

## An Analysis of the Notion of a “Failed State”

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### Abstract

In the post-Cold War era, it has become increasingly evident that one of the most important challenges for the world community is that posed by so-called failed states. Many serious problems that contemporary societies face with highly significant international connections are described on the basis of this phenomenon within multiple academic disciplines. On the other hand, there are theoretically developed different definitions on this concept which are usually extremely brief and in some cases even very ideological. This paper, introducing theoretical concepts behind its differing definitions, is trying to analyze the notion of failed states, while also searching for possible sociological standpoints.

**Keywords:** Failed states, international politics, European colonialism, critical approach.

### 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 20th century, an international political system was under the hegemony of a half-dozen European super powers and of Japan. The system known as a third world was governed by London, Paris, and Lisbon like colony bureaus. The root cause of an imbalance and instability within the system, however, was the power struggle in the territories of Europe and overseas. As a matter of fact this Great War induced a competition within the international political system and this competition was even further provoked by the French and Industrial Revolutions.

Record (2000: 3-4) who considers 3 different waves that took a role in the establishment of more than 200 new states, argues the historical background of this phenomenon. As for that, the first wave was the First World War which brought the collapse of the Ottoman Empire; the second was the Second World War which put an end to the Europe's overseas sovereignty; and the third wave was the expiration of the Cold War era which ended up with the collapse of USSR and the Eastern Bloc countries. As a result, of these 3 waves, the political and economic sustainability of the states started to be questioned as the authority owned by the empire was given to the weak political authority of the state and in some of the cases was directly replaced by the anarchy.

A British historian Eric Hobsbawm (2007: 41-50) points at the phenomenon of states started to disintegrate and to crash along with entering a new century: Institutions and legal systems have collapsed and ferocious guerrillas took their place. On the other hand, there are tax heaven states where governmental institutions started to be replaced by the governing rules and the authority of the global capitalism. Hobsbawm (2007: 47) names this state of affair as a decline of the Western Empire by analogy to the fall of the Roman Empire and the following effects in the Western Europe. Besides, Hobsbawm (2007: 46-47) claims that the state authority has not weakened only in Western countries but also a big part of the Africa together with the Western and Central Asia are deprived of a functional state.

Following 1945 onwards, an international political system has even changed more drastically by entering a Cold War era. Record (2000: 4) argues that highly industrialized European states which were pioneers of the interstate wars for the last three centuries have lived a general peacetime within this period. Changing its shape then the war came into prominence with not a military power but rather via its economic dimension. Hobsbawm (2007: 20) thinks this relative stability is based on the rule of the international system that “Nobody can cross the sovereign state’s borders, yet such an act would make the stability upside down”. After the end of the Cold War this rule has also started to be broken, therefore, at the last quarter of the 21st century, not the powerful ones but mostly the weak states became problematic to the international system.

Along with the growing interest in field work in America since 1950's, social sciences took root rather in war fear and politics of war and have been shaped by the cycle of its dynamics (Bilgin & Morton, 2002: 61-62). In the period of three world establishment, upon the interest in field studies, the 3rd World studies have accelerated as well.

Especially in early 1990's, following the rapid change within the international system, as qualifying notion of the states many scholars started to refer to the failed states in their studies (Nguyen, 2005: 2). While being a focus for debates in political sciences and international relations literature via its social, political and economic dimensions a "failed state" has become one of the most referred notions.

A "failed states" notion has a background of historical, social, economic aspects of the 20th Century and demonstrates significant factors of the past. Nevertheless, it is likely that it will remain as a very important notion in enlightening the problems and trends in the 21st Century as well.

This paper aims to review general characteristics of the "failed state" notion without focusing on a very specific problem. Many serious problems that contemporary societies face with highly significant international connections are described on the basis of this phenomenon within multiple academic disciplines. On the other hand, there are theoretically developed various definitions on this concept which are usually extremely brief and in some cases even very ideological. Introducing theoretical concepts behind its differing definitions, the paper is trying to analyze the notion of failed states, while also searching for possible sociological standpoints.

## **2. Failed State notion and its representations**

The fact that there are various definitions and terms in the literature referring to the specific state of affairs and state occasions, a failed state is substantially functioning as an umbrella term to identify the phenomenon.

The definition is given by Helman and Ratner (1993: 5) which sparked a great debate, later on, is setting three groups of states whose presences are endangered: The first group consists of Bosnia, Cambodia, Liberia, and Somali as here the governmental structures have been overwhelmed by circumstances. The second group with the failing states such as Ethiopia, Georgia, Zaire which could fail in the near future. And the third group embraces the newly emerged states after the collapse of the Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Yet, there is no clarity if the states under the third group would subsist in the future.

An attempt on constructing a taxonomy on failed states came later from Gross (1996), in five categories: 'anarchic', 'phantom', 'anemic', 'captured', and 'aborted', while Bilgin and Morton (2002: 57) revealed also the categories of 'rogue states', 'weak states', and 'quasi-states'.

Zartman (1995), in his work of "Collapsed States", offers a very basic definition on failure which occurs when "the basic functions of the state are no longer performed". Potter (2004: 2) supporting Zartman's definition discuss that the failure of the state is not only related to the collapsed states which are in a civil war and/or in anarchy but also could be understood as a process in which the state fail to discharge its responsibility due to a steadily declining capacity. Referring to this model, Potter offers to classify the states under the three qualities such as weak, failing, and failed. Based on this quality Potter (2004) offers the following categories: 'weak states', 'failing states', 'collapsed states', and 'non-states'.

The current failed state representations, as Brooks (2005) demonstrates, are all in evidence from Somalia to Yugoslavia where all the government institutions collapsed as well as the states such as Ruanda, Haiti, Liberia, Congo, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan which are weakening based upon ongoing crisis.

As distinct from such classifications, an alternative approach claims that a 'weak state' and a 'failed state' have become the critical elements of the state concept in current discourse, however, they are used much as metaphors in most of the cases rather than to be treated as analytical terms. According to the view of Bianic et al. (2003: 14-15), referring to their claim above, the notion of a "failed state" is used with misleading easiness for cases as diverse as Somalia and Russia. Indeed, a 'failed state' is assumed to be like an elephant, when you see it you will recognize it.

Not only the definition of the failed states but also the indicators used to gauge should be taken into consideration. In this respect Cojanu and Popescu (2007), in their work on definition and measurement problems of the failed states, summarize three of the most reputed measurements of the degree of state failure, reflecting differences in the criteria used to define state weakness:

Table 1. RANKING STATE FAILURE: 40 LOWEST STATES, IN ORDER OF WEAKNESS

TABLE 1  
RANKING STATE FAILURE: 40 LOWEST STATES, IN ORDER OF WEAKNESS

Rank	Failed States Index	Global Peace Index	Human Development Index	Index of State Weakness	State Fragility Index
1	Somalia	Iraq	Sierra Leone	Somalia	Somalia
2	Sudan	Somalia	Burkina Faso	Afghanistan	Sudan
3	Zimbabwe	Sudan	Guinea-Bissau	DR Congo	Afghanistan
4	Chad	Afghanistan	Niger	Iraq	Myanmar
5	Iraq	Israel	Mali	Burundi	Chad
6	DR Congo	Chad	Mozambique	Sudan	DR Congo
7	Afghanistan	CAR	CAR	CAR	Iraq
8	Cote d'Ivoire	North Korea	Chad	Zimbabwe	Rwanda
9	Pakistan	Lebanon	Ethiopia	Liberia	Burundi
10	CAR	Russia	DR Congo	Cote D'Ivoire	Liberia
11	Guinea	Colombia	Burundi	Angola	Nigeria
12	Bangladesh	Nigeria	Cote d'Ivoire	Haiti	Sierra Leone
13	Burma	DR Congo	Zambia	Sierra Leone	CAR
14	Haiti	Pakistan	Malawi	Eritrea	Ethiopia
15	North Korea	Myanmar	Benin	North Korea	Guinea
16	Ethiopia	Sri Lanka	Angola	Chad	Angola
17	Uganda	Zimbabwe	Rwanda	Burma	Guinea-Bissau
18	Lebanon	Venezuela	Guinea	Guinea-Bissau	Zambia
19	Nigeria	Cote d'Ivoire	Tanzania	Ethiopia	Burkina Faso
20	Sri Lanka	Ethiopia	Nigeria	Congo, Rep.	Cameroon
21	Yemen	Mauritania	Eritrea	Niger	Congo, Rep.
22	Niger	Kenya	Senegal	Nepal	Eritrea
23	Nepal	Thailand	Gambia	Guinea	Ivory Coast
24	Burundi	Congo, Rep.	Uganda	Rwanda	Niger
25	Timor-Leste	South Africa	Yemen	Equatorial G.	Uganda
26	Kenya	Turkey	Togo	Togo	Zimbabwe
27	Congo, Rep.	Uganda	Zimbabwe	Uganda	Algeria
28	Uzbekistan	Philippines	Timor-Leste	Nigeria	East Timor
29	Malawi	Algeria	Djibouti	Cameroon	Nepal
30	Solomon Isl.	Uzbekistan	Kenya	Yemen	Pakistan
31	Sierra Leone	Angola	Sudan	Comoros	Yemen
32	Guinea Bissau	Haiti	Haiti	Zambia	Djibouti
33	Cameroon	Saudi Arabia	PNG	Pakistan	Iran
34	Liberia	India	Cameroon	Cambodia	Kenya
35	Syria	Yemen	Madagascar	Turkmenistan	Malawi
36	Burkina Faso	Iran	Nepal	Uzbekistan	Mauritania
37	Colombia	Honduras	Swaziland	Mauritania	Mozambique
38	Tajikistan	Guatemala	Bangladesh	Djibouti	Uzbekistan
39	Kyrgyzstan	Turkmenistan	Congo	Mozambique	Azerbaijan
40	Egypt	Azerbaijan	Lesotho	PNG	Benin

Source: Newman (2009: 427).

1. The World Bank's "Governance Indicators" cover 213 countries and territories and are based on several hundred variables produced by 25 different sources, including commercial data providers (Indicators used are: Voice and Accountability, Political stability and absence of violence, Government effectiveness, Regulatory quality, Rule of law, and Control of corruption).
2. The Fund for Peace, an independent research organization, and Foreign Policy prepared a "failed states index", using 12 social, economic, political, and military indicators, they ranked 60 states in order of their vulnerability to violent internal conflict. (Indicators: Social, Economic and Political references are used).
3. The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) examines the political management of change on the way to a market-based democracy. To this end, the index provides two rankings and two trend indicators, which present

the results of the comparative analysis. The Status Index shows the state of development that a country had achieved on the way to democracy and a market economy by the beginning of 2005. (Indicators are showing the economic and political transformation).

Newman (2009: 427) in his work of "Failed States and International Order: Constructing a Post-Westphalian World" compares different conclusions stemming from the empirical approach based on a prepared scales and indexes (See Table 1). In his ranking of state failure, 40 states in order of their weaknesses are shown by comparison of present indexes.

On the other hand, from the perspective of international law "failed state" has three decisive characteristics (Bianic et al., 2003: 15):

- An absence of bodies efficiently representing the state. In other words, lack of government that can be a legitimate partner in the negotiation process.
- Intensive violence.
- Need for humanitarian intervention. In practical terms, it is the decision of the UN Security Council to intervene that is used as the practical criteria for enumerating the failed state.

Bilgin and Morton (2007: 57) argue that post-colonial states are still represented across the social sciences and contemporary representations of post-colonial states. These states commonly revolve around an element of deficiency or failure and are represented as 'quasi-states', 'weak states', 'collapsed states', 'failed states' or 'rogue states' in the study of the 'Third World'. According to their critical approach Bilgin and Morton (2002: 64) find failed states taxonomies arbitrary and discriminatory as they range from so-called 'anarchic states' (Somalia, Liberia), to 'phantom' or 'mirage states' (Zaire, Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC), to 'anemic states' (Haiti), to 'captured states' (Rwanda), or 'aborted states' (Angola, Mozambique).

Such representations do not all refer to the same set of characteristics. The notion of a 'failed state, for instance, is used to describe the internal characteristics of a state. On the other hand, 'rogue' states are labeled as such because of their foreign policy behaviors. What such labels have in common, however, is that they are all representations of post-colonial states; representations that enable certain policies which serve the economic, political and security interests of those who employ them (Bilgin & Morton, 2002: 55-56).

Potter (2004:4), summarizes definitions on failed states have been developed by scholars in the field as it follows:

- Failed States are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and bitterly contested by warring factions;
- Failed States are states which cannot or will not safeguard minimal civil conditions, i.e. peace, order, security, etc. domestically;
- Failed States can be defined in terms of their demise of the practical operation of governmental functions for an internationally recognized state;
- Failed states could be expanded if one were to include states facing serious internal problems that threaten their continued coherence or significant internal challenges to their political order.
- A failure can be also based on cultural indicators such as the restrictions on the free flow of information, the subjugation of women, the inability to accept responsibility for individual or collective failure, the extended family or clan as the basic unit of social organization, the domination by a restrictive religion, the low valuation of education, and the low prestige assigned to work.

As it can easily be recognized that the main problem reference behind the definitions given above could generally and very often change also the representations of the failed states. After exploring the idea of failed states and referring to some of the debates on its representations, it is important now to search for differing approaches on its definition in order to give more depth to the analysis.

### 3. Approaches on Definition

As widely agreed by many scholars Daniel Thürer (1999: 732-740), in his work namely The 'Failed State' and International Law, also approves a failed state notion as an umbrella concept and claims that it could not be used as a categorizing tool by its own. But however, Thürer (1999), stress on three main approaches that the definition could be grounded as it follows:

#### 3.1 The political and legal approach

There may be the geographical and territorial aspect, namely the fact that "Failed States" are essentially associated with internal and endogenous problems, even though these may incidentally have cross-border impacts. Secondly, there may be the political aspect, namely the internal collapse of law and order. The emphasis here is on to total or near total

breakdown of structures guaranteeing law and order. Thirdly, there is the functional aspect, namely the absence of bodies capable, on the one hand, of representing the State at the international level and, on the other, of being influenced by the outside world. Either no institution exists which has the authority to negotiate, represent and enforce or, if one does, it is wholly unreliable, typically acting as “statesman by day and bandit by night”.

International security is a primary issue within this approach introduced by political science and international relations (Wolff, 2007: 3-4). According to Wolff (2007), state failure and its consequences have been no more in a regional prospect after the 9/ 11, but the most widely discussed issue into the international security context.

### 3.2 *The historical and developmental context*

Existing “failed States” are essentially Third World States that have been affected by three geopolitical factors: The end of the Cold War, during which the two superpowers had often kept shallow-rooted regimes artificially in power; the heritage of colonial regimes which had lasted long enough to destroy traditional social structures; general processes of modernization which encouraged social and geographical mobility but were not counterbalanced by nation-building processes capable of placing the State on a firm foundation.

Thürer (1999) underlines that while it is true that such extreme situations have so far remained the exception in the world as a whole, others might well arise in the area formerly dominated by the Soviet Union, especially the Caucasus and south-eastern Europe.

Wolff (2007: 6) similarly points to the fact that within the development discourse, as exemplified in papers by overseas development agencies such as the World Bank and OECD, seems to have converged on the term ‘fragile states’ to describe a range of phenomena associated with state weakness and failure, including state collapse, loss of territorial control, low administrative capacity, and etc.

### 3.3 *The sociological perspective*

The problem of the “Failed State” can thus be seen as an elemental phenomenon which, though currently acute in only a few countries, remains latent throughout the world. Sociologically, it is characterized by two phenomena which Wolff (2007: 9) would name as a ‘consensus approach’.

The first of these is the collapse of the core of government, which Max Weber rightly described as “monopoly of power”. Max Weber elaborated on this idea in his definition of statehood: ‘a state is a human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’ even when ‘the right to used physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it’.

In such monopole States, the police, judiciary and other bodies serving to maintain law and order, have either ceased to exist or are no longer able to operate. Thürer (1999) points to the lack of security in Congo and in Bosnia and Herzegovina as such examples.

The second typical feature of a “Failed State” is the brutality and intensity of the violence used. An internal conflicts such as in Liberia, are characterized by a highly unpredictable and explosive dynamic of their own, as well as by a radicalization of violence, the irrationality of which stands in stark contrast to the politically guided and systematically escalated use of military force for which the mechanisms and instruments laid down in the UN Charter for the limitation and control of conflicts on the international level were designed.

However, the strongest opposition to this approach is based on the claim that such state described by Weber according to his ideal types does not exist in reality (Wolff, 2007: 11).

Adopting Thürer's understanding and accepting Failed States as an umbrella concept, it is possible to make a qualitative (metaphoric) analysis on the existing failed states terms in the context of above mentioned three failed states approaches. Keeping in mind, these terms mostly treat the state as a living organism, thus attribution in such character. As showed on **Table 2**, in accordance to their definitions and some specific representations, Rogue States, Weak States, Non-States, Phantom/Mirage States, Anemic States, Captured States and Aborted States have referred to either legal or political weaknesses which have cross-border negative effects upon the international system.

On the other hand, according to the historical/developmental approach Fragile States, Failing States, Quasi-States and Collapsed States are referring to the Third World States which dominantly faced state weakness and failure. Finally, Monopole States and Anarchic States are considered in Sociological Approach as they stress the collapse of the core government in the context of the Weberian definition of statehood.

Table 2. Metaphoric Composition of The Failed State Notion

<b>Failed States</b>	<b>Representations</b>	<b>Context</b>
<i>Rogue States</i>	North Korea, Cuba, Iraq, Iran and Libya	
<i>Weak States</i>	Senegal, Honduras, Burma, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Haiti, Sudan, East Timor	
<i>Non-States</i>	All failed states at risk	
<i>Phantom/Mirage States</i>	Zaire, Democratic	Political/legal approach
	Republic of Congo, DRC	
<i>Anemic States</i>	Haiti	
<i>Captured States</i>	Rwanda	
<i>Aborted States</i>	Angola, Mozambique	
<i>Fragile States</i>	Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan	
<i>Failing States</i>	Ethiopia, Georgia and Zaire	Historical/ Developmental approach
<i>Collapsed States</i>	Angola, Burundi, Somalia	
<i>Quasi-states</i>	Pakistan, Yemen, Kenya, the Philippines, Guinea, Indonesia.	
<i>Monopole States</i>	Congo, Bosnia and Herzegovina	Sociological Approach
<i>Anarchic States</i>	Somalia, Liberia	

#### 4. Trends in Failed States debate in the literature

In this part of the paper, a brief debate in the literature on the failed states will be in the focus to show the interconnections and opposition amongst the existing discourses of the scholars.

"State Failure" term could be traced up to 1990's, based upon Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner's (1993) important article "Saving Failed State" in which they describe the nation-state as losing its national and international function. The writers debate the presence of the state; comparing contemporary failed states which have lost their authority or are not able to implement their authority onto their societies, or where the government could not prosecute of the main functions, with the German geopolitical remnants after the Second World War.

Helman and Ratner (1993, 3-5) emphasize that a new phenomenon came in view, wide from Haiti to Yugoslavia in Europe; to Somali, Sudan and Liberia in Africa and to Cambodia in Asia: The failed nation states which are failing to survive within the international system. Dragged into the violence and anarchy they endanger their own citizens, confront their neighbouring countries with the refugee flows and they face political instability and continuous warfare. Therefore, it is impossible to stay indifferent towards the reality that human rights violations and due to the right of life being in the first place based upon many other cases of abuse of rights these states should be given a hand (Helman and Ratner, 1993).

According to Helman and Ratner (1993: 5) "Third World countries are not the only ones that could fail. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia over the last two and a half years has created almost 20 new states, most of which

have no tradition of statehood or practice in self-government". Referring to the civil war in Bosnia and lack of experience in governments of many other countries, they think it is impossible to be certain that the political boundaries created under colonialism will, in the end, could prove sustainable.

On Helman and Ratner's account, the proliferation of the failed state phenomenon can be ascribed to the end of the Cold War and the end of European colonialism, two significant historical events. They both resulted in a large number of newly independent states. These states, created in the spirit of the UN mandated self-determination of peoples, were intended to have a liberating effect, but that they would simply not function geopolitically was, the authors argue, never properly considered—such an idea ran contrary to the liberatory spirit of decolonization (MacKay, 2006: 63).

Helman and Ratner (1993), demonstrating various endangered states, suggest that these states should be paid a close interest and innovative policies should be developed to get them under consideration. As a solution, Helman and Ratner prescribe a policy of intervention by developed states. "Existing approaches such as financial aid are insufficient, they argue, as these presuppose the existence of an effective government to receive them" (MacKay, 2006: 63). This is why they conclude it is of a big importance that special intervention policies should be developed.

With the scope of the new intervention policies, the discussion that has started by Helman and Ratner's views on failed states notion could be considered as an intersection for multiple disciplines within the social sciences.

As an important paper Donald W. Potter's (2004) "State Responsibility, Sovereignty, and Failed States" should also be considered. According to Potter (2004: 2) in order to ensure the protection and well-being of their citizens, states provide the appropriate standard of political goods and services. If they refuse assistance there is a responsibility by the international community to react. This creates a dual characteristic to sovereignty. In the first case, sovereignty is seen as an internal component which relates to the state and its relationship to its people, and secondly as an external component which manages the relationships between states.

Thus, Potter (2004) claims that it is important to classify the states by assessing their functionality. By using a state's responsibilities a model can be developed that enable states to be defined and categorized as weak, failing or failed, so that the international community can determine which states no longer meet their sovereign obligations and need support, mediation or intervention. Legitimacy for the decision made for intervention, therefore, is no longer under question.

Bianic et al. (2003) similarly support the idea that failed states should be identified according to the Weberian state definition. Max Weber defined the state as the monopoly of the legitimate use of force (all the three characteristics are of importance). There is only one government in a state, i.e., there is a monopoly in the provision of public governance. The state governs unconditionally, which means that it coerces its citizens into behaving in certain ways. The use of coercive force has to be legitimate, which means that it has to be either legal or accepted in some way by the citizens" (Bianic et al, 2003: 3). Thereby, in Weberian terms failed state has the characteristics of a 'non-state'. It represents the disappearance of the legitimate monopoly of violence over certain territory that formally has been recognized as a state. Security and justice as public goods are either not provided or provided by illegitimate private agents (Bianic et al., 2003: 15).

Looking to the recent history, it might be observed that Helman and Raner's approach has never been debated. After publishing their paper, most of their arguments had an opportunity to be tested showing discrete results. McKay (2006: 63) reminds that numerous intrusive reconstruction missions have been undertaken by the UN varying degrees of success. For instance, while Kosovo and East Timor were partly successful, conversely in the case of Somalia intervention largely failed to resolve the humanitarian crisis.

Wilde's (2003) article "The Skewed Responsibility Narrative of the Failed States Concept" nicely glosses one of the major objections to this position—that it implicitly holds collapsed states responsible for their condition. The state failure phenomenon cannot be properly understood in the terms of domestic politics alone (MacKay, 2006: 63). According to Wild, foreign influences are involved as states often fail under immense foreign pressures—economic, political or even military.

According to Wild (2003: 245), a program of international administration for the state itself can address only domestic causes of state failure—external conditions that encourage a state's collapse such as economic pressures from international financial institutions and/or military pressures from other states are left unaddressed. Any intervening foreign power, therefore, brings with its own interests, its own political value system, and could limit the success.

Another opposing approach comes from Rosa Brooks' 2005 article "Failed States, or the State as Failure?" where she strongly argues the descriptive account of statehood is flawed, and thus encourages a flawed account of state collapse. Besides, more radically she claims that the Westphalian rule of international noninterference and absolute domestic authority is in some practical way flawed as well.

According to Brooks (2005), although failed states vary, most commentators agree that they are described as an exact opposite of the successful states. Successful states dispose of particular geography and their societies; they have

diplomatic relations with the other states and they provide sufficient social welfare to their societies. However, failed states lose their control due to the violence and conflicts they face. Besides, from lack of a stability and peace failed states are not able to achieve economic growth or development in societies they serve. Failed states are often characterized by massive economic inequities, warlordism, and violent competition for resources (Rotberg, 2003).

Brooks (2005), in her critical view, argues that unsuccessfulness of failed states do not stem from themselves, but also from the inequality that international system generates. Therefore, all the states which are strong or weak, with an extrovert or introvert character or remain between, regardless of their society, geography, ideology, culture, and richness every one of them are girded by the myth of the sovereign equality.

Failed states, Brooks claims, are most often states that never succeeded in their own right to begin with. In some cases, they collapsed during or shortly after independence (as in Bosnia and East Timor). In some other cases, they were sustained for a period afterward by the unique international arrangement of the Cold War during which numerous newly decolonized states were made to function artificially through significant economic aid and political influence from one of the two superpowers (as in the Democratic Republic of Congo). This analysis shows how external forces determine state collapse as Wild argues (MacKay, 2006: 64).

According to Brooks, an international community of states founded on sovereign equality is, like the collapsed states she describes, a project of political organization that simply never got off the ground (MacKay, 2006: 64). Brooks in her critical words sets that "from the perspective of an alien observer from another planet, the 'international community' of the planet Earth must surely appear like a failed state writ large." Thus, she finds the international system failed itself.

Brooks makes an important point, nonetheless her argument is quite polemical. If sovereign states fail or risk failure as often as they seem to, at least outside the developed West, then it might be thought that something is wrong with sovereignty itself. She points out quite rightly that the notion of sovereign equality holds only as an idea in international law and it should be carefully analysed (MacKay, 2006: 65). Therefore, there are two main points in Brooks's settlement: Sovereignty notion is controversial hereby a failed state description given on its ground would be in the wrong.

One other critical approach stressing arbitrary classifications on failed states based on the state sovereignty and Weberian state definition is Pinar Bilgin and Adam D. Morton's (2002) article "Historicizing Representations of 'Failed States': Beyond the Cold-War Annexation of the Social Sciences?". Writers state that society is perceived as a *mélange* of social organizations that struggle against the state, sometimes displacing or harnessing the state, to establish who has the right and ability to guide social behaviour. The result, later also developed as part of a 'state-in-society' perspective, is the juxtaposition of state and society, which are placed in a hierarchical order according to the level of stability, social control and development attained by superior state capabilities (Bilgin & Morton, 2002: 62-63). In other words, the aim of this approach is to avoid state-centrism by appreciating the mutuality of state-society interactions.

In their analysis, Bilgin and Morton (2002: 63) criticize the tendency to compare the capabilities of the postcolonial state with the institutional capabilities of states in the West. The denial of state status is, therefore, one of the 'deceptions of sovereignty' and stems from the comparison of an institutional transplant with conditions and processes in the West that have developed over a much longer duration. Besides, they claim that there is a reliance on a neo-Weberian understanding of the state that succumbs to pluralist assumptions about the policymaking process and oversimplified, trivializing, 'ideal-type' categories of political contestation.

Briefly, Bilgin and Morton's (2002) main concern are the question that "how a post-colonial state comes into being in the first place, how it is constituted or being reproduced?". According to their view, this is a critical question as without considering their historical post-colonial position within their socio-political global environment in which they have been targets of colonization. Thus, the failure of the states is explained by their own internal dynamics. Supporting West and Brooks' external dynamics stress, Bilgin and Morton's debate on the tendency to reify the post-colonial state by abstracting them from the international sphere, in such view seem to be ideological.

## **5. In Place of conclusion**

A brief explanation on contextual approaches and main trends on failed state notion showed that some of the scholars uncritically accepted the concept as a paradigm change in international politics. In this case, the discourse on failed states is widely referring to its political and/or legal context. This trend is grounded on the Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner's (1993) view that a state was becoming utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community and failed states would threaten their neighbors through endogenous problems with possible cross-border effects.

Secondly, other analysts are quite skeptical of the analytical value of the concept on epistemological grounds, arguing that it is difficult to objectively define, identify and analyze failed states with methodological rigor. Assessment efforts of the multiple Indices prepared by overseas development agencies present some common components, such as political and



social issues, but still major differences are observed. Besides, external conditions within the international system which are connected to other states are left unaddressed.

The third argument in the literature rejects the idea of failed states as a politicized, ethnocentric, hegemonic concept due to its interventionist context. Based on the narrow and limited Weberian definition on statehood, the blame for state failure are many, ranging from European colonialism to what the colonial successor regimes or external agents did to that legacy. However, although the critical approach is presenting an alternative to the construction of 'failed states', showing interconnections between state and society, and examining both internal and external dynamics of failure, it does not provide an original/alternative conception to the 'failed states'.

As a concluding remark, it could be said that there is a need to generate of an alternative conception of 'failed states'. Giving a wider sociological ground on its definition, a failed state notion could be redefined by considering its historical connotations and suggesting an avant-garde meaning. Failed states notion could be reconstructed in order to have a new explanatory character rather than just to be a tool for classification. Then, the notion could refer to the state and society relations in a more satisfactory way and could function better to interpret contemporary societies.

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