



AFTERWORD

Towards the Era of the Post-Human

Bruce Kapferer

William Dalrymple's *The Anarchy* (2019) wonderfully reminds us that India, the jewel in the crown of Imperial Britain, was born in the rapacious actions of a trading corporation, the East India Company, oriented to extraction of maximum profit. Citing Edmund Burke: '... the Company would, at last, like a viper, be the destruction of the country which fostered it at its bosom'. In the virtual anarchy that the Company wrought, as Dalrymple describes, was its emergence as the colonial state, eventually to metamorphose, via reforms, resistance and the achievement of national independence, into the contemporary nation-state of the Republic of India. Presenting his key point on the joint stock company that was the EIC, Dalrymple states,

We still talk about the British conquering India, but the phrase disguises a more sinister reality. It was not the British government that began seizing great chunks of India in the mid-eighteenth century, but a dangerously unregulated private company headquartered in one small office, five windows wide, in London, and managed in India by a violent, utterly ruthless and intermittently mentally unstable corporate predator – Clive.

The Victorians thought the real stuff of history was the politics of the nation-state. This not the economics of corrupt corporations, they believed was the fundamental unit of study and the real driver of transformation in human affairs. (Dalrymple 2019: xxv)

What happened in India was repeated around the globe as part of the European expansion east, north, south and west. The prime instruments were not just adventurers in search of riches, but often organized in the form of joint stock companies that assumed the virtual autonomy of states (corpo-

rate republics in some current nomenclature), complete with their own administrative apparatus and instruments (police and military) for the monopolization of violent control, frequently backed by the sovereign territorial states that extended them charter. These companies (the EIC was among the most outstanding) were deterritorializing and, in effect, themselves territorially unlimited – the domains of their sovereignty constrained by the violent competition of other territorially sovereign state-backed companies or corporate republics in the regions that they entered and which were open to grab.

The broad, if arguably unexceptionable point, is that the still-dominant global form of the nation-state saw its emergence in the political-economic, social and religious transformations of Europe that were also the circumstances for the formations of capitalism, tied to the emergence of the bourgeoisie and their rule. Marx, of course, developed this understanding the most clearly, also recognizing the moral and political order of the nation-state (its liberal ideology, its ‘civilizing’ mission) that masked, as it may have tempered, the violence and oppressive, hierarchizing, suppressive and marginalizing forces at the heart of the nation-state. Thomas Hobbes wrote his highly influential conservative monarchist traditionalist treatise on the state, *Leviathan*, in reaction to what he experienced as the socially destructive and fractious individualist competitiveness of the merchant groups in London, the adventure capitalists vital to imperialist enterprise and the forming of the nation-state (see Stern 2012; Kapferer and Gold 2018; Kapferer 2019).

The nation-state is an ideological and political economic formation that has a capitalist, corporatist dynamic at its beginnings and centre, the predatory and savage dimension of such a dynamic being domesticated or subordinated (and regulated) to the legal and socio-moral political orders of the nation-state.

Much discussion on contemporary political processes, as in this volume on South and Central American states, conceive their crises as being connected to neoliberalism and resistance to it. This is sometimes treated as relatively recent, reaching a high point in the era of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, for instance, and extending from it. But, as should be clear here, what is addressed as neoliberalism has its foundation in the world of the formation of the nation-state. What is referred to in this book as the corporate state was born with the creation of the nation-state. The hollowing out of the nation-state, the feature of the current historical moment and effectively the nation-state’s reconfiguration as the corporate state, is little short of the apotheosis or full actualization of capital and its pragmatism for profit mediated through social and political formations of class and what was already immanent in the nation-state – a phenomenon that was coincident with Eu-

ropean and North American imperialism and the establishment of the roots of capitalism as the global energy of modernity and post-modernity.

I stress the dynamic (and especially the inner capitalist/corporate process integral to nation-state formation) as one of deterritorialization/reterritorialization, in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari (2002; also Kapferer and Taylor 2012) use the concepts. They are akin to the destructive/creative dynamic that Marx and others recognize to be distinctive of capital: its capacity to adapt and transform to shifting circumstance in the undying hunger to extract the greatest profit. Such is particularly evident at the imperial/colonial outreach that involved the radical restructuring or reformation of the sociopolitical (and ecological) terrains of the imperial intrusions. The class/ethnic/racial hierarchies (and other forms of social marginalization) in the cases presented in this volume exemplify the point. It is a dynamic of sociopolitical and cultural invention and reinvention that builds and rebuilds the social and political ground for capital. This is clear in the processes of bourgeois control and the continual struggles of bourgeois social and political fractions to reproduce their dominance through a process of changing alliances and betrayals, brilliantly discussed by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* – the dynamic of which continues in what many see as the unfolding tragedies of Trump's presidency and in the wranglings of the UK's Brexit (see Kapferer 2016).

Such is also starkly apparent in the chapters of this volume.

One critical thesis of the volume concerns the recurrent pattern of hierarchical forces giving way to egalitarian energies (of sociopolitical liberation, the opening up of opportunities for the oppressed and marginalized, etc.) only for these to give way to hierarchical orders or reactive programs. A major conceptual understanding in this book relates to the fact that hierarchy and egalitarian processes are not mutually exclusive. As I think is well-recognized, paradoxically, egalitarian ideologies often embed hierarchical and exclusivist potential, often of a racist kind that present-day populism, for example, evinces throughout much of the globe. Further, egalitarian forces are premised on the imagination of hierarchy, as they are motivated, most often, by the constraining, oppressive, virtually life-extinguishing and marginalizing effects of hierarchical power.

More generally, it is the history of state formation that underpins the unity of hierarchical with egalitarian dynamics, the mutuality of their implication, in which apparent egalitarianizing developments come to function, from the perspective of the social and political order as a whole, as a means for the reproduction of that order. What can appear as revolutionary, as the American materials so tragically demonstrate, ultimately operates counteractively as a process of reassemblage and continuity. Egalitarian forces are, in the language of the kind of market logics that receive heightened value in

this era of the corporate state, little other than system 'corrections'. They are moments of social and political re-adjustment in the re-formation of inequitable social orders.

The mutual implication of hierarchical and egalitarian dynamics in state systems, and especially those of the nation-state, have a lot to do with the historically produced structural relations of class and race dominated by the bourgeoisie, by and large the agents of capital and a class category in continual formation – a dynamic process in capital – drawing its members from all points across the social spectrum. It is largely among the bourgeoisie that discourse couched in hierarchical and egalitarian terms is the most intense (the bourgeoisie provide the bulk of conservatives and radicals, however these are defined). It is such discourse, usually of a classic or conventional left/right kind, that comprises the terms of the political alignment of fractions of the bourgeoisie in controlling the sociopolitical orders that are affected by capital, and who become willy-nilly agents in the transitions and transformations of the circumstances for the survival of capital or its expansion.

The hierarchical/egalitarian cycle might be understood as closely connected to what has been discussed, in the heyday for the European nation-state (e.g. Pareto, Mosca, Michels; see Nye 1977), as the circulation of elites, a revolving or redistribution of power among dominant groups who share similar class interests even if they have different visions of how these may be preserved.

But perhaps this cycle is approaching its limit and is at the threshold of new potential – in Max Weber's understanding, a switching moment in history of revolutionary frustration and a deepening inequity.

The circulations of power within dominant elites (and the cross-class/race/gender relations, the shifts in relations and reassembling of power blocs promising benefit for sections of the wider frequently disadvantaged populations) facilitated the continuity of an inequitable social order despite or because of its contradictions. The circulation of elites might be conceived as a kind of political and economic redistributive dynamic that enabled particular class interests by drawing others into its web of alliance. The emergence of what is addressed in this book as the corporate state gains significance in this regard.

What is described as the corporate state, as the editors stress, involves a reconfiguration, redetermination and submission of the orders of the nation-state to the rationalism of the economic, to an economic pragmatism that pervades most areas of sociopolitical existence. If it is an outcome of neoliberalism, the imaginary of the corporate state is its most potent manifestation. Thus what has led to the emergence of the corporate state is a desire to institutionalize neoliberal ideology against resistances generated in the contradictions and conflicts, effectively class forces, born of the capi-

talism that conditions the society of the nation-state. The ascendance of the corporate state from within the shell of the nation-state reveals itself as an attack on democratic value (frequently in its name) bearing that shade of the fascism of the recent past in cries of greater efficiency. The corporatizing of the nation-state is associated not just with privatization and outsourcing but the widespread managerialization of bureaucracy (the creation of managerial hierarchies of control relatively free of democratic contingency) and the general establishment of a productive ethos (auditing and other methods of productive control) as a vital dimension of social relations reconceived in terms of the maximization of productive effort. The impetus is against any kind of social disruption threatening a 'harmony' of control. The corporate state is an imagination of the sociopolitical framed largely in terms of a business model founded along the lines of rational economic individualism, whose rationality is defined by results relative to the energy expended.

Manuel DeLanda (2006, see Kapferer 2010) expresses in much of his work a philosophy appropriate to the rise of the corporate state, in addition to an appreciation of the new technologies (most specifically relating to digitalization) that have facilitated the corporate state and the societies of its control (Deleuze 1992) and surveillance (Zuboff 2019) – what may be regarded as the anti-democratic effects of the emergence of the corporate state. Such effects manifest as an attack on forms of the social that emerged in history: initially outside the history of capital, and/or which took form as resistant entities through the force of capital, as in the protests shaped in the relations of class/race/gender. What might be described as the corporatization of the social and the political has encouraged the fractionalization of contesting groups and social categories, often engaging an egalitarianizing ethos, individualist in emphasis, against their collectivist possibility (a paradox of much egalitarianism), with hierarchical effect. A radical restructuring of social and political terrains is in process. Class inequalities have intensified in corporatism (associated with post-industrialism and new innovative forms of production and marketing linked to what is often referred to as the gig economy) along with a growing incapacity of the increasingly exploited and dispossessed to resist.

What I am suggesting is that the rise of the corporate state subverts the repetitive or recurrent cycle of mutually implicated hierarchical/egalitarian processes. Hierarchical forces gain sway and egalitarian processes are relatively suppressed to build increasingly towards system-overturning revolutionary potential. Perhaps there are indications of this in recent events in Bolivia and Chile, as well as a widespread ramping up of sociopolitical violence throughout the societies concerned, as Mexico possibly illustrates.

As already indicated, the wave of populist political action that is explicitly antagonistic not just to political elites but to the established political party

systems of many nation-state orders gives a sense of growing impatience altogether with the corporatizing change in the sociopolitical orders of many nation-states. This is assuming an international dimension, even as nationalist sentiments are receiving increasing voice, the latter in certain cases being an effect of the former. Contemporary populism expresses a frustration with the democratic process that is the basis of state legitimacy. But this impatience is to a growing extent beyond the control of nation-states, whose erstwhile sovereignty has been compromised by globalizing processes that are to a major degree driven in the rise of the corporate state whose potency draws from its cross-state or internationally networked bases as much as or even more than from its supposed national home base. The nationalist turn of much populism is in many aspects a reaction to the rise of the corporate state, whose agents, even as they act within the political order of nation-states, are becoming more alienated from the populations they claim to represent.

The chapters in this volume concentrate on the sociopolitical dynamics within nation-states. But with the rise of the corporate state the forces of domination and control have slipped the domains of even limited democratic possibility. It is in the spaces outside nation-states perhaps more than within them that the forces for expanding social and political abjection, driven in new realizations of capitalist potential and more and more impervious to the human suffering that is occurring, is building. The current historical moment is sometimes referred to as the 'post-human'. The irony of such a label should not be missed.

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