

Published in the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol.5/4 (2003): 467-99. [Electronic publication with the permission of Blackwell Publishing. The definitive version is available at <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/toc/bjpi/5/4>]

## Globalisation, the State and Class Struggle: A “Critical Economy” Engagement with Open Marxism

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## Abstract

This article explores common commitments between competing historical materialist perspectives within International Political Economy (IPE). It does so by engaging with the approach of Open Marxism that has emerged as the basis of a radical rethinking of theories of the state, the dialectic of subject-object and theory-practice, as well as commitments to emancipating the social world. Despite these contributions, though, there has been a sonorous silence within debates in critical International Relations (IR) theory in relation to the arguments of Open Marxism. In contrast, we engage with and develop an immanent critique of Open Marxism through a ‘Critical Economy’ conception of the state proffered by Antonio Gramsci. Previously overlooked, this alternative approach not only promotes an understanding of the state as a *social relation of production* but also affords insight into a broader range of class-relevant social forces linked to contemporary processes of capitalist development. A key priority is thus granted to theorising the capitalist state, as well as issues of resistance and collective agency, that surpasses the somewhat ‘theological’ vision of state-capital-labour evident in Open Marxism. Moreover, it is argued in conclusion that the approach we outline provides an avenue to critique additional competing ‘critical’ approaches in IR/IPE, thereby raising new questions about the potential of critical theory within international studies.

## Introduction: a sonorous silence within critical international theory?

For some time now, theorising the capitalist state has been an abiding concern of the approach of Open Marxism, constituted by a diverse but nevertheless distinct group of scholars committed to the dialectic of subject-object and theory-practice; and the (re)constitution of categories in and through the development of a crisis-ridden social world in the analysis of the state as an aspect of the *social relations of production* (Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis 1992a: xi).<sup>1</sup> By extension, the intention is to focus on the social

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\* Adam David Morton acknowledges the support of an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Postdoctoral Fellowship (Ref.: T026271041). An earlier version of this article was presented at the 43<sup>rd</sup> annual convention of the International Studies Association, New Orleans (24-27 March 2002). We would particularly like to thank Hugo Radice and William Robinson as well as Pinar Bilgin, Robert Cox, Randall Germain, Graham Harrison, and Taku Tamaki for comments on the article in draft.

<sup>1</sup> The wider literature linked to Open Marxism, many aspects of which will be discussed in the ensuing argument, is indeed considerable. For overviews see Bonefeld (1993, 2001), Bonefeld, Brown and Burnham (1995), Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis (1992a, 1992b), Bonefeld *et al.* (1995), Bonefeld and Holloway (1991, 1995), Bonefeld and Psychopedis (2000), Burnham (1990), Clarke (1988, 1991), Holloway and Picciotto (1978a). These concerns of Open Marxism were especially influential within the

class antagonism between capital and labour in order to affirm a commitment to emancipation within the social world by theoretically calling into question the separation of subject from object, or struggle from structure, and practically engaging with social action within which aspects of class struggle obtain and unfold. Ultimately, then, Open Marxism is a *critical theory* that interrogates theoretical and practical categories—it is reflexive about the constitution of the social world—in a spirit of opposition and resistance to capitalist relations of exploitation (Backhaus 1992; Bonefeld 1995; Gunn 1992). Hence the significance of Open Marxism lies in its *critical theoretical* questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world and the practical conditions of dominance and subordination in capitalism, thereby criticising directly liberal institutionalist and neo-realist as well as structural Marxist approaches in International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE).

Yet, despite these issues having striking importance to similar concerns within critical theory debates in IR and IPE, there has been very little, if any, direct engagement with the contentions of Open Marxism. Indeed, there has been what we term a sonorous silence within the debates of critical international theory on the contributions of Open Marxism and its concern with class struggle. This neglect has manifested itself throughout early defining debates within critical international theory (Linklater 1990a, 1990b). It has been present within state-of-the-art reviews of Marxism and International Relations theory (Burchill and Linklater 2001; Hobden and Wyn Jones 2001; Smith 1994); overviews on theories of the state within International Relations and historical sociology (Hobden 1998; Hobden and Hobson 2002; Hobson 1997, 2000; Shaw 2000); constructivist theorising on the state system (Wendt 1999); and in wider and more recent discussions of critical theory, security and world politics (Wyn Jones 1999, 2000). This is despite the admission that the

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early founding and flourishing of the Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE) in Britain (see Conley *et al.* 2001; Lee 2001). Importantly, the Open Marxism presently under discussion should not be confused with entirely different appropriations of the same term (see Drainville 1994; Marzani 1957).

Marxist critique of ideology and radical political economy (Marxian) approaches more generally were a 'conduit by which critical theories of society began to make their mark felt on the study of world politics' (Linklater 1998: 20, 2000: 10). It is therefore reasonable to suggest that this sonorous silence has been enduringly present within the self-image, or foundational myths, of IR as a discipline in many recent post-positivist debates (Smith 1995, 2000; Smith, Booth and Zalewski 1996).

The purpose of this article, then, is to engage for the first time in IR and IPE with the critical theory of Open Marxism. In doing so, the argument is structured into three main sections. The first section develops a critical outline of Open Marxism by focusing on three principal aspects of its critique of political economy. These aspects namely involve: a critique of the separation of state and civil society and of politics and economics; a focus on the social class antagonism of capital and labour as a relation in and against domination and exploitation; and a theory of the state as an aspect of the social relations of production embedded within globalisation which is cognisant of the relationship between structure and struggle and thus the constitution of national states within global capitalist accumulation. While highlighting the positive contributions of Open Marxism, several criticisms are also raised. These include tendencies within Open Marxism to obscure how class struggle is mediated through specific material social practices; to prioritise the dominant reproduction of capitalism over resistance; to refuse distinguishing between different forms of state whilst also frequently indulging in state-centric analysis; and to succumb to an overly theoretical and abstract style of discussion.

Instead, in the second section, a neo-Gramscian alternative to Open Marxism is suggested. In two seminal articles in the early 1980s, Robert Cox (1981, 1983) developed a conceptual framework based on the theory and practice of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. This framework considers change and transformation in world order and has given rise to what are recognised as similar, but diverse, neo-Gramscian perspectives. The

prefix ‘neo’ is emphasised because it avoids conveying a parallel or coexistence, without any significant change, of the historical moment Gramsci occupied (Morton 2001: 35).<sup>2</sup> The aim of raising this alternative is to develop an immanent critique that incorporates many of the positive aspects of Open Marxism whilst at the same time overcoming its limitations. The latter task is particularly pursued in the third section by drawing extensively from the writings of Antonio Gramsci and his previously neglected ‘Critical Economy’ conceptualisation of the state as well as the work of Nicos Poulantzas. It is argued that drawing from these authorities provides the intellectual resources with which to develop a theory of the state as well as issues of resistance in the context of globalisation. Whilst some of the ‘world class’ contradictions within Open Marxism are reiterated in conclusion, scope is also left to examine what the previous neglect of Open Marxism has to say about the wider development of critical theory within IR and IPE. Thereby leaving open several questions about the project of critical theory itself that can be taken up in future debate.

### **A critical outline of Open Marxism**

The emergence of Open Marxism can be situated within a reaction to abstract and ahistorical currents within historical materialism, particularly the ‘structural Marxism’ of Louis Althusser, and the perceived shortcomings of mainstream neo-realism and neo-liberal institutionalism in IR/IPE (see Keohane 1984; Waltz 1979). The ‘scientific’ character of knowledge was customarily asserted within ‘structural Marxism’ in order to reveal the inner essence of the universe (Althusser 1969, 1970: 132). Yet the structuralist approach failed to explain social action and resulted in ‘the repression of the processes through which the conditions of social life are constituted’, as well as ‘the human values

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<sup>2</sup> For a similar exposition of the problem of labelling, as well as an overture to avoid the imposition of particular intellectual identities, see Cox (2002: 26-9).

affirmed/revoked through those conditions' (Psychopedis 1991, 2000: 76). This resulted in the fetishisation of social reality and the related separation between politics and economics (Bonefeld 1992: 114). Similarly, neo-realist and neo-liberal institutionalist IR approaches take for granted 'state' and 'market', in the form of two separate entities, as their starting-point of investigation (see, for example, Gilpin 1987: 9-10, 2000: 13). Yet this inner connection between state and market cannot be problematised. 'Instead "the state" is fetishised whilst "the market" is dehistoricised and viewed as a technical arena in which the "external" state "intervenes"' (Burnham 1995: 136). In contrast to structural Marxism and mainstream IR approaches alike, Open Marxism suggests taking the social relations of production as a starting-point. It is particularly affirmed that a return to Marx on the relation between capital, the state and labour would reveal the separation between state and market as illusory; thereby opening up theorising to consider state-civil society relations as differentiated but connected forms of capitalist social relations of production (Burnham 1995: 146, 2000: 10).

According to Marx, the state has a set of presuppositions in civil society in terms of religion, the judiciary, private property and the family and under capitalist social relations these become divided into separate spheres. Therefore a scission of 'state' from 'civil society' unfolds as discrete forms of expression of social relations under capitalism. This induces a mystification of the powers of the state to the extent that collective identities become separated into individual elements. The public and private spheres are shorn, so that individual freedom forms the foundation of civil society and class exploitation is set aside to give decisive status to abstract citizenship (Marx 1843a/1975: 143-4, 147). Civil society therefore becomes equated with individual rights and private interests and 'appears as a framework extraneous to the individuals, as a limitation of their original independence' (1843b/1975: 230). The individual is presented as an 'isolated monad' to the extent that the state 'regards civil society, the world of needs, of labour, of private

interests and of civil law, as the *foundation of its existence*, as a *presupposition* which needs no further grounding, and therefore as its *natural basis*' (Ibid.: 229, 234 original emphases). Accordingly, concepts such as security become predicated on the protection of individual freedoms and private interests within civil society separate from state 'intervention'. Yet, declares Marx, 'the *real person* reappears everywhere as the essence of the state—for people make the state' and the very social existence of people within the state constitutes their participation and relation to the state. 'Not only do they share in the state, but the state is *their share*' (1843a/1975: 83, 187 original emphasis).

Within Open Marxism such reflections on the separation of the state (politics) and civil society (economics) are further developed in order to dissolve the state as an institutional category and to understand it, not as a thing in itself, but as a form of social relations. Once the unquestioned category of the state is problematised in this way it then becomes possible to ask what is peculiar about the social relations of production under capitalism that gives rise to the separation and constitution of the economic and political as distinct moments within the same social relations (Holloway and Picciotto 1978b: 18; Holloway 1995: 120-1). Understanding how the relations of production are presented in their political aspect within capitalism provides an answer to this query. In contrast to pre-capitalist forms, characterised by the extra-economic direct political enforcement of exploitation and surplus extraction, surplus appropriation and exploitation within capitalism is indirectly conducted through a contractual relation between those who maintain the power of appropriation, as owners of the means of production, over those who only have their labour to sell, as expropriated producers. Capitalist exploitation is therefore conducted within the 'private' economic realm of civil society between appropriators and expropriated, capital and labour, which is presented as separate from the 'public' sphere linked to the coercive political realm of the state (Holloway and Picciotto 1977: 79; see also Meiksins Wood 1995: 31-6). Nevertheless the latter ultimately

secures such processes through the guarantee of private property, the contractual relationship between employer and employee and the process of commodity exchange (Burnham 1995: 145). Hence, the political dimension is intrinsic to capitalist relations of production. It is this understanding that is therefore cognisant of the relation between the state (politics) and civil society (economics) as discrete but related forms of the expression of social relations under capitalism. The state is conceived as a form of capitalist social relations, as an aspect of the social relations of production, predicated upon the reproduction of antagonisms and exploitation within the crisis-ridden development of capitalist society.

For Open Marxism, a crucial consequence of the separation of the economic and the political is the obscuring of the social class antagonism between capital and labour. The relation between capital and labour is assumed to be an antagonistic one that asserts itself in the form of class struggle. ‘Class struggle is . . . the daily resistance of the labouring class to the imposition of work—a permanent feature of human society above primitive levels’ (Burnham 1994: 225). Therefore, the capitalist state is determined by the social form of the class antagonism between capital and labour and thus by the historical process of class struggle in and against exploitation (Bonefeld 1992, 1995). Yet class is not related to a static structural location—a form of stratification—but instead is conceived as a social phenomenon within which conflict obtains (Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis 1992b: xiii). Class antagonism is thus regarded as a primary social relationship within which structures are instantiated and internally related to struggle (Bonefeld 1992: 113-14). Class struggle is by definition also seen as open-ended which promotes enquiry beyond the economic determinism of base/superstructure explanations (Burnham 1994: 225).

Further, it is argued that the separation of politics and economics distorts the relationship between the state and globalisation in mainstream IR/IPE approaches. Approaches to globalisation commonly succumb to this misconception by counterpoising



state and market as two opposed forms of social organisation. Hence arguments that posit the loss of ‘state sovereignty’ or ‘autonomy’ in an exterior relationship to ‘globalisation’, which supposedly results in ‘the retreat of state’ (*inter alia* Burnham 1994, 1997, 2000). External linkages are therefore sought between the state and globalisation rather than appreciating that ‘national’ states exist as moments *within* the global flow of capitalist social relations. Instead, Open Marxism regards a change in the form of the global existence of capital as characteristic of the current epoch, which has to be understood through an examination of the changing contradictions between capital, the state and labour. After all, states have to be inserted within the global character of capitalist accumulation because ‘the state itself is a form of the class relation which constitutes global capitalist relations’ (Burnham 1995: 149).

Sovereign states via the exchange rate mechanism, are interlocked internationally into a hierarchy of price systems . . . national states therefore founded on the rule of money and law are at the same time confined within limits imposed by the accumulation of capital on a world scale—the most obvious and important manifestation of which is their subordination to world money (Burnham, 1995: 148).

In other words, global class relations are nationally processed. ‘It is for this reason that the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is not in substance, but only in form, a national struggle’ (Burnham, 1995: 152). Overall, then, it is argued that ‘a return to classical Marxist ideas on the relation between class, capital and the state in a global context’, can offer, ‘a more productive approach for mapping recent industrial, political and economic change’ (Burnham 2000: 10). It is in this sense that Open Marxism strikes an important and resonant chord against conventional mainstream neo-realist and neo-liberal institutionalist approaches within IR and IPE. By emphasising the historical specificity of capitalism it promotes reflection about the potential for transformation beyond the prevalent social conditions.

Several criticisms, however, can be levelled against the overall approach of Open Marxism. Firstly, there is a clear ambition to project a ‘totalising’ theory, rooted in central

organising principles, capable of accounting for the myriad contradictory forms of relations between capital, the state and labour (Burnham 1999). Yet it is unclear as to whether this totalising approach collapses into a variant of ‘Theological Marxism’ that views the relationship of capital and class not as hypotheses but as absolute knowledge (Cox 1992/1996: 176). For example, in asserting that all ‘social phenomena have to be seen as forms assumed by class struggle, as forms in and against which social conflict obtains’ (Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis 1992b: xiii), there is a tendency to uphold a vision of class struggle as an undifferentiated mass that obscures the varied and specific forms assumed by social class, which are rarely given concrete reference or historical analysis. Generalisations within Open Marxism thus reduce the social antagonism between capital and labour to the unmediated effect of class struggle. Exploitation, domination and class struggle appear in this view as antagonisms that are unmediated in and through social forms or specific material social practices, institutions and norms of conduct.<sup>3</sup> The specificities of class and class-relevant struggles within particular historical conjunctures, or the consideration of distinctive struggles over hegemony, are therefore lost by reducing everything to an objective developmental logic of capital (Jessop 1988/1991: 72-3, 1990: 258-9). Mantras such as ‘capital *is* class struggle’ (Holloway 1988/1991: 100 original emphasis), propagated by Open Marxism, simply elide how the historical development of capital accumulation is mediated by the institutional forms of the social relations of production and how the state itself is one aspect of this (cf. Jessop 1991; Holloway 1991).<sup>4</sup>

There is also a tendency to eschew a direct focus on the social class antagonism between capital and labour to instead prioritise the reproduction of capitalism, or the

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<sup>3</sup> See the similar point by John Michael Roberts who criticises Open Marxism for reducing ‘discrete social forms of life to the main contradiction between capital and labour within the capitalist mode of production.’ In order to understand social forms beyond the capitalist mode of production, it is argued that one has to conceptualise how ‘social form is refracted through both a mode of production and social relations’ (Roberts 2002: 88, 102).

<sup>4</sup> Also see the debate between Bonefeld (1994/2001) and Hay (1994/2001). The importance of considering the political and ideological mediation of state and economic failure is also evident in Hay (1999: 335-6).

governing strategies of depoliticisation, which results in occluding the creative resistance of actual historical struggles (see *inter alia* Burnham 1999, 2001). Even Holloway (1988/1991: 99 emphasis added) confesses that ‘the working class is *not* the focus of analysis, but all the time it is present as the implicit subject of the analysis, as constant counterpoint, as threat.’ There is thus a danger of upholding a somewhat heroic vision of class struggle that collapses into an essentialist ‘workerist’ interpellation of identities and interests divorced from everyday lived experience (Jessop 1991: 165).

Separately, there is a rejection throughout the Open Marxism literature of distinguishing between different forms of state (how the functions of different forms of state are revised and recomposed by the capital relation) or of developing a periodisation of the capitalist mode of production (Clarke 1992, 2001). Instead, Bonefeld (1992: 120) comments that, ‘the coercive character of the state exists as presupposition, premise and result of the social reproduction of the class antagonism and not as an exceptional form of the state or as a qualitatively new period of capitalist development.’ Yet not only does this view neglect other forms of social power beyond coercive aspects of the state, but it also inadequately conceptualises changes within capitalist social relations of production. The question left begging is whether this results in an ahistorical conception of capitalism so that capitalism, is capitalism, is capitalism, without due regard for the changing modalities of capitalist exploitation and social organisation.

Furthermore, despite the aspiration to dialectically situate the state within global capitalist relations, a creeping statism can nevertheless be detected within Open Marxism. Whilst the social antagonism between capital and labour is considered to be global in substance, the form of this at the global level is assumed to be state interaction. For example, Holloway argues that ‘the competitive struggle between national states is . . . to attract and/or retain a share of world capital (and hence a share of global surplus value)’ (Holloway 1995: 127). One can also witness the debate on Economic Monetary Union

(EMU) cast as a competition between different national states pursuing inter-imperialist rivalries (Bonefeld 2001, 2002). Similarly, according to Burnham (1995: 149):

the dilemma facing national states is that, whilst participation in multilateral trade rounds and financial summits is necessary to enhance the accumulation of capital on the global level, such participation is also a potential source of disadvantage which can seriously undermine a particular national state's economic strategy. The history of the modern international system is the history of the playing out of this tension.

One is painfully reminded here of the intra-mural debate in IR between neo-realists and neo-liberal institutionalists over absolute and relative gains and the possibilities of conflict or co-operation between states as rational actors (Baldwin 1993; Grieco 1988).

Finally, it is reasonable to suggest that much conjecture within Open Marxism leans toward an overly theoretical and abstract style. This charge of abstraction does not simply derive from a lack of familiarity with the method of historical materialism (Clarke 1977/1991: 85). It is levelled because of the difficulty in plausibly explaining the structuring of social power by the 'capital relation' and in thus providing a coherent account of how the 'capital relation' encompasses once and for all the role of the state (Jessop 1990: 101). Hence, in the next section, the task of immanent critique commences by outlining a neo-Gramscian perspective that is capable of not only overcoming these shortcomings but also incorporating the positive contributions of Open Marxism.

### **A neo-Gramscian perspective on hegemony, world order and structural change**

Across neo-Gramscian perspectives, patterns of production relations are taken as the starting-point for analysis, which should not be taken as a move that reduces everything to production in an economic sense.

Production . . . is to be understood in the broadest sense. It is not confined to the production of physical goods used or consumed. It covers the production and reproduction of knowledge and of the social relations, morals and institutions that are prerequisites to the production of physical goods (Cox 1989: 39).

These patterns are referred to as modes of social relations of production, which encapsulate configurations of social forces engaged in the process of production. By

discerning different modes of social relations of production it is possible to consider how changing production relations give rise to particular social forces that become bases of power within and across states and thus within a specific world order (Cox 1987: 4). To examine the reciprocal relationship between production and power there is, then, a focus on how *social relations of production* may give rise to certain *social forces*, how these social forces may become the bases of power in *forms of state* and how this might shape *world order*. Social forces, as the main collective actors engendered by the social relations of production, operate within and across these spheres of activity by bringing together a coherent conjunction between *ideas*, understood as intersubjective meanings as well as collective images of world order, *material capabilities*, referring to accumulated resources, and *institutions*, which are amalgams of the previous two (Cox 1981: 139). It is with this framework that three successive stages of world order have been traced within which the hegemonic relationship between ideas, institutions and material capabilities varied and during which different forms of state and patterns of production relations prevailed. These are 1) the liberal international economy (1789-1873); 2) the era of rival imperialisms (1873-1945); and 3) the post-World War II era of *pax Americana* (Cox 1987: 109).

Therefore, not too dissimilar to Open Marxism, it is worth stressing that the focus on social forces and periods of structural change within these world order configurations prompts an open-ended inquiry into modes of class struggle. There is a focus on ‘class struggle [be it intra-class or inter-class] as the heuristic model for the understanding of structural change’ (Cox 1985/1996: 57-8; see also Cox 1987: 355-7). Class identity is therefore inscribed within the broader notion of social forces to emerge within and through historical processes of economic exploitation. ‘Bring back exploitation as the hallmark of class, and at once class struggle is in the forefront, as it should be’ (Ste. Croix 1981: 57). As such, class-consciousness emerges out of particular historical contexts of struggle rather than mechanically deriving from objective determinations that have an

automatic place in production relations (see Thompson 1968: 8-9; 1978). Yet the focus on exploitation and resistance to it ensures that other forms of identity are included within the rubric of social forces—ethnic, nationalist, religious, gender, sexual—with the aim of addressing how, like class, these derive from a common material basis linked to relations of exploitation (Cox 1992: 35). In short, “non-class” issues—peace, ecology, and feminism—are not to be set aside but given a firm and conscious basis in the social realities shaped through the production process’ (Cox 1987: 353).

Concentrating on the post-World War II era known as *pax Americana* it is contended that a period of structural change within capitalist social relations of production, since the early 1970s, transformed the US-led hegemonic world order. Previously, there was established a compromise of ‘embedded liberalism’ combining free trade at the international level with the right of states to intervene in their own economy to ensure social order and stability. It was based on Keynesian demand-management and Fordist industrialism within which the state acted as a mediator between the policy priorities of the global and national economies (Ruggie 1982). The world economic crisis of 1973-74 followed the abandonment of the US dollar-gold standard. The related restructuring of the social relations of production indicated a shift away from the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates to the promotion of rising priorities, among others monetarism, supply-side economics and the logic of competitiveness, that established an ‘emulative uniformity’ throughout the world order (Cox 1987: 298). This resulted in an intensified transnationalisation of production and finance, which precipitated the move towards the phenomenon that is now recognised as globalisation.

During this period of structural change in the 1970s, then, the social basis across many different forms of state altered. Whilst some have championed such changes as the ‘retreat of the state’ (Strange 1996), and others have decried the global proportions of such changes in production (Hirst and Thompson 1999), the internationalisation/

transnationalisation of production and finance profoundly restructured—but did not erode—the role of the state. The notion of the ‘internationalisation of the state’ captures this dynamic by referring to the way transnational processes of consensus formation have been transmitted through the policy-making channels of governments. Those state agencies in close contact with the global economy—offices of presidents and prime ministers, treasuries, central banks—gained precedence over those agencies closest to domestic public policy—ministries of labour and industry or planning offices (Cox 1992: 31). Across the different forms of state in countries of advanced and peripheral capitalism, it has been argued that the state became a transmission belt for neo-liberalism and the logic of capitalist competition from global to local spheres (Cox 1992: 31).<sup>5</sup> This implies that class (-relevant) struggle and capital accumulation is no longer inscribed in national paths of economic development (Radice 1998).

Hence assertions within Open Marxism such as ‘the proletariat conducts its daily struggle in local-cum-national settings’ (Burnham 1998: 197), but not beyond, are simply incommensurate with contemporary aspects of globalisation. Specific characteristics of the changing nature of class struggle within times of globalisation have to therefore be taken into account. It is simply not enough to assess globalisation *à la* Open Marxism as stemming from changes related to ‘the recomposition of labour/capital relations expressed as the restructuring of relations of conflict and collaboration between national states’ (Bonefeld, Brown and Burnham 1995: 31). An analysis of global restructuring has to capture the transnational restructuring of the social relations of production. It has to account for class struggle that takes place at the transnational level not only in substance, but also in form, involving national and transnational class fractions, which operate from within and through national forms of state.

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<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that the metaphor of a transmission belt has been withdrawn from more recent work (Cox 2002: 33).

*Criticisms of neo-Gramscian perspectives by Open Marxism*

Open Marxism is severely critical of the above notion of the internationalisation of the state and the idea that the state functions as a transmission belt between the requirements of the global and national economy (see also Baker 1999; Panitch 1994). At the centre of this argument is, once again, the disaggregation of politics and economics so that 'class relations (and by implication, struggle) are viewed as external to the process of [global] restructuring, and labour and the state itself are depicted as powerless' (Burnham 2000: 14). This leads to the identification of external linkages between the state and globalisation while the 'social constitution' of globalisation within and by states is omitted, since the relationship between capital and labour is viewed as external to the process of global restructuring (Bonefeld 2000: 35; Holloway 1995; Picciotto 1991). Most significantly the overall charge is that there is a 'failure to develop a coherent theory of the state and its relationship to class' (Burnham 2000: 14).

Further, Open Marxism also decries the apparent lack of historical materialist rigour across the diverse neo-Gramscian perspectives on hegemony, world order and structural change. According to Peter Burnham, the neo-Gramscian treatment of hegemony amounts to a 'pluralist empiricism' that fails to recognise the central importance of the capital relation and is therefore preoccupied with the articulation of ideology. By granting equal weight to ideas and material capabilities it is argued that analysis results in 'a slide towards an idealist account of the determination of economic policy' (Burnham 1991: 81). Hence the categories of state and market once again come to be regarded as opposed forms of social organisation that operate separately in external relationship to one another. There is thus a tendency across neo-Gramscian perspectives to indulge in methodological pluralism by simplistically equating labour with trade union bargaining power in a competitive arena aimed at securing particular interests (Burnham 1991, 1999: 38). Put



most strongly, the work of Robert Cox is particularly alleged to be ‘silent on the issue of labour’ (Burnham 2000: 14).

In specific response to these criticisms, it was outlined earlier how the social relations of production are taken as the starting point of analysis. By thus asking what modes of social relations of production within capitalism have been prevalent in particular historical circumstances, the state is not treated as an unquestioned category. Indeed, rather closer to positions within Open Marxism than hitherto admitted, the state is treated as an aspect of the social relations of production so that questions about the *apparent* separation of politics and economics or states and markets within capitalism are promoted.

Moreover, ideas in the form of intersubjective meanings are accepted as part of the global political economy itself. This is significant because ideas, developed for example by key organic intellectuals, can play a crucial role in forging a hegemonic project in times of structural crisis. Yet, in contrast to Burnham’s claim, ideas are not regarded as an additional independent variable alongside material properties. Rather, a principal emphasis is placed on the ‘material structure of ideology’ linked to publishing houses, newspapers, journals as well as libraries and schools, right up to architecture, street lay-outs and names (Gramsci 1995: 155-6).<sup>6</sup> It is through a ‘material structure of ideology’ that a particular constellation of social forces may establish ‘historically organic ideologies’ that sustain validity within the consciousness of people’s ‘common sense’ (Gramsci 1971: 376-7; see Bieler 2001a). Ideas in this sense are not mere epiphenomena. They ‘are anything but arbitrary; they are real historical facts which must be combated and their nature as instruments of domination exposed . . . precisely for reasons of political struggle’ (Gramsci 1995: 395). This indicates an appreciation of the links intellectuals may have, or the wider social function they perform, in relation to the world of production within

capitalist society to offer the basis for a materialist and social class analysis of intellectuals.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore an appreciation of how ideas and intellectual activity can ‘assume the fanatical granite compactness of . . . “popular beliefs” which assume the same energy as “material forces”’ (Gramsci 1971: 404).

The supposed silence on the issue of labour is also somewhat overstated. It is worth recalling that early attempts have been made to accord greater attention to the role of labour within transnational processes (Cox 1971a, 1971b). Admittedly, further innovative work has then concentrated on processes of elite interaction between different class fractions. Gill, for example, has analysed the role of the Trilateral Commission, consisting of economic and political elites from North America, Europe and Asia, in the promotion of neo-liberalism (Gill 1990). More recently, there has also been a focus on rival fractions of capital in an investigation of the revival of European integration since the mid-1980s (van Apeldoorn 2002). Nevertheless, it should be clear that there are diverse routes to approaching questions of hegemonic struggle within neo-Gramscian perspectives and that a focus on labour is not necessarily excluded. For example, the activity of union movements in challenging neo-liberalism has been given greater emphasis within both regional and global forums (Bieler 2000, 2002; O’Brien 2000). Specifically, within the European Union (EU), research has been conducted on the emergence of new fractions of labour as a result of transnational restructuring and how this influences unions’ positions on the revival of European integration in the mid-1980s (Bieling 2001). Similarly, the role of unions within Austrian, Norwegian and Swedish moves towards EU membership (Bieler and Torjesen 2001) and unions’ positions on EMU set against the

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<sup>6</sup> James Scott (1998) has extended this awareness in an interesting way by encompassing a variety of state naming practices, or ‘state simplifications’, that enhance the legibility of society.

<sup>7</sup> One way in which such enquiry has proceeded is through a detailed focus on the social function of the intellectual within conditions of socio-economic modernisation to highlight the mixture of critical opposition and accommodation that has confronted intellectuals in Latin America, with a specific focus on the Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes (see Morton 2003b).

background of globalisation have been analysed (Bieler 2001b). Different questions of resistance, centred around issues of class struggle whilst also addressing additional dimensions of subjectivity, identity and difference, have also been highlighted; most pertinently, with reference to forms of peasant mobilisation such as the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN: Zapatista Army of National Liberation) (Morton 2002). This latter concern with the intersection of class-based and indigenous forms of identity bears out the importance of recognising how class content subsists within the mobilisation of social forces. Hence a focus on the creative capacities of subaltern forms of resistance, in and beyond questions of class struggle, has increasingly become a central concern throughout neo-Gramscian perspectives. This encapsulates the challenge of combining a focus on the dialectical relationship of agents and structures (Bieler and Morton 2001).

Perhaps most tellingly, though, a theory of the state and how this relates to the restructuring of different forms of state within the global political economy is not fully developed, which may be related to the way the rather problematic notion of the internationalisation of the state has been received. As Stephen Gill (1995: 422; see also Gill and Law 1989: 480) has rightly argued, the state is at the heart of the growing contradiction between the globality and universality of capital and its constitution within particular contexts. Whilst, across neo-Gramscian perspectives, there clearly exists a set of at least implicit assumptions about the state as a form of social relations through which capitalist hegemony is expressed, this needs to be more clearly elaborated. In the next section, therefore, we turn to the ‘Critical Economy’ conception of the state proffered by Antonio Gramsci and subsequently extended by Nicos Poulantzas in order to demonstrate how this aspect can be more fully developed from within a neo-Gramscian perspective in an engagement with Open Marxism.

## A 'Critical Economy' conception of the state

Whilst previously neglected, it is clear that Antonio Gramsci advanced a conception of the state within a broader Marxist approach to political economy that he referred to as 'Critical Economy'.<sup>8</sup> For Gramsci, a 'Critical Economy' approach was distinguished from the 'Classical Economy' of Adam Smith and David Ricardo in that it did not seek to construct abstract hypotheses based on generalised, historically indeterminate conditions of a generic 'homo oeconomicus' (Gramsci 1995: 166-7). The whole conception of 'Critical Economy' was historicist in the sense that categories were always situated within historical circumstances and assessed within the particular context in which they derived, rather than assuming a universal 'homo oeconomicus' (Ibid.: 171-3, 176-9). Moreover, the importance of a theory of value was acknowledged to the extent that:

one must take as one's starting point the labour of all working people to arrive at definitions both of their role in economic production and of the abstract, scientific concept of value and surplus value, as well as . . . the role of all capitalists *considered as an ensemble* (Ibid.: 168 emphasis added).

This distancing from liberal ideology was then continued in Gramsci's direct reflections on the state. According to Gramsci, the conception of the state developed by dominant classes within capitalist social relations derived from a separation of politics and economics. 'The state', as represented by the intellectual class supportive of dominant social forces, 'is conceived as a thing in itself, as a rational absolute' (Gramsci 1992: 229). Additionally, in those situations when individuals view a collective entity such as the state to be extraneous to them, then the relation is a reified or fetishistic one. It is fetishistic when individuals consider the state as a thing and expect it to act and,

are led to think that in actual fact there exists above them a phantom entity, the abstraction of the collective organism, a species of autonomous divinity that thinks, not with the head of a specific being, yet nevertheless thinks, that moves, not with the real legs of a person, yet still moves (Gramsci 1995: 15).

In contrast, a 'Critical Economy' approach understands the state not simply as an

institution limited to the ‘government of the functionaries’ or the ‘top political leaders and personalities with direct governmental responsibilities’. The tendency to solely concentrate on such features—common in much mainstream debate in IR—was pejoratively referred to as ‘statolatry’: it entailed viewing the state as a perpetual entity limited to actions within political society (Gramsci 1971: 178, 268). Instead, the state presents itself in a different way, beyond the political society of public figures and top leaders, so that ‘the state is the *entire complex of practical and theoretical activities* with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules’ (Ibid.: 244 emphasis added). This different aspect of the state is referred to as civil society. The realms of political and civil society within modern states were inseparable so that, taken together, they combine to produce a notion of the integral state (Ibid.: 12, cf. Gramsci 1994b: 67).

Within this extended or integral conception of the state there is a fusion between political and civil society within which ruling classes organise the political and cultural struggle for hegemony, to the extent that distinctions between them become ‘merely methodological’ (Gramsci 1971: 160, 258, 271). The state was thus understood not just as the apparatus of government operating within the ‘public’ sphere (government, political parties, military) but also as part of the ‘private’ sphere of civil society (church, media, education) through which hegemony functions (Ibid.: 261). Accordingly, civil society ‘operates without “sanctions” or compulsory “obligations” but nevertheless exerts a collective pressure and obtains objective results in the form of an evolution of customs, ways of thinking and acting, morality etc.’ (Gramsci 1971: 242). In these circumstances ‘one cannot speak of the power of the state but only of the camouflaging of power’ (Gramsci 1995: 217).

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<sup>8</sup> This does not imply reading Gramsci at face value. Whilst the contemporary use of his concepts is not unproblematic, it is nevertheless maintained that ideas can be understood both within and beyond their original context (see Morton 2003a).

Once again, the notion of integral state was developed in opposition to the separation of powers embedded in a liberal conception of politics. Hence a rejection of the notion of the state as a ‘nightwatchman’, only intervening in the course of safeguarding public order, because ‘*laissez-faire* too is a form of state “regulation”, introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means’ (Gramsci 1971: 160, 245-6, 260-3). The state is not therefore agnostic and the ensemble of classes that constitute it have a formative activity in civil society to the extent that the bourgeoisie governs itself through banks and ‘great capitalist consortia’ reflecting the combined and unified interests of a particular class. As a result, Gramsci maintained, ‘the bourgeois class no longer governs its vital interests through Parliament.’ Instead, government, or political society in the narrow sense, would rest on coalitions of class interests with such institutions reduced to police activity and the maintenance of social order within an attenuated form of democracy (Gramsci 1977: 167-72, 174-5).<sup>9</sup>

Thus it can be argued that the state in this conception is understood as a social relation. The state is not unquestioningly taken as a distinct institutional category, or thing in itself, but conceived as a form of social relations through which capitalism is expressed. It is a view that reappraises different modes of cultural struggle within ‘a critique of capitalist civilisation’ that goes beyond a ‘theory of the state-as-force’ (Ibid.: 10-13; Gramsci 1995: 343-6, 357). It does so by introducing the ‘theoretical-practical principle of hegemony’ that takes on an ‘epistemological significance’. This means that the struggle over hegemony revolves around shaping intersubjective forms of consciousness in civil society—‘the trench-systems of modern warfare’ which have to be targeted ‘even before the rise to power’—rather than focusing on gaining control of the coercive state apparatus (Gramsci 1971: 59, 235, 365). It is through state-civil society relations, then, that particular

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<sup>9</sup> Civil society here should not be understood as a mere reflection of the state. Rather, civil and political society are two tightly inter-linked terrains of struggle, struggle within one realm having an impact on the power configuration of the other.

social classes may establish hegemony over contending social forces. By constituting an 'historical bloc', that represents more than just a political alliance but indicates the integration of a variety of different class interests, hegemony may be propagated throughout society, 'bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity . . . on a "universal" plane' (Ibid.: 181-2).

The granting of concessions beyond the 'economic-corporate' level, within a 'compromise equilibrium', connotes this struggle for hegemony (Ibid.: 161). Hegemony is attained by a fundamental social class but it is presented as 'the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the "national" energies' to become identified with the interests of subordinate social classes (Ibid.: 182). An unstable equilibrium of compromises, characteristic of the struggle for hegemony within 'the life of the state', also entails relating the economic realm to that of the political and cultural spheres more broadly. This is essential as "'civil society" has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic "incursions" of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions, etc.)' (Ibid.: 235). As indicated earlier, the social function of the intellectual, 'whether in the field of production, or in that of culture, or in that of political administration' (Ibid.: 97), becomes pivotal in overcoming the impact of such crises.

Yet this conception of the state and concern with the struggle over hegemony was not simply confined to understanding domestic 'national' experiences. For Gramsci was a fastidious student of the 'international' circumstances of hegemony and argued that whilst the 'national' sphere remained the starting point to eliminate class exploitation and private property, capitalism was a world historical phenomenon within uneven development (Gramsci 1977: 69-72). This was combined with an acute awareness of the ramifications of world capitalist production and the 'global politico-economic system' of 'Anglo-Saxon world hegemony' that was manifest within a focus on aspects of 'Americanism and Fordism' concerning the expansion of mass-production techniques and scientific

management processes on a world scale (Ibid.: 79-82, 89-93). Forms of ‘American global hegemony’ (Gramsci 1996: 275) were therefore recognised, with the US described as the supreme ‘arbiter of world finance’ (Gramsci 1992: 261) that was trying to ‘impose a network of organisations and movements under its leadership’ (Gramsci 1996: 11). The latter included international voluntary associations as well as international public and private organisations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (Gramsci 1992: 167-70) or groups like the Rotary Club (Gramsci 1996: 269-71, 318-20) and, separately, the Catholic Church or other pan-Christian movements (Gramsci 1992: 354-5; 1996: 11-13, 282). Forms of regional and international economic integration, within which ‘hegemonic states’ may organise national and ‘international (interstate) markets’, were also discussed (Gramsci 1992: 285-7, 350-1). As a result, the historical fact cannot have strictly defined ‘national’ boundaries because ‘history is always “world history” and . . . particular histories exist only within the frame of world history’ (Gramsci 1985: 181). Hence ‘*relations within society*’—involving the development of productive forces, the level of coercion, or relations between political parties—that constitute ‘*hegemonic systems within the state*’, were dealt with by the same concepts as ‘*relations between international forces*’—involving the requisites of great powers, sovereignty and independence—that constitute ‘*the combinations of states in hegemonic systems*’ (Gramsci 1971: 176).

The implication of all of this is the need to appreciate the specific meaning attributed to the ‘national’ point of departure. One can begin analysing the originality and uniqueness of national specificities and historical differences whilst still displaying a dialectical awareness of how relations within a state react both passively and actively to the mediations of international trends (Gramsci 1971: 176). A focus on the ‘national’ point of departure therefore affords analysis of the concrete development of the social relations of production and the relationship between politics and economics which is inscribed in the struggle over hegemony within a state, whilst remaining aware that ‘the perspective is



international and cannot be otherwise' (Ibid.: 240; cf. Showstack Sassoon 2001). The next question is, then, how to combine this emphasis on the 'national' point of departure with a focus on emerging transnational social forces but without lapsing into a one-sided view of the internationalisation of the state. Here, we turn to the work of Nicos Poulantzas and his understanding of the internalisation within the state of different configurations of national and transnational class interests.

*Nicos Poulantzas and the internalisation of class interests within the state*

One way of expanding this 'Critical Economy' approach in light of changing circumstances is evident in the work of Nicos Poulantzas.<sup>10</sup> Poulantzas explicitly warned against emptying the state of class struggle as 'this leads directly to the ideology of "globalisation", in other words that of an abstract process whose uneven development would be simply the "dross" of its concretisation into social formations' (Poulantzas 1975: 49). Instead, he emphasised that class bias is inscribed within the very institutional ensemble of the state as a social relation of production which not only permits a radical critique of liberal ideology but also promotes interest in the class pertinency and practices of the state as a strategic site of struggle (Poulantzas 1973: 63-4). Social classes do not therefore exist in isolation from, or in some exterior relation to, the state. The state is present in the very constitution and reproduction of the social relations of production and is thus founded on the perpetuation of class contradictions. 'The state is the condensation of a relationship of forces between classes and class fractions . . . *within the state itself*' (Poulantzas 1978: 132 original emphasis). Social classes are therefore defined principally,

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<sup>10</sup> Poulantzas' work is often controversial because of a link to Althusserian 'structural-functionalism' (e.g. Jessop 1990: 87; Foster-Carter 1978: 56n.39). Whether these criticisms are justified or not cannot be discussed here. It would, however, be improvident to dismiss the wider richness of Poulantzas' theory of the state (Jessop 1990: 69). For a broader critical engagement with Poulantzas' Marxist theory and political strategy see Jessop (1985). The classic Poulantzas-Miliband debate highlights some of the controversies on theorising the capitalist state; see Poulantzas (1969, 1976) and Miliband (1970, 1973).

but not exclusively, by the production process and related to the political, ideological and economic social practices of the state. Hence ‘the structural determination of every social class involves its place both in the relations of production and in the ideological and political relations’ of the institutional ensemble of the state (Poulantzas 1975: 207). Yet, again, this should not be taken as economic reductionism as ‘the economic includes not only production, but also the whole cycle of production-consumption-distribution, the “moments” of this appearing, in their unity, as those of the production process’ (Ibid.: 18, 200-01). This leads to enquiry about the institutional materiality of the state or the various class interests that support the economic, political and ideological dimensions of capitalist social relations.

The state is not a simple class instrument that directly represents the interests of dominant classes. Dominant classes consist of several class fractions that constitute the state, which thereby enjoys a *relative autonomy* with respect to classes and fractions of classes (Poulantzas 1975: 97; 1978: 127). Yet, lest the meaning of this phrase is misunderstood, it should be made clear that relative autonomy *does not* mean a distancing from the social relations of production but solely that the state experiences relative autonomy *vis-à-vis* the classes and fractions of classes that support it (Poulantzas 1973: 256). Within the unstable equilibrium of compromises, discussed above, the state organises hegemony by imposing certain concessions and sacrifices on the dominant classes in order to reproduce long-term domination (Poulantzas 1978: 184; see also Gramsci 1971: 161, 245, 254-7).

It also means that relations between different fractions of capital and labour distinguish the struggle over hegemony. The different forms assumed by capital—commercial, industrial, financial—can shape class fractions that share common orientations and interests linked through concrete industrial and financial firms (Poulantzas 1973: 233-4). These interests can become formulated to represent the general

interest through the struggle over hegemony by ‘which a class or fraction manages to present itself as incarnating the general interest of the people-nation’ to thereby condition relations of domination and subordination (Ibid.: 221). Once a hegemonic relationship is established, distinct class fractions can constitute themselves as a social force that expand their horizons beyond distinct interests. Particular economic-corporate interests are transcended to bind and cohere the diverse aspirations and interests—or ‘fringe limits’—of various social classes and class fractions into an historical bloc (Ibid.: 85, 111-12).

Finally, capital is not simply represented as an autonomous force beyond the power of the state but is represented by classes or fractions of classes *within* the very constitution of the state. There are contradictory and heterogeneous relations internal to the state, which are induced by class antagonisms between different fractions of (nationally- or transnationally-based) capital. Hence ‘foreign’ capital, represented by transnational corporations or ‘footloose’ investment, does not simply drain ‘state power’ (Poulantzas 1975: 170). Instead, stemming from a new phase in imperialism related to the expansion of US hegemony and the *internationalisation* of American capital in the 1970s, Poulantzas argued that, through a process of *internalisation*, there was an ‘induced reproduction’ of capital within different states. This means that the internationalisation, or transnationalisation, of production and finance capital does not represent the expansion of different capitals outside the state but signifies a process of internalisation within which interests are translated between various fractions of classes within states (Ibid.: 73-6). ‘The international reproduction of capital under the domination of American capital is supported by the various national states, each state attempting in its own way to latch onto one or other aspect of this process’ (Ibid.: 73). The phenomenon now referred to as globalisation therefore represents the transnational organisation of production relations which are internalised *within* states to lead to a modified restructuring (but not retreat) of the state in everyday life.

In short, these specific issues concerning the changing role of the state are ultimately related to capitalist reproduction on a *global* scale, i.e. ‘global relations of production’ (Ibid.: 63, 83). After all ‘imperialism is consubstantial with the modern nation in the sense that it cannot be other than *internationalisation* or rather *transnationalisation* of the processes of capital and labour.’ Capital is located within an *international* spatial matrix in order to reproduce itself through *transnationalisation*, ‘however deterritorialised and a-national its various forms may appear to be’ (Poulantzas 1978: 106 emphasis added). Hence sustaining a dialectical awareness of the mediation of relations between the ‘national’ and ‘international’ dimensions, which is the very essence of capitalism, ‘contrary to the belief upheld by various ideologies of “globalisation”’ (Poulantzas 1975: 78).

To come full circle, it is now the task to incorporate a ‘Critical Economy’ conception of the state, that includes a conceptualisation of the internalisation of production relations within the state, in order to overcome the problems with the notion of the internationalisation of the state evident within neo-Gramscian perspectives. To start with, it should be highlighted that Cox’s framework does include a focus on different forms of state, which are principally distinguished by ‘the characteristics of their historic[al] blocs, i.e. the configurations of social forces upon which state power ultimately rests. A particular configuration of social forces defines in practice the limits or parameters of state purposes, and the *modus operandi* of state action, defines, in other words, the *raison d’état* for a particular state’ (Cox 1987: 105). In short, by considering different forms of state, defined in terms of the historical bloc or class configuration that determines its *raison d’état* (Cox 1989: 41), it becomes possible to analyse the social basis of the state or to conceive of the historical ‘content’ of different states. Attention is thus given to social forces and how these relate to the development of states, including states in alternative conditions of development (Bilgin and Morton 2002). Further, the state also obtains a relative form of autonomy *vis-à-vis* social classes stemming from the formal

separation of economic and political power created by its *raison d'état* (Cox 1987: 399-400; Holman 1993: 227-8, 231-2). The 'relative autonomy' of the state therefore regulates dominant class interests in a manner consistent with the economic project of the class as a whole, without yielding to the particular interests of fractions of this class (Cox 1987: 149).

It is this definition of the form of state that is entirely consistent with the 'Critical Economy' perspective outlined above. It allows us to treat the state as more than a narrow apparatus by prompting analysis of the interaction of social forces within political and civil society, i.e. the integral state, in their struggle for the determination of state purpose. Analysing different forms of state, as an expression of the social relations of production, along this line also overcomes the separation of state-civil society, of economics and politics, and thus one of the main methodological demands of Open Marxism. A dialectical cognisance is also demonstrated of the 'national' and 'international' dimensions, or the set of 'inter-linking hegemonies' (Gills 1993: 117), that make up the global political economy.

Seen in this way, globalisation and the related emergence of new transnational social forces of capital and labour has not led to a retreat of the state. Instead, there has unfolded a restructuring of different forms of state through an internalisation within the state itself of new configurations of social forces expressed by class struggle between different (national and transnational) fractions of capital and labour. This stress on the internalisation of class interests through the transnational expansion of social relations is different from assuming that various forms of state have become simple 'transmission belts' from the global to the national level (Cox 1992). At issue, instead, is the aim of establishing through empirical inquiry how concrete different forms of state have internalised the conflicting interests between national and transnational class fractions (e.g. van der Pijl 1998; Overbeek 1990, 1993). In some instances, the state may indeed function as a transmission belt, adapting the national economy to the requirements of the global

economy. In others, however, a redefined state purpose could equally well imply a protection of the national economy against global competition. In sum, the internalisation of global class relations in concrete forms of state has to be established empirically for each different state form.

### **Conclusion: on ‘world class contradictions’**

It is argued that an adequate approach to a theory of the state and political economy within critical international theory is not possible without engaging with Open Marxism, although such an approach on its own is not enough. The argument has therefore focused on ‘world class contradictions’ in a double sense. Firstly, some of the contradictions within Open Marxism itself have been highlighted that are of major (i.e. ‘world class’) importance in adequately understanding the modalities of power in the context of globalisation. Secondly, we have aimed to stress the importance of remaining engaged with the state as a site of class (-relevant) struggle and strategic selectivity whilst maintaining awareness of the wider dimension of ‘world class’ (i.e. global) contradictions.

As Poulantzas (1975: 78 emphasis added) reminds us:

The task of the state is to maintain the unity and cohesion of a social formation divided into classes, and it focuses and epitomises the class contradictions of the whole social formation in such a way as to sanction and legitimise the interests of the dominant classes and fractions as against the other classes of the formation, *in a context of world class contradictions*.

The ‘Critical Economy’ conception of the state—based on arguments derived from shared methodological and ontological assumptions—prompts an interest in these very ‘world class contradictions’. It does so by not only viewing the state as a *social relation of production* but by also situating the state within the dialectical interplay of structure and agency (or structure and struggle) in the context of globalisation. This is the principal merit of a ‘Critical Economy’ approach to globalisation and the state within which a premium is placed on understanding globalisation *as* class struggle in its mediation through the

institutional forms of capitalism.

In turn, it is this political economy approach to globalisation, the state and class struggle that potentially might open up new critical avenues of inquiry by further revealing the ‘neo-Smithian’ disposition underpinning wider ‘critical’ approaches in IR/IPE (Brenner 1977). This means raising questions about whether other ‘critical’ approaches are ultimately founded on an understanding of capitalism that is based on the functional expansion and development of market relations rather than the exploitative accumulation of capital and historically specific class struggle. Contrastingly, at present, it seems that there is little place for the subject of class within much recent ‘critical’ international theory. An enduring sonorous silence on the subject of class, we maintain, is particularly reflected within the milieu of identity politics in international theory. As Andrew Linklater (1999: 174) opines, however unfashionable and controversial it may be, ‘the swing from class politics to identity politics has gone too far.’

This neglect cannot just be blamed on the blinkers imposed by an American social science disciplining of IR theory. Nor, due to the existence of such a silence on the subject of class, can claims to greater openness within British IR theory be celebrated (Smith 2000: 376). Critical international theory is seemingly a set of diverse propositions in search of a subject. Whilst, clearly, there is no transcendental universal subject, class (-relevant) characters have nevertheless been ostensibly written out of the plot and are no longer materially recognised within the script of critical international theory. A starting point is, therefore, to signal this neglect.

Beyond this recognition, it might be worth questioning whether such neglect reflects a deeper collective bias towards more palatable forms of critical international theory and away from an historical materialistic problematic. A theory of historical materialism grants primacy to the ‘decisive nucleus of economic activity’ but without upholding an attachment to universal truths that can result in a philosophical position

similar to medieval theologism: making an ‘unknown god’ of the economic structure (Gramsci 1971: 161, 1994a: 365). After all, *contra* Open Marxism, Karl Marx is not some ‘shepherd wielding a crook’, or ‘some Messiah who left us a string of parables laden with categorical imperatives and absolute, unchallengeable norms, lying outside the categories of time and space’ (Gramsci 1994c: 54-8). It has to be shown how historical materialism can progress as a practical canon of historical study rather than as a total conception of the world based on the refinement of dogma (Gramsci 1994a: 311). This is the merit of a historicist approach that ‘does not envisage any general or universally valid laws which can be explained by the development of appropriate generally applicable theories’ (Cox 1985/1996: 53). It is the purpose of a critical theory that ‘is conscious of its own relativity but through this consciousness can achieve a broader time perspective and become less relative’ (Cox 1981: 135). A question that can thus be taken up in further debate is whether critical international theory, due to the growing neglect of historical materialism and class struggle, might itself become simply another follower of fashion within bourgeois social science. Hence the importance of remaining critical about the preconditions of critical theory itself.



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