

Chapter 2

Theoretical and Methodological Background

Introduction

Various political studies take account of the social context within which power is exerted, together with the related ideologies and strategies used to exert power. In order to analyse the ideological and strategic shifts from Old Labour to New Labour in Malta, a number of approaches will be used. These include the Althusserian concepts of *conjuncture* and *overdetermination* by means of which each social formation is viewed according to its particular characteristics; the Gramscian concept of *hegemony* in order to analyse the construction of power blocs; Gramsci's and Althusser's concepts of *the State Apparatus*, which portray the state as being made up of power relations; as well as various theories which give a material existence to *ideology* and *discourse*, which many social theorists consider to be vital for the exercise of power. These theoretical approaches will be reviewed in the first part of this chapter.

The last part of the chapter will review the methodological procedures utilised in this thesis, namely the historical and comparative approach and discourse analysis.

Overdetermination and Conjuncture

The Althusserian analysis of social formations is not developed in terms of a universal *history* along Hegelian lines, but in terms of a variety of histories, each having its own specific characteristics as well as rhythm of development. In *Reading Capital*, Althusser and Balibar state that

“It needs to be said that, just as there is no production in general, there is no history in general, but only specific structures of historicity, based in the last resort on the specific structures of the different modes of production, specific structures of historicity which, since they are merely the existence of determinate social formations (arising from specific modes of production), articulated as social wholes, have no meaning except as a function of the essence of those totalities, i.e., of the essence of their peculiar complexity” (Althusser and Balibar, 1997: 108-109).

Louis Althusser considers each social formation to be a structure that is characterised by various structures, namely economics, politics and ideology. In his “*Contradiction and Overdetermination*” (1977)¹, Althusser makes reference to Engels by talking in terms of “*the determination in the last instance by the economic*” (Althusser, 1977: 113). However, he adds that a correct analysis of social formations must also take account of various factors that determine the social situation. These factors include

¹ This essay was originally published in 1962.

“the forms of the *superstructure* (the State, the dominant ideology, religion, politically organised movements, and so on); specified by *the internal and external historical situation* which determines it on the one hand as a function of the *national past* (completed or ‘relapsed’ bourgeois revolution, feudal exploitation eliminated wholly, partially or not at all, local ‘customs’, specific national *traditions*, even the ‘etiquette’ of political struggles and behaviour, etc.), and on the other as functions of the existing *world context* (what dominates it - competition or capitalist nations, or ‘imperialist internationalism’, or competition within imperialism, etc.)” (1977: 106).

Thus, this theory considers the superstructure to be *relatively autonomous* of the economic structure. Instead of dealing with the Hegelian theme of “*phenomenon-essences-truth-of*” (1977: 111), (which Althusser wants to cleanse Marxism of), he claims to be talking about a “*new relationship between new terms*” (1977: 111). Althusser describes this ‘new relationship’ as “*overdetermined contradiction*” (1977: 113). Overdetermination is characterised by various structural and superstructural factors such as those mentioned above, which are “largely specific and autonomous, and therefore irreducible to a pure *phenomenon*” (1977: 113). It should be clear that the theory of overdetermination takes account of various complexities that specifically characterise each social formation. For example, social change is not simply a question of economic change that forces sudden change on all superstructural elements. Althusser explains this point by stating that various aspects of the superstructure, particularly ideologies, are capable of reproducing themselves when social change occurs. In his words, “the new society produced by the Revolution may itself *ensure the survival, that is, the reactivation, of older elements*

through both the forms of its new superstructures and specific (national and international) ‘circumstances’” (1977: 116).

Given that every social formation has its own overdeterminations, Althusser speaks in terms of ‘*conjuncture*’, namely, the “concept of an aleatory, singular case” (Althusser, 1999: 18). That is, every society in a point in time is considered to have its own specific characteristics that are influenced by various factors. The conjuncture takes account of all the determinations and concrete circumstances that characterise each social formation. However, the conjuncture is not merely an inventory of what characterises each social formation - Althusser states that when one ‘thinks in the conjuncture’, one “poses the political problem and indicates its historical solution, *ipso facto* rendering it a political objective, a practical task” (1999: 18-19).

In “*Macchiavelli and Us*” (1999), one of Althusser’s last theoretical contributions, Althusser states that Machiavelli is the first theorist of the conjuncture (1999: 18), because he wrote about the possibilities and limitations of his nation’s-to-be realisation, which depends “upon a whole series of factors - not only economic, but also pre-existing geographical, historical, linguistic and cultural factors “ (1999: 11).

In line with Althusser’s concepts of overdetermination and conjuncture is Poulantzas’s analysis of what he defines as ‘exceptional’ capitalist states in the Mediterranean. In “The Crisis of Dictatorships” (1977), Poulantzas analyses Spain, Portugal and Greece, and shows how they are characterised by a dependent form of state which is dependent on international capitalism. These countries do not have a simple class structure, because the ruling class itself is divided. In fact, in each of these countries one finds the ‘comprador’ bourgeoisie, which represents the interests of

foreign capital, and a domestic or 'internal' bourgeoisie, based on developing industrialisation (especially light industry), partly representing native capital and partly administering foreign capital. Poulantzas states that these bourgeois-types are not what he considers a 'national bourgeoisie', that is, an industrial capitalist class which can push for progressive changes, as is the case in various core capitalist countries. Therefore, an absence of the national bourgeoisie presents a particular political problem with regards to progressive change.

At this stage one could consider Althusser's theory as being merely a play of words by a Marxist in crisis, or to put it less diplomatically, self-contradictory. To name one of his many critics, B. Hindness states that one must either reduce political and ideological phenomena to the economy, or else one must state that politics and ideology are autonomous from the economy. According to Hindness, Althusser fails to take a stand in this respect (Hindness, 1977: 104).

Steven Smith tries to solve the riddle by summarising Althusser's theory of overdetermination by stating that it "tries to retain the notion of a social formation as constituted of distinct and regionally separated 'levels' or 'instances' in which the economic remains determinant, but also recognises a reciprocal or mutually determining relationship between base and superstructure in which the latter manages to enjoy a considerable degree of 'autonomy'" (Smith, 1984: 157). However, Smith himself states that "it becomes impossible to distinguish between primary causes without which an event could not have taken place and secondary causes which perhaps only incidentally contribute to it" (1984: 165-166).

It seems that Althusser himself seemed to take account of the possible contradictions in his earlier writings. In the last interview before his death in 1990, Althusser explained to Navarro,

his interviewer, that “everything can be determinant ‘in the last instance,’ that is, everything can dominate....in the superstructure itself what is determinant is also its materiality” (Callari and Ruccio, 1996: 25).

What is important in the context of this thesis is that Althusser’s theories of overdetermination and the conjuncture are very different from the economic determinism that reduces all social processes to few economic factors. As Callari and Ruccio put it,

“this notion of materialism, which Althusser calls ‘aleatory materialism’ , refers..... to the fact that action, movement, praxis, process cannot be reduced to any one (simple or complex) idea, cannot be motivated by a posited end, but is rather characterised by contingency, by ‘history’ History cannot have ‘a subject’ (real, potential, organised or spontaneous) because it is not bound by any necessary trajectory. It is rather a process shaped by the interaction (which are always both accidental and structured) of the many identities that..... populate the pristine narrative of Marxism” (1996: 24).

Since according to Althusserian theory history does not have an essential ‘subject’, one can argue that history is not teleological and that it is not predictable. Hence *power* is not something fixed and static - it is characterised by ongoing struggle. The concept of *hegemony* throws light on such a viewpoint.

Political Strategy and Hegemony

The theory of the conjuncture attempts to show how every society has its own overdetermined characteristics. Thus a deep analysis of power must necessarily take account of such characteristics. However, such an analysis must take account of the fact that overdeterminations may change across time, and that political, economic and ideological struggle play important roles in such change. The Gramscian concept of hegemony will be used in this thesis to analyse such types of struggle.

Antonio Gramsci considers power to be something relational. Therefore, rather than being something fixed and one-dimensional, it is considered to be derived from and related to various social, economic and political aspects and struggles. Gramsci states that within capitalist society, power is diffused not only by means of the state and the class structure, but also through civil society².

Gramscian theory holds that both class struggle and other forms of struggle greatly determine the way the state functions. However, given that society is made up of various overdeterminations and is characterised by continuous struggles, state equilibrium is very unstable. This means that although a particular social class may predominate the state, it cannot simply act like a bulldozer and impose its interests on other classes and categories. The presence of various overdeterminating factors and struggle show how there are various interests in society which are not only class-based but could also be political and / or ideological. As Simon puts it,

² Civil society is defined by the Gramscian Roger Simon as being the “sphere where capitalists, workers and others engage in political and ideological struggles and where political parties, trade unions, religious bodies and a great variety of other organisations come into existence” (Simon, 1991: 70). Within civil society a variety of struggles take

“A class cannot achieve national leadership, and become a hegemonic class, *if it confines itself only to class interests*; it must also take into account the popular and democratic aspirations and struggles of the people which do not have a necessary class character” (Simon, 1991: 43).

Gramsci’s concept of *hegemony*, vividly explained in his *Prison Notebooks* during the 1920s and 1930s (Gramsci, 1971), provides a theoretical framework for the explanation of how power can be exerted by taking account of such features as those mentioned above. The starting-point of this concept is that a social class and its representatives may exert power by means of a combination of coercion and persuasion. In Gramsci’s words, “Coercion has therefore to be ingeniously combined with persuasion and consent” (1971: 310).

For this reason, power is not only a question of force and economic dominance, but also of political consent and ideological leadership, to such an extent that a dominant class could be hegemonic if it manages to persuade subordinate classes and groups “to accept the values and ideas which the dominant class has itself adopted, and by building a network of alliances based on these values” (Simon, 1991: 18). The network of alliances is successful when hegemony is exerted - that is, when the system of alliances is maintained by means of political and ideological struggle, within which certain compromises are made, which, however, may act in the long-term interests of the dominant class.

place, ranging from class struggle (which is given most weight by Gramscian theory), to all sorts of democratic struggles such as those involving gender, race, local community, and nation.

One may notice that the Gramscian concept of hegemony, although giving primary importance to social class, also has a “*national-popular*” (Gramsci, 1971) dimension. Thus it is characterised by factors similar to the Althusserian theory of overdetermined contradictions. As stated above, Gramsci argues that no social class can become hegemonic unless it takes account of various overdetermined factors that may be represented by political interests and/or popular demands. According to Simon such interests and / or demands may include “radical and popular struggles for civil liberties, movements for national liberation, the women’s movement, the peace movement, and movements expressing the demands of ethnic minorities, of young people or of students” (Simon, 1991: 24-25).

The strategies used by social classes and groups to create stable alliances that lead to hegemony are defined by Gramsci as a *war of position*. Civil society is the sphere where this ‘war’ of interests is carried out. Social classes and groups may organise consent and hegemony, but at the same time subordinate social classes and groups may construct counter-hegemony by means of their opposition. Hegemony is finally exerted when a social class goes beyond its immediate economic interests and unites various other interests under its leadership, which is considered as being legitimate by the other groups and classes within the alliance. When this happens, a *historic bloc* is created. This historic bloc is successful when it is capable of enduring for an entire historical period.

According to Gramsci a historic bloc is not created overnight. In his words,

“A social group can, indeed must, already exercise ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power (this is indeed one of the principal conditions for the winning

of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well" (Gramsci, 1971: 57).

As implied above, in order to 'lead', the social group in question must take account of other interests represented by other groups within the alliance. This occurs when

"they exercise a balancing and arbitrating function between the interests of their group and those of other groups, and succeed in securing the development of the group which they represent with the consent and assistance of the allied groups - if not out and out with that of groups which are definitely hostile" (1971: 148).

Of particular interest to this thesis is what Simon states about the possibilities of a historic bloc being created in a country that is dominated by another country. Here a national liberation struggle is carried out in the war of position, where not only class interests but also nationalist and patriotic ideologies are given their due importance within the alliance (Simon, 1991: 44).

Therefore, the Gramscian concept of hegemony and the Althusserian overdetermination thesis both consider capitalist social formations as not simply characterised by a simple capital - labour contradiction within which all interests are clear-cut and straightforward. Political success is very important in this regard.

Gramsci and Althusser talk in terms of the political agent that could create a successful historic bloc. Both of these authors echo the role Macchiavelli attributed to the *Prince*.

Macchiavelli, writing in early 16th century Florence, is considered by Althusser to be “a theoretician of the political preconditions of the constitution of a national state, the theoretician of the durability of this state; the theoretician of the strengthening and expansion of this state” (Althusser, 1999: 121). Althusser considers Macchiavelli to be the first theoretician to introduce a materialist analysis by means of which the nation state is able to take shape . This analysis takes account of economic, geographical, historical, linguistic and cultural factors, “which in some sense pre-structure the aleatory space in which the nation will be able to take shape” (1999: 11).

The importance of Macchiavelli is evident in his concept of the Prince, who is considered by him the only political agent capable of carrying out the political task mentioned above. According to Althusser, the Prince is able to realise a popular type of politics, because he is able to exert power by utilising coercion (the army) and consent (religion). He is then able to transform the people’s ideology in order to unify the state. But this is only possible because “*the Prince must not at any price find himself in the position of having the people against him*” (1999: 99-100). Instead, given that the Prince manages to unite the army with religion, what the Prince installs is “fear without hatred” (1999: 102).

Gramsci adapts the Machiavellian concept of the Prince to modern society. Here the prince could be “a Head of State, or the leader of a government, but it could also be a political leader whose aim is to conquer a State, or to found a new type of State; in this sense, ‘Prince’ could be translated in modern terms as ‘political party’” (Gramsci, 1971: 253). In particular, according to Gramsci the modern Prince could be the Communist Party, whose aim is the socialist transformation of society. This could occur if the Party, representing the proletariat, is capable of

carrying out a war of position where the Party could manage to defeat the networks supporting the bourgeois hegemony. This is done by forming alliances with the social movements which aim to bring about change (Simon, 1991: 75).

Nicos Poulantzas, writes in a similar vein. However he gives more importance than that given by Gramsci to interests which are not necessarily related to social classes. In *State, Power, Socialism* (1978), he states that for the success of democratic socialism

“the Left must equip itself with the necessary means, taking up especially new popular demands on fronts that used to be wrongly called ‘secondary’ (women’s struggles, the ecological movement, and so on)” (Poulantzas, 1978: 263-264).

State Power

It would now be useful to analyse the concept of hegemony in relation to state power.

According to Gramsci, the state does not only include the government apparatus, but also the apparatus of hegemony. In his words the state is “the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only maintains its dominance but manages to win the consent of those over whom it rules” (Gramsci, 1971: 244).

In his essay “*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*³” (Althusser, 1984: 14) he adds that within capitalism the state has a primary role in the exercise of power. In fact, he states that the

³ Originally published in 1971

political class struggle revolves around the state. State power is possessed by a certain class or by an alliance between classes, class fractions, and social groups. As Poulantzas puts it, the particular function of the state is that of “*constituting the factor of cohesion between the levels of a social formation*” (Poulantzas, 1978: 44). Cohesion is carried out by means of economic, political and ideological functions that characterise the historic bloc.

Political alliances together with ideological cohesion are vital for the unity of state power. The durability of the historic bloc within the State depends on the ability to maintain the unstable equilibrium and compromise between its components.

Poulantzas adds that within capitalist social formations, state power is even more so maintained in the interest of the various bourgeois classes and class fractions when the state enjoys *relative autonomy* of its given fractions and components, and of various particular interests. Indeed, according to Poulantzas, the Capitalist State serves best the interest of the ruling class “when the *ruling class* is not the *politically governing class*” (Poulantzas, 1969: 71)⁴.

Ideology, Power and the State

Gramsci, Althusser and Poulantzas, each in his own way, specify the manner in which the state, by means of its apparatuses, is capable of maintaining its hegemonic function, which as mentioned previously, includes a mixture of coercion and consent.

⁴ Poulantzas states that the Capitalist state represents and organises the long-term political interests of the ‘power bloc’ (Poulantzas, 1978: 127). This bloc, or state power, is considered by him to be led by a dominant class or classes / class fractions, which could even belong to previous modes of production (1978: 127).

Althusser (Althusser, 1984) shows how the *Repressive State Apparatus* - which includes such institutions as the army, the police and the penitentiary system - is used by the state in order to maintain a monopoly of violence, which refers to coercion.

However, Althusser makes it clear that it would be very misleading to interpret state power as being exerted only by means of the Repressive State Apparatus - as Gramsci would put it, coercion without consent does not produce power. Althusser agrees with such a proposition and puts forward a theoretical analysis of what he defines as the *Ideological State Apparatus* (1984), which, by means of factors such education, the mass media, the family, culture, manages to create *ideological consent* among various social classes and groups.⁵

But what is *ideological consent* ? The Althusserian concept of *ideology* will be discussed to give one interpretation of this concept. This interpretation will be a vital part of the theoretical framework of this thesis.

According to Althusser, ideology is “the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group” (1984: 32). Ideology “has no history” (1984: 33), because “it is eternal” (1984: 35), that is, ideologies always exist in different social formations. Ideology has a material existence, because it “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1984: 36). Althusser insists that ideologies always exist in an apparatus and in its practice or practices.

⁵ Nicos Poulantzas also identifies another State Apparatus within contemporary capitalist social formations - *the Economic State Apparatus*. Poulantzas argues that the contemporary capitalist state, by means of various economic policies and interventions, acts directly within the economy, “*creating, transforming and making reality*” (Poulantzas, 1978: 30).

Althusser's concept of ideology considers the individual to behave "in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which 'depend' the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject" (1984: 41). Therefore, the individual's "*ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject*" (1984: 43). As Althusser would put it, practice is always by and in an ideology and is always by and for the subject/s.

Gramsci states that ideologies "'organise' human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc" (Gramsci, 1971: 367). He adds that ideology acts as a secular religion, providing people with rules of conduct and moral behaviour.

Within the Gramscian and Althusserian framework, the primary function of ideology is to create *cohesion*, or ideological consent, especially when created by means of the Ideological State Apparatus.

Louis Althusser states that the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) is present in a number of institutions⁶. He argues that while the Repressive State Apparatus functions primarily by *violence*, the Ideological State Apparatus, as the concept implies, functions primarily by *ideology*.

⁶ These include the religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private schools), the family ISA, the political ISA (the political system, including the different political parties), the trade-union ISA, the communication ISA (press, radio and television, etc.), the cultural ISA (literature, arts, sports, etc.), and so on (Althusser, 1984: 16-17).

Unlike the Repressive State Apparatus, which belongs directly to the State, there may be a plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses. This is because Ideological State Apparatuses may be both 'public' and 'private'. In this case what matters is the manner in which they function and the interests they serve.

According to Althusser, the importance of the Ideological State Apparatus is such that “*no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses*” (1984: 20).

The Ideological State Apparatus serves the interests of the ruling class by reproducing the mode of production the same class dominates. The *dominant ideology* serves as the *internal cement* of the various state apparatuses and their personnel, creating a high degree of *ideological consent*.

Poulantzas explains this concept by stating that

“in this ideology, a neutral State appears as the representative of the general will and interest, and the arbiter among struggling classes: the state administration or judicial system stands above classes; the army is the pillar of the nation, the police the guarantor of republican order and civil liberties, and the state administration is the motive force of efficiency and general well-being” (Poulantzas, 1978: 155-6).

Gramsci's concept of hegemony has much to do with the concept of the dominant ideology. This is because, as shown earlier, according to Gramsci a class or fraction manages to form a historic bloc by presenting itself as representative of the general interest of the people-nation, rather than

the interests of particular classes or fractions. Hence, its power is *legitimised*, ideological consent is high and hegemony is created.

However, Simon makes it clear that within the new historic bloc, the most common perception of the world will neither be a purely capitalist or purely socialist one. Instead, what comes about is “a more complex synthesis of class objectives with themes that have arisen out of the original and unique history of each country” (Simon, 1991: 62).

It is important to keep in mind that although the state and the historic bloc may be considered to be legitimate, and may even form part of the ‘common sense’, this does not mean that struggle ceases to exist, or the only one common ideology which is blindly adhered to by dead subjects comes to being. In Simon’s words, “common sense is the site on which the dominant ideology is constructed, but it is also the site of resistance and challenge to this ideology” (Simon, 1991: 65). Althusser states that the Ideological State Apparatus always rests on the Repressive State Apparatus, which intervenes when ‘bad subjects’ (as defined by Althusser) provoke its intervention, and Gramsci maintains that counter-hegemonies could be created. Hence, ideological consent is not a case of all-or-nothing. It has more to do with a Weberian ideal type.

Crisis of Hegemony and Caesarism

So far it has been shown that the concept of hegemony makes it clear that power includes both coercion and consent, implying that the historic bloc and indeed the state may face serious questions regarding their legitimacy. Hence, hegemony must be continuously fought for, and

compromises must be made in order to maintain the historic bloc. Otherwise, a *crisis of hegemony* may occur.

When a crisis of hegemony occurs, the people or groups who lead the historic bloc may lose legitimacy and a crisis of representation may occur. When such crises occur, “the immediate situation becomes delicate and dangerous, because the field is open for violent solutions, for the activities of unknown forces, represented by charismatic ‘men of destiny’” (Gramsci, 1971: 210).

The situation *may* result in a catastrophic conflict that results in the dissolution of the historic bloc. Gramsci uses the term *Caesarism* to define such a situation (1971: 219).

Caesarism could result in both progressive and reactionary solutions. In Gramsci’s words,

“Caesarism is progressive when its intervention helps the progressive force to triumph, albeit with its victory tempered by certain compromises and limitations. It is reactionary when its intervention helps the reactionary force to triumph - in this case too with certain compromises and limitations, which have, however, a different value, extent, and significance than in the former. Caesar and Napoleon I are examples of progressive Caesarism. Napoleon III and Bismarck of reactionary Caesarism” (1971: 219)⁷

⁷Although great individual heroes may symbolise Caesarism, Gramsci makes it clear that it is not necessary to have such individual symbols for Caesarism to occur (Gramsci, 1971: 220). An example of a situation without individual symbols may occur within the modern parliamentary system.

Hegemony and Ideology: Beyond Predetermined Certainties and Fixed Meaning

The theories discussed above make it clear that politics is not simply a question of the capital / labour contradiction, and that historic blocs can be created but can disintegrate as soon as they lose legitimacy. Ideologies have no *essential* and *fixed* meaning, as they may be interpreted in different ways within different contexts. One has to see the way ideologies are articulated with political strategy in specific situations characterised by particular overdeterminations.

For example, Ernesto Laclau shows how Fascism was not simply a ruling-class static ideology, as various orthodox Marxists believe. Laclau, although a harsh anti-Fascist, shows how Fascism managed to re-articulate widely shared popular elements in a particular direction. Therefore, “Fascism, far from being the typical ideological expression of the most conservative and reactionary sectors of the dominant classes was, on the contrary, one of the possible ways of articulating popular-democratic interpellations [i.e. identities] into political discourse⁸” (Laclau, 1977: 111).

⁸ It would be useful to give a definition of *discourse*. According to Foucault, discourses are not simply texts or linguistic systems. Discourses “are *practices* like the scientific discourse of psychoanalysis and its institutional, philosophical and scientific levels” (Horrocks and Jevtic, 1997: 86). Michael Foucault asserts that the object of discourse analysis is to form the positivity that characterises statements. Similarly to Althusser’s concept of ideology, this type of analysis determines the *position* any individual occupies in order to be the subject of the statement (Foucault, 1973: 125).

Thus, Foucauldian theory asserts that discourse is very much related to power. Foucault states that in any society “there can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association” (Foucault, 1980: 93). Hence, a production of truth that exercises power comes about. ‘Dangerous’ discourses are excluded, prohibited, disciplined and rejected, similarly to Althusser’s ‘bad subjects’ when confronted by the Repressive State Apparatus. Two theoretical differences between the two authors are, first, that Foucault gives importance to resistance to discourses, and, second, Foucault’s analysis of power does not put the State, Ideological State Apparatuses, nor any other institution at the centre of his methodological framework. Foucault considered power to be multi-dimensional.

Similarly to Laclau, David Silverman shows how three different political actors failed to achieve political success in different circumstances. He argues that although Trotsky, Churchill (in 1945) and the British Labour Party (in 1983) treated discourse in an *idealist* manner. Although each of these actors had their own particular political strategies,

“they spoke as if it were possible to ignore popular conceptions.....
Consequently, in their own way, each constructed his own language as the media of instruction, and each, thereby, failed to take seriously the material reality and power of existing popular discourses. Each was inevitably elitist. The only relation they proposed between the politician and the public was that of professor to student. No possibility was provided for a dialogue with subjects constituted in terms of existing discourses (e.g. as family members, as patriots, etc..)”
(Silverman, 1985: 67).

Therefore, politics consists of a series of clashes that could form and destroy particular historic blocs. Each historic bloc is made up of particular ideologies and strategies that on their own make little sense vis-à-vis power. This is because “particular elements have no significance in themselves, all depends on how they are articulated” (1985: 67).

Economic Reductionism in Gramsci and Althusser

Both Gramsci's and Althusser's concepts of hegemony and overdetermination have been criticised by post-Marxists Laclau and Mouffe (1985) as still being essentially characterised by economic reductionism.

Laclau and Mouffe criticise Gramsci in that, in his view, "on the one hand, the political centrality of the working class has a historical, contingent character: it requires the class to come out of itself, to transform its own destiny by articulating it to a plurality of struggles and democratic demands. On the other hand, it would seem that the economic base assigns this articulatory role to it - hence, that the centrality has a necessary character (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 70). Therefore, according to Laclau and Mouffe, Gramsci has not satisfactorily solved the riddle of whether the economic structure is determinant or not.

With regards to Althusser's analysis of overdetermination, Laclau and Mouffe criticise his concept of *determination in the last instance by the economy*, which, according to the post-Marxists, contrasts with the basic concept of overdetermination. In their words, "if the economy is an object that can determine any type of society in the last instance, this means that, at least with reference to that instance, we are faced with simple determination and not overdetermination" (1985: 99).

However, one must keep in mind that Althusser himself seemed to have revised some of his views regarding the central role of the economy in his last years.

Application of the Theoretical Concepts

So far I have argued how by relating theoretical concepts such as overdetermination and hegemony, a flexible analysis of strategy, ideology and power could be carried out. It is within this theoretical framework that I will analyse ideological and strategic shifts within the Malta Labour Party in the phases defined as 'Old Labour', 'New Labour' and 'Post-New Labour'. The various theoretical frameworks mentioned above will be related with each other and utilised in the following ways:

- *Overdetermination and Conjuncture:* The social context within which the Malta Labour Party functions will be given ample consideration. The political significance of changes within the Maltese social formation will be taken into account, by analysing the ways in which such changes may have determined and/or influenced ideological and strategic changes within the Malta Labour Party. The economic structure will be given the weight it deserves according to the historic occasions analysed, without impinging on the importance of other overdetermining factors. Hence, the analysis will not be economically determinist, but will also give importance to factors such as ideology, tradition, politics, the international socio-economic and political environment, and personalities.

- *Hegemony*: The concept of hegemony will be continuously related to the Malta Labour Party's ideological and strategic configurations by means of which successful political alliances were created. In turn, the effectiveness of such alliances within the Maltese context will be analysed, in order to verify whether Labour Governments have created successful historic blocs.
- *State Power and State Apparatuses*: The level of power exerted by Labour Governments will be measured in terms of the concepts of hegemony and historic blocs. The success of Labour Government strategy will be verified according to the strength of the Ideological State Apparatus when Labour was in office.
- *Crisis of Hegemony*: Various ideological and strategic characteristics which resulted in the Malta Labour Party's failure to maintain historic blocs intact - resulting in electoral defeats - will be analysed.

Methodological Foundations

“All sociology worthy of the name is historical sociology...the historical viewpoint leads to the comparative study of societies” (C. Wright Mills in Llobera, 1998: 72).

The research methodology used in this thesis owes its foundations to historical and comparative research on one hand and on discourse analysis on the other. The research methodologies will be introduced below and I will also explain how they will be applied to this thesis.

Historical and Comparative Research

The Historical or Comparative method implies a comparison of social settings across time or of different social settings at a single point in time.

J. Llobera argues that social sciences were built on a solid foundation of *social totality*, “the idea that allows us to think of society as an interrelated whole consisting of different levels” (Llobera, 1998: 76). He mentions that such a concept is both *materialist* and *evolutionary*. As regards the materialist function, he observes that theories in this area hold that the economy and the environment largely determine both transitions from one stage to another as well as the different levels within a social totality. These levels are defined by Llobera to be economic, political and ideological, thus fitting the theoretical background of this thesis

Llobera proceeds to give vent to conceptual frameworks that may be utilised for historical and comparative research. He gives ample reference to the five *methods of experimental enquiry* put forward by nineteenth century philosopher John Stuart Mill, whose methodology is based on the underlying belief that history and comparison could be researched as natural experiments. The five methods (quoted in full from Llobera who in turn quotes Mill) are the following:

1. *Method of agreement*: “If two or more instances of the phenomenon under investigation have only one circumstance in common, the circumstance in which alone all the instances agree is the cause (or effect) of the given phenomenon”;
2. *Method of difference*: “If an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs, and an instance in which it does not occur, have every circumstance in common save one, that

one occurring only in the former; the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ is the effect, or the cause, or an indispensable part of the cause, of the phenomenon”;

3. *Joint method of agreement and difference*: “If two or more instances in which the phenomenon occurs only have one circumstance in common, while two or more instances in which it does not occur have nothing in common save the absence of that circumstance, the circumstance in which alone the two sets of instances differ is the effect, or the cause, or an indispensable part of the cause, of the phenomenon.”
4. *Method of residues*: “Subduct [subtract] from any phenomenon such part as is known by previous inductions to be the effect of certain antecedents, and the residue of the phenomenon is the effect of the remaining antecedents.”
5. *Method of concomitant variations*: “Whatever phenomenon varies in any manner whenever another phenomenon varies in some particular manner, is either a cause or an effect of that phenomenon, or is connected with it through some fact of causation” (1998: 78-79).

As with any other approach, this approach does have its weaknesses, such as over-generalising and the possibility of errors of omission of ‘hidden’ causes. Nevertheless, Llobera holds that they (especially the first two) have been held to be useful methodologies by various social scientists. The latter compare literature of various historical instances and try to establish the main reasons that explain shifts and changes by comparing variables. Llobera argues that this methodology is similar in its approach to the statistical approach that looks for casual factors (1998: 80).

Discourse Analysis

Discourse⁹ analysis refers to the study of particular systems of language and knowledge together with their associated practices. In the words of Fran Tonkiss,

“Discourse analysis involves a perspective on language which sees this not as *reflecting* reality in a transparent or straightforward way, but as *constructing* and organising that social reality for us. In these terms, discourse analysis are interested in language and texts as sites in which social meanings are created and reproduced, and social identities are formed” (Tonkiss, 1998: 246).

In other words, discourse analysts are interested in how people, by means of language, construct their interpretations of the social world. This implies that such analysts are not interested in discovering a universal social truth, but in analysing the way language is used to present different accounts of reality.

Tonkiss - who considers discourse analysis to be “a messy method” (1998: 250) - says that it is difficult to formalise it into a standard approach. Rather than emphasising the quantity of data gathered, he states that

“the primary concern of the discourse analysis is to find data that will provide insights into a problem. In this sense, a single speech or newspaper report or

conversation can generate very fruitful themes for analysis. What matters is the richness of textual detail, rather than the number of texts analysed” (1998: 252-253).

The important matter for discourse analysts is to analyse the way in which language influences, shapes, reproduces and legitimises various attitudes. However, such research gives importance to the fact that its findings are unlikely to be widely representative (1998: 259).

Norman Fairclough (2000), in his analysis of New Labour in Britain, adopts a methodology which focuses on the analysis of the language¹⁰ used by New Labour.

In “New Labour, New Language?” (2000), Fairclough states that language (or discourse) has always been important in politics, as it forms part of every social practice/interaction. Different parties and/or groups deploy discourses in order to gain support for their actions. Hence, Fairclough states that “effectiveness of forms of deliberation and dialogue becomes crucial for the effectiveness of government” (2000: 157).

Fairclough puts forward a research method - defined by him as ‘*critical discourse analysis*’ – in order to analyse the way in which language is used within political processes. Such language, being very much influenced by social change, is considered by Fairclough to change over time. Besides, it is very much related to power and domination, and hence to politics.

⁹ “discourse refers to a *system* of language which draws on a particular terminology and encodes specific forms of knowledge” (Tonkiss, 1998: 248).

In his analysis of New Labour in Britain, Fairclough gives prime importance to the way the Party uses language. For example, the fact that the British Labour Party under the Blair leadership started referring to itself as ‘New Labour’ enabled the Party to contrast the ‘new’ with the ‘old’, thus putting forward the message that Labour Party had changed and was trustworthy. He states that in this case “changing the name wasn’t just reflecting a shift in political ideology, it was manipulating language to control public perception” (2000: vii).

Fairclough insists that political differences and political struggles have much to do with differences in language and resulting dominant languages. During the past few decades language has become even more important especially because of the synthesis between politics, government and mass media. He shows how nowadays many significant political events are media events, resulting in what the Language Professor terms as a ‘*mediatisation*’ of politics and government.

Quite similarly to the concepts revolving around hegemony, Fairclough considers government to be the “management of relations between groups whether within nation-states or within organisations of a lesser scale” (2000: 11). He considers the language of politics to be characterised by disagreement, dissent and polemic. Therefore, successful democratic politics must achieve a sufficient measure of consent among the various groups with different languages.

Fairclough analyses the shifts from Old Labour to New Labour together with what he considers to be contradictory in the latter version of the Party. For this purpose he analyses a wide range of New Labour texts. These include documents, speeches, books, newspaper articles, and

¹⁰ Political language is considered by Fairclough to be made up of three analytically separable focuses: Style (having to do with identity and values); discourses (having to do with representations); and genres (how language figures as a

pamphlets by the Party, its leading spokespersons and its opponents, government documents, and other related texts. Fairclough concentrates mostly on speeches by Tony Blair, given his stature within the Party as well as because his speeches cover New Labour's policies and concerns. He also compiles a computer database of texts dealing with New and, to a lesser extent, Old Labour, by means of which he identifies keywords of New Labour. The keywords are the words that occur relatively most frequently within New Labour texts.

Finally, he arrives at the conclusion that British New Labour and the Third Way ideology are a contradictory combination of New Right, Social Democratic and Communitarian discourses, which result in various changes and shifts in the way New Labour governs.

Application of the Methodological Foundations

The research methodology used in this thesis gives attention to the perspective mentioned by Tonkiss, and also draws from Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. Hence various Malta Labour Party texts are analysed in order to assess the possible ideological and strategic shifts within the Party. It has been noted above that Fairclough's approach consisted of a thorough analysis of the British New Labour texts, analysing the main trends of discourse. A similar method has been adopted in the analysis of Malta's Labour Party - a large selection of policy documents, electoral manifestos, speeches, and publicity pamphlets, as well as speeches and articles by the Malta Labour Party and its key speakers have been scanned and analysed. Such texts are usually classified as *primary sources*. Besides, various articles and research on the Malta

means).

Labour Party and Maltese society – in this case classified as *secondary sources* – have also been analysed and applied.

One of Fairclough's main tools of analysis, that is counting the frequency of New Labour keywords, has not been used in this thesis. The main reason for this choice of analysis is that measuring frequencies could sometimes lead to misleading results. For example, if the word "new" occurred 1000 times, would this be a low score? Would 1300 occurrences of this word represent a different message? This problem is compounded by the fact that the word in question could have occurred in a non-political context; that counting words could be too mechanistic; and that keywords need to be analysed within the respective context in order to make sense. For example, a politician may use certain keywords if he is addressing his Party's core supporters; and may use different keywords if he is making a speech addressed to a particular social group such as the business community.

However, various points of reference and keywords are utilised within the thesis in order to verify the language in relation to its ideology and strategy. These are analysed by using an approach which gives importance to general trends and to the context in which the communication in question takes place.

At the same time the thesis also makes reference to social trends within Maltese society during the Old Labour / New Labour periods. Data from official and national surveys, as well as the analysis of such data are referred to. These include the national census, which, among other variables reveals the occupational structure of the Maltese workforce, the European value survey, which analyses the value-systems of Maltese people, as well as official economic data, portraying

important characteristics such as Gross Domestic Product and unemployment rates. The data is selected in a way so as to permit continuity for comparative research purposes. The main economic trends are analysed in a manner that incorporates the changes from the 1970s to the 1990s. On the other hand, the occupational class structures and prevailing value systems are compared from periods during the 1980s and the 1990s. The 1980s are chosen as the starting point for these two variables due to a lack of data from the preceding periods.

This thesis also gives much importance to other analyses of the Malta Labour Party. Therefore, the studies by various authors, both from within the Party and from outside the Party, are referred to so as to strengthen the arguments and the depth of research. Here, the major arguments put forward by the various authors are highlighted.

With regards to the methods used to analyse the ideological shifts from Old Labour to New Labour in Malta, the methods of experimental inquiry earmarked above have been chosen to be applied to this thesis.

The concluding chapter will compare various variables derived from the theoretical concepts referred to in this chapter, so as to analyse the ideological and strategic shifts from Old Labour to New Labour. The differences or similarities between different overdetermining factors under the Old / New Labour conjunctures will be considered to be the casual factors which to a large extent determined the shifts in question.

The theoretical concepts and variables in question are the following:

Theoretical Concept	Variable
Overdetermination and Conjuncture	Economy Class Structure Ideology International Factors
Political Ideology and Strategy	Economic Policy Foreign Policy Class Interests Party Interests Power of Leader Labour's Ideology
Hegemony and State Power	State Power and State Apparatus Historic Bloc
Crisis of Hegemony	Class Contradictions Economic Contradictions Electoral Characteristics Party Interests Counter-Hegemony

Given that the thesis relies on 'general' trends within the discourse of the Malta Labour Party, the analysis could be criticised for being partial and subjective, in the sense that the analysis could be very selective. For example, relevant criticism could state that the gender and

educational policies of the Malta Labour Party have been in many aspects neglected in this study. The thesis could also be criticised for being preferential in the issues chosen to be commented upon and in neglecting aspects that do not fit into the theoretical and methodological frameworks.

In response to such criticism one could state that such analyses are not meant to produce universal truths and unshakeable dogmas, but rather, to put forward particular interpretations of certain aspects dealing with the subject in question.

Critique of the Theoretical Concepts and the Methodological Foundations

Similarly to all social-scientific studies, this thesis could be criticised on various aspects, whether theoretical or methodological. These include the following:

- *Methodological Sources and Subjectivity:* One main criticism of the historical and comparative approach is that researchers have to depend on existing sources, which, according to Anthony Giddens may be partial and difficult to interpret (Giddens, 1993: 695). Another shortfall dealing with this aspect has to do with the choice of discourse from documents. One may ask – ‘Why was this document chosen and not the other? Why was this section of the document analysed and not another? Why was this document perceived to represent such discourse and not other types of discourse?’ ‘Why was these variable analysed and why were other variables ignored?’
- *Theoriticism:* This thesis could also be criticised for relying on theoretical concepts such as Overdetermination. Critics of such theories argue that it is one thing to state that certain

factors overdetermine social formations, but it is definitely another thing to prove such arguments by means of empirical methods such as surveys.

In reply to such forms of legitimate criticism, it could be argued that it is humanely impossible to carry out exhaustive research studies. In this regard, Resnick and Wolff state the following:

“one implication of the notion of Overdetermination lies in the recognition that all explanations are inherently and unavoidably incomplete. All theories of society - forms of explanation - are and can only ever be partial; each takes up only some of the factors influencing the object of its theorising. With those factors if one constructs an explanation, a necessarily partial analysis is fashioned around the particular subset of overdetermining factors upon which it focuses. There are thus always alternative explanations or theories of why and how events occur....It follows that we must move away from any notion of truth as singular to a notion rather of truths as plural” (Callari and Ruccio, 1996: 176).

Tonkiss adds that when one analyses discourse one should be modest in his/her analytic claims and consider knowledge to be open-ended rather than all-encompassing. Thus researchers could acknowledge the strengths of their studies while being self-critical, as well as receptive of alternative methods of studies and of critiques of the studies in question (Tonkiss, 1998: 260).

In response to criticism regarding lack of empirical backing and excessive theoreticism, I hold that the theoretical background of this thesis makes sociological sense because it is applied to real factors such as the state of the economy, peoples' values, and various writings and studies on the

Malta Labour Party, which in themselves have a material existence. Besides, I do not think that specific interviews on the issue in question would have been free of subjectivity and less 'objective' than this thesis. After all, respondents have personal opinions, just like authors of studies, including myself.

I do not consider the scope of this thesis to present an absolute truth on the ideological and strategic shifts from Old Labour to New Labour in Malta. The approach adopted by myself is only one possible approach out of a spectrum of alternative approaches. In fact other types of analysis on the subject in question would enrich political sociology in general.

Conclusion

In this chapter the theoretical concepts and methodological foundations of this thesis have been introduced, and I have explained how they will be applied to the thesis.

The issue of this thesis will first be introduced by means of a brief history of the Malta Labour Party from 1920 to 1998, as well as a brief analysis concerning the modernisation of Social Democratic parties in Britain and Europe. The following two chapters will largely be based on what I consider to be important historical events that have occurred during the Malta Labour Party's existence, which will then be interpreted and applied to the scope of this thesis in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. Emphasis will be made on the period from 1971 to 1998 – which, as stated previously, is considered to represent Old Labour (1971-87), the construction of New Labour (1987-96, with special emphasis on the period from 1992 to 1996) and New Labour in government (1996-98).