Introduction

The Many Hands of the State

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The study of states over the past three or four decades calls forth a number of paradoxes. First, intensifying interest in studying states has run parallel to the intensifying forces of globalization. The more states seem to be entangled in global economic, social, cultural, and political forces, the more scholars reach for the term "state" in their analyses, even as they eschew the "Westphalian" understanding of nation-states as the only proper unit of analysis. The intellectual focus on states also has spilled over into the policy domain, as actors operating within international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank – the very agents of globalization – have become fixated on shoring up states around the globe. Although many once advocated shrinking public sectors so as to liberate markets, many policymakers now believe that building up states and improving their "quality" (e.g., governance) is vital for economic development or political stability.[1]

A second paradox is that the drive to focus on the state as an analytic category developed powerfully within U.S. academia, despite the widespread sense of many that the United States has a governing apparatus that operates in fundamentally different ways than what the literature on states – above all in Europe – suggested. Perhaps the state has become an enduring scholarly preoccupation of United States-based scholars because they feel most keenly the disjuncture between the projection of U.S. power around the globe and antistatist political currents back home. The history of U.S. statebuilding also contains a perplexing mix of power and impotence: fragmented decision-making structures, multiple layers of government, and pervasive intertwining of public and private authority, yet also a remarkable capacity to conquer, enslave, surveil, and imprison.

Because the operation of political authority in the United States fits uneasily with the ideal-typical state lurking in the scholarly imagination, there is a growing literature seeking to better understand what "the state" is and means in the U.S. context.[2]

The third paradox lies in the fact that, even as we have seen the waning of debates between "state-centered" and "society-centered" theories of the state, its autonomy (or lack thereof), and its capacities, studies of states have increased and diversified, drawing on novel but more dispersed varieties of theorizing. While earlier analysis of states displayed a high level of theoretical engagement within a relatively narrow set of empirical debates, we now confront a situation of far greater empirical breadth but less theoretical engagement among scholars pursuing different lines of thinking.

A fourth paradox is that continued interest in states has coincided with a widely accepted reading of Foucault that the juridical power of states has been displaced by, or at least supplemented by, diffuse, capillary, or "mobile" mechanisms of power. Real-world events, including the emergence of nonterritorial political forces such as al-Qaeda and the increasing influence of both local and supranational entities, have also challenged the analytic primacy of states. In light of these developments, some counseled us to leave states altogether and investigate instead governance or governmentality.[3] We disagree.

Indeed, calls to disaggregate states into their component institutions and to assess different forms of power have not led scholars to drop the state from their analyses. Since the publication of the germinal *Bringing the State Back In* volume in 1985, the state has remained a central category and topic of analysis, and the academic and policy literature on the state is now vast, transcending disciplines, subfields, methodologies, epistemologies, and geographic areas of study.[4] We see this in the proliferation of modifiers that scholars use to characterize states – ambidextrous, administrative, associational, austerity, capitalist, carceral, centaur, clientelist, competition, consolidation, delegated, developmental, disaggregated, emergency, familial, failed, hidden, hollow, imperial, Keynesian welfare, laissez-faire, layered, migration, motherless, neoliberal, patriarchal, patronal, penal, phantom, polymorphic, predatory, racial, regulatory, rentier, Rube Goldberg, standardizing, straight, submerged, taxing, theatre, uneasy, warfare, welfare, women-friendly, and workfare – to name a few. This proliferation of modifiers reflects a problematic lack of engagement among analysts of states – how do these modifiers actually relate to each other? But it does indicate that the

concept of the state, however varied and contested it may be, is indispensable to contemporary scholarship.

This introduction, and the volume as a whole, makes an extended argument for the continuing fruitfulness of studying states; yet we need a better analytic armory. Our collective project emerged out of a desire to reflect upon several decades of exciting and innovative research, veering off in many different directions, that has flowered since the initial move to bring the state back in. Building on this wealth of research, we sought to reconnect with one another on a higher, theoretical plane. This volume culminates the intellectual work of several conferences, in which we grappled with theoretical questions about the meaning, contours, and reach of state power as we presented and critiqued our individual analyses of different elements of states. We found intriguing parallels across areas of interest that have been studied in isolation, such as political conflicts over state stratification that resonate across different forms of inequality, time periods, and geographic locations. Moreover, widening our lens beyond nation-states to include empires and other forms of governance enriches understandings of the multiple levels at which governing authority operates, processes of internal and external boundary formation, and how the "rule of difference" operates in both imperial and state contexts. We have arrived at the conclusion that several interrelated theoretical innovations mark the contemporary study of states.

First, our title, *The Many Hands of the State*, aims to capture the pervasive move away from conceptions of states as unitary actors and toward an understanding of states as encompassing multiple institutions, varying forms of interpenetration with civil society, multiple scales of governance, and multiple and potentially contradictory logics. One implication is that to understand states, we must both disaggregate and reaggregate, being attentive to the variable and shifting components of states without losing sight of that which binds them together. This, in turn, enables us to see states not as static structures of political opportunity, but as sets of organizations developing over time. Gaps between rules and their implementation are inevitable, allowing for endogenous as well as exogenous forms of institutional change, and possibly the transformation of the character of states or their constituent institutions.

Second, cultural and constructivist turns in history and the social sciences have drawn attention to the significance of states as classifying, categorizing, and stratifying organizations, as well as to the importance of cognition and cultural schemas in constituting boundaries, institutions, categories, and subjects. Rather than assuming there is a self-evident

separation between "state" and "society" or "economy," analysts argue that the state and its boundaries are shaped by cultural and ideological constructions. This also moves us to regain Weber's insight about the importance of *legitimacy*, without which states cannot maintain a monopoly of violence. State officials seek to construct and preserve monopolies over both material and symbolic force, raising questions about how this has been accomplished or why it has not succeeded.

Finally, there is extensive rethinking of the nation-state as a form and a unit of analysis in historical and globally situated contexts. Indeed, many of the nation-states whose trajectories have been treated as prototypical of statebuilding and state formation are in fact better conceptualized as multinational and spatially expansive, noncontiguous empires. The nation-state is but one historically specific form of rule among myriad others, ranging from empires to regions to city-states. Research in this area can be read as overlapping with the renewed interest in how boundaries are culturally and materially constituted, as these are not only "internal" – vis-à-vis "society" or the result of projects of nation-building on contiguous territories – but "external" – vis-à-vis other states or spatially distinct territories.

Our aim in this introductory chapter – after revisiting the intellectual origins and evolution that brought us to our current moment – is to elaborate on the theoretical innovations in the contemporary study of states sketched here. Let us note that we do not aspire to impose a single theoretical apparatus, based on a singular definition, for studying states. We see the canonical Weberian definition of the state that is so often cited these days – "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory" – as a serviceable enough starting point for theorizing states, but one that proves limiting, if narrowly understood.[5] Some scholars using variants of this definition focus only on forms of material power, lopping off Weber's cultural concerns encoded in his reference to legitimacy. Questioning how states legitimate their rule moves us to investigate how beliefs about the essential rightness of a state's rule emerge and are reproduced, alongside the development and consolidation of control of the means of coercion.[6] Moreover, like many definitions, Weber's offers an idealized portrait of that which is studied; in reality, many of the most interesting questions about states concern all that has challenged this ideal – how states are embedded in multiple levels of governance, their malleable and contested boundaries, and challenges to their sovereignty. Once we appreciate the multiplicity or, to invoke our favored metaphor, "hands" of states, it is

difficult to imagine that a single theory could address them all adequately. Indeed, the authors in this volume have each drawn in exciting new ways on different theorists, both classical and contemporary, to understand the diverse elements of states and empires.

STUDYING STATES: INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION

Our interest in states, power, and politics was encouraged by the "sound of marching, charging feet" that was all around us in the 1960s and 1970s, and then by the fallout, political and intellectual, from the decline of those movements and the new challenges of neoliberalism and various political right turns. The 1970s had ushered in a shift within history and the social sciences to consider the *political* significance of *social* arrangements and processes. Traditional approaches toward politics and power had kept scholars focused on formal institutions, elites, and conventional forms of participation. Instead, social science historians and historically oriented social scientists insisted on the significance of politics from below and the social sources of power and interests, particularly as rooted in capitalist relations.[7] Soon after, debates emerged around how "the state" (it was singular in those days) should fit into analysis of politics and power. A number of scholars who many in this volume would call intellectual progenitors – including Skocpol, Tilly, and Evans – addressed the failures of neo-Marxist or, more broadly, class determinist accounts of politics with an approach that highlighted the state as potentially autonomous actor and institution, with varying structures and capacities, drawing on Weber, Tocqueville, and others. Specifically political logics derived from struggles over the means of coercion and administration, and competition in the world system of states. Against the grain of much previous social–historical analysis, scholars argued that politics was not fully determined by economic forces, either in the near term or in the "lonely hour of the last instance."[8] This critical intellectual move is captured in the phrase *Bringing the State Back In*, the title of the 1985 volume that still merits our attention – a move that can be seen in many ways as the epicenter of the scholarly movement Adams, Clemens, and Orloff called the "second wave" of historical social science.[9]

The intellectual movement to "bring the state back in" sparked controversy and debate, with some arguing the state had always been an important topic of scholarly analysis that did not need to be reintroduced.[10] The tendency of scholarship from the 1980s through the early 1990s to conceive of the state as an actor that concentrated and

institutionalized political authority proved to be both compelling and contested. It was compelling because it threw off the presumed subordination of the state to dominant economic groups while drawing attention to the weighty influence of states in the lives of the ordinary people who paid taxes, served in the military, and were subject to laws and regulations. The political significance of the state was grounded in the assumption that states could be forces against capitalism, as, for example, when Esping-Andersen wrote about "politics against markets" in social democratic Scandinavia, and U.S. scholars considered the progressive legacies of the New Deal in curbing capitalism.[11] State-centered analysis drew attention to the differing capacities and structures of states, as well as the economic and social powers with which states had to contend.[12] And this approach forged links between too-often separate analyses of domestic and international politics, with the state as the central, sovereign actor that lies between the two.[13]

Yet initial conceptualizations of the state-as-actor were heavily influenced by a particular interpretation of Weber, emphasizing his analysis of the material underpinnings of state power rather than his focus on culture, and building upon only a few archetypal examples – Prussia, France, and Japan. The image of states thus underscored certain qualities – centralization, coherence, and autonomy – as intrinsic features of "strong" states.[14] Other states showed signs of being effective and powerful, but lacked such an administrative apparatus. The United States, for instance, long a paragon of statelessness in the academic literature and the national self-conception, clearly lacked the idealized state architecture emphasized by state theorists as central to the "strength" of states, yet mobilized collective power to conquer and settle a vast geographic terrain while dispossessing indigenous peoples, imposed a violent system of slavery, fought two world wars and a cold one, and projected power across the globe.[15] Turning to the global South, we see governing apparatuses that also differ from the bureaucratic ideal type, yet viewing these non-European states solely through the lens of how they fail to measure up to a Western standard assesses states according to preconceived ideas about what they *should* be rather than analysis of what they are.[16] And the categories of "strong" or "weak" that came out of the scholarly fixation on state capacity, understood as infrastructural power to "penetrate" and order civil society, tend to be too vague to tell us much about how states actually govern.

Another limitation of the initial literature was the small number of actors in these stories of political conflict – capital, the working class, and

"the state" or, in somewhat less anthropomorphic lingo, state actors (political or policy entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, political leaders). But as scholars asserted the autonomy of the political, many more potential political actors – women and men as gendered actors; religious leaders; ethnic, racial, and national organizations; sexually categorized groups; colonial officials – entered our analytic frames as relevant for shaping state activities. Outcomes of interest also proliferated, including not only the state policies that preoccupied the earlier state-centered literature, but categories of the census and citizenship, how public/private divides were drawn, legal systems, and the political imaginary of state officials.[17] Yet the state remained quite central, as for example when feminist theorists of the state analogized from "politics against markets" to ask if states could roll back the frontiers of male dominance,[18] and scholars of race examined the role of states in securing white supremacy or beginning to unravel it.[19] This work contributed to a larger rethinking of the political as not merely that which takes place in formal politics, but as an ongoing set of struggles of everyday life, including in voluntary organizations, workplaces, homes, and schools. Here, we see interest in both open political struggles and quieter cultural processes of fixing the very boundaries of the state – defining the "public" and "the private," as many feminist analysts have described.[20]

Perhaps most damning for all conceptions of the state as actor was the charge of reification – that viewing the state as a single actor risks subsuming sprawling, complex concatenations of governing institutions under one presumptively unified bureaucratic apparatus. This obscures the multiple actors and processes at work within the state. In response, scholars have sought to unpack this tightly compacted concept, disaggregating the state into its many functions, organizations, and purposes while complicating the initially sharp boundaries drawn between public and private, state and society.

This disaggregating drive has produced much of the literature that inspired our collective project, starting from the many modalities of state action that a metaphor such as "the many hands of the state" implies. When various theories of the state (singular) predominated, analysts conceived of different functions – legitimation and accumulation, for example – as cohering in some way or betraying some inherent contradiction, but kept their eye, simultaneously, on both.[21] Bourdieu gave us a slightly more useful metaphor of the right and left hands of the state.[22] We have been struck by the metaphorical inadequacy of this concept – instead of right and left hands, we have many hands, functions, and forms

of power.[23] Perhaps a better metaphorical representation of our concerns than the Leviathan, wielding scepter and sword, is Kali, the multi-limbed – and many-handed – Hindu goddess of time and death, which are, after all, enduring concerns of historicizing political analysis of states. Alas, her singular embodiment does not yet reflect our interest in boundaries and hybridity; ultimately, we may need to find some science-fictional character to replace Leviathan. But in the meantime, it is our hope that "many hands of the state" will be an inspiring metaphor for scholars seeking to understand states in all their profusion and multiplicity.

STUDYING STATES SINCE *BRINGING THE STATE BACK IN*

The "state-centered" versus "society-centered" debates that characterized the era in which *Bringing the State Back In* was conceived and written fell, by the late 1990s, into intellectual exhaustion and diminishing returns, especially as Marxist influences waned and many in history and the social sciences took multifarious cultural, institutional, and transnational turns. Yet moving past the "state–society" debate has spurred theoretical and empirical innovation and a flourishing of research across a proliferation of sites, historical eras, and policy domains. Given this spreading out of state-focused scholarship and its evolution along transnational lines to encompass empires, colonies, and global systems, we think the time is ripe for people who have been involved in this dizzying array of analyses to enter into deeper intellectual exchange with each other.

Our volume explores four theoretical innovations that shape the grouping of chapters, even though the themes are overlapping and interrelated. First, we examine states as entities whose internal and external boundaries are often shifting and malleable, reflecting political contestation over the state's meaning, purpose, and resources; second, states are assessed as powerful forces for social stratification whose effects are nonetheless subject to negotiation and change; third, we evaluate states as organizations with claims to (legitimate) monopolies over both material and symbolic force, but whose control must be constructed and continually reaffirmed; and fourth, we conceptualize nation-states as one form of globally embedded rule that both has parallels with and often emerged out of empires. Our analysis of these shifts brings us to a series of theoretical observations that can guide further work on states and their indispensible contributions to political authority and social control.

Locating the State: The Problem of Boundaries

Critical to any analysis of the state is an understanding of what the state is and is not. Yet sketching the contours of the state is more complicated than it may seem. The embeddedness of states in international and global relationships is one source of complexity, overlapping sovereignties, and potential blurring of boundaries (as will be discussed in the section on empires that follows). Boundaries are variably clear or blurred in domestic political arenas, too, as states often rely heavily on private agents or difficult-to-classify public–private hybrids to make policies, administer state-funded programs, and deliver services.[24] State authority also operates through multiple levels of government, particularly in federal systems, and some have argued that rescaling processes are pervasive today, with power shifting downward to regional or municipal governments and/or upward toward international and supranational organizations.[25] And, as Risse has argued, many parts of the world are characterized by "limited statehood" – by states that lack full control over at least some part of their territory, having ceded that control to nongovernmental organizations, firms, subnational forms of government, indigenous leaders, warlords and criminal operations, and the like.[26]

Public–private hybridity and blurred boundaries between "state" and "society" are often significant features of states in contemporary and earlier eras, but we must avoid *conceptual* blurring – if all forms of power are viewed as equivalent, we will no longer draw any conceptual distinctions between the state and nonstate realms. In the words of Durkheim, "If the state is everywhere, it is nowhere."[27] Whether justified or not, states are often encrusted in layers of legitimacy and forms of power that help distinguish them from nonstate entities. The latter can be potent, and all the more so to the extent they are financed and supported by states, but the former remains, in most societies, the source from which much legitimate power radiates. If we entirely lose sight of these distinctions we risk losing the state as a theoretically or empirically meaningful category of analysis, and miss a significant element of states' symbolic power.

One way to locate the boundaries of the state – and to comprehend the complex goals and practices of state authorities and other political actors in erecting them or effacing them – is to examine the concrete ways in which states do the work of governing. It is only in examining the real-world practices of governance – the mix of public and private (nonprofit or proprietary) actors charged with implementing policies

and the nature of their relationship, the responsibilities of national versus subnational layers of government in program delivery, the role of law in achieving various objectives, and the lived experience of state policies on the ground by those subject to them – that we gain insight into what the state is.[28] One example is the extensive literature on street-level bureaucracy – the sites at which individuals and public authority meet, and where varying degrees of discretion allow public officials and, increasingly, private organizations to implement policies in ways that often diverge considerably from formal policy goals and rules.[29] Focusing on boundaries also draws attention to the political struggles over where state power starts and ends – why some political actors might seek to "hide" the state's power, for example, while others might try to draw attention to it.[30]

We can also draw on insights from the cultural turns in sociology and history, and the constructivist one in political science, about how cultural schemas influence categories and classifications, including those that demarcate boundaries between state and nonstate realms. As Mitchell noted back in 1991, the state is not a thing, hovering above society; instead, its very contours reflect ideological and cultural work shaping how officials portray the lines between state and nonstate and how citizens perceive them. Viewing the state as a "sociocultural phenomenon" highlights that states are not solely constellations of material power, but embody ideas and beliefs about legitimacy, sovereignty, disinterestedness, and coherence.[31] Such an approach also compels us to scrutinize the narratives about the state that officials – and scholars – produce as a set of cultural or ideological products. In his Collège de France lectures on the state, Bourdieu warns against adopting the self-legitimating categories of the state that only deepen its mystifying character:

> The state . . . is something that you cannot lay your hands on, or tackle in the way that people from the Marxist tradition do when they say "the state does this," "the state does that." I could cite you kilometers of texts with the word state as the subject of actions and proposals. That is a very dangerous fiction, which prevents us from properly understanding the state . . . be careful, all sentences that have the state as subject are theological sentences – which does not mean that they are false inasmuch as the state is a theological entity, that is, an entity that exists by way of belief. [32]

In this view, states profoundly shape the normative order, influencing the very terminology we use to describe them and where we locate their boundaries.