

aufgelegten Zivilisationsmission entlarvt, die als Legitimationsmechanismus der Fremdherrschaft diene. Manns Fokus auf historiografische Traditionen der verschiedenen Epochen zeigt hingegen, dass Geschichtsschreibung auch in der vorkolonialen Epoche auf imperialer und regionaler Ebene als Werkzeug zur Legitimation von Herrschaft diene.

Insbesondere durch den globalgeschichtlichen, vernetzten Blickwinkel hat der Autor eine alternative Sicht auf die Geschichte Südasiens vorgelegt, mit der sich die Auseinandersetzung lohnt.

Robert H. Bates: When Things Fell Apart. State Failure in Late-Century Africa (= Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 191 S.

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One of the three blurbs for this small volume simply states: “Bates is the undisputed doyen of political scientists working on Africa. Here, in one short book, he gives us his distilled analysis of a lifetime. Read it” – says no less a figure than Paul Collier, former World Bank chief economist who is now back at the Centre for the Study of African Economies at Oxford. The book, to leave no doubt, is exactly delivering on this promise – but on little more.

In late-century, Robert Hinrichs Bates, the Eaton Professor of the Science of Govern-

ment and Professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard (Cambridge), introduces, “things fell apart” in Africa – i.e. the number of civil wars started to increase. Answers to this puzzle, Bates claims, are to be found in the theories on the state and the sources of political disorder. Himself a political scientist by training, though with considerable exposure to anthropology, with a turn to political economy later, Bates develops his argument on a reading of Max Weber and, later, game theory and cross national regressions. The argument Bates develops explicitly takes on some approaches (which some may consider “mainstream”) on the alleged role of ethnic diversity in conflict, the political significance of resource richness or the claimed nexus between democratisation and political instability.

The possibility of political order, Bates argues, rests on the level of public revenues, the rewards from predation, and the rate of discount of the “specialist in violence” (i.e. Weberian rulers). In the 1960s African politics were dominated by forms of electoral clientelism (though Bates doesn’t call it this way): bloc votes were exchanged for material benefits. Once the voters learned “to play the system to their advantages they will then extract all the benefits n offer. Thus the incumbent’s dilemma: Pursuing power to accumulate wealth, they find themselves having to surrender their ill-gotten gains to retain political office” (p. 40). And with the crisis of clientelism, already starting in the 1960s, African rulers started creating authoritarian regimes. Hence the political arena begun to shrink, political privileges played an ever more important role while economic inequality increased. At the end private benefits,

rather than public goods, dominated politics in what become “control regimes”, interventionist economies, which benefited an urban clientele and the president who “multiplied the political resources at his command” (p. 68). Against this background the sources for political tensions often were local and the seed for conflict was sown by the dynamics of agrarian societies – as illustrated with the case of the Kikuyu in the Kenyan Rift Valley or the Oromo in the Ethiopian lowlands.

Things started to go wrong when public revenues declined in the late 1970s, due to a combination of a downfall in commodity incomes and sharp increases in energy prices. As a consequence, incomes of public employees plummeted, the quality of public services declined, levels of corruption rose and it became more difficult to manage regional tensions. In response, to Bates narrative continues, African citizens as well as external actors, most importantly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, called for political reforms. Africa’s political elites became insecure: And “with the loss of public revenues, governments became more predatory” (p. 121). The possible short-term gains of abandoning the role of a guardian by cashing in on the continent’s natural resources pushed aside any other considerations.

The book is indeed delivering on Colliers’ promise. But this exactly is also the problem with Bates’ narrative. An old hand in US political science on Africa with a university career, which stretches over more than 40 years, Bates combines some of the most attractive, but also some of the more problematic traditions of his trade. The quest for systematization and rigorous modelling has resulted in a lean explana-

tion for what Bates terms “state failure”. The argument carries some elegance when elite decisions are basically reduced to game theory and dominant dynamics are described in a very lucid way. However, at the same time the argument is also heavily flawed by its superficiality. Too often Bates is glossing over historic differences. African Studies, too, has shown that elites (as any other social groups) cannot be reduced to rational actors in an arena modelled by the assumptions of game theory. The argument presented on the combination of internal and external pressure on incumbent regimes (which is said to have increased their sense of insecurity and willingness to take risks) is ahistorical: The cases of internal pressure quoted – Benin, Zambia – are the result of dynamics infolding only after external pressure had led to the adoption of structural adjustment programmes, they didn’t go hand in hand. But most importantly, “state failure” – at least in the way described as the core problem of this book – itself is too undifferentiated a term, is far too ambivalent in its empirical evidence and too controversial by way of its normative overload, that it makes sense analytically. Empirically the pathways African regimes have taken since the end of the Cold War offer more variation as simply “state failure” (and the many other cases of “good governance” or whatever the label might be) – and the nature of “states” itself seems far more complex.