

Preface

The state-building process is currently considered as an achievement of history, while nation-state has always been mistaken as a universal way of organizing politics. In fact, our naive and universal vision of history mixed European post-medieval history with history of humanity as a whole. Those who are presently ruled by imported European models are reputed to be “developing” countries as long as they have not perfectly reached the unique and common target. Epistemology is strongly affected by this common sense: the same concept and the same word are currently used, and particularly in Latin and Roman traditions, for coining all the politics around the world and through history. International Law contributed in this oversimplification, as all members of United Nations, all sovereign units in the present world, are commonly designated as states, without any restrictions; at the most, they would exist everywhere in essence, but would only vary according to their level of development, the role of “bad guys” who are at power or even the result of bad luck. . .

Hypocrisy or dogmatism? In any way, we face here an incredible faking of history! The excellent book of Bruno Aguilera-Barchet precisely shows up the amazing complexity of European state-building history: Roman origins, role of the feudal and post-feudal societies (as it was strongly stressed by the wonderful book of Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*), and influence of Christian theology. Moreover, Bruno Aguilera-Barchet points out the main historical tensions from where European states were finally shaped: church and politics; absolutism and liberalism; kings and nation; civil society and public space. Reinhart Bendix, Joseph Strayer or Stein Rokkan played here a role of pioneer. . .

Three major questions are then at stake. First one: how such a complex and specific history can be found back elsewhere for generating the same model of politics? In fact, we are, quite the reverse, encouraged to rebuild our own history, to interpret from our state history all the exceptions—sometimes pathologies—of our own development: excessive fragmentation of European map into small political units, tradition of a dramatic inter-state competition (Hobbes), role of war as state-making process (Tilly). . .

Second question: what are the alternative models of ruling? Are they to be found among other histories? Would China or Russia achieve an imperial model which would finally stand differently from Western states? Are African societies presently reinventing tribal or community polities? Alternatively, would it be more relevant to consider, in Africa, Middle East or Far East, a forthcoming political invention which should be compared with the state invention that took place during the European Renaissance? In any case, European state cannot be exported like a plant: “failed states” are first of all failed exportations.

Then we move to the last question. If state dawned in Europe at the end of Middle Age, its own decay or its transformations are obviously conceivable. Those who were born will finally die... Bruno Aguilera-Barchet is right to consider the potential end of nation-states. Presently, their resilience is first imputable to law which does not recognize any alternative international actors. However, this option is at its turn questioned by a slow evolution which is looming through the invention of international soft laws and new regional laws (like European community law). A main question then arises: is nation-state still able to meet all the new challenges stemming from globalization?

Sciences Po Paris
France

Bertrand Badie



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-11802-4>

A History of Western Public Law

Between Nation and State

Aguilera Barchet, B.

2015, XXV, 775 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-11802-4