ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ

SCOSAAR

Anexa nr.6

REZUMATUL TEZEI DE ABILITARE*

TITLU: CERCETAREA POST-POZITIVISTĂ A STATULUI ÎN SOCIOLOGIA POLITICĂ ȘI ÎN SOCIOLOGIA ISTORICĂ. METODOLOGIA RELAȚIONALĂ

Domeniul de abilitare: SOCIOLOGIE

Autor: DUMITRESCU LUCIAN

*în cazul în care teza va fi redactată într-o limbă străină, textul în limba română va fi adaptat

ABSTRACT OF THE HABILITATION THESIS

Both the state understood as a research problem and the historical sociology of the state have been hardly discernible in the field of sociology in Romania for the last three decades. The above may be accounted for by the salient a-theoretical character of Romanian sociology, the difficult relationships between sociologists and historians illustrated by the case of Henri H. Stahl, and also the low autonomy of the field of social sciences relative to the field of power in Romania. Arguably, many other rationales could be factored in to explain why the question of the state and approaches typical for historical sociology have been treated – at best – marginally in the field of Romanian sociology since 1989. Fact is that Romania, along with other low to medium capacity states in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), have failed to achieve the institutional performance of their Western counterparts. That is, to build an ideological and institutional infrastructure conducive to good governance before the advent of democracy. On the contrary, many – if not all – states in CEE have been dealing more or less successfully with the vicious institutional cycle called the middle-quality institutional trap that consists of the long-term interplay between a low capacity state and an imperfect democracy. With its focus on long-term institutional trends, historical sociology has already demonstrated that low capacity states's institutional underdevelopment had predated the moment they were pulled into the orbit of capitalism and Western empires at the end of the 18th century. Specifically, these states' institutional underdevelopment, that refers to preeminent ways of strategic thinking and acting, had derived from their long-term interaction with non-European empires, with a focus on the Ottoman Empire in the case of Romanian Principalities. Fact is that irrespective of what caused the aforementioned institutional underdevelopment, this led directly to different types of long-term dependencies that impact the present-day institutional and economic development in Romania. By tracing long-term institutional trends, such as the interplay among local and international elites, or local and regional developmental views, historical sociology of the state reveals the so-called structures of the possible. It is well established that, in contrast to natural sciences, social sciences are not interested in making predictions due to individuals' agency and the contingent character of social phenomena. This notwithstanding, by exploring institutional master trends, historical sociology reveals the structures of the possible and, thus, can lend empirical support for scholarly statements according to which certain political practices or public policies could be more likely than others.

Yet exploring the state with the methods of historical sociology may run into ontological and methodological troubles. Ontologically, the main research question that arises when a

sociologist sets out to examine the state is what does she/he bring under scrutiny. In a narrow sense, exploring the state is tantamount to bringing to the fore at once ways of thinking and acting. Arguably, such practices need to be historicized, that is, they need to be explored in the long run that spans at least a generation. Otherwise, the question of change and continuity in strategic practices – ways of thinking and acting – of low capacity states is difficult to address. With what research method? Process tracing, case study, and historical comparative research with an emphasis on the deviant case usually stand for the most appealing research methods for historical sociologists. And yet, despite the fact the issue of method is of utmost importance, ontological and methodological questions tend to be more important when exploring the state, especially the low to medium capacity states in CEE. In a larger sense, exploring the state is tantamount to look into historical processes of capital accumulation. Especially Charles Tilly has zoomed in on the long-term development of state's fiscal capacity working from the premise that a developed fiscal capacity is the outcome of total wars that the dominant elite started at a certain point in time. Tilly's bellicist theory argues that it is unlikely for states that were not involved in total wars to develop modern fiscal capacities. Yet, the significant aspect that Tilly leaves out, is that most of contemporary states with developed fiscal capacities used to be imperial centres. Drawing on Tilly, but at the same time advancing a more sophisticated conceptualization of the state. Michael Mann argues that state entails a long-term accumulation of military, political, economic and ideological power. Notably, and in contrast to Tilly, the state is not akin to an entity or an institutional bloc. In other words, ontologically, Mann gets over a substantialist conceptualization of the state and employs a relational approach that turns the state into a social relation that simultaneously brings into the analysis local and regional environments while focusing on different power networks. At the same time, unlike Tilly who focuses exclusively on institutional aspects, Mann argues that explorations into historical processes that a given state consists of need to look simultaneously at material and cultural factors.

The cultural factors lie at the heart of Bourdieu's political sociology who operates an epistemological break with prior researches on the state. To Bourdieu, the state has not only fiscal and violence monopoly on a given territory but also a monopoly on symbolic violence, that is, the capacity to impose dominant representations and thus to control the dominant truth in a society through particular narratives. At the same time, Bourdieu resolutely rules out the possibility of exploring the state only with respect to a certain type of capital. In other words, instead of examining the state only as a historical process of fiscal accumulation, Bourdieu holds that fiscal, symbolic, cultural and bureaucratic processes of accumulation need to be scrutinized simultaneously. Arguably, the researcher needs to have different types of resources at his/her

disposal to trace simultaneously all these historical processes at once in the long run. Yet what matters to Bourdieu, is that material and cultural factors need to be taken into account simultaneously when exploring the state as a long-term accumulation process. Finally, Bourdieu brings into analysis the relational methodology in the field of state studies. The ontological starting point of this relational methodology is that the state should not be conceived of as billiard ball, but rather as a field of power within which a competition takes place among the holders of economic, political, cultural and symbolic capital for acquiring meta-capital. To Bourdieu, the state stands for meta-capital, that is, the ability to regulate through specific public policies all other types of capital with an emphasis on symbolic capital. That is why power blocs who control the state have the ability to turn particular truths into general ones through strategic narratives. Understood as a field of power, the state refers to power relation among capital holders that have been shaped by these relations in their competition for acquiring meta-capital. Arguably, explorations of the state could turn into more complicate exercises when the researcher seeks to understand the so-called black box of the dominant elite's habitus, that is, historical dispositions acquired in the long-run through both primary and secondary processes of socialization. In these cases, state sociology equates sociology of the elites, an approach that seeks to historicize different domination formulas that are specific to either high capacity states with an imperial history, or post-colonial, low to medium capacity states that usually have a comprador institutional profile.

The first part of this thesis represents a foray into my scholarly career, with a focus on the research and teaching activity that I have carried out at the Romanian Academy and the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest. My research interest for the state emerged mostly at the Institute of Political Science and International Relations "Ion I. C. Brătianu" (ISPRI) and the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, where I started teaching a class on Geopolitics in 2008 at the Security Studies Master Program. Due to geopolitics' low explanatory power I gave up on this strand of thought without rejecting classical realism. Undoubtedly, geography matters and certain geographical elements could directly impact a given state's security or foreign policy, like the Strait of Malacca or the Strait of Hormuz. Yet states' ways of thinking and acting are influenced not only by geography, as geopolitics argues, but by many other internal (the dominant type of economy, the dominant sub-strategic culture, state capacity, the dominant leadership style, a given polity's capacity to translate regional pressures in line with its particular interests) and external factors (the military and economic power relations at a regional level). Due to the aforementioned factors, I have substituted comparative grand strategy for geopolitics which puts forth a theory of the state that pays heed to dominant ways of strategic thinking and acting in the field of security policies. In other words, by exploring a given state's strategic subcultures and also its security and

geoeconomic policies, one may understand how that particular state thinks and acts without falling into the essentialization trap.

Political sociology tends to reify states. In other words, political sociology tends to treat states like entities or black boxes. Due to its propensity to trace institutional trends in the long run, not only gets historical sociology over researches on the state that lack historical depth but it is also endowed with the ability to employ relational methodology and thus can historicize power relations among different interest groups – internal and external – that hold different types of capital in the field of power. Undoubtedly, political sociology could also employ relational methodology, in which case states are not approached like entities but rather like security discourses that disseminate specific symbols. Relational-informed political sociology could also examine states as a competition for meta-capital among different interest groups that are interested in imposing their own identity view as a guiding principle for different policies. Eventually, this view turns into the so-called "national interest".

Beside tracing my career in the field of sociology and international relations, the first part of the thesis also presents the way I have gradually shifted from using a substantialist methodology of research in examining the state to a relational methodology. While the former zooms in on tangible state capacities (infrastructural, fiscal, bureaucratic capacities), the latter pays heed to the interplay among objective positions in the field of power. This latter aspect has led me to the sociology of intellectuals, as a different way of exploring the state understood as a field of power. There is no secret that sociology and, broadly speaking, social sciences contributed directly to state development. That is, state's capacity to read the social world or to make the social world more transparent for the centralized gaze of the state. Social sciences offered the data that agents of the state needed in order to penetrate society in a modern vein. Arguably, intellectuals should not be left out by the researcher who is interested in exploring the relationship between sociology and the state in the long run. To me, especially in the case of Romania, sociology of intellectuals stands for a different – and potentially fruitful – way of approaching the state. The rationale for the above is pretty simple. In a low capacity state and in a society that is still dominated by status groups that have been aloof from supporting a more modernized version of the state, the intellectual field tends to have a lower degree of autonomy relative to the state understood as a field of power. That is why the intellectual field in a low capacity state and a prevalent status society tends to be structured especially by personal relations and to a lower extent by ideological values, let alone methodological and conceptual criteria. Consequently, by employing a relational methodology to explore Romania's different intellectual fields, one may grasp not only the power relations among

different intellectuals that hold objective position in this specific field of power but also new ways of understanding present-day Romania's low capacity state.

The second part of this thesis advances new avenues for research with the help of historical sociology and political sociology. Regarding the latter aspect, I am particularly interested in understanding the potential impact of historical trajectories of state-building on the populist movements in CEE. My hypothesis is that, due to the fact that state formation was not immediately followed by state building as in the case of Western states, CEE low to medium capacity states are more vulnerable to populist discourses and practices, and also to external shocks due to their lower levels of vertical and horizontal trust that translate into a lower ability to rapidly mobilize resources in times of crisis. In short, my hypothesis is that political sociology could explain why the resilience of CEE states tend to be lower than the one specific to their Western counterparts due to historical trends of state-building. Also, I am interested in exploring with the relational methodology and the comparative method the CEE low capacity states. This approach entails conceptual innovation, considering that Pierre Bourdieu paid no heed to the question of low capacity, comprador states.