SPACES OF GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT

Deconstructing Human Geography's Binaries

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3 State : Society

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In this chapter I focus on the state/society pairing, which has been an important one in the development of geographical thought, dating back at least to the work of the nineteenth-century German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904). Moreover, state/society relations have a profound influence on the human geography of the world, shaping spatial patterns, changing places and animating landscapes. And yet to use the phrase 'state/society relations' at all, is to accept implicitly that 'state' and 'society' are separate, distinct phenomena between which there can be defined 'relations'. In other words, by thinking of 'the state' as something that influences 'society' (or vice versa) as if the state were something outside of society, we are already in danger of accepting at face value the very idea that this chapter sets out to question. Before that questioning starts in earnest, though, it will be useful to consider whether the state/society pairing should be thought of as a binary relationship in the same sense as some of the pairings examined in other chapters.

The idea of a binary relationship implies a categorical distinction of the form either/or that divides all cases into two groups (men/women; white/black; young/old etc). Binary relationships can also be expressed in the form 'A or not-A'. This version entails a strong power relationship between the two categories. Whereas either/or might be seen as expressing difference with equality, in 'A or not-A', the second category is defined both entirely by reference to the first, and in terms of a lack of the qualities of the first (rather than in terms of its own positive features). When binary relationships are understood as 'A/not-A', women are defined as 'not men', black is defined as 'not white' and old is defined as 'not young'. These kinds of pairings tend to imply that the second category ('not-A') is inferior and subordinate to the first, and distinguished not by its own substantive content and value, but only by its difference from the first category and the absence of those qualities that define 'A'.

Recent critiques of binary thinking in the humanities and social sciences emphasize this power relation and the implied subordination it involves. Some feminist writers, for example, have argued against the use of binary categories such as men/women and masculine/feminine on the grounds that they define women/feminine exclusively in relation to men/masculine and also as inferior.

The use of these categories disguises the differences that exist between women (and men) and underwrite essentialist definitions of masculinity and femininity. They deny the possibility of gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine and are unable to accommodate the existence of human physiologies that are neither entirely male nor entirely female.

Binary thinking has undoubtedly been influential in the development of geographic thought, and the critiques of it are as important to geography as they are to the rest of the humanities and social sciences. Many of the chapters of this book are devoted to assessing the influence of binary thinking in geography and elaborating those critiques. Such an approach, however, cannot be applied straightforwardly to the subject of this chapter: the pairing of state/society. This is because the state/society pairing cannot really be presented as a binary relation of the form 'A/not-A' in the way that male/female and white/black can. Western social thought has had an unfortunate tendency to equate 'female' with 'not male'; but it has rarely defined 'state' as 'not society'. The definition of 'society' as 'not state' is perhaps slightly more common, but overall the categories of 'state' and 'society' have not typically been treated as a binary pair of the form 'A/not-A'. Moreover, in geographic thought 'state' and 'society' have often been the focus of attention of different sub-disciplines. The state has been the concern above all of political geography, whereas the concept of society has been particularly important in social geography and development geography. This means that the geographic literatures on state and society have often spoken past each other and thus in geography the concepts of state and society have not been 'co-constitutive'; that is, they have not always been defined in relation to each other, but often as separate objects of study, each in its own right.

Feminist geographers have been able to use the analysis of binary thinking (among other things) to develop a thoroughgoing critique of the masculinism of geographic thought in general. Similarly post-colonial geographers have been able to launch an assault on geography's Eurocentrism by deconstructing binary pairings such 'the West and the rest' or 'Europe and its Other(s)'. By contrast, ideas about the 'state/society' pairing have not shaped geographic thought in general to quite the same (pernicious) extent as has binary thinking about gender and 'race'. In other words, a critical re-appraisal of geographical thinking about the state/society pairing may not have the same far-reaching consequences for geography in general as the critical re-appraisals developed by feminist and post-colonial writers.

If 'state/society' is not a binary in quite the same sense as some of the other pairings, then our critique of it is also likely to involve a different approach. In what follows, therefore, I will consider some of the ways in which the relationship between state and society has been understood in geography, focusing among other things on the question of *separation* (the assumption that state and society are separate entities that interact). The chapter will also examine recent geographical ideas – and draw on debates in

the wider social sciences – that call that separateness into question and seek to re-theorize the 'state/society' pairing and its geographies.

Geographical approaches to the state

In some respects the history of geography's engagement with the state is a strange one. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century the state was at the core of geographers' concerns. Throughout the middle years of the twentieth century, up to and including the period of the so-called quantitative revolution in Anglo-American geography in the 1960s and 1970s, the state was largely neglected as an object of geographical enquiry, or treated in a rather limited or simplistic fashion. Then, at the very end of the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s the state was rediscovered as part of a major renewal of anglophone political geography. Today, geographers studying all kinds of things from social exclusion to economic restructuring and from the historical geographies of madness to post-coloniality are interested in the state, and their insights have contributed to many new ways of understanding the formation, functions and spatialities of states. In what follows I shall limit the discussion to the modern academic discipline of geography, originating in the middle years of the nineteenth century, and primarily, though not exclusively, to the anglophone literature. (For a more detailed discussion of the history of political geography see Agnew 2002).

The state as organism

The work of the Friedrich Ratzel was enormously influential in the development of modern geography as a whole, but it also provides one of the earliest geographical discussions of the state. Indeed, the concept of the state was central to much of Ratzel's work. For Ratzel the state was a living organic entity that expressed the unity of land and people. Thus, in 'The laws of the spatial growth of states', first published in 1896, he wrote:

> States are dependent both in their size and their form upon their inhabitants, i.e. they take on the mobility of their populations, as it is particularly expressed in the phenomena of their growth and decline. Some number of people are joined to the area of the state. These live on its soil, draw their sustenance from it, and are otherwise attached to it by spiritual relationships. *Together with this piece of earth they form the state.* For political geography each people, located on its essentially fixed area, represents a living body which has extended itself over a part of the earth and has differentiated itself either from other bodies which have similarly expanded by boundaries or by [*sic*] empty space. (Ratzel 1969: 18; emphasis added)

The phrase 'together with this piece of earth they [i.e. the people] form the state' strongly suggests that for Ratzel the relationship between state and people (it is notable that he does not use the word 'society' here) was a unity, rather than a binary. In other words 'the people' were integral to the state, not separate from it. In contrast to more recent definitions of the state as a set of differentiated institutions (see below), Ratzel's sees the state as made up of the population. This way of conceiving the state owes much to Hegel:

> For Hegel, the State is a realization of the Spirit. Thus, the latter does not reveal itself to the peoples, but it is realized in them – for them, when they become conscious of it – by their own labour, by their conscious and reasoned action. (Raffestin et al. 1995: 85; my translation)

Although Hegel saw the state in organic terms, he also broke with early contract theory, which understood the state and civilized society to be the same thing, in contrast to the *un*civilized state of nature. In *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel distinguished conceptually between The Family, The State, and Civil Society, though he includes in 'Civil Society' the police and the administration of justice which are more usually thought of today as part of the state.

It is easy to see how arguments about the essential oneness of the state, the national territory, and a culturally distinct people might be used to underpin exclusionary forms of nationalism and even fascism. In addition, Ratzel argued that as organic entities, states have an inevitable tendency to grow geographically. Such a view was all too easily used to provide supposedly 'scientific' justifications for territorial ambitions and expansionist policies of the German state. Ratzel died some 30 years before the rise of Nazism in Germany, and while writers such as Raffestin counsel against drawing too direct a connection between the work of Ratzel and that of the proponents of *Geopolitik* (which informed Nazi policy), he also affirms that there is an undeniable continuity between Ratzel's ideas and those of writers such as Rudolf Kjellen and Karl Haushofer (Raffestin et al. 1995: 121).

The state and conservative political geography

It was partly because of the disreputable association of geopolitics with Nazism that political geography declined in strength and popularity after World War II (Agnew 2002: 94). For 20 or 30 years political geography was largely evacuated of any concern with politics. In the words of Ron Johnston, writing as late as 1980,

> political geography is weakly developed within the current corpus of human geographical work because its practitioners ignore the real content of politics, which is the exercise of power by and through the state. (Johnston 1980: 439)

This state-centric view of political geography has in turn itself been challenged by more recent work that stresses the ways in which 'the real content of politics' is not exhausted by the power relations of state. None the less, Johnston's wider point that politics is about social conflicts and power, and that the sub-discipline of political geography had been enfeebled by neglecting them was undoubtedly well founded.

While geographers in the 1950s and 1960s may have avoided tackling issues of power and social conflict, it is not quite true that they ignored the state. Richard Hartshorne (1899–1992), for example, the doyen of mid-century American geography, initiated his discussion of 'the functional approach in political geography' by proposing 'to consider the central problems of political geography in terms of the functions of state-areas' (Hartshorne 1950: 104). The suffix '-areas' is indicative of Hartshorne's attempt here to align political geography with his over-arching understanding of the wider discipline as the study of 'areal differentiation' (Hartshorne 1939). For Hartshorne, geography was principally about the study of the character of areas and thus the main concern of political geography was the study of political areas, foremost among which are state territories. At the core of Hartshorne's argument, therefore, was a concern with the territorial integrity of the state – with the 'centrifugal' forces tending to fragment the unity of the state and with the 'centripetal' forces tending to reinforce that unity. This focus on formal territorial unity and the spatial organization of the state takes precedence over any concern with the nature of the relationship between state and society. Although Hartshorne is careful to reject the Ratzelian argument that the state is an organism, he nevertheless uncritically cites Ratzel's definition of the state as 'a section of land and a section of humanity organized as a single unit in terms of a particular, distinctive idea' (Hartshorne 1950: 110). For Hartshorne, the nature of the relationship between 'state' and 'society' is captured mainly in his highly conservative conceptualization of the nation as the mechanism binding a people to 'their' state (Hartshorne 1950: 113–14). Thus, Hartshorne, unlike Ratzel, seems to regard 'state' and 'nation' as distinct and potentially separate phenomena – functional correspondence between state and nation might be highly desirable, but is not inevitable. This suggests that in addition to the dominant spatial or areal definition of the state Hartshorne is also working with an institutional definition. Although its nature is not discussed in any detail, there is an implication that the state must be understood at least partly as a differentiated institutional apparatus, rather than as a mystical union of people, land and spirit.

Hartshorne's static and apolitical conception of the state set the dominant tone until the early 1980s. While John Agnew sees a more dynamic theory of the state in the work of Jean Gottmann (Gottmann 1952), Peter Taylor and Colin Flint are more sceptical, arguing that Gottmann's work shares Hartshorne's conservatism (Taylor and Flint 2000). In a recent commentary, Taylor (2003) goes further still, denouncing this '"non-social" state theory' as

one of the dominant strands in the creation of 'a most unsuccessful conservative sub-discipline [of political geography]'. He continues: 'for most of the twentieth century conservative political geography was under-researched, pedagogically incoherent, perennially in crisis, and, not surprisingly, widely ignored by the rest of human geography' (Taylor 2003: 48).

The emergence of 'spatial science' in the 1960s (which was critical of the Hartshornian orthodoxy) did not significantly improve matters. While electoral geography benefited from the development of more sophisticated quantitative techniques, other aspects of political geography, including studies of the state, could not easily be assimilated to the spatial scientific project. Spatial science tended to focus on the spatial attributes of phenomena in isolation or abstraction from their social and political content. In the case of the state this approach led to a concern with the 'purely' spatial aspects of states (for example size and shape) or, at best, their territorial character. Ed Soja, for example, examined the territorial integration of the state in East Africa through a quantitative analysis of communications flows (Soja 1968). More recent social theoretic approaches also stress territoriality of course. Michael Mann famously argued that the state is defined in part by its territorially centralized character (Mann 1984). Moreover, for Mann, territoriality is a source of *autonomous* power for the state. In other words, the state is not exclusively dependent on power derived from the economy or society (as in some versions of Marxism, for example). However, that does not mean that the territoriality and spatiality of the state can be understood without reference to social and political processes in the way implied by spatial scientific approaches to the state.

As this brief survey suggests, geographers studying the state in the third quarter of the twentieth century did not theorize the state in a binary relationship to society. In general, the relationship between the state and society was either ignored entirely in favour of a focus on the narrowly spatial aspects of state form, or was taken for granted and left unexamined. Soja's bland and uncritical assertion, based on a citation of Hartshorne, that 'a primary function of any politically organized area is to integrate effectively its territorial components – to create a community of interests which accommodates innovation, sustains development, and promotes the general welfare of its adherents' (Soja 1968: 39) is typical and open to challenge on both empirical and theoretical grounds.

Geography, political economy and the state

By the 1970s, therefore, Anglo-American geography's understanding of the state was ripe for a wholesale reinvention, and that is exactly what it got. One of the earliest contributors to this re-thinking was David Harvey, who, as part of his wider engagement with Marxist political economy, published a paper

on 'The Marxian theory of the state' in *Antipode* (Harvey 1976). The paper does not discuss the *geography* of the state in so many words. As its title suggests, it is more an exegesis of (then) current Marxian state theory than a geographical re-working of it. None the less it does contain several features that are to be found in much subsequent geographical scholarship on the state.

First, the arguments of the paper both derive from, and act as a commentary on, the literature on Marxist state theory published (or translated into English) during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In particular, Harvey's paper provides one of the earliest discussions in the geographical literature of work on the state by Ralph Miliband, Antonio Gramsci, Bertell Ollman and Nicos Poulantzas as well as Marx and Engels. Secondly, Harvey draws attention to the ways in which the state sustains and guarantees many of the fundamental relationships of capitalism. These include a system of property rights, regulation of the supply of money and credit and the provision of certain public goods 'which are necessary prerequisites for capitalist production and exchange but which no individual capitalist would find it possible to provide at a profit' (Harvey 1976: 84). Furthermore, although the state represents the interests of capital, it can act as an arbiter (though not always a neutral one) between different fractions of capital. Thirdly, Harvey points out the fragmentation of the state into different institutions. This means that the state is understood as a differentiated institutional apparatus, and not a homogeneous monolith. At the same time, Harvey is insistent that the state cannot be defined as the sum of its institutions. Rather 'the state should in fact be viewed, like capital, as a *relation* or as a *process*' (1976: 87; original emphasis). Fourthly, although most of his paper is concerned with general theoretical principles, Harvey is clear that abstract concept of 'the state' should not be reified in the study of particular social contexts:

> the state is not an appropriate category for describing the actual processes whereby power is exercised. To appeal to the category 'the state' as a 'moving force' in the course of concrete historical analysis is, in short, to engage in a mystification. (1976: 87)

This insight also focuses attention on the process of state formation. Thus 'the bourgeois state did not arise as some automatic reflection of the growth of capitalist social relations. State institutions had to be painfully constructed' (Harvey 1976: 87).

What can be inferred from Harvey's paper about the nature of state/society relations? In keeping with much Marxist work on the state, Harvey understands the state as part of society, not separate from it. States are integral to the workings of capitalist societies which would be unable to function without particular functions provided by the state. Furthermore, while the institutional aspects of the state are important, the state cannot be conceived as a

set of institutions separate from society. Capitalist social relations run through the state, conditioning, though not wholly determining, its form and function. Harvey's paper thus provides a new way (for geography) of understanding the state as a differentiated aspect of society.

The paper closes with three 'unresolved questions' for future research. As these have animated much geographical study of the state in the years since Harvey's paper was written (whether directly or not), it is worth setting them out in full:

1 To what degree do the various aspects and instrumentalities of state power yield to the state a relatively autonomous function in relationship to the path of capitalist development, and to what degree can state functionaries act as purely neutral or even self-serving arbiters in class and intra-class conflict? These questions have been in the forefront of much of Poulantzas' recent work.

2 To what degree can the capitalist state vary its forms and structures to give the appearance of quite substantial differentiation amongst the capitalist nations, while fulfilling the basic function of sustaining a capitalist society and ensuring the reproduction of that society? In other words, what variety of institutions is possible given the assumption of a basic underlying purpose to state action.

3 Which structures and functions within the state are 'organic' to the capitalist mode of production and therefore basic to the survival of capitalist social formations and which are, in Gramsci's phrase, purely conjunctural? (Harvey 1976: 89)

Political economy approaches, and particularly their historical materialist variants, have dominated geographical theorizing about the state since the mid-1970s, although liberal and public choice paradigms have also been developed by some writers. Among geographers, Michael Dear, Gordon Clark and Ron Johnston all worked on the three issues raised at the end of Harvey's paper (Clark 1981; Clark and Dear 1981; Clark and Dear 1984; Dear 1981a; Dear 1981b; Dear and Clark 1978; Johnston 1980; Johnston 1982).

In their *State Apparatus* (1984), Clark and Dear, like Harvey, understand the state as intimately entwined with the social relations of capitalism. Capitalism, they write, 'is as much a political system as it is economic' and 'state intervention in sociospatial processes is a social event, embedded within society and deriving its logic from society as a whole' (1984: 2). 'In our terms' they stress 'the theory of the state and sociospatial processes cannot be divorced from some wider concept of society itself' (1984: 3). The wider concept that they adopt is historical materialism. However, in a passage that bears directly on the issue of the relationship between state and society, they differentiate their approach from some other versions of Marxism:

[O]ur theoretical stance is *state-centred*, in that we begin our analysis from the viewpoint of the state as it is embedded within the structural relations of capitalism. This mode of analysis stands in sharp contrast to the more traditional theories of the state, be they marxist or liberal, which are *society-centred*. In these theories, society is the initial and principal object of inquiry, and the state's role is derived from the ensemble of class or individual relations. (Clark and Dear 1984: 9; original emphasis)

For Clark and Dear, the state-centred approach that they favour 'focuses upon the actual behaviour of the state as an institution' (1984: 9), whereas in the society-centred approach 'the analytical method focuses upon the social obligations between society's members, and hence derives the necessity of the state, and its apparatus, from social relationships' (1984: 10). They argue that many liberal formulations are society-centred, in that they see the state as a necessary means for adjudicating between competing individual claims on resources. Marxist work on the state has also been largely society-centred, they contend. The ideas of Poulantzas (1973) and Miliband (1973) are often seen as opposed to one another, but Clark and Dear suggest that they share a common society-centred perspective in which the nature of the state is 'derived from the logic of capitalism itself' (1984: 11). Thus, according to Clark and Dear, liberal and Marxist theories 'begin with social units, individuals or classes, then build society around either shared or antagonistic preferences, and finally derive the necessary collective functions for social continuity. The state is a product of these logical derivations' (1984: 11).

Although Clark and Dear praise the work of Poulantzas and Miliband, in the end they find society-centred theories inadequate because they are not able to account for the 'non-necessary' features of the state – those functions that the state undertakes not because it logically has to for capitalism to survive, but because it has developed 'within a particular historical and geographical context' (Clark and Dear 1984: 12). Thus,

[t]he issue is then to consider the capitalist state in its entirety, not only its logical derivation from class relationships, and to consider also its particular institutional form, functions and apparatus, and not to regard it merely as a hegemonic integrated institution. [… W]e do not deny the utility of society-centered theory, but rather seek to understand the actions of the capitalist state in specific contexts, a goal which also requires a state-centered methodology. (Clark and Dear 1984: 11)

This methodology leads Clark and Dear to emphasize the *relative autonomy* of the state *vis-à-vis* society, focusing on the state as a set of institutions and practices. This analysis takes up the remainder of their book and considers issues of political language, law, local government, democracy, legitimacy and justice.

Rethinking the state/society distinction

State-centred perspectives, of which Clark and Dear's work is an example, have not been without their critics, however. Writing of developments in American political science, Timothy Mitchell (1991) notes two divergent responses to the difficulty of defining the state. The first response is to abandon the concept of the state altogether in favour of the concept of the political system. By contrast,

> [t]he second response, since the late 1970s, has been to 'bring the state back in' (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985). The new work on the state has defined the term in a variety of ways, most of which take it to be not just distinguishable from society, but partially or wholly autonomous from it. (Mitchell 1991: 77)

Mitchell suggests a third approach in which

> the elusiveness of the state–society boundary needs to be taken seriously, not as a problem of conceptual precision but as a clue to the nature of the phenomenon. Rather than searching for a definition that will fix the boundary, we need to examine the detailed political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction between state and society is produced. The distinction must be taken *not as the boundary between two discrete entities but as a line drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained*. (Mitchell 1991: 78; emphasis added)

This insight helps to explain why it is so difficult to define the state as comprising a particular group of institutions. As I have argued elsewhere (Painter 2000) it is in practice often very difficult to determine whether a particular institution is part of the state or not. The contemporary political scene abounds with institutions that are neither wholly part of the state, nor wholly outside it, such as regulated utilities, private prisons and church schools. Even non-governmental organizations, which by their very name declare their separateness from the state, are often today so intimately entwined with processes of governance as to call their 'non-governmental' status very much into question. Such difficulties vindicate Harvey's insistence that the state should be understood as a process or a relation.

Mitchell's concerns about the problematic nature of the state/society distinction have been endorsed and developed by Bob Jessop, a social and political theorist whose work has been particularly influential in human geography. According to Jessop, neo-statism (that is, state-centred theory):

> assumes there are clear and unambiguous boundaries between state apparatus and society, state managers and social forces, and state power and

societal power. It implies that the state […] and society are mutually exclusive and self-determining, each can be studied in isolation, and the resulting analyses added together to provide a complete account. This reifies and renders absolute what are really emergent, partial, unstable, and variable distinctions. It rules out hybrid logics such as corporatism or policy networks; divisions among state managers due to ties between state organs and other social spheres; and many other forms of overlap between state and society […]. If this assumption is rejected, however, the distinction between state-centred and so-called society-centred approaches dissolves. (Jessop 2001: 155)

It should be emphasized that the question of whether the state is part of society or separate from it is not merely a matter of semantics. That is, it is not just an issue of extending the scope of the *definition* of the word 'society' to include the institutions that are conventionally thought to make up the state. Rather, as writers like Mitchell and Jessop point out, what is involved is a change in the way in which the state is conceptualized, thereby challenging the reification of the state and emphasizing the relational and processual nature of state formation (Jessop 2002: 37).

Jessop himself draws on (among other things) the neo-Marxism of Antonio Gramsci and Nicos Poulantzas to develop a strategic-relational theory of the state. Starting from Poulantzas's (1978) insight that the state is a social relation, Jessop defines that state as

a relatively unified ensemble of socially embedded, socially regularized, and strategically selective institutions, organizations, social forces and activities organized around (or at least involved in) making collectively binding decisions for an imagined political community. (Jessop 2002: 40)

The state is thus understood as both the product of the interaction of social forces and competing interests and the arena within or through which those forces and interests interact. However, the state is not simply the expression of social relations constituted somewhere else; rather, its institutional form has significant effects on the nature of those relations. The strategies of social and political actors, including (but not only) state managers, are affected by the state differentially, so that the state is not only strategic, but strategically selective – put simply, some strategies do better than others. As Jessop puts it, 'state power reflects the prevailing balance of forces as this is institutionally mediated through the state apparatus with its structurally inscribed strategic selectivity' (2002: 40).

Strategic relational state theory does away with the idea of separate spheres of 'state' and 'society' that are self-contained and interact. It emphasizes that social relations cannot be straightforwardly distinguished from state institutions, rather the two are mutually constitutive, albeit in selective ways.

During the 1990s the strategic relational approach became influential within human geography, particularly in studies of neo-liberalism and the rise of the 'workfare state' and of the changing scales of governance and regulation under globalization (for example, Jones 1997; Brenner 1998; MacLeod and Goodwin 1999; Jessop 2000; Brenner 2001; Peck 2001a, 2001b; Painter 2002b; Peck 2002).

Beyond 'embedded statism'

Questions of scale have also been at the heart of debates about another kind of state-centrism, which also have a direct bearing on the issue of the state/society relationship. In this case, though, the central issue is not how to define the state, but how to define 'society'. The word 'society' is such a common term in everyday discourse that it is easy to assume that its meaning is clear and unproblematic, but it is nothing of the sort. Moreover, its problematic character is rarely examined even in academic social science. The unspoken assumption behind most uses of the term 'society' is that it shares its geographical boundaries with the state. In other words, just as the world is divided into many states ('Britain', 'France', 'China' and so on), so it is assumed that it is also divided into an equal number of national societies ('British society', 'French society', 'Chinese society' and so on) (Taylor and Flint 2000: 6). Indeed this territorial equation of 'society' with 'state' recurs throughout the social sciences. Thus, the unit of analysis in sociology has traditionally been 'society' understood as consisting of the national population and in (macro-)economics it has been national economies ('the British economy', 'the French economy', 'the Chinese economy'). Nation-state thinking is so dominant that this tendency to divide social processes up along state-territorial lines is mostly taken for granted and usually goes unremarked (Häkli 2001). This has often been true of radical and Marxist accounts as well as liberal and conservative ones. For example, David Harvey's account of the capitalist state discussed above refers to 'capitalist social formations' (Harvey 1976: 86) and 'actual capitalist societies' (Harvey 1976: 87), in both cases in the plural.

The world-systems approach developed by Immanuel Wallerstein is an exception to this rule (Wallerstein 1974, 1976, 1979, 1983). World-systems theory was introduced into geography by Peter Taylor in the early 1980s and has formed the basis of a heterodox strand of political geography for the past 20 years (Taylor 1981). Wallerstein argues that there is a single 'world-system' which forms the object of social enquiry and thus world-systems theory adopts a 'single-society assumption' in contrast with the 'multiple-society assumption' of conventional social science (Taylor and Flint 2000: 6). The multiple-society assumption is at the heart of what Taylor calls 'embedded statism' (Taylor 1996). This refers to the way in which the spatial organization

of the world into apparently natural sovereign states structures how the world is understood by social scientists. As Taylor puts it:

> the state-centric nature of social science faithfully reflected the power containers that dominated the social world it was studying. Its failure to problematize this spatial structure can be explained by the naturalization of nation-state territories. (1996: 1920)

Embedded statism is a problem for a number of reasons. Taylor's main concern is that it leads social scientists to mistake their objects of analysis and fail to recognize the role of world-systemic processes in shaping national and local circumstances. In relation to the focus of this chapter, it disrupts the state/society pairing in a particular way. The 'separate spheres' view (that state and society are distinct entities that interact) assumes that the spheres occupy the same geographical space and have the same boundaries (as in the assumption the British state governs British society and the British economy). However, Taylor's critique shows that this characterization of state/society relations is fundamentally flawed. To be sure, the British state is real enough and occupies a demarcated territory. Indeed the territoriality of the modern state is such that the Concise Oxford Dictionary offers 'a state' as one possible definition of the word 'country'. The concepts of 'British society' and 'British economy' however are much more problematic. It is not necessary to accept world-systems theory *in toto* to agree that the idea of a national society or a national economy represents an attempt to place territorial boundaries around processes and relations that have much broader spatial scope.

The risk in Taylor's approach is that it may underplay the extent to which the form and function of territorial states generate territorial differences in economic, social and cultural structures and processes. While the ideas of 'British (or French or Chinese) society' or 'the British (or French or Chinese) economy' may be imaginary, they are also imagined (not least by state actors) and that leads to a welter of state activities that seek to make them real. It may be impossible to draw a sharp territorial boundary between 'British society' and 'French society', but social processes operate (somewhat) differently in Britain and France and there are real differences between social structures and social institutions in the two countries. This does not mean that Taylor's 'single-society assumption' is wrong, merely that it is also important to remember that the single (world) society has a geography that includes territorial differences that are in part generated by and also reflect the world political map of nation-states.

To insist on the constitutive role of state processes is not necessarily to return to the kind of state-centrism criticized by Mitchell and Jessop. Jessop himself, and geographers working with his ideas, have combined a rejection of calls for state-centred theory with an emphasis on the state's role in the production and transformation of social and economic life. One of the central

aims of regulation theory, of which Jessop is a leading exponent, is to disclose the nature and causes of national differences in socio-economic relations (Jessop 1997; for a critique see Cox 2002). The recent work on the production of scale that was mentioned above also focuses on the ways in which the state's 'spatial selectivity' (Jones 1997) structures the scaling and re-scaling of social and economic life.

State/society in contemporary human geography

Until comparatively recently geographical work on the state was largely confined to those with a specialist interest in political geography. In many cases 'the state' was viewed as the political geographer's central object of study (Johnston 1982) in the same way that 'the economy' was held to be the focus of economic geography. Elsewhere I have criticized traditional political geography's obsession with formal political institutions (Painter 1995) and with the state (Painter 2003) to the neglect of informal relations of power and post-sovereign political forms. That does not mean, of course, that the state is somehow unimportant. Indeed, it might be argued that it is too important to be left to political geographers and in recent years it has not been. Social geographers, economic geographers, historical geographers and development geographers and others have all been turning their attention to the state to a greater extent than ever before. This has brought a welcome empirical and theoretical pluralism to geographical studies of the state and the 'state/society' coupling.

A good example of this greater theoretical pluralism is the growing importance of feminist perspectives. In a study of the treatment of the state by Latin Americanist geographers, Altha Cravey suggests that

> a feminist perspective on the state offers powerful insights into Latin American politics, society and social change. Understanding the state as capitalist and patriarchal enables a nuanced mapping of social dynamics. That is, a sensitivity to shifting power structures within society and within the state can help researchers transcend static and bounded representations of formal politics. Realignments of power within and beyond the state are therefore more easily anticipated and appreciated. Social scientists might not have been as surprised at the strength of women's movements which confronted authoritarian regimes in the 1980s if the gendered nature of power had been understood. Women cultivated and maintained international, regional and local networks which influenced the institutionalized forces of the states they confronted. (1998: 524)

Whereas her emphasis on the gendering of the state is apposite, Cravey's assertion that states are responsible for 'bounding territory and enclosing societies' (1998: 524) seems to run against Taylor's 'single-society assumption'.

On the other hand, her substantive discussion of the nature of state strategy does focus on similar issues to those addressed by the strategic relational approach, including the 'gendered division of labor within the state apparatus; the gendered structure of power in the state apparatus; the gendered structure of cathexis (or emotional attachments); and the interplay between social movements, state policies and outcomes' (Cravey 1998: 526).

Feminist ideas have also been important in the recent growth in geographical studies of citizenship – another issue where the conventional clear distinction between state and society does not hold. Citizenship provides a good illustration of many of the arguments discussed above because it combines formal political rights derived from the state with socio-cultural questions of identification and recognition. Luin Goldring's study of the geography of citizenship across the US–Mexico border suggests that Mexican women, while frequently excluded from the formal categories of citizenship, are able to exercise 'substantive social citizenship' across the border in the US (Goldring 2001). It is clear that citizenship relations are neither completely 'part of the state' nor 'part of society', but the arguments of this chapter suggest that it would also be incorrect to suggest that they are formed at the 'interface' between state and society as this still implies that state and society are discrete entities. Instead, citizenship is an arena in which the neat distinction between state and society breaks down, giving rein to what Jürgen Habermas calls the colonization of the lifeworld by the system (Habermas 1987). The state becomes ever more bound up with the practices of everyday life making it impossible to distinguish between aspects of life that are unambiguously within the state and others that are unambiguously outside.

Citizenship rights and ever-increasing state regulation are of vital concern to one particularly vulnerable social group: people diagnosed as mentally ill. As Chris Philo's exhaustive study of the historical geography of the 'mad-business' in England and Wales reveals (Philo 2004), state actors and institutions have long had an interest in the diagnosis, treatment and containment of mental illness. This activity extends beyond anything that might be called 'state intervention' (which implies action taken from outside) and can more accurately be characterized as a process of active constitution in which medical practitioners (today of course mostly employed by the state), the judicial system, government departments and local officials are engaged in a constant, if geographically differentiated (Philo 2004), process of describing, defining and organizing the phenomenon of mental illness and the worlds of those living with it.

Philo's work draws extensively on Michel Foucault and it is also from Foucault that recent geographical writing on governmentality draws its inspiration (examples include Luke 1996; Murdoch and Ward 1997; Braun 2000; MacKinnon 2000; Moon and Brown 2000). The concept of 'governmentality' refers to the ways in which the state constitutes its own objects of governance (Foucault 1979; Burchell et al. 1991; Dean 1999). In other words, rather than social and economic problems existing pre-formed and independently

'out there' in society waiting for the state to act to try to solve them, the governmentality perspective suggests that the problems are themselves in part a product of state processes. A good example of this is provided by the phenomenon of 'problem regions'. From the point of view of theories of governmentality 'problem regions' do not have an existence independent of government efforts to identify and address them. This is not to say that some geography areas do not suffer from greater levels of poverty or unemployment than others. However, it is (usually) the state that defines what a region is and what features it has to have to constitute a problem worthy of state policy-making. As I have shown elsewhere, in the case of the recent development of new regional economic strategies in England, it was in part the texts of the strategies themselves that brought into being the regional economies that the strategies were supposed to develop (Painter 2002a).

These brief and disparate examples of feminist state theory, citizenship, mental illness and governmentality are drawn from work in political, socio-cultural, historical and economic geography. They are by no means a representative survey of human geography, but they exemplify the growth of interest in the importance of the state in contemporary geographical scholarship. Most such accounts are not written explicitly or otherwise from either a strategic-relational or a world-systems perspective and not all of them transcend the conventional treatment of 'state' and 'society' as distinct interacting spheres. Nonetheless, they are testament to a growing commitment to taking the state seriously throughout human geography.

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