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## **Collapse or Order? Questioning State Collapse in Africa**

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**Abstract**

In the aftermath of 9/11, the problem of state 'collapse' and 'failure' appears again on the agenda as an important question of global security. Meanwhile, the discussion on this phenomenon seems to be placed in a growing deadlock between classical state-centrist approaches, which keep pointing at functional problems of modern statehood, and more society-oriented insights that try to explain other political and economic loyalties that have emerged in the context of weak state performance. Both approaches nonetheless appear increasingly incapable of defining and delimiting the notion of political order absent of an overarching state framework. While often contradictory explanations exist about what may lead states to collapse, little grounding is provided as to what actually lays beyond this witnessed breakdown of public authority. Besides the global war on terror, such grounding appears more necessary than ever if we look at the continuing problematic nature of statehood in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, a continent hitherto beset with endemic warfare.

This paper makes a first attempt to fill these blank spaces on the analytical map. It does so by explaining, first, the obstacles that appear to be blocking an integrative approach towards the problem of state implosion. Second, it offers a first step into developing an alternative framework for studying political order in situations of post state collapse'. Central to this approach is the notion of political power (or social control): taking as an entry point the "areas of domination and opposition" that exist in the midst of state-society relations, it specifically looks at the different forces in society that try to monopolize the three domains that are traditionally connected to modern state performance: (1) the monopoly over violence, (2) the allocation of economic resources and (3) the representation of a more or less 'fixed' population. Although obviously more sympathetic to more society-oriented approaches, the presented view nonetheless tries to combine these with a more integrative model of state-society relations, which serves to analyze how states and societies continue to constitute and transform one another in a context of growing political insecurity.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In the aftermath of 9/11, the problems of state collapse and state failure have moved centre stage on the academic and policy agenda. While during the early 1990s, the implosion of governments in countries like Somalia, Zaire and Burundi was still largely viewed as a 'marginal' phenomenon – associated primarily with the incapacities of Third World rulers and the effects of economic dependency (Ayoob, 1996; Mazrui, 1995; Zartman, 1995; Zolberg, 1992) – today these events are raising concerns of an entirely different order. First, state failure is believed to have evolved from a regional phenomenon to one reaching almost global proportions<sup>1</sup>. In recent analysis, the weak state capacities of countries like Sudan or Afghanistan are identified with the emergence of non-state actors who appear hostile to the "fundamental values and interests" of international society. Simultaneously, these actors are exploiting the "power vacuum" left by malfunctioning governments to challenge the principles of the international system itself (Yannis, 2002).

Second, this shift of focus has also acquainted state collapse and failure with an important strategic dimension. In contrast to the early 1990s – when the world seemed primarily preoccupied with the humanitarian and regional consequences of state failure – failing and collapsing states are now progressively interpreted as a potential source of international instability. Put bluntly, the perception of state failure has moved from a "strategic threat" to global stability (Helman and Ratner, 1993), to a threat to the international system of states as such. One view that has thus gained increasing popularity amongst strategic thinkers is to describe failed or collapsed states as dangerous breeding grounds of "instability, mass migration, and murder" (Rotberg, 2002a), and – in the extreme case – as reservoirs and exporters of terror (Dorff, 1996; Rotberg, 2002a-b). This vision has acquired a particularly acute dimension during the interventions of US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are both described as extreme cases of state collapse and failure. Both countries have also become the subject of considerable state-building efforts from the part of the international community – but the results of which remain yet uncertain (Cramer and Goodhand, 2002; Reno, 2003; Roy, 2004).

Besides the analysis of the Global War On Terror, the current policy and academic analysis of state collapse still suffers from a number of considerable weaknesses. In the past, a number of analytical models have been proposed within the existing categories of analysis (Gurr et al., 2000; Carment, 2003), but which do not specifically address the issue of state collapse as distinct from general political crises (Spanger, 2000). Similarly, and as suggested by Milliken and Krause (2002) and Martin Doornbos (2002), the literature on state collapse and failure suffers from a number of dangerous flaws, the most important of which are obscure definitions, and a blurring of causes and consequences. Most importantly: while academic and policy analysis has mostly concentrated on the *functional* disparities of state performance in the modern state system (including the normative and practical implications resulting from malfunctioning governments), the emergence of state collapse still seems to be considered almost as an end state, or the product of a "degenerative disease" that ends with an extreme case of governance problems (Zartman, 1995). As I will argue, this analytical opposition between 'normal' states and 'pathological' state collapse is sustaining a dangerous metaphor, which increasingly obstructs our analysis of political order in the absence of an overarching state framework. Moreover, it appears that international interventions in such contexts of endemic

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a shorter version of a previous paper I wrote for the Conflict Research Group.

state collapse is suffering from a conceptual crisis that cannot be overcome by simply limiting the problem of state collapse to institutional and societal failure. I believe that new insights are needed to explain, not only the different factors and trajectories that are leading to the implosion of the state and its structures, but also and primarily, what lays *beyond* this perceived breakdown of authority – and how we should visualize and handle the connections between state collapse and the larger processes of social change.

As a starting point of this essay, I have taken the discussion launched some three years ago in the issues of *Development and Change* and the *Third World Quarterly*, and which have raised these points in detail. Furthermore, I have taken the suggestion raised by Spanger (2000) to treat state collapse as a “process” rather than as an end state. In my opinion, it is in this sense – namely as a process of social *transformation* resulting from specific *institutional* arrangements, that the issue of state collapse should be understood. This insight should enable us, not only to re-evaluate the connection between state collapse and state formation in the modern world (in other words, to question what makes states work, and what fails to do so), but also to place the issue of state collapse in its specific social setting. As my main focus, I shall concentrate on sub-Saharan Africa, for the simple reason that most cases of state collapse are situated on this continent. The aim here is to learn probably not so much *about* then to learn *from* Africa, as this continent gradually seems to have lost its monopoly in this area while nonetheless providing lessons to other cases.

### **Defining the problem**

Three ideas currently dominate the vision on state ‘collapse’. The first idea is that of institutional breakdown. In William Zartman’s meanwhile famous definition, state collapse refers to “a situation where the structure, authority (legitimate power), law and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new.” (Zartman, 1995: 1). Following this description, state collapse is thus primarily interpreted in terms of a collapse of *government*, and the reaffirmation of the structures of public authority is subsequently seen as the prime guarantor of the functioning of society at large. An important consequence of this view is that academic analysis should primarily look at possibilities for *post*-collapse intervention. To paraphrase the same author, the most important objective of the analyst should be to ‘Put Humpty Dumpty back together again’; the reconstitution of state power is thus seen as primary to the sometimes thriving survival of societal forces during situations of state collapse. In the last chapter of his book (called *Putting Things Together Again*), Zartman reaffirms this view, saying that the first precondition for successful analysis is a reaffirmation of the state: “in the search for answers, it is first necessary to reaffirm that reconstruction of the state is necessary.” In addition, because he believes that both the cause and the remedy to state collapse relate to “socio-political structures” rather than the state itself, it is better in his opinion to reaffirm the validity of the existing political unit in both theoretical and practical terms. In general, he concludes, “restoration of stateness is dependent on reaffirmation of the precollapse state.” (*Ibidem*: 268)

The second feature of this analysis is that it generally connects institutional breakdown to a breakdown of society, which are consequently seen as two sides of the same coin. The reason, according to Zartman, is that in a “weak” society, there exists a general inability to refill the institutional gaps left by withering government structures: the organization and allocation of political

assets thus easily fall into the hands of “warlords and gang leaders”, who often make use of “ethnic elements” as a source of identity and control in the absence of an overriding social contract that binds citizens to the state (*Ibidem*: 7). Although technically speaking about the causes of state ‘failure’, this view is also expressed in Baker and Ausink (1996), Gros (1996) and Dorff (1996), who all mirror the societal breakdown associated with state collapse against a fracturing of the principles of ‘good governance’. A good summary of this view is offered by Robert Dorff, who asserts that in relatively ‘weak’ states, “democratic institutions and processes can easily fall prey to the forces of uncertainty and fear, especially when there are indigenous actors ready, willing, and able to exploit human emotions for the sake of redirecting or killing democratic reforms.” (Dorff, 1996: 21) State failure, society failure and state collapse are thus essentially placed on a development ‘continuum’, where one stage of failure almost automatically leads to another. While the difference between these stages is primarily one of *degree*, the common feature of these accounts is that they trace both state collapse and state failure to a common origin, namely “an overall breakdown of the corpus of formal and informal rules governing society, accompanied by the disappearance of formal authority or its emaciation.”<sup>2</sup>

A final feature of this analysis is its preoccupation with armed conflict. Countries like Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are commonly described as extreme examples of a Hobbesian battle of ‘all against all’, in which national state agents are incapable of restoring a monopoly over the means of force, and the provision of wealth and security gradually become fragmented amongst a number of extremely violent contenders that start operating on their own account. The immediate result is often an increase of armed violence and lawlessness as well as a loss of political and economic space to the advantage of non-state armed actors: rebels, militias, bandits etc., that emerge from the authority crisis left by withering government. In their search for economic advantage (and in the absence of a regulating framework), these actors commonly develop a number of extremely lucrative alliances with external players including transnational crime syndicates and armies from neighbouring states, which at the same time provide an important incentive for the prolongation of armed struggle. Breaking this “conflict trap” (Collier, 1995) thus becomes the prime concern for anyone interested in restoring legitimate authority in such places affected by state collapse and prolonged armed conflict.

### **Interventionism and Transnationalism**

The first problem regarding this analysis of state ‘collapse’ concerns the international intervention in today’s collapsing states. As argued by Reno, Duffield and others, the structural adjustment and privatization measures during the 1980s have contributed to a great degree to state collapse, essentially because incumbent state leaders used these resources to skim off profit for their own personal advantage. As soon as bilateral aid fell away, some of these states quickly collapsed as a result of decreasing resources (Somalia and Zaire are a case in point). Contrary to the 1980s, aid is now increasingly seen as a second opportunity “to make modernity work” and hence to counter the inequalities and impoverishment that resulted from these structural adjustment and privatization measures during the 1980s (Schuurmans, 2000). Especially since the latter part of the 1990s, NGOs and international agencies have become more and more prepared to intervene in the world’s conflicts, with interventions that go from massive humanitarian and development aid to co-ordinated programmes for re-creating political space and accelerating political and economic reform (Doornbos,

2002). Apart some notable exceptions – some of which offer a particularly apocalyptic and anti-interventionist view on contemporary conflicts (Kaplan, 1994), state collapse is currently understood as forming part of a development *malaise*, to be reversed by a combination of smart sanctions, external assistance and institution-building. At the same time, this new development ideology has progressively made development into an extension of the global quest for security, of which the general aim is to “reconcile the inevitable disruption of progress with the need for order.” (Duffield, 2002)

More often than not, however, these interventions have involved a radical shift in the political and economic structures of the societies that stand on the receiving end, including sometimes the wholesale take-over of a number of services that are traditionally associated with the functioning of the modern state (Clapham, 2002; Duffield, 2001; Ottaway, 2002). Consider for example a city like Goma in eastern DR Congo, where a wide range of services that are traditionally connected to state performance (such as water supply, housing, and infrastructure) have all been taken over by non-state actors, including sometimes religious institutions (Verhoeve, 2004). To build a house, open a business or pick up a drivers licence, people do not to address themselves anymore to the malfunctioning or abandoned state administration, but instead try their worth through the different parallel institutions that ensure their access to valuable public resources. Similarly, international aid can also confirm existing imbalances that form the basis of state collapse: in Sudan, southern refugees have been assisted by international aid agencies during their stay in the north, while simultaneously taking away their chances to development in their home region (Duffield, 2002). In some cases, this neglect of the internal dynamics of communal conflict can even lead to situations that prolong situations of state implosion, in that it disregards the changes in the definition and negotiation of power and authority at a local level (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, 2004). This lack of contextuality inevitably has consequences for the quality of both policy and academic analysis, since a good understanding of the processes underlying armed conflict and state collapse is crucial to determine the ways in which to approach the problem of political reconstruction in ‘post-conflict’ situations (Milliken and Krause, 2002)

This problem becomes especially evident when we analyse the many ‘transition’ processes that are currently underway in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa – but which have so far produced very mixed results (Menkhaus, 2004). While the sudden “outbreak of tranquility” in countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia and Angola might have been welcome news for a continent that has hitherto been beset by seemingly unending violence, it remains evident that, more often than not, these countries will continue to live the consequences of communal violence in ways that will be determining for their respective political futures; other regions – like the eastern parts of the DR Congo, northern Cote d’Ivoire, Nigeria and Sudan – seem to evolve on the contrary into a permanent situation of low-intensity, low-casualty conflict, which could be described ‘neither-war-nor-peace’<sup>3</sup>. Although it is too early to draw definitive conclusions, a thorough understanding of both these ongoing conflict dynamics, and of their possible consequences for post-conflict reconstruction, thus remain a matter of utter concern to both analysts and policy-makers interested in the impact of armed conflict and state implosion in the global ‘periphery’.

## The State versus Society?

The second problem relates to the fact that state collapse cannot automatically be equalized with society collapse. Martin Doornbos explains that there is often a misplaced tendency to look for single causes and explanations of state collapse, and similarly to propose single, preferably 'quick-fix' solutions as to its reconstitution. In other words, collapse of government does not necessarily include collapse of governance: "with collapse," says Doornbos, "new kinds of situations arise... novel forms of domination may emerge around the introduction of new frameworks of political and economic accountability and control." (Doornbos, 2002).

Some recent case material suggests that the combination of withering statehood and violent armed conflict sometimes have given leeway to the formation of new, non-state centres of authority based on alternative models of social control. Though regarded as a classic example of state 'collapse', Somalia has seen the emergence of a mosaic of local polities evolving around new arrangements between local strongmen, family and clan elders and political (militia) leaders that provide Somali citizens with variable levels of 'governance', if not 'government' (Menkhaus, 2003a-b, 2004). Such arrangements have included the reassertion of community leaders in the establishment of sharia courts, a demobilisation of militias to the advantage of private security forces, and cross-regional arrangements in the area of informal commerce. Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, 2004) – and to a lesser extent also in Sierra Leone (Richards, 1996), the Sahel countries (Roitman, 2002) and Nigeria (Reno, 2002), the conflict environment resulting from public authority collapse seems to have led to the emergence of new institutional arrangements between grassroots populations, armed actors and various 'elites' at a local and national (or regional) level that are fostering new strategies of social, economic and political integration. Although no single designation appears capable of capturing these "cross-currents and contradictions" (Young, 2004), the new configurations of politics and violence in contemporary Africa have nonetheless raised renewed questions about the interconnection between international and local networks of negotiation and authority, as well as central state power (Callaghy, Kassimir and Latham, 2001; Newbury, 2002).

The previous examples essentially tell us two things. First, they suggest that for the communities inhabiting these areas, participation in state structures is not self-evident. This observation has a particular relevance for our understanding of post-colonial statehood in sub-Saharan Africa which, as we know, did not always fulfil the empirical elements by which states are ordinarily recognized (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). In particular, it resonates with earlier observations, made amongst others in Ghana, Guinea and Congo-Zaire, on the growing disengagement of citizens from state structures to the advantage of more 'informal' political and economic arrangements (Azarya and Chazan, 1987; see also: MacGaffey, 1987, 1991). The comments of Azarya and Chazan are useful for our analysis, in that they cut right through the state-society divide that has characterized so many studies on Africa for the last three decades. Essentially, they say that both the hailers and the critics of the African state suffer from an "engagement paradigm", i.e. they primarily focus on the political center and examine post-colonial developments in terms of the differential participation of various groups and their influence on state performance. What this paradigm neglects, however, is that the engagement in state-related operations may not always be worthwhile. In some cases, the risks of (over)exposure and (over)dependence on the state may even outweigh the spoils of participation.

Hence, subscription to state functions (commonly summarized in the monopoly on violence, the allocation of welfare and the representation of the population in terms of their political participation) will always form the subject of a 'rational' but embedded calculation both from the part of 'elites' as well as the 'grassroots' population.

So, rather than an accomplished fact, the state seems to more of an *ideal* to which state agents might have aspired, but which they seldom achieved (Milliken and Krause, 2002). Even state-centrists now accept the idea that policy outcomes are necessarily contingent upon forces emanating from both the domestic and the international field. For example, according to Teda Skocpol, "state autonomy' is not a fixed structural feature of any governmental system," because government organizations necessarily undergo important transformations both in relation to other organizations as to societal groups. (Skocpol, 1985: 8, 14). In order to reach their ideal, state agents have to weigh their actions against the projects and desires of other social forces (such as the church, the mafia, economic entrepreneurs), but which do not necessarily share the same view on how to establish an integrated domination over society. To paraphrase again Azarya and Chazan, the persistence of these social forces in sub-Saharan Africa clearly "indicates how conditional allegiance to the state apparatus really is." By continuing to withhold resources from the state, by locating authority at ever lower levels of society, and by combining traditional roots with modern additions, these forces may continue to form "innovative organisms capable of achieving self-sufficiency and generating new experiments at communal definition." To the extent that they continue to resist state control, these forces may even "[contain] the seeds of a more massive realignment of power relations predicated on the dispersion of state functions to (...) collectivities that the state claims to represent." (Azarya and Chazan, 1987: 128-129).

A second lesson, maybe paradoxically, is that is that the decline of state influence does not necessarily have to mean its total collapse in terms of future orders. On the contrary, the focus on societal responses to state policies seems to reassert the continued importance of the state in understanding social processes in Africa. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that withdrawal from the state cannot be treated as an immoral fact: while on the one hand, engagement in informal economies or withdrawal from public institutions might underline the possibility of preserving a certain standard of living – and sometimes even create a number of political and economic opportunities – these decisions will simultaneously deplete the state apparatus of its core functions. Therefore, the calculations of 'grassroots' actors is sure to have a decisive influence on how sovereign statehood is going to be formulated in any future 'order', and this both in terms of the representation of the 'national' population and the state's autonomy in providing security and welfare. The second reason, scarcely hinted at in some recent case studies, is that in the continuing negotiation of local 'order', three elements commonly dominate the local debate, namely: the monopoly on violence, the allocation of wealth, and the representation of local populations (or the issue of legitimacy); notable attention in this respect is being paid to the provision of security and protection (Reno, 2003). What is needed in order to understand the continued importance of more 'private' or informal ways of creating political order in sub-Saharan Africa is not so much a reaffirmation or a rejection of the African state as such, but rather a detailed analysis of societal responses to processes of state implosion; elementary insights into the workings of authority, and of the actors



engaged in its formulation, should thus enable us to give additional insights into the continuing struggle between the state, society and their relation to social change.

An important question that arises from this is where we have to locate authority in such contexts (for a discussion, see Callaghy, Kassimir and Latham, 2001). In the past, most attention appears to have gone to the *external* dimensions of civil conflict and its connection to state implosion or formation. In today's 'complex emergencies', NGOs have gradually taken over a range of social services that are traditionally connected to the state. This is obviously going to have a decisive impact on how political order is being interpreted and organized in situations of 'post-collapse'. Meanwhile, local actors (traders, militia leaders, economic and political elites) have developed new linkages with the outside world that are meant to strengthen their advantage over competitors, and reduce state interference in their internal affairs. Such insights serve very much to define the different obstacles local and national actors face in terms of their participation in state-building projects. However, we are still largely in the dark as to the *internal* dimension of power relations in the context of state collapse. In other words, these external dimensions and influences do not explain how we should visualize the internal organization of political constituencies in the context of state implosion. Immediate questions that arise in this regard are thus, first, how do local elites and societies adapt to a context of growing state absence and civil war? In other words, what strategies are developed at a 'grassroots' level of society to confront the physical and economic insecurity resulting from state collapse? Second, what is the impact of such adaptation processes on the changing notion of political 'order'? As this analysis suggests, it might not be very useful to confront opposing concepts like the 'state' and 'society', order and disorder or even traditional and modern. What seems to be called for in such situations is rather a detailed analysis of actors and their interests – i.e. "whose interests are served and whose interests matter" – and of the relation between the representatives of 'old' and 'new' orders. Let me end by proposing a model to support this analysis.

### **Beyond State Collapse: Towards an Integrated Approach**

An alternative model, drawing on earlier insights put forward by authors like Azarya and Chazan, Timothy Mitchell and Joel Migdal, views state 'collapse' not so much as an end state or breakdown, but rather as a *culmination point* in the *continuous struggle*, between *various forces* in society, to control the three core functions that are generally connected to state performance. In my earlier notes, I identified these functions as (1) the provision of security – commonly supported by a monopoly over the means of force; (2) the allocation of welfare – or the ability to extract and allocate economic resources; and (3) the representation of a 'national' population inhabiting a fixed territory<sup>4</sup>. This model could be identified as the state-in-society model. According to Migdal:

"The state-in-society model... zeroes in on the *conflict-laden interaction* of multiple sets of formal and informal guideposts for how to behave that are promoted by different groupings in society. These multiple groupings, all of which use subtle and not-so-subtle rewards and sanctions – including, at times, out-and-out violence – to try and get their way, comprise *loose-knit informal collections of people as well as highly structured organizations* with manifold resources at their disposal. In short, all societies have ongoing battles among groups pushing

different versions of how people should behave. The nature and outcomes of these struggles give societies their distinctive structure and character.” (Migdal, 2001, p. 11-12: my stress)

Two ideas dominate this approach. The first concerns the state. The rather straightforward proposal offered by Migdal and the state-in-society model is to abandon the Weberian inspired analysis of the state that has hitherto disconnected theory from practice. As I suggested, this sort of analysis is unlikely to provide understanding into the survival of informal politics in Africa, because it persistently sets out an ideal model of (unexisting) statehood against conceptually derived forms of state authority that are consequently described as ‘failed’, ‘weak’ or ‘collapsed’<sup>5</sup>. Such concepts could maybe be useful for constructing typologies of existing states (be it in or outside historical contexts), but they are rather unuseful if we want to analyze the workings of authority at an inner level of society. As I also suggested, this ideal view of statehood and its derivants is based on a rather unidirectional interpretation of modernity that is largely contrasted by the facts. Contrary to the classical view on social mobilization, which views the adherence of individuals to modern values in terms of their ‘culture contact’ and rational benefits, a growing number of cases seem to demonstrate a rather peculiar coexistence of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’, ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ lifestyles in modern societies (Migdal, 1974). Especially in situations where state structures are absent (or almost absent), the participation in such modern things as urban life, trade and resource exploitation appears to create a thriving ability of individuals to internalize basically ‘modern’ values, but at the same time integrate them into political frameworks associated with more ‘traditional’ forms of authority (for an illustrating example, see De Boeck, 1996). To evaluate the impact of such mobilization on the definition of authority, we must look once again at the role of different ‘borderguards’, i.e. strongmen, community leaders and other actors that determine the interaction between aspiring individuals and the outside world. I will come back to this point further in this paper.

What this view proposes, therefore, is to look at the state and modernity not as a one-way process but as a contradictory entities that often acts against themselves. One view that has thus been proposed is to compare the state to the international ‘anarchical society’ (Reno, 2003), in which the unifying idea of an international ‘society’ is constantly being confronted with its fractionizing parts (this is the international system of ‘states’). However, such view might again offer a distorted image of reality because in most cases, even the idea of a unified society seems absent. What is needed, therefore, seems not so much an affirmation of societal values that confirm the persistence of patronage or plunder logics, but rather a detailed analysis of the conflict-laden interaction between the forces in society that are trying to establish social control.

This brings me to the second idea, which is the idea of society. In analyzing society response to state ‘collapse’, we should be careful not to fall in the trap layed by classical liberal and marxist theorists, and who explain societal forces essentially in terms of shared norms or class interests. As I said, part of the problem might indeed be that a common set of norms may be completely absent in situations of violent state implosion. In this, I could agree partly with the argument of Zartman and other state-centrists, who say that in situations of state collapse, societal forces are generally incapable to rebound and fill the positions left by withering government. However, at second sight this might not be due to the absence of binding norms (which were already absent before state collapse), but rather because certain actors *choose* not to participate in state-related operations<sup>6</sup>. Rather than limiting

ourselves to a discussion on norms, what seems to count then are more the interests and calculations of those people for whom participation in state structures is not considered as worthwhile. The basis of these calculations might be much more down-to-earth than anybody has so far assumed.

Finally, it has to be emphasized that the absence of a common set of norms or interests does not mean that there are no rules governing society. On the contrary, what emerges in situations of state 'collapse' in sub-Saharan Africa, in many cases could be described as a continuation of neopatrimonialism without the state. What I mean by this is that the social 'contract' that binded citizens to the state – and which in many cases consisted of citizens 'fending for themselves' – has tended to devolve completely to the individual level. Thus, in the eastern parts of the DRC – amongst other places – the "reciprocal assimilation" (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1999) that often existed between local 'strongmen', national politicians and the state administration appear to have been replaced by more individual arrangements between local actors seeking economic and political advantage. The state-in-society model offers a first step to also analyse the meaning of these arrangements for the (re)constitution of social order.

### **Applicability**

The advantages of this state-in-society model for analysing situations of 'state collapse' are manifold. First, it finally enables us to abandon the asphyxiating state-society dichotomy that has hitherto characterized so much of the analysis of state-society relations in Africa. Instead, it forces us to look at the various arena's of "domination and opposition" between the forces that are competing for social control. The central question one has to pose when confronting state 'collapse' is thus not: how and when did the state stop performing its functions, but how have particular social forces adapted themselves to incremental changes in the state framework, and what has been the effect of these accommodations on the process of social change. So, instead of looking at institutional strengths and weaknesses, this analysis looks at two-way state-society struggle for political domination; as said, this struggle does not occur between the state and society as such, but rather between different social forces that are competing for social control. These forces include various layers of actors such as national and local politicians, the (remnants of) state administration, as well as local 'strongmen', crime groups and religious institutions.

Following this line of thought, the implosion of state structures is thus understood, not merely as an institutional 'collapse' or breakdown, but as a culmination point in the struggle, between various forces in society, to establish an integrated social control over society. Within this scope, we could possibly draw up two analytical extremes that result from this struggle for domination. The first possible outcome is that one force emerges which can mobilize the necessary resources and support (or normative framework) to dominate locally, and extend its power towards a society-wide domination. The second, more probable option, however, is that the struggle for social control remains undecided, which thus results in a dispersed domination and a fragmentation of social control. In such case, the conflict for social control is likely to devolve to ever lower levels of society, and – as suggested by the Somalia and DRC case – by a strengthening of communal boundaries to the advantage of more 'ethnic' or 'clan' based polities. Whatever the outcome of this struggle, what one has to look for are thus not merely the institutional arrangements that are hollowed out at the national level, but first and

foremost, how local communities are adapting themselves to a situation of state absence, and what these accommodation strategies are telling us about the redefinition of authority.

A second advantage of this model is that it does not look at state collapse as an 'abnormal' event, but as one possible outcome of the ongoing process of state formation (Milliken and Krause, 2002). This observation could be summarized in the statement of Eisenstadt about empires. According to Eisenstadt, "collapse, far from being an anomaly, both in the real world and in social evolutionary theory, presents in dramatic form not the end of social institutions, but almost always the beginning of new ones": 1988: 293). As proposed by Milliken and Krause, the points of dialogue for future analysis could thus be twofold. On the one hand, we should start thinking hard about the possibility that state collapse presents a plausible, and perhaps even likely, outcome for some states in the system. One way to approach this question could be to examine the possibility that the forces that produce strong and legitimate states in some contexts can – interacting with different local and historical conditions – generate weak and collapsed states in others. On the other hand, it becomes more and more important in this context to look at what lies *beyond* state collapse: this analysis would not only include an identification of the forces that are arising out of the depths of public authority crisis generated by state implosion, but also how these forces are competing to establish a society-wide domination. As suggested, this analysis should focus both on the 'old' political framework including (remnants of) the state apparatus, national politicians and local strongmen, as well as 'new' forces emerging from public authority crisis including warlords, militias and rebel forces (or so-called 'non-state armed actors') and the grassroots population.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Consider for example the statement by Helman and Ratner (1993): "From Haiti in the Western Hemisphere to the remnants of Yugoslavia in Europe, from Somalia, Sudan, and Liberia in Africa to Cambodia in Southeast Asia, a disturbing new phenomenon is emerging: the failed nation-state, *utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community.*" (my stress)

<sup>2</sup> What distinguishes Gros' account is that he distinguishes both between various types of state 'failure', as well as the conditioning factors that lead to its emergence. First, his taxonomy of failed states offers an interesting first step to differentiate between states that meet none of the criteria that are commonly connected to modern statehood, and those that meet some of them. Gros thus differentiates between five types of failed states that are subsequently placed on a 'continuum'. These are the anarchic state (exemplified by Somalia), the anaemic state (whose energy is sapped by counter-insurgency groups seeking to take over authority, such as Haiti), the phantom of mirage state (characterized only by a "semblance of authority" like Congo-Zaire), the captured state (which only represents part of the polity, like Rwanda and Burundi), and the aborted state (which failed even before the state was consolidated, like Bosnia and Angola). An important last note is that the categories mentioned by Gros should not be interpreted as fixed stages: states may "straddle them at particular points in their history", and they may linger on in a stage without necessarily jumping to another. Second, he names five conditioning factors that lead states to fail. These factors are economic malperformance, lack of social synergy (or the pervasiveness of patronage), authoritarianism, militarism and environmental degradation caused by rampant population growth.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'violent peace' might offer an approximative sense of such contexts, since it refers to the relative difference that often reigns between long periods of low-intensity war and ever shorter periods of limited physical and economic 'security' (Duffield, 2001)

<sup>4</sup> These functions are generally accepted as three core functions of the state (Giddens). In an alternative vision, Del Rosso (1995) and Gros (1996) add some additional elements such as the control over the natural environment and private sector activities. However, these authors immediately stress that redistributive and regulative functions (such as the regulation of labour relations and the redistribution of capital) cannot be part of this categorisation, lest one wants to run the risk of rendering the concept "almost meaningless" (Gros, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> As suggested, Weber would certainly not agree with such an extension of his concept: see Granovetter and Swedberg (2001).

<sup>6</sup> A useful example in this respect was offered by René Lemarchand (1997) in his discussion on the democratisation process in Zaire.

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