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## On the (im)practicality of the state: Why do I have to have a country?

There are many well-articulated reasons to favor a stateless society. Chomsky departs from many anarchists in believing that such a society is more likely to be achieved through a long, drawn out process that slowly erodes the machinery of the state rather than a single revolutionary moment. As a result, as Chomsky has emphasized in many places,<sup>1</sup> in the current political situation a stateless society can only be considered a long term goal. In the short run, the goal should actually be to strengthen the state in certain respects, namely, in the contexts where it helps achieve a freer and more just society—clear examples of this are providing a check on the power of large corporations and what has become a derogatory term on the right, the “welfare state”—which includes such horrible things as recognizing the right of every child, including those born to poor parents, to have food and get health care.<sup>2</sup> In a way, then, the state can be pragmatically used in the process of moving toward a more equitable stateless society. There is a conflict here between theory and what is practical, which is reflected in the long run vs short run opposition—the latter boils down to practical reasons. The conflict is only apparent however. Chomsky’s political work is not an academic research exercise, in its heart is political (and economic, since the two are really inseparable) activism. There is pragmatism that comes with activism. This activism-motivated pragmatism is the reason why for Chomsky there is no contradiction, as there would be in a pure academic research exercise, between holding anarchist ideals, including stateless society, and using the state to achieve reforms that will lead to a more just society that is closer to anarchist ideals. There is also a reflection of Chomsky as a scientist here—if you are a scientist, say a physicist, you will use whatever methods you can to enlighten the issues you are investigating.<sup>3</sup> On a par with that, regarding his political work, Chomsky says:<sup>4</sup>

“You should use whatever methods are available to you. There is no conflict between trying to overthrow the state and using the means that are provided in a partially democratic society, the means that have been developed through popular struggles over centuries. You should use them and try to go beyond, maybe destroy the institution. It is like the

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1 See e.g. the following interview from March 11, 2010 (Reddit Blog) <https://youtu.be/ke6YXjaZ9HY> and N. Chomsky, *On Anarchism*, The New Press, 2013.

2 See Chomsky 2013, p. 41.

3 In a mature scientific field like physics, there is no subfield or graduate classes devoted only to methodology, which reflects the general use-whatever-you-can methodological attitude.

4 N. Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, ed. B. Pateman, AK Press, 2005; p. 239.

media. I am perfectly happy to write columns that are syndicated by the New York Times, which I do, and to write in Z Magazine.”

The pragmatism that comes with activism, and the general use-whatever-methods-are-available-to-you scientific attitude are at the heart of Chomsky’s political work—it cannot be properly understood without situating it in that context, which immediately dissolves what appear to be contradictions from the pure political-research-exercise point of view.<sup>5</sup>

While, for practical reasons, it is futile in the current political context to advocate for immediate overthrowing of the state and even advocating mere distancing from all state-related mechanisms can actually be damaging with respect to the issues noted above regarding the short run point, in spite of that, also for practical reasons and from the activist point of view it is still important to keep talking about the absurdity of the concept of state, in fact in non-academic, simple, down to earth terms, in a way that would target issues that most people take for granted or do not even notice, the goal being to make the concept of a stateless society more palatable, more acceptable, to avoid its immediate dismissal as something crazy or impractically utopian, which would in turn at best confine it to an ivory tower research agenda. The practical aspect, which goes beyond the ivory tower research agenda, concerns the responsibility of the public intellectual, which has been the basis and the motivation of much of Chomsky’s own work—it in fact lies at the root of his activism. It is addressed rather directly in *The Responsibility of Intellectuals*:<sup>6</sup>

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5 Criticizing Chomsky’s writing style, as Richard Kostelanetz does (when he calls it “surprisingly graceless” in his review of *Chomsky on Anarchism* published in *Social Anarchism; Baltimore* Issue 39, (2006): 39- 43, p. 40) or faulting him for not paying homage by failing to refer in a particular work (Chomsky’s introduction to Daniel Guérin’s *Anarchism* (1970)) to some members of the anarchist hall of fame, as George Woodcock does (as reported by Barry Bateman in Chomsky 2005 (p. 7), also fails to appreciate the activist motivation behind Chomsky’s political work. There is also a degree of jealousy in the anarchist elite club that even leads to statements along the lines that Chomsky’s name will not be “central in histories of modern or American anarchism” (R. Kostelanetz, p. 42; R. Kostelanetz also dismisses Chomsky’s linguistic work, something that would take years of careful studying to put one in a position to properly evaluate—one afternoon that R. Kostelanetz claimed to have spent with Chomsky in this context apparently sped up this process rather significantly). While I disagree with Kostelanetz’s prediction, I strongly doubt that Chomsky would even care, given the driving force behind his political work. R. Kostelanetz also goes on to say (p. 41):

“Chomsky refuses to discriminate between those outlets that are large and those small and probably between those who pay him and those who do not. Nothing is envied more by writers whose prominence depend upon powerful publishers’ publicists than fame that is self-earned, so to speak. If other political commentators ignore him, as too many do, one reason is their refusal to accept that such prominence could be realized without publicists or powerful publishers.”

The above passage actually reflects the true motivation of Chomsky’s political work, activism (which is rooted in the responsibility of the public intellectual discussed directly below), not seeking prominence, as is the case with most other political commentators.

6 Published in *The New York Review of Books*, February 23, 1967, in the context of discussion of a series of articles by Dwight Macdonald in *Politics* on the responsibility of peoples and the responsibility of intellectuals.

“It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies.”

“When we consider the responsibility of intellectuals, our basic concern must be their role in the creation and analysis of ideology.”

“Intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments, to analyze actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intentions.”

Part of the responsibility of the public intellectual is to adopt an activist role in attempting to bring to the surface, to the conscious level, the latent biases we have, which were instilled into us by the machinery of the state and the authorities (and the class and political interests behind them). When it comes to the state itself, the two prong activist strategy of strengthening the state for the reasons noted above and keep talking about the absurdity of the concept of the state requires somewhat delicate balancing when both strategies are addressed together. Here, I will not do that, but will rather bluntly focus on the second, in particular, by taking the state vs the individual perspective within the broader issue of the relation of the individual to the state. This is an ambivalent perspective, with obvious arguments for strengthening the role of the state when it comes to providing broadly the social/health/education security net and checks on the power of large corporations (as part of the short run discussed above), but weakening it (even in the short run) when it comes to issues of personal freedom (where it does not infringe upon the rights of others—obviously there would be such infringement issues with the rights of a psychopathic serial killer to pursue their activities). I will here address the personal level (in the spirit of activism that permeates much of Chomsky’s own work, which will also be reflected in the tone of this paper), but from a somewhat different perspective from the one that is usually taken in discussions which concern the relation of the individual to the state, namely the perspective, often overlooked by those who belong to the “right” states in the sense discussed below, that equates the state and the individual, where the individual is in many respects measured like the state it belongs to. But before doing that, a more general note on the state and personal freedom is in order.

It concerns the concept of belonging to a state. In many respects the state curtails our rights, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. Illustrations abound. Regarding the latter, try for example going to the US with an Iranian passport. However, the rights of those who are stateless are even more curtailed—we really have no choice but to belong to a state.<sup>7</sup> We thus all have to belong to a state—this ownership by the state is in a way a remnant of slavery,<sup>8</sup> where the citizens are in many

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7 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there are about 12 million stateless persons in the world. Official measures to prevent statelessness (like the 1961 United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (which the US is not a signatory to) or the 1997 European Convention on Nationality) implicitly acknowledge that the rights of stateless persons are curtailed.

8 It is of course nowhere as bad as real slavery, hence the term “remnant” here (though “remnant” will often be dropped below for ease of exposition).

respects owned by the state, with the obvious implication that who owns the state<sup>9</sup> also owns us. The ownership can get rather extreme. Consider the concept of eminent domain, where the state is allowed to take private property for public purposes, with the state getting to determine what the valid public purpose is.<sup>10</sup> This actually extends to the most personal of all properties, namely ourselves. Military draft (henceforth draft) is the counterpart of eminent domain in this respect. With draft, the state gets to take you for public purposes, with the state determining what the valid public purpose is. With the Vietnam war, the valid public purpose was determined to be fighting in Vietnam. Just like with eminent domain, your body (in fact 2.2 million bodies in this case) was taken by the state; pursuing the valid public purpose defined by the state, it was transported to Vietnam (648,500 of them) and told to fight. There are those who resisted the enforcement of eminent domain in this respect, and refused to allow it, we all know what the consequences were (if you were not rich and/or politically connected of course; if you were rich, just like the property aspect of eminent domain, the person aspect of eminent domain did not really apply to you). The state really owns your property (eminent domain), and you (draft) too. Draft is just an extreme case of eminent domain, where you are the property that the state takes control of.<sup>11</sup>

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9 An issue that Chomsky has discussed in many works (regarding the ownership of the state by large corporations, see e.g. E. Herman and N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Pantheon, 1988, and N. Chomsky, *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky*, The New Press, 2002), which I will not go into here.

10 The right of property in general is a separate issue that I will not go into here (see for example N. Chomsky, *For Reasons of State*, Pantheon, 1973 or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9OeYtubaek> (an excerpt of a talk delivered at Harvard University, April 13, 1996, “Free Market Fantasies: Capitalism in the Real World”). While there certainly can be valid reasons behind eminent domain, it is worth noting that in the United States, the power of a state or the federal government to take private property for public use can be legislatively delegated to a third party, including corporations. Particularly instructive in this respect is the Supreme Court of the United States case *Kelo vs City of New London* (545 U.S. 469 (2005)), where eminent domain was used to transfer land from one private party to another private party for economic development in the absence of blight (in a way that would also benefit the Pfizer corporation).

11 As Chomsky puts it: “...people have the right to be free, and if there are constraints on that freedom then you’ve got to justify them.” (N. Chomsky, *On Anarchism*, The New Press, 2013, p. 36; Chomsky in fact refers to this as the gist of anarchism) or “It’s the responsibility of those who exercise power to show that somehow it’s legitimate. It’s not the responsibility of anyone else to show that it’s illegitimate” (Chomsky, *On Anarchism*, The New Press, 2013, p. 88). This especially holds for calls for violence (i.e. going to war). If they can be legitimately justified, there won’t be a need for a military draft (although under American law it was illegal for US citizens to join armed forces of other nations, many Americans volunteered for other nations’ armed forces to fight the Nazis prior to America’s entry into World War II in December 1941). It should be noted that although the United States Armed Forces moved to an all-volunteer military in 1973 the Selective Service System, which maintains information on those potentially subject to the military draft (interestingly, not limited to US citizens), is still in place (although there is a bill to repeal it, introduced on December 19, 2019; see <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5492>).

It should also be noted that both American anarchists and American libertarians, which are in many respects on the opposite side of the political/economic spectrum under the current mani-

Our ownership by the state extends to guilt by association. I was unfortunate to have the Yugoslavia passport during the Yugoslav wars in the 90s, when Yugoslavia was a pariah state. I don't have to go into any details regarding what travelling with that passport meant, it suffices to say that from the point of checking in at the airport, I was not allowed even to go to the toilet alone. Why was this happening to me? Because I was owned by a wrong state slave master. After I took the American passport, all that maltreatment stopped. Because now I had a right master. Many people find this kind of discrimination to be OK, especially those who belong to the right state masters, likely not an accident. (You were not a better person than me because you were an American, I did not become a better person when I got that passport. And please do not congratulate me on that—I did not win an Olympic medal or a Nobel prize; I did not achieve anything with that, except more freedom of movement). If I could not go to the toilet alone at the airport because of my race or my gender, everyone would scream about it, people at the airport likely would have complained. But since it was done to me because I had a wrong master (in the sense discussed above), that was basically fine—people are conditioned to accept this situation.

It is important to observe that the servitude to the state, which most of us in fact willingly subject ourselves to, does not come from “a natural inclination to servitude” that sophistic politicians and intellectuals talked about<sup>12</sup> but a natural inclination to belong to a larger group, which is in fact taken advantage of in this context. This natural inclination to belong to a larger group also includes judging oneself by the achievements of that larger group, which is in fact what this paper will be about. If we recognize this sense of belonging for what it really is, servitude (in fact, servitude to what the state represents—which is a class interest, large corporations interest (in modern times), or a more localized authoritarian interest (in authoritarian states), getting rid of the state becomes part of the more general struggle for freedom, an undeniable human impulse.

This camouflage of servitude to the state as a sense of belonging to a larger group often leads to blind acceptance without thinking of situations that are clearly absurd. Consider for example the rather strong opposition in the US to the Iraq war before

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festation of the latter in the United States, have opposed military draft, linking it to slavery and involuntary servitude. The former, including Emma Goldman, in fact challenged the draft in federal court on these grounds (i.e. Thirteenth Amendment's prohibition of slavery and involuntary servitude) in 1917. However, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the draft in the 1918 case *Arver v. United States*.

12 As noted in Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), discussed in Chomsky's *Language and Freedom* (*Proceedings of the University Freedom and Human Sciences Symposium*, Loyola University, Chicago, January 8–9, 1970, ed. by Thomas R. Gorman, also in *For Reasons of State*, Pantheon, 1973; N. Chomsky 2005, N. Chomsky 2013), which considers Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* “one of the earliest and most remarkable of the eighteenth-century investigations of freedom and servitude, ...in many ways a revolutionary tract” (p. 95 in Chomsky 2013).

the war started. Much of that opposition stopped once the war started, the often cited reason was that we have to support our troops. I don't understand what "our" means here (more precisely, I would understand it only to the extent that I personally knew any of them). What "our" is apparently intended to mean here is that whoever justifies ceasing the opposition to the Iraq war on these grounds ("we have to support our troops") and those troops are owned by the same master. If the action itself, going to war in Iraq, was deemed wrong before the war started, it did not suddenly become right. Wrong is wrong, whoever does it. If we oppose a different country going to a particular war, no one is going to stop opposing it once the war starts. It is very different when you and those who are actually going to the war are owned by the same state master. Most people accepted this without questioning, an incredible example of Pavlov-style state conditioning.

Suppose 5,000 miles from you there is a border, with John D. on your side of the border, and John E. on the other side of the border, and you don't know either of them at all. We are supposed to support John D. going to war with John E., even be ready to go to war for John D and against John E., although they are both strangers to us, and no matter what the reasons for all this are, just because we and John D are owned by the same state master? The sad fact is that we are not simply supposed to, most of us do accept this, without any questioning. (I should fight for the guy on "my" side of the border who I don't know against the other guy who I also don't know? How does that make any sense?) If I am against a particular war, I am supposed to stop being against it in order to support our troops? They are not \*my troops in any normal and direct sense of "my". If they do something wrong, it is wrong, it is not right because they are "mine". (Now the state itself is in a different position here; those troops really are the state's, no apostrophe there.) Even many of those who are against death penalty accept this situation. No one should be able to force you to kill or hurt another human being. And if you are against death penalty, how can you accept this situation? Slaves were occasionally looked at as human beings, most of the time not. This is the case when the latter kicks in. You are not really killing human beings, just slaves owned by a different master (and your master told you to do that anyway; even the opposition to death penalty, where you yourself may be the executioner, can get suspended here).

As pointed out above, the natural inclination to belong to a larger group is taken advantage of in the context of accepting servitude to the state. This inclination to belong to a larger group also includes measuring oneself by the accomplishments of that larger group, where accomplishments of that larger group become your accomplishments. In this respect, guilt by association, discussed above, extends to smartness/dumbness by association. Absent proof to the contrary, you are as smart/dumb as your state master is deemed to be. There is a self-smartness syndrome that is particularly manifested and widespread in the states with a heightened sense of nation-

alism, like the US in fact. What constant recitation of the pledge of allegiance in the schools, incessant singing of the American anthem at all kinds of events, constant bombardment with America is the greatest, the best.... slogans<sup>13</sup> leads to is the subconscious belief that the Americans are indeed smarter, better.... than others.<sup>14</sup> At least subconsciously, most Americans do view Americans as smarter than foreigners. I am not just talking here about the situations which all of us foreigners have experienced, where an American who has just met you speaks slower to you although it is pretty obvious that you can speak English quite fluently, the null hypothesis apparently being that as a foreigner you are dumb (which makes you feel like a performing seal; yeah, it is obvious that you have some intelligence, meaning that you can speak English; but you are still a seal), I am talking about a much less obvious level. Even in a field like linguistics, where there are many foreigners in the linguistics departments at American universities, and where the academics in general have been influenced more by Chomsky's political thinking, getting exposed to it more due to his prominence in linguistics itself, even in job situations where there are no visa issues, it is easier to get a top-level job if you are an American (by this I mean a "true" American) than if you are not. I am not accusing here job search committees of open discrimination. After all, most people on those job committees are self-proclaimed liberals who, if you would ask them, would find this kind of discrimination abhorrent, just the way they would find discrimination on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation... abhorrent. Still, there are many respectable works demonstrating latent bias against for example women in academia. I am not aware of any works of that kind when it comes to foreigners. I am pretty sure what the result of such studies would be. The unspoken truth (unspoken when it comes to our American friends, we don't talk to them about this for obvious reasons) is that you have to be much better (in terms of your CV) and smarter (in terms of your research) than the Americans on the academic job market to get a job.<sup>15</sup> There is a latent bias against women and minorities, but there is at least as strong, and likely even stronger bias against foreigners (not even mentioning open restrictions of the kind noted in footnote 15). It is latent, but it makes the CV of Ann Smith simply look better than the CV of Predrag Živojinović. (This of course can be easily tested by doing name

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13 Anyone who is bothered by this may want to play the following clip of the *Newsroom* series to their children [https://www.youtube.com/embed/Y8J7Ug\\_0N6A?end=202](https://www.youtube.com/embed/Y8J7Ug_0N6A?end=202).

14 This may be one of the reasons why so many Americans easily accept Trump's anti-foreigner stance, which actually rests on degrees of "foreignhood", a point addressed below. In this context, it is worth noting that even the personhood and First Amendment rights of non-citizens are legally on rather shaky grounds, see e.g. Michael Kagan, *When Immigrants Speak: The Precarious Status of Non-Citizen Speech Under the First Amendment*, 57 B.C.L. Rev. 1237 (2016), <http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/bclr/vol57/iss4/5>.

15 Federal funding agencies, like the National Science Foundation, do not make this any easier by heavily restricting the eligibility of non-Americans to their research funds, which are often crucially needed for research projects.

replacement.) And this is not simply Americans vs foreigners cut, it is not a simple binary divide but a matter of degree—it matters “how much” of a foreigner you are. Yes, the Americans may be smarter than the rest, but the Germans, the French (not to mention the English, they are as close as you can get to us, Americans, they even have normal names)... are pretty close to us, not for example like those Eastern Europeans. Predrag Živojinović is still lucky, it can get much worse than Eastern Europeans. Yes my fellow Americans, white males can be, and are, discriminated against, even in academia, even in linguistics, even in syntax, where the influence of Chomsky’s political thinking is much stronger than anywhere else due to his prominence in the field.<sup>16</sup> The discrimination is latent, the CV of that American applicant does seem to the committee to be better than the CV of that applicant with a strange name from god knows where (if your country, i.e. your state master, can be at least semi-believably associated with something like *Borat’s* Kazakhstan<sup>17</sup>...), it is not open discrimination. (In other words, those search committee members are not openly behaving like the audience in that Texas rodeo in *Borat*, but we are all that rodeo audience, at least to some extent, on the subconscious level<sup>18</sup>). But if you are one of the latter, then you know. Absent proof to the contrary, you are only as smart as your master is deemed to be. That is where you-have-to-be-much-better-than-the-Americans comes into picture, you have to work on that proof to the contrary. And the burden of proof is not the same for everyone. Until recently, linguistics has been not just Indo-European centric, but pretty Euro centric when it comes to the languages which were emphasized in linguistic investigations. Now you start thinking, Germanic, Romance, Slavic. The most prominent linguistics conference in Europe is GLOW. I invite everyone to take any span of 10 years, and then check and count the papers investigating these language groups, and also check the authors of those papers. What they will find is a huge Germanic and Romance vs Slavic discrepancy.<sup>19</sup> Or look at the Slavic faculty members in the North American linguistics program, easily recog-

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16 This is not to deny the privileged position of white males on different kinds of discrimination scales; the point is that the one under consideration here outranks all the other ones. You are first an American or not.

17 See 2006 movie *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*.

18 In spite of not being a “true” American, by spending more than half of my life here I have to admit to my current master conditioning working on me at least to some extent too. It should be noted that “true” in “true” American sometimes matters, and sometimes not. In the particular case of guilt by association I noted above, “true” did not matter—I was able to go to the toilet at the airport on my own once I got the American passport (though it may have helped that I had the “right” looks, being white). In the case of smartness/dumbness by association currently discussed, “true” does matter—I am not, and never will be, a “true” American.

19 There is another way this kind of discrimination is displayed. It is perfectly acceptable for Western European linguists to write about Slavic languages without checking the original sources on the phenomena they are writing about, where those original sources are generally Eastern European scholars (who actually work in the West, and publish in the venues in the West, so their work is easily accessible), which sometimes leads to almost laughably incorrect



nizable by those funky Slavic names. I am starting to count, and I am not running out of fingers. If I were to do the same with Western European faculty members, there aren't enough fingers in my whole department to do the counting. Maybe we really are not as smart as you are, maybe our CVs are really not as good as yours (we got our PhDs in the West, so it is not about "inferior" PhDs). Or maybe it is something else. A consequence of the you-are-as-smart/dumb/guilty/etc-as-your-master-is-deemed-to-be syndrome is that accomplishments of your master become your accomplishments. And an inferior state means an inferior human being, as the null hypothesis (i.e. in the absence of proof to the contrary). This smartness/dumbness/guilt by association is really the last openly acceptable form of discrimination in the West, and the most prevalent latent form of discrimination. There is also much more of the former than we would like to admit (given that conscious discrimination is more stigmatized than subconscious discrimination for obvious reasons).

One of the main roles of the state is to limit the freedom of movement, as well as the freedom to take a job (the latter is of course part of the former anyway—if you cannot get to X you cannot work in X; still, the latter is even more stringent since being able to get to X does not mean you can work in X). Your freedom of movement is not the same if you are owned by Iran and if you are owned by the US.<sup>20</sup> I don't see many Americans being bothered by this, the way they would be bothered if your freedom of movement were to be limited by other factors, like race, gender, sexual orientation.... Even if you are graciously granted that freedom of movement, why do you have to wait longer in line at passport control at the airport if you are owned by say Nigeria or Ethiopia than if you are owned by an EU country (you also have to deal with those hypocritical smiles of relief from the latter—they don't have to wait like you do. Would the privileged ones, the ones who don't have to wait in line, be equally not bothered by the difference if there was a long line for women (whether they are from Nigeria or EU) and a breeze-through for men (whether they are from Nigeria or EU)? Why is the former kind of discrimination acceptable? Shouldn't they both be unacceptable? The masquerade, the camouflage of the servitude to the state and the interests that the state stands for as the sense of belonging to a larger group somehow also camouflages very open and blatant discrimination.

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claims by well-known linguists, which could have been easily avoided if the works of Eastern European scholars were deemed as worthy of checking as the works of Western European scholars. That those claims are almost laughably incorrect is only obvious to the Eastern European linguists, who simply accept the situation, they accept that they are not equal. In fact, if they were to do something like this with respect to Romance and Germanic, they would be laughed out of the field.

20 I was practically stateless at one point (when finishing my PhD studies), in the sense that I did not have a valid passport (for a simple reason that the country I came from fell apart). That severely limited my freedom of movement and job options. I could not go to conferences outside of the US, could not apply for jobs outside of the US, even Canada (since I would have to go there for a job talk).

State idolizing, briefly referred to above, is an important part of the masquerade here. It can be more blatant or more perfidious, but it is certainly present and encouraged everywhere, in every country.<sup>21</sup> There are certain forums where it is particularly easy to sell—in particular, sports. Success in sports is in fact considered a high state interest in many countries because of that. Sports are the modern opium for the masses; as such, sports work incredibly well for the purpose of state idolizing. But we should not forget here what the state stands for—it is class/large corporations/authoritarian interests; this is actually what we are idolizing here (without realizing due to the sports camouflage).

I am writing this during the beginning of the coronavirus epidemics in the US, when the freedom of movement of New Yorkers, or those living in Connecticut, like I do, is curtailed (and when even the Right argues, blasphemously from their usual point of view, for strengthening the role of the state in some respects that would come under the short run noted in the beginning of this article). Not very severely, in most cases you can still go somewhere else, you can for example go to Florida but you have to self-quarantine for fourteen days before rejoining the society upon arrival. If this sounds harsh, imagine you are owned by Iran, you have an Iranian passport (or a countless number of other passports). You would jump in joy for this kind of freedom of movement, where you can go anywhere, to any country, just wait for fourteen days upon arrival to rejoin the society. Fourteen days may seem like an eternity for the privileged New Yorkers (and yes, you are all privileged in comparison to .... I will leave it to the reader to fill in the blanks, plenty of options there; a friend of mine who was in Bosnia during the war there, and has a Bosnian passport, only bluntly said this in response to the New Yorkers coronavirus problems: I've seen worse; another friend of mine from Bosnia, complaining about the discrimination she had to endure in France during the Yugoslav wars, also added, I was still lucky. Imagine I was from... again, fill in the blanks).

In many respects, we are defined by the state we belong to, by who owns us in this respect. This affects even what should be considered basic rights like freedom of movement and freedom to take a job (really everything, your prospects in life, your prospects for health care, education, it can even affect your right to live). You are born into it, through no fault of your own, through no accomplishment of your own. Yet, fault and accomplishment are attached to it, through the smartness/dumbness/guilt...by association.

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21 The masquerade can be incredibly obvious, especially in authoritarian countries, where one person is in fact the country. This is e.g. the case with the slogans in the former Yugoslavia: *Mi smo Titovi, Tito je naš* ('we are Tito's, Tito is ours). Another illustration of the absurdity: I was in high school when Tito died. The first morning in school after that, the whole class was uncontrollably sobbing and crying, as if their father died. I found this so absurd that I started uncontrollably laughing (after all, I knew who my father was; he did not die, I saw him in fact that morning when I left for school.).

There is an obvious similarity here with the concept of nobility. This includes the hereditary aspect (you do inherit your citizenship<sup>22</sup>), as well as the existence of legal privileges (like those pertaining to the freedom of movement that is determined by instruments like passports and visas; not to mention that there is a considerable difference in how much help you may get if you get in trouble “abroad”). Much of our life prospects thus end up being determined by a simple accident.

The concept of class as an economic state plays a central role in Chomsky’s view of anarchism, issues of class as an economic state inevitably arising all the time within the framework of modern capitalism, which anarchists hope to abolish. The point made here is that the concept of class is broader and to some extent multifaceted (though class as an economic state is very clearly at its center);<sup>23</sup> what is under discussion here is the concept of class as defined by the country that owns you—it does not at all supplant class as an economic state (though in some respects it does incorporate the aspects of the latter).<sup>24</sup> There is also clear hierarchy, clear inequality in class-by-country. This hierarchy, this inequality, is often neglected, even accepted, by those who do not accept the hierarchy and inequality that comes with the standard (for the lack of a better word) concept of class. Abolishing the state, even weakening the state would also lead to abolishing and weakening the concept of class by country.

As noted above, the concept of class by country incorporates the concept of class as an economic state, which is central to Chomsky’s work. Thus, concerning the restrictions on the freedom of movement that are imposed by requiring a passport holder entering another country to have a visa, the poorer a country is the more likely it is that its passport holders will be required to have a visa to enter another country. There are several mobility indexes which measure freedom of movement in terms of visa restrictions imposed on the passport holders of a particular country by other countries. One such index is the Henley Passport index. The three most valuable passports in the 2020 Henley Passport index are those of Japan, Singapore, and Germany. Poor countries, i.e. countries which rank low in terms of GDP per capita, like Somalia, Burundi, Niger, Central African Republic, Congo, South Sudan, Afghanistan, also rank low in the Henley Passport Index.<sup>25</sup>

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22 There are, however, still countries where women cannot pass their nationality to their offspring.

23 See also Barry Pateman’s introduction to *Chomsky on Anarchism*, AK Press, 2005, p. 10 on class as a cultural state.

24 There is a nod to the state privilege arising from the class-by-country notion in N. Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins*, Pantheon, 1969, p. 28: “The fact is that American intellectuals are increasingly achieving the status of a doubly privileged elite: first, as American citizens, with respect to the rest of the world; and second, because of their role in American society, which is surely quite central, whether or not Bell’s prediction proves accurate.”

25 For the 2020 Henley Passport Index, see [https://www.henleypassportindex.com/assets/2020/Q1/2020%20HPI%20and%20Global%20Mobility%20Report\\_200107.pdf](https://www.henleypassportindex.com/assets/2020/Q1/2020%20HPI%20and%20Global%20Mobility%20Report_200107.pdf). Other factors that matter in this kind of measurements of passport value is whether a country is involved in an

While, as pointed out in the beginning, in the short run abolishing the state may not be a practical goal, the state being needed e.g. to check the power of large corporations, if we are going to check the power of the state itself, which we do need to, we have to keep talking about its absurdity, we need to keep talking about abolishing it as part of that, no matter how impractical this may be in the short run, the goal here being something else, namely to raise the awareness of the absurdity of the concept of state, the concept of ownership by the state as a remnant of slavery, where the master can put us all in the us vs them situation... without either us or them understanding what is really behind that or that it isn't our fight. The true interests of the state (i.e. what is behind the machinery of the state) are even more removed from the citizens now than in e.g. Ancient Greece; many of the overt and covert wars that the US has been engaged in are related to the true interests of its citizens as much as for example the war between the Athens/Second Athenian League and Chios/Rhodes/Cos/Byzantium in Ancient Greece was related to the interests of the slaves there, who at least knew that it wasn't their fight. More generally, belonging to a state in Ancient Greece involved less servitude to broader interests that have nothing to do with you than it does now. It is important to recall here that the servitude to the state, which most of us willingly subject ourselves to, does not come from "a natural inclination to servitude" but a natural inclination to belong to a larger group, which is taken advantage of in this context. Once this sense of belonging is recognized for what it really is—servitude; more precisely, servitude to what the state represents (class and political interests, large corporation interests, a more localized authoritarian interest)—getting rid of the state becomes part of the struggle for freedom, which is an essential human attribute.

The interests behind the state prey on our natural inclination to belong, taking advantage of it through the concept of "my country" to get us to accept more readily servitude to their interests. What does it really mean when someone says "I'm proud to be an American"? It implies accepting serving the interests behind the machinery of this particular state. It also means taking credit for what you had nothing to do with (e.g. the Declaration of Independence, beating the Nazis in World War Two, getting to the moon... Similarly, "I'm proud to be Greek" means taking credit for the achievements of Ancient Greece, Aristotle, Plato...). The downside of this is that you can also end up taking blame for something you did not do. And none of this was your accomplishment or your fault.

Our state masters determine our freedom of movement, freedom to choose where to work, through fancy instruments called passports and visas, which are used to

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armed conflict (or more generally politically unstable) and/or perceived to be a likely origin of terrorists.

hide that their real goal is limitations of personal freedom.<sup>26</sup> As such, instruments like passports and visas go against human nature—they restrict personal freedom, hence go against the essential human attribute—struggle for freedom. How would we react if someone were to restrict our freedom of movement, by making traveling from one city to another, say New York to Los Angeles, as difficult and cumbersome as travelling from one country to another? I'm travelling from a city to a city in both cases, why should there be any difference? Why do we so readily accept the difference? The same question can be raised about job prospects. How about making legally getting a job in Los Angeles for a New Yorker as cumbersome as it is as getting a job in London. Why should that be any different? Why are there restrictions on my wanting to travel to Delhi, or work and live in London? Why do we accept that? Why do we allow the interests behind the machinery of the state to put such restrictions on our freedom of movement, job prospects (not to mention the extreme case of those interests forcing us to go and fight in a war), restrictions that we would not accept when it comes to also two arbitrarily picked cities, New York and Los Angeles? Our goal should be to expose and undermine the sense of normalcy in accepting such state imposed restrictions on the freedom of movement (even when they are light). After all, if someone else, not the state, restricts our freedom of movement in this manner, we would not so readily accept it.

Isn't it ironic that there used to be way fewer restrictions on travel and job prospects of the kind noted above?<sup>27</sup> The state-imposed restrictions in this respect are a relatively modern concept, which came with the strengthening of the ownership by the state—the citizens used to be less owned by the state, which actually resulted in more freedom of movement. The concept of a stateless person is also a modern phenomenon—the strengthening of the ownership by the state gave rise to it. Those limitations on the freedom of movement and getting a job noted above are in fact particularly extreme with stateless persons, due to the lack of some of those fancy instruments that are used to legitimize those restrictions. Understanding that

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26 It's not only that the country you are not a citizen of puts restrictions on you being able to enter the country, minimally requiring you to have a passport, and also often to have a visa, where the country of entrance gets to put additional restrictions on you entering the country (having a visa actually does not guarantee entry, since the border crossing authorities are generally allowed to cancel a visa at the border at their discretion), it's also that the country you are a citizen of can put restrictions on getting a passport—being a citizen of a country does not automatically mean you are granted a passport. E.g. in Pakistan, getting a passport requires an interview and signing a religion related oath. In the former Warsaw block countries, passport issuance was not automatic for all citizens, but essentially a privilege and exit visas were required to be able to leave the country. In some countries (e.g. Togo and Montenegro), passport and nationality can be essentially bought with large investments. (In Montenegro this will cost you half-a-million euros; being convicted of a criminal offense will not disqualify you as long as your jail term was not for more than one year).

27 Even as late as late as 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, passports were generally not needed to travel from one country to another.

what the word “foreigner” really means is that the person simply has a different state slave owner should help raise the awareness, hence help deal with the acceptable discrimination of foreigners. Foreigners may be the most the discriminated group of people but they are not a protected class under federal laws that define protected classes. National origin discrimination is actually included in the types of discrimination defined in the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, hence is covered by the US Equal Employment Opportunity laws, but it is defined in a way that does not include foreigners (i.e. non-Americans) as a class, see in this respect the following quote from the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission web page<sup>28</sup>: “National origin discrimination involves treating people (applicants or employees) unfavorably because they are from a particular country or part of the world.” Furthermore, while the law forbids national-origin based discrimination “when it comes to any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing”<sup>29</sup>, it is pretty easy to evade that—this is in fact done quite commonly, but in a way that applies to all foreigners (so in a way that maximizes discrimination), which actually does not go against Equal Employment Opportunity rights since it does not pick on employees that come from particular countries. Essentially, you cannot discriminate against some of them, but you can discriminate against all of them. This is for example easily done by changing the employer’s policy regarding sponsorship of visas. A case was just brought to my attention where a very prominent US university terminated employment of a foreigner who the university sponsored for an H-1B visa for a particular job by the university simply deciding that they will no longer sponsor a visa for that job—they will still advertise the same position but foreigners, including the foreigner in question, will no longer be eligible for it; so the position is not eliminated but foreigners are.<sup>30</sup> Were the university to exclude a foreigner from a particular country this way, this would violate Equal Employment Opportunity laws, but excluding all of them is perfectly fine. Many Americans, including self-proclaimed liberals, find this perfectly acceptable. But the situation is utterly ridiculous: the more discrimination there is the more acceptable it is. In other words, when it comes to the foreign-

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28 US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/nationalorigin.cfm> Accessed April 24, 2020.

29 US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/nationalorigin.cfm> Accessed April 24, 2020.

30 Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University has simply changed their policies in a way that they no longer support temporary or permanent immigration sponsorship below a certain, newly defined rank. Accordingly, all the foreigner faculty below the rank in question who they brought in with Peabody sponsoring their visas are now fired; in at least one case Peabody is re-advertising the position, so this was not the case of the position being closed. Of course the letter that Peabody is sending says that they “will no longer be able to sponsor” H-1B visas but that happened simply because they decided that they do not want to do that; there is agency hidden behind the carefully chosen word “unable” (they are unable because they don’t want to) that is inserted in their letter. The letter also says that the position from which the foreign faculty is being fired will still be advertised and filled.

ers, you cannot discriminate against some of them, but you can discriminate against all of them. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which is supposed to prevent discrimination on the basis of national origin, actually ends up promoting such discrimination since the law ends up encouraging maximizing the discrimination on the grounds of national origin. Say you are a bigot who hates Mexicans and you got a position in charge of human resources in a firm which employs twenty foreigners, eighteen Mexican nationals, and two Russian nationals. It is pretty easy for that bigot to find a legal way (e.g. in the manner described above) to fire those eighteen Mexican nationals as long as the two Russian nationals are also fired.

Consider also affirmative action in the context of immigration. This context is often used to argue against affirmative action in general, or to argue against extending any potential benefits of affirmative action to immigrants, or those born in the US to immigrant parents, even second generation Americans.<sup>31</sup> The crux of the argument concerns the concept of affirmative action where affirmative action is intended to address historical injustices against African Americans (so not as a policy to guarantee diversity by race), hence, the argument goes, affirmative action should not be extended to first or second generation immigrants from say The Gambia or Haiti. But those immigrants are of the same race, their ancestors may also have been slaves (almost a certainty with Haiti), their more immediate economic circumstances have likely been way more dire (considering the difference in the standard of living between e.g. the US and Haiti), the only thing that the argument rests on is really the accident of birth (i.e. where you were born), in fact not even your own accident of birth but your parents' or grandparents'. Why should this kind of accident of birth be treated differently from the accident of birth involved in the concept of nobility, which this country has at least officially eliminated (putting aside the Bushes, the Kennedys of this country as pseudo-nobility)?

The fact is that much of our life prospects are determined by an accident, the accident of where we were born. One of the main roles of the concept of the state is to ensure that. Even when the state recognizes and attempts to ensure the right of every child to have food and get health care almost by definition it attaches the adjective privileged to the children in question by erecting barriers in terms of state borders to "every" in "every child". Even when the state border barrier is no longer there, in the

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31 For relevant discussion, see for example Nathan Glazer, *Debate on Aliens Flares Beyond the Melting Pot*, The New York Times, April 23, 1995; James Robb, *Affirmative Action for Immigrants: The Entitlement Nobody Wanted*, The Social Contract Press, 1995; Hugh Davis Graham. "Affirmative Action for Immigrants? The Unintended Consequences of Reform." In *Color Lines: Affirmative Action, Immigrants, and Civil Rights Options for America*, ed. by J.D. Skrentny, University of Chicago Press, 2001; Farah Stockman, *'We're Self-Interested': The Growing Identity Debate in Black America*. The New York Times, November 8, 2019; Mary C. Waters and Zoua Vang "The Challenges of Immigration to Race Based Diversity Policies in the United States." In *Diversity and Canada's Future*, ed. by Leslie Seidle, Keith Bantin, and Thoams Courchene, Institute for Research on Public Policy Press, 2007.

US there is the “unqualified immigrant” barrier to federal public benefits. Even when the unqualified immigrant barrier is no longer there, there is the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 barrier.<sup>32</sup> The state does a pretty good job of ensuring the relevance of the accident of your birth.

From the perspective of raising the awareness of discrimination on such grounds, which in many cases flies under the radar (especially if you are fortunate enough to belong to a ‘right’ state), I applaud countries like Brazil changing their entrance rules for American citizens to match those that the American authorities imposed on their citizens (no matter how much I loathe the possessives in the preceding sentence). Standing in a long line for American citizens at the Rio de Janeiro airport, with citizens from other countries just breezing by, I was hoping that at least some of those angry entitled people waiting in that line will start wondering why this is happening to them. This is the last publicly fully acceptable criterion for discrimination in this country, but apparently only as long as we don’t feel it ourselves. There are still blatant racists, chauvinists... (we all know at least one of them—we in fact see him on TV almost daily); discrimination on these grounds is at least officially unacceptable (and, thankfully, often ostracized); discrimination on the grounds of what state master you belong to, on the other hand, is fully acceptable—there is no protected class in this respect, and there can’t be as long as the master is involved in determining protected classes. It can go as far as state-sanctioned killing of foreigners, who, as individuals, may not have done anything wrong, in time of war.

In many countries where more than one ethnic group lives there is open discrimination toward some ethnic groups. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, your ethnicity pretty much defines who you are—ethnic-based discrimination is quite open there. In former Yugoslavia it was far less open and widespread but still present; in fact some of that got carried over to the post-Yugoslav states. Before the war, in Slovenia there was a derogatory concept of *južnjaci* ‘southerners’. The discrimination on the basis of ethnic groups is regularly labeled as unacceptable, but the one based on belonging to particular states often escapes open labeling although it is not different in any way. In fact, it is pretty obvious in the case in question, which is the reason why I am bringing it up. The concept of *južnjaci* got carried over with Slovenia becoming an independent state—only now it refers to the citizens of different countries. And of course, everyone has their own southerners; all those former Yugoslavs are in fact

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32 On how the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 curtail the eligibility of immigrants for public benefits, see for example George J. Borjas, *The Impact of Welfare Reform on Immigrant Welfare Use*, Center for Immigration Studies, 2002 and Tanya Broder. “Immigrant Eligibility for Public Benefits.” In *American Immigration Lawyers Association Immigration and Nationality Law Handbook 2005-06*, National Immigrant Lawyers Association, 2005.



southerners for the Germans (and the Germans who live in, and belong to, those southerner states are not quite like the “real” Germans either).

Going back to the responsibility of intellectuals and the activist role that comes with it, when it comes to the state, our goal, the activist goal, should be to undermine the sense of belonging, and eventually to lose the sense of belonging to a state.<sup>33</sup> The slaves in Ancient Rome at least knew they were slaves. The sense of normalcy in accepting state imposed restrictions on the freedom of movement, even when they are light, should also be subverted. In the spirit of that, JFK’s cliché “ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country”<sup>34</sup> should be replaced with: Ask not what you can do for your country — ask why you have to have a country.

One final passage is in order for the sake of clarification given the beginning of this paper. The concept of the state is (morally) abhorrent: regarding the issues discussed in this paper, there is no short or long run, it is abhorrent in any run; it is a discriminatory concept, used for open and blatant discrimination, the last fully acceptable form of discrimination in what is called the West, which is simply the privileged class in this form of discrimination. The sense of belonging to the state needs to be undermined now, the discrimination that comes with it, both the officially sanctioned one, like the limitations on the freedom of movement (implemented through passports and visas) and the more perfidious discrimination, illustrated above through guilt/smartness...by association (it is not your fault or an accomplishment that you were born in a particular country; you were not a better person than me because you are an American, I did not become a better person when I got that passport) needs to be confronted and fought right now. Our life prospects should not be so greatly influenced by an accident, the accident of where we were born.

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33 I lost it but it was easier for me, my state master died.

34 John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961.

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