

STATE FORMATION AND HISTORICAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Benjamin de Carvalho and Halvard Leira

Although the existence of the state was for a long time the unquestioned cornerstone of IR, historical accounts of the state and, importantly, state *formation*, still entered the discipline of IR through early constructivist efforts at critiquing the ahistorical notion of the state system championed by neorealists and neoliberals alike. Relying heavily on accounts of state formation from historical sociologists, these scholars sought to demonstrate the historically contingent character of both state and state system (see, for instance, Campbell, 1998; Kratochwil, 1986; Onuf, 1991; Ruggie, 1993; Walker, 1993;; and implicit in Bartelson, 1995; Ferguson and Mansbach, 1996). The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of these works, discuss their continued relevance to IR and offer some critical remarks in order to guide future research. That being said, state formation is also one of the main theoretical contribution of Historical IR (HIR) to the discipline of IR more broadly, namely in questioning the immanence and ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of both state and state system (see the discussion in Hobden and Hobson, 2002).

Why should IR dwell on state formation, the sceptical reader may interject, when most of what is done on state formation is by historical sociologists. There are two reasons for that. Firstly, while many of these efforts reside outside of the traditional boundaries of the discipline proper (for notable exceptions, see Branch, 2013; Hall, 1999; Nexon, 2009; Reus-Smit, 1999; Teschke, 2003, discussed in the second part of the chapter), they have nevertheless permeated into IR to the extent that they form an intrinsic part of the disciplinary canon. As such, these accounts merit dwelling upon, and this chapter should be read as dovetailing with the chapter on Historical Sociology in the current volume (Go, Lawson, and de Carvalho, 2021), which does not go into these accounts in greater detail. These accounts, in turn, form the basis for identifying challenges and avenues for further research. Secondly, as discussed elsewhere in the volume (de Carvalho, 2021), the types of units that make up the world and their attributes greatly contribute to shape the type of interaction between units. Furthermore, these accounts were central in helping early constructivists harness their critiques of the ahistoricism of the neo-neo understanding. In fact, from the 1980s onwards, much of the historically oriented contributions to International Relations (IR) relied heavily on classic works of Historical Sociology (HS) – most notably works on state formation (see Leira and de Carvalho, 2016, for a discussion). These were successful to the point where these accounts have become commonplace in IR, and many of the historical sociologists have become household names in IR. However, as the discipline has become more global, questions are raised about the applicability of the traditional state formation narratives

outside of Europe. Finally, as broader trends such as globalization and increasingly dense networks of global governance have come to make their mark on international politics, there have been many a commentator heeding the erosion of the state or even a move to a (neo) medieval global polity (cf. the critical discussion in Costa Lopez, 2021). Gauging these the validity of such claims and the potential resilience of the state in the face of these processes requires an understanding of what states consist of, and especially how they came to be. Our current predicament, then, rests largely on our capacity to make sense of how states emerged and transformed.

Historical sociology and state formation

It has become commonplace over the last decade or so to consider historical sociology to have consisted of three waves (Adams, Clemens, and Orloff, 2005).¹ The first wave is considered to consist of the classics, however defined, and need not concern us more directly here, although the influence of Marx, Weber, Hintze and Durkheim is still felt today (see Go, Lawson, and de Carvalho, 2021 in this volume, for a more detailed discussion). The current historical sociological study of state formation is commonly dated from the 1960s and onwards, when a second wave of historical sociology is seen to have arrived with the publication of Reinhard Bendix' *Nation-Building and Citizenship*, Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, the republication of Norbert Elias' *The Civilizing Process* and with Charles Tilly and Stein Rokkan among the earliest proponents. Historical sociology was growing steadily in the 1970s and 1980s, drawing many of their questions from Marx, but many of their answers from Weber, as Philip S. Gorski (2004: 7) put it. As a reaction to this second wave, an alleged third wave, more heterogeneous and less coherent, emerged in the late 1990s, incorporating more culturalist work, including feminism and postcolonialism. But let us now turn to the historical sociology of state formation.

State formation was a recurring theme in the historical sociology of the second wave. The many different approaches to the historical sociology of state formation share at least one very basic puzzle, namely how the perceived criss-crossing pattern of authority and power structures which were pervasive in Europe towards the end of the mediaeval age (see Costa Lopez, 2020, 2021 in this volume) gradually split, coalesced and transformed into the states and the system of states spanning the globe in our current era. The potential time span to be covered is thus more than a millennium, and different authors emphasize different periods, according to which phenomena, they hold to be the most important. Nevertheless, a clear majority of studies centre their explorations between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, although there is wide variation in explanatory factors even within that period.

As Thomas Ertman has argued (2003), the Western tradition of thinking about the emergence of the state, its trajectory and variations in outcome has relied, and to a large extent still relies, on Max Weber and Otto Hintze (1975).² Charles Tilly's work is probably the most well-known to and IR readership. Tilly's edited *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (1975) was hugely influential and largely contributed to the renewed interest in state formation in historical sociology. Many categorizations are possible within the overall Weberian trajectory, and we find it useful to distinguish between three different categories.³

The first category could be called economic-materialist and contains authors who in one way or another have primarily stressed economic factors in state building. Some have focused on dynamics within the state, like class struggle, commercialization of the countryside and the development of property rights. Others have focused on the development of global capitalism. Economic-materialist perspectives have had some influence on IR, but much less than the

dominant perspectives, and as they have generally been less preoccupied with the international dimension they will be less central in this chapter too.

The second category could be called managerial-institutionalist and consists of authors who have chiefly stressed domestic institution-building in the state formation process. Strayer (1970) focuses mainly on the medieval period and the growth of a specialized administration, capable of managing ever larger realms, while Berman, looking at the same period, emphasizes the development of a legal order. With a somewhat different managerial-institutionalist perspective, Spruyt (1999) emphasizes how territorial sovereignty allowed the states to both integrate domestically and interact externally, while also being the most institutionally efficient providers of military power. According to Spruyt, the organizational form of the state spread because of its competitive advantage over other organizational forms: it was the most effective way of combining the functions of coercion and extraction.

Stein Rokkan could also be made to fit the managerial-institutionalist category, with his focus on the phases of state building related to the interpenetration of state and society. Rokkan, often overlooked today, is well worth dwelling on. Towards the end of his life, Rokkan (for instance 1987 [1975]) was working on an ever more complex conceptual map of Europe, where he was explicitly concerned with the internal variety among the states, and where he attempted to tie together the external and internal aspects of state building. The core of the model nevertheless remained what must be counted as Rokkan's key contribution to the historical sociology of state formation, namely the relation between centre and periphery within each state, where peripheries need not be geographical.

The second, managerial-institutionalist, category shades into the third one, which could be called military-institutionalist. The overall picture has been of so-called fiscal-military states and an 'extraction-coercion-cycle,' and the model of state formation is often referred to as 'bellicist.' This has by and large been the most influential approach to state formation, and also the one which has influenced IR the most. It is also clearly the approach which has had most to say about foreign policy and international politics.⁴ Scholars within this tradition draw on Weber's definition of a state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory,' and asks how that situation has come about. While there is an obvious internal component here, in the pacification of the territory, stressed famously by Elias, the second wave theorists like Tilly, Giddens and Mann, were much more concerned with the external use of force and the financing of it. For the sake of brevity, we do not make a point of discerning the fine-grain between the different contributions. Suffice it to note about the differences, that whereas Giddens and Mann have focused on military capacity and military technology and Poggi and Ertman on internal institutions, they have all been concerned with the pressures of the international system of states on the individual states.

Importantly, all of the authors have been concerned with the pressures of the international system of states on the individual states. Charles Tilly has obviously been the most explicit in linking state building and war, famously arguing both that 'War made the state, and the state made war' (Tilly, 1975: 42) and that war-making and state-making could be understood as a form of organized crime, the 'quintessential protection racket' (Tilly, 1985: 169). Key to Tilly's approach is the stress on the contingency of state formation. The ambition of the group working with *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* was explicitly to offer alternatives to the then established view that the emergence of the state in Europe was the result of continuous processes of rationalization and broadening of political participation. Instead, Tilly and his colleagues focused on initial conditions and diverging (largely contingent) paths to the emergence of the state. Tilly's take on state formation centred on the processes of coercion and extraction: war-making forced states to consolidate their apparatuses – bureaucracies, means of

governance, means of policing – and to fund these efforts which in turn forced states to extract resources from their populations through means of taxation which increasingly were made permanent. Both mechanisms, in turn, reinforced each other creating a momentum for centralizing rulers. The money gathered through different forms of taxation allowed for increased concentration of physical power, which again made it easier to extract more resources. In short, as Tilly himself put it, ‘war made the state, and the state made war.’ As the argument goes, surrounded by other political entities and at repeated war, rulers desired to strengthen their military resources. To achieve this, they sought to extract more taxes from their realms.

As Mann (1986: 490) puts it, ‘The growth of the modern state, as measured by finances, is explained primarily not in domestic terms but in terms of geopolitical relations of violence.’ Although Mann presents four sources of social power: ideological, economic, military and political, it is relatively obvious that he in the end privileges military power. Tilly (1992: 14) is even more direct, arguing that ‘the state structure appeared chiefly as a by-product of rulers’ efforts to acquire the means of war.’ Writing against the view which conflated the state and society or which saw the state just as an arena for the aggregation of preferences of different social groups, Mann argued, ‘the state is not an arena where domestic economic/ideological issues are resolved, rather it is an arena in which military force is mobilized domestically and used domestically and, above all, internationally.’ The autonomy of the state, Mann argues, derives from the state’s ‘territorially-centralized form of organization’ (Mann, 1984: 185).

Most of the military-institutionalist scholars privilege developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and material factors. If matters do not impact directly on the extraction/coercion-cycle, they simply do not show up in the account. This is true for the intellectual aspects of the military revolution as well as for nationalism. All told, many of the traditional accounts of state formation pay surprisingly little attention to society, apart from its economic aspects. Poggi, on the other hand, presents an account which does pay heed to society and the internal organization of the state and which acknowledges important developments in the eighteenth century and later. His account falls somewhere between the military-institutionalist and managerial-institutionalist categories. Drawing on continental European sources, among them Habermas and Koselleck, he argues that state building goes from feudalism via the *Ständestaat* to absolutist rule and finally the constitutional state. Although chiefly concerned with the establishment of political institutions, Poggi (1990: 42–46) also considers intellectual developments and the role of law. In the transition from absolutism to the constitutional state, he (Poggi, 1978: 79–85) emphasizes the role played by civil society and public opinion, and how it could work in unison with the absolutist rulers to move gradually towards a more constitutional system.

State formation and International Relations

As noted, the dominant military-institutional account of state building has been criticized on a number of counts. We will mention the two most important ones and add a third of particular relevance to IR. The first, and general critique, has been that the military-institutionalist accounts have been too materialist, and not concerned enough about ideas and intellectual factors, like theories of state and statecraft, law and science (apart from military technology).⁵ The many different specific critiques along these lines point to a lack of sustained interest in the knowledge-dimension of state formation. At the most general level, the alleged third (or culturalist) wave of historical sociology can be seen as a response to these shortcomings (Steinmetz, 1999). More specifically, Gerhard Oestreich (1982: 36, cf. van Gelderen, 2003) lamented almost forty years ago, that the focus on army organization and taxation had led authors to ignore the many theories of practical government of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in general the intellectual

foundations of state building. Over the ensuing decades, conceptual historians, in particular those associated with the Cambridge School, have vastly increased our knowledge of how people historically have thought about the state and its relations with other states.

The second critique has been directed mainly at the application of the military-institutionalist perspective to IR and concerns how insights from the historical sociology of state formation, particularly Tilly's version, have tended to reify the dichotomies of inside/outside and state/society (Leander, 2009). Although this reification is to some extent an effect of reading historical sociology through IR glasses, it should be noted that Tilly, in his work on state formation, does to a large extent treat inside and outside as discrete categories and shows little interest in society as anything other than a field for intervention from the state. The problem with this double reification is that it obscures both processes that transcend the dichotomies and the ensuing enmeshment, and the very processes whereby the distinctions were made in the first place. Rob Walker (1993) and others have demonstrated convincingly how the distinction between inside and outside was first made around 1600, and Habermas, Foucault and others have discussed the many-faceted processes of the eighteenth century, which were part of the production of the distinction between state and society. Reifying the dichotomies is thus quite simply non-historicist historical sociology.

The third critique is a further specification of the second and concerns how the military-institutionalist accounts have dealt with IR. The military-institutionalists generally incorporate an unarticulated analytical perspective of the international context, where war is considered to be a transhistorically valid concept. As Kestnbaum (2005: 249) argues, these approaches largely ignore 'whether war has an internal logic and structure that may vary in sociologically significant ways. Never asked is how warfare actually works' (see also Bartelson, 2021 in this volume). On the question of war it is worth noting the recent publication of *Does War Make States? Investigations of Charles Tilly's Historical Sociology* by Lars Bo Kaspersen and Jeppe Strandsbjerg (2017) which gathers a number of critical essays questioning the central tenet of Tilly's theory. In addition to soften and contextualize some of Tilly's claim, the book draws our attention to experiences beyond Europe, emphasizing the relative inadequacy of the framework to account for state formation outside of the early modern European context. This charge of Eurocentrism is not new, as other authors have probed the validity of the Tillyan framework on other continents before. Most notably, Miguel Angel Centeno has sought to specify additional conditions necessary in Latin America (2002), while Jeffrey Herbst has sought to apply the framework to the African context (1990).

The unspoken premise is that states or state-like entities have been pursuing relatively similar external activities across the millennia, and thus that the actions of ancient Egypt, or at least the actions of medieval polities, are understandable in our current terms. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with an analytical concept of foreign policy, and it is hard to conceive of a social science without analytical concepts at all. However, there is an inherent danger in applying our current concepts analytically to earlier times, namely that one overestimates the similarities, seeing the past in terms of our present. If we discuss the foreign policy of ancient Egypt, it is ever so simple to imagine an Egyptian minister of foreign affairs directing an Egyptian ministry of foreign affairs, thinking along the same lines as our current ministers of foreign affairs. Hobden and Hobson's (2002) critique of IR can in fact also be applied to certain ways in which historical sociology conceptualizes the past, creating a tendency to reify, naturalize and eternalize our current age and to extrapolate it backwards into history in a reversed path dependency.

To recapitulate, there are a number of different approaches to state formation within historical sociology, and we have chosen to highlight the traditional military-institutionalist account, as well as the accounts of Rokkan and Poggi, both more influenced by a managerial-institutionalist

perspective. We have also discussed three central criticisms of the dominant approach, its lack of interest in knowledge, its reification of inside/outside and state/society and its ahistorical approach to foreign policy and international politics. These critiques have been important to those within HIR seeking to highlight the international dimension of state formation.

Within IR, John Herz' early work on the state (1957) is important and often overlooked today. His contribution was a pioneering one in many ways. Firstly, within IR, it was an early move towards searching for answers to current predicaments in long-term historical developments. Furthermore, discussing the future trajectory of the sovereign territorial state, Herz did much of the theoretical groundwork which today characterizes studies of the state under conditions of globalization. As he argues, 'the change-over is not even uniform and unilinear. On the contrary, in concepts as well as in policies, we witness the juxtaposition of old and new (or several new) factors, a coexistence in theory and practice of conventional and new concepts, of traditional and new policies.' Writing in 1957, Herz argued that both the meaning and function of the state ('the basic protective unit') had become 'doubtful.' On the basis of his inquiry into the historical rise of the state, Hertz raises questions about the future trajectory and function of the state and the possibility of finding security in the nuclear age. He argues, 'the nation-state is giving way to a permeability which tends to obliterate the very meaning of unit and unity, power and power relations, sovereignty and independence.'

More recently, Rodney Bruce Hall's *National Collective Identity* (1999) and Christian Reus-Smit's *The Moral Purpose of the State* (1999) contributed to make state formation an explicit concern to IR scholars. Rodney Bruce Hall addressed what he calls the 'strongly state-centric' discipline of IR (1999: 4). By ignoring the collective identity of societal actors, Hall argued, IR theory has been largely unable to explain 'historical change in the international system' (ibid.: 5). For, Hall maintains, 'changes in the collective identity of societal actors transform the interests of relevant collective actors that constitute the system' (ibid.). State interests are thus not to be understood as immutable, as mainstream IR theory would have it. Instead, they are largely the product of collective identities which change over time. Thus, rather than the realist 'will-to-power,' Hall argues that domestic and global orders are the product of a 'will-to-manifest-identity' (ibid.: 6). The international behaviour of actors – such as balancing, alliance formation and conflicts – thus cannot be understood without reference to the framework formed by their collective identities (ibid.: 9).

Christian Reus-Smit takes a related and complementary approach, but rather than enquiring, as Hall does, into how the social identity of actors shapes interaction at the systemic level, Reus-Smit's concern is with how international institutions shape the identity and interests of state actors (1999: 22). However, Reus-Smit stresses that the standard constructivist understanding of the principle of sovereignty as the basis of the state's social identity is insufficient. Rather, he postulates, it must be recognized that 'the identity of the state is grounded in a larger complex of values than simply the organizing principle of sovereignty' (ibid.: 29–30). The social identity of states is firmly entrenched in the normative structure of international society. What Reus-Smit does is, so to speak, to turn Rodney Bruce Hall's account on its head: instead of emphasizing how the identity of polities contributes to the systemic interaction, Reus-Smit suggests that it is the normative system which provides the state with its moral purpose, which in turn forms the basis for its identity. While he recognizes that the collective identity of states has been different in different periods, change itself is nevertheless not addressed.

These works have failed to create much of a research program in IR, and their focus on identity from the late 1990s has not been fully followed up on in more recent studies. However, Daniel Nexon (2009) has addressed the problem both Hall and Reus-Smit have with addressing the drivers of change, finding this in the transnational networks of power which followed from

the reformations. According to Nexon, these contributed largely to tearing down remnants of imperial structures in Europe. But again, where the international is given more explanatory power, the focus is shifted away from the formation of states to the erosion of empires. Another study worth noting here is *The Cartographic State* by Jordan Branch (2013). Branch addresses the conditions of possibility of states, the extent to which the formation of states required a change in mentalities of power, in geographical imaginaries, and the extent to which shifts in technologies of map-making and diffusion contributed to these.

State formation, the state and the state system

As seen above, the ‘import’ of concerns with state formation into IR has given rise to a number of ‘IR proper’ contributions to that literature. Interestingly, however, this has not led to a comparable surge in theorizing about the state or the state system. As the key actor in international politics, the state is central to most theories of international politics.⁶ In fact, whether these make the state the cornerstone of their claims, or seek to move beyond the state, they nevertheless ground their claims in the changing reach of state power. For all the concern IR has had with the state, it has become commonplace to notice that there have been relatively few efforts to study the state in IR. Curiously, perhaps, the current wave of research on empire does not find its counterpart in studies of the state. To the extent that the state has been the object of historical scrutiny in IR, it is largely through the concept of sovereignty (see, for instance, Bartelson, 1995; de Carvalho, 2021 in this volume, provides an overview), and through studies of state formation.

In terms of how to conceptualize the state, IR scholars have for the most part been content with adopting some variation of the Weberian canonical definition of the state in terms of its particular means, the monopoly of violence: ‘Ultimately, one can define the modern state sociologically only in terms of the specific means peculiar to it, as to every political association, namely the use of physical force’ (Weber, 1978: 78). Thus one should comprehend the state in terms of the means peculiar to it, namely as ‘a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory [...] The state is considered the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence’ (ibid.).

Yet, while it may be useful to operate with Weber’s ideal type for analytical purposes, however banal it may seem, it may be worthwhile noting that no state is ever alone in the world. This is important to keep in mind, as the theories of state formation outlined above all tend to focus on how states have evolved after the initial ‘spark’ kickstarting their ‘formation’ (see discussion in the conclusion). Among historical sociologists, little is said about the international system, its logic and precisely how it contributed to the formation of states. International politics, diplomacy and foreign policy are seldom mentioned in the analyses, more often than not the term is covered simply by ‘war.’⁷ Paradoxically, this is also where the international dimension of state formation seems to have been the most crucial (except, perhaps, for the competition between states). Michael Mann, for instance sees the role of the system of states as crucial, as it provided of the spark which ignites the process: ‘The European state system was not simply the “political environment” in which the absolutist state and nation-state developed. It was the condition, and in substantial degree the very source of that development’ (1986 112). Yet, precisely what role the international had in the process is seldom inquired into. Illustrating the diversity within the military-institutionalist category, it should be noted that Poggi (1978: 61), even though he points to the same mechanisms of state competition, is much more explicit about co-constitution, arguing that the overall result of power struggle could just as well stem from the individual rulers’ desire for increased control as from systemic pressure. To Poggi, it seems, the international dimension seems to have been secondary to the formation of states, as he held that state, sovereignty and

territoriality ‘jointly produce a most significant consequence: the political environment in which each state exists is by necessity one which it shares with a plurality of states similar in nature to itself’ (1990: 23).

The case for a history of the state system, then, is rather dire. There is little agreement among scholars as to when and how the system emerged; little agreement as to how (and whether) it undergoes change; and little agreement about what constitutes the system. For a discipline which has the international system as its main framework, it is surprising how little attention IR scholars have paid to the historical development of the international system and its consequences. This may be due in part to the fact that to many IR scholars, the central feature of the international system is precisely its alleged permanence and the timeless nature of its workings. Yet, in spite of a number of historical studies of the constituent parts of the state system, most notably diplomacy, warfare and great power politics, only few major works have taken on the state system as a whole.⁸ As Barry Buzan and Richard Little have charged, ‘despite more than a century of intensive discussion about the nature of the international system, it is difficult to deny how underdeveloped the concept continues to be. Even the more sophisticated accounts of the international system fail to address some of the most elementary questions’ (2002: 204). Buzan and Little attribute this in part to the discipline’s tendency towards presentism and ahistoricism.

Whatever the merits of such a critique, that situation is currently changing in IR, much as the result of work undertaken by HIR scholars. Much of the critique levied above is a critique of the lack of concern historical sociologists have had with the international (as such, it dovetails nicely with the critique in Go, Lawson, and de Carvalho, 2021 in this volume), and recent works such as *The Global Transformation* (2015) do much to address it. Furthermore, IR scholars working on the topic have included the international to a larger extent – although not always in a problematizing way (see, for instance, Hall, 1999; Reus-Smit, 1999). As highlighted elsewhere in the volume (Bartelson, 2021; Caraccioli, 2021; de Carvalho, 2021; Leira, 2021), we can also discern the emergence of a clear research program on hierarchies and empires dealing with the international or global dimension of the broad changes which took place between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries (see, for example, Bayly, 2021 in this volume).

Transformation against formation: a plea for muddying the water

To sum up, historical sociological theories of state formation have been hugely influential in IR, as they were crucial in propelling social constructivism as an approach from the late 1980s onwards. Furthermore, they inspired a number of historical works in HIR, works in which the international is given larger explanatory power than in the works of historical sociologists. Yet, the agenda on state formation to a large extent contributed to cover up the need for studies of the state and the state system. Critiques of this were many, most notably calls for a focus on empires. Where the traditional story of state formation is one of emerging states and vanishing empires, critics held that empires never vanished, and that states were also empires. An emerging literature among global historians, combined with a theoretical turn from anarchy to hierarchy has, in turn, has given the impetus for a broad research program on empires in HIR. The story could end here. That would, however, be less than helpful. Let us therefore expand on four aspects which we believe future research ought to be mindful of.

Firstly, as noted above, the literature on state formation has had a strong emphasis on Europe and the European experience. Now, this is not a critique we believe should necessarily be levelled against those authors. Firstly, many of these writings are aimed directly as critiques of the thereunto prevalent view that there was a path dependency to state formation, and that sequences having taken place in Europe could be made to repeat themselves beyond Europe. There is thus

a critical element to these writings which we tend to oversee, given that the point about the contingency of these processes has become so well established. Furthermore, a number of these scholars also studied state formation outside of Europe, and from a different perspective, although those writings have tended to remain on the fringes of the state formation canon. The writings of Aristide Zolberg, one of Tilly's early collaborators, come to mind (see, for instance, Zolberg, 1983) as works worthy of bringing back into the canon. However, in terms of future research, it seems clear – as noted with respect to the works of Centeno (2002) and Herbst (1990) that making sense of the state cannot happen as long as we take a specific space as our point of departure and bracket out the multiplicity of encounters happening across borders and seas.

Secondly, while excavating empires and imperialism from the statist amnesia is crucial to a better understanding of the emergence and changing nature of international politics and of the international *tout court*, there may be dangers associated with such a project. The main danger may lie in that we come to simply replace one set of concepts by another set; state by empire, state formation by imperialism, anarchy by hierarchy and state system by global power networks. The problem with this is not only that neither state nor state system is given a fair trial, or that it is historically inadequate. There is a danger in that studies of empire replace the state IR misses out on the most rewarding aspect of this new agenda, namely enquiring into how empires *and* states interacted in the early modern period with a view to theorize international politics from a truly open perspective.

Our two next points relate back to the beginning of this chapter and relate to problematic path dependencies which have accompanied us since the emergence of the second wave of historical sociology and Tilly's masterful 1975 volume. Our third point, then, concerns a blind spot in the state formation literature, namely the role of culture, religion and identity in the processes of state formation. Just as there are a number of reasons why IR did not focus on these much before the 1990s, there are many reasons why they do not figure prominently in accounts of the emergence of the state. One of these is the importance of the work done in 1975 by Tilly and his colleagues in delineating a research agenda on the formation of the state. For if their effort brought the state in, it left the nation out. State and nation were thus seen as two different phenomena, and few studies undertook to understand their emergence *qua* nation-state. As Tilly noted,

We began work intending to analyze state-making and the formation of nations interdependently. As our inquiry proceeded, we concentrated our attention increasingly on the development of states rather than the building of nations. There were several reasons for this drift. One was the greater ease with which we could arrive at some working agreement of the meaning of the word 'state.' 'Nation' remains one of the most puzzling and tendentious items in the political lexicon. Another was our early fixation of the periods in which the primacy (of) [sic.] states was still open to serious challenge [...] A third was the bias in our original set of topics toward the extractive and repressive activities of states. The bias was deliberate. The singling out of the organization of armed forces, taxation, policing, the control of food supply and the formation of technical personnel stresses activities which were difficult, costly, and often unwanted by large parts of the population.

(Tilly, 1975: 6)

As alluded to in Heiskanen (2021 in this volume; see also de Carvalho, 2016), there is a need to address this bias by 'bringing back in' (sic) the collective identity and the nation into conceptualizations of state formation. Such a move may also help recover and harness some of the critical potential of first-generation constructivism which has been left untapped by second-generation constructivists (see Leira and de Carvalho, 2016, for a critique).

Finally, our last point is a cautionary one. There has been some debate among historical sociologists about the correct vocabulary to use to best describe the processes inquired into. While some have sought to highlight state *making* as an alternative with clearer agency, other alternatives to formation have also been discussed: emergence, crystallization, development. Each of them comes with their own conceptual baggage. Formation, while being fairly neutral, nevertheless implies the formation of a new type of polity which by extension supplants whatever polity was there before. And, however many qualifiers we use, the terms still leave these connotations. In an interview in 2007, recollecting the process around his first contributions to the state formation literature, Charles Tilly stated,

I made a mistake. And that is in the title of the book and the polemical essays that form part of the introduction and conclusion [that I wrote] I deliberately adopted the term 'state formation'. Now why did I do that? Because I wanted to stress the alternative to the idea of 'political development'. I thought, and I persuaded my colleagues, that this was a neutral term. Well it was a mistake. Almost immediately people started using the term 'state formation' teleologically. So, the question is: 'Is this state formed yet?' And so you got numerous essays on 'the failure of state formation in fill in the blank' or something like that. And I thought: another mistake! [...] I now talk about 'state transformation'. [Although] there is no neutral term because people have teleological agendas whenever they think about the history of states.

(Tilly, 2007)

In line with Tilly, we would like end by suggesting that the focus of macro-historical processes moves away from ends and beginnings, moves away from units supplanting other units, and instead focus on how certain types of polities give rise to others, how different units interact with each other, how that interaction contributes to large-scale processes of change and how polities may gain a new guise and transform over time.

Suggestions for further reading

- Centeno, M. A. (2002). *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America*. University Park, PA: Penn State Press.
- Kaspersen, L. B., and Strandsbjerg, J., eds. (2017). *Does War Make States? Investigations of Charles Tilly's Historical Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strayer, J. R. (1970). *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
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Notes

- 1 Before starting, a caveat must be made regarding literature we discuss here. Even though there have been important French and German traditions straddling historical sociology, much of the work under that explicit name has been carried out in the Anglosphere. Our initial focus will thus be on this tradition, while we get back to criticisms drawing on other traditions below. In Germany, a number of historians, particularly the ones concerned with social and conceptual history such as Reinhard Koselleck, have traditionally come close to historical sociology, while part of Jürgen Habermas' scholarship also clearly fits the label. In France, the work of Foucault, Bourdieu and their collaborators and students comes to mind.
- 2 It should be noted that some more systemic takes in IR have adopted other perspectives, such as the neo-Marxist studies of the state and the international system presented by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) or in the work of Perry Anderson (e.g. 1996).

- 3 A number of academics have attempted to systematise the different approaches according to commonalities in explanatory factors. Philip S. Gorski (1999: 147) simply suggests a division between Marxist perspectives (with Anderson and Wallerstein as examples) and institutionalist (read Weberian) perspectives (represented by Tilly, Poggi and Downing). This is simply too undifferentiated to be useful. Casting a more fine-grained net, both Poggi (2004) and Rae (2002: 24–38) suggest trichotomies, and fusing the two gives us a rather fuller picture. Poggi calls the perspectives managerial (exemplified by Strayer and Berman), military (Collins, Hintze, Tilly) and economic (Moore, Anderson), while Rae calls the approaches materialist (Wallerstein), institutionalist (North/Thomas, Spruyt) and power-based (Elias, Giddens, Mann, Tilly).
- 4 Compare Strayer (1970: 27), ‘The reasons for this concentration on internal affairs are obvious. The fragmented condition of Europe and the weakness of its political units did not permit any sustained or long-range activity in external affairs. [...] In a Europe without states and without boundaries the concept of “foreign affairs” had no meaning, and so no machinery for dealing with foreign affairs was needed.’
- 5 For the natural sciences, see Carroll’s (2006) fascinating study of Ireland.
- 6 This does not amount to say that they are the only actors around in world politics. Few would defend such a claim, and even Kenneth Waltz acknowledged, ‘states are not and never have been the only international actors [...] The importance of nonstate actors and the extent of transnational activities are obvious’ (1979: 93–94).
- 7 A telling example of this can be found in Poggi’s book on the development of the modern state, where we find the following index-entry for foreign policy: ‘See also Power struggle between states’ (Poggi, 1978: 171).
- 8 Interestingly, this is the opposite situation from state formation, where most of the work consists of larger studies. There are, to be sure, notable exceptions to this.

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