Fatma Ülkü Selçuk

“Reconsidering the Marxist Theory of the Capitalist State: An Alternative Approach”

Studies in Social and Political Thought
Vol. 17 (Spring/Summer, 2010), pp. 82-117

Published by the University of Sussex

ISSN: 1467-2219
Reconsidering the Marxist Theory of the Capitalist State: An Alternative Approach

by Fatma Ülkü Selçuk

Introduction

The neo-Marxist manner of treating the consent of the masses as a prerequisite for capitalist survival has to be revised once despotic regimes in several capitalist states are considered. For a more thorough analysis, it is necessary to stress the decisiveness of armed force for the capitalist hold of state power. It is also important to acknowledge that only if a multi-level analytical framework is adopted can a fuller account of the phenomena be given. The conceptual boundaries of the state have to be reexamined and a new conceptualization has to be offered. These are among the tasks this article attempts to fulfill. It critically examines the portrayal of state in classical Marxist texts and Perry Anderson’s approach to armed power compared to Gramsci. There are also conceptually innovative attempts as regards the ‘state’, ‘state power’, ‘action types’, and ‘rationality’, in order to lay relatively solid grounds for theoretical construction.

It is possible to analyze ‘the state’ from a variety of perspectives. In spite of this theoretical diversity, social theorists seem to agree that the state or the concept of the state has a profound impact on the modern individual’s life. While a variety of theoretical perspectives and empirical studies on the issue of the state have been established, much still remains open to debate. Among these varied approaches, the Marxist approach presents a powerful toolkit for analyzing the class character of the state. Yet, since the varied works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels highlight diverse dimensions of the state rather than providing a systematic work on state theory, there have been serious disputes in the interpretation of their works. Hence, the debates – along with the reconstruction of theory – gave rise to a rich Marxist literature with novel dimensions introduced and different emphases made concerning the capitalist state.

Within the past few decades of Marxist studies, the 1960-1980 era can be considered as the one marked by the rise of Althusserian structuralism (e.g.}
Althusser, 1971; Poulantzas, 1975a; 2000) although there were also studies which remained outside this current (e.g. Miliband, 1969). In the course of the 1970s, several Marxist studies on the capitalist state (e.g. Altvater 1979; Blanke, Jürgens & Kastendiek, 1979; Braunmühl, 1979; Gerstenberger, 1979; Habermas, 1973; Hirsch, 1979) focused on the functions and/or form of the state, while the early 1980s saw the rise of poststructuralist analysis in the (post-)Marxist terrain (e.g. Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Amid the post-1990 era, several studies critically evaluated capital and state (e.g. Bellofiore, 1999; Brunhoff, 1999; Carchedi, 2001; Hirst & Thompson, 1996; Jessop, 1997; 2002) by focusing on the geographical dimensions of the question, especially with reference to capital flows, capital accumulation regimes/strategies, and/or forms/functions of the capitalist state. In the second half of the twentieth century – with the exception of a few works (such as Anderson, 1976) – the primary interest of several key Marxist theorists analyzing the capitalist state (e.g. Aglietta, 1987; Althusser, 1971; Altvater, 1979; Blanke, Jürgens & Kastendiek, 1979; Braunmühl, 1979; Gerstenberger, 1979; Habermas, 1973; Hirsch, 1979; Jessop, 1997; 2002; Offe, 1993; Poulantzas, 1975a) remained predominantly on the economic and/or ideological dimensions of the question rather than the means of violence.

The strategies pursued by capitalists and relatively micro-range factors influential over state practices received very little attention except for the studies undertaken with (neo)pluralist or (neo)elitist orientation (e.g. Dahl, 1956; 1961; Domhoff, 1967; 1970; 1983; 1990; Dye, 1986; Mills, 1956; Soloway, 1987; Truman, 1959; Useem, 1984) despite the fact that several of them did not formulate the question with reference to the capitalist hold of state power. On the Marxist front, the works of Miliband especially have approached the question of identifying the channels enabling and/or facilitating the bourgeois\textsuperscript{1} hold of state power from a multi-level perspective. However, his work has been criticized by several Marxists (e.g. Clarke, 1991; Poulantzas, 1969) for ostensibly falling into the trap of bourgeois social science.

In this article, Marxist perspectives on the state will be examined with a focus on the following: Jessop’s categorization of Marx’s and Engels’ texts; the Miliband and Poulantzas debate; and Perry Anderson’s criticism of Gramsci. The analysis will proceed in such a way as to stress the decisiveness of armed force and the need for a multi-level analytical framework. Firstly, the question of conceptual boundaries of the state is examined and an alternative conceptualization is offered. Secondly, the approach to the state in classical Marxist texts is critically analyzed, with alternatives suggested when
deemed necessary. Thirdly, the question of the character of armed power with reference to the state is analyzed. Lastly, a multi-level framework is proposed for the analysis of relations concerning the state. In spite of locating the Marxist state debate at the center of this article, there is no claim that its theoretical standpoint is a version of Marxism.

**The Conceptual Boundaries**

Contrary to the belief that defining such concepts as the ‘state’ or ‘consent’ should be left to philosophers (cf. Barry, 1989), social scientists must, for the sake of analytical clarity and coherence, define the boundaries of their conceptual tools. As for ‘the state’, the attributed meanings have changed considerably both in time and with reference to its definer. Quentin Skinner’s (1989) survey provides an understanding not only for the change in the meanings attributed to the state but also for the conceptual evolution ending in ‘the state’. He showed that, in Western Europe, while earlier concepts used in place of the state were oriented towards a personal view of power, the modern usage of the state started to denote impersonal state apparatuses distinct from not only the ruler but also the ruled. As for today, among the most widely invoked definitions of the state – one that has even influenced Marxist theorists – is that of Max Weber. While Weber’s footprints can be traced most clearly in those works treating the presence of legitimacy as taken for granted (particularly at times of non-rebellion, or non-intense class struggles),2 his influence has had crucial implications over the conceptualization of consent and violence vis-à-vis state power. Weber described the modern state in terms of its monopoly over the legitimate use of force (see 1978a: 54, 65). However, for Weber, although legitimately monopolizing the means of violence was the essential characteristic of the modern state, territoriality, administrative staff and laws were among its other key features (see ibid: 56). As Helliwell and Hindess note, for Weber, “compliance is unlikely to survive for long unless it is accompanied by a belief in the legitimacy of the leader’s power” (1999: 81). Actually, this problem-generating estimation has been embraced by several Marxist (especially the neo-Gramscian) and non-Marxist (especially the liberal structural functionalist) authors, while a number of others questioned its validity (e.g. Anderson, 1976).

As for Marx and Engels’ treatment of the capitalist state, as Miliband asserts, “Marx himself [. . .] never attempted a systematic study of the state” (1969: 5). This gave rise to very diverse approaches in the interpretation of the works of Marx and Engels. However, for our present purposes only the
conceptualizations of Miliband and Poulantzas will be examined, since they represent polar opposites in what has been one of the most influential debates on the theory of the capitalist state over the past few decades. For Miliband, in his definition of the state, his major insistence was on the necessity to distinguish between government and state. He pointed out that when Weber spoke of the state with reference to the monopoly of legitimate force, it was the government, not the state, to which he was referring. Miliband argued:

‘the state’ is not a thing, [. . .] it does not, as such exist. What ‘the state’ stands for is a number of particular institutions which, together, constitute its reality, and which interact as parts of what may be called the state system (1969: 49)

As for the parts of the state system, he suggested that “the government, the administration, the military and the police, the judicial branch, sub-central government and parliamentary assemblies” are the institutions which “make up ‘the state’, and whose interrelationship shapes the form of the state system” (Miliband, 1969: 54). Miliband also stressed that the state system is not identical with the political system, since the latter includes several further institutions such as parties and pressure groups as well as a number of non-political institutions such as giant corporations, churches, and the mass media (1969: 54; cf. Althusser, 1971, on ideological state apparatuses). So, unlike Althusserian accounts – and unlike the Gramscian integral state, which conceptualize the state as the political society plus the civil society – Miliband tried to demarcate the state and non-state by distinguishing ‘the state’ from the broader ‘political’ realm.

As for Poulantzas, he alleged that the purely instrumental conception of the state, which equates the state with political domination, reduces the state apparatus to state power (2000: 12), as if “there is a free-standing state power which is only afterwards utilized by the dominant classes in various ways” (2000: 13). He stressed the necessity to conceptualize the state as a ‘relation’. In his refusal to apply the concept of power to the state, he attempted to distinguish himself from those who:

account for the relative autonomy of the State in terms of the group made up of the agents of the State and in terms of the specific power of this group, as those conceptions which apply the concept of power to the State invariably do: the bureaucratic class (from Hegel via Weber to Rizzi and Burnham); the political elites (this is Miliband’s conception [. . .]); the techno-structure (power of the ‘business
Selçuk: Marxist Theory of the Capitalist State

Poulantzas identified a particular use of the concept ‘power’ with a ‘bourgeois approach’. His refusal to apply the concept of power ended in the rejection of a thorough analysis of the forces acting in and upon the capitalist state positions, and paradoxically the reduction of the state to class struggles. He treated the state “as a relation, or more precisely as the condensate of a relation of power between struggling classes” in order to “escape the false dilemma entailed by the present discussion on the State, between the State comprehended as a Thing/instrument and the State comprehended as Subject” (Poulantzas, 1976: 74). While Poulantzas never clarified the conceptual boundaries of the state in his texts, there is no reason to oppose Poulantzas’ point on the relational character of the social and the state. Obviously any ‘social’ is ‘relational’, but still the problem of analytical clarity remains unless an expansion of those relations is given. In other words, even though any social is a result of relations, and moreover is never neutral (since once it emerges it gains an existence of its own), identifying the forces – both at a micro and macro level – and their magnitude acting upon the social should be the best route to take towards understanding the character and relative weight of the determinant(s) of the resultant and its specific biases (if not all its dimensions). Regardless of Poulantzas’ contributions mainly at macro level, he insistently refused to integrate micro dimensions into his analysis, labeling others with being infected by ‘bourgeois science’. For his works following Political Power, he claimed that he modified and rectified certain of his analyses, but in an opposite direction to that of Miliband, in a way to “emphasize the primacy of the class struggle as compared with the State apparatus” (Poulantzas 1976: 74). Yet, unlike Miliband, Poulantzas did not develop initiatives for the conceptual clarification of ‘the state’ except for his insistence to treat it as a relation in connection with class struggles.

Since conceptual boundaries are vital for analytical clarity, the attitude of Miliband over against Poulantzas is to be preferred in distinguishing the state from other social entities. The conceptualization of the state presented in this article shares a similar concern with Miliband. The state is defined mainly by its legal form, which necessarily has a selective character since the laws of the state (written or unwritten) favor particular interests as against others (cf. Jessop, 1990), while those interests are not held to be restricted only to class interests (cf. Poulantzas, 1975a; 2000). The state, with its legally defined positions, is portrayed as both a site (denoting internality) and an object (denoting externality) of struggles. The following is the definition
proposed here, with the acknowledgment that the word ‘state positions’ can be replaced by a prevalent equivalent depending on the era and context analyzed (e.g. the king’s men, servants of the crown, or any other specific signifier helpful for demarcation):

*The state is a set of networks/institutions (operated by empowered agents)*

(1) with the official authority to make (1.1) laws that at the same time define state positions, and (1.2) arrangements through the legally defined state positions;⁴

(2) deriving its official authority from its power to set the rules and from its claim of sovereignty over a particular territory; (2.1) that becomes possible only by the presence of people commanding some strong/successful enough armed force⁵ who enable the practice of making laws and arrangements through the legally recognized state positions, (2.1a) in favor of particular group(s) of people, defending their interests within and outside the territory⁶ (2.1b) as against other armed and non-armed forces and interests of group(s) of people within and outside that territory⁷ (2.1c) with no unconditionally necessary consent of those living on the territory except for some degree of consent of the determinant exercisers and/or steerers of armed power;

(3) with officially recognized state positions (3.1) some of which are granted the authority to collect taxes from the people on that territory; the taxes that can be transferred or used by the legally defined positions in state networks for (3.1a) legal or (3.1b) illegal practices;

(4) the incumbents of which can make (4.2a) legal or (4.2b) illegal arrangements through their officially assigned authority.

From this definition, it can be detected that not the consent of masses but the threat or use of means of violence (which is not conceptualized as necessarily a part of the state networks) is seen as the source making the presence of the state possible. Theoretically, while those mentioned as ‘strong enough armed people’ may cover even the whole society (all inhabitants armed), they may also be comprised of a group of outsiders. As for the aforementioned clash of interests, this may denote an exclusively inner conflict, a conflict between the interests of the inhabitants and outsiders, or their combination. Similar to Weberian accounts, there is territoriality in the definition. Its distinguishing feature is the official authority granted by armed force; and its law-making capacity and legally
defined state positions. Although the state officials are restricted to the incumbents of the legally defined state positions, state practices are not held to be restricted to legal practices. Therefore, this proposed conceptualization of the state attempts to move beyond the legalist-formalist accounts, providing the opportunity to draw the line between the non-state and state practices, and the non-state and state incumbents, which becomes crucial especially in answering such questions as how to categorize the status of the illegal armed forces; how to conceptualize the status of the state incumbents’ illegal practices; and where the state ends and where it begins. So far as the conceptual boundaries of the state are defined, the next section will focus on state power with reference to the classical Marxist texts.

Critical Examination of the Marxist Portrayal

As for the approach to the state in classical Marxist texts, Jessop (1990: 26-28) suggests a useful categorization, identifying six different usages. The first is the treatment of the state as a parasitic institution with no essential role in economic production and reproduction, which oppresses and exploits the civil society on behalf of particular groups. The second approach is one that treats the state as epiphenomena or surface reflections of the material relations of production and class struggles stemming from the system of property relations. The third approach treats the state as the factor of cohesion, as a regulator of the struggles with repression and concession, and reproducer of the dominant mode of production, defining the state in functional terms in a manner to include every institution contributing to cohesion. The fourth allegedly sees the state as an instrument of class rule. As for the fifth approach, it treats the state as a set of institutions without assumptions about its class character, and sees it as a public power that emerges at a certain stage of the division of labor. Lastly, the sixth approach sees the state as a system of political domination with specific effects on the class struggle, with a focus on the forms of political representation and state intervention, examining them with reference to the long-term interests of a particular class or class fraction.

A critical examination of these six points identified by Jessop is presented along the following lines. As for seeing the state as parasitic, it must be stressed that any institution hindering the liberty of human beings is parasitic to a certain extent, including the state (denoting a parallel with the anarchist accounts that conceptualize the state as a parasitic institution), but it does not follow that the state never promotes liberty or that any non-state is non-parasitic. On the contrary, any institution, social collectivity or
individual hindering human beings’ survival and positive self-development may be addressed as parasitic when they do so. Therefore, seeing the state as a contextually parasitic institution does not entail that the market (as a part of the realm of the non-state) or the institutions embodied in ‘civil society’ (with reference to its meaning excluding the state) are to be conceptualized as necessarily and absolutely non-parasitic.

As for the second approach Jessop identified, treating the state as an epiphenomenon, it has to be acknowledged that once the state emerges, its form, rules and incumbents become among the ‘material transforming forces’ rather than simple secondary mental phenomena caused by and accompanying the economy without any casual influence itself. In this respect, a parallel can be drawn with the state-centered approaches that consider the state as an entity with a structure of its own, the actions of which cannot be reduced to the responses given to pressures of social classes and groups, with the acknowledgment that bureaucracy here is not treated as a social class with interests of its own and the state is not treated as an institution engendering special common interests stemming from its structural location in the society (cf. the criticism of the state-centered approach in Jessop, 1990; Miliband, 1983).

As for the third approach – the state as the factor of cohesion – if cohesion is not conceptualized as synonymous with harmony or the consent of the masses, the state may be seen as a factor of cohesion (among other factors of cohesion), since insofar as the official authority (whether a monarch or the elected representative of the nation) continues to exercise power with a claim of sovereignty over a particular territory, regardless of the presence/lack of consent of the masses, a degree of success in holding the elements of the society in the territory can be assumed to exist on the part of those whose collective long-term interests the state practices favor as against their antagonistic sides. However, if ‘cohesion’ is conceptualized as uniting the elements of society by means of mainly consent through concessions and ideological processes, then the state is not held as a necessary factor of cohesion. Unlike the theories assuming a state of tacit consent with reference to residence or benefiting the services provided by the state, whether in a so-called ‘free state’ or not (Locke, 1689: 301-302; Rousseau, 1762: 93; cf. Hume, 1777: 476), the presence of individuals living in a country without active protests, with a majority of ‘yes’ votes in a referendum for a constitution, and even votes to pro-capitalist political parties, is not necessarily indicative of the inhabitants’ consent to the capitalist order. Actually, there is little alternative for an individual discontented with the
present condition in a particular society but to continue to live there. For example, a particular individual may prefer living in a classless society, but she may simply not see it as a viable alternative in the short or long run, and may prefer a ‘lesser evil’ among the alternatives she sees viable, or may simply stay silent. Furthermore, strictly policed national borders act as a force over the majority of the people, pushing them to live in a particular society. Besides, even if there were no borders, the question would still remain: ‘Is there a place in perfect conformity with the desires of the individual where she can move?’ If the answer is negative, cohesion – in its consent-loaded meaning – is seen not as a necessary attribute but rather as a tendential and non-necessary characteristic of the capitalist state. As for the apparatus unity of the state, it is held to exist only to the extent that there is some degree of conformity with its elements parallel to the biased selectivity of the state, which is structured by the *de jure* or *de facto* binding rules pushing its incumbents towards particular paths of action (cf. Jessop, 1990, on the state’s structural selectivity, its tendential substantive institutional unity, and its function of maintaining social cohesion).

As for the fourth approach Jessop identified – the state as an *instrument* of class rule – unlike Poulantzas’ (2000) claim that this entails viewing the state as external, and in contrast also to Jessop’s (1990) claim that this means seeing the state as neutral, not all those claimed to be instrumentalist treat the state in the way it is commonly alleged. Besides, there are hardly any references in the works of Poulantzas and Jessop which prove that Miliband, for example, saw the state as exclusively external or absolutely neutral. As long as the laws are treated as non-neutral (as is done by Miliband) and the state networks (including the state form) are considered to be structured by the laws in effect to some degree, the claim that Miliband treated the state as neutral becomes invalid. To return to the question of whether to treat the state as an instrument or not, regardless of this legally biased form, a number of examples indicate that state positions (and even some top positions) can be, in part, occupied by those defending working class collective long-term interests in a capitalist society, and sometimes state-power can be used to favor the anti-capitalist forces. Therefore, here, it is held that insofar as the state is structured by its legal arrangements in a biased way (whether those laws are enforced by a monarch or representative assembly) it is in no way neutral. However, to the extent that its power is open to the influence of those relatively non-favored and favored (in terms of the existing legal structure), among its other features, the state, with its legally defined positions, can be treated also as a *non-neutral instrument*, or better, an entity composed of non-neutral instruments, the incumbents (if not necessarily the
laws) of which endow it with a contradictory character.

As for the fifth approach Jessop noted – treating the state as a set of institutions – here, with respect to the class character of those institutions, it is held that, only to the extent that the laws favor a particular class (and its particular short and/or long term interests), do institutions of the state structured by those laws reflect the class character of the state. Other factors moving beyond those laws (these laws themselves may have and generally do have a contradictory character) are treated as reflecting the non-legal subjective side (meanwhile the institutional side, which generally is contradictory, can be considered as the legalized subjectivity) of the state’s class character (e.g. communist practices of the army commanders in a capitalist society).

Although the need for regulating the complex social relations in a society with its increasing division of labor may require the presence of coordinating and intervening hubs, theoretically, there is no need for that coordination to take place exclusively in legally defined state positions, even in capitalist societies. For example, the function of the ‘central bank’, ‘licenses’, ‘public works’, can be undertaken by those enterprises, organizations, or networks in non-state positions, which may be still exposed to legal regulations. But still it is held that the state’s major distinguishing characteristic is its legally defined state positions, which at the same time make up its institutions, while, similar to Miliband, the political system and relations are not seen as limited to the state and the state positions/institutions. Therefore, in the conceptualization proposed here, the state of being exposed to ‘not-directly economic’ class struggles or being exposed to state regulations or public law does not make an institution necessarily a part of the state. For example, although the institution of ‘family’ may be exposed to utilization for capitalist interests (in addition to possible other interests), and even though it is exposed to the regulation of the state, here it is not conceptualized as state apparatus. The conceptualization of the state in an opposite direction renders the borders of the concept ‘state’ vague and blurred, stripping it of its analytical power, making it almost impossible to properly identify the state and non-state, ending in a loss of meaning and an inability to demarcate particular sets of institutions/relations from some others which have certain major distinctive characteristics despite their shared ones with that of the state.

Lastly, regarding the sixth approach – seeing the state as a system of political domination with specific effects on the class struggle – although here the state is portrayed as a privileged site of political domination on account of its power to influence social relations and structures on a wide spectrum (including
the class struggle), ‘political domination’ is not conceptually restricted to the ‘state’ or ‘state positions’. This is not to deny the crucial impact of different state forms over the organization capacity, interests and struggles of social classes, since as Trotsky (1971) argued in his The Struggle against Fascism, the state form (e.g. the state in a parliamentary republic granting the citizens bourgeois constitutional liberties, or the state ruled by fascists in a monoparty regime with active mass support) does affect the provision of opportunities and imposition of constraints over class forces, with critical implications for struggle strategies. Besides, the state form does have impact over the perceptions of many people as regards the way they perceive the state. Yet, all those forms are still legal forms made possible by armed force (provided by the state and/or non-state armed elements). Therefore, what remains unique to the ‘state’ over against other armed and/or political institutions is again its official authority, granted by laws, taking its power from the armed forces strong enough to impose that official authority over the territory. Therefore, the state is seen as a unique (not exclusive) form of political domination in addition to its other features.

Having clarified at least a few issues with respect to the six points raised by Jessop, another question he raised will be examined: namely, how to evaluate the state – as ‘a thing, a subject, a social relation, or a construct’? In this respect, Jessop’s answer to the question is insightful. He not only handled the state as a relation, but also identified some of its distinguishing characteristics, and, unlike Poulantzas’ subjectless analysis, Jessop underlined the presence of calculating subjects operating “on the strategic terrain constituted by the state” which “are in part constituted by the strategic selectivity of the state system and its past interventions” (1990: 262).

Certainly, any ‘social’ is an ensemble of ‘relations’. Therefore, distinguishing a social entity embodying several sets of relations from others requires expanding those sets of relations denoted by the concept. The first step of this expansion should be to fix and demarcate the borders of the concept used in a way to denote particular sets of relations, while its further steps should be to expand the components of the relations defined in the borders of that particular concept, by identifying relatively privileged factors, the forces enabling or acting upon those factors, and the implications of those factors over the analyzed social entity.

As for the question of whether the state is a construct helping to orientate political action or not, the answer is that, even if not exclusively defined as such, it is a construct inasmuch as any social phenomenon has a partially
constructed side. However, despite this constructed side, the state is a social institution (embodifying and regulating several sets of social relations), and has an existence of its own, constraining and influencing the ways individuals feel, think, and act, which should be handled in a similar vein to what Durkheim means by ‘social fact’. The question is what the distinguishing characteristics of the state are, with the acknowledgment that while that demarcation necessarily becomes a constructed tool of cognition, this does not change the fact that the relations themselves denoted by the concept are real, with an existence of their own. As for the state, if there are particular relations and regular outcomes of those relations (characteristics) different than others – for example, if ‘the people recruited by the legally defined state army in the name of protecting the country’ embody different sets of relations than ‘the armed people employed by a private company to control the entrances and exits to the company’, and if both of them are different than, for example, ‘a man with a gun protecting the land he owns in the village he lives in’ – whichever word is used to denote each set of relations, those relations are ‘real’ with an existence of their own, independent of human thought.

As for the question of whether the state is a thing or a subject, the answer depends on how the concepts ‘thing’ and ‘subject’ are defined. Here, it is not that the incumbents of the state have some common interests on account of being elements of the state. So, unlike the state-centered accounts, here the state is not conceptualized as a structure with interests of its own as a collective subject. However, it is the case that, in the way a physical ‘thing’ has an existence of its own, the state is a ‘thing’ with an existence of its own as a valid object of sociological inquiry (‘social fact’ in Durkheimian sense, with the acknowledgment that a social fact may not be explained exclusively by social facts), although unlike the neutrality of ‘physical things’, the state as a ‘social thing’ is a ‘non-neutral thing’ (embodifying constant reactions, which may even give rise to radical changes in its form). The state displays a biased character mainly on account of the way the laws structure it, which is in some ways similar to what Jessop meant by the ‘structural selectivity of the state’, meaning that “it is not a neutral instrument equally accessible to all social forces and equally adaptable to all ends” (1990: 148).

In this section, one issue remains to be clarified theoretically, namely, the nature of the incumbents of state positions; whether or not those incumbents have any will at all (and, if so, how such a ‘will’ might be theorized). To begin with, the individuals are not puppets. Unlike the behaviorist approach theorizing the individual deprived of the capability to make choice, a parallel
can be drawn with rationalist accounts (whether liberal or not) which hold the individuals as capable of making choices, albeit in a constrained environment and cognitive capacity. Here, this choice is held to be in line with the considered individual's *rationality of being* (see that in the section ‘A Multi-Level Analytical Framework’), which is commonly shaped in the most part (if not exclusively) by several (social and non-social) structural positions occupied, with the acknowledgment that some positions may be privileged over others, depending on the context. It is not to deny the presence of some degree of conditioning in human action (which nevertheless is thought to comprise at least some degree of unconscious calculation, rather than being equal to automatic behavior without any calculation).

Liberal rationalist approaches treating individual action as a matter of choice have some validity, but only to a certain extent. It is true that some norms are internalized in the way formulated by generally symbolic interactionist accounts. On the other hand, there is not much reason to treat human beings as *radically* different from all animals. That is not to claim that there is no choice for the individuals because they are either exclusively constituted by the social structures they occupy or that they are exclusively constituted by discursive practices. Still, it is conceded that there is some degree of conditioning in human beings while it may be an outcome of previous and present conscious and/or unconscious calculation. Specifically, it cannot be argued that ‘learned helplessness’ (depending on the context in general, and culture in particular) has nothing to do with a state of non-rebellion. If over and over, the rebels are severely punished (e.g. imprisonment, wounding, killing), this may create a state of conformity over generations without any necessary consent to particular rules.

Making this point clear is important because doing so makes the notions of mass internalization of dominant rules and tacit consent highly suspicious. Conformity under conditions where one makes a choice is in no way a one-to-one indicator of the presence of value-consensus or consent. Actually, even when there is direct implementation of violence there might still be a choice, since, for example, even under torture one can choose to ‘talk and live’ or ‘not to talk and continue to be tortured (or die, or any possible other alternative)’. While the ‘choice to obey a rule’ cannot be taken as an indicator of consent in every case (cf. Hoffman, 1995), the opposite way of reasoning generally ends in the underestimation of the determinacy of violence (whether actually applied or not) in analyzing domination relations in general and the state in particular.
Having made clear that making a choice on the side of obedience to rules cannot be considered as a reliable indicator of the internalization of rules or presence of consent, actions of state elements will be subsumed under three broad categories, varying in terms of the degree of voluntarily performing a particular state practice with reference to protection of capitalist interests: (i) ‘active voluntary action’; (ii) ‘passive voluntary action’; and (iii) ‘involuntary action’. It is possible for any of these action types intentionally (or unintentionally) to work to the advantage or disadvantage of capitalist short/long term interests. As for ‘active voluntary action’, it can be divided into two. The first is action motivated mainly by material gains, such as electoral victory, promotion, or bribery, supplementary to an already-received regular salary/wage/status, (similar to Weber’s instrumentally rational action), while the second is action motivated mainly by a strong belief in the value-correctness of the action (similar to Weber’s value-rational action). As for ‘passive voluntary action’, the individual performs a particular state practice without much questioning as to its value-correctness or possible material advantages or disadvantages (apart from concern for the regularly received salary/wage/status). Instead the action is performed just because it is the given duty, without even theorizing the sacredness of duty (similar to Weber’s traditional action). A possible questioning of the individual may result in ‘active voluntary action’ or ‘involuntary action’. As for ‘involuntary action’, it ends in the performance of a particular state practice with a strong belief that the action is not correct while it is somehow performed in order not to be dismissed or because of a conflicting value-orientation. Here, except for the ‘strong belief type of active voluntary action’, none of these action types are seen as necessarily indicating the presence of consent in performing that particular state practice, while except for the ‘involuntary type of action’, none of these action types are seen as a necessary indicator of lack of consent. Yet, whatever the orientation of the action is, state elements are considered to be the subjects of the action, with or without consent. Consequently, here, even though the state as a collective is not treated as a subject, the incumbents of its positions – namely, the state elements – are held to be subjects.

**Arms, Antonio Gramsci and Perry Anderson**

There is another point that remains to be elaborated with respect to the Marxist state debate, that is, on the nature of state practices favoring capitalists. It is already apparent that because the legal framework makes the state structure biased and the average individual has some degree of choice, certain state practices are held to be pro-capitalist not exclusively at
the behest of the capitalist. Yet it does not follow that the importance of capitalists’ strategic practices to realize their short/long-term interests in a given context is to be rejected. That is certainly a common method, but still the decisive factor that influences state practices is the holding of arms.

Indeed, if there is some strong enough armed power to steer the state practices, even the dominant mode of production may change. In this context, being ‘strong enough’ depends on the balance of forces as well as the orientation of individual actions. While this does not mean that unarmed state elements rule directly at the behest of the armed ones, it means that if a strong enough armed group (whether incumbents of state positions or not) intends to steer the non-armed elements by applying sufficient force, they would most probably – if not definitely – have the power to do so either by neutralizing and replacing the dissenting ones or by forcing the dissenters to act in line with their intentions. If there are challenges between the armed and non-armed elements of the state, and if the civilian governments act in the opposite direction to the will of those armed elements and manage to stay in power, this would be on account of the fact that either those armed elements believe in the relative legitimacy of the civilian government’s challenge (e.g. legitimacy of democratic procedures) or those armed elements not holding that idea are perhaps unwilling to take further steps of intervention, or they are not strong enough as against other armed elements (e.g. other groups in the military, sectors of the police, other countries’ armed forces, possible armed insurrection of the people among others). It is useful to refer here to a point which Perry Anderson persistently and solidly emphasized, that even in advanced capitalist countries the ultimate determinant of the power system is ‘force’ and that “[t]his is the law of capitalism, which it cannot violate, on pain of death” (1976: 44).

The treatment of ‘consent of the masses’, and ‘force concentrated by the state’ as the necessary components of modern society have been effectively theorized by Weber in his political writings. Weber’s influence in social theory has not been restricted to liberal circles. On the contrary, several Marxists treated the consent of the masses as a necessary aspect of capitalist societies. This mode of interpreting the consent of the masses can be found also in Gramsci’s ‘Prison Notebooks’ regardless of the contradictory points he made concerning force and consent. Gramsci has become perhaps the most celebrated theorist by those searching democratic ways of transition to socialism. In ‘The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci’, Perry Anderson (1976) showed how Gramsci’s conception of hegemony shifted in his ‘Prison Notebooks’, denoting predominantly cultural supremacy on the one hand,
and a combination of force and consent on the other. He indicated that, through a metamorphosis, Gramsci’s emphasis on military struggle in his earlier writings later turned into an emphasis on consent. As Anderson suggested, in contrast to Machiavelli’s emphasis on ‘force’ and ‘fraud’, Gramsci’s emphasis was on the opposite pole, with Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and Gramsci’s *The Modern Prince* becoming the distorting mirrors of one another. Although Gramsci “adopted Machiavelli’s myth of the Centaur as the emblematic motto of this research [. . .] where Machiavelli had effectively collapsed consent into coercion, in Gramsci coercion was progressively eclipsed by consent” (Anderson, 1976: 49). As for today, the ‘dual perspective’, which Gramsci had complained is often reduced to a banal and trivial treatment (see Gramsci, 1989: 169-170), is far from trivial, although social theorists have largely handled it with its one pole ‘consent’ rather than ‘violence’. Still, the major problem is not the predominant privileged treatment of consent. Actually, the problem is the ‘dual perspective’ itself.

Although the limited scope of this article does not permit an analysis of Marxist approaches to ideology or Gramsci’s theory since it focuses on neither of them, here, I have to open a parenthesis. For Gramsci, there is the need to state that I agree with Chantal Mouffe in her view that Gramsci became avant-garde with his elaboration on the material nature of ideology. While he did not conceptualize ideology as false consciousness, he questioned the reductionist standpoint attributing ideological elements as an essential class-character (1979: 199). There is much to comment on Gramsci’s approach to ideology, however, Gramsci in this section is referred to mainly in comparison to Perry Anderson’s approach to coercion, along with his criticisms. As for Anderson’s (1976) point that consent is given more emphasis when compared to coercion in Gramsci’s writings, my point here is different. For me, while the consent of the masses is not unconditionally necessary for the reproduction of capitalist relations whether in the short or long run, the consent of a strong enough combination of armed elements ready to use violence is essential for that. Therefore, the problem is about encoding both consent (without specification) and violence as necessary factors. Gramsci wrote:

> Another point which needs to be defined and developed is the ‘dual perspective’ in political action and in national life. The dual perspective can present itself on various levels, from the most elementary to the most complex; but these can all theoretically be reduced to two fundamental levels, corresponding to the dual nature of Machiavelli’s Centaur – half-animal and half-human. They are the levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony, violence
and civilisation, of the individual moment and of the universal moment ('Church' and 'State'), of agitation and of propaganda, of tactics and of strategy, etc. Some have reduced the theory of the ‘dual perspective’ to something trivial and banal, to nothing but two forms of ‘immediacy’ which succeed each other mechanically in time, with greater or less ‘proximity’. In actual fact, it often happens that the more the first ‘perspective’ is ‘immediate’ and elementary, the more the second has to be ‘distant’ (not in time, but as a dialectical relation), complex and ambitious. In other words, it may happen as in human life, that the more an individual is compelled to defend his own immediate physical existence, the more will he uphold and identify with the highest values of civilization and of humanity, in all their complexity (1989: 169-170)

Yet the dual perspective is not without problems. Indeed, as long as strong theoretical foundations are not laid for the necessity of the consent of the masses to the conditions to be ruled, or unless what should be consented to by certain groups/individuals is not specified as necessary factor(s), it is hardly possible for one to treat the ‘consent of the masses to the capitalist order’ as unconditionally the necessary factor for ruling the masses in a capitalist society. Therefore, in those theories under the influence of Max Weber, the problem is not only the underestimation of violence in general, but also the unconditional treatment of consent of the masses to the capitalist order as the necessary component in the absence of mass rebellion. It is quite clear that the presence of some degree of consent among masses to particular state practices does not always denote the presence of their consent to capitalism. Although estimating consent is less problematic in the case of rebellion (since there should be lack of some consent as regards what the individual protests), in the case of non-rebellion, it is extremely hard to identify the presence and character of consent since it is highly ambiguous as to which aspects of the rulers’ policies there is consent and, furthermore, as to whether or not there is any consent to the rulers’ policies at all.

Besides, motives other than consent to particular conditions may be in effect when the people do not protest or rebel actively against the pro-capitalist exercisers of state power or against capitalism. As Anderson suggested, factors other than consent and violence should be taken into consideration in analyzing mass obedience in a capitalist society (1976: esp. 41f). Indeed, generally, a multiplicity of factors is in effect, ending in the obedience of the masses in capitalist societies in a micro-macro range. However, we should assert not only the need to make a multi-level analysis of the determinacy of armed power for the capitalist hold of state power, but also the need to
demarcate state (armed) elements from other incumbents of social positions, so that the categories constructed would provide the analytical power to give a better picture. A critical examination of Antonio Gramsci and Perry Anderson’s standpoints will help to clarify this standpoint further.

As for the question as to whether the armed forces are always restricted to modern state networks or not, the answer is negative. While Gramsci’s position against Perry Anderson’s position of equating the armed elements with state networks is held to be more plausible, Gramsci is wrong, according to Perry Anderson (1976: 32), not to restrict violence to the state alone. In Anderson’s opinion, because Weber’s definition of the state holds that the state has a monopoly on legitimate violence – which according to Anderson is essential for capitalist social formations – even though there may be armed elements not defined legally in state networks such as the military squads organized by the fascists in the 1920-1922 Italy, they should be treated as a part of the state because, for example, “the squadristi could only assault and sack working-class institutions with impunity, because they had the tacit coverage of the police and army” (Anderson, 1976: 32). Although Anderson acknowledged the presence of several armed elements outside the state in footnote 58, he insisted on the marginal character of such phenomena as “semi-legal organizations of private violence, such as the American goon-squads of the twenties and thirties” (1976: 32f) while “[t]he State’s monopoly of the means of coercion may be legally drawn at the line of automatic weapons, rather than hand-guns, as in the USA or Switzerland” (ibid.). His insistence on emphasizing the concentration of means of violence in the state may be relevant to his point that “an insurrection will only succeed if the repressive apparatus of the State itself divides or disintegrates – as it did in Russia, China or Cuba” (1976: 77) while “[t]he consensual ‘convention’ that holds the forces of coercion together must [. . .] be breached” (ibid.).

Perry Anderson’s insistence on the disintegration of the repressive apparatus of the state may be correct for several instances. However, the armed elements outside of the state positions should not be considered within the state just because Weber’s definition of the state holds that the state has a monopoly of legitimate violence. Anderson’s argument for overlooking the civilian armed elements seems to have two grounds: firstly, they are marginal (e.g. the mafia of the US in 1920s and 1930s), and secondly, those that are not marginal are supported by the state (e.g. the squads of fascist Italy).
First of all, today, the armed power of the mafia is far from being marginal in a good number of countries (e.g. Italy, Russia, Turkey) while it has brought about scenes of major battle several times. Secondly, taking the support of the state elements is one thing, but being a part of the state is another. For example, even if an adult feeds a baby while the baby cannot survive without that adult’s support, we still cannot refer to the baby as that adult because the former survives on account of the support of the latter. They are ontologically two separate entities. Therefore, even though state elements may feed fascist squads, we cannot identify these two unless the latter is legally defined in state networks (according to the definition proposed in this article). This is not to deny the support provided by state elements to fascist paramilitary forces in a number of capitalist societies, but is to insist on separating the conceptual categories from each other with borders defined as clearly as possible. Otherwise, whenever a state element supports a non-state element (e.g. a police officer helping an armed communist militant in a capitalist society) we would have to consider the latter as a part of the state, stripping the concept ‘state’ of all its analytical power. In order to avoid what may be called ‘conceptual absorption’, that is, in order to refrain from allowing the concept to absorb the entities/relations denoted by other signifiers in an all-inclusive manner, conceptual precision is vital. For developing stronger theories, a multi-level analytical framework is also essential, since it enables the establishment of links between the relatively micro and macro frameworks.

A Multi-Level Analytical Framework

In conducting social analysis and particularly in theorizing the state, methodological preferences diverging on such issues as to what extent and how individual/collective subjects and structures that regulate, reproduce and transform social life should be integrated into the analysis, and in which manner they should be theorized, have remained at the points of departure. While the macro-level factors have much to do with the formation and transformation of individual feelings, thought, and activity, an overemphasis on social structures runs the risk of underestimating the neuro-physiological mechanisms (non-social parameters) that process natural and social inputs and that produce human action. Regardless of Bhaskar’s claim that “social activity must be given a social explanation, and cannot be explained by reference to non-social parameters (though the latter may impose constraints on the possible forms of social activity)” (1979: 122), a problem seems to exist on account of reducing non-social parameters – that would include at least some instincts and partially certain desires with the acknowledgement that
desires especially are in the most part socially constituted – to constraints. Theories in search of further analytical strength should not hesitate to make use of findings from different branches of science, and integrate the non-social aspects to the analysis in a non-underprivileged manner. Non-social factors are not only the constraints but also the pushing dynamics of human action. What should be considered in social analysis is the interplay of structures, of motives of individual psyche (only partially socially constituted), and of structures and individual psyche.

For the sake of concretizing this issue, a point on motives must be briefly mentioned here. Certain motives behind certain types of reason are influential in shaping social actions, as in the case of non-rebellion on account of physical rationality (with a motive to protect the physical being) even though there may be no consent to be ruled. This is not to suggest adopting an exclusively methodologically individualist model, but rather that the under-treatment of motives (or non-social part of motives) giving rise to certain types of reason and relative irrationalities (both of which embody the social and non-social parameters) renders the analysis incomplete, running the risk of social-structural determinism on the one hand and discursive reductionism on the other. The intentional underestimation of the individual can be detected in Marxist state theory, especially in Nicos Poulantzas’ approach in his reduction of the individuals to merely the bearers of objective structures and instances – an idea which was expressed very clearly in his criticism of Ralph Miliband (see Poulantzas, 1969: 70).

As Levine, Sober and Wright (1987) argued in ‘Marxism and Methodological Individualism’, the traditional Marxist interpretation of Marxism as scientific and materialist (while bourgeois theory is ideological and idealist), as holistic (where bourgeois theory is individualistic), as anti-empiricist and anti-positivist (while bourgeois theory is empiricist and positivist), often rests on the assumption that “Marxism embodies distinctive methodological doctrines which distinguish it from ‘bourgeois social science’” (1987: 67). Not surprisingly, Marxist state debate could not escape from being the scene of war between such labels. This mode has been apparent especially in the critical comments aimed at Miliband, which claim his analysis remains in the borders of bourgeois terrain (e.g. Poulantzas, 1969) or bourgeois sociology (e.g. Clarke, 1991: 20; see also the criticism of Rational Choice Marxism as an example of this tradition in Wood, 1989). It should be recognized that neither reformism nor adventurism is inherent in, if not irrelevant with, the methodological standpoint. The belief in the magical scientific character of the theories proposed by a good number of Marxists,
ready to condemn the other side as ‘bourgeois’, possesses not only the extreme danger of generating historical disasters such as the Stalinist cleansing operations, but also the less extreme threat of creating an exhausting and unpleasant atmosphere among academics, theorists and activists critical of institutional domination and inequalities.

Actually, it has not been easy to avoid integrating micro-level factors even for those who uphold macro-level analysis in an orthodox fashion. For example, although Poulantzas criticized Miliband for his alleged reduction of analysis to the motivations and behaviors of the individuals, he could not escape from including the ‘individual psyche’ in his own analyses. In ‘Political Power and Social Classes’, he referred several times to power fetishism (Poulantzas, 1975a: 244, 339, 355, 356), while in ‘State, Power, Socialism’ he made an even greater critical point with reference to the mechanisms of fear (2000: 83), which inevitably entail reference (whether implicit or explicit) to human psyche and psychological motives. A move beyond both structural and interpretive explanations would require the acknowledgment of neuro-physiological processes (e.g. instincts, needs, and desires; only partially socially constituted) and particular types of reasons reacting to numerous social inputs. The interests and relative rational/irrational preferences of individuals have long been taken for granted in mainstream sociology and economy. However, adding the individual motives and psyche, and the logics lying behind them (that is, adding further micro dimensions to relatively macro-levels of social analysis) is likely to develop rather than harm the analysis, increasing the interconnections between the levels of analysis. Those macro-level analyses that under-represent or tend to exclude relatively micro-level factors run the risk of overlooking some possible influential factors and making false generalizations in the analysis. For example, overlooking the drive for survival (the instinct of living) may end in such a generalization and false conclusion that ‘when the rulers insert more violence over the dominated, the consent of the dominated decreases, and this gives rise to rebellion; so for giving rise to a strong rebellion what the rebels have to do is to force the rulers to insert more violence over the dominated’, as in the case of proponents of certain guerilla strategies provoking the state armed forces to attack the demonstrators or the dominated, who would then in turn supposedly fight against the attackers (state armed forces). Although most social scientists insist on making ‘factual judgments’ rather than ‘political judgments’, in social sciences false generalizations run the risk of ending in not only defective theoretical works but also disastrous outcomes which may sometimes result in millions of deaths. Alas, Marxism is no exception,
Selçuk: Marxist Theory of the Capitalist State
despite all its claims to infallible knowledge, genuine scientificity, and ultimate truth.

For the purpose of minimizing errors, what is proposed here is a multi-level analysis that excludes neither macro nor micro level factors. Structural positions occupied should be treated as forces granting potential capacities to and constraining individual cognition and action, which transform other structures and individual actions and are transformed by them. This type of analysis necessarily focuses on the potentialities, activation, and operation of structures and individuals with reference to their reproductive and transformative orientation. We should not hesitate to refer to motives/drives and reasons/rationalities when necessary, since discussions on consent and violence as regards state theory require such notions. Now then, for grounding further discussions on the ‘capitalist hold of state power’ on a firmer basis, two basic types of rationalities derived from the ‘rationality of being’ will be assumed to exist (in addition to possible other types of rationality), which are ‘physical rationality’ and ‘emotional rationality’, both of which are in interplay with each other in terms of hindering, shaping, and sometimes even giving an end to the physical being. Since the acknowledgment of physical rationality has the potential to radically question the bases of those arguments that take the consent of the masses for granted for the existence of the capitalist state or capitalist hold of state power, or which hold the equation that ‘if the consent of the masses decreases the masses would rebel’ or that ‘if the masses do not rebel that must be because of the power of bourgeois ideology’ (see, for example, Gramsci, 1989: 239; Jessop, 1997: 574; cf. 1990: 76; Marx, 1844: 9; Miliband, 1969: 272; 1983: 66; Poulantzas, 1975a: 223, 317; 2000: 28) two ‘reason types’ will be elaborated for contributing to understand, at least in part, why capitalism still prevails in spite of widespread discontent, and which micro-level factors are in effect for the ‘capitalist hold of state power’.

Here, ‘physical rationality’ and ‘emotional rationality’ are proposed to be treated as among the major reasons for understanding why sometimes people give their consent to be exploited and dominated; why sometimes they stay still but do not give their consent; and why sometimes they rebel. Although there is no claim that only these two reasons exist as basic types of rationality, here they are held to be important factors underlying social action. As mentioned previously, all rationality types can be subsumed under the ‘reason of being’, which can be considered as a processor of the physical, emotional, and cognitive interests of the being, all of which are somehow linked to the neuro-physical structure of the individual.
Meanwhile, physical rationality that refers to conscious and/or unconscious calculation for ‘physical survival and health’ is assumed to be a basic (but not always primary) type of rationality, the components of which internally and externally confront with contradictory reasons. As for ‘internal contradiction’, the example of ‘a worker who has cancer as a result of not using gloves while he works with chemicals because he feels uncomfortable for his hands to sweat’ reflects the internal contradiction between long-term physical rationality and short-term physical rationality, where the latter becomes irrational from the former standpoint (the classical utilitarian short-term/long-term dilemma). As for ‘external contradiction’, any sub-orientation/reason of emotional rationality challenging physical survival or health can be given as an example, as in the case of ‘a person preferring to kill himself because he finds physical survival simply meaningless (which can be interpreted as an outcome of boredom)’ or ‘because he thinks that would be in the interest of his community (for example a suicide bomber with the motive of ‘duty’ and ‘honor’)’. It is apparent that there is no claim that physical rationality can never be challenged and that physical motives are necessarily non-contradictory and harmonious. On the contrary, physical rationality is composed of multiple reasons (each with multiple sources, orientations, and dimensions) with the potential simultaneously or consecutively to contradict one another. But still, it is held to be a basic type of rationality which has implications for motives pushing the person to both obedience and rebellion.

Nevertheless, physical rationality does not have an absolute privilege over other reasons. Although physical rationality is attributed a general (but not absolute) priority as long as human beings are at the same time emotional creatures, emotional rationality – dealing with feelings of aversion, hate, anger, serenity, revenge, compassion, love, and power – can become the major reason for a particular action, while conscious and/or unconscious calculation of the mind may be oriented towards the reduction of stress, experience of pleasure, or escape from pain. It is apparent here that emotions and rationality are not placed on opposite poles. Needless to say, components of emotional rationality are internally and externally open to contradictions and challenges in a simultaneous and/or consecutive manner. Not only physical rationality, but also emotional rationality is important to understand obedience and rebellion. Although there is much to examine about rationality and the relations between different types of reasons, for the moment, acknowledgment of the presence of physical and emotional reasons is sufficient to draw the attention to the importance of micro-level factors.
As for the question concerning the multi-level hold of state power, a tension may arise between tendential multiplicity and tendential unity. Although the pluralist view that state power cannot be dominated by a single group in liberal democracies is questionable, classical Marxist accounts reducing the political struggles to exclusively class struggles and the hold of state power exclusively to the owners of the means of production is also problematic. As for the question of how to define ‘power’, whether as “one’s capacity to exercise control or command over others” or as “one’s ability to ‘make a difference’ in the world” (see Helliwell & Hindess, 1999: 74 for those meanings in Oxford English Dictionary), power here is seen as the capacity to make a difference (to make work), while it is considered as the capacity that can be not only exercised but also held. As for ‘state power’, it is subject to struggles and is defined as ‘the capacity to make arrangements (that includes ‘to execute arrangements’) through state networks via legal or illegal means, which covers the capacity to perform a wide range of practices from laws to violence, while there is always the possibility of the presence of arrangements contradicting others’. When certain individuals or collectivities steer the exercisers of state power in line with their own interests, on account of their intentional practices (not side effects), and with a privilege of determinacy, then they can be considered as holders of state power. There are instances where both the hold and exercise of state power can be tendentially identified at particular levels of abstraction, and where not the hold but only the exercise of state power can be distinguished. Meanwhile, there is always the possibility of a range of holds and exercises of state power (including the possibility of partnership of those in and out of a particular state position and those within state networks) as regards a variety of different interests/desires (of the individuals, groups, communities and classes among others). Therefore, there is a multi-level hold of state power in a micro-macro range with varying time intervals.

Theoretical Reconstruction against Orthodoxy

For the construction of theories with the power to identify the problems with more accuracy, neither micro-level nor macro-level factors should be overlooked insofar as they are present. Once the biological motive of physical survival is considered, in a capitalist society consent to the capitalist order cannot always be treated as the prerequisite of obedience, while lack of consent to certain given conditions can be assumed to exist for many (if not all) of those who rebel against the capitalist order. What a great many people have deep in their heart may be a world without wars, with no rich and poor, although they may not rebel either due to the needs/desires
decree by their physical/emotional reasons or simply because they do not believe that a peaceful world is possible given the existing human material. Although an elaboration on such needs/desires and an exploration of the possibilities of a peaceful world requires data from not only such departments as sociology and political science but also from psychology, biology, medicine, chemistry, and physics, at least the rebellions of the past century indicate that the physical/emotional reasons of a great many people must have been so radically challenged by capitalism that millions of people rebelled at the expense of their lives, what they possessed materially, and even the people whom they cared about. Therefore, even the strong survival motive in living things may be challenged on account of mainly (if not merely) emotional impulses. However, the strong motive of physical survival and wellbeing/satisfaction should not be underestimated either.

Theoretical approaches taking for granted the success of bourgeois ideology in the absence of strong anti-capitalist rebellions in capitalist societies may trigger two dangerous tendencies. The first is the belief that the more the people face pro-capitalist violence, the more they tend to rebel against capitalism (as if they have no motive of physical wellbeing and have a dominant motive of revenge – superior to all other motives – conditioning them towards fighting against those who insert violence over them). The second is the belief that when exploitative and oppressive characteristics of capitalism are propagated against the people, the latter become ready to rebel against capitalism (as if what many people long for is not a world with no rich, poor, wars; as if people have no motive of physical wellbeing; as if people have nothing to care about except further material gains; as if people are engaged in only capitalism-relevant exploitation and oppression relations; as if knowing about certain factors influencing the enslavement of the individual is sufficient for starting to fight against them; as if sometimes rebellion does not radically harm particular physical/emotional interests of the rebel). With the expectation to steer the masses towards anti-capitalist rebellion, while the first tendency runs the risk of generating isolated terrorizing practices without the will of the masses, the second tendency runs the risk of being stuck in ideological demystification practices. Although exploring the possibilities of a world without exploitation and oppression requires far more attention and theoretical elaboration than has been decreed by several Marxist state theorists, until now it has been relatively easy for many Marxists to put the label of ‘bourgeois’ over a number of works critical about capitalist domination without any hesitation.

Rather than automatically identifying Marxism and the macro-mode of
analysis with ‘science’, a scientist has to be as open-minded as possible and encourage a multi-level analysis as much as possible in order to minimize the risk of missing possible factors that have to do with the miserable state of humankind. This text has attempted to reconstruct the concept ‘state’ so as to enhance analytical clarity. It has drawn attention to the importance of constructing the micro-macro link in social analysis, and it has proposed to give reference to physical and emotional reasons without restricting analysis to only macro-level factors. It has also criticized the tradition of equalizing Marxism with science and proposed solutions to the widely discussed issues on the capitalist state among Marxist circles. Underestimation of the importance of the means of violence along with physical motives is held to render such analysis misleading. For this reason, the consent of the masses to capitalism is not treated as unconditionally present in liberal democracies. Conceptual innovation becomes urgent when the prevalent concepts in scientific analysis start generating problematic judgments.

Fatma Ülkü Selçuk (fuselcuk@atilim.edu.tr) is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Atılım University, Turkey. Her past research includes work on social classes, informal sector, labour movement, and Marxist theory. She is currently interested in ethics and political philosophy, constructing her theoretical approach with a focus on ‘more respect to life’, ‘preconditions for peace’, and ‘the search for reality’.

This article is based on its author’s dissertation ‘Mechanisms for the Bourgeois Hold of State Power and The Case of Turkey’, approved in March 2007 in the Department of Sociology at the Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. The article is also a revised version of the paper ‘Violence as the Enabling Factor of State Power’, presented at the 24th Conference of the Nordic Sociological Association ‘Violence and Conflict’, Aarhus, Denmark, 14-17 August 2008.

Endnotes

1 The concept ‘bourgeoisie’, to which a number of different meanings has been attributed in relation to its members’ world view, lifestyle, social origin and location in the production process (for a critical evaluation of the concept ‘bourgeoisie’ see Wallerstein, 1988; Poulantzas, 1967) is, here, used as synonymous to ‘capitalist class’, regardless of the word bourgeoisie’s etymological and other associated meanings. The working class and capitalist class are defined in terms of their location in the production process vis-à-vis each other. As for the capitalist class, its members own the means of production while the unpaid part of the labor of the wage-worker is a major source of their profit. As for the capitalists’ (whether as a member of the...
'capitalist class' in particular or the 'category of capitalist' in general) tendential (not fixed, absolute, or unchallenged) common point on account of their structural location in the economy, it covers both their anti-anti-capitalist motive (including anti-communist motives) and their motive of securing profit. Yet, apparently, the capitalist class is far from being a homogeneous entity in spite of the characteristics, structural constraints, and motivations its members share. Therefore, several Marxists have given reference to the presence of various fractions of the capitalist class in their analyses (e.g. Aglietta, 1987; Jessop, 1990; Poulantzas, 1975a; 1975b; 2000). However, Miliband (1969) especially preferred to put the emphasis on the cohesion of the capitalist class rather than the differences, perhaps because, as Jessop argued, his writings were principally against the distortions and mystifications of the pluralist approach (1990: 29-30). It would be unjust to consider Miliband as claiming an absolute homogeneity of the capitalist class, as he wrote: “[s]pecific differences among dominant classes [. . .] are safely contained within a particular ideological spectrum, and do not preclude a basic political consensus in regard to the crucial issues of economic and political life” (1969: 46), while the economic elites in a capitalist society constitute “a dominant economic class, possessed of a high degree of cohesion and solidarity, with common interests and common purposes which far transcend their specific differences and disagreements” (1969: 48).

2 Here, the class struggle process is held to take place at a site embracing the interplay of associative and communal relationships in a micro-macro range. What makes a struggle class-related is held to be the fight for the interests of class members due to their structural location in the production process rather than the presence of class members in the fight.

3 According to Poulantzas, “[t]he 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” (2000: 44).

4 Meanwhile, ‘for whose interests’ and ‘on account of which intentional determinant efforts’ this official authority is activated are relevant to the question of holding ‘state power’.

5 Those armed elements may not be a part of the state.

6 This may at the same time require the defense/shrink/enlargement of the territory over which sovereignty is claimed where those particular groups do not necessarily denote those living within that territory.

7 ‘Group’ in 2.1a and 2.1b refers to ‘any possible combination of individuals’, including the ‘class’.

8 For example, see Marx’s (1844) ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right’ for his evaluation of the nineteenth century Prussian state. Jessop notes that although this approach disappeared in Marx’s later analyses to a great extent it can still be found
even in those later analyses of Asiatic modes of production, Oriental despotism and the Asian state (1990, p. 26). Nevertheless, “although the idea that the modern state is essentially parasitic is still held in anarchist circles, it was not long retained by Marx himself” (ibid.).

Jessop notes that this approach can also be found largely in Marx’s earlier writings, while from time to time, it also occurred in his later writings (1990: 26-27). While Marx’s comments on law constitute a good indicator of this approach, it can also be detected from the Preface to his Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (see Marx, 1859).

Jessop notes that this approach can be found in the classic texts such as that of Engels, Lenin, Bukharin, and Gramsci, yet despite this it is commonly associated with Poulantzas (Jessop, 1990: 27).

Jessop notes that this approach can be found especially in Marxist-Leninist accounts (1990: 27).

Jessop notes that this approach can be found in both the works of Engels and Lenin (1990: 28). See especially The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (Engels, 1884), and The State and Revolution (Lenin, 1917).

Jessop notes that this approach is best illustrated in Lenin’s (1917) remark considering the democratic republic as the best possible political shell for capitalism and that the change of persons, institutions or parties cannot shake the rule of capital once the democratic form of state is established (1990: 28). This approach can also be found in the discussions on the Paris Commune.

Contemporary state-centered approaches (e.g. Block, 1987; Skocpol, 1979; 1985) are mainly inspired by Weberian accounts.

This short-term and long-term distinction is made purely for analytical purposes and for classifying struggles as regards different sources of conflict. This categorization with reference to class interests may be formulated as follows: as for collective long-term class interests, this category refers to those interests of the class members in abolishing or restoring a mode of production in line with their relatively collective long-term economic interests, giving rise to class conflict/struggles on a long-term interest basis. As for short-term class interests, here, this category refers to those interests that favor any possible combination of elements of a particular class/category in terms of increasing the share from production at the expense of the interests of particular members of the same or different class/category without an intention to restore or abolish the mode of production in which they are situated.

There are a variety of different analytical standpoints concerning the scope of the working class (e.g. Braverman, 1974; Callinicos & Harman, 1987; Dahrendorf, 1965; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Goldthorpe, 1979; 1987; Poulantzas, 1975b; Wright, 1984;
1989) which are conceptualized parallel to the theoretical interests of each author. Here, the category of ‘wage-worker’ signifies only ‘those producing goods or services, deprived of the ownership of means of production they work with, who, more or less regularly, have to sell their labor power in return for the wage promised or received, predominantly on account of economic coercion’. The wage-worker category is referred to as ‘working class’ when the means of production that the worker uses are owned by the capitalist. Where the ownership belongs to the state or the workers of the enterprise, those workers are considered as belonging to the ‘wage-worker category’, not ‘class’, unless particular individuals or groups of people vis-à-vis wage-workers’ opposite side do not turn their control over the means of production (in/with which the considered wage-workers work) into a regular source of private income/privileges by exploiting the workers’ labor – in other words, appropriating a part of the output (or a part of the return to the output) produced by the wage worker on a regular basis. Eradicating the status of ‘working class’ in a collective manner in a way with a lesser (including zero) degree of exploitation is encoded as the working class’s long-term collective interests. Meanwhile, there is no assertion that there is no possibility for a wage-worker to eradicate her status of wage-worker in a way to be better off in economic terms (in its narrow sense) without the expropriation of means of production. Actually, she can do so if she can find the opportunity to be a well-off self-employed or exploiting class element, although this does not invalidate the presence of some collective working class interests which are antagonistic to both short- and long-term interests of the capitalist class. As for the antagonistic class struggles between the capitalist class and working class forces on a short-term basis, they mainly take the form of struggles for more shares of the output (goods/services) produced by the worker in the course of the production process (denoting a structural antagonism) or redistribution process (subsumed under the struggle among a variety of positions occupied by class members, segments, and non-class categories).

17 In this article, it is assumed that what makes it possible to talk about the presence of the ‘capitalist society’ within a particular country border is ‘the presence of the exercise of state power sufficient for securing the conditions of existence of the bourgeoisie; favoring the bourgeoisie more than any other propertied social class; and predominantly as against forces aiming to eradicate the capitalist mode of production, whether those state practices are present on account of the determining strategic practices of the bourgeoisie or not, where there is a capitalist mode of production (along with the presence of possible other modes of production)’. Here, the state in capitalist society is called the ‘capitalist state’ or ‘bourgeois state’. This definition indicates that whether or not there is a bourgeois subject with intentional pro-capitalist practices determinant in making the state overtly ‘capitalist’, a capitalist state may be established or run even by non-bourgeois elements without the presence of any determinant strategic bourgeois practices at all. For example, theoretically, even a strong enough armed wage-worker group may demolish a feudal state and establish a capitalist one, just because they admire the capitalist state in another country.
Although it is possible to interpret the preference of dying in torture as the ‘consent to die’, it cannot be interpreted as an indicator of consent to the conditions that force the person to make the choice. Therefore, while there might be ‘no consent to be tortured’, there might be ‘the consent not to talk but to die under torture’. Similarly, ‘the preference to work in a job under economic coercion’ does not necessarily indicate that there is consent to capitalism, if, for example, that person desires a society where there is neither the rich nor the poor.

Marxist debate on ideology will have to be elaborated further elsewhere. I have dealt with this issue in my unpublished paper ‘Marxist Conceptions of Ideology’ (submitted in the course ‘Ideology and Discourse Analysis’, during my doctoral study at Middle East Technical University, Department of Sociology, on January 24th, 2000), in which I tried to reconcile positive and negative conceptions of ideology, with a focus on Marx, Lukács, Gramsci and Althusser. The focus of the present article is not on a Marxist approach to ideology, since a number of texts have effectively dealt with this. Yet, since my focus on Perry Anderson’s criticism of Gramsci here runs the risk of giving the impression of underestimating Gramsci’s contributions, at least a few points made in such texts with reference to Gramsci should be given. Examples include Larrain on the centrality of organic ideologies (1991: 79); Eagleton on Gramsci’s treatment of organic intellectuals as the unifiers of theory and practice (1991: 119); Woolcock on organic intellectuals as the organizers through hegemonic apparatuses (1985: 206); Hall et al. on Gramsci’s treatment of ideology as the cement of the social bloc and his understanding of hegemony as irreducible to ideology (1978: 48); Mouffe on “the importance of moral and intellectual reform [. . .] in the creation of a ‘collective will’” (1979: 191); Larrain on Gramsci’s understanding of catharsis as a passage to an ethico-political moment, on his understanding of religion – as the bridge between philosophical system and the belief of masses – and on common sense as the most widespread form of ideology among subordinated classes (1991: 85); Kearney on Gramsci’s point that class interests mask themselves as cultural values and natural instincts (1986: 174) and the presentation of sectional class interests as collective interests (1986: 183). These comments exhibit the very diverse dimensions developed by Gramsci concerning ideology. In spite of my emphasis on violence as the prerequisite of the presence of the state, it is important to stress that I do not suggest that the use of violence is the path to a peaceful classless world. On the contrary, I see violence as disrespectful to life in the most part, leading to an almost vicious circle of oppression. My recent essays –published in Turkish – make this point clearer, in which I have treated the conceptual innovation and renewal in the world of meaning in a way to locate ‘respect to life’ at the centre of human practice as the most viable alternative for a non-oppressive world. In a way, ‘respect to life (living and promoting life without killing –with priority to human beings – at its heart)’ (from the micro to the macro) can be encoded as the existential interest of both the individual and humanity, while it can be considered as the basic ethical principle aimed to be accomplished with relative individual/collective progress. Unfortunately, this essay is too short to explain the details of my ethical/political construction in which compassion is attributed a central and positive role. Yet, a few points can be made here to make my attitude regarding violence clearer. Firstly, for
me, violence has to be eliminated as much as possible at both relatively micro (including the relationship between partners) and macro levels (including the renewal of weapons technology in a way to eliminate those ones with a strong potential to kill and wound human beings). Secondly, violence should not be deliberately applied to the innocent. The innocent should not be sacrificed. Thirdly, even though defeating capitalism is the prerequisite; it is not the sufficient condition for a peaceful world. Fourthly, while the working class in particular and disadvantaged groups in general may be more prone to fight against capitalism it does not follow that they are more prone to act in line with the principle of ‘respect to life’. Fifthly, a parallel can be drawn between the elimination of violence and feminization of relations in a micro-macro context, with the acknowledgment that ‘femininity’ should be treated as a quasi-arbitrary signifier denoting relative compassion, mercy, gentleness, peacefulness, and constructiveness. And, at least for this essay, lastly, for the sake of ‘resistance to violence without violence’, there is the need to re-conceptualize and reinterpret death in a way to overcome the fear of death.

20 ‘Being’ here refers to ‘existence’, yet it is not equivalent to mere physical survival. It includes but may sometimes challenge physical survival. ‘Rationality of being’ embodies several types of reasons each of which may be the combination of several others, each of which within and between themselves may be conflicting as regards the consciously recognized/unrecognized orientations/goals and/or relative time (term-relevance). A number of Marxist state theoretical analyses could have given a fuller account of the relations formulated in them if ‘human nature’ were not treated as neutral and the state of ‘being’ were not overlooked, both of which gave rise to theorizing individuals as merely the bearers of their structural positions and/or societal effects (including discursive practices).

Bibliography


Selçuk: Marxist Theory of the Capitalist State

_Changing Patterns of Labour_ Cheltenham: Edward Elgar (10-32)


Dahrendorf, R. (1965) _Class and Class Conflict in an Industrial Society_ California: Stanford University Press


Habermas, J. (1973) *Legitimation Crisis* Boston: Beacon Press


Skocpol, T. (1979) *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press


Selçuk: Marxist Theory of the Capitalist State

Press


