The state is back in again. However, this is not due to a renewed interest in its developmental capacities, be it along the lines of Chalmers Johnson’s deprived developmental state or else. Nor is it because of a growing need for social security provisions, reanimating John Maynard Keynes’ distressed welfare state. Rather it is its seemingly secular decline which raises concerns. From two opposing ends the state as an institution has come under threat. On the one hand, there is increasing talk about “state failure” or “state collapse” which depicts a situation in which the institution of the state has fallen prey to the political vagaries of society and ceases to exist, most notably in today’s Third World. On the other, the potential “eclipse” of the state is looming. Affecting the so-called OECD world in the first place, such a perception refers to the impact of globalisation, a process in which the economic forces of society have made the state an increasingly redundant institution.

This raises important questions: Does the squeezing of the state, once considered the most efficient “organising principle of social life”, indicate that superior forms have arrived and that the universal state system has passed its zenith? Or does it conversely point to a more fundamental societal disease which, among other things, needs to be remedied through a resurrection of the state? Or, from quite a different angle, is it that the two apparently complementary processes in fact do not have anything in common, except for possibly revealing different stages of development and the time-lags behind the back of the puissance

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1 This would be in accordance with earlier calls, see Peter Evans, Dietrich Reuschemeyer, Theda Skocpol (eds.), Bringing the State Back In, Cambridge (CUP), 1985.
forte of globalisation. So far neither the practical responses nor analytical scrutiny provide compelling answers.

It may not come as a great surprise that state failure, even if it happens at remote places on the globe, is not much welcome by the great power guardians of an international system exclusively composed of and based on states. Yet it is not just the systemic failure that raises concerns. The policy implications have proved even more troubling, since failed states produce a considerable fallout by threatening regional security and because of the refugees and banditry they foster, the human rights they abridge and their inability to forestall starvation and disease. Globalisation and the concurrent globalised watchman state, however, are very much in tune with Anglo-Saxon ideological prescriptions and considered a sign of systemic improvement rather than failure. Although the retreat of the state from the market may contrary to state failure produce some immediate benefits, it too entails considerable risks, at least in the medium- and long-term. Both the Asian financial crisis in the recent and the world economic crisis in a more distant past may be telling, though admittedly controversial, examples.4

Academically both phenomena, state failure as well as state eclipse, have proved rather controversial subjects, though one should note a major difference between the two: in the case of globalisation the mere fact of both, the character of economic processes and their alleged impact on the state, is highly contested and has produced a rapidly mounting stock of literature.5 By contrast state failure, be it in Africa or anywhere else, sends a unanimous message back home which can hardly be ignored or disputed. It is therefore the basic reasons and the individual scope of failures which have provoked controversies. And it is the consequences ranging from the management by the international community to the – possibly

novel, but in any case fundamental – systemic lessons failed states convey which have led to fairly contradictory answers.

In today’s world state failure is predominantly a Third World phenomenon much concentrated in Africa where the majority of the 49 sub-Saharan states seems currently at risk. A recent survey reports no less than ten cases of state collapse and more than twenty where state authority is being severely threatened. As cases of complete collapse Congo (formerly Zaire), Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Somalia immediately come to mind, whereas states such as Sudan, Chad or Guinea-Bissau may be less obvious and more controversial cases of failure. However, failed states are not necessarily confined to that part of the world which is allegedly still harbouring the laggards of global development. Just to the contrary can failure been conceived as an integral part throughout the history of state-making, as Charles Tilly pointed out:

“Most of the European efforts to build states failed. The enormous majority of the political units which were around to bid for autonomy and strength in 1500 disappeared in the next few centuries, smashed or absorbed by other states-in-the-making. The substantial majority of the units which got so far as to acquire a recognizable existence as states during those centuries still disappeared. And of the handful which survived or emerged into the nineteenth century as autonomous states, only a few operated effectively – regardless of what criterion of effectiveness we employ. The disproportionate distribution of success and failure puts us in the unpleasant situation of dealing with an experience in which most of the cases are negative, while only the positive cases are well-documented.”

It may be due to this legacy of short memories that today talk is predominantly on state failure in the Third World whereas Europe not only provides the historical foundation of the international state system, but also the shining example to be replicated everywhere else. But it may equally be that the militant, virtually Darwinian character of the selection process, referred to above, made this particular model such an expansionist force. On a global scale, however, the European state has been far from an easy fit, as Christopher Clapham with reference to Africa quite understandably complains:

“The encounter between Africa and the Westphalian assumptions of sovereign statehood, built into the practice of European powers and the international system that

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6 See Die Zeit, 18 May 2000, p. 3.
8 And it could possibly make one of Georg Sørensen’s “wrong answers”, i.e. lack of time, appear in a more favourable light, see his contribution “War and state making – why doesn’t it work in the Third World?”, for the Failed States Conference, April 10-14, 2001 in Florence.
they created, underlies the entire modern history of the continent. It has been an awkward, ambiguous, unsatisfactory, and often indeed tragic combination. “9

The “tragic” consequences of the European model of governance, having been “encountered” in Africa partly by colonial imposition partly by voluntary adoption, led him to conclude that something must be wrong with the model - rather than with the recipient. The claim is fairly straightforward: state failure in Africa should be accepted as a given and “it would be wise to recognise that the brief period in which states covered the whole inhabited world has now passed, and that a reversion to patterns of international activity characteristic of previous eras is now called for”.10 Others point even more radically into the same direction calling for a fundamental overhaul of the international system and its “statist” foundation. Accordingly the end of stateness having already come about in Africa demonstrates the future of the entire globe and means nothing but a reversion to “historical normality: this had been neither the state nor its monopoly of violence but non-statehood (Nichtstaatlichkeit) and the manifold forms of law and social control beyond the state”.11

Though by no means universally shared within the community, it is probably no accident that such views are most popular among Africanists. By deriving normative relief from empirical failures a renewed clash between universalism and the particularistic predicament seems in the offing. This is by no means of only academic interest but entails serious practical implications. In terms of Official Development Assistance, for instance, it raises the question as to whether it is worthwhile to invest efforts into recreating states that have failed or else consider this exercise to be in vain and concentrate on alternative approaches.

Certainly, contrary to its evocation, the state is neither empirically nor conceptionally an eternal (or for that matter: statist) phenomenon marking the end of history. It rather occupies a peculiar place in time and space and may thus one day become outmoded. However, as long as alternative models of governance have neither convincingly grown out of the state nor challenged it in a revolutionary, that is constructive, way the state is far from having passed its future. Moreover, history suggests that Hegel’s “artifice of reason” has found quite a strong candidate in the state.

10 Christopher Clapham, Failed States and Non-States in the Modern International Order, paper prepared for the conference on Failed States, Florence, 7-10 April 2000.
A Failed Onslaught on the State

Right from its intellectual inception and more so from its coming into being around the 16th century, the “modern” state has found as many ideological adherents as opponents. But the first real force to challenge the state as an institution was presented by the socialist movement. By the 19th century, the basic reasoning went, the state had decisively turned from an erstwhile force of emancipation and modernisation into a thoroughly repressive one. It thus simply had to do away with. However, neither has the socialist movement ever found a common denominator in its contemplating the future of the state, nor has reality in post- as well as pre-revolutionary conditions ever provided an indication that the state might indeed be ready to give up. Just the opposite.

Having been shrouded in the darkness of political failure these days, it might be worth reminding that the socialist movement of the 19th century produced two “virtually diametrically opposed concepts of the state”. On the one hand there was a concept that on the background of the absolutist police state perceived the state as an alien institution in itself and thus favoured the victory of society over the state. Charles Fourier, Max Stirner, William Godwin and Piotr Kropotkin may be named as among the most prominent proponents. On the other there were those who, having studied the French Revolution and having read Hegel, were in favour of an institution to tame the particularistic powers of and within society. It was exactly for this reason that Ferdinand Lassalle, for instance, heavily opposed the liberal “watchman state” content with protecting property and the individual. By contrast he presented his “labour class concept” which was based on the assumption that without the state neither liberty could be secured nor the state of nature be overcome. In an equally affirmative understanding of the state as empowering the suppressed individual Louis Blanc conceived his famous notion: “Homme du peuple, l’état c’est vous.”

The categorical distinction between state and society which informed both approaches was analytically insufficient but politically expedient. With Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels it was just the reverse, though in the short term they became the ultimate driving force of the

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12 Eduard Bernstein, Der Sozialismus einst und jetzt. Streitfragen des Sozialismus in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, Stuttgart (Dietz), 1922, p. 76.
socialist movement. According to them it was barely nonsense to think of the state as distinct from society. In capitalist conditions its essential function was thus to provide and secure the basic conditions for the capital to reproduce itself, the suppression of the labour movement included. In socialist conditions it had to organise the transition to its becoming superfluous, the suppression of previous exploiters included. And beyond that it was to be seen, though the Communist Manifesto provided at least a mobilising sense of direction:

“When in the course of development class differences have disappeared and production has been concentrated in the hands of the associated individuals, then public power will lose its political character. The political power in its real sense is the organised violence of one class to suppress another. (...) En lieu of the old bourgeois society with its classes and class contradictions there will be an association in which the free evolution of everybody is the precondition for the free evolution of all.”

This promise prevailed into the initial stages of the first proletarian state, in spite of the fact that this state right from the beginning had embarked on quite a different trajectory. Thus N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky in their “Popular Explanation of the Program of the Communist Party of Russia: The ABC of Communism” – one of the most comprehensive accounts of the clash between the benign concept and the malign reality - reaffirmed that

“In a communist society there will be no classes. But if there will be no classes, this implies that in communist society there will likewise be no State. (...) Since there is no class war, the State has become superfluous. There is no one to be held in restraint, and there is no one to impose restraint.”

For the time being, however, it still needed the suppressive capabilities of the dictatorship of the proletariat which in the specific Russian conditions had some unwelcome side effects. According to the “ABC” there was the danger of distortions since in the course of civil war

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15 *The ABC of Communism*, by N. Buharin & E. Preobrazhensky, The Communist Party of Great Britain, 1922, p. 74. Since “the social order is like a well-oiled machine” administration in communism was expected to be quite simple: “The main direction will be entrusted to various kinds of book-keeping offices or statistical bureaux.” (p. 74). “There will be no need for special ministers of State, for police and prisons, for laws and decrees – nothing of the sort. (...) The bureaucracy, the permanent officialdom, will disappear. The State will die out.” (p. 75). Unfortunately it would need some time for those conditions to come about: “Two or three generations of persons will have to grow up under the new conditions before the need will pass for laws and punishments and for the use of repressive measures by the worker’s State. Not until then will all the vestiges of the capitalist past disappear. Though in the intervening period the existence of the worker’s State is
and due to the obvious lack of development there appeared a tendency “to a certain degree to promote the reintroduction of bureaucracy into the Soviet system. This is a grave danger for the proletariat. The workers did not destroy the old official-ridden State with the intention of allowing it to grow up again from new roots.” As a remedy the authors offer a “continuous rotation” and that “the entire working population shall be introduced to participate in the State administration.” Their expectation: “The more extensive this participation of the masses is, the sooner will the dictatorship of the proletariat die out.” Yet these were the last vestiges of bold criticism which not much later turned into a deadly risk. Thus the personal fate of Bukharin and Preobrazhensky became the fate of a concept which from its inception drew its inspiration from the mobilising force of dreams rather than from cool rationality which eventually prevailed in the technocratic brutality of power in the Marxist Leninist state.

Ultimately, Marx’s thinking on the state was as much eschatological as all the other preceding and following claims to an end of history. That all societies in history would need a state except for the one which comes next can only be explained in categories of Salvation. Thus Bernstein was right when he denounced Marx’ reasoning on the future state as being “thoroughly petty-bourgeois” and his concrete “communal” proposals a naivety in the tradition of Proudhon. In the industrial (as much as in the post-industrial) age with its need for organising the elaborate division of labour, communication and long-distance transport the state as an institution has become indispensable: “To jump out of the state is an impossibility. One can only change it.” At the same time, however, Marx’ theorising opened new and indeed enlightening avenues for explaining why states have once seen the light of the day and what can be considered their driving forces. But this approach, focused on the reproduction of societies, does by no means stand alone. There are other equally universalist explanations which too have not only generated their peculiar side effects but gained some prominence in explaining state failure.

indispensable, subsequently, in the fully developed communist system, when the vestiges of capitalism are extinct, the proletarian State authority will also pass away” (p. 75).

16 Ibid., pp. 195-96.
State Failure and the State System – Primacy of Foreign Policy?

“To be a sovereign state today one needs only to have been a formal colony yesterday. All other considerations are irrelevant.”18 Indeed, turning erstwhile colonial expanses into demarcated states has proved as easy as the appropriation of originally uncharted territory by those colonial powers a century earlier. Beyond that, however, and in regions where the colonial status of the territory at stake is contested, state-building processes have proved much more delicate – and bloody as among others the cases of Yugoslavia, Russia and Indonesia demonstrate. Jackson’s assertion thus only affects the smaller part of the globe and is certainly not indicative of the functioning of today’s global state system.

Yet in the post-colonial world the easy start has had obvious consequences which led Robert Jackson to question on principal grounds as to whether those states really qualify as states. He makes this point enunciating “quasi-states” as the most salient feature of the state system, at least in Africa. These quasi-states are a failure in themselves, “an alien institution” largely created from the outside and based on nothing but international recognition, therefore merely displaying “juridical” rather than “empirical statehood”:

“In sum, Africans were catapulted by the rush of events into the States system of the later twentieth century with very limited preparation for large-scale self-government and still attached to indigenous practices and institutions of which most were rooted in kinship duties and clan or tribal (ethnic) identities that were contrary to the obligations and other requirements of modern sovereign statehood.”19

At the starting point this diagnosis is hardly questionable, since the many efforts to detect pre-colonial state-building processes in Africa have remained rather inconclusive. But does it forty years later still explain the widespread failure of the state as an institution in this part of the world? Georg Sørensen thinks it does. In his three “better answers” to the question why states do not really take roots in the Third World the “certified life-insurance, deposited with the United Nations” and allowing ruthless “statesmen” to do whatever they want within the confines of their sacrosanct borders, not only comes first but also takes precedence. The other two, the “price tag” of inequality in the world economy, are either a mere intervening variable or in the case of the varying impact of different colonialisms an argument for differences and

thus beyond the scope of a paper which treats the Third World as an essentially homogenous group – at least in terms of state failure.\textsuperscript{20} 

The argument as put forward here is based on the intimate relationship between war and state in – particularly European – history. “War made the state, and the state made war” has become a quotation of Charles Tilly the frequent use of which tends to obscure the more nuanced reasons which in his analysis helped the modern state to come by.\textsuperscript{21} In more specific terms he emphasises, for instance, the favourable preconditions in Europe as consisting, at the critical juncture in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, of its cultural homogeneity, the prevalence of the peasantry and the extensive, decentralised but relatively uniform political structures. These factors combined made it “easy to divide the continent up into mutually exclusive territories”.\textsuperscript{22} In light of this Tilly’s thesis certainly deserves a closer look than merely taking it at face value. Obviously, states make war and by means of that they destroy – and create – other states – until today, though it has become more difficult and less universally accepted since World War II. But does that conversely also mean that the war as such explains the state as such? Hardly, because the war as an institution precedes the state as an institution for such a long period of time that beyond the principle of somehow organising groups of people for a common good (or bad) the two things may not necessarily have anything to do with each other.

This, however, would be as much an exaggeration, since the occurrence of the absolutist state with its bureaucratic and war machinery at a specific turning point in European history and on the background of rather specific conditions in society and economy, including the prevailing power arrangements, can hardly be explained without taking notice of the requirements of external warfare at that time – after (and not in parallel) the monopoly of violence on given territories had been established. Otto Hintze dates this European legacy of warfare back to the 17\textsuperscript{th} century and the Franco-Habsburgian fight for supremacy at its outstanding feature:

\textsuperscript{21} Tilly, \textit{op. cit.} (fn. 7), p. 42. The same applies to the emergence of the modern constitutional state where the need for compromises of the rulers to get the ruled aboard their war-mongering has only little contributed whereas the medieval dualism between the secular and clerical power and the extended compromises between the monarchical and feudal powers laid the necessary (institutional as well as behavioural) groundwork.
\textsuperscript{22} Tilly, \textit{op. cit.} (fn. 7), p. 28.
The continuous rivalry between the great powers, variously intermingled with confessional differences, these continuous political tensions, demanding time and again military efforts to rescue and secure the independent existence of the individual states and thus the basis of welfare and culture, in other words: power politics and the policy of a balance of power have created the basis for modern Europe: the state system in international law as well as the absolutist constitutions and the standing armies on the continent.  

Thus the war-and-state thesis is neither novel nor is it, without taking proper account of additional conditions, particularly compelling. And it too has an analytical and a quasi-normative side. Anchored on exactly the opposite edge it luckily enough fell even earlier into oblivion than its Marxist anti-etatiste equivalent. Only a century ago the war-and-state proposition was taken literally in that power politics and the continuous accumulation of whatever made up the state was considered its very essence – and by no means in Germany alone. It is thus an implicit reference to the no-war-failed-state thesis when, for instance, with the advent of the League of Nations the German historian Friedrich Meinecke, far from being a militarist, seriously poses the questions:

“But would not the internal liveliness and the graphic power of the states, the heroism and the spirit of sacrifice of the people extinct in the wake of the extinction of the power struggles. Would then the states not sink down to burned-out volcanos or, as Spengler expressed it succinctly, to fellah states [the historical equivalent to today’s failed states, one might assume]? Isn’t it so that spirit and nature are so inseparably bound together that culture needs a certain fertile ground of barbarism, the rational needs the irrational? Is, after all, the thorough rationalisation of the lives of peoples and states a fortune?”

Only a few years – and less devastating experiences – earlier, the answer was quite clear. Moreover such a question would rarely have been posed though in light of the peculiar 19th century German conditions with allegedly one nation and in fact many states the object of the mobilising desire proved somewhat obscured. For historians of that time it was therefore

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24 Mutual accusations notwithstanding when, for instance, English intellectuals at the beginning of World War I happened to detect in German theorising on that subject a justification of a policy which took the own interest as the inherent right whereas, naturally, in Britain it was just the reverse: “The right is our interest.”

25 Friedrich Meinecke, Die Idee der Staatsräson, München (Oldenbourg), 1925, p. 540.

26 No less a person than Johann Gottlieb Fichte, in his famous Lectures to the German Nation, pointed to the fact that the state might not be enough: “The mere maintenance of the constitution, of the laws, of civil well-being, requires no life properly so called, no original act of will. But when this uniform course is exposed to danger and it is necessary to form new resolutions without the help of the precedent, then there must be a self-acting principle of life. What then is the spirit that can be put at the helm in such a case, that can decide with proper firmness and sureness and without uneasy hesitation, that can have an unquestionable right to demand of everyone it meets, whether he himself consents or not, and if necessary to compel him, to put everything, life included, to hazard? Not the spirit of quiet civic loyalty to the constitution and the laws; no, but the consuming flame of the higher patriotism, which conceives the nation (Volk) as the embodiment of the Eternal; for which the high-minded man devotes himself with joy, and the low-minded man, who only exists for the sake of the
quite natural to detect the essence of state-building in the need to protect oneself against a hostile environment. The question arises as to why this should be rejuvenated today? Certainly not in the normative sense. And analytically it seems a strange irony of history and a paradox to consider the universal recognition which for the first time not only extends to the state system as such but also to its constituent parts, as the ultimate reason for their failure and eventual disappearance. If the state system cannot sustain itself, then, obviously, other forces must be at work to bring change about. These are to be found in society, where else?

**State Failure and Societal Disparities – Domestic Conditions as Root Causes**

Since states have been coming and going all over the globe during the past centuries, there is no reason whatsoever why the many elements influencing state-building and state-failing processes should not be as specific and detailed in Africa or other parts of the Third World than in Europe. State failure in some and its more or less reasonable functioning in a number of other places clearly point to the relevance of particular circumstances preventing it from operating efficiently, anywhere. However, most accounts as to the difficulties of the operations of the state in Africa try to reduce complexity by focusing on one major explanatory determinant. Jeffrey Herbst, for instance, points to low population densities and large spaces which in sharp contrast to Europe made territorial control – and thus state apparatuses - rather irrelevant. However, there was a European answer to exactly the same problem: it was the incongruity between the space to be controlled and the means at the ruler’s disposal which brought about feudalism as an admittedly pre-state organising principle. Nevertheless, the diagnosis of state failure in Africa leads most observers to conclude that the European model has been simply ill-suited, in spite of the obvious fact that the continent “presents a picture of heterogenous state formation” which should defy premature generalisations.

According to the prevalent perception the mere fact of outside imposition in the colonial era “resulted in the creation of a kind of state radically different from any that had existed

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before.”29 This, however, is not universally shared, since according to William Zartman, for instance, African state failure is not a “postcolonial phenomenon, but a condition of nationalist, second- or later-generation regimes ruling over established (i.e., functioning) states”. Neither in Africa nor anywhere else has the state - as a genuinely European invention – proved to be the “wrong institution”, can failure therefore be attributed to a lack of passform:

“It can also be affirmed, perhaps axiomatically, that there is no typical ‘African state” especially adapted to African circumstances, or specifically derived from a precolonial protoinstitution; rather is there a set of functions that need to be performed for the coherence and the effectiveness of the polity – anywhere.”30

There seems to be a consensus that after more than three decades since independence the state in Africa “can no longer be taken as a purely exogenous structure”, rather “a process of reappropriation of institutions of colonial origin“ has taken place with, however, mixed and questionable results.31 Two results stand out. On the one hand, it has been stated that because the state could not emancipate itself but remained “subordinated to the logic of social ties” it acquired a “neo-patrimonial” character and gradually fell prey to the rising power of traditional “intermediaries” such as local chieftains and big men.32 And on the other, it has been emphasised that as a consequence the state in Africa became “one of the most privatized sectors of society”.33 In both cases the centrality of personal and informal relations in conjunction with the unproductive confrontation between an “apparently strong, but in fact hollow state” plus “the weakly integrated society based on clientilism and lacking interest groups capable of conflict as well as compromise” combined to produce the current African crisis.34

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In light of the above one might consider the clash between the two organising principles of society – one based on personal loyalty and one based on functional rationality - as the root cause of state failure in – for that matter – Africa. The state represents only one of the two. It emerged from the uniform principle of personal rule and personal loyalty throughout post-Roman and Medieval Europe without any clear demarcations and with overlapping jurisdictions to become an abstract sovereign entity for which demarcation and exclusivity is equally essential as the inherent right to individual and greatly varying political orders. Only in this sense can a state be considered sovereign which according to Otto Hintze implies: “The extrication of the state as an individual from being embedded in traditional communitarian bonds, the transition to individual self-determination. The preconditions are: independence externally and the exclusiveness of state power domestically.” And it is no accident that the principle of state sovereignty has found its equivalent in capitalism and its economic reason: "It results from the same spirit of increased intensity and rationality of the factory, which accompanies the transition from bounded communitarian relationships to individualistic relationships in society.”

It is hardly surprising that in such conditions the very concept of not only the modern constitutional state but of the state as such in its abstract nature is very difficult to comprehend and even more so to employ. The state represents two opposing things at the same time: it is object of the law and it is its precondition; its operation is defined, regulated and constrained by the law, and at the same time it is exclusively to the state and its organs to make sure that the law is being observed. As an institution it is the highest power, not derived from any other, let alone superior power, yet it cannot be conceived in juxtaposition to the law. Logically such a contradictory dualism, as it were, can hardly function and it is difficult to square with systems of personal loyalty which operate on the basis of unanimity and reciprocity and require at the minimum a visible final authority.

This, however, only depicts a structural dilemma. The question thus arises as to whether the initial clash creates those structural conditions which deadlock the states and societies in question in an eternal status quo. Yet the answer to this question leads straight to the grand project of global change in society and economy of which the state is nothing but an integral part.

What Is To Be Learned from State Failure in Africa and Beyond?

The modern state as we got to know it on today’s global scale not only needed more than a millennium to emerge from the ashes of the Roman empire, it also developed in very peculiar ways, and it did by no means go uncontested. In spite of its peculiar inception the state also became a classical European commodity which was offered around the globe without spending too much time and efforts at scrutinising its marketability. This happened primarily through the mixed blessings of colonialism. And it happened by the virtue of example for the conventional reason that the advanced shows the lagging country “the image of its own future”, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels once aptly stated in the Communist Manifesto. State failure, however, has given rise to a paradigm shift: allegedly it is no longer the developed, but the less developed, it is not Europe, but Africa which experiences today what will be the future of the entire globe. In light of the utter failure of such an outstanding European claim to state-centric progress as represented by real socialism – at times highly appealing to Third World societies - this may not necessarily come as a surprise.

Without taking sides in the dispute between Hegel and his leftwing followers such as Marx as to whether it is the state – the reason, the ethical idea and the determination becoming reality – which keeps society together or vice versa,\(^{37}\) it is quite clear that for any state to function it needs a measure of societal coherence. In the longer run, no state in the world can operate on nothing but coercion. And in constitutional democracies it is hard to clearly distinguish between the state as opposed to the society. On the other hand, the stratification of society and its division of labour require the state as a regulative instrument.

The operations and the failures of states in Africa, however, seem to reveal a different set of problems - not just because the majority of states came into being only forty years ago and states therefore still form a recent phenomenon. In Africa Hegel’s proposition as to the dominance of the state has obviously been invalidated. As opposed to the painful and lengthy European history of gradually decoupling the state as an institution from the individuals who happen to run it, there is no idea, let alone practice, of the state beyond clan and kinship loyalties. Thus the state can merely display the formal semblance of power which can be very

intrusive and oppressive indeed, but does not immediately alter the internalised concept of
rights and duties. Therefore it can become much more easily hostage to only specific (ethnic
or else) groups in society which is not least possible because society within the confines of a
state (and in many porous cases beyond these) maintains its own rules of behaviour based on
personal networks. There seems to be a mutually reinforcing interaction between state and
society which carries the risk of creating a kind of vicious circle. The more the state proves
dysfunctional because segments of society have taken over and serve their particularistic
interests the more personal relations within society need to act as a substitute and as a
precaution against intrusion which in turn again restricts the reach of the state.

There is broad agreement that the state in Africa has proved an inadequate institution which
has been thoroughly privatised by would-be rulers or taken over by traditional intermediaries
and that for these reasons it has seized to operate as such and failed. However, there is much
less agreement as to the consequences in analytical as well as in practical terms. The
perception that failure and the demise of the state entail a process of “regression” detrimental
to development stands in sharp contrast to a view which identifies states as “more of a
hindrance than a help”, at least in parts of the continent. Apart from the strange logic that
the privatisation of the state in Africa is to be overcome by giving up the state rather than
putting an end to its privatisation, the contrasting perceptions directly lead to prescriptions
equally at odds which each other. From the first follows the conventional call for immediate
sanitary action: “In the search for answers, it is first necessary to reaffirm that reconstruction
of the sovereign state is necessary.” The second calls for “alternative strategies” and
boasts, for instance, that there ought to be a future without the state, either because this
represented the “normal case in world history”, or because “there are circumstances in
which states simply cannot be maintained”:

“The principal challenge faced by the international system is not that of restoring states,
but that of dealing with zones in which there is no state, or in which states have become
so enfeebled as to be quite incapable of carrying out what have conventionally been
assumed to be their functions.”

38 See for the first Tetzlaff, op. cit. (fn. 34), p. 308; for the second Clapham, op. cit. (fn. 10), p. 10.
39 Zartman, op. cit. (fn. 30), p. 267. Equally the World Bank in one of its rare acknowledgements that the state
may after all be an indispensable institution: “The urgent priority in Africa is to rebuild state capability through
an overhaul of public institutions and credible checks on the abuse of state power.” The State in a Changing
40 Herbst, op. cit. (fn. 28), p. 120.
41 Von Trotha, op. cit. (fn. 11), p. 265.
42 Clapham, op. cit., (fn. 10), pp. 9, 11. The quote goes on: “This is, however, nothing like such a daunting task
as the state-centred conception on international relations might lead one to assume. The international system has
The proposition that Africa in particular and the Third World in general may have to and
indeed can do without states rests on the optimistic assumption that the existence of the state
“is not a necessary precondition for some kind of social order” and that in case of state failure
“Sooner or later, people have to find some reasonably peaceful and effective way of living
together.”\textsuperscript{43} Those observations have a familiar ring. Friedrich Nietzsche’s nihilistic onslaught
on both God and the state - which another German, the historian Leopold von Ranke,
happened to equate by depicting states as “God’s ideas” - once reflected a similar disregard.\textsuperscript{44}

Anyhow, since the state has proved the most dangerous source of violence, proponents of
turning its monopoly down clearly have a point. Ultimately, however, playing Hobbes off
against Rousseau may be an inspiring intellectual gamble but does not solve any problem.
There is, for instance, the undisputed fact that the overwhelming recent experience beyond the
collapsing African states has been incredible bloodshed and endless human suffering.
Preceding along those lines and calling for an official dismantling of what became defunct in
practise, may therefore easily amount to “a virtual recipe for more catastrophes”.\textsuperscript{45}
Furthermore, leaving those who privatised the state – and worse still their plundering of
resources and rent-seeking activities – untainted, may reduce short-term but will almost
certainly increase long-term costs - to a level detrimental to any prospect of development.

The strongest argument in favour of maintaining the state as an institution is thus as much
provided by current as by historical evidence which reads: there is no viable alternative to the
state which is not to be considered unanimously worse. This is a decidedly Eurocentric
perspective which, however, does by no means entail that an experience, which according to
Jacob Burckhardt made the state as a “piece of art” first appear through its very opposite, has

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{44} “The belief in a divine order of the political realm, in a mystery of the existence of the state is of religious
origin: when the religion is on retreat, the veil of Isis will inevitably be taken from the state and it will no longer
be intimidating. A close look at the popular sovereignty reveals that it will chase off whatever is left of
enchchantment and superstition in conjunction with those sentiments; the modern democracy is the historical guise
of the decay of the state. The prospects generated by this inevitable decay are, however, not in any case
unfortunate: prudence and self-interest are the most developed human characteristics; and if the state does not
correspond to the requirements of these forces anymore, this will not necessarily lead to chaos but to a much
more suitable innovation than the state used to be, in other words: it will lead to the victory over the state.”
München (Carl Hanser), 1966, pp. 682-3.
to be replicated everywhere else. It is Eurocentric in that it does not compromise the ultimate objective: the monopoly of violence which is the essence of the state. And it takes Africa and its experience seriously, because it acknowledges that in devising appropriate ways towards this objective there has to be an African solution to the obvious African problem. A second wave of state-building in Africa, which is being called for, may therefore give much greater emphasis to bottom-up approaches and may favour decentralised and localised models of power, deliberately building upon elements of traditional arrangements and loyalties. In the end, however, these various strings of power need to be bound together in a single authority which then, by definition, constitutes the state - though not necessarily democratic accountability or bureaucratic efficiency. Such an interpretation of what has come to be known “African Renaissance” neither needs to compromise the ultimate objective nor does the process in light of the universal acceleration of change have to be as long and painful as it used to be in Europe.

In this sense Africa is neither different nor is it ahead of Europe. Afrocentric perspectives which applaud the exciting “lavatory of new forms of political power” are quite off the mark and border on obscurantism. There is no prospect whatsoever for new ideas on governance growing out of the ashes of failed states except for acts of desperation and temporary fixes. In circumstances such as these unwelcome international trusteeships with their neo-colonial flavour are much more readily at hand than anything indigenous beyond the tried and tested. After last century’s big leap forward into the post-capitalist stateless future proved illusionary and possibly ill-conceived, this is even more true for any backtracking into the stateless past,

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46 His observation on the Italian Condottieri reads: “Through them for the first time the modern European spirit of the state appears in accordance with its own free inducement; quite often they show the unrestrained selfishness in its most dreadful traits, deriding any justice, nipping in the bud any sound education; yet where this direction can be overcome or somehow counterbalanced, a new living being enters history: the state as a calculated, rational creature, as a piece of art.” Jacob Burckhardt, Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien, 1. Band, Leipzig (Alfred Kröner), 1919 (12th edition), p. 3.
47 The many charges against the central state as having been “at best irrelevant, frequently corrupt and destructive, and occasionally genocidal” cannot confuse the fact that there are essential functions which only central power can perform, namely, guaranteeing rules or facilitating transactions. See James S. Wunsch, “Refounding the African state and local self-governance: the neglected foundation”, in: The Journal of Modern African Studies, vol. 38, no. 3, 2000, pp. 504-5. See also Leonardo A. Villalon, Philip A. Huxtable (eds.), The African State at a Critical Juncture: Between Disintegration and Reconfiguration, Boulder (Lynne Rienner), 1998.
49 Von Trotha, op. cit., (fn. 11), pp. 254, 278.
the alleged normality, as if the Middle Ages represented the destination and not the starting point in the process of civilisation.