

Introduction

State Formation Theory: Status, Problems, and Prospects

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There is little doubt that warfare has always imposed an immense strain on any political organisation. When, for example, the Danish king Frederick II raised an army to field against Sweden in the Northern Seven Years War in 1563, the cost of the 25,000 hired mercenaries was 40,000 rix-dollar (*rigsdaler*) per month. The income of the Danish state was around 200,000 rix-dollar per year.¹ Hence, the annual budget could finance the army for four months. The war lasted seven years. These are not unusual figures in European history, but still they raise questions of how states as social and political organisations could sustain such costs. It is well established in the literature that warfare often constituted a driver for change. The way in which the cost and preparation for war forced states towards institutional innovation has been a primary concern of historians and social scientists for decades. Foremost among these is the American sociologist Charles Tilly (1929–2008). He famously phrased the relationship between warfare and state in this simple, luring and often-quoted fashion: ‘War made the state, and the state made war’.²

The purpose of this volume is to explore and assess Tilly’s enduring contribution to Historical Sociology. We share a general acceptance of warfare’s significance for the historical processes of state formation but also believe that the claim needs to be modified in different ways and for different purposes. All the contributions in this volume are written by scholars who specialise in areas speaking either directly to Tilly’s main claims or to the core methodological and theoretical assumptions in his work. As such, this volume is not intended to provide an introduction to state-formation literature but rather to provide an assessment that brings Tilly’s agenda forward. Many of the contributions are critical, but it is

¹ Carsten Due-Nielsen, Ole Feldbæk et al. (eds.), *Dansk Udenrigspolitik Historie*, vol. 1 (København, Danmarks Nationalleksikon, 2001), p. 308.

² Charles Tilly, “Reflections on the History of European State-Making.” In: Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 42.

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through critique that we realise what is tenable and what is not. His contribution is scrutinised in philosophical, theoretical, conceptual, empirical and also geographical terms. Although Tilly himself never generalised the claim to geographical areas other than Western Europe or to the contemporary world, recent research and policy-making has taken the claim further and beyond the early modern European context. In response, this volume provides contributions that examine whether Tilly's warfare paradigm is applicable to non-European regions (Middle East, South America, China).

Tilly's untimely death spawned a series of symposia and special issues, which celebrated his extraordinary contribution to the establishment of the sub-discipline of Historical Sociology in American sociology and beyond.³ According to William Sewell, Tilly's early work 'helped inaugurate a new style of historical social science that has changed both history and historical sociology'⁴ and for Georg Steinmetz, 'Tilly exerted a quietly revolutionary impact on American historical sociology.'⁵ But while these early tributes retained a commemorative and valedictory tone – often written by former colleagues – no systematic and critical appraisal of and engagement with his key contribution to Historical Sociology, comparable to the companion volumes of his sociological colleagues Elias, Giddens, Mann or Rokkan,⁶ has yet appeared in the scholarly literature. More importantly, none of these special issues was dedicated to an exploration of his key thesis on the warfare paradigm in state-formation research. This volume is intended to close that gap. The remaining parts of this chapter contextualise the assessment of Tilly's work by, first, providing our view of the current

³ See, for example, *Social Science History*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Fall 2010); *The American Sociologist*, vol. 41, no. 4 (2010); *Theory & Society*, vol. 39, nos. 3–4 (2010); *French Historical Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2010). See also the various contributions to the 2008 Conference 'Contentions, Change and Explanation: A Conference in Honour of Charles Tilly', organised by the Social Science Research Council at www.ssrc.org/hirschman/event/2008. For annotated links to Tilly resources see the very useful website at <http://essays.ssrc.org/tilly/resources#conferences>.

⁴ William H. Sewell, "Charles Tilly's Vendée as a Model for Social History," *French Historical Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Spring 2010), pp. 307–15, here at p. 309.

⁵ George Steinmetz, "Charles Tilly, German Historicism and the Critical Realist Philosophy of Science," *The American Sociologist*, vol. 41, no. 4 (December 2010), pp. 312–36, here at p. 313.

⁶ Jonathan Fletcher, *Violence and Civilization: An Introduction to the Work of Norbert Elias* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997); Christopher G. A. Bryant and David Jary (eds.), *Anthony Giddens: Critical Assessments*, vols. 1–4 (London: Routledge, 1997); John A. Hall and Ralph Schroeder (eds.), *An Anatomy of Power: The Social Theory of Michael Mann* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Peter Flora, Stein Kuhnle and Peter Urwin (eds.), *State-Formation, Nation-Building and Mass Politics in Europe: The Theory of Stein Rokkan* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

state of state theory and state-formation theory. Based on this we situate Tilly's work in a broader theoretical landscape before we conclude the chapter with brief summaries of the subsequent chapters.

Theorising the State

The modern state, it is widely believed, is a uniquely European phenomenon. Its temporal origins and geographical expansion – consolidating over time into a distinct worldwide inter-state system – has been the subject of sustained fascination and interest across a number of disciplines, including Historical Sociology, Comparative Politics, International Law and International Relations (IR). In fact, state theory and state-formation theory can be regarded as one prominent intellectual axis across these modern disciplines and national research cultures, building on the classical Western canon in political theory and political philosophy. Theoretical controversies around the state and its historical origins have been as productive and long-lived as the phenomenon itself, gravitating often around the topos of the Westphalian Settlement of 1648.⁷ Sovereign statehood has been regarded until quite recently as the natural terminus of political development, standard political form of self-determination and entry ticket into the international community of any independently minded political association. This seemed to hold until the fall of the Berlin Wall. Thence, the sovereign state as a historical reality and as an object of inquiry seemed to be in decline. A flourishing literature on post-sovereignty suggested replacing the state as the key unit of power and political analysis with an alternative de-territorialising conceptual terminology on a spectrum from globalisation and global governance, via an expanding zone of liberal peace consolidating a 'universal and homogeneous state', to empire.⁸

But this clamorous re-definition of the research agenda disappeared as quickly as it had emerged. Whereas the concepts of globalisation and global governance seemed to capture the intellectual *Zeitgeist* in

⁷ For a comprehensive critique of this topos, see Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003).

⁸ For early critiques see: Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 1990); Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992); David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); Jürgen Habermas, *The Post-National Constellation: Political Essays* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001 [1998]); Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

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the 1990s,⁹ grasping an opportune liberal moment that generated exaggerated claims for a ‘post-Westphalian’ world threatening to transcend the inter-state nature of world politics, and while the concepts of empire or imperialism were revitalised around the turn of the new millennium to grasp the more unilateral nature of American power projection abroad, the state as the key aggregation of political power, source of legitimacy, objective of national self-determination movements and unit of analysis – for all the apparent power-differentials within a hierarchically ordered system of states – refuses to disappear. In fact, the moment of the fall of the Berlin Wall stood for a double movement: while grand claims on post-territoriality and the imminent realisation of a liberal spaceless universalism abounded, the research agenda on state-formation, consolidation, transformation and ‘failure’ gained simultaneously renewed academic traction and policy relevance. Real-time worldwide political developments – state break-ups (e.g. the USSR, Yugoslavia), state ‘failures’ (Africa), state-building (Afghanistan, Iraq, ex-Soviet republics, former Eastern Europe), state consolidation and development (East Asia), regime shifts (Latin America, Middle East, North Africa), decolonisation processes (Africa) and secessions (East Timor, South Sudan) – forced the state research agenda back to the fore.¹⁰ The state fails to keep withering away.

Placing these contemporary developments within a wider historical perspective has been a common, though not universally adhered to, tendency in academia. Drawing lessons from the past to understand the ongoing metamorphoses of one of the social sciences’ most central objects of investigation and, perhaps, to draw valuable policy advice to shape these processes, has been a favourite and well-tested option. It encouraged an inter-disciplinary *rapprochement* between and, in many cases, a convergence of the more presentist disciplines of Comparative Politics, Sociology, IR and International Law towards the terrain of Historical Sociology and, perhaps, even International Historical Sociology. This ‘historical turn’ keeps raising long-standing questions.

⁹ Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalisation in Question* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); Peter Hall and David Soskice (eds.), *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage* (Oxford University Press, 2001); Justin Rosenberg, *The Follies of Globalisation Theory: Polemical Essays* (London: Verso, 2003).

¹⁰ Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); idem, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011); Richard Lachmann, *States and Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (New York: Random House, 2012).

How did the modern state develop? What accounts for the growth of state power? What are the drivers of state-proliferation across the globe? Casting the net of investigation across a wide diversity of state-formation cases to draw a summa is a tempting strategy for the conduct of research and the generation of testable hypothesis. However, the attempt to draw lessons from history – in modern parlance to generate data bases for comparative research – to enrich and secure contemporary policy analysis and advice is an exercise fraught with difficulties.¹¹ Why should contemporary cases of state-building conform to earlier examples, when the former unfold within a geopolitical and diplomatic environment already pre-configured and shaped by the latter? Evidently, the historical sequence of state-formations becomes co-constitutive of contemporary manifestations of state-building. This needs to enter into our theorisations. To distil a scientific essence of state-formation under quasi-laboratory conditions – generating digests and policy manuals for institutional ‘state-building’ – in abstraction from a concurrently evolving geopolitical environment and the specificities of prevailing social relations and power struggles on the ground pursues an anti-historical research procedure for a deeply historical phenomenon. The social-scientific imagination, to the degree that it subscribes to the postulate of general model building, confronts the historiographical counter-postulate of ideography – the emphasis on the *sui generis* character and particularities of each trajectory of state-building. *Historia magistra vitae* is not equivalent to the maxim that history repeats itself. What, then, is the meaning of historicisation in state and state-formation research?

But the turn to history is fraught with a dilemma. For historians and historical sociologists are as divided in their explanations or understandings of earlier experiences of successful state-formations in early modern Europe and elsewhere as their interlocutors in Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology and IR are on state-formation in the present. In fact, even the definition of the state, and *a fortiori* the modern state, is not settled among historians. And there are good reasons for this. For the procedure of ideal-type formation or ‘general abstraction’ as a standard of concept-formation in the social sciences generates tensions and aporias when confronted with the task of historical concretisation.

¹¹ For a minor *cause célèbre* in this regard, see Jeffrey Herbst, “War and the State in Africa,” *International Security*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1990), pp. 117–39. Here, the suggestion is that the absence of state-consolidating warfare in Africa, in contrast to early modern Europe, explains the persisting problems of strong state-building and nationalism on the continent.

Whether in classical Weberian¹² or Marxist state theory,¹³ attempts to define an ‘essence’ of the modern state or the capitalist state in abstraction from its multiple and diverse historical manifestations run the familiar risk of reification and a-historicity. Even if we agree that the modern state is not simply a coercive apparatus – a set of public institutions analytically detached from ‘civil society’ – but rather a social relation, we are forced to take the specificity of these social relations and social conflicts around state power seriously *seriatim*. Theoretical generalisation faces historical specification. In fact, there is an inverse relation between abstraction and concretion. As the conceptual abstraction becomes ever ‘thinner’ to subsume an ever wider repertory of diverse cases, it becomes simultaneously ever less capable of capturing the very heterogeneity of the multiple cases that it was intended to grasp. The procedure of ideal-type formation leads either to the dilution of the general concept of the modern or capitalist state, or to the demotion of cases to ‘variants’ or ‘exceptions’ – usually, to both. But how many ‘variants’ or ‘exceptions’ can a theoretical construct bear before it collapses? Ultimately, the moment of a state’s definitional ideality ‘never comes’.

Yet the problems of conceptuality in the procedures of ideal-type formation go even deeper. While Max Weber’s classical definition of the modern state, as a ‘political community which successfully upholds a claim on the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a given territory’, keeps serving as a common reference point, its ideality has arguably contributed to the classification of many state experiences as ‘failed’ – and thus worthy of intervention and correction by an Eurocentric establishment in charge of a superior normative set of social-scientific categories.¹⁴ Such policy implications have served as a reminder to draw back from ideal-type/impure-type binaries and to convert the rigour of social-scientific category formation into more space-time sensitive *sui generis* concepts for each individual case of political community. This connotes another meaning of the task of historicisation: the temporalisation of the field of conceptuality.¹⁵ Failing that,

¹² Christopher Pierson, *The Modern State*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹³ Bob Jessop, *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in Its Place* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (eds.), vols. I and II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 58.

¹⁵ This problematique has, of course, been taken up by the Cambridge School and *Begriffsgeschichte* (Conceptual History), but remains largely restricted in its focus on textuality and inter-textuality. Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1969), pp. 3–53; idem, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: The Renaissance*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University

the procedure leads quickly into the classical ‘Orientalism’ trap.¹⁶ For if reality does not comply with Western concepts, then it is perhaps not reality that is at fault, but maybe the classical sociological standards of concept formation, whose idealities tend to demote non-ideal experiences to ‘anomalies’ requiring normalisation, as the Neo-Conservative ideology painfully exemplified.

Consequently, a final problem arises. For the articulation of value-free and dispassionate social-scientific lessons drawn from a historical repertory of cases militates against the multiple and contested political purposes to which state-building ‘expertise’ is harnessed. Theory construction is often itself a purposeful exercise designed to intervene into the shaping – some would say engineering – of social reality. Today, any self-reflexive approach to theories of state-formation – as social-scientific ‘truths’, discourses, or ideologies – needs to register their co-constitutive power for ongoing acts of state-formation, intervention and destruction, as entire armies of scholars, consultants and experts in think tanks, governments and international organisations leave their mark on the present. The link between the past and the present remains fragile.

Mapping State-Formation Theories

The (re-)turn to history in the Political Science, Sociology and IR literatures on states and state-building reconnects, as mentioned, with the large and long-standing body of state-formation theories in Historical Sociology. This is in itself a highly diversified and controversial field, which traditionally builds on Classical Sociology (Marx, Durkheim, Weber). In the contemporary field of state-formation research in Historical Sociology, we find a number of competing theories and approaches, emphasising different explanatory factors, embedded in different philosophies of science and, in some cases, operating with different independent or intermediate variables. Some theories reject the language of causality or multi-causality and independent-dependent variable altogether and emphasise interpretation, historical semantics, contested relationality, or the genealogy of epistemic discourses. Some prioritise particular political processes and political institutions as the key variables

Press, 1978); Reinhard Koselleck, “Einleitung.” In: Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhard Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur Politisch-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1972), pp. XIII–XXVII; idem, “Social History and Conceptual History.” In: Reinhard Koselleck (ed.), *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 20–37.

¹⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979).

to be examined (e.g. war, war combined with the character of local government and state infrastructure); others focus on economic processes (e.g. property relations, exchange relations or class struggle), while other scholars stress ideational variables such as religion or culture. Most often, we find attempts to combine these variables, most notably the political and economic dimensions.

Several attempts have been made to systematise and classify the field of Historical Sociology and the filiations of state-formation theory within it. A recent influential survey of the field¹⁷ suggested a periodisation of the sub-discipline's trajectory following a temporal sequence of three waves. Against the backdrop of Classical Sociology, which was centrally concerned with the transition from tradition to modernity, the first wave (up to ca. 1965) revolved largely around the paradigm of a Weber-inspired modernisation theory and a Parsonian structural-functionalism, formulating abstract stages of development and static taxonomies with little grounding in actual historical research. The second wave (ca. 1965–1990) was characterised by a Marx/Weber synthesis, which began to break down during the 1990s and was succeeded by an ongoing post-Marx/Weber third wave. Substantively, the second wave comprised studies on large-scale and long-term processes, including the rise of capitalism, industrialisation, class-formation, revolution, war, state-making, secularisation, rationalisation, individuation and formal organisations. Theoretically, it embraced versions of comparativism, political economy, structuralism and determinism, while conceiving of social change in terms of linear, epochal and progressive transitions (teleology). Its conception of agency was largely utilitarian and rationalist, as political action was often derived from economic or social position. The third wave, in contrast, developed as a reaction to the Marx/Weber synthesis and comprises five distinct groupings: (1) institutionalism, (2) rational choice, (3) the cultural turn, (4) feminism and (5) post-colonialism. 'Rational choice' apart, it took identity, religion, ethnicity, race, culture, nation, gender and informal organisations as their central objects of analyses, while theoretically emphasising case studies, cultural and discourse analysis, agency and contingency. It largely conceived of historical development in terms of moments of non-linear transposition and re-composition. It also rejected attempts to construct space/time invariant general theories, relying on the 'nomological-deductive covering law'

¹⁷ Julia Adams, Elisabeth S. Clemens and Ann Shola Orloff, "Introduction: Social Theory, Modernity, and the Three Waves of Historical Sociology." In: Julia Adams et al. (eds.), *Remaking Modernity: Politics, History, and Sociology* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 1–72.

model as defined by Carl Hempel. While the third wave constitutes a heterogeneous group of scholars, they are united in their aversion to material structuralism, political economy and essentialism.

Other surveys deny a temporal logic of supersession inherent in the metaphor of waves and identify several co-existing ‘centres of gravity’ with no specific chronological beginnings or endings.¹⁸ Patrick Carroll objects to an agonistic and inter-generational logic of supersession by suggesting parallel and competing ‘centres of gravity’, loosely organised according to thematic and theoretical preferences. This classification identifies a ‘military-fiscal centre of gravity’, which includes Tilly and Michael Mann¹⁹ and relies primarily on Weber and, to a lesser degree, on Marx; this competes with an ‘Autonomous State Centre of Gravity’, which is largely Weberian and best represented by the work of Theda Skocpol²⁰ and a ‘Culture Centre of Gravity’ represented by Corrigan and Sayer²¹ drawing much inspiration from Foucault. Carroll himself seems to open up a fourth centre, revolving around the impact of the sciences, notably the natural sciences and technologies, on state-formation. Dylan Riley, in turn, raises a similar charge against the language of waves embraced by third-wavers, ‘for periodising the development of historical sociology in terms of waves of development (...) would seem to be a quintessentially second-wave enterprise. For the language of waves inevitably suggests a transition from one stage of development to another’.²² Riley detects more evidence ‘of a field that grows through an operation of productive return to origins’,²³ which is for him a return to political economy, including Marx and Weber.

This book starts from the assumption that any schematic classification of state-formation theories – putting scholars into boxes – runs the risk of typological oversimplification. This applies to the classical sociologists (see Chapter 2 for Ertman’s comment on Hintze’s shifts of emphasis) as much as to contemporary scholars. While stylisation is

¹⁸ Patrick Carroll, “Articulating Theories of States and State Formation,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2009), pp. 553–603; Dylan Riley, “Waves of Historical Sociology,” *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, vol. 47, no. 5 (2006), pp. 379–86.

¹⁹ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power. Volume I: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge University Press, 1986); idem, *States, War and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); idem, *The Sources of Social Power. Volume II: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²⁰ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

²¹ Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch* (New York: Blackwell, 1991).

²² Riley, “Waves of Historical Sociology,” p. 380.

²³ Idem, “Waves of Historical Sociology,” p. 380.

often hard to evade within the field of state-formation research, this procedure overlooks and misclassifies important work. These categorisations have difficulties coming to terms with, for example, scholars such as Richard Lachmann,²⁴ Hendrik Spruyt,²⁵ and Perry Anderson²⁶ who escape the clear-cut categories of bello-centrism or econo-centrism – or even Neo-Hintzeanism and Neo-Marxism. While these writers may appear at first sight to fall into the econo-centric category, this underestimates the problem that politics and economics appear either as causally inseparable in their works or, rejecting the language of causality altogether (the conception of the social world as a priori, separated into externally interacting domains of causality), as internally related to each other.

The book agrees with Carroll's and Riley's suggestion that the second wave of state-formation theories in Historical Sociology is neither exhausted nor supplanted – particularly as culturalist approaches to state-formation seem to have withdrawn from historicising and theorising the multi-linear and interactive inter-political relations of state-building processes, which non-orthodox theories in the field of IR keep problematising²⁷ – while accepting the fruitfulness of new departures associated with third-wavers. It also finds Riley's idea of a 'productive return to origins' suggestive as some second-wave theories of state-formation have neither been sufficiently explored, refuted or developed. If the language of waves as a periodising device tends to veer towards an instrument of theoretical boundary maintenance, and if the categories of economicist, politicist/bellicist and culturalist are not watertight, then we are returned to accepting Carroll's suggestion to re-convene the field of state-formation theories in Historical Sociology and beyond in terms of multiple and ongoing theoretical centres of gravity. This generates a more open-ended perspective on the cross-disciplinary plurality of contending theory families.

²⁴ Richard Lachmann, *Capitalists in Spite of Themselves: Elite Conflicts and Economic Transitions in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁵ Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁶ Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso, 1974); idem, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974).

²⁷ Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (eds.), *Historical Sociology of International Relations* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002); John Hobson, George Lawson and Justin Rosenberg, "Historical Sociology." In: Robert A. Denemark (ed.), *The International Studies Encyclopaedia*, vol. VI (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 3357–75; Benno Teschke, "IR Theory, Historical Materialism, and the False Promise of International Historical Sociology," *Spectrum: Journal of Global Studies* (2014).