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**HISTORY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE RENEWAL IN
THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE STATE
Crossed Franco-American Perspectives¹**

Sarah GENSBURGER

In France as well as across the Atlantic, historians' interest in the State is relatively recent. In 1990, Rosanvallon was still deploring the State's status as a "historical non-object" (1990, p. 9), whereas, three years earlier, for Leuchtenburg, then president of the *Organization of American Historians*, the State remained a "new frontier" to be conquered for the discipline (1986, p. 589). Since then, historians have encountered the State in a "return to the actors" (Revel, 1995; Guery, 1997; Boucheron, 1998; Chatriot, 2006). In the United States, "social and cultural historians followed their stories inside City Hall [and] state houses" (Balogh, 2003, p. 458).² In France, considering only modern history, the first branch to engage with the State thematic, focus has also shifted little by little, and attention now ranges from objects such as State-formation factors (Tilly, 1975, 1990) to the simple "subjects" of the king (Te Brake, 1998; Gorski, 2001).

Though major theoretical reformulations have been reached in both countries, these projects have been differently institutionalized:

on the one hand, they are positioned within the discipline of history, on the other, within the relations they maintain with sociology and political science. In France, the creation of historical committees at the end of the 1980s, modeled on the Economic and Financial History Committee established in 1986 by the Economic, Finance, and Budget Ministries, has encouraged contemporary historians in their studies (Margairaz, 1991). At the same time, public money enabled the activities of a large European initiative, “The Genesis of the Modern State,” which confirmed the role modern history has played in the development of historical research projects on the State (Genet, 1997; Schaub, 1996; Descimon and Guéry, 1989). Despite a certain number of historiographical reflections on the gradual formation of a “history of the State” (Chatriot, 2006; Fridenson, 2000), the domain has not truly been institutionalized, perhaps because of gaps existing between the historians working on different, and often exclusive, periods of time, from Middle Ages to Twentieth Century. This state of facts goes hand in hand with the paucity of dialogue linking historical work and sociological or political science projects: indeed, historians, for example, forge scanty room for research in sociohistory (Quennouëlle, 2002).³ In this sense, then, the most recent publications represent a break, for they call not upon a sociology of the State itself but upon an analysis of public policies. While these analyses aspire for a return to the concept of the State, they are also, and paradoxically so, as a way of renewing the historian’s approach to the topic (Capuano, 2009; Delalande, 2009).

On the American side, the situation is reversed.⁴ Interest in the State first piqued in the 1970s, partly because of the dearth of academic positions available to historians. This “Public history movement” culminated in the creation of a professional association and a journal, *The Public Historian*. It was not, however, until the end of the decade that this movement truly linked together with research in the university. In 1987, a new, strictly academic journal was created. Though the *Journal of Policy History* did not only deal with matters of the State, questions surrounding the nature of the State, State functioning, and the reshaping of the State grew to become central. The successful institutionalization of this sub-field was due primarily to the dialogue the historians fostered with historical institutionalism, which expanded exponentially on the American political science scene.⁵ As Zelizer, historian and former editor of the

Journal of Policy History described, “Given the state of politics within the history profession, some of the most prominent political historians by the 1990s tended to be political scientists (2004, p. 128)”. Present-day exchanges between historical institutionalism and American political development more generally, along with historical studies of the State continue to flow freely.⁶ Questions of continuity and change are at the heart of this dialogue, and thus for historians the task is to determine if, on the one hand, it is correct to speak of State building, of a beginning and an end, and, on the other hand, whether the American State has maintained its meaning, goals, and powers throughout time. These very questions are also posed in France, and therefore in an entirely different academic context: “Everything goes as if the State did not have any history, its evolution being nothing more than the exact reproduction, constantly spreading, of a pattern generated at the beginning” (*Tout se passe en effet comme si l'on considérait que l'État n'avait pas véritablement d'histoire, son développement n'étant que la pure reproduction, sans cesse agrandie, d'une figure qui aurait été formée à l'origine.*) (Rosanvallon, 1990, p. 10).

As such, despite the non-integrated and non-cumulative nature of historical studies on the State in France along with the major influence of *American Political Development* works on American historians of the State, three axes come together. These correspond to diverse perspectives from which the sociology of the State, now undergoing a renewal, may benefit. These perspectives approach the State variously from organizational, relational, and cognitive positions.

QUESTIONING A ONE-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO THE STATE

“States are, in this sense, qualitatively different, not stronger or weaker than one another”. (Baldwin, 2005, p. 13). This quote is an apt summary of the main conclusion reached by historical studies of the State—then mostly comparative—from the past several years. In *Birth of the Leviathan* (1997), for example, Ertman returns to the classic thesis of the role of war in the birth of the State, using it to specifically examine the causes of differentiation between regimes with bureaucratic administrations and those structured around a dynamic patrimonial principal. By way of conclusion, Ertman recognizes the necessity in overcoming an absolutist-constitutionalist alternative. Instead, he proposes a new, double-axed typology

crossing absolutism and constitutionalism (regime structure) and patrimonialism and bureaucracy (administrative infrastructure). In so doing, the perspective is reversed. The French State, ordinarily characterized as bureaucratic, is presented as patrimonial as a result of a particularly late process of de-patrimonialization. On the contrary, the English State, ordinarily characterized by its infrequent intervention, becomes a State with a proto-modern bureaucracy (Mann, 2000, pp. 333-334). In the same way, Brewer and Hellmuth's comparative studies (1999) reveal the theoretical limitations of the traditional opposition between the Prussian State (bureaucratic, absolutist, and military) and the British one (constitutionalist, parliamentary, and commercial). But even when historical research on the State focuses on single subjects, there is always an implicit comparison between the American or English States—seen traditionally as weak in regards to a “civil society”—and the French State, seen as a model for a “true State” with a strong administration impervious to intermediary forces. That both of these archetypal visions are put into question at the same time represents a marked turn.

“DISCOVERING” THE AMERICAN STATE’S INTERVENTIONISM

American historiography has played a vital role in these evolutions. The common historian's long-held view was of a traditionally nonexistent, *laissez-faire* American federal State. The Progressive era at the beginning of the twentieth century, along with the interwar New Deal, would have given birth to a true State that, despite some signs of international might, remained relatively uninvolved. The work of Skowronek (1982) surely re-questioned these views. However, Skowronek's scope was limited to the nineteenth century, and, while affirming its existence and autonomy, the State was described in terms of parties and courts and thus not in the same state of completion as the European States, French or German. Since then, historical research has revealed the existence of a governed, centralized State dating well before the end of the nineteenth century. “The American State is and always has been more powerful, capacious, tenacious, interventionist, and redistributive than was recognized in earlier accounts of U.S. history”. (Novak, 2008, p. 758). Legal history, which counts Novak's 1996 text among its first,⁷ has been a pioneering force in this renewed historiography. Juridical bodies of work until now almost entirely ignored by

historians have been used to demonstrate State interventionism in economy, urbanism, transportation, societal mores, hygiene, and public health. The notion of a “well-regulated society” is used to describe the State’s management of individual rights and interests. However, this novel research addresses neither the effects of this copious regulation nor potential State production of lawlessness and discrimination.

Since, thematic studies combining legislative and archival sources have addressed these issues. The State appears as having strongly supervised, allowed, and organized the economic development of a “laissez-faire” nation. John’s 1995 study of the postal system is a classic demonstration of this: he shows how the postal system was developed by the federal government, stressing the system’s role in creating a national economy by sketching out communication pathways, for example, or setting the pace for collective living. Likewise, Bense’s 1991 and 2000 studies offer a systematic description of how American industrialization was supervised, supported, and facilitated by the federal State.⁸ A second large field of study deals with the delimitation and borders of national space.⁹ White (1991) shows how, far from being a lawless space, the western United States was continuously shaped by the federal government. In return, a veritable bureaucracy was set in place, large in number and spread across the territory. This region, long a symbol of American individualism, appears as a laboratory for “big government”. Among the administration’s policies are those that aim at categorizing citizens and non-citizens. Slavery and the racial segregation that followed are arresting illustrations of an interventionist American State (Fehrenbacher, 2001; King, 1995; Ngai, 2004). Related are numerous investigative studies of “police power”; these examine police control of morals and private behavior. Attempts such as these to impose State control in the private, even intimate spheres are forceful demonstrations of the American State’s existence well before the beginning of the twentieth century. Just as forcefully, the American State’s interventionism is shown to be extensive in comparison with its European equivalents which, for their part, prove uninvolved on these same questions (Stearns, 1999; Gordon S. B., 2002 ; Tomlins, 2008).

THE BRITISH IN-BETWEEN

The same paradigm shift can be observed in the case of Great Britain. Daunton's 2001 and 2002 studies on British taxation demonstrated how institutions—and, notably, the relation between central and local governments—allowed the development of a fiscal system during the nineteenth century. This system enabled much higher national revenue taxation than by the French State at that time, and many more citizens were inclined to borrow federally. Also, taxes were put in place earlier and to a larger extent.¹⁰ If fiscal taxation and tax consent are one of the first criteria for a State to exist, it seems as though the British State's weak institutionalization coincides with a strong societal hold.¹¹ Studies of public health policies, as we call them today, come to the same conclusions. During widespread epidemics in Germany and France, border controls and restrictions were put in place. These actions have been read as signs of State power, whereas the absence of comparable measures in Great Britain speaks in the name of State weakness. Baldwin (1999) reverses this perspective, however, showing that French and German interventionism at the boundaries of the State only served to compensate for feeble administrative action in the middle. On the contrary, strengthened by their experience with public hygiene and having fought battles against insalubrity, the British had a range of relevant services available. These were dependent on the central State but organized in conjunction with local governments and towns such that borders were crossed, and the sick were reached. Seen in this light, the British State appears clearly interventionist: "A strong state, one might be tempted to conclude, is not seen, while a weak one flails about noisily". (Baldwin, 2005, p. 24). Indeed, these studies gave way to a new hypothesis wherein the State's invisibility can in fact be a sign of its omnipresence: "still interventions run deep".

More generally, these two large-scale studies encourage a qualitative, multidimensional approach in lieu of the long-dominant quantitative one. Reflecting this substitution, Laborde's study of the English State examines the history of political ideas (2000a). In her study, the author addresses the use of the term "State" in English political debate. In so doing, she pits against one another scholars

who claim an England not only lacking a State but ignorant of the very idea of one (Nettl, 1968 ; Badie and Birnbaum, 1979 ; Dyson, 1980) and scholars, who, armed with proof, use the history of English political debate to demonstrate the presence of a strongly bureaucratic British State (Meadowcroft, 1995). These studies show that the concept of "State" is no more present in France than in England, nor vice versa, even if the same word is used to designate different realities, defined throughout the course of these studies. Once again, scholars propose considering the State from new angles: *La recherche comparative sur le concept d'État serait affinée, dès lors, si au lieu de distinguer entre traditions 'avec État' et traditions "sans État", on s'attachait à analyser les différents degrés et types de contestabilité du concept dans des traditions différentes. Et qui sait si, dans cette optique, les étrangers ne nous apparaîtront, non plus comme désespérément dépourvus, mais plutôt comme différemment dotés.* (Laborde, 2000b, p. 82).

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE FRENCH STATE'S MODEL CHARACTERIZATION

As we have seen, the French State appears in these studies as the prototypical State. Thus it comes as a surprise to remark on an opposite reflection, perfectly concomitant with the reconsideration of weak, retracted, or even inexistent American and British States, wherein the French State's supposed force and interventionism are put into question. In Dutton's *Origins of the French Welfare State* (2002, see also 2007), the author objects to the vision of a centralized, Jacobin State dominated by general interest and universal treatment. Examining the implementation of family allowances and social security, he shows that the French social State has, on the contrary, been constructed on permanent negotiations with many collective actors including mutual companies and family associations.

Aside from Dutton's major work, increased studies in the past several years have nuanced the notion, key in the sociology of the State, of "differentiation". Overcoming the traditional opposition between "Jacobinism" and "corporatism" has thus been suggested (Lemerrier, 2005a). Kaplan and Minard (2004) stressed the roles of intermediaries, experts, and informers played by various organizations and private groups in determining the action and conduct of the nineteenth-century French State. Also, Pierre Rosanvallon (2004) has forged the notion of an "imperative of governability" wherein certain

organizations have, from the origin of state interventionism, provided knowledge and competencies absent from the administration.¹² Together with numerous micro-history investigations, these studies all insist on the permeability between the State and notables. Gribaudi's research on the nineteenth century¹³ is situated on a different scale than the others, but he comes to the same conclusion. In a recent article, he examines the 534 employees and functionaries supervising the agencies of the Public Health and Hygiene offices of both the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce between 1803 and 1910. He shows that

Loin d'apparaître comme un organisme bien structuré et délimité par ses fonctions, l'administration se révèle donc plutôt comme une ruche bourdonnante et totalement intégrée à l'intérieur d'une société qui se transforme sous le tiraillement de forces contradictoires. [...] Le fonctionnement administratif lui-même ne peut sortir indemne de ces transformations ; il n'est pas non plus autonome par rapport aux tensions, tant profondes que souvent invisibles, produites par les différentes appartenances sociales originaires des employés, par les relations qu'ils nouent aussi à travers l'administration, par la configuration complexe et variable dans laquelle ils sont inscrits au fil de leur carrière. (2009, pp. 37-38).

TOWARD A NEW THEORIZING OF THE STATE

This crossing of two national historiographies has led to two converging series of questions. No longer for the American State does one ask “why is it so weak in comparison to some European equivalents, but why is so much of it arranged outside the State ?” (Baldwin, 2005, p. 15). For the French State, the “theoretical problem” becomes, reciprocally, the “organization of the relationships between State and society” (*l'organisation des rapports entre État et société civile*) (Lemerrier, 2005a, p. 169). However these new formulations may question traditional concepts in the sociology of the State, of which differentiation is the prime example, they do not break with the Weberian theory of the State. On the contrary, these reformulations have helped renew ways of understanding State power and constraints, if this be via a hybridization of public and private sectors (Baldwin, 2003). For the present moment, though, this renewal in history has not led to real theoretical alternatives, absence which can be only partially explained by history's tendency to study the specific, to focus always on contexts. In dialogues with historians, American political scientists have deplored history's lack of integrated explanations. There is now an effort, perhaps more systematic than before, to develop new analytical outlines (Hacker, 2005; King and

Lieberman, 2009). In the next section, we will discuss historical approaches to the State rather than theories or models, though it may be useful to formally explain some of these. The three approaches we shall discuss here are distinguished as ideal types and are, evidently, closely linked.

THE STATE AS ORGANIZATION: THE NECESSITY OF “INTERPLAYS OF SCALES” (*JEUX D'ÉCHELLES*)

The first approach is the clearest, and perhaps the most revisionist, in that the State is no longer seen as the centralized, impersonal bureaucracy that the theoretical underpinnings of the first historical research on the State, in the tradition of Skocpol, made it out to be. For the French case, this new approach was theorized notably by Fridenson, who, drawing his inspiration from the history of businesses, proposes “a history of the contemporary State as an organization”. In so doing, he suggests examining the *stratégies des principaux rouages de l'État, l'évolution de leurs structures, en faisant toute leur place aux pratiques et aux représentations des usagers comme des agents de l'État* (2000).

Here again, medieval and modern history paved the way. The European research program on “The birth of the State” has shown it is necessary to understand the State's relationship to the power structures, mainly cities and towns already in existence or those appearing in parallel. These emerge often in symbiosis with the developing State and often at the same time, but always in negotiation and interaction. Raggio's now-classic 1990 study on the Republic of Genoa in the sixteenth and seventeenth century provides an example of this type of conceptual thinking.¹⁴ *Dans les deux bourgs de la Fontanabuona qu'il observe, l'État moderne en formation est une réalité lointaine. Ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'il soit absent : mais il n'existe qu'au prix de composer avec les règles locales : celles, coutumières, de ces communautés montagnardes, et plus profondément avec celles qui sont liées au fonctionnement de la parenté.* (Revel, 1995, p. 83). Several of the contributions in Brewer and Hellmuth's work, already referenced, come to the same reversal in perspective. Certainly in Great Britain, but also in the Prussia of the eighteenth century, State authority and constraining power resulted from its State capacity to establish collaborations between already-existing powers. A new definition of the State is thus “a conglomerate of all institutions which spend public money and exert

legitimate force” (Brewer et Hellmuth, 1999, p. 20). One of the book’s contributors, Innes, suggests examining the way in which the State results from these “articulations”. Unbeknownst to the author, she is proposing the same theoretical idea as Rosanvallon, who includes the same idea and even the same term, “articulation”, as one of the four dimensions necessary in understanding the State: “de-globalization, organization into a hierarchy, articulation and addition” (*la déglobalisation ; la hiérarchisation ; l’articulation et la totalisation*) (1990, p. 14). These theoretical proposals are particularly attractive for the sociology of the State. Bureaucracy and the existence of a State are questioned in their supposed equivalence: in fact, the State is shown to be capable of taking alternate routes in order to exercise true constraint, particularly in acting through intermediate, non-centralized authorities.

Though this theoretical renewal may overcome the classic « center-periphery » distinction structuring traditional State sociology approaches, its echo can also be heard in several recent political science research projects, projects which, in the end, merely “rediscover” the modernist historians’ conclusions (though they may not explicitly reference them). The scholars work on a federal level. Ziblatt (2006) rearticulates Mann’s ([1986] 1993) distinction between “despotic” and “infrastructural power” in order to compare the construction of the Italian and German States. The German State’s force is explained by preliminary intermediary power structures on which its construction is based. The State, seen as an organization, allows federalism to be seen not as obstacle to the existence and action of the former but rather as one of its possible modes of intervention, including coercive intervention. In the case of the United States, this perspective has led to a reconsideration of the State-states relation: no longer are they seen as competing, or even in submission, but as two constituent parts of an organization whose relationship has become an object of study (Howard, 1999) and a “pattern of American governance” (Gerstle, 2009). Johnson (2007) shows, for example, how well before the New Deal, during the peak “laissez-faire” periods, the federal State acted directly upon the economy and society, all the while drawing upon non-State actors.¹⁵ In order to do this, the State used what Johnson conceptualizes as “intergovernmental policy instruments”. These include federal loans

distributed to states and for which the attribution depended on the establishment of certain policies.¹⁶

In the French case, where federalism is absent, the bureaucratic State first saw the breakdown of its organizational whole, so it became an ensemble of various elements: from the largest (the State body and Ministries) to the smallest (the civil servant). Opening the black box of the State-organization led to studies at crossing points between State and economic history: Tristram (2005) examined the general management of taxes, and Bordas (2004) and Clinquart (2000) studied head customs officials while Quennouëlle (2000) looked at Treasury management and Terry (2002) studied the economic projections of the Finance ministry.¹⁷ Like economic history, nineteenth-century history was substantially transformed by this approach (Luc, 2002 ; Stanziani, 2005 ; Karila-Cohen, 2008 ; Le Bihan, 2008 ; Galvez-Behar, 2008 ; Houte, 2010). “Paying attention to the relationship between the inside organization of the State and its impact on economy and society is one of the most promising perspectives in history of the State. It enables to grasp the inter-linkage between deliberate choices of politicians and administrative actors—including individuals, groups, corporations or institutions—and their effects on public decisions and so on society” (*La relation qui s'établit entre le fonctionnement intérieur de l'État et son action sur l'économie et la société est l'une des perspectives de l'histoire de l'État les plus récentes, qui devrait permettre d'apprécier les liens entre les choix délibérés des hommes politiques et des acteurs administratifs—qu'il s'agisse d'individus, de groupes, de corps ou d'institutions—et leurs effets sur les décisions publiques et donc sur la société.*) (Quennouëlle, 2002, p. 73).

Despite their use of the term « system » over that of « organization »,¹⁸ Baruch and Duclert's work (2000) on the administration, or, more precisely, the civil servants who make up the administration, has also used this approach.¹⁹ Attention is paid first to inter-ministerial services during the 1875-1945 period, then in the French Fourth Republic. As such, the scholars study less “the nature of economic, social, foreign, defense etc...policies implemented by the State than they look behind these, opening the black box, trying to understand the State as an administrative system” (*la nature des politiques—économiques, sociales, diplomatiques, militaires etc.—conduites par le*

régime que de descendre dans la salle des machines pour tenter de comprendre l'État [...] comme système administratif) (2003, p. 505). Like studies on the link between “State” and “state” at the heart of American federalism, this approach to the administration as system goes hand in hand with changes at both a hierarchical and geographical scale. In France, this is the primary historical approach of dealing with the State, and an American parallel does exist. One of the first scholars to consider himself a State historian, Balogh broke with the dominant Toquevillian view of the American political sphere, showing for example in 1991 how the nuclear energy policy of the United States could only be understood by studying the administration as an organization even while “social demand” from general interest as well as citizens was totally inexistent. More recently, in political science, Carpenter’s now-classic book from 2001 echoes Duclert and Baruch’s approach in its treatment of middle-level public officials and the correlations in their placement. Because he pays attention to networks, his approach is more directly suggestive of the second perspective, though also closely interwoven with the first. With the State defined as an organization, the discipline of history has, recently, seen the development of transnational State history. The internal structure of States is now studied in conjunction with the ways in which States’ make-up and actions relate to those of other States, or, rather, other organs: it is now question of cross-State, cross-Ministry dynamics. Douki, Feldman, and Rosental’s 2006 studies on the actions of the Italian, English and French Work departments (respectively) are an example.

THE STATE AS A RELATION: CROSSING VIEWPOINTS

However, these authors qualify their approach in the context of “relational history”. In the ongoing re-conceptualization of the State, “relational” is not a foreign term, for the two conceptions intersect. “Relational history” deals not so much with relations between parts of the State-organization as relations between the State and society. This is, once again, the case for all of the historiographies we are considering here. In analyzing the European States’ control of sanitary risk during epidemics, Baldwin (2005) suggests drawing up a State typology based on its interactions with civil society. In the same way, Rosanvallon considers that « writing history of the State consists in analyzing the conditions in which the patterns of the relationship between State and Society were born. Indeed there is no history of

the State without understanding a relation: State exists only through and by its relationship with Society » (*faire l'histoire de l'État consiste à analyser les conditions dans lesquelles se sont formées des figures du rapport État/société. Car il n'y a pas d'histoire de l'État hors de la saisie d'une relation : l'État n'existe que par rapport à la société*) (1990, p. 15).

In this approach, the “private” nature of the civil servants is addressed along with the “public” nature of the non-State actors’ initiatives. Baruch and Duclert’s study of the history of the administration treats the individual as a single entity and thus uses this approach. Considered in his totality, the “civil servant” is re-imagined in the context of his relations: social origins, trajectory, training, and, of course, his professional undertakings, for the study is a “political history of administration.” In this sense, the notion of the network is strongly used. In the study of the administration under the Fourth Republic, the State is analyzed from an organizational as well as relational perspective, thus leading the two authors to theorize the long absence of “State reform.” They are, therefore, working in dialogue with the renewal in State sociology proposed by Bezes in his 2009 study.²⁰ While under the Fourth Republic, political economic reform resulted from new, light administrations created on the basis of relations stemming from old resistance networks and/or initial training, State organizational functioning continued along on the classic pyramidal administrative structure (Baruch and Duclert, 2003). Already, studies on the modern State used network analysis (Descimon, Schaub et Vincent, 1997). In Carpenter’s 2001 work it is also the defining trait, showing that autonomy of American administrators was achieved via the mobilization of various networks at the crossroads of economic, social, and ethnic fields. It seems at first paradoxical that private relations should be the ones allowing public actors to gain administrative autonomy and societal hold.

Methodologically speaking, prosopography is used in this redefinition of the State as relational (Genet, 1997; Lemerrier, 2003, 2005b). Multiple career-line analyses were developed over the past years, becoming an obligatory component in State history. Modern historians’ work, rarely cited, unfortunately, by contemporary historians or political scientists, has led to important conceptual advances. Instead of restricting himself to Representative Assemblies, Reinhard (1996) chose to study the social relations among a group of actors at once private and public: conceived of as in continuum, these

are the “elites in power” (*élites au pouvoir*). The development of the modern State is examined not just from the top, but on the measure of its actors’ actions, from the King to the common man and together with the members of their respective Assemblies. Specialist historians of the nineteenth and twentieth century have put forth the project of examining the margins of the State, thus giving way to the idea of “advisory practices of the state” (*pratiques consultatives de l’État*) (Chatriot and Lemerrier, 2002, 2008) or of an “in-between space” (*espace intermédiaire*) (Chatriot, 2010, p. 5). These appear, in particular, to be operative notions. The State is therefore conceived on the basis of the relations that it maintains: relations with the Musée social (Horne, 2004), boards of trade (Lemerrier, 2003), National Economic Council (Join-Lambert, 2001), or workers’ trade associations (Soubiran-Paillet and Pottier, 1996).

Not surprisingly, it is within American historiography that the relation between public and private has been the most intensely conceptualized.²¹ A new analytical paradigm for the State centers on what might be qualified as its “invisibility”.²² Though this is a much older concept and though historical work has, for a long time, come out of the hybrid nature of the American State, the precise notion of a “hidden State” is recent. Developed by a political scientist, it was at first restricted to the study of the welfare State. In 1997, though, Howard proposed a redefinition of the American State’s social policies: no longer would only direct expenditures be taken into account, but also “tax expenditures with social welfare purposes”. This social policy is considered as belonging to a “hidden welfare State”. To construct his object of study, Howard takes a historical perspective, thus becoming a systematic reference in historical studies. Working from an upstage as well as downstage position, he engages in case studies of four federal tax deduction programs voted in 1914, 1926, 1975, and 1978 respectively. He concludes that the welfare spending of the United States reaches a level equal to that of European countries, even before the New Deal. From this conclusion, Howard suggests examining different State types along with the public policy instruments they use. Finally, echoing Johnson’s suggestion about the existence of specific tools for federalism, this second point has recently led Howard to articulate the following new problem “[it] may not be why the U.S. government does relatively little compared to European governments. Rather, the

question is why governments of similar size devote comparable resources to pursue similar policy objectives through such a diverse mix of policy tools”(2003, p. 415). Several historical studies pursue this interest in the “hidden State”.²³

A first group of scholars confirms the hidden nature of the American welfare state, rejecting, however, the idea that these policies’ objectives are the same as for European countries favouring public expenditures. The American objectives are, according to these scholars, less redistributive and less egalitarian (Gottschalk, 2000; Klein, 2003).²⁴ In 2002, Hacker published a now-classic work that generalizes Howard’s approach, all the while diverging from it on the notion of instrument neutrality. While Howard studies the tax deductions, Hacker takes up with social work policies, using the differential chronology of the State’s direct action on retirement and Social Security to explain the varying roles of public and private channels. Unlike Howard, he recognizes the differences in effect between various instruments, finally distinguishing between vertical and horizontal Welfare States (2006), asking “by what standard are we to call the indirect policy tools and government-supported private benefits that are characteristic of American social provision part of that body of State activity conveniently, if often imprecisely, termed the ‘Welfare State?’” (2005, p. 139).

In recent times, the notion of the American State’s “invisibility” has been brought beyond the mere question of welfare. Edling has examined the Federalist development, during the writing of the Constitution, of “a conceptual framework that made it possible to accommodate the creation of a powerful national government to the strong anti-statist current in the American political tradition” (2003, p. 219). The invisibility of the State had come about as a solution for the writers who, European examples in mind, wished for the new nation regal powers that would alone allow for the defense of the territory and for the maintenance of its recently-acquired independence. Therefore, if strong powers had indeed been given to the government by the Constitution, they would exert themselves not inside the country, before the eyes of the Americans, but outside, visible only at the nation’s edges. In the place of a mandatory conscription, a regular army was put in place, composed of chosen and willing men trained and paid at a time when fiscal resources

would have come from protectionist measures and from debt, the principal ways of financing an originally federal, interventionist State.

Balogh (2009) takes this study even further, showing how, far from just at the outset, staying “out of sight” was the federal State’s continual approach throughout the nineteenth century, despite the century’s reputation as “laissez-faire”. Using case studies—justice court activity, the postal system or, notably, economic regulation—the author describes the organization of State “invisibility” by the federal administration: military barracks are set up far from inhabited areas, fiscal administration is situated at ports and away from urban centers. State action is systematically and deliberately disguised under local public actors. Instead of studying actors, Balogh in the end suggests analyzing how, and to what extent, the American State’s being “out of sight”—disposition born from a particular situation during the drawing up of the Constitution—was institutionalized throughout the nineteenth century such that, according to the author, it became a foundation of contemporary American society. Inherent here is the idea that the types of instruments used may make for a specific State functioning.

These diverse studies lead in return to the question of the “visibility” of the French State and the implications of such a nature. King and Lieberman attempted a theoretical model for comparison based on this rediscovery of the American State, entitled “How American patterns offer comparative lessons” (2009, p. 549). The approaches detailed here directly echo the multi-dimensional theoretical model proposed by the two authors. The State as an organization is as encompassing of an “administrative State” as it is of a “fragmented State”. The State as a relation, on the other hand, corresponds to an “associational State”.

THE STATE AS A COGNITIVE MATRIX: THE NECESSITY OF SECOND-DEGREE HISTORY

The same is true for the two other dimensions King and Lieberman discuss, the “standardizing State” and the “segregated State” which make up the last historical approach to the State. This approach consists in explicitly sidestepping the definition of an object in order to fashion a “second degree” State history. The goal is “de ne plus confondre les représentations idéales et en grande partie imaginaires que l’État, par l’intermédiaire de quelques-uns de ses

théoriciens appointés, a voulu donner de lui-même, et la réalité des pratiques intellectuelles, des formes de pensée et de mise en ordre du monde, des routines bureaucratiques par lesquelles il se forme, se perpétue, se légitime jour après jour avec ce que l'on appelle aujourd'hui la continuité de l'État." (Bourdieu, Christin and Will, 2002, p. 6). The underlying idea here is that the State "lasts through the categories through which it thinks and give to think what it thinks" (*se perpétue par les catégories par lesquelles il pense et donne à penser ce qu'il pense*) (Lenoir, 2000, p. 96). In other words, it is "an efficient form of social representation" (*une forme efficace de représentation sociale*) (Rosanvallon, 1990, p. 14).

Together with the State-as-organization and State-as-relation approaches, Minard's 1998 study of Colbertism examines bodies of inspectors of manufacture, in so doing taking the State as a cognitive matrix. A concrete history of administrative practices reveals the way in which the State supervises economic life, normalizing it in the strong sense of the word. In studying the fabricators' reactions to the institutionalization of State control, Minard manages to apprehend State-society interlocking. A certain number of studies on statistics also take this perspective: considering that representations are realities, and produce realities as well, the history of categories and statistical calculations have come to constitute a special domain in studies on the State (Desrosières, 1993, 2005, 2008; Karady, 2008). In the United States, Childs (2001) has shown how, between 1889 and 1945, the federal American State used statistics in order to standardize the regulation policies it established, however indirectly, via the states (Haggerty, 2002). More broadly, the study of racial questions in the United States has led to numerous projects dealing with demographic categories. King's 1995 study is an example. In France, Brian's 1995 work on the "measure of the State" (*mesure de l'État*) serves as an example. In it, the author uses Colbert's *œuvre* to retrace the intellectual and administrative history of population censuses in eighteenth-century France. In particular, the study establishes a link between the division of statistical work and the nature of the work itself, which can be understood *via* the categorization of the world that it produces. The State is, as such, apprehended as more than a distinction between representations and realities. Desrosières' contemporaneous work, now classic, suggests that history and various forms of administrative statistics allow for

comparisons between different States' conceptions and organization—the French, British, German, and American States are accounted for. As Blum and Gousseff sum up using the Soviet case, the history of statistical demographics is a “one of the most accurate field to grasp some of the dimensions of the building of the State : the relationship between administration and political power, on the one hand, between State and Society, on the other, through, among other things, the study of the genesis of social representations” (*domaine [...] qui s’offre comme un point de vue privilégié pour appréhender certains aspects de la construction de l’État, des relations entre administration et pouvoir politique, d’une part, et entre État et société, de l’autre, à travers notamment la construction des représentations sociales*) (1997, p. 441). Originally, these studies were led in a relatively isolated fashion, but they have come to constitute what Rosental (2003, 2006) has judged to be a “political history of populations” (*histoire politique des populations*). The goal is to apprehend societies in processes of “self-creation”, and, in particular, to determine the role of a State initially conceived as an organization and as a relation. The work of Rosental (2009) exemplifies this goal, for it examines inter-ministerial associations on subjects of work and migration.

In the end, this approach calls for an epistemological reflection on the discipline of history’s conceptualization of the State through time and space. Its focal point is located at the crossroads of social history and the history of ideas. Skinner’s classic book from 1978 is in this respect exemplary. In France, Rosanvallon’s 2004 work on the limitations of an approach based on Jacobinism devotes a large section to analyzing the success that this concept has had, until recently, in conceiving of the French State. Novak’s 2008 article on the myth of the weak American State also takes this route, as does King and Stears’ text (2009). These last two scholars examine why American political science has spent so little time on the State since 1945. Indeed, as useful as the paradigm of the invisibility of the American State is, it calls for the opening of a new field of research on the famous “antistatism” as both a cognitive category and a finally limited explanatory factor. Indeed “antistatism” is often considered as un-historical and an independent variable. In dialogue with *A Government out of sight*, A. Sheingate recently looked at the actual American people’s perception of the State, through a study of the public-sector employment. Doing so, he points at the strong

disconnection between the invisibility of the American State and its actual presence in everyday life close to Americans. “This essay began with a puzzle: Americans have difficulty « seeing » the state. Upon closer examination, this puzzle actually manifests itself in two ways. As one might expect, Americans are unable to see the state because of the way federal authority is hidden or concealed in a maze of public-private partnerships and contracting arrangements. More surprising is that Americans are equally unable to recognize the state in the form of their neighbours, as well as themselves, who work as teachers, police officers, and other public-sector employees. In this second respect, the American state is hidden in plain sight”. This analysis calls thus for a new approach of the state as instrumental in the construction of the very idea of “antistatism”. “Herein lays on irony of American state-building. In constructing a state that executes many of its functions through an arms-length relationship with the public, the federal government has been able to expand its authority across a range of activities without employing a large bureaucracy. However, constructing a federal government “out of sight” also reinforces the very scepticism that such a strategy is meant to avoid” (Sheingate, 2009, 11 and 13).

This third component of historical work on the State—as a cognitive matrix—shows us that any reflection upon contemporary State reshaping should include a second-degree reflection on the reshaping of the viewpoints from which the researcher—the historian but also the sociologist—examines his or her object.

NOTES

- [1] This text is an enhanced and translated version of the article published in French in *Revue française de sociologie*, printemps 2011, p. 579-602.
- [2] This first group of American studies dealt mainly with gender (Gordon L., 1994), the conquest of the West (Wehite, 1991) or with environmental questions (Hays, 1987).
- [3] The bibliography and index from Baruch and Duclert (2000) display this excellently.
- [4] For a detailed history of this sub-field's development, see Zelizer (2000) and Graham (1993).
- [5] On this point, see the discussion surrounding the 50-year publication anniversary of *Building a New American State* (Balogh, 2003; Zelizer, 2003).
- [6] See Zelizer (2005) and Pierson (2005) for a debate on this point.

- [7] More recently, Marshaw (2005) has shown the existence of an administrative law, suggesting a centralized administration dating back to the creation of United States.
- [8] See John (2006).
- [9] This category includes work on the Civil War, which played a fundamental role in the development of the American State (Wilson, 2006).
- [10] For the preceding period, see Braddick (1996).
- [11] See Stasavage (2003) in addition.
- [12] In the same way, a 1980 political science commentary of Birnbaum and Badie's now-classic work, Lavau already felt that « plus on voit fonctionner le couple conceptuel société civile-État, plus grandit la perplexité. D'abord parce qu'il n'est pas sûr que ce couple conserve beaucoup de sens lorsqu'on le détache des configurations théoriques d'ensemble (chez Hegel, chez Marx, chez Gramsci) à l'intérieur desquelles les éléments de ce couple faisaient sens » (1980, p. 410).
- [13] See also Gribaudi (1998), Gribaudi and Magaud (1999), and, in this domain, evidently, the pioneering research of Charle (1987).
- [14] For this author's critical reading of the concept of the State as it now commonly conceived, see Raggio (1995) and Cerutti (1990).
- [15] A comparable approach can be found in the research dealing not with State-state relations but with the relation between the federal administration and local justice courts which, while independent of administrative power, were very early on one of the principal actors to implement it on a local scale (Schiller, 2005).
- [16] For another case study dealing with a more recent time period, see Lieberman (2009).
- [17] Pour une synthèse sur cette question, voir la communication de Chatriot (2010).
- [18] Though « organization » is used in regards to « State organization » (Baruch et Duclert, 2003, p. 509).
- [19] These are classic studies for French historiography, but they are not the only ones to have reintroduced the social and political history of the administration as a way of treating State administration (Kott, 1995 ; Viet, 1994 ; Dard, 2002 ; Andrieu, 2002). This is also true for studies of intelligence administration (Laurent 2004, 2007), the State during times of crisis, (Bancaud, 2002 ; Thénault, 2001) or during Soviet time (Cohen, 2003).
- [20] And, more particularly, Baruch and Bezes (2006).
- [21] The debates, already out of date, which followed the development of Italian micro-history and its treatment of the State seem particularly rich in reflections. For two summaries, read Chittolini (1995) and Guarini (1995). Surprisingly, these studies are cited only rarely in contemporary historical or political debates, which seem to be rediscovering some of the themes they dealt with at the time.
- [22] On this precise point, read Gensburger (2010).
- [23] See Katz (2001) and Jacoby (1997) for a convergent historical report on welfare issues.

[24] On this question, read also Gordon C. (2003).

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