Non/Knowledge of Categorized Identity

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> On the one hand, *representation* serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women.[1]

With the increased popularity of post-structural thought in the academy, areas of thought traditionally defined *as* identity politics have begun to question the utility of positing identity as a place from which to begin political struggle. This has been clearly demonstrated in feminist theory. In the first chapter of her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler questions the idea of "'Women' as the Subject of Feminism."[2] She outlines the contours of the debate as it has been played out by feminists interested in holding onto the category of women and those who maintain that to do so is to continually reinvent women as an object of misrepresentation. While the first group argues that 'women' is a necessary site from which to begin feminist political organizing and theorizing, the second sees this starting point as a false reproduction of women *as if* she were a 'true ontology' capable of accurate representation.[3] This has lead to a large body of work seeking to deconstruct identity categories through what is commonly referred to as a post or non-identity politics position. Broadly speaking, I am interested in working through the tensions between these two lines of debate. On the one hand, I remain deeply concerned with the political problems that arise when subjects are named into discrete identity categories through recognition of social difference that has no essential meaning outside the context within which it exists. On the other hand, I understand that the refusal to name social difference runs the risk of reproducing inequities. It does so by neglecting to engage with the manner in which individuals experience discrimination on the basis of identity. I will focus on these questions through an epistemological examination of the (re)production of racial categories.[4] How is it that 'race' becomes something that we have knowledge of? What are the political consequences of this knowledge and how is this knowledge reproduced? How does our knowledge of 'race' (and other identity categories) proliferate as Truth when such categories have no essential meaning or existence of their own? What are the social imperatives that encourage individuals to either recognize or avoid knowledge of these social differences? By examining Judith Butler's work on Althusser's notion of the interpellative hail and Patricia Williams' epistemological theorizing of her own experience in having her identity as a Black woman effaced, I hope to offer some preliminary insights to these questions. I will use Michel Foucault's work in "Power, Right, Truth" to theorize between Butler's deconstruction of identity and Williams' desire to hold onto identity. By doing so I hope to demonstrate that these two positions only appear to be contradictory.

In her piece "Gender is Burning," Butler borrows Althusser's idea of the interpellative hail that inaugurates individuals into a "certain order of social existence."[5] The per/formative call produces us as social agents through discursive formations that exist prior to our social being. These pre-existing narratives involuntarily produce (or interpellate) certain differences as salient signifiers for the formation of identity. "[T]o persist in one's being," Butler explains, "means to be given over from the start to social terms that are never fully one's own."[6] She cites Althusser's example of a police officer's recognition and hail of an individual walking down the street. The hail (of the individual as someone being reprehended by the law) is concretized through the individual's ability to recognize the hail as addressing them on a set of particular terms. In this way, the performative constitution of the subject occurs through previous knowledges of potential identity categories. It is this recognition of salient inscriptions on flesh – the markings of gender, race, class and

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[1] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.

[2] Ibid.

[3] The idea of an accurate representation of a true ontology of women has been perpetuated by feminist discourse (i.e. radical feminists) and patriarchal discourse alike (i.e. men who propose to know the truth of female 'nature'). This problem becomes most disconcerting when examining the way all attempts at accurate representation are simultaneously acts of exclusion. For example, by refusing to include 'race' in feminist analyses, many white feminists in/advertently reproduced the category of women as 'white only.'

[4] It should be noted that the consequences of knowing racial categories are different than those of knowing categorized gender. This is mainly the result of differing imperatives within liberal discourse to recognize and know these two sites of social difference. While there is a strong imperative to know the gender of an individual upon meeting, this imperative does not exist for 'race' wherein we are suppose to remain unconscious of this signifier. I will talk about 'race' in liberal discourse again in the final section of this paper.

[5] Judith Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion," in Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 448-449.

[6] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 28.

other classifications – that enable the individual to exist in a socially intelligible manner. This demonstrates then, that the inauguration of the subject is always an epistemic process – a practice in recognition wherein there exists no neutral or non-codified space for existence but where existence *itself* is produced through codifications.[7]

Because the interpellative hail is always an ordering of the subject into discrete identity categories, it might also be thought of as a process of subjugation.[8] Subjects become objects of thought through discourses that produce and limit the possible identity positions which they might embody. As Butler argues in *The Psychic Life of Power*, this subjugation is not enacted through an external power that only affects the subject in their exteriority. Rather, the subject is formed through a "restriction in production."[9] The inauguration of the subject along certain discursive lines precludes the very possibility of being inaugurated along others.[10] Infinite differences are left unmarked as the subject becomes named along those terms made available by dominant discourses. While counter-discursive namings are always possible, the manner in which subjects perform their identity always holds some relation to hegemonic discourses. This tends to occur whether or not the subject understands their naming to be consistent with their sense of self since dominant interpretations of the subject not only structure how others come to know our social being but also how we come to know ourselves.

Because the production of identity is an epistemic process, it is important to investigate Enlightenment epistemologies used in the proliferation of this knowledge. These epistemologies see the

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[7] This becomes obvious when we think of the manner in which we select sexual partners. It is rare to find a person attractive only to later notice their gender. Rather, our attraction (or even our acknowledgement of another's presence) is instantaneous with our recognition of their gender, race, ability, age, and other salient markers of social difference.

[8] As Butler explains, this gestures toward the double sidedness of subjecthood – it is not only a coming into social existence as a subject but also an inauguration into subjugation.

[9] Ibid, p. 85. This restriction is ongoing – a constant (re)production that forms the subject in ways that can be consistent with or in contradiction with previous productions.

[10] For example, the inauguration of the subject as either female or Black is to preclude the possibility of their inauguration as male or as white. The workings of discursive couplings often further limit possible identity positions a subject may hold. For instance, the coupling of mind to male and body to female, while never a totalizing process, does have a bearing on the way a woman's intellect might be read by others.

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relationship between the world and knowledge as uni-linear wherein the world is purely constitutive of our knowledge of it. In her piece "The End of Innocence," Jane Flax argues that this understanding is enabled through a methodological/ epistemological mode of knowing the world based in the desire to dominate it through stable, unified representation.[11] She calls it the "metaphysics of presence" explaining that this positivist epistemology maintains that knowledge of the world can be produced without human intervention – that the world simply awaits 'dis-covery' by disinterested observers.[12] Because social categorization, in this formulation, is a product of the world prior to our knowledge of it (rather than an active product of particular modes of knowing), the production of categorized identity can appear as non-coercive.[13] Categorized identity becomes reified – *as if* it were an expression of an immutable essence.[14]

Questions of knowledge and discourse are deeply political relevant as discourse is always inter-constituted with materiality. In "Subjects in History" Stuart Hall writes, "that questions of culture are not superstructural to the problems of economic and political change; they are constitutive of them."[15] In other words, knowing is not an immaterial process that exists within the realm of the ideal and thus avoids the problems of 'lived reality.' It is rather a crucial element *of* lived reality. He argues that while 'race' has no essential existence it has been discursively *"made* to be true."[16] The physical differences of say, skin colour, hair texture, or facial features (as real material phenomena) do not bear inherent meaning themselves but are given meaning through racial discourses that "produce, mark, and fix the infinite differences and diversities of human beings through... rigid binary coding[s]."[17] These knowledges shut down infinite possibilities for existence into a set of finite categories predetermined by available discourse. In so doing, they shape the lived realities within which subjects are immersed. Hall argues, "once... symbolic

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[11] Jane Flax, "The End of Innocence," in Judith Butler and Joan Scott (eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 451.

[12] Ibid, p. 448.

[13] Ibid, p. 448.

[14] The term "reification" was first popularized by Georg Lukács in his study *History and Class Consciousness*. I am taking it out of its Marxist context to describe the process wherein our knowledge of essentialized identity, produced through dominant discourse, is concretized and made to appear *as if* it were 'true.'

[15] Stuart Hall, "Subjects in History: Making Diasporic Identities," in Wahneema Lubiano (ed.), *The House that Race Built*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), p. 289.

[16] Ibid, p. 290.

[17] Ibid, p. 290.

difference exists [i.e. symbolic differences of race] ... [this becomes] the line around which power coheres."[18] These symbolic differences influence not only the meaning that an individual's existence is given but also how social and economic goods are distributed in society. The codification of bodies through discourse is a determining factor in what types of material activity a body will participate in and how this material practice will be read. Even when bodies participate in similar practices, they can be interpreted differently depending on which body is engaged in the activity. For example, our understandings of sexual reproduction differ depending on whether it is a working class, Black woman having a child or if the woman in question is white and middle class.[19] In this way, material practice is a location for the production of categorized identity because of its ability to reproduce dominant discourses. Or conversely, categorized existence gains its salience not only because it is a mode of stratification operative through epistemology but also because knowing is itself a material means of stratification.

Because discourse is inter-constituted with materiality, there exists, as Butler has argued, a strong imperative to speak of categorized identity *as if* it were true. Foucault writes, "We are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we *must* speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth."[20] This incitement to speak of categorized identity in a reified manner becomes an effective means through which to justify material practices based in inequality. In this way, power and knowledge become inextricable and not two opposing forces that seek to circumvent the other.[21] Discourses, as representational systems, work with power to consolidate those political relations that enable the social commensurability of a particular mode of representation as 'real.' As Foucault writes, "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the

production of truth."[22] This is seen not only in discourses that re-inscribe historically marginalized bodies as subordinate but also in some modernist anti-racist and feminist discourse that continues to seek the truth of the Black or female body. Because these new, oppositional truths continue to construct categorized identity as immutable, stable and non-negotiable, they can easily be co-opted and read back into dominant discourse as they are frequently little more then a discursive reversal. In this way, they too reify subjects in ways that might bear potential negative material consequence.

So, if the creation of oppositional knowledges is not enough to alter the negative consequences of material and epistemic categorization, then what is? How might subjects who have been produced as marginal through the workings of power/knowledge/Truth find a means of resisting a harmful metaphysics of presence that produces knowledge of the subject on reified terms? It would appear if we follow the logic of Butler and Foucault, that deconstructing categorized identity is the only option. This cannot, however, involve a refusal to recognize social difference.

Patricia Williams deals with this dilemma in her piece "The Emperor's New Clothes." She tells of her son who was diagnosed colour-blind by three different teachers for refusing to identify colour. He had no vision impairment, but was rather mirroring the teachings he had learnt in his nursery school that "colo[u]r makes no difference."[23] Williams continues to explain that the pervasiveness of this discourse – that 'race' doesn't matter – is an affirmation that, indeed it is still an important mode of organizing social knowledge.[24] Normative whiteness, defined as "the absence of colo[u]r," helps produce in opposition to itself the mark of 'race' (read: Black/Brown/Other) within liberal discourse as an obscenity/ an unmentionable/ something to not be known.[25] But the liberal impetus to leave 'race,' as a mark of difference, unknown does not make racial identity, or its lived effects, disappear. In fact, 'race' frequently remains outside the realm of that which is formally known precisely because to know 'race' risks revealing how its existence is tightly intertwined with political and economic inequality. The conditions that enable 'race' to exist encourage it to remain silent so that both racial categories and the material conditions under which they exist

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[18] Ibid, p. 298.

[19] Whereas the first woman is looked upon unfavourably, the second women will most likely receive much social acceptance.

[20] Butler, 1997, p. 543.

[21] Many Marxists understand ideology as existing in opposition to knowledge. While knowledge is equated with both truth and liberation, ideology is seen as a false set of ideas used to conceal unjust material practices in the interests of the ruling class. Althusser, for example, reads ideology as "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." [From "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes in Towards an Investigation)," in Slavoj Zizek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), p. 123.]

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[22] Butler, 1997, p. 543.

[23] Patricia Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race.* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997), p. 3.

[24] Ibid, p. 4.

[25] Ibid, p. 6-8.

can be (re)produced. Rather than altering lived material relations, silence becomes a strategy for the further reification of categorized identity. The obscenity of 'race' remains closeted while normative whiteness, in the attempt to deny racial difference, instead re-inscribes 'race' as Other to itself.[26]

But how does this dual possibility of reification (both through the knowledge and non-knowledge of social difference) come to exist? Williams' piece "The Death of the Profane" offers some peripheral understanding. She theorizes her experience of being barred from a Benetton clothing store by a white store clerk who deems her Blackness a possible threat. She recounts how the clerk chose not to let her into his reality by keeping the doors to the small boutique locked – by keeping the private space of his employment familiar, white and devoid of certain unwanted signifiers of social difference.[27] However, in order to bar Williams from the store, the clerk first had to identify her body as different from his own – as Black in contrast to his own whiteness. This example indicates that in climates of racism, refusals to know 'race' occur only when there is first a silent, but pervasive, mindfulness of one's own knowledge of it.[28] 'Race' becomes a "phantom-word" that people un/consciously pay heed to but simultaneously avoid through social practices that enable individuals to conveniently deny the existence of that which they deem different.[29]

It may at first appear that Williams and Butler present us with two irreconcilable positions on the existence of 'race.' While on the one hand, Butler has shown that individuals are encouraged to talk of reified identities as if they were true, on the other, Williams has

demonstrated that there exists a social imperative that encourages refusals to know social difference. How do these two contradictory imperatives exist in Western society? Is categorized identity to be produced as a truth effect only to remain silent of its own existence through refusals to know it? Is it necessary for the will-to-tell to coexist with the will-to-silence in order for categorized identity to continue its work in stratifying individuals while hiding its own operations in doing so? By returning to Foucault's work in "Power, Right, Truth," I hope to lend legitimacy to the arguments of Butler and Williams, while demonstrating that these two seemingly contradictory positions are in fact working together.

It is important that I first provide a brief definition of what 'right' is according to Foucault as up until now I have concentrated only on the power/knowledge elements in this triangle. While the rules of right are rooted in the totalizing sovereign power of Medieval Europe, Modernity still retains certain elements of right. However, it does so only to "impose limits upon... sovereign power."[30] Foucault argues that while modernist discourse claims these limitations guarantee certain individual liberties, they are more accurately produced through/by and producing of power.[31] In this way, they are themselves instruments of domination. "[T]he essential function of the discourse and techniques of right," he argues, "has been to efface the domination intrinsic to power."[32] This is because right has been mobilized in favor of another form of power – that which is disciplinary.

Unlike right, which is understood as organized and disseminated from above by way of levies and obligations, disciplinary power is polymorphous. As Foucault explains, it "engender[s]... apparatuses of knowledge (savior) and a multiplicity of new domains of understanding."[33] These apparatuses of knowledge are operative through and producing of discourses that encourage the production/knowledge of categorized identity. In this way, disciplinary power is interested in the surveillance of bodies, in their categorization and (re)production. As Wendy Brown argues in "Injury, Identity, Politics," "[d]isciplinary power work[s] to conjure and regulate subjects through classificatory schemes, naming and normalizing

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[26] Ibid, p. 8.

[27] Patricia Williams, "The Death of the Profane," in *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 45.

[28] This can be explained as the result of a 'philosophical imaginary' that refuses to include 'race' formally within the realm of the 'real.' Genevieve Lloyd borrows this concept from Michèle Le Dœuff to capture the idea that the production of philosophical thought always involves a cooperative effort between both the intellect *and* the imagination (Genevieve Lloyd, "No One's Land: Australia and the Philosophical Imagination," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 15:2 (Spring 2000), p. 26-39, p. 27. Many individuals, however, hold contradictory knowledges within these two realms of thought/fantasy. Someone might simultaneously deny their knowledge of 'race' while continuing to uphold and (re)produce fictions about it. Conversely, they might hold onto knowledge of something untrue (such as essential constructions of 'race') while simultaneously refusing to believe in it (as in the case of the conservative who disregards 'race' as a potential site of oppression).

[29] Williams, 1991, p. 49.

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[30] Michel Foucault, "Power, Right, Truth," in Robert Goodin and Philip Pettit (eds.), *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 544.

[31] Ibid, p. 544.

[32] Ibid, p. 544.

[33] Ibid, p. 549.

social behaviour *as social positions.*"[34] Whether linguistic or performative, it creates the "appearance of substance" in social identities – *as if* they had a pre-discursive existence.[35] Disciplinary power becomes the carrier of discourses that normalize and reify bodies into discrete identity categories.[36] In this way, identities become commonsensical, "neutral" knowledge, but knowledge that is in need of being *continually spoken into existence* nonetheless. This description of disciplinary power supports Butler's position regarding the inevitable violence of representation.

Brown's piece is also useful in investigating how the rules of right efface the domination intrinsic to disciplinary power. Right is "superimposed upon the mechanisms of disciplines in such a way as to conceal its actual procedures."[37] While Brown does not speak explicitly of right, she does talk of liberal humanism in an analogous manner. Liberal humanism is a discursive system used to confer rights on individuals while it simultaneously constitutes what the human subject is. These rights are supposedly inalienable and protect individual freedom in societies where the threat of transgression is persistent. But in lending all subjects equal recognition by the state – by representing everyone's freedom abstractly – liberal humanism ignores individual difference.[38] It becomes a totalizing, universal discourse that reduces infinite differences to totalities of 'same.' In fact it is necessary, as Brown argues, for universal discourse, as a mechanism of right, to deny that difference for the category of 'same' even exists.[39] It is this tendency that Williams identifies when she talks of her son's refusal to identify colour and her experience in the Benetton store. In this way, Brown's discussion of liberal humanism and Foucault's theory of right are consistent with the political concerns raised by Williams: universal discourse is able to produce subjects within the category human only by effacing disciplinary power – by *silencing difference through refusals to know*.

It is not only that right effaces disciplinary power. Disciplinary power also "invade[s] the area of right," as Foucault explains, "so that the procedures of normalization come to be ever more constantly engaged in the colonization of those of law."[40] It is this dynamic that enables us to hold onto Butler's criticisms regarding disciplinary productions of identity while understanding how they are connected to Williams' concerns over denials of social difference. The construction of the universal subject has been historically un/marked both white and male. Those who have been excluded from this universal/particular category are re-inscribed as 'different' in relation to it. In other words, as Brown explains, the hegemonic position of the false universal "We" (meaning the un/marked, middle-class, white male) produces as its excess many particularistic "Is" (or historically marginalized identity positions) that come to challenge its legitimacy.[41] But the political assertion of the "I," as a demand for equal inclusion, also inadvertently repositions itself as a marginalized location of difference within liberalism.[42] By pointing to its own universality, 'right' can easily render particular assertions redundant by externalizing all blame for exclusion onto those bodies forwarding the demand.[43] Thus, appeals to right (which are also appeals to universal liberal rights discourse) are done to thwart the oppressive tendencies of right. But in so doing, they strengthen the appearance of substance in categorized identity – they strengthen their appearance as 'real' – by allowing right to do its disciplinary work in reproducing difference through its own 'protective measures.' In this way, the rules of right and disciplinary power act as a heterogeneous team that carries the code of normalization.[44] Together they *simultaneously encourage right's refusal to know social difference and disciplinary power's desire to speak it* to ensure the reproduction of categorized identity as commonsensical knowledge.

As I have demonstrated, the paradoxical impetus to refuse knowledge of categorized identity (through right) and to produce it as a truth effect (through disciplinary power) is not necessarily contradictory. Rather, the silent but incessant speaking of categorized identity into social existence is enabled through the intersection of the rules of right with disciplinary power. In this way, Butler *and*

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[34] Wendy Brown, "Injury, Identity, Politics," in Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield (eds.), *Mapping Multiculturalism* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 154 (my emphasis).
[35] Butler, p. 402.
[36] Foucault, p. 549.
[37] Ibid, p. 549.
[38] Brown, p. 153-154.
[39] Ibid, p. 153-154.

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[40] Foucault, p. 550.
[41] Brown, p. 153.
[42] Ibid, p. 153-154. Brown's study is mainly concerned with how politicized identities (as produced through historical injury) come to desire their own subjugation in order to continue to exist within a politicized form.
[43] This is seen when historically marginalized subjects ask questions of their own economic disadvantage. Because liberal democracies are supposed to be places of equal opportunity, the blame for economic discrimination is easily placed back onto those making the demand. A false separation of the political and the economic under liberal discourse facilitates this process.
[44] Foucault, p. 550.

Williams are both correct – both the knowledge and non-knowledge of social difference enables a reification of categorized identity. If, in response to Williams, we recognize social difference, we also reproduce identities that have no essential existence. If we refuse to acknowledge these differences so as to avoid the problems of reification, we do the opposite. By (re)producing categorized identity in a state of historical amnesia, we inadvertently strengthen the powers of right to produce difference as its excess. How then can this epistemic and material violence be eradicated? Because the inauguration of the subject into social difference through discourse is inevitable, perhaps the only option is, as Butler suggests, to occupy the injurious hail in a manner that disrupts the very logic of the call itself. Such an occupation of the injurious hail must self-consciously mimic the manner in which disciplinary power has constituted the subject while bearing witness to right's historical exclusions. In this way, I would propose a movement towards a position of 'non/knowledge' – a position that takes seriously Foucault's coupling of knowledge/power and maintains that no knowledge claim can have a monopoly on truth. Within such a position, the subject remains a discursive construct, but a discursive construct that is not abstracted from the social conditions that originally called it into existence. It does so by recognizing the ways in which discourses that form the subject having their own particularized histories – histories that arise *through* material practice. In this way, a position of non-knowledge is epistemologically relative in recognizing that categorized identity has no essential existence of its own but is willing to make claims that refuse to erase the realities of living within a particularized body.

Economic Restructuring, Class Reconfiguration and the Canadian State

Sirvan Karimi

> In the long run, the state can serve class hegemony by itself granting certain material demands of the popular masses-demands which, at the moment of their imposition, may assume a quite radical significance (free and universal public education, social security, unemployment benefits, etc.). Once the relationship of forces has changed, these popular gains can be progressively stripped of their initial content and character in a covert and mediate fashion.[1]

The response to the economic turbulence of the 1970s has set in motion waves of economic restructuring that have profoundly recast social relations. Out of the accumulation crisis of the 1970s, capital emerged as a triumphant force which unleashed an offensive campaign on the global scale. Even though economic restructuring is a ubiquitous phenomenon which is not restricted to a specific geographic boundary, it is necessary to unravel its impacts on the underlying social relations within a given socio-economic setting. Within the Canadian context, it will be argued that the economic restructuring mastered by the state and solidified by continental treaties has phenomenally shifted the balance of power to integrated fractions of capital. An unprecedented shift of class power to the dominant classes has led to a decline in the relative autonomy of the Canadian state which has constrained the ability of the state to perform its legitimation function.[2] The Canadian state's response to mitigate the limitation on its capacity to carry out its legitimation function has culminated in patterns of restructuring within the hierarchic-bureaucratic edifice of the state, which have a potent potential to corrode the basis for the state to act as a factor of national cohesion.

State Autonomy

The concept of relative autonomy is a fundamental concept within Marxist structuralist approaches to the state. The strength of

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[1] Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1978), p. 185.
[2] Within the context of this paper, the legitimation function or ideological operation is strictly construed as an attempt by the state to implement ameliorative social measures designed to assuage working class pressures and therefore defuse the threat on the bourgeois hegemony.