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'State failure' in theory and practice: the idea of the state and the contradictions of state formation

STEIN SUNDSTØL ERIKSEN

Abstract. This article provides a critique of the discourse of 'failed states', and outlines an alternative approach. It is argued that by taking the model of the modern state for granted, and by analysing all states in terms of their degree of correspondence with or deviation from this ideal, this discourse does not help us understand the nature of the states in question, or the processes that lead to strong or weak states. Instead, the idea of the state should be treated as a category of practice and not as a category of analysis. Post-colonial state formation could then be analysed by focusing on the inter-relationship between the idea of the state and actual state practices, and on the ways that states have become linked to domestic society on the one hand and their relations with the external world on the other.

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Introduction

In recent years, a growing number of states have experienced severe crises. In some cases, the erosion of the state has proceeded so far as to leading to widespread political violence. Against the background of these developments, it is not surprising that 'state failure' and 'state collapse' have become catchwords in recent discourse about political development in 'the third world'.[1]

There are both economic and political reasons for this renewed focus on the state. On the one hand, the necessity of stronger states and improved government

[1] Mark Beissinger and Crawford Young, *Beyond State Crisis* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002); Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Jeffrey Herbst, 'Responding to State Failure in Africa', *International Security*, 21:3 (1996–97), pp. 120–44; Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Jennifer Milliken, *State Failure, Collapse and Reconstruction: Issues and Response* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); Robert Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press 2003); Robert Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); William Zartman, *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner 1995).

performance has been recognised by proponents of economic liberalism, such as the World Bank.[2] Faced with the disappointing results of nearly two decades of structural adjustment, it was recognised that one of the key impediments to growth in third world countries was the absence of effective state institutions. As a result, we have seen a renewed focus on 'capacity building' and 'good governance'. On the other hand, the emergence of international terrorism has, in particular after 9/11, prompted Western countries to emphasise the importance of state building and prevention of state failure for the sake of their own security and for the fight against terrorism.

This article takes the fast-growing discourse of 'state failure' as its starting point and analyses some of the key contributions to this debate. The aim is not to discuss particular cases of state failure, or to identify some general causes of failure, or even less to suggest how it can be addressed. Instead, it seeks to identify the assumptions underlying some of the contributions to this discourse, and the implications of those assumptions for how we understand the phenomenon referred to as 'state failure'. The article has three aims:

1) To identify the notion of the state underlying a few key contributions to the discourse of state failure.
2) To assess the methodological strategy employed by these contributions and suggest an alternative methodology.
3) To outline an alternative approach to the analysis of post-colonial state formation[3]

Accordingly, the article has three parts. First, I briefly summarise and criticise some key contributions to this discourse, focusing in particular on the notion of the state underlying the analyses and on the implications of these assumptions for how failed states are understood. Second, I discuss the conceptual strategy employed in the failed states discourse and propose an alternative strategy. Finally, in the last section, I sketch an approach to the study of post-colonial state formation. In this section, I draw on the arguments made in parts one and two, and focus particularly on the interrelationship between the idea of the state and processes of state formation.

'Failed states' in theory

We may distinguish between two different approaches to the phenomenon of 'state failure', based on how their proponents understand the state.

The first approach, represented by authors such as William Zartman and Robert Rotberg, sees the state as first and foremost a service provider. According to William Zartman a state has collapsed 'when the basic functions of the state are no longer performed'.[4] In other words, a state has collapsed when it is no longer

[2] See in particular, the *World Development Report*, 1997.
[3] Although I use the term 'post-colonial states', parts of the argument refers mainly to Sub-Saharan Africa. There are two reasons for this. First, most of the states referred to in the 'failed states' discourse are African. Second, this is the region that I am most familiar with.
[4] Zartman, 'Collapsed states', p. 5.

able to provide the services for which it exists. A similar alternative is to describe states that have not been able to establish the features associated with statehood as 'failed states'. Robert Rotberg, another leading authority on failed states, defines state failure as the inability of states to provide positive political goods to their inhabitants.[5]

Both Zartman and Rotberg distinguish between a variety of services that states may provide, ranging from security to the rule of law, the protection of property, the right to political participation, provision of infrastructure and social services such as health and education. These services constitute a hierarchy, Rotberg argues. The provision of security is the most fundamental service states provide, in the sense that security is a condition for the provision of all other services. Rotberg also argues that failure should be seen as a continuum rather than as an either/or, and that we therefore need to differentiate between states that are strong, weak, failing, failed or collapsed. Further, a state may possess some of the features of statehood, but not others. It may have a monopoly over the means of violence, but be unable to provide infrastructure, or maintain the rule of law, or it may have a functioning military, but an inefficient bureaucracy. This conception is then used as a benchmark, against which given states are measured.

As a result of defining statehood in terms of service provision, Rotberg and Zartman provide a perspective that leads to an excessively loose definition of failure, which in fact implies that most, if not all, states must be classified as failed (including Western states, on which the model is based). After all, no state is able to fulfil all the functions assigned to it. The limited statehood of weak, collapsed or failed states is considered regrettable, and as a problem to be resolved (through reforms, capacity building and the like). It is as if a state has to pass or fail a test, consisting of imitating a certain model of statehood (to be administered, we must assume, by states that have not 'failed' in this sense). Thus, it should come as no surprise that those states that serve as the basis for the definition fit it more closely than others. Showing that some states fit the definition more closely than others merely amounts to documenting that the definition itself is based on those states that come closest to fitting it.

Viewing the state as essentially a service provider also leads to a discourse with clear normative overtones. Instead of developing concepts which are better suited to analyse existing states, the gap between ideals and empirical reality is treated as justification for interventions which aim to close this gap, and make empirical reality conform to the model. It might well be the case that such a state is desirable and that good reasons can be given to justify this. However, this leaves the issue of how existing states that deviate from the ideal should be understood unanswered.[6]

[5] Rotberg, 'State failure' and Rotberg 'When states fail'.

[6] It also obscures the fact that the emergence of modern states in Europe had little to do with the provision of services. Instead, as has been shown by Charles Tilly, Michael Mann and others, it was mainly an unintended effect of military rivalry, driven not by any pressure from below for provision of services but by power struggles between pre-modern ruling classes. Geopolitical competition ensured that only those states that were able to defend themselves militarily were able to survive. In order to survive in this competitive environment, states were compelled to improve their own financial basis. This in turn forced them to improve their administrative capacity, in order to be able to tax their population. The provision of services other than security, such as infrastructure, property rights, health and education, was established much later, after the consolidation of statehood in the

It may still, of course, be used as a normative ideal – as describing what one thinks a state *should* look like. In fact, this is what Rotberg and Zartman do, albeit implicitly. The lack of correspondence between idea and reality is taken to indicate a lack – not in our concept, but in the object to which it refers. Thus, for Rotberg and Zartman, the absence of certain features associated with statehood constitutes an argument for changing the world to make it fit the concept of statehood. With this move, one leaves the domain of theory as a tool of understanding and enters the realm of normative theory. In the case of empirical statements, a lack of fit between a statement and reality constitutes a reason for revising the statement. In the case of normative statements, however, the reverse applies. Here, a lack of fit between a statement and the world constitutes a reason for changing the world, not for revising the statement or theory.

According to the second approach, a failed state is a state that is unable to control its territory and uphold its monopoly of violence. This approach is represented by, among others, the international relations theorists Robert Jackson[7] and Stephen Krasner.[8] With this starting point, the term 'failure' does not refer simply to the state's inability to perform the functions assigned to it. Instead, and much more narrowly, it concerns a specific type of failure, namely the failure to control its territory and monopolise the use of violence.[9]

Jackson starts with the fact that after the end of colonialism, all states are recognised as equal participants in the international system. Thus, all states have external, or negative, sovereignty, in the sense that they are recognised as states by other states, participate in international organisations and have established diplomatic relations with other states. They are legal subjects in international law, and they have a right to conduct their internal political affairs without external intervention.

At the same time, many states lack what he calls positive sovereignty. They do not control their territory, may be faced with armed insurgents and have very little ability to implement policies or promote economic development. Nevertheless, they do persist, and continue to be recognised as participants in the state system. Jackson and Rosberg[10] argued that this recognition was the only reason Africa's weak states continued to exist at all – not least because such recognition gives the state access to substantial resources in the form of aid.[11] In other words,

sense of a monopoly of violence, territorial control and international recognition. However, this critique should not be exaggerated. Viewing the state as essentially a service provider is not logically incompatible with a geopolitical explanation of its emergence. If we distinguish between origins and functions, it could be argued that states may have emerged as a result of war and conflict, but they nevertheless perform the functions of service provision. Of course, the provision of security can be seen as one type of service provision, but this does not mean that the state came into being as a result of a contract between states and citizens.

[7] Robert Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[8] Stephen Krasner, 'Sharing Sovereignty: New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States', *International Security*, 29:2 (2004), pp. 85–120.

[9] Giddens refers to this process as 'internal pacification'. Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, (Cambridge: Polity Press 1985).

[10] Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg, 'Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood', *World Politics*, 3 (1983).

[11] Similar arguments on the importance of external funds for African states have been made by many others, including Jean Francois Bayart, 'Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion', *African Affairs*, 99:395 (2000), pp. 217–67; Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System*

international recognition has enabled states to continue to exist even if their actual control over their territory has been extremely limited. Jackson describes such states as 'quasi-states'.[12] A quasi-state, he says, is a state, which is recognised as a participant in the system of states, yet does not posses the empirical features of statehood, such as a monopoly over the means of violence and control over its territory. While he does not use the term failed state, his concept of a quasi-state has much of the same meaning.

Like Jackson, Krasner focuses on the institution of sovereignty and on international relations. According to Krasner, modern sovereignty has three components. First, it refers to *legal sovereignty*, or the recognition of one state by others. Thus, 'the basic rule of international legal sovereignty is that legal recognition is accorded to juridically independent territorial entities, which are capable of entering into voluntary contractual arrangements'.[13] Thus, to be a legal sovereign state is to be recognised as one by other states. Second, sovereignty can be understood as the exclusion of external authorities' right to interfere in the state's political decision-making. This means that a sovereign state is independent of all external authority structures, and that no external actors have a right to intervene in a sovereign state's decision-making (the principle of *non-intervention*). Third, sovereignty can refer to the state position as the highest political authority within its territory. Krasner calls this *domestic sovereignty*. A sovereign state defines the rules, which all members of society must follow and is – at least more or less – able to enforce those rules. To be sovereign in this sense, a state must have monopoly over the means of violence and control over its territory. It follows that, for Krasner, state failure is defined by the absence of one or more of these features. In practice, however, since external recognition and formal acceptance of the principle of non-intervention can be taken more or less for granted, failure takes the form of breakdown of domestic sovereignty.

The term 'failed state', in this sense, does not imply that failure to perform any of the functions assigned to it would imply that a state has failed. Thus, its notion of failure is not so wide that most states would have to be classified as failed. Further, it does not have the normative bias of the idea of the state as a service provider. Compared to the notion of the state as a service provider, this concept also has the advantage of pointing to the close interrelationship between a particular state and the system of states of which it is a part. A given state is not an object, constituted prior to its relations with other states. It does not first exist and then interact with other states. As Giddens says: 'International relations are not connections set up between pre-established states, which could maintain their sovereign power without them, they are the basis upon which the nation state exists at all'.[14] I return to this in the last section.

However, although the perspective of Jackson and Krasner represents a significant improvement compared to that of Zartman and Rosberg, it shares one of the latter's major weaknesses. The implication of both perspectives is that any deviations from their respective definitions of statehood can only appear as a lack.

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999).

[12] Jackson, 'Quasi-States'.

[13] Krasner, 'Sharing Sovereignty'.

[14] Giddens, 'The Nation-State', pp. 263–64.

It is the *absence* of the specified criteria (service provision, a monopoly of violence, control over territory) that constitute failure, and not the actual properties of the states concerned.[15] While most states do have a monopoly of violence, in the sense that they are not challenged by armed rebels, many states have little ability to provide services and limited control over their territory.

If it is known that many states do not possess the properties that are associated with a certain conception of statehood (provision of services, sovereignty, monopoly of violence or whatever), one has to ask how useful it is to start with such a conception.[16] 'Failed states' and 'quasi-states' can then only appear as 'a flawed imitation of a mature Western form'.[17] These approaches therefore represent what Mahmood Mamdani calls 'history by analogy', in which the experience of non-Western states can only be understood as deviations from the 'normal' development experienced by Western states.[18] By implication, the absence of anything like a modern state in many countries is seen as a problem to be addressed, in order to enable a 'normal' state to emerge.[19] This does not get us very far in terms of understanding what particular failed states actually look like.

Instead of regarding one form or model of the state as more natural or normal, and analysing others in terms of their divergence from this model, we should refrain from privileging any particular model. As argued by Bilgin and Morton, 'presenting the experience of developing countries as deviations from the norm does not only reinforce commonly held assumptions about ideal statehood but also inhibits reflection on the binary opposition of 'failed' versus 'successful' states'.[20]

The state, categories of practice and categories of analysis

If the critique of the failed states discourse above is valid, we need an alternative approach to the study of non-Western states. In the remaining parts of this article, I outline the direction that I think such an approach could take. I make three main

[15] Although it is often assumed – for example, in 'realist' theories of international relations – that states actually possess the properties associated with statehood, the starting point for the discourse of failed states is that many states do not.

[16] Using a limiting case as a standard is similar to what is done in the application of rational-choice theory. Here, one starts from an idealised conception of rationality, and assesses actions in terms of their degree of correspondence with this ideal. In this case, as in the case of an idealised concept of statehood, the usefulness of the concept depends on the degree to which the phenomenon it describes corresponds to the theory.

[17] Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, *States of Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 6.

[18] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 9.

[19] However, unlike the modernisation school, it does not see the development of such a state as inevitable. Failure is, quite simply, the absence of a certain form of state, and these theories of 'failed states' can therefore be considered as a version of modernisation theory, albeit stripped of teleology.

[20] Pinar Bilgin and Adam David Morton, 'From 'Rogue' to 'Failed' States? The Fallacy of Short-termism,' *Politics*, 24:3 (2004), pp. 169–80, p. 173–4. To this, we could add that even if we allow for degrees of failure (or degrees of statehood (Christopher Clapham, 'Degree of Statehood', *Review of International Studies*, 24:2 (1999), pp. 143–57), we are still left with the problem that success or failure is defined in terms of deviations from a given norm, although we avoid the 'binary opposition' described by Bilgin and Morton. See also Pinar Bilgin and Adam David Morton, 'Historicising representations of "failed states": beyond the cold-war annexation of the social sciences?', *Third World Quarterly* 23:1 (2002), pp. 55–80.

points. First, the relationship between our concept of the state and the objects to which it refers must be conceived in a different way. Instead of using the extreme case as the standard, we need concepts which are closer to empirical reality, while at the same time allowing for empirical variation. Second, since existing states are based on the idealised concept of statehood, even if they deviate significantly from it, this idea of the state should be regarded as a category of practice rather than as a category of analysis. Finally, instead of using a static definition of the state to measure the degree of statehood of existing states, we need an account of the peculiarities of post-colonial states, and of the processes through which they have been formed.

I have already argued that the concepts of statehood underlying the failed states discourse are of limited analytical value, since they are only able to deal with states that differ from the definition in terms of defining them by what they lack. After all, focusing on what a given state lacks, rather than on what it actually is like, can at best yield explanations of why it lacks certain properties.

This raises the following question: Can the general framework developed on the basis of the European experience serve as a starting point for a study of states elsewhere? Given the wide divergence between the idea of the modern state and actual states in the third world, it might be tempting to reject the use of the same concept of statehood for these states as for Western states. However, this is a temptation that should be resisted.

There are three main reasons why concepts developed on the basis of Western states are relevant for understanding non-Western states as well. First, it is an indisputable fact that the formal institutions of all states are modelled on the European model of statehood. Post-colonial states are based on institutions such as courts, parliaments and bureaucracies, and on principles such as popular representation, sovereignty and separation between the private and public domains. Second, all states, Western and non-Western, are parts of a global system of states, in which the modern state form is universally recognised as the fundamental political unit. As a consequence, all states have certain characteristics, which derive from their 'systemness', such as formal sovereignty (both internally and externally). Given the universal acceptance of this notion of 'stateness', all states are compelled to struggle to approach this ideal, and to pretend possessing a form of statehood that they may not actually possess. The idea of the state, therefore, has become what Balakrishnan calls 'an objectively operative fiction' – an idea which forms the basis for the design of formal institutions, even if the states in question are far from corresponding to it.[21] Third, at the level of social scientific analysis, one has no choice but to use the language of that science and this language happens to be Western in origin. This does not mean that there are no differences between Western and non-Western states, or that theoretical models based on Western conceptions of the state can be used uncritically in all contexts. However, as argued by Sudipta Kaviraj, we must simultaneously use and mistrust this terminology.[22]

Thus, while the notion of 'state failure' should be dispensed with as a theoretical concept, the Western notion of statehood remains indispensable. The problem with

[21] Gopal Balakrishnan, 'The Age of Warring States', *New Left Review*, 26 (2004), pp. 148–60.

[22] Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Modern State in India', in Martin Doornbos and Sudipta Kaviraj (eds), *The Dynamics of State Formation* (New Delhi: Sage, 1997), p. 227.

the failed states discourse is not that it employs concepts derived from theories of Western origin. The question rather, is *which* Western concepts we should apply and *how*. Zartman, Rotberg, Jackson and Krasner all use specific idealised notions of statehood, which are used as the basis from which deviations are measured.

One alternative option could be to treat the idea of the state as an ideal type. An ideal type, as described by Max Weber,[23] is a tool used by the analyst to simplify a complex reality. In order to be useful, it must capture what is seen as the most important aspects of empirical reality. Although this is not entirely clear in Weber's writings, I think the most useful way of understanding the ideal type is to see it as emerging from a continuous movement between the empirical cases and the researcher's model of reality, during which both are assessed and reassessed. On the one hand, the cases are interpreted through the categories and assumptions of the researcher, thus shaping his interpretations of them. On the other hand, interpretation of cases can make the researcher question and revise some aspects of his model. Thus, when using ideal types, our concepts are continuously adjusted and revised in the light of empirical cases. Ideal types should therefore be seen as both the *outcome* of empirical research and a *means* for guiding further research. Ideal types help the researcher in understanding his cases, but at the same time, his cases help him to further develop his ideal types. This means that the idea of the modern state cannot be used as an ideal type in order to understand 'failed states', since this amounts to taking the exception as the rule, and to using the extreme case as the norm.

At the same time, the notion of statehood underlying the failed states discourse has significantly influenced real events in the world. Many actors, both domestic and international, have to a large extent accepted this idea of statehood, and both policies and institutions have been designed on the basis of it. In the case of 'failed states', this means that the model of the modern state, while being far from an actual description of how these states really are, still profoundly shapes them, both because their formal institutions are based on this model and because they must strive to emulate it (or at least pretend to do so). Because of the predominance of this model, both states themselves and other states are drawn into a 'politics of pretending', assuming in practice that all states actually have the properties associated with modern statehood. This is partly a strategic game, where norms and principles are manipulated for political purposes, and partly an expression of how deeply entrenched this specific view of what a state should look like is. State leaders know that they must 'simulate sovereignty'[24] or statehood to uphold their international recognition and to get access to the resources that follows from it (aid, loans, political and military support). They must also simulate in relation to their own society, and present themselves as standing above society, representing the common interests of society as a whole. The fact that states and other actors simulate statehood, although it is known that many states differ significantly from

[23] This discussion is based on Weber's essay, 'Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy'.

[24] Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). This is emphasised by Krasner as well, who describes sovereignty as 'organised hypocrisy'. Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organised Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). However, Krasner still defines failure in terms of the absence of specific features, and he does not explicitly discuss the inter-relationship between the idea of statehood/ sovereignty and processes of state formation.

this idea, shows how fundamental this idea of the state is. This fact – that states are compelled to simulate statehood – is just as important as the fact that their actual mode of operation contradicts the state idea that they must pretend to emulate.

The combination of analytical weakness and practical impact, I suggest, makes it reasonable to treat the failed states discourse and the notions of the state that it is based on mainly as data rather than as a tool of analysis – as categories of practice rather than as categories of analysis, to use Bourdieu's concepts.[25] As such, it constitutes an interesting example of the interrelationship between theories on the one hand and the objects to which they refer on the other. If policies are developed on the basis of false assumptions, they may in turn shape the perceptions and actions of those affected by them, perhaps also altering the distribution of resources between groups. In this sense, the effects of false theories may be as important as the effects of true ones.[26]

Thus, we need a concept of statehood at two levels: One empirical, which corresponds to the idea of the state held by actors, and one theoretical, which guides the analyst's interpretation of actual states. At the empirical level, our concept should reflect the idea of the state on which formal institutions are based and the idea(s) held by actors. While formal institutions reflect the idea of the state derived from the European experience, actors' ideas may vary. However, one can safely assume that at least some actors have an idea of statehood that corresponds to the idea of the state underlying formal institutions, and that this idea of the state is one that analysts must take into account.

At the analytical level, however, these ideas, concepts and beliefs should not simply be reproduced.[27] Instead, the state idea (and the idea of state failure derived from it) should be taken as an empirical fact. At the same time, our analytical concept of statehood should avoid relegating the majority of the world's state to a residual category of failure. A key task for analysts of 'failed states' therefore, is to understand how processes of state formation have been affected by the idea of the state. The enormous variation between states would then be conceptualised as variation in the *form* of statehood, and not as *degrees* of statehood or of 'failure'.[28] The analytical challenge is then to analyse the effects that such ideas has in particular cases, and to uncover what kinds of states they contribute to producing.[29]

[25] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[26] See, for instance, Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', in Hobsbawm & Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1983) on how the colonial state's ethnic classifications came to help constitute ethnic identities in Zimbabwe.

[27] As argued by Bourdieu, an epistemological break is required, through which the social scientist distances him/herself from the concepts and worldviews of those studied, while at the same time recognising that their concepts and ideas are a constitutive part of social reality.

[28] Bilgin and Morton, 'Historicising'.

[29] Philip Abrams ('Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1 (1988), pp. 58–89 makes this point. He makes a distinction between two objects of analysis: the state system and the state idea. According to Abrams, the state system can be studied without the concept of the state, while the idea of the state should be regarded as a form of representation. Students of the state, he argues, should abandon the aim of going behind the idea of the state in order to identify the state's real essence. There are two problems with this approach. First, it depends on a radical separation between idea and reality, or between representation and that which is represented. The only way to avoid this problem is to regard the state idea and the state system as two aspects of the same process (Timothy Mitchell, 'Society, Economy and the State Effect', in George Steinmetz (ed.), *State/Culture: State Formation After the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999),

'Failed states' in practice: state-society linkages, external ties and the idea of the state

An alternative approach to 'failed states' (or rather, to post-colonial state formation) would have to meet three requirements. First, it must be based on an alternative definition of the state, which covers all contemporary states. Second, it must acknowledge the importance of the idea of the state in all contemporary states ('failed' or not). This means that the idea of the state must be treated as a category of practice and not as a category of analysis. Third, it must analyse post-colonial state formation by focusing on the inter-relationship between the idea of the state and actual state practices. The latter means that instead of simply comparing actual stats to the state idea that underlies them, we should focus on how states are shaped by the practices of various actors and by their interrelationships and interactions. Rather than asking why 'their' state is different from 'ours', or why the development of a 'normal' state has not taken place, an attempt to understand the nature of the states that are described as 'failed' should start by asking what kind of practices produce what kind of states?[30] By shifting the focus in this way, from static contrasts between actual states and the idea of the state to dynamic processes and categories of practice, it becomes possible to see how the idea of the state, the idea of 'failure' and actual state formation are shaped through practice.[31]

An alternative definition of statehood can start with the assumption that all states in the contemporary world have a territory with a population, are recognised by other states and have a government. Moreover, they have institutions such as laws, armies, police and an administration. These features can be considered as defining features of modern states.[32] Other features vary, such as the form of government, the degree of monopoly of violence and control over territory and the kind of services they provide. Thus, we must acknowledge that states do not necessarily have a monopoly over the means of violence, actual control over their territory or population or the ability to provide services to their citizens, and these properties should not be considered as defining features of what it means to be a state.

However, the idea of the state on which post-colonial states were based was much more specific. States are seen as sovereign and as representing society as a whole and they claim to be acting on behalf of society's common interests when they seek to 'develop' their societies.

This idea, which Migdal describes as 'the image of a coherent controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory',[33] presupposes that the state has a monopoly of violence, control over its

p. 77. Second, it entails that one gives up the idea of analysing the state as something more than people's representations of it.

[30] Centeno, Miguel and Fernando Lopez-Alves, *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory Through the Lens of Latin-America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2001).

[31] Bourdieu, 'Outline'; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990). See also the contributions in Theodore Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina and Eike von Savigny, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

[32] Georg Sørensen, *Changes in Statehood: The Transformation of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

[33] Joel Migdal, *The State in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 15–6.

territory and ability to provide services. It also presupposes a separation between state and society on the one hand and between the internal and the external on the other. Moreover, it presupposes a unity of ruler and ruled, where the actions of the state express the collective will of 'the people'. Thus, the state, whose actions are seen as identical to those of the people, must also be separated from the people on whose behalf it acts. These features are not part of the definition of statehood as such. At the same time, as an empirical idea, underlying formal institutions and state practices, they are constitutive of what a modern state is. State policies and actions are justified in the language of 'stateness', and 'the practices of state agents assume a general understanding of state authority, a kind of common wisdom of norms and expectations that inhere in stateness'.[34]

Processes of state formation are shaped by a number of factors, of which the idea of the state is only one. Both the state idea and actual states are produced and reproduced through the practices of a multiplicity of actors, domestic as well as external. Through their practices, actors may increase or reduce actual states' correspondence with the state idea. While there have been changes in the perceptions of what states should do (how much it should 'intervene' in the economy, what kinds of services it should provide, etc), the key elements of idea of the state (monopoly of violence, control over its territory, ability to provide services, separation between state and society and between the internal and the external and unity of ruler and ruled) have remained more or less constant.

States are located at the intersection between the domestic and the international, and have to adapt to constraints and opportunities from both these directions. The natures of these constraints and opportunities and the ways leaders have handled them have largely determined processes of state formation. Thus, an alternative approach to post-colonial state formation could focus on the ways that states have become related to domestic society on the one hand and their relations with the external world on the other, and on the interrelationship between the idea of the state and actual processes of state formation in each of these domains. In the following, I will describe some aspects of the processes through which post-colonial states have been linked to domestic society and to the external world. The description mainly refers to those states that are described as 'failed' in the failed states discourse.

State-society relations

The idea of the state presupposes a separation between the state and the society over which it rules.[35] This separation between the domains of the private and the public is premised upon the establishment of the state as the highest political authority in the territory delimited by the state's borders, and means that the state

[34] William Munro, 'Power, Peasants and Political Development: Reconsidering State Construction in Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 38:1 (1996), pp. 112–48, p. 115.

[35] The recognition of the differentiation between the private and public spheres is a key feature of the modern state. See, amidst a vast literature, Timothy Mitchell, 'The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics', *American Political Science Review*, 1:85 (1991); Jeff Weintraub, 'The Theory and Politics of the Private/Public Distinction', in Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar (eds), *Public and Private in Thought and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

should be located 'above' society.[36] State institutions should be separated and insulated from particular interests in society. Thus, a private sphere, consisting of the economy on the one hand, and immediate social relations on the other, is constituted and protected by the state. The state is seen as responsible for promoting the common interests of society as a whole, and state resources should not be used for private purposes. While it may be difficult to locate the boundary between state and society in practice,[37] the idea that the two should be separated is a central aspect of all contemporary states.

During colonialism, copies of the institutions that had emerged in Europe were established in the colonies (bureaucracies, courts, armies, police forces, etc). It was a state that was designed to maintain control and to facilitate the extraction of resources, rather than to promote the welfare and security of the population. At this stage, therefore, the idea of the state on which colonial rule was based only partly conformed to the European idea of statehood. While formal institutions mirrored European models, relations between the government and the governed populations remained fundamentally different. The colonial state remained subordinate and was held accountable to the colonising powers, and not to its own population. Thus, the idea of popular sovereignty – of state power as emanating from the people – was not established. Moreover, the authority of the colonial state was mediated through local leaders (such as chiefs), who retained significant autonomy from the state.[38]

At the same time, the colonial state was characterised by the shallowness of its reach. It had very little presence in ordinary people's lives, and had neither the ability nor the desire to regulate social life and be responsible for the general good:

> While the small cadre of Europeans and their equally small and poorly equipped police and military units could mow down African resistance with a few machine guns, very little was invested in the civic apparatus of infrastructure development, social services and macroeconomic management.[39]

Thus, the infrastructural power (to use Michael Mann's term)[40] of the colonial state was limited, and Kaviraj's argument with respect to India applies to most colonies: 'its circle of activity remained narrow, confined essentially to the maintenance of the colonial order and extractive economic functions.'[41]

At independence, formal sovereignty was established, and the new states were granted full formal authority within their territory. At the same time, the territorial limits of the state's legal authority became clearly defined, and the state came to

[36] James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), ch. 4.

[37] Mitchell, 'The Limits'; Mitchell, 'Society, Economy'.

[38] Mamdani, 'Citizen'. The authority of local leaders was originally embedded in tradition, and the proper rule of conduct for both leaders and subordinates was defined by what was recognised as established convention. Clearly, 'tradition' itself changed in the course of this process. As shown by several authors (Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Sudipta Kaviraj', On State, Society and Discourse in India', in James Manor (ed.), *Rethinking Third World Politics* (London: Orient Longman, 1991) traditions and traditional leaders can in some cases be created by the state - intentionally or accidentally.

[39] Bruce Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism', *African Affairs*, 97 (1998), p. 314.

[40] Michael Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986).

[41] Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Modern State in India', in Dornboos and Kaviraj (eds), *The Dynamics of State Formation* (New Delhi: Sage 1997), p. 232.

be seen as representing 'the people' and as being accountable, not to an external power, but to its own citizens. With independence, therefore, the idea of the state described above became the basis of state institutions.[42]

While the colonial state had been 'a distant and alien other, to be simultaneously feared, milked and deceived',[43] the newly independent states sought to dissociate themselves from colonial rule, mainly through attempts at 'nation-building' and the promotion of economic development. Yet, the main instrument it had to its disposal to achieve these aims was the state apparatus inherited from colonialism.

Rulers of the new states chose a 'development strategy' in which the role of the state was greatly expanded, both in terms of service delivery and in terms of economic activity.[44] The size and scope of state institutions were expanded, and attempts were made to reduce external dependency. The state presented itself as the agent of 'development', and formal rules were established, and elaborate organisational arrangements set up. 'Development', it was argued, should be 'brought to the people', and the state was responsible for bringing it. As described by Sundet in the case of Tanzania: '"development" was inextricably associated with modernisation, and since the uneducated masses of the people were seen as inherently backward and intransigently "traditional", political activity became defined as a means of mobilising people in state-led development.'[45]

In this perspective, society was seen as inherently 'backward', or 'traditional', and therefore as an obstacle to 'development'. This meant that although the new states were based on the idea of popular sovereignty, the relation between the state and the population remained, as under colonialism, one between subject and object. The state defined what 'development' meant, and how it should be brought about, while society was the object of these policies of 'development'. While the state claimed to represent and act on behalf of society, the actions of the state were not seen by state officials as the actions *of* the people. Thus, the object appeared as wholly external to the subject. In other words, it was not the people who acted through the state. Instead, the state acts *for* the people, from a position outside it. In theory, the unity of ruler and ruled, presupposed in the modern idea of the state was recognised, but in practice, state policies contradicted it.

In the absence of backing from the colonial powers, the power of the new states was fragile. The combination of grand ambitions for 'development' and fragile state power led to a situation where, once the nationalist euphoria of independence waned, many ruling regimes became caught up in struggles for political survival to

[42] This idea originated in the Western colonising powers, but its key features (monopoly of violence, control over territory, service provision, separation between state and society and between the internal and the external, unity of ruler and ruled, bureaucracies, courts, armies, police forces) were shared by the Soviet state model, which was influential in some countries.

[43] Beissinger and Young, 'Beyond State Crisis', p. 35.

[44] Policies aiming at 'development' were actually initiated before independence – from the late 1940s (see Berman, 'Ethnicity'; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Towards the end of the colonial period, the colonial powers sought to promote 'development', both economically and socially, and to transform what they saw as 'backward' societies. This had to be done from the outside, by the colonial powers, precisely because the inhabitants themselves were seen as too 'backward' to undertake such a task themselves.

[45] Geir Sundet, 'Beyond Developmentalism in Tanzania', *Review of African Political Economy*, 59 (1994), p. 40.

hold down contenders for power within and outside the state.[46] In this situation the regimes tended to rely on a combination of repression, personal loyalty and cooptation through patronage networks to stabilise their rule.[47] These strategies may be viewed as adjustments to situations where regimes enjoyed little popular legitimacy, and lacked a strong 'hegemonic' social group which supported the regime.

Repression was used to hold down threatening non-state organisations and groups with the use of military force, secret policing, death squadrons, torture, restrictions on freedom of organisation and the press, etc. The use of violence was double-edged however, as army leaders, death squadrons and secret police could turn against the regime.

In the low-trust environment of weak post-colonial states the recruitment into key power positions in the government and army were typically based on *patronage* and *personal loyalty* rather than competence.[48] Patronage practices based on the exchange of state-controlled positions and resources for personal support were used by the regime and reproduced at lower levels of the state. Governments were forced to promote the interests of their clients, and scarce public resources were diverted from state budgets. Lower-level public employees were frequently underpaid as the growth of the postcolonial state apparatuses outpaced public revenue. Public employees at all levels typically used their political power to supplement their incomes, for instance by exacting bribes. The ensuing networks of patronage and personal connections and unregulated links between office holders and non-state groups weakened formal bureaucratic institutions and the state's ability to pursue systematic policies.[49]

The strategy of reproducing state power by building client networks 'contained built-in escalator clauses, that by the 1970s seriously compromised state action'.[50] Ever-expanding patronage networks diverted limited state resources, and undermined the states' capacity to fulfil their plans of social transformation. Thus, a severe contradiction emerged, between the imperatives of political survival on the one hand and the professed aims of state policy on the other. Boone sums up the point in the following way:

> The private appropriation of state resources and the use of state funds to strengthen personalistic power networks [. . .] lay at the very heart of the processes through which postcolonial regimes were consolidated and by which they sought to govern [. . .] Over time, however, the same process has weakened the state as an instrument for organising, exercising and reproducing state power.[51]

Through this process, the power relations and social logics of domestic society became reproduced within the institutions of the state. While the formally

[46] Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State–Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), ch. 6.

[47] Richard Sandbrook, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 84.

[48] Sandbrook, 'The Politics', p. 90–1; Migdal, 'Strong Societies', p. 217–8.

[49] Ibid., 'The Politics', p. 93–6; Migdal, 'Strong Societies', pp. 214–7, 219–20; Patrick Chabal and Jean-Francois Daloz, *Africa Works* (London: James Currey, 1999).

[50] Beissinger and Young, 'Beyond State Crisis', p. 42.

[51] Catherine Boone, 'States and Ruling Classes in Post-Colonial Africa: The Enduring Contradictions of Power', in Joel Migdal, Atul Kohli and Vivienne Shue (eds), *State Power and Social Forces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1994), p. 131–2.

bureaucratic and legal-rational façade of the state remained in place, state institutions' actual mode of operation changed. As a result of this contradiction, most post-colonial states did not succeed in their grand ambitions to promote 'development'.

When patronage is the main form of linkage between state and society, the institutional separation between state and society presupposed in the idea of the state does not exist. In such a system, there is no clear separation between the private and the public, or between the personal interests of officials and the interests of the institution to which they belong. Although the separation between the private and the public is officially recognised, and presupposed in the formal set-up of state institutions, the actual practice of office holders is characterised by a widespread ability and willingness to break the state's formal rules.

Faced with the lack of fit between idea and reality, state officials often admit that they have 'not yet' reached the stage where a full-fledged state has been established. This response reveals two things:

1) that the Western idea of the state has been accepted as the norm of statehood. This means that, as in parts of the 'failed states' discourse, any gap between idea and reality is seen as an argument for changing social reality, rather than for changing the concepts through which reality is interpreted.
2) that they have internalised a teleological perspective, in which they find themselves at a low stage of 'development'. In such a perspective, the establishment of a state corresponding to the state idea is seen as the end point of 'development'.

This form of state-society linkages, driven by domestic socio-political conditions, led to a type of state-society relations that undermined both state power and the project of national development that the state sought to promote. At the same time, the idea of the state was reinforced through this process, since the struggle for political survival and the politics of patronage took place within a framework in which the state idea was taken for granted and used to justify state policies. The result was a widening gap between the idea of the state and state practices. Thus, through their practices, both state leaders and other actors simultaneously reproduced the idea of the state and undermined the possibility of a establishing a state that corresponded to this idea.

External links

In addition to the separation between state and society, the idea of the state presupposes a separation between the internal and the external. This separation presupposes that borders are controlled, and that states are able to control the flow of people, goods, capital and services across borders. While such flows are permitted, the point is that they should be mediated by states, through their policies on trade, capital flows and migration. Moreover, in its relations with other states and international organisations, each state is recognised as sovereign and on an equal footing with all other states. The principle of 'national ownership' follows from this. National ownership means that state policies are formulated and approved by the state itself, not by other states or multinational institutions.

During the Cold War, the external sovereignty of most states was maintained by strong norms of national sovereignty, sustained both by the policies of the former colonial powers and by superpower rivalry. As a result, relations between post-colonial states since independence have by and large been peaceful. Most armed conflicts were civil wars fought for control over the existing state or for secession from it. External interference was aimed to support one of the parties and not at conquest. As argued by Jackson, Herbst and others, the fact that the continued existence of the state itself was not at risk meant that, unlike early modern European states, they did not face geopolitical threats that compelled them to strengthen state power. This meant that geopolitical pressure towards the formation of strong states was weak.

Processes of state formation have also been shaped by the nature of external economic relations. Post-colonial states have typically gained access to economic resources through their dealings with the external world. The availability of such resources has given the state access to easy income, and removed the incentive for creating strong institutions for the purpose of taxation. Rather than engaging in cumbersome tax extraction, which requires development of the administrative apparatus and effective territorial control, ruling regimes can extract revenue by asserting control over these resources, supplemented with foreign aid.[52] This means that states do not depend on domestic society for the reproduction of their own power, and gives the state a kind of economic freedom from society.[53]

Until the 1980s, weak states were able to maintain these ultimately self-destructive policies, because of the combination of Keynes-inspired statism and super power rivalry. While Keynesianism legitimised wide ranging state regulations of the economy, super power rivalry made it possible for peripheral states to exploit the great powers' need for allies in order to gain access to economic and military assistance.

During the 1980s, however, the external relations of post-colonial states changed. With the advent of neo-liberalism, many states were compelled to undertake economic reforms. Given the patrimonial character of state power and their weak economic foundations, these programmes exacerbated the trend of state decline. Enforced cuts in state expenditure, retrenchments, and liberalisation of external trade led to led to further erosion of state capacity.

As a response to a situation where they found themselves constrained by declining export incomes, negative pro capita growth, growing debt payment, reduced international military and economic support, many regimes turned to alternative sources of funding. These include crime (smuggling, drug trafficking) and informal economic ties in which the state, often in collaboration with international capital and private security firms, secures rents that provide funding for regimes, but in ways that do not strengthen the state.

[52] In fact, to the extent that access to aid depends on assessments of need, they may have an interest in not promoting growth, since a lack of growth will ensure that they continue to be considered worthy of assistance.

[53] Bayart, 'Africa in the World'. African politicians, Bayart argues, have become experts at manipulating international organisations, foreign governments and aid agencies. Resources acquired in these dealings and through such devices as trade policies, export taxes and the manipulation of exchange rates, have funded the reciprocal assimilation of elites through the use of patronage.

'Normal' weak states maintain a semblance of formal bureaucratic state structures which supposedly serve the public, while the working of the state in practice is based on large informal structures of accommodations and client networks. In some cases, regimes do not even want to (re-)establish the state's monopoly of violence. These regimes responded to the new opportunities and constraints by switching to 'warlord politics' as their strategy of survival.[54] There was a growing 'privatisation of violence' through illegal and semi-legal international transaction in arms and provision of military services. Warlord politics is an extreme form of de-institutionalisation strategy, which can be related to changing forms of appropriation of unearned rent. It implies that formal, bureaucratic state structures are almost completely eliminated and all pretence that the regime is serving public interests is abandoned.[55] At the same time, it also presupposes the formal existence of the state, and its practitioners exploit the strength of the idea of the state. Indeed, the intensity of struggles over control of the state shows how deeply entrenched the idea of the state has become, even in countries dominated by warlord politics.

Externally imposed conditionalities have contributed to undermining many states' external sovereignty, by shifting decision-making authority from the state to external actors such as the IMF and the World Bank. This had contradictory implications. According to the principle of 'national self-determination', donors are not supposed to interfere in the state's own priorities.[56] This means that aid must be based on voluntary agreements between donors and the individual state, and that activities funded by donors are defined as the state's activities. Donors therefore always emphasise the principle of national ownership, even as their policies undermine it. This has the advantage (for the donors) of enabling them to place the responsibility for failure on governments, rather than taking the blame themselves in case aid programmes do not succeed.[57]

Taken to its logical conclusion, the use of conditionality implies that the state is put under external supervision, and that instead of acting on behalf of, and being accountable to, 'the people', the state becomes accountable first and foremost to donors.[58] In most types of development assistance, this tension is managed by

[54] William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner), p. 21–2.

[55] Reno, 'Warlord Politics', p. 2–3.

[56] This may be the reason why donors rarely define their conditions as 'political'. Instead, they are described as 'technical', without direct political content (Partha Chatterjee, 'Development Planning and the Indian State', in Terence Byres (ed.), *The State and Development Planning in India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press 1994); James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990). Thus, when the World Bank is preoccupied with 'good governance', this is considered as a means of improving 'efficiency', and not as a political issue. ('The State in a Changing World', *World Development Report* (Washington DC.: World Bank 1997).

[57] David Chandler, *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State Building* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); John Pender, 'Country Ownership: The Evasion of Donor Accountability', in Chris Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe and Alexander Gourevitch (eds), *Politics Without Sovereignty: A Critique of Contemporary International Relations* (London, University College London Press, 2007), Graham Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa: The Construction of Governance States* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2004). Conveniently, this arrangement also serves the interests of national governments, by enabling them to present a given policy as being imposed from outside, and thereby avoid being held responsible by citizens.

[58] Martin Dornboos, 'State Formation Processes under External Supervision: Reflections on "Good Governance"', pp. 377–91 in Olav Stokke (ed.), *Aid and Political Conditionality* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), Ferguson, 'Global Shadows'.

defining *society* as the object to be developed, rather than the state.[59] This means that while the state is recognised as an active subject, society is an object to be acted upon by the state and by donors.

However, with the last decade's new focus on 'capacity building', 'good governance' and 'state building', the state itself has become the object to be developed. By receiving tied aid, national governments appear both as objects to be shaped by donor policies and as subjects with whom agreements are made. This reflects a basic tension embedded in the concept of development assistance. One part – the donor – appears as 'developed' and as responsible for developing the recipients of aid. The other part appears as in need of 'being developed', and therefore, in one way or another, as 'underdeveloped'.

As a result, the tension between seeing the state as a subject on an equal footing with the donor and seeing it as in need of being developed has become more apparent. On the one hand, the principle of national ownership affirms the state's position as an autonomous subject with rights and responsibilities. On the other hand, since the state is unable to fulfil its responsibilities (for 'developing' its society) it must itself be 'developed' by donors, through programmes of capacity building, civil service reforms and the like. The result is that while donors continue to pay lip service to the principles of national ownership, their practices contribute to undermining the state even as they reassert their commitment to the state idea. This contradiction is particularly clear in the case of donor programmes aiming at 'state building' and 'capacity building'. Such programmes undermine the sovereignty of recipient states, both by treating them as objects to be developed and by making them accountable to donors rather than to their own citizens.

Thus, the nature of post-colonial states' external links (guaranteed recognition, external funding, conditionalities, warlord politics) have in practice contributed both to undermining state power, and to the reproduction of the idea of the state.[60]

Conclusion

Two main conclusions can be drawn from this discussion. First, many states have 'failed' to emulate the model of statehood on which their formal institutions are based, and on the basis of which they have been recognised by other states. Second, the theories of state failure have failed to explain this, by taking the model of the modern state for granted, and by analysing all states in terms of their degree of correspondence with or deviation from this ideal. The discourse on 'failed states', 'collapsed states' and 'quasi-states' does not help us understand the nature of the states in question, or the processes that lead to strong or weak states. We should therefore reject the use of an idealised concept of statehood as a standard when analysing post-colonial states. This model can perhaps, serve as a normative standard (although as such, it requires a normative justification not provided by theorists of failed states), but it does not help us to understand how these states really are.

[59] Ferguson, 'Global Shadows'.

[60] This also implies that, to the extent that programmes of state building and capacity building have been influenced by the 'failed states' discourse, this discourse has itself contributed both to undermining state power and to reproducing the idea of the state.

The divergence between the idea of the state and actual state practices cannot be regarded as one between idea and reality, since this would imply that the idea of the state is seen as somehow separate from the 'real' state, which would then appear to exist independently of the state idea. The idea of the state not only remains the basis of formal institutions. It has also become entrenched in the practices of both state officials and others and become a powerful rhetorical weapon, which is drawn upon by rulers to legitimise policies and by opponents to criticise rulers. It defines the limits of what can be legitimately said or done, and is reaffirmed even as political practices undermine it. By considering the idea of the state as a category of practice, it becomes clear that it (the idea of the state) has become a constitutive part of what the state is and an essential part of actual states' mode of operation.

The idea of the state must therefore be incorporated into the definition of statehood – not as an ideal standard that empirical states may or may not conform to, but as an idea that is constitutive of the state's very existence, and which underlies state practices, regardless of the degree to which these practices deviate from it. Nor can state practices simply be regarded as an effect of the idea of the state. Instead, both the persistence of the idea of the state and actual states' continuing divergence from this idea must be seen as an effect of the processes through which states have become linked to domestic society and to the external world. Throughout the post-colonial period, the idea of the state has been reaffirmed, even through the processes that have contributed to undermining state power. Thus, through their practices, both domestic and external actors have contributed to simultaneously reinforcing the idea of the state and undermining the possibilities of establishing a state that corresponds to this idea.

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