

Séminaire d'étude doctorale

sur

"Les entreprises transnationales américaines en voie d'expansion: le rôle de l'idéologie dans la mise en place des fonctions hiérarchiques"

organisé par le Professeur Francis Feeley

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Grande Salle des Colloques

15h30

Présentations de recherche

Par

Asma Jedidi

Doctorante dans le Département d'études anglophones - Université Paris Ouest
Nanterre La Défense

"The Role of US Corporations in Post-War Reconstruction Struggles"

et

Par

Mustafa Almrtdi

Doctorant dans le Département d'études anglophones - Université Paris Ouest Nanterre
La Défense

"Le rôle du pétrole Libyen dans les relations libyo-américaines depuis 1969"

Notes on the Research of Asma Jedidi and Mustafa Almrtdi

Marxist concepts of "Ideology"

Two strands of previous critical philosophical thought directly influence Marx's and Engels's concept of ideology. On the one hand the critique of religion developed by French materialism and by Feuerbach, and on the other, the critique of traditional epistemology and the revaluation of the subject's activity carried out by the German philosophy of consciousness and especially by Hegel. Yet whereas these critiques did not succeed in connecting religious or metaphysical distortions with specific social conditions, the critique

by Marx and Engels seeks to show the existence of a necessary link between “inverted” forms of consciousness and men’s material existence. It is this relationship that the concept of ideology expresses by referring to a distortion of thought which stems from, and conceals, social contradictions. Consequently, from its inception ideology has a clear-cut negative and critical connotation.

In contrast with a purely synchronic reading of Marx’s writings, it is necessary to consider the concept of ideology within the context of various stages of Marx’s intellectual development while denying any dramatic “epistemological break” between them. A basic nucleus of meaning finds new dimensions as Marx develops his position and tackles new issues. The first stage comprises Marx’s early writings and extends to 1844. The hallmark of this period is a philosophical debate in which the main points of reference are Hegel and Feuerbach. The term ideology still does not appear in Marx’s writings, but the material elements of the future concept are already present in his critique of religion and of the Hegelian conception of the state which are described as “inversions” concealing the real character of things. The Hegelian “inversion” consists in converting the subjective into the objective and vice-versa, so the starting from the assumption that the Idea necessarily manifests itself in the empirical world, the Prussian state appears as the self-realization of the Idea, as the “absolute universal” which determines civil society instead of being determined by it.

However, the Hegelian inversion is not the product of an illusory perception. It Hegel’s point of view is abstract it is because “the ‘abstraction’ is that of the political state”. In this sense it is maintained that the source of the ideological inversion is an inversion in reality itself. The same idea informs Marx’s critique of religion. Although he accepts Feuerbach’s basic tenet that man makes religion and that the idea that God makes man is an inversion, he goes further than Feuerbach in arguing that this inversion is more than a philosophical alienation or mere illusion; it expresses the contradictions and sufferings of the real world. The state and society produce religion, “which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world”. The religious inversion compensates in the mind for a deficient reality; it reconstitutes in the imagination a coherent solution which is beyond the real world in order to make up for the contradictions of the real world.

The second stage begins with the break with Feuerbach in 1845 and lasts until 1857. This is a period dominated by Marx’s and Engels’s construction of *Historical Materialism*, when the general premises of their approach to society and history are elaborated and Feuerbachian orientation of the first stage is definitely abandoned. In this context the concept of ideology is introduced for the first time. The idea of an inversion is retained, but now Marx extends it to cover the critique which the Young Hegelians had carried out of religion and of Hegel’s philosophy. Marx realizes that their critique is dependent on very Hegelian premises because they believe that the task is to liberate men from mistaken ideas. “They forget, however,” Marx says, “that to these phrases they themselves are only opposing other phrases, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world.” So the inversion Marx now calls ideology subsumes both old and young Hegelians and consists in starting from consciousness instead of material reality. Marx affirms on the contrary that the real problems of humanity are not mistaken ideas but real social contradictions and that the former are a consequence of the latter.

In effect, as long as men, because of their limited material mode of activity, are unable to solve these contradictions in practice, they tend to project them in ideological forms of

consciousnesses that is to say, in purely mental or discursive solutions which effectively conceal or misrepresent the existence and character of these contradictions. By concealing contradictions the ideological distortion contributes to their reproduction and therefore serves the interests of the ruling class. Hence ideology appears as a negative and restricted concept. It is negative because it involves a distortion, a misrepresentation of contradictions. It is restricted because it does not cover all kinds of errors and distortions. The relationship between ideological and non-ideological ideas cannot be interpreted as the general relationship between error and truth. Ideological distortions cannot be overcome by criticisms; they can disappear only when the contradictions which give rise to them are practically resolved.

The third stage starts with the writing of the *Grundrisse* in 1858 and is characterized by the concrete analysis of advanced capitalist social relations which culminates in *Capital*. The term ideology all but disappears from these texts, yet the pertinence of Marx's economic analyses for the concept is shown by the sustained use and re-working of the notion of inversion. Marx had already arrived at the conclusion that if some ideas distorted or "inverted" reality it was because reality itself was upside down. But his relationship appeared unmediated and direct. The specific analysis of capitalist social relations leads him to the further conclusion that the relationship between "inverted consciousness" and "inverted reality" is mediated by a level of appearances which are constitutive of reality itself. This sphere of "phenomenal forms" is constituted by the operation of the market and competition in capitalist societies and is an inverted manifestation of the sphere of production, the underlying level of "real relations". As Marx puts it:

Everything appears reversed in competition. The final pattern of economic relations as seen on the surface, in their real existence and consequently in the conceptions by which the bearers and agents of these relations seek to understand them, is very much different from, and indeed quite the reverse of, their inner but concealed essential pattern and the conception corresponding to it. (*Capital III*, ch.12)

Hence, ideology conceals the contradictory character of the hidden essential pattern by focusing upon the way in which the economic relations appear on the surface. This world of appearances constituted by the sphere of circulation does not only generate economic forms of ideology but is also "a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham" (*Capital I*, 1977, ch.6, p.280). To this extent the market is also the source of bourgeois political ideology: "equality and freedom are thus not only perfected in exchange based on exchange values but, also the exchange of exchange values is the productive real basis of all equality and freedom." (*Grundrisse*, "The Chapter on *Capital*"). But of course the bourgeois ideology of freedom and equality conceals what goes on beneath the surface process of exchange where "this apparent individual equality and liberty disappear and prove to be inequality and unfreedom" (*ibid.*).

From the very early critique of religion to the unmasking of mystified economic appearances of seemingly libertarian and equalitarian principles, there is a remarkable consistency in Marx's understanding of ideology. The idea of a double inversion, in consciousness and reality, is retained throughout, although in the end it is made more complex by distinguishing a double aspect of reality in the capitalist mode of production. Ideology, therefore, maintains throughout its critical and negative connotation, but is used only for those distortions which are connected with the concealment of a contradictory and inverted

reality. In this sense the often-quoted definition of ideology as false consciousness is not adequate in so far as it does not specify the kind of distortion which is criticized, thus opening the way for a confusion of ideology with all sorts of errors.

Soon after Marx's death the concept of ideology began to acquire new meanings. At the beginning it did not necessarily lose its critical connotation, but a tendency arose to give that aspect a secondary place. These new meanings took two main forms; namely, a conception of ideology as the totality of forms of social consciousness—which came to be expressed by the concept of “ideological superstructure”—and the conception of ideology as the political ideas connected with the interest of a class. Although these new meanings were not the result of a systematic re-working of the concept within Marxism, they finally displaced the original negative connotation. The causes of the process of displacement are complex. In the first place, elements of a neutral concept of ideology can be found in some formulations of Marx and Engels themselves. Despite a basic thrust in the direction of a negative concept, their writings are not exempt from ambiguities and unclear statements which occasionally seem to indicate a different direction. Gramsci, for instance, often quotes the passage in which Marx refers to legal, political, philosophical —“in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out” in order to sustain his interpretation of ideology as the all-encompassing super-structural sphere in which men acquire consciousness of their contradictory social relations. (Gramsci, 1971). Engels, in turn, mentions on a few occasions the “ideological superstructure”, the “ideological spheres” and the “ideological domain” with sufficient generality to make it possible for someone to believe that ideology covers the totality of forms of consciousness.

Another important contributory factor in the evolution towards a positive concept of ideology is the fact that the first two generations of Marxist thinkers after Marx did not have access to *The German Ideology* which remained unpublished until the mid 1920s. Hence Plekhanov, Labriola and most significantly, Lenin, Gramsci and Lukàcs in his early writings were not acquainted with Marx's and Engels's most forceful argumentation in favour of a negative concept of ideology. In the absence of this work, the two most influential texts for the discussion of the concept were Marx's 1859 “Preface” and Engels's *Anti-Duhring*, which were frequently quoted by the new generations of Marxists. Yet these two texts contain important ambiguities and certainly make no adequate distinction between the base-superstructure relationship and the ideological phenomenon. So progressively the idea of an ideological superstructure became established through the writings of authors like Kautsky, Hehring, and Plekhanov. But until 1898 not one of the authors of the first generation openly called Marxism itself an ideology.

The first thinker who posed the problem as to whether Marxism is an ideology was Bernstein. His answer is that although proletarian ideas are realistic in their direction, because they refer to material factors, which explain the evolution of societies, they are still thought reflexes and therefore ideological. In identifying ideology with ideas and ideals, Bernstein does no more than repeat what Mehring and Kautsky had already said. But he draws the obvious conclusion they had not drawn; namely, that Marxism must be an ideology. It is symptomatic of the absence of any clear idea about a negative concept of ideology that although Bernstein was already under attack for his “revision” of Marx, none of his Marxist critics took him up on this issue. This shows that the first generation of Marxists did not consider it of the essence of Marxism to defend a negative concept of ideology.

However, the most important cause of the evolution of the concept of ideology is positive and lies in the political struggles of the last decades of the nineteenth century, especially in the Eastern Europe. Marxism focuses its attention on the need to create a theory of political practice and therefore its development became more and more related to class struggles and party organizations. In this context the political ideas of the classes in conflict acquired a new importance and needed to be theoretically accounted for. Lenin provided the solution by extending the meaning of the concept of ideology. IN a situation of class confrontation, ideology appears connected with the interests of the ruling class and its critique connected with the interests of the dominated class; in other words, the critique of the ruling class ideology is carried out from a different class position, or –by extension—from a different ideological point of view. Hence, for Lenin, ideology becomes the political consciousness linked to the interests of various classes and, in particular, focuses on the opposition between bourgeois and socialist ideology. With Lenin, therefore, the process of change in the meaning of ideology reaches its culmination. Ideology is no longer a necessary distortion which conceals contradictions but becomes a neutral concept referring to the political consciousness of classes, including the proletarian class.

Lenin's conception became most influential and has played a crucial role in shaping new contributions to the subject ever since. This is apparent in Lukàcs, for instance, who from his early essays, uses the terms ideology of ideological to refer both to bourgeois and proletarian consciousness, without implying a necessary negative connotation. Marxism, for Lukàcs, is "the ideological expression of the proletariat" or "the ideology of the embattled proletariat", indeed its "most potent weapon" which has led to bourgeois "ideological capitulation". If bourgeois ideology is false it is not because it is ideology in general, but because the bourgeois class situation is structurally limited. However, bourgeois ideology dominates and contaminates the psychological consciousness of the proletariat. Lukàcs's explanation of this phenomenon goes beyond Lenin's account. Whereas for Lenin the ideological subordination of the proletariat was the result of the bourgeoisie possessing an older ideology and having more powerful means of disseminating ideas, for Lukàcs it is the very situation and practice of the proletariat within the reified appearances of the capitalist economy that induces the proletariat's ideological subordination. On the other hand, as Lukàcs himself recognizes later in life, he consistently overrates the role of ideology and ideological struggle in his early writing, to the point that they seem to become a substitute for real political practice and real class struggle.

Lenin's approach to ideology also influenced Gramsci, who explicitly rejected a negative conception. However, Gramsci's ideal of a negative conception does not correspond with that of Marx, but rather refers to "the arbitrary elucubrations of particular individuals". (Gramsci, 1971). Hence he propounds a distinction between "arbitrary ideologies" and "organic ideologies", and concentrates upon the latter. Ideology in this sense is "a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life". But ideology is more than a system of ideas, it has to do also with a capacity to inspire concrete attitudes and provide orientations for action. Ideology is socially pervasive in that men cannot act without rules of conduct, without orientations. Hence, ideology becomes "the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." It is in and by ideology, therefore, that a class can exercise Hegemony over other classes, that is, can secure the adhesion and consent of the broad masses. Whereas Lenin and Lukàcs treated ideology as the level of theory, Gramsci distinguishes four degrees or levels of ideology; namely, philosophy, religion, common sense, and folklore in a decreasing order of rigour and intellectual articulation.

Gramsci broke fresh ground by analysing in a highly suggestive manner the role of Intellectuals and ideological apparatuses (education, media, etc.) in the production of ideology. Whereas Lenin and Lukàcs had not been able to bridge the distance between socialist ideology and spontaneous consciousness, between the “ascribed” consciousness and the psychological consciousness of the class, Gramsci finds a double current of determinations between them. True, socialist ideology is developed by intellectuals, but there cannot be an absolute distinction between intellectuals and non-intellectuals and, moreover, the class itself creates its organic intellectuals. So there is not question of a science being introduced from without into the working-class; rather the task is to renovate and make critical an already existing intellectual activity. Marxist ideology does not substitute for a deficient consciousness but expresses a collective will, a historical orientation present in the class.

The existence of two major conceptions of ideology within the Marxist tradition is the source of many debates. Some authors of the present day believe that only one of these versions is the truly Marxist one, whereas others, unable to accept the difference between Marx and Lenin, try to reconcile both versions. This so with Althusser who has presented the most influential exposition of ideology in the last two decades. He distinguishes a theory of ideology in general, for which the function of ideology is to secure cohesion in society, from the theory of particular ideologies, for which the former general function is overdetermined by the new function of securing the domination of one class. These functions can be performed by ideology in so far as it is “a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 1971) and in so far as it interpellates individuals and constitutes them as subjects who accept their role within the system of production relations. On the other hand, Althusser also affirms the existence of dominated ideologies which express the protest of exploited classes. Althusser insists that science is the absolute opposite to ideology as an objective level of society which is relatively autonomous. The difficulty of this approach lies in the fact that it is impossible to reconcile the existence of a revolutionary ideology with the assertion that all ideology subjects individuals to the dominate system. Moreover, it is very difficult to reconcile ideology as a misrepresentation opposed to science with ideology as the objective superstructure of society, unless the superstructure contains nothing but ideological distortions and science is located elsewhere, but this is also problematic.

--*The Concept of Ideology* (1979), Jorge Larrain
--*Marxism and Ideology* (1983), Jorge Larrain