



# INTRODUCTION

Stategraphy: Relational Modes, Boundary Work,  
and Embeddedness

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While the state had been a recurrent theme in anthropology (Bouchard 2011), the 1990s saw a new wave of interest in it. The efflorescence of the ‘new’ ethnography of the state has cast a spotlight on certain issues, while others have received less attention. Significantly, there has been a marked shift toward state images and representations in research and theorizing. In response, Anthony Marcus (2008) launched a fulminant critique against this development, which he described as the emergence of an ‘orthodoxy’ in (Anglophone) anthropological state theory. According to him, emphasizing the plurality of culturally constructed state representations without much reference to either power relations or larger social scientific discussions amounts to mere empiricism. We agree with Marcus that much of the recent anthropological literature has over-emphasized cultural constructions, images, and discursive representations of the state, which, moreover, are often presented in a peculiarly monomorphic manner. The topic of state practices—perhaps more pronounced in European discussions—has not received appropriate attention in the strand of literature criticized by Marcus. More important, however, we believe that this development has resulted in a problematic theoretical void between state images and practices. The missing link makes it difficult to understand how specific state constellations and boundaries emerge and are reproduced or dissolved.

Notes for this section begin on page 16.

In this introduction, we propose a relational anthropology of the state as a way to bridge the gap between images and practices. While acknowledging that anthropologists have often stressed the embeddedness of the social phenomena they research, we argue that this has not yet been fully explored in the analysis of the state. Making relations the starting point of analysis can offer new insights into the workings of the state. We advance our argument in four interrelated sections.

First, we examine in greater detail the emergence of the analytical gap between state images and practices. This section does not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of the development of the anthropology of the state; instead, we focus on embedding the anthropological discussion within the wider domain of social scientific theorizing. Based on this analysis, we, secondly, outline the proposed relational approach, which we call ‘stategraphy’. This section includes a working concept of the state and proposes three axes of analysis, namely, relational modalities, boundary work, and embeddedness of actors. Together they lay the foundation for the contributors’ individual stateographies, which we describe in the third section. All of the chapters in this book focus on social relations that simultaneously condition and emerge around one central field of state action, namely, welfare services. These redistributive relations constitute a crucial setting where state images and practices converge in the interactions of officials and other citizens. Although not the only possible entry point for a relational analysis, welfare services are especially suited to observe mechanisms of inclusion and identification, as claims and decisions are made about who belongs to a given community and who will have access to limited public resources.

The last part highlights how, read together, the collected chapters contribute not only to an understanding of the variety of constructions of the state but also to broader comparative topics. While many recent ethnographic studies of the state have concentrated on how the history of European state formation provided a powerful ideal for statehood in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere, the contributions in this volume concentrate on Eastern and Western Europe as well as Russia. The demise of socialism has called into question the former self-ascription of state functions and furthered the global hegemony of neo-liberal ideas that has also deeply affected Western European welfare practices. This development has included ideas about necessary state withdrawal from service provision and the introduction of new regulatory frameworks, turning the provision of welfare into important sites where the state redefines itself. Nevertheless, the Cold War dichotomy has not yet vanished (Chari and Verdery 2009), which leads to an often separated treatment of former socialist and capitalist states. Instead of taking the difference for granted, this book examines both post-socialist and post-welfare states as relational settings that demonstrate the fluidity and transformation of state structures, while simultaneously insisting on the particular historicity of each case. Thus, apart from the more general comparative conclusions that can be drawn from the relational approach, this volume seeks to contribute to a post-Cold War ethnography of the state.

## The Emergence of a Dominant Dichotomy: State Images and Practices

The anthropological rediscovery of the state as a subject of research occurred at a time when other disciplines were already agonizing about the apparent withering away of the state. The following short overview of the broader interdisciplinary field shows that neither the timing nor the specific focus of this recent ethnography of the state was accidental.<sup>1</sup>

Up to the 1980s, political scientists and political sociologists engaged in intense debates about the nature of the state. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Marxist-oriented circles, especially those engaged in the ‘Poulantzas-Miliband debate’, discussed to what extent the state was exclusively an instrument of capitalist class interest (Miliband 1983; Poulantzas 1969, 1976).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the largely American pluralist school of community studies of the time viewed the state as an extension of the power of either elitist or pluralist societal interest groups (Dahl 1961; Domhoff 1990). Finally, in the 1980s, neo-Weberian theorists sought to bring ‘the state back in’ (Evans et al. 1985) by treating it as an autonomous entity analytically separable from intra-societal power struggles. By the late 1980s, these approaches to the state had lost much of their appeal, and in the search for conceptual alternatives to overcome this theoretical stalemate, notions of ideology (Abrams 1988; Bourdieu 1994) and culture (Mitchell 1991, 1999; Steinmetz 1999a) took center stage.<sup>3</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, one can now see how these developments provided an opening for the application of anthropological tools to the study of the state, while at the same time conditioning the form that this engagement would take. Looking back at Akhil Gupta’s (1995) article “Blurred Boundaries,” which is considered one of the founding texts of the new (Anglo-American) ethnography of the state, Gupta’s insistence on the “analysis of the *everyday practices* of local bureaucracies and the *discursive construction* of the state in public culture” (*ibid.*: 375; emphasis in original) clearly fits into the broader cultural turn. More recently, two political scientists with an affinity for anthropological approaches, Migdal and Schlichte (2005: 15) proposed differentiating the idea of the state from state practices, thus drawing anthropology’s contribution squarely into mainstream social science debates about the nature of the state. Even if the authors advocated investigating precisely the dynamics between state images and practices, they did not suggest a concrete way of how to proceed. In the end, it was rather the dichotomy between images and practices that became part and parcel of the ‘new’ anthropology of the state.

Prefigured by Gupta (1995), after the turn of the twenty-first century the new ethnographies of the state increasingly concentrated on the domain of representations.<sup>4</sup> In the introduction to their volume *States of Imagination*, Hansen and Stepputat (2001) opted for the formula ‘languages of stateness’ to capture both representations and practices of statehood. However, the volume’s title and individual chapters document a tendency to emphasize cultural images and discourses of the state rather than concrete practices. Shortly afterward, Sharma and Gupta (2006) published a reader on the anthropology of the state,

combining classic theoretical texts with recent ethnographic studies from diverse geographical settings. With older theoretical debates increasingly receding into the past and the question of when and by whom the state was really ever constructed as a coherent entity now often left unanswered, this volume quickly became the established canon. In yet another article, Gupta and Sharma (2006: 277) concluded that an “anthropological approach to the state differs from that of other disciplines by according centrality to the *meanings* of everyday practices of bureaucracies and their relation to *representations of the state*” (emphasis added). Seemingly unwittingly, proponents of the new anthropology of the state have fulfilled the expectations of other disciplines in that they have contributed to the established schools of thought—Marxist, (neo-)Weberian, pluralist—by emphasizing the culturally constructed images of the state.

A distinct line of inquiry still consistent with the emphasis on images of the state was taken by scholars who focused on the idea of the nation-state in building communities and, ultimately, national identities. For instance, Herzfeld (1992) demonstrated that both nation-state bureaucracies and local-level societies put the symbolism of family and the language of blood and race in the service of building, maintaining, and manipulating classificatory systems of inclusion and exclusion. Similarly, Borneman (1992) shows how ideas of kin, state, and nation were mutually constructed in former East and West Germany, which constantly mirrored each other in their efforts to create specific self-understandings by regulating the life courses of their respective citizens. Although these insights clearly speak to the imaginative side of state formation, they have not—apart from a few passing references—been fully incorporated into contemporary mainstream ethnography of the state.

One reason for this omission may have to do with the fact that much of the new anthropology of the state focuses explicitly on non-European marginal sites. Das and Poole (2004b: 6) describe the task of the anthropologist as first having to detect the state in “parochial sightings.” A similar move away from centers of state power can be observed in discussions of globalization. Trouillot (2001: 132) observes that “state power is being redeployed, state effects are appearing in new sites, and, in almost all cases, this move is one away from national sites to infra-, supra-, or transnational ones.” Large parts of the literature on sovereignty have also stressed new forms of sovereignty outside or below the confines of the national state.<sup>5</sup> In addition, many of the studies on specific state activities have focused on coercive sides of the state, such as war, counterinsurgency, and surveillance measures (Aretxaga 2003; Das and Poole 2004a), thereby neglecting the more benevolent side of the state. The stress on often excluded minorities and antagonistic state representations might be due to a certain tradition in peasant studies (Scott 1998). A second influence can be found in Foucauldian thinking, which emphasizes the omnipresence of governmental technologies and techniques in managing (deviant) populations (e.g., Gupta 2012).

Although subscribing to studying the state from its margins, the recent collection of ethnographies of French state institutions by Didier Fassin et al. (2015) is insofar an exception, as it attempts to grasp moral economies and moral subjectivities “at the heart of the state” by studying interactions between state actors

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and marginalized populations (Fassin 2015: 3). As such, it comes much closer to the relational approach we advocate below.

So far, two lines of criticism have been advanced to counter the emphasis on the fragmentation of state power and the linked methodological recommendations for approaching the state from its margins. Bierschenk (2010: 4) calls the latter a “classical anthropological reflex” that “leads to a tendency to re-invent the wheel and to exoticise states of the South” (*ibid.*: 3; see also Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014a: 52–54). Kapferer (2005) and Marcus (2008) contend that this approach takes a pluralist understanding of the state for granted, which in and of itself is an ideology that must be questioned. While non-state actors have undeniably taken over former state responsibilities in many places around the globe, this approach might underestimate the degree to which these processes not only weaken or even deconstruct the state but also contribute to its continuity and strength as both a representation and a political formation (Kapferer 2005: 286–287). In addition, talking about state effects and new sites of sovereignty runs the risk of juxtaposing globalization with an ideal of the sovereign nation-state in much the same way that non-European states were measured against the template of the Weberian ideal type modern state (Migdal and Schlichte 2005: 3; Steinmetz 1999a: 22). To these criticisms we add a third point: the anthropological stress on cultural representation has shifted the weight from state practices toward state images. And despite the stress on the diversity of cultural representations and the co-production of state images by state subjects, the state images described often appear to be rather monolithic, coherent, and unified across the respective society under study. Furthermore, the emphasis on images—first attributed to anthropology by other disciplines in their attempt to overcome the theoretical stalemate in the late 1980s, and then actively appropriated within the new studies of the state in the 1990s—not only rendered state practices the junior partner but also left the void between state images and practices unexplored.

The smaller strand of literature that explicitly focuses on state practices often follows a Weberian tradition with its emphasis on mechanisms of state power. Casting the state largely as a stable political formation, James Scott (1998), for example, took this perspective to the forefront in exploring state practices of making populations and territory legible. In the field of peasant studies, Norman Long’s (1989) concept of an ‘interface’ between the life-worlds of peasants, bureaucrats, and experts also contributed to the study of state practices. Finally, several authors researching particular bureaucratic institutions or sets of actors were inspired by Michael Lipsky (1980), who emphasized the role played by street-level bureaucrats in giving concrete shape to abstract state policies in their encounters with clients. Stressing the structural embedding of state actors, Dubois (2010) studied encounters in French welfare offices, while Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2014b) with their collaborators examined practices of judges and teachers in West Africa. Heyman (1995) explored interactions at the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, and Eckert (2009) analyzed interactions between police officers and poor citizens in Mumbai. Frykman et al. (2009), Larsen (2011), and Olwig (2011) described forms of integration into local communities through welfare provision in Scandinavia. In all of these studies, local

state actors play a pivotal role in determining state practices, which contributes significantly to our understanding of the working of the state. Nevertheless, these findings are discussed only sporadically under the heading ‘anthropology of the state’, and some remain largely confined to the realm of applied anthropology (e.g., Heyman 2004).<sup>6</sup> More importantly, what is often missing here as well is the explicit link to how state actors’ practices are shaped by the relational setting.

To conclude, recent ethnographic approaches have greatly advanced our understanding of state formations. However, the methodological stress on marginal sites and state images, combined with the theoretical emphasis on diversity, fragmentation, and disaggregation, leaves some questions unanswered with regard to the stability and the apparent coherence of images and the solidity of the organizational entity called ‘state’. In addition, the core distinction between state images and state practices brushes over an analytical void by not clearly demonstrating how they are linked. With this book, we propose to return to the crucial aim identified by Migdal and Schlichte (2005) by exploring these linkages through a relational approach. We thereby combine the emphasis of the practice-oriented studies on bureaucracies as emergent organizational forms with scholarly insights into state images. In the following section, we outline the contours of this relational anthropology of the state, suggesting that it can bridge the gap without abandoning ethnography based on micro-level perspectives.

## **Stategraphy: Toward a Relational Anthropology of the State**

With Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and Norbert Elias usually listed as its forefathers, relational theorizing can hardly be thought of as ‘new’ in the social sciences (Häußling 2010; see also Emirbayer 1997). However, its potential has not yet been rendered fully prolific for the anthropology of the state. In the following, we seek to outline the main trajectories and specific insights to be gained from such an approach. Investigations into the potency of images and the inherently processual nature of ever-changing forms has made the endeavor to define this shifting and polymorphous entity called ‘state’ inherently difficult and perhaps ultimately doomed to fail (Jessop 2008: 1). With this in mind, we nevertheless put forward a working concept of the state for the purpose of comparing relational settings. We distinguish three analytical axes that support the indispensable effort to ‘relationalize’ data gathering and analytical proceedings.

The earliest relational approaches in political anthropology were introduced by the Manchester School. Especially in the African Copperbelt, seemingly fixed categories of religious, ethnic, or clan membership no longer were thought to provide a satisfactory explanation for social phenomena. Researchers turned from actors’ individual attributes, such as gender or age, to their personal embeddedness as the focal point of analysis (e.g., Bott 1957; Kapferer 1972). Furthermore, Gluckman (1963) argued that political systems gain their stability through the establishment and re-establishment of cross-cutting ties among social actors.<sup>7</sup> However, shortly after its inception, social network analysis

turned to quantification and ventured into structural determinism, while explicit relational theory remained marginal within anthropology.<sup>8</sup> With our approach, we wish to keep the focus on what happens between actors and thereby view such relations as decisive in shaping state formations, images, and practices.

We seek to retain the earlier insights into the importance of embeddedness and complement it with the above-mentioned emphasis on state representations. As Hansen and Stepputat (2001: 6) have argued, the idealized Weberian image of the state as a sovereign entity that reigns over a specific territory by means of a monopoly of violence and rational bureaucracy has influenced state images worldwide.<sup>9</sup> Such expectations of what the state is or what functions it should fulfill feed into the relations between governments and populations as described by Chatterjee (2004). The relational approach adds to these insights by turning the gaze toward the question of how the images themselves are shaped in a concrete web of relations.

In political science, the first explicit articulation of a relational approach to the state was made by Poulantzas (1969), who advanced the idea that the state is a ‘social relation’.<sup>10</sup> Although he was less interested in the analysis of the state as such (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 3), his proposition was taken up by Bob Jessop (2008), who developed it into a ‘strategic-relational approach’. This and other relational approaches in sociology and political science usually analyze aggregated levels of nation-states and international relations. Taking a more transactional perspective, Frödin (2012: 271) claims that the state can be “best understood in terms of aggregated patterns of interaction among individuals with different rights and obligations, defined by an immense set of constitutive and regulative rules.” This view of the state as ‘aggregated structures of interaction’ is comparable to the structures of networks found by early network theorists. We complement this perspective by maintaining a processual focus in which relational modalities and the influence of embeddedness become palpable in the multitude of recurrent face-to-face encounters.

Accordingly, we can describe the state as a relational setting that cannot be categorized according to simple hierarchies or a governing center,<sup>11</sup> but that exists within the relations between actors who have unequal access to material, social, regulatory, and symbolic resources and who negotiate over ideas of legitimate power by drawing on existing state images—at once reaffirming and transforming these representations within concrete practices. Such a conceptualization does not attach any regulative functions or source of authority per se to the state. States are viewed not as being characterized by static ties but as being processual in nature. From that perspective, states can be understood as ever-changing political formations with institutional settings that are structured by social relations in interactions characterized by different state images.

A first avenue of analysis is thus a focus on different relational modalities. Such modalities draw on differing normative concepts of what a state should be and how it should act and embody past experiences in structural environments that translate into contingent expectations for the future. Consequently, we do not take the attribute ‘relational’ to designate a specific monomorphic concept of the state, as Levi-Faur (2013) critically remarks for the concept of

a regulatory state. Instead, we understand the state generally as polymorphic and as being created by, and experienced through, different relational modalities. To be sure, actual state practices most often do not conform to images, hopes, or wishes for a coherent state. Relations mediate the apparent mismatch between practices and images and, as such, constitute the interceding link. State formations can be seen as emerging through these relational modalities.

A second avenue of analysis focuses on boundary work, which, heeding Mitchell's (1991) call, we consider central to any state theory. As part of a relational analysis, this boundary work is implicated in the constant negotiation of state images in and through social relations that bring states into being. Two fields of boundary work stand out: that between family/kinship and the state and that between civil society and the state. Both are predicated on the dominant Western interpretation of states. Accordingly, earlier anthropological understandings of states were influenced by the powerful dichotomy between state-based and kin-based societies (e.g., Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940), which has been heavily criticized in more recent studies (Thelen and Alber 2017). Nonetheless, both this dichotomy and the concept of civil society as comprising forms of social organization other than the state (Hann 1996) have continued to influence self-understandings of Western societies. Such conceptualizations not only obscure particular social relations as constitutive of the workings of the state, but are in themselves a part of the negotiations and struggles over the power to define how the (legitimate) state should be seen and work.

Besides relational modalities and boundary work, we thirdly emphasize the need to observe different sets of actors and their personal embedding within state hierarchies as well as within other networks. 'Embeddedness' here not only describes the norms and interests of different actors; 'relational embeddedness' is also seen as decisive for practices and decisions (Granovetter 1985). A classic article by Gluckman et al. (1949: 93) describes the irreconcilable demands arising from this double embeddedness in different relational logics as the 'dilemma of the village headman'. Being locally entangled in kinship relations, and being a political representative of this same group of people vis-à-vis the colonial state, made the headman's position difficult, but it also left room for maneuver (Kuper 1970). This by now classical topic, foreshadowed in Weber's notion of pre-modern notables, has lost none of its urgency. Local state actors struggle with structural constraints and their discretionary powers while being embedded in many other relations within the local community that involve different sets of norms. In this regard, Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann's (1998) description of 'state' and 'off-state' activities of state actors in rural Indonesia prefigures the transition from the above-mentioned ethnographic studies of bureaucracies to a relational perspective.

The relations between differentially embedded actors link individuals as well as groups of actors in webs characterized by differences in power and access to diverse resources. Interactions within these webs (re)create boundaries of inclusion and exclusion as expressions of power differentials. By foregrounding concrete social relations and how they adhere in recurring interactions over the life of the individual, we can begin to understand how such situational power

differentials might sediment into larger political formations and lend the state as a political formation an appearance of coherence through time.

The relational approach is not intended to gloss over the existing differentiated concepts of statehood, such as the distinction between legislative, executive, and judicial power; between central government and local authorities; between service provision and coercive intervention; and between the regulation, financing, and implementation of specific state tasks by different actors. But it accentuates how this variety feeds into the empirically traceable notions of statehood that emerge in interactions between state and non-state actors. Using a relational perspective, we come to understand that who is locally seen to be a representative of state power can vary and is contingent on particular configurations of state functions, institutional arrangements, and the social relations within which these are embedded. It should therefore be clear that when using the term ‘local state’ or ‘local state actors’, our analytical interest lies not with bounded local communities but with grounded social interactions and relations.

By focusing on concrete social relations, it becomes possible to see both the processual nature of state formation and how images become generalized and concretized. Moreover, stategraphy as a relational approach encourages inquiry into the negotiation of the tension between what actors see state agents do and what they think those actors ideally should be doing. By focusing on contradictory moments and conflicting images as they become apparent in interactions, we can move away from seemingly straightforward, unified cultural representations in order to appreciate fully the diversity and contradictory nature of existing state images as well as the role of long-term historical and global processes in bringing about such images (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005: 7).

## **Stategraphy: The Relational Approach Applied**

The relational approach that we have thus far outlined has governed the analysis in the chapters in this volume. Rather than anchoring this book in one area-based interpretative framework, we start from the common ground of what we have called ‘stategraphy’. Each individual case study is characterized by a core commitment to a view of the state as a relational setting, ethnographically analyzing how the state is understood, experienced, and reproduced in everyday encounters. These findings are grouped around the three interrelated areas of analysis outlined above—relational modalities, boundary work, and embeddedness—each of which is foregrounded to varying degrees in the contributions to this volume.

In contrast to the aforementioned focus on the coercive sides of the state in many ethnographic studies, the main thematic focus here is on relations within the field of welfare—what could be viewed as a benevolent side of the state, although it clearly has its own coercive dimension. Welfare is a core field of analysis since different state images and state practices come together in negotiations of citizens and local state actors. On the one hand, welfare “managers and protagonists generally undertake action in order to shape their recipients

in the light of their own moral motivations” as Kalb (1997: 205) has argued. On the other hand, citizens also actively engage in the field of welfare, making claims for inclusion. Referring to examples from South Africa, James Ferguson (2013: 259) has insisted on the growing importance of social service provision as a site of politics. It is a field in which citizens are not only disciplined or subordinated to state measures, but can use bureaucratic technologies to make the state ‘see them’ and act as desired (Jansen 2014; Street 2012).

### *Relational Modalities*

In most of the chapters, specific state images embedded in historical trajectories play an important role in citizens’ and state actors’ use of particular relational modalities. They figure most prominently in Vettters’s case study on housing assistance in post-war Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), which documents two ends of a relational continuum. On one end, the state is envisaged as a paternalistic figure that cares for deserving citizens and brings state officials and citizens into personal relationships. In public discourse, this modality is known as clientelism. The opposite end offers a set of practices and images that are associated with civil society. This is represented as relying on the opposing logic, that is, on a clear separation of local government and citizens. Premised on citizens’ desire to relate to state authorities, both modalities facilitate communication and interaction between citizens and authorities despite their apparent opposition. Socio-political transformation along this relational continuum occurs contingently, leading to a temporary stabilization of an otherwise fragmented and increasingly dysfunctional post-war Bosnian statehood.

While also stressing recent historical developments, Dubois’s chapter has the relational modality of French welfare controllers as the starting point of analysis. The modalities employed by the controllers in their interactions with clients depend on their embeddedness within their respective institutions as a result of differential career perspectives. This resembles the distinct relational modalities employed by the Hungarian mayors described by Schwarcz and Szőke in this book’s last chapter. One mayor enacts a paternalistic and hail-fellow-well-met modality in relating to the local public workers, while the other adopts a more distanced educative modality in interacting with his co-villagers. Like the case of the French welfare controllers, the variation of local modalities in Hungary does not contradict central policy aims or contribute inevitably to state fragmentation.

Contrary to the emphasis on discrete modalities employed by specific actors in these ethnographic accounts, Kay’s stategraphy concentrates on how a variety of modalities are employed between local state actors and other villagers, between local state actors and officials *within* the social sector, and between local state actors and higher-level authorities in rural western Siberia. These modalities depend on different—at times contradictory—state images, but they are not discrete. Instead, they are combined into hybrid modalities or used consecutively, thereby reinforcing one another. Similar to both Vettters and Dubois, Kay argues that rather than being imperfections or anomalies, such combined relational modalities bridge the gap between images and practices of the state.

The legal advisers of the two London non-profit legal service providers described by Forbess and James in their contribution also employ different relational modalities that range from adversarial to cooperative. They put citizens into contact with various state actors and enable different state actors to communicate among themselves. In this way, the case resembles the accounts of Kay and Vettters, who describe how ‘getting things done’ through personalized relations makes the state tangible in practice. However, these processes also increasingly blur the boundaries between state and civil society. Ultimately, this might weaken the position of legal advisers, whose power is based on the construction of a separate sphere of civil society. This chapter directs us to the question of how these boundaries are recreated in specific interactions.

### *Boundary Work*

Boundary work is a central topic in Read’s relational analysis of volunteering in three Czech hospitals. The chapter demonstrates how volunteering as an instantiation of civil society is distinguished from the state. The volunteer coordinators forge relationships with a variety of state actors, including hospital managers and officials in local and central government. Although the volunteers’ success depends heavily on material resources and moral backing from the state, Read emphasizes the ongoing reproduction of the ideological boundary between state and civil society. She shows how this apparent contradiction is mediated and resolved within the relationships between volunteer coordinators and state actors.

Using the example of two elder care projects in Serbia, Thelen, Thiemann, and Roth explore yet another prominent field of boundary work—that between state and family. In one project, state-paid carers come to be included as members of the kinship networks of the recipients. In another project, foster families for the elderly are organized and financed through a state program. These practices stand in stark contrast to the prevailing image of an unresponsive and distant Serbian state. By reframing state support in terms of kinship, state care becomes acceptable while simultaneously sustaining an ideological separation of the realms of state and family.

All of these contributions hint at the crucial importance of actors’ embeddedness in a wide range of relations. This determines not only the implementation and outcome of central state policy, but also how state images and practices are either reconciled or challenged in concrete social relations.

### *Embeddedness*

In Vettters’s case study of housing in Mostar, citizens’ employment of different relational modalities depends on which social relations they are able to mobilize based on their embeddedness in particular socially and politically structured webs of relations in a divided city. Read’s contribution reveals how the differentiated embedding of volunteer coordinators leads to more or less successful programs. Similarly, Dubois’s chapter on controllers and Forbess and James’s chapter on legal advisers show how state actors’ specific positions enable them

to make the state ‘work’. In both cases, these actors’ practices make complex circumstances decipherable for higher state officials. Through their practices of putting their clients into contact with different state agencies, the legal advisers, in fact, create new webs of relations for them.

Further exploring aspects of embeddedness, Dorondel and Popa focus on how local state actors translate a central policy by relying on local notions of deservingness. Their relational analysis examines the discretionary practices of local bureaucrats in implementing an EU food aid program in two different sites in Romania. The double embeddedness of local state actors poses a dilemma (as described by Gluckman et al. 1949), but it also enhances those actors’ power and discretion. Thus, similar to Dubois, the authors argue that individual discretion in combination with a transnational policy does not necessarily undermine state power.

In the final chapter in this book, Schwarcz and Szőke compare how the embeddedness of two Hungarian village mayors relates to their distributive practices. At one site, the mayor, in line with national trends, favors individual lower-middle-class local citizens, whom he considers to be ‘self-advancing’ (as opposed to the poor villagers). By contrast, the mayor of the second village organizes state programs in a more expansive manner, ensuring that the members of the marginalized Roma minority in the village have access to the benefits as well. This mayor adheres to a vision of the state as the guarantor of social peace and advocates a sense of community that includes the Roma.

Many of these individual contributions focus on inner-country comparisons, mainly pointing to dissimilarities within a supposedly similar national setting on the basis of different relational patterns. An understanding of stategraphy as a grounded analysis of particular relational settings defines these localities as sites for the manifestation of states, but this owes less to their bounded, small-scale nature or their legally defined degrees of local autonomy. Rather, these sites derive their significance through the convergence of ever-changing regulatory frameworks, actors, resources, and interpretations, actualized in webs of social relations at particular conjunctions of time and space. Thus, our contributors find plural manifestations of the state in one locality (Vettters) and within one state territory (Schwarcz and Szőke). Likewise, actors switch between and combine different images of the state (Kay) and exploit supra-national programs to enhance their role as state actors in the local context (Dorondel and Popa). Such insights gained from an analysis of relational modes, boundary work, and actors’ embeddedness can contribute to broader discussions about the workings of the state. In our concluding section, we therefore seek to open up this perspective by pointing to larger patterns and global historical contexts.

## **Comparative Outlook and Concluding Remarks**

Based on a comparative reading of the individual contributions, we outline some possible, but by no means exhaustive, insights about the issues of local state manifestations and welfare transformation, as well as an analysis of power and

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patterns of inclusion and exclusion, as an invitation for further comparative work that reaches beyond the confines of country or regional area studies.

Throughout this collection of relational analyses, boundary work leading to local manifestations of the state permeates not just interactions between elected or appointed state agents and welfare recipients in which it is clear who represents the state. As demonstrated in the chapters by *Forbess and James*, by *Read*, and by *Thelen, Thiemann, and Roth*, boundary work also pervades interactions involving a broad array of intermediaries receiving varying degrees of state funding. Such intermediaries often emerge to facilitate connections between citizens and various state agencies, sometimes allowing for personalized relationships that would be impossible in direct interactions between state agents and citizens. The resulting complex webs of state and state-like agencies that are together responsible for the provision of welfare have a counter-intuitive implication. As it is often difficult to determine unambiguously whether or not an actor is part of the state, these relations contribute to the blurring of the state's boundaries. Yet as these contributions also demonstrate, intermediaries are often most effective when they discursively distance themselves from the state, thereby recreating the image of a coherent state entity.

The selection of case studies from diverse settings (Russia, Eastern Europe, the western Balkans, Western Europe) shows how the relationships between state institutions at various levels and the constraints posed by welfare restructuring condition how state officials interact with welfare recipients. As a whole, the chapters allow for a more nuanced understanding of change and continuity that challenges the all-too-familiar grand narratives of East-West difference. As demonstrated in some of the ethnographies, the restructuring of the Western European welfare state undermines old certainties and forces the painful negotiation of new, frequently improvised scripts (*Dubois*, chap. 2; *Forbess and James*, chap. 4). Along the same lines, the contributions dealing with post-socialist countries—in two cases they are also post-war societies—provide an avenue for studying the state as a process, itself subject to deep historical transformations (*Thelen et al.*, chap. 6; *Vetters*, chap. 1).

The chapters furthermore illustrate how state agents who attempt to shape the behaviors of welfare recipients with respect to moral notions implied in welfare programs sometimes assume a coercive capacity, patrolling the borders of belonging and making decisions about a given community's inclusion or exclusion by granting or withholding benefits. But the authors also point out the diversity that arises when welfare policies are concretely implemented, which in turn affects images of the state and notions of deservingness. Thus, *Thelen, Thiemann, and Roth* portray a process characterized less by coercion and more by a mutual co-optation of values in which care recipients reframe state-funded support in terms that are acceptable to them. The British legal advisers studied by *Forbess and James* challenge what they perceive as unfair decisions made by state officials on behalf of their clients. Domination and resistance as analytical categories in these instances cannot be easily attributed to clear-cut sides but emerge as properties of social relations.

Through their shared commitment to relating micro-level social relations to macro-level configurations of state, welfare, and political systems, the authors contribute to the larger analysis of power. The chapters by Dorondel and Popa and by Schwarcz and Szőke analyze how, in post-socialist contexts, changes in welfare systems (through the EU as a transnational welfare provider in one case and the decentralization of welfare provision in the other) are utilized by elected state actors to reproduce local communities and their hierarchies. These hierarchies are tied in complex ways to the reproduction of power relations at the national level. In the cases described by Dorondel and Popa, the local practice of symbolic acts of ‘gifting’ to specific individuals and groups—instead of ‘granting’ rights to legally eligible recipients—not only enhances state actors’ personal standing in their respective communities, but also serves to garner political support for ruling national parties in the upcoming presidential elections. Thus, these acts at the same time strengthen the embeddedness of state actors within local and supra-local networks of power, thereby contributing to the consolidation of central authority. In one of Schwarcz and Szőke’s cases, we see a similar yet different effect. The devolution of central regulative power to municipalities allows for some degree of deflection from nationally dominant discourses of deservingness in so-called disadvantaged areas with a Roma majority: the mayor of one such village has established a paternalistic, inclusive practice of granting benefits. However, admitting such local variances also absolves the central government from the responsibility of preventing widespread poverty and demonstrates its compliance with neo-liberal notions of workfare and reduced public spending.

It is instructive to compare this last case with Dubois’s case study of the role of control as an instrument of social policy that has become central to the remodeling of the French welfare system. In an urban setting at the heart of a capitalist Western state and in a context structured by new public management reforms of the welfare sector, we find that paternalistic practices are reintroduced and institutionalized within the boundary zones of the state apparatus in interactions between controllers and benefit recipients. Rather than being inclusive, these practices and the relations on which they are predicated serve the structural rationale of the post-welfare era. As “a consistent mode of governance in which discretion and leeway accorded to street-level bureaucrats are necessary for the state to exert power over citizens’ behaviors” (Dubois, chap. 2), they reveal the coercive side of welfare provision.

In conclusion, we have argued that the historical positioning of the new anthropology of the state within the wider social sciences and within specific anthropological traditions has produced a one-sided emphasis on the state as cultural representation, contributing to the emergence of an analytical gap between state images and state practices. We have furthermore proposed that a relational approach can tie these strands together, thereby bridging the established divide between state images and practices and showing how both are negotiated, approved, and transformed in everyday interactions within webs of relations. Together, the chapters in this book make a strong case for comparative ethnographic research that investigates different relational modalities, the

(re)production of state boundaries, and forms of embeddedness. The relational perspective highlights similarities in such processes without neglecting structural as well as historical particularities. We believe that, applied in a variety of settings, stategraphy as a relational anthropology of the state can yield a number of comparative insights that can enrich current debates about the nature of the state.

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## Notes

1. One might argue that this ‘new’ anthropology of the state took after its ‘elder brother’, political anthropology, by exhibiting an ignorance of the original anthropology of the state, which was mainly concerned with the origins of the state, and ignoring debates about the colonial state as discussed in the works of the early Manchester School (Gluckman 1963; Gluckman et al. 1949). On the relation between political anthropology and the ethnography of the state, see also Thomassen (2008).
2. Strikingly, Marcus’s (2008) critique of the new anthropology of the state resembles Poulantzas’s criticism of Miliband. For a review on the debate, see also Laclau (1975).
3. This turn had some antecedents in both Marxist (Althusser 1971; Gramsci 1992) and neo-Weberian or neo-institutionalist (Nettl 1968) paradigms, but also took up Foucault-inspired post-structuralist approaches.
4. See Thomassen (2008) for more a more detailed analysis of the new dominance of representational approaches.
5. On Africa, see Mbembe (2005). On graduated sovereignty in Southeast Asia, see Ong (2000). On transnational sovereignty, see Sassen (2004), and on fractured sovereignty in India, see Randeria (2007).
6. Similarly, the predominant focus of the growing sub-field of the anthropology of policy in ‘advanced’ Western societies (Shore et al. 2011) seems to have hindered the full incorporation of this body of literature into the new anthropology of the state.
7. On the insights of the Manchester School, see also Thomassen (2008: 266).
8. On the development of network analysis in anthropology, see Schweizer (1996).
9. Despite Weber’s interpretative approach, his ideal type state took on a life of its own, leading to a largely objectivist understanding of the Weberian state.
10. Although Weber (1978: 14) had already paid a good deal of attention to the problem of how agency and authority are attributed to collective entities such as nation-states, which, empirically speaking, are constituted by individual interactions, he did not develop an explicitly relational perspective on the state.
11. For a similar description of society as a relational setting, see Somers (1994: 70–72). For a relational view on the state from an actor-network theory (ANT) perspective, see Passoth and Rowland (2010). Although we acknowledge the importance of the specific materiality of state bureaucracies, we concentrate on interpersonal relations in our approach.

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