State Formations

Featuring a sweeping array of essays from scholars of state formation and development, this book presents an overview of approaches to studying the history of the state. Focusing on the question of state formation, this volume takes a particular look at the beginnings, structures, and constant reforming of state power. Not only do the contributors draw upon both modernist and postmodernist theoretical perspectives, they also address the topic from a global standpoint, examining states from all areas of the world. In their diverse and thorough exploration of state building, the authors cross the theoretical, geographic, and chronological boundaries that traditionally shape this field in order to rethink the customary macro and micro approaches to the study of state building and make the case for global histories of both premodern and modern state formations.

John L. Brooke is Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of History, Professor of Anthropology, and Director of the Center for Historical Research at The Ohio State University. He has previously explored the topic of state formation in his prize-winning books, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713–1861* (1989) and *Columbia Rising: Civil Life on the Upper Hudson from the Revolution to the Age of Jackson* (2010).

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Global Histories and Cultures of Statehood

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To the presenters, commenters, and audience participants at the Ohio State Center for Historical Research Program in State Formations: Histories and Cultures of Statehood, 2013–2015

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Preface

This volume offers an overview of approaches to the state for the new century. We are aggressively global and historical. Where typically such projects are confined to the kinds of states that are "modern," "Western," or both, we consider here the full range of state experience over five millennia, and in every major region of the world. This project has brought together historians, political scientists, anthropologists, and archaeologists bound by a set of common interests in the state and its operations. While we are not necessarily in full agreement on every point, we are collectively committed to pursue four important lines of inquiry on the matter of the state writ large.

First, while our very language makes it inevitable to speak about "the state," the spirit of this project is to focus on "state formations." "Formations" has many meanings: this multivalence presents a fascinating interpretive opportunity. One obvious meaning of "state formations" involves the moment of origin, the founding of states in time past. "Formations" also means the state as "an object with a particular set of forms" – in terms of functions, institutional structures and capacities, boundaries, and the ways in which the state is justified. And in addition to formations as beginnings and as forms, we are particularly interested in formation as ongoing action and processes that often lead to reformation. States have their beginnings and in those founding moments establish forms, but they also have to endure through time. This happens in a variety of ways: through the establishment of key state organizations, through incremental adaptation, and upon occasion at points of critical (dis)juncture. But other parts of this process of (re)formation might not be as obvious. The state is in a constant process of redefinition as the constant

forming and reforming of power within itself and in relation to stakeholders in society. Indeed, many would argue that the state does not exist except in the day-to-day engagement of its actors in political strategies, practices, and technologies.

Second, and in departure from most previous projects, we see our mandate as global. The modern comparative analysis of the state has focused on the West, and this typically has meant the European system of states. Since the founding of the modern academy, from the late nineteenth century to the end of the Cold War, European states were almost without exception considered the nearly universal example of the state – one against which all other experiences of statehood were benchmarked. European imperialism had swept away, or appeared to have swept away, virtually all other traditions of power and governance around the world, and it left distorting effects as it retreated after the Second World War. Thus the European consolidation of sovereign national power, with various paths to something called the "modern national state" in different European contexts, became the central concern of the field. The rest of the world was, if not ignored, then either marginalized or measured against a European putative ideal. Europe's awkward American stepchild, the United States, with its hybrid federal system and its insistence on its own exceptionalism, has generated its own entirely separate historiography, typically ignored in state formation studies. So-called underdeveloped parts of the world were characterized primarily by what they lacked in terms of European standards: impersonal bureaucracies, resource extraction capacity, and industrialization. From its origins this project has worked against the traditional grain to wrestle with the varieties of state formations around the world by including the United States as well as Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Third, this commitment by its very nature requires that we take a longer chronology. The varieties of state formation involve polities beyond Western Europe whose experiences of statehood are very different and often very ancient. Study of regions beyond Western Europe necessarily drives us into a deeper chronology, certainly to before the early modern expansion of European empire and back into medieval and ancient contexts where state formation analysis has an important literature. Our chronological expansion backward in time leads directly into a controversy that runs through this book. Is the state in its essence "modern"? Was there no such a thing as the premodern state? Some of our number argue as much; others take issue with this sweeping pronouncement. Clearly, a commonsense understanding would be that social formations

of some definition have for thousands of years claimed coercive authority and binding rulemaking over peoples within more or less bounded territories; whether these entities should be defined as states may be up for grabs.

Finally, the combination of a long chronological reach and the conceptual struggle over the essential "modernity" of the state means that we necessarily are engaging with what has come to be a central debate in the recent literature on the state: the question of its sociological boundaries. Was and is the state an "autonomous" actor, separate and distinct from the society that it claims to govern, or is it somehow inextricably "embedded" in that society? While some chapters in this volume argue that the state is inherently "autonomous," none of them takes the reverse position that the state is merely a puppet of class interest. Most of our contributors engage to some extent with the notion that the state has some degree of autonomy from society while simultaneously being interpenetrated with society in complex and subtle ways. Since we consider the premodern and modern variants of the state, this volume works to suggest the different ways in which both premodern and modern polities are embedded in their societies, and to argue that the analysis of this embeddedness creates a common field of debate. We also explore the question of hybrid approaches that take seriously both the autonomy and the embeddedness of the state.

Thus we propose a broad agenda. We are looking at state formations through global time and space; we are deeply involved in the contemporary debate over the relationship of state and society. These considerations inform this collective examination of state formations through time. If our examination is collective, our contributions are plural: we come at the problem of the state project from competing theoretical perspectives, and we are concerned with four different dimensions of that project: definitions, foundings, agendas, and memberships. First, what is the essential form of the state? Is it a freestanding and autonomous entity, or is it simply a manifestation of the power dynamics operating in a given society? Or is the state real, but manifested only in the actions of authorized state actors? And, critically important, did the state exist in the ancient and medieval past, or was it coproduced with modernity? These questions are introduced in our opening section of chapters, "Definitions."

Second, how are states founded? Here, the chapters in "Foundings" confront the problem of state formations as state beginnings in the ancient past, in early modernity, and in the twentieth century. How and under

what terms do configurations of state power emerge at given moments, successfully asserting claims to authority and legitimacy of people and territory?

Third, we are interested in what states do with those claims, and how they go about it; this is the fundamental question of our section on "Agendas." Diverse literatures have long explored the problem of state capacities, and much of this work has revolved around the ability of states to raise money and assemble force to achieve goals. Our approach has been to focus on the strategies and technologies that shape these state capacities, and the practices that states and state actors use to achieve the goals – limited and extensive – that they set in motion.

Finally, we are interested in people, the "Memberships" of states and societies. Subjects and citizens participate in the state in a variety of ways, and we are interested in the subtle tensions and effects that this participation entails. Most basically this involves the quality of that membership – what in the modern context we assume is equal citizenship. But we are also concerned with the ways in which the assertion of state agendas inflects and refracts the personal and collective life of a state's peoples.

Taken together, these perspectives open up critical perspectives on the contemporary approaches to states and state formations. Importantly, this volume works to put contested literatures in conversation. By transcending geographic, chronological, and theoretical boundaries, we hope that this effort will spark new conversations and lead to new approaches to the historical analysis of state power.

The chapters in this volume were presented in a two-year program at the Ohio State University on "state formations" and then at a tumultuous workshop in Columbus in September 2015. As we met that weekend, questions about the shape and future of the state in human affairs were on everyone's minds. It was obvious from simply looking at the day's headlines that in many places the state was under siege, but contrary to the triumphalist liberal predictions at the end of the Cold War some twenty years ago, the state was doing anything but fading away. Indeed, it was quite unclear what the eventual shape of the state would prove to be. In short, what was happening around us even as we met – as events have unfolded since – made clear that states are constantly forming and reforming, and that a set of political arrangements made by the state to resolve one crisis may be utterly incapable of handling other, unanticipated crises. As we looked out on the world that weekend, a clear consensus developed in the room. "The state" is never a finished project, but goes through

periods of profound crisis and reformation. Rather than "withering away," as predicted after the events of 1989, the state is all the more critical in the early twenty-first century. And certainties about its structure, function, and history that seemed so clear seven decades ago at the end of World War II have faded.

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