

# The Modern State and the Primitive Accumulation of Symbolic Power<sup>1</sup>

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The exercise of symbolic power has become a privileged focus of scholarship on the state, but without much attention to how states acquired this power in the first place. This article lays a foundation for systematic historical inquiry into the primitive accumulation of symbolic power by modernizing states. It introduces an analytical framework for research on how new domains of administrative activity become recognized as legitimate state practices. This framework is deployed to analyze how a popular revolt in northeastern Brazil managed to frustrate the Brazilian state's attempt to implement civil registration in the mid-19th century. The conclusion considers broad implications of this analysis for students of modern state formation and suggests the need for comparative historical analyses that historicize the naturalization of state power.

Drawing inspiration from Max Weber's enduring definition of the state as a compulsory political organization that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within its territory (Weber 1978, p. 54), accounts of the rise of modern states in Western Europe have devoted sustained attention to the political-military dimensions of state formation. Struggles to wrest the capacity to legitimately coerce from the array of

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historical contenders have received pride of place in the literature. Modern state formation is seen as driven by the intertwining historical imperatives of waging war and collecting taxes to pay for waging more war. From this perspective, the advent and expansion of modern, centralized, rational administration is the cumulative product of successive “extraction-coercion cycles” in the drive to ward off external threats through preparation for war (Tilly 1992, p. 75).<sup>2</sup>

This “bellicist” perspective, as Philip Gorski (1999) refers to it, illuminates the modern state as a military, political, and economic accomplishment. But it tends to obscure the fact that the modern state is also, and essentially, a *symbolic* accomplishment (Bourdieu 1999, p. 40).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, historical struggles over the exercise of symbolic power were integral to historical struggles over the legitimate exercise of military, political, and economic power.

The neglect of the accumulation of symbolic power as a central dynamic in modern state formation is not surprising given that an essentially materialist conceptualization of the *explanandum* serves as the point of departure for most existing accounts of the rise of modern states. Traditional definitions of the modern state highlight the tight linkage between political organization, territorial jurisdiction, and control over the exercise of physical coercion as constitutive of modern statehood (e.g., Tilly 1975, p. 27). Such definitions are not wrong, but they are incomplete. In part, as Gorski (2003, pp. 165–66) notes, they are incomplete because “states are not only administrative, policing and military organizations. They are also pedagogical, corrective, and ideological organizations.”

The problem, however, is not just that conventional approaches privilege the military, political, and economic power of modern states, paying only secondary attention to their ideological power. More fundamentally, such approaches fail to recognize explicitly that the state’s capacity to carry out its ideological, economic, political, *and* military functions hinges in crucial respects on the exercise of symbolic power. Even the most material aspects of modern state formation have a cultural dimension that has been largely neglected by existing accounts. Of course, Weber himself was clearly aware of this, as the centrality of *legitimacy* to his concep-

<sup>2</sup> See also Porter (1994), Downing (1992), Mann (1993), Finer (1975), and Ertman (1997).

<sup>3</sup> This insight pertains to all cases of modern state formation, but it may be especially relevant for understanding cases outside the Western European “core.” In ex-colonial contexts, in particular, the historical roles of coercion and capital as stimuli to bureaucratic development are ambiguous, leaving a much greater explanatory void (e.g., Centeno 1997, 2002).

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tualization of the state makes clear.<sup>4</sup> And neo-Weberian approaches to modern state formation also generally recognize that cultural processes were involved. But until recently (cf. Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Coronil 1997; Adams 1994; Gorski 2003; and the essays collected in Steinmetz [1999]) cultural dimensions of the historical dynamics of modern state formation have not been a central analytical focus.

This neglect has become more glaring in light of the growing body of scholarship focused on the symbolic dimensions of state power. Indeed, many analysts see the capacity to exercise symbolic power as a defining characteristic of the modern state.<sup>5</sup> To cite only a few well-known examples from a rapidly growing field of inquiry, we know that seemingly mundane state practices like taking censuses, making maps, and building museums (Anderson 1991) can become powerful instruments of state rule, as they help to constitute what they appear merely to represent. Similarly, the development of civil registries, tax lists, land surveys, and other strategies to render land and people “legible” for administrative purposes help to remake geography and society along lines deemed relevant to the state (Scott 1998). Systems of national primary education, meanwhile, impart to their students more than a curriculum of standardized substantive knowledge; schools also introduce and naturalize fundamental categories of perception, “principles of vision and division,” which then shape how people understand society and their place within it (cf. Bourdieu 1999; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1993).

Through the establishment and routinization of myriad administrative practices, the modern state may actively constitute the subjects in whose name it claims to exist legitimately (cf. Kertzer and Arel 2002; Brubaker 1996; Giddens 1987; Weber 1976). Though clearly very important, the capacity to give definite commands and exact conscious obedience (what Mann [1986, p. 8] terms “authoritative power”) seems less central to the

<sup>4</sup> Weber’s definition of the state as an organization that claims the *legitimate* use of *physical force* yokes cultural and material power together from the beginning. Yet the intimacy of their interconnection, implied already in the German term “herrschaft,” was diluted by the English translation of this term as either the more ideal/cultural “authority” (Parsons 1960a, p. 752) or the more materially construed “domination” (Bendix 1960).

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., 1999, p. 40) takes this argument further than most. He suggests that the state claims a *monopoly* of the exercise of symbolic violence analogous to its claim to monopolize the legitimate exercise of physical violence. Just as others have qualified Weber’s emphasis on the state’s monopolization of the use of physical force (cf. Mann 1993, p. 55; Giddens 1987, p. 18), Bourdieu’s claim of the state’s monopolization of symbolic power demands qualification as well. Indeed, Bourdieu himself notes in some contexts that the state’s hold on symbolic power is never absolute (e.g., Bourdieu 1990, p. 137). But overall he tends to neglect other loci of symbolic power in the modern world, most significantly, organized religion.

modern state's power than the capacity to order social life through the notion that its practices are natural, inevitable, or self-evidently useful (what Mann [1986, p. 8] terms "diffuse power").

The culturalist revision of what the modern state *is* has not yet been adequately extended to accounts of how modern states *came to be*. Recent work has focused on the variety of ways modern states exercise symbolic power, but not much consideration has been given to how states acquired this power in the first place. There are some important exceptions, most notably the work of Torpey (2000) and Gorski (1999, 2003). For the most part, however, existing work has explored how and to what ends modern states wield symbolic power, as opposed to how the gradual accumulation of symbolic power helped constitute modern states as such. Consequently, while we know much about the historical dynamics that concentrated military, political, and economic power in the modern state (and there are several competing theories that seek to explain the rise of modern states construed in these terms), and we know quite a bit about how states exercise symbolic power in the modern world, we know relatively little about how the modern state accumulated symbolic power.

This article lays a foundation for systematic inquiry into the primitive accumulation of symbolic power by modernizing states. Following a brief discussion of the concept of symbolic power, it introduces an analytical distinction between two phases in the relationship of symbolic power and the state: (1) primitive accumulation of symbolic power, and (2) routine exercise of symbolic power. It then presents a conceptual framework for research on the primitive accumulation of symbolic power by modernizing states. The leverage provided by this framework is then demonstrated through analysis of "the war of the wasps," a little-known popular rebellion against the implementation of civil registration in mid-19th-century Brazil. The war of the wasps frustrated the Brazilian state's attempt to establish civil registration as a legitimate state practice; it represents a significant missed opportunity for the accumulation of symbolic power by the modernizing Brazilian state.

The article concludes with a discussion of broader implications for students of modern state formation. To anticipate, it suggests, first, that our understanding of modern state formation would be enhanced by a broadened conceptualization of the explanandum, and particularly by supplementing the analytical focus on cycles of extraction and coercion with critical attention to the dynamics of early administrative extension—dynamics that enabled the accumulation of symbolic power and helped make sustained extraction and coercion possible. Second, it suggests the need for closer scrutiny of causal sequence in accounts of modern state formation to clarify the role of war making as a stimulant to administrative growth (cf. Centeno 1997). Third, the analysis lends support to

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Gorski's (2003) suggestion that particular forms of state-society interdependence in the early phase of modern state formation may be a sign of state strength rather than weakness. In some cases, the dependence upon nonstate actors and resources could be pivotal for the state's administrative development. Finally, the analysis points to the general importance, in the current context, of research that historicizes the symbolic power of modern states.

### SYMBOLIC POWER

Symbolic power is the power to "constitute the given" (Bourdieu 1991, p. 170). It is the ability to make appear as natural, inevitable, and thus apolitical, that which is a product of historical struggle and human invention. Through practices of classification, codification, and regulation, for example, modern states not only naturalize certain distinctions and not others, but they also help constitute particular *kinds* of people, places, and things (cf. Hacking 1986; Starr 1987, 1992; Patriarca 1996; Scott 1998).<sup>6</sup>

Symbolic power, in Bourdieu's sense of the term, derives from the recognition of authority as legitimate, be it authority originally based in political, economic, or cultural power. The recognition of authority as legitimate confers its carrier with an additional "value-added" power above and beyond the specific form and amount of power upon which that authority is originally based. Somewhat paradoxically, while symbolic power derives from the *recognition* of legitimate authority, symbolic power produces its effects through *misrecognition*, that is, through the appearance that no power is being wielded at all (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 168).<sup>7</sup> Thus, if legitimacy, in the Weberian sense, is enjoyed when the basis of a claim to exercise authority is recognized as valid (Weber 1978, p. 214), symbolic power renders particular legitimizing claims superfluous, because the exercise of authority is no longer recognized as such.

Symbolic power is not of the same "kind" as other forms of power. In

<sup>6</sup> Thus, for example, when the inclusion of a "Hispanic" category on the U.S. census helped to bring a new social grouping into existence (Petersen 1987; Goldberg 1997), this act of *constitution* was generally perceived as an act of mere *description*. A more ominous example: when the Belgian colonial government issued identity cards to Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, what appeared to be simply an act of registration was actually an act of (re)constitution that helped to alter fundamentally popular understandings of ethnic identity, helping to set the stage for genocide (Longman 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu refers to this phenomenon as "misrecognition" in order to emphasize what he sees as the contributing role of the dominated to their own domination: their "doxic submission" to "the objective structures of a social order of which their cognitive structures are the product" (Bourdieu 2000, p. 177; also 1992, pp. 167–68).

Michael Mann's (1986, pp. 2, 22–32) model of four sources of organized power, for example, symbolic power would not be an additional, parallel source of social power that exists alongside ideological, economic, military, and political power. In contrast to these other forms of power, symbolic power does not have its own distinctive networks of social interaction and institutions. Rather, symbolic power may be based on any or all of Mann's four forms of social power. Symbolic power is a sort of *metapower* that accrues to the carriers of specific forms of power to the extent that their particular basis of power is recognized as legitimate.

Symbolic power is a crucial stake in the struggles between the carriers of cultural, economic, political, and military power, precisely because it is the power to shape the terrain upon which such struggles take place. Symbolic power is not simply the power to set the rules of the game, but the power to “enframe” (Mitchell 1990) the game itself, establishing the practices, categories, and cognitive schemes through which the game is understood and experienced. The outcomes of competitions for ultimate legitimacy, meanwhile, are cumulative; the recognition of one basis of power as more legitimate than another in a given domain gives an upper hand to the victor in future competitions on that terrain.

Symbolic power is thus not equivalent to cultural power per se, at least not as cultural power is traditionally understood in the literature on modern state formation. Cultural power has figured in existing theories of modern state formation primarily as *ideology*. In particular, state-created nationalism is highlighted as a crucial ideological tool of modernizing states, used to foster the loyalty of citizens (Hobsbawm 1990; Giddens 1987). The modern state's deployment of ideological power hinges in crucial respects on the exercise of symbolic power, but the two forms of power are not one and the same. Ideological power, as traditionally understood, is exercised through the use of specific symbols, the promotion of specific cultural messages, or the inculcation of particular beliefs.<sup>8</sup> Symbolic power, meanwhile, is exercised through the naturalization of the practices and cognitive schemes that make it possible for such messages to resonate with their intended audiences. Symbolic power is exercised through that “which goes without saying” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.168). As it accumulated in the modern state, symbolic power therefore increasingly facilitated the state's capacity to exercise ideological power. For example, it bolstered the state's capacity to “invent traditions” that

<sup>8</sup> Of course, ideological power and symbolic power are both “symbolic” in the sense that they both rely on symbols (including symbolic practices) to exert their effects. The point here is not to engage in terminological casuistry, but to draw attention to a “cultural” dimension of state power that is not adequately captured by conventional understandings of ideological power.

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seemingly confirm the primordial origins of national identities that were only recently constructed (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

### SYMBOLIC POWER AND THE MODERN STATE

Bourdieu (1999) has argued that modern states are the primary repositories of symbolic power in the modern world.<sup>9</sup> The exercise of symbolic power may not be a complete monopoly of modern states, but these do play with a loaded deck in struggles “to impose the legitimate principle of vision and division” of the social world. States are simultaneously contenders for particular symbolic prizes, and referees who authoritatively proclaim and enforce the rules of the game (Bourdieu 1990, pp. 134, 137). But of course this was not always the case (as Bourdieu [1999] himself strongly cautions). How, then, did symbolic power accumulate in the modern state?

### From Primitive Accumulation to Routine Exercise

Addressing the question of how symbolic power accumulated in the modern state requires a conceptual distinction between two phases in the relationship of symbolic power and the state: (1) the *primitive accumulation of symbolic power*,<sup>10</sup> and (2) the *routine exercise of symbolic power*. In both phases, the realm of *administration* is of primary importance. But different aspects of administration demand analytical scrutiny during each phase. To grasp the dynamics of the primitive accumulation of symbolic power requires a focus on the particular modes of *extension* of the state’s administrative reach. Elucidation of the state’s routine exercise of symbolic power, on the other hand, demands attention to the broad array of state practices involved in the administrative *regulation* (broadly understood) of social life.

Symbolic power is incrementally accumulated in modern states as (or to the extent that) their administrative activities are recognized as legitimate. To begin to accumulate symbolic power, the state must carve out

<sup>9</sup> Note that while Bourdieu writes about modern states as “repositories” of symbolic power, invoking the language of *monopolization*, he nonetheless conceives of the exercise of symbolic power as characteristically *diffuse*, implying a more Foucauldian perspective on how symbolic power operates.

<sup>10</sup> The phrase “primitive accumulation” is, of course, borrowed from Karl Marx (*Capital*, vol. 1, in McLellan 1977, p. 484). It is used to capture the idea of a historical process that was part of the “prehistory” of the modern state: it is a process that is both a necessary precursor to, and constitutive of, the realization of modern statehood. Unlike the primitive accumulation of capital, however, the primitive accumulation of symbolic power is conceived as a process that *may* be zero sum, but is not necessarily so.

a new domain of social life to administer, co-opt the administrative practices of others, or wrestle existing administrative functions away from their traditional executors, imbuing them with new meanings in the process. In order to take a census of the population, for example, the state had to establish political and administrative control over a given territory. But census taking was not purely a logistical feat. The state also had to establish its legitimacy as social accountant. At least in some places, this entailed hard-won battles with existing secular and religious authorities and with local populations. The state had to engage in concrete struggles with an array of historical contenders to establish legitimate authority in a new domain. As this example suggests, during the phase of primitive accumulation of symbolic power, conflicts occur over the *boundaries* and *nature* of state involvement in particular areas of social life. State victories in such struggles are the watershed events in the historical process of the accumulation of symbolic power in the state.

Once the state has accumulated sufficient symbolic power in a given domain, subsequent struggles within that domain take place on a reconfigured terrain. The state's routine exercise of symbolic power begins when activities that were once controversial—whether issuing birth certificates, establishing standardized weights and measures, or taking a census—are no longer challenged. They come, like the modern state itself, to appear as natural features of the social landscape. As a given state practice becomes taken for granted, conflicts over the state's right to engage in that practice become increasingly rare. Attention turns instead to the specific mechanisms and techniques the state employs to get the job done. To return to the census-taking example introduced above, contemporary debates over official counts of the population may rage over which questions, categories, and sampling methods to use, but few question the right of the state to count the population in the first instance.<sup>11</sup> With the accumulation of symbolic power, the institutional reality of the state becomes naturalized. And to the extent that the array of state practices is taken

<sup>11</sup> This may be changing, however, as certain groups organize to denounce this traditional state activity (see, e.g., Scheuch, Gräf, and Kühnel 1989). The questioning or challenging of previously legitimate state activities—those that are routinely “misrecognized” as part of the natural order of things—is the primary means of undermining the state's capacity to exercise symbolic power. It is important to note, however, that efforts to *denaturalize* state power are not analytically equivalent to resistance to the extension of state authority into new domains in the first place. In the former case, the challengers are confronting the state on entirely different terms—from a position in a field characterized by the hegemony of modern states as legitimate arbiters of “domestic” social conflicts. It is an open question, and one I do not take up here, of whether we are now moving into some third stage, characterized by the declining legitimacy of the modern state with a concomitant dissolution of the state's symbolic power.

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for granted, it becomes increasingly difficult to think—let alone act—“outside the state” (see Bourdieu [1999] on “minds of state”). Table 1 summarizes two dimensions of contrast between these two phases in the relationship of symbolic power and the state.

Like all ideal-typical constructs, the distinction between the primitive accumulation of symbolic power and routine exercise of symbolic power is a heuristic tool for analytical purposes. As complex organizational webs, modern states may engage in primitive accumulation of symbolic power in one domain while they already exercise symbolic power in another. Similarly, though the types of political struggles characteristic of the routine exercise of symbolic power presume that earlier struggles to accumulate symbolic power have already been settled in the state’s favor, both

TABLE 1  
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Phase	Types of Practices	Types of Opposition
Primitive accumulation of symbolic power	Extension of the domain of legitimate state practices through administrative innovation, imitation, co-optation, or usurpation.	Struggles over what counts as legitimate state practice (e.g., the boundaries of the state’s administrative reach).
Routine exercise of symbolic power	Naturalization of categories, cognitive schemes, and social practices through administrative regulation, codification, routinization, and socialization.	Struggles over the mechanics or techniques of state practices that are recognized without question as such.

types of struggles could occur simultaneously over different state practices. Even within a single domain, once states have accumulated a modicum of symbolic power, they may begin to exercise it in ways that favor the accumulation of more. Of course, the conceptual distinction between the primitive accumulation of symbolic power and its routine exercise in itself explains nothing. But it is a necessary starting point for any analysis that seeks to understand how states became the primary repositories of symbolic power in the modern world. The next step is to develop an analytical framework that illuminates the principle *mechanisms* through which the primitive accumulation of symbolic power occurs.

Administrative Extension and the Primitive Accumulation of Symbolic Power

Bureaucratic administration is at the heart of the modern state's ability to exercise symbolic power. Crucial to the surveillance capacities of modern states (Foucault 1979), the written documents and registers that undergird bureaucratic administration (what Weber referred to as "the files") enable the state to "contain" (Giddens 1987), "embrace" (Torpey 2000), and "penetrate" (Mann 1993) individual lives. Bureaucratic administration also enables the state to *define* more effectively the parameters of individual identities and existence (Brubaker 1996; Longman 2001; Caplan and Torpey 2001; Burleigh and Wippermann 1991).

The extension of the means of administration enables the state to gain control over the production, unification, codification, and dissemination of knowledge (what Bourdieu [1999] terms "informational capital") that is central to the state's routine exercise of symbolic power. Whether a given administrative practice primarily operates within, or is oriented to, the cultural, economic, political, or military sphere, the informational capital it generates facilitates the state's exercise of symbolic power by helping to constitute (what is then taken to be) the natural order of things. To understand better where the state's capacity to exercise symbolic power came from, it thus makes sense to focus on the historical development of the state's administrative infrastructure.

Of course, existing accounts of modern state formation have emphasized the development of the means of bureaucratic administration. This emphasis follows Weber (1978, p. 223), who saw the development of bureaucratic administration "at the root of the modern Western state." However, bellicist accounts have treated this development in almost entirely "materialist" terms. To take one well-known example, Tilly's account of the rise of modern states in Western Europe highlights how administrative structures were generated by preparations for war: "A ruler's creation of armed force generated durable state structure. It did so both because an army became a significant organization within the state and because its construction and maintenance brought complementary organizations—treasuries, supply services, mechanisms for conscription, tax bureaus, and much more—into life" (Tilly 1992, p. 70). Administrative structures are viewed as a by-product of the material demands of preparing for war.

The cultural dimension of administrative development is all but lost in such accounts. To develop administrative capacity, the state had to succeed in harnessing existing material and human resources and putting them to work for its purposes. Brute force alone could not accomplish this, at least not on the scale or for the duration necessary to yield "durable state structure." To be sustained on a broad scale, administrative under-

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takings such as conscription, taxation, or systems of individual identification required the compliance that comes from recognition of the state's legitimate authority to engage in such activities (cf. Weber 1978). The early development and expansion of bureaucratic administration thus hinged on establishing such activities as legitimate state practices.

States accumulated symbolic power as they succeeded in making particular administrative activities recognized as legitimate state practices. As specific administrative practices came to appear as naturally, rightfully, or inevitably the prerogative of the state, the power of the state to "order" more of social life was enhanced. To understand the historical foundations of the state's symbolic power, the question thus becomes: How, or through what means and to what extent, did states manage to garner recognition of their legitimate authority to undertake particular administrative practices, especially in the early phases of their administrative development? Or put more simply, how did states manage to extend their administrative reach?<sup>12</sup>

The extension of the state's administrative infrastructure was at once a logistical and a cultural feat. The state's administrative growth was not a uniform, automatic, or inevitable outcome of purely "material" processes, even though it may sometimes appear as such in retrospect. Administrative development (or the lack thereof) is better conceived as the cumulative product of concrete historical struggles, of varying types and intensity, over the boundaries of legitimate state practice—and thus, over the practical definition of the state itself.

### Modes of Administrative Extension

Generally speaking, the administrative reach of modernizing states was extended in one of four ways. First, agents of the state could *innovate*, inventing new administrative practices and carving out new domains of social life to administer (cf. Zerubavel 1997). Second, agents of the state could *imitate* the existing administrative practices of nonstate actors, possibly (but not necessarily) rendering such practices redundant or superfluous. Third, agents of the state could *co-opt* the traditional administrative practices of local or religious authorities, incorporating them into the state's administrative apparatus. Finally, agents of the state could *usurp* the administrative practices of nonstate actors, stripping them of the means and/or authority to continue their traditional practices and taking over these practices themselves, imbuing them with new meanings in the process.

<sup>12</sup> The question of *how* states extended their administrative reach is different from the question of *why* they sought to do so; it is the former question that is considered here.

*Innovation.*—The traditional view of state formation as a top-down, center-out process implies that much of the administrative development of modern states occurred through innovation: the creation of new organizations, institutions, and administrative practices to solve concrete problems faced by modernizing states. Censuses, for example, are typically viewed as administrative tools originally developed to facilitate resource extraction, especially taxation and conscription. Similarly, passports are seen as an invention of modernizing states intent on controlling the flow of humans across (and within) their borders (Torpey 2000). The invention and implementation of new administrative practices is most likely to succeed when such practices do not directly threaten the ideal or material interests of local or nonstate authorities or the populations who are their targets. To the extent that administrative innovations do challenge established interests, the state's success in implementing them will hinge on its capacity to impose its will. This capacity may depend, in the last analysis, on the effective control of the means of physical coercion. But coercion may prove unnecessary when the state's right or authority to engage in such administrative practices is already seen as legitimate—that is, where the state has already accumulated a modicum of symbolic power. Moreover, as suggested by the case discussed below, control over the means of physical coercion may itself depend on prior success in accumulating symbolic power.

*Imitation.*—Even when it appears that modernizing states are innovating, they may actually be imitating the existing practices of religious or local authorities. For example, Gorski notes how the introduction of systems of venality in many Catholic polities of early modern Europe followed the model provided by the papacy, while forms of bureaucratic office holding that eventually took hold in many Protestant polities drew inspiration from the *Reformatio*, an early critique of the Roman Church (Gorski 2003, pp. 144–54). The extension of the state's administrative reach could occur through the adoption by state actors of existing administrative practices of nonstate actors or organizations. In many countries, for example, the implementation of secular systems of civil registration closely emulated the long-established record-keeping practices of local religious authorities. The establishment of seemingly parallel administrative practices by state actors might inspire resistance from traditional authorities and local populations to the extent that the state's activities are seen as a threat to traditional prerogatives or as an illegitimate infringement on the traditional order of things.

*Co-optation.*—Rather than creating parallel state agencies to undertake administrative activities already practiced in a closely related form by local secular or religious authorities, the state could extend its administrative reach by incorporating traditional administrative practices—and

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practitioners—into the state apparatus. Indeed, it could be to the state's advantage to capitalize upon the experience and legitimacy of traditional authorities rather than directly challenging them. One way to do this would be through cooperative ventures. Thus, for example, a church-run poorhouse or orphanage could be made a state institution with no change in staff and minor, if any, change in administrative practice. Or, a state could extend its authority by regulating economic activities and the labor market through previously existing guilds. Likewise, a system of civil registration could be established with parish priests serving as the local authorities in charge of keeping the records. Such co-optation could simultaneously bolster the power, prestige, and administrative capacity of local, religious, and central state actors. A more likely outcome, however, is the eventual if not immediate subordination of the original administrative objectives, and their practitioners, to the designs of the state.

*Usurpation.*—Finally, states could extend their infrastructural power by taking over and modifying the administrative practices of authorities or organizations outside the state. This approach is most likely to yield resistance from traditional authorities since it generally implies a diminution of their power, status, and possibly even material well-being. It is also quite likely to spark opposition by the “administered” population, though this will depend on, among other things, the relative legitimacy of traditional versus central state authority in a particular context.

In important respects, the struggles between local, religious, and central state actors that result from efforts to extend the state's administrative reach are akin to the “jurisdictional struggles” detailed by Andrew Abbott in *The System of Professions* (1988). Two (or more) sets of social actors, positioned in different but overlapping institutional fields, vie with each other for authority over a particular domain of administrative practice, and the outcomes of these battles help delimit the boundaries of each field (i.e., where “the state” ends and “civil society” or “the church” begins). One important difference, however, is that while jurisdictional struggles are conceived as zero-sum games, the extension of the state's administrative reach *may* result in zero-sum conflicts (especially in the case of usurpation), but it may also generate positive-sum games (in the case of innovation, imitation, or especially co-optation).

Modes of administrative extension that involve cooperation or coordination between state and nonstate actors may enhance the symbolic power of both parties, resulting in a greater overall capacity to “order” social life (cf. Mann's [1993, pp. 6–7] discussion of “collective power”; also Parsons [1960*b*, pp. 199–225; 1967, pp. 378–82]). Historically, however, the overall balance of symbolic power tended to shift in the state's favor, suggesting another important difference from the jurisdictional struggles analyzed by Abbott. In the context of modern state formation, one set of

contenders was apt to enter into jurisdictional struggles with a loaded deck; in successive rounds, state actors simultaneously competed with those in other fields for jurisdictional authority over particular practices *and* increasingly managed to define the nature of the game and set the rules of engagement.

Attention to the distinct modes of administrative extension creates analytical leverage to explore how, exactly, states managed to establish new administrative activities as legitimate state practices. Which strategy was most likely to succeed, and under what conditions? Why did state actors opt for one strategy rather than another? How did the particular mode of initial administrative extension in a given domain affect the subsequent development of bureaucratic administration in that or other domains? And building on Gorski's (1993, 2003) findings, under what conditions did the availability of particular institutions and cultural practices outside the state become a resource for bureaucratic growth? What made the potential of such resources "visible" to state actors? What conditions facilitated the "harnessing" of such resources, through "organizational entwining" or other means?

To theorize the formation of modern states qua repositories of symbolic power requires comparative historical research to address these sorts of questions. The remainder of this article takes an initial step down this path through analysis of the 19th-century Brazilian state's failed attempt to establish civil registration as a legitimate state practice. As a single instance of *failure* to accumulate symbolic power, the case of the war of the wasps does not alone suffice to generate or test a fully developed theory of how states accumulate symbolic power. Nor, in this instance, does the negative case serve to test or expand upon an existing theory (cf. Emigh 1997), given that no theory of how states accumulate symbolic power yet exists. Rather, consideration of this case serves a primarily *heuristic* purpose: it suggests why we ought to attend to the historical constitution of the state's symbolic power, illustrates how we can go about doing this, and indicates where the work of theory building could fruitfully begin. Cases such as the war of the wasps are ideal for exploring the historical dynamics through which specific state practices become naturalized, because it is precisely in moments of contestation over the boundaries of legitimate state practice that the historical contingency of the state's symbolic power is exposed.

#### THE WAR OF THE WASPS

The war of the wasps is a little-known popular revolt that frustrated the Brazilian state's attempt to implement civil registration and take its first

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national census in the mid-19th century.<sup>13</sup> Though a relatively minor episode compared to other major revolts in the history of Brazilian state building, the war of the wasps is particularly interesting because the rural backlanders emerged victorious from their violent encounter with state authority. Civil registration of births and deaths and the census of the population were suspended indefinitely. The war of the wasps forced the retreat of the Brazilian state from this administrative domain—it would not try to enter it again for several decades.

The failure to establish civil registration represented a significant setback for the Brazilian state in the 1850s. Civil registration lies at the heart of the modern state's extractive-coercive power, facilitating rationalized systems of conscription and taxation. It is also central to the modern state's symbolic power, conferring control over the legitimate means of individual identification (Noiriel 2001; Torpey 2000). The establishment of a system of universal civil registration in 1851 would have represented a pivotal administrative accomplishment for the modernizing Brazilian state.

### The Brazilian State in 1850

In contrast to the Spanish-American republics that won independence through years of destructive war with Spain, Brazil became independent from Portugal through a peaceful negotiation that left Pedro I, son of King João of Portugal, on the throne of the Brazilian monarchy and ruler of the Brazilian Empire. In the decade following independence in 1822, political battles raged over the form the Brazilian nation-state would take. At root were competing conceptions of nationhood: "A conception of the nation as polity based on traditional forms of inherited authority and directed by a ruler of heroic stature was increasingly challenged by a conception that equated the nation with the people and derived all authority from the popular will" (Barman 1988, p. 131). With the abdication of Pedro I in 1831, the latter conception emerged victorious. Brazil would be a constitutional monarchy. The throne was left to the five-year-old Pedro II, and regents were appointed to rule in his name. The following six years witnessed a devolution of considerable political autonomy to the provinces and various liberal experiments in formal political arrange-

<sup>13</sup> The following account is a summary based on original archival research conducted at the National Archive in Rio de Janeiro and the State Archive of Pernambuco in Recife. For a detailed historical analysis of the revolt that situates it in the Brazilian historiography, see Loveman (manuscript). The origins and course of this episode are not documented in the existing historical literature in English, though it is mentioned briefly in some general histories of Brazil (e.g., Barman 1988, p. 236). In the Brazilian literature, I am aware of one detailed secondary account (Palacios 1989), along with brief treatments by Monteiro (1981, p. 19) and Melo (1920).

ments. By the late 1830s, the centrifugal force unleashed by the decentralization of political power threatened to tear asunder the unity of the Brazilian Empire. With the (relative) opening up of the polity, local factional disputes had triggered mass uprisings and major revolts throughout Brazil, all of which espoused strong nativist inspirations, and some of which included claims to independent statehood.

The suppression of regional revolts and the restoration of order became the central goal of the second phase of the Regency period, known as the *Regresso*. The Regresso leaders were intent on reestablishing the primacy of the national government and crushing threats to the political unity and territorial integrity of the Brazilian nation-state. The centralizing aims of the national government fomented resentment among provincial leaders, who envisioned Brazil as a federation of autonomous provinces. The attempt to centralize power in Rio de Janeiro was seen as a return to Portuguese colonial ways and fueled intense opposition in both northern and southern provinces. With the final defeat of separatists in the south (Rio Grande do Sul) in 1845, and the north (Pernambuco) in 1849, the last serious threats to the political existence of the Brazilian nation-state in its current form were eliminated (Barman 1988).

In the 1850s, the national government undertook to consolidate the triumphant nation-state through the development of the central state's administrative apparatus and its extension into the provinces. The slew of new laws that aimed simultaneously to concentrate power in the central state and extend the state's administrative reach into the "interior" (i.e., beyond the court in Rio de Janeiro) included decree 797, calling for the first census of the entire population of Brazil and, as prelude to this, decree 798, calling for civil registration of births and deaths.

#### The Civil Registration Law

In September of 1850, a provision for the government to incur the necessary expenses to undertake a general census of the empire and to institute regular registration of births and deaths was included in the budget law for the following year. The first census of the Brazilian Empire was scheduled to take place in June of 1852. Civil registration of births and deaths would commence six months earlier, beginning January 1, 1852.

By the provisions of decree 798 (June 18, 1851), civil registration was placed in the charge of notaries of the justices of the peace. Notaries were to register newborns within 72 hours of birth. Without official certification of birth, parish priests were to withhold baptism "except in cases of evident danger to the life of the newborn." Registration of death was to occur within 24 hours. Without an official death certificate, cadavers were not

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to be buried in cemeteries (*Coleção das Leis* 1851, decree 798, articles 5 and 10).

The civil registry decree did not formally encroach on the traditional recording activities of parish priests. Indeed, the wording of decree 798 carefully avoided any suggestion of a jurisdictional struggle between secular and religious authorities over the control of the legitimate means of identification. The final article of the decree stated explicitly: “By the dispositions of this Law it is not to be understood that the Ecclesiastical registers, which the Parish priests customarily do, are suppressed. . . . These will be continued, as they have until now, to prove baptisms and marriages” (*Coleção das Leis* 1851, decree 798, article 33). Civil registration was envisioned as a parallel, secular system of documenting individuals’ existence that would not challenge or replace parish registers.

The judicious wording of decree 798 suggests that the state anticipated the possibility of opposition from religious authorities and attempted to preempt it. Apparently, this preemptive move succeeded. Though parish priests and their superiors registered some disapproval of how the decree was to be carried out, disruptive opposition to the decree came not from church authorities but from the population to be registered.

### The Revolt

In the days following January 1, 1852, when decree 798 was meant to take effect, reports of violent uprisings began to appear in local newspapers and were reproduced in the papers of the court in Rio de Janeiro. In settlements and small towns across the northeastern interior, hundreds of men and “even women armed with knives” threatened the lives of local authorities who attempted to comply with the law. In some settlements, anywhere from 600–1,000 people swarmed the central square (*matriz*) to block the enactment of the decree.<sup>14</sup>

In the face of violent opposition, the government appealed to local authorities to make the people see the errors of their ways and clarify the “good intentions” of the government. These efforts proved useless; resistance to the decree spread throughout the northeast. While claiming to the press that everything was under control, the provincial president of Pernambuco, Victor d’Oliveira, ordered the ninth infantry battalion dispatched to the epicenter of the uprising, the hardscrabble farming town of Pau d’Alho. The lieutenant colonel in command of the battalion followed his orders dutifully, marching his 90-some men across the backlands

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., the report of a local religious authority to the provincial president of Pernambuco on January 7, 1852 (Arquivo Público Estadual Pernambucano, “Autoridades Eclesiásticas” [hereinafter APEP-AE] 1852, p. 16).

and promising to use force if necessary to pacify the populace. As they marched, the battalion was ambushed; two soldiers were killed and five others were wounded. The battalion commander reported that the entire area was in turmoil and that “given the circumstances of things” he doubted pacification could be achieved without the use of force (Arquivo Estadual Pernambucano, “Oficiaes do Exército” 1852, n. 16).<sup>15</sup>

Not wanting to rely solely on the sword (or in this case, the musket), the provincial president had also sent the cross to pacify the tumultuous backlanders. Fortunately for the populace, the Capuchin missionary, Frei Caetano de Messina, arrived first on the scene. Winning the trust of the populace, he managed to transform the violent uprising into an occasion of mass religious fervor. Explaining his success to the provincial president, Frei Caetano noted that “it was not fear of military force, which only irritated them further, that obliged them to put down their weapons, it was only the reign that Sacred Religion still has over them” (APEP-AE 1852, p. 45).<sup>16</sup>

An imperial decree on January 29, 1852, announced the indefinite suspension of the decrees calling for civil registration and the census of the empire (*Coleção das Leis* 1852, decree 907). This was clearly a direct result of popular opposition.<sup>17</sup> The next attempt to conduct a national census—this time divorced from the implementation of civil registration—would come only 20 years later, in 1872. Brazil would reintroduce civil registration in 1874, but it was not until after 1889, when Brazil transitioned to a republic, that obligatory civil registration would meet with any degree of success (Meira 1994).

#### Why Did the Revolt Succeed?

How did a relatively small, popular uprising in a remote region of the Brazilian interior manage to force the suspension, and, ultimately, the cancellation of a decree that sought to establish civil registration throughout all of Brazil? Put another way, why did the Brazilian state fail to implement civil registration *despite* this popular opposition?

The seemingly most obvious answer is that the Brazilian state lacked a reliable, well-equipped, and professionally trained army to enforce its

<sup>15</sup> Report from Hygino José Coelho, lieutenant colonel in command of the ninth infantry battalion, to Victor d'Oliveira, president of the Province of Pernambuco, sent from the Engenho Cajueiro, January 6, 1852.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Frei Caetano de Messina to Victor d'Oliveira, provincial president, dated February 21, 1852.

<sup>17</sup> The minister of empire cites the “grave occurrences” engendered by the decrees as justification for delaying civil registration and the census in his annual report to the legislative assembly in 1852 (*Relatorio apresentado* [1852] 1853, p. 33).

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will. Had the Brazilian state been backed by a dependable, professional army instead of scattered contingents of more or less competent, more or less reliable “battalions” of forced recruits, criminals, and unfortunate “desprotegidos,” the war of the wasps might well have unfolded differently.<sup>18</sup> As it was, the 90 men sent in to pacify the town of Pau d’Alho proved to be a catalyst for intensified protest rather than an effective guarantor of public order. The bands of men forcibly assembled to stand in for a professional army belied the limitations of the Brazilian state’s concentration of the legitimate means of physical coercion.

But the lack of a professional army also underscores the limitations of the state’s infrastructural power—its power to rule *through* society rather than over society (Mann 1993). From this perspective, the Brazilian state’s rather pitiful show of an organized threat of physical coercion can be read as a *symptom* of the state’s failure to extend its administrative reach, rather than its primary cause. The creation of a modern, professional Brazilian army depended on the very sort of administrative infrastructure that decree 798 sought to establish. Indeed, as several generations of reform-minded officers within the Brazilian army would subsequently insist, civil registration was the crucial *precondition* for universal conscription, which stood at the heart of a modern, professional army (McCann 1984, 2004; Beattie 1994, 2001).

Even if it were possible for a mass standing army to be created in the absence of a rationalized system of individual registration, and even if the Brazilian state in 1850 had had such an army, it is unlikely that the threat of physical coercion alone would have sufficed to guarantee the successful implementation of civil registration. To enforce a law of civil registration through the threat of physical coercion alone would demand a monitoring and enforcement capacity that is beyond the reach of even most 21st-century states. A modern and formidable standing army might very well have quickened the suppression of the revolt or attenuated its spread in the first place. But it is unlikely that the threat of physical coercion would have been sufficient to guarantee the compliance of the population with decree 798, day in and day out, across the vast expanse of Brazil (cf. Weber 1978).

The war of the wasps forced the suspension of decree 798 by making it plainly evident that the state could not count on the population to comply voluntarily with the new system of civil registration. Without the cooperation of those who would be registered, the massive administrative undertaking of identifying all individuals born and deceased in Brazil

<sup>18</sup> Literally, “desprotegidos” means “unprotected ones.” Beattie (1994, 2001) and Meznar (1992) both document the importance of patronage ties to local authorities or land-owner/employers for guaranteeing protection from forced recruitment into the army.

was simply an impossible task. Cooperation from the population, in turn, hinged on establishing the legitimacy of the state to engage in the practice of individual identification. As it was, registration of individuals was not recognized as something that the state could and should legitimately do. The war of the wasps disputed the boundaries of what was considered legitimate state activity. It challenged the state's attempt to extend the boundaries of the state itself by broadening the domain of legitimate state practices.

The Brazilian state's failure, then, was a failure to elicit the population's voluntary compliance with the new procedures for civil registration. Viewed through the analytical framework outlined above, this failure can be seen as primarily a result of the *particular way* that the state attempted to extend its administrative reach into the domain of individual identification. Of the various modes of administrative extension (innovation, imitation, co-optation, usurpation), the Brazilian state opted for a strategy that combined considerable imitation—of religious forms of registration as well as foreign models of civil registration—with some minor innovation. This strategy appeared to maximize state autonomy, deliberately avoiding the co-optation of religious record-keeping practices and practitioners. The strategy also sought to avoid “jurisdictional struggles” (Abbott 1988) by steering clear of procedures that might be construed as attempts to usurp directly the competencies of religious authorities.

Intended to guarantee the measure's success, this go-it-alone strategy instead undermined the state's objective. The formal stipulations of autonomy from agents of the church could not hide the fact that the state's parallel system of individual registration depended entirely upon the continued demand for baptism and religious burial to secure the cooperation of the population. Lacking sufficient legitimacy to elicit voluntary compliance with the decree, the state attempted to free ride on the legitimacy of the church. Without formal co-optation of local religious authorities, it relied on the “reign of Sacred Religion” over the populace to ensure cooperation with its secular demands. The creation of a secular system of identification that was essentially parallel to church registries may have preempted some forms of opposition from religious authorities, but it also exposed the state to direct opposition from the population it intended to register.

The creation of a separate register of births and deaths in the hands of local secular authorities fomented popular resistance for two primary reasons. First, it fueled a rumor that the government intended to use the lists to enslave free people of color: decree 798 was dubbed the “law of enslavement” (*lei do captiveiro*). The importation of African slaves had been banned only a year earlier, in 1850, creating new pressures on the

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domestic slave market.<sup>19</sup> For the impoverished inhabitants of the north-eastern backlands, the idea that the government would collude with landowners to develop an alternative means to ensure a fixed labor supply took little stretch of the imagination. After all, why would the state go to the enormous trouble of keeping its own records of every single birth throughout the territory without some tangible purpose in mind?<sup>20</sup> Moreover, collusion between land owners and local agents of the state to enslave the free poor was not without precedent (Freitas 1994). The practice of outright enslavement of the free poor appears to have been uncommon, but even one known instance would be sufficient to lend credence to the rumor that decree 798 was, in fact, a “law of enslavement.”

The idea that the state sought to strip the rural poor of their freedom was no doubt also supported by prevailing practices of forced recruitment into the army. Involuntary conscription was quite common, with the army barracks serving as a quasi-penal institution for vagrants, petty criminals, derelicts, dishonorable lovers, and other unfortunates (Beattie 2001). Though conscripts were not legally reduced to slavery, conscription was often experienced as a form of “abduction” by the state. And while there is no direct evidence that the populace feared civil registration’s use to rationalize conscription, the pervasive threat of involuntary recruitment no doubt contributed to the general distrust of the state that made the rumor that decree 798 was a “law of enslavement” seem plausible. In the eyes of the rural population, decree 798 would facilitate the state’s ability to identify, control, and coerce, and there was no reason to think anything good could come of that. In part, violent opposition to civil registration was a product of this quite rational fear of physical coercion at the hands of government authorities.

Second, the state’s strategy for implementing civil registration engendered its own opposition by interposing agents of the state between individuals and their hopes for eternal salvation. In requiring priests to withhold baptism or burial rites in the absence of a notary’s certificate,

<sup>19</sup> The 1850 ban on the import of African slaves was a direct consequence of diplomatic and military pressure from the British government, including the authorization of British cruisers “to enter Brazilian harbors . . . and to seize and destroy all vessels suspected of slaving.” The Brazilian government sought to preserve the pretense of sovereignty by passing a law to end the illegal importation of slaves (Barman 1988, p. 233; also Bethell 1970). Slavery remained legal in Brazil until 1888.

<sup>20</sup> Notably, decree 798 did not call for the color of free persons to be recorded in birth or death registries, although it did require this information in the registration of slaves. The tangible motivations attributed to the government for implementation of decree 798 were not correct. (In fact, the Brazilian government’s motivations for taking a census and conducting civil registration were more symbolic than material at this particular juncture [Loveman 2001; Ventresca 1995]). But the inaccuracy of the rumors did not temper their resonance among the northeastern Brazilian populace.

the state appeared to be erecting capricious obstacles to people's access to the promised land. Indeed, from one day to the next, entrance to "God's Kingdom" became contingent on possession of a piece of paper from an agent of the state. While in principle such papers would be readily available, in the reality of the Brazilian interior of the time, securing such papers would often be a major hurdle, requiring lengthy and hazardous journeys across rough, arid terrain to the house of the nearest notary. Decrying the severity of the consequences to the rural poor who failed to comply with the decree, a vicar wrote to his superior that withholding baptism to those who failed to register with notaries would "drive the *povo* to complete despair" (APEP-AE 1852, p. 2). Against a backdrop of general distrust of the state's material aims, the backhanded interposition of secular authority between people and their priests sabotaged whatever chance decree 798 had of success.

#### The Path Not Taken

Before the disturbances began, the archbishop of Bahia wrote a letter to Pedro II criticizing the decree. Through a veil of conciliatory language, the archbishop reprimanded the government for placing parish priests in the position of having to choose between "submission to the powerful veto of the notary of the peace and obedience owed to the orders of Heaven" (*O Argos Maranhense* 1852, n. 52). The aims of the state would be better served, he suggested, if parish priests were put in charge of the registries. In the archbishop's view, priests could effectively serve the interests of the state if the government would only enforce three conditions: "(1) employ all prudent means to enforce execution of the law of the Church on the reception of baptism; (2) impose severe penalties on parish priests who show themselves to be negligent in certifying baptisms, marriages and deaths; (3) in order to remove all pretexts and excuses, make sure [priests] are supplied with the official books required for the registrations" (*O Argos Maranhense* 1852, n. 52).

Clearly, in proposing that priests take over the role of local notaries and that the power of the state be employed to ensure compliance with "the law of the Church," the archbishop sought to bolster the power of the church through an alliance with the state. But whatever his own motivations, the archbishop was probably correct to suggest that such an alliance would have also bolstered the power of the state. If the Brazilian government had accepted the archbishop's proposal—or even a modified version that charged parish priests with the maintenance of two registries, one religious, one civil—it is likely that the popular distrust of the registry's aims would have been attenuated, along with most of the opposition to civil registration.

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In principle, there was no reason why the parish priests could not be charged with this secular task. In contrast to the situation in Spanish Latin America, the peaceful transition from Portuguese colony to independent constitutional monarchy had not interrupted the pope's recognition of the Brazilian state's royal patronage over the church, or *padroado real* (Meecham 1947; see also Boxer 1978). In practice, this meant that church officials were already, technically, functionaries of the state.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the legitimacy of priestly authority in the northeastern backlands, and the unquestioned acceptance of their practice of recording baptism and burial, made parish priests ideal allies in the state's quest to establish the legitimacy of its registration of births and deaths. In the hands of parish priests the registries would not have taken on the menacing aspect that they acquired *precisely because* they were in the charge of secular authorities.

However, to rely explicitly on agents of the church to do what "ought" to be the work of the state went against prevailing ideas of what made a modern state a modern state. Inspired by the French example, state modernization was equated with secularization. Hence, the archbishop's call for parish priests to take over the role of maintaining the registries was dismissed by the Council of State, the constitutionally enshrined advisory body to Pedro II, when it met in January of 1852 to address complaints lodged by various public authorities in response to decree 798. The council's report included a curt response to the archbishop's plea: "Since the registers pertain to the civil status of Citizens, it is only appropriate that it be done by civil functionaries." Moreover, putting the priests in charge of the registers would be a hindrance to individuals who do not practice "the State's Religion." And finally, the Council blithely noted, "Our country's experience has shown that the parish priests are not the most apt for this type of work."<sup>22</sup> The idea that the state could bolster its legitimacy, and hence, its administrative capacity, by heightening its dependence on the church, even for the short term, seemed anathema. Such reliance on the church would blur the boundaries of church and state precisely when the state was working to sharpen that

<sup>21</sup> Pedro II did not have much confidence in parish priests, but civil registration in this context was not an open attack on the church. In general, church-state conflict was not a major issue in imperial Brazil, precisely because the pope recognized the monarchy's royal patronage over the church, including "the right to nominate Church officials and supervise Church administration" (Burkholder and Johnson 1998, p. 353).

<sup>22</sup> Quotations are from the report of the Council of State's session of January 22, 1852, concerning "doubts raised by some Provincial Presidents and the Reverend Archbishop of Bahia with respect to the execution of Articles 2, 9, 23 and 24 of Decree 798 of June 18, 1851" (Arquivo Nacional [hereinafter AN-CE] 1852, pac. 2, doc. 38).

divide, in the belief that such differentiation was in itself a benchmark of state strength.

Notably, a lone member of the Council of State dissented with the majority's decision to modify some of the administrative technicalities of decree 798 without any fundamental changes to its basic design. In a minority opinion at the end of the council's report, the Visconde de Olinda made a case for transferring responsibility for civil registration to religious authorities. He rejected the presumption that parish priests would prove unreliable functionaries and argued that they were in fact "the only authorities capable of carrying out this function." Given the actual conditions in Brazil's interior, he argued, the desire to enforce a strict separation of civil and ecclesiastic functionaries was "nothing but a lovely ideal, with no base in reality" (AN-CE 1852, pac. 2, doc. 38). His call fell on deaf ears, however. In the end, the Council of State would choose to cancel the decree altogether before it would consider relying on religious authorities to undertake the quintessentially "civic" task of registration of births and deaths.

Thus, the French-inspired, liberal assumption that state modernization meant secularization may have had the unintended consequence, in 19th-century Brazil, of undermining the very sorts of administrative advances that would have greatly bolstered the infrastructural power of the state.<sup>23</sup> Co-optation would likely have enabled the Brazilian state to "harness" (Gorski 2003) the legitimacy and local administrative resources of the church, transforming them, at least partially, into instruments of the state. Explicit reliance on parish priests as employees of the state would have meant an apparent sacrifice of state autonomy in the short run. But by

<sup>23</sup> The influence of France on 19th-century Latin American elites is well established (on Brazil, see, e.g., Needell [1987]). With respect to this particular episode, the archbishop's letter to Pedro II makes clear that the French model for civil registration was, in fact, a contemporary reference point: "I know that in many other countries there are similar laws, and that in France they went so far . . . as to require that newborns be presented to the civil authority to be entered into the birth register before going to Church to receive the sign of salvation. But, Sir, Your Imperial Majesty knows better than I, that the population of France is all clustered together in its respective parishes or districts, with the convenience of easy communication, while in our country the population is all dispersed across an extensive surface and lacks comparable facilities for prompt communication with local authorities. Additionally, the French legislation in ecclesiastical matters is biased by old religious controversies, and more than anything else, by the influence of the great revolution, which abolished the Catholic religion and made everything profane. . . . It is evident that in Brazil, where thanks to divine mercy the purity of our religious doctrine and customs was never even slightly altered, we are not in that offensive situation. And if I am permitted to comment on the goals that the government of Your Imperial Majesty has in proposing this measure, I will observe that they can be equally, if not better, fulfilled—without vexing the populace—by using parochial registers instead" (letter from the archbishop of Bahia to Pedro II, reprinted in *O Argos Maranhense*, February 20, 1852, n. 52).

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ensuring the compliance of the population with registration of births and deaths, the reliance on the local religious authorities would have yielded greater state capacity—both material and symbolic—in the end. Instead, the state attempted to go it alone, exacerbating popular suspicions and cultivating violent protest. Rather than enabling the extension of the state’s legitimate authority to a new domain, the particular way the state attempted to implement decree 798 undermined whatever hope it might have had for success. The Brazilian state failed to accumulate symbolic power because central state actors were unable (or unwilling) to see ecclesiastical authorities as resources to be “harnessed” instead of obstacles to be avoided or overcome.

### BROADER IMPLICATIONS

Analysis of the war of the wasps has several broad implications for our understanding of modern state formation. First, it suggests the need for a broadened conceptualization of what theories of modern state formation need to explain (cf. Gorski 2003). Increasingly, modern states are sustained and empowered—to the extent that they are sustained and empowered—by their routine exercise of symbolic power. The capacity of modern states to wield effectively ideological, economic, political, and even military power hinges largely, and perhaps ultimately, on the capacity to constitute the “givens” of social life. Theories of modern state formation, therefore, must account for how states came to be the preeminent wielders of symbolic power in the modern world.

To theorize the historical dynamics of the primitive accumulation of symbolic power demands a shift in analytical focus from the dynamics of extraction and coercion toward the mechanisms of early administrative extension. From a primary focus on the concentration of military power, the analytical lens hones in on the historical foundations of naturalized administrative power. This shift in focus does not eclipse the traditional bellicist concerns from view; rather, it reframes the picture, bringing the intimate relationship between the accumulation of symbolic power and the concentration of military, economic, political, and cultural power into clearer view.

Expanding and deepening our current understanding of modern state formation requires greater attention to the incipient administrative development of central state infrastructure. And, in particular, it requires an analytical lens that sees the creation of “durable state structure” as simultaneously a logistical and a cultural feat. The protoadministrative development of states—the symbolic/material groundwork that was laid before war or any other potential engine of state growth could exert its

effects—appears to be a crucial determinant of subsequent state development (Centeno 1997; Gorski 2003).

This points to a second implication of the foregoing analysis: the need for closer scrutiny of causal sequence in accounts of modern state formation. In particular, the case of the war of the wasps calls into question the precise nature of the relationship between the concentration of military power and administrative growth. In bellicist accounts, the primary engine of administrative development was the creation of armed force in preparation for war, as in Tilly's oft-cited dictum: "War made the state, and the state made war" (Tilly 1975, p. 42). The growth of administrative structure is basically viewed as a by-product of preparation for war (Tilly 1992, p. 70). But Centeno (1997, p. 1569) has demonstrated that war only fosters state growth where existing administrative mechanisms can "manage the explosion in both revenues and expenditures," and where states enjoy enough support from key sectors of the population "to make domestic extraction profitable." Similarly, Torpey (2000, pp. 14–15) argues that conscription and taxation can only fuel state growth if states succeed in "embracing" their populations through a variety of administrative techniques. These studies indicate that some threshold of administrative development and accompanying naturalization of state authority has to be reached before war-driven "extraction-coercion cycles" (Finer 1975) can drive subsequent state development.

The case of the war of the wasps lends support to this claim, albeit indirectly. The weakness of the Brazilian army, and hence its failure to put down the revolt, was clearly a symptom of the inadequacy of the state's administrative foundations. The shortcomings of the Brazilian state on this front were thus compounded; the lack of a professional armed force, stemming from inadequate administrative capacity, resulted in the failure to enforce a measure that would have improved that capacity considerably.

This suggests that early failures to accumulate symbolic power—that is, to establish the state's legitimacy to engage in basic administrative practices—hindered the accumulation of other forms of power as well. Conversely, initial success in accumulating symbolic power was apt to breed additional success in state-building endeavors, as the naturalization of state authority in one domain facilitated the extension of the state into others. For example, once set in motion, the accumulation of symbolic power via administrative extension and the concentration of military power via rationalized conscription were mutually reinforcing. Once established as legitimate state practice, systems of individual identification facilitated the creation of standing armies. These armies increased the state's capacity to exercise coercion, whether in pursuit of additional military might or in the name of other social, economic, or political aims. At

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the same time, armed forces bolstered the symbolic power of states in ways that facilitated the exercise of ideological power: ritualized shows of military force appeared to signify the inevitability of state power, while techniques of training soldiers inscribed the legitimacy of state authority into individual bodies and minds.

Each success in accumulating symbolic power tilted the playing field to the state's advantage, as more and more state practices delimited the "givens" of individual and social existence. Early victories in the naturalization of seemingly inconsequential state practices could thus have cascading effects for subsequent state development. If on the one hand, the absence of underlying administrative capacity inhibited extraction-coercion cycles from ever getting off the ground, on the other hand, early successes in administrative development could be self-reinforcing and thus very difficult to stop. This makes it all the more important to scrutinize the dynamics that portend the success or failure of the primitive accumulation of symbolic power by modernizing states.

A third implication of the case examined here is the suggestion that the relative success or failure of the state's administrative extension into new domains was determined, at least in part, by the *particular way* the state attempted to extend its administrative reach. The administrative extension of the state could occur through innovation, emulation, co-optation, usurpation, or some combination of these methods. The war of the wasps suggests that co-optation of existing administrative and symbolic resources of nonstate, and especially religious, actors could yield better results for the state than either constructing wholly autonomous administrative structures through innovation or imitation, or attempting to usurp existing practices and risking clashes over jurisdiction.

Though additional research is necessary to fully specify this claim, it is supported by Gorski's research on the role of Calvinism in state formation in early modern Europe. As part of a larger, more nuanced argument about the influence of Calvinist "disciplinary revolutions" on the development of early modern European polities, Gorski suggests that whether administrative structures were generated from the top down (through innovation and emulation) or the bottom up (through co-optation) had significant repercussions for the extent and profundity of bureaucratization and thus the strength and capacity of modernizing states. Gorski argues that the "unusual capacity" of states such as the Netherlands and Prussia is at least partly a product of the way they managed to harness the "new ethics and practices of self-discipline" unleashed by Calvinist disciplinary revolutions (Gorski 2003, pp. 20, 38).

To the extent that state actors could harness the existing organizational and symbolic resources of local and religious authorities, gradually incorporating them into the state, the administrative capacity and symbolic

power of the state would be enhanced. The war of the wasps supports this hypothesis, though as a negative case. The state's failure to take advantage of the existing administrative and symbolic resources of the church frustrated its attempts to establish a foothold of legitimate authority in the domain of individual identification. The war of the wasps thus suggests that in the phase of early administrative development, less state autonomy—and thus, perhaps, the *appearance* of a weaker state (at least according to the conventional equation of state autonomy with state strength)—might actually be a source of strength, leading to much greater state capacity down the road.

Finally and more generally, the case of the war of the wasps suggests that the interconnections of state and society during the state's early development may be much more consequential for subsequent trajectories of state formation than has generally been recognized. Drawing inspiration from Foucault's vision of state power emanating upward and inward from diffuse sites and sources of social discipline (cf. Foucault 1981, pp. 71–72), Gorski argues that “top-down” accounts of state formation “must be complemented by an ascending analysis of state-formation as a bottom-up process in which the capillaries and synapses of power within the social body are gradually plugged into and connected with the central circulatory and nervous systems of the state” (Gorski 2003, pp. 23–24). From this perspective, the strength of the state is infrastructural. And infrastructural power is a two-way street (Mann 1993, p. 59). In other words, the state's power is not derived from autonomy from society, but rather from the webs of interconnections to actors and institutions outside the state.

The nature and extent of “organizational entwining” (Gorski 2003, p. 167) in the early phases of state formation thus becomes a crucial part of the picture if we want to understand subsequent variations in state capacity, and possibly even state form. A focus on organizational entwining as an impetus to the early development of the state also raises a host of questions for future research. For example, what sorts of nonstate administrative and symbolic resources were actually available to be harnessed by states in their early development? What made state actors able and willing to see nonstate actors as potential allies in their quest to concentrate power as opposed to obstacles to overcome or competitors to vanquish? More generally, what determined the chosen route of administrative extension, its likelihood of success, and its consequences for the subsequent development of the state's infrastructural power? And under what conditions was a particular mode of administrative extension more likely to succeed than others?

The analytical framework presented here provides a starting point for comparative-historical analyses of how distinct types of state-society in-

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terconnection affected administrative extension and accumulation of symbolic power by modernizing states. Future research on the primitive accumulation of symbolic power by modernizing states will not only improve our understanding of how modern states qua repositories of symbolic power came to be, but it will also open up new directions for comparative research on the tremendous variation in the actualized “stateness” of modern states.<sup>24</sup>

### CONCLUSION: HISTORICIZING THE STATE’S SYMBOLIC POWER

By way of conclusion, it is worth noting that episodes such as the war of the wasps underline the fact that the modern state’s capacity to wield symbolic power through mundane instruments such as “censuses, maps, and museums” (Anderson 1991) was a hard-won privilege. For any given state, and in any given domain of social life, the primitive accumulation of symbolic power resulted from a series of struggles over the state’s infrastructural penetration and administrative “ordering” of everyday life. These struggles were not always openly conflictive. As is made clear in Weber’s (1976) account of the modernization of rural France, the state’s attempts at administrative extension could provoke a range of responses—or none at all. But it is in the moments of contestation that we can glean the historical contingency of the state’s concentration of symbolic power (cf. Bourdieu 1999).

Once state practices become self-evident as such, they tend to appear as natural features of the social landscape. Thus, for example, as Gérard Noiriel (2001, p. 48) has observed: “Today, the formalities of civil status—the basis for the entire logic of modern identification practices—are part of the administrative routine. We all conform to them automatically, as if they are self-evident, and to such an extent that we find it hard to imagine that they might once have been contested.” In crucial respects, the institution of civil registration and related forms of state identification of individuals are at the core of modern states’ capacity to exercise symbolic power. Through the monopolization of the issuance of identity papers, modern states both shape the terms in which “identity” is understood and exercise a fundamental power over the rights, privileges, and opportunities of those within their territory.<sup>25</sup> In consequential ways, indi-

<sup>24</sup> On “stateness” as a matter of degree, see Nettl (1968); Tilly (1975, p. 70).

<sup>25</sup> As with the state’s monopolization of the legitimate exercise of physical coercion, the state’s monopolization of the legitimate power of identification is never effectively absolute. Counterfeit documents obviously undermine the state’s identification monopoly. In doing so, however, they simultaneously reinforce the idea that only the state can issue legitimate, officially recognized (and recognizable) proofs of “identity.”

vidual identity in modern society hinges on official recognition of birth by the state. Yet the modern state's hold on the meaning of individual existence tends to go unnoticed by most people, most of the time.

Analysis of the popular rebellion against civil registration in mid-19th-century Brazil helps bring to light the historical contingency of the state's power to confer legitimate "identity." Of course, as Noiriel (2001, p. 48) notes, "to put into relief . . . the misunderstandings, refusals, and sufferings entailed by the construction of the civil bond, is not the same as denouncing or questioning the need for it." Today, civil identification is the basis for many of our most fundamental rights and privileges as well as specific burdens and constraints. Still, at a time when many state actors are attempting to make self-evident the state's need for means to "embrace" their populations more tightly than ever before, it is worth reflecting on the historically contingent foundations of much of state-structured social life that we now experience as natural.

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