

Theories of the state

An introductory presentation of approaches to the interpretation and explanation of state forms and their mode of functioning

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The aim of this presentation is to review some of the major approaches to the study of the state. I will present and discuss a number of state concepts and the theoretical contexts within which these concepts have been developed.

As most of the theory construction pertaining to the state and its role in society has developed in the Western industrialised countries, this is also where the emphasis will be in the paper. This does not imply that I believe these conceptual frameworks and theories can be applied without modifications in a Third World context. Quite the contrary. I present the theories of the highly developed capitalist state specifically with a view to raising the issue of their relevance and applicability in a Third World context. In addition to that, I believe it is worth while reviewing existing theories referring to the industrialised societies because they are conceptually rich and reflect a broad range of epistemological and methodological positions. Therefore they have functioned - and they can continue to function - as basic frames of reference for research and theory construction regarding the state in Third World countries.

I propose to organize the presentation under the following headings:

1. The emergence of the state concept - and its abandonment
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2. The return to the state
3. A simple framework for describing state concepts
4. A classification of state concepts

5. The statist approach: The state as an independent actor
6. Interest groups and the state
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1. The emergence of the state concept - and its abandonment

In the history of political thought, the term 'state' has been used widely - partly as a normative, partly as a descriptive concept.

As a normative concept it has focused on the value of concentrating coercive powers in the hands of a single public authority that could ensure order in any given territory. In line with this thinking, normative theorists have regarded obedience to the state as the highest form of political obligation.

The word '*state*' first appeared in its present sense in the course of the sixteenth century. At that time, it was used consciously to express opposition against the existing pluralism of Western politics. The normative theories of the state were opposed to the strong position of the church as well as the personal rule of kings and feudal lords.

With the break-through of capitalism in Western Europe and the establishment of national states the normative power of the concept

'state' gradually eroded. Other values - like individual happiness, equality, intellectual freedom, social justice, and laissez-faire economics - undermined the idea of obedience to the state as the highest form of political obligation. Nationalism and socialism worked in the same direction. By the end of the eighteenth century, the normative concept of 'state' was just one among several competing ideologies affecting individual and group behaviour in the Western world.

As a descriptive concept it emphasized the unique character of the state as an institution. But the concept also played an important part in the attempt to create a descriptive science of politics. For many years the state was regarded as the primary object and the concept of state as the conceptual framework of political science.

This was reflected most explicitly in the continental academic traditions. The nearest equivalent in German for the English *political science* is *Staatswissenschaft*. In Danish we are still using the term *statskundskab* - while the Swedes use the word *statsvetenskap* as synonymous with political science.

Since the Second World War, however, the state concept has fallen into disuse in mainstream political science. It has been replaced by such terms as *government* and *political system*.¹ Gabriel Almond has described and explained this change in the following manner:

"The tendency to abandon the state concept and replace it by other concepts was attributable to the enormous political mobilization that took place in the Western world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the proliferation of new political institutions -

¹ Frederick M. Watkins provides a concise account of the evolution of the state concept in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York, Macmillan, 1968, pp 150-157.

*political parties, pressure groups, the mass media, and the like - that accompanied it."*²

Almond, in the same context, emphasized that the concept of the political system

*"included the phenomenon of the state - the legally empowered and legitimately coercive institutions - but it also included these new extralegal and paralegal institutions of political parties, interest groups, media of communication, as well as social institutions such as family, school, church, and the like, insofar as they affected political processes. Political system theory and structural-functionalism were not reductionist of the state and governmental institutions. They grew out of a realism that recognized the processual character of politics, and examined institutions - legal, paralegal, and informal - in terms of what they actually did."*³

This is an adequate description of mainstream political science in the United States and Western Europe. But it should be added that for Marxist scholars and others inspired by historical materialism, the state continued to be a central concept - although it remained somewhat vague and unspecified throughout the 1950s and most of the 1960s.

2. The return to the state

It was towards the end of the 1960s that Marxist scholars began to elaborate on the crude concepts of the state. It is interesting to note that around the same time the first - little noticed - non-Marxist assaults on the abandonment of the state concept within mainstream political science occurred.⁴

²² Gabriel Almond, "The Return to the State", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 82 No. 3 (Sept. 1988), p 855.

³ *Ibid.*, p 855f.

⁴ The first such major assault was probably an article by J. P. Nettl, "The State as Conceptual Variable", in: *World Politics*, Vol. 20 (1968).

Within the Marxist tradition one of the pioneers was Nicos Poulantzas who published his first very influential book in 1968.⁵ It was translated into English five years later.⁶ Ralph Miliband published his major contribution in 1969.⁷ Around the same time a number of German scholars began publishing their, mainly capital-logic contributions to the construction (or as they expressed it: the reconstruction or derivation) of the capitalist state concept.⁸

Within mainstream political science the return to the state as a central concept and object of study was unsuccessfully attempted over a prolonged period. Even today the state concept remains marginal to mainstream analyses and theory construction. Nevertheless, a separate approach has emerged - or rather a separate set of approaches which challenge behavioralist, pluralist and structural-functionalist approaches. The attempts to "bring the state back in" have been supported by the Committee on States and Social Structures of the American Social Science Research Council since the mid-1980s. The contributors to elaborating what is now known as the *statist approach* include Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Theda Skocpol, Stephen Krasner, and Eric Nordlinger.⁹

In the following, I will review a selection of the state concepts which have been developed by the scholars mentioned as well as by

⁵ *Pouvoir politique et classes sociales*, Paris, Maspero, 1968.

⁶ *Political Power and Social Classes*, London, New Left Review/Sheed and Ward, 1973.

⁷ *The State in Capitalist Society*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969.

⁸ Seven of the most influential articles were translated into English and published in: John Holloway and Sol Picciotto (eds.), *State and Capital. A Marxist Debate*, London, Edward Arnold, 1979. Other important works included: Dieter Läßle, *Staat und allgemeine Produktionsbedingungen*, Westberlin, VSA, 1973; and Joachim Hirsch, *Staatsapparat und Reproduktion des Kapitals*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1974.

⁹ The main thrust of their approaches may be inferred from the following works: Eric Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1981; Nordlinger, "Taking the State Seriously", in: Myron Weiner and Samuel P. Huntington (eds.), *Understanding Political Development*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1987; Stephen Krasner, "Approaches to the State: Alternative Conceptions and Historical Dynamics", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 16 (1984); and Peter Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, and T. Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

others since the late 1960s. In order to do so in a comparative perspective and with a further view to extracting important methodological points we need a common framework to describe and characterise the various concepts and theories.

3. A simple framework for describing state concepts

In a general introduction to our Ph. D. Programme last year I proposed the following four analytic dimensions in a description of basically any institution:

- a) as a *product* of conflicting interests and power struggles and reflections of hegemony in terms of ideology and discourse.
- b) as a *manifestation of structures* which impose a certain order in society or aspects of society and shape behaviour.
- c) as an *arena* for interaction and conflict between contending social forces.
- d) as an *actor* in its own right which by its form of organisation and mode of functioning exert a relatively autonomous influence on outcomes of conflicts and other processes in society.¹⁰

I propose to use these terms to describe and compare the various state concepts. But it may be useful also to apply a distinction between

* A *society-centered* approach; and

* A *state-centered* approach.

¹⁰ Cf. John Martinussen, "General introduction to the theme in the context of development studies", in: *Selected Approaches to the Study of Institutions in Development*. Introductory lectures presented during the first seminar series at Roskilde University Centre, Sept. 1990, Roskilde, International Development Studies, 1990, p 5 ff.

A society-centered approach *a priori* assigns primacy to societal forces - economic structures, social classes or interest groups - depending on the type of conceptualisation of society. It is assumed that societal structures and social forces have a greater impact upon the state than the state upon society, but some kind of interplay or dialectic relationship is implied.

Using Nicos Poulantzas' distinction between

- state power,
- state apparatus, and
- state functions,

the society-centered approach to the study and conceptualisation of the state may be characterised as a method of clarifying how and to what extent the state power - which is located in society - determines the form and mode of functioning of the state apparatus.

A state-centered approach, on the other hand, is a mode of inquiry which focuses upon the actual behaviour of the state apparatus and the autonomy exercised by that apparatus and its personnel. The approach need not imply an assumption about state autonomy in the sense that the state regularly has a greater impact upon society than society upon the state. Without minimizing the importance of societal actors and variables, the proposition implied is merely that "the state can advantageously be accorded analytical priority."¹¹

Although some of the state-centered approaches investigate the relations between society or economy and politics without assuming a very high degree of state autonomy, it remains a general feature of the whole approach to look for autonomy and autonomy-enhancing

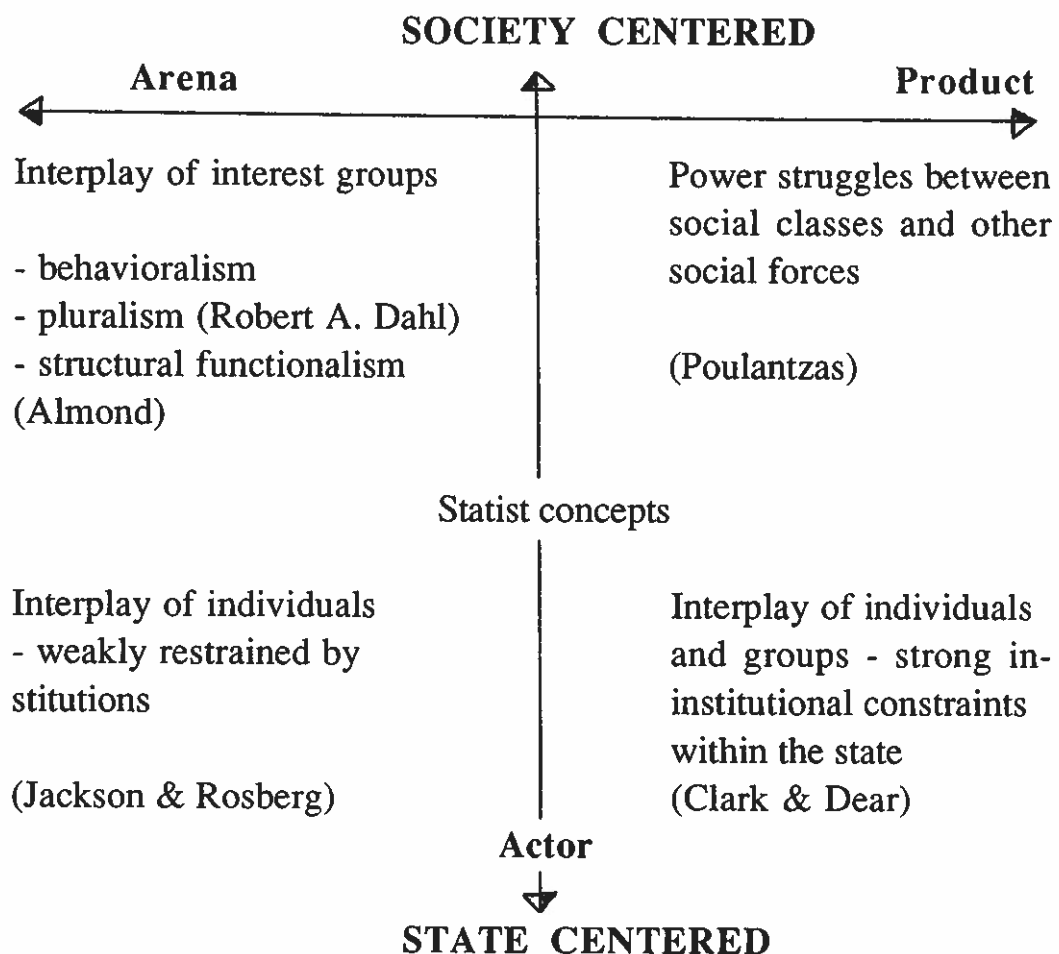
¹¹ At least this is how Eric Nordlinger described his own and other contemporary statist approaches in a rejoinder to Almond in: "The Return to the State: Critiques", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 82 No. 3 (Sept. 1988), p 884. A different characterisation (inspired more by historical materialism) of the state-centered as opposed to the society-centered approach may be found in Gordon L. Clark and Michael Dear, *State Apparatus. Structures and Language of Legitimacy*, Boston, Allen & Unwin, 1984, p 6 ff.

actions - rather than for state-external factors and their modes of determining state form and state interventions. They regard the state more as an independent actor than as a product of conflicting interests and power struggles.

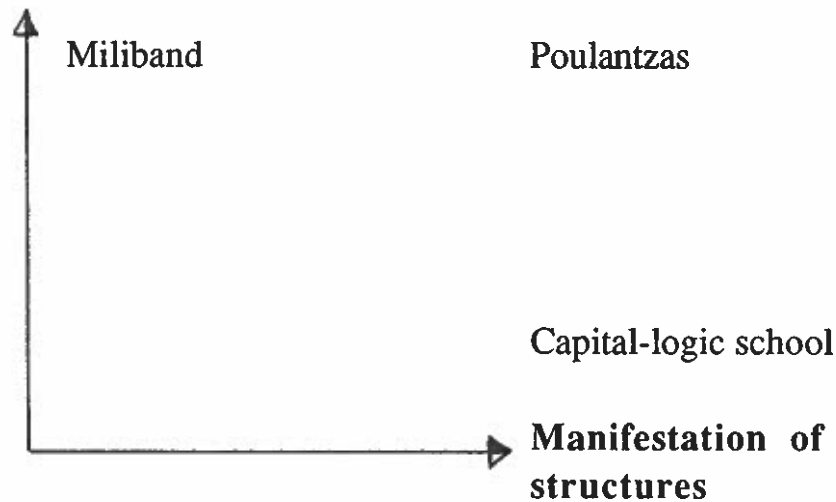
4. A classification of state concepts

There are different ways in which we may combine and use these various concepts to describe the state concepts in the existing literature. I propose the following simplified sequence of two-dimensional classifications:

Degree of autonomy:



Mode of determination (society centered):

Product of class struggles

Other dimensions may be relevant for a more detailed account of the different state concepts - like the relative importance of intra-societal and extra-societal structures and forces. Or the importance attached to the historical dimension and the embodiment of earlier structural and social determinations within contemporary institutions. But these and other aspects will be taken up only where they are deemed particularly relevant in the following.

5. The statist approach: The state as an independent actor

The advocates of the statist approach hold different views when it comes to the degree of assumed or identified state autonomy.

It is of interest to note that some Danish political scientists¹² - together with our present Minister of Education - represent what is probably an extreme position in the international context. Basically, they maintain that the civil bureaucracy and other state personnel like the medical profession have acquired so much power that they have been able to dominate the formulation and imple-

¹² I am referring here to Jørgen S. Dich, Ole P. Kristensen and Jørgen Grønnegaard.

mentation of public policies pertaining to their own interests. One of the visible results of this domination has been the continuous growth in public spending and in the public sector even when this has been opposed by most of society's interest groups, including the major political parties.

Eric Nordlinger and others who have influenced the international debate more do not go as far as that. But they do assume a significant degree of state autonomy. Nordlinger has described "the core of the statist perspective" as featuring:¹³

- a) public officials' forming their own policy preferences; and
- b) the state acting on these (and on its own) preferences despite their divergence from those of the most "powerful" private actors.

Nordlinger emphasizes that public officials are minimally influenced by societal preferences. This is partly due to the ways in which they were educated and socialised as a separate group with its own norms, etc. But it is also due to the manner in which the civil bureaucracy, in particular, functions. The chief reference groups for government officials are other officials "whom they turn to for information, cues, and guidance when considering options in the formulation, adoption, and implementation of public policies."¹⁴

Nordlinger further argues that government officials prefer policies that help structure and heighten their autonomy. And he is of the opinion that they have sufficient resources and skills to translate their preferences into authoritative actions some of which will enhance the autonomy of the state.

The preferences of individual officials are not the same as those of the state. But they are amalgamated so that "the officials' resource-

¹³ Nordlinger, 1988, *op.cit.*, p 881.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

weighted preferences result in a state preference after being aggregated in a conflictual or conciliatory manner."¹⁵

I will not attempt to assess these or other aspects of the statist conceptions and approaches here. I don't find the theories developed by the statist very convincing as explanations of state forms or state actions in the highly industrialised countries to which they explicitly refer. And I deem them falsified (in their more extreme versions, at least) as general theories of the modern state by recent developments in Eastern Europe - which have shown that the states' inherent powers in these countries were far too insufficient to ensure state autonomy in situations where divergencies in state-society preferences occurred.

Still, as I will try to show later, the statist perspective may prove useful as a set of highly relevant hypotheses for research in economically backward societies with "overdeveloped" state apparatuses inherited from their colonial powers.

6. Interest groups and the state

As indicated earlier, the state does not play a major role within contemporary mainstream political science - or for that matter: mainstream social sciences in general. Yet it is worth noting that to the extent the mainstream approaches deal with the state or its constituent parts they do so primarily from a society-centered perspective.

They focus on individuals, groups, organised interests, etc., all of which provide *inputs* into the political system. These inputs are subsequently transformed into *outputs* or public policies. The institutional structures transforming the inputs do play an independent role, but it is secondary to the interplay of interest groups.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 882.

At least this is how the statisticians want to interpret behavioralism and the other mainstream approaches. Almond - in the article referred to in APSR - is of a different opinion. He maintains that the "pluralist-functionalist paradigm" has a much more balanced and open approach to the study of state-society relations.

There is no need for us to go very much into this debate here, mainly because Almond and other representatives of the mainstream approaches have comparatively little to offer in terms of concepts and theory at the aggregate level of the state. They have disaggregated both the state and the rest of society into several component parts without any comprehensive theoretical framework to keep these parts analytically together. They are therefore of lesser interest in the present discussion of state concepts.

But the debate referred to is definitely of interest when it comes to discussing the relevance and applicability of the various state concepts.

7. Marxist theories of the state

There is no agreement among Marxist scholars on how to define the state - or more specifically the capitalist state.

As opposed to the rigour of *Das Kapital*, Marx' own work on the state comprises "a fragmented and unsystematic series of philosophical reflection, contemporary history, journalism and incidental remarks." ¹⁶The same is true of other classical Marxist theorists.

Bob Jessop has identified at least six different approaches and concepts in classical Marxist texts on the state.¹⁷ These are:

¹⁶ Bob Jessop, "Recent theories of the capitalist state", *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1977, 1, p 354.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 354-357.

- (i) Marx originally treated the modern state (at least that in 19th century Prussia) as a *parasitic institution* that played no essential role in economic production or reproduction;
- (ii) Marx also discussed the state as *epiphenomena*, i.e. simple surface reflections of the system of property relations and the resulting economic class struggles;
- (iii) A third approach treats the state as the *factor of cohesion* in a given society. As such it regulates class conflict predominantly in the interests of the dominant class;
- (iv) The state is also seen as an *instrument of class rule*, as "captured" by a dominant class;
- (v) A fifth approach is similar to that of institutional studies in sociology, anthropology and political science. It treats the state as *a set of institutions*. No general assumptions are made here of its class character. The approach focuses more on the empirical manifestations of the state apparatus;
- (vi) The last approach identified examines the state as a *system of political domination*. This approach shifts the attention to the forms of political representation and state interventions.

It is clear from this listing of different concepts that a coherent and sustained theoretical analysis of the state does not exist in the Marxist classics.

Since the late 1960s, a number of scholars have tried to remedy this lack of a powerful analytic framework for the analysis of the modern state. The result has been a proliferation of approaches and state concepts. I will just briefly mention a few and then concentrate on three main perspectives which have emerged in the contemporary debate on the state.

(A) One approach could be termed *instrumentalist* but in a form different from the classical conception. Miliband, who may be regarded as a protagonist of this approach, does not conceive of the state simple as an instrument of class rule. Rather, he draws attention to the complex links between the ruling classes and the state élites.

(B) A second approach may be called *structuralist*. It aims at explaining the state's form and mode of functioning using a number of categories of structural causality or modes of determination. Poulantzas emphasizes the societal determination in terms of class interests and class power but he also includes references to the structural limitations and the determination by the economic structures in the last instance. Eric Olin Wright, among others, has elaborated on this.¹⁸

(C) A third approach is the *capital-logic school*, the overwhelmingly German Marxist analyses which have tried to forge a link between - on the one hand - the nature and development of capital, and - on the other hand - the forms and functions of the state.

(D) A fourth approach is a sort of *statist Marxism* which focuses upon the state apparatus and the autonomy of the state. Clark and Dear may be taken as representatives of this approach.

Let us then take a closer look at the three of these four approaches. I will leave out the instrumentalist approach applied by Miliband. I will also leave out other historical-materialist approaches including those focusing on the nature of language and ideology through which the state pursues class control and exploitation.

When we concentrate on the approaches under (B), (C) and (D), it is possible to identify certain common traits in the state concep-

¹⁸ See his *Class, Crisis and the State*, London, New Left Books, 1978. Wright's characterisation of different modes and models of determination is very useful in any analysis of the complex relations between the state and other societal phenomena; cf. *ibid.*, pp 15-26.

tions. According to all these three Marxist or historical-materialist approaches, the state is not merely an entity or a set of institutions, although this aspect of the state is included in the concept.

But as the institutions - the state apparatus (or apparatuses) - are conceived as integrated parts of the societal formation in its totality, the concept of state must comprise also the interrelations between the state apparatuses and societal structures and forces.

These interrelations are all two-sided. On the one hand, there is the question of the economic and social determination of the forms and functions of the state apparatuses. On the other hand, there is the question of the state's mode of functioning and its impact upon the economic, political and ideological processes.

Thus, the state concept here not only covers the state apparatuses but it also comprises two other analytically distinct but interrelated aspects, the societal determination of state forms and functions *and* the impact of state interventions and actions.

What distinguishes the concepts of the three approaches are their emphases with respect to state autonomy and the ways in which they conceive of the societal determination.

7.1. Economic structures and the state

The capital-logic approaches emphasize the economic-structural determination of the capitalist state's forms and functions. The various protagonists disagree on exactly which aspect of the capitalist economic structure to focus as the point of departure for the derivation or deduction of the state concept.

Müller & Neususs believed that the state should be derived from the basic contradiction between capital and wage labour. Altvater

derived his state concept from the nature of capitalist production and accumulation.¹⁹

But they all essentially agreed that the concept of the capitalist state could be derived or deduced from the Marxian theory of capitalist economic structures.

Let me illustrate the kind of arguments put forward.

According to Altvater, some of the production processes can not be carried out by private capitalist enterprises. There could be a number of different reasons for that:

- The rate of profit which could be realised could be considerably below the prevailing average.
- The amount of capital required could be too large for any single private enterprise.
- The gestation period could be too long as compared with alternative investments.
- The risks involved could be prohibitive for private entrepreneurs.

Under such circumstances private capital would not be forthcoming. Altvater's point now is that a number of production processes with these attributes are necessary preconditions for the other production processes or for the circulation of capital. This is the case, for instance, with most of a modern society's material infrastructure like railways, roads, bridges, etc. According to Altvater, these are the areas where the state will step in and procure these common (*allgemeinen*) *material preconditions* of capitalist production.

Dieter Läßle and other German scholars arrived at substantially the same conclusions but most of them further stressed the need for the procurement or establishment through the state of *external*

¹⁹ See their articles - as well as other attempts at deriving a state concept - in Holloway & Picciotto, *op.cit.*,

preconditions of capitalist production, including legal protection of private property and enforcement of private contracts and other entitlements.²⁰

There is a dynamic aspect implied in these conceptualisations of the capitalist state and its mode of functioning. With reference to the tendency of the average rate of profit to fall and other contradictions embodied in the capital accumulation process they maintain that the state is forced to increase its direct or indirect involvement in support of capitalist production. Indirect involvement may occur in the form of subsidies, export promotion, tax exemption, etc.

This is an alternative way of explaining the expansion of the public sector - quite different from the one proposed by the statist theories.

7.2. Structures, classes and the state

The structuralist approach referred to earlier emphasizes the totality of societal determination of the state's form and functions. There may be - in the writings of Poulantzas and Therborn, in particular, a certain bias in favour of the *social* aspects of the determination, i.e. the determination in terms of classes, their interests and power. But it is still the mode of production, the very basic economic structures, which provide the ultimate constraint on state action. Besides, all class relations are constituted in the economic structures and thus reflects these structures.

Poulantzas conceived of the state as a "condensate of a relation of power between struggling classes".²¹ Therefore, the form and the functions of the state are determined by the class struggle in such a way that the basic interests of the dominant classes - the power bloc or the state power - are realised. The mode of determination

²⁰ See, e.g., Läßle, *op.cit.*, p 100 f.

²¹ Poulantzas in a clarifying remark in his, "The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau", *New Left Review*, No 95 (1976), p 74.

is complex - involving selection, transformation, and mediation in the terminology proposed by Olin Wright.

The overall proposition here is that the main features of the class relations generate specific forms of state. Different types of class relations and of class power generate corresponding forms of state organisation as well as corresponding modes of state intervention.

This implies that the determination is also complex in the sense that the non-dominant classes affect the manner in which and the extent to which the power bloc interests are realised. The explanatory variable is not the power bloc in isolation but its relative position and power in society.

This reference to class power in relative terms and the emphasis on non-dominant class influence on the state clearly distinguishes the structuralist approach from the instrumentalist.

But it should be added that the mode of determination remains asymmetrical and that the state in its form and mode of functioning reflect the interests of the power bloc. It is only when it comes to more specific policies and outcomes and to degrees of goal achievement that the non-dominant classes really matter.

Another major point in the conceptualisation proposed by Poulantzas is the scope of influence attributed to non-class social forces. So-called social categories like the civil and military bureaucracies are recognized by Poulantzas as social forces in their own right. They do not have interests of their own at the same level as the classes - i.e. at the level where the mode or form of production matter. But they do have other types of "interests" relating to their position within the state apparatuses and the role of these apparatuses in relation to the rest of society. And these "category interests"²² may, under certain circumstances, be just as significant as class interests in determining the outcome of a political conflict.

²² As opposed to class interests.

With propositions like these Poulantzas and other structuralist state theorists have approached the basic stands of the statist. But they have not accepted the idea of a symmetrical relationship between state and society, nor have they endorsed the idea of analytical primacy of the state.

In his last book, Poulantzas tried to clarify his position between a determinist, society-oriented approach and a statist approach in this way:

"To sum up, all power (and not just class power) can exist only insofar as it is materialized in certain apparatuses (and not just state apparatuses). These apparatuses are no mere appendages of power, but play a role in its constitution: the State itself is organically present in the generation of class power. But in the relationship between power and apparatuses, and more specifically between class struggle and apparatuses, the fundamental role is played by the (class) struggle... Struggles always have primacy over, and constantly go beyond, the apparatuses and institutions."²³

Therborn has elaborated on this point in his analysis of class rule and political power.²⁴ Without going into detail here, I would like to quote the pertinent questions which guided his inquiry:

His first question was: What is the character of the relationship between, on the one hand, social classes - basically defined by their positions within the economy - and, on the other, the exercise of political power through the state? The second question was: What does the ruling class do when it rules?

In his attempt to answer the second question, Therborn produced a most interesting analysis of the various formats of representation

²³ Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, London, New Left Books, 1978, pp 44-45.

²⁴ Therborn, *What does the Ruling Class do When it Rules?*, London, New Left Books, 1978.

through which the ruling class and its mode of exploitation are promoted and defended. Further, this aspect of his work dealt with the various processes of mediation which ensure that the ruled classes submit to the established order and even contribute to its functioning.

7.3. Statist Marxist approaches

The historical-materialist theorists adhering to the statist approaches basically try to strike a balance between what in their view is a society-oriented reductionist approach and the approach which assumes complete state autonomy.

Clark and Dear characterize the state as both capitalist *and* autonomous. It is capitalist in the sense that it is embedded in the social relations of capitalism. But it is simultaneously an institution of power and an actor and authority in its own right. In other words, the state is a lot more than an entity which concentrates and exercises class power that is essentially located outside its apparatuses - as in the structuralist approach.

Clark and Dear recognize that the specific economic and political structure under capitalism give capitalists a great deal of unilateral power. But they strongly emphasize that it is the state which ensures the maintenance of the capitalists' exploitative hold over the means of production and sources of wealth and economic power in general.

They criticize the structuralist state conception for assuming that the economic relations exist logically prior to the state so that, in effect, the state is dependent upon the play of class antagonisms. Instead, they argue that capitalism is not merely an economic system but also a political system - that legal entitlements and liabilities do as much to define the social relations of capitalism as the market system of commodity exchange. In this sense the state is part of and just as important as the non-state societal structures.

They refer to a two-tiered political structure of capitalism:

*"first, the determination of entitlements, wherein the state must decide who benefits and who loses, and who is entitled to certain rôles or outcomes; and secondly, the enforcement of entitlements, wherein the state protects those who were initially given entitlement advantages."*²⁵

Rather than try to assess these various approaches and their concepts of state in the abstract I propose to discuss them in terms of their relevance and applicability in a Third World context.

8. Relevance and applicability in a Third World context

The concepts of state presented so far all essentially presuppose a societal formation without history, and isolated from any extra-societal interference or influence. Both these presuppositions are highly unrealistic and not in consonance with basic methodological principles at least of historical materialism.

The actual forms and functions of specific state apparatuses are not determined solely by *contemporary* economic structures and social forces. They also embody to some extent the structures and forces prevailing in society at earlier stages of its development.

Further, every societal formation in today's world is part of a larger international formation and is thus influenced by process structures and social forces in this larger system. From the point of view of a given society these structures and forces are *extra-societal*.

The historical as well as the extra-societal dimensions are of particular importance in a Third World context. During the colonial period, which affected almost all the developing countries of today, the extra-societal determination was extremely powerful. It

²⁵ Clark & Dear, *op.cit.*, p 28.

left a legacy of great importance for understanding and analysing contemporary states in Third World countries.

Let me emphasize a few major points from my own analyses of the constitution of a typical colonial state (the British Indian state) as compared with the constitution of the state in a type-defining centre formation (the British state).²⁶

The British Indian colonial state was not based primarily in the economic structures and not shaped primarily by the social forces in the colonial society. The conditions prevailing in British India merely modified the colonial state, the forms and functions of which were determined by the process structures and constellations of power in the British societal formation.

Only a theoretical formulation along such lines enables one to understand and explain the conspicuous discrepancy between, *on the one hand*, colonial state apparatuses intervening in economic, political and ideological processes in a manner furthering development and expansion of capitalism (and thereby contributing to the realisation of the basic interests of the capitalist class) and, *on the other hand*, a colonial society dominated by pre-capitalist economic structures and characterised by the absence of any national capitalist class.

Awareness of this discrepancy has led Hamza Alavi and others to describe the state apparatuses in colonial societies as *over-developed* in relation to their intra-societal "basis".²⁷ These over-developed state apparatuses were essentially taken over as part of the political set-up in the independent Third World countries. Therefore, the post-colonial states are also over-developed.

²⁶ Cf. my *Staten i perifere og post-koloniale samfund: Indien og Pakistan* (The State in Peripheral and Post-colonial Societies: India and Pakistan), Aarhus, Politica, 1980; with an English summary pp 1448-1507.

²⁷ Hamza Alavi, "The State in Postcolonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh", *New Left Review*, No 74 (1972).

Alavi puts it this way: "It might be said that the "superstructure" in the colony is therefore "overdeveloped" in relation to the "structure" in the colony, for its basis lies in the metropolitan structure itself, from which it is later separated at the time of independence... The postcolonial society inherits that overdeveloped state apparatus and its institutional practices..."

As an overall consequence of the way in which the colonial state was constituted, developed and transformed into a post-colonial state the contemporary states of the Third World probably feature a higher degree of autonomy *via-à-vis* their societies than is typical of the states in the capitalist center formations. This difference is compounded by the higher degree of extra-societal determination of the peripheral states and their mode of functioning than what applies in the case of most of the center formations.

There is a fairly widespread agreement on this very general observation. This is reflected in most of the theories regarding the state in the Third World.

One specific implication of this is that the state derivation approaches have played very marginal roles in the theoretical debates concerning the Third World states. Their forms and modes of functioning cannot be derived from analyses of capitalist economic structures alone. They cannot be derived from analyses of economic structures at all, even if such analyses comprised all the modes of production involved.²⁸

A more general implication of the widespread agreement on a higher degree of state autonomy in Third World countries is a cor-

²⁸ I tend to agree on this point with Perry Anderson's observation that non-capitalist modes of exploitation operate through extra-economic sanctions which implies that the concept of state can not be derived from the economic structures but has to be dealt with as an integrated aspect of these structures. Cf. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London, New Left Books, 1974, p 403 ff. From the perspective of the statist approaches the same applies to the capitalist state.

respondingly widespread application of state-centered approaches within development research and theory construction.

But the degree of autonomy and the kind of autonomy attributed to the state and its personnel vary considerably as do the explanations.

According to Hamza Alavi, the military-bureaucratic oligarchy is a social force in its own right and with powers of its own. In situations where social classes are weak this oligarchy, therefore, may capture the state completely and make it act in accordance with its own "interests". In other words, the state may act independently of social classes and their interests.

This is not, according to Alavi, typical of post-colonial states. Actually, he emphasizes that the military and civil bureaucracies in the South Asian countries, which he studied, could only rule in an alliance with the landowners, the national and the metropolitan bourgeoisies. In this sense state autonomy to Alavi remained only a theoretical possibility.

Other scholars dealing with Third World politics have gone further in the direction of specifying state autonomy vis-à-vis the social classes and other indigenous social forces. One of them, Christopher Clapham, has suggested that:

*"Where the state is by far the strongest source of organised political power, government of the state, by the state and for the state becomes extremely likely."*²⁹

But he goes on to add that this way of running the government cannot last for long since the Third World state is typically rather weak in relation to the wider society. He states:

"One of the features of the third world state which prevents it from developing into a totalitarian structure of hierarchical con-

²⁹ Christopher Clapham, *Third World Politics. An Introduction*, London, Croom Helm, 1985, p 41.

trol is the fact that it is so readily permeated by the society in which it exists."³⁰

As opposed to the colonial bureaucracy which was responsible to its own rules and its own superiors, and open to infiltration by the society which it governed only at the lowest level, the post-colonial civil servants have become part of the indigenous political process. They are identifiable with particular social classes, castes, clans or regional groups from which they were recruited.

Göran Hydén has analyzed these relationships between the state and the society in a particular African context.³¹ He does not take any strong stand on the question of state autonomy but points out that in the absence of powerful and well-organised social classes the African post-colonial state has emerged as a locus of power and control over the means of production and other societal resources. He also emphasize that even though the African rulers and their bureaucracies are in control of considerable resources, they are not in a position to really contribute to the economic development of their countries. They have to spend far too many resources in systems of patronage simply to stay in power.

It is interesting to compare the analyses of Clapham and Hydén with the approach of the statisticians like Nordlinger or Clark and Dear.

At the surface they appear very similar. They are state-centered. They stress the crucial role of the state apparatuses and the bureaucracies. But it is worth noting, in my opinion, that Clapham and Hydén explain state actions with reference to the wider societal structures and social forces. These may not be economic in the strict sense. Nor need the forces referred to all be social classes. But they both invoke a societal constraint assumption in that they refer to the wider society when they try to explain state actions. In

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Hydén, *No Shortcuts to Progress. African Development Management in Perspective*, London, Heinemann, 1983.

this sense they are not statist theorists although one could say that they have accorded analytic priority to the state.

9. State autonomy as an empirical question

So far we have treated the degree of state autonomy as a theoretical issue without specifying explicitly the level of generality or the area of validity. This is very much a reflection of the ways in which most of the concepts and theories referred to have presented themselves.

This should not, however, prevent us from treating the degree of autonomy attributed to the state and its personnel as *an empirical question*. As such it would induce us to investigate the actual degree of autonomy and the kind of autonomy which can be observed with respect to particular state apparatuses.

Based on this we could arrive, for instance, at a distinction among societies according to the degree to which state personnel take the initiative in the making and implementation of public policy.

The next step would be to identify the factors and conditions that explain these differences in degree. Certain patterns may then emerge, allowing a categorisation of Third World societies into groups.

This is how I propose to make better use of the extensive debate on the autonomy, embodied autonomy or relative autonomy of the state.

But in order to do so there are still a number of theoretical and methodological issues which have to be clarified. Let me just mention some of them:

Should we assume that the state has power of its own? This is important for the choice of focus and perspective of the analysis. It is

also important for the choice of types of explanations. I will elaborate on this issue in my second presentation.

If we assume that the state apparatuses or more specifically that the state personnel has "real" power which is not derived from social classes or other forces outside of the institutional set-up, what kind of power is it then?

Is it just power to remain in control of the government apparatus, power to suppress opposition - or is it also power to implement policies and achieve a particular impact even when specific classes or other major social forces are opposed to the policies and try to prevent their intended impact?

The issues raised here have been discussed extensively in the literature. Alavi described the post-colonial state as "over-developed" but Colin Leys and several others have convincingly argued that it is definitely not over-developed in the sense that it has proved capable of developing or changing basic economic or social structures. Consequently, the state may be organisationally and institutionally over-developed but incapable of changing anything important in the wider societal context.

But Third World states may be different as may the societal contexts in which they operate. As soon as we start talking about state-society relations as an empirical issue and try to define the areas of applicability of certain propositions we have to start dis-aggregating.

Any such approach would require disaggregation in a number of respects:

a) states differ considerably with respect to their internal organisation and resource endowment, their legitimacy and authority - and therefore with respect to their relationship with the wider society;

- b) there may be great differences from one policy area to another;
- c) considerable differences may further occur when we take a closer look at the various stages of the policy process. We may not find the same degree of state autonomy or bureaucratic influence at all stages from policy formulation through policy adoption, authorisation and implementation to impact.

These are some of the points I intend to pursue in the second lecture.³²

10. Requirements for a theory of the state

Let me round off this introductory presentation by proposing some general guide-lines for an open approach to the study of the state.

Basically, I suggest a combination of the society-centered and the state-centered approaches. They may be mutually exclusive when we have to conclude on the basis of our research. But they are not so at the stage where we formulate our questions and design our mode of inquiry.

Therefore, I propose a comprehensive and integrated account with two major elements:

- A. An analysis of a given state's societal basis - economic and social - and the ways in which this societal basis determines the form and mode of functioning of the state.

The societal basis should be understood as partly intra-societal, partly extra-societal. Furthermore, it should be conceived of as a historical process - in principle as indicated earlier when talking about the constitution of the colonial state.

³² Cf. the article "Policy analysis and regime forms" below.

B) An analysis of the role of the state and more specifically the state apparatus in structuring, in changing or reproducing, the rest of society.

The requirements for a theory from this - statist - point of view have been summarised, I believe, adequately by Clark and Dear in this way:

*"(a) The form of the capitalist state must be analysed in terms of its relationships with the economic and political structure of the wider capitalist social formation. (b) Any theory should fully account for the appearance of, and the necessity for, a distinct political sphere in society, separate from the economic, social, and cultural spheres. (c) The necessity of state interventions should be examined, particularly to identify the range of state production and reproduction functions needed for the maintenance of capitalist social relations, as well as the origin and purposes of supposedly "nonnecessary" functions. (d) Any theory should be able to describe and explain diverse functional arrangements of the state apparatus, in terms of both its sectoral and spatial organization. (e) It should be possible to anticipate and analyze the historical evolution of concrete historical forms, functions and apparatus of the state. (f) Finally, our theory should permit the generation of tractable analytical propositions about the state in the real world."*³³

I would just suggest the addition of one further requirement which is:

(g) The analysis should locate the state in both national and global systems or contexts.

When trying to explain specific institutional formations within the state apparatus or specific state interventions, I suggest we start by asking:

³³ Clark & Dear, *op.cit.*, p 12 f.

- Who would be interested in these particular organisational arrangements? Who would be interested in these policies and interventions? Who would be opposed?

This would lead to a second line of questioning:

- What is the relative power positions of those in favour and those opposed and what are the mechanisms through which they may be able to influence or determine the state's form and mode of functioning?

A third line of questioning would then be:

- What has been the consequences of the manner in which the state has been organised and of its actions? These consequences should be analysed in terms of their impact upon the realisation of the interests of the various social forces - directly or through structural changes affecting their interests. The interests comprise the relative power positions of the contending social forces.

These are the overall questions which has guided my own research for several years. In my second paper I will give examples of how they can be applied in more concrete analyses.³⁴

In the history of political thought, the term 'state' has been used widely - partly as a normative, partly as a descriptive concept.

³⁴ Cf. "Policy analysis and regime forms" below.