Failed State or Failed Label? The concealing concept and the case of Somalia

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Introduction

When accounts of African states are made, most often they are compared with the Western idea of a perfect Weber-style state. Subsequently, African states are described with negative adjectives such as "weak" or "failed". In this paper I will discuss the following question:

To what extent is the "failed state" label suitable to describe an African state – in this case Somalia, how is it used and what are the main problems connected with the applying of this label?

In this paper I will suggest that the failed state label is very little enlightening, and I agree with Hagmann & Hoehne (2009, 44) who point out that "the state failure debate is confronted by empirical, analytical, normative and practical shortcomings of considerable proportion". I also embrace the same scholars' criticism of the discourse for having an underlying dogmatic assumption and wishful expectation that all states sooner or later will adopt a model of Western liberal democracy. Additionally, I would argue that the failed state discourse is part and parcel of Western countries' securitization on certain states, putting all emphasis on the "failed", subsequently leading to biased depictions which works self-reinforcing and in symbiosis with the failed state paradigm itself.

In the following I will look at the origins of the failed state concept, and will thereafter discuss Weber's famous definition of the state and its implications for the "failed state" concept. I will show how the term "failed state" is highly problematic both empirically and theoretically. I will criticize the implicit assumption in the "failed state" paradigm, that there can be such thing as a complete state, and suggest that we need a reconceptualization of the state in Somalia. Furthermore I will argue that the "failed state" label becomes a problem for those labelled and that it contributes to keep African states in the margins of international relations.

Instead of focusing on what an African state is not, I think it is more sensible to try to identify what it is. By taking off the glasses of liberalism or realism, and looking through the lenses of postcolonialism and poststructuralism instead, one will gain a better understanding of the current state of an African "failed" state: Here exemplified by Somalia. When I talk about Somalia in this paper, I refer to the Somali Republic, the internationally recognized state that was formed by the unity of British Somaliland and the former Italian Somalia in 1960. Since fall of Mohamed Siad Barre, president and dictator from 1969 and 1991, and the subsequent collapse of the Somali government, the country has been the prime example of a so-called "failed state". Somalia has not had any federal, functional government since then, but has nevertheless maintained international recognition and kept its juridical status as an independent state (Bøås 2009).

The origin of the "failed state" concept

The end of the Cold War shaped a new international political context where the issues of democracy and human rights were brought out from the internal to the external scene. The weakened role of the Soviet Union gave the United States the possibility to increase its global influence. In this context *the absence of effective government*

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emerged on the world political agenda together with the concept of the "failed state" (Akpinarli 2009).

Boutros Boutros-Gali and Kofi Annan, the former Secretaries-General of the UN, used the "failed state" term as early as in 1990, although the General Assembly or the Security Council never used it. Somalia, which was a typical case of the absence of effective government, was described by the UN without the use of the term "failed state". The concept was then applied for the first time in the article "Saving Failed States" published in the winter edition of Foreign Policy Magazine in 1992-1993 (Helman & Ratner). This article, which was written in the post-Cold War context with its high aspirations for democracy, human rights, the more active role of the United Nations in safeguarding collective security and the emergence of the United States' as the leading agenda-setting actor, established the basic concept and the paradigm. Although some have tried to incorporate "failed states" in international law, the term is highly debated because of the neo-colonial notion attached to it (Akpinarli 2009, 87-89).

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word "fail" can have a range of different meanings: "to lose strength", "to fade or die away", "to stop functioning normally", "to fall short", "to be or become absent or inadequate", "to be unsuccessful" and "to become bankrupt or insolvent" (Merriam-Webster 2011). Thus, I would argue that the word is too imprecise to be meaningful in our attempt to broaden our understanding of the world. In addition, the word is heavily value-laden and has loads of negative connotations attached to it, and therefore I find it unsuitable to use in science. That journalists and politicians still use the term, which is both catchy and tabloid, is understandable when we take into consideration the rather brutal limitations of time and space these two occupational groups have in their struggle to reach their audiences. Nevertheless, numbers of scholars have used and still use the failed state label, many even without engaging critically with the term (Bates 2008; Ghani & Lockhart 2008; Holzgrefe & Keohane 2003, just to mention a few).

The urge to "fix": Securitization and intervention

The failed state paradigm implies that there is something that needs to be "fixed" or "saved" – of course by "good" liberal democratic external forces. "Preventing states from failing, and rescuing those that do fail, are (…) strategic and moral imperatives", Robert I. Rotberg (2002) proclaims in an article with the dramatic title "Failed States in a World of Terror" (the argument is elaborated in his book, bearing the same title). One can feel the notion of "the white mans burden".

One of the most neoliberal contributions in the failed states debate is probably that of Ashraf Ghani & Clare Lockhart (2008, 124) who in their book "Fixing failed states" boldly declare that "today states must fulfil their citizens' aspirations for inclusion and development and also carry out a constellation of interrelated functions". They conclude that states "in the world today" should perform ten key functions, which are: 1) Rule of law; 2) A monopoly of the legitimate means of violence; 3) Administrative control; 4) Sound management of public finances; 5) Investments in human capital; 6) Creation of citizenship rights through social policy; 7) Provision of infrastructure services; 8) Formation of a market; 9) Management of public assets; 10) Effective public borrowing. So now when we have the list, can we just go out in the world and start "fixing"?

Fixing "failed states" is a dangerous exercise: For many policymakers the failed state label contributes to open up for and make a good excuse for military and other interventions. Petra Minnerop shows how the US throughout the second half of the 20th century developed several terms, for example "rogue states", for "states to which it ascribed a high threat potential as regards the United States and international security" (2003). In the years to follow after the 1992 article in Foreign Policy Magazine the international community, with the US in the leading role, carried out military interventions in Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq on the basis that the chaotic situation in these states poses a threat to the US and international security in general. The terms "failed state", "rogue state" and "war on terror" have all been given prominent roles in the public debate. As Akpinarli also remarks, these concepts have been invented by the North to "solve" problems in the South, as well as to advocate for and justify military interventions to protect international peace and security (Akpinarli 2009). I would argue that the concept rather causes more trouble than it solves – not only in terms of military intervention, but also by keeping "failed" states in the margins of international relations.

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It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the labelling of "failed states" is a prime example of what the Copenhagen School of Security has dubbed *securitization*. The founding fathers of this concept point out that "a discourse that takes form of presenting something to an existential threat to the referent object does not by itself create securitization – this is a *securitizing move*, but the issue is securitized only if and when the audience accepts it as such." (Buzan et al. 1998, 25). The audience – in this instance, ordinary citizens in the North – has to a large extent accepted the "failed state" paradigm, especially with reference to Somalia. Both the media and the large organizations working with/in/for the "failed state" are acting as agents for the securitizing actors – that is the governments in the North, especially the United States' government.

Somalia has been among the top five on the list since the first Failed States Index was published in 2005, and since 2008 Somalia has had the dubious honour of being the world's "most failed state". Whether it is possible to measure a state's "failure" is a question that probably requires a book to be answered. Since 2005 the magazine and Fund for Peace have ranked the world's countries after measuring the following variables: Demographic pressures, refugees/IDPs, group grievance, human flight, uneven development, economic decline, delegitimization of the state, public services, human rights, security apparatus, factionalized elites and external intervention (Fund for Peace 2011). No doubt that all these measurements may give a good indicator of how the situation is in a number of countries. However, my point and critique is that the index fails in grasping the vast empirical variations within the research object itself in the case of Somalia. Using the juridical state of Somalia as the object of analysis without looking under the surface becomes a serious hindrance of capturing the full picture.

Somalia's image problem

As Michael C. Williams (2003, 527) excellently points out, "Security policies today are constructed not only with the question of their linguistic legitimation in mind; they now are increasingly decided upon in relation to acceptable image-rhetorics". In this context we can identify the visualization of the verbal rhetoric of the failed state paradigm. The presentation of "failed states" is often accompanied with depictions of a war-torn hell-hole, and the Foreign Policy Magazine takes the lead by presenting the Failed States Index together with a collection of photos appearing under the splash heading: "Postcards from Hell" (Foreign Policy Magazine 2011). When the Failed States Index is referred to by other news outlets, this kind of presentation is reproduced (for a recent example, see: BBC 2011a). I have yet to see an example of any media organization to examine the Index more closely.

Only telling one side of the story is a serious problem. We can compare the use of the "failed state" label with how Somalia is depicted in the daily media coverage. How many times can you remember to have seen the pictures from Somalia, the disaster zone, with starving children, heavily armed Islamist fighters and dead people being dragged through the streets by a cheering mob? Quite a few times, I suppose. On the other hand, how many times have you seen pictures from Somalia showing farmers working in their fields, smiling and playful children, or the beach in Mogadishu crowded with both men, women and children? Probably not at all. Of course, the pictures of the disaster zone of Somalia are real and by every journalistic standard it is right to publish such pictures. The practice becomes a problem when these are the only pictures that are being shown, when the stories about starving children and dangerous terrorists are the only stories that are being told about Somalia outside Somalia. This misrepresentation in the media can for a large part be attributed to the "failed state" label that is burn-marked on the country, and which pay so little attention to the variations within the geographical area that makes up the state of Somalia. When a statement is repeated enough times, it becomes a "truth". Politicians and scholars, as well as the media itself are responsible for this brand marking, and the process is self-reinforcing. The situation has reached the point where members of the Somali diaspora community in Norway has established an organization with one of its main goals to adjust the picture that has been made of Somalia and the Somali people (Iftiin – somalisk-norsk kunnskapssenter 2011).

Somalia has a serious image-problem – literally. Not only does this put the country in risk of external intervention, it also contributes to keep Somalia and much of its population in the margins of international relations. There is a lack of representation of the people inhabiting the territory of the Somali Republic, both because the TFG lacks authority, but also because of the non-recognition of the de facto states of Somaliland and Puntland. Here we have to functional geopolitical entities that are not represented in the UN nor in other global or regional institutions. Furthermore foreign

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investors and tourists stay away because of the perception and understanding of the whole of Somalia being a "failed state".

Africa and the Knowledge of Non-Being

In his classic work Orientalism, Edward Said (2003 [1978]) scrutinize the history and nature of Western attitudes towards the East. He argues that orientalism is a powerful European ideological creation and a way for dealing with the "otherness" of Eastern culture, customs and beliefs. Achille Mbembe applies much of the same argumentation in his critique of Africanism. He says that historically, the West has constructed its own civilization, enlightenment and progress through the "others", thus non-Western cultures, and especially Africa. Mbembe argues that: "Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and still continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West's desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world" (Mbembe 2001, 2).

One of the challenges in grasping how things work outside the Western world is that many, if not even all, of the concepts we use when describing the universe of International Relations is based in Western history and thinking. Max Weber's famous definition of the state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory (Weber et al. 1991, 78). In Western thinking, Weber's definition represents the *idea* of an "ideal state", and it seems like many have the perception that Western states fit into this idea or norm.

When analyzing states in Africa, this is revealed when African states are compared with the *idea* of an "ideal state", which is believed to be a prototype of a Western state – leading to the focus on African states' absences, lacks and incompleteness, as weak or failed. In this way Mbembe's analysis is straight to the point when he states that "while we feel we know nearly everything that African states, societies, and economies *are not*, we still know absolutely nothing about *what they actually are*". Our knowledge of Africa is to a large degree based on the knowledge of non-being (Mbembe 2001, 9).

But claiming that the "Western state" resembles the Weberian state, or even that the "Western state" is the norm, is highly problematic. First of all, every state has its own specific features, and the higher the degree of generalization, the more problematic it is. Secondly, Weber's state is an idea of a state that has never existed in practice – even not in Europe or North America – for example when we take into account the important fact that private violence and private security has existed through modern history, and even today. Abrahamsen & Williams (2010), Colás & Mabee (2010) and Thomson (1994) are among several scholars who have demonstrated how private violence and private security takes form in e.g. private companies, criminal organizations and vigilante groups. If the states in Europe and North America are to be judged by the same standards as the states in Africa, many of these could get the "failed" label as well. Noam Chomsky, for example, has turned the tables in his book "Failed States", where he shows that the US shares features with other "failed states" (2007). But does the "failed state" label provide us with more and better insight into how different states work; does it enlighten us in any way? Definitely not. The label conceals more than it enlightens. Abrahamsen & Williams (2010) argues that we must look beyond the state when analysing security issues in Africa. I would argue that we must look both beyond and within the state also when we want to analyse states in Africa, and especially Somalia.

Knowledge of Non-Being in Practice

Unfortunately, generalizations and sometimes also pure ignorance shapes the West's conception of the rest of the World, and especially Africa. "That Somalia is a failed state is beyond dispute" claims Fareed Zakaria (2010) in a column about terrorism and Somalia, in connection with the bombings in Uganda's capital Kampala in 2010. The scholar and wonder boy of international journalism was named one of the world's top 100 global thinkers the same year by the prestigious Foreign Policy Magazine. As former editor of Foreign Affairs and Newsweek, he now hosts his own show on CNN, is editor-at-large in TIME Magazine, a columnist in the Washington Post and the author of several books (Fareedzakaria.com 2011). Zakaria is one of the world's most influential opinion leaders, and therefore it is unfortunate that also he demonstrates such a lack of precision in his descriptions of what is going on in Somalia.

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On the one hand he should be honoured for being critical against the US agenda building (which is thoroughly demonstrated by Wanta & Kalyango 2007), including the claims and speculations fronted by policymakers and media that hordes of al-Qaeda terrorists are hiding out in Somalia. As Simons and Tucker have shown, considerable numbers of international terrorists do not come from so-called "failed states" (2007). On the other hand, the reason Zakaria provide for the fact that the "failed state" of Somalia is not a very favourable base for international terrorists is little informed: In the same column he writes that "Somalia has no mountains or jungles" which make it difficult for international terrorists to hide. The fact is that Somalia has more than 90 peaks with an altitude between 1500 and 2500 meters (Peakery.com 2011), in addition to 8000 hectares of mangrove forests (Adams et al. 1999; FAO 2005). What is known as the oldest al-Qaeda training camp in Africa is situated in one of these mangrove forest in Ras Kamboni, Southern Somalia (Time.com 2007).

It is not the natural features of Somalia that has made it difficult for international terrorists to get a foothold in Somalia, it is the more or less intentional resistance from the people itself. According to a report from the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (2007), al-Qaeda members were exposed to the same challenges that other foreign interventions in Somalia have encountered, such as extortion and betrayal, (to them) incomprehensible clan conflicts, the local population's suspicion against foreigners, in addition to logistical difficulties. My intent is not to denounce Zakaria in any way, but to illustrate how widespread preconceived ideas of Africa and the continent's different states are, in addition to show a practical example of the failed knowledge of non-being. When even simple, measurable facts are misrepresented, what then with the representation of more complex issues like statehood?

Was there ever a state in Somalia?

The "failed state" paradigm implies one very problematic assumption that we must be conscious about: That there initially has existed a state. In Somalia and many other African countries, this was not the case before the European colonizers draw artificial borderlines and many places started to distort local power structures (see e.g. Akpinarli 2009, 71-86; Iliffe 2007, 195-196; Thomson 2004, 7-30).

Ioan Lewis (2008) gives a very good introduction to the pre-colonial Somali nation which I will borrow from here: Despite that they traditionally had a strong sense of cultural and linguistic unity, the Somali people never formed a single political unit. They were a nation, not a state, consisting first and foremost of pastoralists. The six clans that the nation was divided into never joined forces in the encounter with the world, nor did these divisions act as stable or autonomous political units within the Somali political system on a regular basis. On the contrary, these were again divided into numerous sub-groups – on the basis of tracing kinship in the male line. The reasons for division or unity laid in different interests, such as the competition over water and grazing, or commercial control in towns. Lewis describes a society that in general was "republican", without the chiefs that are widely common in the rest of Africa.

These divisions facilitated the partition of the territories inhabited by the otherwise homogenous Somalis. From the 1880s England, France, Italy and Ethiopia divided the Somali territories into five parts: Djibouti came under French rule, as French Somaliland. Present day's Somaliland became a British protectorate, British Somaliland, while the rest of what is the Somali Republic today became Italian Somaliland (until the Italians were defeated in 1941 and the British took over). Other Somalis came under the British flag in Kenya, while Ogaden was taken by Ethiopia (Lewis 2008, 28). What we call Somalia today, that is the internationally recognized state of the Somali Republic, was formed when British Somaliland and the former Italian Somaliland was united in 1960.

Since the fall of Mohamed Siad Barre, who was the president and dictator of the Democratic Republic of Somalia[1] from 1969 to 1991, the country has not had a central functioning government, and has therefore been dubbed the prime example of a so-called "failed state". However, if democracy should be a prerequisite for *not* being labelled as a failed state, as some of the most fanatic supporters of the failed state concept claim, Somalia was a failed state even before the collapse of Barre's government.

The problem is that one seriously misses out on some very important nuances by labelling Somalia as a "failed state" – by doing this one fails in providing the truly full picture of the empirical variations of statehood beneath the macro-level of the Somali Republic and its Transitional Federal Government. In the following I will give a brief outline of the

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empirical statehood in the different Somali territories[2].

Why the "failed state" concept fails empirically

European nation-states as we know them today have been formed through several centuries of continuous negotiation of identity, for example by conducting wars. As shown above, Somalia as we know it today has not existed as a politico-spatial entity for more than 50 years, when it was formed by the unity of two former colonies, whose boundaries was decided upon for the Somalis by external forces. Therefore we have to look beyond and within the Somali Republic to find Somali statehood. Engel & Nugent (2010, 46) makes a clear point that "in Africa there does not exist a tidy separation between the state (in all its myriad of forms) and broader society". This is an important factor to keep in mind when examining Somalia and its several local systems of governance, which are rarely recognized internationally.

Somaliland

A series of negotiations between clan elders and politicians prevented the civil war in Somaliland (former British Somaliland, in the northwest corner of Somalia) from continuing more than barely five months after Barre's regime collapsed in 1991. An inclusive bottom-up institution building and democratization has given the result that Somaliland has enjoyed relative peace and security since it declared independence on 18 May 1991. Democratic institutions which combines Western and clan politics was established without the interference of external forces (Hagmann & Hoehne 2009). The self-declared independent republic has carried out democratic presidential elections two times, power has been handed over according to the election results, and there are a well-functioning civil society and media (Britannica 2011).

Somaliland has managed to establish a multiparty, democratic and stable political system in the most unstable and undemocratic region of Africa. However, the success story of Somaliland is under-reported and misrepresented. Just to mention a recent example of a claim about Africa from the highly recognized weekly magazine The Economist: "not a single [African state has] peacefully ousted a government or president at the ballot box" (The Economist 2011).

Another sign of effective governance in Somaliland is pointed out by Stig Jarle Hansen (2011, 489-490). He argues that functioning institutions may be more important than the state per se with regard to measures against piracy, and indicate this by referring to that one of the most effective actors in the anti-piracy work in the Gulf of Aden has been Somaliland.

Not a single state has recognized Somaliland's sovereignty, although several countries, both African and European, have unofficial political contact with the Somaliland. This illustrates the international community's schizophrenic relation to Somalia and Somaliland, as it insists that Somalia is a "failed state" at the same time that it will not recognize a government that is actually working in a way that the Western powers want a government to work.

Puntland

Further east we find the self-declared "autonomous region" of Puntland. Unlike Somaliland, this entity has not declared independence from the Somali Republic, although it can be described as a *de facto* state. There have been some bottom-up state-building efforts by clan elders, warlords and politicians, but democracy is limited and it is characterized as a single clan dictatorship. Nevertheless, some representative institutions have been put in place, and governance in the region is working. The security situation is somewhat less stable than in neighbouring Somaliland because of a border dispute with Somaliland, in addition to Puntland's involvement in the conflict in Southern Somalia (Hagmann & Hoehne 2009).

A popular claim is that state failure is one of the reasons for the flourishing piracy in the waters outside Somalia. As Stig Jarle Hansen (2009; 2011) has argued however, pirates (as well as al-Qaida terrorists) prefer areas with relative peace and stability. This does not mean that pirates will not establish their bases in areas where a government has

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control, although this is the case in Somaliland. Puntland, on the other hand, hosts most of the pirate bases, and it has been suggested that it happens with the silent consent or even involvement of the Puntland government (Bahadur 2011). This is nothing new, and Thomson (1994) is just one of several scholars who has shown how European rulers historically commissioned violence on the high seas to private actors. Back in Puntland, Bøås (2009, 91) is even describing a lose network of what he calls "city states", and suggests that this is an example of how state building is taking place with the combination of illegal activities and politics, with reference to how this also happened in Europe (Tilly 1990 cited in Bøås 2009).

Southern Somalia: Galmudug, Jubaland and other autonomous regions

The southern part of Somalia, and especially the area around Mogadishu, is the centre of the conflicts and instability that most people associate with Somalia, the collapse of Barre's government and "state failure". The infamous 1993 battle of Mogadishu, which left 18 US soldiers dead and led to the pull-out of US troops from Somalia, is depicted in the blockbuster movie *Black Hawk Down*. But there is not, and has not, been only total chaos and anarchy, as the movie presents. Throughout the 1990s political orders backed on force and based on warlord rule emerged. Several of these warlords participated in internationally sponsored peace talks and some even became appointed ministers. However, many of these were profiting from the deregulated local economy, and had interests in maintaining the fighting. At the same time they managed to obtain international recognition and support, which they used to boost their own positions domestically (Hagmann & Hoehne 2009, 50).

In the 2002-2005 period the Islamic Courts gained more and more control, as a large part of the population in Mogadishu was willing to accept the rule of *shari'a* in exchange for basic security from the courts. When a coalition of US-backed warlords went into military confrontation with the Islamic Courts Union, the situation in Mogadishu escalated into full-scale war, but the ICU managed to drive the warlords out of the city and establish authority over most of Southern Somalia. The ICU then gained legitimacy by organizing militias, playing on nationalist sentiments among the population against Ethiopian troops deployed in Somalia and by establishing public order and security. Subsequently, the ICU pacified the war-ravaged Southern Somalia for the first time since the fall of president Barre in 1991 (Ibid.). In the same manner, piracy dropped significantly and was almost eradicated during the rule of the ICU in 2006 (Hansen 2011).

The fears of the rise of militant Islamism led to Ethiopia's large-scale military intervention in the end of 2006. Backed by the US and the TFG, the Ethiopian army defeated the Islamists and captured the city. Since then the security situation in Southern Somalia has deteriorated, and the fighting has not been worse since the civil war began in 1991 (Hagmann & Hoehne 2009). Although the Kenyan army reportedly had carried out cross-border operations already in early 2011 (BBC 2011b), in October it launched a military intervention in Somalia, Operation Lindi Nchi[3], in order to fight the Islamist group al-Shabaab. This is a more radical offspring of the ICU, which splintered after the 2006 defeat. At the time of writing, the operation has received broad international support[4] (Daily Nation 2011b).

Kenya supports the division of Somalia into eight autonomous regions, including Somaliland and Puntland, in addition to Galmudug (also known as Hiran), Jubaland (also known as Azania), Bay Bakool, Shabelle, Gedo and Mogadishu (also known as Banadir) (The East African 2011). In April, the former Somali Defence minister was sworn in as the president of the newest geopolitical creation within Somalia's borders: the semi-autonomous republic of Jubaland. The new entity comprises three sub-regions, and is estimated to have a population of more than one million (Daily Nation 2011c). According to a leaked US embassy cable obtained by the Daily Nation, Jubaland is expected to provide a buffer zone for Kenya (2011a). This initiative does not raise the prospects of a reunited Somali Republic, although the Jubaland plan has one major weakness: It seems to be the creation of Nairobi, not a result of local initiatives, like Somaliland and Puntland.

Effective governance

As we have seen above, there are, and have been, several functional systems of governance within the borders of the Somali Republic. The political order in Somaliland is maybe the case that is closest to what a Westerner would recognize as a "normal" state. The fact in all systems of governance in Somalia (both former and present), however,

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is that in all territories there is a high reliance on non-state actors that are embedded in the fabric of Somali society to uphold security: especially clan elders and sheikhs (Hagmann & Hoehne 2009, 51). This is a perfect example of what Engel & Nugent (2010) emphasize: That there is no tidy separation between the state and broader society in Africa. This does not mean that Africa is a traditional, unchanging or timeless continent, though (Chabal & Daloz 1999, 144). As we have seen in the case of Somaliland and Puntland, clans and their representatives have not been excluded from and looked upon as opponents of modern state formation. Subsequently, and this is especially the case in Somaliland, peace negotiations and successful state building has emerged from the local level – it has not been imposed by external forces, as is the case in Southern Somalia where the result of the international community's recipe for peace and effective governance has proved to taste rather badly. As Menkhaus (2006) also documents, the civil war in Somalia has not only ruined the central state, it has also opened up for new forms of political institutions and local state building processes.

If we do the opposite of what I have argued that we should not do when analyzing states in Africa, to look towards Europe and draw historical parallels, it is tempting to compare the German territories in the early modern period with the Somali territories of today. There are similarities with regard to the territorial fragmentation despite the relative homogenous population in terms of culture, language and religion. Although I'm skeptical of such comparisons across time and space because of important contextual differences, I would argue that there is one lesson we could learn from looking back in history in this case. As Whaley (2011) argues in his recent work about Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, even though the empire was fragmented into a vast amount of minor warring territories (300 principalities and more than 1500 minor territories), the political system was made up of a number of different actors (such as princes, warlords, mercenaries, businessmen, city states, etc.) – and it worked.

Power of definition and the power of recognition

Bulloch (2009) underlines the importance of the power of definition in his article about pirates in Somalia: How, and as what, are these actors being interpreted? As we carry out the analysis with a securitization approach, we will understand piracy as a function of speech acts. We can do the same with states, and like Bulloch I think we can paraphrase Carl Schmitt's famous saying to fit our case: Sovereign is he who can label a state as failed. It is the strongest states in the international community that have the power to define and label a state as "failed" – and define what is a state at all. This brings us into the argument of Alexander Wendt (1992) regarding sovereignty, recognition and security. He points out "it is only in virtue of mutual recognition that states have 'territorial property rights'. This recognition functions as a form of 'social closure' that disempowers nonstate actors and empowers and helps stabilize interaction among states". He continues by rightly arguing that the norms of sovereignty are so taken for granted "that it is easy to overlook the extent to which they are both presupposed by and an ongoing artifact of practice".

The international community defines the Somali Republic as a state, both in geographical terms, and in terms of who it means should rightfully govern the territory: the TFG. The result of this type of policy, however, is that many African states in general, and here Somalia especially, is nothing more than a spatial expression. The size and scope of the space of the "failed" is therefore dependent on the question of recognition. When looking at the Somali case, the "failed spaces" – that is the territories without effective governance – would subsequently be far smaller if the international community would recognize Somaliland and Puntland as independent entities.

A reconceptualization necessary

It is tempting to agree with Foucault (2006) who suggests that maybe "the state is no more than a composite of reality and a mythicized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think" – especially in cases concerning the state in Africa. But on the other hand the question of state, although a "mythicized abstraction", is of very high significance, as it in the case of Somalia is one of the main factors fuelling the conflict. Peter Haldén (2008) argues that a great deal of the large-scale violence in Somalia can be traced to the insistence on retaining the country united: "If we are serious about wanting to reduce the extent and seriousness of ungoverned territories, we are well cautioned not to identify governance with de jure statehood but with de facto governance". Hence, parts of the solution to diminish "perilous ungoverned territories" may be "by identifying and supporting the loci of effective

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governance, not by supporting unviable edifices" (Haldén 2008).

This is in the same line of thought as that of Pierre Engelbert, who suggests a "liberalization of the supply of sovereignty" (Englebert 2009, 250-257). He has borrowed the idea from Jeffrey Herbst's concept of "decertification" of states and recognition of entities that break out, if these provide more political order (Herbst 2000).

As pointed out above, failure and the "failed state" concept implies that the state precedes statecraft, thus thinking about the state as a closed and total concept. Richard Devetak (1995) argues that "there is statecraft, but there is no complete state" and that statecraft is "fundamental to its constitution" (cited in de Carvalho 2006, 29). According to Devetak statecraft then means the "ceaseless activity of (re)constituting the impossibility of ever completing the state, once and for all, by closing it off (bounding it) in a unified totality" (cited in de Carvalho 2006, 29). Richard Ashley (1987) argues that the state should be understood as an "historically emergent and always contested product of multiple practices". Furthermore, Alexander Wendt (1992) remarks that "The sovereign state is an ongoing accomplishment of practice, not a once-and-for-all creation of norms that somehow exist apart from practice" (both cited in de Carvalho 2006, 30). Since states do not have an ontological status apart from the practices constituting them, they are therefore in "permanent need of reproduction […] states are (and have to be) always in a process of becoming" (Campbell 1992, 12-13, cited in; de Carvalho 2009).

I would therefore argue that the fact that several African states disintegrate is not failure. Instead, it must be seen as progress – a development towards better and more functioning governance, cf. Devetak (1995) and the incompleteness of states. A fear of "balkanization" in Africa is therefore superfluous, in addition to the fact that Africa before colonization was constituted by many much smaller political entities. Taken into the myriad of different state forms we find in Africa, we need a reconceptualization of states that capture the empirical variations of Somali statecraft both within and beyond Somalia. In line with (Englebert 2009) I would therefore also suggest "altering the criteria for recognition of states from postcolonial sovereignty to effective institution-building", thus Western governments could support the emergence of functional and sustainable types indigenous governance.

Conclusion

When everything boils down to the essence, what exactly is failed? The Somali state; the international community's strategy in Somalia, or; the media and parts of academia's attempts in explaining what is actually going on in the country? I think we find the answer partly in every of these suggestions. Treating the state in Africa as *what it is*, and not as what it is not, will get us a long way both in terms of enlightenment and in practical concerns.

Recognizing and trying to understand what African states actually are would be a good first step on the path towards building peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. Instead of trying to "fix" the externally imposed state project in Somalia, the West should maybe rather accept that states are under constant development and change, and start supporting effective governance that are already in place, sprung up from local initiatives? More concretely, the international community should consider allowing the Somali Republic to successfully disintegrate, thus letting at least Somaliland and Puntland become independent states by recognizing them as such. This would contribute to make it more visible that not all Somali territories are "failed", and include these entities in the international community. Possibly this would encourage constructive and peaceful solutions elsewhere in Somalia as well. I have shown that what is "failed" in the state, in other words where we find the absence of governance, varies over time, and that the absence of effective governance often is limited to limited geographical areas in the case of Somalia. I cannot and will not draw hasty conclusions, but we should not exclude the possibility that this is also the case in other failed states.

A more nuanced picture of the situation would at least not work against the supposed desired outcome of the international community's efforts in Southern Somalia: An end to the civil war. With this in mind, the suggested solution with the highest potential to succeed is probably that international actors must attract al-Shabaab to the negotiation table and contribute to empower moderate Islamic forces. These are crucial in resolving the conflict and establish legitimate and effective government in this part of Somalia (Simpson 2009). The West has emphatically shown that it has overcome its aversion against Islamic governance by its support of the revolutions of the Arab

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Spring – and by recognizing the former ICU leader Sheikh Sharif Ahmed as the president of Somalia in 2009, paradoxically after overthrowing the system of governance that actually worked in terms of enforcing law and order – bringing peace and stability.

I do not at all say that Somalia does not have any problems, but I would claim that it is more fruitful to once in a while talk about things that work, include the functional political entities in the international community and maybe show some pictures of smiling toddlers and women on the beaches of Mogadishu. The failed state label is maybe catchy and tabloid, and works well in political propaganda and to capture the attention of the common media consumer. However, the term is extremely value-laden and it is outrageously imprecise, as it conceals the empirical variations and is therefore very little enlightening. These factors make me conclude that the term is very little suitable to use in an academic context, and that we need a reconceptualization of the state in Somalia.

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[1] The inclusion of the word "Democratic" in a state's name often indicates that the state in mention is not particularly democratic (e.g. People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Democratic Socialist and Republic of Sri Lanka, to mention a few current examples).

[2] Because of the limitations of this paper in terms of time and space, I will not deal specifically with the three Somali-inhabited territories outside the borders of the Somali Republic (Djibouti, Ethiopia's Somali Region and the North Eastern Province in Kenya) although Hagmann & Hoehne considers them as part of the de facto existence of a "greater Somalia".

[3] In English: Protect the country.

[4] The African Union, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda, the United States, Canada, the European Union, France, Turkey, Australia, China, India, Japan, South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Israel and the Gulf Cooperation.

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