

‘Authoritarian Neoliberalism’: Crisis, the state, and the challenge of periodisation

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Police clash with miners, Tilmanstone, Kent, September 4th 1984
(PA Images, 2017)

This thesis is dedicated to all those who have struggled under the violence of neoliberalism

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My mother submitted her Master of Letters thesis when I was four years old. Now, as I come to the end of this Master of Philosophy thesis, I have a whole new appreciation for her balancing of work, family, and postgraduate studies. Well done, Mum. Although not nearly as impressive, this process has not been easy or straightforward, and there is no doubt that without the help of many people along the way, this thesis would not exist.

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MDJR.

Declaration

This is to certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Ryan', consisting of two distinct cursive-style signatures.

Matthew Ryan, 23rd June 2017

List of Acronyms

EC – European Commission
ECSC – European Coal and Steel Community
EMS – European Monetary System
EMU – European Monetary Union
ESM – European Social Model
ESMe – European Stability Mechanism
EU – European Union
GFC – Global Financial Crisis
IMF – International Monetary Fund
NUM – British National Union of Miners
UK – United Kingdom
US – United States of America
WTO – World Trade Organisation

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Abstract

The current context is one marked by twin crises: a crisis of neoliberal capitalism, and a crisis of the liberal-democratic state. The failure of the western economies to overcome deflation, rising public and private debt, high unemployment and low investment rates in the post-Global Financial Crisis has fuelled debate on whether neoliberalism remains a viable way to organise the economy. Concurrently, the aspiration of democracy is facing multiple challenges: from the failure of referenda to instigate democratic change, as seen in Greece; and conversely the success of referenda to limit political freedoms, as seen in Turkey. We are seeing rising anti-establishment and anti-statist movements across the world, alongside the use of constitutional and legal mechanisms to limit the scope of democratic politics. Responding to these material conditions, the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ has been presented as a way to understand the current conjuncture. But surely neoliberalism – and capitalism more generally – always presented with authoritarian tendencies? On what grounds can it be argued, that there has been a ‘qualitative change’ in the way the state attempts to cohere the neoliberal project post-2007? This thesis argues that by separating the current moment of authoritarianism from a broader history of authoritarian tendencies, a ‘violent abstraction’ is made; the actual causal mechanisms producing the current crisis are obscured. If this periodisation is jettisoned, however, ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ presents the potential to refocus attention on the way that authoritarian state transformations *across neoliberal history* have dialectically strengthened *and* weakened the state. This dialectic offers a new perspective on the origins of the current crisis of the state, as apparent in countries as diverse as Britain, the US, and Hungary. By moving past the ‘violent abstraction’ of this periodisation, a renewed focus on state violence under neoliberalism offers a real contribution to our understanding of the current moment.

Introduction

We are witnessing the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism, which is rooted in the reconfiguring of the state into a less democratic entity through constitutional and legal changes that seek to insulate it from social and political conflict (Bruff, 2014: 113).

The exceptional thing about the type of government called democracy is that it demanded people see that nothing which is human is carved in stone, that everything is built on the shifting sands of time and place... Forgetting [this], or remembering the wrong things, is dangerous for democracy, [and] things that seem timeless are never so (Keane, 2009: xii-iii).

The current context is one marked by twin crises: a crisis of neoliberal capitalism, and a crisis of the liberal-democratic state. The failure of the economy to overcome deflation, rising public and private debt, high unemployment and low investment rates in the post-Global Financial Crisis has fuelled debate as to whether neoliberalism remains a viable system of economic management. Concurrently, democracy has faced multiple challenges, from the failure of referenda to instigate democratic change, as seen in Greece, and inversely the success of referenda to limit political freedoms, as seen in Turkey. These salient moments of authoritarianism are paralleled by rising anti-establishment and anti-statist movements across the world, and the use of constitutional and legal mechanisms to limit the scope of democratic politics – all of which constitutes a deep crisis of the state, in many places. Responding to these material conditions, ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ has been presented as a way to understand the twin crisis of the current conjuncture. ‘Authoritarian neoliberalism’ was first put forward by Bruff (2014) to understand changes to the state and the durability of neoliberalism. In particular, Bruff (2014: 116, 124) has noted a ‘shift toward constitutional and legal mechanisms and a move away from seeking consent’ in the construction and reproduction of neoliberal capitalism, in a process that ‘simultaneously strengthens *and* weakens the state’. As a conceptual apparatus with which to understand our current

conjuncture, ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ has since been developed further in the edited volume *States of Discipline: Authoritarian neoliberalism and the contested reproduction of capitalist order* (Tansel, 2017). This thesis aims to develop a sympathetic critique of this emergent concept: critical in the sense that ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ lacks conceptual and historical specificity; sympathetic in the sense that Bruff *et al* offer a suggestive reading of the history of neoliberalism, and through that history shine light on some of the generative mechanisms of the current crisis.

Context

Claims that the state *and* the economy are both in crisis, and that these changes demand new conceptual tools, are contentious – consider briefly the context from which these claims have emerged. Across the global North, voter turn-out is decreasing, while popular opinion is increasingly anti-democratic and anti-establishmentarian (Mair, 2013). Similarly, just as many citizens have become disconnected from political society, or the state, the state has been changing itself: trade agreements are isolating certain policy levers away from democratic control (Sinclair, 2015); balanced budget amendments have constitutionally limited the scope of fiscal policy in various countries, including the US, Hong Kong, Germany, and Switzerland (Danniger, 2002: 8); resounding national referenda have been over-ruled when in conflict with regional agreements, as we saw in Greece in 2015 (Sotiris, 2017); and conversely, other referenda have been used to paradoxically limit the scope of democracy, as seen in Turkey in 2017 (Shaheen, 2017). Turkey is among a number of ‘democratic’ states to be seen as transforming along authoritarian lines, such as Hungary and the Philippines. Hungary has recently seen academic freedoms curtailed, and the detention of asylum seekers, amongst other limitations of political freedoms (Karasz, 2017; Lyman, 2017). Under President Duterte in the Philippines, state violence has been even more extreme, with widespread claims of extrajudicial killing, and clear violations of the independence of the legal system (Santos, 2016; Apostol, 2017). Far from seeing the ‘end of history’ and the triumph of liberal democracy as projected at the close of the Cold War (Fukuyama, 1992), we have rather seen the ‘revenge of history’ (Milne, 2013), as both capitalism *and* democracy have fallen into question.

Responding to these material conditions, and others besides, a swathe of literature has emerged, to consider the current crisis of ‘democracy’ (for example, Anderson, 2006; Hay, 2007; Keane, 2009; Allan, 2014; Brown, 2015; Streeck, 2015). Without entering an extended consideration of the nature of democracy, whether it exists or can exist, we can at least note the real changes occurring across states whereby popular input into policy making has been curtailed in significant ways. Even the blunt quantitative methodology of *Freedom House* identifies the erosion of democratic processes around the world – after a steady rise in the number of countries rated as ‘free’ during the 20th century, 2016 saw the eleventh consecutive year of decline in ‘freedom’ (Freedom House, 2017). The epigraph above, drawn from John Keane’s *The Life and Death of Democracy* (2009: xii), emphasises that democracy, as a form of social organisation, is historically specific, rather than a universalising norm: ‘nothing that is human is carved in stone [and] everything is built on the shifting sands of time and place’. There have been, are, and will continue to be alternative forms of social organisation. Is democracy’s star on the wane?

This is a complex question to address. Runciman (2013) argues that the nature of democracy makes it particularly difficult to diagnose the severity of its crises – an illustration of this is the long history of premature proclamations of democratic demise:

Democracies have always been full of people worried that things are about to go wrong, that the system is in crisis and its rivals are waiting to pounce. The onward march of democracy has been accompanied by a constant drumbeat of intellectual anxiety. Maybe all the good news is just too good to be true. Maybe democracy’s run of luck is about to come to an end. The political history of democracy is a success story. But the intellectual history of democracy is very hard to reconcile with this. It is preoccupied with the prospect of failure (Runciman, 2013: xi-xii).

Whether one accepts that democracy is ‘successful’ or not, Runciman points to the paradox of seemingly continuous claims that the end of democracy is just around the corner, and the historical evidence that it has not (yet) ended. We would be wise to keep this caution in mind. This is raised to reiterate the purpose of this thesis: we are not here to empirically prove (or disprove) that democracy *is* in crisis. Rather, the aim is to probe and historicise the claims made by others; to consider whether claims about the current crisis reify general tendencies – that is, overemphasise the novelty of current developments – and in so doing obscure generative mechanisms through ‘violent abstraction’.

Parallel to the crisis of democracy, the continued reproduction of capitalism is in doubt, and yet also intractably difficult to predict. Despite the difficulties associated with other arguments that capitalism has surely run its course, such as Mandel's 'late capitalism' (1975), we now have the end of capitalism being anticipated again, by the likes of Streeck (2016) and Mason (2016), among others. Not only is there a lack of accord on capitalism's prospects, we also disagree on its history; in addition to the difficulty of predicting the prospects of capitalism, the question of periodising capitalist development is similarly problematic. The past few decades of political economic research have been marked by continuous 'endings' and 'beginnings'. As noted by Albo, we have in recent years heard of 'the end of corporatism, the end of the nation state, the end of Modell Deutschland, and so on' (Albo, 2005: 63). Those announcing forms of 'the new', meanwhile, have provided 'numerous forecasts of a 'new capitalism': post-Fordism, cosmopolitan democracy, diversified quality production, the borderless world, and so on' (*ibid*). If each of these claims is indeed true, then it would seem that history is always ending and beginning, and never simply being, in which case, why bother periodising at all? Others argue against the periodisation of capitalist development for other reasons entirely, such as Althusser (2015: 181), who argued that our social system changes not *as a whole*, but that different spheres of social organisation have different rates and logics of change. The appropriate periodisation of capitalist history is hugely contentious, with some eschewing the legitimacy of the task entirely.

'Authoritarian Neoliberalism'

The recent claim that we are witnessing the 'rise of authoritarian neoliberalism' (Bruff, 2014) responds to each of these issues – the apparent crisis of contemporary democratic capitalism, the difficulty of accurately diagnosing how critical democracy's ailments are, and the messiness of periodising capitalism. Responding especially to the durability of neoliberalism in Europe in the face of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008, Bruff suggested that this resilience should be understood as being supported by particular changes to the state, 'rooted in the reconfiguring of the state into a less democratic entity through constitutional and legal changes that seek to insulate it from social and political conflict' (Bruff, 2014: 113). This claim – the specificity, accuracy, and utility thereof – is

the central concern of this thesis. Crucially, these changes to states since 2007 (i.e. during and after the GFC) are seen, by those who present the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism, as ‘qualitatively distinct’ to historical examples of authoritarianism, despite the role authoritarianism has played in the history of neoliberalisation, and the history of capitalist development more generally. Is this periodisation-claim an accurate or useful one?

Consider Bruff’s argument in more detail:

In the absence of a hegemonic aura, neoliberal practices are less able to garner the consent or even the reluctant acquiescence necessary for more “normal” modes of governance. Of particular importance... is the increasing frequency with which constitutional and legal changes, in the name of economic “necessity”, are seeking to reshape the purpose of the state and associated institutions (Bruff, 2014: 116).

‘Authoritarian neoliberalism’ is an emerging concept, but has been quickly and widely embraced as a way to understand the current conjuncture. Considering contextual developments in Hungary, Turkey, Egypt, Brazil, Greece, and the Philippines (and other places besides), one can certainly appreciate the heuristic resonance of the concept as a way to explain the apparently-contradictory process of neoliberalisation and rising authoritarianism. The most significant example of the embrace of the framework is in the recent volume, *States of Discipline: Authoritarian neoliberalism and the contested reproduction of capitalist order*¹, edited by Cemal Burak Tansel (2017). ‘Authoritarian neoliberalism’ is a conceptual framework that attempts to explain the current crises of democracy and capitalism as internally related, and generative of a marked pivot in the way the state manages the continued reproduction of capitalist social relations. The article ‘The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism’ (Bruff, 2014) has been cited one hundred and four times²; eight of these citations emerged in May 2017 alone, indicating the speed at which the concept is becoming established. Since 2014, the concept has been featured in several national and international conferences³. The ‘context of authoritarian

¹ Contributions to this volume have spanned various empirical applications, including: food production as a tool for social disciplining (Rioux, 2017); the migration crisis of the Mediterranean (Manunza, 2017); the anti-democratic nature of the European Social Model framework (Bruff, 2017); the Greek austerity crisis and the implications for sovereignty under the EMS (Sotiris, 2017); the continued entrenchment of the current Erdoğan government in Turkey (Ozden, Akca and Bekmen, 2017); the curtailment of the Arab Spring in Egypt and Morocco (De Smet and Bogaert, 2017); patronage networks and corruption across the Cambodian state (Springer, 2017); and the authoritarian neoliberalism of China’s marketization (Lim, 2017).

² According to Google Scholar, at time of writing.

³ A series of panels on ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ were planned for the European International Studies Association conference in Izmir, September 2016, before the conference was cancelled due to turmoil in Turkey at the time. The

neoliberalism’ (McBride and Mitrea, 2017: 1) is becoming a common frame for the current context, and yet very little – if any – of this conceptual embrace is of a critical bent. These scholastic developments are, themselves, expressions of the material conditions of the current conjuncture. The significance of all of this is that there is a growing trend to *understand the material conditions of the current conjuncture through the lens of authoritarian neoliberalism*.

It is important to note that ‘authoritarian’ here is used in a way that differs from its meaning in orthodox political-science: ‘Government distinguished by a high degree of state power and discretion and, most often, the absence of procedures for popular consent or for guarding individual rights’ (Calhoun, 2002, online). Rather than seeing authoritarianism and democracy as antithetical, a more nuanced understanding is presented. Drawing on the concept of ‘authoritarian statism’ (Poulantzas, 1978) – and on Stuart Hall’s ‘authoritarian populism’ (1988) – the two forms of social organisation can be seen as potentially congruent, albeit in a contradictory fashion. Rather than simply being defined through the absence of elections, for Poulantzas (1978: 203) authoritarian statism was marked by ‘intensified state control over every sphere of socio-economic life combined with radical decline of the institutions of political democracy’. As Tansel argues, we should not

follow a definition of authoritarianism in which the coercive apparatuses of the state are privileged and understood as *external* to liberal democracy. Subscribing to a coercion-oriented understanding of authoritarianism risks... obscuring the ways in which authoritarian state power is enmeshed with capital accumulation... As opposed to enshrining an ossified separation of liberal democracy and authoritarianism, we maintain that it is important to recognize that state responses to the economic and political crises of capitalism can – and increasingly do – assume similar forms both in formal democracies and in traditionally defined authoritarian regimes. Accordingly, the authoritarian bent in state practices can work in tandem with institutions and legal frameworks that sustain a ‘minimalist’ democracy’ (Tansel, 2017: 11, emphasis in original).

In this sense, we should not see ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ as an *alternative to democracy*, waiting to take the place of democracy as this supposedly outmoded form of government withers, but rather a constitutive part of the current crisis of capitalist democracies.

concept was also featured on two panels at the concurrent International Initiative for the Promotion of Political Economy conference, in Lisbon. An early form of the argument made in this thesis were presented at the latter.

If the neoliberalism of the current conjuncture has changed into a more authoritarian form, however, this begs the question of what is ‘neoliberalism’ in general; and what is it about ‘neoliberalism’ that allows or facilitates change? Dedicated monographs could (and have been) written, attempting to answer each of these questions. But while an exhaustive account cannot be given here, an indicative sketch of the concept must be given. Thankfully, Bruff and I share a significant amount of common ground in relation to both of these questions. Let us first consider ‘what is neoliberalism’.

‘Neoliberalism’ is difficult to define. It has been described variously as: a form of governmentality, which reshapes the subject, emphasising competition as the principle against which all decisions should be made (Dardot and Laval, 2013); as the practice of reducing the role of the state in all spheres of life, instead prioritising the market as the main tool of social organisation (Steger and Roy, 2010); as an institutional response to the crisis of the 1970s, which attempted to solve issues of inflation and overly-aggressive wage claims (Braithwaite, 2008); as an ontological and epistemological project, centred on the positivist claims of neoclassical economics (Mirowski, 2013); and as many other things besides. Although each of these distinct definitions of neoliberalism holds some germ of truth, they are also ultimately flawed (see Konings, 2010; Cahill, 2014).

Against these definitions of neoliberalism, this thesis takes the historical materialist conception as the most useful – often discussed under the rubric of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Cahill, 2010; Ryan, 2015). In this view, neoliberalism is seen as a form of economic and political management, defined by a reshaping of the state. This reshaping is paradoxical, in that increased marketisation in some spheres – the provision of social services, especially – is contradicted by active state intervention in other spheres – such as defence, and the subsidisation of fossil fuel mining and power generation. This approach takes particular issue with those who see neoliberalism as a reduction in the size or power of the state (i.e. Steger and Roy, 2010). The state does, of course, shift and change over time, and in various places. The specificity of this approach is drawn from the class-based nature of these intervention, as well as their relationship to previous phases of class struggle. Emblematic of this view is David Harvey, who famously argued that neoliberalism should be seen as a ‘political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites’ (Harvey, 2005: 19), after the protracted crisis of accumulation of the

1970s (see Brenner, 2006). Importantly, Bruff's treatment of neoliberalism falls within this frame, as he joined scholars such as Konings (2010) and Cahill (2007) in rejecting those approaches to neoliberalism which 'continue to pay lip service to neoliberalism's rhetorical and ideological valorization of the "free market"' (Bruff, 2014: 114), instead emphasising the central role of the state in shaping and driving the process of neoliberalisation.

Key to this historical-materialist conception of 'actually existing neoliberalism' is an understanding of the unevenness of neoliberalism. In fact, this approach rejects the idea of an 'ideal-typical' example or case of neoliberalism, or even the idea that the neoliberal project could ever be 'finished'. It is for this reason that 'neoliberalisation' is emphasised as a *process* – one which is patterned by the context in which it unfolds, resulting in both spatial and temporal variegation. It has been noted that neoliberalism both creates crises, and then uses those crises to 'fail forward', and shift course (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner, 2012). This author firmly agrees with this approach, which treats neoliberalism as a process rather than a fixed state. While we cannot get into the detail of what mechanisms might drive and shape this process over time and space, this aspect of the 'actually existing' neoliberalism framework sits uneasily with Bruff's concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. If neoliberalism has always changed over time, then ought we disaggregate the neoliberal phase of capitalist development into sub-periods? This brings us to two points: 1) this thesis, and the work of Bruff, have a broadly similar understanding of neoliberalism, both falling within the frame of 'actually existing neoliberalism', and 2) that this common ground raises again the question of why this current period should be elevated through the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'.

Moving neoliberalism-in-general aside, let us remind ourselves of the central claims surrounding 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. Bruff's concept rests of four key claims: 1) that neoliberalism has lost its 'hegemonic aura' in the post-2007 context (2014: 116); 2) that the state has managed this crisis by transforming along increasingly authoritarian lines, by both foreclosing debate, as well as coercively repressing protest (*ibid*); 3) that this rise in authoritarianism is distinct from previous moments of authoritarianism under neoliberalism, due to both the increased frequency of these moments, and the necessary role this state form is playing in reproducing neoliberalism in the face of contestation (*ibid*); and 4) that this process is a contradictory one, as these violent and anti-democratic

interventions simultaneously strengthen the state, and weaken it, and that these contradictions present possibilities for progressive opposition (2014: 124-126).

Crucially, the treatment of authoritarian statist transformation presented by Poulantzas, and further emphasised by Bruff, is not determined or uncontested: ‘the state is emphatically not a predetermined entity whose function is to act in a monolithic manner in the name of capital (Bruff, 2014: 119). Part of this ontology of the state is that changes in the way the state patterns the reproduction of capitalist social relations are not automatic, and that these transformations can create their own dialectical contradictions. For Poulantzas (1978: 246), authoritarian statism ‘is partially responsible for creating new forms of popular struggle’. Following from this, Bruff (2014: 120) argues that ‘an increasingly authoritarian state is simultaneously strengthened and weakened by the shift toward coercion’. This dynamic – a ‘strengthening-weakening dynamic’, for short – is a crucial aspect of the theorisation of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. Rather than universally reinforcing the state’s ability to ensure accumulation and reproduction, this process is a contested one which creates its own dislocatory forces within the state, and between the state and civil society. The details of what mechanisms might bear out this dynamic are, however, not fully explained. Throughout the thesis, we will reflect upon the motion of this dialectic, as well as consider its significance within the broader theorisation of the current conjuncture.

Sympathetic Critique

And so, we have a broad literature pointing to various empirical indicators and examples, all arguing that liberal democracy is in crisis. In that context, ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ has been introduced as a framework to understand the current conjuncture, and then been subsequently applied to cases as varied as Greek austerity, and Cambodian patronage. This thesis will argue, however, that such a hasty embrace of an embryonic concept is problematic, and that further theorisation is necessary. In particular, there is an immediate issue with the claim that ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ represents a qualitative change from pre-Global Financial Crisis trends. In his *Rethinking Marxism* article, Bruff asserted that

Authoritarian neoliberalism does not represent a wholesale break from pre-2007 neoliberal practices, yet it is qualitatively distinct, due to the way in which neoliberalism's authoritarian tendencies... have come to the fore through a shift *toward* constitutional and legal mechanisms and a move *away* from seeking consent for hegemonic projects (Bruff, 2014: 116, emphasis in original).

Here 'authoritarian neoliberalism' is presented as a periodisation claim – something that is *qualitatively distinct* from earlier, pre-2007 forms of state organisation of the reproduction of capitalist social relations. It is also significant that this argument is effectively based on a quantity theory of change – i.e. the current period is qualitatively distinct because of a quantitative shift toward *more* authoritarian statism. And yet surely this is a process which cannot be quantified? If it was, the methods of Freedom House would be sufficient to evidence Bruff's claims.

Although 'authoritarian neoliberalism' makes other contentious claims, this is the most problematic. Even those with only a limited understanding of the subject will surely respond "hasn't neoliberalism *always* had authoritarian tendencies"? The typical point of genesis for neoliberalism is usually drawn at the Pinochet government in Chile, before then emerging in the global North in the form of Thatcherism and Reaganism (see Harvey, 2005). Pinochet's government is widely accepted as authoritarian, with Marcus Taylor (2002: 52) even describing this form of government with the terms 'authoritarian neoliberalism' more than a decade before Bruff's conceptualisation. Thatcher, too, has been characterised as 'authoritarian' in various different ways – but especially through the framework of 'authoritarian statism', which has 'had a crucial bearing on how Thatcherism itself has been explained' (Gamble, 1994: 181). In fact, Gamble described Thatcher's government as being marked by 'a shift away from consent towards coercion' (*ibid*). This is precisely the same claim being made by Bruff, more than two decades earlier. This is what we might call a 'knee-jerk reaction' against the idea of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' as something somehow distinct from the previous forms of authoritarianism which have come along with the process of neoliberalisation, and is the principal starting point of for our analysis.

The claim that the authoritarianism of the period post-2007 is somehow different is not the only contentious one within Bruff's framework. As quoted above, Bruff (2014: 116) sees 'authoritarian neoliberalism' as responding, at least in part, to 'the absence of a hegemonic aura' surrounding neoliberal practice since the GFC. This would seem to

imply that the claim of qualitative difference in the post-2007 context hinges on the idea that prior forms of neoliberalism were uncontested. Surely a more accurate history of neoliberalisation would tell of ongoing struggles between those forces pushing for neoliberal-type policies, and those groups being disenfranchised by that process? To be clear, this issue is not the central one of this thesis – it is raised simply to highlight that there are other entry-points for criticism of the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. Rather than presenting a long list of niggling qualms, we will instead focus on two significant, and related challenges to the concept – historical specificity, and periodisation.

It is not, however, completely clear whether ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ should be seen as a periodisation claim or not. While on the one hand this process is seen as ‘qualitatively distinct’, elsewhere Bruff (2014: 125) retreats somewhat, offering that ‘the attempted “authoritarian fix” is potentially more of a sticking plaster than anything more epochal’. Further to this, many of the case studies in *States of Discipline* (Springer, 2017; Lim, 2017) do not emphasise the same post-2007 departure, instead framing ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ as a useful lens through which to recast the entire history of neoliberalisation. This is noted in Tansel’s editorial, where he suggests that ‘retracing the histories of neoliberalisation in those cases through the lens of authoritarian neoliberalism becomes paramount to contextualise and understand’ changes in the state over a broader period (Tansel, 2017: 13). In this sense, perhaps we should see this emerging approach as a contribution to the broad and extant debates around the appropriate definition of neoliberalism in general – alongside ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Peck and Tickell, 2002), neoliberal ‘governmentality’ (Dardot and Laval, 2013), or neoliberalism as an ‘epistemic community’ (Plewe and Mirowski, 2009) – rather than a periodisation claim. Despite this ambiguity, this thesis will engage with the claim that ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ presents as something ‘qualitatively distinct’. This is the way that the framework was originally conceptualised, then echoed in Tansel’s contribution (Tansel, 2017: 3), and which remains the most prominent treatment of the term.

The overarching research question this thesis seeks to answer is this: does the conceptual framework of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ contribute to a theoretically and practically useful understanding of the present conjuncture? If ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ cannot

forcefully articulate the difference between the authoritarian statism of Poulantzas's day, and the authoritarian statism which supposedly operates in the post-2007 era, then it will struggle theoretically and strategically. An even more pointed challenge is raised with Sayer's concept of a 'violent abstraction' (1987). The framework of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' is itself an abstraction, emphasising some aspects of history, while de-emphasising others. Abstraction is, of course, a necessary step in any attempt to understand a complex social totality; the question is whether a particular abstraction clarifies or obscures? A 'violent abstraction', however, is one which obscures some or all of the causal mechanisms the abstraction seeks to reveal. For Sayer (1987: 149), 'theory should be abandoned if it gets in the way of knowledge'. One error along the road to theory which must vitiate the utility of that theory is the failure to develop 'propositions' toward an actual 'explanation':

giving a causal explanation *necessarily* involves 'elaborating' a theory of causal mechanisms. It is only such a theory which makes a series of propositions into an explanation... We do not explain things such as Protestantism or law by their functionality but their genealogy (Sayer, 1987: 125, emphasis in original).

Sayer's test also demands more of our theorisation – we must be able to articulate what led to the change, and why. If we separate out the post-2007 period as distinct because it has "more authoritarianism", then this runs the risk of obscuring the history of neoliberalism which led to this development. The question, then, is this: is the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' a useful abstraction, or a 'violent' one?

Outline of Structure

The first chapter of this thesis will elaborate the theoretical challenges facing the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. In claiming that authoritarian neoliberalism is expressed, in part, by the diminishing expectations that people hold for the power of politics and democracy (Bruff, 2014: 115-116), the specificity of the term immediately comes into question. This is due to the considerable conceptual overlap between 'authoritarian neoliberalism' and extant concepts such as 'de-politicisation' (Burnham, 2001; Flinders and Wood, 2014) and 'new constitutionalism' (Gill, 2008) which both highlight similar state practices to those described by Bruff, seen by these scholars as occurring prior to 2008. After teasing out these overlaps, we will then go further to consider 'de-

politicisation' in its ultimate form – the separation of the political from the economic under capitalism (Wood, 1981; Brenner, 1977). These spaces of conceptual overlap raise questions regarding the specificity of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' which are yet to be answered – not only in terms of the specificity of our concepts, but also in terms of the material conditions which these conceptual and theoretical developments were a response to. Going further, this chapter will also consider the approach of 'uneven and combined development' (Banaji, 2010; Rioux, 2013; Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, 2015). From this perspective, the often-violent history of capitalism, particularly in the experience of the global South, vitiates the clean separation of the political from the economic maintained by Political Marxism. This alternate approach *also* challenges 'authoritarian neoliberalism', albeit from a different angle. That is to say, that violent history of capitalist development – in particular, the coevolution of capitalist social relations under authoritarian states, such as the case of Japan or Germany – also challenges the specificity of our concept-in-question. In short, this first chapter will be a deepening of the critique of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' beyond initial, surface-level reactions, highlighting theoretical challenges to the concept, as well as the contested material conditions which drove the development of these frameworks in the first instance. In engaging with these other literatures, however, some insights can also be drawn which might usefully augment 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. By drawing on the perspective of Political Marxism, mechanisms will be outlined which might bear out the 'strengthening-weakening' dynamic which Poulantzas (1978: 248) associated with authoritarian statism. Finally, in order to ameliorate the tension between Political Marxism, and the 'uneven and combined development' approach, we will arrive at a resolution which gives us an important epistemological insight into the process of abstraction. Through the theory of internal relations (Ollman, 2003; 2015), and the concept of 'vantage point', we can return to the issue at hand – the periodisation claims of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'.

The second chapter will develop the methodological tools necessary to properly evaluate these open questions – in particular, different approaches to the challenge of periodising capitalist development. Fundamentally, any attempt to separate the totality of capitalist history into different phases is an abstraction, or a 'vantage point'. Jessop (2001: 284) emphasises that we can only periodise 'at the level of abstraction and complexity at which they are studied' – it follows from this that as 'authoritarian neoliberalism'

attempts to explain changes occurring *at the level of the state*, then we necessarily must trace a method of periodisation which is sensitive to state theory. As such, this chapter must first analyse the role of the state in capitalist societies, before arriving at the issue of periodisation. This discussion is not only relevant to the task of periodisation, however. As a sympathetic critique, this thesis also seeks to consider the strengths of the ‘authoritarian-neoliberal’ frame – specifically, the argument that authoritarian-type state transformations are inherently unstable. Through discussion around the state as ‘relatively autonomous’ from the interests of capital, certain insights may be drawn which might substantiate the ‘strengthening-weakening’ dynamic associated with authoritarian-type state transformations (Poulantzas, 1978: 248). In particular, the requirements for states to both secure capital accumulation, and to maintain broader legitimacy (O’Connor, 1973), speaks to this dynamic.

We then arrive at the issue of periodisation. By first considering ‘long wave’ approaches to the periodisation of capitalism (Braudel, 1984; Arrighi, 2010), a necessary point can be established: periodisation does *not* hinge on universalising frames, in which all developments, across a world system, are tied to that period. As such, when ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is challenged on its periodisation, it is not being assumed that the framework makes this kind of claim. Rather, as we will find through consideration of Gramscian and *regulationist* approaches to the task of periodisation, periods can absolutely be variegated across different spatial levels of analysis. Other significant insights drawn out from these latter approaches are the distinction between ‘conjunctural’ and ‘organic’ periods, as well as the necessity to relate periods back to the issues of accumulation and reproduction. These nuances of periodisation are overlooked in the hasty conceptualisation of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, and the authors of this approach would do well to return to these fundamental debates.

The third chapter, then, will be an attempt to bring the theoretical and methodological insights of the former two chapters to bear on the *actual history of neoliberalism*. It will do so by considering three empirical ‘moments’ of authoritarianism within the neoliberal frame: Pinochet’s Chile, Thatcherism in the United Kingdom, and the Greek experience of authoritarianism under the framework of the European Monetary System (EMS). Each of these ‘moments’ will be treated as indicative – they are not exhaustive histories, nor do they claim to be. They should, however, be seen as indicative of broader trends

– other moments of authoritarianism within the broad history of neoliberalism are as diverse as the repression of political freedoms in order to drive wide programmes of privatisation in Suharto’s Indonesia (see Blakeley, 2009: 88-91), through to the ‘constitutionalisation’ of neoliberalism under the WTO and multilateral trade agreements (Sinclair, 2015; Cahill, 2014), with a wide array of examples between. There are many possible examples of authoritarianism in the past four decades which we might choose to focus on, but these three – Chile, the UK, and the EU – have been chosen for particular reasons. The reason for the first and second cases is that these are the examples which will most likely be used by critics of the framework. As part of the widespread genesis narrative of neoliberalism, Pinochet and Thatcher have both been characterised as authoritarian in some way – these two cases must be considered if a judgement is to be developed on the periodisation of authoritarian neoliberalism. The third case is necessary, as the structure of the EU is given as the definitional example of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ by Bruff (2014) himself, in the original theorisation of the concept. If the claims of Bruff (2014), Tansel (2017), and others supporting the claim that there has been a ‘qualitative’ change in the nature of neoliberalism, ‘towards’ coercion, since the Global Financial Crisis, then there must be an apparent difference in the authoritarianism of the first two ‘moments’ compared to the third. With this very brief history of authoritarianism under neoliberalism, the theoretical challenges to the specificity of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ are compounded by the historical. And so, with this history in mind, we will return to the claims made by Bruff and others, rearticulating the extant conceptualisation of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. With these claims fresh in our minds, the tools developed in previous chapters will finally be brought to bear.

Argument

The argument being developed is that ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ cannot be sustained as a period in its own right – the framework as it has been articulated to date presents neither a methodology, nor evidence, to support the claim that contemporary authoritarian state transformation is ‘qualitatively different’ to the kinds which preceded 2007. If those claims are jettisoned, however, Gramsci’s insights regarding ‘conjunctural’ verses ‘organic movements’ push us to consider whether authoritarian neoliberalisation might be better conceived as a product of the broader process of neoliberalisation,

convulsing through a period of organic crisis, rather than as a period in its own right. This Gramscian perspective is also closely related to the real contribution offered by this emergent framework: through its focus on changes to the state which concurrently strengthen *and* weaken it, 'authoritarian neoliberalism' puts a name to a particular contradiction. By considering the durability of authoritarian-type state transformations, in part by returning to the work of Poulantzas, the framework of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' offers a useful vantage point from which to consider the current crisis. By focussing less on drawing arbitrary lines of periodisation, and more on the generative mechanisms which are creating change, a real contribution can be made to our understanding of our current global political economy.

Chapter One

Depoliticisation: Theory, history, and challenges

The durability of neoliberalism as a form of social and economic management post-2007 has challenged assumptions of scholars who regarded the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) as a turning point. Some have explained this durability through the lens of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. For Bruff (2014: 115-16), this process can ‘be observed in the reconfiguring of the state and institutional power in an attempt to insulate certain policies and institutional practices from social and political dissent’. This is achieved (in part) through a ‘recalibration of the kinds of activity that are feasible and appropriate for nonmarket institutions to engage in, diminishing expectations in the process’. It is precisely that ‘recalibration’ of the ‘expectations’ we have for the political process that this chapter is concerned with. Defining ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ in this way, however, poses a challenge to the novelty of Bruff’s conceptualisation – I would argue that this process of ‘reducing expectations’ is already the focus of much research under the banner of ‘depoliticisation’. Further, other literatures around disciplinary neoliberalism and new constitutionalism (Gill, 2008) would also seem to describe a similar process. For Burnham (2001: 129) ‘depoliticisation’ is best understood as ‘politics at one remove’ – a process whereby changes ‘market expectations regarding the effectiveness and credibility of policy-making’. The similarities between these approaches should be immediately apparent, and present a direct challenge to the emerging literature surrounding ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’.

The implications of this conceptual overlap are significant, and go far beyond charging authors with developing synonymous and superfluous neologisms. Fundamentally, the concern here is the material conditions which are the subjects of these various attempts at theorisation; ultimately these conceptual issues indicate a deeper issue regarding historical specificity. Burnham (2001) argues that the New Labour government of Tony Blair pursued a state strategy of ‘depoliticisation’ whereby certain spheres of policy-making were quarantined away from popular contestation. And yet, according to Bruff,

‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ – a process that would seem to at least overlap with the extant concept of ‘depoliticisation’ – is ‘qualitatively distinct’ from the forms of authoritarianism present before 2007, and the GFC. And so, a critical interrogation of the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ demands a consideration of the existing literature around ‘depoliticisation’, as well as a consideration of the implications of these contesting concepts for historical specificity, and the possibility of periodisation.

This thesis is, however, a sympathetic critique of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. Ultimately, the argument to be developed throughout the thesis is that the claim that there has been a ‘qualitative change’ in the way states attempt to reproduce neoliberal capitalism cannot be sustained. This does not mean that the framework does not offer other insights into the conditions and processes of social reproduction in the current conjuncture. For this reason, the secondary aim of the thesis is to tease out those aspects of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ which reveal, rather than obscure. This leads to the question: are there conditions or processes, which have been analysed under the rubric of ‘depoliticisation’, that might usefully augment the emerging conceptualisation of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’? And so, as we move through a survey of ‘depoliticisation’, consideration will be given to the positive implications of any conceptual overlap with ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, as well as the negative. Thus this chapter argues that 1) depoliticisation is a process closely related to that of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, that 2) this conceptual overlap challenges the historical specificity of this process that is supposedly ‘qualitatively distinct’ in the post-GFC period, and that 3) as well as challenging ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, by surveying the concept of ‘depoliticisation’, utility may be added to our emerging concept, as the more-advanced debate around depoliticisation offers suggestive signposts for further research into the more-useful aspects of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’.

In pursuing this third point, we are essentially concerned with the durability of depoliticisation as a state strategy. Consider a question raised by Bruff (2014:125) himself: ‘whether the contradictions inherent to authoritarian neoliberalism—especially with regard to the strengthening/weakening of the state—have created conditions in which progressive and radical politics can begin to reverse the tide of the last three decades?’ Building on Poulantzas (1978: 241-247), Bruff suggests that these authoritarian changes to the state dialectically strengthen and weaken the state, as the

contradictions inherent to this process create fractures within which progressive politics might struggle for change. Elsewhere Bruff (2016: 149) has restated the question of whether the contradictions inherent to this strengthening/weakening of the state ‘have created conditions in which progressive and radical politics can begin to reverse the tide of the last three decades’? Here that question is supplemented, querying precisely what the mechanisms whereby these authoritarian changes could result in a weakening of the state – how might these contradictions present? Poulantzas’s original framework is light on the ground with fully articulated mechanisms that might articulate this dialectic, beyond a sharpening of the ‘generic elements of political crisis’ (Poulantzas, 1978: 241) – indeed, the chapter dedicated to this apparent ‘tendency’ is only six pages long. The speculative comments within Poulantzas’s theorisation point toward a leftward politicisation of state bureaucrats, and returns to rank-and-file democratic organisation; I would hazard that these tendencies were contextually specific, and that further research is needed to consider how these contradictions might present today. It is this final question, *whether the ‘strengthening/weakening’ dynamic offers hope of successful challenge to authoritarian-type developments*, which an engagement with the literature around depoliticisation, and the social property relations approach, will speak to.

Through this chapter, two things will become apparent. First, the widespread usage of ‘depoliticisation’, and the fundamental nature of ‘depoliticisation’ within Political Marxism, will both throw up challenges for the periodisation of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. Bruff (2014: 115-116) implies that depoliticisation is a part of the process and period of authoritarian neoliberalism despite the fact that the separation of the ‘political’ from the ‘economic’ under capitalism has been treated as definitional to capitalist development (Brenner, 1977; Wood, 1981). From another perspective, however, that ‘separationism’ creates a misleading narrative of the origins of capitalism, with scholars of the post-colonial and ‘uneven and combined development’ approaches, who highlight that the use of political power has always been central to expanding and maintaining capitalist social relations (Banaji, 2010; Rioux, 2013; Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, 2015). This complicates our periodisation further. Research from this perspective emphasises that capitalist social relations are not only reproduced through a clean separation of the political and the economic, but that violence has a central role in this reproduction, particularly in the global South. By bringing this literature into the conversation, this chapter presents a challenge to the concept of ‘authoritarian

neoliberalism’ on two fronts: reduced expectations in the scope of non-market institutions are definitional to capitalism, and the overt use of (coercive) political power to maintain capitalist social relations would also seem to have a significant historical role. Whichever way one cuts it, the material conditions of the current conjuncture, which ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ presents as qualitatively distinct, would seem to have existed in many places and at many different times in the history of capitalist development. Treating things as new that are not obscures our understanding of these very processes. One such process which might be obscured in this way is the ‘strengthening-weakening’ dynamic which has been attributed to these processes of state-change – first by Poulantzas (1978), and later invoked by Bruff (2014). In this way, this chapter will dialectically weaken, and then strengthen, the case for ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ as a useful concept. Thus, a consideration of depoliticisation in its many forms allows for a whistle-stop tour of the history and theory of capitalist development, and the process by which the boundaries of the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’ are (re)drawn. By bringing the emergent concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ into these historical and theoretical literatures, we will be better placed to understand those very conditions which prompted this wave of conceptualisation.

Politics ‘at one remove’

If we are to make the claim that ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ refers to similar processes as does ‘depoliticisation’, then we had best survey the latter. Depoliticisation is, however, a difficult concept to map, as the process to which it refers is not always labelled as such: the separation of the Church from the state, the creation of an independent judiciary and the associated development of ‘inalienable rights’, all the way through to removing the control of monetary policy from democratically elected representatives – all of these processes can be seen, retrospectively as ‘depoliticisation’, but might not be traditionally conceived of as such. As John Lilburne stood in front of the Court of Star Chamber in London in 1637 and refused to answer questions based on secret allegations (Peirce, 2010: x) posed by a court comprised of largely political figures, in the absence of a jury, his defence was resting on the idea that the legal system should not be a political system – that is, it should be depoliticised. But while we may identify this process as such, there is no established canon of literature which comprehensively defines the term, beyond

the idea of making something which was once ‘political’ no longer so. This is not to say there is not a literature associated with the term: indeed, there are *several*.⁴ Unfortunately, as is often the case with such trans-disciplinary terms, its meaning is imprecise. Often (e.g. Wong, et al, 2004) imprecision is taken to its extreme, as the concept is deployed with no theoretical basis or content beyond ‘making something less political’. Although a comprehensive review of that problematic literature is beyond us here, some of that unevenness can be captured by comparing Marxian (Burnham, 2001; 2014) and non-Marxian (Buller and Flinders, 2005; Flinders and Buller, 2006) contributions to the analysis of British politics.

In his analysis of Tony Blair’s New Labour government, Burnham arrived at ‘depoliticisation’ as the defining characteristic of the ‘Third Way’. Burnham provides a useful starting point for our discussion:

In essence, depoliticisation as a governing strategy is *the process of placing at one remove the political character of decision-making*. State managers retain, in many instances, arm’s length control over crucial economic and social processes, whilst simultaneously benefiting from the distancing effects of depoliticisation. As a form of politics it seeks to change market expectations regarding the effectiveness and credibility of policy-making in addition to shielding the government from the consequences of unpopular policies (Burnham, 2001: 129, original emphasis).

This encapsulates the key themes of depoliticisation: it is a ‘governing strategy’ (consciously or unconsciously) deployed by state managers and elites in order to shield the state from particular demands. This relates to the legitimacy of the state, discussed further in the second chapter of this thesis (see also O’Connor, 1973: 6). Presenting depoliticisation as politics ‘at one remove’ is an important aspect of Burnham’s definition. A shift in institutional structures, or popular expectations, that appears to remove a particular area of policy from democratic political contestation *does not* make this policy area or institution *apolitical*. Rather, the political nature of a particular set of social relations, which have apparently been depoliticised, is retained in essence – while the character of those relations might shift, they remain political. It is the fetishising nature of capitalism that presents these relations as apolitical in appearance.

⁴ For a useful survey of this literature, see ‘Table 1’ in Flinders and Buller (2006: 294).

Congruent with Burnham's concept of depoliticisation, we find several treatments of the process whereby the boundary between the political process and the economic sphere is redrawn. One such example is the rise of central banking and inflation-targeting as the only goal of monetary policy. In the words of Saad-Filho (2007: 89), these related processes 'constrain the choice of economic policy priorities and the use of the available policy tools... and limit the demands of the working class'. And yet, rejecting an apolitical reading of monetary policy, as he argues that 'monetary policy regimes are irreducibly political'. This is an example of depoliticisation in its institutional form. In a general discussion of the process within the neoliberal context, Cahill gives us another congruent concept in the form of 'institutional embeddedness'. For Cahill, institutional embedding is 'the development of institutional frameworks that predispose states to neoliberal policy practices'. The process involves enshrining a

regulatory bias towards neoliberalism through formal rules that privilege neoliberal policy practices, including various forms of competition policy as well as new rules governing the conduct of fiscal and monetary policy... neoliberal practices are institutionally embedded by quarantining such practices from popular deliberation (Cahill, 2014: 106).

This 'quarantining' is immediately connotative of both Burnham's depoliticisation, Saad-Filho's characterisation of the institutionalisation of monetarism, as well as Bruff's 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. Continuing with this conceptual mosaic, take also Stephen Gill's 'new constitutionalism'. Depoliticisation is seen to redraw the boundaries between politics and the economy; 'new constitutionalism' is a process which involves the 'insulation of key aspects of the economy from the influence of politicians or the mass of citizens by imposing, internally and externally, 'binding constraints' on the conduct of fiscal, monetary and trade and investment policies' (Gill, 2008: 132). Indeed, the constitutional-legal nature of many such restructurings has been the focus of Stephen Gill and others utilising the 'new constitutionalism' framework for some time (Gill, 1990, 1998, 2008; Gill and Cutler, 2015; Sinclair, 2015).

At this point, it has been shown that there is a broad swathe of literature which relates to the limitation of the 'political', and that at each turn scholars have found material conditions which would seem broadly similar to those Bruff describes as defining features of post-2007 global political economy. Here it is worth returning to Bruff's conceptualisation, in order to highlight precisely how significant this broad literature on

the institutional expressions of depoliticisation is to the specificity of authoritarian neoliberalism:

Under authoritarian neoliberalism dominant social groups are less interested in neutralizing resistance and dissent via concessions and forms of compromise that maintain their hegemony favouring instead the explicit exclusion and marginalisation of subordinate social groups through the constitutionally and legally engineered self-disempowerment of nominally democratic institutions, governments, and parliaments (Bruff, 2014: 116).

And yet Bruff continues, seemingly dismissing these parallels:

Unlike Stephen Gill's (2008) ostensibly similar account of "disciplinary" neoliberalism, which instrumentalizes the law as a tool of the powerful (especially transnational capital), I argue that *any* attempted reshaping of the legal framework is a multilinear, uneven, and contradictory process...the authoritarian neoliberal response could further heighten this [post-2007 legitimation] crisis by way of the state's reconfiguration into a less open and democratic entity (Bruff, 2014: 116).

This distinction is not entirely clear. Even if it is the case that contradiction and tensions between various fractions of capital are absent from Gill's analysis (and I do not think this is a fair charge), surely all Bruff is suggesting here is a nuancing of an existing concept? There is no reason to think the concept of 'new constitutionalism' is so rigid as to exclude additional emphasis on the contradictory nature of this process. By setting itself in contention with new constitutionalism, and other extant treatments of institutionalised depoliticisation, authoritarian neoliberalism is picking semantic fights with friends, rather than seeking collaboration for strategic leveraging. These extant theorisations do present a challenge for the novelty of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. More importantly, it is not just the novelty of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' as a concept with which we are concerned, but rather claims that these processes observed after 2007 are somehow different to those that came before. At this point, it would seem difficult to sustain that claim, but we put this aside until a methodology for periodisation can be developed in Chapter Two. What we can say about this literature at this point, is that it *does* emphasise that depoliticisation is not limited to 'expectations', or other ideological-discursive limitations on the political – it is also borne out, and embedded, through lasting institutional changes. Crucially, while these changes are not immutable, they do calcify the state apparatus, lending a path-dependant aspect to neoliberalisation: 'not only does such institutional embedding further strengthen the power of capital, thus complementing the embeddedness of the neoliberal policy regime in a set of class

relations which privilege capital, it also gives added durability to neoliberalism, making it highly resistant to change' (Cahill, 2014: 117).

'Depoliticisation' is used to describe both institutional *and* discursive processes, whereby the expectations placed on states and state-representatives are reduced. This process is entirely congruent with Bruff's claim that authoritarian neoliberalism operates, in part, through a 'recalibration of the kinds of activity that are feasible and appropriate for nonmarket institutions to engage in, diminishing expectations in the process' (2014: 115-16), to repeat the above quotation. Noting this conceptual overlap, our understanding of authoritarian neoliberalism could be supplemented thus: *one of the mechanisms whereby the state is 'reconfigured into a less democratic entity' under authoritarian neoliberalism is that of depoliticisation, in both its institutional and discursive forms.* But surely, this is a rather obvious statement, even if Bruff failed to make this conceptual overlap explicit in his original conceptualisation? I would argue that this observation compounds questions already raised as to the historical specificity of designating the post-global financial crisis context as the 'rise' of authoritarian neoliberalism – if depoliticisation has been a strategy since Blair (and arguably earlier, as we shall see) where is the justification for a new break in our periodisation of capitalism? These questions will be addressed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. First, however, let us start with a more modest consideration: can anything be added to our understanding of authoritarian neoliberalism from the literature surrounding depoliticisation?

The durability of depoliticisation

Existing studies of depoliticisation help to articulate the contradictions inherent to this process. If 'authoritarian neoliberalism' effectively describes a similar process, then our understanding of the material conditions that prompted Bruff's theorisation – the many challenges to democracy in the current conjuncture – would be deepened through a consideration of this existing literature. Fundamentally, the process of depoliticisation is a contradictory one, which creates fractures in the state; contradictions which are the mechanisms, I would argue, that bear out the 'strengthening-weakening' dynamic articulated by Poulantzas. This can be seen, conversely, by considering the *absence* of dialectical method in non-Marxist accounts of this same process. Following on from

Burnham's characterisation of Third Way New Labour as a government relying on the strategy of depoliticisation, Jim Buller and Matthew Flinders (2005) join the discussion with an account of some of the contextual reasons for the strategic selection of this approach to governance. Their contribution is collegial, agreeing with and building on Burnham's; indeed, there is nothing overtly 'wrong' with their article – it is in their silence on particular points, however, that the explanatory power of Buller and Flinders' narrative begins to falter. Buller and Flinders assert (unerringly) that depoliticisation in the UK context was not a 'necessary' or 'inevitable' governance trajectory, but rather 'a gradual playing out of internal contradictions between discretionary policy instruments and the institutional context surrounding their operation... They were, in part, a product of human agency, as policy makers failed to appreciate the structural prerequisites for the successful implementation of [their] politicised governing strategy' (2005: 540).

What do they mean by the statement that there were 'structural prerequisites' for a 'politicised governing strategy'? What Buller and Flinders are discussing here is the *breakdown of Keynesianism* – something they attribute to the fact that 'State managers in Britain have historically governed on a structural terrain which has penalised the development of interventionist strategies in the industrial sphere' (2005: 538). Although this conversation in depoliticisation studies within the United Kingdom is quite collegial and sympathetic (see Burnham, 2001; Buller and Flinders, 2005; Burnham 2006; Buller and Flinders, 2006; Flinders and Buller, 2006; Burnham, 2014), I see these two approaches – Marxian and non-Marxian – in contention. The non-Marxian account is unable to explain why politicisation strategies in the form of Keynesianism broke down, precisely because they do not have an appreciation of the dialectics of class and state. Thus, their analyses of depoliticisation (as opposed to politicisation) also fail to locate contradiction within the process and the causal mechanisms underlying 'depoliticisation'. Without a grounding in the fundamental basis of class – and the contradictions therein – these mainstream conceptions of depoliticisation fail to articulate convincing reasons for the adoption of this state strategy, as they fall back on the assumption that depoliticisation is the simple product of the free will of man. They see depoliticisation as voluntarist.

By failing to situate class – and, in particular, the class-character of the state – in their analysis, they fail to fully explain *what* these 'contradictions' between institutions and

their contexts are. It was not simply the existence of ‘institutions’ which necessitated contradiction, but rather the class-character of those institutions; to discuss the breakdown of Keynesianism, and state responses thereafter, without reference to the specificities of the balance of class forces during that conjuncture is a fatal omission (see Brenner, 2006: 165-166; Gamble and Walton, 1976: 11). ‘Crudely put’, in the words of Werner Bonefeld (2010: 17), ‘the purpose of capital is to accumulate extracted surplus value, and the state is the political form of this purpose’– while this state-ontological claim is itself problematic, and will be the focus of discussion further on, it makes the necessary point: the ‘structural terrain’ discussed by Buller and Flinders did not constrain politicisation *because* it was political, but because it was a political strategy that was *against the interests of capital*. The implication of this argument is that the state strategies which have promoted neoliberalism are apolitical, whereas the Keynesian strategies which preceded them failed due to their political nature. Elsewhere, these same authors reduce depoliticisation down to ‘a means of reducing certain political transaction costs’ (Flinders and Buller, 2006: 296). Here they empty the concept of utility even further, as the structural imperatives of the state as guarantor of accumulation and manager of crises thereof are ignored, instead prioritising the opportunism – and *voluntarism* – of individual actors who, at this point, have no class identity. It is for precisely this reason that Isaac (1987: 80) defines power as ‘those capacities to act possessed by social agents in virtue of the enduring relations in which they participate’; power is shaped by and specific to the structural context in which an agent is situated. Any treatment that seeks to explain a conjunctural turn to depoliticisation as a state strategy, while failing to give adequate weighting to the very social relations that define the power exercised by those agents and institutions, will fall short of a theoretically or strategically useful analysis.

A strength of the Marxian reading of ‘depoliticisation’, as represented by Burnham, is an ability to comment on the contradictions *created* by depoliticisation strategies. This strength can be usefully projected across, adding nuance to Bruff’s concept of authoritarian neoliberalism, beyond a simple reliance on the work of Poulantzas. Bruff’s argument relies on Poulantzas’s (1978: 245) ‘strengthening-weakening’ dynamic, whereby authoritarian-type state changes are seen to simultaneously ‘strengthen *and* weaken the state’ (Bruff, 2014: 124, emphasis in original). Elsewhere Bruff (2016: 149) has left open the question as to whether the contradictions inherent to this strengthening/weakening of the state ‘have created conditions in which progressive and

radical politics can begin to reverse the tide of the last three decades'. In this thesis, that question is supplemented, querying precisely what are the mechanisms whereby these authoritarian changes could result in a 'weakening' of the state – how might these contradictions present? Poulantzas's original framework is light on the ground with fully articulated mechanisms that might explain this dialectic, beyond a sharpening of the 'generic elements of political crisis' (Poulantzas, 1978: 241) – indeed, the chapter dedicated to this apparent 'tendency' is only six pages long. Rather than providing answers, Poulantzas raises a key question: how durable is the strategy of 'authoritarian statism'? Even if we reject the claim that 'authoritarian neoliberalism' as experienced since 2007 is somehow 'distinct' from the authoritarianism that came before (as this thesis aims to do), this does *not* reduce the relevance of this question. If 'authoritarian statism' is present in the current conjuncture, then a political-economic understanding of that conjuncture would be deepened if we also understood the sustainability of this process. The argument made by this chapter is that while Poulantzas asks a crucial question regarding the durability of authoritarian-type state strategies, he does not articulate all the mechanisms that might realise a weakening of the state – but that these mechanisms are not wholly unknown. Through this consideration of Burnham's work on 'depoliticisation', we have seen just such a mechanism: the appearance of state strategies as being grounded in class, which leads us to a consideration of the state. Let us go through this in more detail.

A theoretical contribution to this question can be found by returning to Burnham's treatment of 'depoliticisation'. While discussing overtly authoritarian changes as a result to the ongoing crisis in Europe, Burnham argued that

such moves represent not the logical extension but rather failure of depoliticisation strategies and result in the immediate politicisation of social relations escalating further the likelihood of [class] conflict. The politicisation of social relations calls into question not only the content of policies but the separation of state and civil society that Marx understood as constitutive of capitalism (Burnham, 2014: 203).

This is the heart of the contradiction of depoliticisation – and authoritarian neoliberalism – as a dialectical process: as intervention 'within the economy' (not to accept this apparent separation) is foreclosed through depoliticisation, the state apparatus becomes less responsive to popular demands. As this occurs, the apparent neutrality of the state is undermined, as its actual class-character is more-fully revealed.

This argument is made in historical light by Ellen Meiksins Wood, who argued that ‘insofar as capital in its mounting crises demands, and obtains, the state’s complicity in its anti-social purposes, that state may increasingly become a prime target of resistance in advanced capitalist countries – as it has been in every successful modern revolution’ (1981: 94-5). By bringing Wood in here, however, we mention the elephant in the room. In the social property relations approach, the ultimate form of depoliticisation is the apparent separation of the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’, and this is a defining feature of the development of capitalism. Or, as Wood puts it, under capitalism ‘a spatially separate political sphere may *intervene* in the economy, but the economy itself is evacuated of social content and is, as it were, depoliticized’ (1981: 68). And so, while Wood adds depth to our understanding of the contradictions inherent to depoliticisation, the tradition she hails from would seem to present the most serious challenge to the historical specificity of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ yet. If the duration of capitalist history has been marked by a shifting boundary between the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’, then on what grounds can we make the claim (as Bruff does) that limitations to those issues considered as ‘political’ in the current context are a departure from previous trends? We turn now to consider the implications of the social property relations approach (or Political Marxism, as it is also known) for our emergent concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, in order to deepen the challenge to its historical specificity.

The ‘political’ and the ‘economic’: depoliticisation through separation

One of the fundamental tasks of historical materialism is to understand the historical specificity of capitalism; to ask ‘what is it that makes capitalism distinct from other modes of social organisation?’ In answer to that question, Ellen Meiksins Wood argued that

Capitalism differs from other social forms because... appropriators cannot rely on ‘extra-economic’ powers of appropriation by means of direct coercion – such as the military, political, and judicial powers that enable feudal lords to extract surplus labour from peasants – but must depend on the purely ‘economic’ mechanisms of the market (Wood, 2002: 2).

This is not to the exclusion of ‘extra-economic’ power; rather, there is a division of labour between the ‘two moments of capitalist exploitation – appropriation and

coercion' (Wood, 1981: 81). In this view, under non-capitalist social orders there is no distinction between these moments; the appropriator of surplus is also the one threatening coercion, and that these moments occur concurrently – encapsulated within the actions of the feudal lord, or the slave owner. The historical specificity of capitalism is found in the way these two moments are seemingly separated:

Although the coercive force of the 'political' sphere is ultimately necessary to sustain private property and the power of appropriation, 'economic' need supplies the immediate compulsion that forces the worker to transfer surplus labour to the capitalist in order to gain access to the means of production (Wood, 1981: 81).

The foundational nature of this separation is reinforced by looking back to Marx, and primitive accumulation. Marx describes primitive accumulation as 'nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production' (*Capital I*, 1973: 668). The enclosure movement itself is not a sufficient definition of capitalism, however – the worker must also be removed from the means of *subsistence*, in order to create the insidious compulsion, which propels labour toward the commodification of its labour-power (Wood, 2007: 145). When this moment is generalised across a society, the transition from a *society with markets* to a *market society* is complete; the worker is given a false choice between selling their labour power or starvation – indeed, 'formally free wage-labourers are set apart from slaves and serfs more by their illusion of having greater real freedom than by the relatively greater real freedom which they do in fact enjoy!' (Bhandari, 2008: 74). Robert Brenner concurs on this point, articulating the transition from the existence of markets to the totalisation of capitalist social relations:

What therefore accounts for capitalist economic development is that the class (property/surplus extraction) structure of the *economy as a whole* determines that the reproduction carried out by its component 'units' is dependent upon their ability to increase their production (accumulate) ... In contrast, pre-capitalist economies, even those in which trade is widespread, can develop only within definite limits, because the class structure of the economy as a whole determines that their component units—specifically those producing the means of subsistence and means of production, i.e. means of survival and reproduction, rather than luxuries—neither can nor must systematically increase the forces of production, the productivity of labour, in order to reproduce themselves (Brenner, 1977: 32-33, original emphasis).

Essentially, the point here is that when market compulsion becomes generalised this then creates structural accumulation imperatives for capital, thus locking in place the dialectical process that is the circuit of capital, and the resultant contradictions and crises

which result (Heilbroner, 2011: 266-268). We will return to these Political Marxist axioms later on. First, however, it is the apparent separation of those two moments – the ‘political’ moment of coercion and the ‘economic’ moment of appropriation – with which we are here concerned. This is because, in Wood’s own words, this separation constitutes the ‘depoliticisation’ of surplus appropriation; from this viewpoint depoliticisation is part of the *origins and essence of capitalism*. Put in Bruff’s language, this is surely the ultimate ‘recalibration of the kinds of activity that are feasible and appropriate for nonmarket institutions to engage in’. Does this make the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ redundant? In order to answer this question, further analysis is required. Indeed, the methodology of periodisation as it relates to the state and crises will be the specific focus of the second chapter.

This chapter is developing the argument that the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ lacks historical specificity. Although there are no published critiques of this emergent concept at this early stage, surely this critique has been the knee-jerk reaction of many, due to the salient role of authoritarianism within the genesis of neoliberalism: Pinochet’s Chile (see Klein, 2007; Harvey, 2005: 28) is the typical case, but Indonesia under Suharto is also an excellent example. What we find here is that the challenge to the specificity of authoritarian neoliberalism is actually *much deeper*, when one considers the crucial role of depoliticisation under capitalism *in general*. Put again, the critique of specificity can not only be made on the basis of pre-existing authoritarian state forms – the implications of depoliticisation are relevant here as well. Not only are there many examples of depoliticisation as a ‘governing strategy’ *before the 2007/2008 global financial crisis* (e.g. Burnham, 2001) – the conjuncture Bruff points towards as a qualitative break in state strategies of managing and reproducing capitalism (Bruff, 2014: 120) – but the apparent separation of the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’ depoliticises the ultimate act of authoritarianism: the workplace appropriation of surplus labour. This is a conceptual ‘blind spot’ for authoritarian neoliberalism, and teasing out the ways in which extant debates around depoliticisation – and, through extrapolation, the historical specificity of capitalism – is an important part of developing the concept as an empirical research agenda.

‘Authoritarian neoliberalism’ is, ultimately, a theory of the capitalistic state in the current context. Although the general conditions of capitalist social relations, as discussed by

Wood, do challenge the emergent concept, ultimately we need to bring this discussion into conversation with the state as well. As mentioned above, we shall return throughout this thesis to the theory of the state, as the state is fundamentally bound up with questions of crisis and period – the focus of Chapter Two. To provide a first ‘cut’ of the state, however, let us work through Wood’s own conception of how the state interacts with the political/economic separation. Taking the foundation of social property relations, we can dissolve further the apparent separation which vulgar economics is so often befuddled by. For Wood the ‘juridical-political ‘sphere’ is ‘implicated in the productive ‘base’:

from an historical point of view even political institutions like village and state enter directly into the constitution of productive relations and are in a sense prior to them (even where these institutions are not the direct instruments of surplus-appropriation) to the extent that relations of production are historically constituted by the configuration of political power that determines the outcome of class conflict (Wood, 1981: 80).

The state is not only patterned by the class struggle, but then reconditions ongoing struggle through an institutionalisation of the balance of class power, whilst simultaneously allowing, promoting, and shaping the productive process itself – classic examples of this principle include the maintenance and extension of private property rights, and the fundamental frameworks of employment law (see Poulantzas, 1978; Miliband, 1969; Bonefeld, 2010). By seeing the state, production, and class struggle as *internally related* in this way we can argue that while state forms may be more or less authoritarian, or be more or less popular-democratic, the ultimate act of authoritarianism remains within the workplace itself – an authoritarianism which is depoliticised through the apparent demarcation of the economic sphere which is, itself, achieved through the character (and perception thereof) of the state.

In terms of our understanding of the ‘political’, however, we see that *the* political institution of capitalism – the state – is not deterministically instituted to act at the behest of capital. Rather, the state has ‘relative autonomy’ to act independently from the interests of capital, within certain bounds; relative autonomy explains this paradoxical treatment of the ‘political’. The ‘political’ does not have a determined class character. This is seen particularly in the democratic iteration of the juridical-political institutional arrangement. Conservative forces would have no need to limit the scope of democracy in fear of radical, popular concessions (Zizek, 2010: 392) if the state really was just an

executive for the interests of capital. Now, to be certain, the treatment of the state as ‘relatively autonomous’ does not solve all issues of state theorisation – under this treatment questions remain as to why the state might be more or less autonomous at particular points in time, in different places. ‘Relative autonomy’ *does*, however, help us to locate the state between the separation of the ‘economic’ and the ‘political’. It shows us that that which is ‘democratic’ is not necessarily progressive. For example, the related Gramscian concepts of ‘hegemony’ and ‘passive revolution’ attempt to explain why popular movements and democratic processes can deepen capitalist social relations, rather than challenge them (see Morton, 2007; Thomas, 2009). But, in any case, the first line of ‘defence’ against democratic contestation’s radical potential is simply the apparent separation of the ‘political’ from the ‘economic’, which comprises Political Marxism’s abstract definition of capitalism. While formal democratic freedoms do not necessarily ensure progressive outcomes, the contingently radical potential of this framework is limited in the first instance simply by the apparent separation of the political from the economic.

Here again we find increased utility for our conceptualisation of authoritarian neoliberalism through an explicit connection with the concept of depoliticisation. Marx’s dialectical method often returned to familiar concepts armed with fresh understandings – so too here do we return to our starting point with Ellen Meiksins Wood. Just as above, Burnham was seen to provide a mechanism for the claimed ‘strengthening-weakening’ dialectic set in motion by the authoritarian ‘fix’, so too does Wood nuance this argument. Take the following quote from *Democracy Against Capitalism*:

Economic struggle has been inseparable from political conflict and where the state, as a more visibly centralized and universal class enemy, has served as a focus for mass struggle. Even in more developed capitalist societies, mass militancy tends to emerge in response to ‘extra-economic’ compulsion, particularly in the form of oppressive action by the state, and also varies in promotion to the state’s involvement in conflicts over the terms and conditions of work (Wood, 1995: 46).

That is, when popular demands on the state apparatus exceed those that are possible at that point in time, given the necessity of maintaining capital accumulation, the state’s ‘autonomy’ is revealed as false. This becomes especially interesting when contrasted with non-Western expressions of the state, from the Hegelian perspective of contradictions driving history (see Desai, 2004: 28):

If the primitive state was the controller of economic resources and the major appropriator and distributor of surplus product, the advanced ‘Asiatic’ state may represent a more or less natural development out of that primitive form – the appropriating redistributive public power at its highest stage of development. Seen in this light, it is not so much the ‘hypertrophy’ of the ‘Asiatic’ state that needs to be explained. What requires explanation is the aberrant, uniquely ‘autonomous’ development of the economic sphere that eventually issued in capitalism (Wood, 1981: 86).

Thus, if we take ‘class’ and ‘state’ as being the poles of contradiction, within the Asiatic case the two remained close (that is, not in tension). The specific separation in the Western case drew that contradiction into starker relief, driving historical development, and resulting in ongoing struggle of the articulation and rearticulation of the boundary between the two spheres. This might even be argued to constitute one of the driving forces behind uneven and combined development – at the very least though, this will provide a point of reference for discussions around eurocentrism further on.

So, then, we can argue that the state is a contested space, but one which ultimately returns to the position of reproducing capitalist social relations. This is what is meant by the phrase ‘relative autonomy of the state’ – absolute autonomy would see the state freed from the structural necessity of reproducing capitalism. Put another way, the obscured ‘economic’ role of the state supports private surplus appropriation, highlighting the fact that the separation of the political and economic occurs only in appearance. This is borne out in practice through the moment of class struggle. While there may be struggles over the rate of exploitation (i.e. wage rate) or intensity of work (work conditions) within the workplace, these do not equate to a generalised, collective struggle. In the instances where struggle *does* become generalised, breaking out of the confines of the workplace and into the streets, and other public spaces – whether as a strike, or as a riot, as both are playing their part in the post-global financial crisis context (Clover, 2016). Indeed, the parallel developments of Western ‘Occupy’ movements, and spatialised resistance through the Arab Spring, has been the catalyst for much of the literature embracing ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ as the conceptual frame for the current period (Tuğal, 2016; Tansel, ed. 2017). Both historically, and contemporaneously, it is in these situations that the state becomes the class enemy, struggling in proxy for capital, simply in their attempts to maintain “law and order”. Again, this is clearly articulated by Wood:

It is not capital itself but the state that conducts class conflict when it intermittently breaks outside the walls and takes more violent form. The armed power of capital thus usually remains in the background; and when class domination makes itself felt as direct and personal coercive force, it appears in the guise of an ‘autonomous’ and ‘neutral’ state (Wood, 1981: 93).

It may seem esoteric to continually speak of “separation in appearance, but not in essence”. But in this instance, we see a material expression of that distinction – one that holds direct implications for considerations of ‘authoritarian’ state forms. It is in this *material basis* that we find the real power of fetishism under capitalism, as the essence is obscured through reference to real ‘half-truths’ in the apparent form. In the case that struggles break out of the workplace and are materially suppressed, it is the state that – in the case of advanced capitalist states, at least – is seen as the antagonist in that expression of struggle. It is in that moment the class character of the state may be perceived by members of that struggling collective of labour. And yet the separation between the moment of coercion and the moment of surplus appropriation means that such struggles do not challenge the depoliticisation of social property relations – that pressure is largely deflected toward the state. In this way, a more-authoritarian state can be seen as a depoliticising state: not only in the sense that areas of policy are removed from the realm of popular control, but also in the sense that direct coercion reinforces the depoliticisation of exploitation achieved through the separation of the ‘political’ and ‘economic’.

This process can be seen as a dynamic that might (contingently) operationalise the ‘strengthening-weakening’ claim of Poulantzas, upon which Bruff’s conception of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ rests:

insofar as capital in its mounting crises demands, and obtains, the state’s complicity in its anti-social purposes, that state *may* increasingly become a prime target of resistance in advanced capitalist countries – as it has been in every successful modern revolution. The effect of this may be to overcome the particularism and the ‘economism’ imposed on the class struggle by the capitalist system of production, with its differentiation of the economic and the political’ (Wood, 1981: 94-5, emphasis added).

Both the apparent separation of the ‘political’ and ‘economic’, and the state’s role in maintaining that appearance (particularly in the case of direct repression of class struggle), are threatened by authoritarian-type state interference. The separation of the political and the economic threatens to collapse as the state is seen more-and-more not

to be as ‘autonomous’ as first thought. This is not just a theoretical supposition. Some of the most tumultuous processes of change and revolution have occurred when the state becomes the target of popular struggle. In the words of E. J. Hobsbawm (1964: 112), writing on the implications of the French Revolution: ‘the political models created by the Revolution of 1789 served to give discontent a specific object, to turn unrest into revolution, and above all to link all Europe in a single movement’. Whether this threatens the state in continuum is unclear. The state may simply transition into a traditional totalitarian-type regime – an argument which is supported by Poulantzas (1974: 72) in his analysis of fascism: ‘The inability of any class or class fraction to impose its hegemony is what characterises the conjuncture of fascism’. Put differently, if the crisis of legitimation created by observable interventions by the state into the economic sphere can create the conditions in which *more* authoritarianism is the only solution. None of this is determined, however. The purpose here is simply to emphasise that the fractures created by the ‘strengthening-weakening’ of the state are *not* necessarily progressive.

This Chapter has looked to 1) deepen the critique of the claim by adherents to the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is constituted by historical specificity, by highlighting the fundamental nature of depoliticisation under capitalistic social property relations, and 2) to also strengthen the utility of the concept, by highlighting the ways in which contradiction, as discussed in this extant literature, might provide mechanisms for the strengthening-weakening of the state. Before moving on to consider more closely the methodologies of periodisation, however, there is another argument which must be brought into the conversation: the charges of *ahistoricism* and eurocentrism, which have both been levelled at the social property relations approach. This should be considered, for if depoliticisation through separation presents a challenge for our conceptualisation of authoritarian neoliberalism, then surely the more-open theoretical and historical categories of this critical approach – which, importantly, see a *greater* historical role for both state and non-state violence in capitalist development – present an even greater provocation? If Political Marxism obscures the inherent violence of capitalism, then surely a framework which reifies the violence of the current period as “different” also obscures the nature of capitalist social relations?

Theory against history

Subaltern and post-colonial theorists, such as Jairus Banaji and Sébastien Rioux, have criticised the social property relations approach, on the grounds that this approach gives methodological prioritisation to theory over history. Speaking on the separation of the ‘political’ and ‘economic’ within capitalism, Banaji labelled this approach ‘a methodology of forced abstractions, which identified relations of production with particular forms of exploitation, the concept of ‘historical specificity’ was radically impoverished’ (Banaji, 2010: 54), as he argued that ‘the line between freedom and coercion is impossible to draw’ (2010: 134). Taking up this same line is Rioux, who focuses on the continued and expanding role of ‘unfree’ labour under capitalism – defined as ‘forced labour, bonded labour, child labour, slave labour, famine slavery, indentured servants, involuntary domestic servitude, sexual servitude, child soldiers, and the like’ (Rioux, 2013: 93). For Rioux, neoliberal policies have created a socioeconomic context that has acted as a fertile bed for the increase of these extra-economic exploitative social relations, due in part to the conditions of precarity, uncertainty, and general economic hardship experienced by many in the periphery. The social property relations approach draws a contradistinction with capitalism and pre-capitalist forms by arguing that capitalism uniquely separates the political from the economic, with the appropriation of surplus value taking place in the economic sphere between formally-free wage-labourers and their employers. This definition sits uncomfortably with the continued and increasing role of indentured labour in the accumulation process, however, as Rioux explains: ‘according to political Marxism, then, so-called ‘unfree’ labour or ‘extra-economic’ coercion is antithetical to capital’s logic of unfree accumulation and therefore non-capitalist by definition’ (2013: 94). This is seen to be problematic, due to the continued – and possibly expanding – role for coercion and violence, particularly in subaltern experiences of capitalism. Not only is this problematic for the historicity of the social property relations, but it is also a problem for the specificity of authoritarian neoliberalism! That is, violence and state suppression would, in this view, seem to be integral to both neoliberalism *and* capitalism more generally. In this way, critique of authoritarian neoliberalism as a useful concept is deepened.

Rioux later draws in Hannes Lacher, bringing the state into this broader question of the mode of production. To trace Rioux’s criticism, we too should consider Lacher’s intervention, in which he asserted the importance of

Conceptualiz[ing] institutional orders such as the state and the market as social relations, and even more specifically as production relations... For the relations of production which are at the 'base' of society must encompass all those structures and institutions which we have discovered to be social relations. In that sense, capital as a social relation encompasses not only the market, but also the state. To go further: the autonomous political form of the state is a relation of production (Lacher, 2006: 39).

This understanding of the state as political, and overall social, and yet inextricably linked with production, is particularly important. As well as being guilty of an Anglo-centric focus, which in turn leads to an ahistorical explanation of the role of coercion in the development of capitalism, the claim by post-colonial theorists is that Political Marxism partially obscures the state; or, at least, it narrows our view of it. From this perspective, there would seem to be a paradox in Wood's treatment of the state. For Wood (1981: 92): '[under capitalism] direct political coercion is excluded from the process of surplus-extraction and removed to a state that generally intervenes only indirectly in the relations of production...'. The paradox in Wood's 'separationism', evident in this quotation, is this: the state is the location of the 'political', removed from the direct appropriation of the production process; and yet we are also encouraged to look beyond the 'appearance' of separation to see the two as both political. What, then, is the real role of the state? Is it simply another location in a series of similarly political moments? Or is it still a distinct location, but one with characteristics beyond the dualism of the 'political' and the 'economic'? And if it falls within the latter, what is this new differentiation? Put more simply, if the separation of coercion from appropriation is simply a useful veil for the reproduction of capitalistic social relations, then how do we conceive of the state behind that veil? Per this reading of Political Marxism, within the political/economic dichotomy, the state either must be 'political' or 'economic'. If it is 'political', it cannot have a surplus-extractive role – this overlaps with the problematisation outlined above. In the words of Rioux: 'Although the state continues to be essential to the maintenance of the whole system, its role is relegated to that of guardian of an otherwise insulated economic realm of capitalist exploitation' (2013: 99). Already, with the detailed engagement with Wood above, it should be apparent that this is something of an oversimplification – nevertheless, it is a key part of the critique of Political Marxism.

The subtitle of Wood's *Democracy against capitalism* (1995) – '*renewing historical materialism*' – is significant. Despite this commitment to historicism, this approach has been labelled as *ahistorical*: 'the central problem with Political Marxism: that conceptual abstractions

and empirical realities do not correspond to each other (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, 2015: 31). The criticism here is that by prioritising theoretical closure over empirical analysis, the social property relations approach of Wood and Brenner results in a ‘violent abstraction’. An example of this is how Rioux takes issue with Brenner’s account of the origins of capitalism, seeing it as theoretically pre-determined:

Implicit to Brenner’s approach is that he already knows what he is looking for – that is, the dispossession of peasants from their means of subsistence and the break-up of extra-economic coercion. By definition, then, the transition to capitalism must be an agrarian phenomenon disconnected from commercial development (Rioux, 2013: 100).

Rioux’s criticism continues, arguing that Charles Post’s (2011) characterisation of plantation-slavery as non-capitalist renders such a narrow scope as to obscure significant, violent experiences, which – for him – also constitute the history of capitalism. Similarly, Rioux also argues that Wood’s characterisation of the British Empire as non-capitalist, is seen as a further example of this over-emphasis on theory, at the expense of a dialectical engagement with history: ‘In this ‘history *deja constituee*’, to borrow Banaji’s felicitous expression, history is reread through the prism of a static method of self-confirmation as it filters history according to a predefined theoretical grid’ (Rioux, 2013: 101).

Then there is the issue of eurocentrism. Banaji highlights the way in which Southern experiences of the emergence of capitalist forms were distinct from that of Britain – distinct in a way that proves problematic for the conception that there is a neat separation of the ‘political’ and ‘economic’ under capitalism. In a way, Wood and Brenner can be seen as reproducing the errors of Marx himself, with Marx ‘reducing Asiatic regimes to the bipolar simplicity of a mass of village-communities on one side and an all-powerful sovereign on the other’ (Banaji, 2010: 17). From mischaracterising the prehistory of ‘Asiatic’ capitalism to try and fit it within European experiences of feudalism, we move to the issues surrounding colonialism and the continued role of the ‘extra-economic’, for ‘if the capitalist enterprises which dominated most of colonial Africa and large parts of Asia utilised coercive forms of exploitation, we must ask whether the laws of motion of capital are not, within certain limits, compatible with ‘barbarous forms of labour’ (Banaji, 2010: 63). Just as Rioux focuses on the role of ‘unfree’ labour within global neoliberal capitalism, so too has the history of capitalism

been defined by ‘uneven and combined development’ of the ‘political-economic’ separation, with some spaces of capitalism requiring more or less violence in order to ensure accumulation. Further, the uneven and combined development approach would emphasise that these distinct experiences are internally related – that they are constituent, causal parts of a world-system totality. The too-often Anglo-centric history of historical materialism ignores these spaces in which appropriation occurs outside of the economic ‘moment’. Crucially, Banaji and others argue, despite not fitting the theoretical ‘schema’ of Political Marxism, that these moments must be included in our conception of ‘capitalism’.

Joining Banaji and Rioux in criticising Political Marxism’s euro-(or Anglo-)centrism are Cemal Burak Tansel (2015), and Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu (2015). For Tansel (2015: 79), the Political Marxism of Brenner especially is ‘imbued with a stringent conception of the history of capitalism and the modern states-system within which their origins, development and expansion are predominantly explained through an exclusively European lens’. Anievas and Nişancıoğlu give three reasons as to why such a lens is problematic:

First, it conceives of the origins and sources of capitalist modernity as a product of developments primarily *internal* to Europe... By positing a strong ‘inside-out’ model of social causality (or *methodological internalism* – whereby European development is conceptualised as endogenous and self-propelling) Europe is conceived as the permanent ‘core’ and ‘prime mover’ of history... This second normative assumption of Eurocentrism can be termed *historical priority*, which articulates the historical distinction between tradition and modernity through a spatial separation of ‘West’ from ‘East’... From these two assumptions emerges a third predictive proposition: that the European experience of modernity is a universal stage of development through which all societies must pass. This stadial assumption posits a *linear developmentalism*... (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, 2015: 4-5).

This excerpt is worth reproducing at length, as these three interrelated problems of eurocentrism should be addressed – methodological internalism, historical priority, and linear developmentalism. Regarding the former, there would seem to be an inability for Political Marxism to locate the ‘international’ as a causal or constituent factor in its model.

Bringing this problematic forward in time, consider how it intersects with authoritarian neoliberalism: although the separation of the ‘political’ from the ‘economic’ may be a

defining feature of the experience of capitalism in advanced capitalist states, the *depoliticisation* that this constitutes does not have a clear understanding of the depoliticisation of the relations *between* states. Here we essentially have an issue of relative vantage point. By focussing on the unique character of market compulsion within the wage-labour relation, the approach of Political Marxism abstracts away from the ‘state’. Similarly, even a consideration of depoliticisation which is conscious of the way states might pattern that ‘separation’ differently in distinct contexts does not necessarily encompass depoliticisation in a global or regional context. How then are we to understand the recent experience of Greece within the European Union? – a moment of authoritarian statism discussed in the third chapter of this thesis. An answer is provided elsewhere by Jessop, who distinguishes between depoliticisation at the levels of ‘polity, politics, and policy’ (see Jessop, 2014: 210) – Greece’s inability to follow the popular rejection of austerity occurred due to depoliticisation at the level of ‘polity’. Political Marxism is operating at such a high level of abstraction that it is insensitive to such specificities. This surely is a limitation of Political Marxism? Regarding the latter two criticisms – ‘historical priority’ and ‘linear developmentalism’ – the issue raised is whether theoretical abstractions of the social property relations approach can incorporate the ways in which historical examples of ‘unfree’ labour, war, violence, and other forms of extra-economic appropriation or mediations thereof are actually necessary ‘others’ to allow the reproduction of the ‘core’:

What the Political Marxist conception of capitalism thus erases are the various transitional or mediated forms of labour and regimes, involving different combinations of modes of production. Indeed, the idea of ‘combined development’ – as an amalgamation of differentiated modes of production within a social formation – is absent from the Political Marxist discourse, which unduly abstracts from the messy and contradictory reality of ‘really existing’ capitalisms (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, 2015: 30-31).

Whether as ‘uneven and combined development’, or even dependency theory, there are many approaches which argue that the experience of capitalism in the advanced capitalist states are causally constituted by international structures of inequity and extraction. As argued by Andre Gunder Frank, ‘contemporary underdevelopment is in large part the historical product of past and continuing economic *and other* relations between satellite underdeveloped and the now-developed metropolitan countries’ (Frank, 1970: 5). The problem is made stark by considering the following: can all countries in an international capitalist system maintain a pristine separation of the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’

simultaneously? This is a question to which Political Marxism would seem to have no answer.

But what does this criticism of Political Marxism mean for the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’? So far, this chapter has asserted that 1) depoliticisation is a process which seems to describe similar material conditions to those grouped under the rubric of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, posing a challenge to the periodisation of the latter, and 2) that the separation of the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’, which some see as definitional to capitalism, is also itself a form of depoliticisation, thus challenging the historical specificity of authoritarian neoliberalism even further. Do the criticisms of Political Marxism resolve this challenge to Bruff’s conceptualisation? Should Political Marxism be guilty of ‘violent abstraction’ (Sayer, 1987), then perhaps any challenge this approach poses to the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ might be void. Unfortunately for the proponents of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, this is not the case. If, as criticisms of Political Marxism maintain, there is a continued role for various forms of ‘extra-economic’ appropriation within capitalism, perpetrated by both the state and non-state actors, *then the historical role of violence and the general repression of freedoms would also seem to challenge the periodisation authoritarian neoliberalism.* An authoritarian state oppresses and involves itself in appropriation; for the postcolonial and uneven and combined development approaches, this form of state can be a constitutive part of a capitalist world system. This, then, would seem to open up challenge to our periodisation of authoritarian neoliberalism on *two fronts* – from both ‘Political Marxists’ and from ‘uneven and combined developmentalists’.

Some resolutions

This chapter has expanded the scope of the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism in a way that might attract the ire of many, making generalisations regarding not just one body of literature, but several. At this point, it is worth at least attempting to resolve some of these open contentions. This will be done through a return to the ontological and epistemological precepts relating to ‘essence’ and ‘appearance’ in historical materialism, as well as the dialectical method of shifting ‘vantage point’. Through this we can perhaps rescue some of the utility of Political Marxism, in the face of its many

critiques – to avoid ‘throwing out the baby with the bathwater’, so to speak. This is a necessary aside for two reasons. Firstly, the challenge to the specificity of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, which is the purpose of this chapter, can only be maintained if these open contentions are at least somewhat resolved. And secondly, the way in which this is done is significant. By drawing on the theory of internal relations (Ollman, 2015), we flag the significance of ‘vantage point’ for an argument around periodisation – the purpose of the latter two chapters.

One of the most fundamental aspects of Marx’s critique of capitalism was the realisation that ‘not unlike our subconscious, capital also instils illusions in our minds’ (Varoufakis, 2015: 18). Marx helped us to understand that capital, by its very nature, presents itself in disguise, obstructing our understanding. It is this appreciation of the veiled ontology of the capitalist mode of production that is implied by Marx’s dualisms, ‘appearance/essence, form/content, illusion/reality, phenomena/hidden substratum, form of manifestation/inner connection’ (Geras, 1971: 69), and encapsulated within the concept of ‘fetishism’. Fetishism is the way in which the people that comprise the capitalist system, and the web of social relations between them, appear in the form of ‘things’ (Bottomore, 1983: 165). The pen on my left appears as a ‘thing’ – a pen. By appearing in this way, the web of social relations that produced the pen are obscured – the labour-power I have commodified and sold to obtain the money-capital necessary to buy the pen, which was produced overseas in Malaysia by a worker who, also selling their labour power, operates a line of machinery, mediated by the many constituent parts of the transport and sales chains. This then obscures further the fundamental relation between humans and nature, and the way in which capitalism is created in and through nature (Moore, 2015). The *essence* of the pen is the totality of social (and natural) relations that its production was predicated upon; the *appearance* of the pen is, simply, a pen. Fetishism, then, is an illustration of the illusory nature of capitalism. But those illusions, crucially, are based in a materiality. This *historically specific* form of illusion is important to note, as it *compounds* the general dangers of misperception associated with our subconscious tendency toward simplifying complex realities – not only must one be cautious of subconscious abstraction, one must also be aware of the way in which capitalism by its very nature works to avoid being perceived in its actual form. These methodological, epistemological and ontological precepts are crucial if we are ever to

pierce the fog which surrounds the issue at hand – the theoretical category of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’.

As noted above, the most fundamental ontological claim Marx made about capitalism was that its essential nature could not be perceived through mere empirics. His criticism of the ‘vulgar economists’ was that they failed to grasp this fact: ‘even the best spokesmen of classical economy remain more or less in the grip of illusion which their criticism had dissolved, as cannot be otherwise from a bourgeois standpoint, and thus they fall more or less into inconsistencies, half-truths and unsolved contradictions’ (Marx, 1958 [1894]: 817). Interestingly, the implicated methodology of looking past appearance to deduce the ‘real’ has parallel in the discipline of physics (something which, for all their ‘physics-envy’, neoclassical economists have failed to grasp). In the words of Galileo Galilei, arguing against a geocentrist named Scipione Chiaramonti,

I... have never seen nor ever expect to see, the rock fall any way but perpendicularly, just so do I believe that it appears to the eyes of everyone else. It is, therefor, better to put aside the appearance, on which we all agree, and to use the power of reason either to confirm its reality or to reveal its fallacy (Galilei, 1953 [1632]: 256).

Here the argument is twofold: 1) that our senses cannot perceive the actual motion of the falling rock, and that 2) an approach to science which is based on these surface appearances will fail to uncover the actual motion of the falling rock. Varoufakis (2015: 18-20) utilises another analogy from the world of physics to illustrate this, under the banner of ‘the parallax challenge’: a stick part-submerged in water seems from different angles to be bent, but the angle of the bend varies depending on where it is viewed from. Complicating matters further, if the water is flowing, then the stick will seem to be in flux. All of this obscures the ‘reality’ of the stick – that it is, in fact, straight. Speaking methodologically, ‘we need a theoretical leap, like the one the physicist makes, which will allow us to rise above incommensurable observations before landing in a conceptual place from which the whole thing makes perfect sense’ (Varoufakis, 2015: 18; see also Feyerabend, 1979: 69-80). Thus, just as established method in physics calls for one to look past surface appearances to understand the reality hidden beneath, so too does Marx.

The purpose of historical materialism, then, is to follow in Marx’s tradition and attempt to uncover the essence buried under the many ‘half-true’ appearances of capital. By

stressing the ‘apparent’ separation of the ‘political’ and the economic’ under capitalism, Wood was explicitly following in this tradition. The question, then, is whether she and Brenner were successful in their attempt to unveil part of the essence of capitalism (for, as we established earlier, complete perception is impossible). A useful test here is provided by Norman Geras:

‘It seems necessary... to adopt an analytic procedure, in an attempt to isolate different aspects of the concept and to examine them separately, even if such a procedure runs the risk of fragmenting what Marx conceived to be a unified phenomenon. For, if it enables us to clarify the aspects, taken separately, the chances of understanding their relations to one another, that is to say, of reconstituting them as a whole, are thereby enhanced’ (Geras, 1971: 71).

By separating out parts from the whole, and considering their respective ‘reality’, this method is that of ‘vantage point’. This is the method outlined by Geras – that by considering ‘class’, ‘race’, or ‘the state’, we are considering a part of a socio-historical totality; not taking them in isolation, or rejecting the ways in which these facets are internally related, but performing a necessary and temporary abstraction, before bringing the better-understood fragment back into relation with the whole. This method is one which Marx engages in continuously, as noted by Bertel Ollman (2015: 17): ‘Every inquiry – but also every account of its findings – begins from somewhere, and where that is establishes a perspective in which everything that follows finds its place, order, size, limits, neighbours and, to a large degree, is significance (or lack of)’. Let us consider this more closely.

‘Vantage point’ has been mentioned at several points so far, and will continue to feature in the analysis of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism. As Ollman notes, a vantage point is the perspective from which analysis or theorisation starts. But when employed deliberately, this does not constitute an argument against all other possible abstractions. In Marx’s work, he took many ‘apparently contradictory positions’ (Ollman, 2003: 100). For example, capital is in different places treated as a social relation, a means of exchange (money capital), a class, and as value. Rather than undermining or vitiating his other arguments, these diverse treatments show a deliberate deployment of ‘vantage point’ and the theory of internal relations:

They are the result of different abstractions but not of extension or level of generality. They are due to different abstractions of vantage point. The same relation is being viewed from different sides, or the same process from its different moments (Ollman, 2003: 100).

Here we have a nuanced variation of the ontological presuppositions of Galileo and Geras. Understanding that the complexity of our social world – or physical, in the case of Galileo – leads us to an appreciation that considering appearance alone is insufficient for scientific analysis. Going further, it also tells us that the same ‘essence’ will appear differently, when viewed from alternative angles, or, rather, ‘vantage points’. Each perspective will affect the ‘order, hierarchy, and priorities, distributing values, meanings, and degrees of relevance, and asserting a distinctive coherence between the parts’ (Ollman, 2003: 100). The bedrock of ontology supports one’s position on epistemology, from which methodology flows. If we understand the ontology of the capitalist social system to be something too open and overdetermined to understand in an absolute way, then this leads us to consider whether analysis is possible at all. The process of deliberate abstraction through moving ‘vantage points’ is an answer to that ontological-epistemological quandary. This also forces us to acknowledge that we necessarily will have conflicting, contradictory pictures of capitalist social relations – the contention between the perspective of Political Marxism and that of uneven and combined developmentalists are just one such example of this.

However, an understanding of the ‘essence/appearance’ dualism is *not* an historical ‘master key’ (Miliband, 2015: 52) – that is to say, there is not just *one* veil to look behind, but many. Part of this ontological/epistemological sketch is made, inadvertently, by Anievas and Nişancıoğlu (2015: 32): ‘History is, of course, a messy, complex affair, full of accidents and contingencies and the untheorisable. A grand theory of everything is unlikely’. And so, moving from one vantage point to another, uncovering something more of the ‘real’ from each, is the only possible methodology to understand more than obfuscating appearances. Such a method will, of course, create aberrations – as long as we do so consciously and explicitly, and always return to a position of internal relations, then we might hope to pull off the ‘dance of the dialectic’ (Ollman, 2003). This does not, however, imply that all abstractions of ‘vantage point’ are as valid as each other. The test to be applied is whether that particular abstraction makes things clearer. Or, as Sayer demands, whether that abstraction obscures the causal mechanisms that it seeks to unveil. This test of ‘violent abstraction’, as it relates to abstractions of ‘vantage point’ will return throughout this thesis.

But what of ‘vantage point’, and the open contention raised by this chapter? This is how we can reconcile the contradictory treatment of the ‘state’ within the separation of the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’ – they are *both necessary abstractions*. In a way, neither of them exist. They are simply conceptual apparatuses used to try and better understand the real. On one hand, not only does the state ‘not exist’ (Hay, 2014), but paradoxically, it also historically predates capitalism: ‘The State is older than capital, and its functions cannot be immediately derived from those of commodity production and circulation’ (Mandel, 1983: 477; see also Scott, 1998), further complicating any relationship the state might have with capital. Perhaps it would be more useful to read the separation of the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’, as discussed by Political Marxism, as something which occurs at the level of appearance, rather than essence? As Anievas and Nişancıoğlu assert, a grand theory of everything is unlikely, or even impossible. Their criticism of Wood and Brenner would only seem to hold if one reads Political Marxism as purporting to have discovered just that – a reading which does not seem to be based on the actual claims of the approaches proponents.

The explanatory power of separationism can only go so far. If your purpose is to understand how the boundaries are drawn between the democratic state and the authoritarian workplace, then this tool is incredibly useful; if you are looking to explain the complexities of inter-state relations, and differing levels of capitalist development within and between them, then it will be less useful. But this was never the purpose of this abstraction, as we can see through a close reading of Wood: ‘What requires explanation is the aberrant, uniquely ‘autonomous’ development of the economic sphere that eventually issued in [Western] capitalism’ (Wood, 1981: 86). Wood is explicit about the purpose of her abstraction, and it is worth considering this argument at length:

The capitalist system was born in England. Only in England did capitalism emerge, in the early modern period, as an indigenous national economy, with mutually reinforcing agricultural and industrial sectors, in the context of a well-developed and integrated domestic market... England may have been the first and even the first *industrial* capitalism, but it reached its destination by a detour, almost by mistake, constitutionally weak and in unsound health... This model implies that there is a *natural* course of capitalist development which has little to do with the real *historical* processes that produced the world’s first capitalist system...

But suppose we break out of this question-begging circle by just beginning with the simple fact that a capitalist economy *nowhere* and *never* developed in a more ‘modern’ or ‘bourgeois’ society before English capitalism... Might the very features that have been ahistorically

defined as the marks of modern capitalism turn out, on the contrary, to be the tokens of its absence? (Wood, 1991: 1-2, original emphasis).

Wood, here, is emphasising the historical specificity of Western – especially English – capitalism. This was notably the starting point of Marx, as well: ‘The history of expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods. In England alone, which we take as our example, has it the classic form’ (Marx, 1967: 669-670). In labelling English capitalism as ‘classic’, is he arguing this is the *only* definition of capitalism? Of course not – the preceding sentence shows us that Marx conceived of it as a useful example (or, rather, ‘vantage point’), rather than a generalizable law. The criticisms levelled by Banaji and others reacts against the superimposition of a theorisation derived from a specific historical instance of capitalist development over all capitalist moments. I would argue that this was never the ambition of Ellen Meiksins Wood, or Robert Brenner. Marx famously treated the concept of ‘capital’ in at least four different ways – as a social relation, as alienation, as value, and as commodities (Ollman, 2015: 11). Rather than indicating inconsistency, they show Marx’s method of moving from vantage point to vantage point, showing a little more of the obscured ‘real’ from each. It is in this way that the seemingly incongruous theories of the ‘state’, the separation of the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’, and of the ‘international’ can be maintained as all ‘real’, untrue, and necessary, all at the same time.

But what does this have to do with ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’? Method ultimately flows from an understanding of ontology. If the ontology of the social system we are analysing is such that it actively evades full comprehension, then this raises important implications for the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the way we go about acquiring that knowledge (methodology). If we, as Marxists, appreciate that contradictory positions can both be held as ‘true’, depending on vantage point, then this surely provides justification for – amongst other things – periodisation: “Of course authoritarianism has existed throughout capitalist development; but we can argue that the abstraction of emphasising the current period as *different* is justified as a necessary abstraction to explain the durability of neoliberalism”. These ontological precepts both justify abstraction, while also demanding that such abstractions reveal more than they obscure. As put forcefully by Ollman (2003: 111), ‘only an account that puts the process

of abstraction at the centre enables us to think adequately about change and interaction, which is to say, to think dialectically, and to do research and engage in political struggle in a thoroughly dialectical manner'. The theory of internal relations provides a useful way of considering conflicting perspectives, and alternative abstractions – something that will become necessary in following chapters, where the challenge of periodisation is brought to the fore.

Conclusion

The overarching question addressed by this thesis is whether 'authoritarian neoliberalism' is a valid and useful way to characterise the current period of capitalism. As quoted at the outset of this chapter, Bruff (2014: 115-116) sees this period as being defined, in part, by a 'recalibration of the kinds of activity that are feasible and appropriate for nonmarket institutions to engage in, diminishing expectations in the process'. That this immediately connotes the process of 'depoliticisation' – an older and contested concept – would seem to put the novelty of authoritarian neoliberalism in doubt, not only as an original concept, but also as a historically specific set of material conditions. If this is expanded to include the most fundamental of all depoliticisations – the separation of the 'political' from the 'economic' under capitalism – then what might have been considered conceptual overlap threatens to collapse this neologism entirely. Taking a wider geographical view, even the more coercive aspects of authoritarianism would seem to be a part of the violent history of capitalist development.

But while these points present a problematic for scholars embracing the authoritarian neoliberal frame, the challenges are not insurmountable. In many ways, it simply highlights the need to make explicit *on what grounds one can justify the periodisation of capitalism*. It is precisely this question to which we turn in the second chapter: the interrelated concepts of the state, crisis, and periodisation. There are two reasons for such a detailed sojourn into these debates is to consider the periodisation of 'authoritarian neoliberalism', and to consider whether the 'strengthening/weakening' dynamic offers hope of successful challenge to authoritarian-type developments. Here, the interrelated issues of coercion, depoliticisation, and the class-character of the state offer a mechanism whereby such a dynamic *may* be realised – a mechanism which was hitherto

missing from our conceptualisation. Both for Peter Burnham, and for Ellen Meiksins Wood, depoliticisation is a contradictory process. The separation of the political and economic is an important illusion which plays a part in the reproduction of capitalist social relations. When the state quarantines policy areas away from democratic control (however limited), or if it directly intervenes against protest and political agitation, the apparent autonomy of the state is brought into question, potentially making the state itself a target of struggle. As Poulantzas's analysis of fascism (1975) shows, these contradictions will not necessarily lead to progressive outcomes, but nevertheless, these processes help us to better understand what is meant by a 'strengthening-weakening' of the state.

Not only has authoritarianism played an important role in capitalist development in general, but depoliticisation – a material process similar to the conditions theorised as 'qualitatively distinct' under 'authoritarian neoliberalism' – would seem to be a feature of earlier neoliberal governments, such as Tony Blair's New Labour government. This leads us directly into a consideration of the problem of periodisation. In the following chapter, we will arrive at a method of periodisation, through a consideration of the related themes of state and crisis, with which we can then evaluate the claims made by proponents of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. Applying that understanding of periodisation to the real history of authoritarianism under neoliberalism in the past four decades will be the task of chapter three.

Chapter Two

State of Flux: Theories of the (capitalistic) state and periodisation

Authoritarian statism is bound up with the periodization of capitalism into distinct stages and phases (Poulantzas, 1978: 204).

I should like to point out a confusion which has neither been denounced nor elucidated, and which dominates the interpretation of Marxism now, and probably will for a long time to come: I mean expressly *the confusion that surrounds the concept of history* (Althusser, 2015 [1970]: 181, emphasis in original).

Introduction

It is widely noted that the concept of neoliberalism is an especially ambiguous one. With so many differing definitions, alternative genealogies, and approaches to the problem which feature distinct ontological and epistemological foundations, some have dismissed the term altogether (c.f. Dunn, 2016). In this context, qualifying the term further with an additional adjective ('authoritarian') would seem to only add to the conceptual cacophony, rather than offer clarification. This being so, an intervention which is underpinned by such a vague understanding of historiography and periodisation is particularly problematic, and unlikely to be embraced as a discrete research agenda. On the other hand, should we immediately start deploying the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' without rigorous theoretical and historical development – taking the conceptualisation as finished, and going about diagnosing this ill wherever we can – then surely the critics of the term 'neoliberalism' in general are right. If we skip straight to the application, avoiding the difficult questions of periodisation and abstraction, then Dunn may well be right to call for the abandonment of the term. If 'authoritarian neoliberalism' is to be a useful framework, it must be a theoretically robust one, with an explicit argument as to why framing the current moment as historically *different* is useful and valid.

The concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ intersects with a multitude of themes, events and debates: Thatcherism, neoliberalism, new constitutionalism, the European Central Bank, the Global Financial Crisis, state coercion, hegemony, the Greek sovereign debt crisis, and the Occupy movement, just to name a few – and all of this in just sixteen pages of initial conceptualisation (Bruff, 2014). Underlying these, however, are two assertions, which hold significant theoretical ramification:

Authoritarian neoliberalism does not represent a wholesale break from pre-2007 neoliberal practices, yet it is qualitatively distinct... (Bruff, 2014: 116),

And,

The attempted ‘authoritarian fix’ is potentially more of a sticking plaster than anything more epochal (Bruff, 2014: 125).

These contrasting quotations raise some pressing questions, and suggestive lines of inquiry. On what grounds can one argue that ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is ‘qualitatively distinct’, and yet not ‘epochal’? Is there some kind of middle-ground periodisation? A clearer, more-explicit theory of history is required here. And so, the task of this chapter is to develop a methodology of periodising capitalist development that might support (or disqualify) these claims. The chapter attempts to reveal the inner workings of the theoretical ‘black box’ behind ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ – what are the theoretical implications of labelling a process ‘qualitatively distinct’?

To be fair, while he does not provide clear answers, Bruff does acknowledge that he is raising questions of periodisation. The only hint of an approach to periodisation employed is found in reference to the state theory of Poulantzas. For Bruff,

The state is emphatically not a predetermined entity whose function is to act in a monolithic manner in the name of capital. Rather, its evolution is strongly connected to the manner in which class conflicts manifest themselves over time (Bruff, 2014: 119).

This process is seen as an open, undetermined one, which is likely to vary along both spatial and temporal lines. However, periodisation is still apparently possible; Bruff draws on Poulantzas to assert that even in the face of such ongoing, varied change, it is still possible to find distinct periods within these changes in state form:

Nevertheless, Poulantzas argues that the periodisation of the development of capitalism into distinct phases of history is possible, meaning that certain forms of capitalist state are likely (but not guaranteed) to predominate within such periods’ (Bruff, 2014: 119).

Yet, we cannot approach the challenge of periodisation without also, and first, considering the theorisation of the state – how can we understand the way the state might change if we do not have a working understanding of *what the state actually is*?

Debates around the nature of the state under capitalism are far from settled. Indeed, attempts to develop a *general* theory of the state have proved so difficult that most – bar a few key exceptions, such as Bob Jessop (2002, 2008, 2016) – have withdrawn from the task since the debates in the 1970’s (of which Poulantzas was a key participant). A comprehensive survey of this debate is beyond the scope of this thesis. Here we have a (relatively) more modest agenda: *to understand perspectives on how and why the state might change over time*. From the starting point of ‘relative autonomy’ – an important rejection of both liberal pluralism, *and* instrumentalist Marxian approaches – we can start to see how the state operates, paradoxically, as both separate from, and a part of, capitalist social relations. It is this contradictory ontology, when brought into contact with capital accumulation, and crises thereof, which produces change. For this, we must move beyond just the contributions of Poulantzas and Stuart Hall (who also feature in Bruff’s theorisation), to also consider the state theory of others, including O’Connor, Jessop, and Gramsci.

Theories of the state, especially the perspective of O’Connor, lead directly into theories of crisis. And it is with theories of crisis that we approach theories of *history*. It is precisely on theories of history – or, more especially, ‘periodisation’ – where Bruff and the framework of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ again find themselves in troubled waters. Locating Bruff in debates around the appropriate way in which to break up capitalist development into distinct phases and periods is, relative to state theory, a more-difficult task. This is because Bruff is never explicit as to what he means when he says that the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism, although related to the neoliberalism of pre-2008, is ‘qualitatively distinct’. As such, while the first half of this chapter can be considered a ‘fleshing out’ of the framework already given to us, the latter half represents a departure. In this section, we will consider several key contributions, including: ‘long wave’ theory, Gramscian approaches to periodisation, and regulationist⁵ approaches. The purpose of this survey is to venture out into those broader debates, and to identify key insights from

⁵ There is semantic significance in the labels we use. Here we refer to ‘regulationist approaches’, rather than ‘*régulation* theory’, as no attempt is made to distinguish between the many sub-schools within this tradition: the Parisian school, the Amsterdam school, West German regulationists, etc. (see Jessop, 1990).

each, which are then deployed in the next chapter to analyse the actual history of neoliberalism, and reflect on the analytical usefulness of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’.

Ultimately, the argument developed throughout this chapter is this: the analytical task of periodisation is an inherently subjective question, and ones’ answer will be dependent on the purpose of inquiry. (To be clear, this is not to say that capitalist history itself is purely contingent). If you start from the vantage point of the conjunctural agency of labour you will arrive at a radically distinct periodisation than if you, say, consider shifting gender dynamics within social reproduction, or state approaches to monetary policy. And while these different spheres interact and interrelate, this does *not* mean that the periodisation of one will necessarily explain change in another. When this is considered in relation to ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, the claims of Bruff are made clearer and more defensible. This position does not, however, remove all contention from this conceptual development – as we will highlight below, the Gramscian perspective especially poses an important immanent critique of Bruff’s work. What this methodological position does is to ensure that debates around rival periodisations can actually talk *to* each other, rather than the common alternative: talking past each other, without even realising it.

Why periodise?

Before launching into an exploration of state theory and periodisation, there is an ontological assumption regarding periodisation which must be made explicit:

Such exercises have general ontological, epistemological and methodological aspects. Their basic ontological assumption is the paradoxical simultaneity of continuity/discontinuity in the flow of historical time. For, if nothing ever changed, periodization would be meaningless in the face of the self-identical repetition of *eternity*; if everything changed at random all the time, however, so that no sequential ordering was discernible, then *chaos* would render periodization impossible (Jessop, 2001: 283).

Critical realism provides just such an ontological foundation from which to consider capitalist development. Built on the work of Roy Bhaskar (2008), critical realism sees the fundamentally *social* character of economic and political processes as generative of irregularity and change. For example, Tony Lawson (1997) suggests that the lack of observed stable economic relationships can be explained by this open-system ontology.

In his critique of neoclassical economics, Lawson points to this absence of historically stable relationships between economic variables as evidence of this unstable ontology. Contrasting this positivist approach, Lawson suggests that such phenomena might instead be in a state of ‘demi-regularity’ (or, awkwardly, ‘demi-regs’ for short):

The significance of patterns collected under the heading of demi-regs usually turns upon comparisons... Moments of social upheaval, crises and disruption may be especially revealing in this respect... In the case of social upheavals, the contrast is largely temporal. And, indeed, generative mechanisms become that much more accessible at any geo-historical turning point (Lawson, 1997: 203-204).

While Lawson – and critical realism more generally – does not present a definitive methodology for the periodisation of capitalist development, it is important to recognise the ontological assumptions which this task necessarily operates under. Further, also due to this shifting social ontological base, the application of these frameworks necessarily ‘depends on the ‘objects being periodized and the levels of abstraction and complexity at which they are studied’ (Jessop, 2001: 284).

The other insight gleaned from the critical realist approach, which directly informs the methodology of periodisation below, follows from the distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘actual’. Periodisation is often erroneously assumed to imply clean breaks – that variables either stop or start presenting empirically at the end of one period, or at the start of another. It is quite clear that this test would make periodisation impossible. Markets pre- and post-dated the emergence of capitalism, and there are still remnants of feudal social relations comingled within our contemporary capitalist social relations (Wood, 2002) – the continued existence of several monarchies, for example. If history has never been punctuated by what Bruff (2014: 116) terms a ‘wholesale break’, then it would be foolish to assume that periodisation relies on such stark points of departure. Critical realism gives us a deeper understanding of why periodisation might still be justified, despite these confounding empirical examples. A demi-regularity is a temporary regularity expressed within the actual, and observed in the empirical. A shift in these demi-regularities might see the continuation of an empirical observation, while changing the underlying mechanisms producing that outcome or expression. This kind of ontological claim is, of course, highly complex and contested – we cannot go into detailed discussion or proof here. It is enough for our purposes here simply to note two things: that periodisation rests on certain ontological assumptions; and that critical

realism offers an ontological position which might support this task. But, crucially, using critical realism as a starting point does not prescribe a theoretical or empirical vantage point from which analysis must be made – rather, it can be seen as congruent with a variety of approaches. Before returning to these questions around the method of periodisation, however, we must first tackle the fickle object of study that is the capitalistic state. As emphasised above, change is not constant. In understanding reproduction, our starting point must be the state: it is the structures of the state that themselves institutionalise class compromise and domination, contributing to the reproduction of social structures, at least for a time. Above Jessop (2001: 284) emphasised that we can only periodise ‘at the level of abstraction and complexity at which they are studied’ – it follows from this that as ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ attempts to explain changes occurring *at the level of the state*, then we necessarily must trace a method of periodisation which is sensitive to state theory. It is to the ontology of the state that we now turn.

Theorising the State

Despite the normative goals of neoliberal thinkers such as Friedrich von Hayek, Robert Nozick, and others, who argued that the state should be severely limited, the state remains very much extant and active under hegemonic neoliberalism. It also remains an intractable object of study – one which resists general theorisation. Both of these qualities have been recognised more-widely since the visible and perplexing responses of states around the world to the financial crisis of 2008. It is precisely this apparent ‘return of the state’ which has prompted scholars to reconsider the state analytically:

The deployment of public authority in ways that systematically benefit some interests more than others suggests the need for a more profound appreciation of the ways in which socio-economic sources of power make themselves felt in the political arena (Konings, 2010: 174).

Unfortunately, however, such realisations have usually served to re-enforce, rather than depart from, crude state-market dichotomies. An obvious example of this is the way in which Polanyi has come into vogue, but in most cases in a way that treats the pendulum of the ‘double movement’ in very crude, functionalist terms – with the management of society swinging from state, to market, back to state again (Konings, 2010). Even that small niche of scholars who treat the state in more sophisticated terms (e.g. Peck and Tickell, 2002; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Cahill, 2014) do so in a way which is more

concerned with material characteristics of neoliberalism, rather than engaging in general theorisation of the kind seen in the 1970's: 'Contemporary analysis is often confined to the concrete changes regarding the functions of the state under neoliberalism and, usually, sets aside explicit analysis of the general nature of the capitalist state' (Humphrys, 2015: 36).

The call of Konings to 'renew state theory' is a most welcome call to bring the state back into our analyses – especially considering the widespread tendency to concede the 'new right's categories of analysis – states and markets, public and private' (Panitch, 1999: 23). By accepting these zero-sum dualisms, the possibility that the state and markets might be *internally related* and *mutually constituted* is lost. Not only do these mainstream approaches hold theoretically and historically problematic positions – they treat the state as a fundamentally *resolved* subject of study, and 'makes unnecessary, indeed almost precludes, any special concern with its nature and role in Western-type societies' (Miliband, 1969: 2). The analysis here certainly does *not* treat the state as a 'solved' phenomenon; we cannot fully understand the state simply by re-reading Miliband, Poulantzas, Jessop, or anyone else (even though these contributions are far more useful than many others). We can, however, find generalised theorisations which are more satisfying than the usual dualisms of orthodox economics and political science. The general and abstract can then be brought down to the level of the concrete, through a direct engagement with historical developments – in the words of Nicos Poulantzas (1978: 25), 'A theory of the capitalist state can be elaborated only if it is brought into relation with the history of political struggles under capitalism'. Even if we hold that the ontological nature of our social world is too complex to be fully grasped by any individual or any theoretical framework, this does not impact our desire to build slightly less incomplete pictures.

It is by returning to the analysis of the capitalist state that leading scholars of neoliberalism have arrived at more-convincing explanations of the durability of neoliberalism in the face of ongoing crises. As stated above, these studies certainly do not approach general theorisation of the capitalist state, but they do incorporate insights from previous debates around that theorisation, and in doing so enrich their work. This is seen in the work of Cahill, where 'markets always depend upon social support structures in order to function. Thus, they are always embedded in social relations, but

such an embedding takes different forms in different historical periods and geographical and political contexts' (Cahill, 2014: 58). By approaching the relationship between the state and capitalist markets in this way, Cahill moves past the limitations of dominant ideas-centred explanations of neoliberalism (e.g. Blyth, 2013; Mirowski, 2013), underlining the point that our theorisation of the state is of crucial importance. This importance is both theoretical and strategic, as noted by Clarke:

Only an adequate theory of the capitalist state... can distinguish between those features of the capitalist state that are essential to it as a capitalist state, those features that belong to a particular stage of capitalist development, and those features that are contingently determined by the outcome of particular struggles (Clarke, 1991: 2).

Further, and particularly relevant here, Clarke is emphasising the way in which state theorisation is intimately tied up with the task of periodisation.

But what *is* the state? The apparent simplicity of this question belies its enigmatic quality: 'The state is such a complex theoretical object and so complicated an empirical one that no single theoretical approach can fully capture and explain its complexities' (Jessop, 2007: 132). With that epistemological limitation in mind, we can at the very least say what it is *not*. Foremost among these demonstrably problematic approaches is that of pluralism. Bound up with the epistemological context of the turn toward behavioralism and positivism in the social sciences during the latter half of the twentieth century, the pluralist conception of the state rose to dominance in the 1960s (Stretton, 1969), and is well captured in the words of Robert Dahl:

business men, trade unions, politicians, consumers, farmers, voters and many other aggregates all have an impact on policy outcomes; that none of these aggregates is homogenous for all purposes; that each of them is highly influential over some scopes but weak over many others; and that the power to reject undesired alternatives is more common than the power to dominate over outcomes directly (Dahl, 1959: 36).

In this position the state is simply seen as the forum in which these (and other) actors vie for their own interests. The state does not favour one group over another; in this view, the state operates under competitive pressure to ensure that *all* groups are heard, and that this neutrality is maintained: 'As a result, the argument goes, no government, acting on behalf of the state, can fail, in the not very long run, to respond to the wishes and demands of competing interests. In the end, everybody, including those at the end of the queue, get served' (Miliband, 1969: 2).

To advance a comprehensive critique of democratic-pluralist conceptions of the state (or the poststructuralist eschewal of it) would be tangential to the task at hand; that said, the very conjunctural developments which motivated the formulation of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ – and this thesis – provide an empirical demonstration of the failure of pluralists to account for the actual history of the state. Take an antecedent of the authoritarian response to the Greek sovereign debt crisis, and the direct rejection of a democratic referendum: the constitutionalisation of inflation-targeting monetary policy within the structure of the European Union. The partitioning away of policy levers *within* the state apparatus, has direct implications which contradict the possibility of policy alternatives – a situation far outside the framework of Dahl and other pluralists. With this shift in state structures, it becomes ‘much harder to deliver the outcomes chosen by the electorate if the government can count on only one set of (fiscal) instruments, while monetary and exchange rate policy may be pursuing entirely different targets that may even compromise the achievement of other socially desirable objectives’ (Saad-Filho, 2007: 112). Here, we see the field of the state being actively shaped by class struggle in such a way as to make future action difficult, if not impossible; the state cannot be a neutral field of struggle between equal actors if past struggles pattern the materiality of the state in such a way as to shape future outcomes as well. This is put well by Poulantzas:

political domination is itself inscribed in the institutional materiality of the State. Although the State is not created *ex nihilo* by the ruling classes, nor is it simply taken over by them: state power (that of the bourgeoisie, in the case of the capitalist State) is written into its materiality. Thus while the State’s actions are not reducible to political domination, their composition is nevertheless marked by it (Poulantzas, 1978: 14).

On this final point – that ‘the State’s actions are not reducible to political domination’ – we arrive at one of the historical alternatives to democratic-pluralism: historical materialism, and the ‘relative autonomy’ of the state. This approach appreciates the contradictory nature of the state, as the state is neither reduced to a neutral arbiter, nor a single-minded protector of the interests of capital. Let us unpack this.

First, take the contradictory nature of the state. Capital is *not* a homogenous bloc, and as such, contradictions within the capitalist class will be reflected through their interaction within the field of the state (Poulantzas, 1975: 89) – but this is also insufficient. As argued by O’Connor, the state as an institution (in the broad sense of

the term) is both a part of capitalist social relations, *but also apart from them*. By this we mean that the state has its own internal contradictions in terms of the way in which it is embedded in broader society:

The capitalistic state must try to fulfil two basic and often mutually contradictory functions – *accumulation* and *legitimization*. This means that the state must try to maintain or create the conditions in which profitable capital accumulation is possible. However, the state also must try to maintain or create the conditions for social harmony. A capitalist state that openly uses its coercive forces to help one class accumulate capital at the expense of other classes loses its legitimacy and hence undermines the basis of its loyalty and support (O'Connor, 1973: 6, emphasis in original).

In Chapter One, we considered the role of the state within the separation of the political and the economic under capitalism. Summarising that debate, and reading it onto O'Connor's theorisation, one could say, perhaps, that the state's *economic* role is the maintenance of the conditions necessary to ensure accumulation (at varying rates, and punctured by crises), whereas the task of legitimisation is its *political* role. The balance between the two has many determinants. Regardless of how that boundary is drawn, however, let us consider what is at stake in that determination. Following on from the discussion on Wood in the previous Chapter, we have the potential here of a state which is too-much focused on accumulation, and directly engaging in the sphere of production through the disciplining of labour. In this situation we can generalise that the second task (legitimation) is likely being eschewed. The *appearance* of a 'neutral' state, then, underpins capitalist production, and means that class conflict and struggle is often directed toward and managed by the state, despite its internal biases formed by the social structure in which it is situated. The fact that the state manages class struggle is therefore fundamental for the ongoing processes of capital accumulation. The revelation of the class character of the state can be a crisis of legitimisation.

The mediation of these contradictory purposes is necessary to reproduce the state-relation. O'Connor goes on to outline one way in which the tension of the state's dual purposes might be assuaged: 'the state must involve itself in the accumulation process, but it must either mystify its policies by calling them something that they are not, or it must try to conceal them (e.g., by making them into administrative, not political, issues)' (1973: 6). In other words, the process of depoliticisation is one which attempts to obfuscate the role the state is playing in accumulation – this may become more (or less)

necessary, depending on the conditions of accumulation, and the relative power of classes within the state. O'Connor points to the fact that states have to secure the 'conditions' of production which are not naturally preserved by the capital relation. This is partially achieved by providing economic processes with a kind of 'extra-economic' – or political – legitimacy:

Historically, states have developed institutions and regulations for moderating class conflict, including arbitration courts, labour relations boards and legislation providing frameworks for the conduct of negotiations over the employment relationship (Cahill 2014: 70).

These institutions afford a degree of protection and bargaining power to labour. But they also help to sustain production relations by masking them as equal and fairly adjudicated relationships. This state function simultaneously impedes and enables capital accumulation. Further conditions which the state ensures, in order to facilitate continued accumulation – conditions which may not emerge otherwise – include: the reproduction of labour power, including concerns such as housing, transport, and education; the legal enclosure of land and natural resources, transforming these into what Polanyi called 'fictitious' commodities; and the creation and maintenance of fiat money. Without each of these mediations, and many others besides, markets could not operate. However, the maintenance of these conditions also often create a site of further contestation, and real emancipatory potential. An instrumentalist reading would dismiss these institutions as instruments to ensure continued class domination; relative autonomy, and the dialectical method of historical materialism more generally, see the dual roles of reproduction and contestation as inseparable.

While these mediations do provide a visible and ideological foil to mask the inequities produced by the expansion of capital, and deflect opposition to workplace surplus extraction toward the state as a site of struggle, these processes do limit in a concrete way the relatively 'boundless' forms of capital accumulation that would take place were the state acting solely on behalf of the capitalist class. The incredible increases in production and accumulation *during* the two world wars is evidence of this potential. Indeed, it was during the war, not after it, that US manufacturing achieved its dominant position within the world economy (Cameron and Neal, 2003: 359). And yet these moments also highlight the reasons why the state *cannot* intervene in such a way indefinitely, or in any conjuncture. That is to say, the contestation of rationing and state control of production was highly contested, even in war time (Rowse, 2002: 93), and

certainly did not present with the same ability to reproduce which we see in the normal capitalist separation of the political and the economic. While a ‘capitalist state’ may be fundamentally concerned with creating the conditions for capital accumulation, this practically involves a diverse set of processes that disarm potential contests to the system and continue to project an image of the state’s neutrality to the wider public.

This, however, leads us to a reason why grouping violent and non-violent forms of ‘authoritarianism’ together might be theoretically problematic. Let us pause for a moment, and consider the state-theoretical implications of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ directly. Following from O’Connor, non-violent forms of authoritarian (neoliberalism) – such as depoliticisation of, say, regulatory policy – operate (or are designed to operate) in such a way as to maintain (reproduce) the state relation, and social property relations. A *violent* intervention in the productive sphere, however, has the potential to create a crisis of legitimisation in a qualitatively different way to that of an apparently non-violent intervention⁶. As argued in Chapter One, non-violent interventions in the process of accumulation *can* create problems for legitimisation, as the state apparatus becomes less responsive. But is this the same process as, say, the direct policing of protest? At the very least, these two processes would seem to be operating on different time horizons – an element of the periodisation problematic which we will return to further on in this chapter. But while this close engagement with O’Connor raises another facet of our problematisation of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, the vast majority of the approach outlined here is congruent with Bruff’s theorisation:

The state’s materiality, as the crystallization of various compromises between different social groups, inevitably renders as a multilinear, uneven, and contradictory process *any* attempted reshaping of the state’s social purpose...I view authoritarian neoliberalism as a response both to a wider crisis of capitalism *and* more specific legitimisation crises of capitalist states. Therefore, authoritarian neoliberalism simultaneously strengthens *and* weakens the state as the latter reconfigures into a less open and democratic polity. (Bruff, 2014: 119, 124).

There is no barren functionalism in Bruff’s treatment of the state; rather, it is nuanced with contingency, multi-scalar and -temporal, levels of analysis, and an understanding that crisis-management never solves contradictions, but merely displaces or delays them. Broadly speaking, the state-theory of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is similar to (if not the same as) that of Nicos Poulantzas – much of which we have relied upon here. In

⁶ Such mediations only *appear* as non-violent under a narrow, negative definition of violence: the absence of physical confrontation. The fundamental *structural* violence of the capitalist relation is, however, clear when one takes a broader, positive definition of peace, such as that developed by Johan Galtung (1969).

particular, Poulantzas's concept of 'authoritarian statism' (1978: 203) contributes much of the state-theoretical framework of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. One particular aspect of this overlap is the 'strengthening-weakening' dynamic which Poulantzas (1978: 246) attributed to authoritarian statism, whereby more-obvious forms of coercion within the site of the state result in 'major dislocatory effects within the state'. For Bruff, too, these forms of intervention result in a deepening of crisis within the state, as well as more broadly at the level of the political. The fact, however, that this authoritarian tendency is seen as rearing its head in relation *to crisis* raises another aspect of state theorisation, to which we now turn.

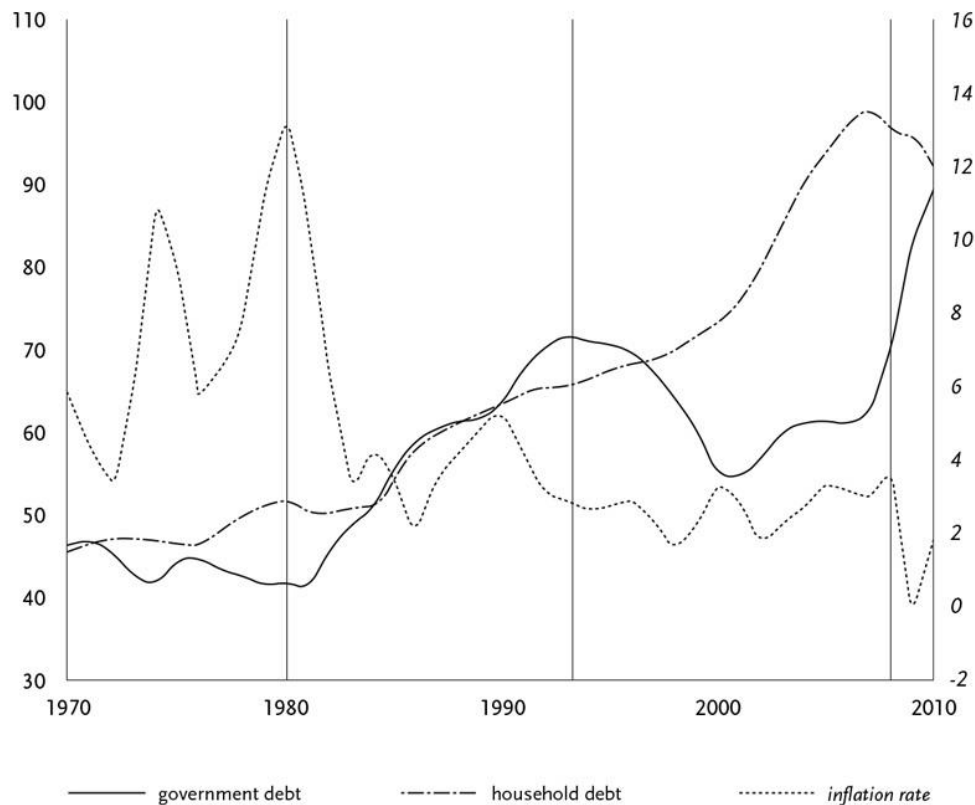
The state creates the 'rules' which are necessary for the functioning of markets. The state too, in its bourgeois-democratic form, depoliticises the social property relations of production. These two general statements fall within the two roles of the state: constitution of markets, and the *reproduction* of market society. The crisis tendencies within the former, however, make the latter more difficult. Here we are concerned with the role of the state in relation to *economic crisis*. While there is endless contention as to the nature of economic crises under capitalism, and their possible causes – does the rate of profit necessarily fall? Are crises accelerating or deepening? – for our purposes here it is relatively uncontroversial to say that 'capitalist development is marked by recurring economic crises'. For a system which is marked by contradiction and crisis in this way, it begs the question: 'how is capitalism reproduced'. The answer would seem to be the state:

For, although state intervention cannot change the objective nature of capitalism and its laws, it can influence their forms of appearance and development. [During the post-war period] these measures ranged from countercyclical fiscal and monetary policies through state sponsorship of R&D, investment, and production to direct involvement in key areas of production through the growth of public enterprise (Jessop, 1982: 49).

Understood in this way, the response of states to this crisis can be read as attempts to 'fix' this fundamental contradiction between the interests of the capitalist and worker in successive, temporary ways. Take, for example, the crisis of the 1970's. Toward the end of the Keynesian era wages were not just keeping pace with productivity increases, but in real terms often outstripped them, due to the maintenance (or, perhaps, allowance) of moderate inflation. This fed into the legitimisation crisis between state and capital, in which capital withheld or displaced investment, and so inflation became the immediate target of those governments such as Thatcher's and Reagan's, which looked to re-

balance this political tension. And while these strong states were willing to allow the consequence of depressed wages and increased unemployment resulting from tighter monetary policy, the political promises of increased prosperity had to be maintained (for a time).

Figure 1 - The crisis sequence in the US



Sources: OECD National Accounts Statistics; OECD Economic Outlook: Statistics and Projections

(Source: Streeck, 2014: 42)

Thus, increased worker prosperity via the co-existence of near full employment with continued wage growth, was now relocated to a rapidly increasing reliance on social security systems across these neoliberalising political economies, resulting in public debt replacing wage growth as the key source of demand which fuelled capital accumulation. Counter to neoliberal theoretical ‘free market, small state’ postulates, social spending often increased alongside the suppression of wages and the abandonment of full employment as a policy goal (Streeck, 2014: 40). Continuing this broad-brush narrative, public debt only lasted a short while as a prosperity-stopgap, as much of the OECD was

forced to go through a period of fiscal consolidation during the 1990's, pressured to do so by nervous bond markets. The story from here is more familiar to contemporary audiences, as the period from around 1993-2008 was of course defined by rapid increases in private debt, encouraged by state managers both directly and indirectly through low interest rates, deregulation, and continued wage suppression (Cahill, 2014: 141). These three phases of crisis, and crisis management – inflation, public debt, then private debt – can be illustrated empirically, as the following figure shows (Figure 1). But whether the narrative used to explain them accurately describes *why* states acted these ways is another matter.

While these empirical developments can indeed be traced in this way, *does this imply that the state acted consciously and instrumentally to solve each crisis as it arose, for the deliberate purpose of reproducing capitalism?* In short, no. The longer answer relies on an appreciation of the fact that the state does not reproduce capitalism for the sake of capital, but rather state managers operate under their own imperatives and incentives, creating this effect (Panitch and Ginden, 2012: 7).

But this statement raises again the question of 'who or what comprises the state'. Jessop (1999: 7) has suggested that the state presents as an 'institutional ensemble', which immediately problematizes the treatment of the state as a unified actor. From this point, it can also be said that there are likely to be contradictions between these many institutions – not only do civil society actors struggle with each other within the state apparatus, but the apparatus itself also operates with and against itself. This complex relationship between civil society and the state apparatus is perhaps best captured in the work of Gramsci, and his theorisation of the 'integral state'. For Humphrys,

Civil society and political society are better conceptualised not as geographical locations, but as different sites of social practice: civil society is the location of hegemonic practice and political society is the site of direct domination (Humphrys, 2015: 48).

In this sense, the state cannot be understood solely through reference to an institutional location, but must necessarily also include the relations between civil society and political society as well. Take Gramsci himself:

the state is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules (Gramsci 1971: 178, Q13§17; 244, Q15§10).

Thomas (2009: 137) has argued that ‘the concept of the integral state was intended as a dialectical unity of the moments of civil society and political society’; or, as Morton succinctly puts it, ‘this alternative conception of the state is inclusive of the realm of civil society’ (Morton, 2007: 120).

This Gramscian perspective on the state complicates the treatment of the state as either a coherent actor, *or* as a set of institutions somehow separate from the society in which they exist. Ultimately, however, as important as these insights are, treating civil society and the state as existing in ‘dialectical unity’ is a perspective characterised by a high level of abstraction. For Humphrys, the approach of ‘relative autonomy’, as articulated by Panitch and Gindin (2012), as well as Poulantzas and Miliband, is too small a lens, as it excludes class struggle *outside of* the state: ‘capitalist society, like other class societies, the struggle between classes is fundamental to comprehending how society is maintained and what the conditions are for its overthrow. For Panitch and Gindin, as for Poulantzas and Miliband, the nature of the state is not derived from these fundamental social activities’ (Humphrys, 2013, online). Surely, however, none of these state theorists would disagree with the statement that class struggle is central under capitalism? Indeed, Poulantzas (1978: 137) has defined the state as the crystallisation of the balance of class forces. If the approach of ‘relative autonomy’ *is* guilty of these sins, it makes such abstractions (different to the integral state, though not necessarily higher) in order to focus on what drives *change* within the shape of the state.

To return again to O’Connor, the state must maintain accumulation in the general sense (not necessarily accumulation for specific capitals) because the state relies on this ongoing accumulation for its own existence (i.e. taxation). Another material basis for this state imperative is that

Economic crises in capitalism [sometimes] result from crises of confidence on the part of capital; they are not technical disturbances but legitimisation crises of a special kind. Low growth and unemployment [can be] the result of ‘investment strikes’ on the part of owners who invest their capital but refuse to do so because they lack the necessary confidence (Streeck, 2014: 23).

This makes clear the interpenetration of both accumulation and legitimisation: expectations on the parts of both capital and labour act as material drivers for state action, communicated in the constitutional-democratic state form via *taxation* and *elections*. This is what is meant when the state is described as ‘relatively autonomous’ – it is autonomous in that there is no generalizable way in which the state functionally represents the interests of capital, but this is ‘relative’ in that the state ultimately operates under its own material pressures to reproduce capitalist social relations.

With the general theorisation of the ‘relative autonomy’ of the state, we arrive at the level of abstraction of Poulantzas (1978: 204), when he argued that ‘authoritarian statism is bound up with the periodisation of capitalism into distinct stages and phases’, and that ‘authoritarian statism hinges upon those transformations in social classes, political struggles and the relationship of forces which mark the current phase’. Changes in the form of the state are a necessary outcome under this generalised theory of the state, and provide a way to consider how we periodise capitalism. This relates directly to how we are to evaluate the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, as clarifies what it is that is supposed to have changed. Also relevant here is the further development of the argument raised in the first chapter, regarding the sustainability of authoritarian state strategies. The apparent class-neutrality of the state is an important aspect of the reproduction of capitalist social relations, and processes that limit the reflexivity of the state to popular demands – such as depoliticisation, and authoritarian statism – effectively politicise the state itself. This is the dialectical process to which Poulantzas (1978: 205) referred as the ‘tendency to strengthening-weakening of the State’, and has direct bearing on our understanding of the material conditions addressed by Bruff, Tansel, and others researching under the rubric of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. With these two points established, we can move to survey various attempts to periodise capitalism.

Periodising Capitalism, Periodising the State

There is a tendency within academia to always see the current conjuncture as either the end of an era, or the beginning of a new one. Some of these assertions may be correct, but they cannot all be. In a fallacy of composition, if each announcement of ‘ending’ and ‘beginning’ was true, then nothing would ever actually exist – at least not long

enough to warrant framing as a distinct phase of capitalist development. Within comparative political economy, declarations of ‘endings’ include: ‘the end of corporatism, the end of the nation state, the end of Modell Deutschland, and so on’ (Albo, 2005: 63). Those announcing forms of ‘the new’, meanwhile, have provided ‘numerous forecasts of a ‘new capitalism’: post-Fordism, cosmopolitan democracy, diversified quality production, the borderless world, and so on’ (*ibid*). This trend has continued apace since Greg Albo made the above observation in 2005. Since then, we have seen the many premature proclamations of the ‘end of neoliberalism’ on the one hand, and, conversely, the claim of Bruff and others that we are witnessing the ‘rise of authoritarian neoliberalism’ on the other. The latter of these being not the end of neoliberalism (*a la* those who saw state interventions post-2008 as antithetical to the small-state logic of neoliberalism) but rather a qualitative change in the way the state manages social relations under a still-hegemonic neoliberalism.

And so, we arrive at a problem. If your conception of the world was entirely drawn from this academic literature, then it might seem that things are constantly ending and beginning, and never simply ‘being’, or staying the same. Part of the reason for this is the *many and multiple perspectives and scales at which change can be observed*. There are changes in: methods of production; ways of organising labour; the intensity of work; race and gender relations; the organisation of domestic labour and care work; changes in the realization of value; changes in state-institutional structures; and many other vantage points besides. Put simply, locating change depends on the unit and focus of your analysis. Similarly, the spatial and temporal scale at which analysis is undertaken will produce radically different results: local, national, regional, international and global scales, all multiplied by the temporal horizons of the annual, electoral, decadal, ‘long centuries’, and even civilizations. And so, when you identify change in your unit of analysis, there is an implicit argument that yours is the correct vantage point from which to plot historical change. This mode of framing tends to bring in the assumption that whatever you’re periodising changes *as a whole*. Put differently, arguments around periodisation often assume that theirs is the only vantage point, and tie all change to that particular variable. So, e.g., if you have ‘Fordist’ capitalism and ‘post-Fordist’ capitalism, it treats both as essentially whole, coherent systems. This assumes away the possibility that different spheres of society have changed at different points, and for different reasons. For example, monetary policy and labour law clearly interact as part of the same

system, but have quite different logics of change. This is borne out through understandings of the uneven plane of action that is the state, considered above. ‘To assume that the same periodisation fits both, so that we have, e.g., ‘Fordist’ monetary policy and ‘Fordist’ labour law, and that these change concurrently in an internally related process, is to assume that there is some systemic essence of ‘Fordism’ that explains both’ (Beggs, 2016, online; see also Althusser, 2015 [1970]: 181).

And yet, we must not let this cautionary note dissuade us against periodisation entirely. An evacuation of historical *change* from our analysis would hamstring us in any attempt to explain the real, lived experiences of capitalism of people around the world, and also impinge on any utility of our analyses within the strategic arena. This is not to say that Althusser’s work is guilty of such an evacuation, but is rather a reminder that theoretical purity can easily slip into ‘violent abstraction’ (Sayer, 1987). A case where this danger has presented is the approach of Open Marxism. Exploring this approach, and criticisms of it, is a worthwhile endeavour here as it illustrates the need for periodisation, while also giving us a window into Bruff’s own thinking on this issue, as he is himself involved in mounting the critique of Open Marxism.

This approach is defined by: ‘a critique of the separation of state and civil society and of politics and economics; a focus on the social class antagonism of capital and labour as a relation in and against domination and exploitation; and a theory of the state as an aspect of the social relations of production’ (Bieler and Morton, 2003: 469). To be clear, this approach is not without merit – however, the Open Marxism’s emphasis on the state as a ‘relation of production’ result in a refusal to ‘distinguish between different forms of state’ (*ibid*). Quite simply, they reject periodisation *in toto*. Or, in the words of the approach’s proponents:

The relevance of the issue of *historical periodisation* is this: whoever divides history into ‘periods’, whether or not these periods be termed ‘modes of production’, is thinking of form in a genus/species way... Dialectics comes into its own as the critique of, precisely, such a division into stages. Critique comes into its own dialectically, as inherent in the movement of contradiction and, so, an open Marxism is able to demystify the notion of new times in a forceful way (Bonefeld, Gunn, and Psychopedis, 1992: xvii).

This approach reduces all of capitalist history to the capitalist social relation of production. And while Open Marxism dismisses periodisation for a different reason than seen above – indeed, Althusserian structuralism is one of the reasons behind the

genesis of this approach – the normative implication is similar. This implication is the crux of the critique which Bieler, Bruff and Morton bring against Open Marxism:

Open Marxism's universal focus on the capital relation renders it unable to conceptualize 'production' as anything other than the expression of the dictates of the movement of value... a lack of subtlety in distinguishing specific phases of capitalist development (epoch) from determinate historical moments (conjuncture), or variant relations between state and capital that have shaped different forms of state... Accepting the capital relation as the singular constitutive source of human social practice and, by extension, world historical development means that all social forms are reduced to the capital relation: capital, is capital, is capital (Bieler, Bruff & Morton, 2010:30-31).

There is neither strategic, nor theoretical utility in seeing constant change; similarly, there is no utility in totalising all history into one theoretical category. Indeed, one of the strengths of the 'relative autonomy' perspective on the state is that it is very sensitive to changes in the form of the state, and to shifts in the balance of class forces which drive state change (Poulantzas, 1978: 17).

And so, with that state theorisation in the back of our minds, we move now to consider a more satisfactory methodology of periodisation. The remainder of this chapter will consider several approaches to this challenge – in particular, 'long waves', Gramscian periodisation, and the regulation approach. The reason for this engagement is that the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' rests on a claim that there has been a qualitative change in the way the state operates – away from seeking consent and toward more-authoritarian forms of reproduction, including the foreclosure of various forms of contestation, as well as more-direct coercion. And yet, this is hedged by suggesting that, perhaps, this shift is not a permanent one, but rather a 'sticking plaster'. A qualitative argument such as this is difficult to test. But before we even attempt a discussion on the validity of this position, we need to arrive at the same vantage point from which to consider historical change. That is to say, change can be viewed from the perspective of different spheres, actors, or issues, with a wide variety of scopes and scales used to contrast current conjunctures. There are many continuities between the pre- and post-2008 contexts, and if any of these are given analytical priority, then you will necessarily see 'authoritarian neoliberalism' as a spurious claim to difference. If, however, you are concerned with the horizons for possible strategies on the part of labour, operating within the strategic-relational field of the state, then you might be closer to the vantage point of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. Before we ask if there has been a change, we need to agree that this is the most *important* location to look for change.

Long Waves

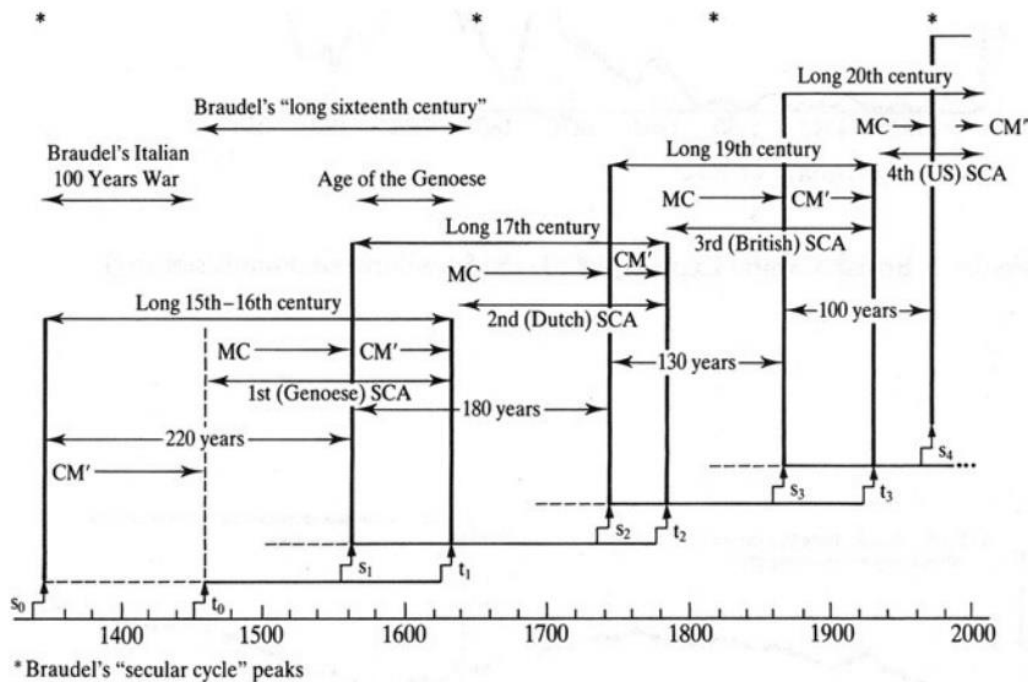
Perhaps the most common appreciation of ‘periodisation’ is that of universal, ‘long-wave’ change – periods which are broken up according to units of analysis such as epoch or empire. A key example here would be Giovanni Arrighi (2010), his ‘Systemic Cycles of Accumulation’, and the broader World Systems approach. These periods are roughly measured as ‘long centuries’, which all share ‘a fundamental unity of the primary agency and structure of world-scale processes of capital accumulation:

A Genoese cycle, from the fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries; a Dutch cycle, from the fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries; a British cycle, from the latter half of the eighteenth century through the early twentieth, and a US cycle which began in the late nineteenth century and has continued into the current phase of financial expansion (Arrighi, 2010: 6-7).

These periods quite obviously overlap. The simplistic assumption that periodisations rest on clean breaks in history – pivoting at clear points, defined by policies, prices, or events, where one stops and the other starts – befuddles an accurate understanding of history. (Indeed, part of the knee-jerk reaction against ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ assumes this kind of change). But even while operating at the same scale, this does not guarantee agreement. Against these four ‘long centuries’ stand another four, similar-length, periods – the ‘secular cycles’ presented by Fernand Braudel (1984), which relate closely to Kondratieff (1984) cycles (forty to sixty year waves between points of high and low growth). These secular cycles are, however, based on key price indicators, such as gold (see Figure 2).

In Figure 2, we can see the incongruence of Braudel’s periodisation (the peaks of waves marked *) and Arrighi’s own ‘long centuries’, or systemic cycles of accumulation (marked $t^0 - t^1$, $t^1 - t^2$, *etc*). Others (Mandel, 1995; Glubb, 1978) have drawn different dates, and different pivot-points, between the dominance of one empire to another, or one price-cycle to another; these details aside, the generalizable point here is that these approaches see periods as global, universal frames. Bringing detail back in, however, we should not treat all global periodisations as similar. The contention between Arrighi (2010) and Braudel (1984) is evidence of this. Although similar in length, there is no correspondence between Braudel’s secular price cycles and Arrighi’s systemic cycles. In this difference we arrive at an issue which parallels ours: how to choose between rival approaches to the periodisation of capitalist development? Arrighi gives us a possible answer:

Figure 2 – Long centuries and systemic cycles of accumulation



(Source: Arrighi, 2010: 220)

Faced with a choice between two kinds of cycles, we have opted for systemic cycles because they are far more valid and reliable indicators of what is specifically capitalist in the modern world system... [Kondratieff cycles] are certainly not reliable indicators of the contractions and expansions of [capital]... Profitability and the command of capital over human and natural resources can decrease or increase just as much in a downswing as in an upswing. It all depends on whose competition is driving prices up or down... Nor do price logistics... seem to be specifically capitalist phenomena (Arrighi 2010: 7).

In other words, Braudel's focus on price movements is not necessarily representative of changes within the social relations of production. In contrast, the vantage point from which Arrighi has chosen to observe change is one sensitive to the specificities of capitalism, and one which is sensitive to capital itself.

This does not mean Kondratieff, or secular, price cycles are rendered useless, but simply makes an argument based on vantage point; if one is looking to understand capitalism as a social system, rather than a purely economic one, then one has to use the appropriate categories. For Arrighi, a 'systemic cycle of accumulation' is the world-systemic extrapolation of Marx's essential formula of capital: M-C-M'. Put differently, the two

phases of transformation – M-C and C-M' – are seen to correspond to the two phases of capitalist empires. MC represents a period of material expansion, whereas CM' corresponds with a turn to speculative financial activity as the dominant mode of accumulation:

In phases of material expansion money capital “sets in motion” an increasing mass of commodities (including commoditized labor-power and gifts of nature); and in phases of financial expansion an increasing mass of money capital “sets itself free” from its commodity form, and accumulation proceeds through financial deals (as in Marx’s abridged formula MM) (Arrighi, 2010: 6).

To return to the central question, restated: is the vantage point of long-centuries, world-systems, and the dominant form of accumulation the appropriate one to understand *all* change within capitalism? Not at all. This might seem like an unnecessary point to clarify; unfortunately, it is all too necessary. When Bruff (2016, online) responded to a query on his periodisation of authoritarian neoliberalism, he argued that: ‘there is no expectation that authoritarian-neoliberal-type processes unfold simultaneously everywhere, or indeed that they will unfold everywhere – as my work on capitalist diversity shows, unevenness is very much part of capitalism, regardless of the era’. This response assumes that the questioner was reading authoritarian neoliberalism as a universal, totalizing frame, in the vein of these ‘long waves’ above. This defence, taken with Bruff’s other work (Bruff, Ebenau and May, 2015; Bruff and Horn, 2012; Bruff, 2011), can be understood to rely on the ‘varieties of capitalism’ approach: in this view, ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is simply another possible variation, a state form which distinguishes one place from another. But surely questioning the periodisation of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ does not assume such a totalization? It is a temporal critique as much as it is a spatial one. Of course, there are states and spaces which, in the current conjuncture, do not exhibit authoritarian-neoliberal-type characteristics. But in those spaces that *do*, should we treat these changes as ‘qualitatively distinct’, within that context?

But let us take a space which Bruff has attributed these characteristics to – the UK. The Office of Budgetary Responsibility is named by Bruff (2014) as being an example of this pivot. Yet, as the work of Gamble (1994: 174-206) shows, there were distinctly authoritarian characteristics seen in the neoliberalism of the Thatcher government.

Querying the legitimacy of describing authoritarian neoliberalism as a ‘qualitative change’ in the balance between coercion and consent in the post-GFC context does not imply a reading of this concept as totalising. More simply, the ‘long wave’ approach to the problem of periodisation is not the only one. If the only defence given for the lack of historical specificity within the ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ framework is that “capitalism is varied”, then many will remain unconvinced. Even (or, rather, especially) with a sensitivity to the uneven and combined development of capitalism, this critique still stands as the single greatest challenge to the utility of the framework. Authoritarian neoliberalism, then, should not be considered a ‘long wave’, nor a world-wide change. What other methodology, then, can we apply to the task of periodising capitalism, while being sensitive to local specificities, from a vantage point which more-explicitly includes the state in view? Let us turn to a methodology of periodisation which Bruff himself has used: Gramsci, and the conceptual pairing of ‘organic’ and ‘conjunctural’ change.

Enter Gramsci

Gramsci’s concern with history and historiography is well known: ‘indeed, a study of the ‘theory of history and historiography’ constitutes the first subject of the proposed study plan that he wrote on the first page of his notebook’ (Thomas, 2009: 246, see also 243-306). The vast majority of literature on Gramsci which engages with questions of ‘history’, however, gravitate around questions *historicizing* Gramsci himself (see Morton, 2007: 24), or concern themselves with the related concept of ‘praxis’. Here we will focus on a different aspect of Gramsci’s historiography. In his own words,

“A common error in historico-political analysis consists in an inability to find the correct relation between what is organic and what is conjunctural... The dialectical nexus between the two categories of movement, and therefore research, is hard to establish precisely” (Gramsci, 1971: 178; Q13, §17).

On the distinction between the conjunctural and the organic, Gramsci noted ‘the conjuncture can be defined as.... being in movement, i.e. as constituting a process of ever-changing combinations’ (1971, 148-9; Q17, §37). Although even organic periods are certainly not static, this emphasis on movement, on being unstable, is important; the conjunctural, it can be said is defined by crisis:

A crisis occurs, sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves (reached maturity), and that, despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them, within certain limits, and to overcome

them. These incessant and persistent efforts (since no social formation will ever admit that it has been superseded) form the terrain of the “conjunctural”, and it is upon this terrain that the forces of opposition organise (Gramsci, 1971: 178; Q13, §17).

This presents a problem for ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. As is widely acknowledged, neoliberalism has been in crisis since 2008. By its own argument, authoritarian neoliberalism *is* an attempt to maintain neoliberal-type accumulation, in the face of growing opposition, by shifting political forms. Gramsci (1971: 177; Q13, §17) also asserted, drawing on Marx, that ‘no society breaks down and can be replaced until it has first developed all the forms of life which are implicit in its internal relations’⁷. It is not a significant leap to see that neoliberalism has always had a strand of authoritarianism within its ‘internal relations’ – both in thought and practice. Indeed, this has been mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, and will be discussed further in Chapter Three. This all would suggest, then, that the period post-2008 is better understood as the playing out of the tendencies of neoliberalism *in toto*, in the face of ongoing crisis and emerging opposition, rather than a newly emerging organic set of relations which we might expect to last for some time.

Let us consider this more closely. The example that Gramsci used to concretely demonstrate his categories was the period of France, between the Revolution in 1789, and the Paris Commune in 1870-1. For Gramsci, the failure of the Commune, and the assertion of the new bourgeois class, was the final playing out of the ‘internal relations’ set in motion by the events of 1789. This entire period of almost a *century* can, then, be seen as ‘France has now enjoyed sixty years of stable political life only after eighty years of convulsions at ever longer intervals: 1789, 1794, 1799, 1804, 1815, 1830, 1848, 1870’ (Gramsci, 1971: 180; Q13, §17); put differently, an organic period is one of relatively stable *hegemony*, whereas conjunctural periods are periods of crisis and upheaval, where that hegemony is being directly contested. In Gramsci’s own words:

It is precisely the study of these “intervals” of varying frequency which enables one to reconstruct the relations on the other between the development of organic movement and conjunctural movement in the structure (Gramsci, 1971: 180; Q13, §17).

⁷ “No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is no room in it have developed” (Marx, Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*).

One of the few examples of engagement with these methodological categories, Bieler, Bruff and Morton (2010) – in their critique of Open Marxism – highlight this Gramscian caution regarding the method of periodisation:

As Gramsci has counselled, distinguishing between ‘organic’ (relatively permanent) and ‘conjunctural’ (occasional, immediate, or accidental) movements is essential when developing an historical methodology to understanding the contradictions and causes of capitalist development (Bieler et al, 2010: 31)).

Gramsci challenges us to be more careful in conflating the ‘conjunctural’ and the ‘organic’. This is a useful way to reframe our questioning of authoritarian neoliberalism: are these expressions of authoritarianism an ‘organic’ change – that is, relatively stable new historical moment – or, simply something more occasional?

Although Gramsci was not insensitive to the uneven nature of capitalist development, we should emphasise that even an ‘organic’, relatively stable period is not a totalizing period. Even if it was established that ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is an ‘organic’ change – a difficult task, to be sure – this does not necessarily need fall into the totalization cautioned against above. It is simply to say that these changes to the state are in direct relation to our period of crisis, that this crisis is widespread, and that in the absence of (progressive) mitigating or countervailing conjunctural factors, we can reasonably expect to see this expression of the state spread to similarly crisis-affected spaces – albeit, in a way which is patterned by the specificities of different states and locations. This is precisely the treatment of neoliberalism as a spatially and temporally variegated *process*, encompassed under the frame of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore, 2010). From this perspective, neoliberalism has *always* been a deeply variegated thing. ‘Actually existing neoliberalism’ is always treated as a process, a thing in motion, for this very reason; rather than being a static state, achieved in a universal way, it is better conceived of a direction of change, which ‘fails forwards’. In this way, we might think of authoritarian neoliberalism as an emerging tendency within that broader process, cropping up in a variegated form, but more and more regularly as the contradictions of neoliberalism play out. If the turn to ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ really can be found to be ‘organic’, in the Gramscian sense, then it would be a sound basis for periodisation. Bruff, then, through collaboration with Bieler and Morton, has provided the very yardstick which his later theorisation must be measured against. *But*, such a claim must be tentative, and ready to be empirically disproven. There is no *positive*

method that could prove such a change is organic; or, put differently (in Bruff's own words), a 'qualitative change' in capitalist social relations.

Confounding the question of whether this current change can be seen as 'conjunctural' or 'organic' further, is the fact that this distinction is being made *in real time*. That is, we are observing events as they unfold, and trying to determine their quality without the benefit of hind sight. The difficulties of this particular task were apparent to another of our interlocutors – Nicos Poulantzas. Poulantzas (1973: 60-62, 110-112), in his analysis of 'the transition to democracy in Southern Europe', was attempting a 'real-time periodization in order to identify feasible horizons of political action' (Jessop, 2008: 133). In this sense, Bruff is not only relying on the state-ontological work of Poulantzas in theorising 'authoritarian neoliberalism' – he is bringing the project of 'real-time periodisation' forwards to the current conjuncture. The inevitable messiness of this task should be understood by all those who critique or dismiss the framework. In particular, as seen in Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* (1977), as well as the complexity of different types of period (the dualism of 'organic' and 'conjunctural' periods put forward by Gramsci is in no way exhaustive), this task is complicated further by the multiple, overlapping temporal dynamics of political and economic events. Some strategic-selective actions operate immediately, while others have temporal delays of months, years, decades, and even centuries. When we look at the current conjuncture, there are moving parts of these temporal processes which cannot yet be seen reflected in empirical developments, making prediction difficult. The ways in which these delayed processes then interact with extant and developing processes in the future pushes that difficulty closer to impossibility. Even *if* the claim can be made that certain fractions of capital are operating within the field of the state in order to limit the possibilities of future democratic action, and that this is being done consciously, in order to solve problems of accumulation in a period of economic stagnation, there is no guarantee that this selective purpose will result in the desired outcome – longer-term dynamics of demand, accumulation, and legitimisation set in motion by both previous and future actions of other actors may very well countervail against the successful operation of the first actor(s).

The question remains, however, does the Gramscian distinction between conjunctural and organic historical movements vitiate the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'? If it is claimed or expected that this state-form will become a stable form for a significant

period of time in one or more nation-states, then yes. Similarly, any approach to periodisation which conflates all historical change into a single type of period will fail to properly account for ongoing change, failing to locate the causal mechanisms driving that change. But if, however, we move forward with a sensitivity to Gramsci's distinction, we position ourselves in a far stronger position. Real time periodisation is a difficult task, but at the very least we can keep in mind that changes emerging may simply be conjunctural upheavals, in a period of crisis. These are, nonetheless, important to identify – but it is a caution which Bruff unfortunately does not include in *this* piece of work. A research agenda based around the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' would do well to relocate Gramsci within the historical methodology being employed.

The Regulationist approach

In parallel with the ontological assumption of simultaneous continuity/discontinuity outlined above, and working toward a resolution of this paradox, we have the Regulationist approach. This tradition was built on the foundation of Michel Aglietta's doctoral dissertation – later published as a monograph, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (2015 [1979])⁸ – which, importantly, departed from the treatment of social reproduction of capitalism as essentially automatic: 'we deny that what exists does so automatically. The notion of *reproduction* then becomes necessary' (Aglietta, 2015 [1979]: 12). Reproduction, in this view, is not a continuous, uninterrupted process, however. In seeking to move past the ahistorical nature of neoclassicism (Aglietta, 2015: 10), the crisis-ridden history of capitalism brings the opposite of 'reproduction' – that is, 'rupture':

When actual social systems are studied, historical experience confirms that *transformation means rupture, qualitative change...* these two notions of reproduction and rupture confront one another in sterile opposition, each simply excluding each other, as long as the system is defined in the manner of the various conceptions of equilibrium... The attempt to define the regulation of a system in movement leads to a different conception of the system. It implies the conception of a *hierarchy* in the constitutive relationships of the system, and not merely functional interdependence (Aglietta, 2015 [1979]: 12, emphasis in original).

Encapsulated in this passage we have several key points: first, is the assertion that historical change *has happened*, and that that change has been punctuated with periods of crisis, leading to 'qualitative change'; second, that the historical existence of both

⁸ Or, to be more precise, this work was first published in French, *Régulation et crises du capitalisme* (1976), before being translated into English three years later.

continuity *and* change demands a theoretical explanation – one which equilibrium-based approaches especially are unable to provide; and third, that this problematic is best solved through an explanation based on a hierarchical interaction of the relationships that define the social system. It is particularly in this last assertion that the Regulationist approach maintains a connection with previous structural Marxisms; in contrast with, say, the Open Marxist approach, regulationists do not allow the determination of capitalist relations to be opened up entirely to the possibilities of contingency. In a similar vein to the ‘relative autonomy’ of the state, there are, ultimately, some structural conditions which must be met *in some way*.

How those conditions are met, however, are open to many possibilities. At this point, we must bring in some definitions. Although the methodologies of the Regulation Approach are many, there is a conceptual pairing which is central:

- (a) The ‘Regime of Accumulation’ (RoA) reflects the way surplus is distributed between capital and labour in each period so that production is coordinated with demand. It encompasses the essential economic conditions (technology, the labour process and the combination between the departments of production) for the operation of the system and is posited at the level of given economic structures.
- (b) The ‘Mode of Regulation’ (MoR) designates the institutional forms and social compromises that are necessary for the reproduction of the RoA. The MoR is less determinate than the RoA, since it relies on historically specific factors. It encompasses the modalities of wage determination, the forms of competition and coordination of economic activity, the structure of the international system, the state management of money and the cultures of consumption (Mavroudeas, 2012: 305).

In terms of the hierarchical articulation of these two conceptual groupings, it is seen that there are multiple possible ‘modes of regulation’ for any one ‘regime of accumulation’ – that is, that the mode of regulation is open to historical contingency, crisis and change, possibly even *within* an ongoing regime of accumulation. Regimes of accumulation are, of course, also open to crisis and change, but the ‘base’ (accumulation) is given primacy.

A brief, stylised example might be that after the crisis of Fordist-type accumulation based on widespread, stable growth of industry, the regime of accumulation came to be increasingly defined by financialised, speculative accumulation. Within that financial regime of accumulation, the institutions (particularly the state) and ideologies of the global North have been characterised by a neoliberal mode of regulation. Although always contested at some level, the reproduction of this mode of regulation has, especially since 2008, fallen into crisis. Although neoliberalism quite apparently survived

the immediate fallout of the global financial crisis, one of the key contradictions created by this mode of regulation – that is, anti-politics – would seem to be leading toward new forms of state and politics: an example of the former being Brexit, and an example of the latter being the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America. What this brief stylised example shows is how the interaction of ‘regimes of accumulation’ and ‘modes of regulation’ provide a basis for explaining historical change, and *periodising capitalism*. Put more simply, ‘the regulation approach periodizes capitalism on the basis of the historically contingent correspondence between RoAs and MoAs’ (Mavroudeas, 2012: 307).

Although the regulation approach was not a response to, or a development of, David Harvey’s conceptions of ‘spatial fixes’, ‘temporal fixes’, or ‘spatio-temporal fixes’ (see Jessop, 2006), we can ourselves conceive of these separate approaches as related. That is to say, both Harvey’s historical geographic materialism, and the regulation approach, are concerned with the ways in which capitalism ‘resolves’ crises of the system. This is seen in a summary of regulationism provided by Heino:

Capital accumulation, and the tendential laws governing it, can be guided and regularised through a contingent, historically variant combination of economic and extra-economic factors in a distinctive institutional matrix, vitiating, deferring or displacing the various contradiction encoded in capitalism’s DNA and reproducing the capitalist mode of production... Such institutional fixes to the paradoxes of capitalist social relations achieve only provisional and temporary measure of success. Regulation cannot absolve capitalism of its contradictions; indeed, the attempt to regulate particular paradoxes tends to exacerbate others, unleashing disequilibria which ultimately undermine the coherence of any particular regulatory phase (Heino, 2014: 2).

In this sense, the regulationist approach is in line with its historical materialist genealogy, by articulating a dialectical relationship between regulation and rupture. In a survey of the approach, with particular emphasis on how regulationist approaches understand the periodisation of capitalism, this is an important point to note – in particular, it is important for how we might understand the changes associated with ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. If we are to glean insight into a methodology of periodising capitalism from the regulation approach, this contribution would be wholly unhelpful if it did not maintain this dialectical thread. Although the actual application of these methodologies to the history of capitalist development, especially in its neoliberal phase, will only be attempted in the third chapter of this thesis, we have (in chapter one) already found that

any such methodology must be sensitive to the contradictions *created by* 'authoritarian neoliberalism', if we are to better understand the 'strengthening-weakening' dynamic introduced by Poulantzas, and relied upon by Bruff.

Toward a methodology

This chapter has drawn on insights from a range of locations – critical realism, 'long wave' theory, Gramscian perspectives, and regulation theory – for the purpose of drawing strands of insight from each. The task now is to weave those strands together. The first of these insights is that the various components of 'vantage point' - focus and units of analysis, scale, and scope – are absolutely crucial (Ollman, 2015). This in the sense that the length of periods, and the points at which they shift, are totally tied to that which one includes in view; an analysis of changing class dynamics within the context of the United States, in the twentieth century, will produce a radically different periodisation to an analysis of natural commodity trade during the hegemony of the United Kingdom. Even simply considering labour law instead of monetary policy, within an identical time-frame and spatial context, may produce a different periodisation. While each of the processes named above might, in some way, be related, this does not mean that we can reduce them to one analytical unit, nor assume that change occurs across these different spheres all as a response to the same causal mechanisms. Understanding the significance of 'vantage point' in this way, we must be sure to be *explicit with our vantage point*, in order to avoid spurious disagreements, or the issues of talking past one another.

In the interest of avoiding spurious criticisms or dismissals, the next point which we can derive from the preceding discussion is that *periodisation does not rely on clean breaks*. The simple fact that a particular empirical variable was expressed both before and after a supposed shift in period does not, in and of itself, vitiate that periodisation. If this was the case, one would (as an extreme example of this logic) have to subsume the capitalist period into the feudal period, simply because monarchies exist before and after this asserted change. This insight is gleaned from the critical realist approach. Markets pre- and post-dated the emergence of capitalism, and there are still remnants of feudal social relations comingled within our contemporary capitalist social relations. Critical realism gives us a deeper understanding of why periodisation might still be justified, despite

these confounding empirical examples. Touched on at the outset of this chapter, a demi-regularity is a temporary regularity expressed within the actual, and observed in the empirical (Jessop, 2005: 41). A shift in these demi-regularities might see the continuation of an empirical observation, while changing the underlying mechanisms producing that outcome or expression. This kind of ontological claim is, of course, highly complex and contested – we cannot go into detailed discussion or proof here. It is enough for our purposes here simply to note two things: that periodisation rests on certain ontological assumptions; and that critical realism offers an ontological position which might support this task. But, crucially, using critical realism as a starting point does not prescribe a theoretical or empirical vantage point from which analysis must be made; it can be seen as congruent with a variety of approaches – Gramscian, world-systemic, or, from the regulationist approach. To state this again, in the context of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, the simple existence of authoritarian states before 2008 does not mean that ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is a false periodisation. Rather, the burden of proof is shifted to show that the *role played* by the authoritarian state form is in some way different. To be clear, we have not yet explored this secondary problem – at this stage, we are simply making the problem more apparent.

The next point to be drawn out of the above discussion is the Gramscian distinction between ‘conjunctural’ and ‘organic’ change. Here the question is not ‘whether change has occurred’, but rather ‘what is the quality of that change’. Or, to put this differently, how permanent is ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’? Will this be the predominant state form for decades to come? Or are we simply observing the ‘morbid symptoms’ (to borrow another phrase from Gramsci) of the current period of ongoing crisis, which may well be replaced with a more-permanent (stable) period in a few years? This is a question which is doubly hard to answer. First, due to the simple fact that there is *no positive(ist) test*, with which to determine if these current institutions and relations are conjunctural or organic. Second, as experienced by both Marx and Poulantzas (among others), is that these challenges are further compounded by attempting periodisation *as events unfold*. Due variously to the differing temporal dynamics of various actions, policies, and events – as well as, potentially, shifting causal mechanisms at the level of the ‘real’ resulting in changes to things seen as regularities in the ‘actual’ – we cannot truly know the ramifications of various contradictions and processes until they have played out – if not fully, then at least in a more-complete form.

Conclusion

The assertion that we are witnessing the ‘rise of authoritarian neoliberalism’ is a contentious one, and rests upon a variety of subsidiary claims and assumptions. ‘Authoritarian neoliberalism’ also resonates immediately with the current context, marked by developments such as: the 2016 British referendum, in which British people voted to leave the European Union; the apparent dissolution of ‘liberal democracy’ in Turkey, the state which until recently was heralded as a regional leader in combining liberalism and Islam (Tuğal, 2016); and, of course, the election of a billionaire right-wing populist demagogue as President of the United States of America. In this context, it is often difficult to step back, and to consider the kinds of sub-claims and assumptions which constitute the framework of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. Rather, the temptation is simply to take the theorisation as complete, before moving on to consider empirical case studies. This thesis seeks to take that step back, and consider more closely the theoretical – in part, to head off critiques which might dismiss the term out of hand. With a more-robust theorisation, we will be better placed in the debates ahead, as scholars attempt to understand these historic shifts.

This chapter has considered just a few of those claims and assumptions. In particular, that the state is not an instrumentalist tool, captured and determined by the interests of capital; that the ontology of the state – and of capitalism itself – is open to *variation*; that this variation is (as it changes) a basis to break up (conceptually) the development of capitalism into distinct periods; and that these periods are not universal, but are subject to temporal and spatial variation. Put simply, ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ makes claims which fall into the broader debates around state theorisation and the periodisation of capitalism. These claims are, however, relatively implicit – the concept is not clearly situated within these debates. This chapter has attempted to locate where and how ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ might intersect with these two areas of contention.

This task is somewhat easier in the case of the ‘state’. As Bruff (2014: 119) emphasises, ‘the state is emphatically not a predetermined entity whose function is to act in a monolithic manner in the name of capital’. This is a nod toward broader debates, making clear what Bruff believes the ontology of the state to be – implied in the above is a rejection of Marxist-Leninist-type treatments, which see the state as a mere tool of

bourgeois class domination. The complete inverse of this position – liberal pluralism – is, however, equally limited. It is for this reason that both liberal pluralism and Leninist state theories were contrasted above. Although the debate on state theorisation is not reducible to a trichotomy, we here have presented 'relative autonomy' as a more-satisfactory treatment of the state; one which would support the state-ontological assumptions underpinning 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. Nestled within 'relative autonomy' are the material factors which ultimately shape (if only in part) state action. These material factors can be extended beyond simply the reliance of the state on taxation revenue, and, by extension, capital accumulation – in particular, to consider crises of *legitimisation*, as well as accumulation. Here we have considered briefly how this might relate to the contradictions specific to the process of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'; how a general theory of the state as 'relatively autonomous' highlights the unsustainability of 'authoritarian statism' in general, speaking to the crisis of the state which is exacerbated by the process labelled as 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. Although this is a connection which cannot be fully established here, this thesis suggests that pursuing these insights through an engagement with the literature surrounding 'anti-politics' may well be a way forward for the 'authoritarian neoliberalism' research agenda.

A question this chapter has raised is, if periodisation is such a fraught endeavour, should we bother at all? In the words of Jameson (2002: 29), 'we cannot not periodise'. If the purpose of our philosophy is not only to understand the world, but also to change it, then periodisation is a necessary task to that end. Periodising capitalist development, and attempting to explain contemporary dynamics – what is different about them, and what is the same – is a crucial task. Yet, we must understand that real-time periodisation is, ultimately, fallible; and, that our tentative periodisations must be *fit for purpose*. That is to say, when we decide between vantage points, or when we consider two conflicting periodisations made from the same vantage point, the first question we must ask is 'does this perspective reveal more than it obscures'? Or, even before that question is asked, we must ask 'what is the purpose of this periodisation'? Only then can we attempt to answer whether or not that theorisation is appropriate. To approach these questions, we must finally arrive at the history of neoliberalism. By considering that broader history, as well the supposedly-distinct current context, we can bring these insights regarding periodisation to bare on the recent history of capitalism. In doing so, we will find that

an attempt to analytically separate current moments of authoritarianism from previous examples is, in fact, a 'violent abstraction'.

Chapter Three

Violence of Abstraction, Violence in Neoliberalism

The imperilled state of democracy in the current conjuncture is widely appreciated (Ferguson, 2006; Hay, 2007; Mair, 2013; Brown, 2015). The emergent framework of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ offers a way to understand how that apparent decline in democratic possibilities is related to, and driven by, the process of neoliberalisation. By returning to the work of Nicos Poulantzas, Bruff (2014) and others (Tansel, 2017) make the claim that there has been a qualitative change in the nature of the state post-2007 ‘toward constitutional and legal mechanisms’ of discipline and coercion, and ‘away from seeking consent’ for neoliberal strategies (Bruff, 2014: 116). For Bruff, although authoritarian statist strategies have existed in prior stages of neoliberal development, and, although these changes occur at different times and in different ways, it is still theoretically and conceptually important to distinguish the current phase of neoliberalisation from its previous forms. This thesis does not challenge the assertion that there are distinctly and characteristically anti-democratic developments occurring at different scales, and in many places, in the current conjuncture – far from it. These developments are distressing, and theoretically significant in terms of our understanding of capitalist development. But the question remains: is it *useful* to definitively separate the current phase of neoliberalism? Does the argument that there has been a qualitative change in the state reveal something of the essence of the moment? Or does it obscure the actually existing history of neoliberalism – and capitalism more generally – and in doing so, reify general tendencies as something new and different? These are the questions being brought to bear in this chapter, and in this thesis.

We return here to Sayer’s argument around the ‘violence of abstraction’ (1987). The framework of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is itself an abstraction, emphasising some aspects of history, while de-emphasising others; but does this perspective clarify or obscure? For Sayer (1987: 149), ‘theory should be abandoned if it gets in the way of

knowledge'. One error along the road to theory which must vitiate the utility of that theory is the failure to develop 'propositions' toward an actual 'explanation':

giving a causal explanation *necessarily* involves 'elaborating' a theory of causal mechanisms. It is only such a theory which makes a series of propositions into an explanation... We do not explain things such as Protestantism or law by their functionality but their genealogy (Sayer, 1987: 125, emphasis in original).

Put simply, if 'authoritarian neoliberalism' cannot forcefully articulate the difference between the authoritarian statism of Poulantzas's day, and the authoritarian statism which supposedly operates in the post-2007 era, then it will struggle theoretically and strategically. This can be articulated in the terminology of the *regulationist* approach discussed in Chapter Two: has the context of accumulation and reproduction changed in such a way as to prompt a qualitative transformation of authoritarian statist forms? And if there are contextual drivers which induce authoritarian statist responses, have those underlying drivers changed? A periodisation claim which does not present answers to these questions is shaky, at best. This chapter will argue that by abstracting the current, post-Global Financial Crisis context, and the role of authoritarian state forms within it, away from the broader history of neoliberalisation, a 'violent abstraction' is made. One of the principal reasons for this is that the very conjunctural developments which the framework of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' would seem to speak to – issues surrounding the 'strengthening-weakening' of the state, such as the crisis of legitimacy in politics and the state – cannot be explained if one excludes *earlier neoliberal authoritarianisms* from view. This chapter seeks to bring a theoretical concern for the 'violence of abstraction' together with the distinctly violent and coercive history of neoliberalism, in order to better assess the claims of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. Before we move to outline that history, however, let us recall that which has come before.

The first chapter of this thesis elaborated the theoretical challenges facing the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. The chapter considered research undertaken under different rubrics, which overlap, or at least intersect, with the concerns of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. These included 'depolicisation', 'new constitutionalisation', the approach of Political Marxism, as well as that of uneven and combined development. These spaces of conceptual overlap raise questions regarding the specificity of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' which are yet to be answered. Most importantly, it should be seen that the *material conditions* that these literatures were responding to are real

challenges – as important as theoretical and conceptual clarity is, it is the specificity of historical moments which is our key concern. In engaging with these other literatures, however, some insights were drawn which might usefully augment ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, rather than simply dismiss it. In particular, through a ‘first cut’ of the *state*, here from the perspective of Political Marxism, mechanisms were outlined which might bear out the ‘strengthening-weakening’ dynamic which Poulantzas (1978: 248) associated with authoritarian statism, including the revelation of the state’s relative class character at that particular conjuncture. Later in this chapter the ramifications of this particular contradiction will be considered. Principally, however, the first chapter sought to deepen the critique of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ beyond those limitations that are more-immediately apparent, mounting both theoretical and historical challenges to the specificity of the ‘authoritarian neoliberal’ claims.

With this critique more-fully articulated, the second chapter of the thesis looked to develop the methodological tools necessary to approach questions of periodisation. Through a ‘second cut’ of state theory, and a consideration of the state as a manager of capitalist crises, we find that periodisation and state theory are closely intertwined. In a wide-ranging survey of approaches to the task of periodisation – spanning ‘long wave’ approaches, Gramscian approaches, and the perspective of regulationist theory – useful insights of each were identified. First among these was the understanding that vantage point is a crucial aspect of periodisation, and that disagreement over appropriate periodisation is often simply due to differences in perspective. Also important was the understanding that a periodisation is not necessarily global or universal. The implication of this is that the unevenness of capitalist development is not a sufficient defence of periodisation claims. Perhaps the most significant insight drawn out from these approaches, however, was the distinction between ‘conjunctural’ and ‘organic’ periods, as well as the necessity to relate periods back to the issues of accumulation and reproduction.

This third chapter, then, will be an attempt to bring that theory to bear on the *actual history of neoliberalism*, to finally develop an evaluation of the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. It will do so by considering three empirical ‘moments’ of authoritarianism within the neoliberal frame: Pinochet’s Chile, Thatcherism in the United Kingdom, and the Greek experience of authoritarianism under the framework of the European

Monetary System (EMS). These ‘moments’ have been chosen for specific reasons, and are in their own right significant challenges to the periodisation claims implied within the ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ framework. They should also, however, be seen as *indicative* of a wider tendency within neoliberalisation to rely on authoritarian-type state structures to insulate policies against popular challenge. Despite this plethora of cases, those of Chile, the UK, and the EU have been chosen for particular reasons. The reason for the first and second cases is that these are the examples which will most likely be used by critics of the framework. As part of the widespread genesis narrative of neoliberalism, Pinochet and Thatcher have both been characterised as authoritarian in some way – these two cases must be considered if a judgement is to be developed as to whether understanding authoritarian neoliberalism as a distinct historical period is valid. The third case is relevant, as the structure of the EU is discussed by Bruff (2014) himself, in the original theorisation of authoritarian neoliberalism, and warrants inclusion on this basis. The latter part of this chapter will then return to the claims made by Bruff and others. With these claims made clear, and the three ‘moments’ of authoritarianism outlined, we will finally be able to draw together some conclusions regarding the utility of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ as a framework to understand our contemporary world.

The argument developed in this chapter is that ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ cannot be sustained as a period in its own right. The concept presents neither a methodology, nor evidence, to support the claim that contemporary authoritarian state transformation is ‘qualitatively distinct to the kinds which preceded 2007. If those claims are ejected, however, the insights of Gramsci regarding ‘conjunctural’ verses ‘organic movements’ push us to consider whether authoritarian neoliberalisation might be better conceived as the playing out of the broader process of neoliberalism in general, convulsing through a period of organic crisis, rather than as a period in its own right. This Gramscian perspective is also closely related to the real contribution offered by this emergent framework: through its focus on changes to the state which concurrently strengthen *and* weaken it, ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ puts a name to a particular contradiction. By focussing less on drawing arbitrary lines of periodisation, and more on the generative mechanisms which are creating change, a useful contribution can be made to understanding our current global political economy.

Pinochet's Chile

The experience of neoliberalism in Chile is 'one of the most storied episodes in the history of neoliberalism' (Peck, 2010: 108). One reason for this is the fact that Pinochet's economic reforms are commonly seen as the 'first' example neoliberalisation, and used as a marker of the breakdown of state-led strategies. Beginning in the spring of 1973, these changes preceded the market-based reforms of both Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Chile's *neoliberalismo* is also memorable for its dramatic narrative: the combination of a CIA-sponsored military *coup d'état*; the overthrowing of a stable, democratically elected government; and the striking use of violence under the junta government, all combine with the visible involvement of well-known Northern intellectuals – Milton Friedman was joined in supporting the Pinochet government by many economists, such as Arnold Harberger and Friedrich von Hayek, among others – and their students, the 'Chicago boys'. The prominence of Chile in the history of neoliberalism poses a problem for the conceptualisation of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' – not least because the term was used *before* Bruff introduced it, to describe this very historical moment (Taylor, 2002: 51). Here we will briefly engage with the popular narrative surrounding Pinochet's government, and the involvement of Northern academics, before moving to consider the role of authoritarian state strategies more closely.

The conventional story is well known: the University of Chicago Department of Economics, led by Friedman and Harberger, developed an alternative approach to the dominant Keynesianism of the time. Through targeted scholarship programmes, and other means, the University of Chicago then taught this approach to large groups of Chilean graduate students who were studying in the US. When these students returned home, they took up positions within the civil service, and then convinced Pinochet – who already had a dislike of unions – of the merits of their newfound free-market economic policies. As a result, 'Pinochet effectively handed control of economic policy' to the 'Chicago boys' as they had become known, who 'led by [Sergio] de Castro, would staff the key [economic] positions' in the junta government (Peck, 2010: 108). This clean narrative is presented in a particularly compelling way by Naomi Klein (2007), and is repeated by many (e.g. Steger and Roy, 2010: 100). Unfortunately, it obscures much detail – in particular, it unduly elevates the importance of the global North within this causal chain, reducing the importance of indigenous, Southern experiences, motivations

and struggles (Connell and Dados, 2014; Valdés 1995; Silva 1996; Moulian 2002; Winn, 2004). Most popular Northern analyses of *neoliberalismo* spend more time talking about the University of Chicago than existing struggles around agriculture and land ownership within Chile (see Zetlin and Ratcliff, 1988). They also skim over the manifest failings of state-led developmental strategies (Stillerman, 2004: 164), which led to neoliberalism being domestically embraced as a development strategy:

The Chicago Boys—and the other players in the making of the dictatorship’s economic policy—were not offering General Pinochet a textbook of economic theory. They were offering a solution to his main political problem: how to get legitimacy by economic growth, satisfy his backers in the Chilean propertied class, and keep the diplomatic support of the United States, without giving an opening to his opponents in the political parties and labor movement. Neoliberalism *as a development strategy* met those needs (Connell and Dados, 2014: 122, emphasis in original).

In fact, the actual role of Northern academics in this project was summarised early on by a *New York Times* editorial in 1975, which queried the way in which academics were lending *legitimacy* to the authoritarian government (New York Times, 1975, in Peck, 2010: 109). It is a shame that this clarity, which did not emphasise their ideas as causal, was forgotten along the way. An understanding of the emergence of neoliberalism in Chile should then be grounded in an understanding of the domestic struggles around capitalist development – of which struggles around land reform are just one example – as well as how import-substitution industrialisation (ISI) had started to express real material failures. Friedman, Harberger, and their students played a role, but to prioritise their causal influence, divorced from an understanding of domestic struggles, is certainly a ‘violent abstraction’.

We must, however, move contentions regarding causation aside somewhat. This small survey cannot begin to develop an argument around the emergence of neoliberalism in Chile – and this is not the aim of this section. Rather, the Chilean experience of *neoliberalismo* is of pressing relevance to our understanding of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. If the very first instance of neoliberalisation was one marked by obviously authoritarian state forms, and a far greater emphasis on imposing coercion rather than seeking consent, then how can Bruff make the claim that authoritarian neoliberalism marks a shift away from seeking consent? Whether this is due to an overemphasis on the current moment, or due to geographical focus, we will consider further on. Either way, let us move beyond a myopic focus on ‘the Chicago boys’ and their epistemological

influences, and instead focus on the detail of the different forms, expressions, and moments of authoritarianism under Pinochet – our purpose being to draw a thumbnail sketch of the character of the Pinochet government.

It is important to ground this discussion in real, lived experience. Language such as ‘coercion’ and ‘repression’, in isolation from anecdotal evidence of the arbitrary violence of a regime such as Pinochet’s, evacuates meaning. Away from the abstractions of theory, take the following passage relating the overthrow of President Allende by the military in Chile, in September 1973:

On September 11, 1973, we awoke to a country in turmoil. What many people had predicted was actually happening: the armed forces of Chile were staging a coup d’état to overthrow democratically elected President Salvador Allende... On the evening of September 13, a group of soldiers, led by a captain, came to our home and proceeded to search for weapons. When they didn’t find any, they took my father away with them. They also took our books about socialism or left politics, and we found out afterward that such books had been burned. About an hour later they returned for my older brother and he was taken, beaten up and brought back to us. The captain said to my mother, “Here’s your son – we brought him back so he can work for you, because we executed your husband” (Aguilera and Fredes, 2003: vii).

Although the authoritarian nature of the Pinochet regime has become part of the general history of neoliberalism, the brutal details of state-led coercion too-often fade into the background. The reality is that ‘capitalism and freedom’ did not prove as symbiotic as Friedman (2002) promised. Neoliberalism was introduced under Pinochet through authoritarian means: ‘a military coup backed by the traditional upper classes (as well as by the US government), followed by the fierce repression of all solidarities created within the labour and urban movements which had so threatened their power’ (Harvey, 2005: 39). There is some contention regarding the actual number of civilians who were detained, imprisoned, tortured, or executed, but most believe that the number of persons who ‘disappeared’ equal at least three thousand (Solimano, 2012: 23). Further, ‘at least 80,000 were imprisoned, and 200,000 fled the country for political reasons’ (Klein, 2007: 77). While many of these expressions of state violence were random or arbitrary, there was an underlying logic of suppressing sources of potential resistance – left-leaning intellectuals or teachers, unionised workers, and journalists, in particular. It is not controversial to assert that such concerted state violence has the effect of curtailing formal democratic procedure, or political engagement more broadly. In this sense neoliberal economic policies were, in the first instance, instigated in parallel with direct political repression (Taylor, 2006: 51-55).

Pinochet's authoritarian violence was not just direct however, but also structural. Put simply, the economic violence of the neoliberal policies, being implemented concurrently with direct suppression of resistance, is of equal importance in understanding 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. In 1975, the junta government 'cut public spending by 27 percent in one blow – and they kept cutting until, by 1980, it was half of what it had been under Allende' (Klein, 2007: 82). Under the direction of the 'Chicago boys', an economic agenda was pursued that included 'abolishing price controls, deregulating markets, reducing import tariffs', as well as de-nationalizing property and industries previously seized by Allende's socialist government, as well as pursuing 'external credits', through negotiation with the IMF and World Bank (Solimano, 2012: 25). Consolidating these austere fiscal policies was a concerted effort to undermine, break up, and target organised labour and trade unions (Stillerman, 2004: 124; Taylor, 2006: 49). This process was justified in part by reference to the role of wage claims in driving the significant levels of inflation effecting the country. The political power of unions was further undermined by policies, including the above, which increased unemployment, and thus the bargaining power of labour in the workplace. In the face of severe state-led austerity, 'a profound contraction of demand as recession set in and wages plunged to under two-thirds of their former value in two years', whilst the number of people receiving those reduced wages shrank as 'unemployment climbed above 15%' (Taylor, 2002: 52). Far from being the real world expression of 'free market economics', as some characterise it, the sum of these policies was, in reality, an active state intervention into the market, in order to undermine sources of potential opposition.

Although the rapid 'marketisation' of state policy in Chile – or, 'shock doctrine', as Klein (2007) called the process – *did* reduce inflation (from 340 percent in 1975 to 9.5 percent in 1981) as well as drive increased GDP growth, this success was short-lived. It was also felt incredibly unevenly. These macro-level figures, often touted by neoliberal apologists as evidence of the "cruel-but-kind" nature of market-based reforms, mask entirely the incredible inequality that these policies promoted; GDP figures mask that most benefit went to a few firms, most of which were based in the US. With financial instability, and crises of the current accounts balance, rearing their heads in the 1980s, even this generalised 'success' was undone. Crucially, however, *neoliberalismo* in Chile was *not* undone. To explore this, we need to consider the third pillar of Pinochet's rule –

alongside direct political violence, and rapid marketization of fiscal and monetary policy, the use of legal and constitutional mechanisms proved to be one of the most enduring (but least discussed) aspects of this authoritarian period.

In 1980, through a tightly controlled plebiscite, General Pinochet brought a new constitution into force. This constitution effectively enshrined the core tenets of his government's neoliberal platform:

The 1980 constitution legally sanctioned the immense powers that had already been adopted by General Pinochet and promoted three major tenets of neoliberalism – the supreme value of private property, severe restrictions on the state in its economic role as producer (with the exception of its copper industry the main provider of funding for the military), and a severe clampdown on labor rights (Solimano, 2012: 36).

Although some of the executive powers gifted to the president in the 1980 constitution have since been wound back, these economic constraints on democratically elected governments continue to this day. As a result, there have been 'restricted political representation of positions that do not fall within the agenda of (restricted) democracy and free-market economics' (Solimano, 2012: 37) since the demise of the military regime. Indeed, although the constitution was altered in 1989 to remove the dictatorial powers of the president, the constitution has been widely seen to have 'made it vastly more difficult, if not impossible, for the citizenry to challenge the business-military domination of Chilean society' (Chomsky, 1999: 9).

One example of this 'constitutionalisation' of neoliberalism in Chile relates to the scope of activities which a trade-union can pursue. Under Article 19(19), voluntary unionism is enshrined in the constitution (Constitution of the Republic of Chile, 1980) – a tool used to lower union density, and thus power, around the world, though not always via constitutionalisation. Further, under the same article, 'Union organizations and their leaders may not intervene in political partisan-activities' – an open-ended provision, which can be (and has been) interpreted in ways which undermine the ability of unions to engage in a democratic process, even post-Pinochet. As discussed earlier in this thesis, Bruff (2014: 116) emphasises the increased reliance on constitutional and legal mechanisms, to foreclose avenues of resistance to neoliberal policies, as being definitional to 'authoritarian neoliberalism' in the contemporary conjuncture. The implications of the 1980 Chilean constitution, as pertaining to Bruff's theorisation, will be drawn out further on. We should, however, note here that constitutional and legal

mechanisms have *always* been a part of the history of neoliberalism; ‘That is neoliberal democracy in a nutshell: trivial debate over minor issues by parties that basically pursue the same pro-business policies regardless of formal differences and campaign debate’ (Chomsky, 1999: 9). Although polemic in tone, Chomsky here highlights that de-politicisation in its various forms are definitional to actually existing neoliberalism.

General Augusto Pinochet, and the junta government he led in Chile, have been the subject of many studies and histories. A comprehensive history, or even historiographic survey, is not the purpose of this chapter. This ‘brief history’ of Chilean *neoliberalismo* has highlighted three key forms of authoritarianism relating to ‘market-based’ governance. First, although language of national interest and ‘stability’ were used to justify the programme, direct coercion played a more material role in the imposition of reform, and the neutering of resistance. Second, that direct violence was compounded by the violence of the economic programme, which also reduced resistance through the outlawing of unionism, as well as the material compulsion toward the broad-based acceptance of lower wages, due in part to reduced welfare spending. And finally, that these reforms were consolidated through legal means, which have limited avenues of opposition to neoliberal governance, even in the current post-Pinochet, ‘democratised’ context. If ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is to be embraced as a useful category and research programme in the *current* conjuncture, a comprehensive answer must be presented to the challenge arising from this discussion of Chile, that “neoliberalism has *always been* authoritarian”. Further, the history of state violence being used to break resistance to emergent neoliberal reforms is hardly limited to one aberrant Southern example – as mentioned above, this is a hallmark of the history of neoliberalism, not least of Thatcherism. We turn now to consider this second ‘moment’ of neoliberal authoritarianism.

Thatcherism

The global crisis of the 1970’s, emanating from the US (see Gamble and Walton, 1978; Brenner, Brenner and Wilson, 2010), was, for various reasons, particularly acute in the United Kingdom. This was noted by Stuart Hall: ‘few would deny that, since the political debacles of 1972 and 1974, and the economic recession after 1975-6, the crisis has reached a qualitatively new stage’ (Hall, 1988: 123). This is the pre-history of political

and economic crisis, from which Thatcherism emerged: ‘neither the weakest economies with the strongest labour movements, like Great Britain, nor the strongest economies with the weakest labour movements, like Japan, remained immune’ (Brenner, 2006: 23). The economic crisis of the early 1970’s was marked by the theoretically-improbable emergence of ‘stagflation’ – concurrent growth stagnation *and* inflation (Cameron and Neal, 2003: 390). Political crisis then emerged from the successive failure of governments on both the left and right to present or implement solutions to these ongoing issues (Poulantzas, 1978: 204). Gramscian analyses of this period have characterised it as one of ‘organic crisis’, marked by a failure to cohere a hegemonic power bloc (see Jessop et al, 1988).

This is the context in which Thatcher’s government emerged – a distinctly anti-conservative Conservative movement. The early years of the Thatcher government were not, however, immediately successful – either in solving these deep economic issues, nor in converting electoral success into hegemonic dominance. Part of this was due to the contradictory imperatives which the government was attempting to balance:

The dilemma which the Thatcher government faced from the outset was how far to continue the defensive and short-term policies of its predecessor, and seek to cushion and to smooth economic decline by whatever combination of measures lay to hand, and how far to break with that pattern and make a bold attempt to reverse Britain’s economic fortunes... This made the early period of the Thatcher government appear as a highly unstable and transitional phase. The government was pursuing two contradictory strategies simultaneously (Gamble, 1981: 207, 212).

Consider an example. One of the most popularised examples of Thatcher’s ‘authoritarian populism’, as Hall described it (1988: 138), was the breaking of the miners’ strike in 1984 (Harvey, 2005: 59). It is easy to treat this moment as a device with which to generalise about the entire period of Thatcher’s government. As significant as this event was, this should not obscure the deeply contradictory early stages of Thatcherism. It is in the uneven application of such policies, and concerted efforts to capitalize on conjunctural events, that we can locate a (fallible) attempt to consolidate hegemony. In this early, contradictory phase of Thatcher’s government ‘trade union power was being weakened by high unemployment, and pay settlements were falling, but no direct assault on trade-union organisation had materialised’ (Gamble, 1981: 212). Thatcher’s war on unions was not an automatic expression of ideas through the state, but a project which

was created gradually, and deeply connected to the context of crisis in which it emerged. Although crises are over-determined (Hall, 1988: 128) – that is, unable to be tied directly to one cause or another – it is crucial to understand the emergence of Thatcherism in this context. Only then might we approach an understanding of the emergence of authoritarian state forms in this period.

One reason an understanding of Thatcherism – and the authoritarian aspects of Thatcher's Tory government – is necessary, is to ground analysis in the drivers behind state change. Put differently, the period of Thatcherism was not a clean departure from existing trends of crisis management, but rather a continuation of struggles around accumulation and legitimacy faced both by earlier governments, and by governments in other developed economies at the same time. It is for this reason that we can bring Poulantzas's concept of 'authoritarian statism' to bear, despite its conceptualisation pre-dating the emergence of Thatcher. In the words of Andrew Gamble (1994: 181), 'the concept of authoritarian statism has a crucial bearing on how Thatcherism itself has been explained'. Faced by the crisis of the 1970's, states around the global North seemed to need to deepen Keynesian-type crisis management; there was an imperative to 'widen the basis of consent for measures of state intervention, such as prices and incomes policies and public-investment policies (Gamble, 1994: 181, see also Bulpitt, 1986). Although these deepening interventions were occurring during the 1960's – many of them successfully – the consent for these types of programmes began to break down in the face of the economic downturn. With the failure of consent-based strategies, a shift to coercion began to occur. The failure to legitimize continuing state intervention

Brought a shift away from consent towards coercion. The state seized new powers to impose its policies; gradually the democratic aspects of political life began to be eroded and every base of independent countervailing power to the state came under threat (Gamble, 1994: 181, emphasis added).

Thatcherism, in this light, only came together as a hegemonic strategy once the approach of authoritarian statism was employed (see also Strinati, 1983; Hall et al, 1979). We should here note the parallel between Gamble's claim regarding Thatcherism, and Bruff's claim regarding a qualitative shift from consent-based strategies to coercion in the post-2008 conjuncture (but hold this aside for consideration further on). This argument, however – that the crisis of the 1970's led the state to contingently adopt

strategies of discipline, policing, and depoliticisation – is summarised concisely by Poulantzas himself:

The whole of the current phase is permanently and structurally characterized by a sharpening of the generic elements of political crisis and state crisis – a sharpening which is itself articulated to the economic crisis of capitalism. Authoritarian statism appears also as the result of, and as a response to, the sharpening of those elements of crisis (Poulantzas, 1978: 206, emphasis in original).

The economy of the United Kingdom was, in the 1970's, in a deep crisis. This economic crisis was linked to broader international issues relating to accumulation. States across the global North were each struggling to cohere policy responses, and political legitimisation of those policies, leading to internally related political and state crises. One contingent response of states in the face of these material constraints was to expedite policies, to silo decisions away from the purview of elected officials, and to 'police the crisis' in a more militaristic fashion. Thatcher's government, in this vein, can be described as one pursuing 'authoritarian statism'.

This general point is also found in Stuart Hall's work on the concept of 'authoritarian populism', who argued that 'this double movement – creeping authoritarianism masked by the rituals of formal representations – is what gives a particular historical specificity to the present phase of crisis of the state/crisis of hegemony' (Hall, 1988: 126). Hall explicitly agrees with Poulantzas, but goes further in considering the way in which 'authoritarian statist' strategies approach the challenge of legitimisation and reproduction: 'what it [authoritarian statism] omits is the steady and unremitting set of operations designed to bind or construct a popular consent to these new forms of statist authoritarianism' (Hall, 1988: 127). This is the question which 'authoritarian populism' attempts to answer. These frameworks are complimentary, rather than exclusive, and both provide insight into the Thatcherite 'moment' of authoritarianism.

But what do we mean when we say that Thatcher was authoritarian? This claim does not imply that Thatcher was as violent or dictatorial as Pinochet, or any other spurious comparison to conventionally-authoritarian despotism. The claim rests on the understanding that authoritarianism, rather than being antithetical to democracy, as it is commonly conceived, can co-exist:

Authoritarian statism is included towards a gradual transformation that has critical effects on the functioning of the liberal democracy by incapacitating political parties, the parliament, the judiciary and some sections of the bureaucracy, and empowering the technocratic-minded elite within the executive branch (Bekmen, 2014: 47).

In this sense, then, we can characterise particular actions of Thatcher and her executive as being authoritarian. One example of this was her turn toward a more ‘presidential’ leadership style. Under Thatcher’s government, many decisions which were previously made by cabinet bypassed this arena. Her sidelining of cabinet was institutionally supported, and had the effect of taking power out of the hands of elected ministers, granting it instead to an inner circle of unelected advisers – ‘Thatcher established a strong link between her inner circle and the Treasury in the form of a Cabinet subcommittee called the ‘E committee’” (Gallas, 2015: 137). The result of this was that ‘the involvement of Cabinet in economic policy matters was minimal’.⁹

Another illustrative example is the ‘Financial Management Initiative’ (1982, see Fry, 1988), which imposed strict cash limits on public service departments, having the effect of legally restricting the autonomy and policy scope of individual departments (Gallas, 2015: 138). If de-politicisation is conceived of as reducing the parameters of policy possibilities, foreclosing particular approaches, then this was indeed the effect of the FMI. There were many similar impositions of efficiency and cost-reduction onto the public service. The effect of these changes was to enshrine the primacy of Treasury in all policy-making:

Mrs Thatcher and her Treasury team ensured that the regime could not be questioned in official circles. Whether or not civil servants thought it was correct (and the majority did not, before the mid-1980’s) they accepted it as their framework of reference (Middlemas, 1991: 259, in Gallas, 2015: 138).

In a broad strategy, which reduced the scope of opposition to the policy programme of the day, these bureaucratic changes dovetailed with an increased ‘reliance on coercive authority and repressive apparatuses of the state in disciplining the economic and the political struggle, in the context of crisis’ (Hall, 1988: 136). Drawing on Stuart Hall again, we find a broad sweep of policies and state changes which together represent a significant change in the balance of coercive activities:

We have in mind here the extension, over the period, of police power and surveillance of political groups and individuals; the use of police and legal apparatuses in a wide area of social conflicts; the role of the judicial forces in containing the economic and industrial class

⁹ There is a parallel here to the ‘camarillas’ [cliques] who struggled over influence within Pinochet’s government (Zeltin and Ratcliff, 1988).

struggle; the employment of new judicial instruments – the Industrial Relations Act, legal constraints on picketing and strikes; the extension of the conspiracy charge and political trials; the abuse of habeas corpus under the loose definition of ‘emergency’ (Hall, 1988: 136).

This same thrust is corroborated by a recent study by Gallas (2015: 141), who noted that ‘despite its hostility to state spending, it raised police wages, bought new equipment and increased the number of officers. There was a 20 percent increase in police staff between 1980 and 1989, and a real-term rise of the Home Office budget by 55 percent’. Gallas also notes the pressure Thatcher’s circle put on the judiciary regarding ‘tougher’ sentences, and introduced new custodial punishments (*ibid*). Also in line with Hall, it is important to note that these types of extensions of state violence went hand in hand with a rhetorical commitment to law and order. The Thatcher government spent its early years pursuing contradictory policies, caught between an intellectual aversion to Keynesian stimulatory policy, and a material context which necessitated continued softening of the economic downturn. It was only through the vehicle of authoritarian statism and authoritarian populism that the Tory government could cohere a hegemonic project, and finally pursue their electoral goals. Thatcher may have never formally suspended parliament or the rule of law¹⁰ – the traditional definition of authoritarianism – but this minimal test of democracy does not give appropriate weighting to the concerted violent and coercive methods used to curtail resistance during Thatcher’s neoliberal turn.

The most iconic example of this kind of state strategy was, of course, the National Union of Miners (NUM) strike of 1984-5. The strike was provoked by extensive waves of redundancies and pit closures – a state policy justified by the comparatively cheap cost of imported coal. Lasting almost a year, the breaking of this particular strike (there were plenty of others during Thatcher’s prime ministership) has been widely seen as a pivotal moment for the UK labour movement, marking its decline (Harvey, 2005: 59). Even at the time it was clear that the strike was economically irrational, costing the state billions of pounds over its duration (Gamble, 1994: 192) – that the government was prepared to absorb such costs, while also pursuing fiscal discipline in other areas, speaks the explicitly class-based nature of the neoliberal project. As to whether the violence of the state (police) against the workers and their families constitutes an example of

¹⁰ It may be argued that the Falkland’s War might constitute such a breach of democratic norms, but this thesis is concerned with ‘authoritarian statism’ in the Poulantzasian sense – state management of the economy and society – rather than overt ‘war’.

authoritarianism, the answer is complicated. From the perspective of the UK legal system at the time, trade unions had very few rights when it came to strikes and picketing (McIlroy, 1985: 101-103), and police were within their rights to ‘keep the peace’. The role of legal mechanisms in legitimising obviously violent state actions is, however, precisely the point. Now, of course this is not to say that any expression of state violence through the police targeted at unions is necessarily authoritarian. What we can note is how *changes* in law played out at the time, and what the relative effect(s) of these changes were. The key piece of legislation here is the 1980 Employment Act, which markedly reduced existing rights of workers to strike and picket (*ibid.* 103); it is not simply the existence of a legal monopoly of violence that ‘authoritarian statism’ is found, but rather in observable changes to the bounds of that violence, understood in relation to a context of struggle. And so, just as was the case with Pinochet in Chile, direct state violence is paired with legal changes. These legal changes had the effect of limiting the political voice of the unions, and justified the breaking of the strike in 1985. Put plainly, Thatcher’s ‘authoritarian statism’ was defined by both violence, and legal foreclosure of protest.

The government of Margret Thatcher – one of the earliest examples of neoliberalisation in the global North – was a moment of authoritarian state forms and actions. The construction of a hegemonic project surrounding neoliberal economic policy was, even at this point, marked by a distinct proclivity for *coercion*. This holds direct ramifications for our understanding of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. With this history in mind, it becomes even more difficult to maintain that the post-2007 context is marked by a shift toward using legal and constitutional measures to foreclose democratic contestation of policy, considering this very strategy played a key role in the birth of neoliberalism in the first place. How is an understanding of the current period deepened by de-emphasising the continuities of the current moment with historical tendencies? Surely, then, we are approaching the point where we can reject the claim that the authoritarianism expressed post-2007 is ‘qualitatively distinct’? For this comparison, we need to consider some of the detail of this current ‘moment’; the case pointed to by Bruff as evidence of the ‘rise of authoritarian neoliberalism’ – the European Union.

The European Union

The European Union (EU) is replete with contradictions; from its very origins, there have been tensions between, on the one hand, a cosmopolitan internationalism, which rejected the horrors of nationalism and the world wars, and, on the other, the creation of a strong economic zone which might stabilize the global economy (Varoufakis, 2015: 71-74). Debates as to whether the EU should be seen as a triumph of humanity's peaceful potential, or a glorified economic cartel, will not be settled here (indeed, this dualism is really a false choice, obscuring a far more complex history). Rather, we are concerned with how the material realities of the Union – and, in particular, the strictures of the European Monetary System (EMS) – might be characterised as authoritarian in some way. Indeed, both projects – cosmopolitan and corporatist – have had tenuous relationships with democracy. Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, an early advocate of *Panuropa*, once stated that he thought the integration of Europe would allow nations to 'supersede democracy', replacing this inferior populist system with a 'social aristocracy of the spirit' (Rosamond, 2000, in Varoufakis, 2016: 58). This is not to say that all intellectual currents supporting the notion of European integration were anti-democratic – many were deeply democratic. It does, however, highlight the uneasiness of this relationship. Similarly, those who conceive of the Union as first and foremost an economic institution point toward the foundations of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and the way in which this cartel 'openly and legally, controlled prices and output by means of a multinational bureaucracy vested with legal and political powers superseding national parliaments and democratic processes' (Varoufakis, 2016: 59). Put simply, the European Union, and its multiform institutions, have a complex (and not always complementary) relationship with democracy, which traces back to the emergence of the union.

While the origins of the European Union are contradictory, it would be misleading to say that the political and economic crises facing Europe today are simply the logical extrapolation of a contradiction set in motion in 1950. The process of integration has gone through several phases, with corresponding changes to the structure of the union; changes which have not occurred outside of global political economic developments, or without the input of human agency. Broadly speaking, this development can be divided into a Fordist period, and a neoliberal one. Shaped by the Bretton Woods system, and further developed by the Marshall Plan, Europe did initially pursue policies of

integration which supported wage-led growth, and broad welfare systems (Cameron and Neal, 2003: 365). However, ‘As this system succumbed to its internal contradictions in the 1970s, the(re)launching of the single market and the EMU spearheaded the neoliberal restructuring of capitalism in the 1980s and the 1990s’ (Ryner and Cafruny, 2016: 7). This neoliberalism has been incredibly durable during the post-2007 crisis of the Eurozone; and yet there are those who see the neoliberalism of this crisis – protracted for a decade now – should be seen as a separate period again. How, then, should we understand this complex institution?

A comprehensive study of this history, or even the role of authoritarianism within it, is outside the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, with the discussion of the perils of periodisation fresh in our minds from the second chapter of this thesis, even the broad-brush claims made above are problematic. Rather, this brief engagement will consider key moments within the history of the EU which speak directly to the framework of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. This is done, however, with full appreciation of the impossibility of ever fully understanding something as complex as the EU. This point is made usefully by Bruff (2017: 150):

Full comprehension of the world in all its complexity is highly unlikely... this is especially the case for the EU, which is a multilayered, multifaceted entity of considerable complexity and which has evolved radically since its beginnings in the 1950s... a full, comprehensive and in-depth knowledge of the EU is impossible.

This brief engagement with the history and structure of the EU fall short of completion – that objective is itself impossible. But, in the face of this epistemological quandary, Bruff draws usefully on a methodological precept offered by Gramsci: ‘even if the facts are always unique and changeable in the flux of movement of history, the concepts can [and must] be theorised’ (Gramsci, 1971: 427, in Bruff, 2017: 152). And so, with caution and complexity in mind, let us consider the relationship between the EU, and authoritarianism.

One such institution, nestled within the EU, is the European Monetary System (EMS). An insight into why a focus on the EMS is, in this regard, necessary can be found in the words of a surprising individual – the above-maligned Margret Thatcher. For on November 22, 1990 – on the very day she was removed as leader of the Conservative Party – Thatcher made a comment during question time about the idea of a currency union, and a then-hypothetical European central bank, which was incredibly prescient:

The point of that kind of Europe with a central bank is no democracy, taking powers away from every single Parliament, and having a single currency, a monetary policy and interest rates which take all political power away from us... a single currency is about the politics of Europe, it is about a federal Europe by the back door... Now where were we? I am enjoying this (Hansard, 1990: para 451).

While the authoritarian parallels between a European Monetary System and her own use of authoritarian methods of governance was apparently lost on her, Thatcher made a key point: ‘Thatcher’s precious point was that controlling interest rates and the supply of money is a quintessentially political activity which, if removed from the purview of a democratically elected parliament, would occasion a steady descent into authoritarianism’ (Varoufakis, 2016: 97). To speak in more concrete terms, however, an example of this is found in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, which ‘mandated a series of criteria for member states to be included in the EMU (such as low budget deficits and low inflation), which by default took priority over alternative socioeconomic goals such as full employment and reduced inequality’ (Bruff, 2017: 154). In this sense, the EMU is part of a broader context, in which there is a clear trend away from democratic input into policy making within the structure of the EU. It is a process labelled by Cahill (2014: 107) as the ‘institutional embedding’ of neoliberalism, ‘a framework of rules and obligations’ is put in place which ‘privilege and commit states to neoliberal forms of regulation and response’ – a process of Poulantzas’s ‘authoritarian statism’ which differs only on scale of operation, rather than effective outcome.

In trying to understand the shape and character of authoritarianism within the structure of the EU, the most resonant example upon which to focus is the recent case of Greece, and the referendum of July 2015. Having, since 2010, gone through several rounds of sovereign-debt bailouts, successive Greek governments have signed ‘Memoranda of Understanding’ with their creditors (the ‘Troika’ of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary fund). These memoranda have ‘not only created a condition of limited sovereignty, but also acted as a disciplinary mechanism, whereby the constant supervision and evaluation of the Greek economy and state functions are regulated through loan payments’ (Sotiris, 2017: 171). Although these kinds of authoritarian interventions should *always* be recognised as such, the referendum instigated by the Syriza government made this particularly stark. On the 5th of July, more than 61 percent of voters voted *oxi*, or ‘no’, to the proposals of the Troika. This vote carried no weight in bailout talks, and the Greek government were eventually forced – through disciplinary measures, such as an immediate cap on the European

Central Bank's (ECB) liquidity injections, and mass panic surrounding the availability of people's savings (Sotiris, 2017: 179) – to concede to another round of cuts: a goal of 0.25 percent fiscal deficit, increases to the age of pension eligibility, cuts to the social welfare system totalling 0.5 percent of GDP each year, further labour market deregulation, and many other austerity measures besides (Stewart, 2015, online). In this way, the already-embedded authoritarian tendencies of the structures which make up the Eurozone – the European Commission (EC) and ECB, especially – were revealed; a resounding referendum, and a clearly-failing (assuming the goal of achieving fiscal balance) austerity program, were both ignored. Instead, policy was made in the same way it was through the ECSC: policy was dictated by financial, rather than democratic, actors and institutions. Even before the Greek situation came to this point, Bruff recognised this case as being an exemplar case of 'authoritarian neoliberalism':

Measures possessing quasi-constitutional status have constituted a growing part of the conditions attached to bailouts in Greece... such impositions are not just reactive, occurring after a bailout has been requested, but are also increasingly pre-emptive, locking in neoliberal governance mechanisms in the name of necessity, whatever the actual state of play (Bruff, 2014: 123).

There are a myriad of vantage points from which one might consider how the 'institutional embedding' of neoliberalism within the EU has limited democratic control over policy making – Sharpf (2010) has, for example, has emphasised the constitutionalisation of competition law and deregulation, whereas Bruff (2017) has also, elsewhere, emphasised the European 'Social' Model (ESM) has also played a key role, through the hardening of 'soft' law. Susan Watkins (2012: 6-7) has emphasised the European Stability Mechanism (ESMe) as another location of authoritarian-type limitation of democratic policy making. Wolfgang Streeck (2016: 148) reinforces the choice to focus on monetary policy, in arguing that 'monetary union [in the case of Greece] thus 'spills over' into a form of political union, at the cost of democracy in the South – where the budget-making power of parliaments is transferred to the supervisory apparatus of the EU and the IMF'. The above focus on the EMU, and its ramifications in terms of Greece's experience of austerity, does not detract from the importance of other moments of 'authoritarianism'. It is simply the case that this instance provides a clear illustration of two key points: that authoritarianism can indeed be keenly felt, even when surrounded by the trappings of formal democracy; and that these current, ongoing

examples bring immediate heuristic weight to the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’.

And yet, surely there is a problem here. It is certainly true that the Troika has effectively bypassed the ability of the Greek parliament to control their own fiscal policy, labour market, and regulatory environments. But it is equally true that the same would be true, if one replaced the antagonistic role of the Troika, with a different trio – the IMF, World Bank, and WTO; or the ‘unholy trinity’, as Ha-Joon Chang (2008: 15) calls them – and the victim country with Argentina. Or Nigeria. Or Zaire. Put simply, the experience of Greece would seem to mirror that of a range of countries from the global South, during the period of ‘structural adjustment programmes’ (SAPs) and the Washington Consensus (see Stiglitz, 2002; Chang, 2008). Thus, despite the best intentions of its proponents, there is a potential here for sliding into eurocentrism, through emphasising the novelty of these (Northern) instances of authoritarianism, without giving appropriate weight to the many and multiple parallels with prior moments of authoritarian neoliberalism (in the global South).

Throughout these three ‘moments’ of authoritarianism within the history of actually existing neoliberalism, three common themes have emerged: state forms have shifted to quarantine particular policies away from the control of democratically elected representatives; this process has often involved legal and constitutional means; and that these forms of structural repression of discontent are often re-enforced through directly violent means. Despite these commonalities, there is an argument that there has been a qualitative shift between the former two cases – Chile and Thatcherism – on the one hand, and the latter – the EU – on the other. This poses a direct challenge to the conceptual framework of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’: why emphasise the current period as different, when it presents so many continuities with the period that supposedly preceded it? We move now to evaluate the claim, that the ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ of the post-2007 context is somehow distinct.

Toward a periodisation of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’

The claim that authoritarian neoliberalism represents a ‘qualitative change’, a shift ‘away from seeking consent towards coercion’, is a contentious one. Even before one gets to the deeper methodological questions as to how these types of claims could be made or supported, a far simpler question arises: “surely neoliberalism has existed in authoritarian forms before”? The centrality of the stories of General Augusto Pinochet’s junta government in Chile, and of Margaret Thatcher’s violent breaking of the miners’ strikes, to the well-known narrative of the turn from active state-management of the economy in the 1970’s and 1980’s will be, for many, the first thought when presented with the emergent framework of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. And while these historical experiences form a significant aspect of the critique of the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism developed by this thesis, they are not the only issue. Challenges to the theoretical and historical specificity of the concept span: the conceptual overlap between authoritarian neoliberalism and ‘depoliticisation’; the problem that depoliticisation in some sense is, per the approach of Political Marxism, *definitional to capitalism*; and even that critiques of Political Marxism, from the approach of uneven and combined development, also pose a conceptual challenge, rather than offering succour. Behind the veil of these concepts, the real challenges posed to the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ are the material conditions which scholars such as Wood or Rioux were studying. Whether those conditions are found in the enclosure movement in England, or the current and continued abuse of indentured labour in globalised commodity chains, the conditions which these competing approaches seek to understand are conditions which pose a challenge to the historical specificity of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’. It is not simply the existence of competing frameworks which challenges ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, but also the historical processes which they each seek to understand. By exploring the implications of these various approaches and frameworks, this thesis has effectively deepened the critique of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’.

As stated at several points, however, this critique does not aim to reject the framework entirely. In the course of this critique, there has been an attempt to highlight those elements of the ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ approach which are suggestive of a useful theoretical lens. This task has also involved making more explicit aspects of method, which might assist in making a more-nuanced assessment of the prospects of the framework. In terms of the former, Bruff’s incorporation of the ‘strengthening-

weakening dynamic' first presented by Poulantzas (1978: 246) has been seen to "name" a particular contradiction set in motion by 'authoritarian statist' change. This aspect of Poulantzas's own concept, 'authoritarian statism', was never exhaustively theorised, however – which mechanisms might operationalise this 'strengthening-weakening' was never made clear. Existing research agendas around depoliticisation, and Political Marxism, would seem to be congruent here, possibly even taking Poulantzas's work further. Similarly, the consideration of state theory, and the social relations which 'state theory' attempts to understand, within this thesis – particularly that of O'Connor – also adds weight to the theoretical and historical action of this contradiction. Should this process indeed be one of the 'strengths' of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' (conceptually speaking), then this actually *reinforces* the above issues of periodisation. That is to say, should 'authoritarian neoliberalism' in practice work to undo itself, then this raises questions about the *kind of change* that it represents. By considering various approaches to the task of periodisation, the insights of Gramsci regarding 'conjunctural' verses 'organic movements' push us to consider whether authoritarian neoliberalisation might be better conceived as the playing out of the broader process of neoliberalism in general, convulsing through a period of organic crisis, rather than as a period in its own right.

'Authoritarian neoliberalism', as a conceptual framework, stands accused of a lack of historical and theoretical specificity. At this penultimate stage of the thesis, we have considered these theoretical and historical challenges, as well as explored some of the methodological tools necessary to evaluate these challenges. Before that argument is finally developed, however, we must return to the source. Many of the claims of Bruff and others, in the theorisation of 'authoritarian neoliberalism', have been quoted throughout this thesis. We return here to those claims, in fuller detail – if we are going to deliver an evaluation of the framework of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' we would do well to have that framework clear in our minds.

Understanding the claims: period or emphasis?

Although the term 'authoritarian neoliberalism' has been deployed previously (Solfrini, 2001; Taylor, 2002), its introduction as a discrete framework for understanding the post-2007 conjuncture was first articulated in the form of a research note by Bruff (2012), and then a longer article (2014), which has been cited by one hundred subsequent articles

and books¹¹. Since then, the concept has been featured in several national and international conferences¹² – scholarly developments which are, themselves, expressions of the material conditions of the current conjuncture. The most significant example of the emerging popularity is in the collection *States of Discipline: Authoritarian neoliberalism and the contested reproduction of capitalist order*, edited by Cemal Burak Tansel (2017). The significance of all of this is that there is a growing trend to *understand the material conditions of the current conjuncture through the lens of authoritarian neoliberalism*. At stake is not only an intellectually sound understanding of historical change, but also *effective political action*. In order to faithfully reproduce the claims made by the proponents of this emerging approach, we will move through a series of important quotations. We will consider the definition of the term, ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, the processes which are supposedly encapsulated within it, and defences of the term offered. In simple terms, according to the abstract of Bruff’s *Rethinking Marxism* article: ‘we are witnessing the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism, which is rooted in the reconfiguring of the state into a less democratic entity through constitutional and legal changes that seek to insulate it from social and political conflict (2014: 113). This claim is made more fully further on:

In the absence of a hegemonic aura, neoliberal practices are less able to garner the consent or even the reluctant acquiescence necessary for more “normal” modes of governance. Of particular importance... is the increasing frequency with which constitutional and legal changes, in the name of economic “necessity,” are seeking to reshape the purpose of the state and associated institutions... [this involves a] recalibration of the kinds of activity that are feasible and appropriate for non-market institutions to engage in, diminishing expectations in the process; and the reconceptualization of the state as increasingly nondemocratic through its subordination to constitutional and legal rules that are deemed necessary for prosperity to be achieved. In sum, we are witnessing the rise of *authoritarian neoliberalism* (Bruff, 2014: 115-116, emphasis in original).

Importantly, this original theorisation does not treat the pre-2007 history of neoliberalism (nor capitalism in general) as a process or period free from violence, coercion, or authoritarian state forms:

Authoritarian neoliberalism does not represent a wholesale break from pre-2007 neoliberal practices, yet it is qualitatively distinct due to the way in which authoritarian tendencies... have come to the fore through the shift *toward* constitutional and legal mechanisms and the move *away* from seeking consent for hegemonic projects (Bruff, 2014: 116, emphasis in original).

¹¹ According to Google Scholar, at time of writing.

¹² A series of panels on ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ were planned for the European International Studies Association conference in Izmir, September 2016, before the conference was cancelled due to turmoil in Turkey at the time. The concept was also featured on two panels at the concurrent International Initiative for the Promotion of Political Economy conference, in Lisbon. An early form of the argument made in this thesis were presented at the latter.

This partial acknowledgment of the historical role of authoritarian state strategies is perhaps the most important moment in Bruff's article, and is the crux of this thesis. What does it mean, for something to be 'qualitatively distinct', and yet not a 'wholesale break'? Evidently this semantic sleight of hand is supposed to absolve the framework of issues surrounding periodisation; for, if the concept does not claim to be wholly new, then the sin of reification is surely avoided? But, as we have seen in Chapter Two, periodisation – even when done deliberately – does *not* rely on clean breaks. By claiming that there has been a qualitative change in the state post-2007, there can be no doubt that this is a historical claim. Even more problematic is the fact that this historical claim is made, without ever explaining how such a change might be measured or proven.

This initial framing is further supplemented by Tansel, both in definition, and in qualification. For Tansel, contemporary authoritarian neoliberalism

... reinforces and increasingly relies upon (1) coercive state practices that discipline, marginalize and criminalize oppositional social forces and (2) the judicial and administrative state apparatuses which limit the avenues in which neoliberal policies can be challenged. This argument should *not* be read to the effect that the deployment of coercive state apparatuses for the protection of the circuits of capital accumulation is a *new* phenomenon, nor should it lead to the assumption that the pre-crisis trajectories of neoliberalization have been *exclusively consensual* (Tansel, 2017: 2, emphasis in original).

And yet, having acknowledged that capitalist states have often, in different times and places removed barriers to accumulation via 'violent, disciplinary and anti-democratic means' (*ibid*), the justification of *difference* provided is really quite vague. Authoritarian neoliberalisms are supposedly distinct from these previous authoritarian forms in that they:

1. Operate through a *preemptive* discipline which simultaneously insulates neoliberal policies through a set of administrative, legal and coercive mechanisms and limits the spaces of popular resistance against neoliberalism (Bruff 2014: 116);

And

2. Are marked by a *significant escalation* in the state's propensity to employ coercion and legal/extra-legal intimidation, which is complemented by 'intensified state control over every sphere of social life... (and) draconian and multiform curtailment of so-called "formal" liberties' (Poulantzas, 1978: 203-204) (Tansel, 2017: 3, emphasis added).

The above passage from Tansel is, however, an example in point: the supposed difference of the post-2007 period is defined by reference to Poulantzas, published in 1978 – was Poulantzas not responding to conjunctural developments in his own time? Or was he rather simply prophesizing what would happen thirty years hence? Tansel

also goes on to claim that authoritarian neoliberalism is a ‘historically specific set of capitalist accumulation strategies’ (*ibid.*: 6), without stipulating what makes them historically specific beyond these two vagaries of ‘pre-emption’ and that these changes present a ‘significant escalation’. How are we to prove ‘preemption’, with the complexities of agency implied? And by what measure do we detect a ‘significant escalation’ of authoritarian statist transformations? Is there a quantitative or qualitative indicator that might measure or evince this process? With the three moments of authoritarianism within the broader history of neoliberalism considered, as well as discussions surrounding the complexity of periodisation in mind from the previous chapter, the problematic nature of Bruff and Tansel’s claims should be immediately apparent.

And yet, while there is clearly a claim that something ‘new’ is going on in the current conjuncture, there would also seem to be a parallel claim: that the ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ framework might be useful to understand the broader history of neoliberalism. Contributions to *States of Discipline* (Tansel, 2017) span case studies on Cambodia (Springer, 2017), China (Lim, 2017), Egypt and Morocco (De Smet and Bogaert, 2017), and Turkey (Ozden, Akca and Bekmen, 2017), among others. Across these chapters there is an argument that *historical* processes of neoliberalization have involved a strengthening of the state along authoritarian statist lines – they do not seem to emphasise a post-2007 change. This leads Tansel (2017: 16) to offer that ‘retracing the histories of neoliberalisation in those cases through the lens of authoritarian neoliberalism becomes paramount to contextualise and understand’ how these state processes have changed over time. A sensitivity to these variegated Southern experiences also leads Tansel (2017: 13) to note that ‘in many ways, European societies are now being subjected to the same pressures and disciplinary conditions that numerous countries in the global South have faced through conditions attached to their internationally sanctioned debt and bailout programmes’.

These two comments, taken with the case studies mentioned above, leads to a different inflection of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ than as a post-2007 phenomena: perhaps authoritarian neoliberalism is better understood not as a periodisation claim, but as a contribution to the larger debates surrounding what we mean by neoliberalism *in general*. In this sense, we should be locating the claims of Bruff, Tansel, and others, alongside

existing contributions to the definitional debate surrounding neoliberalism: next to the ideational (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009; Mirowski, 2013); next to the Foucauldian (Dardot and Laval, 2013; Brown, 2015); along-side the institutional and regulationist understandings (Braithwaite, 2008); in collaboration with existing Marxian understandings (Davidson, 2010; Cahill, 2014). In this sense, authoritarian neoliberalism could be read as an emphasis or clarification of the nature of neoliberalism, in a similar fashion to ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002), or ‘disciplinary neoliberalism’ (Gill, 1995) – they each add an adjective or descriptor which stipulates which definition of ‘neoliberalism’ is most useful. I would argue that the emerging research programme surrounding authoritarian neoliberalism has not yet formulated a position on which task it is prioritising: clarification and emphasis spanning a broader neoliberal history, or change and periodisation *within* the neoliberal frame.

Against ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’

In evaluating the emerging framework of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, there are significant grounds against the theoretical and historical specificity of the term. This thesis has outlined several of these challenges: there is considerable conceptual overlap with the existing concept of ‘depoliticisation’; the distinction made by the authors (Bruff, 2014: 116; Tansel, 2017: 10) between authoritarian neoliberalism and both ‘new constitutionalism’ and ‘disciplinary neoliberalism’ (Gill, 1995; Gill, 2008) is unclear; the specificity of the claim that expectations in the political process are diminished is also challenged by the fundamental axioms of the Political Marxist approach, which would see this process as definitional, and ongoing, under capitalist social relations more generally; and, simultaneously, those critics of Political Marxism who see this approach as obscuring the enduring violence of capitalism would also be sceptical of claims that there has been a qualitative change away from consent, back toward coercion. Indeed, when conceived of as a world-system, neoliberal history can be seen to have actively involved and promoted slavery relations in some parts of the world (Rioux, 2013). The purpose of the first chapter of this thesis has been to show in detail the theoretical intersections between ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ and extant concepts – and by implication, similarities between the material conditions prompting this earlier research,

and the current conjuncture – highlighting that this emerging research programme will face challenge on theoretical grounds, as well as historical.

These theoretical issues are also entwined with a complex global history of both capitalism generally, and neoliberalism more especially. Throughout this third chapter we have considered three moments of authoritarianism – Pinochet, Thatcher, and the subordination of Greek democracy to the structures of the EMS. With more space and time, we could just have easily discussed Suharto's Indonesia (see Blakeley, 2009: 88-91), Columbia (Bailey, 1965), or India (Chatterjee, 2008), just to name a few other examples. There is obviously difference in each of these countries experience of neoliberalism – this is precisely what is emphasised by those who speak of 'variegated neoliberalism' (Brenner, Peck and Theodore, 2009). Similarly, the state transformations across these places which might be broadly characterised as 'authoritarian-statist' are also variegated; while Poulantzas was noting a general turn toward authoritarian statist state forms during the tumultuous 1970s, he would not have argued that Pinochet and Thatcher's governments transformed the state, limiting democratic appeal, in identical ways. The similarities are, however, theoretically significant: across the three case studies explored, legal mechanisms were used to circumscribe resistance to neoliberal policy platforms; in all three cases material changes to the institutional structure of states were used to limit the scope of democratic input into policy processes; and in all three cases, the violent arm of the state was used to constrain protest and resistance to the above changes. These three common themes – legal mechanisms, de-democratisation of state policy making, and direct violence – resist the analytical separation which the framework of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' would seek to apply. And yet, that is precisely what the framework of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' would seem to do; according to the periodisation claims of Bruff, the temporal location of the Greek sovereign debt crisis (post-2007) makes it a part of a qualitatively different state process. All periodisation is, of course, an abstraction – but is this separation perhaps a 'violent' abstraction? Does it obscure the process it attempts to explain?

The second chapter of this thesis brought together various approaches to the periodisation of capitalism, in order to better make an evaluation of the specificity of authoritarian neoliberalism. Crucial points drawn from this discussion include an understanding that periodisation does not have to be built around 'long waves', spanning

centuries, and does not hinge on clean breaks between periods. In line with this latter point, advocates of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ do not argue that capitalist history has not been violent, or that authoritarian statist interventions have not pre-existed the post-2007 period (Tansel, 2017: 2). But in making the claim that there has been a qualitative shift *away* from consent-based strategies, *towards* more coercive ones suggests a periodisation of sorts; that the role of these strategies in the maintenance of both neoliberal accumulation regimes *and* state legitimisation has somehow changed. This is precisely what we can draw from the regulationist approach to periodisation: that differences and similarities in state form must be understood relative to contextual issues surrounding accumulation and reproduction. This periodisation methodology is incredibly significant here. It is not the *existence* of authoritarian states in previous neoliberal periods which vitiates the framework of authoritarian neoliberalism, but the purpose of those earlier strategies. For the argument to hold, it must be articulated how and why these state transformations are occurring for *different reasons*. For this reason, Tansel’s acknowledgement of the violent and sometimes-authoritarian history of capitalism and neoliberalism does not defend it from criticism. To dismiss *this* criticism, further theoretical and empirical research into current forms of authoritarian statism must show that the role played by these strategies in the reproduction of capitalism is somehow different to those seen previously. This challenge has not yet been adequately addressed.

For ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’

The purpose of this thesis is not to reject ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ entirely, or to deny the conjunctural importance of research of this kind; the purpose of this thesis is to both highlight the significant challenges which face the emerging framework, cautioning that an under-theorised framework will struggle to withstand criticism within the broader debates surrounding neoliberalization, while also highlighting the *strengths* of the approach, and possibly looking for suggestive directions which may both fortify the framework, while also contributing to material struggles around these repressive changes around the world. There is no doubt that the empirical events which the framework is a response to – from Greece, to Turkey, to Brazil – are historically significant, and linked in some way to the current organic crisis of capitalism. And while ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ may be on unstable ground in making claims that these processes are

somehow qualitatively different to those that came before, this analysis of contemporary state transformation is not without insight. By building on Nicos Poulantzas's 'authoritarian statism', I would argue that one of the most significant contributions of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' is to put a name to a particular contradiction which is traversing states and polities around the world. The contradiction which is implied here is that 'an increasingly authoritarian state is simultaneously strengthened and weakened by this shift toward coercion' (Bruff, 2014: 120). For Poulantzas (1978: 246), authoritarian statism 'is itself partially responsible for creating new forms of popular struggle' due to the way in which this state strategy weakens the legitimacy of the state, deepening state crisis. Further 'these struggles exhibit a characteristic anti-statism... [and] even though the movement is located 'at a distance' from the State, it sets up major dislocatory effects within the State itself' (*ibid*). This strengthening-weakening dynamic has been touched upon at various points throughout this thesis. I would argue that this is the real contribution offered by Bruff (2014) and those who have followed him. To put this differently, work which considers the deepening of 'authoritarian statism' in the current conjuncture provides another perspective from which to consider the broad trend of 'anti-politics', as it offers a generative mechanism (authoritarian statism) to help understand this process.

A comprehensive definition of the concept and condition of 'anti-politics' is beyond the scope of this argument. Generally understood, however, there is an emerging interest in the growing schism between civil society and the state (see Tietze and Humphrys, 2014). Relatedly, the late Peter Mair (2013) went through in great detail the development of popular disinterest and disillusionment with the democratic political process, across the 1990's and 2000's, tracking a widespread trend of lower voter turn-out, lower political party membership, and lower political engagement. The general decline of social engagement with political processes, and the resultant decline in the relevance of the democratic process is now well observed (see also Ayers and Saad-Filho, 2014; Streeck, 2014; Anderson, 2006; Maus, 2006; Clarke, 2011; Ferguson, 2006). This process has been labelled by some as 'anti-politics' (Tietze and Humphrys, 2014) – in the words of Colin Hay (2007: 1), people have come to believe that politics 'is not all that it was once cracked up to be', and so increasingly disengage with the political process. This deepening of political and state crises may be seen to be connected to Poulantzas's conception of the authoritarian state, and even more importantly, as generative of the

success of ‘anti-establishment’ political movements – ranging from Brexit and Trump on the one hand, across to the success of Podemos in Spain on the other. Our purpose here is not to provide a comprehensive theoretical survey of ‘anti-politics’, nor to map its many empirical manifestations in the current global political economic crisis. The point is a simpler one: that perhaps the greatest utility offered by ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is a renewed focus on the contradictions inherent to authoritarian statist strategies. Further to this, I would argue that an explicit engagement with debates around ‘anti-politics’ would be a particularly fruitful direction for the programme.

If we take this suggestive focus on the contradictions currently traversing states and societies together with an understanding of the tendency of neoliberalisation to utilise authoritarian statist and authoritarian populist strategies, then the analytical strengths of this research programme are made clear. This can be brought out even more clearly if we return to the insights of Gramsci, discussed briefly in the second chapter – namely, the distinction between conjunctural and organic movement, as well as the related concept of ‘organic crisis’. Consider again the quotation included there:

A crisis occurs, sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves (reached maturity), and that, despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them, within certain limits, and to overcome them. These incessant and persistent efforts (since no social formation will ever admit that it has been superseded) form the terrain of the “conjunctural”, and it is upon this terrain that the forces of opposition organise (Gramsci, 1971: 178; Q13, §17).

This deeply entrenched crisis, which expresses through its tumult the contradictions inherent within current economic and social relations, and which must be overcome through the creation of a new hegemonic project, is the ‘organic crisis’. In this sense, we can link Thatcher, and the crisis-management of her government, to the current conjuncture; the authoritarian statism of Thatcher, and the deepening of that state form under successive prime ministers in the UK, can be seen as a partial determinant of the anti-political, anti-establishment rupture that is the British referendum to leave the EU – or, ‘Brexit’, as it has become commonly known. This connection – which highlights the potential strengths of a renewed attention on authoritarian statism *combined with* an understanding of the difference between conjunctural and organic shifts – is precisely the direction taken recently by Jessop to understand Brexit:

we should look beyond the immediate political situation and particular political conjuncture in which the referendum occurred to the wider domestic and international contexts. The integral economic context domestically was a protracted crisis of Britain's flawed post-war Fordist economy and, relatedly, of its insertion into the circuits of Atlantic Fordism and the world market, evident from the mid-1960s onwards. Politically this was associated with a crisis in the state form and state strategies. This crisis occurred because the state lacked the capacities to engage in statist intervention, or effective corporatist coordination, or a consistently rigorous laissez-faire line and therefore oscillated uneasily among different strategies that all failed in their different ways in different conjunctures (Jessop, 2017: 134).

An understanding of Brexit is not assisted by removing it from the context which generated it. If the history of actually existing neoliberalism, and its authoritarian statist tendencies, is not artificially separated into distinct analytical categories (as a rigid interpretation of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' would suggest), then the framework may actually enrich our understanding. Put simply, the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' presents the potential to offer a significant contribution to the understanding of the current conjuncture. Arguing that there has been a qualitative change beyond the playing out of a period of generalised organic crisis is, however, problematic, and detracts from this potential. It is through building explicit connections between a study of how authoritarian statism has occurred, and continues to occur, within the broader context of neoliberalism, and how these state transformations are related to the processes of 'organic crisis' and 'anti-politics', that a useful analytical direction is found for the concept of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'.

Conclusion

The title of Jairus Banaji's book, *Theory as History* (2010), is an epistemological argument: that neither theory nor history provides an adequate understanding of the world, and that we must utilise both, in a dialectical method. To reference another important title, while this thesis may not have fully achieved the 'dance of the dialectic' (Ollman, 2003), it has tried to incorporate both theory and history into its critique of the emergent framework of 'authoritarian neoliberalism'. Building on the theoretical critique offered in the first two chapters, this chapter has focussed on three 'moments' of authoritarianism within the broad history of neoliberalism in practice. Through these cases, the variegations of appearance – elements such as spatiality and temporality –

have been moved aside, emphasising instead the commonalities across these distinct moments. These commonalities correspond precisely with those elements of the current conjuncture which have been identified by the approach of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ as qualitatively different. This poses a direct challenge to the historical specificity of the concept.

Although Bruff, and the others embracing this framework, do explicitly acknowledge the historical role of authoritarian statist forms, and the role of violence more generally in the reproduction of capitalist social relations, this caveat is not sufficient. Implied in the framework is an argument that the contextual conditions of accumulation and reproduction have somehow changed, and that this gives current expressions of authoritarian statism a qualitatively different *raison d'être*. This claim is highly contentious; it either needs to be evinced far more convincingly, or jettisoned from the framework entirely.

This does not, however, vitiate the theory entirely. This chapter has also highlighted perceived strengths of the approach, and pointed towards directions which future research ought to consider. Chief among these is the focus on the ‘strengthening-weakening dynamic’ associated with authoritarian statist transformations. First conceived by Poulantzas, and incorporated into the framework of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ by Bruff, this moving contradiction is far from fully theorised. Earlier in this thesis, it has been suggested that some of the state-theoretical insights of E.M. Wood (1981), and O’Connor (1973), may provide mechanisms which generate this kind of outcome. Most interesting, however, is the potential link between research into the contradictions inherent to authoritarian statism, and the process and outcome of ‘anti-politics’. These are, I hazard, more-fruitful directions of the research programme associated with ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, than attempts to artificially separate out periods within the history of actually existing neoliberalism – especially when one considers that the entire history of neoliberalism can be conceived of as one of ongoing – albeit uneven – organic crisis.

At the very outset, Bruff touched on the true nature of the process of authoritarian neoliberalism, through an epigraph drawn from Gramsci: ‘The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear’ (Gramsci, 1971, in Bruff, 2014: 113). The (significant) error here was to prioritise the crisis of 2007 in the theorisation, rather than

linking this process back to the earlier crisis of the 1970s. Another suggestive comment is in Bruff's comment that 'the attempted "authoritarian fix" is potentially more of a sticking plaster than anything more epochal' (Bruff, 2014: 125). Here it is almost as though Bruff is alluding to his previous work, where (in collaboration with Bieler and Morton), emphasis was placed on Gramsci's distinction between 'organic' and 'conjunctural movements' (Bieler, et al, 2010: 31).

All of this might be summarised by two issues: one of scope, and one of method. If we see the crisis of 2007 as disconnected from the crises that preceded it, then the abstraction made is becomes a 'violent' one. Similarly, if there is no sensitivity to which movements are 'organic', or relatively permanent, as opposed to the more-occasional and immediate 'conjunctural' movements, then the theorisation made will fail to accurately explain historical change. A return to these questions of scope and method will enable the approach of 'authoritarian neoliberalism' to consider again the nature of the claims being made. This will lend authority to the approach, enabling it to offer its real contribution – an understanding of the current crises of economy, state, and politics, and the relationship between authoritarian state forms and the similarly-important process of 'anti-politics'.

Conclusion

The Global Financial Crisis has had – and will continue to have – momentous ramifications. One such ramification has been renewed attention to the concept of rationality within orthodox economics (Cassidy, 2009). The idea that markets, and the people who comprise them, are not rational is not, however, particularly surprising to those on the outside of this orthodoxy – political economists, for example. The myth of the rational actor has been widely dismissed, well before the 2008 crash (see Lawson, 1997). And yet, despite this broad-based understanding within the post-positivist social sciences, it is all too easy to forget that the kinds of cognitive biases and group-think dynamics which so obviously impact on the decisions of individuals within markets can also impact on us as well – scholars – in the process of our research.

I would hazard that there is just such a cognitive bias at play with the widespread embrace of the concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ as a useful designation for the current conjuncture – the bias toward quantification. The claim that there is a qualitative distinction between the state pre- and post-2008 – a ‘shift *toward* constitutional and legal mechanisms and the move *away* from seeking consent’ (Bruff, 2014: 116) – resonates heuristically. Not only does this claim imply the ability to actually measure such a pivot, it also validates that feeling that the current historical moment is an important one. Given the strong historical materialist background of many of them, I doubt that any of the scholars associated the emerging literature on ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ would argue that such a crude quantification is possible. Certainly, the blunt tool of Freedom House’s annual freedom reports (e.g. Freedom House, 2017) cannot be considered a sufficient tool to understand the hugely complex object of study that is the ‘state’, let alone provide an adequate comparison of the uneven and combined development of states in an international context. And while this caricature is somewhat unfair, there is an element of this style of positivism implied in the claims of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’; to say that neoliberalism has always had authoritarian tendencies, but that

this tendency has somehow produced ‘a significant escalation’ (Tansel, 2017: 3) of authoritarianism in the current conjuncture implies that this is something that *can be measured*.

Let us approach the problem of understanding the current conjuncture from another angle. Wolfgang Streeck has suggested that we *are indeed* seeing the emergence of a new phase of capitalist history. Rather than tying this periodisation to a change in the construction of neoliberal hegemony, however, Streeck draws a different distinction:

Trump’s demolition of the Clinton machine, Brexit and the failure of Holland and Renzi – all in the same year – mark a new phase in the crisis of the capitalist state system as transformed by neoliberalism. To describe this phase I have proposed Antonio Gramsci’s term ‘interregnum’, a period of uncertain duration in which an old order is dying but a new one cannot yet be born. The old order that was destroyed by the onslaught of the populist barbarians in 2016 was the state system of global capitalism. Its governments had neutralized their national democracies in post-democratic fashion so as not to lose touch with the global expansion of capital... What the still to be created new order will look like is uncertain (Streeck, 2017: 14).

From this view, the real root of historical change is in the breakdown of neoliberal hegemony, as opposed to a supposed change within the neoliberal period, toward different state strategies of hegemonic cohesion. Also significant here is Streeck’s characterisation of the neoliberal order – which the ‘interregnum’ marks the prolonged death of – as ‘post-democratic’. Put differently, authoritarian statism is not only tendential within the entirety of the neoliberal period, but it is also partially causal of the current popular turn towards anti-establishment politics.

As we have noted at several points, periodisation is essentially a question of vantage point. Periodisation of the entire social system is ultimately problematic. Despite this, as Jameson (2002: 29) emphasised, ‘we cannot not periodize’. The necessity of this is drawn in no small way from the connection between theorisation and *praxis*, or a desire for scholarly efforts to support and inform struggle. The alternative to periodisation is reducing capitalist history to a totalizing social relation – precisely the outcome of the approach of Open Marxism: ‘critique comes into its own dialectically, as inherent in the movement of contradiction and, so, an open Marxism is able to demystify the notion of new times in a forceful way’ (Bonefeld, Gunn, and Psychopedis, 1992: xvii). The strategic implication of this puritanical theoretical position is that all struggle must be

explicitly tied to the dialectic of the capital-worker social relation. We must reject this paralysing position. And so, we are both to reject the possibility of definitive periodisation, while also rejecting the alternative of not periodising at all. The solution of the paradox is to enter into a conversation as to whether the periodisations we draw are useful ones, or whether they constitute ‘violent abstraction’, in the sense articulated by Sayer (1987). Periodisation cannot be arbitrary – it must be clear as to the vantage point used, and why that perspective is the most useful for that particular issue. Arguably ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ does this. Bruff openly accepts the existence of previous forms of authoritarianism within capitalist development, but believes a point of change can be located at the GFC, where there was an intensification of the process of authoritarian statist-type interventions. The argument here is that this abstracts violently, as theoretically prioritizing the period post-2007 obscures the very generative mechanisms of the current crisis – i.e. those examples of authoritarian statism which have been co-produced by neoliberalism over decades.

The social world is far too complex to be fully comprehended. As discussed in the first chapter, this incomprehensibility is compounded by the material structure of capitalism, a set of social relations that (through fetishism) always appears in disguise. In the face of this complexity, any attempt at theorisation will necessarily be fallible. Understanding this, the question must always be kept in mind, ‘does this abstraction make the real world easier or harder to understand?’ This is the same test that must be applied to rival periodisations. If one draws inappropriate spatial boundaries around an inquiry, this abstraction will hinder understanding – one cannot understand, say, levels of migration into a country without also considering the global context of where those migrants are coming from, and the reasons for their movements. Similarly, if a periodisation draws inappropriate temporal boundaries around a question, the answer may be obscured.

This thesis has argued that if the periodisation claim within the current conceptualisation of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ is retained, then this creates a violent abstraction – it obscures that which it seeks to understand. By theoretically prioritising recent authoritarianisms, and deprioritising the authoritarian history of neoliberalisation more generally, we fail to understand the dynamics driving the current crisis of capitalist states, and the dynamics driving historical change. This can be seen in the twin contributions of Streeck (2017) and Jessop (2017), who both see the current crisis as an ‘interregnum’,

between the gradual breakdown of neoliberal hegemony, and the emergence of an alternative hegemonic mode of organisation. In this sense, the whole history of neoliberalism feeds into the current crisis, rather than just the past ten years. As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, Gramsci (1971: 177; Q13, §17) asserted, drawing on Marx, that ‘no society breaks down and can be replaced until it has first developed all the forms of life which are implicit in its internal relations’¹³. It is not a significant leap to see that neoliberalism has always had a strand of authoritarianism within its ‘internal relations’ – both in thought and practice. Rather than the post-2007 phase being a qualitative change in the relationship between authoritarian statism and neoliberalism, it is part of a broader history whereby all the contradictory tendencies implied within a hegemonic order gradually play out (though not in a determined fashion, to be sure). It is not only the ‘authoritarian statism’ of the post-2007 period that is producing current state crises, but rather the *entire history of neoliberalism* must be seen as feeding into the current upheaval.

The concept of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ would seem to be a problematic proposal. It draws an arbitrary point of change at the Global Financial Crisis, but never suggests a method for detecting or measuring such a change. It would also seem that while periodisation is always necessary, this particular periodisation gets in the way of that which it seeks to understand – the current crisis of legitimacy traversing states across the globe. And yet this thesis does not aim to dismiss the contributions of Bruff (2014; 2017), Tansel (2017), and others using this conceptual frame. Rather, the purpose here is to present a sympathetic critique, a conceptual refocussing of what has been a largely empirically-driven literature, and to suggest possible future directions for the research programme. So, where is this redemption to be found?

Building on the foundation of Nicos Poulantzas’s concept of ‘authoritarian statism’, Bruff has argued that ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ dialectically strengthens *and weakens* the state:

an increasingly authoritarian state is simultaneously strengthened and weakened by this shift toward coercion as new forms of popular struggle set up “major dislocatory effects within the state”,

¹³ “No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is no room in it have developed” (Marx, Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*).

and, also, that

these contradictions are sharpened in times of capitalist crisis, and the authoritarian statist response is “partially responsible for new forms of popular struggle”¹⁴, characterized by an antistatism that resists both the greater investment of state power into everyday life and the state’s increasingly coercive nature (Bruff, 2014: 120).

This is the strength of the approach of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ – it refocusses attention on an under-theorised, and oft-forgotten aspect of Nicos Poulantzas’s state theory: the contradictory nature of authoritarian-type state strategies. The ‘strengthening-weakening’ dynamic, which plays out as an authoritarian statist government undermines its own legitimacy, puts a name to a particular contradiction which has patterned the way authoritarian statist strategies have effected neoliberal hegemony – a contradiction which should also be seen as partially causal of the current shift toward anti-statist movements and struggles. Put simply, it is possible that Bruff – via Poulantzas – is contributing to an understanding of ‘anti-politics’. By questioning the contradictory nature of authoritarian statist interventions, under the rubric of the ‘strengthening-weakening’ dialectic, it may be possible to argue that the authoritarian nature of neoliberalism is partly generative of the political upheavals which mark the current crisis of the state and politics. Above it was suggested that the anti-establishment sentiment which drove Brexit may well be related to this process. But as Poulantzas argued, this process is not unidirectional, or a necessarily regressive process; sometimes *depoliticisation* can result in radical *politicisation* in other spheres. I would tentatively suggest that one case which this approach may well help us understand is the astonishing success of the Labour Party in the 2017 UK general election. In particular, record rates of voter turnout among young people, and the recent surge of party membership within the Labour Party (Travis, 2017), both buck the anti-political trends noted by Mair (2013). The temporal proximity of these events and the completion of this thesis mean this claim cannot be substantiated in a concrete way; this example is raised here in the Conclusion simply to point toward possible directions for future research, and to highlight the potential utility of ‘authoritarian statism’ as a dialectical lens.

The contributions of those authors working within the framework of authoritarian neoliberalism are not limited simply to reminding us of a particular facet of Poulantzas’s work. The impressive empirical work done teasing out the real and concerning patterns

¹⁴ Double inverted commas here indicate quotations drawn from Poulantzas (1978: 246).

of authoritarian statism across states and scales – spanning Turkey, Greece, China, Cambodia, and more – is hugely important. It is equally important, however, that a problematic aspect of the concept’s theorisation does not cloud this contribution. And as it stands, the periodisation claim associated with ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ does just that. This violence of abstraction should not distract from the actual violence of neoliberalism.

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