

**abstract** Taking the contemporary debate about the status of political sociology as a starting point, the article presents some of the alternative views, and discusses the relationships between sociology and political science. It claims that, despite persistent controversies, looking into the research tradition of political sociology is a useful way to grasp the identity of the sub-discipline. Accordingly, the author takes the relationship between state and society as the central issue that everywhere cuts across theoretical and methodological diversity. Finally, the text takes the nation-state as the most typical configuration of the relationship between state and society in modern history, and one that remains so in the present, despite the many historical and analytical challenges we observe today.

**keywords** nation-state ♦ political institutions and social life ♦ political sociology ♦ state and society

One of the most popular views of ‘political sociology’ defines it as a specialty which focuses on the study of power inherent in social phenomena. This definition, although containing essential elements, remains too general, a fact which led Max Weber – one of the classical social scientists who contributed most to circumscribing politics as a sociological theme – to prefer the notion of ‘domination’ to that of ‘power’ (Bendix, 1962). In this sense, ‘political sociology’ became more and more vague a term as it developed within sociology, especially after political science came to compete with it as its profile as a distinctive discipline achieved clearer demarcation.

Within sociology itself, political sociology was shaken by several developments; particularly the so-called ‘cultural turn’ (since Michel Foucault’s work [1969, 1971, 1975]) led to significant dislocations. Thus, it now seems unthinkable for studies on the constitution of cultural identities, public or private subjectivities and the construction of modes of classification, and many others, not to be perceived as instances that mobilize power. This broadening of scope of the concept of power, to include not only formal political institutions but also informal political processes in the private and market spheres, has obvious theoretical consequences and implies a loss of specificity.

As for the relationship of political sociology to other disciplines, the comparison with political

science rather than with sociology itself or other specialties such as political anthropology, has long preoccupied those concerned about the impasses and prospects of political sociology (Bendix, 1973 [1968]; Bottomore, 1979; Lipset, 1969). Even when seeking complementarities rather than just differences between disciplines, the concern with what a specifically sociological approach to politics would be is still present. This raises problems even for definitions of political sociology as an interdisciplinary area, as in the well-known distinction proposed by Giovanni Sartori (1969) between a ‘sociology of politics’ (‘a subdivision of the general field of sociology’) and ‘political sociology’.

Even if a definitive solution is never achieved, it is possible to stake out spaces. Enquiring about the specific research challenges that political sociology has set itself (its ‘research tradition’ [Reis, 1999]) can be an effective way of facing the problem. And windows onto the everyday practice of the discipline, by means of a few significant examples, can give us a more concrete but also more nuanced view of this research tradition. But given that theoretical generalization is part and parcel of sociological work, we must still pay attention to the broader relationship between state and society that shapes the discipline of political sociology, in the midst of all its historical variety, thematic diversity and theoretical-methodological pluralism.

## Political sociology: a field in dispute

The relationship between political sociology and political science was the subject of a recent symposium of the Political Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association (ASA). The conclusions of the event were published in their official newsletter, *Political Sociology: States, Power and Societies*, in the summer of 2008. The basic question posed to the participants in the symposium was precisely about the different fields, how they complement and compete with each other, and what defines a study of politics as specifically sociological. Despite some variation, the answers tend to converge towards the differences rather than the complementarities between disciplines. Political sociology is characterized as having greater breadth or thematic fragmentation (depending on the point of view) than political science: social movements, collective identities and actions, classes, gender and race are some of the themes of the former. In turn, political science is seen as having greater thematic specialization, with research concentrated on specific political institutions such as parliaments, the presidency or parties and, at its broadest, electoral behaviour. Second, the replies emphasize the centrality for political science of so-called theories of 'rational choice' based on the idea of calculation of interests, especially in studies of voting patterns and of parliamentarians, or on the constitution of decision-making processes at various levels. This contrasts with the reduced influence of these theories in political sociology, which is still strongly marked by the diverse views on 'socialization' into values and norms inherited from classical authors in the social sciences. Finally, the replies stress the centrality of quantitative methods and data and their intensive and expansive use as a crucial characteristic of contemporary political science, contrasting this with the use of qualitative methods and data in sociological research.

The ASA publications offer other significant insights into the everyday practice of political sociology. For example, in its fall 2007 issue, the Political Sociology Section of the ASA offers a symposium on 'Great books and articles every political sociologist should know', with the help of researchers in various North American universities. The results suggest a significant pluralism, since no author is mentioned more than once in the symposium with the exception of Gøsta Esping-Andersen on the welfare state. Even so, it is still possible to detect a pattern in the replies regarding themes: workers and protest, gender and, above all, race are the most common themes in the books and articles mentioned, in addition to the welfare state.

The diversity of themes in political sociology and

the plurality with which it is defined by its practitioners also appear in a survey carried out in the UK in 1995. Department chairs and professors of political sociology were asked to enumerate which from a list of 13 topics were covered by political sociology. No author or study was mentioned more than twice in this survey. The more frequent themes were political parties, power structures, elites, collective protests and behaviour, legitimacy, electoral behaviour and gender politics (Rootes, 1996: 122). Except for the fact that electoral behaviour is taught more frequently in departments of politics (18 to 4), as to a lesser degree are political parties (20 to 11), there are no great differences in the topics covered between sociology and politics departments (Rootes, 1996).

If at first these general characterizations of political sociology seem limited (because restricted to specific intellectual traditions and/or national contexts), they do point to some important tendencies in different contexts. That is what the efforts of the Political Sociology Section of the ASA showed when it sought to classify and deepen some of the discussions which had appeared over the decades in its newsletters by publishing a significant editorial project in 2005, *The Handbook of Political Sociology*, as noted by the editors in the preface (Janoski et al., 2005: xiii). Bringing together a collection of 32 articles by authors from diverse intellectual traditions, the book covers the following themes: theories that orient research in political sociology, civil society and political action, the state and its processes, public policies and globalization. In this way, say the editors, the book seeks mainly to reintegrate 'unrelated fields' that we call political sociology and achieve a possible synthesis of new theoretical developments with existing theories.

But the more general tendencies of contemporary political sociology, also present in the US, can be seen above all in another significant example, the 1996 special issue of *Current Sociology* titled 'Political sociology at the crossroads'. Edited by Baruch Kimmerling, the issue comprises articles on the historical, institutional and cognitive developments in political sociology in diverse national and regional contexts – Brazil, Great Britain, India, Poland, Russia, Scandinavia, Southeast Asia and the US. Despite significant variations, certain common features are identifiable. From the institutional point of view, there are many difficulties in characterizing political sociology as a well-defined field of studies in politics in its relationship to political science or even to sociology. Such is the case of Great Britain, whose political sociology has been considered one of the most 'underdeveloped' areas of sociology as a whole (Rootes, 1996). This situation stems in part from the fixation with class conflicts and class politics, and

from the persistence with which politics itself has been used as a variable dependent on economic or social factors. In fact, this also contributes to understanding the controversial nature of the behaviourist empirical studies in Great Britain, which are more oriented to descriptions of formal political institutions and to political philosophy (Rootes, 1996).

The difficulties were even greater regarding Russia, since political sociology did not even exist in the USSR because of its limited conceptualization as a field of study of the phenomena of political participation in so-called civil society in democratic systems (Voronkov and Zdravomyslova, 1996). On the other hand, the situation now seems to be very promising for political sociology there, given the growing interest in themes related to the democratic transition. Protests and social movements, constitution of parties, electoral behaviour, constitution of a public sphere or civil society (as well as ethnic disputes) are among the main themes of its political sociology (Voronkov and Zdravomyslova, 1996). The same themes of democratic transition are also prominent in Poland. However, the existence before socialism of some institutionalized sociology, with its corresponding thematic and theoretical-methodological pluralism, was not entirely lost, and seems to be playing a crucial role in the definition of a contemporary research agenda for political sociology (Kubiak, 1996).

In the case of India, political sociology's classical interest in the social bases of political life is renewed through investigation of relationships between the political system and cultural diversity, the role of religion, ethnicity and castes in elections, the legitimacy of democracy and of the nation-state itself (Gupta, 1996). Political sociology in Southeast Asia, still marked by themes related to democratic transition (as in Russia and Poland) and by its relation to its own cultural and social traditions (as in India), has also shown interest in the relation between democratization and economic development (Khondker, 1996). This leads to re-examining central questions such as whether economic development necessarily leads to political democratization, or whether Asian development retains and presupposes non-democratic forms of government. Is there a general convergence on classical liberal-democratic democracy? Can the historical and cultural traditions of Asian countries be an impediment to democracy (Khondker, 1996)? These questions are also crucially important in the Brazilian tradition of political sociology, which has been strongly influenced by the themes of development and underdevelopment. And these questions become even more relevant when taking into account that the current Brazilian context is marked by a 'crisis' of the principle of the

superiority of the state (especially the developmentalist state) as a collective actor in organizing social life (Reis, 1996; 1998a: 111–36).

Scandinavia is a quite different case. It has an important academic output on politics linked to more universal themes such as political parties and electoral behaviour, alongside other local themes such as the impact of the European Union, the Scandinavian concept of democracy, the attention given to the local community, the fate of its welfare state (Allardt, 1996). However, this does not mean the fate of political sociology as a well-defined institutional and cognitive field is less uncertain in the region. After all, these studies are being developed both by sociologists and by political scientists who are clearly identified with the mainstream of their respective disciplinary fields, and the expression 'political sociology' is not even a significant part of the vocabulary of their scientific community (Allardt, 1996).

Nevertheless, the continuum between political sociology and political science, especially around an empirical interest in the state and its political institutions, is certainly broader than the Scandinavian case would suggest. It also appears in diverse activities promoted by the Research Committee on Political Sociology (CPS) of the International Sociological Association. Founded in 1960 with Seymour Lipset as its first president, this same Committee has been present since 1970 in the International Political Science Association (IPSA). The simultaneous presence of the CPS in the international associations of sociology and political science raises intriguing questions about the relation between these areas and their boundaries. On the one hand, it points to the difficulty in thinking about a consensual cognitive identity for political sociology which traces a clear line of demarcation from studies in political science. On the other hand, it indicates a deliberate intention to bring the disciplines closer, to keep them together and to establish a common research agenda. That in fact is what the 2006 CPS newsletter says in its editorial, which claims bringing sociology and political science closer together to be its 'mission'.

If the thematic convergence between political sociology and political science points to a relationship of complementarity, it does not seem enough to determine what exactly is a specifically sociological approach to politics. Scientific disciplines, or even research fields, are not defined only in terms of their empirical objects but also in theoretical and methodological terms. This can be observed with the reintroduction of the theme of the state in political sociology's research agenda, especially in the contemporary American field with studies by Charles Tilly and Theda Skocpol.

Skocpol's studies (for example, 1985, 1992, 1996), more than just contributing to the reinvigoration of the sociological interest in the state, have been considered especially responsible for the so-called 'neo-institutionalist' reorientation in political studies, in which the state is conceived as an empirical reality and an analytical variable that is independent of classes and other social forces. Thus, institutions not only have autonomy as the empirical locus of politics, but also have the possibility of shaping and reshaping political life and broader social life. It is no coincidence that this reorientation has been interpreted as a strengthening of political science, even to the point where it means a dislocation of the bases of political sociology from sociology to political science (Orum, 1996). On the other hand, it is true that there are difficulties in directly and exclusively relating the neo-institutionalist orientation to one discipline or even to one general theory of society explicitly shared by its followers (Skocpol, 1985).

Asserting the state as a relevant actor, in Skocpol's work and partly in Tilly's as well, may be understood as a double reaction: on the one hand, to the extremely formal view associated with the traditional juridical perspectives on the study of the state (which tend to consider political institutions as virtuous or not in themselves); and on the other hand, to so-called neo-Marxist traditions such as in Nicos Poulantzas (1968), whose analyses of the state are centred exclusively on society, characterizing it as a space in which interest groups ally with or oppose each other in order to define public policies. While this view of the state and of politics in general may seem 'reductionist' from an institutional point of view, one should not lose sight of the fact that a formalist view of institutions does not favour the perception of the possibility of policies in the sphere of the state being formulated by sectors that manifest their interests, or at least that such policies have diverse consequences for social groups (Giddens, 1985). Thus, the relation between political institutions and social life is inescapable, since the essence of political life is always (even in democratic regimes) constituted by relations of domination between distinct segments of society.

Therefore, while it is not possible to claim that relations between state and society are not also a concern of political science, one cannot minimize the fact that they are the basic and perhaps most characteristic empirical and theoretical research problem in political sociology (Bendix, 1973 [1968]). As stressed by the editor of the special issue of *Current Sociology* in his stocktaking of the diverse national and regional political sociologies which we have analysed, the state/society relationship formalizes, in

a sense, the particular experiences of political sociology. If political sociology is the science that studies 'the political' (perceived as historically and culturally constructed and changeable), there are also core components of the 'political' that run through all these variations (Kimmerling, 1996). However, this does not mean that social and cultural differences, as well as temporal processes and contexts, should be seen necessarily as a history of unified development or a set of patterned sequences, especially since components of the political constantly interact at the same time with choices and conditions that delimit social and cultural differences in each society.

The distinction between state and society undergirds the possibility of a distinctly sociological approach to politics, even though this does not necessarily imply a dichotomous concept of the relationship, as if state and society were not intertwined spheres. In other words, an approach that starts from society or the social structure in order to analyse the state or the political, is not the only possible sociological one. Although this is the basis of the discipline's concern with politics, by identifying the social bases of political life and specifying the role of social structure in institutional arrangements and political actions, the opposite is also true. In other words, approaches that attempt to specify the effects of institutions and institutional practices on political life and on society as a whole, but which preserve the significant connections between politics, social structure and even material life – why would such approaches not also be sociological? These are problems of empirical research that cannot be replaced by logical deductions. In short, it is the *relationship* between state and society that is of interest to political sociology, that ignites its curiosity, and that is the decisive intellectual experience in its research tradition. In sum, the *relationship* of state and society is an analytical axis that still allows us both to locate specific historical experiences and to unify the diversity of themes in political sociology into a broader explanatory framework. As in other cases, even research of more circumscribed empirical political phenomena such as political parties has to openly assume some general image of the state/society relationship, and consequently it adds or subtracts plausibility to these images with the specific results that it reaches. The state/society relationship also has the advantage of allowing us to fix in a more integrated way the main contemporary theoretical and empirical challenges in political sociology.

## State and society: the axis of political sociology

Relations between state and society assumed diverse theoretical, empirical and historical forms in political sociology throughout the 20th century. None has been more important and specifically sociological than the nation-state – although the valuing of the idea of ‘public sphere’ and the re-emergence of the debate on ‘civil society’ that goes with it also create many challenges for political sociology today.

The nation-state (the typical form of political community in modern times) was until very recently understood not only as an empirical reference in political sociology but as an interchangeable term with ‘society’, which is seen as more abstract and generic and, in practice, as synonymous with the object of study of sociology in general. From the point of view of political sociology’s research tradition, the nation-state took on very important meanings, analytically operating as a sort of catalyst of the different themes involved. In fact, this allowed specific themes of political sociology to gain intelligibility also as part of broader processes.

Reinhard Bendix (1977 [1964]), for example, investigates the constitution of the nation-state in a comparative perspective, connecting it to the issue of citizenship. The latter issue is in fact a crucial and enduring one in political sociology, and had already been dealt with by another influential but controversial classical author of the discipline, TH Marshall. Dealing specifically with the British case and not with a general theory, he understood the development of citizenship as an evolving sequence (at once historical and logical) of civil, political and social rights (Marshall, 1950). Bendix’s view of citizenship is greatly influenced by Weber’s thesis (which he updates), according to which societies differentially combine three basic principles of societal coordination – *authority*, *solidarity* and *market* – which are historical options that, once taken, lead to consequences that tend to condition subsequent alternatives in each society. Thus, he rejects any understanding of social development in terms of a differentiation from the simpler to the more complex, as well as the very idea that social change operates with interconnected and easily generalizable systemic variables that are independent of the ‘historical sequence’ of societies. The comparison between problems of legitimation of authority, articulation of interests and organization of solidarity in different societies allows Bendix to interpret national construction as a process in which bureaucratization of public authority and legal recognition of basic rights to members of the political community are related. In other words, authority and solidarity

are variable principles of social coordination, but recurrent in relation to the legitimation involved in the exercise of public authority and its complex relation with social structure. Thus, since the construction of the nation-state does not follow an a priori single and systemic pattern, there is also more than one path to citizenship.

Besides establishing the relation between national state and citizenship, Bendix’s work contributes, from a broader theoretical viewpoint, to a more nuanced definition of modernization and social change. Refuting both the notion of ‘prerequisites’ and ‘ideal-typical sequences’ for modernity, Bendix opposes: (1) the belief in the universality of evolutionary stages, proposing instead that the momentum of past events and the diversity of social structures lead to diverse paths of development; (2) the dichotomous view of tradition and modernity, proposing instead the understanding that each society combines elements of both; and (3) the conception that processes of change are internal to each society, proposing instead that they combine intrinsic components with responses to extrinsic stimuli, always involving state intervention as an important characteristic of these processes.

Charles Tilly, in turn, related the construction of the national state to collective action, which also has direct consequences for the comprehension of citizenship. Although he considers the construction of the state as a process that is potentially independent of other social forces, Tilly (1975, 1978, 1986, 1996) analyses it in relation to the historically variable dynamics of collective action, trying to take into account the innumerable reactions, mobilizations and negotiations on the part of common people to the assault of a centralizing and resource-greedy state. The available repertoire of collective action (as the author calls these mobilizations and negotiations) varies greatly as the processes of state construction, capitalist expansion, urbanization and coercion (especially war) advance. Thus, the national state implied a great transformation in the ways people acted together in pursuit of their interests: since there was greater dependence on decisions taken at the national level (rather than the local), the most relevant levels of political power for the interests of the common citizen were significantly dislocated, requiring new means and new goals for collective action. In this perspective, the extension of citizenship rights should be thought of as possible outcomes of concrete conflicts between social groups. Besides proposing a model for understanding collective action, Tilly intends to overcome one of the deepest antinomies of social theory: the ‘action’/‘structure’ dichotomy. On the one hand, he wants to determine the capacity of agency and

creativity of individuals in their mobilizations; and, on the other hand, the structural constraints that limit the possibilities – or, in his words, the repertoire – of collective action.

One of the main challenges of contemporary political sociology concerns the destiny of the nation-state as a typical form of political community in modernity. We live in a context marked by the dramatic pulverization not only of ‘traditional’ certainties but also of the values, practices and institutions associated with the political constellation of modern society, which seem ‘at risk’ from the restructuring of social relations and processes brought about by globalization. We are in the field of the consequences, some of them unforeseeable, of what Benedict Anderson called the imminent crisis of the ‘hyphen’ that linked state and nation for 200 years (Anderson, 1991). This crisis, however, can be given different answers.

In contemporary sociology, there have been countless debates on the issue of the empirical ‘referent’ of the discipline. With the intensification of global processes at all levels, the idea that the favoured field of study in sociology was closed ‘societies’, that is, self-contained and territorialized (even if internally diverse) totalities, has been subject to much criticism. Thus, one of the consequences of the process of globalization regards the perception that the nation-state is not a universal experience or a ‘natural’ result of societal dynamics (Wagner, 1994: 73), but a very specific and contingent form of relating authority and solidarity.

Thus, Ulrich Beck (1992, 1996, 1999), for example, claims that global processes produce a rupture in modernity, whose driving force (individualization) has profound consequences for collective identities such as the dissolution of patterns, codes and rules established by a national society. The ‘second modernity’ or ‘reflexive modernity’ that we are supposedly living in has crucial implications for sociology, since its very concepts are related to national territory. Hence the need to open the ‘container of the nation-state’, get rid of ‘zombie categories’ (categories based on obsolete historical presuppositions) and recreate sociology, providing it with new conceptual, empirical and organizational bases as a science of transnational reality. And one of the main consequences and indices of this process is the fact that the political constellation of the first modernity’s national society is becoming ‘non-political’, while what used to be ‘non-political’ in the nation-state domain is now becoming political. In other words, politics is not exclusively or principally found in institutions such as parliaments, parties, unions, etc. It is now found at the centre of private life, since the microcosm of the conduct of personal life is

interrelated with the macrocosm of global problems (such as the environmental issue). Thus, politics in the nation-state structure is no longer the starting point for a new territory of the political, the geopolitical or the global risk society.

Another perspective defends the thesis of the ‘uncoupling’ of state and nation (Eder, 2003), asserting that the national state faces a paradox in the course of its universalization: becoming a central actor in the process of globalization while its cultural unity (the nation) is being undermined by both supranational and primordial forms of solidarity or feelings of belonging which no longer coincide with national frontiers. What is left is the national state without the nation. In this case, it is not about the disappearance of the national state – the latter is even gaining space as a rational collective actor and an interest group on the global scale, but in a way that is disconnected from national identity, which is now challenged by other claims on identity. The issue, then, is to discover if one of the central functions exercised when state and nation walked together (the transformation of a collective sentiment into a civilized *demos*) can be taken over by institutional arrangements that go beyond it. In short, we are talking about a latent separating out of the nation, which now contests and challenges the national state (Eder, 2003; Eder and Giesen, 2001).

Other perspectives ponder whether, independently of the aspect it takes on in a globalized world and of how distant that is from current reference points, the need for adjustment between ‘social solidarity’ and ‘public authority’ is actually becoming obsolete. This can be illustrated by the fact that the conflicting tendencies that shape the contemporary world associated with globalization still seem tangled with regard to the challenges of coming up with alternatives to the collective political identities stemming from the nation-state, or its political innovations such as participatory democracy and the related idea of citizenship. Another essential fact is that the nation-state, despite the successful efforts of supranational integration on the one hand and the vigour of more primordial loyalties on the other, is still the reference point for the exercise of sovereignty and implementation of citizens’ rights (Reis, 1996).

The perspectives which emphasize the mediation role played by culture in the historical and functional articulation between state and nation indicate nationalism and political culture as crucial dimensions, and have given new vigour to research on these themes. The acknowledgement of the contingency of the relationship between nation-state and collective identities evidenced by globalization processes has been forcing political sociology to rethink the place of nationalisms. Thus, for instance, Calhoun (2007)

proposes that 'nations [still] matter' and that one should not underestimate the role of nationalism in the organization of contemporary political and social life.

Different perspectives (Delanty and Kumar, 2006; Smith, 2010 [2001]; Young et al., 2007) have been stressing the persistence of nation and nationalism as social phenomena of renewed interest, the former as a subjective community and the latter as a social force informing in a theoretical and practical way both social movements and political agendas of states. These perspectives claim, each in its own manner, the necessity of taking into account the flexible and persistent quality of the idea of nation, which lays deep roots in the imagined and real past, as well as its adaptive capacity to ever changing realities.

In the studies on political culture, the relationship between socialization processes and political behaviour also becomes central, based on the acknowledgement that the actors' answers to objective social situations are given by means of subjectively mediated orientations. Thus, the idea of political culture refers to the set of attitudes, beliefs and feelings that give order and meaning to a particular political process, showcasing the rules and assumptions upon which its actors' behaviour is based. A classic reference in this debate, Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture* (1963) not incidentally seeks inspiration in the Culture and Personality School developed in the US, whose research agenda was developed during the perplexing moment of the Second World War, and was directed towards the analysis of cultural patterns comprising the 'national character' of different societies. Meanwhile, the concept of political culture emerges, strongly linked to a concern about the developmental conditions of democratic political systems.

In the countries that have experienced authoritarian regimes, the political culture studies were directed towards the analyses of the presence and diffusion of democratic values in society. In the specific case of Latin American transition to democracy, for example, many researchers had their focus on both the political-institutional transitional process and on the change (or not) of attitude regarding democracy. They attempted to investigate the presence of values and conduct in accordance with the civilian and social basis of that system, in the sense the civic cultural tradition attributed to them: political, social and civilian tolerance, belief in the efficacy of political participation and suitable recognition of civic and political rights (see Diamond, 1994). The study undertaken by Putnam (1993) on the differences in the performance of local public institutions in Italy has accomplished an important theoretical and

methodological renewal by privileging the analysis of the conditions affecting the performance of democratic public institutions and their greater or lesser efficiency regarding public interest.

The tensions that the nation-state produces in the dynamic of social life are central to the scope of essential empirical and theoretical questions that have been reformulated by diverse traditions of contemporary political sociology. Contemporary critiques focus, above all, on normative and teleological aspects of the theories that presuppose that the construction of the nation-state was to be a universal model defined by certain European experiences which are, in reality, historically very diverse and contingent (Balakrishnan, 1996; Bhabha, 1990; Tilly, 1996); or that the construction of the nation-state could in fact produce purely civil ties, thereby minimizing the persistence of more primordial forms of solidarity in modern society such as kinship (Alexander, 1990).

This theoretical valuing of the tensions that the nation-state bestows on the dynamic of social life is relevant not only for a revision of the European situation, but also for research into other empirical realities and the (false) problem of their lack of adaptation to one or other hegemonic *model* of national formation (Botelho, 2008, 2009). And as one contemporary analyst suggests in the preface to the Brazilian edition of one of his books, the crucial sociological programme for 'non-European' researchers of national construction is to understand in what way 'the export of European state structures produced such diverse states in regions of European colonization'; to be done well, the important thing is for this programme not to 'mechanically apply European models, but examine the types of causes and effects which produce different things when applied in distinct environments' (Tilly, 1996: 37, 40).

Another beloved theme of the political sociology research agenda, which directly articulates the theoretical issue of social change with the state/society relationship, concerns social movements. It is possible to identify at least three major theoretical lines that explain social movements (Alonso, 2009), all of which had to be adapted in order to face contemporary challenges, such as collective mobilizations reaching global scale, involving violence and tending to concentrate on identity issues. The first theoretical line is expressed in the so-called resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald, 1977), which values rationality over explanations of collective mobilizations in terms of collective emotions.

The two other major theoretical lines – the so-called political process theory and the new social movements theory – derive from the weakness of

Marxist debates about possibilities of revolution. Despite the fact that the former is devoted to a theory of political mobilization while the latter is founded on a cultural change approach, both stand up against either determinism and economicist perspectives on collective action or the idea of a universal historical subject, preferring macro-historical perspectives, which analytically combine politics and culture in the social movements explanation. With reference to the political process perspective, Sidney Tarrow (1998), for instance, argues that when there are no changes in 'the political opportunity structure', that is, in the formal and informal dimensions of the political environment, then new channels of demand expression are opened and created for social groups outside the polity. This may occur through political and administrative institutions' increased permeability to civil society claims, caused by some crisis in the political coalition in power; by changes in the political interaction between state and society, particularly reduced repression of protest; and by the presence of potential allies (Kriesi et al., 1995). Mobilization is grounded in a conflict between different parts, one of which occupies the state for the moment, while the other speaks on behalf of the society. Since such positions are variable, inasmuch as actors move from one to another, the analyses have to overcome the conventional barriers which define 'state' and 'society' as two coherent and separate entities. Thus, instead of defining the equation in terms of social movements *versus* state, this perspective opposes 'power holders' (polity members), who have control over and access to the government ruling a population (comprising the means of repression), and 'challengers' who attempt to gain influence over government and to obtain access to resources controlled by the polity (Tilly, 1993).

In its turn, although it is not considered a homogeneous perspective, endowed with a stable unity, one can discern a common postulate among the main theorists of the so-called new social movements – Alain Touraine, Jürgen Habermas and Alberto Melucci. If, on the one hand, each of them maintains the macro-historical approach and the association between social change and conflict forms, on the other hand so too does each consist in the elaboration of an effective cultural interpretation of social movements. Notwithstanding the fact that each has his own modernity theory, they more or less share the same central argument that, throughout the 20th century, a macro-structural change would have modified the nature of capitalism, whose centre would no longer be industrial production and work. Labour conflicts would have been attenuated, either through democratic institutions, such as rights expansion movements, or capitalist institutions, like salary

increases, and would have become eminently cultural, exercised through the control of information by a technocracy. Furthermore, the change would have blurred distinctions between public and private, provoking shifts in subjectivities and originating in a new conflict zone, by moving claims for redistribution, from the world of work, to quotidian life, calling for the democratization of its structures and affirming new identities and values. There would be a politicization of private life. So the class movements would give way to new expressive, symbolic and identitary movements, such as feminism, pacifism, environmental and students' movements.

The enhancement of global processes and the related crisis of the nation-state also pose inspiring challenges for the political sociology of social movements. It is necessary to face the shift of scale in activism, from the national/local to the transnational/global level, as well as its professionalization, which can be observed in the fact that in various western countries social movements have become bureaucratized, converted into parties, acquired an enterprise culture or assumed the administration of public/state services (Rootes, 2003). Moreover, contemporary protests involve activists and themes that cross boundaries and are often directed towards multilateral institutions or to transnational public opinion. No less important is the weakness of the association between new social movements and post-materialist agendas caused by the recent wave of ethnic, religious, communitarian and conservative mobilizations.

One ought to note that the analysis of new social movements was gradually converted into a civil society theory. The critics together with the empirical evidence of the bureaucratization of activism deepened the crisis of the distinction between new and old social movements. The theoretical tendency has, then, ceased to relate innovation to an actor, the movements, and has begun to link it to a *locus*, the civil society. To a great extent defined negatively – civil society is not state, nor market, nor private sphere – from civil society would emerge demands for autonomy referring not to political-institutional power, or to material benefits, or to self-interest.

The rediscovery of the concept of civil society restores it to a privileged place for mirroring the specificity of the state/society relationship from the point of view of the effects introduced, at both poles, either by the autonomous dynamic of private interests developed in the centre of the very society or by the possibility of its harmonious or conflictive consociation. Throughout the revival of the debate regarding this concept over recent decades, new ideas were elaborated and incorporated into the contemporary lexicon. In response to the prevalence of the

market, the image of civil society has been strengthened as an expression of either communitarian solidarity or of some kind of counter-attack to the economic, seen as a place for the realization of the individual's potential over the political. With this inflection, civil society was depoliticized, beginning to be considered either as a shelter for the individual and the voluntary associations against the state, or as an environment capable of reconstructing the civic traditions destroyed by the market. On the other hand, as a representation of participative democracy's growth, plausibility has been added to the image of civil society as a plural sphere of interests which, by means of increasing meritorious associative actions, would lead to an almost redeeming 'general will', to a 'program that seeks to represent the values and interests of social autonomy in face of both the modern state and capitalist economy, without falling into a new traditionalism' (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 54).

Similar challenges are relevant in the other main area in which state/society relations have been examined in political sociology: theories of the 'public sphere' and 'civil society'. Such is the case with Latin America, for example, whose societies are historically structured around the state or the market, and in relation to which civil society is both a theoretical marker that would aid perception of the limits of fashionable political proposals and a third arena to be strengthened (Avritzer, 2002). On the other hand, if we agree with the argument regarding diverse connections between authority, solidarity and interests in each society and their consequences for its historical course, then the legacy of traditional conceptions of citizenship will not be without consequences for strengthening 'civil society' or the 'public sphere' in these societies. This is evidenced in the comparative analysis of contexts marked by economic scarcity and reduced effective legitimacy and capacity of the state, such as the Latin American and Eastern European cases. Thus, the more organic and holistic the traditional conceptions of collective identities, the more probable it is nowadays to find feelings of alienation, and the more reasons there are for people to take refuge in their private networks of relationships, making the public sphere narrower and more indiscriminate and reducing democratic participation even further (Reis, 1998b: 91–110).

The re-emergence of the idea of 'civil society' (Alexander, 1993) and the greater value attributed to debates on the 'public sphere' that goes along with it, may represent relevant theoretical alternatives to the more historical orientations of political sociology that are mainly focused on the problem of the nation-state. Not coincidentally, perhaps, there are efforts to bestow greater historical support and breadth to these alternatives (Cohen and Arato,

1992), even though their Eurocentrism is still strongly criticized (Hann and Dunn, 1996). In any case, it is true that these alternatives may seem 'minimalist' from the viewpoint of the problem of collective identity linked to the nation-state, insofar as they suggest that people should basically accept the procedural rules of open and equal debate between individuals bearing interests (Eder, 2003). However, perhaps what is most relevant is to observe that this revaluing of ideas of 'civil society' and the 'public sphere' has led to significant redefinitions of relations between state and society from the latter's perspective (considered the locus of democratic organization and of defence against processes of bureaucratization and the marketization of social life). This may lead, in some cases, to the return of disjunctive views of state and society and therefore, in extreme cases, to compromising the specificity of political sociology as a research tradition.

## Annotated further reading

- Bendix R (ed.) (1973 [1968]) *State and Society: A Reader in Comparative Political Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.  
This collection of classical articles written by renowned sociologists offers an overview of the field of political sociology in the 1960s and of its themes, issues and founding theoretical-methodological approaches, which would also largely shape it in subsequent decades.
- Janoski T, Alford R R, Hicks A M and Schwartz M A (eds) (2005) *The Handbook of Political Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
The book presents an overview of political sociology, analysing historical and analytical aspects of its development as an area of research up to the present time, and also of its main themes and theoretical approaches. This excellent introduction to more recent developments in political sociology also offers valuable bibliographical suggestions, which give some idea of the discipline's complexity.
- Mann M (1986, 1993) *The Sources of Social Power*, 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
A comprehensive study of the sources and origins of power in human societies from the Neolithic period, through the ancient civilizations of the Near East, the classical Mediterranean age and medieval Europe until the Industrial Revolution in England and on to the contemporary age. Mann attempts to build a generalized model and a theory of power based on this extensive historical material.
- Moore B Jr (1993 [1966]) *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.  
A classical work of historical-comparative analysis in political sociology and in the social sciences in general. Comparing revolutions and modernization in China, England, the US, Russia, France and Japan,

Moore studies the conditions for the sociogenesis of democracy and of the fascist and communist regimes in an attempt to explain the ways in which industrialization and pre-existent agrarian regimes interacted to produce different political results in those different societies.

Reis EP (1998) *Processos e escolhas: estudos de sociologia política*. Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa Editora.

A collection of articles on diverse themes of political sociology, ranging from classical themes such as citizenship, onto the nation-state and its metamorphoses, and then to comparative studies on democratic transition in different regional contexts and the relations between citizenship and social inequality. It is an important work both for introducing Brazil and Latin America as historical and empirical analytical references, and for the theoretical dimension it encompasses.

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**résumé** En prenant comme point de départ le débat contemporain sur le statut de la sociologie politique, l'article présente quelques vues alternatives et discute de la relation entre la sociologie et la science politique. Il soutient que, malgré les controverses persistants, examiner la tradition de recherche de la sociologie politique se montre comme une ressource utile pour saisir l'identité de cette sous-discipline. Ainsi, l'auteur prend la relation entre État et la société en tant que la question centrale qui imprègne leur diversité théorique et méthodologique. Finalement, le texte prend l'État-nation comme la

configuration la plus typique de la relation entre État et société dans l'histoire moderne, qui se maintient comme cela, malgré les plusieurs défis historiques et analytiques qu'on observe aujourd'hui.

**mots-clés** État et société ♦ État-nation ♦ institution politiques et vie sociale ♦ sociologie politique

**resumen** Tomando como punto de partida el debate contemporáneo acerca del status de la sociología política, el artículo presenta algunas visiones alternativas y discute la relación entre sociología y ciencia política. Sostén que, a despecho de controversias persistentes, examinar la tradición de pesquisa de la sociología política se muestra un recurso útil para aprehender la identidad de esta sub-disciplina. De esta manera, el autor toma la relación entre estado y sociedad como una cuestión central que atraviesa su diversidad teórica e metodológica. Finalmente, el texto toma el estado-nación como la configuración más típica de la relación entre estado y sociedad en la historia moderna, que permanece así en el presente, a pesar de muchos desafíos históricos y analíticos que observamos hoy.

**palabras clave** estado-nación ♦ estado y sociedad ♦ instituciones políticas y vida social ♦ sociología política