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Prof. Andreas Bieler¹,
Professor of Political Economy,
E-mail: Andreas.Bieler@nottingham.ac.uk
Personal website: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~ldzab>

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The Transnationalisation of the State: A neo-Gramscian Perspective

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to engage critically with a range of historical materialist perspectives and their understanding of the role of the state in globalization and here in particular with Open Marxist and neo-Gramscian perspectives. This debate is located within the wider discussion in International Relations/International Political Economy (IR/IPE) about the nature of globalization and the role of the state. On the one hand, neo-realists such as Waltz (2000) and state-centric comparative political economists (e.g. Hirst and Thompson 1999; Weiss 1998) argue that globalization implies mainly an increase in cross-border flows and, therefore, does not change fundamentally the international state system. In other words, states remain the only significant actors in international relations and we should, as a result, speak of internationalization, not globalization. On the other hand, so-called hyperglobalists make the point that

¹ Andreas Bieler is Professor of Political Economy and Fellow of the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ) in the School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham/UK. His research is predominantly focused on understanding the current struggle over the future economic-political model of the European Union (EU) and the possibilities to resist neo-liberal restructuring. He is author of *Globalisation and Enlargement of the European Union* (Routledge, 2000) as well as *The Struggle for a Social Europe: Trade unions and EMU in times of global restructuring* (Manchester University Press, 2006). During the academic year 2009/2010, Andreas Bieler is a research fellow at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies (<http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/english/>).

globalization has drastically changed the international system with non-state actors, and here especially transnational corporations (TNCs), increasingly taking over core functions, traditionally carried out by states (Strange 1996). In turn, states are reduced to transmission belts adjusting national economies to the requirements of global capital. They would increasingly become powerless and wither away (Ohmae 1990 and 1995). The so-called transformationalists are a liberal IR theory variety, who do agree that globalization signifies dramatic change (e.g. Held et al 1999), but argue that states are being restructured as competition states within the global economy (Cerny 2006), rather than becoming obsolete. The main bone of contention between these understandings is then whether and to what extent the state has lost authority vis-à-vis non-state actors in the global economy. Are states still in charge, as neo-realists would have it, have they become obsolete as a result of external pressure by the global economy – see here the hyperglobalists – or have they become restructured in a process of re-organising the share of authority between states and non-state actors in the global economy – see here the transformationalists.

The historical materialist approaches, discussed in this paper, have in common a clear difference from this mainstream debate in that they all reject the separation of the economic and the political, inherent in this debate. A key merit of pointing this out goes to Peter Burnham (1994 and 1995) from the Open Marxist group of scholars. I will, therefore, engage first with Open Marxism in the next section, point to its crucial contributions, but also failings when conceptualizing the role of the state in globalization. In particular Open Marxism's continuing state-centric focus, when analyzing international relations, will be highlighted as a problem. In a second step, then, I will

introduce a neo-Gramscian, historical materialist perspective, which equally starts an analysis through a focus on the social relations of production and class struggle. It goes, however, beyond Open Marxism by acknowledging the fundamental changes related to globalization as well as the specific consequences for world order resulting from this assessment. The work of Bill Robinson, a prominent neo-Gramscian scholar, will be discussed in this section. Robinson develops the distinctive notion of the emerging transnational state (TNS), consisting partly of transformed nation-states, but also the administrative apparatus of international organizations such as the WTO, thereby delinking the state from its traditional territorial basis. It will be argued that he too easily assumes a homogeneous transformation of states and their incorporation into the TNS. In contrast to Robinson, I will develop a neo-Gramscian perspective, which stresses the openness of the form of state formation in the global economy and emphasizes the variety of possible state forms in the global economy at multiple geographical scales. I will then provide the EU as a possible example for a new, unique form of state at the regional level. The conclusion will sum up the results of the paper and highlight the importance of directing research beyond understanding the form of state formation towards analyses of the contents of different state forms.

I would like to raise one proviso here, before the argument starts. As Adam Morton has asserted, it is important to think in terms of a plurality of neo-Gramscian perspectives (Morton 2001). Hence, I do not claim here to present ‘the’ neo-Gramscian conceptualization of the state in globalization. Other neo-Gramscians – see here, for example, Robinson – may come to very different understandings. I simply claim to present one neo-Gramscian, historical materialist perspective, which starts its analysis

through a focus on the social relations of production and emphasizes the open-endedness of class struggle as the dynamic force behind historical development.

Open Marxism and the continuation of state-centrism

Peter Burnham (1994; 1995) criticizes mainstream approaches for fetishising or reifying the state and the market as two separate entities.² Both are regarded as ahistoric things, which are externally related to each other. The main question is then to what extent the state exercises control over markets or, alternatively, is forced to restructure in order to adapt to the requirements of the (global) market. Instead, the main focus has to be on why the state and the market, the political and the economic, have emerged as two separate things under capitalism in the first place (Holloway and Picciotto 1977: 78). In other words, this separation is a historical phenomenon. In order to explain this, Open Marxism turns to an analysis of the social relations of production in capitalism. In contrast to feudalism, it is argued, when political and economic authority was fused in the hands of lords and the creation of surplus value was directly politically enforced, capitalist social relations of production are based on the private ownership of the means of production and wage labour. Thus, in capitalism workers have become separated from their means of subsistence and, as a result, are compelled to sell their labour power ‘freely’ on the market. The compulsion to do so is not directly politically enforced, but the result of indirect economic pressures. ‘The worker is not directly subject physically to the capitalist, his subjection is mediated through the sale of his labour power as a commodity on the market’ (Holloway and Picciotto 1977: 79). Workers have to sell their labour

² As Robinson defines, ‘to reify is to understand something that social agency has produced as though it exists and operates quite independently of this agency, according to its own laws. It is to perceive a social practice that we engage in as some external “thing” that exists on its own’ (Robinson 2004: 90).

power, if they want to survive. ‘This abstraction of relations of force from the immediate process of production and their necessary location (since class domination must ultimately rest on force) in an instance separated from individual capitals constitutes (historically and logically) the economic and the political as distinct, particularized forms of capitalist domination’ (Holloway and Picciotto 1977: 79). In short, Open Marxism’s emphasis on an analysis of the social relations of production allows us first to understand both the state and the market as two different forms, expressing the same social relations of production, expressing a particular historical form of class struggle. It allows us to understand capitalism as a historical phenomenon and directs our analysis towards an investigation of the internal relationship between the political and the economic. This includes, for example, an analysis of the role of the state and how it, while appearing separate of the market, ensures capitalism through a guarantee of the institution of private property (Burnham 1995: 145). The second significant contribution of Open Marxism is its emphasis on open-ended class struggle between capital and labour as a result of the capitalist social relations of production as the driving force of history. ‘Class struggle is . . . the daily resistance of the labouring class to the imposition of work – a permanent feature of human society above primitive levels’ (Burnham 1994: 225). By definition, class struggle is regarded as open-ended, which promotes enquiry beyond the economic determinism of base/superstructure explanations. These two insights are closely related to each other and reflected in Open Marxism’s rejection of simple base-superstructure arguments and the related dangers of economic determinism. ‘The economic should not’, it is argued, ‘be seen as the base which determines the political superstructure, but rather the economic and the political are both forms of social relations, forms assumed by the

basic relation of class conflict in capitalist society, the capital relation, forms whose separate existence springs, both logically and historically, from the nature of that relation' (Holloway and Picciotto 1977: 84). The focus on the social relations of production and the open-endedness of class struggle has important implications for the understanding of globalization. Instead of analyzing the external impact of globalization on the state, Open Marxism concentrates on the internal relationship between states and the global economy and analyses in what ways both the international state-system and the global economy are expressions of the same configuration of social forces. In the words of Werner Bonefeld, 'the state itself is a form of the class relation which constitutes global capitalist relations' (Burnham 1995: 149).

There are, however, a range of problems, resulting from this conceptualisation of the state and market as two different expressions of the same configuration of social forces.³ Building on this assumption, Bonefeld argues that 'both, the establishment of the national state and the world market, were products of the same social struggles that revolutionised feudal social relations' (Bonefeld 2008: 67). In other words, both states and market are considered as logical complimentary parts of capitalism, one requiring the other. As Ian Bruff remarked, this assumption rests on two highly questionable assumptions: 'that capitalist social relations and the world system of national states emerged contemporaneously and in a complementary manner' (Bruff 2009: 340). The historical accuracy of this claim by Open Marxism is, however, questionable. As research by Benno Teschke and Hannes Lacher has made clear, an international state system of absolutist states existed before the emergence and spread of capitalism. In other words, capitalism 'was born' into an already existing international system of states. 'Plural state

³ For an expanded critical engagement with Open Marxism, see Bieler, Bruff and Morton (forthcoming).

formation, creating the distinction between the domestic and the international, and capitalism, creating the distinction between the political and the economic, were not geographically and temporarily co-constitutive. Multiple state formation came first' (Teschke 2003: 74). In a careful historical analysis, Teschke identifies a pre-modern international state system, a system of absolutist dynastic states characterised by dynastic succession crises and the drive of political accumulation through violent military conquest of rival states and territories. In relation to the respective social property relations, the absolutist state was still based on peasants, who owned their means of subsistence, making them independent from production at a competitive rate on the market. The extraction of surplus value was directly enforced through the collection of taxes. 'The "tax/office structure" (Brenner) of the absolutist state expresses, or is the form and locus of, the continuing unity of both political and economic power, of domination and exploitation' (Lacher 2006: 75). In other words, capitalism emerged in a pre-existing international system of geographically defined states. The co-existence of states and capitalism is, therefore, in many respects a historical coincidence, in which one does not necessarily require the other. As Ernest Mandel had already noted,

the bourgeois State is a direct product of the absolutist State, generated by the seizure of political power and its institutional machinery by the bourgeois class. But it is also the negation of the latter. For the classical bourgeois State in the epoch of the victorious ascent of industrial capital was a "weak State" par excellence – because it was accompanied by the systematic demolition of the economic interventionism of the absolutist States, which had impeded the free development of

capitalist production as such (Mandel 1975: 478).

The way this prior existing international state system shaped the subsequent emergence and geopolitical expression of capitalism is neither acknowledged nor conceptualised in Open Marxism. As a result, the multiplicity of states is considered to be essential for capitalism and the smooth functioning of capital accumulation.

This has direct implications for the understanding of conflict and cooperation in the global system. While the character of the accumulation of capital and, thus, class struggle is considered to be global in substance (Holloway 1994: 30), the conditions of exploitation are standardised at the national political level. The form of class struggle at the global level is, therefore, the interaction of states, which ‘are interlocked internationally into a hierarchy of price systems’ (Burnham 1995: 148). For example, Holloway argues that ‘the competitive struggle between states is ... to attract and/or retain a share of world capital (and hence a share of global surplus value)’ (Holloway 1994: 34). Similarly, according to Peter Burnham (1995: 149):

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

Thus, this tension is presupposed to be a competitive struggle between states and state rivalry is, therefore, the expression of class struggle at the international level. As Burnham (1998: 196) classically put it, ‘growing competition among the bourgeoisie indicates that conflict and collaboration is the norm in the global system and is manifested in national terms as a struggle between states’. This is very similar to neo-realist arguments about states competing with each other for military and economic resources.

This state-centrism is then also reflected in empirical analyses by Open Marxists. It is argued that ‘class struggle had to be brought back in to allow for a proper critical reassessment of the form of the state, its social constitution, role and purpose’ (Bonefeld 2008: 64). In concrete empirical analyses, however, class struggle does not feature. Burnham, for example, challenges the neo-realist understanding of post-war reconstruction in Europe, which argues that Britain would have had to submit itself to the wishes of the US hegemon. Instead, he gives several examples, in which Britain successfully resisted the imposition of US rule. In relation to the Korean war, for example, ‘the British decision to rearm was not an example of the UK bowing to American pressure, but was a decision taken by the government to show the United States that Britain had attained independent economic status in Western Europe and would not be treated as “just another necessitous European nation”’ (Burnham 1990: 12). While interesting as such, this is not a class analysis, but resembles a neo-realist analysis of inter-state competition within the international system. This state-centrism is equally apparent in Open Marxist analyses of European integration. For example, Carchedi analyses capitalist accumulation in Europe as the result of competition between different

national capitals, competing with each other for the extraction of surplus value at the international level. The future form of the EU, he argues, ‘will continue to be shaped by inter-capitalist rivalries (centring upon the relations among Germany, France and the United Kingdom)’ (Carchedi, 1997: 108-9). The working class does appear in some Open Marxist investigations of European integration, but only as a domestic actor within its particular national context (e.g. Bonefeld 2002: 135).

Other varieties of historical materialist approaches too exhibit such a state-centric focus. According to world-systems analysis, the current world-system emerged in the ‘long’ 16th century in Europe and parts of the Western hemisphere, before it expanded across the whole world. ‘There grew up a world-economy with a single division of labor within which there was a world market, for which men produced largely agricultural products for sale and profit’ (Wallerstein 1974: 399; 2004: 23). The world-market co-exists with multiple, territorially defined political entities, i.e. states. They are subdivided into states in the core, semi-periphery and the periphery. States in the core are characterised by monopolized production, which yields larger levels of profit in a ‘free trade’ system characterised by unequal exchange with countries in the semi-periphery and periphery. Once these leading production sectors have lost their monopolised privilege, they are shifted to countries in the periphery, where the market in these products is characterised by free competition and, as a result, lower levels of profit. ‘Given the unequal power of monopolized products vis-à-vis products with many producers in the market, the ultimate result of exchange between core and peripheral products was a flow of surplus-value (meaning here a large part of the real profits from multiple local productions) to those states that had a large number of core-like processes’

(Wallerstein 2004: 18). Fragmented political authority and world market are closely related to each other. 'Capitalism and a world-economy (that is, a single division of labor but multiple polities and cultures) are obverse sides of the same coin. One does not cause the other. We are merely defining the same indivisible phenomenon by different characteristics' (Wallerstein 1974: 399). In other words, capitalism requires an international system of multiple states. The alternative, a world-empire with a unified political authority would imply the end of capitalism. It 'would in fact stifle capitalism, because it would mean that there was a political structure with the ability to override a priority for the endless accumulation of capital' (Wallerstein 2004: 58).

Alex Callinicos presents yet another historical materialist approach to globalisation and imperialism, which exhibits a continuing state centrism. Callinicos focuses on how to conceptualise the intersection between economic competition on the world market and geopolitical competition between different states. His way forward is to think in terms of 'two logics of power, capitalistic and territorial, or two forms of competition, economic and geopolitical' (Callinicos 2009: 74). He suggests to introduce, in line with Marx's own methodology, a new determination in a non-deductive way. Thus, 'the state system is treated as a dimension of the capitalist mode of production' (Callinicos 2009: 83). The tendency of uneven and combined development is hereby considered as a fundamental dynamic behind the maintenance of the system of territorial states. In the historical development of capitalism, high productivity complexes developed as a result of the way competition compelled capitals at the cutting edge of new technology and products to constantly innovate in order to stay ahead of competitors. Hence, Callinicos concludes

The tendency of capitalist development to generate spatially concentrated economic complexes creates very powerful centrifugal forces that would strongly work to sustain the political demarcation of the world into territorial states. Capitalists in such a complex would have an interest in preserving the existing state to which they had privileged access; equally state managers would be reluctant to surrender the control they currently exercised over the resources of this complex (Callinicos 2009: 91).

In other words, the international state-system is ‘a necessary concomitant of the capitalist mode of production’ (Callinicos 2009: 88). Unsurprisingly, when analysing developments in the global economy since the early 1970s, Callinicos stays within a state-centric analysis. The statement that ‘it does not follow in the least that the institutions that the US builds and the policies it pursues are neutral between the interests of capitals based in its territory and those based in other states’ (Callinicos 2009: 190) reflects this state-centrism well. Individual companies are still understood to reside within territorially defined nation-states. His final assessment of the US is very much in line with neo-realist thinking. ‘The US remains’, he writes, ‘by comparison with any other power, well ahead in both economic and military capabilities’ (Callinicos 2009: 225). A neo-realist would not express it differently.

Importantly, what Open Marxism, world-systems theory as well as Callinicos overlook is that the transnationalisation of production and finance since the early 1970s has implied that class struggle is now not only in substance but also in form of an

international character in addition to the continuing struggle at the national level (Bieler 2006: 32-4, 47-54). Burnham's assertion that 'the proletariat conducts its daily struggle in local-cum-national settings' (1998: 197) but not beyond is no longer valid. Open Marxists are right when they assert that the nature of capitalism has always been global and is not the result of globalisation. Nevertheless, the specific characteristics of this global nature have changed and it is not enough to assess the changes since the early 1970s as 'the recomposition of labour/capital relations expressed as the restructuring of relations of conflict and collaboration between national states' (Bonefeld, Brown and Burnham 1995: 31). Core industries have spread their production networks across countries in the core, semi-periphery and periphery, to formulate it in world-systems theory terms. The profits many companies generate are not automatically allocated within the territory of one particular state. While capital as such has become more centralized, production processes themselves are increasingly fragmented and the production of individual products is often organised across borders within several countries along so-called global commodity chains (Robinson 2008: 25-8). In other words, the new landscape of capitalist accumulation does no longer reflect a situation, which in Callinicos' terms implies that concentrated economic complexes are located within one specific country or even region. Callinicos' analysis of changes in the global production structure echoes the work by Hirst and Thompson (1999) in that it underplays the importance of TNCs. His logical conclusion that 'the idea, then, that capital has broken free of its geographical moorings remains a myth' (Callinicos 2009: 203) is, however, no longer an adequate reflection of capitalist development. Hence, what is required is an approach, which is able to conceptualise globalization as a distinctive period within the

overall stage of capitalism. The assertion that capitalism is capitalism is capitalism does not adequately represent the internal transformations of the capitalist mode of production as reflected in changing social relations of production. Only an adequate periodisation of capital will allow us to understand that ‘globalization represents an epochal shift; that is, fundamental worldwide changes in social structure that modify and even transform the very functioning of the system in which we live’ (Robinson 2004: 4). The next section will look at a neo-Gramscian alternative to understanding globalization and the role of states, comprehended as a significant new period within the overall history of capitalism.

Transnational classes and changing forms of state: a neo-Gramscian alternative

Similarly to Open Marxism, neo-Gramscian perspectives start their analysis with an investigation of the social relations of production.⁴ Production is, however, understood as more than the physical production of goods. Rather, the production of goods is closely related to the knowledge and institutions necessary for such production to take place (Cox 1989: 39). ‘In other words, if the capital relation is a social relation – as Open Marxists argue and with which we concur – then it must be acknowledged that the *organisation* of production is suffused with ideas, concepts and values through which humans attempt to make sense of their material conditions of existence’ (Bieler, Bruff and Morton forthcoming). Moreover, neo-Gramscian perspectives focus on class struggle as the heuristic device to understand and explain capitalist development (Cox with Sinclair, 1996: 57-8). Social class forces are identified as key collective actors through an investigation of the production process. ‘If we want to gain an understanding of the class

⁴ Neo-Gramscian perspectives were introduced in *International Political Economy* by Robert Cox in the early 1980s in two path-breaking articles (Cox 1981 and 1983). For an overview of neo-Gramscian perspectives, see Bieler and Morton (2004) and especially Morton (2007a).

structure of a particular society at a particular moment in history, we would do well to start with an analysis of the economy and the social production relations that prevail' (Robinson 2004: 38). Drawing on the changes in the production structure since the early 1970s, but especially mid-1980s, indicated above, Cox concluded early on that 'it becomes increasingly pertinent to think in terms of a global class structure alongside or superimposed upon national class structures' (Cox 1981: 147). Neo-Gramscian perspectives focus here especially on the consequences of the transnationalisation of production and finance. 'Under globalization', William Robinson argues, 'a new class fractionation, or axis, is occurring between national and transnational fractions of classes' (Robinson 2004: 37; see also van Apeldoorn, 2002: 26-34). In other words, class struggle does not only take place between capital and labour at the national level, but also between national and transnational class fractions (Bieler 2006: 32-4). Flows of foreign direct investment, leading to a lasting establishment of production processes across borders, are frequently cited as empirical evidence for the transnationalisation of production. Outflows of FDI rose from US\$ 88 billion in 1986 to US\$ 1187 billion in 2000 as peak year (Bieler, 2006: 50). A period of recession led to a decline in FDI flows from 2001 to 2003, but four years of consecutive growth led to a new all-time high of FDI outflows of US\$ 1996.5 billion in 2007 (UN 2008: 253). Overall, there were 78817 TNCs with 794894 foreign affiliates in 2007 (UN 2008: 212). Additionally, Robinson refers to processes of increasing cross-border Mergers and Acquisitions, transnationally interlocked TNC Directorates and transnational strategic alliances between TNCs to illustrate the concrete reality of the transnationalisation of production and the rise of a TCC.⁵ Importantly, as a result of transnational restructuring, 'transnational capital has

⁵ Whether the transnationalisation of production constitutes a significant structural change in the global

become the dominant, or hegemonic, fraction of capital on a world scale' (Robinson 2004: 21). Nevertheless, as stated above, the social relations of production also include the knowledge and institutions, which make production feasible in the first place. Neo-liberal economics is frequently understood as the new hegemonic project by a transnational historical bloc with transnational capital at its leading class fraction (Gill 1995). Neo-liberal economics includes an emphasis on price stability and low inflation, the liberalization and deregulation of markets, including the labour market, as well as the curbing of trade union power, considered to be obstacles to the smooth functioning of the market. 'Neoliberalism is the policy "grease" of global capitalism' (Robinson 2004: 80-1), the application of which has, however, concrete material implications of state restructuring. Neo-liberalism regained popularity as a theoretical critique of Keynesianism during the 1970s, was then implemented within the USA under Reagan and the UK under Thatcher during the 1980s, before it assumed a hegemonic status in the 1990s, having been accepted as a kind of 'common sense' of how the economy would work objectively (Gamble 2001). It had concrete material implications for the constitution of people's behaviour from a more collective outlook towards individualism as well as a restructuring of state institutions towards a focus on price stability. Institutionally, it signified what Stephen Gill referred to as 'new constitutionalism', in which traditionally political decisions were handed over to neo-liberal technocrats. For example, monetary policy-making in the European Union was given to bankers within the independent European Central Bank, which is outside political accountability (Gill 2001).

economy is hotly contested. For an overview of the debate, see Bieler (2006: 49-54).

This understanding of the significant changes in the global production structure and, as a result, the transnational composition of class forces, as well as the role of neo-liberal economics is widely accepted within neo-Gramscian scholarship. In a bold move, and here Robinson establishes a unique position within neo-Gramscian perspectives, Robinson argues that the transnationalisation of production and the concomitant rise of transnational capital as new leading class fraction have led to the emergence of a transnational state (TNS), which is in charge of organizing the smooth functioning of capital accumulation at the global level. In this process, states do not disappear, but they become restructured and integrated into the TNS apparatus. Hence, the TNS ‘comprises transformed and externally integrated national states, together with the supranational economic and political forums, and has not yet acquired any centralized institutional form ...; the TCC has directly instrumentalized this TNS apparatus, exercising a form of TNS power through the multilayered configuration of the TNS. It is through these global institutions that the TCC has been attempting to forge a new global capitalist historic bloc’ (Robinson 2004: 88; see also 100). As a result, in relation to capitalism and its relation to the system of multiple states, Robinson concludes that ‘if capitalism’s earlier development resulted in a geographical (spatial) location in the creation of the nation-state system, then its current globalizing thrust is resulting in a general geographical dislocation’ (Robinson 2004: 98). Robinson’s claim is predominantly based on an empirical analysis of current changes. He does not argue in a functional way that a transnational production structure requires a transnational state. Lacher, however, goes here one step further. He argues that the continuing political division into different states

is limiting the transnational integration of production and finance processes and thus constraining the continuing smooth accumulation of surplus value. Hence,

the globalizing tendency of capital makes a corresponding process of political integration necessary if current levels and patterns of global productive and financial integration are to be sustained. Only a global state of the sort envisaged by Robinson, or an “empire” of Hardt and Negri’s specification could sustain global capital through crises and contradictions. Only a global state could secure the social and economic reproduction of transnational capital and thus fulfill the state function (Lacher 2006: 162).

In other words, Lacher perceives a ‘systemic need for a global state’ (Lacher 2006: 167; see also Lacher and Teschke 2007).

While I agree with a lot of Robinson’s assessment about the emergence of a TCC as new dominant class fraction as a result of the transnationalisation of production and finance due to my very similar neo-Gramscian understanding, I reject his empirical analysis of the TNS as well as Lacher’s rationale for why such a TNS is necessary. There are a whole range of problems with Robinson’s TNS thesis (see, for example, Morton 2007a: 140-50). Most importantly in my mind, however, is his reference to the role of states as ‘acting as transmission belts and filtering devices for the transnational agenda’ (Robinson 2004: 125). He, thereby, echoes Robert Cox’s earlier unfortunate reference to states as ‘transmission belts’, which would adjust states in line with the neo-liberal interests of transnational capital (Cox 1992: 31), which has led to so much controversy

and criticism of neo-Gramscian approaches more generally (Bieler and Morton 2004: 101-3). For Robinson, states do not disappear in this process of adjustment. ‘Rather, power as the ability to issue commands and have them obeyed, or more precisely, the ability to shape social structures, shifts from social groups and classes with interests in national accumulation to those whose interests lie in the new global circuits of accumulation’ (Robinson 2004: 109). He regards this process as being enforced by the disciplinary power of global capitalism (Robinson 2004: 50). In other words, states may retain their institutional form, but they lose their traditional function of securing the conditions for successful capital accumulation. They ‘are no longer the point of “condensation” of sets of social relations within a country. They are no longer nodal points for organizing those relations with regard to another set of relations between the country and an international system of nation-states’ (Robinson 2004: 143). The problem here is that the national restructuring processes during times of globalization are conceptualized as a uniform process, integrating all states in the same way into the global economy. As Morton highlights, ‘the transnational state thesis therefore offers a flattened ontology that removes state forms as a significant spatial scale in the articulation of capitalism, levels out the spatial and territorial logics of capital accumulation, and elides the class struggles extant in specific locations’ (Morton 2007a: 148). Capitalism has emerged historically within an already existing international states system. Its particular production and institutional characteristics has also been shaped by specific national conditions leading to what is elsewhere referred to a ‘variety of capitalisms’. To assume now, as Robinson does, that all states will be restructured according to the same dynamic

and develop into similar state forms is an ahistoric understanding of the way global restructuring is played out within the geo-political system of nation-states.

Morton points to an alternative neo-Gramscian way of conceptualizing the dynamics of capitalism and geopolitics through a historical materialist focus on the philosophy of internal relations. ‘Geopolitical relations linked to the states system’, he argues, ‘are interiorized within the conditions of modernity as part of the composition of capital. Put differently, in the modern epoch the geopolitical states system is internally related to capitalist relations of production’ (Morton 2007b: 606). Within Cox’s initial understanding, forms of state constitute a separate level of activity between the social relations of production and the world order levels. The form of state is concerned with the relationship between civil society and political society and is defined in terms of the apparatus of administration and of the historical bloc or class configuration that defines the *raison d’état* for that form (Cox, 1989: 41). States are, consequently, defined as a social relation, which confronts social forces as structures within and through which they operate. Specific state projects within a particular form of state are the result of class struggle. Thus, in a historical materialist understanding, ‘the state is the institutionalisation of class relations around a particular configuration of social production’ (Robinson 2001a: 163).

In order to conceptualise the structural impact of state form institutions on class agency, Jessop’s strategic-relational approach to the state can be drawn upon, understanding ‘the state as a site of strategic selectivity’ (Jessop 1990: 193). In its formal aspects, the state can be analysed as the site, the generator and the product of strategies. It is understood that ‘as an institutional ensemble the state constitutes a terrain upon which

different political forces attempt to impart a specific strategic direction to the individual or collective activities of its different branches' (Jessop 1990: 268). Thus, the form of the state is the framework, within which various different strategies are possible. The state in this sense 'can never be considered as neutral. It has a necessary structural selectivity' (Jessop 1990: 268), favouring certain strategies over others. Importantly, 'the differential impact of the state system on the capacity of different class (-relevant) forces to pursue their interests in different strategies over a given time horizon is not inscribed in the state system as such but in the relation between state structures and the strategies which different forces adopt towards it' (Jessop 1990: 260). In other words, there is an analytic focus on structure and agency, i.e. strategy, when determining the impact of state institutions on agency. Second, social forces operate within and through the form of state, struggling over who determines the 'national interest' and, thereby, the state project, which ensures that 'the state gains a certain organizational unity and cohesiveness of purpose' (Jessop 1990: 353; see also 358). Finally, the strategic-relational approach includes a historical dimension in that 'the structure and modus operandi of the state system can be understood in terms of their production in and through past political strategies and struggles' (Jessop 1990: 261). In other words, the historical dimension of the formation of specific forms of state in their different ways needs to be taken into account when analyzing the impact of globalization on state forms. Global restructuring and the emergence of transnational class fractions does lead to forms of state restructuring. New transnational class forces of capital do not, however, confront the state as an external actor, but are closely involved in the class struggle over the state project at the national level. The exact way this is played out and the extent to which the interests of

transnational capital become internalized within individual state forms needs to be empirically assessed and is likely to differ from country to country depending on different configurations of social forces and institutional set-ups at the national level in line with different historical trajectories of national state formation (Bieler and Morton 2003: 485-9). Importantly, ‘a stress on the internalization of class interests within the state, through the transnational expansion of social relations, is different from assuming that various forms of state have become “transmission belts” from the global to the national level’ (Morton 2007a: 142-3).

It must not be forgotten, however, that such a position should not assume that there are, therefore, no changes in the geopolitical system of multiple states possible. New states have emerged during the history of capitalism, others have disappeared. One only think of the break-up of former Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union into a whole range of new states in recent history. Morton argues that ‘the unfulfilled promise of theorizations on uneven and combined development is to combine an appreciation of the generality of capitalism with a historical sociology of transformations within specific forms of state’ (Morton 2007b: 613). What such an understanding must not imply is that a multiplicity of states exists as a result of uneven and combined development within the capitalist social relations of production, nor that such a multiplicity is maintained or even required by continuing uneven and combined development. Robinson’s TNS thesis does not, in contrast to what Morton suggests, imply conditions of ‘evened development’ (Morton 2007a: 147). The link between uneven and combined development and the multiplicity of states reflects Callinicos’ problematic state-centric understanding in this respect, mentioned above. Nevertheless, there is no direct link between this particular

form of the market and this specific form of the political. Uneven and combined development also occurs within states and does not automatically require a multiplicity of territorially bound political entities. In developing countries, ‘glittering malls replete with the latest the global economy has to offer, fast-food chains, beckoning recreational centres and well guarded residential neighbourhoods that would be the envy of any first world centre stick out as lagoons of wealth and privilege surrounded by oceans of poverty and mass misery, often divided only, and literally, by the very best security systems that social control technology can buy’ (Robinson 2001b: 558). In fact, Robinson argues, uneven and combined development occurs within and across states in increasingly transnationalised capitalist social relations of production. In short, although I reject the TNS thesis, I agree here with Robinson, when he argues that

there is no theoretical reason to posit any necessary affinity between continued uneven development and the nation-state as the particular territorial expression of uneven development. The concepts of centre and periphery (uneven and combined accumulation), of development and underdevelopment, may be reconceived in terms of global social groups and not nations in which core-periphery designates social position rather than geographic location (Robinson 2001b: 558).

Thus, the exact political form of the international system can change. Nowhere is this clearer than when analyzing the European Union (EU).

The EU as a new, emerging form of state

Since the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952, European integration was steadily deepened and widened. Over the years, the EU acquired increasing policy-making competencies in a host of policy-making areas. This includes general economic policy, competition policy, monetary policy in the hands of the independent European Central Bank (ECB), aspects of regional and social policy as well as the common commercial policy dealing most importantly with international trade agreements, amongst others. Traditionally, foreign and security policy remained exclusively a national matter of concern. Over recent decades, however, co-operation in these areas as in areas of justice and home affairs has increasingly been intensified. Importantly, integration implies that states have agreed on pooling aspects of their national sovereignty either by transferring them to the supranational institutions, the European Commission, the European Parliament (EP) or the European Court of Justice (ECJ). Alternatively, sovereignty has been pooled through qualified majority-voting in the Council of Ministers, which implies that a country can be outvoted on occasions and must accept decisions, which are against its initially stated interest. This deepening of integration has gone hand in hand with widening and the initial six members of the EU have been joined by 21 more members in a range of enlargement rounds. Most recently, Romania and Bulgaria became new members in January 2007. As new members have always had to accept the *acquis communautaire* of the Union, the level of integration has been extended to new members.

‘State’ projects are key to an understanding of the ‘national’ interest pursued by forms of state. Driven by a discourse of competitiveness, EU integration has increasingly

become dominated by economic neo-liberalism (van Apeldoorn 2003). Restructuring started with the Internal Market programme of 1985 and the liberalisation and deregulation of national markets leading towards the free movement of goods, capital, services and people. It has been further cemented through Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) with its convergence criteria of low national debt and budget deficit levels and the independent European Central Bank and its task to prioritise price stability over other objectives. The Lisbon Strategy continued these developments of an exclusive focus on the market (van Apeldoorn 2009; Bieler 2006: 9-14; Hager 2009). Although the EU's so-called Social Dimension distinguishes it from the US economic-political model, these measures can be regarded as part of the market building process (Leibfried 2005: 257, 262). Transnational class fractions of capital have played an increasingly central role in determining the social purpose of EU policy-making. The struggle between a neo-liberal globalist, a mercantilist and a social democratic project ended in what van Apeldoorn labelled 'compromise of embedded neo-liberalism' (van Apeldoorn 2002: 158-89). The dominant direction in line with developments at the global level is neo-liberal restructuring. These processes are embedded in that some concessions in the spheres of social and industrial policies are made in order to place the hegemonic project on a broader alliance of social class forces. Social class forces of labour and trade unions as their representatives too have increasingly become active at the European level (Bieler 2005). Thus, class struggle in the EU today occurs at both the national and transnational as well as across both levels.

Decision-making takes place in a complex system of supranational and intergovernmental institutions. The Commission is responsible for the day-to-day running

of the EU and most importantly for the drawing up of new pieces of legislation. In more and more policy areas, the decision-making process follows then the co-decision procedure, in which the European Parliament (EP), consisting of elected members, decides together with the Council of Ministers, in which national member states send the relevant ministers. The European Court of Justice arbitrates in the areas of the various EU treaties and its decisions enjoy supremacy over decisions by national courts. Finally, the European Council consisting of heads of state and government provides the general direction of further integration. In short, as Ziltener correctly argues, the EU institutional set-up constitutes a complex area for strategic-relational decision-making, a form of state with its own inherent strategic selectivity (Ziltener 2000: 78, 81). This should not, however, be mistaken for a Robinson style transnational state, in which all national member states of the EU have become restructured and their political elites integrated into a new state apparatus at the European level. On the contrary, in the rather complex decision-making system, states continue to play a crucial role through their representation in the Council of Ministers and its decisive role in day-to-day decision-making as well as, of course, the European Council. Importantly, in this decision-making process, national differences continue to shape outcomes. First, individual EU members have rather different production structures. For example, while the production structures of countries such as the UK and Sweden are highly transnationalised, German and French production structures are partly transnationalised, while Austria's is much less affected by the transnationalisation of production. Moreover, in the UK, it is the finance sector which is predominant, in Sweden transnational manufacturing. The public sector plays a different role in different EU member states. Of course, these differences themselves are partly the

result of the different emergence and development of capitalism in these countries (Bieler 2006: 55-66). Additionally, the historically formed institutional set-up differs from EU member state to EU member state. The UK is often related to the ideal type market-oriented, Anglo American model of capitalism, in which finance capital is dominant and delinked from industrial capital, trade unions are little involved in decision-making at the national and company level, and the state predominantly concentrates on a policy of price stability, but otherwise does not intervene into the economy. Germany, on the other hand, is associated with the negotiated model of capitalism, in which banks are in the service of industrial capital, trade unions are to some extent integrated in the economic decision-making process at company and national level, and the state is closely involved in economic decision-making at all levels. France, in turn, is often referred to as a case of state-led model of capitalism. Here, the state in close co-operation with business is heavily involved in economic decision-making including the allocation of credit, while trade unions are generally outside this partnership (Schmidt 2002). There has been neo-liberal restructuring in all three countries, but they continue nonetheless to have different national institutional set-ups which mediate the restructuring pressures by the EU differently and, in turn, also shape these states' involvement in the EU in different ways. Importantly, also as a result of these different national contexts, the homogeneity of transnational European capital should not be exaggerated either. As Huw Macartney outlines in an analysis of financial trade associations engaged in EU financial market integration, while there is a neo-liberal consensus in these associations' policy discourse, German, British and French transnational finance capital continue to be embedded in distinctive, different national-domestic contexts and their related competing accumulation

strategies (Macartney 2009). In other words, while there is a general convergence around neo-liberal restructuring in Europe the way the accumulation of surplus value is organised and integrated at the European level still differs from member state to member state (Bieler 2006: 71-86). Social class forces, in turn operate within and through different national forms of state as well as the European form of state. The latter, hence, has emerged as an additional form of state level without replacing national forms of state.

Conclusion: from form to social purpose.

To conclude, the conceptual understanding of the capitalist social relations of production constituting the economic and the political, the world market and the international states system as separate forms implies that this separation is maintained as long as production is organized around the private ownership of the means of production and wage labour. The precise appearance of these forms, however, is changeable. There is no logical or necessary connection between a capitalist world market and an international states system. The fact that capitalism emerged within a pre-existing states system is a historical coincidence. New forms of state may emerge at the regional level or even the global level in the future, co-existing with the traditional national forms of state. Changing social relations of production imply new class forces and changing configurations of social class forces. In the related open-ended dynamics of class struggle, past political and economic forms are likely to change in an unpredictable way. Ultimately, the capitalist accumulation of surplus value can be carried out within a variety of different state forms across a range of different geographical scales. The specific form the (geo-) political

takes is the result of open-ended class struggle and, thus, shaped but not determined by the social relations of production.

These particular institutional developments need to be examined closely. After all, different forms of state with different strategic selectivities have an impact on which strategies and policies are likely to be successful and what kind of model of capitalism is dominant. Equally, different state forms are important for the possibilities of resistance to neo-liberal globalization more generally. Nevertheless, the analysis of form is not an end in itself. Analysis also needs to go beyond the form and concentrate on the social purpose underlying a variety of state forms. Different state forms in themselves do not guarantee different policies and are as such not a necessary factor towards a transformation of the capitalism system as a whole. Especially, when trying to understand the resilience of neo-liberalism, it will be important to analyse how neo-liberalism is constituted in different state forms across different scales. EU studies have, for example, concerned themselves for far too long with the future form of the EU, whether it will remain predominantly an international organisation consisting of independent nation-states or whether it will develop into a new, federal state. What has been overlooked is the policy contents and here in particular the neo-liberal social purpose underlying the revival of European integration since the mid-1980s. However, the latter has arguably been the more important aspect of EU integration over the last 25 years than the increasing complexity of EU decision-making processes across different levels.

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