



A Critical Evaluation of Poulantzas's Theory of the State

Poulantzas'ın Devlet Teorisinin Eleştirel Bir İncelemesi

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to evaluate Nicos Poulantzas's theory of (capitalist) state based on the general characteristics of his conceptual framework. Poulantzas is a pre-eminent figure in the state theory not only due to the debates that he participated or that are drawn upon his position, but mainly due to the key theoretical means that his framework provides for analysing capitalist state, considering the developmental line of his complicated works. In this sense, this paper shares the view that Poulantzas's works do involve certain features of a relational, a non-reductionist theory of state which provide essential means to grasp the capitalist state with its different types.

Keywords: Poulantzas, Capitalist State, Power Bloc, Double Determination, Form of State

Öz

Bu çalışma, Nicos Poulantzas'ın (kapitalist) devlet teorisini, kavramsal çerçevesinin temel niteliklerini izleyerek değerlendirme çabasıdır. Poulantzas, yalnızca katıldığı veya onun üzerine yürütülmüş olan tartışmalar nedeniyle değil, aynı zamanda ve özellikle, sunduğu çerçevenin kapitalist devletin analizi için sağladığı kavramsal araçlar nedeniyle de devlet teorisinin en önde gelen isimlerinden biridir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma Poulantzas'ın kuramının, indirgemeci olmayan, ilişkisel bir devlet teorisinin temel özelliklerini bünyesinde bulundurduğu ve bu yönüyle, kapitalist devlet türlerini kavramak için önemli araçlar sunduğu fikrini paylaşmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Poulantzas, Kapitalist Devlet, İktidar Bloğu, İkili Belirlenim, Devlet Biçimi

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Introduction

It is generally assumed that the issue of analysing the state has been an under-developed side of Marxism, at least until a certain period. The main aim of Nicos Poulantzas was to develop it. By interpreting Marx's *Capital* as the 'theory of economic region'¹ he declared his attempt as doing the same theoretical work for the political *region*, in other words as providing the 'theory of political region in capitalism'.² Poulantzas began to do this in *Political Power and Social Classes* (in 1968), it is followed by *Fascism and Dictatorship* (in 1970), *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (in 1974), then *Crisis of Dictatorship* (in 1975) and finally *State, Power, Socialism* (in 1978). Through these works, there emerged certain transformations in his theoretical and political position that can not be ignored. When he wrote the *State, Power, Socialism*, he had already relinquished certain aspects of his earlier position and his earlier attempt for developing a 'regional' theory of capitalist state was replaced with the conceptualisation of state as a 'relation' based on his rejection of categorising the social realm into the regions or *levels*. In this sense, as Bob Jessop figures out, there is not 'one' theory of state that we encounter with in Poulantzas's complex works.

In this article, it's aimed to offer a broad view about Poulantzas's attempt to theorise the capitalist state by necessarily leaving some specifics aspects aside. The first section is dedicated to his positions on the debate of capitalist state. In the second section basic abstractions of his theory are assessed. Then, the elaboration of transformations through his thinking and his subsequent position about the capitalist state problem are discussed. At the last section, the critiques raised to Poulantzas are tried to be appraised. The conclusion reached in the article is that Poulantzas as a founder of relational state theory offers profound theoretical tools to understand the capitalist state.

Debate on Theorising the Capitalist State

Beginning from late 1960s, Poulantzas was not the only figure among Marxists who interested in state theory, or attempted to theorise the capitalist state (or the *state in capitalist society*). Indeed, the general framework within the period from 1960s to 1970s, both the rise of welfare state and emergence of its certain constraints, gave rise to the various attempts to challenge the dominant views that were shaped by the 'state monopoly capitalism' or *stamocap* theory, among Marxists (Holloway and Picciotto, 1991). The critique of conceptualisation of the state as the simple instrument of the dominant class, the basic argument of *stamocap* theory, was one of the main points of Poulantzas' works, too. This general tendency among Marxists to create a new theory of capitalist state has evolved through some debates. Most probably, the most famous one has been the debate between Poulantzas and Miliband.³

This debate is generally known as a debate between *instrumentalist* Miliband and *structuralist* Poulantzas, although both of them rejected this categorisation. Nonetheless, it is the fact that both of the theoreticians have had at least a tendency towards instrumentalist and structuralist

¹ Which was a problematic interpretation and criticised by Clarke (1991a, 1991b); Holloway and Picciotto (1991).

² The theoretical and methodological assumptions underlying such an attempt will be mentioned in the following section.

³ The debate began by Poulantzas' critique of Ralph Miliband's work named "The State in Capitalist Society" in 1969. It was continued by Miliband's responses and also others' contributions such as the one by Ernesto Laclau.

positions respectively, in the debate. Considering Poulantzas, it is a pity that his whole theory is generally and strictly reduced into such a polarisation through being evaluated just by his position within this debate and by neglecting his other works. He contributed to the debate by two articles. The second article was written years after the first one which had started the debate, and indeed, the shift in his position, the break from earlier structuralist notions of his position, is very much explicit in it. This second article can be read as Poulantzas' self-criticism of the Althusserian notions that were inherent in his earlier works and in this sense, Jessop (1985) is so right to underline that to label Poulantzas as simply a structuralist leads to an ignorance of the change in his position.⁴ We may add that Poulantzas' critique of Miliband was mainly constructed upon Miliband's insistence on the individualistic connections between capitalists and state officials that he assumes as the proof of the class base of the state. Contrary to such a framework, Poulantzas took attention to the 'structuralist' or objective character of the capitalist state in the capitalist society and such a moving point has hardened the interpretations of his theory as being structuralist which is, for sure, not completely irrelevant.

"Regional Theory" of the Capitalist State

Although Jessop argues that Poulantzas' first article in his debate with Miliband was the most structuralist position of Poulantzas, the main theoretical framework that he developed in *Political Power and Social Classes* (written before the beginning of the debate) was also largely constructed upon Althusserian presumptions. The epistemological assumptions that he draws by reference to Marxism reflect the structuralist view in various aspects.

Poulantzas, in *Political Power and Social Classes (PPSC)*, begins with "two basic propositions of dialectical and historical materialism" which are: there is a distinction between real processes and the processes of thought (i.e. being and knowledge), in addition to the primacy of being over thought (of real over the knowledge of real). He emphasises on the first one. Accordingly, although the theoretical work is always related with the 'real' processes, its 'raw material' is not the 'real-concrete' objects. Rather, the theoretical work is constructed upon the 'notion' or 'information' about that reality. Through the conceptual tools, it gets the knowledge of that object. Yet, Poulantzas argues, the theoretical work or the process of knowledge can also be based on the "abstract-formal" objects, beside of the real-concrete ones. This epistemological assumption is the base of the distinction between *mode of production* and *social formation* on which Poulantzas constructs his theory, following Althusser.

The distinction between abstract-formal and real-concrete objects is embodied in the mode of production and social formation, with Poulantzas' own words:

The mode of production constitutes an abstract-formal object which does not exist in the strong sense in reality. Capitalist, feudal and slave modes of production, which equally lack existence in the strong sense, also constitute abstract-formal objects. The only thing which really exists is a historically

⁴ Moreover, as Jessop argues, even in his earlier works, although Althusserian structuralism composes of one of the theoretical roots of Poulantzas' position, it was not the only one. According to him, beside of Althusserian structuralism, Poulantzas was also very much influenced by 'romano-german law' and 'Italian politics', thus he had never been an Althusserian structuralist in its full meaning.

determined *social formation*, i.e. a social whole, in the widest sense, at a given moment in its historical existence: e.g. France under Louis Bonaparte, England during the Industrial Revolution (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.15).

The definition of 'mode of production' which is composed of economic / political / ideological and theoretical instances or levels, characterised by an "over-determination" among those regions. Thus, the complex whole that each different modes of production refers a specific *articulation* of those levels that one of which will be dominant is determined by the economic level (*in the last instance*) in capitalist mode of production. This specific form of articulation in a specific mode of production is called as the "matrix" of a mode of production by Poulantzas, again following Althusser. Yet, in the sense of social formation (in reality), there is no one single, pure mode of production. Rather, in one specific historical period, different modes of production, the remnants of the previously dominant modes or the subordinate modes, exist at the same time --although one of them dominates others. It is this fact that makes the social formation a complex structure and gives each social formation a specific manner, since the articulation of those different characteristics of modes in each example provides a particular, an original combination.

This schema, indeed, is the one that is developed by Althusser, thus Poulantzas, in this sense, follows Althusserian structuralism in his epistemological assumptions. Although he would make a self-criticism of his works that are constructed such assumptions, his earlier works and so that various conceptual tools that he developed through those works reflect this structuralist framework.

Indeed, Poulantzas uses this framework in order to justify his aim that he explains in PPSC as "producing the concept of the *political region* in *capitalist* mode of production" (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.16). In other words, Althusserian structuralism provides Poulantzas the justification of the assumption that the political region or the state can be an object of inquiry. Yet, since a region, its limits and extension, is constituted through the articulation process specific to one mode of production, the theory of political region can only be drawn upon that particular mode of production. That is why Poulantzas insists on that it is not possible to produce a general theory of "state" and what he tries to do is to produce the theory of "capitalist state".

Therefore, analysing capitalist state is directly related with the specific characteristics of capitalist mode of production. Poulantzas states that the specificity of capitalist mode of production which provides the very possibility of creating a regional theory of the political mainly rises from the articulation of the levels in a *relatively autonomous* manner. The other specificity of capitalist mode of production that he indicates is the position of economic level which is not only the one that determines the dominant level in *the last instance*, but also the dominant one (Poulantzas, 1975a, p. 29).⁵

Indeed, Poulantzas mainly takes attention into the relative autonomy between the economic and political levels (rather than ideological instance). He draws his arguments based on the idea that within the 'economic' level, in production field, the particularity of capitalist mode of

⁵ By insisting on the specific character of the levels in capitalist mode of production in comparison with the other modes, Poulantzas tends to generalise the "levels" in all modes, and this is one of the aspects of his self-criticism as well as others' critique of him.

production reveals itself as the separation of labour both from the means of production and from the means of labour (in the sense of 'relation of property'). This results in that the exploitation in capitalist mode of production is realised without any direct intervention of extra-economic force into the production process. This is why Poulantzas sees the political and economic levels as relatively autonomous to each other, as a specificity of capitalist mode of production. Yet, his interpretation of Marx's insights in *Capital* which he refers to while concluding those assumptions is strongly criticised by Open Marxists who insist that Poulantzas has a distorted vision of *Capital*. Clarke (1991a) argues that by identifying production relations with the 'economic level', Poulantzas can not go beyond the Althusserian structuralist-functional view which excludes the "social" from the production field and places social relations into the 'political and ideological level' through reducing the 'economic' into a technical realm. Contrary to this, he indicates that Marx's understanding of production, as a valorisation process, is both social and material and the so-called 'levels' are just the *forms* that relations of production take. This is an impressive critique of Poulantzas work and can be thought as partially valid for his later position, too.

However, as also Clarke accepts, Poulantzas's attempt is not limited with the implementation of structuralist assumptions to the theory of capitalist state. He enduringly stresses on the "class struggle" as the main factor that determines the capitalist state in addition to the its structural determination. While doing this, it is sure that there emerges new problematic aspects in his works due to such a "double determination" of the state that he tries to theorise.

We may move on to the issue of what Poulantzas specifically indicates about the capitalist state by following the concepts he uses based on these assumptions.

Double Function, Power Bloc, Relative Autonomy

First of all, for Poulantzas the state is not just a union of various institutions that have their own power. The concept of "state power" is a problematic one in his consideration since it assumes such a power of the institutions. On the contrary to those assumptions, it is the social classes that hold and exercise power and the state institutions are the *centres* in which the political power of classes is exercised. This is an impressive critique of the theoretical position of statist-institutionalists who ascribe power to the 'state' itself. Yet, Poulantzas adds that this is not to say that the state and its apparatuses are just the appendices of class power, as instrumentalist views argue. Rather, he states that they have their autonomy and "*structural specificity*" which refers an "organising matrix of institutions" (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.115).

Based on the Althusserian terminology until he rejects it, Poulantzas categorises the roles of the state according to levels (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.50). The political, economic and ideological functions of state which are *over-determined* by the political functions, "i.e. its particular function in political class conflict" (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.54).⁶ Yet, he also argues that this over-determined character of the functions of the state results in that:

⁶ It is contentious whether it means that Poulantzas identifies "class struggle with the realm of political" as Holloway & Picciotto (1978, p.7) argue, or not.

Strictly speaking, there is no technico-economic, ideological or 'political' function of the state: there is a global function of cohesion which is ascribed to it by its place, and there are modalities of this function overdetermined by the specifically political modality (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.51).

Therefore, for Poulantzas, the main characteristic of the state, "the global role of the state" is its function of being the *cohesive factor* of the autonomous levels. He adds that this main function of the state is also a necessity considering the 'overlapping of several modes of production' within one social formation. That is to say, the state functions as the cohesive factor within a formation's unity and "this makes it the place in which the contradictions of the instances are condensed" (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.47). It takes various forms based on the characteristics of the mode of production and the social formation. Thus, Poulantzas derives this 'global' role of the state from the existence of various structural levels and from the need for cohesion both within one mode of production and also between the different modes in one social formation.

Related with its role of cohesive factor, the distinctive character of capitalist state for Poulantzas, is its ability to "presents itself as embodying the general interest of the whole of society" which is achieved through its *juridico-political instance* that composed of the aspects or institutions such as universal suffrage, parliamentary representation, political liberties etc. (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.123). Through those means that go beyond the ideological effects, the capitalist state "constitutes the agents of production as individual juridical subjects rather than as the members of antagonistic classes" (Jessop, 1985, p.63). This is what Poulantzas calls as the *effect of isolation* that refers to conceal of the class identity through fragmenting, individualising and isolating the agents of production through promoting 'competition' among them. Then, through this isolation effect that the state presents itself as the state of people/nation, as if it has no class nature --this is why Poulantzas underlines a *double function* of the juridico-political instance of the state, in the sense that "isolating and representing the unity" (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.133-4). This double function is the central aspect in state's relations with the dominant and dominated classes. As he states explicitly, the capitalist state gains a peculiarity through its double function and it achieves to display "as if the class 'struggle' did not exist" in its institutions, although:

its function is to disorganise the dominated classes politically, and at the same time to organise the dominant classes politically; to prevent the dominated classes from being present in its centre as classes, whilst introducing the dominant classes there as classes; by relating itself to the dominated classes as representative of the unity of the people-nation, whilst at the same time relating itself to the dominant classes *qua* politically organised classes. In short, this state exists as a state of the dominant *classes* whilst excluding from its centre the class 'struggle'. Its principal contradiction is not so much that it 'calls' itself the state of all the people, although it is in fact a class state, but that, strictly speaking, it presents itself in its very institutions as a 'class' state (i.e. the state of the dominant classes which it helps to organise politically), of a society which is institutionally fixed as one not-divided-into-classes; in that it presents itself as a state of the bourgeois class, implying that all the 'people' are part of this class (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.189).

Therefore, the capitalist state is characterised by representing the political interests of the dominant classes, not directly their economic interests. This aspect underlines Poulantzas's usage of *hegemony* and *power bloc*.

As it is already mentioned, in one social formation there exist several modes of production that are dominated by one of them. Thus, there are several classes and class fractions. Poulantzas argues that although it is a general feature, the capitalist formation and the structure of capitalist state has a peculiarity that enables the emergence of "power bloc". Power bloc refers "a contradictory unity of politically dominant classes and fraction", yet such a unity does not mean a fusion or simple alliance; rather, it is achieved "under protection of the hegemonic fraction" (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.239). Whether or not this hegemonic class or fraction of power bloc also plays the hegemonic role vis-à-vis the dominated classes depends on the 'ideological function' of that fraction. Although there is general tendency to do so, for Poulantzas, it is very much bounded up to the conjuncture. Thus, Poulantzas defines "power bloc" based on the term "hegemony" by reference to Gramsci, yet by claiming to enlarge the usage of the term, especially for the case among the dominant classes and class fractions.

What is more essential in his conceptualisation of power bloc is that within the power bloc the hegemony of a class or class fraction "is made possible by the unity which is the particular mark of the institutionalised power of the capitalist state" (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.239). That is to say the capitalist state through its specific relation with the dominant (and at the same time with the dominated) classes, makes the constitution of power bloc *possible* (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.230). Then, through the base that the capitalist state provides, the hegemonic class/fraction can gain a double-function in the sense of maintaining the dominant role among the dominant classes and fractions and of representing the general interest of the people-nation based on the conjuncture (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.141).

The role of the state in constitution of power bloc is, therefore, connected with its relation to the dominant and dominated classes that is mentioned above. In its relation with the class struggle, the capitalist state is once more characterised by its *relative autonomy*, in Poulantzas's theory. In other words, the main function of the capitalist state as the factor of both political organisation of dominant classes and disorganisation of dominated classes can only be achieved through the relative autonomy of the state vis-à-vis the *dominant* classes and class fractions (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.287). The state politically organises the dominant classes due to the fact that bourgeoisie is not a homogeneous class but composed of fractions and also that they are also fragmented through the effect of isolation. Thus, the capitalist state functions as the factor of political unity of the power bloc (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.299), and it is the feature of relative autonomy that enables capitalist state to do this. Indeed, the relative autonomy of capitalist state is its "constitutive feature" for Poulantzas.

This constitutive feature, nonetheless, may take different forms. For instance, the state may force the hegemonic class to sacrifice its (short-term) interests in order to maintain its hegemony and through this it may "present itself as the guarantor of the interests of various classes and fractions of the power bloc against the interests of the hegemonic fraction" (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.301). It is in this context that Poulantzas refers *Bonapartism*. Roughly, it is a specific case in which none of the classes or fractions within the power bloc can show the

ability to be the hegemonic one. His analysis of Bonapartism in fact one of the aspects of his works that is most commonly criticised. It is due to that Poulantzas tends to accept Bonapartism as potentially intrinsic to *all* capitalist states, by referring to Engel's phrase that assumes Bonapartism as "the religion of the bourgeoisie" (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.302). Yet, as Jessop indicates, although Poulantzas really tends to do this, he is also aware of the different forms of relative autonomy:

It is clear that the state's unity and relative autonomy take on particular forms (i.e. different degrees) in the various concrete forms of the state and of the regime. There are variations within the limits fixed by its structures (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.303).

On the other hand, the very term of relative autonomy, indeed, indicates much more fundamental problems in Poulantzas's theory. As it is mentioned before, the relative autonomy of the state derives from the relations of structures, peculiar to the capitalist mode of production. Here, at issue of the double function of the state, including its role in constitution of power bloc, represents the other source of the relative autonomy of the capitalist state, in Poulantzas's framework --its relative autonomy in its relation to the class struggle. He expresses that:

(...) the unity of power characteristic of the state, related to its role in the class struggle, is the reflection of its role of unity vis-à-vis the instances; and its relative autonomy vis-à-vis the politically dominant classes or fractions is the reflection of the relative autonomy of the instances of a capitalist formation. In short, this unity and autonomy of the capitalist type of state is related to the *specificity* of its structures (relatively autonomous vis-à-vis the economic) in their relation to the political class struggle, which is relatively autonomous vis-à-vis the economic class struggle (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.257).

According to Hall (1980, p.62), this is the tension inherent in PPSC that "there is a double framework to every question; each element appearing *twice*, once as the 'effect of the structure' once as the 'effect of a practice'" while Poulantzas attempts to give "a primacy to the constitutive effect of class struggle" within the limits of structuralist causality. Indeed, it is what Clarke, as well as Holloway and Picciotto indicate as the originality of Poulantzas's theory in the sense that he tries "to give Althusserianism some substance by developing a theory of class" (Clarke, 1991b, p.82). Yet, in this theory of 'double determination' of the state, the dimension of class struggle is also conceptualised as being determined by the structure; that is to say "class struggle is condemned to reproduce the structure", to the *function of the state* (Clarke, 1991b, p.98). Contrary to those criticisms, Jessop (1985, p.76) argues that Poulantzas's work is not a simple synthesis of structures and practices of class struggle; rather he interests with the "juridico-political" level of the state which mediates between "the abstract structural matrices and concrete class struggles". Thus, structures and practice become potentially complementary in his work, for Jessop and for this reason even in PPSC, Poulantzas's position goes beyond the structuralism. Yet, the main problem in the framework of PPSC is the tendency of placing the state more or less *above* the *civil* society as being an organising factor that shapes the class struggle through its *double function* in its relation to the social classes, as Carnoy (1984, p.103,

107) mentions. This limited vision of the state, however, would be significantly changed in Poulantzas' later works.

Form of State and Form of Regime

Poulantzas, in his earlier position, was also criticised for his underestimation of the 'concrete' analysis of capitalist state. It was the underlying point of Miliband's critique of Poulantzas for failing into a "structuralist abstractionism" that prevents Poulantzas from recognising the essential differences between different types of capitalist state, between democratic and fascist types for instance. Yet, by *Fascism and Dictatorship (FD)*, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism (CCC)* and *Crisis of Dictatorships (CD)*, Poulantzas more concentrates on the 'concrete analysis of concrete situation'. Indeed, he develops the categories of form of state and form of regime, in parallel to the periodisation of capitalism in PPSC and he adds the concept of "exceptional state form" in order to analyse the concrete cases.

For Poulantzas, since the capitalist type of state is characterised with its relative autonomy as its general feature, "the modifications of the relation of the state to the socio-economic relations" refer to the various forms of it (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.148), such as the non-interventionist form of state in private capitalism or the interventionist form of state in monopoly capitalism:

(...) the modifications of these forms of state, characterised by specific articulations of the economic and political structures within the framework of the same invariant and so by specific forms of intervention and non-intervention of the economic in the political and of political in the economic can only be located in a relevant way in the relations between the state and the field of the class struggle (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.151).

Thus, the modifications of the structure of the state in its relations with the class struggle (again, the "double determination" of the state) gives rise to the different forms that state takes. Yet, there are also "variables within the limits set by the *form of state*" that is to say different *forms of regime* (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.154). In other words, a form of state may appear as or combine with different forms of regime, such as that the liberal state as a form of state can take the form of regime as constitutional monarchy or parliamentary republic.

On the other hand, there is a third dimension that is related with *periodisation*. If we return to the phrase mentioned above that "interventionist form of state in monopoly capitalism and non-interventionist form in private capitalism", here 'monopoly capitalism and private capitalism' refer to the various stages. Therefore, the periodisation of a formation in stages indicates the existence of several modes of production that is characterised by the dominance of one of them over others (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.150).

Within this framework, fascism signifies both a specific form of regime and a specific form of state within the capitalist type of state. This characteristic of fascism displays its *exceptional* nature, due to the fact that its emergence refers a *political crisis* within the imperialistic stage of capitalism. In this sense, since fascism denotes *exceptional form of state*, it differs from the ordinary capitalist state forms, yet it also says much about the ordinary capitalist state form due to being a product or remedy to its crisis.

This political crisis rises from the specific situation of the class struggle --mainly from the deepening and sharpening of the internal contradictions within the power bloc. Inability of any of the classes or class fractions within the power bloc to become hegemonic, i.e. *hegemonic crisis*, also refers a *crisis of party representation* between the dominant classes/class fractions and their political parties and the crisis necessitates a new organisation within the power bloc. Fascism emerges as the response to this need for the re-organisation of the power bloc (Poulantzas, 1974, p.72). The role that fascism plays is, in this sense, making "big monopoly capital" fraction of bourgeoisie enable to become the hegemonic one. Yet, it does not mean that fascist state is a direct instrument of the financial capital. Rather, for Poulantzas, fascism denotes a process that has different stages or periods and that displays a complex structure of class alliances (which comes to an end by its contradiction with monopoly capital that achieves to be the hegemonic power). Indeed, it is the very reason of its emergence, as the response to the existing political crisis, that signifies its specific *relative autonomy* (as different from the autonomy in the case of Bonapartism) rather than being an instrument of any fraction:

Throughout the rise of fascism and after the conquest of power, fascism (the fascist party and the fascist State) *characteristically* has a relative autonomy from both the power bloc and the fraction of big monopoly capital, whose hegemony it has established. This relative autonomy stems from two sets of factors: (a) from the internal contradictions among the classes and fractions of classes in the power alliance, i.e. from its internal political crisis: the relative autonomy necessary to reorganise this bloc and establish within it the hegemony of the fraction of big monopoly capital, (b) from the contradictions between the dominant classes and fractions and the dominated classes, i.e. from the political crisis of the ensemble of the social formation, and from the complex relation between fascism and dominated classes (Poulantzas, 1974, p.85-6).

At the beginning of the process, the fascist party that has a base of petty-bourgeoisie, increasingly gains the support of masses and becomes a mass party. Yet, it is by gaining the support of big capital fraction that fascism comes to the "point of no return". Thus, through providing guarantees to the big monopoly capital, the fascist party achieves to be the remedy to the crisis of "party representation" since it provides the political ties to the bourgeoisie. Yet, the complex class alliances underlying fascist period gives rise a more complicated structure: fascist party should "make certain concessions to the masses" and also due to its class origin, petty-bourgeoisie gains some privileges (it becomes the "ruling class" through its position as the "class in charge of the state apparatus" but never becomes the hegemonic one)⁷. Following this period, at stage of "stabilisation" of fascism, once again the political scene changes. The big monopoly capital finally establishes its hegemony and also holds the status of ruling class by displacing the petty-bourgeoisie. Within this period too, the fascist party or *stabilised fascism* "often finds itself obliged to impose on the power bloc certain concessions to the masses (underestimated by the Comintern) so that its links with them should never be entirely broken" (Poulantzas, 1974, p.88). This is another reason that Poulantzas mentions in addition to the revive of the contradictions within the power bloc that necessitates the 'distance' between fascist state and

⁷ These differences is based on the PPSC. The *class in charge of the state apparatus* refers to the one "from which the political, bureaucratic, military etc. personnel is recruited and which occupies the 'heights' of the state" (Poulantzas, 1975a, p.249). Poulantzas also denotes the *supporting classes*. The distinctions are made according to their roles in the political scene, yet the details are out of the frame of this paper.

the hegemonic fraction. All those specificities of the fascist state that enables the monopoly capital to establish its hegemony are also the factors of later antagonism between fascism and monopoly capital which gives rise to the end of fascism.

Then, although it is an exceptional form of state, fascist state is characterised by the general feature of capitalist state, too; by *relative autonomy* in such a specific manner, in its relation to the classes and class fractions as it is mentioned above.

Poulantzas's analysis of fascism leads to various criticisms. Holloway and Picciotto (1977, p.8-9) argue that he evaluates fascism without any reference to the its relation with 'exploitation', that is to say without emphasising its relation with the inherent contradictions of the capitalist accumulation. Rather than this, they state, Poulantzas discusses fascism merely in terms of "juridico-political crisis" which refers to the contradiction among the capitalist class fractions, by ignoring the main contradiction in capitalism, between capital and labour. Similarly, Clarke (1991b, p.94) indicates that there is no answer in Poulantzas's analysis of fascism that whether its success rises from the necessary functioning of capitalist mode of production or from the weakness of proletariat and whether it is the creation of the dominant class or the state.

In his analysis of the military dictatorships in *Crisis of Dictatorship* (CD), Poulantzas seems to be much more careful at issue of the relation of those exceptional forms of state with the dominated classes. He defines the exceptional forms of state as the war against the popular masses and underlines that:

the exceptional state comes into being in order to remedy a characteristic crisis of hegemony within the power bloc, and in this bloc's relationship with the popular masses. It corresponds to a significant shift in the balance of forces (Poulantzas, 1976, p.92).

Thus, although there exist certain differences among the various examples of exceptional state forms, between fascism and dictatorships or Bonapartist state, we can conclude the general characteristics of them based on his framework in CD. The 'significant shift' in the balance of powers that Poulantzas refers in quotation above can only be realised or institutionalised through particular modifications 'at the very heart of the state'. Those changes are mainly:

suppressions of the traditional political representatives (political parties) of the fractions of the power bloc itself, elimination of the suffrage, shift of the dominant role in the state apparatuses to the repressive apparatuses (in particular the armed forces), considerable strengthening of the state's 'bureaucratic' centralism, hierarchical ordering and duplication of real centres of power within the state, and of its transmission belts (Poulantzas, 1976, p.92).

So that, we may assume that Poulantzas's analysis in CD is very much sensitive to the different characteristics of the various forms of the state, contrary to criticisms. Moreover, although he seems to emphasise on the 'political' side of the issue, he is also aware of the internal relation between the class struggle and capitalist accumulation and their contradiction that both underlie and shape through the modifications within the state --since the state is "the condensation of a balance of forces":

In actual fact, the contradictions between the various fractions of the bourgeoisie themselves always express, in the last analysis, different tactics and modalities for the exploitation and domination of the popular masses. This is not to do more than formulate, in class terms, the fact that the contradictions of capitalist accumulation are ultimately due to the class struggle, and the fact that the very cycle of capitalist reproduction already bears within it the contradiction between capital and the exploited classes (Poulantzas, 1976, p.82).

It is in this sense that Poulantzas argues at issue of the fall of dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece that although there were no 'frontal mass movement' against those regimes, it was the popular struggle, as the 'determining factor' of the immediate factors that undermined the dictatorships. Indeed, it is true that Poulantzas conceptualises the internal contradictions within the state much more as the contradictions among the fractions of power bloc. He states that since those dominant fractions hold 'centres and bulwarks of power' within the state, the most directly reflected contradictions within the state are the ones among them and the ones between them and supporting classes. On the contrary, the contradictions between power bloc and working class is expressed by a very 'mediated' way, only 'at a distance' in the bourgeois state (Poulantzas, 1976, p.104). This very characteristic is displayed in exceptional forms of state in an intensified form; that is to say, the exceptional form of state presents a much more 'fragile' compromise within the power bloc, due to the internal contradictions among the state apparatuses which become a power centre through the fractions that hold them. This underlines the particular relative autonomy of the exceptional forms of state which makes possible " a struggle between various clans, factions and coteries which does not entirely coincide, in a direct and mechanical way, with the class contradictions" (Poulantzas, 1976, p.112).⁸

In the sense of the relation between the classes and state apparatuses, as it is mentioned before, Poulantzas argues that the 'power' is not of the apparatuses themselves, but of the classes or class fractions that exercise in and over them and those apparatuses through their repressive, ideological and economic functions (which depends on the state 'power') plays a "constitutive" role in class struggle, in turn. This is one of the specific issues that he mentions in his previous work, in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (CCC). In this work, the changes in the position of Poulantzas began to be explicit --he much more refers to the "class struggle" as the main base of his analysis, rather than as a secondary factor. Yet, the class struggle itself again is subjected to a double determination by the *structure* and *practice*.

In the introduction part of CCC, Poulantzas distinguishes "class places" that are structurally determined within the production process, in *economic* sphere, and "class positions" that are conjunctural forms of class struggle and practice and that are specific to the historical uniqueness of a social formation. He criticises the tendencies that reduce the class determination to its class position for presenting a voluntarist view of the class (Poulantzas,

⁸ In addition to this general difference between 'normal' forms of state and exceptional forms of state, the military dictatorships have a further vulnerability that they lack both "unifying apparatus of the whole institutional establishment that the fascist party provides" and the "specific cohesion of the parliamentary-democratic regimes' apparatuses" (Poulantzas, 1976, p.124).

1975b, p.14-5). Moreover, he rejects the "Hegelian schema" of class-in-itself and class-for-itself by underlining that the ideological and political relations are "themselves part of the structural determination of class" (Poulantzas, 1975b, p.16). Then, it seems that Poulantzas admits the constitutive role of ideological and political in the 'structural determination' of classes, yet he still identifies the production field with the economic. Since the "political and ideological relations are materialised and embodied, as material practices, in the state apparatuses" the analysis of classes can only be "undertaken in terms of their relationship with the apparatuses" (Poulantzas, 1975b, p.25). Therefore:

these apparatuses are not simply 'added on' to the class struggle as appendices, but play a constitutive role in it (...) (and) these apparatuses are never anything other than the materialisation and condensation of class relations (...) (Poulantzas, 1975b, p.25).

It is at this point that Poulantzas moves to a position in which the state is theorised as a *relation*.

State as a "Relation"

In his second contribution to the debate with Miliband (and Laclau), Poulantzas both makes a self-criticism of the Althusserian notions of his earlier position and also draws a clear framework of conceptualisation of state as a *social relation* that he began to develop in CCC and that would be more specifically elaborated in *State Power Socialism* (SPS) later on.

In his self-criticism, Poulantzas admits that his earlier position in PPSC had a tendency of "teoricism" as a consequence of Althusserian structuralism that assumes the 'theory' as an independent region and also a tendency of "formalism" which led to an underestimation of the concrete analysis. It is the fact that Poulantzas eliminates any formalist tendency by his works FD, CCC and CD. Another feature of his self-criticism is that the class struggle had to be much more emphasised and as it is mentioned before this is also what he aimed to do beginning from CCC. At issue of his "structuralism", Poulantzas (1977, p.184-201) states that he is a structuralist Marxist only in the sense of being a materialist and rejecting the 'human essence' as the main dynamic of history; but, he adds, he is against structuralism in the sense of considering the classes and class struggle, not the structures, as the main dynamic of the social formations.

Indeed, Poulantzas's works involve an enduring criticism of the instrumentalist view of the state, in addition to the 'revisionist', social democratic considerations of it. As he states in CD:

(typically) in bourgeois ideology, but also (having its effects) on Marxist theory of the state (that) the state is considered either as a *subject* or as a *thing*. Considered as a subject, we are back at the old Hegelian conception of a state that really is 'separate' from 'civil society', endowed with an intrinsic rationality as the embodiment of the general will in the face of atomised individuals (...). Viewed as a thing, we have the 'instrumentalist' conception also present within Marxism: the state is considered as by its nature a mere instrument, a machine, that can be manipulated at will by the dominant classes (...) (Poulantzas, 1976, p.81).

Both of those positions are equally false, for Poulantzas. The failure of the views of state either as a subject or an object/thing rises from their consideration of state and social classes as *external entities*. This underlying assumption also leads to political repercussions that:

in this problematic of the state/classes relationship (or that of state/social groups-civil society) as one of two separate entities confronting one another, classes are seen as acting on the state only from out-side, by the play of 'influences', each of them taking hold of a piece of the state, or the state as a whole (...). But this precisely makes it impossible to grasp the internal contradictions of the state itself (Poulantzas, 1976, p.81).

The similar problem is shared by what Poulantzas calls as "formalist-economist position" in SPS. This is the view:

according to which the economy is composed of elements that remain unchanged through the various modes of production -elements possessing an almost Aristotelian *nature* or *essence* and able to reproduce and regulate themselves by a kind of internal combinatory (Poulantzas, 1980, p.15).

This view, for Poulantzas, conceptualises the economic space as "intrinsically capable of *reproducing* itself" which is involved in two main misunderstanding. On the one hand, it is embodied by the mechanistic-economistic conception of the state that based on the 'topological representation of base and superstructure" which reduces the state into an appendage, a reflection of the economic base. On the other hand, it gives rise to the consideration of social totality "as in the form of *levels* or *instances* that are by nature or by essence autonomous from one another" which leads to the assumption that as if those levels exist prior to their 'mutual relation' (Poulantzas, 1980, p.15). This is an explicit critique of structuralism and so the general theoretical assumptions of his earlier works.

Again, in both those 'misunderstandings' the problem rises from their consideration of the relationship between the state and economic sphere as *external*. For Poulantzas, the fact is just the opposite. Contrary to this assumed externality, the state has a *constitutive* role in the relations of production, besides its reproduction function. This role, or *presence* of the state in relations of production is not an a-historical one, but changes through both the modes of production and also through the different stages and periods in one mode of production (specifically in capitalism). Thus, the real relationship of the state to the economy "is never anything but the modality of the state's presence in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production" (Poulantzas, 1980, p.17). Indeed, in capitalist mode of production there exist a *relative separation* of the state and the economic sphere due to the *peculiar feature of capitalism*.⁹ Therefore:

What is involved here is not a real externality, such as would exist if the State intervened in the economy only from the outside. *The separation nothing other*

⁹ In contrast with feudalism, the direct producers in capitalism are separated from both the property relations and the relationship of possession. Those free-labourers enter into a contractual relation, into a juridical sphere, for selling their labour power, which signifies the commodification of labour power. The capitalist gains the surplus value within this capitalist relation of production which converts the surplus labour into the surplus-value. so that, the reproduction of capital is realised within the relation of production. Poulantzas argues that this whole structure which is peculiar to the capitalism is the base of the specific relation of state and economic sphere.

than the capitalist form of the presence of the political in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production. This separation of State and economy and the presence-action of the former in the latter -in effect, two expressions of a single pattern of relations between State and economy under capitalism- traverse all the historical stages and phases of the mode of production; albeit in changing forms, they are rooted in the hard core of capitalist relations of production" (Poulantzas, 1980, p.19).

It is why, according to Poulantzas, there can be no 'general theory' of economy or state, since those have different characteristics in different modes of production. It is for the same reason that it is a legitimate attempt to theorise the "capitalist state" since it has a unique specific character of "relative separation" although in various periods within capitalism, this separation gains 'transformed forms'.

Based on this analysis Poulantzas defines the capitalist state:

The (capitalist) State should not be regarded as an intrinsic entity: like 'capital', it is rather a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions, such as this is expressed within the State in a necessarily specific form (Poulantzas, 1980, p.128).

This definition enable to grasp the capitalist state with its internal contradictions, rather than being a "monolithic bloc". It was the failure of the conception of the state-as-object with *no autonomy* and the state-as-subject with an *absolute autonomy*. Whereas the case is that:

(...) the State is through and through constituted-divided by class contradictions. Thus, an institution destined to reproduce class divisions is not, and can never be, a monolithic bloc without cracks (...). Contrary to conceptions that treat it as a Thing or a Subject, the State is itself divided. It is not enough simply to say that contradictions and struggles traverse the State - as if it were a matter of penetrating an already constituted substance or of passing through an empty site that is already there. Class contradictions are the very stuff of the State: they are present in its material framework and pattern its organisation; while the State's policy is the result of their functioning within the State (Poulantzas, 1980, p.132).

In this sense, the "relative autonomy" of the State gains a new definition, too. Poulantzas does not abandon this central term although he makes significant changes in his theory, yet within this new framework "State's autonomy" is defined directly through the class struggle, in conformity with the centrality of class struggle in general. It can be argued that as opposing to the positions that ascribe state an absolute or no autonomy, Poulantzas tries to take attention to the non-monolithic character of the state due to its internal class-divided nature. Moreover, he underlines that the relative autonomy of the state is not a 'conscious' function of the state (as if it can have) or does not denote its capacity to remain external to the classes and class fractions within the power-bloc. It is the very result of "what takes place *within* the State" (Poulantzas, 1980, p.135), that is mentioned above.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, it is assumed that there is an essential shift in Poulantzas's theory of state realised throughout his works and without attempting to draw a chart of similarities and differences in his works, the general framework is tried to be evaluated. We think that Poulantzas's theory is one of the most impressive ones, maybe the most detailed, at issue of the state. It provides useful means to grasp and to compare the different types and forms of capitalist state. Although there are still blurred points and conceptualisations in his last work, it seems that through the modifications that Poulantzas does, his theory of state presents an important base (indeed more than a 'base') for a non-reductionist conceptualisation of capitalist state. Moreover, it is not the case that the criticisms of Poulantzas prove the invalidity of his theory, rather they complete it through denoting its failures. Surely, this is not to say that (especially, state-derivationist or open-Marxist) critique of Poulantzas is unimportant, on the contrary, that is to say that it is illuminating.

According to Jessop (1985, p.15), Poulantzas's position represents a "movement away from existentialist Marxism to his own distinctive version of Marxism" in which Althusserian structuralism constitutes the 'bridge' in his theoretical journey. Put it another way, Jessop (1985, p.360) argues that Poulantzas's theory evolved into a relational theory although he could not develop it fully. Considering his suggestions for democratic-socialist strategy, Wood (1992, p.42) argues that the evolution of Poulantzas's theory is into a Euro-communist position which is characterised by the exclusion of the class struggle through replacement of the main contradiction within the production field with a contradiction between *power-bloc* and *people*. The political strategy that Poulantzas suggests for a "democratic socialism" is not the subject of this paper, but it can be said that, it is not easy to interpret Poulantzas's theory as the one that excludes the "class struggle". Considering his later position, it is just the contrary. Poulantzas situates the class struggle into the 'heart of the state', so that of his theory.

In structuralist theory of the state, Wood (2003, p.71) underlines that, the state is capitalist due to its structural features which are derived theoretically, rather than its relation with the capitalist relations of production. This statement really fits with the assumptions of Poulantzas in PPSC, although he tries to integrate "class struggle" to his structuralist view of the state which gives rise to the dual character of his early theory. Yet, the impressive framework that Poulantzas gradually develops in his later works mainly constructed upon the specificity of capitalist production relations and concluded the view of state as a relation, just as Wood argues from her point of view. So that the critique of Poulantzas for producing a structuralist view of state is mainly rooted in his PPSC, as if he had not transformed his theory. Very similarly, Clarke (1991a, p.18) underestimates the shift in Poulantzas's theory by claiming that he 'relaxes the rigid structural determinism' of his earlier position through 'attributing greater weight to ideology, increasing scope for contingency in the conjuncture and allowing a greater role to autonomous dynamics of the state apparatuses' --yet, this relaxation "did not change the underlying theory."

Carnoy (1984, p.136) takes attention to that the criticisms that had been developed by many before Poulantzas wrote SPS, had been effective on Poulantzas's abandonment of 'determinist structuralist nature of the state' in his later position (we can assume that the important aspects

of Holloway and Picciotto's and also Clarke's earlier criticisms were two of those, yet we can also assume that the later arguments of Poulantzas has effected the German debate, in turn).¹⁰ As Hall (1980, p.65) argues the 'state' in SPS as the condensation of class relations replaces the 'state' in PPSC as the *cement* of social formation and together with other views that Poulantzas developed in SPS, it provides "a rich, new seam of concepts and ideas".

Most probably, the most positive interpretation of Poulantzas is hold by Jessop. Following his general framework, such as his emphasis on the 'institutional materiality' of the state, Jessop tries to provide a concrete analysis of the capitalist state. Yet, he also criticises Poulantzas as having an enduring tendency of "politicism" in his works (critique of Poulantzas's theory for being politicist is also made by Holloway and Picciotto). Jessop claims that the main gap of Poulantzas's theory is the role of the state in the capitalist accumulation process-- although Poulantzas refers it in his SPS through underlining the "not only reproductive but also the constitutive role" of the state in relations of production and also through indicating various dimensions of the role of the state in capital accumulation.

Yet, it is true that Poulantzas still maintains some problematic features, maybe terminological confusions, in his later theory. As we can understand from the expressions he uses, he seems to identify the relations of production with economy --although there are also certain expressions that refer to the production field as an unity of ideological, political and economic. This tendency gives rise to Clarke's and Holloway and Picciotto's permanent dissatisfaction with Poulantzas's theory. In addition to this, the term "relative autonomy", although it is used in a different manner, creates a confusion, mostly due to its earlier connotations.

The other noteworthy point is Poulantzas's analysis of "*authoritarian statism*" which roughly refers to "an intensified state control over every sphere of socio-economic life combined with radical decline of the institutions of political democracy and with curtailment of so-called 'formal' liberties" (Poulantzas, 1980, p.203). This is the new 'democratic' or *normal* form of the state in current period of capitalism, "as a response to the sharpening elements of crisis", although it shares the repressive feature with 'exceptional' forms of state. Yet, while state realises an expansion, in this sense it strengthens, at the same time it also becomes more vulnerable to the crisis due to the instability of the bourgeoisie's hegemony as the characteristic of the period (so that authoritarian statism embodies a dual aspect of the state as strengthening and weakening -- Poulantzas, 1980, p.241). The authoritarian statism, in Poulantzas's framework, is the form of Western countries¹¹ in the specific phase of monopoly capitalism in imperialistic period¹¹ which is characterised by the "displacement of dominance" from the economic to

¹⁰ It is needless to say that as a Marxist theoretician Poulantzas's whole work was based on his interpretation of Marx, Engels and Lenin. He was also deeply influenced by Gramsci in his conceptualisation of hegemony and power bloc and by Foucault in his later vision of power (and by criticising Foucault, in his emphasis on materialisation of the state power).

¹¹ Although Poulantzas develops his analysis based on the Western countries, and Hall interprets it as a useful tool for analysing Thatcherist period in Britain, it seems that the frame that Poulantzas (1987) draws can also be used for the *neo-liberal* periods of other countries, such as Turkey.

¹¹ Poulantzas deals with the periodisation of capitalism and an analysis of imperialistic stage of capitalism with its phases especially in CCC and CD. There are important points to mention. He states that in current (late 1970s) stage of imperialism "there is no longer independent social formations whose relations among themselves are relatively external" (Poulantzas, 1975b, p.43). Rather, the imperialistic chain reproduces an uneven development and binds the dominated social formations to the dominant ones which makes them dependent to each other. Yet, as he expresses in CD, it does not mean that the forms of national states, the dependent countries, are directly shaped through the external effects, rather they become influential as far as they combine with the 'internal' factors, i.e. class struggle, of that country. It is in this sense, Poulantzas argues that there does not exist a clear demarcation between the internal and external factors, in the imperialistic stage. Another important point is his evaluation of the position of nation states, which is very much relevant to today's discussion on *globalisation*: "National states are still the nodal points of the internationalisation process,

political, i.e. to the state. It is the case that the state 'intervention' into the economy gains a decisive manner. That is to say that the 'economic functions of the state occupies the dominant place' (Poulantzas, 1980, p.168) and they also involve the reproduction of the *dominant* ideology. According to Jessop (1985, p.108), the terminology of 'displacement' is a structuralist one. Despite of his rejection of considering economic, political and ideological as distinct levels/regions, Poulantzas's insistence on the "displacement of the dominance from the economic to the political" denotes a contradiction in his work, and this is the *last significant residue of structuralist Marxism* in his analysis.

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which actually increases their decisive role in the accumulation of capital (particularly by way of their economic functions), and this explains why they are still more than ever privileged object of struggle in the conflicts between various fractions of the bourgeoisie itself'. Thus, for Poulantzas the nation states are still and in fact strengthening actors of the process of the internationalisation of capital (also in 1987, p.75).