

State-Formation and How It Has Differed in the Non-Western World from the Traditional Western European Model

The relatively newer phase of state-formation in the non-Western world has a number of differences both in the nascency and evolution. For the sake of simplicity and to form a common base for the following sections of this paper, the terminology of “non-Western world” will be used synonymously with the “Third World”.

The first dissimilarity is with regards to the time spent for the state-formation. Ayoob (1993), while mentioning the inadequate stateness of the Third World, attributes this feature to a balanced combination of coercive capacity, infrastructural power and unconditional legitimacy and argues that such deficiency has a strong correlation with the insufficient amount of time spent for the formation of the state. Given that today’s modern European states spent four to five centuries starting from the 14th century in dealing with their deficiencies and curing those failures, it is beyond decency to expect the newly-evolving states to fulfill all the essential responsibilities of the state and to carry out the capabilities anticipated from a contemporary state in four to five decades.

In laying out the significance of time, Stein Rokkan (1975, from Ayoob) asserts that “the great majority of the political systems of Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa have been faced with a critical cumulation of nation-building challenges over very short spans of time... This is a fundamental contrast between the older Western systems and the newer systems emerging from the break-up of the great empires: the latecomers were not only late in achieving sovereign status, they were left with only a minimum of time to build up their institutions before they were faced with disruptive pressures from outside as well as from inside.”

Second, as Tilly points out (1975, cited from Ayoob), another dimension of the issue is that many aspiring states have tumbled and fell along the way through state-formation. Porter (in Oppenheim, 2003) asserts that whereas the 14th century Europe comprised over 1,000 'political entities', by 1900, only 25 remained. Nevertheless, the new world order following the second World War renders the juridical personality inalienable once it is achieved. Ayoob (1993) exemplifies the case of Lebanon one in which the international community refuses to accept its political demise despite the fact that it has failed in its state-making endeavour. The author strikingly contrasts the historical record of Europe where, "from the early modern period to the end of World War I, the creation of viable states was accompanied by the relegation of many others to the dustbin of history." Cited from the same author, Gabriel Ben-Dor (1983) contend that countries still may -and do- fail in state-building but "the cost of failure ... is not disappearance, but incoherent, uncontrollable conflict." Then the stalemate for the Third World elites becomes the fact that whereas they do not have much maneuverability in handling their state-formation problems over a lengthy period of time without external pressures, they are also not given an appropriate option of relinquishing their juridical statehood.

Third, admittedly -to some extent- with some hypocrisy, the inter-state conflicts of the newly-forming states are taken by the super powers for granted. While the leading powers have put so much emphasis on their own security or the security of the peripheral actors, they have not accounted the conflicts in the Third World in the aftermath of the second World War. Sisir Gupta (in Ayoob) noticeably argues that "to the extent that the central power balance has become immune from the contagious effects of Third World conflict, to the extent that the stability of great power relations can be maintained in spite of local and regional disturbances, such conflicts and such disturbances have become permissible."

The fourth difference between the non-Western world and the traditional Western European model is the notion of rentierism which is not a very common case for European countries. Rentier state is the one where a significant portion of national wealth comes from a single source, such as oil or a precious metal. The state provides basic needs of its people, such as food, and -to some extent- shelter and jobs and expects people to stay quiet. It should be noted, however, that people are not perceived as citizens in a rentier country, but rather as the subjects of the state, which is seen in many instances as 'holy' in the eyes of the citizens and immune from animadversion. In order to suppress a probable unrest, rentier states attempt to provide the basic ingredients of people's livelihood and in return, people are expected not to interfere in state affairs and leave it to the so-called elites or oligarchs.

It would be enigmatic had any study dealing with state-formation in the Third World not included the impact of colonialism. It would not be an overstatement to argue that in colonized countries, nearly all institutions and administrative infrastructures were designed only for the purposes of colonial convenience. Ayoob (1993) argues that "the problems of governance within Third World states was further compounded by the colonial powers' proclivity to use multiple 'traditional' structures of authority in the colonies as instruments of control that mediated between the colonial power and the colonized populace," and goes on to contend that "in many instances, many of these so-called traditional authority structures were largely the creation of the colonial powers for reasons of administrative or political convenience. In many parts of the world, the colonizing powers left behind multiple structures of authority in actual or potential competition with the authority structure of the 'legitimate' post-colonial state."

In Europe, three major tasks -warming, statemaking, and extraction-, known as 'iron triangle', form the basis upon which the modern state was erected. Oppenheim (2003) attracts

attention to these state abilities and affirms that in Europe “warmaking and statemaking required robust militaries, which in turn required sophisticated bureaucracies to manage armed forces and the taxes which sustained them. By necessity, rulers bargained with citizens and elites to secure capital. The result was an increasingly potent and coherent state apparatus, which became progressively beholden to citizens’ interests.”

Having said that, the final difference in understanding the state formation in the Third World and traditional Western European model brings us to the notion of ‘hollow states’, which lack the infrastructural capability for reaching down the society and people for war-making, and the ability for extracting resources. According to Centeno (1997, cited from Oppenheim), “states are not actors in and of themselves... they are shells -potentially powerful shells- but nevertheless hollow at the core.” Mitchell (1991, from Oppenheim) argues that “this hollowness, the frequent inability of the state to behave as a discrete actor counterposed against society, renders statemaking the critical activity in many former colonies.”

In overcoming such hollowness, non-Western world needs to cure the “endemic internal political instability” since the “ruling groups tend to lack a wide and deep base of support in the general population.” (Azar and Moon, 1998) This argument lays out the significance of legitimacy, namely, people’s perceived acceptance of a state and its institutions. Azar and Moon (1985) discuss that “illegal political changes such as military coups, palace coups, and hereditary political succession, along with repressive and arbitrary political rule based on the personal whim of rulers deepen the legitimacy crisis.”

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