

**An Intervention into Poulantzas' Marxist Theory of State:  
The Problem of Racial Capitalism in the United States**

A Thesis Presented to the Honors Tutorial College, Ohio University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation from the Honors Tutorial College with  
the degree of Political Science A.B.

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April 2021

## **Table of Contents**

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Introduction.....   | p. 3  |
| Chapter 1: Literature Review of <i>Toward A Critical Theory of States: The Poulantzas-Miliband Debate After Globalization</i> ..... | p. 6  |
| Chapter 2: Marxism and Race within Poulantzas' Theoretical Framework.....   | p. 22 |
| Chapter 3: The State Repressive Apparatus.....  | p. 36 |
| Chapter 4: The State Political Apparatus.....   | p. 51 |
| Chapter 5: The State Economic Apparatus.....  | p. 59 |
| Chapter 6: The State Ideological Apparatuses.....   | p. 73 |
| Chapter 7: Relevance of Structural Marxist Theories of the State in the First Part of the Twenty-first Century.....                 | p. 85 |
| References.....   | p. 95 |

## **Introduction**

When I began my thesis work, I decided that it might be appropriate to utilize my project to call attention to the problem of racism in the United States, and that is essentially the objective that I hope to accomplish as I write this thesis. I recognize, however, that as a white academic situated within the privileged fortress of the university, I cannot speak on this issue with absolute authority and credibility, for I cannot provide a firsthand account of the Black experience in the United States. It is therefore important to note that I wish neither to speak for the Black community nor write on its behalf. In fact, I urge readers to explore the works of Black writers all over the world who may provide much more valuable insight than that of my own into the problem of racism in the United States. My work should never occupy their rightful place within the discourse. However, I believe it would still be inappropriate on my part to ignore the problem completely and fail to take advantage of my platform in order to speak out against the issue of racism. After all, one of the Black Lives Matter protesters' phrases should reverberate through the eardrums of the entire population: "white silence is violence." My potential silence on the issue is additionally harmful, and I therefore aim to create a project that brings attention to the ubiquitous racism that characterizes the United States as a social formation. Rather than appropriating the experience of Black Americans or drowning them out of the discourse, I hope to avoid wasting my platform with white silence; I hope I can enrich the academic and activist discourse with my own research and analyses of the barriers we must confront when attempting to advance real social change.

Readers should keep in mind that I am a Marxist theorist and that my knowledge of political science is most extensive within the field of Marxism. It therefore makes sense that I address the issue of racism in the United States within a Marxist theoretical framework because

this is the avenue through which I have the most advanced knowledge and research to offer to the discourse. However, I am not aiming to appropriate the experience of Black Americans in order to advance my own politics. Rather, I am striving to contextualize the problem of racism in the United States within the theoretical framework through which I can provide the most valuable insight in order to speak out against injustice.

In any case, I believe Marxist theoretical approaches can provide a unique and important contextualization of the problem of racism in the United States. Of particular concern are the analytical categories of repression and ideology that become prevalent within the Structural Marxist background. The repressive function of the capitalist state involves the prominent and indispensable use of the police apparatus in order to ensure the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production, and given the dominant ideologies of white supremacy that permeate the United States, racism becomes a powerful ideological weapon that can legitimize arbitrary and unrestricted use of police violence whenever it is necessary in order to ensure the reproduction of capital and labor-power. When abolitionist activists call for defunding or dissolving the police apparatus in order to address the problem of racist state violence, they must recognize the behemoth they confront, for such a police apparatus is inextricably linked to the capitalist mode of production itself. Many writers and activists of several theoretical backgrounds already understand that the police apparatus in the United States is inherently racist institution rooted in white supremacy due to its historical origins in the context of slavery and settler-colonialism, and many of them have already concluded that dissolving the current institution and reimagining the concept of policing are necessary steps forward with regard to addressing racist police violence. However, the Structural Marxist analyses of repression and ideology can enrich their understandings by contextualizing racism within the situation of international capital

accumulation and demonstrating that political struggles against the police apparatus are actually compatible with Marxist struggles against international capitalist exploitation, if not inseparable from them.

Through investigation of the capitalist character of the state and its repressive, political, economic, and ideological functions, Structural Marxist analyses can reveal the mechanisms and modalities of racial oppression in relation to international capital accumulation and denote the ties between racism and capitalism in general. They may demonstrate the capitalist functionality of racism and its capacity to strengthen the political power of the ruling classes. In addition, they may provide comprehensive solutions to the issue of racist state violence and prescribe broader revolutionary objectives that fight the oppressors at the heart of their power. If we understand the history of the United States to involve the colonization of Black people for the purpose of surplus-value extraction of their labor, then we can contextualize our conceptualizations of the role and function of each institution/apparatus of the state within this historical development. In the following chapters of my thesis, I aim to incorporate the problem of racism into specific analytical categories within Marxist theories of the state, particularly in regard to repression and ideology, in order to better understand the racist character of the capitalist state.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review of *Toward A Critical Theory of States: The Poulantzas-Miliband Debate After Globalization***

### **State Theory in the Age of Post-Fordism and Globalization**

Political and economic globalization in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century has catapulted transnational actors, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations to the forefront of theoretical discussion, thus leading a prominent wave of Western social scientists to dismiss the prioritization of state theory. Some theorists contend that the relevance of nation-states has diminished due to their disaggregation, declining sovereignty, and loss of authority over certain domestic actors. However, in *Toward A Critical Theory of States: The Poulantzas-Miliband Debate After Globalization*, Clyde W. Barrow finds that closer analysis of the globalization process reveals that the nation-state is still a salient agent in the transformation of the global political, economic, and ideological system. In fact, he argues that it is exactly the role of the nation-state that enables this transnationalism and economic globalization. When exploring Marxist theories of the state, the Poulantzas-Miliband debate of the 1970s provides an informative theoretical background. The application of their analytical frameworks may facilitate attempts to theorize the contemporary state form and what led to its reconstruction. Before I turn to Marxist theories of the state in order to analyze the state in the contemporary context, I will first revisit the Poulantzas-Miliband debate in order to draw lessons from their contributions and analytical frameworks and recognize their relevance to the problems we currently face.

I have decided to focus my attention on the Poulantzas-Miliband debate because of its prevalence within the popular intellectual discourse surrounding Marxist theories of the state, but we must first note that the absence of discussions surrounding race severely limits the ability of

either Poulantzas' work or Miliband's work to find adequate relevance in the United States today. This is a devastating shortcoming that we cannot overlook. As I shall soon elaborate in this chapter, my project employs the theoretical framework of Poulantzas, but only with this reservation and criticism of him in mind. He completely ignores the problem of racism in some of his most influential books, including *Fascism and Dictatorship* (1974) and *State, Power, Socialism* (1978). Some might consider this an unforgivable offense, for how can we take a theorist seriously when he writes an entire book on facsism without providing sufficient attention to the problem of racism? What is most regrettable about this issue is the fact that in my opinion, his insights into Structural Marxism can actually help contextualize racism within the broader framework of the capitalist state and the internationalization of capital. Rather than discarding his contributions entirely, I believe we should attempt to furnish his theoretical framework with analysis of historical examples and documentations of the problems surrounding racial capitalism. Such an effort may be able to breathe new life into Poulantzas' insights, which I believe are still relevant today.

One of the key lessons we may learn from the Poulantzas-Miliband debate is that Miliband furnishes a rather limited theoretical framework with plenty of concrete historical examples and evidence to illustrate his points, while Poulantzas develops an intricate theoretical framework without much if any reference to concrete historical illustrations of its validity. Therefore, one of the primary theoretical objectives of this project involves bringing Poulantzas' structural analysis into more concrete points of contact with historical examples of racism in the United States. In any case, let us now explore Poulantzas' and Miliband's theoretical frameworks.

### **Miliband's Theory of the State: A Summary**

In *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969) Ralph Miliband elaborates his own Marxist theory of the state while simultaneously engaging the state theory of democratic pluralism, which was prominent in the discourse at the time. In this work, Miliband utilizes empirical and historical evidence to challenge the pluralist declarations of an allegedly nonexistent ruling capitalist class. He theorizes that the ruling bourgeois class wields its economic power and ideological influence to exert control over state institutions and the positions of power within them in order to maintain class dominance under the capitalist mode of production. According to Barrow (2016), Miliband divides the state system into five parts: the governmental apparatus (e.g., elected legislatures and executives), the administrative apparatus (e.g., bureaucratic institutions, central banks, regulatory agencies), the coercive apparatus (e.g., military, police), the judicial apparatus (the legal system), and sub-central governments (e.g., states, provinces, municipalities), all of which are subject to varying degrees of capitalist class control (p. 24). The separation and relative autonomy of these five parts of the state signifies that legislative and executive powers (the governmental apparatus) are not the only components of state power, meaning that the election of socialist or social democratic legislators and executives are not a sufficient condition of a transition to a non-capitalist state. In addition to the other four parts of the five-part state system, Miliband recognizes that structures within the economic sphere itself limit the power of the governmental apparatus. Miliband's work in *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969) demonstrates empirical evidence that the capitalist ruling class, by nature of its inherent economic power, exerts an uneven degree of power over the state system in relation to other classes of civil society.

Miliband contends that the structure of the corporation and the systemic ideological unity in the state system are two paramount factors contributing to capitalist class control of the state.



The joint-stock corporation contains an oligarchical internal structure, and a small portion of the population of social formation, which Miliband calls the capitalist class, controls a significant share of corporate stocks. This economic class of finance capitalists exerts exceptional influence over the election of boards of directors of corporations and consequently both oversees investment and indirectly wields control over productive capital. According to Barrow (2016), Miliband asserts that these finance capitalists often control the executive branch of the government apparatus as well as the administrative apparatus, which have historically developed larger shares of power relative to the legislature and the other apparatuses of the state system (pp. 26-27). In addition, Miliband theorizes that the capitalist class maintains power and legitimacy throughout all five apparatuses of the state through the maintenance of systemic ideological unity. In order to control all five apparatuses of the state system, the ruling class must ensure that the military, police, intelligence agencies, courts, state governments, etc. maintain an ideological commitment to the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. Miliband contends that a lack of ideological unity among the entire state system may entail reduction in ruling class state influence, meaning that cultural commitment to the legitimacy of the capitalist mode of production is necessary for the maintenance of its state power.

***Poulantzas' Theory of the State: A Summary***

Nicos Poulantzas, like most if not all Marxists, theorizes that the capitalist mode of production involves labor relations in which the bourgeoisie owns and controls the means of production and extracts surplus labor value from workers in order to realize a profit. This capitalist mode of production involves contradictory class interests and thus an inherent, perpetual class struggle between the laborers' pursuit of material self-interest and the bourgeois pursuit of material self-interest. However, according to Barrow (2016), Poulantzas contends that

class struggles and crises tendencies establish disequilibrium in the capitalist mode of production, and the state then serves as a necessary regulatory agent that maintains equilibrium of the system and allows the dominant class to successfully realize capital accumulation in spite of contradictory class interests (p. 34). Under this conception, Poulantzas contends that the capitalist state is not a mere tool or instrument of the dominant classes, but rather a strategic terrain in which all classes may express power, including the subordinate classes. Bourgeois domination via the state is therefore a consequence of the uneven degree of bourgeois class power expressed within the terrain of state. Poulantzas, a theorist with a background in Structural Marxism, elaborates the following four structural functions of the state: the economic function, the political function, the repressive function, and the ideological function, all of which serve to maintain capitalist class power and social equilibrium despite structural tendencies toward disequilibrium. In his theorizing, Poulantzas conceptualizes the following complementary state apparatuses that together carry out these three respective functions: the state economic apparatus, the state political apparatus, the state repressive apparatus, and the state ideological apparatus.

### **The Poulantzas Critique of Miliband's Theory of the State.**

The Poulantzas-Miliband debate regarding Marxist state theory began in 1969 when Poulantzas criticized the methodology, overall political objective, and theoretical analyses of Ralph Miliband. First, while he extolled Miliband's ability to challenge the bourgeois social science of pluralist theory, Poulantzas argued that critical theorists should not legitimize these theories by confronting them empirically and historically on their own theoretical grounds. Instead, he contended, they must employ empirical and historical facts within a different, Marxist theoretical framework. Second, Poulantzas claimed that Miliband regards particular social agents within the state personnel as the determinants of whether or not the state reflects bourgeois

domination, which may lead to the conclusion that various social agents can manipulate the state like a tool or instrument, depending on who operates within the positions of power within the state personnel. Furthermore, according to Barrow (2016), Poulantzas declares that Miliband fails to recognize the objective structures (i.e. capitalist mode of production and labor relations) as the subjects of political and economic action, which results in the internal unity and cohesion of the state apparatus despite the participation of different social classes in the state apparatus (pp. 40-42). In other words, the state functions to maintain structural equilibrium in the capitalist mode of production despite contradictions between class interests, and the actual participation and control of the capitalist class within the state personnel is irrelevant to the capitalist character of the state. This alleged neglect of structural factors, in addition to Poulantzas' comments regarding the state personnel and bourgeois political domination. lead and may continue to lead several critical theorists in the Poulantzas camp to apply the label of "instrumentalism" to Miliband's theory of the state.

Third, Poulantzas rejects Miliband's alleged assertion that bourgeois ideology and culture are subjects that act upon the state personnel and so that they can maintain capitalist state power. Rather, the state ideological apparatus, by virtue of its functional role as the regulator maintaining equilibrium for the actual subject (structural labor relations in the capitalist mode of production), advances and inculcates the dominant bourgeois ideology. Barrow (2016) finds that in contrast to Miliband, Poulantzas believes churches, political parties, trade unions, schools and universities, the press, television, radio, and the family are all elements of the state ideological apparatus (p. 43). Poulantzas thus theorizes that the transformation or termination of the capitalist mode of production is the only prerequisite to the transformation of these ideological

elements; the transformation of these ideological elements themselves alone is not a sufficient condition of the socialization of the existing mode of production.

These contentions toward Miliband and the discrepancies between the two analytical frameworks are important to comprehend, but Barrow argues that some of these critiques of Miliband mischaracterize his ideas and fail to acknowledge their relevance to contemporary Marxist state theory. According to Barrow (2016), Poulantzas does not illustrate a significant number of substantial distinctions between his criticism of Miliband and his criticism of C. Wright Mills (p. 81). In *The Power Elite* (1956), C. Wright Mills proposes the notion that the economic, political, social, and cultural components of society are separate and autonomous from one another, but each of these components contains its own respective group of power elites (i.e. oligarchies) that wield an exceptional degree of power relative to the remaining citizens that comprise them. Although this notion challenges the bourgeois theory of pluralism, Mills does not utilize a Marxist (or any, for that matter) theory of political economy to account for the overlapping capitalist relationships between economic, political, social, and cultural components of society, nor does he construct a theory of state. Alternatively, however, Miliband does not fail to identify the structural linkages between these societal components, nor does he fail to elaborate a theory of the state. Unlike Mills, Miliband recognizes the existence of a capitalist class that exerts systemic control across economic, political, social, and cultural components of society.

Barrow believes the assertion that Miliband fails to account for structural relationships in his Marxist theory of the state leads several critics to inaccurately ascribe the “instrumentalist” label to his analytical framework and consequently critique instrumentalism instead of Miliband himself in their review of his work. According to Barrow (2016), Miliband contends that he does

indeed account for capitalist structural constraints in respect to the power of the state, specifically and potentially most importantly, the constraint of *business confidence*, in his theorizing (Italicized Barrow, pp. 90-92). If state systems do not establish policies that facilitate capital accumulation, the state may lose a perception of legitimacy among its most wealthy and powerful citizens, which might result in detrimental national instability, whatever form that may take. In respect to Poulantzas' critique regarding ideological state apparatuses, Miliband simply rejects the notion that cultural institutions (e.g. churches, television, radio, schools) are part of the state. However, he does acknowledge the growing ability of states to influence these institutions, especially schools, and he still believes the ruling class exerts significant ideological power in these institutions, albeit not via the terrain of the state itself. It is evident that Miliband is not an instrumentalist in the strictest sense of the ideal-type, but regarding the Poulantzas-Miliband debate surrounding ideology, I find that it might be necessary to simply take sides, depending on which of the two frameworks one employs.

### ***The Miliband Critique of Poulantzas' Theory of the State.***

While a significant portion of the Poulantzas-Miliband debate involves Miliband defending his own analytical framework, it additionally involves Miliband's own criticisms of Poulantzas, specifically in relation to Althusserian-structuralism. Barrow finds that Miliband ascribes the label "structural super-determinism" to Poulantzas and his analysis, elaborating that Poulantzas too heavily emphasizes objective structures and thus possesses no ability to theoretically distinguish the factors that lead to specific concrete discrepancies between capitalist states in different regions or time periods. According to Barrow (2016), Miliband asserts that Poulantzas derives his analysis primarily from what he calls the *structuralist abstractionism* of Louis Althusser, a twentieth century French philosopher, rather than Marx, which leads

Poulantzas to neglect the importance of explaining the empirical, historical, and institutional evidence of specific structures in existing capitalist states (Italicized Barrow, pp. 46-47, 50).

However, similar to the criticisms of Miliband's own theory of the state, Miliband's criticisms of Poulantzas mischaracterize his actual theoretical framework and its important nuances.

In contrast to the structural determinist approach of Althusser, Poulantzas employs a historical structuralist approach to the construction of his analytical framework. According to Barrow (2016), Poulantzas criticizes Althusserian structural determinism for its abstractedness, formalism, neglect of class struggle, and lack of attention to the economic function of the state (p. 109). Although Althusser identifies the repressive and ideological functions of the state, Poulantzas asserts that he fails to recognize a precisely economic function. In addition, Poulantzas believes that even a Structural Marxist theory of the state should involve analysis of specific social formations and the concrete sites class struggle. It is therefore important to note that Poulantzas himself critically engages other forms of analysis while working toward the construction of a Marxist theoretical framework, thus somewhat nullifying his first critique of Miliband mentioned above.

We should additionally note that Poulantzas identifies the following theoretical weaknesses within what he regards as the "formalist-economist" position: the existence of unchanging economic structures over time, the obfuscation of class struggle, and the potentiality of a "general theory of the economy." According to Barrow (2016), Poulantzas argues that modes of production are *abstract-formal objects* that lead to the construction of different state forms, depending on their historical context in relation to class struggle; he rejects a general theory of the economy applicable to all modes of production but instead accepts the prospect of a general theory of the capitalist state that can identify and analyze its various forms and historical

mutations (p. 115). In *State, Power, Socialism* (1978), Poulantzas acknowledges an ongoing transition to a new form of the capitalist state—authoritarian statism—which might be impossible to conceptualize within a formalist-economist position and its implicit assumptions that a theory of the state is applicable to various modes of production. Miliband’s critique of Poulantzas’ “structural abstractionism” is therefore a mischaracterization of Poulantzas’ actual theoretical approach.

### **Moving Beyond the Poulantzas-Miliband Debate**

Barrow contends that contemporary Marxist state theorists should move past the debate between Poulantzas and Miliband and instead draw analytical ideas from both of their frameworks in order to theorize the current state form in existing societies. He believes the primary division between them concerns primarily the differences between their methodological and epistemological approaches. Barrow (2016) finds:

The Poulantzas-Miliband debate did not focus on conceptual or empirical disputes about how to define the state, the “function” of the capitalist state, or the internal structure of the state apparatus and its relations to different classes in specific social formations. Instead, the Poulantzas-Miliband debate digressed almost immediately into an epistemological dispute over whether there is any such thing as a specifically Marxist methodology, but even this question was incorrectly posed as the false dichotomy between structure and agency (p. 152).

Ironically, Barrow concludes that both Poulantzas and Miliband employ non-Marxist methodologies in order to analyze Marx’s writings, and he notes that whether or not a specifically “Marxist” methodology even exists is an ongoing, unresolved debate. What then, can we draw from each of these two theorists in our contemporary analysis of the state? Poulantzas’

historical structuralist conception of the state as an agent of restoration of equilibrium in the capitalist mode of production during crisis periods and class struggle disequilibrium offers crucial theoretical groundwork when analyzing the causal factors leading to the transition to the current state form. Equally relevant is understanding the importance of the “state economic apparatus” in the construction of the new state form. According to Barrow (2016), Poulantzas never finished theorizing the character development of the state economic apparatus in its contemporary regional and historical context (pp. 119-120). We can therefore attempt to examine the state economic apparatus specifically within current social formations. Miliband’s analytical examination of existing institutions (e.g. corporations, finance capital, commercial and investment banks) as well as their state legitimization and empowerment in specific concrete social formations provides empirical and historical evidence of the relation of the state economic apparatus to the establishment of a new equilibrium and post-Fordist state form and allows us to better understand the institutional framework of the state economic apparatus and its components. The theoretical contributions of both Poulantzas and Miliband can better inform our understanding of the capitalist state as we move forward.

The application of these analytical frameworks in developing a Marxist theory of the state involves a historical analysis of particular events and conditions that generated crises of capital or class struggle disequilibrium as well as documentation of relevant state institutions and social actors. (A historical materialist perspective of political economy enables theorists to explain how actual examples of class struggle and crises of capital in the 1970s contributed to the introduction of the current form of capitalist state to which Poulantzas refers as authoritarian statism.<sup>1</sup>) In our particular analytical project, we shall in the following chapters aim to understand

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on authoritarian statism as a distinct form of the capitalist state, see Part Four of Poulantzas’ book, *State, Power, Socialism*.



authoritarian statism as a response to the crises of the 1970s within the United States as a distinct social formation. In addition, we will aim to document the material development of the capitalist state throughout subsequent decades in the United States in order to understand and contextualize the problems we encounter today regarding the state. In particular, our analysis will operate within Poulantzas' theoretical framework in order to explore the advantages of Structural Marxism and determine whether or not such an approach is relevant in this current period, but we will furnish his framework with concrete historical information—something that Poulantzas' theorizing often lacks.

### **The New State Form**

In response to the crises of capital accumulation and class struggle disequilibrium in the 1970s, a new neoliberal state form has emerged in the United States and other nations in order to advance the interests of U.S. financial imperialism. As we specifically employ Poulantzas' theoretical framework in our project, we of course recognize that the current form of capitalist state is actually authoritarian statism, for Poulantzas does not refer to neoliberalism as a state form. However, particularly in the United States, we cannot neglect an analysis of neoliberal theory and practice because its normative order of reason and governing rationality has shaped and guided authoritarian statism throughout its progression and evolution within this social formation. Therefore, we shall refer to authoritarian statism in the United States as the “neoliberal form of capitalist state” even though it is technically incorrect to consider neoliberalism as a state form within Poulantzas' framework. Authoritarian statism refers to a specific relationship between the political, ideological, and economic fields under a distinct stage of capitalism within specific nations, and we may therefore consider it a state form within Poulantzas' framework. Neoliberalism, contrastingly, refers to a political theory and practice that

manifested under authoritarian statism in order to guide state policy and mark academic discourse. Our use of the term “neoliberal state form” will serve merely as a rhetorical device that will help us better understand the particular nature of this distinct social formation.

What then, do we desire to express by our reference to the neoliberal capitalist state, and where does originate? As U.S. finance capitalists continue to seek new investment and growth opportunities, it becomes necessary to enhance the prevalence of transnationalism, globalization, and economic liberalization by establishing a neoliberal state form in the United States as well as other nations with desirable capital assets. According to Barrow (2016), the relevance of the state is not waning in the age of globalization, but instead is becoming a regional tool that facilitates the penetration of U.S. capital into particular nations via the following three mechanisms identified by Bob Jessop: internationalization of domestic policy, denationalization of the state, and destatization of the political system (pp. 126, 145-147). The internationalization of domestic policy involves the incorporation of the interest of the fractions of capital influenced by the global process of capital accumulation directly into national political and economic policy. Deregulation, privatization, and the establishment of liberal trade agreements in countries such as Mexico and Chile are state policies that permit the investment of U.S. capital in their countries and the consequent acquisition of significant shares of their firms. This of course introduces a contradiction between international capital accumulation and national legitimation because the internationalization of domestic policy may not correspond with purely national interests. Denationalization of the state strives to resolve the contradiction between accumulation and legitimation by displacing the crises stemming from the contradiction to new levels of political and economic organization such as the European Union. Destatization of the political system

involves the establishment of partnerships between government, para-governmental, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Barrow (2016) finds:

As the state becomes overloaded with demands on its national and local administrative capacities, it continues to delegate and disperse regulatory and distributive powers to quasi-public corporations, trade associations, professional organizations, social service corporations, labor unions, chambers of commerce, scientific associations, and many other private nonprofit organizations (p. 147-148).

These para-governmental actors and NGOs take on several of the responsibilities of the national state and may therefore assume the blame for political and economic policies that are unfavorable for national legitimation. Poulantzas in addition describes the an evolving relationship between the repressive and economic functions within the new state form, for brutal dictatorships (e.g. Chile) and state-led structural adjustment programs (e.g. Mexico) are authoritarian responses to class struggles and crises of capital accumulation that have authorized and instituted this new state form.

Overall, Barrow contends that globalization is a contemporary manifestation of U.S. financial imperialism. Barrow (2016) finds:

This “new imperialism” is characterized by the direct penetration of U.S. capital into foreign social formations, which includes the restructuring of economic, political, and ideological relationships with those nation-states and their subordinate articulation with a new American superstate (p. 123).

In other words, many nation-states constitute in a certain sense a form of satellite state that must restructure its economic, political, and ideological functions in order to facilitate the internationalization of U.S. finance capital. According to Poulantzas (1978):

A new division is appearing between, on the one hand, what I have called the *domestic bourgeoisie* (which, while being linked to foreign capital and thus not constituting a truly national bourgeoisie, nevertheless enters into significant contradictions with it) and, on the other hand, a bourgeoisie entirely dependent upon foreign capital (Italicized Poulantzas, p. 212).

In this new form of U.S financial imperialism, the nation-state must direct its political and economic policy toward the favor of the bourgeoisie dependent upon foreign capital. Within Poulantzas' framework, each nation-state occupies a particular position within the imperialist chain organized under the relative hegemony of the United States.

### ***Prospects of My Theoretical Research***

In order to connect Poulantzas' historical structuralist approach of Marxist state theory to more points of concrete historical analysis, I must conduct a thorough analysis of particular crises of capital accumulation and class struggle disequilibrium through a historical materialist perspective of political economy. According to Brown (2015), neoliberalism is a systemic reaction to Keynesianism and the democratic socialist movements of the 1960s and 1970s (p. 21). The identification and description of this particular crisis in addition to others throughout history (e.g. Great Depression, Great Recession) is a necessary prerequisite to comprehending and theorizing the development of the current state form.

As I attempt to better comprehend the contemporary reality of the capitalist state in the U.S. within Poulantzas' theoretical framework, I shall maintain some degree of engagement with the theoretical agenda that Poulantzas outlined for future theorists. According to Barrow (2016), Poulantzas identifies the following three primary theoretical agendas to address: the identification of the subject and scope of the state, the analysis of the new relationship between

the political and economic functions of the state, and the study the institutional framework of the new state form (pp. 163-164). My project aims to identify and describe the specific institutions comprising the state repressive apparatus, the state political apparatus, the state economic apparatus, and the state ideological apparatus and theorize the structural relationship between them.

This project will consist of introducing the problem of racial capitalism into Poulantzas' theoretical framework in order to examine the relevance of Structural Marxism to understanding racism in the United States. I will attempt to address the following two theoretical questions of research: 1) How does the neoliberal character of authoritarian statism as a response to the political and economic crises of the 1970s in the United States inform our contemporary understanding of the capitalist state in this social formation; and 2) How can we attempt to understand racial capitalism within Poulantzas' theoretical framework? In addition, I will explore the relationship between these two questions because I cannot fully answer either one without answering both simultaneously, for these two questions overlap and inform one another. By addressing them, I hope to better understand the problems surrounding the state that we must now confront, and I hope to rectify Poulantzas' mistake by incorporating questions of race into his framework.

## **Chapter 2: Marxism and Race within Poulantzas' Theoretical Framework**

### **Chapter Overview**

Before directly engaging my two questions of research, it is necessary to first demarcate with more precision the specific aspects of Poulantzas' theoretical framework and conception of the state. In general, this demarcation shall serve as the principal theoretical basis and guiding conceptualization throughout our analysis, even as we shall in addition explore the notions, frameworks, and concepts of other state theorists and how they relate to Poulantzas' framework in order to supplement our overall comprehension of the state. Only then can we accurately and effectively analyze the current social formation and institutional state materiality within the United States through the analytical lens of Poulantzas.

Before I bring discussions of race into the project, I will first outline Poulantzas' theoretical framework as it stands on its own in order to ensure that readers may understand how the problem of racial capitalism fits within it. This chapter introduces a conversation between Poulantzas' theoretical framework and the insights Black Marxism so that these two backgrounds of study may inform and enrich each other. The first section of this chapter demarcates Poulantzas' theoretical framework, and the second section incorporates the insights of Black Marxists within it.

### **Poulantzas' Theoretical Framework of the State**

Of course, Poulantzas is sure to emphasize his deviation from an instrumentalist conception of the State, which describes the state as a class dictatorship and alleges that state power exhausts itself within the state apparatus alone. This instrumentalist line of thought conceptualizes the State as a specialized apparatus standing above society and an impenetrable kernel of power in which only the ruling classes are able to exert influence and wield as a tool of

political domination. However, Poulantzas also highlights a second misconceptualization regarding a dual-nature of the state that both traditional and Marxist theorists sometimes recognize. Poulantzas (1978) finds:

Invoking the dual nature of the State, they see *on the one hand* (still the great divide!) a kernel of the State that somehow exists side by side with classes and class struggle...Then *on the other hand*, there is the State's second nature, this time related to classes and class struggle. So we have a second State, a super-State or a State within the State, which is grafted on to the back of the first' (Italics Poulantzas, p. 13).

For these theorists, there yet exists one nature of state power in which class is entirely absent until a particular class grafts itself onto the back of this kernel and utilizes this power. However, Poulantzas asserts that all class powers, which includes those of the subordinate classes, are never absent from that state. Poulantzas (1978) finds that:

The state apparatus - that special and hence formidable something - is not exhausted in state power. Rather political domination is itself inscribed in the institutional materiality of the State. Although the State is not created *ex nihilo* by the ruling classes, nor is it simply taken over by them: state power (that of the bourgeoisie, in the case of the capitalist state) is written into this materiality (Italics Poulantzas, p. 14).

Within his distinct Structural Marxist framework, Poulantzas conceptualizes the state not as a tool or instrument that the bourgeoisie is able to wield without discretion, but rather as an expression of the relationship of class forces and powers, which in the capitalist case is an expression of a relationship of bourgeois domination. For Poulantzas—the concept of the State<sup>2</sup>—refers not to a concrete institution that the subordinate classes can smash, penetrate, or

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<sup>2</sup> Notice here that we capitalize the word “State.” In *State, Power, Socialism*, Poulantzas capitalizes “State” in order to designate the State as an epistemologically distinct object and differentiate it from the economic sphere.

overtake, but rather an expression of the relationship of social forces within a social formation. The—inscription of classes and class struggle rooted in the relations of production therefore finds expression within the institutional materiality of the state<sup>3</sup>—in its entirety.

Poulantzas rejects the formalist-economist position and the prospect of a general theory of the state or economy. Marxist theorists often invoke a topological representation of an economic “base” and politico-ideological “superstructure” in which the economic sphere, acting as a material foundation, primarily dictates the structures of the political and ideological spheres that arise from it. Poulantzas asserts that the formalist-economist position draws upon this image, conceptualizes the economic sphere as an object containing unchanging elements throughout various modes of production, and consequently treats the State as a simple mechanical reflection of the self-sustaining economic base capable of reproducing its conditions of production on its own. (Poulantzas believes this position permits the possibility of a general theory of the economy, which, based on this understanding, must conceptualize the superstructural fields not as unique epistemological objects, but rather as external extensions of the economy-object.<sup>4</sup>)

In contrast, Poulantzas rejects the topological imagery of “base” and “superstructure” in its entirety (a rather unique position for a Marxist) as well as the formalist-economist conceptions that sometimes stem from it, and he contends that the economic sphere cannot reproduce its conditions of production on its own. He asserts that in every mode of production, the political and ideological fields of the State are present in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production within the economic sphere, although the contours of these three spheres and the interrelationship between them mutate according to the specific mode of production or phase of capitalism. Poulantzas (1978) finds “The position of the State [political

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on this discussion, see: Poulantzas (1978, pp. 14-25).

<sup>4</sup> For more information on Poulantzas’ discussion of epistemological objects, see: Poulantzas (1978, p. 16).



and ideological fields] via-a-vis the economy is never anything but the modality of the State's [political and ideological] presence in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production" (p. 17). He ascribes autonomy to the political and ideological fields that undergo metamorphosis whenever there is a change in the mode of production or phase of capitalism that requires a transformation of the space-process where these spheres and their new delineations enter into the reproduction of the relations of production. We may now refer to the state political apparatus and the state ideological apparatus in order to categorize the material functionality of concrete institutions/apparatuses (e.g., parliament, Church) according to their political and ideological roles in the economic sphere.

In the capitalist mode of production, the direct producers possess neither the object nor the means of their labor, thus transforming labor power into a commodity and surplus labor into surplus value and further separating the State from the economic sphere, relative to its separation under feudalism and slavery. According to Poulantzas, "What is involved here is not a real externality, such as would exist if the State intervened in the economy only from the outside. The separation is nothing other than the capitalist form of the political in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production" (pp. 18-19). For example, capitalism delegates the function of legitimate violence to the State political and repressive fields rather than the economic sphere itself, unlike feudalism, where legitimate violence is prevalent in both the State and the production process. Poulantzas believes that the unique and specific form of State political presence in the constitution and reproduction of the capitalist relations of production permits the possibility of general theory of the capitalist state or general theory of the capitalist economy. However, Poulantzas (1978) finds that:

The theory of the capitalist state can attain a genuinely scientific status only if it manages to grasp the reproduction and historical mutations of its object at the very place where they occur - that is to say, in the various social formations that are the sites of class struggle (p. 24).

This is neither to signify that the relations of production themselves constitute a theoretical object nor to assume that the State assumes universal forms and mutations across all social formations that depend solely on the stage and character of class struggle. Rather, each social formation is a unique site in which distinct factors lead to particular reproductions of the relations of production and mutations of the actual theoretical object - the capitalist State.

Still, the relations of production and social division of labor, but neither the labor process nor the technical division of labor, serve as the primary theoretical reference point of the production process of the economy. According to Poulantzas (1978):

From this primacy flows the presence of political (and ideological) relations within the relations of production: the latter, like their constituent relation of possession and economic property, find expression in class ‘powers’ that are organically articulated to the political and ideological relations which concretize and legitimize them” (p. 26).

The relations of production and social division of labor themselves represent the distinction between social classes (e.g., proletariat and bourgeoisie) and shape the field of power rooted in class struggle. The organizational framework of the State repressive, political, and ideological apparatuses stems from their functionality in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production, which cannot regenerate on their own.

At a point of divergence from Althusser—Poulantzas rejects the conception that repression and ideology serve as the sole two functions of the State<sup>5</sup>—because such a conception

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on this divergence from Althusser, see: Poulantzas (1978, p. 30).

often rests upon the notion that the economic sphere contains an ability to reproduce and regulate the relations of production on its own. This notion maintains that the State is not present in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production and therefore utilizes repressive and ideological functions to prevent the alteration or obstruction of an otherwise self-preserving economic sphere. However, Poulantzas (1978) finds that:

the relation of the masses to power and the State - in what is termed among other things a *consensus - always possesses a material substratum*...The State therefore continually adopts material measures which are of positive significance for the popular masses, even though these measures represent so many concessions imposed by the struggle of the subordinate classes (pp. 30-31).

Poulantzas thus identifies “the state economic apparatus” as the material apparatus that realizes the third function of the State - the economic function. We may therefore conclude that the State contains a concrete repressive apparatus, political apparatus, economic apparatus, and ideological apparatuses, all of which enter into the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production.

In my particular project, it is necessary to document the interrelationship between the state repressive apparatus, state political apparatus, the state economic apparatus, and the state ideological apparatus and identify the particular institutions/apparatuses that execute each of the four State functions within certain social formations. According to Poulantzas (1978), “Depending on the form of State and regime and on the phase of the reproduction of capitalism, a number of apparatuses can slide from one sphere to the other and assume new functions either as additions to, or in exchange for, old ones” (p. 33). In my study of the United States, the neoliberal state form, and the internationalization of U.S. finance capital in this current social

formation and historical context, it is imperative that we examine the institutional framework of the State in order to identify the concrete institutions/apparatuses that execute each function of the State and explain the growing relevance of the economic function within particular institutions/apparatuses.

Poulantzas' analysis maintains that the capitalist relations of production constitute the foundational elements of the institutional material framework of the capitalist state. (Although a number of Marxist theorists contend that commodity exchange and the circulation of capital serve as its foundation.<sup>6</sup>) According to Poulantzas (1978), "Economic functions favouring the accumulation of capital affect the structuring of the State in a number of important ways that vary according to whether it is a question of primitive accumulation, competitive capitalism, or present-day monopoly capitalism" (p. 52). Commodity exchange and the circulation of capital may assume different characteristics under distinct stages of capitalism. Still, however, the capitalist relations of production are the basis of these functions and their relationship with the capitalist State; commodity exchange and the circulation of capital predate capitalism but assume a particular role within the capitalist relations of production.

Poulantzas contends that although the State itself assumes a distinct field of power—class powers within the relations of production and social division of labor serve as the primary sources of social power and extend beyond the State and its apparatuses<sup>7</sup>—in which class struggles inscribe their materiality. Still, according to Poulantzas (1978), "The State plays a constitutive role in the existence and reproduction of class powers, and more generally in the class struggle itself - a fact which refers us back to its presence in the relations of production" (p.

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<sup>6</sup> For more information of these other theorists and their assertions, see: Poulantzas (1978, pp. 49-53).

<sup>7</sup> For more information on this conception, see: Poulantzas (1978, pp. 37-38).

38). In other words, the State enables the expression of these class powers by entering into their constitution and reproduction.

In addition, there exist in several capitalist societies other relations of power such as racism and patriarchy that extend beyond mere class power defined in strictly economic terms. Poulantzas (1978) finds that “class division is not the exclusive terrain of the constitution of power, even though in class societies all power bears a class significance” (p. 43). Racism and patriarchy bear a class significance in that they position themselves within the context of the relations of production and social division of labor. Furthermore, I believe that race and gender are themselves each a form of class because the material positions of various races and genders have differentiated in respect to one another within the various modes of production. This belief does not conflict with Poulantzas or Marxism in general because this identification of race and gender each as a form of social class is still rooted in historical materialism. However, historical materialists should recognize that racism and patriarchy have constituted distinct forms of political, economic, and ideological oppression within the capitalist mode of production that traverse the mere bourgeois oppression of the proletariat. In my analysis of the particular social formation within the United States, it is imperative that we further examine the class significance of race and power in order to understand the State.

### ***Marxism and Race in the United States***

In order to scientifically advance Poulantzas’ analytical framework toward the development of a general theory of the capitalist state, theorists must examine the historical evolution of individual social formations as well as their internal contradictions and cultural characteristics. At the site of class struggle and the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production within the United States, I cannot in good faith neglect the class significance of

racism and the white supremacist power relations that weave the particular social fabric of the nation. According to Manning Marable (1983), “Because of its peculiar historical development, the U.S. is not just a capitalist state, but with South Africa, is a *racist/capitalist state*” (Italics Marable’s, p. 61). Racist power relations are especially beneficial to the accumulation of capital and the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production within this social formation. We therefore cannot ignore the situation of racist power relations within the social division of labor; it is thus imperative that my project elevates the voices of Black Marxists to the forefront of my analysis. In this analysis of the United States as a social formation, I cannot fall into class-reductionism, for class distinctions within the relations of production and social division of labor are inextricably linked to their racial constitution and character.

The historical origins of the particular social formation within the United States lie in the white European colonization of the Americas, the institution of slavery, and the development of capitalism according to the forces of racism and nationalism. Cedric Robinson therefore introduces the concept of “racial capitalism,” which refers to racist character of surplus value extraction and capitalist discrimination against direct producers of color. According to Robinson (1983), “This can only be true if the social, psychological, and cultural origins of racism and nationalism both anticipated capitalism in time and formed a piece with those events that contributed directly to its organization of production and exchange” (p. 7). From its genocide of Native American populations to its enslavement of African peoples, the United States, at its roots, is a white colonial-settler state that incorporated its already existing white supremacist culture into its development of the capitalist relations of production. According to Marable (1983), “The most striking fact about American economic history and politics is the brutal and systemic underdevelopment of Black people. Afro-Americans have been on the other side of one

of the most remarkable and rapid accumulations of capital seen anywhere in human history” (p. 55). Within this organization of racial capitalism, the exploitation of Black labor has historically constituted the backbone of surplus-value extraction in the United States.

We must note that there may exist some degree of distance between Poulantzas’ analytical framework regarding the general theory of the capitalist state and the repressive function of the State within a social formation of capitalism and slavery. After all, Poulantzas regards the relative separation of the State and the economic sphere as one principal element that defines the capitalist relations of production. Although the relationship between Black slaves and the State does not reflect this separation in a manner identical to the that of the free white laborers, specifically in terms of legitimate violence and repression, Marx asserts that slavery was still a fundamental component of Western capitalism in the nineteenth century. According to Kevin B. Anderson (2019), “Slavery, [Marx] wrote in a draft for *Capital*, reaches ‘its most hateful form ... in a situation of capitalist production,’ where ‘exchange value becomes the determining element of production.’” (para. 2). In other words, racial capitalism situated slavery within the capitalist mode of production and the predominance of exchange value within the extraction of surplus labor value. Under U.S. slavery capitalism, however, capitalists practiced legitimate violence toward the Black population directly within the production process (i.e. economic sphere), and the State often cooperated in such an effort, thus establishing a unique relation between State and capitalist economy whose legacy and intersection with white supremacist culture continue to permeate the social formation today. According to Marable (1983), At its inception, the primary concern of the U.S. state apparatus was the construction of a strong government capable of guaranteeing property rights, including those of slavery (p. 56). If the violence practiced directly on plantations could not guarantee the reproduction of the labor

value of slaves, the U.S. state apparatus provided security for the capitalists in that its police apparatus could patrol runaway slaves and itself serve as an additional modality of repression. The interconnection between State violence and violence within the production process reveals a distinct relationship of separation between the State and economic sphere. We must remember this when we examine the four structural functions of the U.S. capitalist state and its various institutions/apparatuses because the ongoing permeance of this historical legacy will become much more apparent in the coming chapters.

Following the abolition of slavery, only the State retained the right to practice legitimate violence toward Black Americans, but the previous relationship only mutated and did not simply vanish. Although they held no state personnel positions within the concrete institutions/apparatuses of the State itself, many white Americans, especially in the South, continued to commit violence and terror toward Black Americans without repercussions or even resistance from the State. Black Codes, which referred to laws of which the State could convict only Black Americans, became widespread throughout former slave states (Angela Davis, 2003). As a result, Black Americans soon represented—the overwhelming majority of the population<sup>8</sup>—living within penitentiaries. It was not long before many states introduced the convict-lease system, which coerced incarcerated inmates to sell their labor to capitalists at a much lower price than that of those on the outside. According to Davis (2003), Scholars who have studied the convict-lease system note that in many important respects, convict leasing was much worse than slavery because while slave-owning capitalists may have been concerned for the survival of individual slaves, working convicts to death did not affect profitability (p. 32). The State reproduced racist power relations and the relations of production by simply transferring the spatial locality of coerced involuntary labor from the plantation to the

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<sup>8</sup> For statistics on the post-slavery racial composition of U.S. penitentiaries, see: Davis (2003, p. 18).



penitentiary. It is important to keep this historical development in mind as we later discuss the institution of the prison apparatus and its role within State functions.

Although racist power relations within this social formation have generally served and reinforced bourgeois class power, they have generally weakened proletarian class power as a whole, largely due the prevalence of racism within white labor movements. Marable (1983) finds that:

The making of the Black industrial working class is a relatively recent historical phenomena, spanning only three generations. Throughout this period of Black proletarianization, advocates of Black economic equality and civil rights maintained an uneasy and ambiguous relationship with the labor movement. At most times, the overtly racist practices and policies of white labor leaders proved to be major obstacles to biracial labor unity (p. 77).

The prevalence of racism within the white subordinate classes has often generated—relative material gains for them in comparison to the Black subordinate classes, but at the expense of the absolute material gains<sup>9</sup>—that proletarian solidarity realizes. We can observe this experience in the United States still in the first part of the twenty-first century: Trumpism secretes a visible current of white proletarian and petty bourgeois support for a fascistic, demagogic racist whose rhetoric divides and enervates proletarian class power. (Although there has always existed within the Black exploited classes a tendency of resistance and a recognition of the material benefits of labor struggles, white racism, oppressive conditions, and the daily struggle for survival impede the long-term advancement of a radical cause, for psychological and cultural racism serve as one principal basis of legitimation for the State and the material concessions of the white subordinate

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<sup>9</sup> For evidence demonstrating the nature of these material gains, see: Marable (1983, pp. 21-46).

classes.<sup>10</sup>) Consequently, it would not serve the interests of bourgeois class power to dismantle white supremacy or erase the inscription of racist power relations and their class significance from the materiality of the State.

Within Poulantzas' theoretical framework, one could contend that biracial solidarity within the proletariat might lead to the consolidation of enough class power to delegitimize the racist actions of the State and exert such a degree of power onto the strategic terrain of the State that it would eventually implement anti-racist reforms within its institutions/apparatuses, which would then act upon the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production in such a manner to diminish the gap between Black underdevelopment and white underdevelopment and weaken the power of white racism. However, as we shall soon elaborate in the coming chapters, racist power relations bear such a historicak mark on the materiality of these institutions/apparatuses (e.g., police apparatus, prison apparatus, military apparatus) that many systemic anti-racist reforms within them would be nearly impossible without a decisive—"break" of the State apparatus altogether toward the favor of the subordinate classes' political domination<sup>11</sup>— an effort that would risk a fascistic backlash to defend white supremacy and monopoly capital. Even when a consolidation of proletarian class power forces the State to introduce anti-racist reforms without the transformation of the mode of production itself, as it has done in the past through the civil rights movement among other efforts, the exploitation of the Black proletariat and the national culture of white racism do not vanish entirely. Therefore, it makes little sense for a movement of proletarian class power to exhaust its efforts there; the underdevelopment of Black Americans is already so profound that the transition to a socialist

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<sup>10</sup> For more reflection upon this experience, see: Marable (1983, pp. 21-46).

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the concept of this "break," see: Poulantzas (1978, pp. 258-259).

mode of production remains the most efficient and effective means of combating underdevelopment. According to Marable (1983):

More than any other social stratum within American society, Black workers would be the direct and immediate beneficiaries of the reorganization of the U.S. political economy. The contemporary and historical crisis which confronts the Black working class primarily, as well as the Black majority, cannot be resolved unless worker self-managed factories and the public ownership of the central means of production, transportation, and distribution of goods and services is won in our generation (p. 91).

It is thus no coincidence that the Black radical tradition is rich with anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist fervor.

We must recognize, however, that while the transition to a socialist mode of production is indeed one paramount objective within the context of Black liberation, it would not eliminate racist power relations altogether. According to Poulantzas (1978), “The consequence is well-known: radical transformation of the state apparatus in the transition to socialism is not enough for the totality of power relations to be abolished or transformed” (p. 43). In the United States, there is little doubt that its culture and social fabric of racism and patriarchy would survive despite a transformation or termination of the capitalist relations of production. It is therefore crucial that socialist movements place racial justice, feminism, and the preservation and empowerment of Black culture, history, and identity at the forefront of their projects, especially within this particular social formation. As we explore the analytical categories of repression, politics, economy, and ideology within this racist/capitalist State in the coming chapters, we hope to better understand this project and identify specific mechanisms, modalities, and objectives of effective resistance of racial capitalism.

### **Chapter 3: The State Repressive Apparatus**

#### **State Repressive Apparatus**

We now shift our attention toward an analysis of the repressive function of the capitalist State and the problem of racism in the United States within Poulantzas' theoretical framework. In order to analyze race in terms of Poulantzas' category of repression, I must first outline Poulantzas' theoretical concepts that characterize his understanding of the state repressive apparatus. Then, I will possess the ability to examine the applicability of his theoretical framework to the problem of racism within this specific social formation. Poulantzas' findings will offer important theoretical contributions to an understanding of race and repression in the United States.

Poulantzas asserts that repression primarily assumes the form of organized physical violence to the political bodies that occupy the spaces over which the capitalist State enters into the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production. Poulantzas (1978) finds:

In every State, this takes place in two ways: through institutions which actualize bodily constraint and the permanent threat of mutilation (prison, army, police, and so on); and through a *bodily order* which both institutes and manages bodies by bending and moulding them into shape and inserting them in the various institutions and apparatuses” (Italicized Poulantzas, p. 29).

The repressive apparatus of the capitalist State organizes and consumes these bodies through physical violence in order to discipline and regiment them into their proper institutional positions within the social division of labor, and this takes place primarily via the three following branches of the state repressive apparatus: the police apparatus, the prison apparatus, and the military apparatus.

Poulantzas asserts that—the “counterposition” of law and terror<sup>12</sup>—is a misconception because even within a legal framework, the capitalist State may exercise violence and terror in an arbitrary and abusive manner. According to Poulantzas (1978), “Furthermore, law organizes the conditions for physical repression, designating its modalities and structuring the devices by means of which it is exercised. In this sense, law is *the code of organized public violence*” (p. 77). Law demarcates the boundaries and scope of State repression and in a sense, legitimizes the decisive authority of the State to commit violence. Poulantzas (1978) finds that “Unlike its precapitalist counterparts, the capitalist State holds *a monopoly of legitimate physical violence*” (Italics Poulantzas, p. 80). This reflects the relative separation of the State and economic sphere that is characteristic of capitalism. Unlike feudalism, where violence is prevalent directly in the production process, under capitalism, only the State holds the permission to practice legitimate physical violence. The State’s monopoly of legitimate violence is perhaps one of the most important, if not the most important, features of the state repressive apparatus. Although Max Weber first identified this conception of State monopoly violence, the ability of Poulantzas to situate this conception within his understanding of the capitalist State demonstrates that Structural Marxism is extremely relevant to understanding the problem of racism in the United States. Within a legal framework, the State can exercise arbitrary violence and terror toward the population without repercussions or loss of legitimacy. In contrast, social actors who do not hold positions of power as personnel within the state repressive apparatus cannot exercise such violence. For example, if the average citizen assaults a member of his or her community, this violence is not legitimate, and the perpetrator will face legal repercussions. However, if a police

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<sup>12</sup> When Poulantzas asserts that this “counterposition” of law and terror (an common idea within bourgeois political philosophy’s juridical-legalist conception of the State) is false, he means that even within a legal framework, the State can exercise violence and terror toward the population to a nearly unlimited extent without much restriction. For more information, see: Poulantzas (1978, pp. 76-77).

officer murders a Black man or woman for no reason whatsoever, such violence and terror is legitimate and unchallenged because of the State's monopolization of legitimate violence. State monopolization of violence opens the door to boundless prospects of State terror and repression via the state repressive apparatus, for the popular masses can neither question its legitimacy nor physically fight back.

In the early stages of capitalism, armed conflict between factions of people was constant and regular, so nations began to establish specialized and centralized juridical States to stand above society and possess the decisive monopoly of violence to maintain equilibrium and order among people with contradictory class interests. The people found this monopoly of violence to be legitimate only because it operated within a framework of legality through which people hoped they could acquire political power. Therefore, the state political apparatus presupposes and cannot exist without the presence of the state repressive apparatus and the State monopolization of violence. In fact, the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production is impossible without State violence. According to Poulantzas (1978), "We need rather to grasp the material organization of labour as a class relation whose existence and guarantee of reproduction is organized physical violence" (p. 81). The organized physical violence of the State materially prevents armed confrontations between class factions that may threaten the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production. Regarding these specialized state bodies in which violence is concentrated, Poulantzas (1978) finds that "Under the impact of the same state monopoly, these have given way to permanent disputing of political power..." (p. 82). We shall of course analyze the state political apparatus in the next chapter, but it is important to note these historical mechanisms through which law and repression have organized the contours of the political arena.

### **Racist Violence and Repression in the United States**

Within the social formation of the United States, the application of Poulantzas' theoretical framework to race in terms of the state repressive apparatus becomes peculiar because this juridical State did not arise primarily from regular and constant armed conflict like many of its European counterparts. This nation-state was born from settler-colonialism and white supremacy with a history of violence extending beyond the state repressive apparatus and predicated toward the subjugation, repression, and even genocide of non-white populations. We noted in the previous chapter that during the period of slavery in this nation the capitalist State did not monopolize violence in the strictest sense because slave-owners could practice legitimate violence toward their slaves with the permission and even cooperation of the State. Therefore, the boundaries that demarcate the relative separation between the State and economic sphere within Poulantzas' framework become blurry under U.S. capitalism. Even subsequent to the abolition of slavery, which occurred much later than European counterparts within this social formation, this legacy did not simply vanish, and various mechanisms of—extra-state racist violence<sup>13</sup>—still persisted.

For the sake of historical chronology, let us first reflect upon the problem of lynching that plagued the United States in the wake of slavery abolition. According to Bryan Stevenson (2017), “Lynchings were violent, public acts of torture that traumatized Black people throughout the country and were largely tolerated by state and federal officials. These lynchings were terrorism” (p. 13). We cannot move forward without addressing this legacy or acknowledging these extrajudicial executions of thousands of Black Americans. Stevenson (2017) finds that “The decline of lynching relied heavily on increased use of capital punishment following court

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<sup>13</sup> When I use this term “extra-state racist violence,” I am not referring to violence outside the State, for within Poulantzas' analytical framework, all violence takes place within the State because the State is not some concrete institution/apparatus, but rather an expression of the relationship of forces within society. Rather, when I use the term “extra-state violence,” I am referring to violence that takes place outside the specific branches of the state repressive apparatus (e.g., police, prison, military).

trials and accelerated, unreliable legal process in state courts. The death penalty's roots are clearly linked the legacy of lynching" (p. 17). Thus, we can observe that even as the repressive apparatus of the State monopolized more violence as lynching declined, there remained an inscription of these racist power relations within the materiality of the State and its juridical system.

The structural impact of racist power relations within this social formation is particularly pronounced, and although they certainly bear a class significance, racist power relations shape the modalities of violence and repression in forms that in many respects may traverse the class powers that Poulantzas conceptualizes. Unlike the regions of emphasis within Poulantzas' historical analysis, where constant armed conflict concerned primarily class factions, there is an abhorrent history of racist violence in this nation that the specialized and centralized state apparatus never extinguished through its monopolization of force because such violence never threatened the reproduction of the relations of production and rather in several ways facilitated it. According to Davis (2016), "During the campaign around Trayvon Martin, it was pointed out that George Zimmerman, a would-be police officer, a vigilante if you want to use that term, replicated the role of slave patrols. Then as now the use of armed representatives of the state was complemented by the use of civilians to perform the violence of the state" (p. 16). (Angela Davis additionally reflects upon her childhood experience during which the Ku Klux Klan terrorized her community without governmental restriction.<sup>14</sup>) We can thus conclude that within this social formation, largely due to its legacy of slavery and white supremacy, the repressive apparatus of the capitalist State has not explicitly monopolized violence in the strictest sense but has rather often permitted extra-state agents to practice legitimate violence on its behalf. Of course, the State has not entirely relinquished its monopoly of violence; this racist terror is only legitimate to

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<sup>14</sup> For more information, see: Davis (2016, p. 7).



the extent that the State allows it to occur. State monopolization of violence therefore has not disappeared and is extremely relevant in regard to the problem of racism in the United States. The State wields the legal power and authority to prevent such violence, but racist power relations permeate the racist/capitalist State to such an extent that this racist extra-state terror is almost indistinguishable from the racist terror the State performs on its own, particularly through the police apparatus. Consequently, the concrete social agents of racist violence are irrelevant to the State; all that matters is the performance of its repressive function and the reproduction of the social division of labor.

### ***Legal Rights and Liberties***

Poulantzas asserts that law organizes repression not only through negative prohibitions, but additionally through positive injunctions and coercions as well as the establishment of constitutional rights and liberties to maintain legitimacy among the masses. Poulantzas (1978) finds that “It also organizes and sanctions certain ‘real rights’ of the dominated classes (even though, of course, these rights are invested in the dominant ideology and are far from corresponding to practice in their judicial form); and it has inscribed within it material concessions imposed on the dominant classes by popular struggle” (p. 84). In the United States, law employs liberal democratic concepts such as natural rights that find expression within the amendments of the Constitution. However, we find that throughout most of its history, from slavery to segregation and Jim Crow to mass incarceration, non-white people either never enjoyed these rights or liberties or experienced them to a lesser degree than white people. It was not until the Civil Rights Rights Act of 1964 that Black Americans achieved even some semblance of equality and citizenship, although these rights still live under perpetual assault due to practices such as racial profiling and the association of Blackness with criminality.

For Angela Davis, this observation is especially relevant to an analysis of the prison apparatus because—imprisonment became the primary form of punishment in the U.S.<sup>15</sup>—in the eighteenth century. According to its bourgeois founders, the penitentiary serves as a physical space that confiscates rights and liberties so that inmates can reflect upon their criminal transgressions and rehabilitate themselves before reclaiming their constitutional rights. However, according to Davis (2003), “Before the acceptance of the sanctity of individual rights, imprisonment could not have been understood as punishment” (p. 44). It therefore makes little sense to conceptualize the penitentiary as a means of Black Americans reclaiming their rights and liberties because they often did not possess such rights and liberties in the first place. Bourgeois justifications of the penitentiary merely serve to mask the functional role of the prison in the context of the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. Drawing upon Poulantzas’ initial observations at the beginning of this chapter, I may further conclude that the prison apparatus under racial capitalism serves to repress, organize, and consume Black bodies for the purpose of surplus value extraction and capital accumulation, and here lies Poulantzas’ contribution to our understanding of race. The Thirteenth Amendment even still in the first part of the twenty-first century permits involuntary, coerced labor within the confines of the penitentiary, and it is no secret that mass incarceration disproportionately affects people of color.

### **Class Dictatorship.**

Of course, we should note Poulantzas’ assertion that the repressive activities of the State extend beyond law and judicial regulation. (The practices of the State may either make no reference to the law or act directly against it, often citing the precedence of “the higher interests of the state.”<sup>16</sup>) For example, in the United States, this has taken the form of expansive

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<sup>15</sup> See: Davis (2003, pp. 40-59).

<sup>16</sup> See: Poulantzas (1978, p. 84).

surveillance in the twenty-first century that violates the constitutional liberties of its citizens with the justification that such actions are crucial for national security. This is Poulantzas' interpretation of Marx's contention that every State is a class dictatorship. According to Poulantzas (1978), "In Marx's statement, the term 'dictatorship' refers to the precise fact that every state is organized as a single functional order of legality and illegality, of legality shot through with illegality" (p. 85). The consequences of this class dictatorship for Black Marxist activism have been devastating. According to Marable (1983), "Halting the emergence of Black political activism in the 1960s could not be left solely under the aegis of the criminal justice system. To accomplish this, the state developed an extraordinarily powerful and illegal apparatus – the COINTELPRO or 'Counter Intelligence Program'" (p. 152). In the 1960s, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) engaged in illegal counterintelligence activities that targeted groups such as the Black Panther Party (BPP) and extrajudicially murdered Black political leaders such as Fred Hampton. Even today, Black Americans experience the arbitrary repression and violence of this class dictatorship to a much greater extent than white Americans.

### ***Historical Origins of the Neoliberal State Form.***

Now that we have documented the general ways in which Poulantzas' analytical framework regarding the state repressive apparatus may and may not apply to race in the United States, we must engage our broader theoretical task of identifying the subject, scope, and institutional framework of the neoliberal capitalist State within the contemporary historical context with regard to race. Of course, this research will continue to employ Poulantzas' analytical framework as we examine this new state form. First, we must identify the crisis of capitalism that precipitated the transformation of the State.

We noted last chapter that Poulantzas rejects the instrumentalist conception of the capitalist State and instead asserts that both dominant and subordinate class powers find expression with the institutional materiality of the State, often resulting in State policies that yield material concessions to the popular masses in order to maintain legitimacy. Political and economic crises often lead to material reconfigurations of the capitalist State, such as the instance of the Great Depression and economic crash of the early twentieth century prior to World War II. David Harvey (2005) finds that a class compromise between capital and labor resolved this crisis through “embedded liberalism,” which involved a blend of state, market, and democratic institutions and Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies (pp. 10-11). Due to the expansion of the welfare state and the introduction of various social programs, income inequality began to decline. The State began to increase its presence in the economic sphere in order to regulate and stabilize capital and fulfill some of the material demands of the subordinate classes.

However, by the late 1960s, embedded liberalism began to falter, both within the United States and elsewhere, and the stagflation of the 1970s exacerbated its issues, leading to a structural economic crisis that required another reconfiguration of the State. Harvey (2005) finds:

By the end of the 1960s embedded liberalism began to break down, both internationally and within domestic economies. Signs of a serious crisis of capital accumulation were everywhere apparent. Unemployment and inflation were both surging everywhere, ushering in a global phase of ‘stagflation’ that lasted throughout much of the 1970s. Fiscal crises of various states (Britain, for example, had to be bailed out by the IMF in 1975-6) resulted as tax revenues plunged and social expenditures soared. Keynesian policies were no longer working. Even before the Arab-Israeli War and the OPEC oil embargo of 1973, the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates backed by gold

reserves had fallen into disarray. The porosity of state boundaries with respect to capital flows put stress on the system of fixed exchange rates. US dollars had flooded the world and escaped US controls by being deposited in European banks. Fixed exchange rates were therefore abandoned in 1971. Gold could no longer function as the metallic base of international money; exchange rates were allowed to float, and attempts to control the float were soon abandoned (p. 12).

After World War II, the U.S. dollar, which was fixed to the price of gold emerged as the primary currency for global trade. As Harvey mentions, however, international capital flows eventually led to the diffusion of U.S. dollars throughout the world, particularly within European banks, and the U.S. could no longer effectively control or manage its currency, particularly in regard to the capacity of the central bank to regulate interest rates. This manifested within a balance of payments deficit that generated monetary problems for the United States, which led the nation to abandon the gold standard and turn toward floating exchange rates. In order to reproduce the relations of production, the subject and scope of the State required a metamorphosis, and two primary prospective solutions emerged in Europe and the U.S. The leftist parties of Europe and popular movements in the U.S. sought to swing the pendulum of state power toward labor with deeper interventions into the economic sphere, but the ruling classes sought to expand market freedoms, liberalize economic policy, and reduce State intervention into the economic sphere.

Harvey asserts that the structural economic crisis of the 1970s presented—a political and economic threat<sup>17</sup>—to the ruling classes. Leftist European parties and popular U.S. movements were acquiring more political power, and in this period of an economic crisis of capital accumulation, the reductions in income inequality that emerged over the previous decades could no longer coincide with corporate profits. According to Harvey (2005), “The Chilean experiment

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<sup>17</sup> See: Harvey (2005, p. 15).

with neoliberalism demonstrated that the benefits of revived capital accumulation were highly skewed under forced privatization. The country and its ruling elites, along with foreign investors, did extremely well in the early stages” (pp. 15-16). (The U.S.-backed coup of Marxist President Salvador Allende and the subsequent military dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet set the stage for a new state form that would feature extensive and brutal repression of labor, privatization of assets both domestic and abroad, expansion of export-led growth strategies, and deregulation/liberalization; this reconfiguration of the State served to revitalize capital accumulation and enhance bourgeois class power by ransacking the subordinate classes of previous material concessions.<sup>18</sup>) Of course, when state ideological functions alone cannot sufficiently legitimize such a process, this reconfiguration of the State becomes impossible without repression and brutality.

### **Police Apparatus and Prison Apparatus in the Neoliberal Capitalist State**

The Chilean experiment demonstrated that this metamorphosis of the State and the restoration of bourgeois class power required severe measures of organized violence and expansion of the state repressive apparatus, which during the onset of neoliberalism from the early 1980s to the present—unleashed a massive wave of racist terror in the United States<sup>19</sup>—simultaneously via the police apparatus and the extra-state counterparts mentioned in previous sections. Marable (1983) finds that “paramilitary groups in Chile closely parallel the Ku Klux Klan, the American Nazi Party and other more mainstream, conservative, mass based forces in the U.S.” and that this contemporary racist terror “is a necessary element in the establishment of any future authoritarian or rightwing government (p. 245). The material inscription of racist power relations onto the state repressive apparatus has always existed in this

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<sup>18</sup> See: Harvey (2005, pp. 5-38).

<sup>19</sup> For more information on this contemporary wave of racist violence, see: Marable (1983, pp. 207-226).

social formation, but the expansion of the police apparatus under authoritarian statism magnifies and multiplies this problem. Davis (2016) finds that “What we saw in the police reaction to the resistance that spontaneously erupted in the aftermath of the killing of Michael Brown was an armed response that revealed the extent to which local police departments have been equipped with military arms, military technology, military training” (p. 14). The experience of the Ferguson resistance reflects the expansion and militarization of the police apparatus within this reconfiguration of the State.

In addition, neoliberalization of the State involves carceral expansion via the prison apparatus. According to Davis (2003), although the worldwide prison population is approximately nine million, more than two million are incarcerated in the United States, and the majority of state and federal prisoners are Black (pp. 5-11). Michelle Alexander argues—mass incarceration reinstitutes pre-civil rights era legal structures of racism<sup>20</sup>—and while Davis concurs with this assertion—she extends this analysis to the context of the entire state repressive apparatus<sup>21</sup>—and its overall expansion. Mass incarceration via the prison apparatus is thus additionally a modality of disciplining, regimenting, organizing, and consuming Black bodies through physical repression in a manner that the reconfiguration of the State requires.

### **Military Apparatus in the Neoliberal Capitalist State**

The internationalization of U.S. finance capital for foreign direct investment (FDI) requires both the cooperation of the U.S.-backed nation-states, which are sometimes born via coups (e.g. Chilean experiment), and the material expansion of the United States military apparatus itself. For example, Cornel West (2004) finds that the Israeli nation-state often acts as a satellite state for the imperial U.S. superstate, which in turn neglects Israeli repression of

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<sup>20</sup> For more information, see: Alexander (2010).

<sup>21</sup> For more information on Angela Davis’ position, see: Davis (2016, p. 13).

Palestinians (pp. 108-112). Let us recall Barrow's observations mentioned in the first chapter of this project; the reconfiguration of individual nation-states involves the internationalization of domestic policy that must correspond to the interests of global capital accumulation and U.S. financial imperialism. Israel is thus a nation-state that serves as a branch of the U.S. Empire, and the cooperation between Israel and the United States involves crucial implications for the state repressive apparatuses both within the United States and abroad.

Of particular concern here is the role of Group 4 Security (G4S), the largest private security group in the world. According to Davis (2016), "G4S is directly responsible for the ways Palestinians experience political incarceration, as well as aspects of the apartheid wall, imprisonment in South Africa, prison-like schools in the United States, and the wall along the US-Mexico border" (p. 5). G4S is yet another example of an extra-state or "private" agent of legitimate violence, and we cannot neglect its intertwinement with the branches of the state repressive apparatus in the United States and Israel. Sure, the State maintains its monopoly of legitimate violence, but the legal distinction between "public" and "private" has diminished in relevance, largely due to the destatization of the political system under neoliberalism that I addressed in the first chapter of this project. Destatization involves, according to Barrow (2016), "the creation of partnerships at all levels of governance between government, para-governmental, and non-governmental organizations in which the state apparatus is only first among equals" (p. 147). If the repression of Palestinians generates a crisis of national legitimation, the Israeli nation-state can shift its responsibilities toward G4S, which may then assume accountability. What we are witnessing in the first part of the twenty-first century is the delegation of the repressive functions of the State to "private" organizations such as G4S that form partnerships with both the U.S. military apparatus and the state repressive apparatuses of



U.S. allies. The destatization process does not even escape the United States itself; G4S assumes significant responsibility for the construction of the U.S.-Mexico border wall, thus relieving the military apparatus of such an assignment and transforming it into a profitable enterprise. (Davis asserts that neoliberal ideology accompanies this privatization of security, privatization of imprisonment, and privatization of warfare.<sup>22</sup>) Organized violence under neoliberalism has become a profitable enterprise within the economic sphere, although only via the cooperation and approval of the State, which must authorize these non-governmental agents to perform its repressive function on its behalf.

We shall conclude this chapter with the following simple observation that we should have already implied within our demarcation of Poulantzas' framework: the police apparatus, the prison apparatus, and the military apparatus are of course but various segments of the whole state repressive apparatus with the function of organized physical violence. However, it is important to note the degree to which they materially intersect. Davis (2016) finds that "the Israeli police have been involved in the training of US police. So there is this connection between the US military and Israeli military" (p. 15). Davis goes on to note that many of the same weapons used against protesters in Ferguson in 2014 have been used in the repression of Palestinian resistance. The repressive function of the State in the United States extends beyond national borders to such a degree that we should attempt to understand the interconnection between domestic police brutality and military occupation abroad. In addition, we must recognize that the police apparatus, the prison apparatus, and the military apparatus share weapons and surveillance technologies because they are all branches of the same state repressive apparatus with the same State function. According to Davis (2016), at this point in U.S. history, the criminal justice system cannot operate without racism, and in order to abolish racist power relations in our

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on Angela Davis' position, see: Davis (2016, p. 55).

society, we need to imagine a society without prisons and without the kind of policing we see today (p. 48). Therefore, if our Marxist project is to work toward Black liberation, we must consider prison abolition and the end of policing (both via the police apparatus and the military apparatus).

## **Chapter 4: The State Political Apparatus**

### **State Political Apparatus**

Our analysis now turns to a discussion of the state political apparatus within Poulantzas' theoretical framework as we continue to examine the neoliberal transformation of the capitalist State and the problem of race in the United States. According to Poulantzas (1978), "'Today as in the past,' this State has to represent the long-term political interests of the whole bourgeoisie (the national capitalist collective), although it does so under the hegemony of one of its fractions—currently monopoly capital" (p. 128). Poulantzas asserts that—the bourgeois class consists of a power bloc comprised of various class fractions such as big landowners; non-monopoly capital (or its commercial, industrial and banking fraction); monopoly capital (whether predominantly banking or industrial); the internationalized bourgeoisie or the domestic bourgeoisie<sup>23</sup>—all of which possess contradictory material interests. All of these class fractions find material expression of their powers within the strategic terrain of the State, though none to the same degree as the hegemonic fraction (i.e. monopoly capital), meaning that the State maintains its autonomy of any particular fraction in its organizational role even though the uneven influence of the hegemonic fraction limits this overall autonomy.

Poulantzas is certain to elucidate that the autonomy of the State refers not to a conception of State externality vis-a-vis the class fractions but rather to the fact that all fractions of the power bloc exercise at least some degree of power within the State, thus signifying that the State is not a mere tool or instrument of one fraction and is itself divided. Poulantzas (1978) finds that "The State is the condensation of a relationship of forces between classes and class fractions, such as these express themselves, in a necessarily specific form, *within the State itself*" (Italics

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<sup>23</sup> For more information, see: Poulantzas (1978, p. 133).

Poulantzas, p. 132). Although not directly and immediately, these class contradictions crystallize within the material framework of the State and its various institutions/apparatuses. Within each of these institutions/apparatuses (e.g. parliament, army, judiciary), according to Poulantzas (1978), “is the specific concentration-crystallization of a given interest or alliance of particular interests” (p. 133). Each institution/apparatus, in other words, may either predominantly favour the representation of one particular fraction of the power bloc, or favour the representation of multiple fractions of the power bloc simultaneously. Therefore, although the State contains a centralized, hierarchical and bureaucratic structure, it is not a homogeneous instrument, for it contains contradictions between various institutions/apparatuses and the different class fractions or alliances of class fractions they each represent.

Of course, the State apparatus still possesses characteristics of unity and centralism because the hegemonic class fraction exercises a predominance of power within the material framework of the State. Poulantzas (1978) finds:

This unity of state power is established through a whole chain whereby certain apparatuses are subordinated to others, and through the domination of a particular state apparatus or branch (the military, a political party, a ministry, or whatever) which crystallizes the interests of the hegemonic fraction – domination, that is to say, exercised over other branches or apparatuses that are resistance centres of other fractions of the power bloc (p. 137).

The dominant state institutions/apparatuses to which the others are subordinate thus often become impenetrable to all but the hegemonic fraction of the power bloc. According to Poulantzas (1978), “Moreover, even when a Left government manages to gain control of the hitherto dominant apparatus, the state institutional structure enables the bourgeoisie to transpose

the role of dominance from one apparatus to another” (p. 138). This transposition of the role of dominance may additionally occur when the hitherto dominant institution/apparatus can no longer ensure the political hegemony of the monopoly fraction of the power bloc, although Poulantzas notes that the transposition of bourgeois class power across apparatuses is not a particularly rapid process due to the institutional and material rigidity of the state apparatuses themselves.

Under the current neoliberal state form, where the economic function of the State holds primacy over the politico-ideological functions of the State (we will discuss this phenomenon further in the next chapter), the power bloc shifts its influence toward apparatuses that represent the interests of monopoly capital and possess the ability to effectively carry out the economic functions of the State with minimal subordinate class interference.<sup>24</sup> Poulantzas (1978) finds:

The current role of this apparatus accounts in part for the precipitate and accelerated decline of parliament and the institutions of representative democracy in favour of the Executive, as well as the diminishing role of political parties in comparison with the bureaucracy and state administrations, and other such phenomena (p. 172).

In the United States, political power has shifted toward the Executive and the bureaucratic state administration as these institutions/apparatuses have in large part become sealed from the political expression of subordinate class power. The Executive and the state administration are now the summit of the chain of subordination; all other state institutions/apparatuses operate under their decisive command. According to Barrow (2016):

Yet, even as the official repressive apparatuses tend toward secrecy, state elites increasingly deploy “a whole system of unofficial state networks operating concurrently with the official ones (para-state machinery) with no possible check by representatives of

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<sup>24</sup> For more information on the dominance of the state economic apparatus, see: Poulantzas (1978, pp. 168-169).

the people” (e.g., special forces, intelligence agencies, private security contractors) (p. 165).

For example, under the current state form, intelligence agencies (e.g. Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Administration) and other state networks have emerged within the now diffuse circuits of policing and control, and like other bureaucratic institutions within the state administration, they operate under a certain degree of secrecy that permits them to predominantly represent the hegemonic fraction of monopoly capital without sharpening the contradictions within the power bloc. The political power of representative institutions such as political parties operating within the U.S. Congress has declined as all political institutions are now subordinated to the Executive and bureaucratic state administration, which centrally organize the political hegemony of monopoly capital.

It is important to recall Poulantzas’ assertion that subordinate class powers, in addition to those of the bourgeois power bloc, find inscription within the institutional materiality and strategic arena of the State. According to Poulantzas (1978), “*Of course, popular struggles, and power in general, stretch far beyond the State: but insofar as they are genuinely political, they are not really external to the State*” (Italics Poulantzas’, p. 141). However, their existence within the State is quite different from that of the bourgeois power bloc, which finds its expression of power through the representation of various fractions of capital within concrete apparatuses or branches of the State. Poulantzas (1978) finds that “By contrast, 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” (Italics Poulantzas’, p. 142). Within the material structure of the State, the dominated classes are present only insofar as they remain dominated classes that resist the power bloc from a subordinate position within the State;

they cannot acquire state power as a dominant force without a radical transformation of this material structure.

Poulantzas asserts that the basis of power lies within class division and struggle under a capitalist mode of production and that the field of power is relational in that it refers to capability of each class to realize its own interests, which contradict and oppose the interests of other classes; we observe such capabilities—not as a quantitative zero-sum measurement but instead as the objective material position of each class within the economic, political, and ideological relations<sup>25</sup>—of society. Regarding the State, Poulantzas (1978) finds that “It is a *site* and a *centre* of the exercise of power, but it possesses no power of its own” (Italics Poulantzas’, p. 148). This is because the State is merely the material condensation of a relationship of class powers (both dominant and subordinate) that both traverses and finds inscription within the State, thus serving as the fundamental source of state power, which would not exist without it. According to Poulantzas (1978), “If struggle always has primacy over apparatuses, this is because power is a relation between struggles and practices (those of the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled) and because the State above all is the condensation of a relationship of forces defined precisely by struggle” (p. 151). Political struggles within the strategic terrain of the State are thus crystallizations of struggles and contradictions between the power bloc and the subordinate classes, but it is important to note that within state policy, the power bloc and the subordinate classes do not always confront each other as two unified forces and may sometimes experience alliances between fractions of both forces.

Therefore, the political struggles of the popular masses always find some form of material expression within the State. Poulantzas (1978) finds that “Even when the popular masses are physically excluded from certain apparatuses, these struggles always have an effect

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<sup>25</sup> For more information, see: Poulantzas (1978, p. 147).

within them – albeit an effect which is manifested at a distance, so to speak, and through the intermediation of the state personnel” (p. 152). For example, although the popular masses physically exist at a distance from the Executive, the state administration, and the police apparatus, their demands and struggles from centres of resistance can reverberate within these institutions/apparatuses via the state personnel and pressure them to make material concessions.

Poulantzas demarcates a political strategy of popular resistance that involves the formation of autonomous political organizations without retreating entirely from the strategic terrain of the current State. Poulantzas (1978) finds:

We also know that, alongside their possible presence in the physical space of the state apparatuses, the popular masses must constantly maintain and deploy centres and networks at a distance from these apparatuses: I am referring, of course, to movements for direct, rank-and-file democracy and to self-management networks (p. 153).

In other words, we should not abandon the exercise of our power on current State and leave it wide open for the political domination of the power bloc, but we must simultaneously develop our own political organizations and mutual aid networks that resist contemporary state power and may even replace many of the old institutions/apparatuses during our transition to a socialist mode of production. According to Poulantzas, the State is the material condensation of a relationship of forces, and since it is therefore impossible to exist in a position of exteriority outside the State, these alternative political organizations and networks of mutual aid still comprise part of the State. However, I still do not believe we should discard Lenin’s conception of dual-power, which refers to the ability of these alternative political organizations to strive toward the replacement of the existing capitalist state apparatus. Even if we subscribe to Poulantzas’ view, we should recognize that these democratic self-management networks are still



distinct institutions/apparatuses that operate at a physical distance of exteriority from the existing political institutions/apparatuses, even if they produce an effect within them.

At a potential point of divergence from Poulantzas, I personally contend that the subordinate classes cannot take State power without the destruction of the existing political institutions/apparatuses that represent the interests of the power bloc and ensure bourgeois political domination. Poulantzas shifted from a Marxist-Leninist position toward a democratic socialist position later in his life, and I disagree with his abandonment of some of the core principles of revolutionary socialism. According to Poulantzas (1978):

If we understand the democratic road to socialism and democratic socialism itself to involve, among other things, political (party) and ideological pluralism, recognition of universal suffrage, and extension and deepening of all political freedoms including for opponents, then talk of smashing or destroying the state apparatus can be no more than a mere verbal trick (p. 261).

In this statement, Poulantzas reveals his opportunist and reformist tendencies and frankly his misunderstanding of revolutionary Marxism, for without the dictatorship of the proletariat and the abolition of all bourgeois and reactionary forces, there can be no talk of democracy under a socialist mode of production. Lenin (1917) finds:

Only in communist society, when the resistance of the capitalists has been completely broken, when the capitalists have disappeared, and when there are no classes (*i.e.*, when there is no difference between the members of society as regards their relation to the social means of production), *only then* does “the state...cease to exist,” and it “*becomes possible to speak of freedom.*” Only then will really complete democracy, democracy without any exceptions, be possible and be realized (Italics Lenin’s, p. 338),

We can therefore observe that Poulantzas has not relinquished the ideological shackles of bourgeois conceptions of liberal democracy; he fails to let go of liberal democratic institutions of representative democracy or consider the advantages of democratic centralism. In order to seize political power, the subordinate classes must smash the existing bureaucratic institutions that function to reproduce bourgeois political domination so that alternative political organizations and self-management networks can take their place. If the popular masses cannot express their political power within the Executive or state administration, then the mere existence of these institutions all but guarantees perpetual bourgeois political domination, and the usurpation of State power is impossible without their destruction. Although Poulantzas' theoretical framework may facilitate an understanding of the state political apparatus and help Marxists identify the dominant political institutions/apparatuses that represent the hegemonic fraction of the power bloc, I do not believe he provides a sufficient solution to the problems he describes.

## **Chapter 5: The State Economic Apparatus**

### **State Economic Apparatus**

We now shift our attention toward an examination of the state economic apparatus within Poulantzas' theoretical framework as we analyze the shifting contours of the respective spaces of State and economy and the interrelationship between them under neoliberalism and racial capitalism in the United States. (The development of the neoliberal state responded to the crisis of capitalism by incorporating various fields such as the training of labor-power, town-planning, transportation, health, and the environment directly into the expanding space-process where the State enters into the economy in order to reproduce and valorize capital.<sup>26</sup>) Poulantzas contends that although repression and ideology were beforehand the dominant functions of the State to which the state economic apparatus articulated its function, the economic function has now become the dominant function as the space-process where the State enters into the reproduction of capital expands and mutates. According to Poulantzas (1978), "*The totality of operations of the State are currently being reorganized in relation to its economic role*" (Italics Poulantzas', p. 168). In order to respond to the crisis of capitalism of the 1970s, the state economic apparatus began to hold primacy over the state repressive apparatus, the state political apparatus, and the state ideological apparatus. Poulantzas (1978) finds that "If things are so, it is because the economic involvement of the State is now, to a certain extent, *incompressible*: the State can no longer avoid the effects of these economic functions simply by not fulfilling them" (p. 169). In other words, structural economic crises have pushed economic functions to the forefront of the State's agenda. The State has no choice but to increase its intervention within various fields of the economic sphere, and consequently, various institutions/apparatuses (e.g. judiciary, army,

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<sup>26</sup> For more information, see: Poulantzas (1978, p. 167).

school) must now fulfill an economic function in addition to their other functions, such as repression and ideology.

In this new state form, Poulantzas asserts that the capital accumulation process authoritatively directs state activity as all functions of the State are subordinated to its economic function.<sup>27</sup> Poulantzas (1978) finds that “Through its expansion, the State does not become more powerful, but on the contrary more dependent with regard to the economy; for such expansion corresponds to a development whereby the totality of socio-economic fields is subordinated to the capital accumulation process” (p. 169). However, this State dependence on the capital accumulation process, which involves the restoration of bourgeois class power under neoliberalism, limits the potential political mechanisms for organizing class hegemony and heightens contradictions between the power bloc and the subordinate classes, thus creating an increase in social instability and the consequent necessity of the reproduction of the dominant ideology directly within the economic functions themselves.<sup>28</sup> Without the reinforcement of the dominant ideology within state economic functions, the sharpened contradiction between economic operations and ideological operations may threaten the ideological legitimacy of the State because its neoliberal interventions rapidly ransack the dominated classes of previous material concessions.

In the United States, neoliberalization of the state apparatus, the primacy of finance capital over productive capital, and the dismantlement of social welfare programs have adversely affected the Black population in a distinct manner. In the 1980s, as the fields of advertising, travel, information technologies, banking, credit, insurance and health care expanded but largely excluded Black Americans from their growth—the industries with higher concentrations of

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<sup>27</sup> For more information, see: Poulantzas (1978, p. 169).

<sup>28</sup> For more information, see: Poulantzas (1978, pp. 169-171).

Black workers (e.g. productive industries such as automobile services) began to decline<sup>29</sup>—which resulted in high rates of Black unemployment. At that moment—neoliberal theorists and policymakers often regarded unemployment as necessary in order to lower inflation and create a reserve army of surplus labor<sup>30</sup>—which resulted in the decline of real wages in the United States. The dismantlement of social service programs under Reaganism involved the reproduction of racist ideology; Reagan’s racist stereotype of “the welfare queen” is but one illustrative example. Marable (1983) finds that “many ‘middle-class whites believe that the Federal government’s deficit spending, Keynesian economic policies since the Great Depression, and national, state, and local taxes are the reason for their economic plight” (p. 242). Both the white petty-bourgeoisie and white proletariat materially suffered from the economic downturn of the 1970s, and the ideological racialization of social service programs facilitated the legitimation of their erosion by rendering the Black recipients of these state services as scapegoats for the structural economic crisis. The reproduction of racist ideology lowered the contradiction between the economic and ideological operations of the State when the subordinate classes failed to effectively impede the dismantlement of social welfare programs, which constituted a pillar of previous material concessions under embedded liberalism.

In addition, the prison apparatus, which had hitherto executed a primarily repressive function, began to carry out a distinguishable economic function alongside its repression; its role was crucial to the restructuring of the capitalist economy under neoliberalism. Davis (2003) finds that there are “real and often complicated connections between deindustrialization of the economy—a process that reached its peak during the 1980s—and the rise of mass imprisonment, which also began to spiral during the Reagan-Bush era” (p. 17). The high rates of Black

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<sup>29</sup> For more information on these trends, see: Marable (1983, pp. 41-46).

<sup>30</sup> For more information, see: Harvey (2010, p. 14).

unemployment that accompanied the financialization of many industries signified the existence of a large reserve army of surplus labor, and the prison apparatus began to function to manage and regiment these bodies. According to Davis (2003), “The massive prison-building project that began in the 1980s created the means of concentrating and managing what the capitalist system had implicitly declared a human surplus” (p. 91). The prison apparatus established for many members of the reserve army of surplus labor a defined structural position within the social division of labor during a period of material instability.

This gave birth to the prison-industrial complex, which refers simultaneously to the utilization of prison labor for the profits of private corporations and the carceral expansion that accompanies the recognition of the prison as a profitable enterprise that can stimulate economic growth and provide a solution to unemployment. Davis (2003) finds:

The transformation of imprisoned bodies—and they are in their majority bodies of color—into sources of profit who consume and also often produce all kinds of commodities, devours public funds, which might otherwise be available for social programs such as education, housing, childcare, recreation, and drug programs (p. 88).

Although the prison apparatus has managed Black bodies and coerced them into performing relatively cheap labor since the era of convict-lease system, its economic function under neoliberalism has become even more pronounced.

### **The Tendency of the Falling Rate of Profit**

Poulantzas subscribes to Marx’s theory of the tendency of the falling rate of profit, which serves as the central reference point of his understanding of State activity within the economic space-process rooted in the relations of production. According to Poulantzas (1978):

Our investigation must take as its *guiding thread the tendency of the falling rate of profit*: state intervention in the economy should be essentially understood as the *introduction of counter-tendencies* to this tendency, in relation to the new coordinates whereby the average rate of profit is established in the present phase of monopoly capitalism (p. 173).

In political economy, Marx's theory posits a tendency of the ratio of profit to capital investment (i.e. the rate of profit) to decline in the long-term. Poulantzas elucidates that the rate of profit refers to the distribution of surplus-value among various sectors of capital, not the mere extraction itself of surplus-value, and he contends that this tendency is rooted in class struggle. Poulantzas (1978) finds that "state operations liable to introduce counter-tendencies to the falling rate of profit enter into the production and reproduction process of which the fall itself is the index: the falling tendency is ultimately nothing but the expression of popular struggles against exploitation (p. 174). As innovation enables more efficient productive output per worker across various sectors of capital and thus more relative surplus-value extracted from each worker, in the long run, the demand for labor will decrease as the average rate of profit becomes more even across the fractions of capital, and this rate of surplus-value will then apply to fewer workers, resulting in a decline in profits.

Of course, Poulantzas notes that there are two counter-tendencies to the fall of the rate of profit. According to Poulantzas (1978), "Of these the two principal ones are: *devalorization* of a portion of constant capital, leading to a rise in the average rate of *profit*; and an *increase in the rate of exploitation or rate of surplus value* (training of the labour force, technological innovations, etc.)—which is designated as an increase in *relative surplus value*" (Italics Poulantzas', p. 174). Poulantzas asserts that statization-devalorization of capital involves only the redistribution of the total surplus value between fractions of capital, and while this certainly

occurs, mostly to the benefit of monopoly capital, the second counter-tendency is more predominant within the activities of the State.<sup>31</sup> He recognizes a movement toward intensive, rather than extensive, exploitation of labor, thus signifying the primacy of increases in labor productivity and technological innovation over decreases in wages and elongations of the work day. We should still note, however, that—real wages have steadily declined in the United States<sup>32</sup>—under neoliberalism. Nevertheless, Poulantzas (1978) finds that:

Of crucial importance today are a whole series of state activities in relation to scientific research and technological innovation, restructuring of industry, education and occupational training, as well as in such areas as housing, health, transport, social welfare, urban development, and collective consumption. Although quite seemingly heterogeneous, all these fields are articulated around the State's role in the expanded reproduction of labour-power (p. 176).

Here, Poulantzas is sure to clarify that the target of these state activities is not mere innovation within the production process (e.g. technical training), but rather the reorganization of the labor process and the reproduction of labor-power within the relations of production and social division of labor in order to counteract the falling rate of profit by increasing the rate of surplus-value.

### ***The State and the Economy***

Functioning as a committee that manages the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie, the State must perform various economic operations in place of capital itself in order to secure the long-term interests of the entire bourgeois power bloc and maintain the capitalist relations of production. Poulantzas contends that although the State sometimes performs economic functions

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<sup>31</sup> For more information, see: Poulantzas (1978, pp. 174-176).

<sup>32</sup> For a graph demonstrating the decline of real wage rates, see: Harvey (2005, p. 25).



that are unprofitable for capital alone, it additionally intervenes in fields that are indeed profitable for capital (e.g. certain energy sectors) via mechanisms such as nationalization in order to minimize contradictions within the power bloc. According to Poulantzas (1978), “Assumption of these functions by any one individual capital, or even fraction of capital, involves considerable risks: the functions themselves may be quite drastically distorted in order to serve particular, short-term profits (pp. 181-182). Certain profitable fields carry unique characteristics, and their complete privatization may sharpen tensions between the power bloc and destabilize the mode of production as a whole.

However, under neoliberalism, we may observe the privatization of several industries that might either heighten tensions between the power bloc or operate less efficiently than they would under statization in order to expand the opportunities for the allocation and investment of surplus capital. Harvey (2005) finds that “the corporatization, commodification, and privatization of hitherto public assets has been a signal feature of the neoliberal project” (p. 160). As the range of reinvestment options in production diminish over time, there develops a problem surrounding surplus capital and what to do with it. In response to this swelling problem in the 1980s, the neoliberal state has continually authorized the privatization of several enterprises so that they may absorb this surplus capital. For example—public utilities, telecommunications, public institutions (e.g. universities and prisons), and transport have all experienced some extent of privatization under neoliberalism<sup>33</sup>—although most notably in the regions of financial imperialist exploitation and penetration of U.S. capital, in order to absorb this capital surplus.

Since monopoly capital constitutes the hegemonic fraction of the power bloc within the state political apparatus, state intervention in the economy favors monopoly capital, although of course not as a tool or instrument of monopoly capital. (Poulantzas notes that while

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<sup>33</sup> For more information, see: Harvey (2010, pp. 28-29).

devalorization of certain capitals occurs via mechanisms of the State, it additionally occurs within the economic space itself (e.g. bankruptcies, take-overs, mergers).<sup>34</sup>) When particular sections of capital (e.g. firms) fail to realize profit, other sections may acquire their assets or benefit from the redistribution of their surplus-value. Poulantzas (1978) finds “This happens above all through the State, because neither within capital as a whole nor within monopoly capital itself is there an instance capable of laying down who should make sacrifices so that others may continue to prosper” (pp. 182-183). Through its political regulation and activities, the State establishes order within what might otherwise amount to a chaotic and self-destructive confrontation between fractions of the power bloc when sections of capital falter.

### **Police-Political Control**

The constitution of reproduction of labor-power within the social division of labor under neoliberalism always involves politico-ideological features, and Poulantzas emphasizes that we cannot ignore the repressive characteristics of this reproduction. (Notably, he highlights the police-political management and control of labor-power and collective consumption.<sup>35</sup>) According to Poulantzas (1978), “The realities are well-known: social welfare structures, unemployment relief networks and job-placement bureaux; the material organization of ‘social’ housing space (short-stay housing estates); asylums and hospitals - all these are so many political sites where legal-police control is exercised over labour-power” (p. 186). The spatial matrices of these political sites of legal-police control tend to reproduce structures and spaces similar to those that spawned from redlining, where the subordinate classes are easily subject to legal-police control and surveillance. This of course assumes a specific materiality under racial capitalism in the United States. According to Taylor (2019), “Segregating African Americans

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<sup>34</sup> For more information, see: Poulantzas (1978, p. 182).

<sup>35</sup> For more information see: Poulantzas (1978, p. 186).

into deteriorating urban neighborhoods while simultaneously denying those communities access to resources that could be used toward development created an economic disadvantage for Black people that has been impossible to overcome” (p. 260). As the real estate industry has dispossessed Black homeowners of the value of their housing assets and served to segregate neighborhoods, legal-police surveillance and profiling of predominantly Black neighborhoods becomes much easier, and the relative resources of the police apparatus devoted to the control of these political sites is impossible to overlook.

Poulantzas asserts that—more flexible networks and circuits of legal-police control are diffusing throughout the social formation<sup>36</sup>—under authoritarian statism. Poulantzas finds that “control is shifted from the criminal act to the crime-inducing situation, from the pathological case to the pathogenic surroundings, in such a way that each citizen becomes, as it were, a *priori* suspect or a potential criminal” (Italics Poulantzas’ pp. 186-187). In its reproduction of labor-power, the state economic apparatus functions to materially allot citizens particular locations and positions in which they become the primary targets of legal-police profiling, surveillance, and control. According to Poulantzas (1978), “The organization of space in transport or housing not only reproduces isolation and the ideology of the family cell, but gives a planned structure to division among the popular classes (the wage-earning petty bourgeoisie, the working class, immigrant workers, and others)” (p. 187). This only exacerbates the problem of racial profiling because the police apparatus can easily identify and target preferred political sites of control, which are predominantly Black working class neighborhoods in which it regards each citizen as a *priori* suspect or potential criminal.

### **Limitations of the State.**

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<sup>36</sup> For more information, see: Poulantzas (1978, p. 186).

There are a variety of structural and material limits that define the capitalist State and therefore the activity of the state economic apparatus. For example, Poulantzas contends that intervention in the economy can only serve to reproduce the specifically capitalist relations of production and maintain bourgeois possession of economic property and power over the means of production, mostly to the benefit of monopoly capital. In addition, the State possesses a limited arsenal of economic strategies and tactics, and it sometimes contains neither the proper information nor the resources to correctly decide when to intervene in order to maintain the conditions for capital accumulation. According to Poulantzas (1978), “At one and the same time, it is driven to do both too much (crisis-inducing intervention) and too little (being unable to affect the deep causes of crises)” (p. 191). The State often encounters difficulties with its planning of the capitalist economy. Poulantzas (1978) finds “*A priori* intervention, which is very often blind, can hardly go beyond certain elementary measures indispensable to the process of valorization of capital in general and to the realization of monopoly superprofits” (p. 192). The State must attempt to prevent crises of capital accumulation even though it does not always possess the power or foresight to employ the necessary tactics and policy to prevail.

The neoliberalization of the capitalist State and the internationalization of capital exacerbate this problem by limiting the regulatory influence of the State. Loosening restrictions on capital flows across national borders is necessary for U.S. financial imperialism and the exportation of capital to regions that yield the highest returns on investment, but this incentivizes national States to weaken their regulatory power in order to attract this investment flow. According to Harvey (2010), “As lucrative business naturally flowed to wherever the regulatory regime was laxest, so the political pressure on the regulators to look the other way mounted” (p. 20). By sacrificing this regulatory power, the State limits its own ability to intervene in the

economic sphere in order to prevent crises, and the deregulation of the banking industry that led to the financial crisis of 2008 in the United States further illustrates this point.

Another limitation of the capitalist State involves the material resources it requires to effectively intervene in the economic sphere and maintain the relations of production. Poulantzas (1978) finds that “the State is largely unable to plan its revenue and to define in advance its margin of intervention: this is expressed in the permanent fiscal crisis that currently affects the capitalist states to a varying degree” (p. 192). This issue becomes especially apparent under the neoliberal transformation of various state forms around the world when the internationalization of U.S. finance capital involves capital flows toward regions with the lowest taxation rates on corporate profit. In the age of the predominance of transnational corporations, there exists an incentive for States to minimize their taxation rates in order to attract capital investment within their nations in order to maintain stability and material competitiveness with other nations.

### ***Socialist Alternatives.***

In his conclusions surrounding the state economic apparatus and a transition to a socialist mode of production, Poulantzas rejects a common Leftist position that proposes smashing certain institutions of the State while maintaining the existing technocratic institutions and economic structures for Left experts to manage. In this regard, Poulantzas rejects the conception of a dual-natured state economic apparatus, which posits that a centralized super-apparatus organizes economic functions under the hegemony of monopoly capital while the various branches of a technical apparatus perform a more general economic role that is indispensable to continuous functionality of the production process and distribution-allocation of resources. According to Poulantzas (1978), “In reality, the economic apparatus is not split between a technical apparatus and a monopoly super-apparatus, although some of its branches and

mechanisms do crystallize monopoly interests in particular” (p. 197). Contrary to those who conceive of this split as real and seek to smash the monopoly super-apparatus while maintaining the technical apparatus under the management of Left experts, Poulantzas suggests that we should radically transform the economic apparatus in its entirety in order to avoid bureaucratic statism. According to Poulantzas (1978):

Precisely to the extent that the economic apparatus discharges functions crucial to the reproduction of capitalist relations of production and capitalist accumulation as a *whole* - functions that are incompressible so long as the relations of production are not themselves radically undermined - the changes undergone by this apparatus cannot but *closely follow* the rhythm of change in the relations of production. Now the democratic road to socialism refers to a *long process*, the first place of which involves a challenge to the hegemony of monopoly capital, but not a headlong subversion of the core of the relations of production (p. 197).

Poulantzas’ vision aims to maintain the branches of the state economic apparatus that can provide resources and aid to the organizations and centres of democratic self-management during the the long-term socialization of the relations of production; without these networks of support, he contends, the complete dismantlement of the economic apparatus might generate enough material instability to burden the transition process.

Therefore, Poulantzas proposes not the destruction of the state economic apparatus, but rather certain stages of its entire transformation as it intervenes into the relations of production in order to slowly socialize them. According to Poulantzas (1978), this transformation must advance the following steps: the dismantlement of the institutions/apparatuses that favor monopoly capital, the transformation of each branch, network, and circuit of the economic

apparatus according to the needs of the popular masses, and the transformation of each branch or network vis-a-vis the economic process and its exact political character” (p. 198). In other words, Poulantzas asserts that we should radically transform the economic apparatus into something that functions to enter into the economic sphere in order to enter into the constitution of the socialist relations of production alongside democratic political organizations and self-management networks.

Personally, while I may concur with some of Poulantzas’ assertions here, I propose that we proceed with caution. Socialization of the mode of production would of course require some form of State management and distribution of resources, so we of course should not smash or destroy any infrastructure that could facilitate this process. However, Poulantzas’ proposition that we should gradually democratize the state economic apparatus may encounter several obstacles. First of all, this gradual process is likely impossible without first smashing the repressive and political institutions/apparatuses that are capable of mobilizing an armed defense of the state economic apparatus and its specific institutions/apparatuses that favor monopoly capital, and this of course would not involve a long, gradual process. Poulantzas’ propositions on the transformation of the state economic apparatus appear relatively vague and concise and may serve to obfuscate a hidden opportunistic or reformist tendency. Second of all, certain branches of the state economic apparatus may possess the institutional capacity to engage in counterrevolutionary reactions to popular struggles by mobilizing and distributing resources to the dominant classes during a revolutionary period, and in those instances, revolution is impossible without smashing these branches and cutting off the flow of state aid to the capitalists. In any case, our ultimate objective should be the seizure of the state economic

apparatus, but in a nod to Poulantzas, I agree that we should strive to minimize physical damage to the branches and infrastructure that may facilitate our long-term cause.



## **Chapter 6: The State Ideological Apparatuses**

### **Ideological State Apparatuses**

We now shift our attention toward a discussion of the ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) within Poulantzas' theoretical framework as we explore the applicability of race to Poulantzas' understanding of this analytical category. (Before Poulantzas, Althusser conceptualizes the ideological state apparatuses within the context of Structural Marxism in his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," where he asserts that there are a plurality of ideological state apparatuses (e.g. religious ISA, educational ISA, family ISA) that operate together, unified under the dominant bourgeois ideology.<sup>37</sup>) The ideological function of the State involves material institutions and practices, some of which exist within the "private" domain but are still part of the State because they function to reproduce this dominant ideology throughout the social formation. Althusser (1970) finds:

The distinction between the public and private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law, and valid in the (subordinate) domains in which bourgeois law exercises its 'authority'.

The domain of the State escapes it because the latter is 'above the law': the State, which is the State *of* the ruling class, is neither public nor private; on the contrary, it is the precondition for any distinction between public and private" (Italicized Althusser, p. 18).

Structural Marxists such as Althusser and Poulantzas therefore recognize that both public and private institutions may function as ISAs because they all perform the ideological function of the State, which stands above the legal distinction between "public" and "private." Poulantzas expands upon the theorizing of Althusser and elaborates the specific functionality and institutional framework of the various material institutions and practices that reproduce

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<sup>37</sup> For more information, see: Althusser (1971, pp. 1-60).

bourgeois ideology. According to Poulantzas (1978), “The dominant ideology, then, is embodied in the state apparatuses. One of their functions is to elaborate, inculcate, and reproduce that ideology - a function of considerable importance in the constitution and reproduction of social classes, class domination, and the social division of labour” (p. 28). The reproduction of the relations of production and the legitimation of the capitalist State require that the subordinate classes understand and internalize the dominant ideology that dictates their position within the social division of labor.

### **Separation of Intellectual and Manual Labor**

Poulantzas examines the conception of the separation of intellectual and manual labor; this separation expresses its materiality not only within the ISAs, but additionally within the other apparatus of the State, although ideology assumes a crucial role within the intellectual labor itself. This separation does not simply refer to an empirical difference between physical labor and mental labor. Rather, it refers to the politico-ideological relations within the capitalist relations of production. It refers to, according to Poulantzas (1978):

- 1) The characteristic separation of intellectual elements from the labour performed by the direct producer, which, through differentiation from intellectual labour (knowledge), becomes the capitalist form of manual labour;
- 2) The separation of science from manual labour at a time when the former enters ‘the service of capital’ and tends to become a directly productive force;
- 3) The development of specific relations between science-knowledge and the dominant ideology...in the sense that power is ideologically legitimized in the modality of scientific technique, as if it flowed automatically from a rational scientific practice; and

- 4) The establishment of organic relations between, on the one hand, intellectual labour thus dissected from manual labour and, on the other hand, the political relations of domination: in short, between capitalist knowledge and capitalist power (p. 55).

In other words, intellectual labor (i.e. knowledge-science invested in ideology) contains certain techniques of scientific knowledge that present themselves as inherently rational in order to mask the embeddedness of bourgeois ideology within them. (In fact, the very modalities of scientific technique within capitalist social formations legitimize bourgeois political power by presenting it as a fruition of some form of rational scientific practice.<sup>38</sup>) The popular masses often encounter exclusion from this intellectual discourse because it is accessible only to those who occupy positions of relative power within the State or production process. The organizational functions of many institutions/apparatuses of the State require some degree of centralization, and by excluding the manual laborers from their knowledge and discourse, they prevent pluralist dilution of an otherwise centralized and predominant ideology that guides the activities of each institution/apparatus. For example, the police apparatus, the military apparatus, and the state administration involve, according to Poulantzas, “the practical supremacy of a knowledge and discourse - whether directly invested in the dominant ideology or erected on the basis of the dominant ideological formation - from which the popular masses are excluded” (p. 56). Each state institution/apparatus contains a dominant knowledge or discourse, and by sealing such discourse from the influence of the popular masses, the separation of intellectual and manual labor ensures the perpetual reproduction of the dominant ideology or dominant ideological formation within positions of State power.

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<sup>38</sup> In order to learn more about how modalities of scientific technique legitimize power by presenting power as something that flows directly from a rational scientific practice, see: Poulantzas (1978, pp. 55-58).

The separation of intellectual and manual labor is especially relevant to discussions surrounding the educational ISA and the structural racism within it. Althusser contends that the educational ISA transplanted the religious ISA as the dominant and primary ISA during the transition from feudalism to the capitalist mode of production. During this transition, liberal philosophy and social science began to inform and shape the educational mode of study and present themselves as inherently rational despite their functionality in the production of bourgeois ideology. According to Meyerhoff (2019):

education emerged as part of primitive accumulation - that is, the creation of the preconditions for capitalist relations, which also involved the violence of expulsion of farmers from the land through enclosures, colonial dispossession and enslavement of Indigenous peoples, military suppression of peasant rebellions, and the degradation of women, seen most brutally with the execution of so-called witches (p. 151).

Liberal theory emphasized concepts such as individual freedom, natural rights, social contract theory, and private property, all of which reinforced bourgeois ideology and social hierarchy within the capitalist relations of production and excluded Black and Indigenous voices from its discourse. In fact, liberal writers such as John Stuart Mill often directly employed their theoretical and philosophical concepts in order to legitimize European colonization of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. According to Lowe (2015), Mill's "liberal" doctrine enforced a hierarchy of nations, races, and cultures, and he described the people of parts of Asia and Africa as still existing in the state of nature and thus incapable of self-government and self-determination without first becoming subjugated, controlled, and educated (pp. 102-113). This intellectual discourse served to structurally exclude certain cultural histories and non-white modes of study because an influx of such perspectives would have threatened the organizational

centralization of various state institutions/apparatuses and their functions. We may therefore recognize the embeddedness of not only bourgeois ideology, but also ideologies of white supremacy within capitalist modalities of scientific technique and the institutions/apparatuses that employ them. The assimilation of Black and Indigenous peoples into white settler-colonial capitalist society often involved the internalization of white techniques of knowledge and understandings of liberal thought that reinforced their exclusion from positions of power within the state apparatus.

The educational ISA therefore emerged as a structurally racist and colonial institution historically rooted in cultural genocide and the expansion of white techniques of knowledge. When referring to schools in the United States, W.E.B. DuBois sometimes discusses—the concept of “educated ignorance”<sup>39</sup>—which in a sense refers to the inability of the techniques of knowledge embedded within the intellectual labor performed within institutions of the educational ISA to critically address racist power relations. Meyerhoff (2019) finds “an epistemology of ignorance is a way of *knowing what not to know* in order to maintain some dominant way of being in the world, whether white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, or—as I argue—the education-based mode of study” (Italics Meyerhoff, p. 49). Therefore, there exist structural limitations within the educational ISA itself; it both impedes the retrieval of Black, Indigenous, Asian, Hispanic, and Latino histories and prevents the popular masses (i.e. manual laborers) from participating in its discourse. In large part due to this reason, the Black Panther Party demanded in Point Five its Ten-Point Program the vitalization of access to knowledge that reveals to the popular masses the history of racism and exploitation in the United States. According to Davis (2016), “Number five, we want decent education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that

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<sup>39</sup> For more information, see: DuBois (1920).

teaches us our true history and our role in present-day society” (p. 72). Here, Angela Davis is reiterating Point Five of the Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Program and the emphasis of Point Five on the importance of access to education that does not reproduce educated ignorance. The existing educational apparatuses (e.g. schools, universities) fail to address this issue because they are merely sites of reproduction of knowledge-science invested in bourgeois and often white supremacist ideology. We must therefore attempt to escape the structural confinements of the current educational ISA and seek to empower alternative modes of study and institutions of knowledge, which we will explore in the final section of this chapter.

### ***Individualization and Atomization***

Poulantzas asserts that the centralized, bureaucratic capitalist State attempts to organize the interests of the power bloc under the hegemony of monopoly capital and simultaneously fracture and atomize the judicial-political persons (i.e. individuals) of a given social formation so that these individuals encounter no forms of personal bonds or social cohesion except through the State, which binds them together as a people-nation. State ideological functions often reproduce this individualization. According to Poulantzas (1978), “This ideology of individualization not only serves to mask and obscure class relations (the capitalist State never presents itself as a class State), but also plays an active part in the divisions and isolation (individualization) of the popular masses” (p. 66). Such an ideology functions to prevent the formation of personal bonds that link people together on the basis of class interests and international proletarian solidarity and instead inculcate the idea that social cohesion manifests primarily via common association within the people-nation. There exists a contradiction here; the State must simultaneously isolate individuals from one another and yet cement them together with homogenous and ubiquitous understandings of the social categories that characterize the

people-nation. Provided it remains grounded in the material foundation rooted in the relations of production and the social division of labor, Poulantzas believes that Foucault's conceptualization of disciplines (i.e. techniques of knowledge) and normalization may enrich Marxist theory and help explain how the State molds this sense of individuality and homogenization of social categories within the unified people-nation. What is meant, however, by this term, "normalization?" Poulantzas (1978) finds that "Signs expressing status, privilege and affiliation tend to be replaced, or at least supplemented by, a whole ladder of normalcy, the rungs of which, while indicating membership in a homogenous social body, themselves serve to classify, hierarchize, and distribute social rank" (p. 66). In other words, normalization both reinforces uniform elements and categories that reflect the homogenization of the social body and reproduces isolation and atomization via mechanisms of differentiation and separation of individuals that correspond to the position or level of each person in relation to another on the hierarchical social ladder.

In the United States, this normalization process is particularly apparent within the educational ISA and its techniques of knowledge. Meyerhoff (2019) urges us to:

Consider how institutional and popular discourses of education embed this positive valuation in their imagery of a person's normative educational trajectory: "rising up" from pre-K to grade 12, graduated as opposed to "dropping out," entering "higher" education, and continuing into the highest realm of "masters" and "doctorates" (p. 43).

These educational categories are homogenous throughout the entire social formation; the rungs of the educational ladder classify, hierarchize, and distribute social ranks that possess common definitions and meanings across the whole people-nation. We often rely upon our educational achievements to locate, internalize, and accept our social rank, and through this hierarchical

differentiation between one another, we become more atomized and isolated from each other. Meyerhoff contends that the ideological stigma surrounding the “dropout” conditions us to internalize shame, regret, and a subordinate class identity when we fail to maintain an upward trajectory within the educational mode of study. He explains that our society tends to refer to dropouts as some form of Other—someone who may not possess the moral or intellectual capacity to self-govern or participate meaningfully in civil society without control or regimentation exercised over them. In addition, he reflects upon the romanticization of success stories surrounding those who advance vertically up these educational rungs. In a fragmented social formation of atomized individuals, education serves to homogenize the scattered elements of the people-nation by presenting itself as an equalizing institution capable of distributing social rankings that people often recognize as valid and legitimate.

### **Race and Ideology.**

In the United States, racist ideology functions to attempt to segregate the populace based on race, form an ideological association between Blackness and criminality, and assimilate Black Americans into the social fabric in a manner that strips them of their cultural autonomy and forces them to internalize white modes of thought. One root cause of this segregation and ideological linkage of race to criminality is the prevalence of racist stereotypes that promote negative depictions of Black Americans’ character. Davis (2016) finds that “these stereotypes have been functioning since the end of slavery. Fredrick Douglass wrote about the tendency to impute crime to color” (p. 33). This ideological connection between Blackness and criminality may seem obvious to many, especially to Black Americans who have struggled against it in their daily lives, but we still cannot fail to address it and speak out against it. Through mechanisms of individualization and atomization, the ISAs in the United States reproduce within the



consciousness of white Americans feelings of difference and distance from the Black experience, thus dehumanizing Black Americans and impeding any form of solidarity with their Black comrades. According to Davis (2016):

There's also the impact on the psyche, and this is where the persistence of stereotypes comes in. The ways in which over a period of decades and centuries Black people have been dehumanized, that is to say represented as less than human , and so the representational politics that one sees through the media, that one sees in other modes of communication, that come into play in social interactions, have equated Black with criminal (p. 34).

Racist ideology in the United States, which persists in every ISA, further atomizes individuals and produces a social cohesion of the people-nation that exists only under a homogenous inculcation of white supremacist ideologies.

***Neoliberal Ideology in the United States.***

We of course have not forgotten that our broader theoretical project involves a documentation of the neoliberal state form and its historical mutations, so we now shift our attention toward an examination of race within the context of the production and reproduction of neoliberal ideology and in the United States. First and foremost, we should recognize that neoliberal ideology emerged with aims to intensify the individualization and atomization of individuals with common-sense cultural appeals to “individual freedoms.” According to Harvey (2005), “By capturing ideals of individual freedom and turning them against the interventionist and regulatory practices of the state, capitalist class interests could hope to protect and even restore their position. Neoliberalism was well suited to this ideological task” (p. 42). Individual freedom and accountability therefore constitute a core pillar of neoliberal ideology. Neoliberal

ideology strives to shift attention away from overarching structures, the holistic functionality of various institutions/apparatuses, and broader social justice projects, and divert it toward individual agents and actors, thereby imposing and legitimizing the dissolution of various forms of association and organization.

In the first part of the twenty-first century, this neoliberal ideology has become particularly counterproductive in its relation to activism against racist police violence. Davis (2016) finds that “neoliberalism attempts to force people to think of themselves only in individual terms and not in collective terms” (p. 49). Regarding racist police violence, such an ideology often leads people to focus their attention on the level of the individual while failing to examine the historical functionality of the entire police apparatus in the context of the racist/capitalist State. When a police officer murders a Black man or woman, neoliberal ideology emphasizes the individual responsibility and accountability of this one police officer, thus leading a significant portion of the population to call for the prosecution of the individual perpetrator without noticing that such instances are consequences of broader, deeper problems surrounding the inextricable historical link between structural racism and the state repressive apparatus. According to Davis (2016):

In 2012, when Trayvon Martin was killed, the cry ‘Justice for Trayvon Martin!’ awakened people to the urgency of building antiracist movements. But we focused somewhat too sharply on George Zimmerman, the individual perpetrator, to be able to identify the structures of racist violence and specifically the links between vigilante violence and state violence (p. 85).

Arbitrary and unrestricted State violence toward the Black population has reflected an internal characteristic of the U.S. racist/capitalist State throughout its history, and we cannot

meaningfully address this problem without dissolving the specific institutions/apparatuses whose purpose and function by design is to carry out such mechanisms of repression. Rather than devoting our time and resources to the prosecution of individual police officers, antiracist activists should consider abolitionist approaches such as Defunding the Police, for only then can we address the heart of the problem.

### **Prospects of Change: Radicalizing Education**

In *Beyond Education: Radical Studying for Another World* (2019), Eli Meyerhoff conceptualizes higher education as a strategic terrain of struggle, and he proposes that we should develop alternative modes of study that empower Indigenous and Black radical traditions in order to escape the structural confinements of the current branches of the educational ISA and its reproduction of educated ignorance. He asserts that radical intellectuals may possess the ability to utilize the university apparatus in the advancement of this cause by capturing and redirecting university resources toward these alternative modes of study. Whether it concerns financial resources, literature, professional knowledge and expertise, or the mobilization power of dedicated student organizations and movements, the university itself contains many valuable assets that radical scholars can redirect toward the development of alternative organizations and modes of study. According to Meyerhoff (2019), “Going beyond critical university studies, I call for not only an abolitionist university studies but also an *abolition university*, one that aligns itself with modes of study in abolitionist movements, with, against, and beyond the university as we know it” (p. 31). In order to recover often forgotten histories and cultures, help the masses understand the nature of their position within this oppressive and exploitative society, and challenge the ideologies of educated ignorance secreted by various branches of the educational ISA, we must advance and expand alternative modes of study in which Indigenous, Black

radical, and anti-capitalist approaches to knowledge can grow and effectively inform the popular masses.

## **Chapter 7: Relevance of Structural Marxist Theories of the State in the First**

### **Part of the Twenty-first Century**

#### **Structural Marxism in the Contemporary Context**

As I reflect upon Poulantzas' theoretical framework and the various instances in which the examination of racial capitalism in the United States may enrich and furnish an understanding of his analytical categories (e.g. repression, ideology), I contemplate whether or not Structural Marxism is relevant in the contemporary context of the first part of the twenty-first century and whether Poulantzas' particular historical structuralist approach possesses the capacity to adequately inform our understanding of race within this given social formation. Personally, as I conclude this project, I feel as if the primary contribution of Structural Marxism to a comprehension of racial capitalism is its ability to draw connections between historical legacies of racial injustice and the broader structural context of the reproduction of capitalist relations of production, both at a national and international level. Our analysis of race within Poulantzas' theoretical framework documents the functionality of racism within the capitalist State and its role in the constitution and reinforcement of bourgeois class power. I find that the incorporation of the problem of racism into Poulantzas' theoretical framework overall provides valuable and informative insights that may facilitate a better understanding of both race and the capitalist State. I believe that Structural Marxism and specifically Marxism in general are extremely important and indispensable theoretical approaches that not only identify the inextricable link between racism and international capitalist exploitation but additionally delineate potential avenues of resistance and deeper social change.

We cannot challenge the institutions/apparatuses that function as sites of racism and oppression (e.g. the police apparatus) without understanding the historical and functional origins

of these institutions/apparatuses and contextualizing them within the structural context of global capital accumulation. Sometimes we must take a step backward and analyze the entire picture. For example, we cannot fully address the problem of police violence and repression toward the Black population in the United States without first understanding the inextricable link between racism and State violence within this social formation. In chapter three of this project, we noted Angela Davis' assertion that policing in the United States cannot persist without racism. One crucial insight of Poulantzas' Structural Marxist analysis is that the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production is impossible without the state repressive apparatus and its decisive monopoly of legitimate violence and terror. We therefore cannot dissolve this inherently racist police apparatus without directly challenging and transforming the capitalist mode of production in its entirety. These insights and realizations reveal the urgent relevance of Marxism in the context of contemporary struggles.

### **Authoritarian Statism**

One important advantage of Poulantzas' historical structuralist approach is that it strives to identify the various forms and historical mutations of the capitalist State and theoretically addresses the differences between them. This allows us to comprehend the specific relationship of forces that find expression within the State so that we may better understand the distinct characteristics of class struggle within our own regional and historical contexts. In addition, in the case of authoritarian statism, we may identify the state institutions/apparatuses that represent the interests of the hegemonic fraction and centralize real political power. These insights can be very informative and beneficial when attempting to examine prospects of radical social change and political transformation.

I shall begin my own reflection of Poulantzas' theoretical framework by revisiting the contemporary form of capitalist State prevalent in the current phase of imperialism and monopoly capitalism to which Poulantzas refers as authoritarian statism. Authoritarian statism emerged in the 1970s primarily within the dominant capitalist countries of the imperialist chain (e.g. Europe, United States) and differs from the interventionist State of the previous phases of monopoly capitalism and the liberal State of competitive capitalism. As it now must fulfill an incompressible economic function, the State introduces many economic policies that sharpen the tensions between fractions of the power bloc in order to maintain the hegemony of monopoly capital. Poulantzas (1978) finds "The characteristic sharpening of contradictions within the power bloc necessitates growing political involvement of the part of the State, so that the bloc may be unified and class hegemony reproduced" (p. 212). This growing political involvement of the part of the State has become more apparent than ever; state policy clearly favors the interests of monopoly capital and reduces Welfare State expenditures for the popular masses in order to instead fiscally invest in the reproduction of their labor-power.

A core feature of authoritarian statism involves the erosion of democratic political organizations (e.g. political parties) and civil liberties guaranteed under the law. Poulantzas recognizes that relative political power has shifted away from the legislature and political parties and toward the Executive and state administration. In the past, the popular masses and fractions of the power bloc could find representation within political parties that possessed the power to express their interests to the state administration, but under authoritarian statism, the state administration has become more autonomous of Congress and thereby increasingly subordinate to the Executive, who then serves as the personal embodiment of leadership within the administrative power centres and networks. This concentration of power within such

impenetrable institutions/apparatuses is necessary in order to organize the hegemony of monopoly capital despite sharpened contradictions between fractions of the power bloc and between the power bloc and popular masses. Of course, all fractions of the power bloc find some degree of representation within the Executive and state administration, but the centralization of power ensures the predominance of the hegemonic fraction. Consequently, political parties primarily fulfill an ideological rather than a political or economic function. Poulantzas (1978) finds:

the Democratic Party and the Republican Party in the United States, do indeed cover real contradictions among fractions of the power bloc - contradictions which concern their specific interests and the policy variant to be adopted in relation to the popular masses. But these parties are not the sites where such contradictions are really handled. They are rather the sounding-boards for contradictions at work in the dominant centre, namely the administration and the Executive (p. 230).

Poulantzas suggests that representative political parties are paramount to the popular realization of civil liberties, which may depreciate alongside a decline in the political power of parties and Congress.

We must grapple with authoritarian statism as an inescapable reality whose plethora of issues still confront us in the first part of the twenty-first century. An understanding of authoritarian statism allows us to contextualize our current struggles against racial injustice, economic despair, and political domination and identify the most effective avenues of resistance. For example, it reveals the limitations of reformist approaches, especially via the avenue of political parties and Congress, which of course cannot effectively challenge the political power centralized within the Executive and the state administration. Our civil liberties, especially those



that Black Americans possess, are currently under attack, and in order to advance our project toward Black liberation, we must confront with solidarity the primary institutions/apparatuses that concentrate the real political power of the bourgeois power bloc and its hegemonic fraction of monopoly capital in order to retain and further develop our civil liberties and acquire proletarian political power.

***Prospects of Change: Poulantzas on Dual Power***

Poulantzas outright rejects a common position of the Third International regarding Lenin's conception of dual power because he conceptualizes the State as a relationship of forces, not a fortress or institution in which someone can exist in a position of interiority or exteriority. Poulantzas (1978) finds:

For all Lenin's analyses and actions are traversed by the following *leitmotif*: the State must be entirely destroyed through frontal attack in a situation of *dual power*, to be replaced by a second power - soviets - which will no longer be a State in the proper sense of the term, since it will already have begun to wither away (Italics Poulantzas', p. 252).

Poulantzas contends that for Lenin, it is possible to establish political organizations such as democratic workers' councils that exist in Lenin's conception in a position of exteriority vis-à-vis the existing capitalist state apparatus, and in the event of a precise revolutionary moment, revolutionaries may smash the fortified state apparatus, take command of its apexes, and replace it with a second, proletarian state in which the workers councils replace institutions of representative democracy. However, for Poulantzas, he does not believe that we should discard the existing institutions of representative democracy entirely, and since he believes that the centres of power for the popular masses possess the ability to reverberate their interests within the institutions/apparatuses of the State even if from a physical distance, he does not

propose smashing the existing state apparatus. Instead, he contends that the popular masses must organize enough power in order to ensure that the relationship of forces on the strategic terrain of the State shifts to their side through a stage of real breaks. According to Poulantzas (1978):

For state power to be taken, a mass struggle must have unfolded in such a way as to modify the relationship of forces within the state apparatuses, themselves the strategic site of political struggle. For a dual-power type strategy, however, the decisive shift in the relationship of forces takes place not within the State but between the State and the masses outside. In the democratic road to socialism, the long process of taking power essentially consists in the spreading, development, reinforcement, coordination and direction of those diffuse centres of resistance which the masses always possess within the state networks, in such a way that they become the real centres of power on the strategic terrain of the State (p. 258).

In Poulantzas' democratic socialist view, such a mass struggle must involve the organization and development of these diffuse centres and networks of resistance to such a level that they can produce effects within the existing state institutions/apparatuses that amount to a real shift in political power in favor of the subordinate classes. In other words, he does not believe the popular masses should smash the existing state apparatus and replace it with alternative political organizations (i.e., material condensations of these diffuse centres of resistance); rather, they should develop these alternative organizations and centres of resistance to such a degree that they can force the existing institutions/apparatuses to represent their interests instead of those of the power bloc, for the relationship of forces would then favor subordinate class power.

Personally, I contend that Poulantzas fails to recognize the various manners in which Leninism may actually be compatible with his own conceptualizations within his theoretical

framework. It is his own understanding that the existing institutions/apparatuses of the State enter into the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production and social division of labor in order to maintain a relationship of forces in which the bourgeois classes occupy a dominant position in relation to the subordinate classes. In the state form known as authoritarian statism, bourgeois political power is concentrated within the fortified Executive and the state administration, which occupy the summit of command in which all other institutions/apparatuses are subordinate to them. This is to ensure the political hegemony of monopoly capital when the popular masses' centres of resistance can effectively reverberate their power within other institutions/apparatuses such as political parties. In a sense, the Executive and the state administration are the last line of defense for the political power of the power bloc and its hegemonic fraction because the power bloc has shifted the expression of its power primarily to these two institutions/apparatuses. What would happen, we must ask, however, if a mass struggle were to entail smashing these two institutions/apparatuses? After all, according to Lenin (1917), "The words 'to smash' 'the bureaucratic-military state machinery,' briefly express the principle lesson of Marxism on the tasks of the proletariat in relation to the state during a revolution" (p. 297). In *The State and Revolution* (1917), Lenin proposes that mass struggle must involve smashing both the state bureaucratic administration and the state repressive apparatus and replacing them with state managers hired by the proletarian ruling class and the armed vanguard, respectively. Could the centres of popular resistance express themselves within the strategic terrain of the State via the mechanisms of smashing the concrete institutions/apparatuses that concentrate the political power of the power bloc and heightening the already existing class contradictions that threaten the stability and legitimation of authoritarian statism? With neither a state repressive apparatus that holds the decisive monopoly of legitimate violence nor a

bureaucratic state administration to represent the interests of monopoly capital, how would the relationship of forces find new expression within the strategic terrain of the State?

If we take Poulantzas' view, we might predict that the power bloc would shift the expression of its power to another institution/apparatus, which would then become the dominant one in the political chain of subordination. Poulantzas (1978) finds:

Moreover, even when a Left government manages to gain control of the hitherto dominant apparatus, the state institutional structure enables the bourgeoisie to transpose the role of dominance from one apparatus to another. In other words, the organization of the bourgeois State allows it to function by successive dislocation and displacement through which the bourgeoisie's power may be removed from one apparatus to another: the State is not a monolithic bloc, but a strategic field. Given that their rigidity makes the state apparatuses resistant to straightforward manipulation by the bourgeoisie, this permutation of apparatus dominance evidently takes place not overnight but according to a relatively lengthy process; this lack of malleability may thus act to the disadvantage of the bourgeoisie and create a breathing space for the Left in power (p. 138).

In the event of the smashing of the Executive and bureaucratic state administration, the bourgeois power bloc would attempt to transpose the role of political dominance to another institution/apparatus. However, Poulantzas himself even recognizes that this is not an overnight process, and if the reverberation of the popular masses' power within institutions/apparatuses such as political parties is already a condition that helped lead to the development of authoritarian statism, we see that the bourgeoisie would have a limited array of options in the event of the smashing of the Executive and bureaucratic state administration. Without any concrete condensation of the relationship of forces within the Executive and state administration

so that they may represent the power bloc and hegemonic fraction and enter into the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production under bourgeois political domination, a brief door may open for the this relationship of forces to shift to the favor of the popular masses entirely.

Even more crucial may be the smashing of the state repressive apparatus, for the mere existence of any political apparatus presupposes the state repressive apparatus' monopoly of legitimate violence. Smashing the Executive and the bureaucratic state administration would likely involve a direct confrontation with the state repressive apparatuses and its various branches. Poulantzas (1978) finds that even "the democratic road to socialism will not simply be a peaceful changeover" (p. 263). Poulantzas himself admits that in order for the diffuse centres of resistance possessed by the popular masses within the state networks to spread, develop, and coordinate in such a manner that they become the real centres of power on the strategic terrain of the State, some degree of armed resistance may be necessary. Although Poulantzas does not explicitly say so, this likely means that these diffuse centres of resistance must possess the capacity to present a physical threat to the branches of the state repressive apparatus in order to ensure that their power effectively reverberates within them when the relationship of forces on the strategic terrain of the State shifts toward the favor of the popular masses. Whether or not they actually smash the existing institutions/apparatuses is consequently irrelevant, for they must possess the capacity to do so in any case. Without the machinery of the state repressive apparatus to represent its interests, the bourgeoisie would have to strive to quickly develop alternative institutions/apparatuses to physically defend itself in a hasty and desperate attempt to exercise power on the strategic terrain of the State. This would present a crisis that might essentially amount to an open armed conflict between revolutionary forces and those that represent the

power bloc. In other words, the state repressive apparatus and the legitimation of its monopoly of violence constitute the glue that holds the entire capitalist mode of production together.

These conclusions entail significant ramifications for our understanding of race and racist police violence the United States and demonstrate the crucial insights that Marxism has to offer with regard to such issues. For the purposes of ideological legitimation of the State monopoly of violence, racism carries an indispensable function, for when police officers can arbitrarily murder and terrorize Black Americans without consequence, the State's monopoly of violence becomes further entrenched. Without racism, it is difficult to imagine that the police apparatus could carry out its repressive function with a perceived legitimacy among the popular masses. In addition, under racial capitalism and the racist/capitalist State, racism is without a doubt an inextricable component of the police apparatus, meaning that policing is so historically rooted in the surplus-value extraction of Black labor that current modalities of policing would require institutional overhaul in order to adequately eliminate racism from policing practices. Without the state repressive apparatus' monopoly of legitimate violence, the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production might be impossible, and the doors would open for revolution. In our confrontation with the police apparatus, we struggle not only against racism but against the last line of defense of the capitalist mode of production. Without the Marxist theoretical approach, we lose the broader perspective that yields these invaluable insights.

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