects of the system.
- A successful example of a small hybrid political system, developed by TLO, is the Commission on Conflict Mediation (CCM), which was facilitated in Khost Province at the request of the provincial governor of Khost in 2006 (TLO 2008). Composed of six respected tribal elders, the commission provides an alternative dispute resolution mechanism akin to western out-of-court arbitration, and effectively serves to include the authority of tribal elders into the formal conflict resolution architecture at the provincial level (the CCM is authorised and supervised by the provincial governor, who selects and refers the cases for the council, signing off on the final decision). Experiences so far demonstrate that the CCM mechanism enables mutually supportive relationships between formal and informal justice systems. In cooperation with the provincial governor, the CCM has so far resolved 23 protracted land disputes, and proactively deescalated emerging conflicts (inter-tribal as well as conflicts involving district-level government bodies). Funded by the US Institute of Peace since late 2008, the activities of the CCM in Khost are going to expand and a new CCM is to be established in Paktia upon the request of the governor.

4. Conclusion

By ignoring local realities, state-builders in Afghanistan (and elsewhere) are setting themselves up for failure, not only due to unrealistic expectations but also due to models that were never likely to succeed in the first place (cf. Boege et al. in this volume; Hagmann/Hoehne 2009; Suhrke 2006, 2007; Woodward 2006). One can only hope that the ideas suggested by Boege and his colleagues may create a paradigm-shift in how state-building is approached in the future. However, international actors need to understand that research is crucial for understanding how best to support hybrid state-building, as it would be unwise to uncritically shift from one extreme to the other. After all, state-building is never conducted in a controlled laboratory environment, but affects the lives of real people, people that can suffer and die.

The Afghan case illustrates the irony (or tragedy) that even though hybrid state-building was never promoted, at least not consciously, it nevertheless emerged out of the weakness of the new administration and ill-conceived actions of the international community. By shying away from some hybrid political orders (e.g. customary institutions) while accommodating others (e.g. military

strongmen, warlords and drug lords), the international community and the Afghan ruling elite enabled the latter to capture the Afghan government, creating a situation “where those with a vested interest in keeping central government institutions weak and ineffective, and their own personal power and regional fiefdoms strong, were placed in positions of authority over the very institutions that needed to be strengthened” (Wilder/Lister 2008, 88). In contrast to a modern state, patronage systems still run strong throughout the current Afghan government (Lister 2007). In addition to strengthening potential spoilers to the state-building project, customary institutions that in the past worked alongside the state (e.g. under the monarchy) have been sidelined, making it much harder now to bring them back to the (hybrid) state-building table.

This may lead to the conclusion that some hybrid models are more successful than others (e.g. Somaliland, cf. Boege et al. in this volume; Hagmann/Hoehne 2009). The key to success could lie in how each of the two systems was achieved: Somaliland by an organic state-building process largely left alone; Afghanistan by an artificial process where external actors reinforced certain power holders over others. Nevertheless, the resources and attention of international actors and neighbouring countries probably also play a role, as next to Somaliland lies Somalia – a country with similar problems to Afghanistan. The tricky part may well be to sort out how to support hybrid political orders without strengthening the wrong actors. Further research, however, is needed to verify this and extract other lessons. Part of it will be to simply listen to the general population: what do they think of existing hybrid political orders? In Afghanistan, a listener would have heard one message early on, loud and clear: that a *warlord* hybrid political order is *not* the solution to Afghanistan’s problem. Other hybrid political orders may be; and these will likely differ for the various regions and social groups in the country.

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