

## Sociology 924. Reading Interrogations. Session #6. Tilly

October 20, 2011

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### 1. Naama Nagaer

Tilly provides an account of the importance of capital in the making of national state, but not an account of the formation of European states as capitalist states. In other words, Tilly's analysis, while acknowledging of the importance of considering capitalist relations of production, places them only as explanatory variable for extractive strategies, and hence reduces them to means for war-waging, while he acknowledges himself that states evolved from war-mongering entities to more complex and multipurpose bodies.

What is missing from Tilly's account is a description of the transformation from a state which makes use of and benefits from a certain economic configuration (going beyond the 'natural selection' of such state) to a state which intervenes more and more in the economic sphere. In other words - a history of financial and economic legislation and regulation, and all the 'inputs' or 'feedbacks' which flow from the state to the economy. Here, too, of course, there is variance among states, since some states (such as the Dutch) were a far more mercantilistic than others, and yet many others shifted from taking capitalist accumulation for granted to involvement in its reproduction.

Thus, for instance, Tilly considers as a given the "general processes of monetization and commodification", but does not look at state's mechanisms which fostered such processes. Is the missing link a mere temporal one? How can we reconcile Tilly's history of European state formation with theories of the capitalist state?

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### 2. João Alexandre Peschanski

In Tilly's framework, war and preparation for war ultimately drive state formation. When capital comes up in his framework it is as resources for warmaking. International competition, especially by war and preparation for war, shape state organization and action.

Given Tilly's framework, I would like to discuss:

- 1) His approach to warmaking. Even though his account is historical -- i.e., the historical evolution of states in Europe --, warmaking is itself not historical. His account seems to entail that states will necessarily compete and go to war. But I do not think states in the Middle Ages and the bourgeois era go to war in the same way, for the same reasons. Noblemen fought in wars for territorial control that was important for feudal domination, status; capitalists go to war to reproduce conditions of accumulation, to some extent. Those two different drives matter, and challenge Tilly's framework.

- 2) Tilly is building a theory of ecological competition to explain optimal state formations. Even though many modes of states existed, only the capitalized coercive mode prevailed, given its fitness to warmaking. To understand what is historical about Tilly's bellicist approach, it might be useful to compare his theory to other theories of historical change, such as historical materialism and evolutionism.
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### 3. Bob Osley-Thomas

Tilly aims to explain the changing shape of European states from 990 to 1990. Two variables provide the greatest explanatory power: coercion and capital. Coercion is located in the state and capital is located in the city. State development involves a dynamic tension between these two factors. Some states are coercive intensive (e.g. Russia), some are capital intensive (e.g. Venice), while others are a mixture of the two. He argues that the coercive-capital intensive states (e.g. France and England) were the most successful and long lasting.

I would like to explore the transition from indirect to direct governance that occurred in France at the end of the 18th century. Tilly argues that state formation is largely shaped by warmaking activities. The shift from indirect to direct governments is a substantial change in the relationship between citizens and the state. Can we explain this shift in terms of the structure of coercion or the structure of capital? Were the warmaking activities or the commercial arrangements in this period different to such an extent that this form of governance had to change?

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### 4. Matt Kearney

Charles Tilly argues that war contributed to the centralization of large nation states. He emphasizes that financial arrangements affected the conditions of war; governments waged war on borrowed money from monied parties (banks, the church, merchants), so the more economically advanced states tended to become militarily successful. I am interested in drawing out the implications of this financial relationship, which in a broad sense applies today as it did in 1400. If a war between powerful nations is in progress or on the horizon, the government will borrow from banks (or other monied interests) to pay for the military. If the banks chose not to lend – perhaps they made a deal with the foreign power – then the state would lose the war and could be conquered. (This is a bit simplistic since banks also finance wars of foreign governments, but the basic principle holds.) If this is true, then once a government falls into debt, sovereign power really rests with the banks.

But this isn't the case. On an emergency basis the government could finance its military by nationalizing the banks, or otherwise forcibly collecting their resources. To maintain their independent existence, the banks thus have to cooperate with the government if it insists. A

bank's only choice is lend or be nationalized. My question is whether this is in fact the implication of Tilly's argument. Are governments and banks forced into a shotgun marriage by the threat of war and the inability to pay for it from taxes alone?

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## 5. Ayca Zayim

There are two issues that I would like to discuss. The first one pertains to Tilly's conceptualization of the state. Tilly defines the state in a Weberian fashion, emphasizing the aspects of coercion and territoriality (states are "coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories", p.1). In his analysis of the divergent paths followed by different European states and their consequent convergence on the national state, Tilly also pays attention to class structure and class struggle (such as the organization of social classes within a state's territory, the different combinations of coercion and capital, and how these two factors condition the strategies employed by rulers for war-making). State formation is deeply structured by the bargaining between the 'state makers' and 'major classes'. In fact, he argues explicitly that "the subject population's class structure therefore helped determine the state's organization" (p.100). In Tilly's account, does the state represent an autonomous organization above and beyond the classes in society (albeit influenced by the 'subject population's class structure')? The answer to this question is affirmative: Rulers pursue war-making, state-making, extraction of resources, etc. as their goals (if we use the term 'goals' in a general manner). For example, Tilly says that "armed men form states by accumulating and concentrating their means of coercion within a given territory" (p.131), conceptualizing rulers as at least partially distinct from those in the sphere of production and reproduction. However, can we also argue that state-makers or rulers constitute a distinctive class of their own in competition with other classes that have distinct class interests? Tilly argues, for example, that state organizations "themselves developed interests, rights, perquisites, needs, and demands" or that "bureaucracies developed their own interests and power bases throughout Europe" (p.117) or similarly that "rulers attempted to avoid the establishment of institutions representing groups outside *their own class*" (p.64, emphasis added). (I acknowledge having separate interests does not necessarily constitute a separate class).

The second relevant issue pertains to the objective of the state and the alliances formed between rulers and landlords and between rulers and city-based capitalists. The main objective of the state is argued to be the extraction of resources for war-making and Tilly analyzes three different modes of relations to the major social classes: coercion-intensive, capital-intensive and capitalized coercion. (In the coercion intensive mode, rulers had to give concessions to princes and gentry; coercion played a major part in extraction of resources from citizenry and massive apparatuses were built to squeeze these resources. In the capital intensive mode, on the other hand, the availability of capital and capitalists permitted states to extract resources in an efficient way without large bureaucracies in exchange of protection). Yet, I am curious how we establish the primary driver of the states as continuous and unchanging? Is this not

ahistorical? Furthermore, understanding the state as an organization geared towards war-making leads Tilly to explain the development of citizenship and the state institutions that cater to it in terms of the demands of classes outside the state and in fact as a 'burden' on the rulers (p.118). As such, it is explained as external to the state. But where does this autonomy originate and how can we subject his account to empirical scrutiny?

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## 6. Emanuel Ubert

### 1. Why war?

According to Tilly, "contrasting peasant experiences were both cause and effect of the very different trajectories of *state formation* in capital-intensive and coercive-intensive regions" (p. 152/153, ch. 5). I can see that, on a temporary scale of analysis, they could theoretically be both, a cause on and an effect of state form and activity (e.g. peasant class struggle influences state making at some point and then, later, that same state shapes peasant class identity and class struggle capacity, although the functional distinction between state form and content appears a bit muddled here).

It seems, however, that in his book war making and top-down systems of domination, and not peasant/ class experiences, act as Tilly's central and primary causal mechanism of state formation (i.e. shaping of state form). Variations in state specific positions in the "network of capital and coercion" (plus prior history) (p. 160, ch. 5) in turn affect states' predominant activities beyond the "commonality" of war making (i.e. state content and state transformation but not "original" state formation). Class seems to affect state trajectories, but is not seen as the motor that is forming the state in the first place. War making and violent competition is.

Where does this central (and seemingly universal) desire for war making come from in the first place? Answering this question, Tilly states that "coercion works" and that resulting compliance "draws the multiple advantage of money, goods, deference, access to pleasure", etc. p. 70 (ch. 3). This seems to indicate that state formation is ultimately not driven by the individual or collective maximization of "passions" for war making (as essentially implied by Tilly?), but instead by the dominant classes' attempts to reproduce and fulfill its material needs (surely no war *really* gets started because the other king has the more beautiful wife) through exploitation. By exploitation I mean the non-productive oppression plus ultimate appropriation of production or resources of the conquered/ defeated. The war makers need the conquered for the satisfaction of their needs. As such, war making simply seems to be a cruder form of economic/ capitalist exploitative strategies. Coercion (war making) and economic exploitation under Tilly could be viewed as essentially the different side of the same coin (exploitation).

-> In the context of his theory of state formation, Is Tilly methodologically and empirically justified in (analytically) separating domination/ coercion from exploitation/ economic means of reproduction?

## 2. Contemporary state selection mechanisms

While different weights on coercion and capital intensity determine the specific form of states, according to Tilly war and violent competition act as the key mechanism that selects which (state) organizational forms reproduce and eventually dominate. British, Spanish and French states (not fully intentionally) balanced their weights of capital-coercion intensities in a way that allowed reproduction and international domination precisely because those configurations proved most resourceful and effective in wars with other state forms. It seems to me that the post 1980's global neo-liberal organizational dominance was not primarily achieved through means of war or violent coercion, but rather through economic domination (collapse of UdSSR, structural adjustments, etc.). Similarly, and given modern (war) technology, it seems to me highly unlikely to expect future dominant state forms to arise out of (global) war (rather a collapse of the state form...).

-> Given today's globalized and technological environment, is war and violent material competition still the primary mechanism that selects state forms' survival, reproduction and dominance?

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## 7. Paul Pryse

Tilly makes what I think is a pretty unassailable case that two 'logics' of coercion accumulation and capital accumulation defined the possible paths of European state builders. Tilly defines 'coercion intensive regions' by the absence of what makes 'capital intensive regions', that is cities and commerce. Therefore, behind these two 'strategies' is one over-arching factor, the level of capitalist development. As Tilly explains, it is the level of capitalization that determines how rulers can extract resources for war-making from their populations, and the more reliable capital-accumulation is, the more regular and less intrusive extraction mechanisms (taxes being the ultimate) are available. Given this emphasis on the level of productive forces, I'm reminded of Marx's early thesis on history, from the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, that state apparatuses arise from relations of production 'appropriate to' the forces of production. I think Tilly's thesis is a vindication of the notion that the level of productive forces determines what sort of state apparatus are possible in a given period. However, he goes further in noting, like Trotsky's writings on combined and uneven development, that capital develops unevenly. Therefore, state competition forces a kind of symmetry on to states, but over an uneven playing field.

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## 8. Alex Hanna

I would like to talk about the reification of internal social dimension of the state. At several points in the book, Tilly refers to the process of how the ruler must deal with different “major social classes” in the state in constructing his own coercive agenda. However, there are two problems here. First, there is little discussion in the book of the actual mechanisms of how social classes resist and force the ruler to reshape his own coercive policy. In this sense he gives in to a more structural analysis. Secondly, the interests of major social classes are taken for granted, and we are given little or no indication of how does the process of state formation itself affect the shape of social classes in their composition and the nature of their interests within the state. I get the sense that Tilly rejects the instrumentalist view of the state, but with that rejection, do we have classes who set as their demands anything more of narrow economic interest?

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## 9. Sarah Stefanos

Tilly's *Coercion, Capital, and European States: AD 990-1990* offers a cogent, sweeping, and compelling account of how the conglomerate of coercion and capital was essential to the forming of the modern national state. Because I generally appreciate Tilly's arguments and think he makes them persuasively, I make my critiques/raise questions here understanding the constraints of attempting to tell a broad story (sometimes at the expense of depth):

- 1) *Defining the terms:* Although Tilly devotes some attention to defining what he calls a state (which is open to debate), I could not recall seeing a definition of state sovereignty in his work. I think many people have a notion of what he means by this, but the idea of “state” sovereignty has certainly changed over time, and Westphalian sovereignty, for example, differs from other types of sovereignty. In the “European cities and states” chapter, for instance, Tilly repeatedly uses the term “fragmented sovereignties;” when discussing the 990 AD time period, he observes, “the correlation between size of states and density of cities was negative; where cities swarmed, sovereignty crumbled” (40). I think Tilly is basically making the claim that because there was no formal national state as we understand it now in 990 AD, there was no concomitant *state* sovereignty. That is fine, but he should be careful to outline and explicate the forms of sovereignty that *did* exist, particularly within cities.
- 2) *The relationship between European cities and states:* This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of this relationship, but Tilly seemed to gloss over a number of details. For example, how did the centers of power in Antwerp, Milan and Naples in 1490 shift to London 300 years later(48)?

- 3) *The character and future of the national state*: In chapter 1, Tilly briefly mentions that “powerful rivals of states” – transnational networks – are posing challenges to state sovereignty (in this he seems to preface Anne-Marie Slaughter). He takes a 1992 decision by the European Economic Community to reduce economic barriers as a sign, along with the (rise of?) transnational networks to “show that states as we know them will not last forever, and may soon lose their incredible hegemony” (3-4). This is a very curious and unexpected statement coming from a theorist whose book is concerned with the rise of national states and how the model of the national state became dominant. I understand that Tilly indirectly argues that states arose somewhat indirectly from the “struggle over the means of war” (117). But despite its war-making origins, the national state – or government, if you will - has slowly emerged over the centuries to institute and inscribe itself quite forcefully over territory and population. How does Tilly, given his historical perspective, imagine a future without national states? What kind of assemblages (to use a Saskia Sassen concept) does he de envisage for the next 50 or 100 years? Is he speaking more of the lack of viability of small states, microstates (like those that predominate in the South Pacific, for instance), or about national states more broadly?
- 4) *Whitewashing and “statemaking”*: I’m not sure if I accept Tilly’s concepts, or definitions of statemaking, warmaking and protection in contrast to the “other” state domain of adjudication, distribution, and production (Chapter 4). For one, statemaking is a complicated and highly contestable concept that might include the latter three concepts. Tilly doesn’t whitewash, per se, how statemaking – or part of it – happened ruthlessly in the past (100), but he fails to give sufficient attention how such statemaking had to be negotiated with the development of a welfare system and rights system (which I think he blankets under the term “bargaining.”) How does Tilly account for the rise of modern welfare states from the more “barbaric” beginnings he describes?

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## 10. Kathryn Anderson

Tilly defines states as: “coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories” (p.1). Thus, coercion, priority over all other organizations, and territory are the three streamlined criteria. In this way, Tilly can identify the 200 states he finds for 1500. What is missing, vis a vis Weber? Legitimacy. Personally, I think the abandonment of legitimacy is an important step forward if we wish to speak about the real world rather than the ideal world. The key concept is location of the state in international context, where relations between the state and struggling social classes are driven by the need to extract resources for war. The state described in “Coercion, Capital, and European States,” eventually comes to rely on the capitalist class, but is *autonomous* from it. Their relationship is mutually dependent,

with the state needing the capitalist class to borrow huge sums of money, and the capitalist class needing the state to protect its financial interests. States without capitalist class accumulation will not have the money to survive.

Tilly seems to ignore class structure. He talks about how war determines the ultimate convergence on one type of state, the national state, but he does not address the important question of “how do class structure and the shifting relations between different sub-groups affect state formation?” If state formation is bargaining between rulers and subjects, how do the different class relations in different places affect this bargaining process and the ultimate institutions that evolve?

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## 11. Chris Carlson

A few ideas that could be worth discussing here: First, how does Tilly’s approach present a challenge to the Marxist perspectives on the state? Couldn’t warfare be given explanatory power, but still fit within a general Marxist framework in which the state engages in warfare in order to serve the interests of the ruling class? It seems likely that warfare did play a role in shaping the state, but was probably only one of many factors. As long as warfare isn’t given primacy over all other factors, as Tilly gives it, then I think giving explanatory power to warfare could be compatible with Marxist accounts.

Second, I think it would be worth discussing the ways in which Marxist approaches are superior to this approach. A couple reasons came to mind as I read. One, it seems obvious that throughout history states would have been concerned with many problems other than warfare. In particular, maintaining and upholding the legal order, property relations, infrastructure so that production can take place. In this sense the Marxist approach seems superior since the state is seen as playing the role of mediator in class society, with the task of sustaining a system based on class division/antagonistic interests.

Another reason I think Marxist approaches are superior is that by seeing warfare as a fundamental factor, it seems Tilly runs into the problem of explaining the underlying causes of warfare. His explanation seems to border on explaining war as simple human nature. Again, from this perspective the Marxist approach seems superior since it does not have to make questionable claims about human nature. By viewing the state as a product of class struggle in a class-divided society, Marxism can explain its emergence as a natural consequence of humans organizing to produce the necessities of life.

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## 12. Taylan Acar

I do not want to interrogate Tilly's book with regards to factors and variables, which are exogenous to his model. So I will try to pose questions within his model. It goes without saying that his macro-analysis does not take a variety of factors into consideration, but explain the formation of states according to interaction of military and economic development. And the outcome of this interaction is determined by the capacity of states to extract resources for war making. If wars were the key events, what made the modern states, I contend that revolutions were the other ones. What are the mechanisms that kept the states in tact, and what are the ones that lead them to failure? Intuitively, Tilly would answer this question by saying if the states would not be able to extract resources anymore, it would lead to their failure. However, he does not discuss this issue in the book. Maybe that's why he felt the urge to publish another "huge comparisons" soon after this one (*European Revolutions, 1492-1992*, 1993)

Secondly, if the national states are formed via capitalized coercion, how did the tribute-taking empires and states of fragmented sovereignty, formed via coercion-intensive and capital intensive development, respectively, became national states? In other words, if the modern national states are the result of interaction of high accumulation of capital and high concentration of coercion, how did the states followed other two paths ended up being national states? I think Tilly's model is flawed on the one hand he is arguing that the capitalized-coercion is the only way to national states, however on the other hand he does not discuss the mechanisms how the other two alternatives –the tribute-taking empires and states fragmented sovereignty- became national states, which obviously did not follow Tilly's high + high path? I think this is a key question in the discussion: what is the relationship between the three outcomes he proposes, if national states are the outcome of capitalized coercion.

Finally, I want to discuss where the resources come from specifically? Tilly's answer is (1) loans from capitalists and (2) levies on the population. But I think it makes a qualitative difference whether the money comes from the capitalists or from the population via levies. This is particularly important in terms of maintaining the capitalist accumulation. If the extraction from capitalists increases to a degree that capitalist can not invest anymore, this could have further negative implications on the reproduction of the capitalist economy, which could undermine the war-making capacity of the state.

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## 13. Aliza Lutz

In Tilly's introduction, he acknowledges potential pitfalls of a book so sweeping in scope (see the preface as well as pp. 35-36). Thus my questions will refer only to those aspects of the book that I feel are misleading or that neglect components of state-making that I believe are equally as important determinants as those which Tilly places at the core of his argument. I will also about evidence since there is such a lack of detail, which makes it difficult to evaluate the

validity of his claims that, while theoretically rich, require much more empirical support to be able to draw such vast conclusions about state-making in Europe from AD 990-1992.

First, Tilly defines coercion as the concerted application of action that causes loss or damage to person or possessions of individuals or groups aware of both the action and the potential damage (19). This definition of coercion is similar to Weber's in that there is an implicit assumption of compliance, however minimal, which leads to a question about the sources of legitimacy that various European rulers employed to secure their followers. Tilly does not discuss legitimate domination, however, and so conflict over coercion- what paths it took, how dissent was resolved, how state physiologies were shaped by each moment of sociopolitical contestation- is neglected in his analysis. Such conflicts, however, are central to the development of states. Whether there is cultural match when rulers impose their demands, when and why some rulers are perceived as more legitimate than others, and what the result is between clash and compromise, are all important components necessary to take into account in any model of state formation.

Second, though perhaps along a similar line of thought, is that Tilly's thesis conflates political power with military and economic power, and neglects ideological sources of power as a result. Ideological power matters for the securing of commitment across territories that are increasing in size and diversity; as states accumulate more through war, how do they secure the support of their populations beyond material bargaining? Since ideological power is not spatially organized, how states were able to secure loyalty beyond military and economic engagement is an important process to describe in detail, particularly because social loyalties and dependencies have always operated in contention with the state. What is the process by which the state-as-organization in Europe was able to exercise priority over all other organizations within their territories? Answering this question can perhaps lead to better understandings of the struggle even today for states such as those in sub-Saharan Africa to secure national-ideological over ethnic or other status-group-based commitments from their constituents.

Third, this neglect of analysis about the development of commitment and ideological/cultural struggles to secure dominance points toward another dilemma with Tilly's thesis, which is the assumption that the quality of coercion was the same in all areas. While Tilly nicely articulates differences and alterations in state control of capital, the varying levels among and within states of quality of coercion is less developed which leads to an overly simplistic account of why people fight, or are willing to pay for rulers to fight on their behalf. How populations are politically mobilized is an important question and it is analytically misleading to conflate coercive state structures with motives for political mobilization; in fact, this is a paradox: political mobilization cannot be realized without already-established channels to the population that induce mobilization, but this is precisely what coercive and strong state agencies are needed for in the first place.

Finally, Tilly acknowledges that he is not interested in power in the Foucauldian sense, but I believe it is important to question how it is that populations became citizens: how did people's subjectivities change such that the notion of a state serving as an organization over all others

within a given territory was not simply accepted but naturalized? This is not about capital or coercion, per se, but about the construction of a new category that became so embedded that it is today impossible to imagine a citizen-less human being and a state-less entity. Perhaps these questions/critiques can be summarized along similar lines: *Coercion, Capital, and European States* falls short in its ability to account for various micro-dynamics in the development of European states. As a result, the question inevitably arises: what historical nuances were equally as important as capital and coercion in explaining variation in the kinds of states historically prevailing in Europe and why do we see the forms of states in Europe that exist today?

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#### 14. Mitch Schwartz

We have talked before about the current economic crisis being related to the spread of globalized, highly finance-driven capitalism. Does the transition to this form of capitalism impact the role of war and/or coercion for the state?

Tilly noted that contrary to popular opinion, instances of war have not really declined over time. There has, however, been a decrease in military action among highly developed nations. He observed that this could be due to developed nations finding less costly ways to settle disputes and/or outsourcing their conflicts to less-developed nations. Can we think of war then as associated with production-driven capitalism? Does war become obsolete as national economies become interdependent within global finance capitalism? After all, it doesn't make much sense to go to war with countries whose economies are intertwined with one's own economy.

But if the lesson of the current crisis is that finance-driven capitalism is unstable without some form of production-driven capitalism bolstering it, are developed nations obliged to be involved in wars of production, resources, etc.? We've also talked of service-driven economies. Does this option free states from the interactions between production and war? Do service-driven economies depend on war/coercion less heavily than production-driven economies?

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#### 15. Yotaro Natani

Tilly's explanation of the development of states by focusing on war-making strategies over the long course of history is a compelling argument. My question, however, is if this framework is adequate for understanding the specific form and operation of the modern capitalist state. While Tilly argues that all states eventually converged toward the national state because this form of state was the best-suited for carrying out war at a competitive level, he does not say very much on whether there is a specific logic to the way capitalist states function. For example, we have learned from Offe and Poulantzas that (through somewhat different logics) the state

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functions to secure the conditions of reproducing the overall system; from Therborn that the state apparatus and state power express/possess class struggle/character. Is there something unique for Tilly about the capitalist state? His broad argument is that the state's relationship with the dominant classes strongly determined what kind of strategies the state took (coercion or capital-extraction) for war-making. It seems, then, that the state in capitalism is a relatively autonomous entity from capitalists, but is dependent on the capitalist class for resources for war-making. Does this mean, then, that the requirement of capital accumulation is always subordinated under the requirement of maintaining a powerful standing army for most capitalist national states? Tilly does expand his framework to include other tasks for which the state is responsible, such as adjudication, distribution, and production. How influential is the capitalist class in determining the level or character of the state's intervention? Or, alternatively, how autonomous is the state from capitalists in how it conducts these tasks. Some theorists we have previously read will argue that the role of capitalists is tremendously influential, and some will argue less so. But I did not see within Tilly's framework a way to articulate these specific issues of the capitalist state.

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