

## Nationalism and the State

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### Nationalist Ideology as a Material Force

The “nation” is a category of vision and division of the social world, an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983/2006) produced, enshrined, perpetuated, and sometimes contested within the horizons of concrete institutional orders and apparatuses. “Nationalism” is the political doctrine associated with struggles to achieve or defend the “sovereignty,” “independence,” or “self-determination” of a given “nation.” As such, the “nation” and “nationalism” operate at different levels of subjectivity – the former pertaining to the level of (often implicit) perceptual schema; the latter, to the level of explicit political program. Nevertheless, both categories are fundamentally “ideological constructs,” at least insofar as “ideology” is conceptualized broadly, following Althusser and Gramsci, as encompassing the “imaginary relations of individuals and classes to their conditions of existence” (Balibar 1995/2007, p.31).

Like all ideological phenomena, the “nation” and “nationalism” are “material” in a double-sense. First, these imaginings and aspirations are “material” insofar as they exist not merely in the ethereal realm of ideas, but instead, are always already “embodied in institutions and apparatuses.” Second, they are material insofar as they constitute “material forces” in history. In Gramsci’s words, “‘popular beliefs’ and similar ideas are themselves material forces” (1971, p.165). Belief in the nation, more specifically, allegiance to the national community, serves as a particularly powerful political cement, capable of producing the effect of “social cohesion,” indeed of “welding” together and fortifying existing constellations of power relations; though at other times, it can serve as powerful political dynamite as well, and in many contexts has proven capable of destroying and overthrowing existing constellations of power relations, or at least radically transforming them.

The nation is imagined as a “collective subject.” Like all subjects, it is a construct. Reification and essentialism are therefore to be avoided by critical social scientists. An important task is to elucidate the social forces and processes at work in subject construction. This in accordance with the goal of Althusser to “demonstrate the materiality and historical efficacy of ideologies,” as well as the ambitious outline sketched by him in his later work of “a general theory of ideology as the ‘interpellation of individuals as subjects’ and as a system of both public and private institutions ensuring the reproduction of social relations” (Balibar 1995/2007, p.31).

### The Nation and Other Legitimizing Myths

The national community as the basis of political allegiance constitutes one of the dominant political myths operative in ensuring the reproduction of social relations in the contemporary world.

Alongside and intertwined with other hegemonic myths of “modernity” and “post-modernity” – myths that act to “submerge consciousness,” “to domesticate” (Freire 1970/1972, pp.27-28) even to “manufacture consent.” Consent – like the will, or the subject from whom it is alleged to emanate – is never spontaneous, but is always “organized through specific institutions and always (and necessarily) backed up by the potential application of force” (Buroway 2003, pp.214-15; Gardner 2015).

Legitimizing myths abound in unequal and unjust contemporary societies. Such myths are presented to the public “by well-organized propaganda and slogans.” They help keep people passive via “subjugation,” and therefore facilitate the preservation and reproduction of the status quo. They include and are also intimately associated with the “national idea” and with “national ideals,” and have proven capable on many crucial occasions of eliciting allegiance, including even the willingness to kill and to die, perhaps especially in defense of “national security” and for the sake of the “national community.” Freire has elaborated an illustrative, if non-comprehensive, list of some of the most common domesticating and legitimating tropes or myths in and around his native Brazil. For example:

“[T]he myth that the oppressive order is a ‘free society’; the myth that all men are free to work where they wish, that if they don’t like their boss they can leave him and look for another job; the myth that this order respects human rights and is therefore worthy of esteem; the myth that anyone who is industrious can become an entrepreneur - worse yet, the myth that the street vendor is as much an entrepreneur as the owner of a large factory; the myth of the universal right of education; the myth of the equality of all men when the question ‘Do you know who you’re talking to?’ is still current among us; the myth of the heroism of the oppressor classes as defenders of ‘Western Christian civilization’; the myth of the charity and generosity of the elites; the myth that the dominant elites, ‘recognizing their duties’, promote the advancement of the people, so that the people, in a gesture of gratitude, should accept the words of the elites and conform to them; the myth that rebellion is a sin against God; the myth of private property as fundamental to personal human development; the myth of the industriousness of the oppressors and the laziness of the oppressed, as well as the myth of the natural inferiority of the latter and the superiority of the former” (1970/1972, pp.109-110).

Such myths are ubiquitous. This because they span across and correspond to three underlying “fundamental modes of ideological interpellation.” Subjects are always “subject[ed] and qualif[ied]” – “we” are told, related to, and made to recognize three kinds of

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ideas, as Göran Therborn has explained. First, ideas about “what exists, and its corollary, what does not exist” – that is, about “who we are, what the world is, what nature, society, men and women are like,” and their corollaries, what these things are not.

Second, ideas about “what is good, right, just, beautiful, attractive, enjoyable” and their opposites. The realm of desire, itself structured, “norm-alized,” if not always “normal-ized.” Third, ideas about “what is possible and impossible, our sense of the mutability of our being-in-the world,” i.e. what can be changed, as well as “the consequences of change” – these ideas, too, are patterned, our “hopes, ambitions, and fears,” are always interpellated, that is, they are “given shape,” conditioned, even constituted, by systemic social forces in which “we” subjects are always embedded and formed (Therborn 1980, p.18).

## Ideology and the Construction of the Subject

The power of ideology is most insidious indeed. It “functions by moulding personality,” subjecting “the amorphous libido of new-born human animals to a specific social order,” and qualifying “them for the differential roles they will play in society” (1978/2008, p.172). It is thus not merely a matter of doctrinal conscious convictions. As Nietzsche put it, consciousness is but a surface (1888/1992, p.35).

Nietzsche may have introduced the concept of the unconscious; but it was Freud who developed it. As Althusser reminds us, Freud “discovered for us that the real subject, the individual in his unique essence, has not the form of an ego, centred on the ‘ego’, on ‘consciousness’ or on ‘existence’” (1971/2008, p.70). A momentous discovery, that of the depth of the human psyche, though like most “discoveries,” it is most certainly a re-discovery, albeit an original synthesis and re-articulation. Momentous nonetheless, opening up the intellectual space for exploring consciousness as construct, as artefact. The human subject is thus revealed to be “de-centred by a structure which has no ‘centre’ either – except through misrecognition and projection of an imaginary ‘ego’, i.e. in ideological formations in which it ‘recognizes’ itself” (1971/2008, p.171). The imagined “centres of sovereignty” in whose likeness and image the subject is constructed and projected, these central Subjects (with a capital S) – be they “God, Father, Reason, Class, or something more diffuse” – serve to pattern the “super-ego of subjects” (with a lower-case s), providing them with “ego goals.” Conscious convictions, best interpreted as but the surface manifestation of a deeper and complex set of semi- and sub-conscious forces of interpellation at work, a double process of “subjection and qualification” (Therborn 1980, p.18).

Althusser also reminds us that desire is “the basic category of the unconscious,” that it is perhaps even “the sole meaning of the discourse of the human subject’s unconscious,” a “meaning that emerges in and through the ‘play’ of the signifying chain” (1971/2008, p.164). Conscious affiliations always corresponding with so many unconscious desires. Desire for proximity, for nearness, or for their opposites, underlying and

reinforcing “forms of social and political allegiance,” not to mention forms of social and political exclusion (Ahmed 2006, p.145).

The “self,” the “subject,” as imaginary misrecognition, and as construct, as artefact. And with the self comes its corollary, the Other. Indeed, the projection and construction of the “self” always entails the projection and construction of an Other, indeed, multiple Others. Every ego has an alter-ego, multiple alters, every ideology an alter-ideology, multiple alter-ideologies. Alter-ideologies which refer to “the ideological dimension of the form in which one relates to the Other: to perceptions of the Other and of one’s relationship to him/her,” to “them,” to those who are not “me/us,” to those who are “like me/us,” to those who are “unlike me/us,” to those who are “beneath me/us,” to those who are “above me/us” (Therborn 1980, p.28). Belonging and exclusion, it turns out, are but flips sides of the same projected and constructed subject, two sides of the “same coin.” The question of ‘the subject’ thus emerges as “crucial for politics.”

As Butler has famously insisted, “exclusionary practices” are invariably involved in the production of “juridical subjects,” though these practices are often effectively concealed, and “do not ‘show’ once the juridical structure of politics has been established.” In other words, the “subject” is always constructed in accordance “with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims.” Political analysis therefore must pay close attention to these exclusionary operations at work in the construction of the subject. If it fails to do so, if instead it takes “juridical structures” as “foundation” or starting point, it runs the risk of reifying, concealing, and naturalizing political processes of subject-formation and exclusion (1990/1999, p.5).

The self is constructed and constricted, always operating with relatively fixed and “durable” – though “transposable” – dispositions. Operating with a “habitus,” as Bourdieu has rightly emphasized, that is, with “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures,” in accordance with “principles which generate and organize practices and representations.” Principles which are “objectively adapted” to produce particular outcomes and patterns of behaviour, but which do not require or presuppose “a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (1990).

Habitus disposes and orients the subject, and it operates beneath the surface of consciousness. Something similar can be said for the Foucaultian categories of “epistemes” or “discursive formations,” which are “systems of thought and knowledge governed by rules beyond those of grammar and logic” and that work to delimit “conceptual possibilities,” in effect, to constrain and constrict “the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period.” Epistemes and discursive formations are sometimes depicted as operating “beneath the consciousness of individual subjects,” though – given Foucault’s famous rejection of psychoanalysis, it would seem more accurate to say that they serve to fix its horizons (Stanford 2003/2013).

Ideology, broadly conceived, includes not only (1) conscious convictions, but also (2) subconscious, even subliminal, symbolic associations and projections; (3) habitus, durable dispositions and

orientations; and (4) epistemes or discursive formations. Consciousness revealed not only as a surface, but as a bounded surface, de-limited by definite frontiers.

The notion of durable dispositions returns our attention again to the “material existence of ideology,” that it always “exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices” (Althusser 1971/2008, pp.39-40). These “apparatuses” crucially include the body itself. Ideology is thus material in the literal sense that it is embodied, incorporated, incarnated, made flesh as well.

## Bio-Power and Normalization as “Modern” Techniques of Social Control

Another Foucaultian category – that of bio-power – deserves mention in this regard. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault vividly depicted the emergence of bio-power in eighteenth-century Europe as an innovative “technique of power,” one “utilized by very diverse institutions,” spanning across “the family and the army, schools and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies,” and working to sustain the forces and relations of “economic development,” acting simultaneously “as factors of segregation and social hierarchization,” facilitating and guaranteeing “relations of domination and effects of hegemony.” Bio-power as a quintessentially “modern” technique of social control, achieved through the “investment of the body, its valorization, and the distributive management of its forces” (1978/1990, p.141).

Along with bio-power – indeed, as a consequence of it – came “the growing importance assumed by the action of the norm.” The pursuit of control over life, an ambitious new task, required “continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms,” which in turn effected a profound transformation in European institutions of justice. The law came to operate “more and more as a norm,” and the judicial system was progressively “incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory.” The result: the normalizing society, as corollary and historical outcome of the new “technology of power centred on life” (Foucault 1978/1990, p.144). Disciplinary control and normalization as “distinctive features of modern power,” the “concern with what people have not done,” with “failure to reach required standards,” the obsession with correcting “deviant behaviour,” so pervasive in the contemporary world (Stanford 2003/2013).

The impulse to “normalize” and the obsession with “deviance” thus go together. “Normalization” is always an unfinished project. Indeed, the sign of “normalising society” is not “that everyone becomes the same, but that more and more people deviate in some way or other from evolving standards of normality, opening themselves through these multiple deviations to disciplinary strategies of neutralization” (Connolly 1991/2002, p.150).

As Sayer and Paige have noted, “Foucault’s exploration of the disciplinary mechanisms of modernity” contains striking parallels with Max Weber’s “notion of the disciplined self of ascetic Protestantism.” In his classic, *The Protestant Ethic*, “Weber famously argued the ideal self for capitalist social relations is the disciplined, ascetic, industrious, frugal and

rational personal ideal of Puritanism and its sectarian offshoots.” More recently, Gorski has argued that the same can be said for “the ideal citizen of the modern nation-state and for the employees of its bureaucratic apparatus” as well. Both accounts, like Foucault, emphasize the uniquely “modern” emphasis on attaining “strictly regulated, reserved, self-control” (in Paige 2000, p.4).

The subject is constructed, constricted, and normalized; it is itself a process and product, a “consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity.” But “signification” is never a “founding act.” Rather, it is produced through “a regulated process of repetition,” one that “both conceals itself and enforces its rules through the production of substantializing effects.” The subject is therefore constituted, but never definitively determined (Butler 1990/1999, p.185).

To insist upon the social construction of the subject thus does not entail any ultimate ontological denial of agency. It does, however, require a renunciation of the possibility that agency could ever be exercised outside of power relations. As Foucault puts the point: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1978/1990, p.95). Therborn, too, has likewise insisted that the “formation of humans by every ideology ... according to whatever criteria” always involves the double process of “subjection and qualification.” More precisely, a dialectical double process, through which, subjects, “[a]lthough qualified by ideological interpellations,” also “become qualified to ‘qualify’ these in turn” (1980, p.17).

Even so, the effects of interpellation within systems of domination should not be underestimated, either. The transformation from amorphous libido into human child is one which requires survival, one which requires “having escaped all childhood deaths, many of which are human deaths, deaths punishing the failure of humanization.” All adults have passed this test. We are all “the never forgetful witnesses, and very often the victims, of this victory,” we all bear in our “most clamorous parts, the wounds, weaknesses and stiffnesses that result from this struggle for human life or death.” Even if some of us, perhaps “the majority, have emerged more or less unscathed – or at least give this out to be the case.” Still, other “veterans bear the marks throughout their lives.” Some will eventually succumb, dying from the old battles, though “at some remove,” after the festering “old wounds” burst out again in a fit of “psychotic explosion,” in “madness, the ultimate compulsion of a ‘negative therapeutic reaction’.” As for the “normal” majority, their demise is not so spectacular; instead, it usually takes “the guise of an ‘organic’ decay.” As Althusser disturbingly concludes: “Humanity only inscribes its official deaths on its war memorials ...” (1971/2008, p.157). The “fallen heroes” at least get remembered, if only tendentiously, that is, officially and superficially. By contrast, we who survive and are ground down by the everyday struggle, whether we burn out or slowly decay and fade away, we are destined to be forgotten.

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## The Machinery of Self-Construction

Having thus sketched the scope and effects of interpellation, let us now turn to examine more closely what Foucault referred to as “the machinery of production,” in which “manifold relations of force ... take shape and come into play,” together working to produce the subject (1978/1990, p.94). Althusser used the term “State Apparatuses (SAs)” to specify such “machinery,” and distinguished between Repressive and Ideological “SAs.”

Althusser’s distinction runs the risk of reifying a misleading binary between institutions of coercion and institutions of consent, as if hegemony pertained to a “pole of consent in contrast to another of coercion.” However, the Gramscian notion of hegemony, more accurately conceived, reflects always a “synthesis of consent and coercion” (Carnoy 1984, p.73).

However, the balance of consent and coercion varies systematically across institutional arenas. Those arenas that function most explicitly and prominently in terms of physical coercion and the threat of violence – institutions such as the Army, the Police, and the Prisons – these constitute the Repressive State Apparatus. Which is not to say that they function by physical violence alone. To the contrary, as Weber rightly insisted, the effectiveness of the Repressive Apparatus itself always relies to a significant degree on issues of obedience and morale among the rank and file.

Other institutions of the State proper rely on a more balanced mix of coercion and consent. These include “the Government, the Administration, the Courts,” all of which are referred to by Althusser as both Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses.

Yet other apparatuses rely less immediately still upon physical coercion, and are engaged more directly with the “manufacturing of consent.” These institutional arenas are what Althusser had in mind by “Ideological State Apparatuses,” among which he included the following suggestive list: (1) the religious ISA (the system of the different Churches); (2) the educational apparatus (2) the system of the different public and private schools); (3) the family ISA; (4) the legal ISA; (5) the political ISA (the political system, including the different Parties); (6) the trade union ISA; (7) the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.); and (8) the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.) (1971/2008, pp.17-18).

For Althusser, like Gramsci, “hegemony is everywhere,” though it manifests itself “in different forms” across different institutions and institutional arenas. The State proper is enveloped within a broader “apparatus of hegemony,” one that encompasses nominally “private” institutions in so-called “civil society” (Carnoy 1984, p.73).

Althusser goes farther than Gramsci in elaborating an expanded concept of the State, though in making the case he relies quite heavily on appeals to Gramsci’s authority. Indeed, he portrays Gramsci as having insisted that “the distinction between the public and the private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law;” that it is thus only “valid in the (subordinate) domains in which

bourgeois law exercises its ‘authority’;” and that therefore, the State itself is most accurately considered not “public,” but instead, as the “precondition for the distinction between private and public” (1971/2008, pp.17-18).

Althusser thus invokes Gramsci’s authority in order, effectively, to “obliterate[e] the peculiar apartness of the state from the rest of society.” In so doing, he is certainly treading on heretical terrain within the Marxist tradition. After all, the apartness of the State had “always been regarded as a distinctive feature of the state in the theory of historical materialism,” as Therborn would insist. Indeed, according to Therborn, it “is precisely because of the cleavage of society into a separate state body and other social institutions that the state is bound up with the division of society into classes” (1978, p.172).

With the paradigm of historical materialism having entered into a degenerative phase, if not yet terminal decline, the heresy involved in Althusser’s interpretation of Gramsci has been largely forgotten, or at least its significance seems no longer so obvious. Even if the specificity of State institutions, narrowly conceived – their apartness from the rest of society – is crucial for the reproduction of class divisions in the rest of society, the thrust of Althusser’s expansionary conceptualization of the Ideological State Apparatuses remains forceful, persuasive, even clear: nominally “private” institutions can certainly perform important, delegated functions in the ideological construction of the subject.

## The State as Educator

Moreover, Althusser’s interpretation of Gramsci is not bereft of textual support either, especially given Gramsci’s own shifting and ambiguous conceptualization of the State, and of the State’s role in the production and reproduction of hegemony. On the whole, Gramsci did hold an expansive conception of the State. He viewed “the State as an extension of the hegemonic apparatus – as part of the system developed by the bourgeoisie to perpetuate and expand their control of society in the context of class struggle” (Carnoy 1984, p.74). In this crucial respect, Gramsci’s analysis converges with that of Foucault. He announced not merely an expansive State, but an ever-expanding one, a State progressively creeping in to control every aspect of life. More directly and explicitly than Foucault, Gramsci attributes this transformation to the rise of the class project of the bourgeoisie, a “revolutionary” class who he believed had “revolutionized” the State. According to Gramsci:

“The revolution which the bourgeois class has brought into the conception of law, and hence into the function of the State, consists especially in the will to conform (hence ethnicity of the law and of the State). The previous ruling classes were essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to construct an organic passage from the other classes into their own, i.e., to enlarge their class sphere ‘technically’ and ideologically: their conception was that of a closed caste. The bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous



movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating to its own cultural and economic level. The entire function of the State has been transformed; the State has become an 'educator', etc." (1971, p.261).

Struggle for control and revolutionary expansion of the State Apparatus thus characterized the ascent of the bourgeoisie in Europe. As an ascendant class, its emergent hegemony was increasingly manifested in the form of the state. Indeed, it had to be. "The State, as an instrument of bourgeois domination" had to be "an intimate participant in the struggle for consciousness." The bourgeois project could never depend on "the development of the forces of production" alone, but instead required "hegemony in the arena of consciousness" as well. As a result, the State came to be progressively instrumentalized and "involved in this extension;" its role expanded well beyond that of the "the coercive enforcement of bourgeois power" (Carnoy 1984, p.76). In a word, it turned into educator. As Gramsci would again insist:

"In reality, the State must be conceived of as an 'educator', in as much as it tends precisely to create a new type or level of civilization. Because one is acting essentially on economic forces, reorganizing and developing the apparatus of economic production, creating a new structure, the conclusion must not be drawn that superstructural factors should be left to themselves, to develop spontaneously, to a haphazard and sporadic germination. The State, in this field, too, is an instrument of 'rationalisation', of acceleration and of Taylorisation. It operates according to a plan, urges, incites, solicits, and 'punishes'; for once the conditions are created in which a certain way of life is 'possible', then 'criminal action or omission' must have a punitive sanction, with moral implications, and not merely be judged generically as 'dangerous'. The Law is the repressive and negative aspect of the entire positive, civilising activity undertaken by the State. The 'prize-giving' activities of individuals and groups, etc., must also be incorporated in the conception of the Law; praiseworthy and meritorious activity is rewarded, just as criminal actions are punished (and punished in original ways, bringing 'public opinion' as a form of sanction" (1971, p.247).

"Public opinion," not merely manufactured; but manufactured and deployed as a new form of sanction. The institutional arenas of the ISA's thus come into focus as critical sites for concrete political struggles, commanding heights to be controlled or captured, for the purpose of manufacturing and reproducing the horizons of consciousness, not to mention the rhythms and reflexes of embodied subconscious desires, and with these, the terms of consent. The ISA's as critical sites of struggle for the institutionalization, the materialization, of different ideologies, always organically linked with different social forces in conflict, in struggle – especially different social classes.

## The Doctrine of Historical Materialism and the Dominant Ideology Thesis

The "bottom line" of the historical materialist thesis regarding ideology, classically conceived, largely hinges on this last point. In Marx's felicitous turn of phrase from the German Ideology, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" (1845/1978, p.172). Or, as Therborn would reformulate the idea, perhaps more precisely: in class societies "the patterning of a given set of ideologies" is always "overdetermined by class relations of strength and by the class struggle." This goes for all ideologies, not just explicitly ideologies about class. For example, "if we want to explain the different relative positions of Catholicism and nationalism in contemporary France and Italy," historical materialism thesis directs us to "look at how these ideologies have been linked with different classes, and at the outcome of struggles between these classes" (1980, p.39).

Laclau and Mouffe are right to notice subtle but important differences between the "classic problematic" of historical materialism and more recent reformulations such as those advanced by Althusser or Therborn, reformulations heavily indebted to Gramsci. In this regard, Laclau and Mouffe insist upon "two fundamental displacements" brought about by Gramsci. The first, which we have already emphasized, Gramsci's "conception of the materiality of ideology" – that is, that ideology is always "an organic and relational whole, embodied in institutions and apparatuses," and that, furthermore, it serves to "weld together" and "unify" disparate fragments of society into "cohesive" social forces, indeed, into "historic blocs" themselves organized "around a number of base articulatory principles." The second, related displacement: for Gramsci, "organic ideologies" never represent "a purely classist and closed view of the world;" instead, they are always formed "through the articulation of elements which, considered in themselves," cannot be reduced to "class belonging" (1985, p.67).

However, Laclau and Mouffe mislead insofar as they suggest that the irreducibility of "elements of articulation" to "class belonging" should lead to neo-Gramscians to stress agency and contingency, rather than over-determination by intersecting but irreducible systems of domination. In this latter vein, critical race and feminist theorists have persuasively chastised the classical exponents of the doctrine of historical materialism for their tendency to vulgar economic reductionism, not to mention their excessively narrow and commodified conception of toil. "Historic blocs" and "counter blocs," it turns out, are never only embedded within class relations and are never only organically linked to specific social classes, classically conceived. Instead, they are always simultaneously embedded within multiple, intersecting constellations of power relations. More specifically, they are always organically linked to subjects and subjectivities interpellated not only by formal class relations, but by ethno-racialized and gendered categories of consciousness and of praxis as well.

In a word, contending "blocs" are always located and recognizable only within intersecting, irreducibly interdependent systems of domination, they are destined to

inhabit social landscapes structured by intersecting constellations of power relations, constellations currently categorized and divided by three main, globally-coordinated, regionally-patterned, interdependent systems of domination: class, ethno-racialized and gendered hierarchies.

## The State and the Concrete Coordination of “Fictive Universalities”

If ideology “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals,” a preliminary task for social science is to decipher and delucidate the “structure of misrecognition” operative in a given context (Althusser 1971/2008, pp.37, 171). To pursue a hermeneutic of de-masking the “fictive universality” of hegemonic ideologies (Balibar 1995/2007, p.47). Even to purposively disenchant “the imaginary participant in an imaginary sovereignty,” to awaken her to the cold, disturbing, even brutal reality that she has been “robbed of [her] real life,” only “filled with an unreal universality” (in Paige 2000, p.4). For at the level of consciousness, at least, ideology primarily manifests itself as “the dream of an impossible universality” (Balibar 1995/2007, p.48).

The State provides a crucial terrain for struggles to produce, reproduce, and propagate precisely such impossible dreams, such fictive universalities. Indeed, according to Balibar, the State “is a manufacturer of abstractions precisely by virtue of the unitary fiction (or consensus) which it has to impose on society.” In the process, the State tends to dawn the mask of the “nation,” though underneath this mask it always remains “a fictive community,” even if its “power of abstraction,” its power to “universalize particularity,” serves to compensate somewhat “for the real lack of community in relations between individuals” (1995/2007, p.48).

This peculiar power of the State, its ability to represent and produce “fictive universalities,” renders the state a most useful instrument and therefore site of struggles to perpetuate and/or transform the horizons of contestation, the terms of ideological hegemony, in a given context. Privileged minorities manage to mask their specific advantages, to represent their particular wills as “the general will,” to portray their particular interests as the “national interest,” and thereby to mystify the masses, to exercise a magical, quasi-hypnotic power. This is the power of ideological hegemony. It expresses itself – indeed, is embodied – most manifestly in the State machinery, which in turn can be subdivided into so many institutional instruments and arenas, capable of being effectively employed to mesmerize, to mis-recognize, and to otherwise hide structures of advantage, indeed of domination, covered over and concealed in the heavy romantic mist of “fictive unity.”

Thus we return to the State’s propensity to be instrumentalized in pursuit of always incomplete projects of “ideological hegemony,” projects protagonized by contending groups in society. In pursuit of “ideological hegemony,” through which “the development and expansion of the particular group” come to be “conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the ‘national’ energies;” per chance a performance, through which “the

dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups ...” (Gramsci 1971, pp.161, 182)

The concrete coordination of collective illusions, the manufacturing of collective fantasies, among the central educational tasks carried out by the State. The propagation of the “semblance” that “the rule of a certain class is only the rule of certain ideas,” and with it the “sublimation of particular interests in the general interest,” carried out by loyal ideologues, in collaboration with, organically linked to, particular State apparatuses. Ideologues whose most remarkable quality with all too disturbing frequency comes down to their ability to “mystify themselves, ‘in their questions’, i.e. in their mode of thinking ...” (Balibar 1995/2007, p.50).

The State as conductor in the orchestration and production of what Gramsci called “common sense,” of “the sense held in common,” of the proto-typical conformist underpinnings working to “ground,” to produce, and to reproduce “passive quiescence” at the very least, and more optimally, “active consent.” “Common sense,” which is frequently “constructed out of long-standing practices of cultural socialization,” and which thus can be effectively mobilized to “mask other realities,” to conceal specific patterns of advantage, to legitimate specific patterns of disadvantage (Harvey 2005, p.39).

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Design/layout by: Tony Shephard

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