

The Failed State and the State of Failure

Peter Hitchcock

The first step towards liberation is, in a way, the awareness of defeat.

Slavoj Žižek

The failed state is, for Marxism, comparable in significance to the falling or failing rate of profit because both are overdetermined by the crises associated with the rising organic composition of capital as a global matrix. There is more than one twist to this narrative, however, starting with a second-order comparison (linked in my schema to the invocation of a messy and unevenly developed chiasmus) that holds that such state failure harkens back to the concept of the falling rate of profit as itself a failure to explain adequately the current constellation of labor and capital on a world scale. In the following argument one supposition will ghost or harangue the other as if held in a dialectical tension, the state of a debt, as it were, that owes less to Derridean mourning than to a certain entropic function in any organic composition. Such historicity extends to the conceptual field, which is not to make a virtue of the failures of Marxism but to draw attention to what is living and dead in theories of the state, where I read the failed state as a decisive symptom. The tension at issue does not reveal chiasmus as a surrogate for dialectics within cultural materialism but is nevertheless a heuristic method regarding a constitutive reversal in the nature of the state that, as an organic composite, now threatens to recolonize the decolonized and decolonize the colonizers or the axis of the nation-state through which such power is networked. For Marxism the state is an X factor, the form of domination that is yet the architectonic for domination's diminution. The familiar mantra that the state constrains and is constrained (for it is always and never identical with a class

structured in dominance and capital as a divisible term) has always pivoted on the issue of autonomy, absolute for Hegel in terms of general interest and relative for more recent Althusserians eager to map the ideological dispensations of the economic. There is no space here to expound fully on the complex parameters of this genealogy, the interrogation of theoretical practice, but I hold it as axiomatic that much Marxism on the question is still bound by the conditions marked with an X by Pierre Macherey in 1979, *Hegel ou Spinoza*.¹ This is not a binary, especially for those who favor Spinoza, because it offers the possibility, as Warren Montag has suggested, of a dialectic of the positive, shorn of its negation of the negation.² By and by, it also opens up a space for anarchic thought vis-à-vis the state, and it is not for nothing that a libertarian like Noam Chomsky has pushed the issue of failed states to the fore (see below). My primary interest is in the long space of the failed state, which links its conceptualization after the end of the Cold War to the inception of international relations themselves, whose X factor is the Peace of Westphalia and its framework of autonomy, relative or otherwise. In this light, I will urge the prescience of chiasmus not just within poesis but within the very form of the state, within the texture of its time/space or chronotope. It is not a hermeneutical device but an analytical lever enabling us to ask questions of what becomes (of) Marxism where no proletariat dictates and where the state dissipates not from freedom's reign but precisely from the latter's disinterested abstraction under globalization.

No doubt chiasmus is a nod to my sense of a cultural materialism that acknowledges the material basis of the state in the economic and the juridical yet sees in failure and falling a decidedly tropological and cultural suasion, relations a tad more active in the apprehension of the state, individually and collectively. For Marxism, the dissolution of states is an impressively ambivalent event, not just because of the human costs but because history is littered with the detritus of states that claimed, rightly or wrongly, an allegiance to Marxism as an organizing principle. Engels, of course, held that the state is not abolished, it withers away, but by the early 1990s one might have been forgiven for thinking that most of this withering had occurred within socialism and that abolition of this state was achieved with velvet ease. However much we claim that what withered was not the rational kernel but the mystical shell, we live in an age beyond easy alibis. Fortunately, capital and its ailing trading partner, the nation-state, exist in the same world and this is why the theory of the failed state emerges precisely at the moment when capitalist triumphalism should have been at its highest, when indeed the specter of actually existing socialism gave up the ghost. States could no longer fail according to some highly nuanced Cold War calculus (the reds did it!); another set of measurements had to be developed and propagated, and

some of these might reflect the infrastructural crises of capitalist statehood even as capital itself has clearly sought a mobility relatively unfettered by state dictate.

The general research project from which the current discussion derives is to understand the extent and depth of crisis in postcolonial statehood and polity — the displacement of the falling rate of profit onto the production of failure in alternative decolonization. Previously I have argued this as not only a challenge to the forms of political transformation but one that places a special burden on the powers of imagination, not Homi Bhabha's pun, but that which seethes in a kind of psychic dislocation first tracked by Fanon.³ Some of that critique, like an obstinate symptom, will reappear below under the rubric of failure, but in the interest of brevity I will argue within three interlaced theoretical and historical problems that all descend from my initial proposition. First, the failed state concept as a festering bourgeois antimony over the future of the global south or an oppositional order once termed the Third World. What we might call the Westphalian *Weltanschauung* finds the meaning of globalization obstinately disjunct in a manner that reduces sovereignty to exchange value and threatens to exchange northern hegemony for redistributive regionalism and local delinking. Second, the failed state as an eruption of a constitutive non-space in the organic composition of capital, a terrifying void where subjectless natives cannot be depended on to give up value for extraction especially after a good bludgeoning via structural adjustment or forthright occupation. Third, the failed state as a creative space for catachresis that exists between the state as a paradigm and the invocation of specific nation-states. I insist on this admixture because they are organic interlocutors, like constant to variable capital, without which politics is itself subject to failure and the imagined community of nation itself is unimaginable.

The concept of the failed state owes its formulation to an article by Gerald Helman, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, and Steven Ratner, an international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, that appeared in *Foreign Policy* at the end of 1992.⁴ Yet before we consider its elements, and indeed its subsequent tabulation, we must emphasize that the failed state actually begins with the concept of state sovereignty read to be ratified by the Peace of Westphalia (1648), whose treaties (Munster and Osnabruck) still *remarkably* inflect the *ratio* of the nation-state today.⁵ The incredulity exists in several forms. The Peace is seen to set the terms for sovereignty, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, and the legal equality of states. Unfortunately, participants like France, Sweden, and the Holy Roman Empire assumed sovereignty and felt no particular urge to sanctify it for the benefit of others in either treaty. France

and Sweden, in particular, were accorded the right of intervention, especially where the Holy Roman Empire was concerned. As for legal equality, in the case of the Empire the emperor was more equal than anyone else and could dispense with princes on a somewhat less than equal basis. A sensitive dependence to initial conditions also serves to remind us that the world according to Westphalia consisted of Catholics and Protestants (indeed we have two treaties because the noble Christians did not want to share the same room) and that in general the model of the international order was definitively a European solution to a European problem, namely, the Holy Roman Empire as a failed or failing state. It has not escaped historical commentators that the Peace of Westphalia sought to both inhibit *and* preserve the beneficence of imperialism (the Empire lasted until 1806), and one non-signatory in particular, England, thought that contradiction was deliciously fertile, and still does, as mortars rain in Basra and as politicians twiddle their thumbs over the European Union. I should say, however, that while the European Union diminishes state rivalry, within its compass it holds fast to an original precept of Westphalia, that the model of polity is Europe itself. Abolish the Westphalian system, its defenders like Rawls say, and wars and fundamentalism will conspire in devastating hegemonies.⁶ It is certainly possible to derive a moral order from Westphalia as Rawls does but it comes with consequences that are not altogether moral, even when people are assigned a primary position over states (incidentally, something that the text of the treaties demonstrably overlooks). By reintegrating state failure into the state's most influential blueprint one can begin to track a different circuit in its extension, one that has ideological and political implications. If the original Peace offered rapprochement between several conflicting orders — feudal, imperial, religious, despotic — the medium of settlement is composed of property and law; indeed the law of property is pronounced in many of its pages. Yet, since it is read to say what it often does not, its consummate hold on international relations takes on the order of a fetish, or an *objet petit a* that is in fact split off from what is truly desired. This is an instance of both the mythology consonant with nationalism of which Benedict Anderson has written and a kind of originary forgetting we might associate with Renan's nation formulation (the latter, of course, highlighting the extreme violence in making nations).⁷ For nascent European bourgeoisies this functioned more like an investment opportunity where one could make something from nothing and use a prince or two to overthrow the feudal order. In all of this the desire is for a subsumption of state to the law of property and the development of class alliances only to the extent they submit to bourgeois identity itself. It is an instance where, as Marx and Engels point out in *The German Ideology*, the language of class directly

inflects its character: *eigen* (one's own), *Eigenschaft* (feature), *Eigentum* (property).⁸ Just as the European feudal order imploded in an eighty-year war and a thirty-year war that highlighted its failure to consolidate state hegemony, the treaty itself is haunted by failure and proceeds to cultivate characteristics it either cannot name or must contravene at all costs. It can be argued that strong states have emerged by riding roughshod over Westphalia, but any failure of the West is premised primarily on a fetishistic compulsion to accede to that which the Peace does not state. Far from marking this text therefore as irrelevant, its lack is a fundamental linchpin of bourgeois approbation in the current international order.

In 1992 what Helman and Ratner saw in Haiti, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, and Cambodia is a form of a state "utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community." The main characteristics, "civil strife, government breakdown, and economic privation," are understandable markers, but the writers then argue that the emergence of the failed state is a symptom of the very proliferation of nation-states after World War II, tied inexorably to the process of decolonization. "Self-determination" is placed above "long-term survivability."

Fundamental to the notion of decolonization was the idea that peoples could best govern themselves when free from the shackles, or even the influences, of foreigners. The idea, then, that states could fail — that they could be simply unable to function as independent entities — was anathema to the *raison d'être* of decolonization and offensive to the notion of self-determination. New states might be poor, it was thought, but they would hold their own by virtue of being independent.⁹

The logic here is worth examining because it girds a contradiction produced by the mythology of the world of Westphalia that to a great extent the UN Charter preserves. Clearly, the proliferation of independent states has much to do with the success of anti-colonial movements around the globe and the weakening of specific imperial states that could no longer maintain dominion. To this we could add the machinations of the Cold War that secured client states by investments, loans, and military support. We should also note this theorization of the failed state foregrounds both the problems of newly minted states and the more recent interpellation of the United States as a sole superpower and global "policeman." Initially the United States leveraged its power in the UN to share the burden of its global primacy (most evident in the conduct of the Gulf War where the United States was paid handsomely for dumping huge amounts of ordnance beyond its sell-by date),

but in general there was ambivalence in the United States about global stewardship. What Helman and Ratner do not address is the effect of this discomfort on UN intervention and relief. While they advocate UN trusteeship or conservatorship over and above the sovereignty concerns of the failed or failing state, they elide America's geopolitical influence in the matter. Only when direct U.S. or Western interests in general are met do we see significant humanitarian and security aid provided. If the nation-state is a victim of its own success ("the vast proliferation of nation-states," etc.), its viability has also been undermined both by its formulae and by the messy contradictions of the new world order.

One problem in this regard, artfully spun in the nature of a cruel reversal, is the principle of sovereignty, which the authors describe as a "talisman." Indeed. It is criticized as "an ill-defined and amorphous notion of international law [that] has been used to denote everything from a state's political independence — its separate existence as a political unit on the world scene — to the more extreme view that all the internal affairs of a state are beyond the scrutiny of the international community."¹⁰ It is not surprising that this vagary is applied only to new states of the Third World or postcolonial world and not to states like the United States, which have played with sovereignty's strategic ambivalence. Post-1945 states are described as attaching "an almost exaggerated importance" to sovereignty as if the experience of nations like Haiti, Panama, Grenada, Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, Indonesia, Chile, Afghanistan, Iraq, and so forth had not suggested a little emphasis on non-intervention might be appropriate. And now, according to Helman and Ratner, it is China that "hides behind sovereignty" despite some estimates that 40 percent of its GNP is owned by foreign capital. I have suggested that sovereignty's claim on nation-state identity has had a somewhat fetishistic function in international relations, but this desire is not primarily located in the muddleheaded mythologizing of anti-colonial struggle: it is rather constitutive of a necessary obfuscation in the real foundation of capital's organic composition. The point would be not just to redefine this sovereignty as Giorgio Agamben has done to encompass the bare life (*zoē*) of a simple living body but to analyze its historical purchase on state formation as a medium of capital circulation and accumulation.¹¹ The rule over bodies is not simply some philosophical contagion but a material embodiment of state desire. Statelessness, or the identification of the failed state, often now refers to the barely living rather than to those who have joyously reverted to an Aristotelian distinction. As a historical predicament it certainly reveals specific antimonies in the concept of sovereignty, but Agamben roots this in Nazi Germany (the current craze for Schmittism) and not to the somewhat pressing contemporary concerns of the world system

(we can say there are intimations of fascism in the latter but they are never only political structures and are not identical because of that).

In the face of a surge of *debellatio*s (a term, Helman and Ratner remind us, that was once used to describe the shattered German state after World War II), what should the world order do? Within the UN Security Council, at least, you pick your interventions according to the imbalance of your power. When a few million Africans are dying across Burundi, Rwanda, the Congo (and then DRC), Sudan, and Somalia, the calculus appears to be the balance between their economic effects on global circuits of power and the ideological necessity of saving a few blacks to maintain the aura of beneficence. No one is ever that cynical, but even the Kuwaiti royal family must have noticed a difference between their rescue and those of the Tutsi a few years later. In *Capital* Marx famously brackets the question of the state, an omission often remedied by a Marxist emphasis on *The German Ideology* or *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, themselves parentheses of a particular crisis. Kojin Karatani suggests that the problem of the state in *Capital* should be answered by the method of *Capital* itself.¹² This approach has much to recommend it, for Karatani requires a critique of modern absolutist monarchical states (because Marx explains a current condition by reference to its previous conjunction). To some extent this is applicable to the current fix of the failed state (we could, for instance, read it into both the example of Kuwait and that of Rwanda — the latter historically hamstrung by that arch-absolutist, Leopold, in the Congo). The failed state recalls Marx's notion of fetishism as the confusion of gold for currency. The nation-state is the gold standard but its failure is on the order of *méconnaissance*, an event of interpellation in which intimations of a general equivalent form must be expunged, or demonized, or displaced as Third World dysfunction. For bourgeois rationalism an anti-mony requires more than stigmatization; it necessitates systematization — it must be itemized and graphed.

Thus, we move from linchpins of a league of nations to the league tabling of nations. The Fund for Peace, in cooperation with *Foreign Policy* magazine (home of the Helman and Ratner article), has developed a formula for failure around what it calls a Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST): a four-step trend-line analysis, consisting of (1) rating twelve social, economic, and political/military indicators; (2) assessing the capabilities of five core state institutions considered essential for sustaining security; (3) identifying idiosyncratic factors and surprises; and (4) placing countries on a conflict map that shows the risk history of countries being analyzed.¹³ The fund's main aim — to prevent war or alleviate the conditions that cause it — is admirable and I do not doubt the seriousness they bring to this task. The CAST, however, has a clinical resonance, like a twelve-step program as you

struggle with the issue of dependency. The Failed State Index (FSI) is produced using the first category with a precision that is breathless: “The CAST software indexed and scanned tens of thousands of open-source articles and reports using Boolean logic. The data are electronically gathered using Thomson Dialog, a powerful data-collection system that includes international and local media reports and other public documents, including U.S. State Department reports, independent studies, and even corporate financial filings. The data used in each index are collected from May to December of the preceding year. The software calculates the number of positive and negative ‘hits’ for the 12 indicators. Internal and external experts then review the scores as well as the articles themselves, when necessary, to confirm the scores and ensure accuracy.” For those unfamiliar with Thomson Dialog it is a subscription database that searches within English, French, German, and Spanish (too bad if your research or reports are in Russian, Chinese, or Kiswahili) and can turn up nuggets from the *Wall Street Journal* with consummate ease. And for anyone captivated by Colin Powell’s performance at the UN, State Department communications also pop up with edifying frequency. There is no spin filter, although the experts provide what some may call quality control, which is only to remark that once a position/view has been sanctioned by transnational media conglomerates it is subsequently true for the Boolean search (at least within the time parameters given). The indicators include easily measured features such as the “legacy of vengeance seeking group grievance or group paranoia”; “uneven economic development along group lines”; “criminalization and/or delegitimization of the state”; “suspension or arbitrary application of the rule of law”; “security apparatus operates as state within a state”; the “rise of factionalized elites”; and “the intervention of states or other external actors.” Each indicator is assigned a value out of ten (again a measure of general equivalence) and the results are tabulated. In 2005 Cote D’Ivoire won the race for failure, scoring a state-defying 106 out of 120. Obviously the civil war had much to do with this but the Fund/*Foreign Policy* also notes an unwillingness to bend to needed reforms (advocated, for instance, by Ivory Coast’s previous custodians, the French). The DRC came in a close second, a paragon of failure so obvious that it does not even require a country assessment in the fund’s analysis. The hideous predations of the Janjaweed only merit Sudan third place in 2005, and it was only by the valiant efforts of and training by the government that Sudan raised its position to first in 2006 and 2007 with an impressive 113.7. Iraq and Somalia round out the top five and point to the utter failure of the assessment of failure (they climb to second and third, respectively, in 2007 with a remarkable surge in failure). Why?

In both cases the indicators immediately reveal serious elements of state collapse but they do not connect these in any way to systemic foundations in the state apparatus and their meaning within a long space that would include imperialism, colonialism, and the deep structures of local polity. Why have these countries failed and what makes some more than others worth saving? In the case of Somalia, for instance, state collapse is linked to the anarchy following the overthrow of Siyad Barre, but this naked truth fails to comprehend the fantastic projection of statehood endured by Somalis and others who dared to think beyond the prescriptions offered by Britain, Italy, and France after the World War II. Without belaboring the point, Somalia’s democracy collapsed in 1969 with the assassination of Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, its second president. The state had already failed and was kept in that position by Cold War fiat. Like Mobutu or Idi Amin, Siyad Barre was permitted to be sovereign, that is, to exercise the right to the monopoly over violence within his borders, so long as it served the greater game. This is similar to the fate of the state in Iraq, although the tender mercies of the United States in that regard have been overdetermined by more forthright geopolitical and geoeconomic indicators. Such is the paranoia of its caretaker that one is no longer certain whether Iraq is actually required to fulfill American ambition; indeed, for some politicians the completion of Iraq’s failure as a nation would mark the success of U.S. involvement in that delegitimization (to borrow from the language of failure prescribed by the Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy*). The latter are correct to assert that none of the indicators should be read in isolation, but this also means understanding the failed state as a state of failure necessarily at or beyond the normative assumptions of state viability. This may explain the curious position of Israel in the rankings, whose incursions into Lebanon and occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem are read as healthy exercises in sovereignty, and whose treatment of its Arab minority does not seem to vex the indicators, or that its skies are streaked with rockets that threaten its civilian population, or that it faces no sanctions or intervention for its contravention of UN resolutions, or that it is a bastion of theocratic apartheid, or that its nuclear arsenal is a massive destabilizing factor in West Asia, or that without the crutch of the United States (whether in arms, technology, or foreign direct investment) it would hear the wings of capital flight. Interestingly, its economic health offsets most of the negative indicators, and this activity is often focused on arms and technology traded to deal with other states’ failure. True, at position 67 Israel (75 in 2007) is failing more than Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Libya, but why it cannot climb above Egypt or the Dominican Republic suggests that the search engine might be missing a title or two in the CAST system of the FSI. I do not argue that merely by raising the specter

of chiasmus we might alter the preference for tabulation over transformation, but I do take the failed state as a symptom, in Althusser and Balibar's critique, of "inadequate knowledge" and this requires further comment and analysis.

Karatani's answer to Marx's lacunae on the state in *Capital* is to read his methodology transcritically, as a pronounced parallax of constant transposition in which the principle of association undoes the unholy trinity of capital, nation, and state. Of course, Kant plays a role in this figuration and one wonders whether indeed it is possible to maintain the parallax before Kantian hypotyposis, the difficulty of rendering concepts before the sensorium. No doubt, Žižek would say *that* is the precise advantage of the parallax because its impossible point of view cannot confirm seeing as believing. Karatani himself favors the trans in transposition as the trans in transcendental and thus we have the intriguing notion that the state is a sublime object of ideology. Yet Karatani means more than this, and crucially so because he reads Marx to expound on the state in its absence through a synchronic analysis of capital and value. Althusser and Balibar read the shortfall as itself symptomatic — the silence is constitutive of the method (a favorite move of the aforementioned Macherey in his literary critique). The former tracks the effects of Marx's assumption that the rate of surplus value of total social capital is constant in his examples; the latter suggest that such assumptions themselves arise from an adherence to preliminary abstractions before concrete manifestations. Althusser and Balibar write out this silence through a Spinozan reading as theoretical practice; Karatani, however, perhaps less spooked by Hegel, preserves this dialectical tension, especially in his critique of the third volume of *Capital*. Where they would agree is around the stress on abstraction, a transcendental level for Karatani that resists the drift of empiricism. The precise meaning of this tension and of alternative reading apparatuses must here remain a challenge rather than a formula. I would like to unpack a couple of elements from the approach to explain how the failed state might reverse the state of failure when theoreticism and empiricism are not read as options (either/or) but as dynamic constituents of a Marxist problematic on the State.

The nation-state, as capitalists well know, continues to be a vital platform for the preservation of surpluses and the distribution of liability. Within globalization it is a home for capital, not the scene of capital, especially not finance or fictive capital. The attribution of failed state is a risk assessment algorithm that helps decide whether a home should be part of the scene and vice versa, in the manner of chiasmus. Marx, for Karatani, faced an analytical dilemma because of this juxtaposition, which has only intensified

since he set out his framework. Capitals with a higher organic composition coexist with those of lower organic composition, as different fields of industry with relative surplus value accrue more rapidly toward the higher stage, given its exploitative advantage. The problem is in tracking the falling rate of profit across these fields when they are spatially defined not just by industry but by nation, region, and globality. As Karatani notes, "In the profit that a certain individual capital gains, what is distributed is the surplus value exploited from the workers of different industrial branches as well as independent small producers; in the profit that the total capital of a certain nation-state gains, what is distributed is the surplus value exploited from the workers and peasants of foreign countries (colonies). But the difficulty is that these details are always invisible."¹⁴ Karatani sees industrial capital as a variant of merchant capital, but whatever the distinction its global form continues to search for cheap labor power (fictive capital seeks accumulation through circulation itself via a logic of speed and technology). While he emphasizes that capitalist globalization remains partial as a mode of production, Karatani acknowledges it has become globally dominant. So, while Marx attended to a nation-state, Great Britain, as his model for the study of capital, it is nevertheless linked to the world system because of his consideration of the rate of profit across different branches of industry with contrasting productivities; in effect, world capitalism. Now if that sounds like a preference for synecdoche over chiasmus we must crucially factor in both the effect of Marx's synchronic reading *and* the importance of autonomy. Earlier I mentioned how England claimed (and claims) exceptionalism to the whims of Westphalia (while actually enacting the vagaries of its prescriptions) but this uncertainty principle, this failure as a state of desire, to be wanting, to be absent (some of the meanings of failure), structures the world system as such. The failed state is indeed relatively autonomous because the factors precipitating its contravention are uniquely arrayed but also because each state has a being autonomous from capital. Factors appear consonant when ascertained synchronically, but within the long space they emerge as radically disjunct and mutually exceptional. This causes several issues to disappear or become invisible (to use Karatani's parlance), including the falling rate of profit. The failure is, whatever else it is, the absence of this calculation. Thus says Marx in volume 3 of *Capital*: "In so far as foreign trade cheapens on the one hand the elements of constant capital and on the other the necessary means of subsistence into which variable capital is converted, it acts to raise the rate of profit by raising the rate of surplus-value and reducing the value of constant capital." Marx continues: "We have shown in general, therefore, how the same causes that bring about a fall in general rate of profit provoke counter-effects [chiasmatic reversals,

perhaps] that inhibit this fall, delay it and in part even paralyze it. These do not annul the law, but they weaken its effect. If this were not the case, it would not be the fall in the general rate of profit that was incomprehensible, but rather the relative slowness of this fall.”¹⁵ Given Marx’s conclusions, Karatani asks why Marx failed to approach the world economy, especially since Marx states that it tends to weaken the law that is so much more demonstrable in its autonomous form. Karatani argues that Marx wanted to show the weakness of the autonomous form so that, through a political economist’s sense of negative capability, one comes to understand the real relation of capital’s organic composition. We might say, as Marx says of the left-Hegelian Szeliga, that his talent is “not that of disclosing what is hidden (*Verborgne zu enthüllen*), but of hiding what is disclosed (*Enthüllte zu verbergen*).”¹⁶ This, I believe, is what we mean by failed state.

To return to our Failed State Index, the factors considered imply that the criteria are of equal weight in each example and that the scores fluctuate according to the statistical sweep of publications that take up these factors. Clearly the emphasis is on governance, which is to say the preponderance or not of Westphalian sanctioned stability: Is security provided? Are borders defensible? Is there an infrastructure for the distribution of what are often called political goods (that include health care, communications, a legal system) that a citizen expects from her/his state? Any political position that would claim the failed state as a field of possibility must account for the social cataclysm it represents. However, abstractions from the nature of a state’s failure are not an endorsement of the production of failure. Using the criteria developed by Robert I. Rotberg on the failed state, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was weak and began to fail not just from the greed of Hussein, his family, and cronies but as a result of the years of sanctions placed upon it.¹⁷ The failure was enforced by an invasion that of course claimed to wish the opposite but has now placed Iraq on the brink of a special subcategory of failure, the collapsed state (intriguingly, one that almost always sanctions intervention according to Rotberg). As for profit, the economic indicators included in failed state analysis are often vague and/or narrowly conceived. Think of the FSI’s consideration of corporate financial filings — I am sure this produced a veritable cornucopia on the subject of Somalia. The World Bank proudly displays no economic data in its assessment of Somalia while the Institute for Security Studies wagers that individual GDP is \$500 despite the fact it cannot generate a figure for Somalia’s overall GDP since at least 1993. Yet the economy certainly continues.

In a remarkable study, *Somalia: Economy without a State*, Peter D. Little has attempted to show how Somalis have survived under statelessness.¹⁸ With no functioning government, no central bank, and no accountable security

system, Somalis have continued to trade (officially, via contracts with transnational corporations [who neglected to include this data for Thomson Dialog], and unofficially, via a large and intricate black market), to move about the country (this is particularly important for roving pastoralists who maintain Somalia’s large livestock industry), and to maintain a semblance of social order (although, as Little affirms, this has not been the case in the main urban areas [at least until the recent emergence of the Islamic Courts — a mitigating factor that receded with the invasion of Ethiopian troops in December 2006 and U.S. air raids in their support]). Little’s research on Somalia of the 1990s underlines that the *sur-vivre* of Somalis has a longer history than the UN Charter. With no governmental administration, Somalis continued to use traditional local institutions to maintain communal and regional viability. These include the principle of the *diya*, a “blood payment” established through an extended family matrix that mitigates need in times of crisis; the *xeer* that functions as a form of social contract; and the *aqil* (renamed the *nabadoon* after the revolution of 1969), who acts as a local mediator among clan elders to resolve disputes. Little does not reject the advantages of the modern state apparatus; his argument is about how a postcolonial population survives when it basically gives the regime of state a vote of no confidence. Western and specifically UN aid remains crucial and is not discounted, but the example of Somalia shows that it is held with such deep suspicion that local communities survive by fending for themselves. This does not mean foreign intervention cannot assert itself: it has in the past and now, with the perception that failed states are breeding grounds for transnational terrorism (unlike autocratic strong states, of course), Somalia has become once again a topic of “strategic interest.” The failed state narrative, however, masks the importance of the geolocal and substitutes instead a compromised calculus that overlooks the substance of what I would term postcolonial duration.

The 2006 FSI top ten included eight African states, all of which have emerged from colonialism since World War II. More significantly, none of the top thirty-five failed states in any year so far has been an independent nation-state beyond the twentieth century. While strong states produce postmodern statelessness and a roving consonant with fictive capital, decolonizing states have often clung or been tied to modernity’s blueprint which, as I have suggested, includes the failed state concept in its inception. Furthermore, when the geopolitical prop of Cold War strategy was replaced by structural adjustment, local economies were offered the shock of instant integration. If one considers each example of failure in its autonomy, as I have begun to do in the case of Somalia, then the lacunae of Marx is not so much filled as reframed. Multiple modes of production are seen to coexist

but not in a manner sufficient enough for them to appear talismanic for capital's primary accumulation strategies. The problem is not extrapolation but interpolation. A taxonomy of transnationalism must bear the weight of failure both in its descriptions and in its abstractions. So far, the world order has blazed away terminologically to confirm that dysfunction in the family of nation-states is, for instance, a pathology of postcoloniality. Meanwhile, conceptual analysis of the state form begins and ends with markers that are often no less narrow than the empiricist projections of Washington think tanks. What then are alternative strategies for making sense of this failure?

If Karatani and others are correct in their reading of *Capital* as evidence that Marx grasped capitalism "beyond a polis (nation-state)," this is, as yet, little solace for the people of the South who sought to re-create sociopolitical systems delinked from imperial and colonial predation yet find these efforts crossed out, reversed by modernity's dead ends. By interpolating rather than extrapolating capitalist globalization from Marx, one finds no easy isomorphism between the failure of states as the failure of a dominant class to hold its own and capital's push to sublimate the nation-state as a means to slow the crisis of the rate of profit failure. Certainly in the emergence of a new theorization of the failed state we can discern elements of a familiar Westphalian gambit — to preserve state formations regulating class conflict and provide an economic system porous enough for surplus value to pour out. Yet other factors are quite clearly at work tantamount to a revenge of history on decolonization (accepting individual states harbored classes and rulers who had little problem with this chiasm). Strategic interests within the transnationalism of strong states include a complex reterritorialization of nations that have said "no" and an intense desire to roll back failure when the prospect of hostile non-state actors (real or paranoiacally imagined) peppers the horizon (of course, the world's most predatory non-state actor is capital itself). The antimony, to expunge states whose use value trips too slowly to exchange versus the fear factor as a conduit for the consolidation of strong state power, represents a major challenge to Marxist theories of the state that no longer have to hand-wring over the degree of deformation in workers' states (Trotsky's line). Although the reorganization of the world system into regional economic and political blocs is no less significant, withered states today are not simply excess to that consolidation. Because of the contradictory logic in their designation a more analytical valence in failance has yet to be theorized.

Malcolm Bull, for instance, takes state failure as chiasmatic, but only to the extent that it augurs a reversal of Spinozan global modeling in favor of Hegel's theory of state ("society armed with force," as Bernard Bosanquet puts it).¹⁹ It is the failure in the latter that affords the necessity for new

divisions at or beyond the nation-state as form, otherwise the end of state will be suffused with end-of-history arguments that obfuscate the real foundations of global difference. The promise is of a global civil society rather than the chimera of a global state, and Bull correctly notes that the narrative of failure is actually the West failure, a will to global civilization and statehood that foundered on the contradictions of European imperialism and brutal subjugation, a sequence, as Bull puts it, "more obvious to the colonized than the colonizer."²⁰ Yet, while one must laud Bull's critique of the "dissipative structures of the entropic global state," this narrative is taking millions of decolonized lives to make.²¹ Chomsky's chiasm is also fluently conceived — the nature of reversal requires that the biggest advocates of the failed state diagnosis be accorded a failing grade using only facts, not a theory of the state of course.²² What Chomsky has in mind is U.S. flouting of international law, the suspension of habeas corpus, the promulgation of extraordinary rendition, torture in the pursuit of terror (a rather slippery emotion that can serve all kinds of authoritarianism both in the United States and among its coalition of the willing accessories after the fact), and an emerging democratic deficit in which institutions of democracy are made complicit in acts less than democratic. However much we discern institutional dysfunction in the United States (in health care, welfare, and debt), Chomsky's interpretation of the failed state overlooks the central point in the effulgence of the failed state: its global question about the terms of the nation-state and its sovereignty.

Bull suggests, finally, that the declining fortunes of the global hegemon, the United States, force it into a role that Gramsci once pinned to the dictatorship of the proletariat, the self-annihilating night watchman state. The rhetorical gesture does not quite work, since proletarian being appears at the moment of its sublation and thus is a creative function in a non-proletarian future; the death throes of a hegemon armed to the teeth, however, cannot be said to assume a creative role, at least on recent evidence. Long ago Lenin imagined the complete destruction of bureaucracy and the old state machinery for revolution to proceed. The failed state offers a lesson in destruction but it is as much about a revolution betrayed as a revolution alloyed. In the historical prospects of failure between Westphalian states and postcolonial forms we must interject a new revolutionary cry: "You first."

Notes

¹ Pierre Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza* (Paris: Maspero, 1979).

² Warren Montag, "Who's Afraid of the Multitude? Between the Individual and the State," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104:4 (Fall 2005): 655–73. See also *Bodies, Masses and Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries* (London: Verso, 1999).

³ See Peter Hitchcock, *Imaginary States* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2003); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1986).

⁴ Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner, "Saving Failed States," *Foreign Policy* 89 (Winter 1993): 3–21.

⁵ The full text of the two treaties can be accessed at <<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/westphal.htm>>.

⁶ John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999).

⁷ Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?" trans. Martin Thom in Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 11.

⁸ Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1988) 100.

⁹ Helman and Ratner, "Saving" 3–4.

¹⁰ Helman and Ratner, "Saving" 9.

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1998).

¹² Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique*, trans. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

¹³ See the following Web site for links to the various tables/calculations used in the designation of the "failed state": <<http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/>>.

¹⁴ Karatani, *Transcritique* 247.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume Three*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1993) 345–46.

¹⁶ Frederich Engels and Karl Marx, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism*, ed. Peter Byrne, 1997, 6 Nov. 2008

<<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/ch05.htm>>.

¹⁷ Robert I. Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (New York: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Peter D. Little, *Somalia: Economy without a State* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2003).

¹⁹ See Malcolm Bull, "States of Failure," *New Left Review* 40 (July/August 2006): 5–23; Bosanquet qtd. in Bull, "States" 8.

²⁰ Bull, "States" 22.

²¹ Bull, "States" 23.

²² See Noam Chomsky, *Failed States* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).