

CHAPTER 4

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE LIMITS OF THE STATE

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THIS chapter maps the intersections and differences between the newly formulated conception of limited statehood and recent anthropological scholarship on the state, both of which mark a departure from the traditional political scientific understandings of statehood and state power. We focus on selected ethnographies of the state in Africa, India, and Latin America to highlight the ways in which they unsettle binaries of West and non-West, public and private, state and non-state, formal and informal, national and trans- or supranational, on which much of the discussion of state capacity is predicated. We then turn to examples from states understood to have a relatively secure monopoly on violence, in Scandinavia, Western Europe, and the United States, to ask whether, or how, even here blurred limits of state power are central to the nature of statehood, albeit manifest differently from those in the Global South. Our contention is that anthropology offers a route through which to complicate functionalist conceptions of governance, by interrogating the limits to statehood in terms of an understanding of a sovereign, bounded entity whose agency can either fail, or be withdrawn, from an area of operation, or whose plans and intentions are, or could be, realized as designed in policy areas. Our focus then is on the force within ordinary life of the presence of the state as it is expressed and experienced in and across complex social relations, and as sites in which the state itself is continually being made, but is also unmade.

ANTHROPOLOGY, GOVERNANCE, AND THE STATE

How might anthropology contribute to the formation and critique of political science concepts—in this case *limited statehood*? What remains particular to an anthropological

perspective, at a time when older conventions about differences in the kinds of societies studied, or the methods employed, no longer define disciplinary distinctions? The division of labour, in which sociology and political science study modern industrial societies, whereas anthropology is about societies without armies and courts, is obsolete, if it ever made sense. Meanwhile, the stark contrasts between research in Western and non-Western settings, on state and stateless political organizations, or through primarily ethnographic or quantitative approaches have been subject to criticism for several decades, although these methods are yet to be abandoned. Today anthropology is often defined, we would argue, by its desire to question our taken-for-granted assumptions on the basis of our experiences with interlocutors in the register of everyday life. Everyday interactions and ordinary relationships, it turns out, are not ancillary to the production of the state, but are the substance of its enactment.¹

In the twentieth century, anthropology challenged not only divisions of scientific labour that had set ethnographic fieldwork the task of identifying juridical-political systems in 'primitive' societies for the purpose of colonial administration, but also challenged the arrangement of economic, political, and religious institutions as divided between so-called 'simple' and 'complex' societies. The state entered late into anthropological scholarship by way of the critique of conjectural, evolutionary history and its moralizing of 'primitive' subjects. In 1940, Meyer Fortes and Edward E. Evans-Pritchard inaugurated the comparative anthropological study of political systems in 'simpler' societies (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940). In his preface to the volume, Radcliffe-Brown reprimanded comparative politics for its tendency to concentrate on what is often called the 'sovereign state', thus limiting the understanding of statehood primarily to control over war in a governed territory. He describes the state that wields sovereignty from above as a fiction of political philosophy:

[the] State . . . is usually represented as being an entity over and above the human individuals who make up a society, having as one of its attributes something called 'sovereignty', and sometimes spoken of as having a will (law being often defined as the will of the State) or as issuing commands. The State, in this sense, does not exist in the phenomenal world . . . What does exist is an organization, i.e. a collection of individual human beings connected by a complex system of relations. Within that organization different individuals have different roles, and some are in possession of special power or authority, as chiefs or elders capable of giving commands which will be obeyed, as legislators or judges, and so on. There is no such thing as the power of the State. (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: xxii)

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, for their part, had distinguished two effective types of political systems in their schematization of African societies: Group A societies, presenting a centralized authority, administrative bureaucracy, and juridical institutions whose power structures reflected 'cleavages of wealth, privilege and states'; and Group B societies, which lacked such institutionalized forms of governance, and in which there appeared to be 'no sharp divisions of rank, status, or wealth' (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940: 5). This classification mapped onto earlier political categories of the 'primitive state' and

'stateless' societies, respectively. By the end of the 1940s, the Manchester School had problematized these distinctions while maintaining the discipline's reliance on a worm's eye view from the ground—that is, at the level of concrete relations—commensurate with the observational techniques of participant observation, rather than a bird's eye view of macro structures and processes. The disciplinary concern with stateless societies, where power was wielded by decentralized tribal units rather than centralized authority—and thus was not a reflection of differential control over resources—was defended on the basis of a methodological, rather than normative, rationale; that is, the study of political systems as they were expressed in forms of local relations could only feasibly be achieved in smaller, 'less complex', and conceptually bounded polities amenable to participant observation during fieldwork. Scientific considerations thus allowed for the presence of the colonial state and its acts of repression to disappear from view.

But Max Gluckman's emphasis on undifferentiated tribal-type societies was not a matter of reproducing a strict developmental paradigm; rather, he envisioned a reply to Leslie White's notion that the development of human societies could be conceived as a *general* corollary of the increased control not over energy, but rather violence. For Gluckman (1958, 1965), states with economic systems as were to be found in Africa were so inherently unstable that they met with recurrent breakdown, and thus the typological plurality within this category (i.e. whether they have, or do not have, chiefs) was considered more likely a function of cycles of development than progress towards new or higher forms of rule. In approaching 'primitive' law as law, even in the absence of the state (see Gluckman 1965), rather than as an operation of proto-state governance, anthropology proceeded in 'stateless' societies without much concern for the nature of that state. Nor did it scrutinize its relationship to the colonial state and the new political elites it had served to create and bolster. Instead, anthropological scholarship was concerned with the connection between non-Western modes of production and exchange, the formation (or absence) of class-like cleavages, and various 'non-governmental' juridical institutions concerned with the adjudication of a plurality of state and non-state norms. Legal pluralism, whose existence comes as a recent realization in political science and jurisprudence, was a phenomenon well researched by anthropologists in the 1960s and 1970s.

If research on non-Western societies was often transfigured as a concern with law and order outside of strict state forms of governance, later anthropologists, working in clearly centrally administered colonial and post-colonial states, described the opposition between those structures and 'society' as the domain of culture. The opposition between state and (civil) society, Jim Ferguson (2006) has argued, was often put to anti-democratic and ideological uses, in which the assumed verticality of the relation between the two covertly reintroduced the paradigm of 'nation building' that had been wielded against the Global South and which allowed the local or rural to be posited as backwards spaces. Clifford Geertz (2004), for instance, argued that newly liberated polities were 'complicated' because their inherited state apparatuses were at odds with the 'multiethnic, multireligious, and multilinguistic' communities they sought to govern. Such states, Geertz surmised, were thus not (as in Europe) 'underpinned by a compact

and sovereign nation' (Geertz 2004: 577). Anthropology in Geertz's view was particularly well situated to addressing this 'new' configuration of state power because of its experience of its workings in non-Western spaces and conditions. He insisted that the preoccupation of political science and philosophy with Western states had rendered these disciplines incapable of imagining effectively managed states in the absence of a 'proper nation—sovereign, single, and self-aware'. Such a claim, however, reveals much about his imaginations of the homogeneity of European societies raised to a hyper-real benchmark for comparison. Hence, his earlier argument (Geertz 1980) that the pre-colonial state in Bali was distinct in that its cultural spectacle was constitutive of the state itself, rather than an instrument of support for its power, as is presumably the condition in the West. Some states were for him *theatre states*, while others were not, even though as Foucault (1975) famously showed, the spectacle was always a principal component of sovereignty.²

The distinction between society and state took another route in French anthropology, most famously through Pierre Clastres (1977), who, under the influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Alfred Métraux, argued that the characterization of societies as either possessing or not possessing a state tacitly reintroduced an evolutionary conception of civilization whereby non-Western societies were postulated as 'lacking' something which the West had, but which would be their destiny, too. Clastres argued that the 'political relation of power precedes and founds the economic relation of exploitation', whereby the 'emergence of the State determines the advent of classes' (Clastres 1977: 167-168).³ In the hands of Maurice Godelier and Claude Meillassoux, French Marxist anthropology reformulated the relation of infrastructure to superstructure. It attempted to go beyond structural analyses of social relations in order to arrive at the 'effects' of structures on one another by means of their associated praxis, which would reveal the causal networks through which social and economic forms were reproduced (see Clastres et al. 1982; Godelier 1977). Drawing on the Marxist distinction between land as subject of labour and as instrument of production, Meillassoux (1972) argued that in the latter (e.g. among self-sustaining agricultural communities of the Gouro in Côte d'Ivoire), domination was contingent on control over reproduction (especially women and sustenance), rather than production. The relationship between control over the reproduction of labour power prior to colonialism and the exploitation of labour under imperial capitalist rule might, moreover, be understood as a continuation of a logic internal to domestic social structure and not simply as a historical rupture (Meillassoux 1975). Political scientists, notably Jean-François Bayart, have offered powerful critiques of such analyses, for example, by appeal to the notion of the 'the politics of the belly'. For Bayart (1989), the comparative study of the state in sub-Saharan Africa reveals an emergent mode of governance in which the boundaries between private and public interest, licit and illicit markets were blurred and in which bribery was pervasive, but which amounted to an efficient and effective mode of administration premised on self-engorgement.

Since the 1960s, anthropological fieldwork has extended to Europe and North America.⁴ If earlier ethnography in Europe had centred predominantly on 'traditional' societies in relatively closed peasant communities (the subject proper of 'Volkskunde'),

by the late 1970s anthropology had overturned the presentist view of the village⁵ in favour of a new interest in large-scale categories and processes, including: 'state formation, national integration, industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, class conflict and commercialization' (Boissevain 1975: 11). At the same time, anthropologists working outside of Euro-America were devoting much of their theoretical energies to dislodging the Eurocentric and colonial legacies of the discipline's analytical, conceptual apparatus. Marxist anthropologists, for example, traced the history and circulation of commodities in global flows of capital and labour, which revealed forms of colonized labour, particularly on plantations in Caribbean, to be at the very heart of the formation of industrial modernity in the metropole (Mintz 1985; Wolf 1982). This critique was later reinvigorated by post-colonial theory, in which the mythical imaginary of 'Europe' as the source of modern forms of governance was seen to be smuggled into social scientific historicizing by means of European categories of 'disenchantment, secular time, and sovereignty', which marked the 'third world' as characterized by a political and cultural lack and a temporal lag (Chakrabarty 2000).

DECOLONIZING POLITICAL THEORY

International relations scholars (Robbie Shilliam) and political theorists (Ranabir Samaddar, Joseph Chan) working on societies outside Euro-America have likewise begun to decolonize disciplinary epistemes, not only by displacing European narratives of modernity, but also by turning to genealogies of political concepts outside the West as generative of theory. Sudipta Kaviraj's (2005) work on the shifting conceptions of the state under Indian modernity is emblematic of such approaches. Tracing the forms of political thought that occupy voters, bureaucrats, activists, and other actors, from 'pre-modern' states of Hindu antiquity (in the guise of the Manusmriti) and Islamic-Aristotelianism through the British Raj as well as after independence in 1947, he has argued that one can discern two tendencies in Indian thought on the state: one essentially critical of European modernity, and one supportive (the former based on the subsidiary principle, the other on sovereignty). Such a story allows him to

[bend] middle-level principles of social/political theory away from their familiar architecture historically centred on Western history; bending the whole enterprise of theory with its major methodological principles, theoretical hypotheses, large taxonomies, central concepts and minute patterns of detailed analytical inquiry away towards other historical formations (not cultures) in a fundamental divarication of political theory. (Kaviraj 2005: 265)

Alongside efforts to overcome the allocation of geographic spaces to different disciplines, anthropologists and political scientists have also troubled methodological asymmetries that left quantitative approaches to political and sociological research, and made ethnography into the special domain of anthropological practice. In political science, a generation of scholars with ethnographic sensibilities has emerged,

who have challenged abiding notions of the universality of European modernity, often through an explicit return to anthropological critiques of empire and its modes of production. Some, inspired by post-structural theorists, especially Foucault (1975) and Said (1978), as well as by ethnographic and historical work on colonial administration, have argued that the genealogy of modernity and the state must exceed even models that cache its formation through the interactions of Western and non-Western societies (Mitchell 2002). Instead, it is modernity that produces such oppositions in service of the power apparatus. This perspective has been utilized to dislodge what political scientists call the 'boundary problem', by suggesting that the 'limit' of the state is in effect a strategy of state discourse, a technical innovation of liberal order itself (Mitchell 1991). In other cases, these repertoires draw upon a powerful critique of 'high-modernist' utopianism in authoritarian state planning projects (Scott 1999). James Scott (2009) has challenged conventional teleological accounts of the formation of nation-states through attention to their slow incorporation of populations on their periphery. In so doing, he inverts the optic on the limits of the state's capacity for governance by focusing on the making of statelessness through the intentional agency of those communities seeking to opt out of life under state control. Drawing on the case of marginal groups in the Southeast Asian highlands, who have developed ingenious, semi-autonomous alternatives to the state, Scott reveals an alternative to the hegemonic development narrative of civilizational progress. Despite what he terms the 'absence' of the state, he identifies several 'state effects' characteristic of stateless hill societies, and which might be read as part and parcel of a broader and commonplace strategy for avoiding centralized governance. Geographic dispersion, political decentralization, shifting cultivation, economic self-sufficiency, segmentary kinship organization, and the blurring of ethnic boundaries can be understood as deliberate, defensive responses to evade extraction and avoid oppression by the state. In her critique of the story that casts sovereignty as a 'spectral relic of a past political theology', Veena Das (2007: 163) makes a related shift, by showing how the state's institution of 'forms of governance through technologies of writing' simultaneously produces the possibility of mimetic performance and forgery.

Political science notions of statehood and governance, often based on Weberian ideal types, proceed then to their 'impurities in reality'—towards essential characteristics, and 'working from general principles which are not at all present in the thought of the individuals whose concrete behaviour is nevertheless to be understood on their basis' (Foucault 1991a: 80).⁶ These principles, within political theory, are often defined through the language of state functions (or in Althusser's sense, the state apparatus) within particular domains (over a population, a territory, or policy), which the state may either have the sovereign agency to undertake, or else it might partially withdraw, or it could fail. Recent anthropological scholarship suggests to us that the state (and not just some states) appears and recedes in different ways across different registers, from different positionalities, and with different force, some of which we might not reasonably anticipate from the position of a theoretical observer, who imagines herself at a distance from the world. It begins from the concrete workings of institutions, the relationships

between members of a society, and their expressions of power, which we can then see as simultaneously interconnected in numerous ways.

What often appears as a limitation to the state's institutional capacity or ability to govern, might be seen from another angle as a stratagem of control, one of the myriad ways in which power is enacted without having to be performed by the bureaucratic administration, but which remains subservient to the order that likewise upholds the state. This 'scattering' of sovereignty (Randeria 2001) certainly re-configures the state, decentralizing it, or handing over its administrative labour, and in so doing, effacing, on the one hand, 'the boundary between the national and the supranational, and on the other hand, that between state and civil society' that its own discourses had erected (Randeria 2003: 306). But if its tactics have shifted, we need not assume this is because the state's power has receded or been curtailed by other actors, infrastate or suprastate, private or international. This cunning of the state in late capitalist globalization is not, as we once thought, a tactic primarily of those semi-peripheral states with scarce resources, whose control over their own territories, populations, or policy areas was limited (Randeria 2007). As many of the cases listed next suggest, these processes are also evident in the working of neoliberal states, even though many scholars imbue them with an imagined quality of maintaining a strong monopoly over violence, physical, symbolic or otherwise. We argue that methodologically, it is neither always clear who is an agent of the state, considering the increasing role of private corporations in managing facilities such as prisons or of paramilitary in managing dissent, nor can demarcations be made easily between those who wield power and those who are subject to it. Anthropology offers us a way of being attentive to the fact that power is not only wielded in the episodic exercise of sovereignty over coercive violence, but also through normalization, constitutive power, or modes of subjectification, including the biopolitical (see Das 2011, 2015; Foucault 1991b; Rabinow and Rose 2006). We would thus like to respond to the question of *limited statehood* in light of efforts to unsettle the category of the state itself. What we hope to offer is another *optic* on the kinds of problematics to which the limited statehood concept draws our attention.

Conceptions of limited statehood have instructively shown how the 'limit' marks an empirical check on the 'ideal type' of the state, which is seen to be primarily a feature of the Western 'developed world'. It is understood in terms of inability of the state viewed as a bounded actor, or set of institutions with a unidirectional agency, to perform certain functions; that is, '(in)capacity to act', 'implement', or 'enforce' its will in set domains of action (see Risse 2011; Risse and Lehmkuhl 2007). The arguments for limited statehood draw on institutionalist definitions of state power, based on a Weberian notion of 'institutionalized rule structure with the ability to rule authoritatively and to legitimately control the means of violence' (Risse 2011: 4, c.f. Weber 1922). The concept is thus deployed as a 'corrective' to normative analyses about 'failed' states or 'weak' states in the Global South in particular. In contrast to pooled sovereignty, as in the case of the European Union where there is a voluntary delegation of some areas of policymaking to supranational institutions, fractured sovereignty is increasingly relevant to contemporary understanding of monetary and fiscal policy (but also in social policies), through the

interventions of institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and thereby affected states in the Global South (Randeria 2001, 2003), though more recently also European states like Greece.

Limited statehood, though conceptualized as a universally applicable analytical framework, seems to postulate state incapacities and limitations of sovereignty as a marker of post-colonial or post-socialist states rather than of advanced capitalist ones, if one goes by the empirical case studies used to deploy and argue for it in this volume (see Chapter 3 Schlichte, this volume). By pointing to possible avenues of the extension of the idea of limited statehood to Euro-America, anthropological scholarship could be seen to ironically provide a useful complement. Might we push this concept even further, however, by thinking of these limits then not as points at which the agency of the state ends, but as marking relational experiences that conjure the state (and not just its image)? Seen from this angle, the state is *constituted* by its limits, neither prior to nor independent of them (see Chapter 9 Korf et al., this volume). Nor can it be thought through spatial metaphors since the state does not fall on one side of a state/non-state boundary. A dialogue between disciplines might begin then by exorcizing the ghost of Weber, including on what constitutes the ‘violence’ of the state, and its associated conception of ‘sovereignty’. Rather than dwell on whether governance occurs ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the state, thought of as a neatly contained entity, we advocate problematizing those discourses and practices that construct these points *as* limits.

SOME TOPOI OF LIMIT

How would we understand the state and its limitations if we were to ask, instead, how limitations emerge and become a force in the lives of people, which are produced by those practices as situated on one side or the other of the line between state and society? What kinds of relations call the state into being, and how might these shift political ideas about the power of the state and its nature? Can we think of governance not in terms of unidirectionally and intentionally enacted control wielded by spatially bounded entities, whether state or non-state, or their bureaucratic avatars, but instead, as suffused in different intensities across social worlds? This is not to deny the fact of the state’s power wielded against those who live within its purview, but to ask for attentiveness to the ways power flows into institutions and relations that appear outside the direct conscious control of its wielders. This is evidenced, for instance, in the various hinges and junctions between sovereign power and disciplinary power or in the way state projects become incorporated into the lives through hegemony rather than dominance. From this perspective, assigning practices of governance unambiguously to state or non-state control becomes much more complicated than it appears at first sight.

Anthropological research has delineated several terms within the semantic domain of limit that seem especially well suited to this theoretical formulation. Examples of this emerging vocabulary are: first, the language of horizons of affect that trace the boundary

of belonging to national, cultural, or political imaginaries and muddle our sense of clear demarcations between state and society (and thus state and its beyond); second, through descriptions of the enmeshment of the administrative apparatus of the state within everyday life, and; third, the conception of margin as constitutive of the state, rather than as sites of passive exclusion from state power.

The Magic of the State

One topos of limit that has been central to contemporary anthropological theory of the state has centred on the modulation of horizons of affect and enchantment. By focusing on negotiations of our desires, fears, anticipations, and identifications through new kinds of disciplinary apparatuses in society, anthropologists have explored how the boundaries of belonging, recognition, and legibility are transformed. Despite the discourse of globalization and the rise of non-state and state-like actors and private authority, this work has shown how the state remains an anchoring subject in everyday life through forms of ‘meta-capital’—a term Begoña Aretxaga (2003) borrowed from Bourdieu to describe the ‘commanding imagery of power’ involved in the production of the state, which circulates alongside global flows of ‘real’ capital.⁷ Such performative power involves a ‘subjective’ component, she argued, ‘bodily excitations and sensualities, powerful identifications, and unconscious desires’ (Aretxaga 2003: 395). This affective formation of the state also takes familiar, large-scale, and public forms. Ethnographic work, for example, on reunification in Germany during the 1990s, has described how public spaces like Alexanderplatz have served as a screen through which the state directs the symbolic work of conjuring a unified ‘people’ (Weszkalnys 2010). Moreover, these registers are often imbricated within one another, as in the case of religious striving and notions of national ‘progress’, as is the case in Pakistan, in which the state lurks in the interstices of these aspirations (Khan 2012).

The paradigmatic examples of this line of thinking emerged predominantly from fieldwork in Latin America, where the *magic* of the state and the power of enchantment were central to the coalescence of development discourse and the revolutionary politics of the mid-twentieth century. Departing from Geertz’s earlier emphasis on the theatricality of power with its implications of power being hollow, the state appears in service of efforts to unify the nation through monumental ‘illusions’ (Sanchez 2016). Fernando Coronil (1997) popularized this view by tracing the ways transcendent figureheads ‘magically’ transformed former colonies into modern states through spectacles aimed at foreign creditors and an unsettled civilian population. Venezuela had been imagined as having two bodies; a political one, comprised of its citizens, and a natural one, circumscribed by its territory and environmental resources, as an oil nation. When the state emerged in the nineteenth century, its power was fragmented by local political and military leaders; its independent agency would not be asserted until it had moulded itself as a mediator between foreign fiscal interests in the oil fields and the political nation. Into this position at the seams of two national existences, the state would *appear* as the singular

agent of magical transformation. ‘Thus,’ he writes, ‘the state itself was *produced* as an ensemble of practices, institutions, and ideologies of rule in the course of contests over its regulation of oil production and its control over oil-derived money’ (Ibid.: 4, our emphasis). This aspiration to monopoly over not only the sovereign use of physical force but control over natural national wealth, was achieved through dramas of conquest. An inheritor of the baroque aesthetics of the previous century, the state sought to leave those under its dominion *boquiabierto*, dumbfounded. Whereas it has been assumed that the modern state was contingent on rational discourse in the public sphere, the Venezuelan case reveals: (i) how states might assert control through dazzling stories about a shared future and in opposition to a barbaric past, but which fuse authoritarian rule with democracy, and (ii) that old dialectics of capital and labour must incorporate a third term to be negated and which had been erased by Eurocentric theory, namely *land* or nature.⁸

Michael Taussig (1997) famously traced the work of this magic in the mountains of Venezuela through a literary-ethnographic account of the theatre of spirit possession in the domain of the Spirit Queen, and in which cults of the dead, fetishized ‘other’ have been used to generate the ‘magical’ performance of authority. Through the dead’s possession of pilgrims, particularly those of soldiers who fought during the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries during colonization and the war of independence, a power is accrued to the state and acquired by people through embellishment. For Taussig, spirit possession was not simply a dramatic re-enactment of large historical events in service of a narrative of a founding myth, for example, but also attuned to the subtler affective and imagistic qualities of the state, in the aesthetics of ordinary figures like local officials, roadway systems, money, and so on, as much as in grand nationalist spectacles. Following Bataille, Taussig argued that through the circulation between the mythical and the real, matter, and spirit, the state is reified as a looming and ecstatic figure, and which he seems to propose, can only be defaced through its own play with ‘reality’ and imagination.

In other contexts, affect has been used as a tool of both state and non-state actors as a response to sharp economic recession (e.g. in Zambia), revealing how the state’s control over expectations and aspirations are contentious zones of power in the context of decline (Ferguson 1999). If we think of the legacy of transformational politics of the 1960s, in which the Zambian Copperbelt was held up as a symbol of African development on its way towards an industrial modernity, the rapid decline of 1970s–1990s was in part driven by a controlled state economic withdrawal (including devaluation and deregulation) in order to produce ‘free markets’ and to reduce and reverse urbanization by diminishing standards of living. Where earlier the state had offered an imagery of growth and expectation for the copperfield workers, the state now had created a pervasive sense of loss of standing, the narrative mythology of modernity relegating African subjects to ‘second class’ individuals who had slid backwards from the precipice of modernity. What anthropological work among this de-urbanized labour showed was that these myths propagated by the state served as ‘cosmological blueprints that [laid] down fundamental categories and meanings for the organization and interpretation of experience’ (Ferguson 1999: 15).

Post-Colonial Bureaucracies and Administrative Relations

As Bourdieu (1999) warned, any analysis of the state was in danger of being taken over by those forms of thought sanctioned and produced by the state (whose power he believed was contingent on the imposition of its own categories); bureaucracies were equipped producers of ‘social problems’ which were taken up (and thus affirmed) by sociology. Where Bourdieu had proposed that we understand the state through the concentrations of various forms of capital within a field of power, and thereby to problematize those terms which the state would have us take for granted, anthropology has demanded attention to the kinds of work required to effect those movements of capital, symbolic or otherwise, which tend to evade the simplifying gesture of locating positions on geometrical planes. In post-colonial states, particularly in South Asia, recent work has focused especially on how state bureaucracy does not clearly demarcate actors on behalf of the state from those it administers (i.e. how paper mediates shifting relations), and serves to inscribe a permanent state of structural violence through the arbitrariness of care (Gupta 2012). Such effects, moreover, are simply produced by the labour of those employed by the state bureaucracy or by development offices, but also by the subjects of those programmes themselves—more often than not, the poor. A view from the daily functioning of bureaucratic administrations then highlights the inadequacy of spatial metaphors of the state particularly well.

The state in Pakistan, for example, appears frequently as central to the lives of ordinary citizens and as a coherent administering force. Its existence is given expression in the materiality of its mass of circulating documents and encounters with them, close inspection of which reveals that the state is not, in fact, capable of simply inscribing itself onto society (Hull 2012). One might consider the use of *parchis*, scraps of paper testifying to requests for favours, and which move through networks of bureaucrats, kin and friendship, crossing paths in administrative offices with formal petitions addressed by a complainant directly to the state. While it might be tempting to render such practices as limitations of the state’s capacity to govern qua corruption, in effect the *parchis* ground bureaucratic operations in the circuits of everyday life. Rather than think of the lives of those networks as standing clearly outside of the state, actual practices of bureaucracy reveal a picture of state power that does not simply intervene upon the everyday, but also vice versa.

These paper-mediated relations also fail regularly, paradoxically presenting a state but one unable to enact policy through the law—this failure, however, is not a failure of state power, but rather inherent in the nature of such relations. In her recent ethnography of the implementation of India’s National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Nayanika Mathur (2015) traces how the making of bureaucracy requires a performance across different registers. Indeed, those who wield legal authority over the region of Uttarakhand in north India might speak of two lives of the law—its state (*sarkari*) life and real (*asli*) life, which indexes the state’s need to reproduce itself as state at some distance from the fact of the enactment of the law. Its life on the ground is another

matter. When a man-eating tiger comes to the small Himalayan town of Gopeshwar, for example, the state (itself a metaphorical tiger in the register of Indian folklore) responds through a frenetic production of paper bureaucracy, the inaction of which leads the poor citizenry to contest the state's power. In response, small-time bureaucrats exploit the law itself, which is written in the context of development projects to be always potentially unimplementable. Despite itself and its imagination of its own separate sphere, the state is then unable to escape the social worlds with which it is co-constitutive, and thus repeatedly fails.

In African post-colonial contexts, on the other hand, anthropological attention has revealed how, contrary to notions of 'weak' state power, resistance reshapes state authority through the interstices of its networks and powers (Roitman 2004). Others have argued that the condition of post-coloniality, rather than simply birthing weak states with rampant poverty and crime because of their incapacities, reflects colonial legacies of criminalizing race and class—producing a disorder which in turn fetishes the law (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006). This is particularly evident in what Achille Mbembe (2001: 102) calls the bureaucratic 'banality of power'—that is, not simply the mounting routinization and rule-order that accompanies state formation, but also the 'non-official' cultures that are 'intrinsic to systems of domination'. In post-colonial contexts, for example in Cameroon, the state tends towards an accumulation of excess, particularly of identities. State power, he writes, both

... creates, through its administrative and bureaucratic practices, a world of meanings all its own, a master code which, in the process of becoming the society's primary central code, ends by governing—perhaps paradoxically—the various logics that underlie all other meanings within that society; [and] (2) attempts to institutionalise its world of meanings as a 'socio-historical world' and to make that world fully real, turning it into a part of people's common sense not only by instilling it in the minds of the cibles, or 'target population', but also by integrating it into the consciousness of the period. (Mbembe 1992: 4)

If we want to draw out the manner in which power 'seeks to institutionalize itself', and thereby construct for itself a legitimation of the use of violence through hegemony (through the fetish), we must abandon binaries that conceive of power relations in terms of oppositions between state and civil society, but also autonomy and subjection, resistance and passivity, and so on. The multiplicity of meanings inscribed by state power, and which threatens its subjects, for Mbembe belongs neither to a relationship of assent to domination nor resistance, but to a fraught co-habitation of the two.

Margins and Alterity: State as a Site of Struggle

In their landmark volume *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004) challenged ethnographers to reflect on the kinds of 'practices, places and languages considered to be at the *margins* of the state' (Das and Poole

2004: 1, our emphasis). Their effort was to resist the notion then prevalent within political and anthropological reason, that a recent surge in political and economic reforms had somehow produced a weakened or more restricted state form, and particularly to trouble the idea that such weakening happened at the margin of the state's power. Rooted both in a disciplinary concern with the lived experiences of people, and in the possibility of giving voice to the margins within Western political theory, Das and Poole suggested that, rather than ascribe a partiality to the margins, it might be possible to shift the question to how, 'the forms of intelligibility, partial belonging, and disorder that seem to inhabit the margins of the state constitute its necessary condition as a theoretical and political object?' (Das and Poole 2004: 5). Within an Enlightenment picture of political life, the state and its monopoly over the legitimate use of violent force, was an inherent picture of boundary between the rule of law and those outside of it.

Where Giorgio Agamben had proposed a metaphysical language of state of exception, Das and Poole, by analogy to the inclusion of the exception within the rule, argued that the margin was in fact entailed within the state itself. The contributors to the volume conceptualized the margins along three lines: first, as pertaining to those peripheral peoples, who had been understood to occupy a place of insufficient 'socialization' under the law; second, by appeal to the documentary practices of states that sought to produce its power by means of policing legibility, but through practices which, the ethnography showed, were in fact themselves illegible; and finally, through exercises in sovereignty not just over territory, but also over the bodies of its subjects, through control over the status of life itself.⁹ Rather than pose these modes of inhabiting the margin as exceptions, outside the state, or simultaneously within and without it, as a spectral presence, anthropology allows us to trace their embeddedness within everyday practices, and which, moreover, often constitute a refounding of the originary violence of the state and authorial governance that is nevertheless prior to or beyond it. Thus, while it is often assumed that the state works to secure the identities of its population, in reality its practices often also undo their stability. The state appears not only a site of struggle, but one of certain paradoxes of power. For example, the illicit activity of those at the margins of African states has been shown not to reside beyond the state merely because it escapes the explicit regulatory regime; but rather the rising intensity of unregulated trade parallels an increase in the affective power of the state which still is able to collect tariffs on such exchanges and makes its presence felt in their daily lives (Roitman 2004). Or in the case of India, the aura of legal authority that surrounds the signature of the state on official documents like death certificates is predicated on its unreadability.

A related set of concerns might be raised if we were to examine how the liberal state has inherited colonial imbalances of power that define membership in populations under their purview by demanding they perform their authentic belonging. But this research has also revealed how such performances have emerged as sites of subtle resistance among indigenous communities. In the case of the Belyuen in northern

Australia, we see how the politics of multiculturalism as authorized by liberal states on the model of Western Europe requires the embodiment of certain anticipated kinds of difference. This takes the form of an imagination of pre-colonial sexual and bodily practices, which the state deemed repugnant, and which become subject to a heterosexual hegemony through the instrument of the law. When the state institutes the National Title Act in 1993 claims about land rights are mediated both by liberal ideas about relation to the land and of kinship/descent (c.f. Chapter 12 Förster and Koechlin in this volume)—while the law was initially presented as a break with prevailing historical notion of the homogeneity of the nation and political recognition (Povinelli 2002: 231). Australian citizens, who work on behalf of the state or beyond it, who are members of this or that community, each rely and make claims on shared grounds of meaning, from which differences might emerge even as structured by these assumptions—under late liberalism, the state no longer works only through enforcing a subjectivity in which the colonized identifies with the colonizer, but by imposing an imaginary standard of self-authenticity through the language of multiculturalism, and yet which must simultaneously meet the demands of contemporary colonial ethics. For Povinelli (1998), the limit is one of liberal recognition and which is able for a time to cohere a ‘national collective will’ from otherwise fragmented discourses emerging from disparate incarnations of state power (within juridical, economic, political domains, and so on).

AT THE LIMITS OF WESTERN STATE POWER

What each of these critical languages seems to highlight is that the porosity of the state, and the complexity of its power, are neither incidental to its formation or its function, nor to the ways in which it is experienced. While there are, we would certainly agree, a manifest variety of forms the state might take—and indeed, this is part of the challenge inherent in theorizing the state or governance as such, but this might be said of any social phenomena—these differences should be conceived of as particular configurations of power, rather than stronger or weaker expressions of an ideal type of statehood. As the limited statehood concept makes clear, analytical tools like the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) reproduce the fiction of well-consolidated states in the West and North, and weak or failed states in the South (Risse 2011). We have tried to show that, from an anthropological perspective, we might take this concept even further, since governance is not so easily ascribed to an inside or outside of the state, or to actors, who can be considered to belong to it, or not. These are ‘limits’ of a very different kind, and ones that tell us something about the nature of state (trans)formation and power. Thus, if the limited statehood concept is to fulfil its promise as an analytical framework, it must find ways of incorporating Euro-American states into its ambit—a task which anthropologists have theorized *avant la lettre*.

How then has anthropology challenged our assumptions about the solidity of spatial metaphors of state power in what political science has often considered the most secure monopolies over violence in northern/western Europe and the United States (Gupta and Ferguson 2002)? The 'Western' state does not represent, in our view, another point in a continuum in which sovereign governance is less susceptible in shifting to non-state actors, or in which, in virtue of economic or 'cultural' condition, the state is more likely or willing to 'limit' its statehood by handing over domains of governance to private markets or extranational organizations. If we take seriously the issue that state power is constituted in particular responses to material and social conditions, and that it is not located only on one side of such 'limits', we can begin the work of provincializing Europe more rigorously, and not only 'in theory'. As Partha Chatterjee (2004) has powerfully articulated, the security apparatus and welfare state may appear as the clearest structures of administration, but in restricting the space of democratic debate, they have also led to the rise of identity politics in the streets, thus challenging the ways we understand the role of the governed in governance.

If the theories of globalization that arose at the end of the twentieth century reflected a broad sense that the liberal state, territorial borders, and national forms of control were undermined by global flows of goods and concepts and by supranational regime, or to non-governmental agencies (NGOs) (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996), the nation and its state remained at the centre of political discourse even among the defeated powers of post-War Japan and Germany (Conrad 1999). Phenomena as pervasive as the global outsourcing of labour from northern states to southern have indeed had material consequences for the nature of state power on both sides of the equation, leading some theorists to argue that we must shift our view from the territorial national state to the translocal (see Gupta and Sharma 2006). Rather than imagine processes of globalized exchange as producing weakened or even limited forms of state sovereignty, such a frame allows analytical work to cope with the seemingly diminished nation-state in post-Fordist markets without dismantling the nature of state power. Gupta and Sharma thus take their lead from sociologists like Saskia Sassen (1996) who have pointed to the 'unbundling' of forms of sovereignty as indicative of the kinds of limits of statehood to which the entries in this volume are addressed. Anthropologists working within this paradigm have taken up Foucault's language in search of forms of governance without/beyond the state (Rose 1996), while many have argued that anthropology must defend the cultural particularity of state forms against any effort to essentialize the state as a concept. Nevertheless, if anything, anthropology seems to show that the history of the 'bounded' sovereignty of 'pre-globalized' nation-states is a European (and American) political fantasy, just as the nation has always been a contested and heterogeneous zone of imagination (see also Herzfeld 2014).

These debates have taken on increased salience as issues of both territorial and economic sovereignty are being cast with urgency in contemporary discourse.

Ethnographic work on Iroquois Confederacy lands between the United States and Canada has shown how in practice a ‘materially dominant’ state still competes with legal sovereignty over the administration of the land and population, while independent sovereignty exists in the imagination of those who resist colonial politics of recognition (Simpson 2014). Others have examined how the spectre of deportation and the intermittent exercise of coercive power produce a racialized figure of illegality, for example, of Mexican-American labour in the United States (de Genova 2002). The policing of porous territorial limits serves to enact governance through normalization of racial profiles rather than the administration of spatial control. At times, these tensions have exploded into disputes over land rights and labour, not mediated by legal language of citizenship but through local forms of belonging; for example, in the dispossession of Hispano residents of the New Mexican forests, where the metaphorical language of ‘roots’ is used to contest claims of expertise and legitimacy relevant to the care of the land (Kosek 2006).

Tensions over belonging to land and state in the ‘dark’ times of mass mobility have seemingly drawn the nation back into the imaginary of the state, though transformed by the experience of globalization. Logics of exception, racial boundaries, and surveillance, long central to both coercive and normative power of the state, are being re-affirmed in new ways in the daily lives of Western bureaucracies (and not just among those who are subject to their violence; see Fassin 2011). At the same time, Western states mobilize the exceptional category of the ‘refugee’ to push humanitarian reason into a new era of biopolitics (Karagiannis and Randeria 2018). The language of economic violability that once dictated migration policy has been replaced by a politics of ‘obligatory compassion’ premised on health claims, and thus the task of policing entry falls to ‘non-state’ actors like doctors, nurses, and social workers (Fassin 2005). The reaction of states in Europe to the migrant ‘crisis’ is emblematic in this regard (Hansen and Randeria 2016). The language of states limited by supranational politics, unable to police their own borders or secure its citizenry, suddenly vulnerable, has, in practical terms, also enabled the return of even stronger statist politics. But even where such regimes have not taken control, the shift in language from the intentional and differentially capable state to the partial or selective exercise of authority renders the cunning state unaccountable.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, rather than resort to older ideas about disciplinary proprietary then, our contention is that a broad anthropological tradition might be understood by its effort to problematize concepts and theories through a concern with the implications of power within the discipline’s own knowledge production. In our understanding, anthropological perspectives derive not from expertise in ‘foreign cultures’, but on a certain

view of social phenomena, be it in Euro-America or in the Global South, one that is characterized by context sensitivity, perspectivity, and reflexivity—that is, without an Archimedean point from which to think, among other phenomena, the state (Karagiannis and Randeria 2018). Instead, anthropological scholarship seeks to account for the multiplicity of perspectives involved in the experience of the state and its acquisition of force in everyday life, within different contexts, and with variable inflections of power, and by offering resistance to the tendency to naturalize conceptions thereof. The perspective we advocate, following more recent trends in anthropological writing, often from post-colonial contexts but also increasingly in the West, is one that examines how the state is conjured in the everyday lives of people (whether actors working in the name of the state or those who are subject *to* it, or excluded from it); that is to say, in its complexity and without the need of encompassing and ultimately reductive typologies and binaries.

NOTES

1. See Brandel (2016) for one picture of anthropological thought in this vein.
2. It is worth recalling that the publication of Geertz's (2003) Mintz Lecture on the differences between these states (some which he had earlier called theatrical) coincides ironically with President George W. Bush landing on a naval carrier in front of a large banner that reads 'mission accomplished'.
3. The legacy of Clastres' critique of the state has been recuperated contemporarily by a strain of anarchist anthropology advocated by David Graeber (2004), who has articulated a picture of anarchist politics as a withdrawal from the state, or vice versa, in which the Tsimihety have been able to evade the state's gaze and organize themselves spontaneously and in egalitarian fashion.
4. However, more work remains to be done to trouble assumptions about what constitutes proper subjects of ethnographic attention in such societies. It is worth noting the seemingly paradoxical marginality of some regions in Europe, as Michael Herzfeld (1989) famously argues for Greece, given their import to 'theory'—that is, how anthropology has tended to avoid directly gazing into the centre of life in those places that have been productive of its hegemonic concepts. This marks the mirror of the anthropological attention to the margins of the state outside of Europe and the United States, and which remains a major front in the battle to overcome structural Eurocentricisms. The tendency to render work only in the margins of such societies as of anthropological interest continues to be deeply ingrained.
5. Earlier anthropologists in Europe continued the highly functionalist attitude, though by the 1970s it had been replaced by structuralist and 'interactionalist' modes of analysis.
6. This language is borrowed from Foucault's interview on method, but a rather similar argument, as already discussed, might be gleaned just as easily from Marxist anthropology.
7. See also the scholarship on corruption and capital (i.e. Gupta 2012; Navaro-Yashin 2006).
8. For a comparative perspective, see Borneman (1998) on the state's role in the production of national narratives.
9. That is, insofar as politics might be conceived of as articulated through the management of what does and does not count as human life.

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