

**EDITORIAL**

# Transformations of the State and Political Sociology

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Statehood and violence are inextricably linked (Weber 1919: 3-5). Whether it is the police beating demonstrators, border control authorities mistreating refugees, or the Russian military targeting Ukrainian civilians, in all cases public institutions perpetrate violence against individuals. Undoubtedly, these examples highlight the power imbalance between state and individual, a theme that has been extensively explored across the social sciences. Comparing different forms of state violence, wars are likely the social interactions with the most significant consequences for individuals. And the military state is arguably the most violent formation of the state. In Europe, it is fair to argue that this state had been in retreat since the end of the Cold War.

Ever since the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022, Europe has come closer to war. And although individuals from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and other war-torn countries have been continuously arriving in Europe, the consequences of war are being experienced more directly due to the physical proximity to Ukraine. Three days after the invasion of Ukraine, the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, emphasized that Europe is preparing for war with his *Zeitenwende* speech and the promise of a 100 billion special fund for the German Bundeswehr.<sup>3</sup> Probably, these preparations will significantly change the state.

In Germany, the allocation of more resources to the military is an indicator of the resurgence of the military state. As the German public is now debating the

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3 A translation of the speech can be found here: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/search/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>.

reintroduction of conscription, it is likely that we will observe a significant reorientation of the state-citizen relationship in the near future.<sup>4</sup> The projected reemergence of the military state corroborates what Eric Hobsbawm posited in a 1996 essay, namely that roles and functions of the state are contingent upon the challenges faced by a society. In the absence of the development of new means to solve old problems, it is probable that functions of the state can be re-actualized in any domain whenever necessary (Hobsbawm 1996). And this trajectory underscores that with changing sets of problems and a constantly transforming state (Dewey 1927: 107), society might be also affected and is likely to transform.

With the increased likeliness of war, economic enterprises manufacturing rifles, ammunition, tanks, missiles, and other tools necessary to the fighting of wars are gaining momentum and market shares.<sup>5</sup> This indicates that transformations in the economy are taking place that might be accompanied by changes in the public's perception of these companies and their product. Or at least that is what those companies might aspire to achieve. The German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall, according to its self-description an "integrated international technology group," has for instance announced prior to the 2024 UEFA Champions League Final that it will become the new champion partner and sponsor of Borussia Dortmund, a German football club that is deeply rooted in local working-class culture.<sup>6</sup>

This case of sponsorship seems to be an object well-suited for critical theories of society. In his *One-Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse (1991) inquired the power structures and ideologies of Western societies under the impression of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In order to explain the stability (or even rigidity) of social structures exposed to the constant threat of nuclear destruction, he referred to an interplay of two dynamics at work within these societies – technological rationality and the happy consciousness. While the structure of the economic system is determined by the application of technological means, which in turn leads to alienated labor conducted by the workers, the very same workers learn to adjust to these unpleasant circumstances by adapting fragments of a public ideology which is being conveyed via consumption and the cultural industry. Viewed from this perspective, raising a

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4 See for instance the position promoted by the German Ministry of Defense (<https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/minister-pistorius-stellt-neuen-wehrdienst-vor-5791920>) and the decision of the main opposition party, CDU, to seek such a reintroduction of conscription by way of policy (<https://www.cdu-parteitag.de/artikel/wehrpflicht-kommt-zurueck>).

5 For data on military expenditure see the Database of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI): <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

6 See <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/kommentar-rheinmetall-sponsert-bvb-geld-schlaegt-moral-100.html>.

100 billion special fund against the doctrine of public austerity can be embedded into a stream of happy consciousness by winning over Borussia Dortmund as a brand ambassador for the military industrial complex. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Gramsci 2007), we could also argue that the armament company tries to capitalize on the glamor and glory of a football club and hopes to affect changes in public opinion. Even without the radiance of a football club, changes in public opinion can already be observed as a consequence of the Ukraine War: Between 2021 and 2022, approval ratings for the increase in defense spending and the number of personnel in the German Bundeswehr rose by 20 percent (Graf 2022: 4).

Why, apart from the editors' inclinations to write an editorial about Borussia Dortmund, the military state, and changing public opinions that confirm a reemergence of authoritarian ideas, are these very specific developments relevant? While much has been written as of recently on the social-ecological transformation and its consequences or the rise of authoritarianism and populist politics, other topics have been sidelined, certain institutions have lost the attention of researchers, and some might argue that once classical subjects of social research have receded into insignificance. Against this backdrop, the seemingly incoherent observations mentioned above indicate that in social science research, and political sociology takes a leading position here, a stronger focus must again be placed on the state, as the main instrument for enforcing political decisions (Weber 1921/22: 1042-1062), and on the consequences of state actions for individuals and societies. At the same time, the observations make apparent that social research focused on current problems should also systematically examine the links between political, economic and military institutions, organizations and elites (Mills 1958), in order to provide a realistic assessment of the structures of power in contemporary society. Drawing on these observations, we argue that critical political sociology should also place a stronger focus on the impact of public opinions and political publics and make thus accessible knowledge about manufacturing and maintenance of legitimacy. Such approaches could include perspectives from pragmatism, cultural studies or critical theory, which all deal with the relationship between social and political order and ideas/ideology.

While none of the articles published in this issue focus on the military state, defense contractors or the power elite, they speak to the broader tasks that we consider relevant for political sociology. And they bring state, power structures, elites, public opinion, and the research of these subjects to the fore.

In her article *Crisis as Opportunity: The Bank of England and the Rise of Monetarism in 1970s*, Inga Rademacher shows that crises create certain opportunity structures that can affect the form and institutional structure of the state and provide elites with the

means necessary to achieve this. Abbey S. Willis, Deric Shannon, and Davita Silfen Glasberg also focus on a crisis moment, the pandemic. In their article *Theorizing State Power: The Multi-Sites of Power Approach, Race, and New York State's COVID-19 Treatment Guidelines*, they analyze how state actors aim to create legitimacy and social order under changing social conditions. Markus Kip and Silke van Dyk introduce the concept of double democratization based on the analysis of political processes centered around organizing public property in Barcelona. Their article *Double Democratization and the Politics of Property in Municipalist Barcelona* elaborates on the interaction of different dimensions of political decision-making, the intersection of different agents and interests in decision-making, and the difficulty to overcome habits and the power of vested interests. Taking a systematic approach to the state and political institutions, Christian Lahusen's article *Trust and Distrust in Political Institutions* complements scholarship in this field by exposing the relational dimension of institutional trust and distrust, which operate at the individual and collective levels and involve reciprocities and complementarities. In one way or another, though from different perspectives, all the contributions revolve around the motives and problems outlined above.

With this issue, we also introduce a number of new formats to the Journal of Political Sociology: the essay, the review article, and the obituary. In her essay *How to stay in academia without becoming cynical?*, Lisa Herzog discusses the state of academia and how researchers can change the academic system with projects that seek to address and potentially solve real problems. Michael Hoffman's review article *Branding in Crisis-Prone Capitalist Democracies* analyses the second structural transformation of the public sphere in light of the recent writings by Jürgen Habermas on the topic. Carmen Ludwig has formulated an obituary on the passing of our colleague Eddie Webster, who died at the age of 82 in March 2024. The final contribution to this issue is an interview, in which Hanna Kieschnick and Kseniia Cherniak discuss with Agnieszka Weinar, based on her book *European Citizenship and Identity Outside of the European Union* (Routledge 2020), the current state of the European Union with a particular emphasis on the role of the Central- and Eastern-European periphery.

## Literature

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