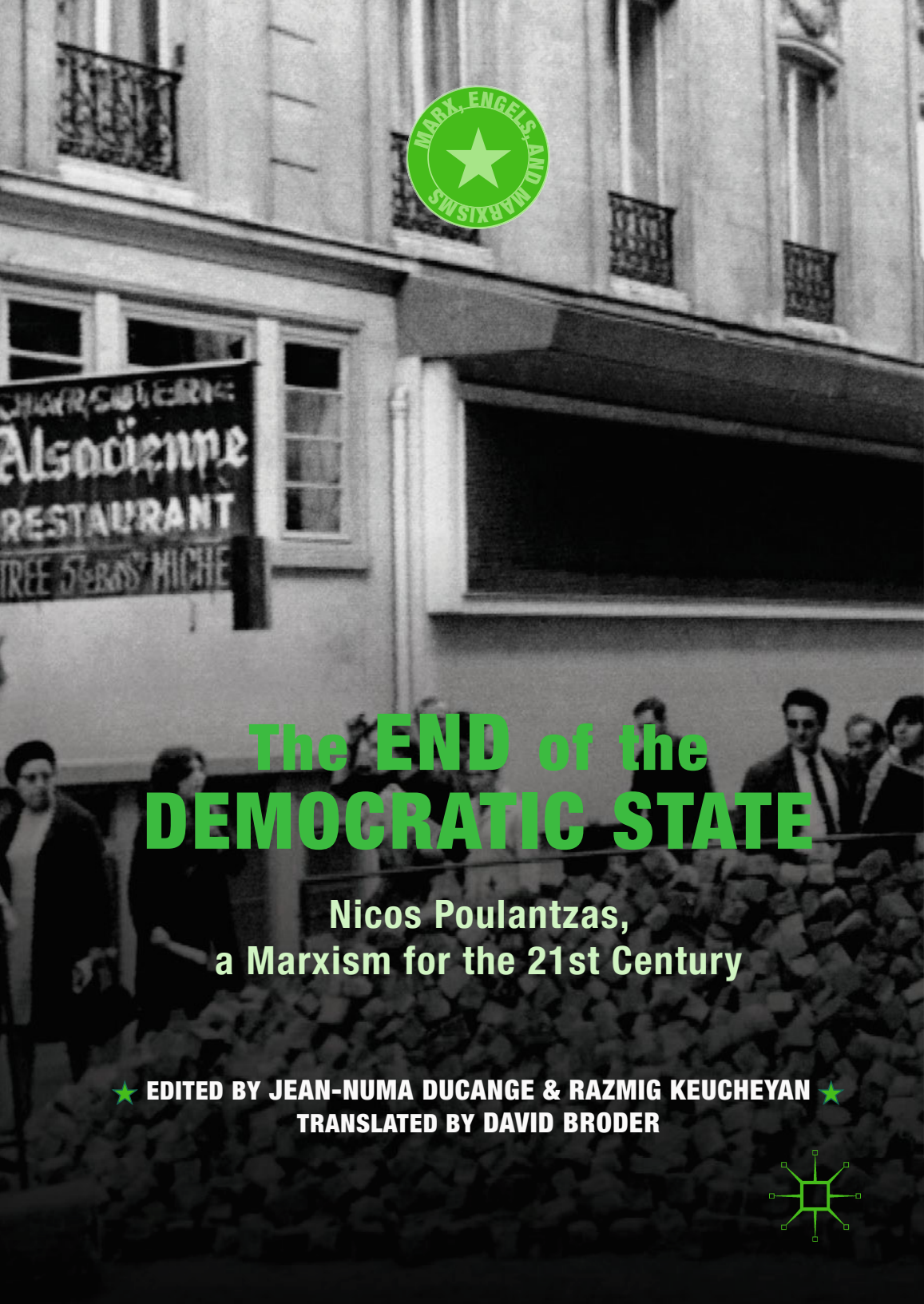

The END of the DEMOCRATIC STATE

Nicos Poulantzas, a Marxism for the 21st Century

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Preface

In the preface to this volume, we state the importance of Nicos Poulantzas's thought for the understanding of the contemporary social world, and especially the relationship between capitalism and the state in the neoliberal era. Poulantzas's ideas are analytical as well as political: they aim to understand so as to transform. They are also interdisciplinary, as shown by the variety of contributors to this volume: historians, philosophers, geographers, economists and sociologists. Poulantzas's thought is the culminating point of a century of Marxist debates about the nature of capitalism and the state. It is also a starting point for those who, in the twenty-first century, try to imagine alternative, postcapitalist, futures.

Revisiting Marxist thought is never an innocent matter. When we study the texts, what we are trying to grasp is the political conjuncture in which they were written. By definition, Marxism asserts its connection to the emancipation processes and the political and social movements harbored within a given era; indeed, it seeks to help bring them to fruition. In this sense, reading a Marxist thinker's works is also a way of posing ourselves questions about these processes themselves. More than that, drawing on tradition is also a way of shedding light on elements that come from a seemingly completed period, yet might also be politically productive in our own time. This being so, history is inextricably linked to thinking about possible futures. Such was the ambition of the international Poulantzas conference held at the Sorbonne (Paris-IV) in January 2015, from which this book results.

Born in Athens on 21 September 1936, Nicos Poulantzas was one of the great Marxist thinkers of the 1970s. He grew up in a Greece ravaged by the 1946–1949 civil war, before he pursued his law studies in Athens; he then went to Munich where he began a philosophy Ph.D., before making his home in Paris, where numerous left-wing Greek intellectuals also lived. He defended his doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne in 1961. It was published three years later under the title *Nature des choses et droit: essai sur la dialectique du fait et du valeur*. He here began his far-reaching reflection on the state; a reflection also conveyed by Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*, which published several of Poulantzas's articles. Through his posthumous dialogue with Gramsci and his engagement with Althusser, Poulantzas became one of the most unique thinkers on the question of the state. He elaborated his thought across several works, from 1968's *Political Power and Social Classes* to *State, Power, Socialism*, published in 1978, soon before his death. Poulantzas killed himself in 1979.

This trajectory was the focus over two days in January 2015 as a packed hall at the Sorbonne—a good part of it consisting of young students and researchers—devoted its attentions to Poulantzas's thought, and moreover posed questions as to its implications for our own time. The opening address at the conference was given by Álvaro García Linera. Bolivia's vice-president and himself one of today's most important critical thinkers, García Linera had come to France especially for this occasion. All the key themes of Poulantzian thought were addressed at the conference, from the nature of the modern state to capitalism's crises, fascism, globalization, and the European project.

The reader will recall that January 2015 was also the moment of Syriza's victory in Greece. For the first time in Europe, a party of the radical Left had arrived in power through the ballot box. The fact that this conference was devoted to a Marxist of Greek origin—and, indeed, a theorist of the 'democratic road of socialism'—meant that it could be be immediately 'plugged into' the current conjuncture. Moreover, a large part of Syriza's leadership and cadres was itself steeped in Poulantzas's ideas, and Syriza's own research institute is called the 'Poulantzas Institute'. It has been said that the emergence of Syriza and Podemos on the European political stage was, in a sense, the 'revenge' of the Eurocommunism to which Poulantzas had subscribed in the 1970s.[1]

[1] See Escalona Fabien, 'Syriza, Podemos, et l'héritage eurocommuniste', Mediapart, 28 January 2015.

A volume devoted to Nicos Poulantzas is necessarily an interdisciplinary one. The authors who have contributed to this book belong to all the disciplines of the human sciences, including philosophy, sociology, history, economics and geography. If Poulantzas is usually considered a political scientist or political philosopher, he also made decisive interventions in debates regarding sociology (for instance, on the question of the 'new middle classes'), geography ('spatial-temporal matrices') and history (the nature of fascist and authoritarian regimes). This explains why debates devoted to Poulantzas's theses have taken place in a number of these disciplines, indeed at the international level. But this has perhaps rendered rather more difficult the circulation of his ideas in France, where disciplinary divisions are more rigid than they are in the English-speaking world.

Many Marxists have resisted the disciplinary division of intellectual labor, and Poulantzas's *oeuvre* itself bears witness to this. This critique has a specific theoretical foundation. Capitalism is a totality (a contradictory totality, i.e. an open one) whose logic tends to impose itself on all sectors of social life. If we are to understand and combat this logic, we must indispensably situate our critique at the same level at which capital itself operates, i.e. the level of the system as a whole. For this reason, for Marxism the fight against the fragmentation of knowledge is an intellectual and political battleground of primary importance. However, this is becoming all the more difficult over time, as the disciplinary division of labor continually deepens.

We should thus consider as one of Poulantzas's most important contributions the fact that he was able to intervene in several disciplinary fields, and more precisely to tie together problematics which disciplinary straitjackets usually keep divided. Establishing such interconnections requires a theoretical equipment that is constantly being refined, and put to the test by the most varied objects of empirical inquiry.

This book is but part of the current movement of (re)discovering classical and contemporary Marxism in France. This movement consists of two main aspects. The first has been the translation, over the last fifteen years or so, of works by foreign Marxists—most of whom are either English-speakers, or publish in English. These figures range from David Harvey to Frederic Jameson, Perry Anderson, Mike Davis, Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, and more. In passing, it is interesting to note that Poulantzas is an important source of inspiration for many of these thinkers. For instance, a lot of Poulantzas's ideas have made their journey

toward the English-speaking intellectual field by way of the *New Left Review*, long edited by Perry Anderson. This latter's own works on the state consist, among other things, of a critical dialogue with Poulantzas's approach to the state.[2]

The other aspect of this renewed interest is the re-publication of 'classic' Marxist texts: Gramsci, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky and a few others, or the publication of books that have to do with these figures. Through this intervention, new generations of students and researchers have been able to discover some of the treasures that the Marxist tradition contains. In the 1980s and 1990s a virulent anti-Marxism was on the march. Fortunately we have now emerged from this phase, and today we can well see that without Marx and Marxists you cannot explain capitalism and its crises, or indeed contemplate the conditions of going beyond it. As Jacques Derrida argued in his *Specters of Marx*,[3] one may be for or against Marx, but one cannot do without Marx. We can say the same of Poulantzas.

In classical Marxism, the theory of the state reached its high point of sophistication in the works of Gramsci. He fundamentally reassessed the question that the late Engels had left abandoned in the early 1890s, as he was confronted by a new political situation in which the insurrectionary road alone no longer seemed appropriate. Engels had begun, but never completed, a reflection on the forms that the transition to socialism could take in a context different to the model that had arisen from 1848.[4] *Mutatis mutandis*, Gramsci worked to think through the 'great transformation' of capitalism that took place the first decades of the twentieth century, a process in which the state played a central role. Just as Gramsci sought to think through how the state had developed in the 1920s and 1930s, Poulantzas strove to understand the way in which the state had evolved in the post-World War II period during the *Trente Glorieuses*. As several contributors to this volume note, this was the context in which the Greek Marxist developed his 'relational' theory of the

[2] See for example his *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London: NLB, 1974.

[3] *Specters of Marx*, London: Routledge, 1993.

[4] See in this regard the contributions by Jacques Texier, for instance 'Les innovations de Engels, 1885–1891', in Mireille Delbraccio and Georges Labica (eds.), *Friedrich Engels savant et révolutionnaire*, Paris: PUF, 1997, pp. 162–164.

state, in which the state is not a 'thing' or a 'substance', but a rather set of power relations which overlap in a complex fashion. This is what led him to formulate his famous definition of the state as 'the condensation of a relationship of forces between classes and class fractions'.

This formula, and the whole theoretical apparatus that underpin it, is a fruitful starting point if we are to analyze the evolutions of the contemporary state—the *neoliberal* state. Our task, today, is to pick up the thread of the Marxist debate on the nature of the capitalist state, which fell away in the 1980s—a debate in which Poulantzas's theses had been one of the organizing focuses.[5] One of the ambitions of this present volume is to contribute to debates on this very question.

The book consists of three parts. The first brings together contributions by Álvaro García Linera, Isabelle Garo, Alex Demirović and Stathis Kouvelakis. This part has to do with the question of the state, and more precisely the strategic implications of Poulantzas's theory of the state. The second, featuring articles by Serge Wolikow, Marco Di Maggio and Ludivine Bantigny, is of a more historical key. It seeks to reconnect Poulantzas's ideas to some of the major political debates of his time. The third part, which consists of contributions by James Martin, Costis Hadjimichalis and Tristan Auvray and Cédric Durand, is devoted to the theoretical-political disputes in which Poulantzas himself participated.

While this division helps our reading insofar as it allows for an organization of ideas, inevitably it is also rather artificial. For Poulantzas's thought was extremely consistent, with each of its components closely linked to all the others.

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[5] For an introduction, see Razmig Keucheyan's 'Lenin, Foucault, Poulantzas', in Nicos Poulantzas, *L'État, le pouvoir, le socialisme* [1978], Paris: Les Prairies ordinaires, 2013.

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PART I

State and Strategies

CHAPTER 1

The State and the Democratic Road to Socialism

Álvaro García Linera

Nicos Poulantzas's intellectual work is characterized by what we could call a tragic paradox. He was a Marxist who theorized his epoch from a revolutionary perspective, in a time when the revolutionary processes were closing or had deviated into the aberrant restoration of a statified capitalism. Without doubt, Poulantzas was a heterodox Marxist. His contributions regarding the path to socialism were both brilliant and courageous, indeed at a time when the socialist horizon was falling apart as a symbol and as a perspective with the capacity to mobilize people.

I would like to study two key concepts of Poulantzas's Marxism. These concepts are each interconnected, and allow us to think and to act in the present. They are the state as a social relation, and the democratic path to socialism.

The State and Gödel's Incompleteness Principle

There is no doubt that this first concept (the state as a social relation) is one of the Greek-French Marxist sociologist's main contributions: i.e. the idea that we should study the state as 'a material condensation of the

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relationship of forces between classes and class fractions'. But is it not in fact the case that the executive and parliaments are chosen by the majority popular vote, from both dominant and dominated classes? And even if the popular classes vote for representatives that belong to the dominant elites, are these representatives not in some way committed to their voters? Is it not true that there are moral restrictions, imposed by voters, that limit the sphere of government action, which, if transgressed, will prompt a switch in voter preferences towards other candidates, or indeed produce social mobilization?

Some varieties of Marxism, confined in the universities, have argued that the popular classes live in a permanent state of delusion, under the effect of an 'ideological illusion' organized by the dominant classes, or that the weight of the tradition of domination bears down so heavily on the popular classes that they can only reproduce their domination, whether voluntarily or unconsciously. This is absolutely not the case. The first idea amounts to considering domination as a biological fact, closing the door to any possibility of emancipation. Nor is tradition all-powerful. If that were true, new generations could only repeat what older generations had done before, and therefore history would be the perpetual repetition of the beginning of history. In this case, how could we understand that, for instance, we today live in cities whereas our ancestors lived in caves? It is wrong to overestimate the weight of tradition. It is true that tradition permeates and guides our attitudes and possibilities, but it never closes off the new paths and alternatives that could also appear. We can well understand the role of tradition in history by using Gödel's incompleteness theorem.[1] Gödel proves that in the formal systems of arithmetic, assuming the existence of a set of noncontradictory axioms, there are statements that cannot be proven or refuted by those axioms.

In the infinite diversity of possible human actions which result from people's prior conditions (tradition), there are many choices and historic possibilities that do not depend or derive directly from this tradition. That is what explains the fact that societies transform themselves permanently despite the historic burden of relations of domination. The tradition of relations of domination that affect the behavior of new generations, those who rule and those who obey, in order to reproduce relentlessly those relations of domination has spaces (statements) that

[1] Kurt Gödel, *On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems*, New York: Dover, 1992.

cannot be inferred from this domination and that do not reproduce this domination. There are spaces of uncertainty or interstitial fissures that escape from this logic of reproduction of domination. We could call it a principle of historic incompleteness which allows the possibility of innovation or breaches—in other words, of revolutions.

It is clear then that popular classes are not dumb, that reality is not a simple illusion and nor is tradition ubiquitous. Surrounded by deceptions, impostures, and the legacy of domination, peoples can also choose, learn, know, and decide. That is how they can elect some representatives instead of others, reaffirm their confidence in them or reject their promises. So, through the articulation of this legacy of domination with their own decisive action, the popular classes contribute to the formation of the public authorities and participate in the historical patterning of the relations of force within these same authorities. When they feel that they have been misled, they are outraged, and associate with other outraged people. If they see some opportunity, they mobilize. Moreover, if their actions condense in a collective hope for a different future, they transform their conditions of existence.

Those mobilizations usually break apart when they confront their first adversity or success. Sometimes they grow, win over new supporters, and extend their influence over media and public opinion. In some cases, they create a new common sense. When their demands materialize in accords, laws, budgets, investments, and rules, they become a state matter. And this is precisely what the state is: an everyday pattern of social relations between the governing and the governed, in which everyone participates in defining such concepts as the public, the commons, the collective and universal, albeit with different levels of influence, effectiveness, and determination.

The state is a permanent process of monopolization of a diversity of concepts: coercion, use of taxes, the common resources, dominant universals, and the writing and implementation of the laws that will apply to all. It is also an institution of rights (to education, health, security, work, and identity). The state thus encompasses all these determinations, albeit in a process. It is a flow, a fluid frame of relationships, struggles, achievements, sieges, seductions, symbols, and discourses that fight for goods, symbols, resources, and monopoly control over their management. The state definitely is a process, a cluster of social relations which enter into an institutional framework, become regular and stabilize (and indeed, this is why the words state and stability have a common root). But with

the particularity that here we are faced with relations and social processes that institutionalize relationships of political-economic-cultural-symbolic domination, with a view to the reproduction and 'naturalization' of this same domination. In certain cases, the state is an institution, a procedural machine, but this machine and this materiality are also relationships, reified flows of struggles that objectivate the quality of the relationship of forces between those flows and social struggles.

The society, the state, and its institutions are like the tranquil geography of a rural landscape. They seem static, fixed, and immovable. But that is only on the surface. Underneath this geography we can find intense, burning lava flows that shift the landscape above as they circulate down below. When we look at geology at the scale of millions of years of history, we see that the surface is the result of lava flows that rose up and destroyed the old landscape, through their movement creating new mountains, valleys, and precipices that solidified and gave rise to today's geography.

Institutions are like geography in this regard: over time, the temporary solidification of past struggles, the relations of force between different social groups, and a particular moment of this relationship of forces, cools down and petrifies as norms, institutions, and procedures. Ultimately, institutions are the result of ancient struggles, forgotten and petrified. They are objectivated struggles but, at the same time, they also serve these struggles; they express what was the dominant relationship of forces during these ancient struggles which are now forgotten. They now work as structures of domination, without appearing as such. Hence, the double effectiveness of domination: The institutions are the result of domination, working for domination, but they have become dominant without appearing as structures of domination.

The State as a Paradoxical Process: Matter and Idea, Monopolization, and Universalization

The state is a cluster of paradoxical institutions. In the first place, it represents material and ideal relations. Second, it is a process of monopolization and universalization. It is in this paradoxical relation that we can find the secret and the real mystery of relations of domination.

We say that the state is matter because it daily presents itself to citizens as a set of institutions where people do paperwork or obtain certificates,

or as laws that must be respected unless they want to risk punishment, or as procedures to follow in order to secure certification in the educational, labor, or territorial fields. The state also materially presents itself as courts of law, prisons that remind us of the consequences of breaking the law, and ministries where people can present demands or insist on their rights, etc. At the same time, the state is an idea and a symbol. In fact, it is more an idea and a symbol than it is matter, and it is the only place in the world where the idea precedes matter, because the key idea, the social proposal, the government program, the triumphant discursive articulation between the frame of discourses that define the social field transform into matters of state, laws, decrees, budgets, management, execution, etc.

The state is formed by a set of learned knowledge concerning history, culture, the natural sciences, and literature. But it also represents the certifications that validate the different hierarchies (be they military, educational, or social) that allow us to organize our lives (even without clearly knowing the origin of these hierarchies). It represents fears, prohibitions, and scrupulous respect for what is socially correct and socially punishable; acceptance of police or civil authority; submission before the learned, accepted, and respected standards that regulate paperwork, rights, certifications, legal, financial or proprietary procedures; norms about what is or is not appropriate; the mental organization necessary to function successfully within all these routine social norms; and the culture inculcated by the school, civic rituals, or institutionalized recognition, accepted as such. The state represents all this. In this sense, it is possible to say that the state implies a way of knowing the existing world as it has been constructed, and functioning with it; a way of knowing how to translate into action the symbols of the institutionally established dominant order; and a way of being able to act, whether individually or collectively, as workers, peasants, students, or businessmen, according to the maps for navigating society that are pinned up in offices, schools, universities, parliaments, courts, banks, etc.

The state is a permanent process that consolidates the existing relations (relations of domination) in each person's body and in the frameworks through which they perceive and practically organize their own world. It is the permanent formation of the mental structures that people use to understand the existing world and to interact in this perceived world. The state is, then, the set of mental structures, symbolic frameworks, and systems for interpreting the world adopted by

individuals who operate and function in the world. Clearly, this world is hierarchically organized, but it has also become internalized as a schema for interpretation and possible action. So it is no longer seen as something external; instead, it is 'naturalized' through the organization of the world at the level of ideas, alive in the mind and the body of every individual. Consequently, the state is also a set of ideas, knowledges, procedures, and perception frameworks that facilitate the tolerance of the established structures of authority. To some extent, it could be said that the state is the way in which the dominant reality chooses to write its grammar of domination on the body and mind of every individual, and on the collective body of every social class. It also represents the procedures of symbolic, discursive, and moral production through which every person and collective body sees themselves and interacts as a body in the world. In that sense, it can be said that the state is both matter and idea: 50% matter, 50% idea.

Similarly, in the other dimension of its paradoxical definition, the state is a permanent process of the concentration and monopolization of decisions. At the same time, it is a process of universalization of functions, knowledges, rights, and possibilities.

The state has the monopoly of coercion (according to Weber's studies),[2] but it is also a process of monopolizing taxes (as Norbert Elias has shown),[3] of educational qualifications, national narratives, and dominant ideas—in other words, frameworks of perception and mental action with which people understand and interact in the world. It is the process of monopolization of common sense and the symbolic order,[4] or, following Durkheim,[5] of moral and logical principles that made people what they are in the world. This permanent monopolization of the knowledges and procedures that organize the social order is the main visible quality of the state. This is a monopolization of the principles that organize material and symbolic life in society.

However, there cannot be a legitimate monopoly (a primary quality of the state) if there is not a socialization or universalization of procedures, knowledges, achievements, rights, and identities. Social alchemy works in

[2] Max Weber, *Le Savant et le Politique*, Paris: Plon, 1995.

[3] Elias Norbert, *The Civilizing Process*, New York: Urizen, 1978.

[4] Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1989–1992*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014.

[5] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, New York: Dover, 2008.

such a way that the appropriation of resources (coercion, taxes, knowledge, etc.) can only work if those resources are shared.

To some extent, the state is a form of community: a territorial, linguistic, educational, historical, mental, spiritual, and economic community. However, this community cannot be constructed without it simultaneously being usurped and monopolized by the few. The state is a historical process of the construction of the common. As soon as it has become common, something universal, it is simultaneously monopolized by a minority (the authorities). The result is precisely a monopoly of the common. The state does not represent a monopoly of private resources, but rather the monopoly of common resources, of common goods. We find in this contradiction the key to understanding the state or, in other terms, social domination.

The state can only appear in contemporary history if it produces common goods (as a result of social struggles and relations) and resources that belong to the whole society, such as legality, education, protection, a civic history and social contributions to the common welfare. However, the production of those common goods is only possible on condition that there simultaneously begin the process of its monopolization, concentration, and administration by a few who confirm the existence of these common goods by monopolizing them. These common goods are created, constantly developed and demanded, but they only exist if they are monopolized. This cannot take place as a simple and ordinary private expropriation. In that case, the state would no longer be a state and would become the private domain of some class or caste. It would immediately lose legitimacy and disappear.

The state will fulfill its potential—or, in other words, Poulantzas's 'condensation of the relationship of forces' will become an enduring institution of domination (a state)—only if those who monopolize the common goods are able to manage this monopoly in their own favor. For that, they must convince the others, making them believe, understand and accept that this monopoly over these common goods is beneficial to everyone (including the producers and participants of these common goods). Here we find the secret of domination: the belief in a double community, where the administration is monopolized by a few. Consequently, it is no longer a real community. It becomes what Marx called an 'illusory community'.

State domination is the relation of social forces that impose a double illusory community, in everyday life and in the symbolic world of

persons. First, the illusory community of common goods that allows the existence of state goods, such as common taxes (in other words, the universalization of taxation), common education (the universalization of elementary and higher education), citizens' rights (the universalization of juridical, social, and political rights), common institutions and narratives (the universalization of a national community), moral and logical frameworks regarding the organization of the world (the universalization of common sense and the symbolic order of society). In this case, we are talking about the common goods produced for everyone (first community). These goods are nevertheless organized, proposed and directed by a few (first monopoly). It is true that these common goods are shared and distributed among every member of the state (second community), but at the same time this distribution is managed and regulated by a few people. It is they that can benefit from distribution and obtain a greater quantity, more easily, and with a real decision and management capacity (second monopoly).

So, the state presents itself as a hierarchy and a process of regulation of the common goods. There is a state (community) when there are common goods that involve the entire society. But this community can only be ruled and be profitable in a hierarchical system, and, to a certain extent, only if it is expropriated by a few (a monopoly). This is the reason why Marx so aptly defines the state as an 'illusory community'; for the state is a social balance of power, where the forces that produce the common goods are monopolized and enjoyed, in better conditions, by a few. We find therein not only the legitimacy of the state but the legitimation or naturalization of domination.

This explains the permanent fascination that the state exerts over different social groups, and especially over the lower classes' projects for social emancipation. Ultimately, it is there that they seek a sense of community. We also find in this an explanation for the permanent frustration of these same emancipation projects: they cannot overcome the idea of the illusory community, i.e. the monopolization of management and production in the community.

The social process called the state is a process of construction of hegemonies or class groups. In other words, it is the result of a historic class group's capacity to articulate its social project with other classes who do not belong to the dominant group corresponding to that project. However, in the struggle for state power, there is always a dimension of emancipation, a community potential that must reveal itself at

the beginning of the confrontation with the relations of monopolization found within the state project or in the state will.

From Fetishizing Capital to Fetishizing the State

As we can see, the fact that the state is a contradictory relationship of forces does not only owe to diversity of forces and interests acting within it. This is also a contradictory relationship because of the inherent logic of the state's functioning. It is both matter and idea, both monopoly and universalism. And it is in the infinite dialectic of these contradictions that we can find the key to understanding the management of the class contradictions that envelop the state. This 'illusory community' (the state) is itself contradictory, but it is a functioning contradiction that can only work in the same contradiction as a process of state building. This paradoxical magic can only work with the contribution of an entire society and the participation of every social class, and thanks to the action, and often inaction, of these classes.

In order for the state to exist, it must represent everyone, but it can only be a state if it does this as a monopoly of the few. In seeking to secure this monopoly, it may well preserve the material, ideal or symbolic goods for everyone. In this sense, the state has the same logic as money. Given that it is a monopoly, the state cannot be in the hands of everyone. We could say the same thing for money, which is different from any use-value or any concrete product of human labor, but is used as a unit of measure and exchange. However, the state can only be the state if it guarantees universality, a common, inner being for all, a modicum of common goods for everyone. The same thing happens with money: it can only be the general equivalent for all products and assure the social realization of commodities' use-values, because it has something in common with all of them, independent of their utility: namely, abstract human labor (the universality of labor).

Money can fulfill a necessary social function, as a means for the exchange of different products between producers. It can do so because money represents something that all these products have in common: abstract human labor. In the same way, the state fulfills a necessary social function of gathering and uniting every member of society as a territorial community, through its management of the shared resources. However, money fulfills this mission only by substituting for the direct encounter between producers, i.e. by using a common abstraction of

their products' concrete qualities: abstract human labor. Ultimately, producers exchange their products in order to satisfy their needs, and not for common control over the product of their labor or to participate directly in social production. Relations among people are mediated by an abstraction (abstract human labor) that eventually ends up managing, overpowering and dominating producers. This means that human beings are dominated by their own creations, and thus abstract human labor (exchange value) transforms into that 'highly mysterious' entity that rules the lives of its own producers. That is the essence of capitalism.

This same mystification process can be found in the state. There is a need for universality in the relations among people, in the interdependence and associativity of everyday life, of rights, of production, of culture among members of the society. However, until now, this associativity and that community have not directly arisen as 'free association of producers' (Marx), but as a monopolized production or as the monopolistic administration of (material and immaterial) common resources, social rights, identities, and forms of coercion—a monopoly held by a portion of society that becomes a ruling and dominant group. Ultimately, when hegemonies last for a long time this also gives society some measure of stability.

Universality and community are social and human needs. But ever since the disappearance of the ancestral agrarian community, this community has only existed as a monopolistic administration. In other words, it existed as a dominant group institutionalized as a state. In the same way as money, this relation of monopolized universalization, of common resources monopolized by a few, called the state, has become a relation and an institution superposed on society. It has acquired a life of its own, not only in the everyday life of persons but also in intellectual and political life. Ultimately, the twentieth-century leftist parties' conception of the 'state as instrument' expresses this same fetishism of a social relation understood as a thing with its own existence.

But, why can people not directly exchange the products of their labor, using the concrete qualities of these products, instead of using money—i.e. something that ends up becoming autonomous and then ruling over these same producers? This is really the big question to which Marx responds in *Capital*. This question can also be formulated in the following terms: why can people not build a community in their everyday activities—in the fields of education, culture, economics, or human relations—and why do they instead have to find this community in the

process of the monopolization of common goods—in other words, in the state?

The money-form has thus the same constitutive logic as the state-form, and historically both run in parallel, reinforcing each other. Money and the state recreate spaces of universality or spaces for human sociability. Money allows the exchange of products at a global scale, and facilitates the realization of the use value of the concrete products of human labor, reflected in the consumption (satisfaction of needs) of other human beings. There is no doubt that this is a function of sociability, of community. However, this function is fulfilled on the basis of an abstraction of the concrete action of producers that work as private producers, validating and sanctioning the separation among them. Money's function emerges from this material fragmentation of the producers-owners, reasserts it, overpowers them and, in the long run, ends up ruling the private producers-owners immersed in a process of atomization/separation. Money can only reproduce this fetishism because it simultaneously recreates some sociability and condenses a sense of community, even though this is the abstract sociability of a flawed 'illusory community' which nonetheless operates in the material and mental action of every member of the society. In the same way, the state brings the members of a society together, reaffirms a sense of belonging and the possessions held by all. But it does this on the basis of the monopolization-privatization of the use and management of these common resources.

With money, this process comes about because the producers do not participate in a social production, such as would allow them access to the products of social labor without the intervention of money, i.e. as a simple satisfaction of human needs. In the case of the state, this process occurs because citizens are not members of a real community of producers that produce their means of existence and coexistence in an associated manner, and build relations directly among themselves. Rather, they do so through the mediation of the state. That is why we can conclude that the logic of value-forms and commodity-fetishism, described by Marx with such genius in *Capital* Volume I,[6] is doubtless the underlying logic that creates the state, and its fetishism.[7]

[6] See Chapter One, 'Commodities', in Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 35, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975).

[7] That is why we can categorically reaffirm that the core of the Marxist theory about the state and power is the theory of the forms of value that we find in the first chapter of *Capital*.

The key to the mystery of this 'fetishism of domination' is to be found in the permanent transformation of the state as the condensation site of goods, rights, and universal institutions that traverse every society, which is simultaneously monopolized and concentrated by a few—and if that were otherwise, this would not be a state.

Ultimately, the state machine and its centers of discourse production, education, persuasion and coercion, are under the command of a limited social group (and that is why we call it monopoly), whose monopoly can only be effective if it simultaneously produces consensus, fusion, and collaboration with those who possess other monopolies (money, means of production). Most importantly, they also have to establish such ties with the great majority of the population who do not possess any monopoly, but who must feel that they are being aided, protected and guided by the owners of the state monopoly.

Subversion in the Interstices

When Poulantzas tells us that the state is a relation among the propertied classes and a relation with popular classes, he is not only criticizing the understanding of the state as a thing, as a machine external to society. This latter conception was, indeed, at the source of the failed elitist and reformist strategies of either destroying or occupying the state, both of which brought the creation of new ruling elites, either through armed force or through the ballot box.

Poulantzas moreover suggests that we should not think of the state as a relation that seeks domination, or as a starting point to explain things and set out revolutionary strategies. Instead, the state should be understood as a point of arrival of complex processes and social struggles that produce precisely this domination. Hence, domination is not the starting point for explaining society but, on the contrary, the process, the evolution, the continual social mechanism full of possibilities and, sometimes, tactical uncertainties, and spaces empty of domination. And it is precisely these spaces that make emancipation or resistance possible.

A certain fossilized Marxism considers the state as a monolithic machine subordinated to a class and, moreover, as the enforcer of an existing system of domination. There is no space, then, for the possibility of the dominated classes liberating themselves. In such a case, emancipation can only be the result of the work of a conscious 'vanguard' that has been immunized against the illusions of domination. In other

words, emancipation is the work of some enlightened and specialized minds supposedly free of the domination that oppresses the brains of the popular classes. But how can these enlightened minds remain outside of domination, and not make up part of society—i.e. the only way of not participating in it. Here, we find one of the greatest mysteries that these creators of vanguards were never able to answer, in order to give some logical seriousness to their arguments.

Following this reasoning, the emancipation of popular classes could only come from 'outside' and not from the popular classes themselves. Even worse, emancipation could only emerge from outside society, in some meta-society nestled in the uncorrupted minds of the vanguard. That was precisely the metaphysical discourse and the failed path of mainstream Marxism during the twentieth century. In that sense, if we are to create a living Marxism for the twenty-first century, a socialism for today, our understanding of the state must overcome this instrumentalist trap. And this is precisely what Nicos Poulantzas's contribution allows us to do.

In that sense, if domination is not the starting point for explaining the world, but rather a process that is being created every day, and that has to be updated and verified daily, this also means that domination is not an inevitable fate. It is in the holes of domination, in the interstices of the state and in the permanent uncertainty of its realization, that a possibility of emancipation can be found, lives, and emerges. The history of real revolutions shows us that amidst the passivity and resignation of the destitute and the complicity between governing and governed, something suddenly explodes. A memory of organization reappears, respect for the governing vanishes, the old discourses of order no longer appeal, and new ideals and ideas that were marginal before the revolution seduce and call to action more and more people. Domination breaks from within, in the process of domination itself.

The state as a monopoly of universalizing decisions is questioned from within. It is as if its concealed base, the desire for community, rises up from popular expectations, opening the doors to collective wills that reappropriate the capacity to deliberate, imagine and decide. There emerge urgent, practical hopes of managing the commons in new ways. Certainly, sometimes these practical actions are projected onto representatives that simply reenact the functioning of the old state monopolies, with just the faces changing. But, even in spite of that, we can see the awakening of new mobilizing beliefs that sustain a social enthusiasm

(at first in small localities, then in some regions, and maybe later across the whole country). And when this social awakening not only focuses on new personalities but gets rid of the old representative elites and goes beyond electoral representation through new forms of popular, extra-parliamentary mobilization, and moreover seeks to replace the deep mental frameworks through which people morally and logically organize their everyday lives … then we have revolutionary processes that change the very structure of society's hierarchies of decision-making. Those processes eliminate the old certainties about the future, and encourage people to participate and believe in other ways of managing our common affairs. In other words, here we have an overall crisis of the state that can only be solved through the restoration of the old beliefs and the old relationship of forces, or through the establishment of new power relations, mobilizing beliefs and forms of participation. In other words, this crisis can only be solved through the formation of a new state, whose degree of social democratization will depend in the subalterns' capacity to sustain, in the streets and in the institutions, their own participation in the management of the commons.

The relational perspective of the state, proposed by Poulantzas, inspires us to advance such reflections, but it also let us issue what might be called the proposal of giving up on trying to take state power: an idea that was relatively weak when the Greek sociologist was alive, but which has since then gained in popularity among some desperate sectors of the left.

Those who propose to 'change the world without taking power' suppose that the popular struggles, the collective knowledge, the organizational frameworks of the world and even social identities (nations or communities) exist outside or above the state's own sphere of operations. Sometimes this organized knowledge and these identities are indeed constituted in order to confront the state; and yet they are reaffirmed and legitimated precisely because they are effective before and in the state. Their achievement is that they are inscribed within the state's own material structure, as markers of citizenship. In other cases, they are promoted within the state, but their effectiveness owes to their capacity to articulate collective expectations and needs which become a custom or practical memory of the popular classes.

This abdication of the question of state power is the counterpart of the instrumental comprehension of the state, because it supposes that society and the subaltern classes develop their histories outside the state, as if this latter were constituted in total isolation from the subaltern classes.

They forget that the state not only 'condenses' these classes' subaltern position, but is itself this subalternity in an institutional and symbolic form. Additionally, the state also represents the social community, the common achievements, and collective goods that have been attained, even if it does so in a reified form. To speak of 'changing the world without taking power' implies that power is a property and not a relation, that it is an object external to the social, instead of a social link that ties us all together.

With this kind of reasoning and perspective, the subaltern classes are seen as powerless faced with the reality of their own history, of their struggles to produce common goods, and of their own complicities with the state. In this sense, 'to change the world' becomes something reserved to the 'pure', those who are not 'contaminated', those who do not use money or buy in the markets, those who do not study in the state institutions, those who do not respect the law—in other words, those who stand outside society, which is 'impure', 'contaminated', 'distorted'. They want to build a social revolution without society, or to build a world without the real inhabitants of the world. They do not understand that the real society, the real social world, have built the state with all its achievements and misfortunes; they have produced the common goods and seen them silently being expropriated. And, if there is to be a revolution, it must be led by 'contaminated' people who have grown up in the context of the state; that is, people that in a moment of their collective life feel overwhelmed by the monopolization of what is theirs, and feel duped by those who monopolize their common goods. They begin the insurrection precisely because they suffer the monopolization of their social labor and decide to break it. And they do so based on their own experience of this monopoly, of the interstices of the state and their own experience of the state.

'Changing the world without taking power' is the credo of a new spiritual vanguard of the 'pure': those who are so pure that they have nothing to do with the subaltern classes that result from the condensation of struggles and relations of force. The way in which they will stop being subaltern is not to distance themselves from the 'contaminated world of power', but rather to overturn the structure of these relations of force. In other words, they will transform themselves, and in so doing they will transform the state itself. For this state not only expresses their inferiority, but also makes them what they are today.

Finally, it is always strange to see how this position abdicating the question of the state, which may seem very radical in its determination to avoid the contamination of power, in fact gives the dominant classes the absolute freedom to keep on governing, and does not exert any control over the material conditions of state domination. 'Without taking power' is an elegant way of saying that those who control state power should go on holding it as long as they wish. Even worse, the subaltern classes end up defenseless, because they do not recognize their achievements in the institutional structures of the state nor their history of struggles that, in the long run, influence the state. They want to change the world but they want to forget history, the experience of past struggles and the people that build the world. So again history is the result of a small group of 'untarnished' people, free from the corruption of worldly power.

The intellectual vanguard of the instrumental Left is today replaced by the spiritual vanguard of the 'abdicationist' Left. In both cases, the revolution is not led by the subaltern classes, because they are 'ignorant' or 'impure', but by a few individuals that will restore a 'pure world': the monopoly of the chosen, or in other words, a new state! But a state without the 'illusions' and 'impurities' of the plebs.

A retreat into local autonomy forgets that in the subaltern classes' relations with the state, they are not autonomous: They pay taxes, they use money, they require services, go to school, make use of the courts, etc. To proclaim a struggle purely outside the state is to leave the ground open to those who control the absolute monopoly of the state and the relations of domination. This is without any doubt an elitist position and, in the long run, a conservative one that excludes itself from the struggles of the popular classes. For these latter inevitably traverse the state and are part of it.

The Democratic Road to Socialism

Finally, I would like to revisit very quickly a second key concept in the last book of Nicos Poulantzas, specifically in the last chapter of that book: 'Towards a democratic socialism'.

If the modern capitalist state is a social relation that traverses the entire society and every one of its elements—social classes, collective identities, its ideas, its history, and its hopes—then socialism, understood as the structural transformation of the balance of power between social classes, necessarily has to proceed via the state, material, ideal, economic,

and cultural institutionalization of this balance of power. And socialism proceeds through the state precisely as a substantial democratization of collective decisions, of the management of the commons, and a growing reduction of the monopolization of the production of cohesive universals. In other words, as an irruption of democracy in the material and symbolic conditions of social existence.

According to Poulantzas, this democratic road to socialism has seven characteristics.

1. It is a long process.
2. The struggle of the popular masses brings itself to bear on the internal contradictions of the state.
3. These struggles transform the materiality of the state.
4. These struggles uphold and strengthen ideological and political pluralism.
5. These struggles deepen political liberties, and universal suffrage within representative democracy.
6. New forms of direct democracy are developed, as well as centers of self-management.
7. Everything happens within the perspective of the state's ultimate disappearance.[8]

When Poulantzas says that the democratic path to socialism is a 'long process', he means that it is not something abrupt, an assault on the state, an electoral or military victory, and still less a decree. Basing himself on a relational logic, he asserts that socialism is the radical transformation of the balance of power toward social classes that previously occupied a subaltern place. This transformation should materialize in a series of state-institutional nodes that condense precisely this balance of power. And I would add that this also means permanent transformations in the organizational forms of the working classes, in their capacity to associate and directly participate. More importantly, it also means transformations in what we call the ideal dimension of the state, in other words, in the key-ideas of society, in the set of moral and logical frameworks people use to organize their everyday lives.

[8] See Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, Part Five, London: Verso, 1980.

In fact, this ideal dimension of the state—which Poulantzas sometimes overlooks—is perhaps the most important aspect to transform, because even the more material aspect of the state (the means of coercion) is only effective if it preserves the legitimacy of the monopoly—in other words, if there is socially-shared belief as to its pertinence and practical necessity. The idea of a process thus refers to a series of transformations in the balance of power, in the totality of spaces both within and outside the state structure, whatever the differentiation in the results in the long run. But, certainly, it is not an accumulation of gradual changes within the state, as the old reformism proposed.

In the Bolivian experience, this process implies the simultaneous deployment of intense social struggles in every space of the state structures, i.e. the theater of profound transformations in the relationship of forces among the social groups able to make decisions and in the material composition of these state structures. This is true of the systems of electoral representation (electoral victories), of the administration of common goods (economic policies) and of political hegemony (symbolic order of the world).

Hegemony is the growing irradiation of a mobilizing hope in a social way of managing the common goods of every member of the polity. But it is also the modification of the moral and logical frameworks that people use to organize their presence in the world. Gramsci is right when he says that the working classes must lead and convince the greater part of the social classes around a revolutionary project for the state economy and society. However, Lenin is right, too, when he affirms that the dominant project must be defeated. So there are two paths to political hegemony: to convince, along with Gramsci and to defeat, along with Lenin.

Our experience in Bolivia teaches us that hegemony is the result of a combination of both these paths. At first, you have to radiate outwards and convince people of the principle of a mobilizing hope (as Gramsci sought). This is a long labor in the cultural, discursive, organizational, and symbolic fields that establishes nodes of territorial irradiation in the social space. Its effectiveness is put to the test when the moral accord between governing and governed is set in crisis, or when it is socially possible to repudiate the dominant social order's moral and logical frameworks.

It is impossible to know precisely at what moment the old political loyalties will be rejected. It may be that generations of revolutionaries, academics, and social leaders will live and die before seeing any result.

However, there are indeed moments when society accepts the possibility of rejecting some of its fundamental beliefs. Then, the long work of cultural, symbolic, and organizational construction has to prove its capacity to radiate outward, and articulate mobilizing hopes on the basis of the potential latent within the subaltern classes. The emergence, common to every revolutionary process, of a 'catastrophic standoff'[9] of two opposed social projects with a capacity to mobilize, a moral certainty and a territorial irradiation of their own, will be born from this 'war of position' strategy (Gramsci).

However, there is a moment, which we could call a 'Robespierrian' moment, where you must defeat the discursive and organizational structure of dominant classes. There, Lenin is right. No power accepts its defeat by a simple evaluation of probabilities or by way of fatigue. On the contrary, it does everything in its power to preserve its control over the state, and even violently so. So amidst a social insurgency developing both outside of the state, and internally to the state's own institutional structures, you have to defeat the old decadent power, and arrive at what we could call the 'bifurcation point'. This allows the forces built up in every field of social life across decades to fight each other, and give rise to a new relationship of forces and a new condensation. A relationship of forces does not change without a change of power, stricto sensu. That is why a change of direction and position in the relationship of forces demands a 'point of bifurcation', or a change in the forces that are fighting each other. Hence the Leninist preference for a 'war of movement' (as defined by Gramsci) is not a particularity of 'Eastern' revolutions, where there is a weak civil society, but the common necessity faced with every state in the world. For these states are but a condensation of the relationship of forces between social classes. Revolutionary strategy can distinguish between the moments when it is necessary to make recourse to 'war of movement' or 'war of position'. But the basic idea is that one cannot exist without the other.

Having passed this point of bifurcation, which radically reorders the relationship of forces between social classes and gives rise to a new power

[9] See Álvaro García Linera, 'Estado y revolución: empate catastrófico y punto de bifurcación', in *Compendio. Discursos oficiales del 22 de enero y 6 de agosto (2006–2012)*, La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional, 2012, pp. 35–44. See also *Las tensiones creativas de la revolución. La quinta fase del Proceso de Cambio*, La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional, 2011.

bloc, it is necessary once again to integrate and convince the rest of society. This even includes the opposition (who are not about to disappear), no longer as dominant classes but as defeated classes, disorganized and lacking a project of their own. Here, Gramsci once again enters the scene, with the logic of consent and the idea of a moral and intellectual reform. In this case, the idea is to convince and to establish, in Bloch's words, a 'principle of hope'.[10] In other words, we must defeat the dominant project and integrate the rest of society in the new moral and logical framework. That is the recipe for attaining political hegemony, and the process of building a new state form.

We do not want to oversimplify this idea of socialism as a process, but we can distinguish among the principal nodes, the decisive nodes and the structural nodes that demand a revolutionary change in the form and the content of society, in order to follow the democratic road to socialism.

The principal nodes for a revolutionary change in the balance of power would be:

a. Government,
b. the parliament, and
c. mass media.

The decisive nodes:

d. The subaltern classes' experience of autonomous organization.
e. Social participation in the management of common goods.
f. The use and redistributive function of public resources.
g. The key-ideas or contemporary horizons which mobilize people.

And the structural nodes:

h. The forms of ownership and management of the main sources of wealth, in the perspective of their socialization or communitarization.
i. The moral and logical frameworks used by people to know the world and to act in it, which may serve to gradually destroy the monopolies in the management of society's common goods.

[10] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.

We thus have principal nodes, decisive nodes, and structural nodes. But they are not the condensation of gradual and growing forces; they are concentric elements in the class struggles that reveal the social, economic, political, and symbolic composition of the social field, the social framework and the state-process in operation.

When we have changes in the principal nodes alone, we are confronted with regular renovations in the political systems but within the same state order. If we have changes in the principal nodes and in the decisive nodes, we are confronted with political and democratic revolutions that renew the dominant capitalist state order in the form of a widened democratization of institutions and rights. Finally, when we have changes in the three nodes simultaneously we can see social revolutions than start a long process of state transformation, the constitution of a new ruling class bloc, the growing democratization of politics and the economy and—what is decisive—a process reversing the monopolization of the management of society's common resources (taxes, collective rights, basic services, natural resources, the financial system, collective identities, culture, cohesive symbols, economic networks, etc.).

The democratic road to socialism, as proposed by Poulantzas, also implies two further things. First, it involves the defense and enlargement of political pluralism and representative democracy. This may seem obvious today but, thirty years ago, on the Left and among Marxists, that statement would have been considered something of a heresy, for representative democracy was associated with bourgeois democracy. I am sure that Poulantzas himself received many critiques from both the radical and 'official' Left, and some political excommunications.

Second, Poulantzas also proposes the extension of the spaces of direct democracy. Obscurantist loyalties long forced Marxist thinking to censure and silence its own ideas in order to defend certain regimes which in the long run proved to be anomalous forms of state capitalism. But now we understand that political liberties and representative democracy are, to a large extent, the result of popular struggles. They have a right to citizenship and they belong to the popular tradition, collective memory, and its political experience. It is true that representative democracy helps reproduce the capitalist state regime, but it also reaffirms social rights, unites class collectivities and, even more importantly, it is a fertile ground for awakening democratic possibilities that go far beyond this sphere. Representative democracy can become a fossilized democracy that destroys social decisions in favor of individualized rituals that

reproduce passivity and domination. But it can also express some of the organizational force attained by the subaltern classes and its temporary limits. Above all, it is the natural scenario in which democratic forms and capacities for organization can emerge and develop, beyond democracy and the state itself.

Certainly, the people constitute itself a political subject through elections and political liberties, but it is also clear that the concept of the popular is more than simple representation. The spread of democracy throughout society creates or engenders spaces of direct participation, of communitarian democracy, of trade union experience and of territorial assemblies. All of these things contribute to the society's democratic pluralism. This dualism of democracy, between representative democracy and participative-direct-communitarian democracy, is the key to understanding the democratic path to socialism.

Indeed, from this perspective, socialism is not associated with the stratification of the means of production, which although a useful way of redistributing wealth is not a type of social property or the beginning of a new mode of production. Nor is it associated with the one-party regime (which was, for Lenin, but a temporary exception, imposed by the war and the invasion by seven global powers). Socialism is nothing less than the limitless expansion of the spaces for deliberating and executing the management of public affairs and, in the long run, for the production and management of social wealth.

In all Poulantzas's audacious reflection, there remains one central theme that his writings do not address. This is the question of the forms of ownership over economic resources under socialism. This poses the problem of the complexity and difficulty of building the organizational experiences necessary to developing forms of social property, social wealth production, and the social management of production, able to go beyond state ownership and private capitalist property.

Perhaps it is in looking back to the tragic paradox characteristic of the era in which Poulantzas was writing, that we can see the source of his theory's real power. He was able to look beyond the temporary defeat that was looming in his own time, and proposes the central themes of the resurgence of socialist thought that would come thirty years later. If we are to understand the present and be able to transform it, we contemporary socialists and Marxists have a lot to learn from this intellectual.

CHAPTER 2

Nicos Poulantzas's Strategic Reflection Between Economics and Politics

Isabelle Garo

Nicos Poulantzas was part of a 1960s intellectual generation whose brilliance spanned the whole range of philosophical and political choices. In the political and ideological context of this period, all theoretical trajectories necessarily crossed paths with Marxism. Indeed, numerous authors came to question the future of capitalism, or even the possibility of going beyond it. In Poulantzas's case, this meant an intervention situated on the terrain of Marxism itself. His project first of all brought him close to Jean-Paul Sartre, in the period where this latter came to identify with Marxism, and then to Louis Althusser, who would quickly establish himself as the most innovative Marxist of this period. This did not at all take away from the profound originality of Poulantzas's work, today as in his own time. Without doubt, the best way of reviewing Poulantzas's contributions to the debates of his time, and indeed our own, is to address his work in terms of the strategic question. After all, his theoretical analyses can never be dissociated from the concrete perspective of the conquest of the state and the transition to socialism. Yet paradoxically, these questions are today widely neglected, even as the need for an alternative to capitalism becomes ever starker.

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A Paradoxical Dialectic

Poulantzas's thought on the capitalist state and the political perspectives for transforming it was a thought-in-motion. This thought was closely linked to his own political evolution, before it was brutally interrupted by his premature death. I will, therefore, focus on his last theoretical elaborations, which appeared in *State, Power, Socialism*. We can consider this work the final stage of Poulantzas's reflection, at the same time as we take account of the evolutions of his thought that had taken place shortly beforehand, in connection both to the conjuncture and the debates that his previous works had prompted. In *State, Power, Socialism* Poulantzas defined the state as 'the condensation of a relationship of forces between classes and class fractions'.[1] As has been said time and again, this thesis desubstantializes the state and defines it as a contradictory relationship rather than as a thing. The consideration that class struggles are refracted within the state and play out not only outside the state sphere, but also within it, opens up new perspectives for the transition to socialism. Yet this latter statement, which is strategic in nature, is not a simple logical extension of this redefinition of the state. This demands that we delve deeper into the association between two different kinds of statements. In this regard, we need to begin by listing the principal traits that Poulantzas attributed to the capitalist state. I will enumerate seven of these, all of which also concern us today. We can present these as situated tendencies, and most importantly as tendencies that are torn between two unilateral conceptions, even to the point that they are defined by this tension itself. Poulantzas indicated the two contrasting alternatives which he rejected, although even in making this double critique he did not always explicate his own conception.

1. The state is 'neither a thing-instrument that may be taken away, nor a fortress'.[2] Rather, it is a condensation of relations which nonetheless also exhibits its own 'peculiar material framework'.[3] Far from being 'a mere appendage of the social',[4] the state itself plays a constitutive role.

[1] Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, London: Verso, 1980, p. 132.

[2] Ibid., p. 257.

[3] Ibid., p. 14.

[4] Ibid., p. 38.

2. This specific state gives rise to a 'relative separation of the state and the economic sphere'.[5] But there exists no 'real externality, such as would exist if the state intervened in the economy only from the outside', even if the state cannot intervene 'in the hard core of capitalist relations of production'.[6]
3. The state is not in all aspects produced by the dominant classes, and nor is it simply taken over by them.[7] But even so, it is the 'strategic site of organization of the dominant class in its relationship to the dominated classes'.[8]
4. The state's role is to organize consent, by way of ideology, and the exercise of domination, by way of violence. But its role also concerns the 'overaccumulation-valorization of capital and … the management-reproduction of labour-power'.[9]
5. The state is one of the strategic sites of class struggles. Conquering the state remains on the order of the day, and the parliamentary or electoral road will not alone be sufficient to achieve this.[10]
6. The transformation of the state has to be radical, but that is something distinct from destroying or smashing it.[11] Its transformation must also be accompanied by the extension of direct democracy.[12]
7. The state is the organizer of the boundary between public and private, and 'fixes [the individual-private] as the target of its power'.[13] Emanating from a relationship of forces, the state organizes this boundary and makes ever-possible its own authoritarian drift.

Such definitions of the capitalist state have the advantage that they openly present themselves in dialectical terms. However, this is true in a very particular sense. These definitions combine a claim and its opposite, oscillating almost to the point of instability, and perhaps fail to make clear (for want of stating it directly) what the contradiction actually is,

[5] Ibid., p. 18.
[6] Ibid., p. 191.
[7] Ibid., p. 14.
[8] Ibid., p. 148.
[9] Ibid., p. 163.
[10] Ibid., p. 261.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., p. 263.
[13] Ibid., p. 72.

when it is situated on the terrain of things rather than the terrain of discourse. This was a dialectic more vaunted than it was truly theorized. At the very moment when this dialectic found itself excommunicated by the structuralism that was then dominant on the Left, it was often summarized in the matrix-formula 'relative autonomy', which was very much in vogue in the 1970s.

It is worth taking a moment to revisit the history of this expression, which is of considerable theoretical consequence. It was used for the first time by Engels—in a private letter of his, late in his life, and not in a work intended for publication—as he criticized the narrowly determinist vision of history that had wrongly been attributed to Marx and him. The advantage of such a formulation is its plastic character. Yet this is also its major defect, which does more to create ambiguity than it does resolve the problems posed. Engels notes a case of 'interaction' between cause and effect, for 'On the whole, the economic movement gets its way, but it has also to suffer reactions from the political movement which it established and endowed with relative independence itself'.[14] For his part, Poulantzas like Engels asserted the determinant role of the economic base 'in the last instance'. Like Marx, Poulantzas noted the potential existence of some political or ideological dominance (for instance politics in ancient Rome, or religion in the feudal world, as Marx notes in *Capital*),[15] and moreover that this dominance is—again in the last analysis—the result of the contradictions that take form at the base of a given mode of production. This leaves open the question of why and how the various instances within a given mode of production take form.

In this sense, so long as we remain attached to the architectural vocabulary of *The German Ideology* (which distinguishes base from superstructure), it is difficult to escape from a spatial conception of relative autonomy. Yet this work was but Marx's first approach to a question to which he would ceaselessly return. The Althusserian tradition entrenched this early conception of an overlapping set of different instances, i.e. a structure of articulated layers, apparatuses or functions—the site of a reciprocal interaction, without doubt, but also one based on the assumption that these instances stand external to one another. In many regards, despite Poulantzas's efforts to add greater complexity to such analyses,

[14] Friedrich Engels to Conrad Schmidt, 20 October 1890, text from Marxists Internet Archive.

[15] *Capital*, Vol. I: *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 35, p. 93.

of whose defects he was well-aware, he remained ensnared in a description that amounts to much more than a metaphor. For even when the state was defined as a consolidation of relationships, it above all appeared as a set of localized and fixed apparatuses, which in turn intervene in the base that gives rise to them.

Such an analysis focused on apparatuses will logically end up attributing priority importance to ideology and to violence, taking these latter for key functions of a capitalist state that intervenes directly in class struggles, but only intervenes around the edges of the world of the economy and production. This is a problematic conception of the state's role, especially if it is to be inserted within the framework of a critique of political economy, such as in Marx's work, which sets itself the task of thinking through a totality-in-becoming which is traversed by essential contradictions. For if we address the capitalist mode of production in this manner, we see that the relative separation of the state apparatus is precisely its means of intervention within social life, and even more so the condition for a certain structuring of the social world, in which the market and state combine to grant it its peculiar capitalist nature. In this sense, social production relations are present in the very core of the productive forces, which they themselves fashion: politics is indeed political economy as much as economic policy.

Building Socialism Strategically

By the time of his final book, Poulantzas seemed to have become more fully conscious of this problem. Here, he repeatedly emphasized the state's role within capitalist production relations, and more specifically with regard to the logic of capital (accumulation) and the logic of labor under capitalist domination (the division of labor). Nonetheless, the state continues to be conceived as a specific layer, as a 'relatively autonomous' structure: it is a regional instance that modifies the production relations that preexisted it and which it itself regulates and reproduces, at the same time as it also produces the human subjects that correspond to itself. It follows from this that in Poulantzas's eyes, political strategy must concentrate on the state level thus conceived, separating the stakes of politics from questions of production, or more precisely, never getting as far as concretely joining them together, while also underlining the need for such a connection to be made. As we know, this greater emphasis on the relations of production than the productive forces is a characteristic that

Althusserianism inherits from Maoism. Poulantzas clearly makes quite some effort to integrate these both distinct and linked moments: and he manages to do so by way of the priority he accords to the 'political-ideological', which is charged with 'reproducing' the relations of production. But he then neglects the dimension proper to the productive forces themselves, i.e. the dimension of their dialectic with the relations of production, which entrusts to the state and the law the task of producing the rules and norms that give form to the labor process itself.

It is precisely at this point that Poulantzas turns to attack instrumental conceptions of the state, as a means of legitimizing his own approach. We ought to ask ourselves what this 'instrumental conception' really is, and who he is really arguing against, here. The claim that the state is an instrument in the service of the ruling classes can be found in Engels. He defined the state as 'a power seemingly standing above society which would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'; and this power, having arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state.'[16] Lenin cited this extract in his *State and Revolution*, before immediately going on to specify that 'The state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms'.[17] According to Engels and Lenin, the state organizes class domination. But for both authors, this functionality comes from contradictions that traverse social reality and threaten this domination itself. Its instrumental dimension does not owe to it being the simple emanation or mere reflection of a social domination which is duplicated therein.

Even if Engels and Lenin simplified Marx's conception of the state, their conception cannot be considered narrowly instrumental. In reality, such an 'instrumental' vision is found much more among the theorists of the Second International, who considered the state as a neutral site open to all political and social forces, thus rendering both 'violent revolution' and 'the suppression of the state apparatus' redundant. In 1917 Lenin addressed his critique of this same thesis against Kautsky. Yet it so happens that in the era in which Poulantzas was writing he detected a certain kinship between this approach and that taken by the French Communist Party. This latter's theory of state-monopoly capitalism aimed to justify

[16] Friedrich Engels, '*The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*', in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 269.

[17] Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Chapter One, text from the Marxists Internet Archive.

a strategy focused on the electoral conquest of a French state which the PCF described as the temporary instrument of the monopolies. In this line of argument, the conquest of this same state by the *Union de la gauche* would immediately transform it into a tool in service of the *Union's* own program.

Looking through the complex debate that now reemerged (even if it developed back-to-front), we can deduce that even diametrically opposed choices could each become the target of the critique of instrumental conceptions of the state. Such a critique could thus be deployed by any of the protagonists in this debate. We should add that this critique did not imply any definite political choice, any more than it was synonymous with a new strategic choice, even though in Poulantzas's writing it served to underline the dangers of simplistic alternatives. None of these options was tenable in this late 1970s, as the Left prepared to enter government; Poulantzas was right to worry about this, and in so doing showed a great deal of foresight.

Before returning to strategic questions, there is a theoretical problem that we need to address. Is it possible that this impasse revealed an analytical flaw that is inherent to any Marxist approach to the state (whatever conclusions we might draw from this)? Yet the conception which represents the state an instrument that can manipulated at will, situated outside of the contradictions of history, stands foreign to Marx. Indeed, over the course of his work Marx was ever more insistent that it was necessary both to conquer state power and to smash the state. This did not at all stop him from analyzing the state as 'a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' in the *Communist Manifesto* and then speaking of the 'state machine' in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*. For Marx was now struck by the gradual and continuous extension of the modern capitalist state, and by the tight intermeshing of society and state which advanced through the development of specialized and diversified institutions. Despite appearances, Marx's 'machine' and Poulantzas's 'apparatus'—a term that he borrows from Althusser—do not refer to the same thing. After all, they do not correspond to the same analytical framework. Thus Marx remained focused on the role of modern citizenship, the legal status of the 'free laborer', as well as the legal status of the representative state, and its capacity to represent the general interest—questions which Althusser and Poulantzas neglected. Two contemporary reassessments of these questions allow us to further and extend this analysis, namely those conducted by Stathis Kouvelakis and Antoine Artous.

The Capitalist State and Economic Intervention

In Antoine Artous's book *Marx, l'État et la politique*,[18] whose analyses of Nicos Poulantzas he reasserted in a recent article,[19] the author reminds us that Poulantzas rejected Marx's youthful writings on the state. Like Althusser, he considered these texts tarnished by an obsolete philosophy. In so doing, Poulantzas overlooked Marx's analysis of the state in terms of abstraction. Artous emphasizes that this abstraction does not refer to the formation of philosophical entities cut off from reality, but rather a concrete process that forges objective abstractions, distinct functions, which have to be separate in order for them be functional. Marx would rediscover this same category 'abstraction' in *Capital* when he analyzed abstract labor as the substance of capitalist value. This process of abstraction escapes Poulantzas, for whom the civil society/state distinction in Marx's texts is but the temporary persistence of a liberal conception that was later destined to disappear; this is, indeed, a critique borrowed from Althusser, which bypasses the Hegelian origins of Marx's analysis.

It is then necessary to insist on the non-separate character of the state-abstraction, which comes to structure and most importantly to give form to the capitalist production of wealth and its social relations. Antoine Artous but so, too, Tran Hai Hac, Stathis Kouvelakis, André Tosel, and Lucien Sève[20] are among those contemporary Marxists who have underlined Marx's invention of an original notion of form, with a view to dialectically thinking through the form of a given content. This is, indeed, a form which distinguishes itself from this content only in order to organize its production-reproduction over the course of time. This line of analysis allows us to escape from the weakly defined character of 'relative autonomy'. The state form can thus make despotism in the factory coexist with modern citizenship, as the two faces of this operation of structuring-from-within, which cannot be reduced to an

[18] Antoine Artous, *Marx, l'État et la Politique*, Paris: Syllepse, 1989.

[19] Antoine Artous, 'À propos du livre de Nicos Poulantzas l'État, le pouvoir, le socialisme', online at the 'Marxismes au xxie siècle' site www.marxau21.fr.

[20] Hai Hac Tran, *Relire le "Capital"*, 2 vols., Lausanne: Page Deux, 2003; Stathis Kouvelakis, 'La forme politique de l'émancipation', in Jean-Numa Ducange and Isabelle Garo (eds.), *Marx politique*, Paris: La Dispute, 2015; André Tosel, 'La critique de l'économie politique ou les catégories marxiennes de l'émancipation', in *L'Esprit de scission. Études sur Marx, Gramsci, Lukács*, Besançon: Annales littéraires de l'université de Besançon, 1991; and Lucien Sève, *Structuralisme et dialectique*, Paris: Messidor-Éditions sociales, 1984.

ideological or repressive-type intervention external and subsequent to the social relations that it regulates. Beyond despotism within the factory walls, what is at issue, here, is the whole relation of exploitation and management of labor-power, a relation which combines violence and consent and most importantly the remodeling of the labor collective. Such a concrete logic arises at the level of wage-labor, as a juridical construction. Wage-labor—this fundamental level of social relations—thus finds its fundamental fulcrum in the state: the state provides its legitimation and guarantee, but also its political-juridical form, which is both specific and changeable.

So as Alain Supiot writes, during the Fordist sequence the state developed public services which 'add to the idea of political citizenship the idea of social citizenship'.[21] At the same time, the state would alter the status of wage-labor by grafting a certain number of new forms of 'security' on to it. These latter themselves took account of a relation of domination, maintaining and reproducing this same relation even as they adapted it in function of the political and social relationship of forces of that time. But what we are seeing today is a renewed challenge to these social gains; a challenge which does not make juridical and state intervention disappear, but rather reconfigures it. This is a reconfiguration of considerable importance, for—particularly since the 1980s—it has combined processes of denationalization and renationalization. This has troubled the previous interpretative frameworks and demanded that they become more complex. It has also compelled us to rethink the state at the national as well as the international and global levels. Saskia Sassen writes that 'Particular components of the national state begin to function as the institutional home for the operation of powerful dynamics constitutive or critical for global capital'.[22] Having become a supreme international norm, competition law sweeps everything in its path. Meanwhile the nation-state changes role and becomes the zealous harbinger of the capitalist market, and the proxy of the national and transnational dominant classes, as it sets as its priority the undoing of past rights and the destruction of all social protections.

So to present the state as an instance situated at the political-ideological level alone (even if in passing Poulantzas also signals its reproductive

[21] Alain Supiot, *Critique du droit du travail*, Paris: PUF, 2002, p. xviii.

[22] Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 222.

function) is to fail to understand this subtle and continuous integration into the capitalist mode of production. Alain Supiot thus emphasizes the proliferation of employer standards, which have no binding effect on the employer and seek only 'to normalize employees' behaviour'.[23] Such norms have a complex juridical status; they can be the simple expression of the most arbitrary of employer power, or else come under the remit of the employers' juridically defined prerogatives. Such a remark suffices to show the degree to which the state does not in fact remain external to the private capital holder's power over his employees: nor is the state the site of compromise or the registrar of the level of class struggle, however, low it might be.

Here, we see how out of date the thesis of the separation of the political from the economic has become, for it corresponds to an interpretation of a Keynesian parenthesis which has long since closed. We also see how far Poulantzas's decision to exclude market relations from the state's role conceals this key element concerning the wage relation. Moreover, now that the critique of law and of all regulation has become a key element of liberal discourse, it is important to elaborate a Marxist approach that grasps the effects of the class struggle, but also the particular nature of an institutional modus operandi and a normative innovation process inseparable from the mutations of contemporary capitalism and its aggravated crisis. From this point of view, labor law appears as the most complex and the most crucial question for any critique that claims to offer both rigorous analysis and fuel for the trade-union and political struggles on this same terrain.

Taking this same opportunity to pose the question of the true nature and specific function of political and juridical authorities within socialism, such an analysis also (and even prominently) concerns the problem of the processes of transition. Should we devote all our efforts to preserving the rights that have already been won, or fight for new rights, whose tenor could make it possible progressively to go beyond the limits of the capitalist mode of production? The problem of property rights and expropriation is at the heart of these questions, entirely conditioned as they are by the relationship of forces in society but also by the strategic perspective that is adopted and defended. As barely needs underlining, the radical Left must urgently get a handle on these questions once more,

[23] Alain Supiot, op. cit., p. 244.

and not simply settle for defending public services. Still less should it just amuse itself with an ivory-tower discussion of the commons; to do so is to evade rather than frankly address the question of property rights, a problem that needs confronting in light of the class struggle, the working class, and wage-labor.

We might note in passing that the question of abstraction here once again proves crucial. For abstraction also designates—especially for Marx—the manner in which the law of value regulates, as best as it can, a wealth production process which is marked by the anarchy fundamental to capitalism's very principle—i.e. driven only by the irrational logic of 'valorizing value'. And indeed, the value of commodities, mediated and constructed by the capitalist market, is the real abstraction that allows for their exchange on the market, insofar as their production is no longer regulated by social needs or organized by the producers themselves, but instead solely guided by the individual capital-holders' quest for profit. Poulantzas little addressed this consideration.

Yet it is precisely for the purposes of handling its own congenital madness that the capitalist mode of production has needed to forge a separate and articulated state machine at the political level, operating alongside the law of value which acts at the level of the market. And, indeed, it has been able to forge such a state machine, which both concentrates political activity and detaches it from economic and social life. It does this in order to harmonize as far as possible—and in the name of the general interest—the powerful contradictions that spring from the very core of this mode of production, at the same time as it also echoes and reproduces these same contradictions. At the heart of the capitalist mode of production, it is the state that renders possible the wage relation, the legal extortion of surplus-value and the exploitation of the workers. Its operation includes the granting of concessions and social protection against those overly brutal forms of domination that would ultimately endanger this mode of production as a whole, and which are themselves also a direct function of the level of class struggle. Here, it seems that political and juridical law can be considered the twin of the law of value. These are, of course, 'laws' in very different senses. Yet they are articulated to one another, insofar as each of them expresses and gives form to mutilated social relations dispossessed of their own capacity for rational self-organization, instead projecting outside of themselves instances that are charged with operating this regulation of the capitalist market and the state.

It was no chance thing that Marx saw communism—and what he considered its concrete prefiguration by the Parisian Communards of 1871—as the government of the producers themselves, i.e. a government which aims at the emancipation of labor and reintegrates political management and collective decision-making in both the workplace and at the level of democratic planning bodies. The implication is that the opposite of the capitalist state is not the suppression of politics, understood in a broad sense, but rather the end of the division between political and economic and humanity's reappropriation of the political management of its own social life. If we want to play around with terms we could call this a revolutionary reform or reformation, repoliticizing the world of production and inventing specific democratic forms for this sphere. So to get rid of abstraction does not mean an end to representation or mediations, but rather the abolition of their separation as a specialized and concentrated power. For it is this separation that allows for them to be captured and dominated by one or many classes, and to be unduly monopolized, as in the case of socially produced wealth. These are questions to which Poulantzas himself points, though he stops short of giving any answers to them, for such responses could not have been theoretical in character. And in this regard, we are at the same point that he was.

The State as Political Form

Indeed, the question posed is the problem of politics and its redefinition. This includes the problem of the state, but also goes beyond it. Stathis Kouvelakis[24] has highlighted the true consistency of Marx's political thinking, despite the critiques often leveled against this, though this is absolutely not to say that there Marx did not have his hesitations or sometimes revisit his past thinking—quite the contrary. Kouvelakis also emphasizes the importance of Marx's notion of form for reflection on the capitalist state. He defines this notion of form as an 'active determination, which entertains an active relationship with the content, oriented toward an ultimate purpose'.[25] If Marx's goal was the emancipation of labor and the transition to a society without classes, then 'the form was

[24] Stathis Kouvelakis, op. cit.

[25] Ibid., p. 41.

not only the means of achieving this objective, but the form of emancipation itself'.[26]

If we try to think through politics as a whole on the basis of this dialectical notion of form, then two consequences result. On the one hand, the capitalist state should itself be conceived not as an external framework for capitalism but as its adequate form, i.e. a form that is constantly adjusted to the social relations of capitalism even as it carries forth its contradictions. On the other hand, the project of the transcendence-abolition of capitalism also concerns a state which is neither an instrument nor a mere façade. Under the pressure of political and social struggles, a form is bound to transform in a more or less radical way, and indeed this is the whole stakes of a specifically political action that sets itself the goal of surpassing capitalism. If we adopt this as an orientation for our analysis, then the question of the state becomes distinctly more complicated. While we should of course rule out any merely instrumental conception of the state—and this was never Marx's own understanding—we should also cast aside the idea that politics is reducible to the state, and simultaneously the thesis that the state is the 'material frame of reference of the labour process'[27] or 'strategic site of organization of the dominant class',[28] or even the site where a politics takes form as the 'result of the class contradictions inscribed in the very structure of the state'.[29]

If these definitions are all accurate in at least some sense, what they fundamentally lack is any grounding in some more overall and dialectical definition of politics. They instead remain bound to the idea that the state is a site, structure, or set of apparatuses, indeed in a manner that bears the mark of both structuralism and the left-unity strategies of the 1970s. Indeed, it is notable that Althusser's conception of a distinction among different instances which are each relatively autonomous but also combine with one another, goes hand-in-hand with the prioritization of the ideological level. This does have the advantage of avoiding reductionism. This conception combines with strategic choices which have the merit of putting the state apparatuses back at the center of attention, but also the idiosyncrasy that they see these latter as opportunities for specific

[26] Ibid., p. 42.

[27] *State, Power, Socialism*, p. 86.

[28] Ibid., p. 148.

[29] Ibid., p. 132.

local interventions that will supposedly be coordinated by way of programmatically defined axes.

The ideological question proves central, here, for it cannot be dissociated from the base/superstructure division. Moreover, on the terrain of ideology both the merits and the limits of Poulantzas's approach become more clearly apparent. For Poulantzas, once ideology—conceived as an instance of the state, and thus as an Ideological State Apparatus—has become a relatively autonomous site or even the determining factor of political activity, it is but the domain of deception and lies, of the state-driven inculcation of the representations that are necessary to the proper functioning of capitalism. *Political Power and Social Classes* characterizes ideology as 'men's real relation to their conditions of existence in the form of an imaginary relation',[30] in this sense also conforming to Althusser's definition. 'As opposed to science ideology has precisely the function of hiding the real contradictions and of *reconstituting* on an imaginary level a relatively coherent discourse which serves as the horizon of agents' experience; it does this by molding their representations of their real relations and inserting these in the overall unity of the relations of a formation'.[31] For this very reason, ideology is one of the privileged means of state intervention, which combines ideological intervention and repression. Poulantzas was at this time seduced by Foucault's definition of a 'biopolitics' which directly plugs the state into bodies, in the form of a subjection that abolishes any type of representation and mediation, and dissolves politics into forms of social engineering and discipline. However, counter to Foucault, Poulantzas shows that he holds to thesis of state violence and repression. It is this that allows him to continue to conceive of the state in terms of apparatuses, a conception which Foucault obviously rejects.

It is here that we get the measure of how distinct Poulantzas's conception of superstructures was from Marx's. This again corresponds to a choice between alternative options: representation is either considered an objective and active mediation, or else identified as a specialized instance. These two options do not seem so far apart, however, much as a conception of politics and the state in terms of form allows us to distinguish levels and roles without having to isolate different layers or

[30] *Political Power and Social Classes*, op. cit., p. 208.

[31] Ibid.

separate out the specialized apparatuses. But the two thinkers' analyses do differ considerably. After all, for Marx, ideology is above all the result, within the sphere of ideas and representations, in the broad sense, of what is in fact a real inversion—i.e. the inversion operated by capitalism, insofar as it organizes capital accumulation and the capturing of social wealth by particular classes. An inside-out image of the world, ideology is something to which social relations give rise, yet which is also elaborated by individuals, intellectuals, who are members or allies of the bourgeois class and devote themselves to apologias for capitalism, with varying degrees of intellectual competence and seriousness.

Marx was ultimately embarrassed by his overly rigid notion of ideology, and came to the understanding that ideology and science are not incompatible. Indeed, in its combination of knowledge and apologias for capitalism, classical political economy provided a good example of how they mix. In this sense, what should be opposed to ideology is not science, but rather the theoretical and practical activity of fighting against capitalism, while also intervening within its own contradictions. Thus the critique of commodity fetishism is above all a call for an overcoming of capitalism and its narrowly market forms of regulating society, rather than the denunciation of an illusion as such. If Marx's work itself also had a demystifying dimension, it took up a position far from the critical conception inherited from the Enlightenment, and instead associated social struggle with the fight against the dominant ideas. These two aspects combined in a conception of politics which also included this representative dimension, making it dialectical and more complex. For his part, Poulantzas thus ascribed the juridical-political ideology of capitalism a principal role in 'hiding the economic level which is always determinant [… and] of hiding the level which has the dominant role and hiding the very fact of its dominance'.[32] Added to this was its atomizing function in setting the workers in competition with one another. But given this reading, Poulantzas neglects the question of the contradictions proper to the ideological terrain. This despite the fact that he does elsewhere grant that the state's role as representative of the general interest does not consist of a simple lie. This argument is essential to backing up his own strategic choice.

[32] Ibid., pp. 210–11.

We might consider that here Poulantzas also neglects this juridical form's structuring character. It is not reducible to a mere semblance of equality; rather, it is the concrete and institutionalized condition of a particular type of real equality (if, indeed, we are prepared to admit that 'formal' and 'real' are not at all counterposed). This is the real equality which sets face-to-face the buyers and sellers of labor-power, i.e. the very condition of the capitalist wage relation, whose continued persistence bourgeois law has the function of guaranteeing. At a more narrowly political level, citizenship and the representative character of political life are no mere tricks, but also a form of political life appropriate to the social relations peculiar to capitalism, even if capitalism may temporarily have an interest in abolishing them and even if its *representative* nature ought to be distinguished from its *democratic* nature, in the strong sense of that term.

In the structuralist Marxism of the 1970s, these analyses had the effect of redefining class struggles—in their means as well as their contours—as well as ascribing decisive importance to intellectual activities and the fight against ideology. But they also implied the formulation of a strategic thesis concerning the capitalist state. Poulantzas repeatedly asserted the need to transform the state, and in this set himself at a distance from those political tendencies that settled for imagining an electoral route that would lead to a supposedly more socially just exercise of power. Yet he stuck to asserting 'the need for a radical transformation of the institutional frame'.[33] Yet the term 'frame' conveys a conception of the state form as something that can somehow be detached. And this is rather too optimistic a hypothesis, given the extent of the transformation that has to be achieved.

Strategic Questions for Today

In today's very different context, the question is whether the radical Left be will be able to take forward Poulantzas's proposal for the 'transformation of the state … and development of direct democracy'.[34] If the juridical-political form guaranteed by the state is indeed the form of existence of a content—in the dialectical sense of Kouvelakis's proposed definition,

[33] *State, Power, Socialism*, op. cit., p. 237, translation altered.

[34] Ibid., p. 264.

i.e. not as a framework forcibly imposed on this content from the outside yet still foreign to it—then no perspective of socialist transformation, or even the democratization of this form, can be based on taking over this form. The state's current forms of representation are no longer openly based on property qualifications, and yet they are founded on massive popular abstention; and what the state directly organizes through these forms is retreat and de-democratization. It does so when it intervenes in the class struggle in favor of the bourgeoisie alone, smashes apart hard-won labor rights and deregulates the economy, and when it revitalizes the extraction of absolute surplus-value (by increasing working time) and not only relative surplus-value (through productivity gains).

This does not mean that we should be looking forward to 'the coming insurrection' or imagining taking up arms like the Blanquists. Nor is this a matter of rejecting the electoral logic, or still less all forms of representation, in favor of direct democracy. This latter does not correct the flaws of representation, and can sometimes even aggravate them. We see as much in the highly vertical restructuring process within Podemos, or indeed the Occupy movements' pernickety rules on speaking rights, as they strive to clamp down on any type of representation. Still less is this a matter of thinking how to combine representation with the social mobilization which is alone able to realize it in a thoroughgoing way. Rather, the question posed is the redefinition of politics itself. This is a Marxian question *par excellence*. This question of form needs posing in terms of both the parties of the present and the future organization of social life, when it is no longer captured and monopolized by a state. The renewal of strategic thinking on the Left must proceed by way of a renewed collective reflection on the end goals of the transformation of social relations. This transformation must restore politics' character as a democratic dynamic, as a dynamic of permanent democratization, which always continues beyond its necessary institutional innovations, such as to envisage an organization of production by the producers themselves.

The strategic question today is a problem of political form. This should be grasped in terms of its dynamism: both a force for opposition and mobilization, and one able to initiate the transformation of social relations, reorganize production, and invent democratic forms of planning and concerted decentralization. These latter developments will not just spring up from one day to the next. If, despite everything, the 'socialism from above' of the 1970s has managed to maintain its power

of attraction even today—for want of any more developed alternative or any more advanced reflection on politics—the most urgent thing to grasp today is the acuteness of the questions that these experiences pose. Faced with the challenges of our own era, it is no longer time for the old-style *Union de la gauche*. Rather, the time has come for a radical, majoritarian transformation, able to provide itself with renovated organizations, and to pose strategic questions not merely as programmatic or narrowly theoretical problems. Rather, it must pose them as a work of radical transformation situated at the very heart of production, workplaces, institutions, and political, trade-union and associative formations. All this is enormously difficult. We should recognize that it was to Poulantzas's great credit that he was able to spell out the question of politics in all its theoretical and strategic complexity.

CHAPTER 3

The Capitalist State, Hegemony, and the Democratic Transformation Toward Socialism

Alex Demirović

Without doubt, Nicos Poulantzas's works count among the most innovative recent contributions to the Marxist theory of the state. The majority of his numerous texts, including five books which made their mark on theoretical discussions at the international scale, were published within a short stretch of time, between 1968 and 1979. This period saw the emergence of new left-wing forces linked to the protest movements that spread across the world in 1968. These new forces, which had vast political and cultural consequences, were not only opposed to bourgeois domination, but also criticized orthodox and Stalinist tendencies. Marxist theory itself also had an exceptional, and very wide echo in this period, and in many countries it received a considerable impulse toward renewal, which took the form of numerous works of empirical research and lively theoretical disputes.

Nicos Poulantzas was one of the most remarkable theorists in this context. His work, and he as a person, brought together major

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tendencies of history, politics, and intellectual life. For the purposes of his studies, he moved first from Greece to Germany and then to France, in each of these three countries familiarizing himself with the theoretical discussion on the nature of law. In France he was linked to the two most significant currents of Marxist theory of the era, i.e. firstly the current represented by Jean-Paul Sartre and Lucien Goldmann, and after that the one embodied by Louis Althusser, whose reflection he would forever remain attached to even as he became increasingly critical of his theoretical paradigm.

Poulantzas taught at the University of Vincennes over a brief period that was especially marked by the presence of Michel Foucault, at the same time as the likes of Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, and Jacques Rancière. His political engagement was also linked to Greece and the opposition against the colonels' regime, and his works on the questions of fascism and dictatorship were grounded in an analysis of authoritarian states and political crises. More specifically, his works situated themselves in the context of the Left's theoretical attempts to explain the tendency toward fascism. In his last book, *State, Power, Socialism*, he elaborated for the first time the thesis of a 'state of exception', as he sought to give account of authoritarian forms of statism. Nicos Poulantzas had a very strong understanding of international Marxist debates on the state, Austro-Marxism and Gramsci. He pursued a polemic with Ralph Miliband that revolved around the questions linked to the Marxist theory of the state. He also had the opportunity to study first hand the state derivation debate in Germany (with a view to receiving a professorship at Frankfurt University, where he could have collaborated more closely with Joachim Hirsch, the main representative of the materialist theory of the state in West Germany). So it is worth remembering that in his works Poulantzas pursued discussions linked to Marxist research in Britain, in Germany, in Southern Europe, and in France.

That said, Poulantzas's works are highly important and full of meaning also in political terms. In Germany in this period, Jürgen Habermas stood on social-democratic, welfare-statist positions and rejected social movements on the basis of a neo-romantic and conservative outlook. As against the likes of Johannes Agnoli and Joachim Hirsch, whose works remained anchored in Marxism, Habermas distanced himself from the theoretical work linked to the autonomous social movements of the period. So seen from a German perspective, Poulantzas's writings were doubtless remarkable. Like the works of other French intellectuals such

as Christine Buci-Glucksmann or Jean-Marie Vincent, Poulantzas's writings made it possible directly to pose the question of the contradiction between the politics advanced by the social movements and by the traditional left-wing parties, respectively. On the one hand there was the '68 protest movement, and the various currents and milieu of the 1970s radical Left, and on the other a considerable renewal and reorganization of the workers' movement. In France, Portugal, and Italy it could be expected that these transformations would lead to the formation of reforming left-wing governments. This whole situation created a collective desire for theoretical understanding, and the theory of the state elaborated by Poulantzas was a substantial response to this same desire.

In this text, I will concentrate my analysis on the central concepts of Poulantzas's theory of the state—with special emphasis on his concepts of hegemony and the power bloc—while also indicating his main differences with Antonio Gramsci's theory. More particularly, I will argue that the concept of hegemony in Poulantzas's work can only be understood if we closely articulate it to his concept of the power bloc. In this perspective, Poulantzas's and Gramsci's ways of conceiving hegemony do appear as complementary, but they should not be considered one and the same, for they take aim at distinct practices of power and levels of domination.

Constructing the State as an Object of Analysis

Poulantzas's theory of the capitalist state should first of all be distinguished from other classical positions within Marxism. Firstly, Poulantzas was opposed to that tradition which considers the state as a subject that holds power and makes use of it in an autonomous way: 'State apparatuses do not possess a 'power' of their own'.[1] On the other hand, among those approaches centered on society, he also distinguished himself from two other conceptions. He was opposed to that long tradition which presents the state as a neutral instrument of the bourgeois class. This would imply that the state did not possess any autonomy and that the bourgeois class, as a class, takes logical and chronological precedence over the state. The Left would, therefore, have to pursue the strategic objective of conquering the heights of the state apparatus in order to place this apparatus at the service of left-wing objectives. The Marxist

[1] Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, London: NLB, 1975, p. 26.

tradition has discussed and criticized this instrumentalist conception in various different ways, but it was Evgeny Pashukanis who raised the crucial problem: namely, that we still need to explain the fact that the bourgeois state exercises its power and its violence in the name of the general interest. It is precisely because the state confers upon itself this supposed general character that it can appear as an authority standing 'above' social classes and society. So we first of all have to resolve this contradiction from a theoretical point of view: on the one hand the neutrality and generality of the state, and on the other the moment of class domination.

Here then comes into play a second theory of the state centered on society, which explains the supposed universalism of the state by presenting it as a form of appearance necessary to the capitalist mode of production and the value-form. The commodity presupposes a formal equality among all those who hold commodities. Their relations do not imply any relation of power and violence, but rather a juridical relation between subjects of private law. The fact that the state represents itself as standing above society and social classes owes to a necessity inherent to capitalist social relations, insofar as the state constitutes the authority which conditions the dispositions of the law and ensures the conditions necessary for the reproduction of capital.[2] Thus this form of appearance contributes to making the exploitation of labor-power possible at the economic level. The state thus constitutes nothing but a 'shadowplay' of the processes that are playing out in society. In this perspective, the meaning of political processes—which is to say, the production of wills and of alliances, conflicts and decisions (including missing or mistaken ones), democratic or repressive processes, institutions and procedures—is reduced to a mere function of this economic logic, i.e. of guaranteeing the reproduction of the capitalist valorization process.

Nicos Poulantzas rejects this position, insofar as it wrongly supposes that the economy functions according to an immanent and autonomous logic, separate from political dynamics.[3] Here, the class struggle and political domination are only worth considering in a secondary sense, which itself derives from the economic structure, as if from the outside. So next to the economic structure there would then supposedly be some other sphere that revolutionaries or at least social movements in favor

[2] For a critique, see ibid., pp. 97 et sqq.

[3] Ibid.

of a radically democratic praxis could take aim at. This political practice is then itself interpreted by means of a simple binary schema: either it is integrated into capitalist imperatives and follows their logic, or else it is opposed to it. In this perspective, the analysis of the constellation of forces, strategies, and tactics, the various political forms of domination, and therefore the different alternatives open to the forces of the Left, plays an only minor role.

But in Poulantzas's perspective, the capitalist state is neither an instrument of the bourgeois class, nor a subject that stands above society. His main theoretical operation consists of drawing the radical consequences of Althusser's positions, according to which Marx above all developed a theory of the capitalist mode of production as an indivisible and structured whole. The state and its separation from the relations of production are a constitutive property of the capitalist mode of production. The state is not an object constructed after the fact; rather, capitalist relations of production as well as the political sphere and the state apparatus are constituted immediately in and by way of this separation. Within this relationship, the relations of production and the social division of labor that they condition certainly do have priority. This is precisely the paradoxical relationship that Althusser seeks to conceptualize by means of the concept of structural causality. Even though it is separate from the relations of production, the state is constitutively always-already present within these relations, while its effectiveness and its modes of functioning are determined by the capitalist mode of production. In other words, it is determined by its action on and within the social division of labor, and through its relationship with social classes. In this perspective, the state does not constitute an autonomous body, but rather a relationship specific to capitalism.

For the sake of avoiding any misunderstandings, I should like to emphasize that Poulantzas also rejected a systemic perspective—like, for example, that developed by Niklas Luhmann—which makes the state one functional system among many others, whose differentiation would then be a function of the laws of modern society. Poulantzas is not defending the thesis of a closed political operating system, as if its operation were based on a binary function defined by either the presence or absence of power. For Poulantzas, even if the relations of production and the state are separate, they do both contribute to reproducing the capitalist mode of production, and the state constitutes a moment of this dynamic, into which it is incorporated. The specific logic of domination and of political practices should be understood within this more general context.

The thesis that the capitalist mode of production relies on the separateness of these relations, and forms a specific structure on this basis, leads us to another very important argument. Marxist theories often postulate the existence of national states that each possess their own respective market, which through their interconnection combine to constitute a global market. Conversely, since Poulantzas conceives of the distinction between capitalist production relations and the state as a logical characteristic of the capitalist mode of production, he does not presuppose the existence of a national market or a national state. The state constitutes itself within class struggles, and the form of the national state emerges from concrete historical conflicts. So the question we must then pose is how the relationship of forces both within the ruling classes, and between the ruling classes and the popular classes, takes on consistency in a national state, i.e. within a historically determinate territorial division or a specific temporal order. However, just as capitalist production relations are not limited by a closed national market, nor is the capitalist state—from a logical point of view—exclusively bound to the national state. On the contrary, the capitalist state is the historical outcome of the condensation of the relationship of forces within society; its specific form thus varies in consequence of the conjuncture. Elements such as the territory, the composition of the population, political apparatuses, the state's relationship with social classes, as well as the conjunctural forms of political crises, each make up part of this specific form.

In this perspective, we should today pose the question of the form that the capitalist state has taken on since the 1990s with the extension of the transnationalization of capital, one of whose consequences has been the recomposition of its national dimension. Poulantzas conceived the authoritarian state as the political form of the management of political crises and the crisis of the state—the crisis of the dictatorships in the 1970s—faced with the development of the class struggle and a plurality of new social movements, as well as workers' self-organizing initiatives and the possibility of governments that would seek to lead a transition to socialism. But this form has new been replaced. This new form of state is notably characterized by transnational governance, and is moreover linked to a new conjuncture in the condensation of contradictions. In

Europe, this conjuncture has taken the form of a new political and state crisis: namely, the crisis of the EU and of the euro since 2008.[4]

The Power Bloc

This analysis of the state as a constitutive relation of the capitalist mode of production led Poulantzas to reject a logical division according to which on the one hand there are the relations of production and on the other hand the class struggle, encountering this structure from the outside. He especially challenged this by means of historical arguments. But for Poulantzas, classes do not exist prior to the class struggle. The relations of production are always constituted within social struggles, and thus the state is immediately present in the relations of production; it constitutes and organizes the bourgeoisie as a ruling class. The bourgeoisie is thus by definition always a ruling class from an economic and political point of view. The existence of politics does not come as something subsequent to the existence of classes, and the state is not an appendage of the social.[5] As Poulantzas puts it: 'In the field of theoretical explanation, it makes no sense whatever to speak of a class division of labour and class power existing prior to the speak, that is, of a chronologically and genealogically primordial layer which subsequently engenders a state intervening post festum'.[6] Yet if the state does not stand above society, then nor can we say that it organizes the bourgeois class's political domination, either in a class sense or indeed simply in an abstract sense, as a general interest.

In other words, the universal element of the general interest is not, as such, always-already embodied in the state. So the state should not be conceived as a site devoid of power, which would then supposedly take form through a plural conflict between the actors seeking a share in

[4] On this subject, see Alex Demirović, 'Materialistische Staatstheorie und die Transnationalisierung des kapitalistischen Staates', in Alex Demirović, Stephan Adolphs and Serhat Karakayali (eds.), *Das Staatsverständnis von Nicos Poulantzas. Der Staat als gesellschaftliches Verhältnis*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010, and Alex Demirović, 'Ökonomische Krise – Krise der Politik', in Alex Demirović, Julia Dück, Florian Becker and Pauline Bader (eds.), *VielfachKrise. Im finanzdominierten Kapitalismus*, Hamburg: VSA Verlag, 2011.

[5] *State, Power, Socialism*, op. cit., p. 39.

[6] Ibid.

the formal power to define the common good. The state is not a sort of neutral arena in which social groups seek to influence the government's legitimate power, as if this were what the state's force really consists of. The state does not in itself have any power; rather, it is a social relation, which has to be reproduced. It is within this perspective that Poulantzas poses the question of how it comes to pass that the state meets with the general interest of the ruling classes. Indeed, the theoretical short-cut that makes the state—immediately and as such—the representative of the interests of the bourgeoisie, directly leads to an untenable functionalist position according to which the state's role is reduced to realizing this functional requirement. Poulantzas's position on this subject is more cautious, and open. In his perspective, the dominant do not have any unity or well-determined general interest, for they pursue a variety of interests. And since they are divided into multiple different fractions, the question of their power is a contested one; there exists no general point of view that is self-evidently linked to the interests of its various fractions.

If we want to identify the foundations of this division, we should analyze these fractions' respective functions in the circulation of capital (for instance in industry, trade, and finance), in the development of the productive forces and capitalist accumulation, and in the integration of local production relations into the global division of labor. Even starting out from the heterogeneous interests which so vary among and between these different fractions, a general interest must indeed be found. But for this process to succeed, it must be organized; and the question of who will organize it is always open and contested. One of these various interests can impose itself—alone, or in connection with others—if it manages not so much to push all the other interests aside, but rather to overdetermine them. These interests can thus make up part of the state's policy, albeit in a subordinate manner within the state condensation of power relations. At the same time, the interests that have imposed themselves assume a hegemony through which they can reproduce ruling-class interests as a whole. It can sometimes happen that these interests predominate on account of the weaknesses of other fractions, or on account of a wrong perception of what strategy should be adopted. And finally, the hegemonic fraction can also commit strategic errors with regard to other fractions of the ruling classes, or indeed its allies among the petty bourgeoisie, or even among the subaltern classes. So it is by no means assured that this state condensation of power relations will, indeed, succeed in guaranteeing the general interest of the ruling classes. But in any case,

this means that the owners of the means of production do not reproduce their power and their domination all by themselves, but rather constitute themselves as a power bloc by means of the state apparatuses.[7]

I think that here Poulantzas is making a wholly original contribution: for here he defines and determines the capitalist state on the basis of its specific activity of organizing these groups of interests into a power bloc, within the overall division of society. He conceives this power bloc in strategic terms, in that as he describes the specific alliances between classes and class fractions.[8] It is thus the institutional structure of the state that makes it possible for a power bloc to take form. Within this framework of political power, parties strive to even out divergent interests, to avoid tactical and strategic errors, and to reach compromises. This also seeks to prevent the conflicts within the ruling classes from intensifying and leading to a political crisis, which would thus create a threat to their domination.

The power bloc thus constitutes a contradictory unity. This unity is established and organized under the thumb of a hegemonic fraction of the ruling classes. Hegemony here means a class or class-fraction imposing its own economic or political interests in the guise of the general interest of all the other classes and dominant fractions. This is the expression of the economic exploitation and political domination which it exercises. The unitary and universal character of state policy are thus both made possible and organized by a party which represents and organizes the dominant class-fraction as a power bloc. The hegemonic fraction of the ruling classes thus has the function of guaranteeing the unitary and universal character of state policy.

Two Concepts of Hegemony

So Poulantzas differentiates between two types of hegemony, in a different manner to Gramsci. There is a hegemony exercised within the power bloc, over the other ruling classes and the different fractions therein, and a wider hegemony which is directed at the whole society. These two types of hegemony are not the same. Hegemony within the power bloc is based on complex strategies for appropriating surplus

[7] See *Political Power and Social Classes.*

[8] See *Les classes sociales dans le capitalisme aujourd'hui*, Paris: Seuil, 1974, p. 27.

labor. Conversely, the need for generality and hegemony over the whole society relate rather more to the hegemonic group's ideological function, insofar as it also claims to represent the general interest of the oppressed classes. For Poulantzas, hegemony within the power bloc, and the success of such a practice of domination, is essentially expressed in the profit rates that the dominant fraction is able to extract within the given relations of production, on account of its own dominant position. Whether this fraction also holds a hegemonic position in ideological processes is a different question. This leads Poulantzas to distinguish himself from Gramsci on two points.

The first is that in Gramsci's reflection this latter hegemony develops on the basis of control over the apparatus of production, which is to say a group's capacity to organize the social division of labor effectively and in a highly differentiated way. We can thus firstly speak of a hegemonic group when this group not only pursues its own selfish interests but also succeeds in securing the consent of the subaltern and thus extending its own forms of life and the conditions of its existence across a large part of society. So hegemony takes form by means of a process of generalization and extension across society. For Gramsci hegemony thus constitutes a specific and historically determinate practice of domination over the subaltern, whereas for Poulantzas this hegemonic practice is part of the very existence of the capitalist state, and is exercised within the power bloc formed by the ruling classes.

Second, for Gramsci a hegemony can only exist on condition that the bourgeoisie makes compromises with the subaltern, and that an all-encompassing civil society is built in which this consent can be forged and lived. The state can thus be defined as an integral state, exercising two forms of domination: constraint and convention. Gramsci does not use the term 'power bloc'—he instead speaks of a historic bloc—and he conceives the dominant class's hegemony only on the basis of the practices through which it imposes structure on its allies and the subaltern. This is his way of trying to capture a process that we do not find in Poulantzas: namely, the formation and generalization of consent within civil society. The different groups in the bourgeois class have to obtain the confidence of the members of the lower classes, and thus persuade them that the modes of life and exploitation that they impose upon them are also to their own advantage. This is only possible by means of a multiplicity of capillary power processes, from below. Only then is it possible for molecular processes to aggregate these micro-constellations of power

into bigger class units and into class organizations (for instance unions of workers, of bosses, of artisans, of farmers, etc.).

Counter to Gramsci, Poulantzas concentrates his analysis on the contradiction internal to the power bloc, and to the conflicts between the different fractions of the dominant classes. For him, the state, under the direction of the hegemonic fraction, must first of all organize compromises between the dominant. In this process of compromise formation, other forms of alliance with groups other than the dominant classes can also enter into play. These latter groups are thus used by the hegemonic power bloc with a view to granting itself new possibilities for action.

The State as Condensation

Nicos Poulantzas upheld the thesis that the existence of the state's institutional structures, as a social relation separate from the relations of production, makes possible the formation of a power bloc consisting of several dominant fractions, under the leadership of one hegemonic fraction. In such a power bloc, the dominant fractions are represented by parties. But what exactly is the meaning of this argument, according to which the state is an institutional structure that organizes the power bloc. Does this structure preexist the ruling classes—and why exactly can we speak of a capitalist state? What is the power bloc's mode of existence? What exactly are political parties? In order to be able to respond to these fundamental questions, we need to take further our examination of Poulantzas's reflection on the state.

From a logical point of view, the state does not precede the bourgeois class's political domination. On the contrary, over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', it became the organizer of this domination: it formed the party of this class, or rather it constituted a bundle of parties under the aegis of one such party.

This is a particularly important moment of Poulantzas's theoretical system. It is worth noting that in Poulantzas's work the term 'party' does not only refer to political organizations made up of party memberships, or to parliamentary parties. The state consists of a multiplicity of state apparatuses: (1) economic state apparatuses: the Treasury, the central bank, the administration of the unemployment agency, the patents office, national statistics agencies, economic institutes etc.; (2) repressive state apparatuses: the police, the army, intelligence services, prisons, the courts, etc.; and (3) Ideological state apparatuses: the media, the schools,

universities, trade unions, and parties. Each of these state apparatuses organizes and essentially represents the power of a determinate fraction of society. But that does not mean that in each of these apparatuses only one fraction is in fact represented. We should rather say that each state apparatus transforms multiple fractions into a contradictory unit, over which one of these fractions holds hegemony. Yet there also exists a specific state apparatus that relates to each of these different apparatuses, and by means of which the state's general policy is unified. This allows for hegemony and unification processes, which provide the foundation for the relative autonomy of the state precisely because no apparatus represents a single fraction, but always a determinate constellation of power.

Nicos Poulantzas thus strives to develop a non-functionalist and non-institutionalist conception of the state. Within the class struggle, the state constitutes the site in which the ruling classes can form compromises. And these compromises are made under the leadership of one of these classes' own fractions, as they seek some particular means of maintaining their general domination. The political domination permitted by the capitalist state consists of both an individualization process and a process that totalizes individuals within an entity to which they belong, the 'people-nation'. And the state can set this process in motion only on the basis of the social division of labor and the separation of the immediate producers from the means of production and the products of their labor. The division of labor thus separates the functions of leadership, organization, and control from the immediate tasks of organizing economic processes. And these functions materialize in the state: 'Class contradictions are the very stuff of the state: they are present in its material framework and pattern its organization; while the state's policy is the result of their functioning within the state'.[9] The separation between the state and the relations of production must itself be conceived as a political activity, which always takes place under the hegemony of one of the groups that bid for domination, and forces all the others to integrate into this state-political relation, although the possibility and the success of this integration can never be guaranteed in advance. The state thus essentially constitutes a social and political relationship, which forces the dominant fractions to integrate into a power bloc whose reproduction must constantly be taken up anew, and which necessitates a permanent

[9] *State, Power, Socialism*, op. cit., p. 132.

process of forming a power balance between these fractions. Nicos Poulantzas brings these reflections together in one of the theses that is most decisively important to his theory of the capitalist state: i.e. that the state should be conceived as 'a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions, such as is expressed within the state in a necessarily specific form'.[10]

In this text I will keep to three remarks on this definition. First of all, unfortunately Nicos Poulantzas does not go far enough in explaining this concept of condensation. We should understand this term not in the sense of the physical condensation of a thick mass into a reduced one, but rather in the sense that the psychoanalytic tradition has given it. Here, condensation refers to an explicit mental phenomenon being invested with the energy of numerous other mental phenomena, or indeed, conversely, that the intensity of this phenomenon is distributed across various other mental phenomena.[11] Nicos Poulantzas himself gives an indication in this regard, when he discusses representation by parties. There can be phenomena of non-correspondence, in the measure that class contradictions are displaced and a quasi-contradiction or an aspect of a contradiction becomes a central contradiction. This provides us a way of understanding how the policy conducted by a state apparatus can either condense the objectives of multiple dominant fractions; limit itself to imposing the objectives of one single fraction; or pursue heterogeneous objectives—and thus be internally divided—because it fails to form a compromise or because its general rules do not coincide with the urgent demands of pragmatic action. We can also conceive how a state apparatus thus ends up dysfunctioning: it is no longer capable of registering and regulating problems, and decisions are constantly put off. The state's functions can also be abandoned or delegated to a private individual. In this sense Poulantzas's theory is of decisive importance, because it allows us to envisage, within a perspective of emancipation, the dynamics and contradictions of the behaviors of the political actors in state apparatuses.

[10] Ibid., p. 128. On this, also see *Les classes sociales dans le capitalisme aujourd'hui*, op. cit., pp. 28 et sqq., and the analysis of this definition in Alex Demirović, *Nicos Poulantzas, Aktualität und Probleme materialistischer Staatstheorie*, Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2007, pp. 222 et sqq.

[11] On this subject, see ibid., pp. 226 et sqq.

Next, I think that it is important to underline Poulantzas's indications as regards the fact that the state is not a pure relationship, or even a condensation of a relationship, but rather 'the specific material condensation of a relationship of forces'. The state does not constitute a parallelogram of forces, and its politics ought not be conceived—as in a neopluralist reading—as the momentary result of the conflict between various groups' different interests. Such a miscomprehension would suggest that the forces fighting for emancipation could achieve their goals within the state apparatuses, by practicing the same politics as these latter do. This perspective would render superfluous the thesis of the capitalist character of the state, for the state would then be nothing else than the contingent result of the interaction between different interest groups. The state certainly does express a relationship of forces, but it is that which organizes the dominant forces and disorganizes the dominated forces within the social division of labor. According to Poulantzas, class struggles are inscribed in the state apparatuses, where they can be displaced and condensed: for example, in the cuts in particular ministries' budgets and the budget more generally; the structuring of public administration; and the reorganization of management services, the size and the articulation of state apparatuses, the distribution of posts, the definition of competences, the implementation of programs, etc. The state is a space determined by the class struggle, in which the power relations among the classes materialize and become sedimented, thus also determining the class struggles of the future. State apparatuses thus exhibit a specific temporal and spatial order which determines the organization of the political field.

Lastly, then, the state is the expression of the condensation of the relations of force between the classes. Some have objected to this definition of the state, as they insist that it does not allow us to give account of the variety of different relations of domination, and in particular sex- and racial domination, and domination over nature. The condensation of the power relations between the dominant and popular classes is not of such a kind as would organize, balance out, and represent all of the dominant in the same way. And the subalterns are only indirectly present within the state, i.e. as objects of political domination. Poulantzas alludes to the question of gender only sporadically. The inequalities and the domination that women suffer do not only owe to the class they belong to; rather, they are grounded in a specific articulation between class and sex,

within the social division of labor.[12] Insofar as the state itself constitutes a moment of this social division of labor, it must also condense these social relations concerning sex, which are also relations of force. Poulantzas's 'theory of the state' does indeed outline such a perspective: there exist power relations between men and women which are not identical to class relations. He defends the thesis holding that these power relations take form within specific state apparatuses, and that the state intervenes in or acts on all power relations, in order to give them a specific class value and insert them in the overall pattern of class power: 'The state is a class state not only insofar as it concentrates power based on class relations, but also in the sense in which it *tends* to spread through every power by appropriating its specific mechanisms (even though that power is never co-extensive with the state)'.[13] The state overdetermines the autonomy of the power relations between the sexes, and displaces them in the terms of class relations.

The class relationship does not, therefore, constitute an 'ordered' relationship between classes, as if they were purely and simply opposed. Rather, it integrates a multiplicity of relations of domination. Each of these constellations of power can, for example, distribute the conflicts between classes in the form of sex relations concerning sex (unequal access to education and the employment market, wage inequalities, discrimination among those with equal qualifications, assignment to specific jobs, sexist harassment, etc.).

The question then posed, from the perspective of the power bloc, is whether these struggles between the sexes or over sexual orientation may somehow disturb its own internal balance, and whether they can lead to ruptures, conflicts, and ultimately to political crises. Such ruptures appear to be of even more capital importance if they help undermine the capitalist mode of production itself, and thus the state and the relations of production. Numerous contradictions and conflicts may exist, but if they are to affect the very existence of the mode of production they must condense in class antagonisms. We could criticize Poulantzas's thinking, here, for subordinating social relations concerning sex to the class question. But we can also take a different view of this. 'Class' is itself the result of displacements and condensations, in a concrete generality.

[12] See *Les classes sociales dans le capitalisme aujourd'hui*, op. cit., p. 24.

[13] *State, Power, Socialism*, p. 44.

Struggles for emancipation, in terms of the relations between the sexes, must also take on the character of a class struggle. Poulantzas explicitly states, within a perspective of emancipation, that a radical transformation of the state toward socialism is not in itself sufficient to remodeling or overturning the power relations between the sexes. In so doing, he means to tell us that in the process of transforming the state toward socialism, the conflicts surrounding the social division of labor will no longer be over-determined by state power.

Socialist Transformation

This takes me to the final question that I want to address in this text: the question of social transformation. Poulantzas's conception of the state as a material condensation of a relationship of forces between the classes calls for a relational and strategic analysis of the capitalist state. The state is a contradictory unity and a strategic field in which a multiplicity of displacements and condensations of class conflicts take place. In no sense, then, are emancipation processes absolutely autonomous of it. On the contrary, the power practices of the dominant bring social struggles back onto the terrain of the state. That is why Poulantzas constantly insists on the fact that the struggles of the subaltern do not take place outside of the state. The dominated classes thus participate in the structuring of the state, but only *as* dominated classes, and *as* oppositional forces.[14] The state apparatuses therefore organize a specific relationship with the dominated classes—although of course, each of them does so in its own way. These apparatuses form specific compromises by admitting in some measure the interests and the members of the subaltern classes (e.g. through social rights or employment in the public sector), which limit the dominant classes' field of action. And given that the different fractions of the power bloc entertain diverse relationships with the subaltern, and therefore follow different tactics and strategies and even enter into distinct compromises with these latter, for Poulantzas this relationship with the subaltern constitutes 'a prime element of division within the power bloc'.[15]

[14] 'The dominated classes exist in the state not by means of apparatuses concentrating *a power of their own*, but essentially in the form of centres of opposition to the power of the dominant classes': ibid., p. 142.

[15] Ibid., p. 143, translation corrected.

The fact that the subaltern are always situated on the state terrain does not mean that they thereby possess the power to transform state apparatuses, or that they can become a force within the power bloc and aim for hegemony. The state apparatuses must be transformed, from the perspective of the interests of the popular classes. Fundamental to Poulantzas's theoretical thought is a critique of two left-wing strategies which he considers mistaken. One is the social-democratic choice that consists of entirely relying on representative democracy and seeking to occupy the heights of the state, by placing left-wing political personnel at its summit. This can never be enough for a genuine transformation of the state apparatuses. This statist position is the twin of another conception which is entirely reliant on grassroots democracy, councils and self-management, and considers the state as a fortress that has to be frontally assaulted and broken from the outside. Nicos Poulantzas attributes such a position to Lenin, and as against the Bolshevik leader argues that such a strategy, consisting of building a parallel state on the basis of organs of self-management, in fact contributed to making the party itself into a state instance, controlling all political life and taking charge of the state's functions. For Poulantzas, despite its attempts to distance itself from the state, positions focused on councilist democracy themselves contained elements of Stalinist statism. They lacked a strategic perspective on long-term transition processes, which must necessarily be located within the development of and participation in democratic political life. That is, within a radical transformation of the state, proceeding by means of an expansion and deepening of freedoms as well as institutions of representative democracy and an extension of democratic self-organization.[16] So as compared to many left-wing critics of the state, Poulantzas is rather less preoccupied by the absorption or co-option of resistance or social movements when the Left moves onto the terrain of the state. Rather, he advocates a strategy allying struggles both within and outside of the state, and which allows for the overcoming of any binary between war of movement and war of position, by conjugating these two strategic elements with one another.

In the political crises in the military dictatorships—notably in Greece and Portugal—the cracks within the government and the state apparatus were decisive in the process which deepened the political crisis

[16] See the conclusion to *State, Power, Socialism*, particularly, pp. 252 et sqq.

of the state and opened up the transition to parliamentary democracy. Following these experiences, Poulantzas turned his interest to emancipatory forces' different means of actively constructing or strengthening the subalterns' bases of resistance and power on the terrain of the state. He moreover explored their different means of imposing new compromises that would make it more difficult for the state to handle the political crisis; of deepening its internal contradictions; and of encouraging the development of democracy and thus the transformation of the state apparatuses. This was obviously not simply a matter of winning parliamentary elections or pushing through a few legislative proposals with a view to occupying some crucial political position. From a strategic point of view, the criterion of success must necessarily be the lasting transformation of the state apparatuses.

Whatever that may be, changing the state's own internal relationship of forces does not mean a continuous progression of reforms, coming one after the other. It does not mean the piece by piece conquest of the state machinery, or the simple occupation of governmental posts and the heights of government. Rather, it means an *approach based on effective ruptures*, whose culmination—and there must necessarily be one—resides in the overturning of the relationship of forces on the strategic terrain of the state, in favor of the popular masses.[17]

For Poulantzas, it was necessary to understand that the antagonism constructed by the dominant is the object of a conflict both internal and external to the state. It is, then, necessary to combine the already-existing struggles supposedly unfolding outside of the state, with struggles internal to the state. The objective is to transform the overall strategic configuration, and to use the power of democratic activities external to the state apparatuses in order to transform these apparatuses such that their very existence, no longer resting on any historical rationality, will gradually become superfluous.

[17] Ibid., p. 258.

CHAPTER 4

Specters of 'Totalitarianism': Poulantzas Faced with Fascism and the State of Exception

Stathis Kouvelakis

Recent publications and conferences speak to an ongoing rediscovery of Nicos Poulantzas's thinking.[1] Yet this rediscovery seems to have left aside his works on fascism. These latter doubtless suffer from being pigeonholed as documents of a historical and historiographical character. In this piece, however, I am going to argue against such an understanding. In my view, the theory Poulantzas elaborated of fascism and the state of exception constitute the pivot around which his intellectual and political itinerary was organized. Indeed, as the best-informed commentators have highlighted, Poulantzas's work on fascism produced a turning

[1] See Alexander Gallas, Lars Bretthauer, John Kannankulam, and Ingo Stützle (eds.), *Reading Poulantzas*, London: Merlin, 2011; Haris Golemis and Iraklis Oikonomou (eds.), *Poulantzas Today* [in Greek], Athens: Nissos, 2013; and International Poulantzas Conference, Transform! Network, Athens, 12 and 13 December 2014; Colloque international Poulantzas, 16 and 17 January 2015, Université de Paris-Sorbonne.

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point in his theoretical orientation, leading him to distance himself from the structuralism to which he had previously been attached.[2] But there is more. For the purposes of getting to the bottom of this point, I will hazard the following formulation: Poulantzas only became a Marxist theorist, properly speaking, from the moment that he began to work on the question of fascism and thus to mount a militant intervention on the strategic questions central to a properly Marxist theory of politics.

The remarks that follow propose an—inevitably partial—path through Poulantzas's elaborations on fascism and the state of exception in the four books of his that addressed this question. We will see that from the outset Poulantzas combined these two categories with a third one—'totalitarianism'—which was doubtless rather more surprising, coming from a Marxist theorist. Far from being limited to a polemical object, this category would serve both to indicate a persistent problem and to provide a spur to venture down new paths. In other words, at the end of this journey 'totalitarianism' appears as the specter that haunts both the object of analysis and the author's own conceptuality. It is both the figure that follows the functioning of modern power like a shadow, and the theory that strives to define the conditions for the emancipatory transformation of this same power.

'Totalitarianism' and the Capitalist State—A First Approach

The question of fascism and the forms of the state of exception makes its first appearance in a section entitled 'The so-called phenomenon of totalitarianism'[3] in the fourth, penultimate part of *Political Power and Social Classes*. Today's reader will surely be struck by the fact that in this book, whose publication coincided with the May '68 events in France, the term 'totalitarianism' above all refers to the elaborations of the Frankfurt School (he cites texts by Franz Neumann and Adorno) and only to a lesser degree the works of the 'anti-totalitarian' current represented by Hannah Arendt and Jacob Talmon. In fact Poulantzas only cites these latter on a critical note, with specific reference to their notion

[2] See in particular Bob Jessop, *Marxist Theory and Political Strategy*, London: Macmillan, 1985, p. 229. The chapters of Jessop's book devoted to works on fascism and military dictatorships (pp. 229–82) offer an indispensible synthesis.

[3] Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, op. cit., pp. 290–95.

of the 'mass' as an aggregation of atomized individuals liable to manipulation by totalitarian power. So totalitarianism did not appear, here, with the same connotation that would rapidly become dominant in France, i.e. as a notion encompassing both fascism and communism. Rather, it corresponded to the idea of a tendency inherent to the development of advanced capitalist societies.

In this there is certainly something of an indication of the ideological climate of the period. Yet it also points to a question that Poulantzas passed over in silence. For in this work he never addressed the nature of the state under the regimes of 'actually existing socialism'. This silence is symptomatic of a repressed [*refoulé*] problem, insofar as it amounted to saying that it is possible to produce a theory of the capitalist state and its transformations entirely in abstraction from this major theme of the twentieth century—the formation of states and regimes that laid claim to socialism and Marxist doctrine. Poulantzas would return to this question later on, in the France of the late 1970s, when the conjuncture had dramatically changed both within the communist movement and in terms of the dominant perception of 'actually existing socialism' in Western societies.

So, for the moment, we should note that in *Political Power and Social Classes* the reference to totalitarianism is limited to the theory of the capitalist state and its internal tendencies. For this reason, it makes up part of a sequence through which the fundamental thesis of this work is developed. This is the thesis of the dualism of the capitalist state, in the sense that this state is characterized by both *unity* and *relative autonomy*. By unity, Poulantzas refers to a form of *cohesion* and internal integration of political power which constitutes it as a specific level, relative to not only the other instances of the social totality but also its own internally differentiated structure. For its part, relative autonomy concerns the state's *relationship* with social classes. This contradicts any instrumentalist and substantialist conception of the state, such as would see it as a tool subject to the dominant class's will and/or as a 'reflection' of the economic base, a docile servant of capital. The state's 'relative autonomy' is thus also a marker of its capacity to *internalize* the relationship between the dominant and dominated classes, and thus the antagonism and the relationship of forces that are inherent to this relationship. According to a formulation of Poulantzas's that he would advance only in later works (though its component parts appear already in *Political Power and Social Classes*) the state is the *condensation of a class relation*. This means that

the dominant class only unites, and thus only effectively becomes dominant, in and through the state. But it also means that the dominated classes are not external to the state, and that their presence is just as constitutive—even if in an asymmetrical fashion—of the 'condensation' to which the state gives form.

This theorization of the state makes up the heart of this book, and represented the culmination of a whole phase in the author's intellectual itinerary. But it was also the commanding principle of his style, which was representative of wider tendencies in the French intellectual debate of the time. And in my view that is a far from secondary question. At the moment when Poulantzas enthusiastically signed up to the structuralist-Althusserian version of Marxism, he defined, as the axis of his research, the constitution of the political as the 'object of science',[4] i.e. as a regional instance within the 'dominant structures' that are modes of production.[5] A structuralist mechanism is thus set up in which the social totality is considered as the interlocking of three regional instances, namely the economic, the political, and the ideological, which are carefully isolated and separated from one another within this totality. Poulantzas particularly emphasizes the fact that the possibility of 'isolating' these instances, of considering them autonomously of one another, is the very condition of being able to grasp them intellectually and analyze them scientifically. Therefore, it is the interrelation between these three instances—their 'articulation' or their 'combination', according to an apparently very classic structuralist understanding—that determines the specific configurations of the social totality as a predominantly *structured* totality. This last aspect is the object of particular attention, insofar as Poulantzas tries to combine the structuralist approach with the Marxist thesis of 'determination in the last instance' by the 'base'. Here he follows in the wake of Althusser's analysis, which considers this 'determination in the last instance' on the basis of a distinction between determination and domination, i.e. in terms of the determinant instance's selection of the regional instance that dominates this or that specific articulation to the totality in question.

We get a clearer view of the uniqueness of Poulantzas's approach precisely when he addresses this notion of the 'autonomy' and 'autonomization' of instances. Indeed, upon closer reading we discover that here

[4] Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, op. cit., pp. 16–17.

[5] Ibid.

structuralism combines with what we could characterize as a Weberian, or Marxist-Weberian approach, also bearing the mark of Frankfurt School interpretations.[6] If there is indeed a thesis peculiar to the 'general theory of the political' proposed in *Popular Power and Social Classes*, it is that the specificity of the capitalist mode of production is based on the autonomy—or more precisely, the growing autonomization—of these instances. In other words, capitalism is characterized by the fact that the economic is constituted as an autonomous instance, although also a both dominant and determining one. The capitalist state's specific place within the map of the structured totality, which is the foundation of its unity, is thus itself index-linked to the growing autonomization of regional instances and more particularly the autonomization of the economic level. As for the second aspect of the state's constitutive dualism, namely its relative autonomy, it 'reflects' within itself (and it should not escape us that this term 'reflection' belongs to the categories of the dialectical) and 'internalizes' the autonomy of the instances that make up the social totality.

The dualism posed by the unity/autonomy pairing thus leads us to the idea that the state is characteristically two-sided. The route from the one point to the other is a development which we could qualify—notwithstanding Poulantzas's occasional efforts to deny this[7]—as implicitly and yet clearly dialectical, even if—as we see shall in a moment—this was also a blocked dialectic. The state appears on the one hand as a specific level, as the outcome of this structural interplay of regional instances, and on the other as the site of the articulation of practices whose deployment nonetheless remains subordinate to the interplay of structures. The state thus occupies a dual function within this social totality: it is a factor for cohesion but also the site in which the contradictions of the social formation are condensed. Schematically, we might say that in this first function the state is 'on the side of the structures' and in this second function 'on the side of practices', i.e. the field of class struggle.

[6] Poulantzas however rejected Weber's dissociation of the 'economic' and the 'social', separating the former from the camp of social relations, and thus from the class struggle. He criticized Bourdieu for falling victim to this same division. See *Political Power and Social Classes*, op. cit., p. 65.

[7] See Ibid., p. 47, where the category 'reflection' is posed—with no further explanation—as distinct from the relationship between phenomenon and essence.

Without wishing to dwell at length on Poulantzas's efforts to articulate these levels, we should highlight the two problems which this demanded he come to terms with. The first concerned the status of the economic. Its place immediately appears highly problematic, in that as a 'regional instance', the 'economic'—and more particularly, 'the economic' peculiar to the capitalist mode of production—appears as separate/autonomized from the political and from ideology. The presence of political and ideological elements within the economic, at the level of the practices of class struggle, thus appears as a rebound effect of the interplay between these instances and the economic. And this latter should indicate, in counter-relief, the absence of other structures, and thus the formal place that their action in return will come to occupy. Here Poulantzas deployed a conceptual dexterity whose formalism itself indicates difficulty of the problem he was trying to resolve. To assign such a status to an economic instance conceived in disjunctive terms was, indeed, highly paradoxical for a theorist who identified with Marx's analyses. For these latter always denied the existence of an 'economic' level separate from political-juridical and ideological determinations.

The second difficulty concerned the articulation of structures and practices. Following a fine structuralist logic, Poulantzas conceived of structures as a space that delimited the variation of practices. But practices then intervene on the limitations that the structures have imposed, without thereby resolving the problem of the mode by which these structures are themselves transformed: 'the limits are complex', they are 'limits in the second degree', i.e. limits which are themselves limited by the intervention of political practice on structure.[8] The indeterminacy of these formulations suggests the first hints of a dialectic between what we might hazard to call 'limiting practices' and 'limited practices'; a dialectic that is immediately blocked and entirely hemmed in by the game of reciprocal limitation of structures' effect on practices. And it is a dialectic that refuses at all cost to be named as such, on pain of being expelled from the terrain of the all-conquering structuralist Marxism that marked this theoretical conjuncture.

[8] 'The effectiveness of the structure on the field of practices is thus itself limited by the intervention of political practice on the structure': *Political Power and Social Classes*, op. cit, p. 95.

The Fascist State, a Spanner in the Works of Structuralism

We can now look at how the question of fascism and totalitarianism serves to destabilize the theoretical edifice whose broad terms we have just outlined. Let us begin by looking at the notion of totalitarianism. As we have said, this term refers above all to the transformations of the state within advanced capitalism, and to the tendencies that lead it to make a rupture with the forms of the liberal-parliamentary state. Here we find references to familiar themes of the Frankfurt School tradition, organized around the vision of a massified industrial society that is increasingly subjected to a Leviathan-state. This latter penetrates and spreads through the depths of the social body, homogenizing it and using all its weight to crush the private sphere, i.e. the last refuge of the autonomous individual, now on the road to oblivion. Indeed, this theme retains an air of familiarity even for today's reader. For it anticipates a recurring theme in critical theory which has today been forcefully reactivated (albeit on the basis of other theoretical traditions) by Giorgio Agamben and his vision of the 'state of exception' and 'naked life'.

Poulantzas characterizes this vision as an 'apocalyptic mythology' inappropriate to grasping the reality of the processes it indicates.[9] This vision depends on the category 'totalitarianism', here qualified as an 'ideological theme', indeed for two reasons.[10] The first is that the effects which this category designates, i.e. the destruction of the spheres of autonomy and mediation in civil society, can only be adequately analyzed if they are understood as effects of the functioning of the capitalist state. For it is, indeed, this state that acts as the operator of homogenization and unity within a social body that had previously been atomized under the dual impact of the autonomized economic instance and the juridical ideology that redoubles the atomization of the social body by representing it as a union of free and equal subjects. The conclusion that Poulantzas drew from this—in a thesis that he would continually reformulate and refine—was that the phenomena covered by the so-called 'totalitarian' state are not the Other of the liberal-parliamentary state. Rather, they are a tendency immanent to this latter and from which it cannot dissociate itself, even if the realization of these phenomena also

[9] *Political Power and Social Classes*, op. cit., p. 291.

[10] Ibid., p. 290.

depends on determinate conjunctures. The 'fascistization processes' analyzed in *Fascism and Dictatorship* and the 'authoritarian statism' theorized in *State, Power, Socialism* were the name for such conjunctures. The former referred to cases where the pendulum swings toward the most radical state of exception, and the latter to a crisis situation in the forms of the liberal state that had been refashioned by the postwar Keynesian consensus.

There is nonetheless a second aspect that the notion 'totalitarianism' also covers—even at the risk of 'diluting its specificity'—namely the fascist state in the proper sense of the term. Poulantzas chose to leave it up for future analyses to engage in a study of this question, whose object would be the 'relation between the social forces in the concrete conjuncture'.[11] He nonetheless devoted a long footnote to this problem,[12] in which, quite in contradiction with his previous reasoning, he argued that the fascist state does not fit into the typology of the capitalist state and cannot be analyzed on the basis of the categories proper to this latter. The reason for this is that these state forms are 'characterized precisely by an articulation of the economic and the political, different from that specifying the capitalist type of state'.[13] The differentness of the fascist state remains undefined, even if the allusions Poulantzas does make in this regard—counterposing the fascist to the capitalist state, while comparing it to Bismarckianism and its distinctive gap between its (capitalist) function and its (feudal) instances—suggest that this differentness consists precisely of the renewed challenge it poses to the separation between the economic and the political. However, Poulantzas immediately adds, this in any case poses no real difficulty, because the historical 'cases' in question are 'marginal'.[14] Far from the 'marginal' character of the fascist state revealing the truth of the situation by pushing it to its maximum consequences, Poulantzas immediately relativizes this experience in order to preserve the validity of his existing 'typological problematic'. We can see how untenable this position is when we relate it to the previously proposed opposition between Max Weber's typological approach, accused of empiricism, and the Marxist one founded on the production

[11] Ibid., p. 293.

[12] Ibid., pp. 293–94.

[13] Ibid., p. 294.

[14] Ibid., p. 145, translation corrected.

of concepts.[15] Indeed, when Poulantzas looks at the fascist state he does exactly what he reproaches Weber for doing, i.e. trying to shed light on reality by presenting it as the most limited possible divergence from the abstract type defined by an ideal-typical model. Here, more than ever, moving on to study concrete conjunctures seems to be the only way to break out of the theoretical impasse.

Fascism, a Process and Regime of Exception

The opening sentence of *Fascism and Dictatorship* allows us to get a measure of the transformation in Poulantzas's position since his previous book. He began by posing the question 'what purpose can there be in a study of fascism at this moment in time?' Rejecting any purely historiographical or academic vision, his answer was the following: 'I believe that the urgency of the problem makes such a study a political necessity. … In the light of the sharpness of class struggle in the period we have now entered (the future lasts a long time) the question of the exceptional state, and so of fascism, is therefore posed once more'.[16] (Here Poulantzas adopted a line from De Gaulle; to our knowledge, this was the first time that a Marxist did this, before Althusser committed these same words to posterity. This foreshadowing of Althusser is almost dizzying, if we think about the possible biographical parallels.) But beyond this, it is worth emphasizing that Poulantzas's theoretical intervention was now entirely posed in terms of the *present moment*, i.e. a *conjuncture* marked by the sharpening of the class struggle. This conjuncture tied the question of the state of exception to the question of the revolution, of which it thus seemed to represent both the double and the opposite face.

The new point of departure in *Fascism and Dictatorship* obviously expressed the impact of the events that had taken place since the period in which he wrote *Political Power and Social Classes*, namely May' 68 and the Greek colonels' coup d'état in April 1967. Of course, the Greek coup happened even before *Political Power and Social Classes* was published, and the book made a few scant references to it. Nonetheless, this book was the end product of an earlier research programme, which had seen its author depart from the disciplinary shores of legal theory—and

[15] Ibid.

[16] Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, London: Verso, 1979, p. 10, translation edited; '*L'avenir dure longtemps*' is a citation from Charles de Gaulle's memoirs.

indeed, the intellectual shores of Sartrean Marxism—and head toward an Althusserian-inspired 'science of politics'. In the meantime, for the first time in his life Poulantzas was active in a political party, as he joined the Paris branch of the so-called Greek Communist Party—Interior, just after the split that took place in spring 1968. He divided his time between researching properly theoretical questions and intervening in the situation in Greece, which was now under the yoke of a military dictatorship.

This shift in Poulantzas's line of approach was also apparent in the difference in *form* between the two books, and by extension, their respective styles. *Political Power and Social Classes* resembled the model of a political science textbook. Of course, it laid claim to the strictest Marxist conceptual framework, but its spirit and Poulantzas's writing style here testified to the 'theoreticism' that descended across this period. Althusser would later define this theoreticism as a 'speculative rationalism', coupled with a 'formalism' proper to the structuralist tendency 'towards the ideal of *the production of the real as an effect of a combinatory of elements*'.[17] Conversely, *Fascism and Dictatorship* made up part of a new conjuncture marked by the worldwide rise in the class struggle, thus putting (back) on the agenda the questions of both the revolution and the political forms of the counter-revolution, and thus the question of fascism and the state of exception. The 'and' in the title of this work moreover clearly indicated that the question of fascism would be studied in differential fashion, i.e. in its relation to other forms of state of exception (Bonapartism, military dictatorships), while its subtitle ('The Third International and the Problem of Fascism'; in French, 'The Third International Faced with Fascism') signaled that the strategic questions facing the workers' movement would be at the center of his analysis.

The theoretical question that Poulantzas now proposed to examine was twofold: to define fascism both as a *specific form of the state*, i.e. as a particular case of a general theory of the 'state of exception', itself integrated into an overall theory of the capitalist state, and as a *product of a determinate conjuncture*, of a 'fascistization process' constitutively linked to 'crisis', a category that now occupied a central place in Poulantzas's analysis. The fascist state was certainly an extreme example, but in no sense a 'pathological' case—or 'anomaly'—of the capitalist state. For it

[17] Louis Althusser, 'Elements of Self-Criticism', in *Essays in Self-Criticism*, London: NLB, 1976, p. 129.

emerged in a conjuncture of exacerbated crisis in the dominant class's hegemony, itself situated within a determinate stage of capitalism, i.e. the monopoly imperialist phase. The term 'fascistization process' refers to the moment that the state-forms fully internalized this crisis, against the backdrop of the defeat of the working-class revolutionary offensive in the West in the years following World War I. Here, we should right away note the crucial shift in the centre of gravity of Poulantzas's analysis, which was no longer situated in the 'combinatory' of instances but rather in the dynamic relationship between (crisis) conjuncture and the form of the state (of exception).

For Poulantzas, fascism is not 'external' to a descriptive typology of the capitalist state, or still less an insignificant 'marginal' case; rather, it helps indicate deeper structures within this state, By this he does not at all mean to say that all capitalist states are a 'fascism-in-embryo'. This was, indeed, the claim advanced by the political and intellectual *gauchisme* of the era, and especially among the Maoist groups, which reduced Pompidou's France to 'fascism' and in general overlooked the ruptures between the liberal-parliamentary regime and the forms of state of exception. The fascist state certainly is a form of capitalist state insofar as it reflects—albeit in particular fashion—the separation of economics and politics, and also the relative autonomy of the state with respect to the dominant class, and thus the internalization of the relationship between this class and the dominated classes. While the fascist state does not assume the capitalist state's functions *on the same model* as the liberal-parliamentary state, it is not different *in nature* to this latter. Even so, for the dominated classes and their struggle it nonetheless represents a considerable regression. Even if the advent of fascism was far from inevitable, it did mark the culmination of a series of defeats.

The fascist state must be understood as a mode of reorganizing bourgeois hegemony in which the internal structure of the state—the relations that the state apparatuses establish with each other and with social classes—is profoundly changed, in two different ways. On the one hand, the law, and especially the constitutional armory (the *Rechtsstaat*) no longer governs the relationship between state apparatuses. Meanwhile the relative autonomy of the ideological apparatuses, such as exists under the liberal-parliamentary state, is suppressed. These two aspects constitute the distinctive trait of the fascist regime of exception, and the result is the instability peculiar to this regime. This drives it toward

a permanent, headlong rush forward, finally culminating in war (both internal, genocidal war and external, expansionist war).

This configuration imprints a certain instability on the fascist state, which itself depends on the conjunction of two factors. The first resides in the substitution of the juridically regulated plurality of state apparatuses with just one apparatus, which tends to stand in for all the others and subordinate them to itself. The nature of this apparatus varies, depending on the form of the state of exception or its stage of development. So this single apparatus could be the army, as in the case of a military dictatorship, or the fascist party—or more accurately, specific layers of the fascist party, given that such a party is a heterogeneous and multifunctional reality. So in the example of the Nazi state—an extreme case of the regime of exception, during the phase of its internal stabilization (which was simultaneously the phase of the rush to 'total war')—this role was played by the political police. This latter extended its grip over the rest of the state, at the price of the state becoming increasingly dysfunctional.

But this instability also characterizes fascism's relationship to the dominated classes. Poulantzas quite particularly insists on the fact that within this state form, the dominated classes are both omnipresent and absent. They are omnipresent, to the extent that they are integrated into the state by means of the mass fascist party and its multiple ramifications (youth, women's and trade union organizations, etc.). But they are also absent, because they are deprived of sites of autonomous organization and self-expression, and thus of any place that can be identified and assigned as such. If these classes' energy is thus channeled and mobilized, it is liable to emerge in a scattered way, everywhere, or indeed to contaminate the most varied sections of the state apparatus by way of its subterranean action. What Poulantzas wants to emphasize is that even in the case of fascist regimes, or as he would later go on to say in *Crisis of the Dictatorships*, in the military dictatorships, 'the masses are present in the state'. The class struggle also traverses this type of state form, and it manifests itself in the internal contradictions that constantly work away at this state from within. And when the crisis becomes more acute, these contradictions can result in open conflicts, liable to lead to its downfall.

So despite its apparently monolithic character, the fascist state—as well as the state of exception more generally—is riven by structural contradictions. This is quite contrary to the visions conveyed by theories of 'totalitarianism' or by a historiography obsessed with the charismatic leader.

Working-class organizations' strategy must, therefore, take into account the operation of this state's internal contradictions and the possibility of destabilizing its relationship with the dominant class (or fractions of it). So, too, must it take into account the irreducibility of the masses' presence within that state, and the possibilities which this opens up for anti-fascist action. Of course, from this there derives the fundamental importance of intervening in the mass organizations established by these regions (and particularly the unions and cultural and associative organizations). This was a need theorized by the Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti, a close comrade of Antonio Gramsci's, and practiced in a more action-oriented fashion, indeed with considerable (and lasting) success, by the Portuguese Communist Party under Salazarism.[18] In other words, even where the masses are excluded from the state *as an autonomous force*, the 'war of position' strategy that takes account of the contradictions internal to the state and its relationship with the dominant class is still valid. This remains true even when the overall perspective is the insurrectionary overthrow of the regime.

The experience of the fall of the Greek and Spanish military dictatorships and the long death-agony of Francoism would but confirm these analyses, and indeed call for a widening of Poultanzas's perspective. His attention was particularly caught by one factor which although playing a decisive role in the fall of these regimes, wrong-footed the analyses and strategies which had earlier been developed by resistance organizations and the workers' movement. Indeed, the primary cause of the dictatorships' downfall owed to the fact that the dominant class in these countries, which had succeeded (thanks to these regimes) in consolidating its power and its economic foundation—thus making it an 'internal bourgeoisie'—now withdrew its support. In so doing, it managed to maintain control over the democratization process and to cope with the rise of working-class and popular struggles. In their different forms these latter struggles did, indeed, play a decisive role, and in the Portuguese case they even challenged the bourgeoisie for hegemony, if for only a limited time.

Hence a double strategic lesson: on the one hand, the underestimation of this new bourgeoisie's capacity to take the initiative, and of the

[18] See Palmiro Togliatti's *Lectures on Fascism*, New York: International Publishers, 1976, pp. 59 et sqq. On the Portuguese Communists' approach, see the PCP leader Álvaro Cunhal's *Portugal: l'aube de la liberté*, Paris: Éditions sociales, 1974.

specific forms in which it manifested itself, caught the popular forces off-guard and limited the scope of their action. Hence 'the overthrow of the dictatorships' proved possible 'even though process of democratization ha[d] not been telescoped together with a process of transition to socialism and national liberation'.[19] On the other hand, it was the democratization process that now set the the parameters of the strategic terrain of socio-political confrontation. The working-class and popular forces could destabilize the hegemony of the internal bourgeoisie and provoke 'political crises' that would open the way to socialism and national liberation, precisely by fighting to take the leadership of this struggle.[20] There thus begins to emerge a new problematic, centered on the relationship between democracy and socialism.

'Authoritarian Statism' and the 'Democratic Road to Socialism'

This new problematic would be formulated in Poulantzas's final book, whose very title referred to the question of 'socialism'. It further deepened the author's transformation into a Marxist militant who made strategic interventions at the highest level of theoretical elaboration. The conjuncture had suddenly become gloomier, as was marked in France by the breaking of the *Union de la gauche* and the sharp turn in the social and ideological climate under the blows of 'anti-totalitarian' thematics and the crisis of the Keynesian compromise. In this context, the question of 'totalitarianism' and the state of exception inevitably re-emerged with some force, and in a considerably renovated form. An engagement with Foucault and the notion of 'authoritarian statism' would provide Poulantzas's main two lines of approach.

The first systematic treatment of this problem featured in a section entitled 'The roots of totalitarianism' in the first part of the work, 'The Institutional Materiality of the state'.[21] If the debate with Foucault made up an essential part of this discussion, Poulantzas was just as much in dialogue with his own earlier thinking, as he returned in some depth to the elaborations in *Political Power and Social Classes* addressed above. While valid insofar as they allowed him to grasp the effects that the capitalist

[19] *Crisis of the Dictatorships*, p. 60.

[20] Ibid., p. 133.

[21] *State, Power, Socialism*, London: Verso, 2000 [1980], p. 69.

state produces in terms of atomizing and unifying the social body, in the author's eyes these past elaborations nonetheless now seemed rather lacking. For the effects designated by the term 'totalitarianism' had hitherto been reduced to the activity of juridical instances alone. The atomization/unification of the social body, as a 'political body' constituted in and through state sovereignty, had essentially been understood as the result of the bourgeois ideology of law. What was missing, here, was a consideration of the technologies of power, the techniques that 'shape even the corporality of the subjects over which power is exercised',[22] the analysis of which represented 'Foucault's really original contribution'.[23]

Here emerges a double-trigger convergence with Foucault, which takes place at the level of the critique of juridical ideology. In revealing the material substrate of modern state power, Foucault doubtless led the way in terms of rectifying Marxism's one-sidedness. But for Poulantzas, in so doing he had also made it possible to see the shared target more clearly. Contrary to its own pretensions, a bourgeois juridical ideology establishing a separation between the individual-private sphere and the public-state sphere does not at all guarantee the former against intrusions from the latter. Far from this separation acting as a barrier, it is the very basis on which the state 'travels a further distance down the road of the modern state'; it is the instance that 'open[s] up for it boundless vistas of power'.[24] It is here, Poulantzas continues, that we find the 'premises of the modern phenomenon of totalitarianism'; and they 'affect the countries in the east as well as western societies'.[25] These two factors explain why totalitarianism—no longer placed between quotation marks—cannot be reduced to a purely ideological question. With Foucault's assistance—and his convergence with the French philosopher took form *also* on this terrain—Poulantzas now recognized totalitarianism as a tendency of the 'modern state'. This notion *exceeds* the context of the capitalist state and also includes the 'actually existing socialist' regimes. And the specific conditions of these latter cannot be explained simply by referring to 'the capitalist aspects of their states',[26] real though these are.

[22] Ibid., p. 70.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., pp. 72–73.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 74.

Totalitarianism thus appears, as in both classical political theory and in the most sophisticated 'anti-totalitarian' thinkers (especially Arendt), as the specter that haunts *modern* sovereign power. This latter category includes capitalist domination but is not limited to this alone. For Poulantzas, the causes of totalitarianism depend on 'a number of factors for which there is as yet no exhaustive explanation',[27] and 'which Marxism cannot alone explain'.[28] Such a thesis could have led to the rehabilitation of the counterposition of 'democracy' and 'totalitarianism', and thus to the rehabilitation of liberalism *tout court*, if it were not decisively *inflected* by an *analysis of the concrete conjuncture*. And this is precisely what Poulantzas then goes on to elaborate. Indeed, this analysis also concerns the transformation of the state form. It appears in the fourth part of this volume, 'The Decline of Democracy: Authoritarian Statism'. By 'authoritarian statism', Poulantzas means a set of transformations that the state experienced in a particular conjuncture in advanced capitalist societies. Which is to say, the conjuncture of the late 1970s, marked by the crisis of the Keynesian social compromise and the rise of what would later become known as 'neoliberalism'. This crisis extended into a 'crisis of the state' which authoritarian statism tries to resolve by laying the bases of a state form adequate to stabilizing bourgeois hegemony on new bases.

This form of state can hardly be reduced to the increased role assumed by repressive mechanisms, even if this is indeed one of its constitutive dimensions. It above all means an institutionally established exclusion of the masses from political power's centers of decision-making. The maintenance of the liberal-parliamentary regime as the dominant framework neutralizes in advance the possibility of an anti-capitalist rupture resulting from the combination of popular struggles and the electoral game. In this sense, authoritarian statism does not at all mean a slide toward fascism, and nor does Poulantzas's reference to it imply that he had belatedly rallied to the 'apocalyptic mythology' he had so repudiated in *Political Power and Social Classes*. His elaboration of this notion nonetheless depended on earlier analyses of the state of exception, which, as we have seen, were based on a study of the relationship between the crisis-conjuncture and the internal transformation of the

[27] Ibid., p. 208.

[28] Ibid.

state form. Authoritarian statism expresses a profound reorganization of bourgeois domination, resulting from a crisis of the previous hegemonic configuration. This time, it is a new apparatus, the top administration, that becomes the organizing center of state power, insofar as it manages to 're-direct' the preexisting mediations and empty out their content, starting with with representative institutions and political parties. The masses' consent now tends to rely not so much on the possibility that they can share in the 'fruits of growth', but rather on a 'new materiality of [the] social body'.[29] This materiality is fashioned by disciplinary mechanisms and by formal adherence to a partisan game emptied of any real significance, now that it is increasingly subjected to the 'single-party centre'[30] constituted at the top of the state. The state's internal cohesion and relative autonomy are reconfigured under the aegis of the top state administration; this latter becomes the true 'party' of the dominant class and the state armors itself against popular pressure, albeit at the price of a new type of dysfunction and internal contradictions. Thus although authoritarian statism is not a form of state of exception, or an irreversible transition in that direction, it nonetheless attests to 'totalitarian tendencies' that are present in 'every democratic form of capitalist state'.[31]

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So we should understand the concluding part of *State, Power, Socialism*, entitled 'Toward a Democratic Socialism', in light of 'authoritarian statism'. All the more so given that Poulantzas's final work is also the only one in which the author arrives at strategic proposal which poses the question of socialism. When we compare this with his previous 'great' works,[32] which do not arrive at strategic conclusions, or even any conclusions, we immediately see the contrast. The fact that *State, Power, Socialism* 'opens out' onto such an orientation is far from just a matter of formal considerations. Rather, the reason it does so is that this final text is the work in which Poulantzas finds a 'way', or perhaps a voice,[33] that

[29] Ibid., p. 238.

[30] Ibid., p. 236.

[31] Ibid., p. 209.

[32] What he himself (in *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, op. cit., p. 8) calls a 'short text' devoted to this crisis in Spain, Greece and Portugal is a partial exception. Here he also informs readers of his coming work on *State, Power, Socialism*.

[33] A pun in French: a *voie*, or perhaps a *voix*.

is truly his own. And his path is a democratic socialism centered on a revolutionary and democratic transformation of the state and the economy. Such a vision was a response to that authoritarian statism whose rise he so presciently analyzed, long before it was possible to see the full effects of the 'exchanges of power without alternatives' [*alternances sans alternative*] in France as elsewhere in Europe and the world. The neoliberal destruction of democracy thus compels us to pose socialist democracy in new terms, as the only alternative to the dis-emancipation process in which humanity is presently mired.

PART II

Histories and Communisms

CHAPTER 5

The Comintern's Uncertain Heritage

Serge Wolikow

The book that Nicos Poulantzas completed in July 1970 addressed the problem of fascism and more generally raised the question of the state of exception.[1] Poulantzas situated this moment of his theoretical reflection on the state in the context of the legacy bequeathed by Marx, but also the one which came from the international communist movement. This text makes up part of Nicos Poulantzas's wider oeuvre on the state, and when we re-read it today we obviously have to look back at the ideological and political context in which it was written. Looking into Poulantzas's approach also poses the question of the interest of his analyses as such, given that he engaged in a historical analysis even while he steered clear of any claim to be doing a historian's job.[2] But it is also necessary to clarify Poulantzas's theoretical approach by revisiting his involvement in the political debates of that moment. Indeed, the author's reflection was doubtless strongly marked by the events of

[1] Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, London: Verso, 1979.

[2] On this paradox and its consequences, see Jane Caplan, 'Theories of Fascism: Nicos Poulantzas as Historian', *History Workshop*, 3, spring 1977, pp. 83–100.

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the late 1960s. These events played out at different registers that each directly concerned Poulantzas personally. We should, of course, bear in mind the fact that the Mediterranean dictatorships maintained themselves in power or even became stronger during this period. The established of the colonels' regime in Greece in the wake of the 21 April 1967 coup d'état, supported by the US authorities and indeed the US secret services, bolstered the old dictatorships in Portugal and Spain. These events demanded a response from the European Left and particularly the Communist Parties. Their echoes converged with *les événements* that affected Western Europe in 1968 as well as the countries of central Europe and especially Czechoslovakia, where the Soviet intervention in August of that year brought a sharp end to the democratic-socialist project. The international communist movement went through an unprecedented crisis, characterized by the emergence of tendencies and divisions throughout the Communist Parties of Europe. Many of these latter distanced themselves from the Soviet Union and the CPSU. The question marks that had been raised over Marxism-Leninism in the 1960s were now obvious, and expressed themselves in multiple different ways. Nicos Poulantzas, a member of the KKE (Greek Communist Party)—Interior, himself took part in the debates among the communist intellectual and academic world. Maoist critiques—which had considerable influence in certain French academic milieux—also offered the possibility of a left-wing critique of Soviet Marxism, which still remained the dominant reference point of the Communist Parties of Europe. The question of the state—but so, too, critical reflection on Stalinism and the legacy of the Comintern—again took on fresh relevance in the present, indeed particularly so when the far-Left political and social movements in Western Europe were telescoped together with the events in Prague. Reflection on political perspectives in Europe, in France as in the Mediterranean region, opened up a wide space in which it was possible to discuss anew the very bases of communist strategy and analysis. Nicos Poulantzas thus conducted his intellectual activity in a political conjuncture which saw both the emergence of Eurocommunism (in the mid-1970s) and the return to Marx, as well as a return to the texts of the revolutionaries of the decade following the Russian Revolution. Among the Trotskyist and Maoist currents [*mouvances*] of the far Left, the critique of Stalinism and its doctrinal orthodoxy had the wind in its sails in the 1960s, before this then gave way to greater reflection on the encounter between democracy and socialism. This chronology is worth bearing in mind when we are

examining texts that above all represented interventions in the ideological debates of the moment. Poulantzas's philosophical training and his involvement in the domain of political theory led him to revisit the communist movement's theoretical production in light of his own preoccupations regarding politics, the state and social classes.

In this book, which is plenty well-researched from a historical point of view, Nicos Poulantzas wished to develop and give empirical grounding to an approach that he had already elsewhere substantiated at the theoretical level.[3] Even so, he embarked upon this rereading of the texts by comparing them with Gramsci's writings, and took inspiration from Althusser as he dissected and brought to light the presuppositions on which they rested. Even if his analysis was sometimes still rather summary, he did also put into perspective the interaction of these texts with the real practice of the Communist Parties, the Comintern, and the USSR. This was first of all supposed to be a descriptive analysis, as if it was first necessary to attest the limits of a theoretical reflection from which he needed definitively to unshackle himself. From this point of view, the debates within the Greek communist milieu after the colonels' dictatorship was established did indeed call for such a move. For faced with the political urgency of mounting an analysis of *this* dictatorship, and the need to contemplate a political strategy appropriate to *this* context, the scholarly dimension was something of a lesser consideration.

In sum, this text reviewing the activity of the Third (Communist) International constituted an important and yet limited moment in the evolution of Nicos Poulantzas's philosophical and political reflection. Over the 15 years of his intellectual production, it is the only text he devoted to a historical review of the inheritance of communist doctrine in Europe—this, at the very moment that it had become patently necessary to go beyond this legacy. Nonetheless, this text is a lot more than a parenthesis or an exercise in style. We might note that even within the field of re-reading, such as had been initiated and formalized by Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas undertook an investigation that did not remain attached to the exegesis of the Marxist writings by a few theorists, but rather encompassed the activity of the Comintern more broadly. His documentary base was the texts published at the meetings of the International's leadership bodies. But he also made use of books

[3] See Stathis Kouvelakis and Isabelle Garo's texts in the present volume.

by Italian and German historians, which themselves attested to the rapid development of historical research in these countries in the 1960s, such as did not exist in France. Nicos Poulantzas's work thus publicized an oft-ignored historical documentation also in the French-speaking world. Notably, while the role of the Communist International—particularly in the face of fascism—had been hidden and then forgotten in France, Poulantzas spoke of the activity of the Comintern as such. He returned to a question that had remained a taboo in the collective memory of the communist organizations and beyond, the question of the workers' organizations, the advance of fascism, the fascist conquest of power, and the defeat of the workers' movement. He also considered the USSR's role in this history of anti-fascism, which was far from straightforward, and yet was often masked by the heroic memory of the struggles in Spain and in the Second World War. As part of this book, whose theoretical project was clearly stated, Nicos Poulantzas returned to the question of class relations and the state by examining the role of the different classes in the establishment and then the consolidation of fascism as a power and form of the state. Logically enough, the final part of the work was devoted to the fascist state. This led Poulantzas to outline a series of theoretical propositions concerning the fascist state *qua* form of state of exception. Nicos Poulantzas's intellectual line of approach thus led him to address the history of the Comintern as a means of affirming his own theoretical propositions concerning the state, social classes and the status of politics, in more or less explicit polemic against other European Left theorists such as Ralph Miliband.

Forty-five years later, this work centered on highlighting the flaws in the Comintern's strategic, theoretical and political thought has lost its polemical charge, insofar as the lacunae and the avatars of the Communist International's activity are no longer at the center of debate. After all, international communism has been relegated to the scrapheap of twentieth-century history. Moreover, historical research concerning the history of the Communist International has now greatly advanced.[4] All the same, the virtue of Poulantzas's writings on this score has not

[4]Jeremy Agnew and Kevin MacDermott, *The Comintern. A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin*, London: MacMillan, 1996; Pierre Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale communiste (1919–1943)*, Paris: Fayard, 1997; and Serge Wolikow, *L'internationale communiste (1919–1943). Le Komintern ou le rêve déchu du parti mondial de la révolution*, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier/Éditions ouvrières, 2010.

disappeared: for an understanding of this historical experience is all the more important again today. After all, political developments—especially in Europe—are not only bringing up the demons of the past, but also authoritarian tendencies and xenophobia. So, too, are they reviving modes of political domination in which certain fractions of the dominant classes allow national societies to be led by movements and organizations acting in the name of popular categories, middle-class layers, and the dominated petty-bourgeoisie. In short, there is no little value in resuming Poultanzas's line of march, basing ourselves on his reflection while also allowing ourselves to extend it in light of historical research. We think that the best way to pay homage to this researcher, who was taken from us too soon, is to consider him as a trailblazer.

Revisiting the History of the Communist Movement?

What Poulantzas wanted to demonstrate in his book, with all its abundance of digressions—and indeed, it was sometimes weighed down by them—was the importance of the links between the communist movement's theoretical analyses and its real activity. His investigation was built around a schema in which general theoretical propositions were clarified, if not legitimated, by historical references. Taken as a whole, his task was to produce an inventory of the Comintern's analytical errors, and then shed light on its political failures. It is worth noting that despite Poulantzas's avowed dislike of the Comintern's inheritor parties, he did not truly distance himself from a communist movement which it seems he considered the central force for revolutionary action still at the end of the 1960s, despite its errors and its renegacy. This ultimately meant that he continued to consider the evolution of the workers' movement and left-wing political forces solely in function of a binary between reform and revolution. Whatever that may be, the strong points of his critical analysis lay elsewhere. They lay in the main questions addressed by his conclusions—his general propositions—and then the explanations nourished by his references to historical events, which he called upon in order to provide legitimacy to his theoretical reasoning.

Right from the outset, Poulantzas grasps the fluctuations and the about-turns of the Comintern's positions regarding fascism. He identifies errors which he then repeatedly returns to. However, his chronology and his documentation only address part of this evolution, and he leaves aside certain other phases even though they were also important.

According to Poulantzas, the Comintern's inability to get a proper measure of fascism had a long history. In 1924, two years after Mussolini reached power, the Comintern's Fifth Congress reasserted the theory of the economic collapse of capitalism. Such a reasoning would continue to blind the Comintern's leaders, who considered that as capitalism became more exhausted it would try to use either the social-democratic or the fascist solution in order to shore up its own domination. Poulantzas writes that for the Comintern, the prospect of a new economic crisis in 1928 and 1929 put a fresh revolutionary phase immediately on the agenda, even despite the rise of fascism. He accused this theory of economism, and counterposed it to the Leninist conception of class struggle advanced both by Lenin in his final writings and above all by Mao, who embarked upon a new political course in China. In this regard, Poulantzas's reference to the writings of Charles Bettelheim bears witness to his embrace of a vision in which the Chinese communists were Lenin's only true heirs. Indeed, while Poulantzas repeatedly paid tribute to Dimitrov's analysis at the International's Seventh Congress in 1935 and his critiques of the errors the International had made in underestimating fascism, he above all emphasized the erroneous economic analyses which underpinned the Popular Front strategy, insofar as they reduced the class basis of the fascist state to monopoly capitalist groups alone. It is notable that his reflection essentially left to one side the anti-fascist struggle engaged within the Comintern, with all its contradictions, its limits and its successive about-turns. We might especially think of that phase of anti-fascist action which was seen as a form of revolutionary struggle, at the conclusion of a debate that traversed the Communist Parties and the International in 1926 and 1928. Nor does he take into account the alliance policy that was conceived during this period. When Poulantzas critiques the Comintern's theses on social-fascism, which reached their apogee between 1930–1933, he essentially imputes them to the economic catastrophism of the International's analysis of the present situation, much more than its shrunken conception of the state and institutions—though Poulantzas does, elsewhere, attack this drift in Comintern thinking. Nor does his analysis take into account the years after 1935, even though this period was characterized precisely by the communists' anti-fascist engagement, in the name of a democratic horizon which marked the de facto abandonment of a short-term revolutionary perspective. From 1935, the USSR's policy adapting to this anti-fascism initially consisted of the defence of the European status quo. For a

period between 1939 and 1941 the Soviet policy then swung away from this, and toward an alliance of circumstance with Germany. This turn shook an international communist movement many of whose cadres and militants had committed *en masse* to the anti-fascist struggle. When this struggle returned to the forefront of Comintern discourse and activity in June 1941, anti-fascism was more than ever conjugated in terms of a register of patriotic mobilization and international solidarity with the USSR's war effort. It was, moreover, in the name of this struggle and its demands that the Third International was dissolved in May 1943.

Poulantzas's propositions have in some measure been confirmed, even if his analysis does not fully recognize the complexity of a historical evolution which was certainly not his own main concern. That particularly applies to the study that he conducted with regard to the relations between the Communist International and the USSR. We can moreover make reference to certain historical analyses that shed light on our argument, which for its part certainly is based on using historical work as a source for the formalization of theory.[5]

Poulantzas addresses the link between the Comintern and the USSR by means of an analytical grid dominated by the various different theoretical interpretations for characterizing the Soviet reality of the 1920s. He signals the discrepancies or the non-correspondence between the USSR's and the Communist Parties' policy at certain different moments, albeit without denying the primary importance of the Soviet domestic situation; he rejects any simplifications, at the same time as he affirms the pre-eminence of the Soviet leadership's political line.

> These remarks should not be misinterpreted. I do not want to deny or minimize the influence of the factors described on Comintern policy when I emphasize the key role played by the general political line *as a link in the relation between the USSR and the Comintern*. I emphasize it rather because of the specific role which it takes on *within the USSR itself*. This line had a determinant relation to 'what went on in the USSR'.[6]

On this point, Poulantzas elaborates an interpretation that he unreservedly and explicitly borrows from Charles Bettelheim's work on the

[5] Jean-René Tréanton, 'Reflexions sur Fascisme et dictature', *Revue française de sociologie*, 3, July-September 1976.

[6] *Fascism and Dictatorship*, op. cit., pp. 227–28.

class struggle in the USSR. He thus asserts that the Soviet Union was traversed by the recurrent confrontation between the socialist road and the capitalist road. Poulantzas specifies his line of approach in the following terms 'My aim is to show that the periodization in the USSR and in the Comintern, and their relationship cannot be grasped in their relation to the class struggle in the USSR unless we refer to the general line which gradually became dominant there. During the whole of this period there was a desparate struggle in the USSR between these two roads'. He takes his theoretical proposition to its full conclusion, explaining that 'by a contradictory process, the struggle between the two roads ended in the Soviet bourgeoisie being reconstituted in a new form and in its taking over state power'.[7]

But in the last analysis, he notes a historiographical gap when he argues that we cannot establish a periodization of Soviet history. Even to understand that the general direction of this history was the early victory, under Stalin, of a Soviet bourgeoisie able to base itself on the state apparatuses, was not sufficient to overcoming this gap:

> No history of the USSR has yet been written which takes the class struggle as its connecting thread and which uses the line described above to relate these various factors to the steps of the class struggle in the USSR. Until such a detailed and conclusive account is available it is impossible to establish a more rigorous periodization of the USSR.[8]

Class Struggle and 'Economism'

From all this cluster of comments and theoretical considerations, we get the idea that we need to take another look at first appearances, and indeed mount a critique of them, while putting off to a later point the task of establishing a periodization founded on a class analysis. Thus the variations in the Comintern analysis of fascism—the central theme of the book in question—cannot be reduced to any general periodization.

The critique of economism recurs repeatedly throughout Poulantzas's argument, when he identifies the insufficiencies and the shortcomings in both the Comintern's and the USSR's analyses. For Poulantzas—invoking Lenin, but in fact above all relying on the critique that came

[7] Ibid., pp. 230–31.

[8] Ibid., p. 232, translation corrected.

from Mao—the political line that emanated from the USSR and the Communist International underestimated the class struggle, and put forward an exclusively economistic reasoning as it characterized the situation of international capitalism and forecast its imminent collapse. Two moments in particular make up the object of this analysis, namely the Comintern's Fifth Congress in 1924 and the outbreak of international economic crisis at the end of the 1920s.

Poulantzas begins by indicating how the Soviet and Comintern leaders attributed the economy an immediately political role. For him, this omnipresent economism is the principal source of the analytical errors and political mistakes committed by the international communist movement, which was thus led to under-estimate the political struggle:

> Economism here consists, first of all, in giving priority to the 'productive forces' at the expense of the relations of production. This is accompanied, in the second place, by an economistic-techonologistic conception of the production process and the 'productive forces' as being somehow independent of the relations of production. This makes it impossible to define correctly the way in which the production process is articulated with the field of the class struggle. Class struggle is outside the picture, in the sense that it is reduced to a mechanical economic process which is attributed primacy in historical development.[9]

Putting this point of view to the test, he cites the analyses that Zinoviev presented at the Fifth Congress in July 1924, a few months after Lenin's death, which advanced the thesis that the collapse of capitalism was inevitable. For Poulantzas, even though it was soon recognized (at the Fifth Plenum in 1925) that there was a relative stabilization of the economy, the economistic approach still held firm in 1928, when the Sixth Congress heralded the end of this stabilization, basing itself on economic indicators alone. 'The end of stabilization was therefore not related in the least to the characteristics of the class struggle; which explains the totally mistaken meaning this 'ultra-left' congress gave to this end of stabilization'.[10] From these remarks, which heavily simplify the contradictions that were at work in the Comintern at this moment, there logically follows the thesis that the weakness of its analysis of fascism

[9] Ibid., pp. 39–40.

[10] Ibid., p. 46.

fundamentally resided in the over-estimation of economics relative to politics: "A general line (of economism, and the lack of a mass line) thus became dominant in the Comintern by a gradual and contradictory process. It was a line which governed both its 'right' and 'left' turns".[11] Poulantzas thus criticizes the recurring under-estimation of fascism and the insistence that capitalism's collapse was inevitable:

> Fascism, as a mere passing episode in the automatic process of growing economic crisis-evolution-catastrophe-revolution, was somehow supposed to crumble of its own accord. This idea was deep-rooted in the Comintern: the idea that the "internal contradictions" of fascism would lead to its imminent, automatic fall.[12]

We thus see how the reference to economism inspired Poulantzas's critique of the blindness of certain Comintern attempts to evaluate fascism. Even so, as we have already indicated, the Comintern was traversed by different analyses of fascism which did engage with its specifically political dimension—a dimension that we can find in the positions taken by the Italian communists in 1928, in Togliatti's writings in subsequent years, and later in Dimitrov's texts from 1935 to 1936. Indeed, the critique of economism overlooks the essential Comintern thesis emphasizing the political radicalization of the masses, in the framework of a political voluntarism which simultaneously asserted both the impotence and the crisis of the bourgeois state. It is true that the political radicalization that was thus decreed and expected did not in fact arrive at its date with history, even after the generalization of unemployment from 1930 onward and in the face of the social disaster provoked by deflationary public policies. The exaltation of the USSR and the insistence that revolution was around the corner cannot simply be explained in terms of the effects of economism. Rather, they were much more part of a political voluntarism which had a theoretical logic of its own. This voluntarism was founded on the understanding that bourgeois democracy was obsolete and in particular that parliamentarism had reached its end, as well as a representation of class struggle as directly expressed by political parties considered the direct bearers of the warring class interests. If we want to grasp the Comintern's approach to fascism, then casting

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 48.

an eye at this representation of politics and the forms of the state is at least as important as understanding the shortcomings or the generalizations of its economic analyses. Indeed, the theorization of the political terrain was by no means absent from the Comintern's activity, even if it is true that it remained rather summary in status, insofar its discourse on political activity was essentially founded on the different experiences of the European labor movement, with the Russian and German reference points nonetheless remaining dominant. We find these experiences as operative factors in the debates on Italian fascism, the German situation, and the French and British situations during the strategic clashes that traversed the Comintern in the second half of the 1920s. Despite the rising monolithism, these experiences expressed themselves in both Comintern meetings and in the columns of *Inprecor*, albeit in a form that was very much structured by the dominant discourse up till 1934, which spoke of fascistization as a means of destroying the bourgeois state apparatus and thus preparing the ground for the revolutionary phase of the civil war and the seizure of power by the proletariat. This theoretical schema did not allow for the joint rallying of anti-fascist forces, because this framework insisted that anti-fascism must itself be revolutionary. The failure of this orientation cannot be imputed to the Comintern's economistic drift alone. Rather, it must much more be linked to the very conception of politics that reigned within the International at this moment. In this regard, Poulantzas makes cursory reference to the Comintern's Seventh Congress in 1935, giving credit to Dimitrov for having foregrounded the political dimension of fascism and its capacity to base itself on the middle classes, at the same time as denouncing what he sees as an error of Dimitrov's, in imputing fascism to the categories of monopoly and finance capital alone.

The Democratic State in Question

Poulantzas's reflection on the fascist state begins with a long prelude on the state apparatus in general and ideological apparatuses in particular. He of course makes reference to Gramsci's thinking in this domain, but also the doubts that they prompted in his own mind. He moreover addresses the way in which Althusser saw them, indeed often critically so. This line of march—more expansive and diversified than any conception reducing the state to its repressive instruments alone—allows Poulantzas to offer an approach that gives a proper place to the autonomy of the

political, and especially of parties, and of the ideological activity of certain state apparatuses. But it is striking that this reflection, which is without doubt the most fertile in this book, only incidentally relates back to the experience of the international communist movement. Indeed, it ignores or else skates around the question of the democratic forms of the state in capitalist societies, their limits, the challenges to them, and (as relevant) also the meaning of their disappearance. Yet this question was very much at the heart of the discussions and the uncertainties of the international communist movement in 1926, in 1928, and of course in the 1930s. It also has considerable presence in Poulantzas's other books on the state and socialism.

However dated this book may be, comparing the different aspects of Poulantzas's thought apparent therein should allow us to explain the following, rather paradoxical, conclusion. Namely, that the political history, properly speaking, of the Comintern, especially during the various crises that it had to confront, had not yet been integrated into the core of his reflection. It seems that he was immersed in his present preoccupations, in an era where historical research in this domain was indeed still limited.

CHAPTER 6

The Eurocommunism of the Intellectuals: Poulantzas and the Third Way to Socialism

Marco Di Maggio

Poulantzas's entire intellectual activity fitted into the political and social context of the 1960–1970s. Here I will try to relate his theses on the state and democratic socialism to the political and ideological movement known as Eurocommunism. His theses emerged in a context in which it seemed possible that the two biggest Communist Parties in the West could reach power by the peaceful and democratic road. He systematically expounded these arguments in his book *State, Power, Socialism*, published in 1979 at a moment when the Eurocommunist movement was already in crisis.

In this sense, Poulantzas's analyses devoted to the relationship between representative and direct democracy, the subjects of revolutionary transformation, and the attempt to think through the question of the transition to socialism outside of the schemas handed down from the Third International, represent a first-rank contribution to understanding the strategic debate within the European Left, but also for grasping the transformations of the capitalist states in the West at the end of the *Trente Glorieuses.*

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De-Stalinization and Hegemony: The Intellectual Debate Before 1968

A study of Poulantzas's theoretical production and the wider 1960–1970s international debate on the revolution in the West allows us to reach a better understanding of the potential and the limits of the Western Communist Parties' attempts to break out of the crisis of the Soviet-hegemonized communist movement.

Poulantzas was one of the Marxist intellectuals in this period who took an original approach to confronting the 'crisis of Marxism'—a crisis that can be considered one of the expressions of the cultural collapse of twentieth-century communism. This collapse preceded the crisis of communism as a political and social phenomenon. If we are to understand this crisis, we have to consider how the communist movement structured itself in the period stretching from the 1930s to the postwar era.[1] In taking account of its structure, we can explain that while the socialist camp did manage to take over vast regions of the world during the Cold War, the communist movement guided by the Soviet Union had no real hegemonic project, beyond the combination of a highly ideologized Marxism and the foreign policy that cemented the socialist bloc. Faced with the growing complexity of the post-1945 world, the primacy of Soviet state interests made it increasingly difficult for any new project for global revolution to be elaborated and put into practice. Indeed, at the very moment that the revolutionary movement was growing stronger through the explosion of national liberation struggles, the USSR supported these latter mainly for the purposes of making them an instrument of its own Great Power policy.

Even beyond the gradual economic and social degradation of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp, the crisis of communism as a global phenomenon was a process of continued political, cultural and symbolic erosion. This process preceded and accelerated the crisis of 'actually-existing socialism' as a political and social system, and moreover gradually reduced the non-ruling Communist Parties' capacity to represent the

[1] On this point, see Serge Wolikow, *L'internationale communiste (1919–1943). Le Komintern ou le rêve déchu du parti mondial de la révolution*, Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier/Éditions ouvrières, 2010 and Silvio Pons, *The Global Revolution*, Oxford: OUP, 2014.

interests of the popular classes and build their hegemony on the basis of the new forms of social conflict.[2]

In a 1966 review of Louis Althusser's *Reading Capital*, Eric Hobsbawm highlighted four main currents in the re-readings of Marx's thought that had been elaborated after 1956: the first was something like an 'archaeological operation' which sought to eliminate the strata of theoretical thinking which had accumulated on top of Marx's authentic thought; the second sought to identify and to pursue the different currents of the early Marxism; the third began to come to terms with the non-Marxist scholarly developments that had been passed over in silence during the Stalinist period; and finally the fourth expressed the desire to return to an understanding of the real world, after two decades in which the 'official understanding had become increasingly remote from reality'.[3]

In parallel to this, on the political level, the end of Stalinist dogmatism and the Sino-Soviet split opened the way for national roads to socialism.[4] This research, crossing all four currents cited by Hobsbawm, was at the heart of the intellectual debate that developed at the beginning of the 1960s. The questions of the nature of Marxism, the balance-sheet of the errors and the consequences of the Stalin period, and finally the theory of revolution and the phases of transition, either implicitly or explicitly traversed the intellectual debate throughout the whole Left. Thus the encounters and the discussions between the different intellectual currents often coincided with political-strategic type choices.

Louis Althusser was one of the protagonists of this discussion in France. In the 'research program with a political calling' that he announced at the beginning of the 1960s, he proposed a critical revision of the PCF's Marxism and its political culture. Althusser's goal was to overcome what he had defined (in the introduction to *For Marx*) as the theoretical poverty of the French workers' movement.[5]

[2] Marco Di Maggio, *Alla ricerca della Terza via al Socialismo. I PC italiano e francese nella crisi del comunismo (1964–1984)*, Naples: ESI, 2014.

[3] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Revolutionaries*, London: Phoenix, 1994, p. 143.

[4] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Il marxismo oggi: un bilancio aperto', in Eric Hobsbawm and Georges Haupt et al. (eds.), *Storia del marxismo*, Turin: Einaudi, 1982, vol. 4, p. 11.

[5] On the French debate of the 1960s and Althusser's role therein, see Marco Di Maggio, *Les intellectuels et la stratégie communiste. Une crise d'hégémonie (1956–1981)*, Paris: Les Éditions sociales, 2013.

In an article published in *La Pensée* in December 1962 under the title 'Contradiction and Over-Determination', Althusser critiqued both economistic and idealist variants of Marxism.[6] He used two passages from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* in which the Italian communist leader addressed Second International Marxism and defined the role of intellectuals within the revolutionary party. Following Gramsci, Althusser recognized the critique of the theory and ideology of the workers' movement and Communist Parties as a key step toward the elaboration of a revolutionary theory appropriate to the historical circumstances. Althusser's entire theoretical and political itinerary was marked by this type of attempt to come to terms with Gramsci. Two fundamental problems were particularly at issue, here: the question of the cultural autonomy of Marxism, as the necessary condition for the conquest of hegemony; and the question of analyzing the forms of bourgeois hegemony and passive revolution. As Christine Buci-Glucksmann has emphasized, many of Althusser's theses were structured on the basis of an ambivalent and contradictory relationship with Gramsci, combining his rejection of all of Gramsci's philosophical positions (historicism, philosophy of praxis, humanism) with his positive evaluation of Gramsci's discoveries in the domain of scientific materialism (organic intellectuals, the notion of hegemony, his analysis of the state).[7]

The force of Althusser's argument resides in its capacity to indicate a theoretical route out of Stalinism, to its 'Left'. In Althusser's reflection, the critique of ideology and ideological readings of Marxism, accompanied by a certain capacity to read the social and historical reality, combined with the critique of certain specificities of the French workers' movement.

As such, one common concern emerged in the 1960s debate among communist intellectuals. Starting out from what were very often opposite bases, numerous intellectuals posed the problem of a politics that could transcend both the institutional and economic-corporatist dimensions of the Communist Parties' activity. This revision implied that theory must now play a new role in the elaboration of communist

[6] Louis Althusser, 'Contradiction et surdétermination', *La Pensée*, 106, December 1962, p. 3, English text at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1962/over-determination.htm.

[7] Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980, p. 14.

strategy; and in this regard there also emerged a more or less radical critique of the doctrinaire and ideological character of Cold War Marxism.

The critique of the Western Communist Parties' platform of demands and institutional strategy was closely linked to the analysis of the crisis of actually existing socialism. This connection became the starting point for the search for a theoretical and practical alternative to the model of socialism that had arisen in 1917. This was a quest that the West's two biggest Communist Parties—France's PCF and Italy's PCI—pursued in different ways. But they always did so in an only partial and contradictory fashion.

Poulantzas and the Revolution in the West

Althusser's approach is the starting point of Poulantzas's itinerary. Indeed, from *Political Power and Social Classes* onward he proposed a critical analysis of Marxism. As Poulantzas engaged with the question of the state, as a terrain of the struggle for hegemony, and with the forms of the transition toward socialism, he altered the approach that Althusser had set out in 1964. In concentrating on the relationship between socialism and democracy and on the sociology of the state, Poulantzas changed the axis of the 'class struggle in theory', shifting from an epistemological dimension to a political-theoretical one.[8] The displacement of this axis onto a level that directly concerned the question of strategy was the result of a historical context that shaped the entire activity of the intellectuals and organizations of the Left.

In 1968, with the revolt of the new intellectual layers and the repression of the Prague Spring, it was patently obvious that the Soviet model of hegemony was in crisis. From the beginning of the 1970s, initiatives developed to construct the unity of Western Communism on the basis of a new relationship between communism and democracy, in an era when it began to seem that the superpower-dominated blocs were coming to an end. Within this context, Eurocommunism can be seen as the final attempt to respond to the crisis of the model that had emerged from the October Revolution. Thus in the mid-1970s Eurocommunism became the 'big question' on the Left in numerous Western European countries. This was, indeed, a significant historical phenomenon. It was the

[8] Bob Jessop, *Nicos Poulantzas: Marxist Theory and Political Strategy*, London: Macmillan, 1985, p. 59.

beginning of a process which would ultimately result in the overcoming of the divisions that had emerged in the workers' movement during the interwar period. Eurocommunism imagined itself a movement that could represent an effective alternative to both the social-democratic model and crisis-ridden Soviet socialism. Politically speaking, the assertion of the Western Communist Parties' national and European specificity was articulated on the basis of a political convergence: for it was on the continental terrain that unity with the other currents of the workers' and democratic movement was to be built. The convergence among these currents was, in turn, supposed to allow the European workers' movement to play a vanguard role in overcoming the global bi-polar order.[9]

Poulantzas's theoretical production entirely fitted into this context. With *Political Power and Social Classes*, the Greek communist undertook a study of the hegemonic state apparatuses in the era of developed capitalism. In defining the state as the terrain for the mediation of class interests, under bourgeois control—and thus as the dominant classes' main instrument of hegemony—he put into question one of the foundations of the Western Communist Parties' theoretical and ideological inheritance, according to which the working-class's economic struggles could alter power relations within the state, if a vanguard party translated these struggles onto the political level. Taking an Althusserian-type approach, Poulantzas strove to analyze the functioning of the capitalist state's ideological and repressive apparatuses. He thus challenged Marxist economism and the theory of 'state monopoly capitalism', according to which the state's principal function is to impose limits on capital devaluation by means of nationalizations and Keynesian policies.

Stimulated by the events of 1968 and the Prague Spring, but also by the end of the Southern European dictatorships, Poulantzas embarked on a new research trajectory. He here sought to transcend Gramsci and Althusser's theories regarding both the definition of the notion of hegemony, in the strategy of the revolutionary subject, and the critique of the Marxist tradition that had built up during the Third International and across the Cold War period. In this sense, Poulantzas took up a position at the crossroads between Italian Marxism, Althusserianism, and the European Left debate of the years following 1968. In an interview published in the PCI's weekly *Rinascita* a few days after his death,

[9] Marco Di Maggio, *Alla ricerca della Terza*…, op. cit., p. 239.

Poulantzas provided a summary definition of his position in relation to Gramsci: for him, the Italian communist leader had signed the death certificate of dogmatic Third International Marxism, but his conception of the conquest and exercise of power remained stuck in a dualist conception which had not resolved problems like the plurality of parties and the relationship between direct and representative democracy. For Poulantzas, Gramsci could not be of great assistance in what was 'a completely new task'.[10]

The main subjects of these theoretical-political debates were the relationship between socialism and democracy, the differences between East and West, the definition of the state and its function within society, and the problems of capitalist development. If we situate these questions within the context of the Eurocommunist movement, and above all the specifically Italian case, then we see that the theses of Kautsky, Bauer, and Hilferding expressed a vision that was closer to Eurocommunism's conceptions—even if sometimes in a very partial fashion—than was the Third International vision (including Gramsci's). This proximity did not express the superiority of non-communist Marxism in the interwar period, but rather underlined the fact that these intellectuals were the—both positive and negative—expression of the Western political, cultural, and social reality of their era.

As he himself embraced left-Eurocommunism[11]—and thus mounted a critique of the weaknesses of the Eurocommunist parties' official orientations—Poulantzas started out from Gramsci's conception of hegemony, insofar as this provided the most complex expression of Leninism (and indeed the adaptation of Leninism to Western conditions).[12] He nonetheless sought to go beyond Gramsci's notion of hegemony, so that he might propose a means of transcending both the Third-International Marxist tradition and the social-democratic and socialist tradition.

[10]Nicos Poulantzas, 'Le risposte che è difficile trovare', *Rinascita*, 10 October 1979, pp. 25–26. English translation at https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3525-the-loss-of-nicos-poulantzas-the-elusive-answer.

[11]For a definition of left-Eurocommunism see Christine Buci-Glucksmann, 'Pour un eurocommunisme de gauche', in Olivier Duhamel and Henri Weber (eds.), *Changer le PC? Débat sur le gallocommunisme*, Paris: PUF, 1979, pp. 129 et sqq.

[12]Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, op. cit.

The 'Crisis of the State' and Eurocommunism

Poulantzas's approach started out from the same recognition of the 'crisis of Marxism' that Althusser arrived at in 1977. For Althusser, the crisis of Marxism was not a recent phenomenon or a process that had only begun with the Sino-Soviet conflict of the early 1960s. Even if the ideological monolithism of the Cold War prevented it from becoming clearly apparent, the causes of the crisis were to be found in the 1930s production of a 'systematic' Marxism-Leninism. According to Althusser, Marxism had had an only 'limited and deformed' development in the domains of the analysis of the capitalist state and the theory of the revolutionary party—domains in which Lenin and Gramsci's theorizations were 'pathetic' in their simplicity.[13]

Poulantzas elaborated a theory of political struggle and the state which, starting out from the political and institutional conditions in the West, favored the progressive liquidation of the Stalinist and even Marxist-Leninist tradition. He defined this approach via a study of the Third International, fascism and the dictatorships of Southern Europe.[14] He thus understood the importance of providing an analysis that would deconstruct the theoretical and political culture of Marxism—a necessary process, this, if the organizations of the Western Left were indeed to be reformed.

With the publication of the collective work on *The Crisis of the State*, the results of this research would be set in relation with the crisis of the *Trente Glorieuses*.[15] Edited by Poulantzas, this book brought together contributions by intellectuals situated between the Left of the PCF and the archipelago of *gauchisme*. This volume was simultaneously both an analysis of the institutional transformations of the European democracies, and a systematic critique of the economism that still inspired Communist strategy in the West. In his introduction to this book, Poulantzas critiques the communist and social-democratic conceptions of the state. He argued that the two main political cultures of the workers' movement were incapable of going beyond an institutional approach and considering the state as the site of class struggle. And as a consequence

[13] Louis Althusser, 'The Crisis of Marxism', *Marxism Today*, July 1978, p. 219.

[14] *Fascism and Dictatorship*, op. cit; *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, London: NLB, 1976.

[15] Nicos Poulantzas, *La crise de l'État*, Paris: PUF, 1976.

of this, each of them ended up at a bureaucratic and elitist conception of the transcendence of the state.[16]

Poulantzas understood the limits of the expansion of the welfare state, and in this also saw the impossibility of Keynesian policies intervening on the terrain of the relations of production. He moreover emphasized the fact that the extension of the state's functions engenders the numerical growth and politicization of the public sector workforce. Thus the political crisis meets with the economic crisis, in a process whereby each determines the other. However, he rejected the thesis according to which the economic crisis produces the conditions for the overturning of the relations of force at the social and political level. After all, the mass politicization processes that emerged in the 1960s were accompanied by the reduction in the powers of elected parliaments and an increase in the importance of technocracy. Political life thus tended to be reduced to the exchange of power [*alternance*] between two poles, in which the functions of the mass parties were more and more diminished. As the crisis deepened and the tendency toward technocratic authoritarianism became stronger, the policy conducted by capitalist states, founded on the pairing of reform and repression, ultimately ceased to have any 'global social project'.[17] The conclusion of Poulantzas's introduction to *La crise de l'État* explicitly addresses the question of the Western Communist Parties' strategies. While these latter did make reference to the democratic transition to socialism, they were not doing enough to question the nature of the capitalist state and its crisis.

The PCF's and PCI's responses to Poulantzas came in Jean Lojkine's review of *La crise de l'État*, which appeared in the November 1977–December 1977 edition of *La Pensée*, and in Giuseppe Vacca's preface to the Italian edition of the book, issued by the Italian party's publisher in 1979. Lojkine claimed that Poulantzas was incapable of taking into consideration the real development of the productive forces. Meanwhile Vacca accused him of not having accurately analyzed the link between the state and social classes, and of having ruled out the possibility of

[16] 'The Political Crisis and the Crisis of the state' in *The Poulantzas Reader*, London: Verso 2008, p. 308.

[17] Ibid., p. 322.

the state apparatus being transformed by the dominated classes, except through a simple substitution.[18]

The critiques coming from these PCF and PCI intellectuals confirmed the two parties' respective lines: The French displayed an economic-corporatist type approach, according to which the economic struggles waged by the working-class and its allies would allow control of the state apparatus to be unpicked from the hands of the monopoly bourgeoisie. In the criticisms formulated by Vacca, we instead find the legacy of Togliatti's theses on progressive democracy and his interpretation of Gramsci's notion of war of position. For Vacca, the working-class's economic and political struggles and its institutional activity would allow 'elements of socialism' to be inserted into the state apparatus. These elements would be able gradually to overturn the relations of force and ever more clearly point to the structure of the new state. The two communist intellectuals thus took differing points of view, with the PCI devoting notably more attention to the question of state apparatuses than did the PCF. But from their different bases, they each confirmed an approach holding that because of the development of the productive forces there was a 'neutral' part of the state apparatuses which the dominated classes could and should appropriate.

In 1977–79 a new era opened up with the failure of the *Union de la gauche* strategy in France and the Historic Compromise in Italy, and thus the end of Eurocommunism. This failure made up part of a context in which the experiences and cultures of the '68 period began to turn toward various forms of nihilism, individualism, or even reactionary anti-communism.[19] Now there began to take shape the scenario in which the neoliberal restoration of the following decades would develop.

The 'Crisis of Marxism' and the Third Way to Socialism

In this context, Poulantzas went deeper into the theses which he had expounded in *La crise de l'État*. He did this with the interview he granted to Henri Weber—appearing in *Critique communiste* in

[18] Jean Lojkine, 'Crise de l'État et crise du capitalisme monopoliste d'État', *La Pensée*, 193, 1977, pp. 115–26 and Giuseppe Vacca, 'Introduzione', in Nicos Poulantzas (ed.), *La crisi dello Stato*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1979, pp. iii–xxxii.

[19] Marco Di Maggio, *Alla ricerca della terza via al socialismo*, op. cit., pp. 289 et sqq. and Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left. The Antitotalitarian Movement of the 1970s*, New York: Berghahn, 2004.

1977[20]—and with the 1978 volume *State, Power, Socialism*, which served as his theoretical-political testament. In both his debate with Weber and the final chapter of *State, Power, Socialism* devoted to 'democratic socialism', he sought to resolve the question of the relationship between representative and direct democracy in the transition process.

As Bob Jessop has shown in the new edition of *State, Power, Socialism*, Poulantzas here mounted a threefold change of theoretical-political positions; faced with the simultaneous crisis of Eurocommunism and the *Union de la gauche* in France, but also the war between Vietnam and Cambodia (and indirectly, between the Soviet Union and China), the author defined 'a strategic-relational approach to the state as the contradictory condensation of social forces in struggle'. He definitively moved 'from a rejection of institutional protections' to 'an appreciation of their crucial role in the democratic transition toward democratic socialism'.[21]

Poulantzas here started out from critiques of the Third International and social democracy. He asserted the need to go beyond the essentialist conception holding that there is a 'neutral' dimension of the state corresponding to the development of the productive forces—a dimension which the dominated classes should appropriate—and then a uniquely 'negative' dimension of ideological and repressive apparatuses responsible for preserving class domination. Starting out from an analysis of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, Poulantzas critiqued the two poles of the Western CPs: both that proper to the PCI, according to which it was necessary to conquer and deeply reform the ideological state apparatuses by means of a gradual operation from within; and the position typical of the PCF, centered on the productive forces, which held that conquering political power through electoral means would afford control of the productive forces, and then the substitution of the bourgeoisie's apparatuses of domination. In neither case did the CPs' orientations take account of the masses' own action. In the PCI's case this carried the risk of a slide toward social democracy, and for the PCF the danger that the Party would become submissive to social democracy if this latter arrived in

[20] Nicos Poulantzas, 'L'État et la transition au socialisme. Interview par H. Weber', *Critique communiste*, 16, 1977, pp. 15–40.

[21] Bob Jessop, 'L'État est un rapport social [Postface]', in Nicos Poulantzas (ed.), *L'État, le pouvoir, le socialisme*, Paris: Les Prairies ordinaires, 2013, p. 383.

government without the simultaneous development of a powerful mass movement.[22]

Poulantzas also analyzed the shortcomings and the failings of the '68-era experiences of direct democracy, thus distancing himself from the various other critiques that the revolutionary Left leveled at the CPs and their politics. Indeed, these latter critiques adopted the classic Leninist schema holding that the construction of socialism would proceed via the destruction of the bourgeois state and the construction of new state apparatuses with popular assemblies and councils. Poulantzas here criticized those who denied the central importance of communist institutional action by counterposing it to vague slogans of self-management and decentralization. Thus what Greek communism needed to do was to transcend both the Leninist model and the Gramscian-inspired model of war of position. Poulantzas thus gave theoretical definition to the model of 'democratic socialism', alternative to both authoritarian socialism and the technocratic, statist and Keynesian practices of social democracy. At the heart of Poulantzas's theory stood the idea of the interpenetration of representative-democratic institutions and direct-democratic institutions. For Poulantzas, democratic experiences must not be subordinated to an institutional strategy—typical of the Western CPs—that aimed to draw the anti-systemic instances of class conflict back within the apparatuses of representative democracy.[23] Democratic socialism is a long-term process. It does not simply involve the progressive conquest of the state apparatuses, as according to the PCI's interpretation of Gramsci. But nor is it a rupture or a simple substitution, as in the perspective of the PCF's and far Left's various different re-elaborations of Leninism. It is rather more a matter of a series of successive ruptures, through which practices of direct democracy previously developed in the resistance to the activity of the bourgeois state's ideological and repressive apparatuses are themselves introduced into the state apparatus. Poulantzas sketched out a theory of the gradual encirclement of the state, both from within and from the outside. However, he did not resolve the problem of the relationship between political and union representatives and the masses' initiative within the state apparatuses.

[22] *State, Power, Socialism*, op. cit.

[23] Ibid.

On these last points, Poulantzas's theses had points of contact with some of the interpretations of 'progressive democracy' that had been developed within the PCI, at the impulse of Palmiro Togliatti. In particular, his approach crossed paths with PCI left-wingers' theses regarding the Gramscian-Togliattian legacy, and especially those of the *Il manifesto* group, marginalized and then excluded from the PCI in the '68 period. According to Togliatti's vision, the party—but so, too, the unions and social organizations of the workers' movement (in particular cooperatives)—constitute the instruments through which the popular masses organize and through which they are then able to change the power relations and the structure of the state, on the basis of their own social struggles.[24] The theory of the *partito nuovo* and the notion of progressive democracy constituted the framework on which basis the Gramscian heritage defined the PCI's political culture from 1945 onward. Looking beyond the different interpretations and applications of these notions within the PCI, there was one common element that characterized all Italian communist politics after 1945: namely, that the strategy for the transition to socialism implied a conception of hegemony that resolutely sought a constant accumulation of forces, a permanent war of position that would be waged within both the state and civil society. But this accumulation of forces was principally conceived as a peaceful 'long march through the institutions'. It did not attribute sufficient importance to moments of rupture.[25] This was one of the limiting factors that restricted Italian communism's ability effectively to continue down the path that Gramsci had opened up.

Given that Poulantzas's theses and the PCI's political culture had so many points of contact regarding the notion of 'progressive democracy', it would seem that his critique of the notion of war of position was leveled more against the PCF's present-day strategy than Gramsci's original formulation. Nonetheless, Poulantzas seems to have underestimated the

[24] On Togliatti's notion of 'progressive democracy', see Alexander Höbel, 'La democrazia progressiva nell'elaborazione del Pci. Un anticaglia?', *Historia Magistra*, no. 18, April-June 2015. Alexander Höbel, *Luigi Longo. Una vita partigiana (1900–1945)*, Rome: Carocci, 2004.

[25] Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review*, I/100, November–December 1976; Perry Anderson, *L'Italia dopo l'Italia. Verso la Terza Repubblica*, Rome: Castelvecchi 2015 and Gregorio Sorgonà, *La svolta incompiuta. Il gruppo dirigente del PCI tra l'VIII e l'XI Congresso (1956–1965)*, Rome: Aracne, 2011.

importance of a critical analysis of the role of the party, its functioning, and its relationship with social movements.

By the end of the 1970s, the PCF's crisis was manifest. As the Left arrived in power in France it was the Socialists who asserted their hegemony, and in parallel to this there came the development of various forms of dissent within the PCF. Numerous intellectuals spoke out to denounce the party's political and cultural backwardness.[26] As for the PCI, the failure of the Historic Compromise gave rise to its resumption of an antagonistic perspective. This latter started out from the critique of the Historic Compromise, and especially the manner in which from the mid-1970s onward the PCI had begun to privilege institutional action over mass mobilization, despite the latent social conflict that Italy was experiencing in this period.[27] Poulantzas's theses on democratic socialism display important points of contact with Berlinguer's principles in the final period of his leadership between 1979 and 1984, as he as he sought to redefine the party's strategy in the wake of the failure of the Historic Compromise. For instance, it is important to note the arguments that he elaborated in 1980, after the coup d'état in Poland: it was at this point that the PCI general secretary made his famous statement declaring that the propulsive force of the October Revolution was now exhausted. This statement made up part of Berlinguer's attempt to revive his party's initiatives in search of a third way to socialism; a path able to came to terms with the simultaneous crises of both the social-democratic and Soviet models, and which would be able to conjugate socialism and democracy.[28]

After Poulantzas: The Final Crisis of Historical Communism and Its Perspectives

However partial and contradictory they may have been, the attempts made within the CPs to break out of the crisis that emerged at the beginning of the 1980s displayed several points of contact with Poulantzas's earlier critiques, formulated in a time when it seemed possible that the

[26] Marco Di Maggio, *Les intellectuels et la stratégie communiste*, op. cit., p. 283.

[27] Francesco Barbagallo, *Enrico Berlinguer*, Rome: Carocci, 2006, p. 371 and Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, Turin: Einaudi, 2006, p. 162.

[28] Ibid., p. 219.

PCF and PCI would indeed reach power, and when Eurocommunism seemed to be a concrete possibility of arriving at a model of socialism more acceptable than the Soviet one.

At the end of the 1970s, with the crisis of Eurocommunism and the first ideological and cultural manifestations of the new neoliberal hegemony, Poulantzas continued to investigate the relations between theory and politics, socialism and democracy and the Marxist inheritance. Even soon before his tragic death, he provided important pointers for an analysis of the integration of the parties of the workers' movement within state apparatuses; an integration that was one of the characteristics of the passive-revolution process that accompanied the end of the *Trente Glorieuses*.

In an interview with *Rinascita* in October 1979, Poulantzas posed the question of the crisis of the mass parties. He here situated the crisis of the European workers' parties' strategy, culture, and support within the formation-process of an authoritarian and technocratic statism. In parallel to this, the Eurocommunist parties abandoned the Stalinist model without being able to find an alternative to it. It was clear that they were struggling to build bridges with the new social movements and social subjects, which in Western societies were "with increasing speed … losing the connotation of being 'marginal'". Faced with this twofold difficulty, the Communist Parties in the West provided a wholly political response, not having truly understood the structural tension between parties and social movements.[29]

The European integration process, the development of the states which are involved in this project, and the crisis of the reformist and revolutionary Left—but so, too, the struggles that have developed in recent years (for instance the struggles in defence of common resources, and especially forms of popular organization at the territorial level, and local collectives and experiences in Latin America) show us that Poulantzas's indications regarding democratic socialism can indeed be a useful point of departure. They are useful not only for critically analyzing the history of the workers' movement over the last decades of the twentieth century, but also for redefining social and political transformation for our own time.

[29] Nicos Poulantzas, 'Le risposte che è difficile trovare', op. cit., p. 25.

CHAPTER 7

The *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire*, Nicos Poulantzas, and the Reception and Discussion of His Theory

Ludivine Bantigny

'We are faced with a historic gamble'. In a debate with Henri Weber, at that time one of the main theorists of the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (LCR), Nicos Poulantzas evoked the great intensity of both the situation they faced and the discussion of which it was the object. This period was considered highly important in historical terms, and the theoretical propositions here being renovated were up to the standards which this demanded. This exchange, which appeared in the June 1977 edition of *Critique communiste*, moreover indicated the importance that the LCR accorded to Poulantzas's thought. Theirs was a critical but attentive reception of his theory, in which there simultaneously emerged both strong disagreements and an evident mutual respect.

It is, however, worth emphasizing right from the outset that this discussion was pursued by only a small number of militants within the

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LCR,[1] and indeed above all its leaders. This was a restricted circle, and in fact an overwhelmingly male one. Antoine Artous, Daniel Bensaïd, Michael Löwy, Jean-Marie Vincent, and Henri Weber—historians, sociologists, and philosophers by training—played the most important role. As Michael Löwy later recognized, 'I don't think that [Poulantzas] was read a lot in the LCR more generally, in its activist circles'.[2] What is more, this reception of Poulantzas hardly came all in one go: rather, it evolved over time. It progressed at the rhythm of the theoretical propositions that Poulantzas himself advanced—from his 1968 *Political Power and Social Classes* to his *State, Power, Socialism* published ten years later—and so, too, the rhythm of the historical and political conjuncture that served as both the framing and the stakes of this discussion. The Chilean and Portuguese experiences, the overthrow of the dictatorship in Greece, and the vicissitudes of the *Union de la gauche* were not merely context that provided the scenery for this theoretical engagement. Rather, they constituted its raw material. For there was nothing abstract about the development of this theory; it fed on the situation itself, and constantly started out anew from this situation in order to measure itself by the present realities and adapt to their consequences.

We should also recognize the high theoretical level at which this exchange took place, indeed within a unique framework. Among the forces of the revolutionary Left, the LCR distinguished itself with its political openness and resistance to sectarianism, taking on the character—to use Ernst Bloch's formula—of a 'warm current' of Marxism.[3] In this era, the desire to theorize the revolutionary transition was carried forth with an openly avowed sense of subjectivity—subjectivity here being understood as the essential place accorded to historical subjects,

[1] Indeed, the CD-ROM of the LCR's paper *Rouge* does not feature any mention of Poulantzas. Thanks to Christian Beauvain and Jean-Guillaume Lanuque for helping me to check this information.

[2] Michael Löwy, 'The Nicos Poulantzas I knew', English text at https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1908-michael-lowy-the-nicos-poulantzas-i-knew. This interview was conducted for *Contretemps* by Alexis Cukier, Razmig Keucheyan and Fabio Mascaro Querido in December 2014. It is worth noting that Poulantzas's name did not appear in the standard historical study of the LCR, Jean-Paul Salles's *La Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (1968–1981). Instrument du Grand Soir ou lieu d'apprentissage?* Rennes: PUR, 2005, or in Joshua Florence's *Anticapitalistes. Une sociologie historique de l'engagement*, Paris: La Découverte, 2015.

[3] Razmig Keucheyan, *Left Hemisphere: Mapping Critical Theory Today*, London: Verso.

over and above the weight of any economic determinism. For this reason, some of the authors mentioned in this piece (Daniel Bensaïd, Ernest Mandel, and Jean-Marie Vincent) contributed to *Contre Althusser* (1975), a collective volume that defended voluntarism against scientistic objectivism, and revolutionary initiative against structural mechanism. This fundamental question of revolutionary subjectivity was addressed in the discussion with Nicos Poulantzas, together with certain other themes of similarly decisive importance, whose stakes also overlapped with this same question. These themes ranged from the contours of social classes in general and in particular the working class, to the nature of the state and the intervention to be made within it, and thus power and the means and ways of conquering it. This theoretical exchange thereby also corresponded to a strategic thinking that was never disconnected from history in its real development.

The Critical Uses of Concepts

It is in 1968 that we find the first traces of the reception and use of Nicos Poulantzas's concepts and definitions. In summer that year Daniel Bensaïd completed a philosophy masters thesis at Nanterre under the supervision of Henri Lefebvre, devoted to 'the notion of the revolutionary crisis in Lenin'.[4] *Political Power and Social Classes* had just been published in Maspero's 'Textes à l'appui' collection, and the young philosophy student—at this point a leader of the *Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire*, and obviously highly involved in the events of May–June 1968—immediately drew from it elements that would be important to his own reflection. What he particularly took from *Political Power and Social Classes* was its theorizations of the social formation, characterized by Poulantzas as 'the specific overlapping of several 'pure' modes of production'. In Bensaïd's judgment, Poulantzas completed Lenin, through the very manner in which he talked about politics. For Poulantzas, politics takes on three criteria: its object ('the conjuncture'), its product ('the transformation of the unity of a social formation') and most importantly its strategic objective: the state. Here already it was

[4]English text available at https://www.viewpointmag.com/2014/09/05/the-notion-of-the-revolutionary-crisis-in-lenin-1968/. The author would like to thank Sophie Bensaïd for generously (and very promptly) sending him the French version, which is now available on the Daniel Bensaïd site at http://danielbensaid.org/La-notion-de-crise-revolutionnaire.

possible to bring to light the way in which Poulantzas considered the state, 'the cohesive factor of this complex overlapping of various modes of production' between which it neutralized 'a true relation of forces'.[5] Daniel Bensaïd would again emphasize these innovative contributions in the article he wrote together with Sami Naïr, appearing in the December 1968 issue of *Partisans*.[6] At this stage, Bensaïd's borrowing from Poulantzas could be considered the enrichment of his own theoretical reflection; and no disagreements had yet come into view.

The turning point came in 1970, with the publication of *Fascism and Dictatorship*. This time Daniel Bensaïd took charge of producing a critique of Poulantzas's book. This critique moreover combined with the increasingly manifest opposition to Althusserian thought among the ranks of the *Ligue communiste*. Even if *Fascism and Dictatorship* offered a historical-type political reflection, and in particular concerned the Third International's activity in the face of Fascism, Bensaïd accused Poulantzas of having followed Althusser's lead in his excessive structuralism, and of having removed the element of revolutionary subjectivity. In his view, this element had repeatedly been neglected. Firstly, because in analyzing the rise of fascism Poulantzas had paid only limited attention to the class struggle. Next, because the author of *Fascism and Dictatorship* did not accord sufficient importance to 'the subjective collapse of the workers' movement'—here meaning the leadership of the Third International under Stalin, and the absence of any revolutionary response to the rise of fascism. Finally, comparing point-by-point the criteria that Poulantzas and Ernest Mandel had each set out in their respective readings of fascism, Bensaïd highlighted the much more decisive role that class determinations played in the analysis proposed by the USFI leader. Indeed, unlike Poulantzas, Mandel emphasized the crisis of capitalism that led to changes in production and thus in the conditions of the realization of surplus-value; the role of fascism's fundamental social base, i.e. the petty bourgeoisie; the destruction of the proletariat's mass organizations (parties, unions); and finally the incapacity of the workers' movement to come to terms with this challenge. For his part, Poulantzas stuck to more superstructural factors at the level of the state and ideology: the mass party, the domination of the state apparatus, political police, and

[5] *Political Power and Social Classes*, op. cit., p. 47.

[6] Daniel Bensaïd and Alain Naïr, 'À propos de la question de l'organisation: Lénine et Rosa Luxemburg', *Partisans*, 45, December 1968–January 1969, p. 11.

bureaucratic administration. Finally, because he had failed sufficiently to delve into the history made by social classes and social actors, Poulantzas had remained 'prisoner of the academic straitjackets of Althusserianism', even as he strove to break out of them.[7]

The critique sharpened yet further in response to Poulantzas's work on the extremely intense political situation of their own period, namely his 1975 book *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*. The same question also proved central in the discussion on this book: i.e. the place occupied by revolutionary subjectivity, and therefore the class struggle. According to Bensaïd, this book overly neglected properly working-class struggles; in his view, this corresponded to a 'fundamental' and 'far from harmless' 'error of method' in Poulantzas.[8] This marked a turning point, which Bensaïd now formulated in more direct and explicit terms. This once again meant an open critique of Althusserianism, and it was moreover asserted that Poulantzas remained under this latter's influence. This disagreement was not just theoretical in nature, but fundamentally strategic. Indeed, for Bensaïd, the 'harmful' consequence of such an oversight was precisely that it kicked strategic questions into the long grass. In focusing on the contradictions internal to the bourgeoisie without sufficiently emphasizing the central dynamic of conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Poulantzas privileged a tactical alliance with the most democratic fraction of the bourgeoisie, thereby forgetting the working-class perspective—in the political sense of the term. This position was compared to the one that the PCE had adopted in Spain when it decided to support the 'democratic *junta*', whose platform did entail democratic advances but remained absolutely silent on properly working-class social demands.

Social Classes and Class Struggle: The Critique of Poulantzas's Definition of Class

The theoretical and programmatic tension that had now been opened up led to a more advanced reflection on the evolutionary nature of social classes, the possibility of a new managerial class emerging based on the

[7] Daniel Bensaïd, 'À propos de "Fascisme et dictature". Poulantzas, la politique de l'ambiguïté', *Critiques de l'économie politique*, 11–12, April–September 1973, pp. 268 et sqq.

[8] Daniel Bensaïd, 'Nicos Poulantzas, La crise des dictatures: Portugal, Grèce, Espagne', *Critique communiste*, June–July 1975, p. 127.

metamorphosis of the petty bourgeoisie, these classes' respective situations within the relations of production, and finally their links with the proletariat. The 1974 publication of the book *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* provided a further opportunity for this debate.

One of the terms of this discussion concerned the situation of the new white-collar employees, which Nicos Poulantzas attached to the new petty bourgeoisie. For Jean-Marie Vincent, this latter class was more limited in scope than Poulantzas's conception suggested. Indeed, the extension of the spheres in which surplus-value was realized, in particular in banks, insurance, and commerce, did not prevent the 'proletarianization' of these sectors.[9] After all, Vincent insisted, these categories of employees were very much under the grip of capitalist exploitation, thus attaching them to the working class. The true petty bourgeoisie that was now being constituted was, instead, situated 'on the other side of capitalist despotism and domination, albeit without being its direct emanation'. Here, the LCR's theorists were essentially challenging the idea that the proletariat was dissolving. In their view, Poulantzas was helping to spread this very hypothesis, for he had taken for granted what they considered an overly restrictive definition of the working class. For Antoine Artous and Daniel Bensaïd, the working class could not be defined exclusively in terms of the productive character of its work, or still less material production in particular. Contrary to Poulantzas, they refused to place banking and commercial employees outside of the working class in the name of what they considered an erroneous division between manual and intellectual labor. Returning to the criteria that Lenin had proposed for defining social classes, Artous and Bensaïd noted that each of these criteria—whether or not one owned means of production, one's place in the organization and division of labor, the form and amount of one's income—was necessary to such a definition, but not sufficient if it was taken in isolation. It was using these same criteria that they—together with the *Ligue*'s leadership—emphasized the proletarianization of white-collar employees in sectors like banking, trade, healthcare or indeed social security. Here it was possible to see a leveling-out of educational, housing and wage conditions between blue and white-collar workers. Meanwhile recent struggles (the strikes in the banks and big shops, the unification of blue and white collar workers in major

[9] Jean-Marie Vincent, 'État et classes sociales. Sur un livre de Nicos Poulantzas', *Critiques de l'économie politique*, 19, January–March 1975, p. 28.

mobilizations, notably including at FIAT) as well as similar unionization rates also tended to bring these categories closer together.

Once again, the consequences of this disagreement over the boundaries of the social space that the proletariat occupied also corresponded to strategic and not purely sociological questions. For if, as Poulantzas understood it, the new petty bourgeoisie spanned several million white-collar workers, then the strategic lessons drawn from this could lead down 'a dangerous path' to "a new version of the old stagist strategies, based on a 'democratic alliance' between the proletariat and the new petty bourgeoisie".[10] At stake here, once again, was the centrality of the working class. And, indeed, it was considered that Poulantzas was putting this centrality in question.

The Nature, Role, and Contradictions of the State

As we know, one of Nicos Poulantzas's major theoretical contributions owes to the nuance of his propositions regarding the state. Poulantzas analyzed the state not as a homogenous or undivided bloc but as a relatively autonomous field of constant struggles, internal divisions, and complex relations. For Poulantzas, the state is not a substance, but rather the 'material condensation of a relationship of forces between classes and class fractions'. The LCR's theorists acknowledged the pertinence of this famous definition of the state, and did not challenge its validity.

Nonetheless, they did level several criticisms against Poulantzas. First of all, in their view he had not sufficiently studied the causes of such a condensation and of the relative autonomy that the state had acquired within social relations. Thus for Jean-Marie Vincent, the autonomization of the state, qua the exteriority of the political in relation to the social, is 'the ultimate consequence of the exteriority of the relations of production in relation to the agents of production': the working class is not only deprived of the means of production and of control over the labor process, but it is also dispossessed of the political itself. For this latter is monopolized by a state bureaucracy.[11]

Some then questioned how novel such a definition really was. In his exchange with Poulantzas, already mentioned above, Weber emphasized

[10] Antoine Artous and Daniel Bensaïd, 'Hégemonie, autogestion et dictature du prolétariat', *Critique communiste*, 16, May 1977, p. 45.

[11] Jean-Marie Vincent, 'État et classes sociales', op. cit., p. 8.

that already Lenin noted the contradictory and non-monolithic character of the state. That was why he advocated that revolutionaries conduct activity within the school, the army, or even within the Duma.[12] In short, whereas Poulantzas criticized the revolutionary tradition for postulating its own 'absolute externality' with regard to the state, these LCR theorists held that no such claim had never really been made. The workers' movement has relentlessly worked to penetrate state institutions, 'breaking and entering'[13] in order to make its demands and thus a class point of view prevail therein. In this period the LCR insisted on workers' organizations' rights of monitoring and control, from the classroom to the barracks; sought to organize soldiers into unions so that they could demand their rights as workers in uniform; and demanded the lifting of the professional secrecy and duty of confidentiality clauses that bound state personnel. Nonetheless, this was 'not a matter of entering into the state, but rather of playing on its contradictions in order to break apart its machinery'.[14] Thus within the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) in Portugal, the USFI upheld a political line that sought to deepen the cracks in the army, especially through the constitution of soldiers' committees linked to the workers' unions. Even when it was also necessary to defend democratic—and in this sense, unitary—demands, the LCR's essential political axis remained 'the proletariat's own class independence'.[15]

Indeed, the LCR's most fundamental critique of Poulantzas was the suspicion that through his nuance and complexity he was blurring the class character of the state. This critique was in fact not only leveled against Poulantzas, but, more frontally, against political organizations like the Italian Communist Party or Jean-Pierre Chevenèment's CERES current in France. In this view, these latter had given up on the class struggle against the state and were instead advocating a certain kind of integration into the state institutions. In this regard, the LCR was evidently very strongly opposed to the various currents

[12] 'L'État et la transition au socialisme', interview of Nicos Poulantzas by Henri Weber, *Critique communiste*, 16, May 1977, p. 17.

[13] Antoine Artous and Daniel Bensaïd, 'À l'Ouest, questions de stratégie', *Critique communiste*, 65, 1987, pp. 23–24.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Daniel Bensaïd, 'Eurocommunisme, austromarxisme et bolchevisme', *Critique communiste*, 18/19, October–November 1977, p. 165.

of Eurocommunism. And here lay the essential, long-term strategic question.

At the Heart of the Strategic Debate

As Razmig Keucheyan has rightly emphasized, with Nicos Poulantzas's complex conception of the state 'the need for the state to wither away during the transition to socialism becomes clearly less self-evident'; moreover, 'this conclusion takes Marxism down an as-yet unexplored path'; and in particular 'the revolution ceases to be synonymous with an armed confrontation with the state'.[16] The heart of the debate was over this specific point. Poulantzas sought a balance between the classic 'dual power' strategy—direct and self-organized democracy in the form of councils, combined with a parliamentary-type representative democracy—and the so-called 'Italian' strategy, which Poulantzas considered 'verging on uniquely fixed within the physical space of the state'.[17] His own attempt to find a middle course was not enough to stop the theorists of the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* leveling two major critiques against their Greek comrade. Firstly, in their eyes the class nature of representative democracy remains a sort of un-thought in Poulantzas, whom they considered attached to a 'formal' and altogether rather abstract notion of democracy, which he had little analyzed from a materialist point of view. In Daniel Bensaïd and Antoine Artous's judgement, Poulantzas had overly concealed the social conditions in which the 'general will' presiding over representative democracy takes form; in particular, there was an obvious need to return to the Marx of the *German Ideology*.[18] For in what sense did the two forms of democracy coexisting in Poulantzas's fundamental proposition really combine with one another? It was precisely this *articulation* which was judged to have been left unanalyzed, and in need of further consideration. Following the classical path marked out by Lenin, the *Ligue*'s theorists judged that in this form of combined democracy, eventually the councils' place risked being subordinated to the parliamentary form.

[16] Razmig Keucheyan, preface to the new edition of Nicos Poulantzas, *L'État, le pouvoir et le socialisme*, Paris: Les Prairies ordinaires, 2013, p. 30.

[17] Nicos Poulantzas and Henri Weber, 'L'État et la transition au socialisme', op. cit., p. 19.

[18] Antoine Artous and Daniel Bensaïd, 'À l'Ouest, questions de stratégie', op. cit.

This fear was neither abstract nor cut off from the historical situation. On the contrary, it was backed up by recent examples which remained hot topics. In Chile the food-provision committees were rapidly closed down in the name of parliamentary democracy, as were the revolutionary cells in the army and the workers' councils. In Portugal, the sovereignty of the Constituent Assembly also won out over the workers' commissions. Such defeats justified and underpinned the fear that direct democracy would be gradually worn down and ultimately abrogated in the name of parliamentary democracy. And direct democracy is not 'one democratic form among others', but 'a higher form'. Daniel Bensaïd insisted on this point: 'As Gramsci lucidly noted even during the *l'Ordine Nuovo* experience, through the committees, councils or soviets the worker overcomes the divide between man and citizen, the split between the private man and the public one, the lesion between the economic and the political'.[19]

Further building on this argument, the LCR's theorists accused Poulantzas's strategic conception of neglecting the actual moment of confrontation. 'The reality of the test of force', Henri Weber emphasized, was thus no longer taken into consideration.[20] They thus identified the risk that Poulantzas's thought would result in a classic reformism, ultimately abandoning any revolutionary perspective.

For all that, the breaches that had been opened up by Nicos Poulantzas did provide food for thought, and they were very far from simply brushed aside. We can see this when we look at two further points. First of all, it was necessary to respond to the conclusion Poulantzas had formulated, according to which the disappearance of parliamentary democracy in favor of direct soviet or council democracy would necessarily lead to authoritarianism or even totalitarianism, as the experience of Stalinism so tragically and implacably demonstrated. Antoine Artous and Daniel Bensaïd insisted that such a development is far from inevitable, and that there was no reason to mechanically associate democratic freedoms with the system's parliamentary form alone. But even as they made this point, they were also careful not to overlook the extent to which Trotsky's thinking on this question had evolved. While

[19]Daniel Bensaïd, 'Grève générale, front unique, dualité de pouvoir', *Critique communiste*, 26, January 1979, pp. 55 et sqq.

[20]Nicos Poulantzas, 'L'État et la transition au socialisme. Interview par H. Weber', op. cit., pp. 21–22.

the Left Opposition held steadfast to the idea of the single party up till the end of the 1920s, Trotsky broke with this in his 1936 work *The Revolution Betrayed*, precisely in the same move that he questioned any narrow identification of party and class. "From the viewpoint of socialist democracy, therefore, political democracy—understood not only as 'freedom of discussion' but as a struggle between parties, with all the rights that this supposes—is no optional extra".[21]

Political temporality was a further object of reflection if not sparked, then at least stimulated, by the debate with Nicos Poulantzas. Echoing this latter, the participants in this discussion again insisted that the revolution is not necessarily '*Le grand soir*' [an imagined sudden overhaul], a notion which is much too fetishized and caricatured. They responded to Poulantzas's idea of a 'long process' by acknowledging that the tearing-apart of the social consensus and the established order will take place as the result of an accumulation of experiences, and that this will indeed be a process. Nonetheless, they once again emphasized that there was no room to cast off the very idea of a rupture. In their view, this rupture continued to be embodied in strategic terms by the hypothesis of the self-organized, insurrectionary general strike: it provided a 'reliable guideline [for] a day-to-day revolutionary practice tending toward a final objective rather than being swept back and forth by the latest improvisations'.[22]

The Horizon of Discussion

Nicos Poulantzas was fearless in advancing new theoretical propositions on complex questions, from the internationalization of capital to the advent of a new petty bourgeoisie or his conception of the state. Nor was he afraid of sparking controversy. Jean-Marie Vincent himself noted as much, and paid tribute to Poulantzas in this regard; for in so doing he had walked away 'from the sheltered paths of academic caution. That makes his work all the more valuable for those who are not satisfied by disembodied abstractions'.[23] At the beginning of the 1970s, for some like Daniel Bensaïd the intensity of the discussion was itself

[21] Antoine Artous and Daniel Bensaïd, 'À l'Ouest, questions de stratégie', op. cit.

[22] Daniel Bensaïd, 'Eurocommunisme, austromarxisme et bolchevisme', op. cit., p. 194.

[23] Jean-Marie Vincent, 'État et classes sociales. Sur un livre de Nicos Poulantzas', op. cit., p. 5.

'testament to the actuality of the revolution'.[24] If this prospect became more remote over the course of the decade, this did not mean that the debate became any less rich. And it is on that note that we would like to bring this contribution to its conclusion, citing Michael Löwy's words on Poulantzas: 'he was an Althusserian whereas I was a Lukácsian, he was semi-Maoist and then a Eurocommunist, whereas I was a Trotskyist. And yet we got along marvelously well. … Over the years we organized courses on the Third International, the national question, state theory, Lenin, Gramsci… And at the outset we had decided to do the courses together. The students loved this, because they heard two different points of view on each of these themes. Our little duo lasted for some years…'[25] The disagreements did not prevent discussion and common elaboration. Nearly forty years later, these exchanges have lost none of their relevance. And that is why it is such an essential task to save Nicos Poulantzas and the critical debate he sparked from the condescension of posterity.[26]

[24] Daniel Bensaïd, 'À propos de "Fascisme et dictature". Poulantzas, la politique de l'ambiguïté', op. cit., p. 281.

[25] Michael Löwy, 'The Nicos Poulantzas I knew', op. cit.

[26] Razmig Keucheyan, preface to the new edition of Nicos Poulantzas, *L'État, le pouvoir et le socialisme*, op.cit., p. 10. Here the author adopts the formula E.P. Thompson coined in his *The Making of the English Working Class*.

PART III

Theories

CHAPTER 8

Poulantzas: From Law to the State

James Martin

Introduction

I would like to devote my comments to thinking very briefly about the place of law in the work of Poulantzas. More specifically, I want to reflect on the transition that he made in the mid-1960s from a focus on law to a focus on the state as the primary object of his political analysis. My interest in this is stimulated by the comments he made shortly before his death concerning the 'difficulties' he felt Marxism continued to manifest 'in understanding' a range of contemporary phenomena, such as new social movements. 'The same' he continued 'can be said of the study of legal systems and of the law in general';

> although we have cast off traditional dogmas as to the merely 'formal' nature of democratic freedoms, we still do not have a real theory of justice. As a result we are unable to formulate a positive conception of human rights and freedoms clearly distinct from neoliberalism. (2008: 386)

This comment is interesting because the field of law was in fact at the origin of Poulantzas's theoretical enquiries (see Martin 2009). His first

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book was drawn from his doctoral thesis on philosophy and law and his first published articles posed questions about Marxism in terms of legal concepts (see Poulantzas 1965; 2008: 25–73). But, as Poulantzas himself made clear, he very soon felt this field to be problematic and by the late 1960s he had not only shifted his interest to the question of the state but had rejected the philosophical suppositions that originally motivated him (see Poulantzas 2008: 387–88). Yet, in 1979, he felt there was still work to be done in understanding legal systems and the law in capitalism.

So I would like to ask: what was it that in his early studies on law that he sought to achieve and what happens to his understanding of the law in his mature theory of the state? In short, I want to argue that while there are many positive gains made in his shift from law to the state—which is simultaneously a transition from a humanistic, phenomenological Marxist paradigm to a structural Marxist paradigm—there are also some difficulties for thinking about the character of law and its relation to radical political analysis and strategy.

The Philosophy of Law

Similarly to many European intellectuals, Poulantzas started out his career as a legal scholar. Before sociology or political science became legitimate sites of academic enquiry, one of the few ways that political ideas and institutions could be acceptably apprehended and theorized in the academy was by way of the philosophy of law. This was, of course, the same route taken by Marx, who moved from an interrogation of legal theories to the theorization of social and political relations more generally. The study of law is perhaps unique in that affords an opportunity to theorize the organization and coordination of social relations by way of explicitly formalized concepts and codified doctrines. Sociologists of various kinds have thus often been conscious of the importance of law in manifesting, to varying degrees, the organizing principles of society (see Cotterrell 2006).

The preoccupation of Poulantzas as a legal philosopher was with the Marxist apprehension of legal values; that is, with the relations between prevailing legal norms and the economic 'base'. In his doctoral thesis, he had sought to reframe the revival of Natural Law theory with a sociological understanding of human praxis founded in labor. This work—published as *Nature des choses et droit* in 1965—drew from Sartrean

philosophy to ground legal norms in the generation of values elaborated through class relations of production (see Poulantzas 1965). In this work and in some of the articles that followed, Poulantzas developed a critique of both reductionist Marxist approaches to law—which treated law as the instrument of class or simply a rationalization of relations of exchange—and to liberal positivism—which treated law as an independent body of principles external to values generated in society. For Poulantzas, law had to be conceived as both 'fact' and 'value', as a set of norms that confront subjects externally *and* as a specific articulation of values generated in a capitalist, class-divided society. A genuinely Marxist approach, he argued, had to attend to the 'dialectic of fact and value' in producing legal norms.

This view was expressed neatly in his 1964 article, "Marxist Examination of the state and Contemporary Law and the Question of the 'Alternative'", on which I would like to dwell (see Poulantzas 2008: 25–46). It is there that Poulantzas set out a Marxist approach to the state that incorporated his insistence that law be understood in both its 'internal' and 'external' dimensions. Already he underscored the 'relative autonomy' of the state conceived as both a general instrument of class rule and, at the same time, an independent structure of legal norms that function independently of any specific class. The state, he implied, was constituted as a field of contest by means of the legal norms unifying it. We cannot decipher the state by viewing it as a purely external force directly supporting class interests. Rather, we must simultaneously recognize the way it internally organizes human values. The state is thus constituted as a contradictory unity of fact and value, of laws that express the external needs of the market and internally articulate values with which all social classes are in some way complicit. 'Every current state norm, corpus, hierarchy or institution is thus *simultaneously* in an external genetic relationship with the base *and* in an internal normative relationship with the system as a whole' (2008: 41). Legal axioms embodied in the capitalist state, he suggests, are subjectively and objectively organized. Law may confront social classes as external commands—that is as repressive norms—but they are also elaborated as positive values that crystalize shared commitments to equality and liberty. Thus any revolutionary confrontation with the externality of law will necessarily entail the internal re-elaboration of legal values.

It is interesting to note here the influence not only of Sartre but, particularly, of Lucien Goldmann, whose sociology of culture elaborated

a similar dialectic of facts and values (see Zimmerman 1978–1979). Goldmann, who was still writing at this time and with whom Poulantzas later indicated an early affinity (see 2008: 387), had developed an approach he called 'genetic structuralism' (see Goldmann 1966). Any culture, he argued, involves the dynamic interrelation of subject and object—or praxis—where the *forms* of cultural production (and not only their substantive contents) mirror the internal unity of conscious 'world-views' of social groups, extending them in new ways (see Mayrl 1978). Social relations and ideas never comprise a static structural totality but entail an ongoing *striving* for totality or internal unity by way of confrontation with a prevailing 'disequilibrium', or imbalance, in the relations between different structural ensembles. As Zimmerman puts it: for Goldmann, 'the making or genesis of structures has potential transcendent primacy over the structures out of and toward which the genetic activity takes place' (1978–1979: 153). To grasp this ongoing dialectical striving, then, we must take account of both the immanent interrelated totality that gives coherence to any activity or artifact *and* its genesis over time, or its historicity. That is, we must 'comprehend' or interpret it as part of an interconnected whole—where individual parts fulfill a function—*and* 'explain' the dynamic to reconstitute equilibrium and assert coherence in relation to wider structures. So genetic structuralism—which Goldmann counterposed to the purported 'static' structuralism of Levi-Strauss and Althusser—involved grasping, at the level of social consciousness or 'culture', the ongoing movement within a totality as it registered both unity and change.

We can see a similar genetic approach to social structure in Poulantzas's 1964 article. There he explicitly referenced the term 'genetic structuration' and even attributed the concept to Marx and Engels (2008: 38). We must regard the law, he argued, as a relatively independent totality of norms that are related to the economic base, through various mediations, as part of an ongoing historical process whereby extant values are reappropriated and eventually transformed. Capitalist law, for example, reappropriates existing values, such as juridical voluntarism (where law stems from human will, rather than Divine authority), but also introduces abstract principles of equality and liberty (see 2008: 33). Likewise Poulantzas argued that the proletariat, which experiences in a concrete way the failure of abstract legal values to procure for them genuine social empowerment, is capable of making these values material rather than purely abstract and so transform them in a

more socially just way (2008: 34–35). The internal and external modes of analysis that Poulantzas advocated are here similar to Goldmann's practices of comprehension—acknowledging the normative coherence of law as a functional whole—and of explanation—examining the genetic impact of class struggles on law as a body of regulations and principles persistently under transformation.

Poulantzas argued that this way of conceiving law opened up insights into the character of the contemporary state and its juridical forms. In monopoly capitalism the state exhibits a peculiar variation on abstract liberty and equality: it entails a growing emphasis on the values of calculability and predictability in order to plan and control market relations. Legal norms of generality, abstraction, formality and strict codifiability combine to enable the law to operate in accordance with a new kind of systematicity that strives to govern 'organized capitalism'. Poulantzas claimed that gauging the degree to which these values were instantiated—from both external and internal points of view, as legal facts but also as internally coherent norms—could 'offer real tactical possibilities for revolutionary praxis' (2008: 45).

So in this early phase of his work, law represented a medium through which the dominant class organized both its power but also strove to legitimate itself to other classes—its ideological hegemony. For that reason, a radical, socialist alternative was conceived as both the building of new institutions and sites of power but also as an opportunity for discursive legitimation—that is, the elaboration of values through the reappropriation of legal norms. The implication was that a Marxist political analysis of the state must involve exploring the degree to which a certain form of legal subjectivity imposed itself upon and unified the political order.

State Theory: Law and the Mode of Production

Just a few years later, however, Poulantzas began to substantially, if not entirely, reject this way of seeing things. In the period between 1964 and 1968, the legal scholar became a theorist of the state and social classes, drawing theoretical insights principally from Althusser's structural Marxism. By consequence, the law was no longer treated as a privileged site of political enquiry and the phenomenological framework of his earlier analyses was decisively rejected. Indeed, the articles he published in this period (on the Marxism of Anderson and Nairn, as well his lengthy,

clarificatory study of the concept of hegemony) might reasonably be regarded as a form of self-criticism (see Poulantzas 2008: 74–165).

The theoretical bases of this structural critique are well known. Poulantzas now rejected the simple schema of 'base' and 'superstructure', and criticized its Hegelian model of 'expressive totality' (where an underlying class essence struggled to elaborate its inner coherence by disseminating a worldview, or ideology, throughout the superstructures). The binary framework of facts and values—even if 'dialectically' interrelated—was rejected as a species of 'historicism', that is, a means to ground the coherence of ideas on their historical resonance with the underlying base. Indeed, the entire framework of class politics understood as the subjective striving to assert a unified 'way of life' was dismissed: Gramsci's 'hegemony' did not now entail merely a struggle for ideological domination, he argued. Indeed, the "general conception of ideology presupposes abandoning the 'subjectivist' perspective" (2008: 93). For the earlier phenomenological approach, even when theorized in a complex way, nonetheless 'grasps the state as an instrument created by the will of the dominant class' (2008: 103). The idea of class politics as, fundamentally, the struggle to impose a unified will upon society was now regarded with suspicion.

In place of the discredited 'historicist' and 'subjectivist' model, Poulantzas elaborated a new understanding of the state as the occupant of an objective 'political level' of the mode of production. I don't want to go into details here but it is notable that, like other structuralisms of the period, the Althusserian concept of the 'mode of production' constituted a type of 'decentred structure'—it assigned a set of coordinates that separate out and interrelate its various levels or instances without making any of them (or the classes that occupy them) the commanding, organizing-center of the whole. The political level was separated off from the economic and ideological levels as a distinct location with a precise function (namely, supplying cohesion), divesting the other two instances of any *automatic* role or specific mode of presence in the state (see Poulantzas 1973: 44–45). As Poulantzas argued in his critique of Anderson and Nairn, the class that dominates ideologically need not be (or be exclusively) the class that rules politically and economically. The dominant ideology need not be an expression of the dominant class (2008: 130–32).

Having separated out the levels of the mode of production in the abstract, it was up to class struggles to determine precisely how the state was to fulfill its function as the 'factor of cohesion'. The distinctive

combination of strict analytical rigor *and* attention to contingency and variation is doubtless what has made Poulantzas's mature work so insightful—but also problematic, especially if we consider the place of the law. The law must be regarded *both* from the perspective of the mode of production (as an ideological condition of existence of the economic and political instances of capitalism) *and* as a variable element in the struggles and conflicts through which class compromises are made. As a component of the state, law is not simply the expression of class praxis nor of the general logic of market relations but a complex body of doctrines and practices that enable and constrain class relations of production. But while Poulantzas gave us some idea about how we might understand legal systems in the capitalist state, he never says enough to help us see the way law is a site of political struggle.

For instance, in *Political Power and Social Classes*, he said surprisingly little about law and legal discourse. What he did say is largely in support of the idea of law as a component of structural cohesion. Law is clearly implicated in the formal separation of state from society; it constitutes one of the 'modalities' through which the political level is organized to regulate economic relations. Poulantzas referred to law as undertaking a 'technico-economic' function in line with its positioning within the political domain (1973: 128)—it coordinated class relations by standing formally outside those relations. Equally, he underscored the ideological function of law in its assertion of an independent body of principles that *obscures* the wider dominance of production relations (1973: 211). 'Bourgeois' ideology is to a great extent 'juridical' in form: it is the law of contract, formal equality and codified liberties which reinforce the 'isolation' of the individual from society by figuring the legal subject as a private individual and fosters a 'technocratic' misperception of the formal independence of political authority. But there was nothing to say of law as an element of political struggle or a site inside which class and other social movements may achieve degrees of autonomy.

In his account of the 'exceptional' forms of state discussed in *Fascism and Dictatorship*, he said a little more (see Poulantzas 1974: 320–24). The normal form of state, he argued, regularizes the political game in favor of the dominant classes but, he continued, it also enables 'the masses' to impose partial limitations on dominant classes and its forms of intervention (1974: 321). An 'exceptional' state, however, tends to rule arbitrarily and without consistent juridical regulation (1974: 322). 'The law is no longer the limit' in exceptional states; executive power often exceeds

any legal differentiation between 'private' and 'public', with unregulated 'political' interventions from various apparatuses without clear limits, often because the judiciary itself has been corrupted (1974: 323). But the regulation of private law largely remains intact in all regimes governing monopoly capitalism, being charged with the function of sanctioning property relations and organizing the circulation of capital and goods. So, aside from noting the possibility for popular struggles to influence the law, Poulantzas said very little about what effects those struggles might have.

This view was reasserted, but perhaps with greater nuance, in his final book—*State, Power, Socialism* (1978)—where he expressed his appreciation of the role of popular struggles in shaping the 'materiality' of the capitalist state and insisted less that the mode of production alone fixes the coordinates of state power. Poulantzas continued to underscore the rule of law as '*a code of organized public violence*' that underlies any apparent consensual dimension to political order. In that respect, the law was still perceived as, fundamentally, an oppressive apparatus serving dominant economic classes. Yet at the same time, he insisted, law has 'inscribed within it material concessions imposed on the dominant classes by popular struggle' (1978: 84). Conflicts over the extension of rights, legal protections or the wider allocation of judicial responsibilities can result in important gains for groups such as, among others, trade unions, women or ethnic minorities, that significantly limit their exploitation in the market.

Indeed, because the legal order is never reducible to the state apparatus, capitalist states regularly seek to violate their own legal principles. States, argued Poulantzas, aim to assert primacy over the intrinsic constraints of their legal constitution, indicating a capacity for agency that is sometimes coincident with, but sometimes 'exceptional' to, its formal legal prescriptions (1978: 84–86). Poulantzas's discussion of 'authoritarian statism' further developed this view by arguing that the classical liberal state form—consisting of a separation of judicial, legislative, and executive functions and characterized by a formal and universal legal norms—was being supplanted by a centralized structure in which states increasingly curtailed formal liberties in favor of its own administrative control. Thus the instability and crises of the bourgeois power bloc inevitably placed the state as odds with its own juridical form and democratic structures (see Poulantzas 1978: 203–47).

Thus law's separation from direct class control enabled popular and democratic struggles to shape the manner in which the state supports class power, forcing states to exceed their own legal form. Nonetheless, in this final text Poulantzas continued to align law with a capitalist division of labor that constituted juridical subjects outside of relations of production and delimited public and private realms so as to weaken political resistance to capitalism (see Poulantzas 1978: 86–90). The abstract and formal nature of legal structures, he went on, permits law to regulate the relative position of classes from the ideologically unifying perspective of 'national-popular' subjectivity. That ideology (that speaks in the name of 'the people' or the 'common good') undoubtedly exposed law to the fluctuating balance of forces in the power bloc—serving 'as a prop for strategic calculation' to permit concessions with dominated classes—but, he made clear, it never exceeds its wider structural function (see Poulantzas 1978: 91–92).

Conclusion

What we see, then, in Poulantzas's shift of focus from the law to the state is a rejection of the view that law might constitute a privileged component of political subjectivity. The law became, in his later work, a technical element of the political 'instance' of the mode of production, an ideological frame that obscures and divides more than it illuminates or unites. In his early work—which was organized around the notion of a striving for a socialist worldview that would reoccupy and transform legal axioms—the law was conceived as the expression of values that gradually permeate the social field. But in his mature work, law lost that privilege and was aligned, broadly, with securing the structural function of social cohesion.

What was gained here was, without a doubt, a nuanced conception of the state as a strategic field open to a variety of complex and shifting permutations, where legal norms serve as both the condition for market relations but also the site of contest in and around the hegemonic power bloc. But what was lost was a sense of law as a key terrain of political and ideological struggle. It is not that the mature Poulantzas *could not* conceive this—he increasingly suggested that the state was constituted as a 'condensation' of numerous struggles that placed the dominated classes *inside* its apparatuses. Indeed, his discussion of the authoritarian tendencies of contemporary capitalist states undergoing crises was crucially

important for other analyses attuned to right-wing discourses of 'law and order' (see Hall et al. 1978). But Poulantzas tended to treat law as, in essence, a subordinate body of ideas and values whose very form supported capitalist economic relations of production through the implicit threat of violence, supplied legitimacy to the power bloc, or obscured the state's capitalist nature with a veil of impartiality (see Jessop 1990: 69–72).

The shift in Poulantzas's work from the law to the state might therefore be seen as both an advance and a regression. I am certainly not suggesting that we should return to the pre-structuralist Poulantzas. But it is possible that a view of law as a medium of political struggle and as a domain of political subjectivity would have helped answer the difficulties concerning legal systems and justice that Poulantzas himself noted before his death. Indeed, the argument that law constitutes a significant terrain of political struggle for the left is precisely what was advanced in the 1980s and 90s. Eventually, in British debates at least (where Poulantzas's work had considerable impact), the left abandoned its sweeping and often dismissive critique of legal subjectivity, rights, and procedural justice (see Hirst 1979; Hunt 1993). Far from being tools of the dominant classes, law was increasingly viewed as a terrain in which struggles for social emancipation of various kinds could make considerable progress. Today, 'Human Rights'—not socialism—is one the left's primary signifiers. Poulantzas himself made great strides in enabling us to understand law as a terrain upon which progressive struggles might unfold, that law was not uniformly a class instrument, and that certain inroads can be made by conceiving legal systems as regimes open to progressive alteration. But I don't think the mature Poulantzas fulfilled his promise in this regard and in certain respects, as I have tried to suggest, it is perhaps in his earlier work that we find him more theoretically attentive to this issue.

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CHAPTER 9

Geographies of the State: Nicos Poulantzas and Contemporary Approaches to State/Space

Costis Hadjimichalis

In the dominant Marxist and left discourse, space rarely attracts attention. It is often classified as a secondary contradiction and its conceptualization is restricted to material, absolute space, a simple container of productive forces, where geometrical distances and natural characteristics are post facto associated with social relations. A radical left approach to space begins with the recognition that space is not something outside social relations, something waiting to be discovered 'out there', but rather produced and reproduced through social practice, it is both contingent on and formative of social relations, and because of this it is highly political. This is difficult to accept for some Marxists and left-wing politicians who are used to a-spatial arguments of political economy and for whom all accumulation processes take place at the head of

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a pin. As David Harvey once told us in an interview in Athens: "…it was easier to introduce Marxism in geography, than to convince Marxists to think geographically, to make them think that space exists and it is politically highly relevant".[1]

Nicos Poulantzas deals theoretically with space and time in his book *State, Power, Socialism* (1980), while in his edited volume *La crise de l' Etat* (1976), four chapters have an explicit geographical/spatial focus. I do not intend to suggest that Poulantzas *also* spoke about space in order to legitimize my own intention and ideas. There is, however, an interesting coincidence: in the 1970s in Paris a very productive debate took place on the spatiality of capitalism in its relation to the state, in which Poulantzas participated. To begin we have H. Lefebvre who first introduced space in Marxist theory making a real epistemological break and then, together with Poulantzas, several others including M. Castells, R. Dulong, E. Préteceille, A. Lipietz, C. Palloix, J. Lojkine, Ch. Topaloff, M. Aglietta, and of course M. Foucault, introduced space in their research agenda. From different perspectives, they founded a radical left spatial problematic on social phenomena. These developments took place in a highly productive intellectual environment which was always open to a search for theoretical and practical relations between space and society; and it developed in France, with a strong geographical and historical tradition (epitomized, among others, in the Annals School), with a strong state interventionist tradition in planning at multiple scales and, finally, with a live memory of May 1968. So, without exaggeration, everything started at that time in Paris.

I don't argue that Poulantzas was a spatial theorist, or that he was in agreement with the intellectuals mentioned above. I argue, however, that, first, he initiated a state problematic in which the multiple geographies which constitute its existence are always materially and symbolically present; and, second and perhaps more important, his work was and remains highly influential to those political and social geographers and planners who studied everyday life in cities and regions of capitalist states in the Global North. Particularly, in his book *State, Power, Socialism*, he writes:

> …For its part, Marxist research has up to now also considered that transformations of space and time essentially concern ways of thinking:

[1] D. Harvey interview with Costis Hadjimichalis and Dina Vaiou for *GEOGRAPHIES*, no. 10/2005, pp. 14–20.

> it assigns a marginal role to such changes on the grounds that they belong to the ideological- cultural domain- to the manner in which societies or classes *represent* space and time. In reality, however, transformations of the spatio-temporal matrices refer to the materiality of the social division of labour, of the structure of the State, and the practices and techniques of capitalist economic, political and ideological power; they are the *real substratum* of mythical, religious, philosophical or "experiental" representations of space-time. (p. 98, emphasis in the original)

And he continues (in pp. 64–65) to include the segmentation of space and not only time in the foundations of Taylorism, so that every person has a place in a socio-spatial continuity which connects the factory with the town, neighborhood, and individual house. The two basic dimensions of capitalist development according to Poulantzas are *territory* (territoire) and *tradition* (tradition), geography and history, the spatial and temporal matrices which have a *logical priority* (what Marx called in German Voraussetzung) in understanding the materiality of social reality. In his words:

> …the direct producers are freed from the soil only to become trapped in a grid –one that includes not only the modern factory, but also the modern family, school, army, the prison system, the city and national territory. (1980, p. 105)

This represents an uneven capitalist development which never takes a final form: it expands and reproduces itself with crises and conflicts so that accumulation and profits are secured. The continuous reproduction of uneven spatial development in capitalism in the context of the nation-state is realized with the atomization of society and the splintering of individuals from society. In this process a controlled, fragmented, and porous space is produced, in which, according to him:

> …Social atomization and splintering (…) a cross-ruled, segmented and cellular space in which each fragment (individual) has its place (…) Separation and division in order to unify; parceling out in order to encompass; segmentation in order to totalize; closure in order to homogenize; and individualization in order to obliterate differences and otherness. The roots of the totalitarianism are inscribed in the spatial matrix concretized by the modern nation-state- a matrix that is already present in its relations of production and the capitalist division of labour. (1980, p. 107)

Thus, without abandoning the Marxist tradition, Poulantzas, like Lefebvre before him, criticizes some dogmatic Marxist approaches of his times which ignored the role of space-time in the development and survival of capitalism. However, his innovation was the realization of the key role of space-time in the formation and function of the nation-state. He underlines the particular monopoly power of the state in constituting social space and social time: through techniques and networks the state monopolizes the processes which produce citizens' space-time in everyday life. The genealogy of the production of space preceded the history of its appropriation.

These Poulantzian views influenced a substantial number of scholars focusing on the theoretical and empirical analysis of space/state and they can be summarized in the following four points:

1. The Role of the State in the Production of Space

As it is well known, Poulantzas conceives the capitalist state as the condensation of the balance of class forces and class fractions in a social formation. Following to a certain degree the Gramscian tradition, he identifies the necessity of a single state/space, a space of sovereignty for the introduction and application of state policies, a political space for the development of class struggle and an ideological space for the development of the ideological state apparatuses. In this respect I could argue that space and spatiality has a triple appearance in Poulantzas's writings: (a) as *material space*, the territory, the borders, (b) as *relational space*, the space of political relations, the space of class struggle, the space of social achievements and rights, and (c) as *representational space*, the ideological space and that of national imagination where common cultures, languages, and symbols are reproduced. All three forms of space acquire, according to Poulantzas, an *institutional materiality* through the state, a very useful and remarkably geographical concept. The state 'produces' materially, symbolically, and institutionally the political and imaginative space for the class struggle while at the same time it is constituted by class struggle. This triple dialectical approach is in line with earlier ones such as those by H. Lefebvre (on spatial practices/material space, space of representations, representational space) and by F. Braudel (on social spaces produced by events/raptures, by conjunctures and by structures of the 'longue dureé'). These Poulantzian views had an influence and have been further developed by economists such as A. Lipietz and M. Aglietta; sociologists such as B. Jessop, M. Castells, and M. Wissen;

planners such as D. Läpple; and geographers such as E. Soja, N. Brenner, J. Painter, and many others. Soja (1989) argues that Poulantzas was seeking to redirect Marxist analysis toward a materialist interpretation of space and time, an explicitly historical geography of capitalism. Building in part upon the contributions of H. Lefebvre, he defined the spatial and temporal matrices of capitalism, its material groundedness, as simultaneously presuppositions and embodiments of the relations of production. Läpple (1991) in his paper on space argues that Poulantzas uses the concept of matrix in a metaphorical way as uterus and as causal power. Spatiality and temporality are presented together as the concretization of social relations and conflicts. And as Wissen (2006) argues, Poulantzas's use of the spatial-temporal matrix rejects the concept of space as container of productive relations, outside social relations occurring 'inside' space.

2. The State and Uneven Capitalist Development

The nation-state constitutes itself on the basis of integration but also of disintegration/marginalization of social groups, minorities, regions, languages religions, issues which are at stake in conflicts and struggles beyond the classical one between capital and labor. The problem of uneven capitalist development does not arise only among sectors, firms, and social classes but also across space and time. Those social scientists following Poulantzas begin their analysis of uneven development from the relations between spatial and temporal matrices and the capitalist relations of production as well as the social and spatial division of labor. The segmented, fragmented, and irreversible space/time is simultaneously delimited but without an end. It is always contingent, an outcome of the contradiction of *homogenization/differentiation* which is the key in understanding the role of state's intervention in uneven development. These interventions take three distinctive forms (see also Brenner 2004; Painter 2006; Hadjimichalis 1987).

(a) *Geographies of the State's spatial structure*. These concern the relational space of politics which acquires an institutional materiality through the state's sovereignty, such as the everyday modus operandi of institutions with centralization/decentralization, the federal organization, the geographical organization of welfare services, etc. This territorial organization of the State permits the relative autonomy of the political and economic spheres.

(b) *Geographies of the State's spatial strategies.* These concern the economic and political space at various scales including permanent interventions such as sectoral incentive policies, regional and urban planning, interventions in local/regional labor markets, environmental protection rules but also defense policies, border control.
(c) *Geographies of particular State projects.* These concern the physical/absolute space at various scales and include ad hoc interventions such as large-scale infrastructural projects, defining administrative boundaries, local/regional electoral representation, application of administrative laws.

From a dogmatic Marxist perspective, the state is simply an instrument of the ruling class and uneven development is materialized through decisions by and in favor of the ruling class. In this dogmatic view, there is no contradiction of *homogenization/differentiation* but only a continuous increase of spatial and economic inequalities. On the contrary, for Poulantzas through the above forms of intervention the state segments, differentiates, and simultaneously homogenizes space while often these forms of intervention and as he said: "(…) in order to avoid crises, become factors of a crisis that, for this very reason, goes beyond a straightforward economic crisis" (1980, p. 212). Those who follow Poulantzas's analyses do not locate uneven capitalist development to the economic sphere only as a result of accumulation processes but *also* in the state's contradictory interventions which in turn themselves result from the condensation of class forces and class fractions outside and inside the state's apparatuses. And for this reason they distinguish margins of intervention trying to transform the State's contradictions into popular demands.

3. The Organization of Social Space and the Everyday: Cities, Urban Planning, and Urban Social Movements

We have seen before that the state is not a homogenous instrument but an assembly of everyday practices established through conflicts and contradictions among social actors, different state agencies, institutions, and particular places/regions. Urban planning and urban administration are typical forms of the state's 'institutional materiality' and part of the state's spatial strategies. They depend on the level of centralization/decentralization in each social formation and on whether urban planning

is a function of the central or the local state. In particular, urban planning undertakes the materialization of decisions concerning everyday life in space, which are often responsible for generating new contradictions and conflicts and thus providing a privileged area for critique of state policies on account of the inequalities and injustices they reproduce.

Social housing, public education, public transport and public health, security, and nutrition, the environment, etc., are not 'secondary contradictions' but constitutive elements of the uneven operation of state apparatuses and they highlight the inability of the state to deliver its major function: the social, spatial, and environmental justice promised to its citizens. This inability was and remains a principal reason for the rise of many urban social movements demanding more socio-spatial justice or defending their own achievements.

In the 1970s these observations guided M. Castells, E. Préteceille, J. Lojkine, Ch. Topaloff, among others, to speak on *collective consumption* in order to study urban social movements of their time, influencing a whole generation of urban activists and scholars up till the present. In their action and research there was always particular attention to the so-called role of the state, thanks mainly to Poulantzas (see also Poulantzas 1976). The urban and everyday have been introduced in the lexicon and practices of the radical left, often in contrast with official party lines such as PCF's state dogma of monopoly capitalism in the 1970s, which ignored these contradictions.

4. Toward a Critique of the Post-modern Theory of the "Territorial Trap"

The dominant evolutionary theories of globalization argue that the old autonomous Fordist state does not exist anymore. It has lost its power and cannot control global flows (such as of capital, merchandise, information, people), it has lost the territorial control of its borders and, finally, the distinction between 'internal' and 'external' state policies, they argue, does not exist. Those who argue the opposite fall, supposedly, into a territorial trap.

I do not argue that contemporary states remain unchanged or that many of the above observations on globalization do not hold. But together with other radical geographers and sociologists such as D. Harvey, R. Hudson, N. Brenner, B. Jessop, M. Jones, and G. McLeod, I argue that evolutionary theories of globalization are mistaken vis-à-vis the territorial trap, or at best one-sided.

Radical geographers and sociologists begin with Poulantzas's observation in *State, Power, Socialism* that national borders and national territory (particularly in Europe) did not exist prior to the unification of the national market: there is nothing primary 'authentically inside' which has to be unified. Borders are established and negated simultaneously with industrialization, which, as trade and small manufacturing before it, was always internationalized. 'National' markets in Europe were internationalized at the same time of their creation. National borders, writes Poulantzas, are established when capital and trade are in a position to get rid of them.

Thus, there was never a linear transition from the national to the international market and the current global flow of capital, trade, and people did not happen for the first time during globalization. These invocations constitute a positivist and empiricist conceptualization of the elements which constitute globalized relations and the role of contemporary nation-state. As J. Painter and N. Brenner argue, they also ignore another important contribution by the Poulantzian tradition via the work of A. Lipietz and Cr. Palloix, the contradiction of *territorialisation-de-territorialisation*: the association of certain social relations with territory (materially and symbolically), while others are de-territorialized or change scales.

National territoriality is a dynamic and not a static relation and it is the subject of multiscalar changes and imaginations. National territoriality is not the foundation of state sovereignty but an unstable relational outcome correlated by the balance of social forces in the interior of the state and the encroachment of others who may try to 'penetrate' national borders. Thus borders are not—and never were—static or only 'national'/territorial but a dynamic relation, changing continuously in content and scale.

Today, the generalized openness of borders, claimed by those advancing the theory of territorial trap, holds only selectively for few, while for many others it brings an exclusion and closeness which did not exist in the past. On the one hand, the everyday crossing of borders by migrants 'sans papiers' stigmatized them with an invisible border in their body. On the other, porous borders are reproduced everyday by financial capital, by military airplanes, by maps, and by deaths in minefields. And finally, global borders between 'us' and 'Others', a constant imagination of Orientalism, are accompanied—here, next to us but in another

scale—by gated communities in evil paradises or by forgotten areas of unemployment and racism.

And to conclude:

Many of the arguments by Poulantzas, as Carnoy and Castells (2001) argue, do not correspond with the new historical realities for the state in the globalization era, but this does not constitute an accusation against his theories. Only metaphysics claims to hold the eternal truth. The value of social theories should be judged by their ability to generate questions useful for the present conjuncture. For this reason I cannot follow some of the debates in the 2009 Athens conference on his work (30 years after his suicide) and in the book *Poulantzas Today* (2012), on whether Poulantzas's thoughts could explain the state's evolution vis-à-vis the EU, whether the concept of 'authoritarian statism' could be applied today or whether he was in favor of European political integration and other similar arguments. I restrict myself to saying that, if we are at the beginning of the twenty-first century in a position to study space/state and the organization of social and political space at various scales by addressing questions posed by Poulantzas's views, this is already an acceptance and a tribute to his work and memory.

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CHAPTER 10

A European Capitalism? Revisiting the Mandel–Poulantzas Debate

Tristan Auvray and Cédric Durand

Six years after the outbreak of the Eurozone crisis, the future of the project for a European state is still hanging in the balance. In this context, one of the important challenges for critical thought is to explain both the advances in the integration process and the enduring fragility of the European proto-state. One dimension of this problem concerns the links between capital accumulation and the territorial delimitation of the functions of state.

Regional integration can be set in relation with the dynamic of capitalism, as a means of encouraging economic growth in order to ensure rising profits and undergird the system's legitimacy by distributing part of the resulting gains to subaltern groups. If this is indeed the case, then integration corresponds to a logic of extending the state's functions geographically in response to the demands of capital accumulation, the realization of surplus-value and the associated problems of legitimation. This is what Klaus Schwarb, executive chairman of the World Economic

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Forum which meets each year in Davos, calls the 'license to operate'.[1] This is a means of resolving the tendencies toward real or potential crisis. It seeks to align political structures to the spatial organization of capital.[2]

But the integration process may also have rather different motives. When existing socio-political capacities are not up to the task of intervening at the new regional scale, the institutional changes through which political integration then proceeds will moreover provide an opportunity to crystallize and develop new relations of force between social classes and class fractions. If this is indeed the case, the new proto-state structures can embed a new hegemony without this necessarily being a matter of aligning these structures with the existing structures of capital.[3]

How far can we say that the European space is the privileged space for the articulation of capitalist relations? That is the question which we will seek to address in this text, taking as our starting point the debate that took place at the turn of the 1970s between the Marxist economist and Trotskyist leader Ernest Mandel and the Eurocommunist philosopher and political scientist Nicos Poulantzas.[4] Indeed, the theme that they debated is still a hot topic even today. Ernest Mandel formulated the terms of this problem in the following way: to what extent does there exist such a configuration of capitalist production relations that—to use Mandel's terms—"a 'European' capital demands a 'European' bourgeois state?" And, following on from this, has the European space now become the relevant strategic terrain for social and political struggles?

We will first of all outline the Mandel-Poulantzas polemic, and will then go on to examine the theoretical foundations of their disagreement. After that, we will indicate the manner in which we can appreciate the contemporary organization of capital's powers at the European level, from each of their respective points of view.

[1] Klaus Schwab, 'The Profitability of Trust', *Project Syndicate*, 9 December 2014, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/profit-maximization-versus-social-responsibility-by-klaus-schwab-2014-12.

[2] Peter Cocks, 'Towards a Marxist Theory of European Integration', *International Organization*, 34, 1980, p. 15.

[3] See Cédric Durand and Razmig Keucheyan, 'Financial Hegemony and the Unachievement of European statehood', *Competition and Change*, 19, 2, 2015.

[4] Among the many important contemporary studies on the European Union, Magnus Ryner has provided an introduction to the debate; 'Financial Crisis, Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in the Production of Knowledge about the EU', *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, 40, June 2012, pp. 647–73.

The Poulantzas–Mandel Dispute

Ernest Mandel and Nicos Poulantzas's reflection on the European project, as discussed in this piece, was elaborated in three different texts. These were the article by Mandel that appeared in *Socialist Register* journal in 1967, his 1969 book *La réponse socialiste au défi américain*, and an article by Nicos Poulantzas published in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1973.[5] All three of them took as their starting point an analysis of capitalism at the international scale. According to Mandel's approach, US domination compelled the national capitalist classes of the European states to reorganize themselves, or else risk being eliminated. Yet since the space of the nation-state was too restricted for them to be able to enjoy the advantages that can come from economies of scale, there was pressure to amalgamate the property of the big capitalist firms at the European scale. This amalgamation then drove a supranationalization process in some of the functions of state.

> the growth of capital interpenetration inside the Common Market, the appearance of large amalgamated banking and industrial units which are not mainly the property of any national capitalist class, represent the material infra-structure for the emergence of supra-national state-power organs in the Common Market.[6]

According to Mandel, the pressure of rivalry with the USA would spur the formation of a European capital that would in turn form the social base of a European sociopolitical bloc. Poulantzas vehemently rejects this interpretation, accusing Mandel of "go[ing] along with all the current bourgeois propaganda about the 'united Europe'".[7] The disagreement between the two was articulated around the closely interwoven questions of imperialism and the state.

[5] Ernest Mandel, 'International Capitalism and "Supra-Nationality"', *Socialist Register*, 4, 1967, pp. 27–41, text at the Marxists Internet Archive; Ernest Mandel, *Europe Vs. America*, London: Monthly Review Press, 2009; Nicos Poulantzas, 'L'internationalisation des rapports capitalistes et l'État-Nation', *Les Temps Modernes*, 319, February 1973, pp. 1456–1500, English version 'Internationalisation of Capitalist Relations and the Nation-State', *Economy and Society*, 3, 2, 1974, pp. 145–79.

[6] 'International Capitalism and "Supra-Nationality"', op. cit.

[7] 'Internationalisation of capitalist relations and the Nation-State', op. cit., p. 169.

The Nature of Imperialism

For Poulantzas, the simple distinction between inter-imperialist competition and the polarization between center and periphery was no longer suitable for characterizing the current period. He suggested that:

> the establishment of a new line of demarcation in the metropoles' camp between the U.S.A. on the one hand and the other metropoles of imperialism, in particular Europe, on the other. The structure of domination and dependence of the imperialist chain organises the relations of even the formations of the centre

This new demarcation line implied no mechanical contradiction between the national bourgeoisie and US capital, or—even less so—any automatic rivalry between Europe and the USA. Dependency on the USA disarticulated autochthonous capitals; the labor processes that these capitals organized integrated elements of US capital at the level of the means of production (machinery, technology, inputs), of the forms of the organization of labor, as well as by means of the relations of competition and subcontracting. This itself meant that the political and ideological conditions of US imperialism were consubstantial with the European societies. This implied that "The currently dominant form of interimperialist contradiction is not that between 'international capital' and 'national capital', nor that between the imperialist bourgeoisies understood as juxtaposed entities".[8]

Given the imbrication of European capital and the disarticulation of domestic capital, there could be no frontal and systematic opposition between US capital and the European capitals that were supposedly amalgamating in order to resist its might.

The second point of disagreement concerned the fact that for Poulanzas there was no necessary correspondence between the forms of capital's organization and the forms of the state.

> the State is not a mere tool or instrument of the dominant classes, to be manipulated at will, with the entire stage of the internationalisation of capital automatically provoking a "supranationalisation" of States. The State, the apparatus of cohesion, the apparatus of the unity of a formation and of

[8] Ibid., p. 151.

> reproduction of its social relations, concentrates and epitomises the class contradictions of the social formation as a whole, by sanctioning and legitimising the interests of the dominant classes and fractions in the face of the other classes of the formation, at the same time as assuming world class contradictions. It follows that the problem we are concerned with does not, moreover, reduce to a simple contradiction of mechanistic composition between the base (internationalisation of production) and a superstructural envelope no longer "corresponding" to it.[9]

In short, the economic need to build a new level of accumulation did not automatically imply the construction of a political apparatus at this same scale.

Poulantzas thus shed light on the deeper economic and political processes associated with the internationalization of capital. But in his writings he did not directly provide an explanation of European integration. However, as we shall go on to see, the theoretical tools that he developed are indeed extremely valuable for giving account of what has emerged at this level since his demise. Ernest Mandel's analysis may seem rather more crude, but it did allow him to pose a hypothesis powerful in its simplicity: namely, the adaptation of the political to the European-level amalgamation of national capitals, within the framework of the inter-imperialist rivalry with the USA.

Despite the disagreements between the two authors, they did both underline the difficulties that internationalization poses for revolutionary strategies. Mandel did not fetishize the European level. He anticipated the fact that in the short to medium term there would be no complete parallelism in the economic, social, and political development of the various different European countries. The historical differences between their social structures and workers' movements translated into class relations of force that varied from country to country, thus entailing differentiated possibilities of the working class conquering power. Mandel here emphasized that internationalism does not consist of waiting until the conditions are ripe for a simultaneous seizure of power across all the different countries: "socialists should continue to work for the overthrow of capitalism within the boundaries of 'their' own country inside the Common Market, as long as this is *objectively possible*". However, when the process reaches the point "where the workers of the six countries are

[9] Ibid., p. 171.

faced actually with a new 'European' employers' class, the whole struggle for socialism will have to be lifted to the new international dimension'. And it was worth warning against any underestimation of 'the tremendous difficulties on the road to practical, international coordination in a struggle for political power'.[10]

Over recent decades the internationalization of production processes has deepened considerably. Yet even in the 1970s, Poulantzas could already see the difficulties that would result from this: 'whilst the struggles of the popular masses are developing more than ever on a world foundation determining concrete conjunctures, and whilst the establishment of world relations of production and the socialisation of labour objectively reinforce the international solidarity of workers, it is the national form that prevails in their essentially international struggle'.[11] Several factors contributed to this paradox, from the concrete specificities of each social formation to the particularities of working classes' forms of organization; the nationalism of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry, following from their unique relationship with the state; the role of the social categories of the state apparatuses for whom the nation-state was the direct source of their positions… Poulantzas then drew the following political conclusion: "in this uninterrupted revolutionary process there cannot be an individual stage of 'national liberation' or of 'new democracy' based on forms of alliance with a 'national bourgeoisie' against 'foreign' imperialism and its 'agents'". Indeed, national capital was so dependent on US capital that 'the rupture of the imperialist chain in one of its links becomes terribly difficult', and this break could come about 'only by making a direct attack on, among other things, the labor process itself and on the forms of social division of labor in the process of production'.[12]

Four decades later, history is no longer bearing down on the revolutionaries of the European Aventine. Yet nor has the dispute between the two authors gone out of date. How is the international system organized today, and what place do the bourgeoisies of Europe play within it? Do the European institutions constitute the nucleus of a European state in-becoming? Or is all this instead a political miscarriage, with the

[10] 'International Capitalism and "Supra-Nationality"', op. cit.

[11] 'Internationalisation of capitalist relations and the Nation-State', op. cit., p. 171.

[12] Ibid., pp. 177–78.

current institutional matrix proving unable to bring the 'baby' to term? If this is indeed the case, then the repeated crises surely signal the impossibility of completing the European state.

The social and political forces that set themselves the goal of human liberation must once again revive the spirit of strategic urgency which animated these two authors. While the EU has become the principal site for driving forth neoliberal policies, these forces find it difficult to reflect on this political construct and to define an orientation toward it. One point is particularly important, in this regard: namely, that the European space has become a sort of self-evident political fact. Europe is reified in the name of the supposed economic interdependencies between the economies. In short, it is assumed that European capitalism is already here.

The debate between Mandel and Poulantzas allows us to question whether this is indeed self-evident. Do workers find themselves faced with a "new 'European' class of employers", such as Mandel expected would emerge? Or have we rather more seen a deepening of the European capitalist classes' imbrication with US capital, such as Poulantzas noted? In other words, has there been an amalgamation of national capitalist classes, allowing them to take on a more coherent form European scale? Or have we instead rather more seen their disarticulation under the hegemony of US capital, a process itself aided by the 1980s revitalization of European integration?

If this appears to be a simple question, it also raises very considerable theoretical and empirical difficulties. Indeed, we first of all need to define exactly what we mean by a capitalist class, and then get an empirical appreciation of how its organization has developed.

How Can We Understand the Spatial Cohesion of Capitalist Classes?

The problem of defining capitalist production relations stands at the very foundation of Mandel and Poulantzas's disagreement on the European question. Their differences on this point lead them to distinct analyses of the spatial economic-political alignment of capitalist classes.

For Mandel, what defines belonging to a capitalist class is the fact that an individual is involved in capital accumulation, i.e. the owner of a capital that is destined to grow. The top functionaries and

managers are also integrated into the bourgeoisie because the high incomes they receive allow them to buy equity and thus to become capitalists.[13] The question of the geographical organization of a capitalist class is posed in terms of the structuring of capital's juridical property. Looking at the developed countries, Mandel distinguishes between three configurations in which those capitals which have an international dimension are centralized and concentrated: (1) cases of pure and simple alienation of a nation's industry, to the profit of the capital of a foreign power, hence leading to this country's transformation into a semi-colony; (2) cases where this process remains limited, such that the involvement of foreign capital does not bring a qualitative change of economic-political relations; and (3) cases of international amalgamation of capital, which he describes in the following terms:

> if, instead of dominant penetration by a single nation in other industrial nations, there is increasing foundation of absorption of companies by capital from various nations, without any one of them holding a position of hegemony, we are no longer confronted with one imperialist power dominating one or many national economies, but with a new phenomenon: the international interpenetration of capital.[14]

And from this Mandel draws conclusions regarding the European project that we have already mentioned above:

> once the interpenetration of capital within the EEC has gone so far that at least an important section of the means of production and distribution ceases to be the private property of this or that national bourgeoisie, to become the property of capitalists of different nationality, overwhelming pressure will build up in favour of a different kind of state - a state capable of defending this new kind of private property effectively… European capital demands a European bourgeois state as an adequate protector and guarantor of profit.[15]

[13] For example, Ernest Mandel, *Critique de l'eurocommunisme*, Paris: Maspero, 1978, and *Traité d'économie marxiste*, Vol. 3, Paris: 10/18, 1962, pp. 260–63.

[14] *Europe Vs. America*, op. cit., p. 23.

[15] Ibid., p. 62.

Mandel's position is therefore extremely clear. He identifies the spatial organization of capital with the geography of property. He principally sees the state as a means of promoting its own domestic capital, guaranteeing its profits and defending its interests against opposing imperialism. If according to Catholic dogma the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, according to Mandel the European project proceeds from the interpenetration of European capital's property.

Nicos Poulantzas was not an economist, but having come into the orbit of Althusserian circles he was familiar with Charles Bettelheim's arguments. This was particularly striking in his 1976 work *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, where he adopted and extended the conceptual analysis developed by Étienne Balibar in his 'On The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism'[16] and by Charles Bettelheim in his *Economic Calculation and Forms of Property*.[17] In particular, he adopted the distinction that these authors each made between relations of *property* and relations of *possession* in capitalist production relations.

Property as an economic relation means 'the power to appropriate the objects on which it acts for uses that are given, particularly the means of production, and the power to dispose of the products obtained with the help of these means of production'.[18] It is thus control over both products and profits. Economic property, de facto property, does not necessarily coincide with the contours of juridical property. As we shall see, this opens up a major possibility of dissociating the two. The second relation is the relation of possession. It concerns the labor process itself, and corresponds to 'the ability to put the means of production into operation', i.e. to set in motion the combination of the workers' activity, the means of their labor and the object of their labor.

The forms that these two relations each take within the capitalist mode of production lead to a dual separation. The capitalist property relation has, as its consequence, the separation between the worker and

[16] Étienne Balibar, 'On the Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism', in Louis Althusser (ed.), *Reading Capital*, London: NLB, 1970, first French edition 1965.

[17] Charles Bettelheim, *Economic Calculation and Forms of Property*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975.

[18] Ibid., p. 56.

the product of her work: and this is here that the appropriation and the utilization of profit take place. The relation of possession implies a second separation, this time between the worker and the means of production. This separation manifests itself over the course of the labor process, by means of the technological choices and modalities of work organization that capital imposes on the worker; indeed, it is here that the extraction of the profit takes place.

Starting out from this theoretical bedrock, in *Classes and Contemporary Capitalism* Poulantzas develops extremely forceful variations on it. He advances the idea that within the capitalist class itself these categories of economic property, juridical property and possession tend to drift apart, fragment and recompose, in turn feeding major contradictions between the different class fractions. Table 10.1 uses three ideal-types to illustrate these relations through which juridical property, economic property, and possession break apart and fit together again.

The first configuration, that of the unitary firm, corresponds to the competitive capitalism of the nineteenth century and is characterized by the coincidence between juridical property, economic property and the relation of possession directed by the individual capitalist. The second possibility corresponds to one of the dominant figures in the twentieth century, namely the multi-divisional group. The holding company at the head of the group unites the juridical property and dominates economic property: it exercises control over its subsidiaries' capital and makes the essential decisions in terms of allocating resources within the group. The subsidiaries, conversely, have a full grip over the labor process, and thus possession—all the more so when the group's activities are diversified. Around the edges the subsidiaries can hold onto parcels of economic property, thus allowing them to keep an eye over the allocation of resources within the group. But their management by financial indicators very rapidly subjects them to the holding company's economic property. Since the labor processes within the group are distinct, circulation between its subsidiaries takes on a market character.

The third ideal-type is the network of subcontracting. The sub-contractor company formally holds juridical property, but its power of possession is greatly reduced on account of the influence that the ordering customer has on the labor process. It is dissociated from economic

Table 10.1 Distribution of the different degrees of property and the character of product circulation within the unitary capitalist firm, the multi-divisional group, and the sub-contracting network

Forms relations	*Unitary firm*	*Multi-divisional group*		*Subcontracting network*	
		Holding company	*Division*	*Order-giver*	*Subcontractor*
Juridical property	XXX	XXX		XXX	XXX
Economic property	XXX	XX	X	XX	X
Possession	XXX		XXX	XX	X
Circulation	Non-market	Market		Non-market	

property, which essentially belongs to the order-giving firm. For example, this is what Michel Aglietta describes when he says that subordinate firms' 'dependence is set by technico-economic norms over which they have no influence. Their clients are imposed on them… The quantities produced and the prices at which they are marketed are similarly imposed on them'.[19]

The Organization of Capital in Europe in the Age of Globalization and Financialization

The contemporary organization of capital in Europe corresponds to a new arrangement of the relations of property and possession. We should now examine this new arrangement on the basis of the theoretical considerations that we have already advanced, first in general terms and then in a schematic fashion at the empirical level.

The financialization of property corresponds to the dissemination of shareholding, a growth in the proportion of profits that is distributed to shareholders, and a growth in finance's power thanks to the strengthening of market liquidity.[20] On the other hand, the fresh phase of company

[19] Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*, London: Verso, 2000, p. 220.

[20] André Orléan, *Le pouvoir de la finance*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1999.

restructuring that began in the 1980s was marked by industrial deconcentration and an increased fragmentation of production processes between different firms, notably at the international level through the development of global commodity chains.[21]

The link between these two phenomena stems from the fact that the chains of subcontracting are by nature hierarchically-organized. For example, one study on the French case establishes the link between the fact that the order-giver plans and controls the sub-contractors' activities, and the fall in wage and skill levels the further along the chain from the principal order-giver we proceed.[22] We see this phenomenon in global commodity chains. Several works show that the brazen exploitation of labor in the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries is the other face of the yields achieved by the global buyers' and global manufacturers' shareholders.[23]

Within the terms of Poulantzas's (and Bettleheim's) theory, these two phenomena—the financialization of ownership, and the fragmentation of production processes—reflect fresh dissociations between juridical property, economic property, and possession, as illustrated in Fig. 10.1.

On the one hand, financialization corresponds to capital ownership becoming more distant from labor processes themselves. The deepening of market liquidity allows an expression of economic property that is uncoupled from the constraints linked to the relation of possession. It manifests itself in the big firms in the tendency toward a uniformization of short-term capital yield demands. The financial markets thus become the principal site of economic property, insofar as they operate a centralization of both profits and profit demands. The powers associated with economic property are, then, distributed at the level of big firms, and in a residual manner at the level of the sub-contractor firms.

[21]For an introduction to the literature in this field, see Jennifer J. Bair, *Frontiers of Commodity Chain Research*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

[22]Corrine Perraudin, Héloïse Petit, Nadine Thèvenot and Julie Valentin, 'Inter-firm dependency and employment inequalities: Theoretical hypotheses and empirical tests on French subcontracting relationships', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 46, 2, 2014, pp. 199–220.

[23]William Milberg and Deborah Winkler, *Outsourcing Economics.*

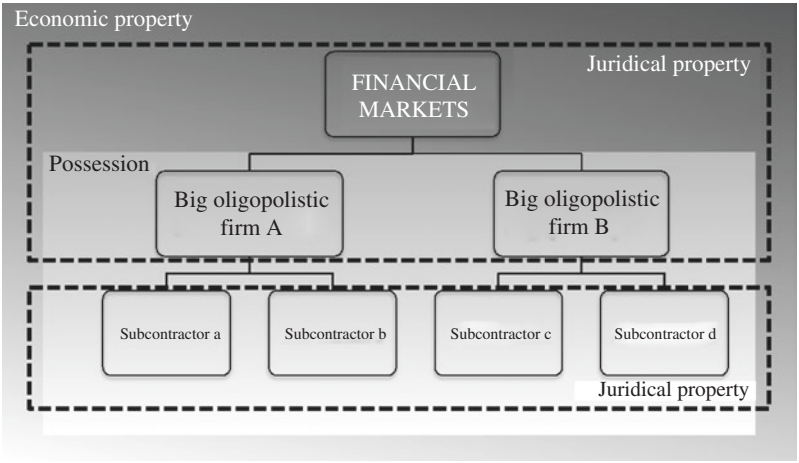

Fig. 10.1 Relations of property and possession in the era of financialized capitalism and the fragmentation of production processes

On the other hand, the powers of the leading firms as regards economic property, but also at the level of the relation of possession, now extend far beyond the limits of companies' juridical property. The basis of this change is an ever more socialized labor process, for instance as expressed in the development of modularity and the interpenetration of information systems along the length of commodity chains. Conversely, the sub-contractor firms' juridical property is shorn of the essential attributes of possession and economic property. A particularly flagrant case, although a far from unique one, is the example of the suppliers of the supermarket and clothing giants. These latter have a market power and a knowledge of labor methods and technologies that allows them to impose not only prices, but also production methods, on the firms from which they supply themselves.

The distinctions between juridical property, economic property and possession demand that we think through the spatial organization of capital in all its complexity. It is no longer sufficient to observe the geographical division of juridical property, like Mandel does. We also have to take into account the geography of the powers

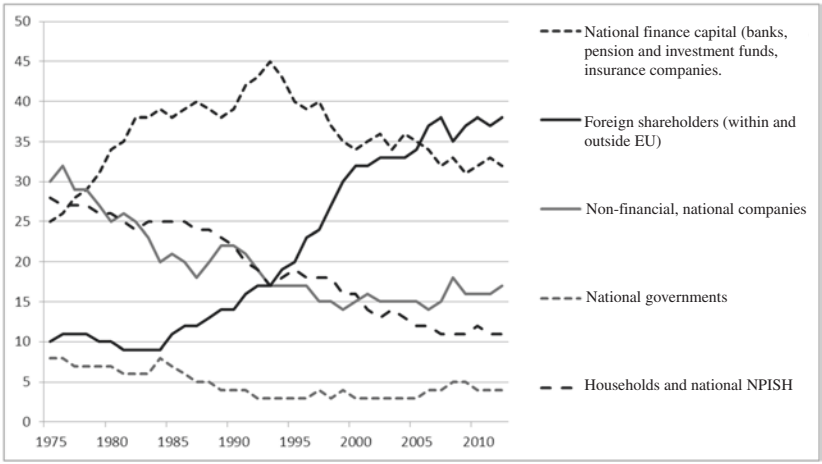

Fig. 10.2 Juridical property in the European Union (% of national stock market capitalization) (Didier Davydoff, Daniele Fano and Li Qin, 'Who owns the European economy? Evolution of the ownership of EU-listed companies between 1970 and 2012', op. cit.)

associated with economic property and possession, which exceed the bounds of juridical property. At an empirical level, this demands that we mobilize various indicators that will allow us to appreciate the transformations of the geographical organization of capital in Europe (see Fig. 10.2).

The first indicator concerns stock holdings on the European exchanges. The orders of magnitude involved can be identified using the national financial accounts which we can find on Eurostat, as well as those compiled by Davydoff and his colleagues, among others.[24] This indicator allows us to give account of the extent of the European tendency toward the amalgamation and internationalization of capital in terms of juridical holdings and, to a lesser extent, economic property.

[24]Didier Davydoff, Daniele Fano and Li Qin, 'Who owns the European economy? Evolution of the ownership of EU-listed companies between 1970 and 2012', 2013 European Commission Report.

Indeed, shareholders receive part of their profits in the form of dividends and, as the case may be, of market capital gains supported by share buybacks. The mimetic mass of financial professionals orients capital flows at the whim of its own erratic psychology. Already in this sense this mass acts on economic property; nonetheless, only the main shareholders truly command the strategy and use of profit, by designating its directors.

The composition of company boards is but a very distant reflection of juridical property relations, insofar as the bulk of minority shareholders are not represented therein. Nonetheless, it does provide an essential indicator, insofar as this is the level—as Mark Mizruchi demonstrates[25]—at which economic elites are articulated. A breakdown of these boards by nationality is also an important way of evaluating the degree to which economic property is indeed internationalized/Europeanized, for it is within their walls that the firm's top management is named and given its mandate. It is also here that the company's financial policy is determined, including with regard to dividends. Finally, it is here that the company's main strategic orientations are debated. In this sense, company boards do have a parcel of powers of possession, technological choices or modes of labor organization that they might discuss. Nonetheless, effective powers of possession are for the most part distributed, from the leading executives down the chain of management hierarchy, to the subsidiaries and, residually, within particular installations.

Relations of possession are also in part the product of international forms of integrating labor processes, which play out by way of trade relations, i.e. technological interdependencies and the common standards established across the various spaces of capital accumulation. A more in-depth analysis of this indicator could inform us as to the geography of these interdependencies in labor processes. But it could furthermore inform us as to the geography of economic property, insofar as often unequal relations of force in commercial exchange contribute to a concentration of profit in the leading firms, to the cost of the dispersed subcontractors.

[25] Mark Mizruchi, *The Structure of Corporate Political Action*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Our final indicator is the evolution of the stock of (incoming and outgoing) Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), according to its destination and origin. This gives us more transversal information as to the Europeanization/internationalization dynamic among multinationals. Indeed, FDI statistics give account of the shareholdings in foreign entities above a 10% threshold, i.e. those holdings that correspond to a capacity to exert decisive influence on profit strategy and the use of profits, and so, too, on the labor process. This is, indeed, typically the case of the subsidiaries of multinational firms. This indicator has a transversal dimension, and helps inform us as to how the geography of capital evolves in its both juridical and economic dimensions, and so, too, in terms of labor processes. For multinationals coordinate an array of juridical properties and centralize profits and labor processes.

The empirical data demonstrate multiple developments taking place in European capital, within each of these different relations.

Figure 10.2 shows three major tendencies in juridical property. The first is the fall in mainly passive shareholders like households, as well as ones like states and industrial firms. The second tendency concerns the fact that this fall first of all benefitted national financial capital; an important share of household savings was no longer invested on the markets, but rather directed toward the savings products offered by financial intermediaries (bank investment funds, life-insurance products, etc…). Offering a collective and centralized management of savings, this finance capital acquired the juridical property that was abandoned by industrial firms and states during the various phases of privatization. Finally, from the mid-1980s onward, within each European country we see a very rapid rise in foreign property ownership, encouraged by the internationalization of finance capital.

Obviously the whole question of the amalgamation of European capital concerns what nationality these foreign shareholders are. The available data only goes back to the beginning of the 2000s. It does indicate a rise in the foreign share, but this exclusively owes to non-European shareholders, whose share rose from 17 to 22% between 2001 and 2011 (Fig. 10.3). This principally owed to the increase in US investors' role.[26]

[26]According to a study the authors conducted into the share held by US stockholders belonging to the top 20 stockholders. Based on a representative sample of the European stock markets (Eurostoxx 600 index), covering over 1100 companies representing more than 12,000 figures from 1999 to 2012.

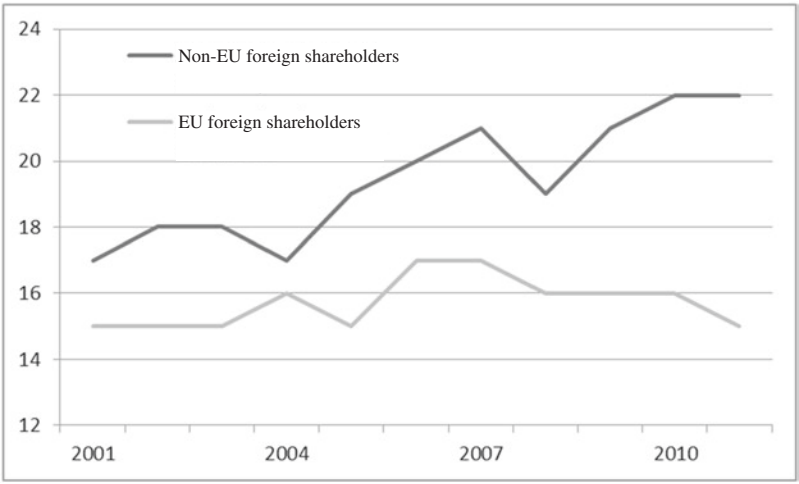

Fig. 10.3 Foreign (EU and non-EU) shareholders' share of total stocks on EU exchanges (Didier Davydoff, Daniele Fano and Li Qin, 'Who owns the European economy? Evolution of the ownership of EU-listed companies between 1970 and 2012', op. cit.)

More than a European amalgamation of juridical property, the tendency we see is more than anything an internationalization dominated by finance capital from the USA.

The available data on the composition of company boards also show that there is no straightforwardly European amalgamation process. National networks remain dominant, but they tend to become looser, thanks to concentration process in the big economic and financial groups.[27] However, this does not necessarily take place at a specifically European level, for transatlantic relations often play a primary role.[28] For example, German managerial elites seem to have made a direct jump

[27]François-Xavier Dudouet, Éric Grémont, Antoine Vion (2012), 'Transnational Business Networks in the Eurozone: A focus on four major stock exchange indices', in Georgina Murray and John Scott (eds.), *Financial Elites and Transnational Business: Who Rules the World?*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 124–45.

[28]William Carroll, JP Sapinski, 'The Global Corporate Elite and the Transnational Policy-Planning Network, 1996–2006: A Structural Analysis', *International Sociology*, 25, 2010, pp. 501–38; Stefania Vitali and Stefano Battiston, 'Geography versus topology in the European Ownership Network', *New Journal of Physics*, 13, 063021, 2011.

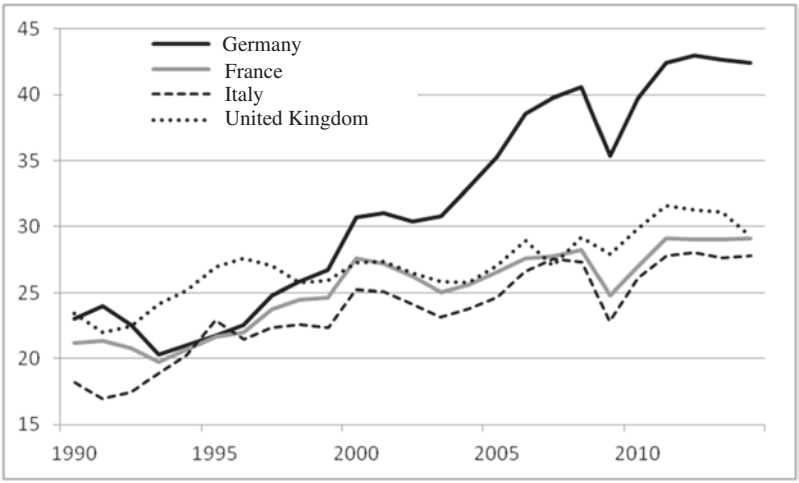

Fig. 10.4 Openness rates of France, Italy, United Kingdom. Openness rate = [(imports + exports)/2]/GDP, OECD data

from the national to the global level, and now occupy a central position in transatlantic networks.[29] In the French case, the 2009 figures tell us that among the 838 directors and managers of the CAC 40 companies, 70% were of French nationality, 6% came from the USA or Canada, and 21% from elsewhere in Europe.

There is an even more striking shift in trade links, expressing a powerful internationalization of labor processes in which the European scale again appears to be not particularly central. The weight of foreign trade in the main European economies has greatly increased since the beginning of the 1990s (Fig. 10.4). This only partly results from the intensification of internal EU trade, which are less dynamic with exchange with the rest of the world (Fig. 10.5)

Finally, an analysis of FDI tells us more precisely about the perimeter within which multinationals operate. What we first see is that the EU countries and the USA have greatly increased their foreign investments

[29] Kees Van der Pijl, Otto Holman, Or Raviv, 'The Resurgence of German Capital in Europe: EU integration and the restructuring of Atlantic networks of interlocking directorates after 1991', *Review of International Political Economy*, 18, 3, 2011, pp. 384–408.

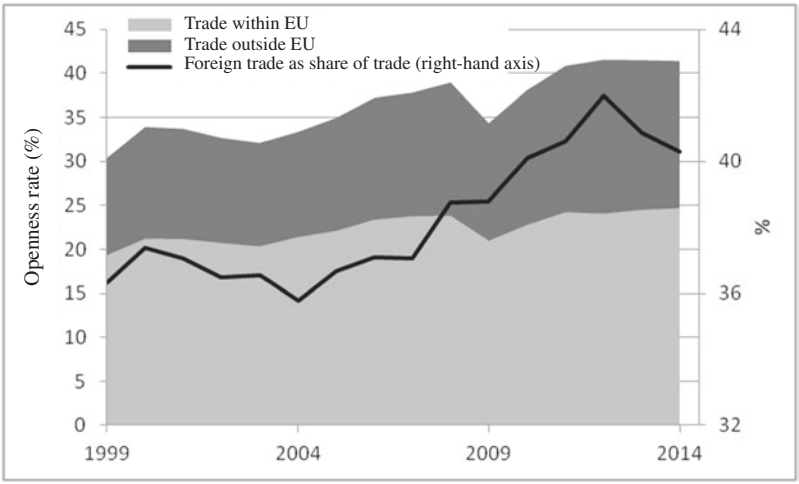

Fig. 10.5 EU 28 openness rate and share of foreign trade within and outside EU since 1999. Openness rate = [(imports + exports)/2]/GDP, OECD data

over the last two decades. Encouraged by globalization, the average outgoing FDI stock has increased from 10 to 60% of GDP in Europe and from 10 to 30% in the USA (2012 figures; the change is also more or less equivalent for incoming FDI stocks).[30]

The difference between the two is linked to the great increase in inter-EU FDI, which does provide evidence for the argument that European capital is indeed amalgamating. While in 1990 40% of the FDI stock entering EU countries was from elsewhere in the EU, by 2010 this figure had risen to 70%. Conversely, the proportion coming from the USA fell from 30 to 10%.

In short, globalization means both an increase in transnational capital at the operational level, and powerful amalgamation in Europe. However, transatlantic relationship remains essential: if we consider the EU as an integrated zone, then the share of US FDI represents almost 50% the FDI entering the EU, and the USA is the destination of almost 40% of the FDI coming from Europe. So we have both the constitution

[30] OECD figures, authors' calculations.

of groups operating across multiple European countries, and the maintenance of a transatlantic axis of primary importance within the general context of globalization.

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The debate between Ernest Mandel and Nicos Poulantzas exemplifies the richness and the theoretical audacity of the 1970s controversies within Marxism. Directly in tune with concrete political problems, these two authors developed bold hypotheses which are still extremely fruitful for our investigation of the bases of European integration today. As we have seen, Mandel proposed a simple explanation in terms of capital amalgamating at the European level in reaction to the pressure from American capital. For his part Poulantzas considered Mandel's conception of property as overly simplistic, and pointed to the interpenetration of European and US capital as well as the partly subordinate position of the former relative to the latter.

Starting out from the triptych of juridical property, economic property and possession, we have sketched out a method that allows us to study the contemporary forms in which capital is organized at the European level. To this end, we had to start out from a theoretical characterization of the powers of capital, before then arriving at the different indicators best able to capture the concrete manifestations of these powers, however imperfectly.

When we look at juridical and economic property, the available data on shareholders and company boards evidence an *internationalization* rather than *Europeanization* process. The amalgamation of stock holdings at a European level seems to be retreating relative to the growing role that extra-European capital plays on the continent, and in particular finance capital coming from the USA. Data on company boards confirms this both intra- and extra-European internationalization process, but it also shows the unequal involvement of the different countries, for instance if we consider the central role that German directors play in transatlantic networks. As for relations of possession, the trade data points in the same direction, for it underlines a growing internationalization whose dynamic mainly plays out at an extra-European level. This speaks to the ever-more global socialization of labor processes. These considerations thus directly contradict Mandel's thesis that European capital is amalgamating in opposition to US capital; they instead underline their deep interpenetration.

The data on FDI however demand qualification of this claim. This data more directly reflects multinationals' field of operation, and as such concerns each of the three powers of capital that we earlier described. This data indicates the powerful increase in intra-European investment, showing that the European level is indeed an increasingly important operational level for major firms in the region, although this does not mean that it undermines the pre-existing transatlantic ties or contradicts the external projection of these groups.

In sum, the big firms have taken on a more markedly European character. Meanwhile the juridical and economic property centralized by finance capital, and so, too, the power of possession associated with common technologies and standards, remains defined in more global terms, particularly by way of the link with the USA. So in no sense is Europeanization opposed to the globalization of capital; rather, it is subordinate to it. In this configuration, Poulantzas's work provides indispensable paths into thinking through the continuing fragility of the continental proto-state.