

ON THE *DECEPTIVELY OBVIOUS* PERSISTENCE OF THE GLOBAL POLITICAL
ECONOMY: IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE IN THE LEFTIST LEGAL THEORY ©

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INTRODUCTION

The article seeks to discuss the of concept of ideology for the global political economy in interpreting and explaining the recent tide of uprisings and social movements against it. However, since ideology is a broad concept owing to extensive differences in its conceptual treatment under various theoretical traditions; the article will limit itself to Althusser's conception.

This focus on Althusser, however, requires further justification: (a) Marxist framework, arguably, was the first systematic attempt to study ideology: grounding it in a concrete historical setting,² ridding the term of its idealist provenance;³ (b) situated in this paradigm, Althusser chronologically appears after major thinkers like Marx & Engels, Mannheim, Lukacs & Gramsci, thus in many ways builds upon, and critically challenges their theses to offer a more sophisticated analysis; (c) the profound legacy of this sophistication (though not gone unchallenged) has been at least conceded to by a generation of theorists still debating its impact.

The article will proceed along the following two lines of inquiry: the first section will examine the (1) relevance of Althusser's concept in addressing and incorporating certain issues at the heart of tradition of critical political economy and (2) its application in interpreting global movements and uprisings. The second section will engage in a critique of Althusser's

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² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology" in *Collected Works*, (Lawrence and Wishart 1932) 31

³ Michael Freeden, *Ideology* (Oxford University Press 2003) 10

theoretical approach to demarcate and outline the limits of its usefulness in interpreting the workings of the global political economy, particularly the social uprisings against it.

SECTION 1: RELEVANCE AND APPLICATION OF IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

Ideology by its very claim to explain the reproduction of means of production demonstrates its politico-economic enterprise. Althusser's *symptomatic* approach makes a paradigm shift by situating social issues in their historical moorings.⁴ Thus, it redefines the problematic and aims to develop an appropriate discourse to deal with these issues⁵. His methodology allows us to recognize the contradiction and flaws of Capitalist Mode of Production (CMP).⁶ Moreover, by integrating various social phenomena with political-economic explanations he broadens the scope of political economy. The most concrete example of such integration comes from his theory of interpellation.

INTERPELLATION OF SUBJECTS

Since individuals are the basic agents of capitalism whose independent actions constitute the structure of the global politico-economical setup, it would be pertinent to consider here how individuals are constituted as subjects in the first place. Althusser argues that individuals are born into a social system which precedes them,⁷ one which is greater than themselves. This system acts as a structure⁸ which constrains and orients the trajectory of their individual lives. However, the constraints of this material context are misrecognised⁹ as individuals are given an illusion of being free and in control of their lives.¹⁰ However, the only freedom they have is to conform to these already governing norms. This act of calling to conformity, also known as 'hailing', constitutes subjects.¹¹ Althusser clarifies that hailing exhibits an active participation on the part of subjects, who respond to the call being made. To elaborate this,

⁴ Louis Althusser, "Reply to John Lewis" in Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (Verso 1984) 87

⁵ Louis Althusser, "From Capital to Marx's Philosophy" in Étienne Balibar and Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* (New Left Press 1970) 28

⁶ From now on, Capitalist Mode of Production will be referred to as CMP

⁷ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (Ben Brewster tr, New Left Books 1971) 164-165

⁸ Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism" in Ben Brewster tr, *For Marx* (The Penguin Press 1969) 233

⁹ Louis Althusser, "On Theoretical Work: Difficulties and Resources" in Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists: & Other Essays* (Verso 1990) 29

¹⁰ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (n 7) 169

¹¹ *Ibid*, 164

he points to the dual meaning of the term 'subject' which is both an individual possessing consciousness and a being who is *subjected* to the system. Althusser argues that individuality is constructed so that the decision to conform to an exploitative system appears as a free choice, masking its coercive nature.

This notion of independence is important here because it explains the basic economic assumption of rational choice. Consider, for example, a factory where working conditions are miserable; by choosing to work there -hailing to call- workers may take for granted the exploitative conditions as normal, and thus may blame only themselves for starving to death, shall they choose to quit later. Althusser's theorization offers numerous insights into a real world scenario. First, it refers to the dilemma of simultaneously being free and constrained in capitalist societies. Poulantzas argues that ideology explains how people in a certain local setting think of themselves as independent individuals and are unable to see the broader global connections which determine them and to whom they are 'always already' subjected.¹²

Similarly, Althusser's theory explains the persistence of capitalism not because of some hegemonic might or 'grace of God'¹³ but by the interpellation wherein it serves a social function to individuals who create this imaginary relationship, a subject 'in which each subject can contemplate its own image'.¹⁴ This subject is the notion of being a 'good subject' whose conformity will 'make everything alright'.¹⁵

REPRODUCTION OF THE RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION:

One may ask how does such ideology get inculcated and why precisely one set of ideas and not others? Althusser answers: because all subjects are related to each other through relations of production, and the function of ideology is to reproduce those relations¹⁶ which ultimately benefit the bourgeois. Therefore, it will propagate those set of ideas which correspond to the interests of the dominant class. Since ideology operates in a social discourse and is embedded in the rituals and practices,¹⁷ these very social institutions become the 'apparatuses' for the inculcation of ideology. Althusser notes, in CMP, education system is the prime example of

¹² Robert Paul Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (University of California Press 1992) 320-322

¹³ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (n 7) 172

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 168

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 169

¹⁶ Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (n 12) 209

¹⁷ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (n 7) 146

Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) which supports the smooth running of a system of exploitation. In accordance with CMP's principle of specialisation and division of labour, educational institutions produce stratifications of workers with various skills and mindsets which fit like cogs in the capitalist machine. Althusser remarks that Educational ISA produces three classes of people: the labourers; the petty bourgeoisie; and the capitalists.¹⁸ All three categories of people are trained in the respective ideologies suitable to their class positions, through selective dissemination of knowledge. For example, workers are trained in the ideology of hard work and survival, and the capitalists in the ideology of profit-making and economic optimization.¹⁹

Another supporting mechanism of the capitalist state is its separation between intellectual and manual labour.²⁰ A relevant example here can be of the Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) such as Apple which guard its technology through the use of patents and intellectual property rights while it dispatches components of iPhone's to be assembled by cheap labour in China. Therefore, we see, the education system does not simply reproduce ideology in their institutional setups, but more broadly, perpetuates the existing relations of exploitation by offering differential opportunities for attaining specialized knowledge to different classes. For instance, it is most likely that children of manual workers will be unable to afford specialist professional colleges and hence will be cast into the vicious cycle of deprivation. Whereas, the children of capitalists would get into universities that support and promote the ideology of their own classes, and hence will perpetuate the system. Thus, ideology is not only able to explain how the relations of exploitation in the global capitalist economy are reproduced but more importantly how such exploitation appears *natural* to both the exploiters and the exploited.

ROLE OF STATE AND STATE POWER:

Althusser identifies ideology with the functioning of state and by doing so he offers a new analytical insight in comprehending the nature of state and dissemination of power. By

¹⁸ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (n 7) 147

¹⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (Longman 1994) 96-98

²⁰ Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (n 12) 338

shifting from Marxist conception of the state as a controlling body²¹ to distinguishing between State's function and functionaries, he makes an analytic leap from 'descriptive theory' to 'theory' as such.²² By recognizing the ideological nature of power, one can comprehend the multi-faceted character of the state in the global political system. For instance, the conflict between ideologies explains the dilemma of states in dealing with global vs. national interests.²³

Consider, for instance, the pressure the British government had to face in allowing Romanian workers the equal right to work in the UK. Being a part of the EU, the UK had to allow Romanians the mobility to work in the UK like other European citizens. However, fearing a severe drain on the national economy of the potential benefits and welfare claims²⁴ by the poorer Romanians, the Government was reluctant to do so until recently.²⁵ However, despite giving in to EU pressure it is considered to have played an ideological move. In order to protect its economic interest, the Government have deterred Romanian immigrants through campaigning which highlights the negative side of British life, such as rain,²⁶ lack of jobs, increasing theft and poverty.²⁷

Moreover, Althusser's notion of how the State serves to uphold the ruling class ideology by intervening to protect their economic interests explains what Poulantzas refers to as the contemporary phenomenon of the rise of monopoly capitalism.²⁸ A contemporary example is the increasing state intervention to prevent liberal market economies, such as during the banking crisis of 2008 by offering bailout packages amounting to two hundred billion pounds.²⁹

²¹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (n 7) 132

²² *Ibid*, 135

²³ Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (n 12) 356

²⁴ BBC, 'Bulgarian and Romanian immigration - what are the figures?' (BBC News, 14 May 2014) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21523319>> accessed 14 April 2014

²⁵ GOV.UK, 'Bulgarian and Romanian Nationals' (UK Border Agency) <<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/eucitizens/bulgaria-romania/>> accessed 8 March 2014

²⁶ Ed West. "Note to Bulgarians and Romanians: Britain Is Rubbish." *The Telegraph*. *The Telegraph*, 28 Jan. 2013. Web. <<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/edwest/100200282/note-to-bulgarians-and-romanians-britain-is-rubbish/>>.

²⁷ Rajeev Syal. "Immigration: Romanian or Bulgarian? You Won't like It Here." *The Guardian*. *Guardian News and Media*, 27 Jan. 2013. Web. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/jan/27/uk-immigration-romania-bulgaria-ministers?CMP=tw_t_gu>.

²⁸ Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (n 12) 356

²⁹ HM Treasury. "Financial Support to the Banking Industry." *The National Archives*. HM Treasury. Web. 15 Apr. 2013. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/press_100_08.htm>.

Similarly, Althusser argues that the State performs the important function of acting as the front screen for the ruling class ideology by providing a platform so that the capitalists who own the means of production are not in the limelight and the grievances at economic exploitation are displaced via political channels. Put simply, the State allows a platform for ideological struggle between dominant and dominated classes. This will further be elaborated with the examples of uprisings such as the London riots and the Occupy Wall Street movement.

PUTTING THINGS INTO PERSPECTIVE: CASES OF THE LONDON RIOTS AND THE OCCUPY WALL STREET MOVEMENT:

Two notable events at a global level namely the London Riots and Occupy Wall Street are analysed from Althusser's theoretical standpoint. This section will not only show how ideology helps in explaining and interpreting the causes and aftermath of these uprisings but will also put the discussion carried so far, in a clearer perspective. Thus, capitalism corresponds as a structural causality where the causes cannot be seen separate from effects. In other words, interpellation explains how individuals imagine themselves as consumers of brands and thus constructing themselves by taking consumption/production decisions whose aggregate makes up the overall system. Other examples of how conformity would make things alright are the principles of liberalism such as equality before the law and the belief in the possibility of good life by working hard and maximizing profits, being masters of their own success or failure. Individuals relate to and thus subscribe and to these beliefs.

Some salient points of analysis are as follows:

- Ideology weaves both micro (regional) and macro (global) level explanation and choices in a structural explanation. At microlevel, rioting could be seen as a response to the 'unjust' killing by the Metropolitan police of a youth (belonging to a racial minority). However, at macrolevel, the motivations for rioting can be traced to wider factors such as the lower socio-economic background of the rioters' and hence ultimately to their economic deprivation. This is best explained by the Marxist concept of *overdetermination*, which refers to the idea that any social phenomenon or practice cannot be *causally* reduced to a single factor. Rather, any social practice is

always determined by a complex interaction of multiple causes- all of which are *necessary* for the existence of the practice- though they (the causes) may appear seemingly unrelated, or contradictory (to each other).

Therefore, seen in this manner, riots could be viewed as an expression of a general dissatisfaction by the working classes with the exploitative global capitalist system, while not discounting or undermining the more *immediate* cultural, racial and regional factors that triggered the riots.

- The case of the London Riots demonstrates *how the dominant ideology allows the dominated ideologies to be expressed*. For instance, though national media was covering the riots and expressing the legitimacy of exploited classes by acknowledging austerity cuts as responsible³⁰ it was still criminalizing the protestors.³¹
- This demonizing attitude conforms to Althusser's observation that dominated ideology failed to make a lasting impact because it is allowed only on occasion and means of expression by the dominant ideology which either incorporates, utilizes or absorbs the contradictions of dominated ideology, in its own position.³²
- *Ideology accurately explains the role played by the State*. By actual physical coercion such as the arrest of protestors and by criminalizing the protestors in official statements and on mainstream media, the State was deflecting the attention off the real contradictions of CMP such as rising urban gentrification. This supports Poulantzas' elaboration of Althusser's idea that the ruling class uses the structured form of State power for propagation and reproduction of domination.³³
- The role of internet media and broadcast television in discussing the stance by Conservatives and Socialists demonstrate ISAs as a '*site of class struggle*'.³⁴ The unrest caused by the economic depravity (which is the result of global capitalist relations) unfolded in the political arena and was directed at the State. This reflects how class

³⁰ National Centre for Social Research, *The August Riots in England* (NATCEN 2011) 11

³¹ The Guardian, Reading the Riots (London School of Economics & The Guardian 2011).

³² Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (n 7) 140

³³ Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (n 13) 337-338

³⁴ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (n 7) 154

struggle is mirrored in the political arena. In the case of Occupy Wall Street, the funding and backing of the movement itself by anti-consumerist camps show the contest of two economic classes, struggling in a displaced domain.³⁵

- *Ideology situates economic explanations on broader cultural and social landscape.* The alienation effect of estranged labour, described by Marx³⁶, can be clearly seen when the economically disadvantaged protestors were exhibiting a contradictory relation with regards to branded consumer goods. They were spontaneously destroying the goods as a protest to consumerist ideology³⁷ and indulging in commodity fetishism by stealing luxury good like trainers from JD.³⁸ This contradictory tendency is explained by the Freudian concept of 'lack' whereby 'the subjects lack the sense of being fully themselves'³⁹ which 'reigns in the conditions of existence of men themselves'.⁴⁰ Thus, consumption by looting showed how they were trying to complete the 'lack' and gain a sense of fulfilment. This way, as Althusser remarks, they were expressing a will, a hope or nostalgia.⁴¹ The fascination with stealing and looting shows how economic depravity is translated into the cultural and political sphere.⁴²

In other words, what explains the continuing hold of CPM is not the 'cunning and pure utility'⁴³ of exploiters but the active part of subjects in having subconsciously subscribed to the ruling class ideology. Thus, this shows why the revolutionary vigour of Occupy Wall Street or the London Riots is unexpected to bring any long-term change because they are trapped in the illusion of freedom given to them by the ruling ideology. In simple words, any short-term change of ownership, or policies, would not bring any emancipation since by such 'the state apparatuses remain unaffected'.⁴⁴

³⁵ Mark Bray, *Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street* (Zero Books, 2013)

³⁶ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, (M. Milligan tr, first published 1844, International 1964) 135-7

³⁷ (Maher, 2011)

³⁸ National Centre for Social Research, *The August Riots in England* (n 30)

³⁹ Ian Buchanan, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (OUP 2012) 279

⁴⁰ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (n 7) 154

⁴¹ Althusser, *Marxism and Humanism* (n 8) 234

⁴² Martin Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory* (Princeton University Press 1984) 112

⁴³ Althusser, *Marxism and Humanism* (n 8) 234

⁴⁴ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (n 7) 135

COMPLEXITY AND UNEVENNESS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: IDEOLOGY AS THE COHESIVE ELEMENT

Another relevance of ideology is in its advancement and refinement of the understanding of certain crucial assumptions of classical economics. For instance, Adam Smith's notion of 'Invisible Hand' suggests that the optimal state of efficiency can be achieved by uncoordinated aggregation of individual choices.⁴⁵ On the contrary, ideology justifies the study of various 'isms' which critique the traditional *laissez-faire* approach of market system by highlighting the growing interdependence of global actors in the real world and explains why the State may intervene to prevent banking crisis' and how it would be serving the interests of a corporate world (despite its supposed neutral stance). Hence, ideology vitiates the category of 'rationality' to understand the apparently bizarre actions of individuals and agents' choices at a global level. Ideology explains that optimality may not only be economic but rather economic transactions are inseparable from total social consciousness.⁴⁶ Thus, ideology explains how 'class interests' may not be congruent or in conformity with class position.⁴⁷ For instance, ideology of nationalism may explain why Britons may be content with the financing of millions of pounds for the Queen's royal expenses. Hence, as Althusser notes such inconsistencies go unnoticed since ideology masks contradictions.⁴⁸

Apart from bringing forth such contradictions of CMP, ideology also serves to provide a wider social explanation of economic problems such as inequality in a more sophisticated manner. Eschewing, a simple causal explanatory model, informs us of a process of complex forces acting at the same time upon any site (be it individual or institution in CMP). The dynamic nature of this process is denoted by 'Matrix effect of a mode of production'.⁴⁹ In explaining the unevenness of development, Resnick and Wolff use Althusser's concept of Overdetermination. This concept implies that everything is in a state of change and everything is affected by other processes (which themselves are determined by other factors), therefore no social entity remains unchanged. However, the constellation of processes

⁴⁵ Kaushik Basu, *Beyond the Invisible Hand: Groundwork for a New Economics* (Princeton University Press 2011) 16

⁴⁶ Althusser, *Marxism and Humanism* (n 8) 233

⁴⁷ Stewart Clegg, *Organization Theory and Class Analysis: New Approaches and New Issues* (De Gruyter, 1990) 58

⁴⁸ Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (n 12) 317

⁴⁹ Étienne Balibar, "Reading Capital: The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism" in Étienne Balibar and Louis Althusser's *Reading Capital* (Librairie François Maspero 1968).

influencing every site, such as an individual is unique, explains that they must 'experience uneven development'.⁵⁰

Another example of ideology as informing wider social paradigm comes from Jameson's attempts, who traces the implications of CMP through a cultural lens by arguing that postmodernity can be viewed as the 'Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' referring to its defining traits of 'abstraction as a bewilderment' caused by economic relations of production.⁵¹

SECTION 2: CERTAIN LIMITATIONS TO ALTHUSSER'S THEORY

Having established the relevance of Althusser for the discourse of the global political economy, this section will examine and evaluate some of the critiques of Althusser's theory to appraise its usefulness. Althusser is thought to have provided a pessimistic outlook to social reality in declaring that ideology never ends,⁵² even after the revolution. Thus, it can rightfully be asked, what is, if at all, the worth of a project of emancipation? In this regard, Geuss asserts that there are two concepts of ideology present in Althusser's work, a positive one (referring to totality of consciousness) and a negative one (referring to aspect of misrecognition).⁵³ Though Althusser never made such a demarcation, he invoked ideology in its positive sense⁵⁴ meaning that ideology does not end since it is how individuals become conscious of their surroundings.⁵⁵ Even if we assume that Althusser referred to a positive concept, we can see that Althusser's psychoanalytical debt⁵⁶ retains the problem from a different angle. He is pessimistic since he makes a fundamental claim about the human nature to be in a state of misrecognition and hence a deception. Such essentialism validly devalues his theory as some kind of dogma.

Another strand of criticism concerns Althusser's trouble with Empiricism. His anti-Empiricist epistemology⁵⁷ has been criticized for overlooking the 'dialogue between social

⁵⁰ Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, "Althusser's Liberation of Marxian Theory" in Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (eds) *The Althusserian Legacy* (Verso 1993) 64

⁵¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Verso 1991) 37-39

⁵² Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (n 7) 152

⁵³ Jorge Larraín, *Marxism and Ideology* (Gregg Revivals 2007) 43

⁵⁴ Jorge Larraín, *The Concept of Ideology* (Hutchinson 1979) 155

⁵⁵ Eagleton, *Ideology* (n 19) 93-94

⁵⁶ Terry Lovell, "The Social Relations of Cultural Production: Absent Centre of a New Discourse" in Terry Lovell, *One-dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Politics of Culture* (Allison and Busby 1980) 233

⁵⁷ Gregory Elliot, "Althusser's Liberation of Marxian Theory" in Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (eds), *The Althusserian Legacy* (Verso 1993) 24

being and social consciousness'.⁵⁸ Put simply, Althusser is said to have denied subjects the 'authenticity' of their experiences. For instance, Thompson and Rancière accuse Althusser of ignoring subject's 'direct' experiences by talking about 'misrecognition', and such approach undermines the aspect of 'alienation' since alienation is the direct experience and not an 'imaginary/misrecognized' lived relationship.⁵⁹ In response, one may assert that Althusser does not ignore 'direct' experience, rather he relates to it in a different way. He argues that understanding and knowledge is not as much concerned with the object, as with seeing itself⁶⁰ and thus shows how reality will be represented ideologically. One may recall for instance the commodity fetish of certain protestors of the London Riots whose alienation sought expression in commodity fetishism and lash back at the system through ideologies of Anti-Consumerism. This issue remains troubling in his thesis and it is not to deny the split of modalities (real experience vs. imaginary)⁶¹ which Althusser has made attempts to bridge by discussing the possibility of the existence of scientific (true) knowledge.

However, Resch notes that Althusser has confused the concepts of ideology, science and philosophy in his theory,⁶² which gives rise to the question of possibility of objective knowledge.⁶³ Althusser, however, does not eliminate the possibility of objective knowledge but assigns it to the domain of science by establishing a clear distinction between science and ideology. According to his theory, only science is capable of producing objective knowledge of the real, historical material conditions of societies - whereas ideology can never do so.⁶⁴ Science, exclusively, is able to identify what is ideological. Anything within ideology, by definition, cannot recognize itself as ideological. Thus, obviousness of obviousness cannot be acknowledged within ideology.⁶⁵ Such lack of conceptual clarity in Althusser's thesis prevents any precise conclusions and general application.

On a different note, Larrain raises criticism at Althusser's structural methodology. He argues that Althusser's ideology has manifested the 'irreconcilable opposition between structuralism and historicism, and appears to leave no room for other options'.⁶⁶ Similarly, Elliott has

⁵⁸ Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory, or An Orrery of Errors* (New York University Press 1978)

⁵⁹ Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (n 12) 226-227

⁶⁰ Althusser, *From Capital to Marx's Philosophy* (n 5) 21

⁶¹ Etienne Balibar, "The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser" in Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (eds), *The Althusserian Legacy* (Verso 1993) 13

⁶² Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (n 12) 159

⁶³ *Ibid*, 162

⁶⁴ Luke Ferretter, *Louis Althusser* (Routledge 2006) 76

⁶⁵ Eagleton, *Ideology* (n 19) 107-109

⁶⁶ Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology* (n 51) 1

pointed out the prioritizing of ‘structural necessity over human agency’ and ‘anti-historicism’ in Althusser’s work.⁶⁷ However, while Althusser has a clearly structural approach, he does not seem to ignore or overlook history. For example, when he illustrates that on account of the history of capitalism and enlightenment, the role of Church was split and replaced by education ISA.⁶⁸ Moreover, as we have already seen, his theory of ideology takes both local (particular historical) and global (broader, structural) circumstances into account.⁶⁹

Besides, some critics have accused Althusser also of being too reductionist. Thompson accuses Althusser of reducing all phenomena to an economic base.⁷⁰ On the other hand, Resch argues that Althusser’s non-essential explanation means that base-superstructures influence each other in a circular fashion and thus it cannot be determined which relation is dominant. These points of critique can be countered by Althusser’s idea of ‘over-determination’ which goes beyond the simplistic division of base and superstructure and places everything in a complex dialectical relation to the other so that nothing can be reduced to one level.⁷¹ Such a notion of semi-autonomous levels of social phenomenon, also answers the criticism raised by Resch that the concept of over-determination does not distinguish between the hierarchical stratification of political, economic and ideological instances.⁷² Moreover, as Resnick and Wolff contend, although the ideological domination may ultimately be linked to the economic base of the society, it does not imply that Althusser’s theory is reductionist; it is because Althusser notes that the base and superstructure do not exist in a simple cause-effect relationship, rather the base and superstructure mutually condition each other.⁷³

In a similar strand, Resch points out that Althusser’s theory portrays ideology as a category identified with the dominant ideology and thus cannot be extended to explain interpellation of all subjects.⁷⁴ However, we can see, Althusser’s theory clearly explicates that while dominant ideology is that of the ruling class; it is not only dominant classes that create ideology, dominated classes also create their own ideologies.⁷⁵ Furthermore, he maintains

⁶⁷ Gregory Elliot, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (Verso 1987) 302

⁶⁸ Eagleton, *Ideology* (n 19) 96

⁶⁹ Moreover, it would be interesting to note how Althusser gives his own view of history as opposed to classical view and role of history

⁷⁰ Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory, or An Orrery of Errors* (n 56) 225

⁷¹ Fredric Jameson, “On Interpretation: Literature as a socially symbolic act” in Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. London (Routledge 2002) 22-23

⁷² Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (n 12) 312

⁷³ Resnick and Wolff, *Althusser’s Liberation of Marxian Theory* (n 48) 68

⁷⁴ Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (n 12) 215

⁷⁵ Ferretter, *Louis Althusser* (n 62) 80

that both dominated and dominant classes are 'living' their own ideologies since all subjects regardless of their class are 'born' into ideology.⁷⁶

Relatedly, Balibar objects that 'ideology' is not useful in explaining the use of *same* practices (simultaneously) 'to organize exploitation and to be exploited'.⁷⁷ The example of the role of education ISA discussed in the earlier part of this article shows how the same practices can be used to reproduce both the exploiters and the exploited. Therefore, it can be argued that opposing practices are indeed produced within the same system of CMP. Likewise, Ricoeur questions the ability of Althusser's theory to 'explain different ideologies that emerge from similar economic conditions'.⁷⁸ This point, however, has been addressed in the previous section of the essay by Resnick and Wolff's application of the theory to explain the unevenness of social development. Furthermore, Althusser was also accused of essentializing the "irrationality of human consciousness".⁷⁹ Thus, all these points of criticism are, arguably, to some extent, unforthcoming in their capacity to engage with the Althusserian Marxist dialectics and somehow seem to be reductionist in their approach.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

Setting a definitive criterion for the usefulness of a theory is a daunting yet inconclusive task: partly, because of the inexhaustibility of any social theory⁸⁰ and partly because the truth of a theory does not correspond directly with its usefulness.⁸¹ Having identified certain strands of criticism on Althusser's theory of ideology we may posit that despite varying theoretical inconsistencies, 'ideology' allows mapping of politico-economic relations onto a wider social plane. It broadens our understanding of the complex intricate patterns of real-world scenario of reproductions and explains the deceptively obvious global persistence of CMP. The structural nature of ideology renders at least two transitive implications for the discipline of a political economy: (a) revisiting the need for studying the trans-individual mechanism of how people make sense of themselves and global order, and; (b) a reconsideration of our perception of obviousness (of reality, science and broadly of Weltanschauung).

⁷⁶ Ibid, 87

⁷⁷ Balibar, *The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser* (n 59)

⁷⁸ David Kaplan, *Ricoeur's Critical Theory* (State University of New York 2003) 199

⁷⁹ Eagleton, *Ideology* (n 19) 17

⁸⁰ Resnick and Wolff, *Althusser's Liberation of Marxian Theory* (n 48) 65

⁸¹ Ironically, this point stems from Ideology: what is untrue may be useful in making allusion to reality.

Arguably, Althusser's theorisation of what is apparent⁸² and its ramifications have not always been welcome, nonetheless, its importance can be gauged from the range of debate it has generated. True at least to his own methodology, his symptomatic approach accentuates its own failings, what he missed out has been picked on by others from what he makes obvious, hence in this way he continues to be useful in advancing the understanding of the global political economy, particularly the understanding of the anti-capitalist social movements. However, to what extent is his concept fruitful remains difficult to ascertain also because ideology can't be separated from his broader project, the fuller implications of which can't be broached upon here, and without such any conclusive statement fears being rejected as truism. However, 'like a good scientific' work whose conditions he himself set, ideology brings forth 'in the very solution of problems, as many, if not more, problems than it resolves' ⁸³. Thus, despite his errors (or maybe precisely due to them), his work continues to exert considerable influence upon the contemporary discourses on the political economy.

⁸² Jan Mieszkowski, *Labors of Imagination: Aesthetics and Political Economy from Kant to Althusser* (Fordham University Press 2006) 172-173

⁸³ Althusser, *On Theoretical Work: Difficulties and Resources* (n 9) 59