

States of imagination¹

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Does everybody hate the state? It often appears so. Neoliberals detest the state and aim to downsize it or even make it wither away. And defending it certainly raises problems. Many people disenchanted by formal politics no longer look to the state, despairing of its associations with bureaucracy, hierarchy, corruption, secrecy and lies. Others view it as an outdated institution, a left-over legacy of nineteenth-century nation-building and twentieth-century power politics that has little relevance to those seeking to create new responses to contemporary challenges. This has given rise to a search for new forms of social and political engagement – the Indignados movement, new feminist and anti-racist movements, and a proliferation of community mobilisations – that flow across national borders and have little truck with old-style political parties.

However, a politics of the state still matters. And how we imagine the state, how we feel about it, will shape the kinds of politics that are possible. Popular disenchantment with the state reflects the experiences of the kind of state we currently have to live with, at least in Britain – a state that has been commodified, marketised and managerialised, and seems to ignore the human relationships at stake in its encounters with citizens. But the ‘rolling back’ of the state also creates a strong sense of loss: the loss of state funded institutions (voluntary organisations, advice centres, arts and cultural provision), public services (the local library, hospital, youth centres), public welfare (elder care, childcare), and, not least, the capacity for public governance. In our current conditions of austerity and deepening inequality, many people are looking to the state to regulate financial interests, curb corruption and abuse, and prevent social harm. In such moments, we hear a different view of the state – it is seen as a bulwark against the market’s destructive powers; as the guarantor of rights; as ‘the equaliser’.

This is the puzzle – the paradox of the state – that we must address: that the state is both despised and desired. Yet this is not a simple paradox, and should not be treated as an ‘on the one hand ... on the other’ kind of argument. The problem facing us in seeking to understand ‘the state’ is that it is many things, and works through a series of different relationships with those whom it claims to represent, serve, scrutinise, improve or coerce.

This makes a singular politics of the state elusive. What’s more, a focus on analysing the defects or merits of the contemporary state tends to overlook the affective dimensions of our relationships with state institutions and practices. This echoes some of the words we have already used – disenchantment, hate, loss, desired, despised. States are the focus of both paradoxical politics and ambivalent affects: complex feelings of attachment/detachment, hostility/closeness, refusal/engagement, and nostalgia/paranoia – for example – suffuse experiences of the state, relationships with the state and political debates about the state. Such feelings mean that would-be rational discussions about the politics of the state often founder in mutual antagonisms, silencings and mis-hearings.

Our own view is centred on the state both as an expression of publicness – as something more than the sum of individual interests or choices – and, paradoxically, as an instrument for the destruction and evacuation of public attachments and identifications. Our primary focus in this chapter, then, is on the renewal and reassertion of notions of public governance, public dialogue and public solidarity. And as an aid to understanding how this might be brought about we draw on a series of newspaper headlines that show something of current contradictory responses to the changing role of the state, and the affective dimensions of those responses.

The state we are in

The health services could keel over in 2016

Guardian, 7.8.13

Fat profits: how the food industry cashed in on obesity

Guardian G2, 8.8.13

When did we give our consent to a secret state?

Guardian, 4.10.13

The current British state, like many others in the global North, is thoroughly implicated in the neoliberal project; it acts as the agent of global capital, and seeks to restructure society, economy and public culture along market lines. And this project has fundamentally changed the state itself, hollowing it out, shrinking it and changing its purpose. For example, the privatisation of public goods has blurred the distinctions between public and private sectors to the extent that it is no longer clear for what, exactly, the state retains accountability and responsibility. Is obesity a public issue or is it just a consequence of individual greed or 'lifestyle choice'? Or, as argued in the G2 piece above, is it perhaps a direct consequence of profit-seeking by the food industry, and, if so, should the industry be regulated more closely?

The state has also been opened up to powerful interests: the reference above to the health service potentially 'keeling over', for example, was made by the head of the Foundation Trust Network, when calling for the pace of privatising reforms to be accelerated and for political interference to be curtailed. Furthermore, the state is actively seeking to protect the interests of capital by attacking workers' rights, equality legislation and the regulation of wages and working conditions. But, even more than this, it is deeply implicated in the economisation of the social realm, turning citizens into consumers, enmeshing civic and not-for-profit organisations in a web of contractual relationships, and establishing economic calculations as the ultimate measure of value. All of this could be seen as contributing to a view of the state as being in decline as a result of the overwhelming power of markets.

But such a view is challenged by the state's role as an intrusive power, concerned with national security and carrying unprecedented

powers of surveillance and control. Revelations about the extent of mass surveillance by security agencies in Britain and the US (our third headline above) have attracted huge public concern. Responses by the liberal media have supported ‘whistleblowers’ and attempted to disclose and publicise infringements of personal freedoms. But here too divisions within the state have come into view, raising questions about how far the part of the state that is concerned with parliamentary enquiries and committees can exert control over its security arms.²

The state is, then, both retreating and expanding; it is plural in the forms of power and authority it exerts. The state that is being undone, securitised and marketised is also the one that inscribed – however partially and conditionally – the rights which previous generations of campaigners and activists fought for: gender and racial equality, the protection of workers from forms of abuse that threaten their health and safety, legislation against rape and domestic violence, rights to pensions and other forms of social protection, and the right to receive education and healthcare and other public services. Are such rights merely residual – left-over traces that have become unsustainable in the face of would-be dominant conceptions of choice and responsibility? We think not – our own research, and that of others, has shown how attached people remain to their identities as members of a wider public. They continue to look to the state to guarantee rights and to ameliorate inequality, hardship and insecurity. Part of our concern here is to see how these continuing attachments might connect to emergent elements.

Something must be done!

Summer of hunger: huge rise in food bank use as demand linked to welfare reform

Independent, 10.8.13

Child poverty in Britain causing ‘social apartheid’

Observer, 25.8.13

Such headlines invoke a recurrent feeling that ‘something must be done’ – and that feeling usually implicates the state in the doing because of its capacity to make and enforce laws, collect taxes, distribute (and redistribute) income and other benefits, and to use a variety of means to get people (and companies) to act in desired ways. The first headline here suggests that the state can have a positive role to play in protecting low paid workers from exploitation by employers through mechanisms such as the minimum wage; the second looks to the state to change its policies so as to avoid a worsening of poverty, social division and the (gendered) social relations of care.

Of course, many of the problems the state is being asked to address are themselves the consequences of its own actions – privatising water provision, creating greater inequalities between rich and poor, and engendering what the second headline terms ‘social apartheid’. Indeed, the state continues to be viewed as the only actor who can ameliorate inequality through processes of redistribution. This includes redistribution within families and households to address gendered inequality, and between generations in order to provide for the needs and rights of the growing elderly population as well as to invest in the life chances of future generations. It also involves addressing the deepening inequalities between regions and nations within the UK.

All of these divisions point to the urgency of redistribution through a progressive programme of benefits and taxes. But both benefits and taxes have been stigmatised in the neoliberal climate:

Stay-at-home mums are making a lifestyle choice and can expect no help with childcare costs, says Osborne

Daily Mail, 5.8.13

This headline expresses the contemporary neoliberal view of the state’s limits, articulated through the idea that households sink or swim according to their own choices and lifestyles. This, together with the demonisation of those on benefits, represents a profound ideological turn. There is a need, then, for a politics that might rebuild popular

support for equality, inclusion, solidarity and social justice as principles for a public realm. For such principles – which are the underpinning of support for redistribution – are under increasing threat, not only through cuts to benefits and services, but through cultural processes of stigmatising benefit claimants.

No more guilty pleasures

- Council becomes first in the UK to block housing hardship payment to people who spend too much on smoking, drinking and TV
- Edinburgh says lifestyle clampdown is necessary to ration poverty funds

Independent, 24.8.13

This *Independent* front page summons up an image of a dour and censorious state, which places ‘lifestyle’ conditions on the meagre benefits it offers. But it also reveals something of the strain experienced by councils and others at the ‘front line’, charged with making hard decisions about how scarce resources should be used. There is a sense of crisis about the state’s capacity to function effectively as it is slimmed down, rolled back and hollowed out, and as new expectations are placed on state workers to both control and change the behaviour of those they serve.

But while people certainly fear some extensions of the state’s power (intervention into lifestyle choices, the criminalisation of dissent), they do also want the state to act as a powerful guarantor of public interests against private ones: challenging excessive executive bonuses in the financial sector, controlling profit-taking from privatised public utilities, acting against tax avoidance by companies moving key functions to nations with more favourable tax regimes. Conventional mechanisms of state regulation seem inadequate to meet such challenges, not least because of the transnational structures and flows of capital. Indeed, the attack on ‘red tape’ has helped to build a culture in

which corporate interests prevail, enabling moves by employers to circumvent employment rights, the weakening of equality legislation, the failure to punish environmental degradation and so on. These have been the focus of much public criticism and there is clearly a public interest at stake here. Such failures of the state to act as a ‘bulwark’, we think, exacerbate public disenchantment with the state and withdrawal from political participation.

Re-imagining the state

For all these reasons, there is a current search on the left for alternative imaginaries of the state – from the ‘relational state’ to a state capable of fostering ‘progressive capitalism’.³ There is also a desire to look beyond the neoliberal project, for example to experiments in the global south which offer alternatives to privatisation, or show how privatised goods can be brought back into public, municipal or cooperative forms of ownership.⁴ These remind us that states can be more than a bulwark against the powerful; they can also be a source of emergent rationalities, and provide resources for experiment and innovation. Both these elements are critical for any project of remaking states – the imaginative needs to be combined with material resources to explore new possibilities. States are in the unusual position of being able to provide the resources to support their own remaking.

Our own contribution to the debate revolves around the renewal of public relationships. The idea of the state as representing or embodying a unified idea of the public and public interest is of course no longer viable. The social and political settlements on which earlier forms of the state rested have unravelled, and the idea of a singular public, unadulterated by the transformations of diversity and difference, is now unsustainable. There can, then, be no going back to a mythical golden age of the state. Nor do we envisage a return to the idea that the state can somehow be ‘captured’ by progressive social forces. Rather, we propose an approach to the state that enhances notions of the commons, that reasserts collective (public) interests and enables collective (public)

action. Public-making does not reside wholly in the state but is enacted through a proliferating array of groups and organisations working beyond the state to build new communities, networks and forms of mobilization within and beyond the nation. But here we propose three dimensions of public-making that we think offer scope for a progressive politics reinventing the state and enabling a popular structure of feeling centred on collective identifications and attachments.

The first dimension involves a stronger approach to public governance. Processes of marketisation and the dispersal of state power to a wide range of agencies – individual schools and hospitals, quangos, devolved bodies, voluntary agencies and corporations – have fundamentally shifted the relationship between public and private authority. We are left with thin forms of public authority and regulation that are getting progressively weaker with the recurrent attacks on ‘red tape’. While there can be no going back to the monolithic state bureaucracies in which public governance was invested in the past, we want to stimulate discussion of how public authority and democratic legitimacy can be enhanced.

The second line of development is cultural and ideological, and concerns the language through which the politics of the state is conducted. [Doreen Massey's contribution to the Manifesto](#) traced the shifts in language that have transformed us from citizens to consumers, from social subjects to individualised market actors. She argued that ‘discourse matters’, and also proposed that it can be changed. We take this discussion forward here, addressing the need to renew and remake public discourse in order to constitute new forms of public solidarity. This is not only a matter for the state, but the state has a crucial role to play in shaping public opinion and public action (rather than simply treating citizens as solely motivated by individual interests).

This takes us to the third line of development, in which we propose reimagining the state as a dialogic entity. This is not a matter of the success or failure of so-called ‘big conversations’ initiated by governments seeking to restore their legitimacy by spurious ‘listening exercises’. Nor are we merely concerned with inter and intra political

party dialogues, or even the official dialogue between states and citizens. Rather we think it is vital to attend to, and nourish, the dialogues in the complex of public and political relationships that inform state action. We said earlier that the state is not a single entity, which implies the dialogic relationships that might connect different facets of the state, linking those shaping and those enacting policy, the regions and nations, policy-makers and publics, and, above all, the different publics who understand and imagine the state and its possibilities in diverse and sometimes conflicting ways.

Thinking of the state in such public terms means going beyond an interest in relationships between states and citizens to considering the complex clusters of relationships through which the state (that strange abstract idea) is brought to life. Each cluster of relationships – whether in the coercive institutions of the state, its security complex, the management of the social order, the shifting alignments of civil society organisations and government, or the infrastructure of support for private capital (corporate, rather than social welfare) – is highly political. Each cluster also informs popular understandings of, and feelings about, the state. But such relationships are fragmented and often competing, making states contradictory and thoroughly unstable institutions. It is this instability and incompleteness, rooted in unresolved contradictions, that creates the spaces of possibility for alternative imaginaries of the state to emerge.

Public making as public governance

In a recent *Big Issue*, under the headline ‘We have the power to make a difference’, John Bird offered a non state-centred response to the scandal of ‘payday loans’ – loans that charge exorbitant interest rates and which are most used by those in dire poverty. It includes the comment:

Credit at such extreme rates should be outlawed. But can you imagine any government making that happen?

Big Issue, 5.8.13

There is clearly a loss of belief in the power of the state to curtail the excesses of capitalism. But does this mean giving up on the idea of the state as a guarantor of rights and a bulwark against inequality? We think not. The idea of active state intervention into the economy has been in retreat over the last forty years, partly as a result of the unhappy turn to Hayekian theory and monetarist policies in the Thatcher/Reagan years. The banking crisis challenged the hegemony of such economic policies, but did not displace them: indeed the state-sponsored buyouts of parts of the financial sector can be viewed as interventions to prop up failing capital. Any notion that the crisis would open up space for emergent rationalities – expanded public spending to deal with the social consequences of crisis, a less consumerist society more concerned with the sustainability of resources and the quality of life, a renewed trust in public institutions rather than private profit – was quickly deflected by governments anxious to restore the pre-crisis status quo and even exploit the crisis to enable further profit-taking. These are not just questions of economic policy: rather, they raise the possibility of thinking again about power. How might the relationships between the public authority of the state and the private authority of corporations, media organisations and the public be arranged differently?

Royal charter sealed after legal action fails

Guardian, 31.10.13

Four admit to hacking plots

Guardian, 31.10.13

These headlines are part of a prolonged media storm over the shift in relationships between parliament and the press following the Leveson Report, and the progress of criminal action against journalists and editors charged with ‘hacking’ offences, collusion and corruption. The Royal Charter is a state instrument for public regulation, which appears likely to stand alongside a rival regulatory body being set up by the press itself, opening out a significant tension between different regulatory relationships across the line between public and private.

Other headlines reflect a concern with limiting the expansive power of private capital to colonise and appropriate public goods that constitute core elements of basic human well-being.

Employers who flout the national minimum wage to be actively named and shamed

Guardian, 23.8.13

The Water Companies and the foul stench of exploitation

Observer, 4.8.13

The first headline here hints at a possible positive role of the state in protecting workers – and other citizens – from exploitation, while the second points to the state’s ambivalent role in regulating services that had once been public, and that, as in the case of water, relate to fundamental resources on which life depends. These suggest the possibilities of restoring and reworking what might be thought of as the ‘residual’ role of the state in public regulation and public ownership. There are now a number of calls for the re-publicisation of core public services – water, transport, health and so on. Where services that have been put to the market fail to live up to the social and political goals they were designed to meet, arguments have increased for them to be brought back into public control. Restoring forms of public control (including user involvement) is not a guarantee of perfect services, but it is a precondition for achieving the range of qualities that services to the public should be striving for.

However, while there are good examples of taking privatised services back into public control in the global south, prospects have seemed more limited in Britain and some other European nations because of the tainted memories of past forms of state ownership and the complex entanglements of public and private authority in the present. Emerging experiments in cooperative ownership, new forms of local control, and democratic forms of governance offer promising alternatives to outright state ownership, given adequate safeguards for

workforce conditions and equality criteria. What matters is that the state ensures the provision of services, rather than simply making them ripe for corporate expropriation and profit taking.

The headlines we have so far drawn on in this chapter reflect the continuing desires of citizens for ‘something to be done’ where private interests threaten public interests. The state’s role in public regulation, then, cannot be residual, based on the assumption that self-regulation can be effective.

But it is important that any expanded role for the state is driven by a more expansive concept of a good society (health, sustainability, care); it should not be concerned only with creating a bigger economy. State agencies must seek out and promote alternatives to the current culture of ‘growth’; and invest in a range of forms of social value, rather than pursuing the narrow interest of shareholder value. State intervention must try to reverse the subordination of social and political life to the economy, and instead pose the question of how the economy might serve collective well-being, now and in the future. We also envisage a more coercive national response to questions of corruption and abuse, perhaps through the criminal justice discourse of ‘zero tolerance’ being reworked to crack down on things that are overtly anti-public, from tax avoidance to the failure of organisations and agencies (whether private or public) to meet their public obligations.

Public making as public discourse

In today’s political culture the idea that we share a ‘commons’ – involving mutual interdependence and responsibility – has been increasingly residualised by processes of individuation and consumerism. But these are not automatic processes that flow directly from anonymous forces such as ‘globalisation’ or ‘neoliberalism’. The state has played a crucial role in spreading this orientation as a way of thinking and behaving. And it can play an equally crucial potential role in remaking and renewing public culture. It can, for example, summon public action (not just individual responsibility) around issues of common concern:

Stop trolls killing our kids, Mr Cameron
 (father of Hannah Smith, who committed suicide after online bullying)
Mirror, 8.8.13

E-crime officers investigating Twitter threats make third arrest
 (report on police action after online threats against high-profile
 women, including Stella Creasey and Caroline Criado-Perez)
Guardian, 8.8.13

These headlines summon up an emergent sense of concern about the need for new forms of public regulation. Yet the state often appears to be ineffective in relation to global media, and seemingly unable to respond to racist, sexist and homophobic attacks in social media and internet sites, despite such attacks being nominally illegal. There is, we think, a need for an expansive public leadership role on the part of the state, shaping a public culture that confronts such forms of abuse and intolerance. Instead the state itself has contributed to the making of a culture of intolerance and abuse, as in the notorious ‘go home’ campaign that targeted migrant populations in London:

Go home campaign denounced by human rights groups
Guardian, 9.8.13

Liberty target ‘illegal’ Home Office racist van – with another van
www.Huffingtonpost.co.uk

Critics challenged the ‘go home’ discourse as contributing to a climate of fear and fostering hostility towards migrants. The ‘anti-public’ actions of the Home Office served to summon up new forms of public action on the part of oppositional groups such as Amnesty, Refugee Action, 38 Degrees and Freedom from Torture, including the imaginative appropriation and reversal of the government’s own language, with mobile hoardings proclaiming the illegality of the Home Office message. Such reversals are exceptional; oppositional groups rarely

have the capacities and resources to confront state action head on. But the example shows how a commitment to publicness can inform a contemporary politics of contestation acting in the name of solidarity and social justice around the state.

Such emergent orientations inform our interest in promoting a sense of publicness as a resource for public action – within and beyond the state – through a concern with public discourse. Issues of redistribution, regulation and taxation are not simply matters of policy. They are rooted in culture and ideology, and are subject to slippery discursive shifts that subtly change their meaning. For example in recent years both redistribution and public service provision have been regarded as matters of public finance rather than public culture. There is a need, we think, to shift the debate from how welfare is consumed (with its focus on ever greater conditionality, centred on the demonisation of ‘scroungers’ and the associated ‘culture of entitlement’) to a debate about how a good society can be imagined and brought into being. This would require a state that intervenes to promote the public good, that invests in producing social value, and that promotes sustainable futures – economic, environmental and social, both domestically and internationally.

Only by shifting the terms of debate by promoting public discourse – internationally as well as nationally and locally – will states be able to deal with the current crises of austerity, environmental degradation and rising care needs. Such ideological work is difficult in a climate of mediatised adversarial politics, in which political parties jostle for short-term electoral advantage. It would require strong public institutions that embody and enact public values, democratised political parties and a renewed civil service that could look beyond departmental and ministerial interests. But the state is not the only, nor even the dominant, actor here. We have seen in recent years how emergent political movements, new social struggles, innovative forms of public protest and civic action, have changed the terms of debate. Issues from the living wage to female genital mutilation have entered public discourse, opening out new agendas for state action. And the

political climate itself has shifted as a result of claims such as ‘we are the 99%’ – forms of discourse remembered even where the movements themselves fade from view. Each of these creates new forms of public discourse, and generates emergent publics willing and able to act on the public stage, and to be part of a wider dialogue.

Public making as public dialogue

Talk of public culture and public governance opens up another source of ambivalence. It is now not enough to speak of a singular public, unmarked by the struggles around race, class and gender that demonstrated the exclusions deeply inscribed into state bureaucracy and other forms of institutional power. This is why we argue that a critical function for the state is that of creating the space for public dialogue and debate. We think this points to the need for a fundamentally dialogic state – one which is constantly encouraging, and simultaneously being shaped by, public dialogue.

Thinking of the state in such terms opens out questions about how to enhance dialogic relationships between state and citizen: to open up dialogues that offer alternatives to the dominant cultures of mediatised ‘spin’ on the one hand (in which the public has little voice) or the quick opinion poll on the other. There is a wealth of experience about how to establish dialogue through public participation and engagement exercises, citizens’ juries and new democratic channels (see for example the activities of Open Democracy). There is always the risk of such developments being incorporated and depoliticised; but they nevertheless offer emergent possibilities for re-imagining the state. We want to argue for a shift towards enabling and resourcing civic actors to participate in political and civic life, including material support – especially where civic actors have to compete with powerful corporate interests in public forums. Inequalities of resources and power have limited the effectiveness of experiments to bring public and professional voices into governing bodies. But there is nevertheless a need to open up key institutions that claim to represent the public interest – audit

and inspection bodies, industry regulators and others – by rendering them more dialogic.

A dialogical state is one that promotes public dialogue rather than consumer feedback; that fosters political participation rather than consensual passivity; and that engages with a diversity of publics and movements rather than attempting to police dissent. Conflict is an intrinsic part of social and political life, and different political views have to be rehearsed and debated: only by fostering and extending dialogue might the current shift towards consumerist or authoritarian populist versions of politics be challenged. Such dialogues need to be horizontal – among the many publics that make up society – as well as vertical between the citizens and the state.

This means that a dialogical state is also necessarily a dispersed state. The dispersal of state power to other agents over the last fifty years or so has weakened formal democratic accountability, but it has simultaneously generated new spaces of participation. We do not, then, advocate the reconsolidation of power to a unified state machinery. Rather, we support a shift in the balance of power and resources away from the centre and towards the nations and regions of the UK, and towards local governments and a proliferating array of not-for-profit and civic agencies. The state is not the only site of democratic practice, nor does party political democracy offer the only model of engagement. Civic, not-for-profit and community based organisations all offer forums for political participation, while contemporary movements, from Occupy to Open Democracy, from new feminisms to environmental activism, offer alternative models of democratic engagement and political renewal. These can, of course, become stripped of their progressive potential as they become routinised in the machinery of the state; but it is only by dispersing power that new experiments can flourish. The mainstream must, we think, learn from the margins rather than rejecting new movements for their failure to present coherent manifestos or demands.

To set up such a dialogue would need state agencies to actively support the emergence of new publics – and conversations among

them. This approach can be captured in the idea of a commitment to a dialogic model of the state – as not only embodying a public interest but as itself being a public-making entity. But here we return to paradox and ambivalence. Many progressive positions, we fear, fail to fully engage with issues of power, or over-romanticise the power of ‘ordinary people’ or ‘local communities’. And the local is not always a fertile ground for progressive alternatives and a vibrant political culture: it can summon up defensive, often racist or homophobic reactions, and can be a space for exclusionary communitarian or narrow faith-based politics to flourish. There is, then, a necessary tension between, on the one hand, liberating local innovation and participation to create a state whose edges are both widely dispersed and porous, and, on the other, retaining a centralised capacity to guarantee rights, to enforce equality and to engage in establishing national and international standards (of legality, for the environment and more).

This tension cannot be wished away – but it needs to be seen as a dynamic tension, built into the fabric of the state. This points to the need for a dialogic state to foster a vibrant public realm at the local, national and international level, and concern itself with the reassertion of public values. History teaches us that states do not renew themselves from within, but only as a result of political movements and social action. States are not the only public-making entity, nor can states be the only form of power or source of leadership in play. Today we are witnessing a resurgence of new social movements, new styles of politics, new mobilisations and new creative interventions that imagine and enact alternative ways of living and working together. These are able to flourish precisely because they choose not to engage with the state or other forms of institutional power. And yet ... if we reject the state as a focus of political and public action, there is no possibility of its renewal.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have imagined different directions for the remaking of the state, linked to notions of public governance, public discourse

and public dialogue. This is not, however, a call for moving from one form of state to another: from neoliberal to post-neoliberal, from hierarchical to relational, from coercive to enabling. Rather, we have imagined different directions for the remaking of the state, all linked to the reinvention and expansion of public culture. It will be evident that the different ideas of the state we have explored are somewhat contradictory, reflecting our understanding of the state as multi-faceted. We make no apologies for this: there is nothing to be gained from treating states as singular and coherent entities. They are the product of conflict and compromise – not only the shifting compromises between classes, but also a series of other compromises. New forces and interests, emerged as the social and political settlements that gave rise to the post-war democratic state unravelled – and they still make their presence felt on different aspects of the state. But other forces are now at work, giving rise to new compromises – and new possibilities. This view of the state as one crucial site of possibility reflects our view of politics as always unfinished.

This unfinished conception of politics is reflected in our focus on the different kinds of attachments to the state, which persist despite ideological forces dedicated to its undoing. But it is also attentive to emergent ideas and forces that might help construct more dialogical and relational state forms. Our analysis here is grounded in what Raymond Williams called the residual and emergent cultural forms that always coexist with the currently dominant.⁵ So, for us, the possibility of remaking the state lies partly in the residual attachments to collectivity and solidarity in insecure times. As Williams argued, the residual is marked by the continuation of questions that cannot be answered in the terms of the dominant, and we certainly see the desires for a bulwark against exploitation, a sense of security in the face of uncertainty, and an attachment to collective institutions that transcend the individualising drive of neoliberal capitalism as residual in just that sense. Such orientations are joined in the present by emergent desires to live better – to put social value before economic; to realise the promises of equality and solidarity; to find sustainable ways of working and

living; to inhabit an ethically ordered society; to acknowledge and respond to internationalised obligations. A state in the making might respond to such residual and emergent desires – both embodying them and making them more possible. States are contradictory in part because they are always confronting the challenge of managing the contradictions in, and crises of, contemporary capitalism. Yet – paradoxically – such contradictions create the cracks and spaces of possibility out of which alternatives recurrently emerge.

Notes

1. We have borrowed this title from a collection of ethnographic studies of the postcolonial state, edited by Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (Duke University Press, 2001).
2. 'Spy agencies face inquiry by parliament', *Guardian* 17.10.13.
3. G. Cook and R. Muir (eds), *The Relational State*, IPPR 2012; D. Sainsbury, *Progressive capitalism: how to achieve economic growth, liberty and social justice*, Biteback 2013.
4. D.A. McDonald and G. Ruiters (eds), *Alternative to privatization: public options for essential services in the Global South*, HSRC Press, South Africa; M. Pigeon et al, (eds), *Remunicipalisation: putting water back into public hands*, Transnational Institute 2012.
5. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press 1977.