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# **CLEARING THE GROUND:**

**HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY**

**AND**

**THE STATE IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Sociology at  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to "clear the ground" for the socio-historical study of the state in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The rationale for this type of reflexive or "meta-level" study is a) that the existing substantive literature remains somewhat under-theorised, and b) that the complexity of current sociological debates is such as to perhaps raise doubts about their applicability to concrete social formations. In this work, I try to develop a critical pathway through some of these problematic theoretical areas, showing how in spite of their considerable complexity, there *are* ways of coherently and usefully managing the general issues. In that spirit of optimism, I go on to develop ideas about how my preferred theoretical perspectives might be "applied" within the context of New Zealand history.

The study has three main phases. Initially, I map the field of historical sociology, indicating my preference for a realist philosophical basis and a critical-pluralist theoretical approach. Then I tackle some of the key definitional and analytic questions around "the state" as a domain of study for the historical sociologist. Surveying the debate between society-centred and state-centred approaches, and between monocausal and pluralist explanatory frameworks, I articulate a neo-Gramscian model of analysis derived from the work of Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz. Finally, taking elements of this model into my own field of empirical and political interest, I show, using a selection of existing analytical texts on the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand, how this preferred perspective can provide an improved overview of state formation in this country. It also, I hope, contributes to the impetus of post-colonial reflection on our political past and future.

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# INTRODUCTION



# 1 THE SHAPE OF THE THESIS

The general topic of this thesis is the sociological understanding of state formation in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The approach taken to this topic involves an emphasis on historical sociology. However, while the focus is on what happened in the past, the impetus for this research is a result of current concerns. In contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand, the state (as government and public service) has a huge impact on the everyday life of New Zealanders. As well as dealing with day-to-day matters such as collecting revenue and policing the streets, the state is involved with ongoing debates that (directly or indirectly) establish the limits of state jurisdiction. These limits are constantly being altered - expanding in some areas and contracting in others. Establishing why these changes occur is always open to debate. The first step in this process is, I believe, a consideration of the way that the *history* of the state may be studied.

The reason that this must begin in the present, is that it is contemporary debates that throw light on the past. In our topic, there are two particularly pertinent sociological issues of some consequence: the role of historical sociology and the respective virtues of society-centred and state-centred approaches. A second contemporary impetus for this research is more "political" the shift in the last ten years to a state structure that is tending towards a focus on the socio-ontological primacy of individuals, and which appears to be altering the areas of state jurisdiction. The third contemporary issue is equally urgent, and concerns "post-colonial" relationships and identities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Particular issues that have been prominent recently include republicanism, the settlement of Treaty of Waitangi claims and relations between Maori and Pakeha. In this ongoing context of political and academic debate, the analytical history of state formation in Aotearoa/New Zealand is (to me at least) an area of obvious significance and interest. However, it is also worth stating at the outset that whilst the thesis is driven in part by the political questions just alluded to, the

thesis is in large part a methodological and theoretical dissertation rather than a empirical or policy-focused study.

Any sociological research involves the selection of boundaries. Without some self-regulation, this research would be in danger of aspiring to be nothing less than a *magnum opus* concerning the history and development of the Aotearoa/New Zealand state from colonisation to the present day, including a detailed assessment of all the contemporary sociological debates! A more tangible possibility was to focus on the evidence and existing material on the state in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and by applying a theoretical model, develop a body of work that improved our knowledge about the development of the Aotearoa/New Zealand state. A slightly different option was to focus on the project of "clearing the ground" in order to establish a coherent and theoretically detailed exposition of the process involved in developing and applying a theoretical model in my chosen "domain". It is this second route that I have taken. This could, in a condensed form, perhaps be seen simply as one chapter in a study of the Aotearoa/New Zealand state. However, these issues are intrinsically interesting and certainly worthy of detailed attention as at least forming one part of the developmental sociology of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

As the title indicates, then, I shall attempt to "clear the ground". This process of selecting a subject area and working through the process leading up to empirical research has been identified as significant by Lloyd (1993)<sup>1</sup>. Lloyd argues that:

general concepts and general theories are parts of background frameworks or traditions of beliefs, ideas, knowledge, and assumptions that all explanations employ. These frameworks include philosophical and methodological assumptions, which are sets of ideas and beliefs about the entities and processes of the world and of how we can have knowledge of them.

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<sup>1</sup>In this book Lloyd also argues for a "structuralist" approach, which is not considered in this discussion.

The framework, concepts and general theories that the advanced sciences employ pertain to what have been called "domains" of knowledge. (1993:22)

The process of identifying and outlining a domain can proceed (to a certain extent) in isolation from the consideration of specific empirical questions or hypotheses (Lloyd, 1993:30). The subject matter must, however, be identified and distinguished "from the totality of social life" (Lloyd, 1993:37). My own project, in those terms, is concerned with discussing the domain of "the state" in Aotearoa/New Zealand through a progressive articulation of three strands of analysis, namely; historical sociology, a state-centred approach to political theory and a model of conjunctural analysis developed by Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz (1985). It does not attempt to answer questions related to how and why the state developed as it did. Rather, it looks at the theoretical arguments for utilising and articulating together the three elements that I have chosen to promote. I do examine several existing texts by local authors that focus on the period that I am concerned with. At that point, I highlight some key empirical details, and identify possible areas for further study. However, my primary emphasis remains on establishing a coherent domain of study.

The first chapter opens with a discussion of history and sociology. I contend that historical sociology can combine aspects of each discipline in a way that enhances our understanding about the past. A consideration of both philosophical and theoretical issues strengthens the case for using historical sociology as the over-arching framework for research. I later identify the period 1840 to 1907 as a key period in state development - and one in which the benefits of using historical sociology are clearly evident. This period is also characterised by marked shifts in the position of Maori relative to settlers. The process of colonialism and the issue of post-colonialism are also raised here as concepts that are central to the practise of historical sociology in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The second area in need of clarification is that of "the state". This discussion moves from a definition of the state as the governmental system and public service to considering the state in relation to civil society, the nation-state, and its international context. This process of conceptual clarification is a core part of historical sociology, and leads on to a consideration of a range of state-centred and society-centred approaches. Although the state is the focus of research, an explanatory theoretical framework can focus on the state or aspects of society as the driving force of change or stability. State-centred approaches argue that the amount of autonomy that contemporary states enjoy means that they effectively drive change or stability in society. On the other hand, society-centred approaches view society as being the key. The three society-centred approaches that I consider include liberalism, pluralism and Marxism. More recent work in this area proposes a realignment of Marxism and pluralism which retains a critical approach while allowing a degree of state autonomy. Therefore the importance of the state is acknowledged alongside the complexity of the state/society relationship.

The third chapter discusses the particular approach that I consider to be applicable to the history of the Aotearoa/New Zealand state. As I have indicated, there is minimal existing research in this area. I have therefore identified the model developed by Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz ("State and society, 1880-1930":1985) as applicable to the Aotearoa/New Zealand situation. By expanding on this model I identify the characteristics that, in principle, could provide valuable insights into the Aotearoa/New Zealand case. The Hall and Schwarz approach to Britain does not consider colonialism (or imperialism) in any depth, but it is possible, I think, to integrate colonialism within their overall approach. The widely accepted view that the Gramscian approach is impressively sensitive to the complexity of state development provides the basis for this optimism. Also, the Hall and Schwarz approach uses the concept of crisis to structure their consideration of events. While I have altered this concept to a focus on a period of potential state (re)formation, this can include, alongside political

representation, a range of other pertinent issues. Taken together, the selection of time frame and particular issues provides the basis for assessing whether there was a shift in the role of the state from an emphasis on individualism to an emphasis on collectivism (in the Hall & Schwarz discussion). The shift is also apparent in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the time frame that I have identified, and similar shifts in emphasis could be assessed throughout the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The final chapter of the thesis works upon four existing key texts to highlight the advantages of the Hall and Schwarz approach, as well as areas that Hall and Schwarz have not developed. The most obvious area is the issue of colonialism and how this shaped state development in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Theory is also a key part of the domain that I have identified, and the first part of this discussion considers the role of theory in light of the selection of historical sociology and state-centred approaches as theoretically valuable. I then go on to consider how a period of potential state (re)formation can be identified. Each of the texts that I have selected provides material that can be used to identify the potential for change in a range of areas including political representation, colonial relationships, and socio-economic structures. Hall and Schwarz focus on political representation as a key factor and I have also done this, while indicating where other factors warrant consideration. Finally, I identify the ways in which it may be possible to develop indicators for a shift in the balance between individualism and collectivism in the role played by the state. The thesis concludes with a summary of the key parts of this domain and a reiteration of major areas that could be investigated within it.