

Interrogations #2. Therborn: What does the ruling class do when it rules February 2, 2017

1. Pete Ramand

After winning the Greek elections in 2015, many expected the new Syriza government to begin to transform elements of the capitalist state. This, however, did not occur. When questioned, various cabinet ministers stated that the lack of action stemmed from a lack of theory and analysis – they knew the Greek state was a capitalist state, but they lacked a theoretical framework which allowed them to specify which elements of the state apparatus to transform, what to transform them into, or the likely consequences of such actions.

Therborn's stated aim was to develop an analytical model that could help solve this problem: he wished to "develop a formal, comparative analytical model of the class character of the state apparatus, which may serve as a tool both for scientific investigation of the historical types of state, and for a programmatic debate about how and why the state apparatuses of the advanced capitalist societies should be 'smashed'." (pp. 34)

Therborn's book added a great deal of clarity to the existing body of work in the Marxist tradition. (The Miliband/Poulantzas debate, for example, provided little specificity on which components of the capitalist state have a class character, and in what way they should be transformed). However Therborn's work is, by his own admission, preliminary.

If we were to advance Therborn's project today, and develop a formal, comparative analytical model of the state apparatus that could help to solve the problems stated above, what would we take from Therborn's work, what would we jettison, and what needs to be developed further?

2. Tamara Wattnam

Therborn insists that "state power" and "state apparatuses" are two analytically distinct, though closely related, concepts. What does this analytical distinction mean for his model of the class character of the state and what are its implications for strategies for transformation?

Commented [EW1]: This is a pretty enormous question. Perhaps a more focused version would be to say: for a left government in power, what features of the capitalist state would be the most important to try to change/modify? Does Therborn give any indication about which feature of the state -- among the many class dimensions of the state apparatus -- is a) the most vulnerable to transformation, and/or b) the most important to transform in order to create openings for working class initiatives?

3. Aaron Yarmel

While reading Therborn, I keep coming back to the following question: what, exactly, would count as evidence that his account should be rejected? In order to make this question more specific, I am going to think of it as an exegetical question: what, according to Therborn, would count as evidence that his account should be rejected? Evidence, here, can be construed broadly so as to include pragmatic facts, methodological facts, empirical facts about the organization of states, & etc.

Therborn's goal is to give an analytical model that shows "that different types of class relations and of class power generate corresponding forms of state organization, and to elucidate the way in which the class character of the state apparatus is determined and revealed" (35). As he notes, his account should be rejected on logical grounds in the absence of "the existence of a real causal relation between the forms of state organization and the particular class relations to which they are linked in the model," or on empirical grounds "if the forms of state organization mentioned cannot be identified with the class of the model, or with any other; or if the variations of state organization are more readily explicable by variables other than class struggle and class power" (36).

To keep this comment short, I am only going to talk about the logical grounds of rejection. Clearly, the existence of some causal relation between the variables is insufficient evidence, as his claim is that one variable *generates* the other: the causal explanation goes in a particular direction. This is to say, while I could not find a place where he develops this possibility, his claim would be false if it were to turn out that forms of state organizations generate types of class relations and class power, and *not* the other way around. To go a step further, it is entirely unclear to me how he should respond if the following is true: the empirical evidence is ambiguous between, or equally supports, *both* directions of explanation. While this would not challenge the coherence or usefulness of his model, it would show that a more general form of it is available.

Commented [EW2]: I think the better way to draw your contrast is between the presence of a correlation and the claim about causal direction.

Commented [EW3]: Wouldn't the fact that capitalist class relations emerged before the state apparatuses were transformed to have a capitalist character be evidence of the causal direction?

4. Janaina Saad

Therborn's discussion of the state apparatus under socialism is based largely on real existing experiences with socialism. This is likely a result of the period in which he is writing. As such, his analysis of socialist state apparatuses emphasizes the roles of party cadres as necessary for resolving the inherent contradiction between "...on the one hand, the collective supremacy of a previously downtrodden and exploited class... and, on the other hand, the subordination of the individuals who compose that class to a bureaucratic and technocratic expertise that still remains necessary." (p. 124). I am not convinced that this contradiction is, in fact, *fundamental* to socialist society. Although I understand that the exercise that Therborn engages in is

based on existing organizational forms of the state, I wonder if, and how, his characterization of the socialist state apparatus can be modified to allow for democratic forms of social organization. This leads me to the following question: *are the characteristics of the socialist state apparatus in Therborn's model too narrowly stated to capture more democratic forms of organization?*

5. Kristinn Már

Therborn, when setting up the first part of the book (p. 25-26) writes that “the working class needs not only an economic programme of nationalizations and social services, but also a political programme of changes in the organization of the state that will bring about a popular democracy” and then (provisionally) concludes (p. 123) that the “existing [capitalist] state has to be smashed in any socialist revolution.” This conclusion rests upon an argument that *bureaucracy, technocracy and democratic representation under capitalism inherently reproduce capitalist social relations and must be replaced by “cadre organization” (p. 124) and “mass involvement according to political line” (p. 118)*. Therborn’s argument that the capitalist state is unresponsive and insulated from the interests of workers (and other groups) is convincing; and backed up by overwhelming evidence. Less convincing is a) that bureaucracy, technocracy and representative democracy need to be smashed and b) that “cadre organization” and “mass involvement according to political line” constitute their replacement. The latter is unconvincing partly because it is not clear, to me at least, how it works and what its structure is. (Political parties are usually hierarchical and even bureaucratic and technocratic organizations, and the same is true of many worker organizations such as unions (e.g. Offe and Wieselth, 1980). Depending on organizational structure the organizer can have significant power to set the agenda, select strategies and leaders and, is of course corruptible.) The former is not fully convincing because it is conceivable that *bureaucracy, technocracy and representative democracy are unresponsive and insulated because of the mechanisms which reproduce the capitalist state - resource dependency, the influence of capital on politics, ideology etc.* It is also conceivable that adjustments to each of these, such as decreasing insulation by increasing involvement or more firmly making state apparatuses accountable to voters/employees (approximating ideal speech, deliberation, representativeness, targeted representation etc), could move them closer to reaching a standard of “popular democracy” - especially under a different mode of production. Relatedly, is a detailed description of the “economic programme of nationalizations and social services” - i.e. a description of the productive forces, social relations and structure of the economy - of socialism necessary precondition of Therborn’s project to sketch the structure of the state and, furthermore, to be able to assess the *logics* of that structure? Would the structure of the state be different or the same in a society where the state owns and operates all production compared to one where the means of production are owned by the workers of many enterprises? Lastly, would

Commented [EW4]: I personally think Therborn is trapped in the ideological assumption that the self-described socialist states were in fact socialist. It is not open to the possibility of nonsocialist forms of non-capitalist states. It is one thing to say that in the Russian revolution the revolutionaries wanted to create a socialist society in which the working class was the ruling class, and another to say that what they built was a form of the state that actually achieved this.

Commented [EW5]: This is a very good point: some of the properties of the state that seem to reproduce capitalism – and thus have a capitalist class character – may only have these effects by virtue of their co-presence with other features of the state. It may not be that in and of themselves they have a bourgeois class character; the class character may come from the *forms of articulation* of these elements – their specific configurations and interactions. This is like Chantal Mouffe’s argument about hegemonic ideologies: they are forms-of-articulation of elements which, taken serially, do not have an intrinsic class character.

such a description need to be more detailed, at a lower level of abstraction, to capture the tasks and operations of the state? For example laying out the the mode of income distribution (universal basic income, same payment for everyone, income for work decided by workers in co-ops, welfare provisions etc)?

6. Benny Witkovsky

In his discussion of bureaucracy and scientific, technological knowledge (pg 52-54), Therborn outlines a capitalist state that both maintains predictable systems of rule in order to create and change laws for the success of capital and strategically deploys scientific and technological knowledge to intervene in the market and benefit capital. While Therborn admits that this state is an ideal-type, does he give us a mechanism to understand a capitalist state that fails to uphold these functions?

It seems evident that many modern capitalist states consistently fail to adapt to changes in capital, maintaining old policies that restrict the growth of certain industries or struggling to create new policies to prevent particular industries or firms from disrupting the function of the market. And when states intervene in the market, their technological and scientific knowledge seems just as likely to cause long term problems for capital as to benefit it.

In Therborn's framework, should we understand this type of ineffective capitalist state as fundamentally different in form to a capitalist state, or is it merely a difference of degrees? Beyond that, how does it change the strategies and processes of socialist development that he discusses if that development follows a well-functioning or struggling capitalist state?

Commented [EW6]: If we observe persistent failures of the capitalist state – policies that undermine the strength of capital accumulation or destabilize class relations, etc. – then I think Therborn invites to see if this is because a) there is some deterioration in the class character of the state apparatuses which means it doesn't filter things properly, or b) is the problem in the environment of the state which makes it incapable of producing reproductive policies, or c) have particular apparatuses been captured by social forces with interests that interfere with these functions. Specific apparatuses may be more vulnerable to this than others.

7. Youbin Kang

Public-private boundaries

Therborn demonstrates that different private-public boundaries are rooted in class relations and struggle (p.63-66). In the bourgeois state, the distinction between private and public has a clear demarcation between the two. Broadly, he characterizes this as the public sphere which provides services for private (capitalist) activities. In contrast, in the proletarian state, the distinction is less definite. Therborn highlights that the mechanism “is not equivalent to the absorption of the private sphere by a public bureaucracy” but “private life is made public by a number of proletarian and popular mass organizations apart from the state apparatus itself.” (p.69).

How do the boundaries between private and public spheres shape the state's servicing of the working class? Therborn's description of the private-public

collaboration described through the examples of Eastern Europe, Soviet Komsomol, and East Germany (p.70) is reminiscent of some of the debates in labour regulation today. For example, Andrew Schrank and Michael Piore's work on different bureaucratic forms of labour inspection (2008) demarcates a labour inspection model that is comparable to those described by Therborn that is more attributable to the proletarian state. The Latin model of inspections, compared to the US-model is more flexible and tacit in its approach, and cooperative with private actors (Trade unions, NGOs, companies). Other examples around the world, such as the Brazilian approach in fighting slave labour, or the EU's model of social dialogue and workplace councils also has elements that are comparable to the proletarian demarcation of private-public relationships. These examples are characterised by collaboration among social partners to extend the use of resources, deliberation through civil society forums, and adjudication by the state which provides the coercive basis (or legal "bite") of the model.

In considering these examples, I wonder whether such forms of mutually reinforcing models of private-public collaboration is a case of Therborn's proletarian form of the state, a petty bourgeoisie-modeled institution (p.121), or some form of both that includes class compromise and mediation within a capitalist state.

Democracy & class politics

Therborn characterizes democracy or electoral politics within the bourgeois state as controlled by a tiny minority, through representativeness which provides the legitimacy and mechanisms of such a politics (p.76-77). However, in modern society there have been forms of democracy which provide counter examples to Therborn's classification. The most prominent in today's world is the Indian democracy, in which the **largest voting class is the lowest classes**. The sheer number of this class (which is not necessarily the organized, manufacturing working class but range from peasants to service workers) have in turn motivated representatives to provide policies catered to this class, such as the erasure of caste relations and the provision of jobs (ex, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). How can we think about **this counter example?** Is it again, a form of class compromise, or is Therborn a little bit wrong?

Commented [EW7]: I like the way you frame this issue of the public/private boundary. This is probably one of the features of the apparatuses of the capitalist state that is most vulnerable to disruption, to the development of a contradictory class character. This might even be a kind of contradiction in the neoliberal state: public/private "partnerships" are a feature of neoliberal privatization of state functions, but this may also open-up space for partnership with social movements, community organizations, and other collective actors embedded in the popular classes.

Commented [EW8]: But the largest voting bloc in every democracy is "the masses" in some general sense.

Commented [EW9]: This really isn't a counter-example. Social Democracy and the welfare state do these sorts of things all the time without the state ceasing to be a capitalist state in which representation also caters to the problem of reproducing capitalist class relations.

8. Griffin Bur

I'll start with a **quick summary** of what I take Therborn's project to be, and then I will put my **discussion question in the following paragraph**. My major question is **what work does the framing of the Marxian theory of the state within systems theory do? Is it effective?**

Therborn recapitulates a fairly standard, although plausible and rigorous, Marxian account of three major modes of production and their accompanying **state apparatuses** and **state power**. This latter distinction (set out on p. 29 inter alia) is the more original part of his account. State power, with which, he argues, Marxian accounts of the state

tend to be narrowly concerned, is “the content of state policies” which expresses “the content of social class relations” (p. 34). The apparatus(es) is, on the other hand, the state in its capacity as a “formal organization” which is “distinguished by its specific functions: coercive defence, political governance (by supreme rule-making), administrative management (by rule-application), and judicial regulation of a given social formation.” (37). Much of the following section one is framed by an attempt to demonstrate “the class character of the state” not in terms of “the effects of state policies” but in terms of “their forms and intrinsic content” (p. 40)--that is, not merely in terms of which class is the beneficiary of state policy but in the formal dimensions of state policy--who it relates to and how, what tasks fall within its purview. Section I.ii of the book outlines these forms and content in terms of nine “variables” which cluster into input and output mechanisms (given on p. 39-40). I gather that this framing in terms of inputs and outputs, as well the general approach to the state as “a self-maintaining system” or as one species of the genus **organization**, is drawn from **systems theory** with which I’m not very familiar (Therborn explicitly acknowledges this influence, p. 38).

My question is: what does this provisional adoption of the language of systems theory do for Therborn’s account, and how does it differ from more standard Marxian accounts? What is gained by examining the state apparatus as a particular kind of organization or system? I say this not as a critique of Therborn; I found many parts of the empirical section fascinating. For example, I think that his treatment of the actually-existing socialist states (I agree with him that there is no sense in calling them “state capitalist”, p. 101) is very original (especially the treatment of state personnel, p. 79-86). So, too, is the discussion of cadre on p. 108-114. With that said, I found the sections on the capitalist state to be very well-formulated but to also be fairly conventional. For example, the discussion of capitalist state personnel recruitment (p. 74-79) makes the correct but uncontroversial point that the seemingly universalistic character of both bourgeois democracy itself as well as its affiliated institutions (e.g. universities) **actually reproduce capitalist property relations in the political sphere.** **I am not totally sure what is added, or being advanced, in discussions such as that one.** I do think Therborn is right to argue that much Marxian analysis sets aside the problem of the *form* of the state in favor of analyzing its class content, and the focus on the apparatus itself is interesting and useful (and less tied in knots than many contributions concerned with the state-form, e.g. the “state derivation” debate). But I am unclear, to take an example, as to how Therborn’s account is distinguished from that of, say, Miliband (whose approach to the state as organization Therborn is fairly critical of, p. 26-7). Therborn argues that Miliband “completely bypasses the problem of organization” (ibid.) by focusing on the “bourgeois ideological orientation of its personnel” but Therborn’s treatment of personnel is itself fairly preoccupied with, for example, the way that certain kinds of education foment a managerial, technocratic cast of mind.

Commented [EW10]: Basically what you get from this is a way of differentiating a broader inventory of dimensions of the state that have some potential independent sources of variation in class terms. Instead of just saying that the state is a capitalist state, this conceptual framework requires you to identify the capitalist character of specific features of the state, and defend this by arguing for variable forms that those features could take.

Commented [EW11]: This is actually a highly controversial claim. It isn’t obvious that this recruitment mechanism “reproduces capitalist property relations *in the political sphere*”. It is also at least somewhat controversial that the universalism of the recruitment processes as such has the effect of reproducing capitalist property relations. Anyway: why do you think these claims are uncontroversial?

Commented [EW12]: While Therborn agrees that state personnel have particular ideological orientations, he rejects the idea that this is the most fundamental feature of what renders the state amenable to capitalism. The point is that people with those subjectivities need a particular structure of apparatuses in which to act effectively on the basis of this ideology. Miliband doesn’t say that.

9. Kaan Jittiang

One of the most interesting points and perhaps the most important contributions of the book to the understanding of the state is the distinction between *state power* and *state apparatus*. For Therborn, state power is “a relation between social class forces expressed in the content

of state policies” (p.34). This definition of state power seems to go in a different direction from those in the readings we read last week in the way that previous readings primarily align state power with those who hold power, while Therborn tends to give more focus on the “content” of state policies and the way in which those policies could have an impact on the society. This way of conceptualizing state power, I think, seems to make more sense especially because it demonstrates how a certain class would be able to reproduce its position as a dominant class within a society as well as exercise its power through state apparatus. Thus, understanding state power through “content” leads me to see how Therborn is able to distinguish between state power and state apparatus.

However, what I do not seem to fully understand in the text is when Therborn links the state to a division of labor. He mentions, “[t]he separate existence of the state is part of a specific division of labor within society” (p.35). What I am not sure is whether what Therborn states here refers to the division of labor between the state and other social organizations within the society or whether it is the division of labor between organizations within the state apparatus. Also when Therborn continues to talk about the disjuncture between state power and state apparatus, I am wonder whether there is a possibility that such disconnection may not necessarily have destabilizing effect, for example, a bourgeois revolution could still be stable even if it is accomplished by the proletarian state apparatus.

10. Kurt Kuehne

On page 37, Therborn writes, “We should view [the state apparatus] not as a goal-oriented subject in an environment, but as a formally bounded system of structure processes within a global system of societal processes,” arguing that extant literature ignores larger historical process and overly fixates on the localized ‘settings’ and organizational subjects/goals. In the span of about one page, Therborn dismisses it to present a new analytical model and new schema for understanding the state apparatus. **Should he be so quick to dismiss the robust body of subjectivist analyses of the state?** By page 48, he states that his analysis is limited to European states, and that “further specifications of a similar kind would be needed in order to deal adequately with the states of Africa, Asia and Latin America.”

Where do we stand in this debate? Should we view the state apparatus as a ‘goal-oriented subject in an environment’ or as a bounded, structured system-within-a-system? If I can add a follow-up, what ‘further specifications’ would be needed to deal with non-European or post-colonial states? I’m inclined to agree with Therborn’s later analysis and justifications, but the subjectivist approach has some appeal to my regions of interest.

Commented [EW13]: Therborn is referring to the former – the vision of labor between the state and the rest of the society.

Commented [EW14]: Therborn’s argument is that in order for State power to stably be in the service of a particular class, there must be an apparatus designed in a particular way. State power in the interests of the capitalist class – i.e. reproducing the class dominance of the bourgeoisie – could not be stably and effectively accomplished by a proletarian state apparatus. If there was an attempt to do so, one of the first things that would happen would be state policies directed at eroding the proletarian character of the state itself, since these would continually undermine the effort at strengthening capitalism.

Commented [EW15]: I think Therborn is just being cautious here. His categories would be a good point of departure for analyzing the class character of the Brazilian state. All he is saying is that they might need adjustment, modification – there may be more variant subspecies if the empirical scope of the analysis is widened.

Commented [EW16]: I am always uncomfortable with treating structures-as-actors: “The state does X” seems like a short hand for “The political actors in control of the machinery of the state decide to use that machinery to do X”. As long as it is clear that the subjects-in-action are people, not structures, then the ellipsis is OK. I think Therborn’s central point is that even if you want to treat the state as a subject-actor, it is still the case that the organizational structure interior to the state has a class character and explains what the meta-human actor does. I suppose it is like saying that the anatomy and neuro-structure of a person explains much of what a human-subject-actor does.

11. Courtney Deisch

Therborn indicates a determinism of the organizational form of state apparatus based upon the state's relation to the means of production (be that feudalism, capitalism, monopoly capitalism, or socialism). He states that the capitalist state apparatus must be smashed in order to allow for the transition into socialism. However, he clarifies that "what are to be smashed are neither the various agencies of the state... nor the personnel who work in them... *To smash the state apparatus means to smash the class character of its technology or organization.*" (123). This open view of state apparatus design seems to allow for the possibility maintenance of the basic organizational framework of the capitalist state apparatus given that it is altered in such a way as to prevent the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. Indeed, Therborn indicates a possible solution to the problem of the establishment of working class supremacy over the state is through the election of officials in workers', peasants', and soldiers' councils as in the case of the Leninist state apparatus of the early Soviet republic. (95). However, does not the very emphasis upon the labour *movement* problematize the persistence of a democratically elected form of governance? Elsewhere, Therborn describes the emphasis of the nomenklatura system of recruitment of cadre's in a later phase of the Soviet state as one intended to improve upon the "capitalist method of individual competition for posts." (80). Given that democracy is in it's very nature a competitive form of state personnel recruitment, how can the goal of a working class supremacy over the state apparatus ever be achieved through a democratic framework? Is democracy fundamentally and exclusively suited to the maintenance of a capitalist class structure? I remain unclear upon Therborn's perspective of the usefulness of democracy in a socialist state apparatus.

Commented [EW17]: The "basic organizational structure" is not exactly being "maintained" if the class character of its technology or organization". To be sure, the state apparatus still is an organization with inputs, transformation processes and outputs – that is the necessary components of every state apparatus by virtue of being a state apparatus. But the "basic organization" of the state comes from the forms of each of these ingredients.

Commented [EW18]: I think the claim here is that there are different forms of democracy. It may be true that they all will involve elements of competition, and for state-democracy, competition organized through something like parties. But they can still vary in all sorts of ways, which make the section of political leaders operate in very different ways. Atomized voting with top-down organized parties is the bourgeois form of democratic competition.

12. Sarah Farr

After providing a survey of the approaches that other Marxist scholars have theorized the state, Therborn favors the approach taken by Poulantzas to see the state as relational—"a materialized concentration of the class relations in a given society" (34). Therborn argues that this relational approach should be applied to the two aspects of the state that he identifies: power and apparatus. It is easier for me to understand state power as relational than the state apparatus as relational. I think it has to do with the state apparatus being itself "a specific division of labor within society," but I am no entirely clear on this. On this point—the question of the state as being about relations—I was struck by this passage on the construction of a socialist state after the "smashing" or the capitalist one: "But what is a socialist state – a state of transition to classless society – if not a strenuous effort to dismantle the barriers between the workers in their factories and the functionaries in their offices?"

I guess the questions related to this are: What does it mean for the state not to be an institution or instrument, but a relation? What does it mean for the apparatus itself

to be a relation? Does the shifting nature of work in today's society have ramifications for Therborn's understanding of the relational nature of the state (ie, the rise of the service sector, the loosening of employer-employee categories, etc)?

13. Loren Peabody

In his discussion of the "tasks" of the state, Therborn argues that a central function of the capitalist state is to reinforce the separation between public and private spheres of social life, restricting the role of the state to the public and filtering out demands defined as private (p. 63). This task was crucial for the rising bourgeoisie's struggle against "quasi-public corporations" that restricted competition and the profit-seeking prerogatives of the individual (p. 66). It coalesced nicely with a liberal ideology that could defend property rights and individual rights with the very same principles. Over time, the private sphere extended to "the choice of occupation and place of work, the choice of marriage-partner, and the ideological convictions, consumption habits and the life-style of the individual" (p. 66). While these issues may threaten feudal hierarchies or the socialist politicization of private life, in capitalism these expressions of individuality just present new angles for Don Draper to use to sell you something.

This seems to imply that infringements on freedom within the private sphere—oppressing or stigmatizing LGBTQIA identities, confining women to traditional roles, maintaining the use of religious symbols in public, banning abortion, etc.—are holdovers from feudal forms of state. Doesn't Therborn's theory predict that demands for justice in these areas should be relatively easy for the capitalist state to accommodate because they do not have a class character? In the neoliberal period, not only does the culture war continue to rage, but other trends he identified—growing state interventionism, reforming the labor market to benefit workers, strengthening the safety net, and mitigating income inequality (p. 67)—have reversed direction. As a secondary follow up question, do these kinds of observations of dynamics within a mode of production compromise his more abstract account of the biases built into the form of organization of the state by virtue of the mode of production?

14. Masoud Movahed

Göran Therborn's book is an attempt to develop an analytical model of class character of the state. Building on theoretical underpinnings of the Marxist tradition, Therborn offers a comprehensive analysis of the characteristics of various types of states in different modes of productions. Therborn posits that in order to understand class character of the state, one should distinguish between state power and state apparatus. State power, according Therborn, is a relation between social class forces

Commented [EW19]: This kind of conceptualization – the state is a relation, capital is a relation, etc. – is always difficult to grasp, and causes lots of confusion. I think there are two ideas in play here: 1) the apparatus is itself *made up of relations*. This is what "an organization" is: it is a *structure of relations*. What does it mean to describe the way decisions get made inside of the state (one of the transformation-of-inputs aspects of the state as an organization)? This requires describing the specific forms of relations between all of the roles/positions/people involved in making decisions. 2) The apparatus only exists by virtue of its relations to the broader social system of which it is an organizational part. This is reflected in even the standard Weberian definition of the state as an organization *holding a monopoly of the legitimate use of force over a territory*. All of those specifications are relational.

Commented [EW20]: This is one way of understanding this. But another way is to think of the state as a class state but not merely a class state: it is also a gendered state, and the state interference in sexuality and gender issues is a specific feature of the public/private boundary in the patriarchal state. In Feudalism the class form of the state and the gendered form of the state worked very well together: there was a kind of isomorphism in these two dimensions. In the capitalist form of the state these two dimensions of the state come into increasing tension.

Commented [EW21]: But doesn't this reversal reflect a strengthening of the distinctive capitalist form of the public/private boundary against the encroachments that came from working class struggles – which could be thought of as eroding the distinctively capitalist form the state on that dimension?

expressed in the content of state policies, and that “the class character of these policies may be seen in their direct effects upon the forces and relations of production, upon the ideological superstructure, and upon the state apparatus” (p. 35). State apparatuses constitute the institutional structures in which the state exerts power. State apparatuses also have an identifiable class character or “class content.”

Commented [EW22]: “character” refers to the *form* of the state more than the *content* of state policies. State power is more about content.

Therborn builds the investigation of the characteristics of the state apparatuses on a comparative analysis of different property relations namely, feudalism, capitalism and socialism. Therborn also identifies three broad mechanisms that shape state apparatuses: input (i.e. task execution personal recruitment, securing revenues); transformation (i.e. decision making processes, patterning organizational positions); output (i.e. state’s relations with foreign counterparts, the outcome of the decisions and policies made on behalf of the society, the outcomes of material resources). According to Therborn, each of these categories and their sub-categories have a class “content”

Therborn’s discussion of class character of the state apparatuses, while coherent, is somewhat problematic. True that societies under any given modes of production are rent by class divisions, that these schisms structured the production and appropriation of the social product, that they breed similar antagonisms and patterns of struggle, and that this shared architecture is the basis for a common politics. That’s to say, under feudalism, the feudal property relations of landlords versus serfs, and production for *subsistence* determined the class structure of the feudal societies. Under capitalism, the *private ownership* of means of production—and indeed, production for capital accumulation—determines the class relations of capitalist societies. And the capitalists, because they have control over the means of investment, tend to dominate the state under capitalism. Under the ideal case of socialism, presumably, there would not be any class dominance, because *private ownership over means of production* would be abolished, but still the society cannot go unscathed of class struggle and antagonism. Simply because state-managers—even in a socialist state—will continue to exert *authority* over society, and this will engender class antagonism.

Commented [EW23]: When you introduce a paragraph with a topic sentence like this, the reader expects an account of what is problematic to follow. But in this paragraph everything that follows is a reaffirmation of positive – not problematic – claims that Therborn makes.

Therborn seems to take the Soviet Union as the exemplar of a socialist state, and claims that we can learn from the characteristics the structure of the socialist state by in the Soviet Union. I think this is a somewhat misleading example to dissect class character of the state under socialism. This is so largely due to the fact that there was never an abolishment of property ownership under U.S.S.R., so that we can think of it as a legitimate socialist state. That is to say, the property relations under Soviet Union are not that those of socialism. The state in the Soviet Union owned the means of production, which is contrary to the core tents of socialism. So how can we think of class character of a socialist state?

Commented [EW24]: Why is this contrary to socialism? If workers democratically controlled the state, why would state ownership be anti-socialist?

15. Samina Hossain

In *Ruling Class* (1978), Therborn maps out a highly specified model that illustrates how state apparatus reflect class relations. In an effort to avoid the *subjectivist* problems of traditional organization theory, he uses a “social process approach” to capture the influence of outside processes on an organization. These dynamics that shape state organization can include temporal considerations such as trends and conjunctural forces: “...the concrete class character of the state apparatus...are significantly affected by their location in every dimension of historico-social time” (p. 46).

These caveats lead me to wonder to what extent can his model – which, by virtue of being a typology, must essentialize the different systems of governance – respond to the fluidity of its contents? **In other words, when is the characteristic of a state – be it feudal, socialist or capitalist – innate and when is it the product of temporalities i.e. the coalescence of people in a globalized world?** This question especially comes to mind when we see some shared features across the different state systems, which, in my opinion, Therborn ascribes unduly to one system over another: 1) accumulation of wealth (through conquest or corporate arrangements), 2) ideology as a reinforcement of the system (tradition, liberty, class solidarity) and the 3) need for specialized knowledge (devolution of tasks to non-nobles, capitalistic bureaucracy, centralized planning).

Can it be that these tendencies have always been there in the operation of a state but they just take different forms, **not solely due to changing modes of production, but also because of their “location in historico-social time”?** After all, Therborn refers to “relics” and “lingerings” of previous state systems that inevitably characterize subsequent systems. Is “class relations”, then, an adequate or even appropriate independent variable?

Commented [EW25]: I think the methodological issue here is this: in order to make sense of the ways in which concrete, actual states contain complex hybrid forms with lots of contradictions and inconsistencies, we need a set of ideal-types – which you describe as essentialist. The concrete analysis then draws on these to see how specific contexts embody such disparate forms.