

The “Andersen Principle”: On the Difficulty of Truly Moving Beyond State-Centrism

A Response by Trutz von Trotha

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1. Introduction¹

In Hans Christian Andersen’s fairytale *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, the little child says at last: “But he has nothing on at all!” Volker Boege and his co-authors² have taken on that child’s role vis-à-vis their colleagues from political science and peace and conflict studies. Unlike the mainstream, they rely on their own eyes and point out the obvious: no, the failing state does not function like a state. The failed state does not have state institutions. And it does not make sense to continue denying the obvious. Instead, we have to come to terms with the realities of political orders which are not states. This insistence on what I will call the Andersen Principle is, in my view, the most important contribution of the essay – important not only for the discourse of political science and peace studies concerning international security, development cooperation and globalisation, but also for practical politics, to which both disciplines seek proximity. To date, these disciplines have relied on the normative pretensions and jargon of high politics resolutely (unlike empirical political sociology and ethnography) and, it must be said, with a strong sense of status and sinecure. Still, the Boege team does not pursue the Andersen Principle to its logical conclusion, and leaves half-accomplished its ambition of changing the discourse on social-engineering blueprints for state formation into a practice of peace and a debate on the peace potential of social and cultural institutions and actors of non-state orders.

¹ Many thanks go to Dr. Kate Sturge (Aston University Birmingham / Berlin) for translating this comment from German into English and to the Berghof editorial team for their excellent copy editing.

² For the sake of simplicity, in the following I will refer to the “Boege team” or “the authors”.

2. State-Centrism and the Failed Denial of Non-State Political Orders

Right up to the present day, political science, its sub-discipline peace studies and practical politics have found it difficult to reconcile themselves to what is empirically obvious. Their state-centrism has seemed insurmountable. In the course of the not particularly civilised “civilising process”, the state has become ‘second nature’ for the western – and not only the western – world, even though this form of political rule is anything but the historical norm. Many legacies converge in this state-centrism, not least colonialism, which tried to realize the utopia of modern state rule in the colonies and thereby globalised that utopia. As such a globalised utopia, one-dimensional thinking within the categories of statehood has even outlived decolonisation. The juridical features of statehood have remained the touchstone for participation in international relationships.

The Boege team reveals the bankruptcy of state-centrism in political science, peace studies and practical politics. This step is first of all a public affirmation of a sober sense of reality. It is a confirmation that the paramount and still most difficult task of scholarly endeavour is an empirical and analytical one. ‘Theory’, that formidable enterprise, becomes no less formidable when it offers analytical access to the world as it is. Yet, following the Platonic tradition, political science and peace studies have never been satisfied with empirical study – quite apart from the fact that it is probably considerably easier to draw up a “civilisational hexagon” (Senghaas 2004a, 17 ff.; 1996, 30 ff., 124 ff.)³ that summarises the quintessence of constitutional developments in democracy and the rule of law since the bourgeois revolutions, and to make this one of the many similar ‘templates’ for what ‘development’ ought to look like. At the Davos forums of this world, and in the political science and peace studies mainstream, we do not even find an attempt to offer the impressive theoretical elegance of a Dieter Senghaas; instead, as the authors remind us, the OECD state model is proclaimed the optimum route to sustainable development and internal peace without further ado.

If the counterfactual normativity of state-centrism can now no longer be maintained, this is due to a range of developments whose consequences had become clearly discernible by the end of the Cold War. While the “end of history” was being declared in a self-aggrandising, imperial discursive gesture, it was discovered that in not a few regions of the world, like Sudan or Sri Lanka, “small”, “new”, “asymmetrical” wars, or however else they were labelled, had been raging for decades. Sierra Leone was becoming a gangland ruled by warlords. In Rwanda, within around ten weeks hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and people thought to be Tutsi or suspected of helping Tutsis were murdered, and the murderers carried out their horrific task with machetes as if it were part of their usual daily work in the fields (Brandstetter 2007). In the DR Congo, what has now become known as the ‘African World War’ was unfolding. But just as charity begins at home, the west’s view of itself was most deeply affected by the ‘Yugoslav war’, which brought state collapse to European shores and continues to the present day in Kosovo, and by the American experience in Somalia – where, in October 1993, the military operation ‘Continue Hope’ (a name apparently chosen personally by the USA’s vision of itself) ended with dead American soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, the Americans retreating from Somalia in disarray and images of the events racing around the world.⁴

³ See also Dieter Senghaas’ article in the *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* (Senghaas 2004b).

⁴ It is probable that the American humiliation in Somalia contributed to the USA’s Security Council veto of an effective UN intervention in Rwanda (Dallaire 2003).

3. The Surreal Nature of Engineering State-Building

Faced with these experiences, politics underwent a momentous shift: in place of the fiction of statehood, it took upon itself the task of establishing state orders in regions afflicted by wars and other forms of severe instability within the state, regions that thus – and under the premises of the so-called “war on terrorism” – come to be perceived as threats to international or even national security. Under the banner of “civil crisis prevention, conflict resolution and the consolidation of peace” (my translation of the German government’s May 2004 action plan⁵), deployments that are heavy on personnel and resources, and potentially life-threatening for soldiers, have aimed to bring about democratic states and the rule of law on a more or less western model. Exemplary here are the deployments in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. This shift in policy was attended and fuelled by a political science, and representatives of its nearest neighbouring disciplines, that had now discovered the ‘failing’ and ‘failed’ state. Instead of proclaiming the end of history, they recommended (and still do) “learning to do state-building better”, because ultimately the future of the world order depended upon it (Fukuyama 2004, 120, as cited in the lead article). This is exemplified in the German context by the memorandum on rethinking Germany’s Africa policy (“Memorandum zur Neubegründung der deutschen Afrikapolitik”, Engel et al. 2000) and the critique of reconstruction policy in Afghanistan (Wimmer/Schetter 2002). What the Africanists’ opaque sociological jargon had named ‘structural stability’, the critics of the reconstruction policy in Afghanistan – with at least the virtue of being straight to the point – called a “state-centred” strategy which had to be pursued (ibid., 9). The ‘fiction of statehood’ had been abandoned. But the state-centrism of political action remained unaltered – and indeed, with the declining appeal of neoliberalism for development cooperation and for the internal configuration of the state, is beginning to attract renewed attention in continental Europe and beyond.

Once again the authors’ strong sense of reality is indicated by the fact that they dismiss the hackneyed precepts of a state-centred strategy in international relations and development cooperation. They rightly point out how “inherently violent”, unpredictable, protracted and convoluted the process of state formation actually is, and, again an important point to make, how high its social cost may be from the perspective of the ‘citizens’. There is one thing, though, that the Boege team in my view does not emphasize strongly enough: the idea of learning to do state-building and implementing it in a planned fashion is such a ludicrous notion that it ought to prompt serious concern over a political mainstream and an academic discipline which allows itself such surreal historical amnesia. Implementing state rule is the most radical and ambitious exercise of power, because it leaves barely a single building block of non-state political orders unaffected, including those of centralized non-state systems of power. If one considers how complex the preconditions of state rule are – not to mention the modern constitutional rule of law, let alone the welfare state – it becomes clear why successful state-building is a thoroughly ‘non-obvious’ affair,⁶ kindling more or less all the serious conflicts with which human beings can confront each other. Accordingly, in many places it has been and remains above all a concatenation of failures. Commands fade unheard. Institutions of central authority fail to take root, or decay just like the shoddy or magnificent edifices designed to house the functionaries doing their duty in the cause of state rule. The grass grows high over the transportation links between local authorities and the capital, and the bridges destroyed by the annual snowmelt remain unrepaired, because local officials lack both the material and the human resources to rebuild

5 Available (in German) online at www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/de/Aussenpolitik/Themen/Krisenpraevention/neu/Ueberblick.html. [For the English version, replace /de/ by /en/ in previous link.]

6 On the concept of the ‘non-obviousness’ (*Unselbstverständlichkeit*) of state rule, see Trotha 1994a, 1 ff.

them. Worse, if those being ruled initiate open, violent resistance against the state's claim to rule over them, the door is opened wide for entanglement in a spiral of escalating violence. The idea that one could 'learn' state-building and then, so to speak, after passing one's exams would be ready to put what one has learned into effective practice signals an extensive loss of political and administrative elites' grasp on reality, as well as that of their aides in the universities and think-tanks – a loss that is proportionate to the spread and arrogant expansionism of the managerial, administrative sense of feasibility and control.

4. The Colonial State as a Failing State

Like so many others before them, the authors assert that the emergence of the European state took centuries, whereas the postcolonial state resulted from the relatively short-notice delivery of a product exported from Europe in the period of decolonisation. In the overall context of the lead article, this is a marginal note, but it in turn requires an annotation, since it propagates a cliché that is anything but marginal.

Let me recall here Eugen Weber's (1979) influential study. In it, he argues that France, continental Europe's prime example of statehood, became a modern state – and made "peasants into Frenchmen" – only during the first half of the nineteenth century. This is an initial reservation which relativises the opposition of the west and the postcolonial world along the temporal dimension of state formation. However, the reservation acquires greater weight if we remember that when calculating the timescale of state formation, the colonial period itself must also be added to the balance. Accordingly, sub-Saharan Africa, for example, can look back on a state-building process that has taken not around sixty but around 120 years, approximating the time span between the French Revolution and the First World War. The authors support what I call the 'African strategy': making globalisation, the non-African world and especially the former colonial rulers responsible for the loss of statehood (albeit colonial statehood) that was experienced by many postcolonies. Yet on the contrary, the foundering of statehood in numerous postcolonial nations commences with the colonial state itself – and the authors themselves hint at as much in many apposite comments on the colonial state. The fact that more than a few colonial states were 'weak' and increasingly 'failing' states was conditioned by the "colonial situation" in Georges Balandier's (1982) sense, i.e. a monopoly on violence that reached only minimally into the internal relations of the subjugated communities, an administration whose bureaucratic and direct administrative agency was overlaid with, if not supplanted by, despotic and intermediary action, and a virtually complete lack of the basic legitimacy of cultural affiliation (Trotha 1994b). In other words, the history of the failing and failed state is also the history of colonial states, which did not succeed in overcoming the immense obstacles posed by the wealth of preconditions required for the modern state. The colonial state-constructors felt the cold wind of the non-obviousness of state rule. In many places, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, they did not succeed in effectively protecting themselves from it.

This failure of the colonial state, moreover, includes an experience that should act as a warning to the increasingly apparent colonialism of pacification and democratisation to which state-building military interventions mutate nowadays in the course of their occupations. A failure of state-building is predictable under two key conditions. One of these is radically exogenous state-building, that is, through conquerors who are alien in every respect⁷ – all the more so if these

⁷ At this point I will not further discuss the complex problem that state formation in the historically 'normal' case is exogenous to the extent that the elite agents of state formation must first of all subjugate those, in particular the mass of the peasant population, who may one day succeed in becoming self-confident 'citizens' or at least, as the German tradition has it, 'citizens of

conquerors have, like those in the current pacification deployments, made it their credo to end the occupation as soon as possible. Successful state formation is a chiefly internal transformation of societal orders, one which, of course, takes place in the context of competing political orders and which in Europe, at least, took the form of “elimination contests” which were typically violent in nature. This, certainly, is how Norbert Elias (1969) describes the warlike and bloody process by which the modern state emerged. Part of the power of Elias’s theory is that it names the indissoluble connection between political and societal transformation and the psychological reorganisation of the person as preconditions of a modern society under state rule. Only the interdependence of these three fundamental transformations makes stable statehood possible, underlining once again the radical non-obviousness of a successful process of state formation. Not least on the basis of these prerequisites for the state comes the second condition of likely failure, as the Boege team correctly observes: state-building that is faced with nations which have no history of successful statehood. This was the norm in sub-Saharan Africa.

5. From the Concept of the Failed State to the Concept of Hybrid Political Orders

The concept of the failed state, with its various degrees of failure, exists in two variants. One of these, and the one from which the Boege team most clearly dissociates itself, is what I call the “institutionalist variant”. Its view of the state is narrowed even beyond the analytical notion of the state in Max Weber’s sense. It regards the OECD model of the strong state and democratic rule of law as the yardstick by which to measure statehood. Its criteria are specific institutions such as general and fair elections guaranteeing secrecy; parliaments; parties; independent judiciaries; and human rights. It might also be called the model of “triple non-obviousness”, since it adds to Max Weber’s state the Enlightenment model with its aspects of democracy and rule of law and – at least in a rudimentary form – the interventionist model adopted by, for example, the welfare state.

As the authors’ presentation of Ghani et al.’s (2005, 2006a, 2006b) concept of the state makes clear, this model is not always easy to separate from the second variant, which I call the “functionalist” one. Here, a political order is not measured by the presence and *modus operandi* of specific institutions, but by the fulfilment of functions which the modern western state typically delivers. State-centrism here is indirect, a kind of ‘second-order’ state-centrism, because the achievements of non-state political orders are measured against (and research criteria are orientated towards) the functions of the modern state.⁸ This model is no less normative than the institutionalist one, and neither theoretical variant has anything in common with the brilliant analyses of state formation made by Bertrand de Jouvenel (1969) and Charles Tilly (1990, 1986). For the latter the beginnings of the state are to be found in brigandage, organised crime and racketeering.

Boege and his colleagues refute both variants of state-centrism in the debate on failed states. They are seeking to persuade political science and peace and conflict studies to join a voyage of discovery that will lead once and for all away from the institutional and functionalist ‘obviousness’ of state-centred thinking (and, as I would add, feeling), and towards the diversity of those political orders that they gather under the heading of “hybrid political orders”. However, in my opinion these efforts do not go far enough.

the state’ (*Staatsbürger*). The classical distinction between exogenous and endogenous state formation is hence a relative one.

⁸ This variant of state-centrism is exemplified by the theoretical basis of Research Centre (SFB) 700 of the German Research Foundation, investigating “Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood” (Risse/Lehmkuhl 2007).

The concept of hybrid political orders responds to the circumstance that the regions of fragile, failing and failed states accommodate political orders of great heterogeneity and non-synchronicity; that they lack a state monopoly on violence and, equally, encounter divergent claims to authority and legitimacy; that ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ institutions co-exist, ensure order and compete for ordering functions – in short, that the regions of fragile states are marked by a principle that has been proclaimed ‘postmodern’, namely hybridisation (Journal of American Folklore 1999). This concept is intended to highlight the diversity of non-state orders, to focus on the connections between elements of the political order that have very different societal origins and follow very different logics, and to draw attention to the fact that the different components of a political order do not exist in isolation but refer to one another, entering into a great variety of interpenetrative relationships.

So far, so good – in the context of tenacious state-centrism all the more so because the concept aims for a fundamental shift in perspective: away from the fixation on state institutions and functions, and towards the search for non-state actors and institutions which make important contributions to shaping the political order.

However, it must be asked whether the postmodern word-coinage is really necessary. Hybridity is not a peculiarity of the postcolonial order or indeed of postmodernity. It appears with the historicity of social orders itself, as should have become clear after the discussion of the historicity of the “people without history” (Wolf 1986) and the “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983). Admittedly, this objection could be countered by saying that we are talking about degrees of hybridisation, and that the present day’s hybrid political orders represent the opposite end of the spectrum to the weak hybridity of, for example, a ‘traditional’ society. But in this counterargument it becomes evident that the concept of a hybrid political order is actually intended as a ‘sensitising concept’ in the sense used by Herbert Blumer (1954) and Norman Denzin (1989). As such, it marks a beginning, even though, on the one hand, it competes with even more general yet less ambiguous terms like “non-state orders” and, on the other, falls behind what is in many respects the greater precision of concepts like “quasi-statehood” (Hahn 2006) or “para-statehood” (Klute/Trotha 2004; Trotha 2004) – concepts, to be sure, which are more limited in analytical scope right from the outset. At the same time, I would argue that ‘hybrid political order’ is conceived of in too static a way. It fails to sufficiently highlight the dynamism of hybridity, just as it downplays the dynamics, interests, conflicts and power struggles of those customary non-state institutions and actors (Klute et al. 2008) which the ‘failed state’ model regards as being the obstacles to modern statehood and the enemies of successful state-building – and which the Boege team would, in turn, like to see taking centre stage.

But while all these modified objections have their place within a narrow academic discussion of the theory and research of hybrid political orders, they are peripheral from the point of view of the ambition the authors are pursuing: to integrate traditional and local institutions, processes and actors into a practice of state formation. For this practical objective, they seem willing to sacrifice the Andersen Principle which they have just used to argue so vehemently and persuasively against state-centred concepts of the failed state. As a result, they remain silent on the price that non-statehood makes us pay for applying the Andersen Principle.

6. Somaliland, the Andersen Principle and the Price of Peace

The authors write: “the Somaliland and Bougainville cases demonstrate that new forms of ‘state-building’ [...] can have positive results” (Boege et al. in this volume, 28). I will restrict myself to commenting on the case of Somaliland, which the Boege team presents in detail. What does that case actually demonstrate?

There is a clue in the fact that the authors place the word ‘state-building’ in quotation marks. For Somaliland is not a case that can document the success of state-building according to the authors’ ideas. Somaliland is a considerable success and a demonstration of several relevant insights. For one thing, it proves that there are ways out of the violent collapse of states, ways which lie beyond the state and in the mobilization of customary institutions and procedures. Crucially, and contrary to the cliché of the rigidity of tradition and customary ‘premodern’ institutions (a cliché that cannot be corrected within the western tradition of emancipation and progress), in Somaliland these institutions and procedures have proved to be extremely flexible and adaptable. While the state collapsed, the segmentary order has endured through all the storms of history, in ever new variations, by ‘modernising’ itself again and again. I call this kind of continuity “supple transcontinuity”. Somaliland is, as well, a demonstration of how there is a central role for the local neo-traditional authorities among the actors of peace-seeking and consolidation. But there is one thing Somaliland certainly is not, and that is an example of state-building – or only if we use the word in the context of a state-centrist debate, metaphorically and ironically, as the quotation marks are presumably intended to indicate.

Somaliland is a segmentary order in etatist clothing. Somaliland reverses, so to speak, the story of *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. It has clothes on, and those clothes fulfil precisely the task that is intended for them: they are cut according to the conventions of taste, namely to satisfy the strict rulebook of international law and international relations, in which states are the dominant actors, and to veil what this rulebook insists must not be revealed, namely a segmentary order. One of Somaliland’s most challenging features is that it has *no* monopoly on the means of violence⁹ and that the path to peace was not accompanied by disarmament of the population – thus remaining, as in all segmentary orders, permanently precarious. Why, then, should we speak of a process of state-building where there is no state? It is pointless to speculate – perhaps the answer lies in the authors’ desire to search for middle ground in the discourse on state-building. The important point is that here they abandon the Andersen Principle and, just like at the end of the story of *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, align themselves with the crowd of chamberlains who “walked with still greater dignity, as if they carried the train which did not exist”.

Somaliland is provocative because it is a segmentary order, and as a segmentary order in the garb of the modern state it claims the status of an actor in international relations and international law. This means nothing less than that the juridical and political foundations of the ‘Westphalian order’ no longer hold, and that international relations must be placed on new foundations. The challenge that seems to be posed by the twenty-first century is to continue the process which began in the context of war, when additional protocols extended the protection of the Geneva Convention beyond the circle of soldiers to combatants in civil war conflicts – that is, to non-state actors. International politics has an analogous task. It must find institutions, procedures and legal systems which are orientated on actors’ ability to ensure peace and order, not exclusively on their statehood. This is what the Boege team reports regarding Somaliland, and what defines the heart of

⁹ The same is true for Papua New Guinea, of which Bougainville is part.

its peace-policy ambitions. However, the authors risk muddying the discourse and praxis around the integration of non-state actors in the formation of orders of peace by disguising this integration as a process of state-building. After all, the issue is no longer the state alone, which has probably passed the zenith of its expansion. It is, rather, the acknowledgement that non-state orders too (or rather, in view of the long history of non-statehood: especially non-state orders) hold a substantial potential for peace and order that we cannot continue to ignore. Applying the Andersen Principle consistently would mean replacing the principle of state-building with the principle of peacebuilding.

That has, of course, its price. I imagine that it is this price, among other things, which makes it so difficult in western democratic welfare states, especially among the political elites, to find legitimation for non-state-centred politics, and which recurs in the harmonising tone of the authors' representation of non-state institutions and procedures. The price is made up of, on the one hand, the fact that the principle of peacebuilding by means of non-state orders follows a principle analogous to the Westphalian order's principle of non-intervention: to achieve peace, also those social and cultural orders and procedures of non-state actors must be accepted which do not seamlessly match the universalist claims of human rights and emancipation. Somaliland is undoubtedly not a country of human-rights individualism or unrestricted press freedom, nor one of gender mainstreaming. The history of human rights and social emancipation is a history of statehood – statehood which has been assertive to an unprecedented degree – and, of course, equally a history of the appalling violation of human rights and the suppression of emancipatory movements; something exemplified by the last century with its fascisms and totalitarianisms. Minorities need a central authority capable of asserting itself if they are to achieve their claims to recognition and emancipation. The end of the state, and a peace policy on the basis of non-state orders, makes life considerably more difficult for such minority and emancipatory claims.

What is even more problematic is that peacebuilding by means of non-state orders has to be paid for by curtailments in the reliability of that peace. Somaliland shows quite plainly that the consolidation of peace in non-state orders takes time and places huge demands on the patience of those concerned. Follow-up and re-negotiations are the rule rather than the exception. The large number of powerful and power-conscious local actors makes it necessary to put in place not a peace treaty but 'omnibus treaties' with local rulers and groups of differing degrees of influence. Concluding peace with one party does not automatically mean the acceptance of the peace treaty by another party. In fact, the peace treaty of the now widely accepted type loses its significance. It is replaced by a plethora of small-scale agreements with more or less influential coalitions of actors. In contrast to western notions of law, moreover, peace accords are only temporary agreements, which therefore remain as precarious as the peace in segmentary orders. Reliable guarantees of lasting peace do not exist in non-state orders. Unlike in state orders with a legitimate monopoly on violence, the non-state order remains in the shadow of violent self-help and of the relative political autonomy of social units, whether those be segments, 'age sets' or 'big men' (Godelier/Strathern 1991; Trotha 1986). We must use the Andersen Principle and the principle of peacebuilding to learn how to deal with such insecurity and lack of reliability – though this should at least be made easier by the fact that the principle of denial and refutation of non-statehood, as pursued by state-centred politics for decades, has failed miserably in many parts of the world.

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