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The Rise of Clan-Based Governance

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To Luca,
for the lives he saved
and for the books he wrote

Preface to English Edition

The book that follows represents an attempt to offer as coherent and comprehensive an interpretation as possible of the world in which we live; a model of analysis, we might even say, that does not settle for such effective yet reductive formulas as "new world disorder". The underlying assumption—as will be seen—is that 1989, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bipolar system based on the balance of terror, also ended a centuries-old diarchy between state and capitalism. Since then, the processes of globalization have brought about a genuine triumph of neoliberal ideology, the effects of which are there for all to see: the unstoppable growth of inequality; the crises of democracies, with the resurgence of populism; the loss of control of phenomena that are in themselves consubstantial to human development, such as migrations or urbanization processes—not to mention the environmental crisis.

The protagonists of this truly new "great transformation" are no longer nation-states, but clans, whose rebirth and spread in all contexts and at all latitudes, regardless of political regime and level of development, is explained by their ability to interpose themselves between individuals and institutions and mediate between local and global. The clan represents the "solution" to the problem of managing neoliberal globalization, determining the triumph of economic, private interests over political, public ones.

In the three years since the book's publication in Italy, a series of highly tragic events has not only strengthened the plausibility of the book's theoretical framework, but has ended up confirming its pessimistic conclusions about the advent of an autoimmune society, which feeds its own ills instead of striving to eradicate them.

The Covid-19 pandemic, from 2020 to 2022, has made even more evident the absolute inability of politics to give a coherent and unified response at the global level; claiming, on the contrary, the functionality of borders, even at the subnational level, in the face of a virus that, by definition, makes a mockery of any border, physical and mental. Above all, it has made more evident and dramatic in its consequences the now pathological self-referentiality achieved by Western political systems, concerned (and not always, if we recall the stances taken by such notable figures as then US President Donald Trump or British Prime Minister Boris Johnson) to protect at most the health of their own citizens, completely oblivious to the rest of the world. The same self-referentiality that continues to prevent them from confronting a climate crisis now out of control or much more "humane" phenomena such as migration flows.

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The most significant event, however, for our purposes is certainly Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which also brought into sharp relief the inability of the social sciences to emancipate themselves from the old paradigms: power politics, imperialism and nationalisms.

Far from proposing a return to the past, in fact, the war unleashed by Russian leader Vladimir Putin represents for all intents and purposes the supreme phase of neoliberal capitalism, as well as the apotheosis of what, in the literature, are called "new wars". An autocrat who claims to make private use of the apparatuses of the state, knowing that he can count on the support of at least part of the armed forces (of the top brass, rather than the ranks, it seems), brings to a new and higher level that permanent global civil war—characterized by continuous internal conflicts within states capable however, of producing international repercussions both economically and socially and, above all, of turning into an ordinary and perpetual condition for millions of human beings—which has become one of the inescapable features of the world in which we live (see below, in Chapter Three).

Compared to Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen—to take just a few of the possible examples—Ukraine embodies a quantum leap because it is at the centre of Europe and because of the scale of the means of mass destruction employed. However, as it is the case in all other theatres of war, the goal here is to make slaughter and destruction the daily bread of defenceless populations (albeit, here, in much greater numbers); and to generate, as a result, an even more biblical flow of refugees (now all within Europe).

Contrary to what we read and hear repeatedly in the media, the attack on Ukraine does not represent the failure of globalization; if anything, it is a demonstration of its inability to stop, of the fact that its race has run out of control. It represents the end point of the process that began at the end of the Cold War and which, as the book argues, is the product of an original combination of shadow economy and hegemonic instability.

This is demonstrated by a quick comparison with the two twentieth-century world wars. Let us look, first of all, at the wartime economy. In the current conflict, the market manages to meet the growing demands of the contending parties without, at the moment, noticeably altering the production flows of normal consumer goods: the supply of means of mass destruction of the most varied nature does not seem to interfere with that of cars, computers or cell phones for civilian use. On the financial side, too, the United States and European countries are proving capable of lavishing billions of dollars and euros of aid on Ukraine without resorting to extraordinary measures; while Putin, for his part, still seems, for the time being, to be able to meet war expenses by drawing on the extra profits guaranteed by gas and oil exports.

One cannot, in short, ignore the fact that Russia (as well as China) are today perfectly integrated into the global capitalist system, as demonstrated, moreover, by the fact that everyone in Europe and the US (and Italy) has done business with Russian oligarchs, allowing them for decades to enjoy the illicit fruits of looting their country on yachts moored in Costa Smeralda or in villas in central London (and to buy European citizenship through Golden Visas or Investor Immigration Programs offered by almost all member states).

Second, the masses also play a somewhat different role in the current war than in the two world wars. The aggressed Ukraine, to be sure, had to resort to conscription; as, eventually, did Putin himself, with much more caution and with not a few difficulties created by the draft dodging of many young men. But, not unlike what has been happening for decades in conflict on the world's peripheries, multiple non-state groups are also deployed on the battlefields: mercenaries, ethnic-based militias, international brigades. This genuine subcontracting of spot fighting in the territories, particularly by Russian government (with the case of the infamous Wagner Company, authorized to recruit even among prisoners and adept at stealing the thunder from the armed forces themselves), not only strains the lines of command, but above all encourages the perpetration of war crimes.

Failing to grasp the newness of this context and reintroducing old twentieth-century paradigms carries immense risks. In particular, the claim of leaders and intellectuals to interpret the current war in terms of the return of nationalism, like any self-fulfilling prophecy, could really end up provoking a broader direct involvement of the masses on the battlefield.

Above all, it deprives democracies of the chance they still have to halt the carnage and prevent the escalation of conflict. At the turn of the twentieth century, the overcoming of absolute monarchies had been made possible by a convergence of interests between the state and capitalism: the advent of parliamentarianism, the rise of mass parties and trade unions, represented the counterbalance of growing industrialization, the rise of the working class, and, to follow, the need for the market economy to feed on mass consumption. The victory of democracies over Nazism and Fascism had strengthened this alliance for some decades, at least until the (political) decision to end the Bretton Woods agreements had emancipated financial capitalism from any supervision by states.

Today, it would perhaps be possible to enter into a new pact, mutually convenient because it has its own economic rationality, which would allow (democratic) politics to rediscover its essential function of combating inequality through income redistribution—a strategy that, beyond any ethical considerations, would help revive mass consumption and reduce social conflict—and for the market to reconvert production so that it is no longer content merely to satisfy the luxuries of

the elites, but also to meet both the immense demands for goods and services by the impoverished masses and the need to save the planet from self-destruction.

Turin, 19 September 2023

Contents

Foreword

> There are two ways by which the spirit of a culture may be shriveled. In the first—the Orwellian—culture becomes a prison. In the second—the Huxleyan—culture becomes a burlesque. [...] An Orwellian world is much easier to recognize, and to oppose, than a Huxleyan (Postman, 1985: 155–156).

The turn of the millennium, following the fall of the communist regimes and the end of the Cold War, marked the start of a global process of restructuring society that is affecting every aspect of individuals' daily lives and the institutions to which they have hitherto entrusted the organization of their interests and their own survival. The politics of the mass parties, the class struggle and the defence of collective interests have given way to a much richer and more diverse array of actors, capable of drawing, as needed, on the typical resources of the various social spheres—political, economic and civil—and variously producing their own, original power configurations. The modern state, which for the past five centuries has provided the institutional framework for social dynamics, still exists. The network that it built up and implemented over time, the international community that, in the course of the twentieth century, eventually came to incorporate all the earth's land surface within states, is still active. But this is not the only network, nor today is it necessarily the most significant.

The new protagonists of this great transformation are clan-based groups. They are more effective at combining local and global than the old state institutions. They do so at a lower cost and without the constraints imposed by respect for democratic rules. For an obvious example, look at the various forms of organized crime, from the mafia to terrorists and warlords. And the clan logic has also returned to the fore in politics. Just think of Donald Trump's "familial" administration in the USA, or the magic "circles" and "lilies" in Italian politics. It now also characterizes the seemingly aloof dynamics of the financial elites and the CEOs of large multinational corporations.

What we are witnessing, seen with hindsight, is the spread of a veritable new form of government characterized by two main factors: 1) it is based on the clan as the reference structure of the social system and 2) it puts (private) economic interests ahead of political (public) interests. Consequently, I have chosen to define this new form of government *oikocracy.* This neologism is derived from the union of the Greek term *kratos*, power, with *oikos*, which signifies the home, family or clan, and is the root of the word "economy" (meaning "household management").

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Oikocracy is proposed as a universal model, one that supersedes the traditional embodiments of politics, from democracy to authoritarianism, systems whose forms it even tends to emulate, reducing them to epiphenomena. Moreover, oikocracy does not present itself as a residual form of government, to be attributed perhaps to those developing countries on the periphery of the international system that are already "failed" or "rogue" states. On the contrary, its origin lies in the Western and most highly industrialized countries and then expands from the West to the rest of the world. Europe and the United States, moreover, have possessed undisputed political and above all global financial hegemony for centuries. Think, on the one hand, of the principles enshrined in the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe, or the strategy of the balance of terror underpinning the Cold War; and, on the other, the fact that it was those same powers, the victors in World War II, that laid the foundations of the international financial system at Bretton Woods and then brought that system to an end thirty years later. The latter decision certainly favoured the triumph of capitalism over the Soviet state economy, but at the same time it opened the doors to the uncontrolled growth of private credit and generated the chronic instability of the financial and monetary system that continues to trigger recurrent crises in the world economy.

The spread of oikocracy around the world today foreshadows the birth of a new regime, one that combines the two dystopias of Orwell and Huxley evoked in the epigraph in an original way. Postman adds that Orwell warned against oppression imposed from above that had the purpose of depriving people of their memory and independence. Huxley represented the people as coming to love their oppressors, to adore technologies that nullified their powers of thought. Orwell feared those who would ban books; Huxley that there would be no need to ban them, since no one would want to read them any more. Orwell feared that we would be deprived of the truth and develop a slave culture; Huxley that the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance and we would generate a trivial culture.

Depending on the times and the regional contexts, now one and now the other of these models may prevail, though the Western democracies today show a certain preference for the Huxleyan dystopia, while Orwell still seems to be relevant to Russian autocracy or those of Islamic origin. But these are forms that are entirely compatible with each other, united as they are by their similar clan-based matrix.

To use a metaphor, it is as if, before falling into defeat, the old totalitarianisms had the time to spread the genes that, over time, reproduced in the new societies, mixing with other "hereditary" historical-cultural factors specific to various places. And it is as if some of these genes had even become embedded within the triumphant democracies, modifying or subverting their nature, yet enabling them, at the

same time, to conceal the mutation by continuing to display their democratic mask outwardly.

Almost without realizing it, we are producing an autoimmune society, incapable of recognizing its pathogens and consequently doomed to foster its ills instead of eradicating them.

In our partial favour it has to be said that, unlike in the past, all these manifestations of dystopic regimes, if taken individually, seem almost harmless or, at least, easy to circumscribe. In reality, they tend to form networks that, over time, as in a horror film, could grow into a global deadly fluid (the Blob), but only when it could well be too late for us to defeat it. If this happens, it would mean that, by now, we have come to the end of the democratic experiment.

This, at least, is what I mean to demonstrate in the following pages.

The Prologue is intended to demystify the world view propagated with increasing frequency by political elites in Europe and the United States, which represents the Western world as the victim under daily siege to destroy its values and models of life. To do this, I will start from a simple record of two days in the life of the world, reconstructed by scrolling through the headlines of the websites of the best-known international newspapers, and then moving on to the analysis of some aggregate data on arms production and trade, the global distribution of wealth and migration.

The first chapter of this book starts from the assumption that the whole development of the modern state has been characterized by a substantial congruence of interests between it and capitalism. The political evolution from absolute monarchies to liberal-democratic parliamentary systems has gone hand in hand with the emergence of a market economy in its successive commercial, industrial and financial forms. The second half of the twentieth century, however, with the onset of processes of globalization and the emergence of a neoliberal ideology, began to put the traditional diarchy between state and capitalism under pressure.

Finally, 1989 marks an epochal fracture, the arrival point of a sequence of crises that produced a far-reaching transformation of the traditional social spaces, destined to generate an increasingly complex network of actors arising from political, economic and civil society, originating what we define as the new paradigm of the triadic society. These actors interact with one another at any level, from the street to the Web, triggering an unprecedented acceleration (a vortex) in the processes of globalization; and, in addition, making the boundaries of their respective fields increasingly permeable.

The second chapter explores the nature of this triadic society by analysing in greater detail the oikocratic regime it creates. As will be seen, the re-emergence of the clan—never completely vanquished, after all, in the long process of the construction of the modern state—marks the end of the age of individual rights

and our consequent entry into an era in which the individual's independence and freedom are subordinated to the interests and the will of the relevant "imagined family". The clan is capable of nurturing the emotional attachment of its members and strengthening its power of social control over them, in part due to its broad availability of resources: clientelistic political and social relations, and money of course, whether acquired legally or not.

Oikocracy also tends to restore cities to the centre of the political universe, furthering a process already begun by globalization, transforming them with increasing frequency into places for the exercise of coercive power, as well as the continuous and inexhaustible reproduction of original accumulation of resources. Moreover, oikocracy proposes a reinterpretation of the boundary between legal and illegal, which becomes fluid, adapting to the needs of the various clans involved and effectively undermining legal certainty. This continuous redefinition of the spaces of legality, gradually configures competing clusters of sovereignty, confering a comparative advantage to those clans that can also draw on resources of violence.

The third chapter develops the idea that the spread of oikocracy in the world is generating a new form of absolutism that we could term "neoliberal". Today's absolutism seems to be a reproduction in miniature of its old state-based progenitor, and for this reason it is more difficult to identify as such. It manifests itself in a local dimension, in a multiplicity of different places at the same time. Yet, as we will see, it retains its absolutist essence intact, based on a particular monistic and authoritarian organization that reduces any debate (and culture itself) to mere populist propaganda. And it often rediscovers violence as an everyday, pervasive instrument for coping with conflicts.

Neoliberal absolutism, we could say in other words, wells up from below, from the territory, generated by a market logic, by a now uncontrollable demand for *money.* It then evolves through the construction of transnational clan networks, capable of reconciling the peculiar intertwining of interests present at the local level with the dynamics imposed by globalization. Unlike in the past, it no longer needs a complex institutional apparatus of propaganda and sophisticated ideologies centred on the supremacy of a nation, race or particular political doctrine. On the other hand, it is capable of taking advantage of the fact that the modern social media enable anyone to easily reach and mobilize segments of the masses, whether on behalf of a populist leader or a drug-trafficking boss. And so the total wars between nations can likewise be usefully replaced by the maintenance of a condition that I will define as "permanent global civil war".

The Epilogue prefigures the entry of humanity into a new, regressive phase of the modernization process, one characterized by a now chronic inability to recognize the nature of the crises that it traverses or to find an adequate solution to the

daily challenges posed by neoliberal absolutism, leading to the transition from a "risk society" (Ulrich Beck) to an autoimmune society. Such a challenge does not conform to the traditional canons of the class struggle, nor can it be reduced to the usual and consoling paradigm of the effort to establish a new balance of power between nations. Faced with this situation, we have to try to respond by developing principles of government antagonistic to the existing ones and avoid the salvific solutions proposed by an increasing number of Western leaders, who are running the risk of rapidly taking us back to the edge of that abyss from which we thought we had escaped forever when the Cold War ended.

What these principles may be and who should be entrusted with their application is a topic to which the social sciences should devote much more attention than they do today. They have to supersede the methodological myopia that prevents them from looking beyond the current conjuncture, and their own narrow disciplinary field.

Prologue. A glance at the world

If we want to get a fairly accurate idea of what is going on around the world, we need only reconstruct what has happened in the course of an ordinary day by browsing the front pages of the sites of some international newspapers. We can start with 25 June 2018, the day I started writing this book.[1]

- President Donald Trump calls for fast-track deportation measures, bypassing the courts, for illegal immigrants to the US. Meanwhile, between 1,500 and 2,000 children and adolescents, separated at the border from their parents accused of trafficking minors, are "lost" in the various detention facilities and unable to keep in touch with their families.
- The European leaders, with France and Germany at their head, seek solutions to the migrant problem, while a ship with castaways aboard is adrift in the Mediterranean. Some 800 refugees are rescued off the coast of Spain, while others are trapped on the border between Greece and Macedonia.
- In Turkey, Recep Erdogan thanks the voters for the love they showed him, after gaining a decisive victory in the first elections following a constitutional reform giving the president greater executive powers (he has already been in office for 15 years).
- In Mexico, the entire police force of the city of Ocampo in Michoacán is arrested after the murder of a mayoral candidate. More than 100 politicians have been killed across the country ahead of the presidential elections to be held on 1 July 2018. And 2017 was the deadliest year in the history of Mexico, with over 20 murders per 100,000 inhabitants.
- Colombia: hundreds of peasants and activists have been killed in the past 18 months by gangs hired by drug traffickers. This came after peace agreements formally put an end to 52 years of war between the regular army and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), which is estimated to have caused 220,000 deaths and seven million displaced persons.
- Latin America has 42 cities on the list of the 50 most violent worldwide (other than those caught up in war). There are 17 in Brazil, 12 in Mexico, 5 in Venezuela, 3 in Colombia, 2 in Honduras, and one each in El Salvador, Guatemala and Jamaica.
- The Syrian army steps up its offensive to recapture Daraa, causing thousands of civilians to flee the city.

1 The news stories that follow were culled on 25 June 2018 by consulting the websites of AlJazeera, BBC World, CNN, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.*

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- In Yemen, coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia storm the port of Al-Hudayda, forcing tens of thousands of civilians to flee.
- In the Congo, a peace agreement reached after two years of fighting between the regular army and Ninja rebels allows 108,000 displaced people to return to their villages, destroyed and stripped of all essential services (from schools to health facilities).
- In Cameroon, the Anglophone regions are plagued by an escalation of indiscriminate violence between separatist groups and security forces, both accused of attacking and burning schools and villages, causing the inhabitants to flee.
- Ethnic clashes between farmers and herders cause 86 deaths in Nigeria.
- In Myanmar the official line is that security forces have not committed abuses against the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya forced since August 2017 to flee and seek refuge in Bangladeshi refugee camps. The question is being mooted as to whether the International Court of Justice should be given a mandate to investigate the alleged deportation of Rohingya civilians from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

Now let's see what happened a little over a year and a half later, on 8 January 2020, the day I completed the final draft of this book.

- Iran has launched 22 missiles against USA military bases in Iraq in retaliation for the killing of General Qasem Soleimani by the USA on 3 January 2020. The Iranian government says it does not want escalation towards war. American president Trump twitters an optimistic message: "All is well! Missiles launched from Iran at two military bases located in Iraq. Assessment of casualties & damages taking place now. So far, so good! We have the most powerful and well equipped military anywhere in the world, by far! I will be making a statement tomorrow morning." Democrats are pressing for further details about the killing of Soleimani, but the Trump administration offers very few.
- Afghanistan, which has 13,000 USA troops in bases near the north-east border with Iran, fears the repercussions of the escalation of the conflict with the United States on its relations with the Iranian regime, which has been secretly funding the pro-American Afghan government, as well as keeping up contacts with some Taliban cells. Moreover, the two countries can boast enduring and complex political, economic and cultural ties. In recent years millions of Afghan refugees fleeing the war have sought refuge in Iran.
- A Ukrainian plane takes off from Tehran airport and crashes, killing the 176 passengers (of seven different nationalities) and crew members. The Iranian government refuses to deliver the black boxes to Boeing.

- In Libya, opposition forces loyal to General Khalifa Haftar claim to have captured the city of Sirte, after persuading a local militia to switch sides. In the battle for Tripoli, Haftar is supported by Russian mercenaries and can count on support from, among others, Egypt, Jordan and France. The Turkish president Erdogan, having obtained the support of Parliament, has guaranteed military support to Fayez al-Sarraj, the president and head of the government of national unity in Tripoli, and plans to send in irregular units earlier deployed in Syria.
- In Damascus, Russian president Vladimir Putin, on a rare visit to the Syrian capital, meets his Syrian counterpart Bashar al Assad to discuss the risks to the region of the escalating conflict between the USA and Iran and to bring season's greetings for the Orthodox Christmas to the Russian troops in the area.
- In Mexico, since 1964 more than 61,000 people have disappeared, the majority since 2006, the year the former president Felipe Calderón declared war on the drug trafficking cartels. In 2019 alone, the first year of Andrés Manuel López Obrador's presidency, 9000 have disappeared. Also in 2019, 800 secret mass graves were found and 1,124 bodies recovered. More than half of them were of individuals between 15 and 34 years of age, 74 percent men. Official statistics show 2018 was the most violent year ever, with 33,341 homicide investigations, an increase of 33 percent over 2017.
- In Myanmar, the armed forces (Tatmadaw) have intensified military repression in the state of Rakhine, already the scene of the campaign against the Rohingya, leading to the exodus of 740,000 people and charges of genocide by the international community. This time the incursions into the country's second-poorest region are aimed at striking at the Buddhist rebel Arakan Army that supported the clampdown in "clean-up operations" against the Muslim minority.
- In Congo, a measles epidemic that broke out in 2019 has already led to the diagnosis of over 310,000 cases and the deaths of over 6,000 people. Although more than 18 million children under the age of five have been vaccinated, the poor infrastructure, inadequate health measures and frequent attacks on clinics have thwarted efforts to stop the disease spreading in a country that is also struggling with the world's second-deadliest Ebola epidemic.
- In Somalia, at least 4 people are killed and 10 injured in the explosion of a car bomb in Mogadishu, at a checkpoint near the parliament building. Also in the capital, a similar attack last 28 December, subsequently claimed by the Islamic group al-Shabab, caused 81 victims. The same group also claimed a 6 January attack on a military base in Kenya used by the American military (causing the death of a contractor and leaving two wounded.)

– The European Union last year presented the dictatorial government of Eritrea with €20 million for the purchase of roadbuilding materials in an attempt to stop the flow of migrants from the country and encourage regime change. Humanitarian organizations protested, noting that forced labourers are often employed on these projects and it is impossible to monitor their progress.
– Numerous human rights organizations have condemned Australia for the harshness of its border protection policies. The country currently holds more than 7,000 men, women and children in detention camps. They are refugees and migrants from various parts of the world who face the prospect of a never-ending wait to be released.

These simple news stories chronicle crimes in just two days of routine folly, a view of the world that jars, sometimes to the point of being irreconcilable with what is presented daily by the leaders of Western countries. Ignorant or heedless of the dead accumulating outside their borders, they are increasingly inclined to present their countries, certainly oases of peace and well-being compared to the rest of the planet, as fortresses besieged variously by terrorists, migrants, the forces of globalization, Brussels technocrats and so forth.

Comparison between the two days also brings out the tendency towards a drastic worsening of the general picture: from the escalation of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa to intensification of internal violence in countries such as Myanmar or Mexico (which actually seems committed to breaking its own record for numbers of murders), and the growing impoverishment of Africa. Finally, in the face of the heightened activism of powers that are certainly not democratic, such as Russia and Turkey, the whole of the West and above all the European Union are displaying a complete inability to understand their own role and, consequently, their responsibilities. They appear to govern the world unwittingly, while ignoring both the growing democratic deficit within their own countries and the fact that they are among the protagonists of the new absolutism emerging worldwide.

Just a century ago, on the eve of World War I, European powers occupied 84 percent of the earth's land surface (Headrick, 1981). Joined in the twentieth century by the United States, they are responsible for the developmental models that still accompany us in these opening decades of the millennium. The West is in all respects the creator of those models. Yet what has been rightly called "the Westernization of the world"[2] does not seem to have ever been matched in the past by the

2 The reference is to the title of the well-known essay by Serge Latouche, who went so far as to

ability to take responsibility for its mistakes (from colonialism to imperialism and two world wars). Today those same countries, which continue to claim and occupy a hegemonic position, are demanding increasing resources to be able to maintain their lifestyle, even though this is causing the growing economic and cultural impoverishment of the rest of the planet and an exponential increase in inequality even among their own citizens.

Being unable, as regimes that claim to be democratic, to present themselves to the world with their true face as a new neoliberal absolutism—in fact as its thinking head—they express indignation at the effrontery with which the excluded at times try to resist the continual plundering of the resources of their countries or even dare to flock to the borders of Europe or the United States in an attempt to escape death by war or hunger. (And the former only, it is worth noting, is magnanimously accepted by European governments as a possible reason for admitting them. Political refugees are allowed in, if all goes well, but not economic migrants.) And they foment a growing sense of insecurity among their own citizens by conjuring up perils hardly matched by the reality.

We only need to examine some data to realize that in recent years the Western powers have reached levels of excellence in the art of mystification.

1 Weapons and wars

In particular, after 11 September 2001, the American government, followed by those in Europe (as well as elsewhere) invented that veritable contradiction in terms of the "war on terrorism" as a response to terrorist attacks on their soil (Bonanate, 2004). The choice of this strategy first produced the territorialization in Afghanistan and Iraq of a conflict that was by definition as unpredictable and delocalized as the terrorist threat. Then followed its extension to the whole of the Middle East, partly due to the fact that an avatar called the Islamic State, or Caliphate—in fact, a pluriverse of poorly assorted groups sometimes warring with each other and scattered over distant and unrelated geographic areas—was accredited as truly existing by governments and media in the West.

Without detracting from the seriousness of the threats and attacks carried out by terrorist groups or increasingly often by single "lone wolves", the fact remains that between 2007 and 2018, Europe and the Americas were the regions that experienced the fewest conflicts in the world, while Africa, Asia and the Middle East (in

define the West as "a machine, soulless and nowadays masterless, which has impressed mankind into its service" (Latouche, 1996: 3).

descending order) were the most violent. In 2018, 14 conflicts were active in Africa, 7 in Asia, 4 in the Middle East, one in Europe and one in the Americas. It is worth adding that the Islamist armed conflicts have sprung up in almost equal parts everywhere, but outside the West: in the Middle East, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (SIPRI, 2019).

The paradox is that the distribution of world military expenditure is inversely proportional to conflicts. As it is shown in Figure 1, in 2018 it totalled approximately 1,822 billion dollars (2.6 percent more than in 2017), 670 billion of which was spent by the USA and 364 billion by Europe—266 of which by Western Europe. USA, China, Saudi Arabia, India and France are the top spending countries, totalling 60 percent of world military spending.

WORLD MILITARY SPENDING, 2018

Region	Spending (US$ b.)	Change (%)
Africa	(40.6)	*–8.4*
North Africa	(22.2)	*–5.5*
Sub-Saharan Africa	18.4	*–11*
Americas	735	*4.4*
Central America and Caribbean	8.6	*8.8*
North America	670	*4.4*
South America	55.6	*3.1*
Asia and Oceania	507	*3.3*
Central and South Asia	85.9	*4.2*
East Asia	350	*4.1*
Oceania	29.1	*–2.9*
South East Asia	41.9	*–0.8*
Europe	364	*1.4*
Central Europe	28.3	*12*
Eastern Europe	69.5	*–1.7*
Western Europe	266	*1.4*
Middle East	. .	. .
World total	**1 822**	*2.6*

( ) = uncertain estimate; . . = data unavailable. Spending figures are in current (2017) US$. All changes are in real terms for the period 2017–18.

Figure 1: World Military Spending, 2018 (SIPRI, 2019).

The world total accounts for 2.1 percent of world GDP and $239 per person (SIPRI, 2019). To provide a scale of comparison, the World Bank tells us that, although the number of people living below the extreme poverty threshold has gradually fallen (from 4 out of 10 in 1990, to 1 out of 10 in 2015), more than 705 million individuals live on less than $1.90 a day. This means that annual military expenditure per person is equivalent to about 126 days of earnings for all those living in extreme poverty. To provide another indicative figure, in 2016, the year that marked the record

expenditure on public development aid by the European Union, the world's largest donor, it disbursed €75.5 billion, equivalent to an average of 0.51 percent of European gross national income.

Nuclear weapons deserve separate discussion. Currently in the world there are some 13,865 nuclear warheads, 91.5 percent of which are held by the two Cold War superpowers. The USA has 6,185 (with 1,750 deployed), Russia 6,500 (with 1,600 deployed) (Figure 2). The USA has also launched a programme to modernize its arsenal and sites. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) in February 2017 estimated it would entail an investment of 400 billion dollars in the period 2017–2026. The programme, however, will continue well beyond that date, at least until 2046, with total expenditure forecast by the CBO at $1,200 billion (1,700 according to other estimates), equivalent to a 50 percent increase over the cost of maintaining its existing arsenals (SIPRI, 2018).

WORLD NUCLEAR FORCES, 2018

Country	Deployed warheads	Other warheads	Total inventory
USA	1 750	4 435	6 185
Russia	1 600	4 900	6 500
UK	120	80	200
France	280	20	300
China	–	290	290
India	–	130–140	130–140
Pakistan	–	150–160	150–160
Israel	–	80–90	80–90
North Korea	–	(20–30)	(20–30)
Total	**3 750**	**10 115**	**13 865**

– = zero; ( ) = uncertain figure not included in the total.
'Other warheads' includes operational warheads held in storage and retired warheads awaiting dismantlement. The figures for Russia and the USA do not necessarily correspond to those in their 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) declarations because of the treaty's counting rules. Total figures include the highest estimate when a range is given. All estimates are approximate and as of Jan. 2019.

Figure 2: World Nuclear Forces, 2018 (SIPRI, 2019).

A final figure, here even more significant, concerns the principal *exporters* of weapons. The volume of international transfers of weapon systems increased by 7.8 percent between 2009–2013 and 2014–2018, reaching the highest level since the Cold War ended. The five largest weapons suppliers in 2014–2018—the USA

(34 percent), Russia (22), France (6.7), Germany (5.8) and China (5.7)—account for over 75 percent of the total volume of global exports (Figure 3).[3] Then, in 2014–2018, the USA was the biggest supplier of weapons systems, with exports to at least 98 states. The gap between the USA and all other exporters has widened. Asia and Oceania were the main importing regions, with 40 percent of the total volume for imports of weapons systems in 2014–2018. The Middle East ranked second, with 35 percent of imports (but with an 87 percent increase between the five-year periods of 2009–2013 and 2014–18). The ten main importers, quite a heterogeneous list of states, represent 53.2 percent of total imports (SIPRI, 2019).

THE MAIN EXPORTERS AND IMPORTERS OF MAJOR ARMS, 2014–18

	Exporter	Global share (%)		Importer	Global share (%)
1	USA	*34*	1	Saudi Arabia	*12*
2	Russia	*22*	2	India	*9.5*
3	France	*6.7*	3	Egypt	*5.1*
4	Germany	*5.8*	4	Australia	*4.6*
5	China	*5.7*	5	Algeria	*4.4*
6	UK	*4.8*	6	China	*4.2*
7	Spain	*2.9*	7	UAE	*3.7*
8	Israel	*2.9*	8	Iraq	*3.7*
9	Italy	*2.5*	9	South Korea	*3.1*
10	Netherlands	*2.1*	10	Viet Nam	*2.9*

Figure 3: Main Exporters and Importers of Major Arms, 2014–2018 (SIPRI, 2019).

A look at this data makes it plausible to claim that Western states are also selling weapons to those countries they then claim to feel threatened by.

2 Wealth and consumption

We can now move on to economic factors. Some raw data do not seem to bear out the idea of the decline of the Western world or the loss of its financial leadership. It was widely reported, even in the mainstream media, that the richest 1 percent of the planet's population in 2017 owned more than 50 percent of the world's wealth (it was 45.5 at the start of the millennium, but then fell to 42.5 with the 2008 crisis). Credit Suisse's annual report (2017), the source of the data, contains further and even more significant details. For instance, the richest 10 percent own 88 percent

3 But if we add Spain (3.2 percent), Italy (2.3) and the Netherlands (2.1), Europe accounts for 25 percent of total exports.

of global wealth, while half of the world's adult population has to share just 1 percent; and all this not during an overall decline in wealth but an increase that in 2017 amounted to 6.4 percent (equivalent to $16,700 billion out of a total of 280,000 billion).

In short, what is called the pyramid of global wealth sees almost 3.5 billion adults (over 70 percent of the total) living on incomes of less than ten thousand dollars, and more than 1 billion (21.3 percent) on incomes between ten thousand and one hundred thousand. Only 36 million (0.7 percent of the total) enjoy incomes of more than a million dollars (Figure 4).

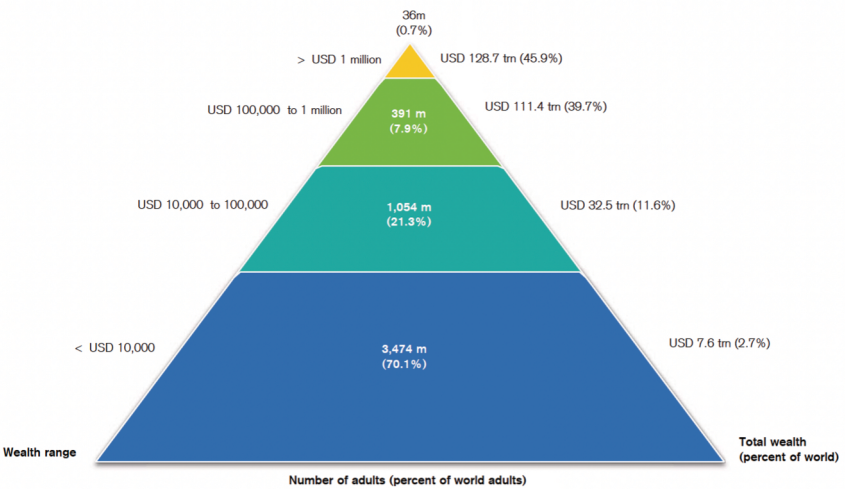

Figure 4: The Global Wealth Pyramid (Credit Suisse, 2017).

But it is the regional distribution of wealth that brings out the global imbalances even more clearly. To understand this we need only compare the percentage of net wealth in each region out of the world total with its percentage of the adult world population. North America and Europe account for 64 percent of the world's familial wealth (36 and 28 percent respectively), but have only 17 percent of the world's adult population. The Asia-Pacific area (excluding China and India) achieves a certain balance, with 20 percent of the world's wealth held by 23 percent of its adult population. Elsewhere, the ratios are again reversed dramatically. China possesses only 10 percent of the world's wealth but has 22 percent of the world's adult population; Latin America 3 percent of the wealth and 9 percent of the population; and the inverse ratio between wealth and population is even higher in India and Afri-

ca, where, as in Asia-Pacific and Latin America, a further decline in average wealth is expected in the coming years.

We come now to the top of the pyramid, to millionaires with an annual income of over $50 million (about 148,200 adults, an increase of 13 percent from 2017 to 2018) (Figure 5).

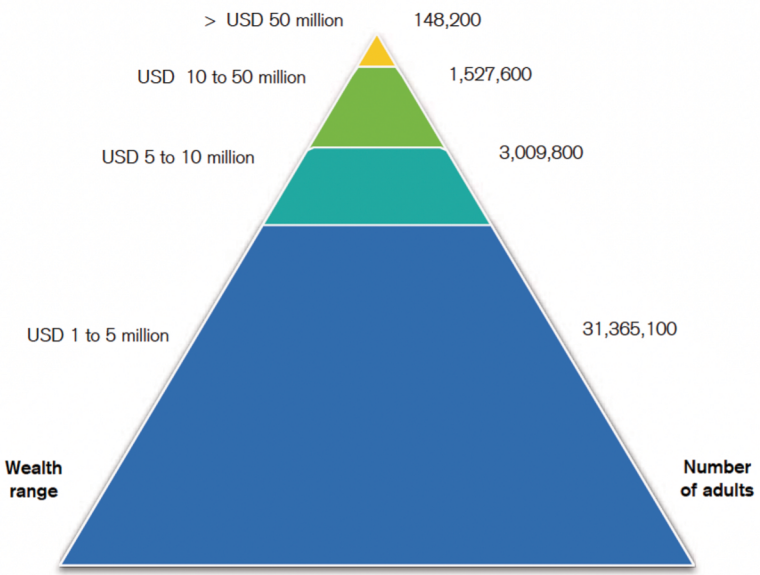

Figure 5: The Top of the Pyramid (Credit Suisse, 2017).

The report identifies them by the acronym UHNWI (Ultra-High Net Worth Individuals). Unlike those who occupy the lowest income bracket, who tend to be represented in all countries (albeit with different percentages and prospects),[4] UHNWIs are mainly concentrated in certain regions: 51 percent in North America (49 percent in the USA) and 22 percent in Europe. China is second overall in the ranking of individual nations, with just over 12 percent, revealing some room for manoeu-

4 In developed countries, 30 percent of adults fall into the lower income bracket and mostly for limited periods, as they have greater opportunities to change jobs. In Africa and India, the percentage rises to 90 percent, if not 100 percent; and for the majority of these individuals, belonging to the lower income bracket of the population is a permanent condition bound to continue throughout their lives.

vre for so-called emerging countries.[5] However, the characteristic that all millionaires in the world seem to share, in addition to similar lifestyles and an appreciation of luxury goods, is that they "hold a disproportionate share of their assets in financial form" (Credit Suisse, 2017: 17). This hardly supports the thesis, still widely accredited, that the richest tend to reinvest their profits in creating new jobs.

An even more careful analysis of inequalities of income reveals that since 1980 they have also grown rapidly within individual countries: in North America, China, India and Russia, and to a lesser extent in Europe. In the same period they have remained constant, but at extremely high levels, in areas such as the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa or Brazil.

A significant datum for assessing internal inequalities is the balance between private wealth and public wealth. And if there is no doubt that the former has risen, the latter (public resources net of debts) has fallen in all countries: sharply and suddenly in China and Russia, as was predictable after the abolition of the planned economy or its downsizing, as well as in the United States and Britain. Japan, Germany and France, on the other hand, still maintain slightly positive net public wealth, with a great deal depending on the policies adopted, in particular progressive taxation and the criteria for access to education. Again in this case, however, the ranking of countries based on Gross National Income (instead of the more usual Gross Domestic Product) reveals that the figure for North America is three times higher than the global national average per adult, while in the European Union it is twice as high. The difference would be far greater were it not for the striking increase in the growth rate of China's national income per adult (831 percent from 1980 to 2016), which has raised the global average (World Inequality Lab, 2017).

A final and different indicator of global inequalities, which also highlights the prohibitive costs of the Western way of life, consists of the material footprint of consumption (i. e. the quantity of materials required to satisfy the final demand (consumption and investments of capital) in each region or country. This indicator, which also increases in relation to the speed of economic growth, is considered an excellent proxy for assessing living standards as well as environmental impact. In the USA, its value is 25 tons per capita; Europe 20; Asia-Pacific, Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean between 9 and 10; Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia 7.5; in Africa it drops to 3. The richest countries manage to consume up to ten times more materials than the poorest and twice as much as the global average, but to maintain their standard of living they will necessarily have to repro-

5 The percentages are not very different among "normal" millionaires: 43 percent are in the USA and 26 percent in Europe (with 4 percent in Italy), for a total of 69 percent.

duce this level of inequality in the distribution of raw materials indefinitely, effectively preventing real growth in the least developed countries.

Moreover, in the case of Europe followed by the USA, the possibility of guaranteeing a material footprint appropriate to the needs of its citizens rests on their ability to expropriate the resources of others. Given their completely inadequate internal production, both regions in the years between 1990 and 2010 became the largest net importers of metallic and non-metallic minerals, fossil fuels and biomass. Whether willingly or not, Africa was fated to become the biggest net exporter (UNEP, 2016).

3 Migrations and demographics

If this is the level reached by inequalities between the different regions of the world, it could hardly come as a surprise that part of the world's population is seeking to improve their living conditions by abandoning their homelands. But again in this case the figures offer a more diversified picture, to say the least, than the widely propagated image of the "invasion of the West". In 2017, the number of international migrants totalled 258 million. Of these, 165 million (64 percent) lived in high-income countries, 81 million (32 percent) in middle-income countries and 11 in low-income countries (4 percent).

If we go into further detail and analyse flows between regions of origin and destinations, it emerges that the largest regional migration corridor consists of flows within Asia (63 million out of a total of 105.7 million Asian migrants, equal to 60 percent). But even in Africa, flows within the continent prevail: 19 million out of a total of 36.3 (53 per cent). As for Europe, out of a total of 77.9 million migrants registered in 2017, 41 million came from other European countries (53 percent); 20 from Asia (26 percent) and 9 from Africa (12 percent). In North America, however, out of a total of 57.7 million migrants, 26 came from Latin America and the Caribbean (45 percent) and 17 from Asia (29 percent).[6] But what should really make us think is that the phenomenon is not a historical anomaly. Although the international migrant population has increased significantly in absolute values, in fact in percentage terms it grew by a single point between 1970 and 2015.[7]

6 The percentages of migrants out of the total population—742 million in Europe and 361 in North America (UN, 2017b)—are respectively 10.5 and 15.6 percent.

7 In 1970 the percentage was 2.3 percent (amounting to 84 million migrants); in 1990, it had risen to 2.9 percent (equivalent to 153 million migrants); and in 2015 to 3.3 (244 million migrants, 1 in 30 of the world's population; 52 per cent men, 48 per cent women) (IOM, 2017).

In particular in Europe, the flow of migrants made it possible to compensate for the fact that, between 1990 and 2000, the number of deaths began to exceed births. In 2015 the median age[8] of the world's most developed countries was 41 years and it is estimated that it will rise to 45 by 2050, while in the least developed countries it will rise from 28 to 35 (in Africa, from 19 at present to 25). If the flow of new migrants was to be blocked, the median age in North America would increase by another 2 years over what would happen if current migration levels were maintained and in Europe by 1.1 years. This would lead to a further increase in the population aged 65 and over compared to the working age population (between 20 and 64 years).

We can look at this in more detail in Figure 6. In 2017, Europe and North America recorded the lowest percentages of their populations in the age brackets 0–14 (16 and 19 percent respectively) and 15–24 (11 and 13 percent respectively). In Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean, the percentages were 24 and 25 percent in the 0–14 bracket and 16 and 17 percent in the 15–24 bracket. In these four regions a substantial balance is reached in the 25–59 age bracket: 49 percent in Europe, 48 percent in Asia, 46 in North America and Latin America and the Caribbean. The gap widens again significantly for the over 60s: 25 percent in Europe and 22 percent in North America (forecast to reach 35 percent and 28 percent respectively in 2050), 12 percent in Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean. The data for Africa fully reflect the drama of the particular "developmental model" of that continent: as much as 41 percent of the population, in 2017, was in the 0–14 age group; the figure drops to 19 percent in the 15–24 bracket, rises again to 35 percent in the 25–59 age group, and then collapses to 5 percent for the over-60s, a figure that will rise to no more than 9 percent by 2050.

Such a demographic trend, which would lead to a further and progressive fall in births over time, not only foreshadows unsustainable social security levels in Western societies, due to the negative ratio between individuals of working age and pensioners (who are increasingly long-lived).[9] A society incapable of seeing that migration contains a regenerative factor, rather than being a virus threatening the survival of its citizens, truly seems doomed.

8 Median age is the age at which half of the population is older and half younger; dividing the population by age into two equally numerous groups. Average age is calculated on the arithmetic average of the ages of all the members of a population.

9 Life expectancy between 2010 and 2015 was as follows: North America 79.2 years, Europe 77.2, Latin America and the Caribbean 74.6, Asia 71.8 and Africa 60.2 (UN, 2017b).

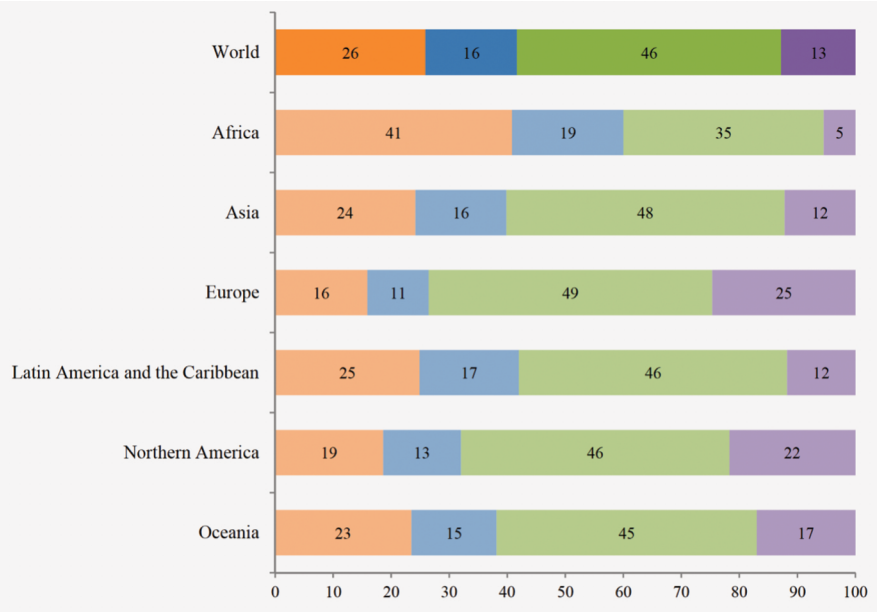

Figure 6: Percentage of Population in Broad Age Groups for the World and by Region (UN, 2017b).

4 Tourists and vagabonds

Finally, we can look at the ranking of the world's states compiled on the basis of the number of countries to which their citizens enjoy visa-free travel. According to this index, drawn up in collaboration with the International Air Transport Association (IATA), a German citizen, for example, can freely enter 176 countries and Italians or Americans 174. But if you were born in Zambia, the countries you can enter freely fall to 63; if in Afghanistan to 24. Combining this data with the Human Development Index used by the United Nations and the Fragile States Index of the Fund for Peace clearly reveals that the possibility of entering a country easily is determined by its degree of development and political stability: "Access to regular migration options is somehow linked to the 'birth lottery.' [...] Citizens from countries with very high levels of human development can travel visa-free to about 85 percent of the world's other countries." Vice versa, the imposition of visas is common practice towards low-income or conflict-affected countries, and "irregular pathways are likely to be the most realistic (if not the only) option for potential migrants from these countries" (IOM, 2017: 173). The lottery metaphor, however,

conceals what in reality is a diplomatic (i. e. political) practice enacted first and foremost by the wealthier nations.

Zygmunt Bauman observed that one of the effects of globalization has been the growth of individual mobility. This, however, has very different features for those at the top of the social ladder and those on the lower rungs. The former fly business class and are free to choose where to go. The latter are thrown out of places where they would like to stay, they travel in inhuman conditions crammed in the holds of boats or hidden in trucks, and become an embarrassment for the rich, who would like to be able to conceal them. "The tourists travel because *they want to*; the vagabonds because *they have no other bearable choice.* [...] *Green light for the tourists, red light for the vagabonds*" (Bauman, 1998: 93).[10]

Since then the situation has evolved further and the vagabonds have themselves become consumer goods. From necessity, the mobility of migrants has long responded to veritable market strategies. They are seen as a commodity to be sought in the deepest and most derelict suburbs of the planet and forced to pay toll for their transportation over and over again. They have to pay the criminal clans involved in passing them along their route and the corrupt representatives of the institutions that facilitate their transit. Finally the migrants are sold in the outlet markets, mainly in Western countries, as slave labour: in the tomato fields of Puglia or the strawberry fields of California, in the textile factories serving major fashion brands in Tuscany or the Mexican *maquiladoras* that assemble mechanical or electronic components for USA corporations, or in the endless alleys of the prostitution market.[11]

The major criminals, those who organize the international drug trade or human trafficking, or who launder their proceeds, and who mostly reside already in high-income countries, are granted all the privileges of tourists, including visa-free travel first class.

The above picture should arouse indignation over the drama of global conditions of inequality, and even more for the false consciences of the Western democracies (the regimes that most boast and extol the end of ideologies). But this is beside the point. The problem, rather, is that it presents an unsustainable and, even more worryingly, an irrational development model in terms of congruence between the means and ends of political action. Let me be clear: this is not a novelty, and it is entirely plausible to imagine, given the absence of comparable data, that the situation was certainly no better in past centuries. What should surprise us, if

10 Unless otherwise stated, italics within the quotations are those of the author of the text quoted.
11 For a recent analysis of the state of the research into human trafficking, with a rich body of data, see IOM (2016).

anything, is that all this is happening today, in a world that is finally globalized in terms of knowledge and aware of its potential as never before, as well as being guided by nations that proudly (and arrogantly) profess their levels of development and democracy.

In the 1930s, in the midst of a conjuncture even more dramatic than the present, in *The Outlook for Intelligence*, Paul Valéry displayed a lucidity far superior to that of many academics and politicians who were his contemporaries:

> Every habitable part of the earth, in our time, has been discovered, surveyed and divided up among nations. The era of unoccupied lands, open territories, places that belong to no one, hence the era of free expansion, has ended. [...] *The age of the finite world has begun* (Valéry, 1989: 14–15).

This also means, Valéry continued, that every action, however circumscribed, anywhere in the world produces effects that tend to reverberate uncontrollably within this now closed space.

A theorist of globalization truly *ante litteram*, Valéry concluded by observing that in order to understand "a completely new era", the "universal confusion of questions and conjectures" that lies before us, we should start from an analysis in depth of the present, and not to predict future events, about which one is invariably mistaken, "but in order to prepare, arrange, or create what is necessary to ward off events, to resist and use them. [...] Let us beware of backing into the future" (Valéry, 1962: 476–477).

Facing the present today without going backwards means accepting, first of all, that there is a logic in this new universal chaos in which we find ourselves immersed. This, at least, is what I mean to demonstrate in the following pages.

1 The dynamics between politics and the market

The contemporary world appears increasingly a concentrate of paradoxes: globalized yet dominated by the revival of localisms; governed as never before by formally democratic regimes, yet subject to a relentless growth of inequalities and forms of exploitation, within each individual state as much as between the centre and the periphery of the planet; globally connected to a ceaseless flow of news yet increasingly incapable of communicating.

We cannot ignore the fact that ultimately other human beings decide the fate of each of us: those who, at every level, perform the functions of government. In the end, everything is *political.* And it is certainly not reassuring to observe that political leaders, whatever their language or dialect, are increasingly replacing the discursive practice of dialogue and the search for compromise with the apparently more profitable one of invective. Or that today, in the daily debate, the shallow comments conveyed by tweets, posted at the speed of a teenager operating the joypad of a video game, prevail over the meditated and shared language of diplomacy, even if the subject of discussion is war and peace.

In recent years, it should be noted, it appears that after winning the challenge posed by communism, democracy has given the impression, so to speak, of wanting to lay down its arms and withdraw from the competition. Wendy Brown, for instance, notes that "in a century heavy with political ironies, there may have been none greater than this": thirty years after the Cold War ended, democracy has become impoverished to the point of being the ghost of itself, a regime with an uncertain future (Brown, 2015: 9). Benjamin R. Barber notes that although many dictatorships have been overthrown, "countries offer a patina and pretence of democracy but are mired in a politics of violence, vengeance and treason" (Barber, 2016: 17). Common to these and many other authors is the belief that capitalism, with the mutations taking place within it, is responsible for everything. Neoliberalism[1] has spread at the expense of democracy, coming to generate, according to William I. Robinson, "a crisis of humanity" that extends from the ecological to the social dimension (Robinson, W. 2014: 1). Again in Wendy Brown's words:

> Neoliberal reason [...] is converting the distinctly *political* character, meaning, and operation of democracy's constituent elements into *economic* ones. Liberal democratic institutions,

1 I here adopt the definition of neoliberalism as a utopian plan for reorganizing capitalism and a political project that developed in the 1980s with the turning point imposed by the Thatcher governments in Britain and the Reagan presidency in the USA, which radically rejected Keynesian policies and the welfare state models that had dominated post-war development in Western countries (Harvey, 2005).

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> practices, and habits may not survive this conversion. Radical democratic dreams may not either (Brown, 2015: 17).

Taking a small step back in time, it is worth remembering that already in Ulrich Beck's analysis the ideology of globalism was blamed for having produced, among much else, our entry into a "risk society", in which the increasingly intense use of technologies and ecological crisis made the opposition between nature and society problematic.[2] Another observation by Beck, equally relevant, spoke of how "the nation-state framework that supported earlier developments is now being broken out of on all sides":

> For the parallel between the first and second modernity to be complete, a world state should be coming into being to play the role that the nation-state did before. Instead of a transition from nation-state to world state, we seem to witnessing a transition from state to market. Instead of a transition to something different but equivalent, it looks like we're suffering a loss. It looks like the foundations of politics are being dismantled (Beck and Willms, 2004: 45–46).

In reality, however, politics has not been dissolved—this, at least, is what this book will attempt to show. Rather it is entrusted to other actors and other organizations. The first step to enable us to grasp these structural changes in all their relevance is to abandon what Beck himself defines as "methodological nationalism", meaning that the "nation-state is conceived of as something that contains society within its borders. The state is conceived of as something that fixes society, that secures and stabilizes it" (Beck and Willms, 2004: 13), to the point where any other factor escapes from the field of perception of the social sciences.

To carry out this operation of "methodological denationalization", however, we need to begin by examining the historical evolution of the relationship between the state and capitalism, and then analyse the radical transformation that, for simplicity's sake, we can date to 1989, the symbolic year of the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War. At the end of the chapter, we will try to present a sort of model of an analysis of today's society. This will enable us to grasp its continuing development in all its complexity beyond traditional state borders.

1 The long state–capitalism diarchy

The propensity to recount society in terms of individual academic disciplines has made us lose sight of that dense network of interactions between capitalism and

2 A fuller discussion of Beck's sociology of risk is found in the Epilogue.

society, with the state acting as a mediator, that is essential to understanding the evolution of both institutions. Fernand Braudel stated:

> The preserve of the few, capitalism is unthinkable without society's active complicity. It is of necessity a reality of the social order, a reality of the political order, and even a reality of civilization. For in a certain manner, society as a whole must more or less consciously accept capitalism's values. [...] Thus, the modern state, which did not create capitalism but only inherited it, sometimes acts in its favor and at other times acts against it; it sometimes allows capitalism to expand and at other times destroys its mainspring. Capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, when it is the state (Braudel, 1977: 63 – 64).

Studies of the formation of the modern state have drawn attention above all to the process of centralization or monopolization of power, pointing out that in Europe this process takes the form of the absorption of a great variety of pre-existing political entities that until then had claimed, with different titles and degrees of success, their own specific sovereignty: manors, communities, provinces, estates. In this way, the state appropriated the rights and privileges of which those entities were the holders and representatives, to the point where, as Charles Tilly observes, it is safe to say that "the European national revolutions of the last few centuries did not so much expand political rights as concentrate them in the state and reduce their investment in other sorts of governments" (Tilly, 1975: 37).

At the same time, however, the process of monopolization of and in the state has been accompanied by a process of increasing differentiation of roles within societies. The same monarch who successfully claims the monopoly of legitimate physical force is compelled to undertake the task of redistributing resources to an increasing number of social groups, as a function of social interdependence:

> [T]he monopolist is never in a position to use the profit from his monopoly for himself alone [...]. If he has enough social power, he may at first claim the overwhelming part of the monopoly profit for himself, and reward services with the minimum needed for life. But he is obliged, just because he depends on services and functions of others, to allocate to others a large part of the resources he controls—and an increasingly large part, the larger his accumulated possess become, and the greater his dependence on others (Elias, 1993: 146).

Here the economic dimension comes into play, since the distribution of opportunities takes place within a society which, at least in Europe, is already in full capitalist development. In Weberian terms, this means the transition from an economy based on domestic administration, oriented to satisfy one's needs, to an acquisitive economy, which aims to create earnings through trade (or at least, a growing distinction between the two models) (Weber, 1927).

The social group relevant to domestic administration is the family or, more broadly, lineage, kinship. With the affirmation of capitalism, it tends to shrink

steadily to comprise single communities of parents and children. In social terms, the imposition of what we can call an acquisitive or, for simplicity's sake, market economy entails the appearance of new groups and associations in different fields, such as craft and commercial activities.

Think, for example, of the guilds, which in the field of craftsmanship played an essential role in Europe in the process of industrialization, making it possible to reduce transaction costs,

> first, by creating a stable environment, which encouraged craftsmen to invest in training the successor generation. Second, through the coordination of complicated production processes. And finally, in the marketing stage, through the reduction of information asymmetries between producers and customers (Epstein and Prak, 2008: 4).

Chartered companies played a similar role, above all well beyond state borders, by uniting professional merchants who agreed to pay a registration fee and subject themselves to stringent regulations. In fact, such companies did more than allow the state to reduce the costs of transoceanic societies, by taking on the risks and sharing their profits with governments. They also created the conditions for the advent of the Industrial Revolution by putting goods and money into circulation and promoting consumption (Thomson, 1994).

Both, guilds and chartered companies were founded as economic actors, but they also came to play a decisive part in fostering social mobility, favouring the emergence of a new bourgeois class, which joined the old orders of the nobility and clergy and the emerging class of the bureaucratic and administrative staff of increasingly bloated state apparatuses.[3] Both, therefore, also forced politics to become receptive to wider forms of representation, through the creation of the first political parties and parliamentary assemblies, which were destined, albeit gradually, to interfere with the activity of government by monarchies. Both would eventually be abolished on the basis of political decisions, because, in a further phase of development, they had become a curb both on free enterprise and the affirmation of the individuality of political and civil rights, the new idea of citizenship conveyed by the American and French revolutions. Chartered companies at times even grew into a political threat to their motherland, given the degree of independence acquired by the governments of the colonies (Lawson, 1993).

3 This bureaucratic class would develop in ways similar in many respects to that of officers in the armed forces (Armao, 2015: 111 et seq.), passing from recruitment based on patronage (in the case of officers, membership of the nobility), to one based on professionalism acquired through education.

This evolution found a precise response in the transformation of the foundations of legitimacy of sovereign power, which could no longer content itself with appealing to the divine source of its mandate (secularization, also a consequence of the wars of religion, had meanwhile imposed the separation between state and church) nor simply to tradition (hereditary law). It had to begin to invoke a law constituting the legal system, the constitution. And suffrage became the criterion that guided the times and modes of state intervention to safeguard the unity of society when the capitalist market fell into crisis. As Karl Polanyi observed in his fundamental work *The Great Transformation*, which we will return to more fully in the next paragraph,

> how far the state was induced to interfere depended on the constitution of the political sphere and on the degree of economic distress. As long as the vote was restricted and only the few exerted political influence, interventionism was a much less urgent problem than it became when universal suffrage made the state the organ of the ruling million (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 206).

In other words, the state emerges as the privileged interlocutor of capitalism by its nature as a "set of organizations through which collectives of officials may be able to formulate and implement distinctive strategies or policies" (Skocpol, 1985: 20–21). It is the state that endorses and protects rights, starting from property rights, so enabling economic decisions to be made independently and in a decentralized way. It is the state that guarantees the accumulation of capital and promotes market growth as a mechanism for allocating and coordinating resources (including labour), all essential characteristics of capitalism (Kocka, 2016). The relation between state and capitalism, at least for a long historical phase, was therefore configured as an *entente cordiale*, or rather a diarchy (or duopoly, if one prefers the language of economics).

The clearest confirmation of how this diarchy has developed over time comes from the dynamics between *Power and Plenty* (to quote the title of one of the few books devoted to a topic that deserves far more attention from social scientists): "Politics thus determined trade, but trade also helped to determine politics, by influencing the capacities and the incentives facing states" (Findlay and O'Rourke, 2007: XIX).

If we look at history, moreover, we find there is certainly no lack of examples. Just think of transoceanic trade, which was initially financed by ruling houses and later subcontracted to chartered companies, as mentioned above. These companies took on many of the typical features of sovereignty, whether they were largely private in character, as in the case of the Dutch companies, or state-owned, like the French and Portuguese ones: "A state independent of the state", as they have been termed, the companies recruited armies and manned fleets, they established

settlements where they had the power of government over their compatriots, they struck coins, declared war and signed treaties. Companies, not states, were the real driving force of European colonial expansion. They brought the new military technologies and organizational skills of the Western world into contact with the civilizations of Asia, Africa and the Americas:

> Down to the mid-eighteenth century, the response of European rulers to larger scale, more expensive, and more organizationally demanding warfare was not the growth of the state and the establishment of its monopoly over military force but a series of experiments with various forms of military contracting-out, or, ultimately, private–public partnership (Parrott, 2011: 60).

The nomadic soldier, usually a mercenary, was the commonest European export commodity of the pre-industrial era (Parker, 1988).

This model of co-management of power changed radically between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the entry into the phase of imperialism.[4] There is a whole series of theories seeking to explain the causes of this, ranging from the variants of Marxism that focus on economic factors (underconsumption or a tendential fall in the rate of profit), to those of a liberal matrix, much more benevolent towards capitalism and rather inclined to blame the survival of precapitalistic conditions, to which are added political and cultural factors such as protectionism and nationalism, or even the reason of state.

Without going into the merits of the debate, what really matters is that each of these positions contains elements of truth, and that the error lies in claiming to find only one cause for a phenomenon of extraordinary complexity. Scholars like Fieldhouse are certainly not wrong to highlight the role played by geopolitics among European governments in partitioning with extreme rapidity the Pacific and Africa—the latter a victim, to use Polanyi's effective expression, of a "gigantic haul" (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 8)—from the late nineteenth century. In his words, a further interpretation of imperialism

> pinpoints Bismarck's sudden claim for German colonies in 1884–5 as the genesis of the new situation. [...] By staking large claims in Africa and the Pacific, and by bringing colonial disputes in West Africa to an international conference table, he created a stock-market in colonial properties that none could thereafter ignore (Fieldhouse, 1966: 155).

4 Or perhaps it would be more correct to term it the "new imperialism", indicating its seamless continuity with colonialism (Headrick, 1981).

Hannah Arendt offers more highly articulated judgment. While aware of "the old vicious practice of 'healing' domestic conflicts with foreign adventures", she also notes the peculiarity of the situation at the end of the nineteenth century, noting that

> from the very beginning the imperialist adventure of expansion appeared to be an eternal solution, because expansion was conceived as unlimited. Furthermore, imperialism was not an adventure in the usual sense, because it depended less on nationalist slogans than on the seemingly solid basis of economic interests (Arendt, 1973: 152).

But the presence of economic interests in the imperialist adventure is not sufficient to fully represent the strength of the state–capitalism diarchy. We have to admit that "a complex process like imperialism results from both appropriate motives and adequate means. If the motives are too weak [...] or if the means are inadequate [...] then the imperialist venture aborts". In the case of the new imperialism "both the motives and the means changed, and both caused the event" (Headrick, 1981: 9–10).

Imperialism, then, was a fundamental phase in the whole history of the relationship between the state and capitalism and not yet its final outcome. While in a first phase the most effective strategy proved to be the substantial contracting out of colonization to private actors, now it was the state that took over. Hence imperialism anticipated the developments that would culminate in two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century: the consecration of nationalism, followed by the emergence of the pseudoscientific racism of social Darwinism; the construction of totalitarian ideologies, mass parties and propaganda systems; and again the industrialization of massacre, first in the trenches of the Great War and then in the extermination camps; and the conversion of the whole economy to a wartime footing.

It was the state–capitalism diarchy that made it possible in two world wars to mobilize 65 million and 80 million men respectively, train them and transport them to the front, supply them with weapons, ammunition and provisions and, where possible, bury the victims. And it was the perfect synchronism between public and private that made it possible to plan and carry out the Manhattan Project: the creation of the first atomic bomb by the USA in less than three years, with an investment of $2 billion and the coordination of 120,000 scientists (McNeill, 1982).

When USA President Eisenhower, in his farewell speech to the nation in 1961, warned citizens about the risks of an alliance between the military and the defence industry, coining the term the "military-industrial complex", he was describing a factual reality already firmly established for some time. And it offers the most effective representation of the state–capitalism diarchy.

2 The great transformation of 1989

To sum up, we might say that politics, through the institutions that the state created in its long process of formation and consolidation over the past five centuries, historically took on the task of mediating between the market and society. Seen with hindsight, it appears a far from disinterested mediation and not even in reality *super partes.* This was because from capitalism and its representatives governments derived resources (financial, industrial, natural) that were much more essential to the maintenance of power than those that the masses of simple subjects and later of citizens could provide. (The quest for consensus, if necessary through the manipulation of public opinion, only became a necessity in the twentieth century.) However, this mediation was all the more indispensable as the utopia (the dystopia, it would be more correct to term it) of the self-regulated market emerged.

It is in particular on this theme that Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* proves to be still illuminating today and very far-sighted, especially if we think that Polanyi wrote during World War II, in the golden age of industrialism. In advocating self-regulation of the market, today's neoliberals are further benefited by the increasing financialization of the capitalist economy, the incessant and dematerialized flow of currencies, securitized credits and derivatives, and by gambling on the stock exchange increasingly governed by algorithms, all factors that seem to make state intervention even more superfluous (and futile).

It is worth reconstructing, albeit briefly, some passages of Polanyi's thought. The starting assumption is that

> a market economy is an economic system controlled, regulated, and directed by markets alone; order in the production and distribution of goods is entrusted to this self-regulating mechanism. An economy of this kind derives from the expectation that human beings behave in such a way as to achieve maximum money gains (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 68).

Any type of society, he observes, is limited by economic factors, but only nineteenth-century civilization elevated profit to justify every action in the daily life of each individual. An institution such as the self-regulated market "could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness" (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 3). This statement takes on the sinister tone of a premonition in times of climate change induced by a model of development now unsustainable for the planet.

The problem, Polanyi continues, is that any attempt to "defend society" by impeding the market's self-regulation would have the effect of disrupting the func-

tioning of industry, effectively putting that same society at risk in another way. Historically, he observed, there has been a sort of oscillation between phases in which markets prevail and others in which politics claims the right to bring the economy under its control, entrusting the state in particular with the task of implementing protectionist measures to defend its citizens and, if necessary, adopting colonial or imperialist strategies. This was the very mechanism that led to the collapse of nineteenth-century civilization. But the following words could apply almost literally to the global financial crisis of 2008 (and the consequent "great collapse of trade") and the various strategies adopted by the USA and European countries to save the banking system (Tooze, 2019):

> In the last resort, impaired self-regulation of the market led to political intervention. When the trade cycle failed to come round and restore employment, when imports failed to produce exports, when bank reserve regulations threatened business with a panic, when foreign debtors refused to pay, governments had to respond to the strain. In an emergency the unity of society asserted itself through the medium of intervention (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 206).

At the time when Polanyi wrote, it was world war that ineluctably marked the collapse of the old institutions; but that same war also proved the (albeit temporary) solution to the dilemma. When World War II ended and Nazi-fascist totalitarianism was defeated, the self-regulated market and society could well claim to have reached a deal, at least in the Western bloc and albeit at the price of 85 million deaths, counting both combatants and civilians, in the two wars. Post-war reconstruction allowed capitalism to experience a phase of growing industrialization which involved an unprecedented increase in the demand for mass consumer goods. The democracies, for their part, found it easy to support the market, willingly taking on part of the social costs through welfare policies and by redistributing incomes and above all receiving a significant return in terms of popular legitimacy.

The truce, however, lasted only a few decades. In 1989 the collapse of the communist regimes soon laid bare the frailty of the whole bipolar system. Since then, a free market dystopia has once more gained the upper hand. It established itself as one of the coarsest and most widely touted ideologies, developed in prestigious academies and think tanks, especially by economists (some of them—not many—today conscience-stricken), and was relaunched as a mantra by the political and entrepreneurial elites, misguided and oblivious of their social responsibilities. Today, 80 years later, it seems that the dilemma highlighted by Polanyi is reproducing itself unaltered, placing us before a new phase of the great transformation.

Back then, institutional intervention had degenerated into fascism. To quote Polanyi one last time:

> The fascist solution of the *impasse* reached by liberal capitalism can be described as a reform of market economy achieved at the price of the extirpation of all democratic institutions, both in the industrial and in the political realm. The economic system which was in peril of disruption would thus be revitalized, while the people themselves were subjected to a re-education designed to denaturalize the individual and make him unable to function as the responsible unit of the body politic (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 237).

Today the new "solution" to the recurrence of Polanyi's dilemma, once again at the cost of the destruction of human society, is precisely the affirmation of the neoliberal absolutism whose outlines we will sketch out in this book. But how did it get to this point?

First, the spread of neoliberalism in the 1990s (the orthodoxy of the so-called "Washington Consensus") was facilitated by the fact that the collapse of communism rendered superfluous all residual ideological conflict: between democracy and totalitarianism and between the free market and a state-run economy. Even China renounced it for the sake of capitalist development. The failure of the only historical alternative to liberal democracy has had a cascading effect on the Western way of understanding politics. By stripping democracy of the rhetorical aura that had surrounded it during the bipolar era, in particular, it revealed all its intrinsic weaknesses—"broken promises" Bobbio called them—such as the backlash by vested interests against political representation, the persistence of oligarchies and the proliferation of invisible powers, three factors that tended to strengthen each other (Bobbio, 1987). This, on the one hand, reduces their attractiveness towards, for example, the perennially developing countries; on the other hand, even within the developed countries, it seems to justify a race to lower compliance with democratic standards.

The nineties, not surprisingly, also mark the decline of the traditional mass parties and the rediscovery of charismatic leadership, long discredited by the experience of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. As is well known, charismatic power rests on direct communication between the leader and the masses and, unlike the more stable legal-rational power, needs to be constantly confirmed (Weber, 1978 [1922]). Charismatic leaders tend, by definition, to strain their prerogatives. They insist on rewriting the rules and bypassing the institutions to appeal to the people, from whom they believe they have received a direct investiture.

In the contemporary era, this continuous appeal to the people is channelled through the mass media. Media-driven politics does more than just make the fortune of spin doctors and ghost writers and it is not limited to exacerbating the importance of the form of the message to the detriment of its content, even going so far as to justify the use of lies if they are held to be effective. One of its consequences is the exponential increase in the costs of political competition. In this sense,

political systems effectively reintroduce a class criterion into the processes of selecting politicians. Only those who are very rich and have an adequate network of financial backers can contemplate running for election with some chance of success.

Hence the descent into the lists in the first person, in a growing number of countries, by exponents of the business or financial worlds. This has the inevitable corollary of conflicts of interest generated by the likelihood that they will use political office to favour the vested interests of their companies or shareholders. More generally, the increase in the cost of access to the political arena is upsetting the delicate balances that govern relations between politics and the market, in particular by giving large corporations unprecedented bargaining power.

The most emblematic case, in this respect, is a ruling of the Supreme Court of the United States (a country that is actually very careful to regulate lobbying). In January 2010 it invoked the First Amendment to remove the restrictions on campaign finance by corporations, effectively equating their freedom to spend with the free speech of individuals (Liptak, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2010).

To the problem of leadership and the costs of politics we have to add the fierce criticism of the welfare state and in many countries its dramatic downscaling. This process, which largely stemmed from policies pursued by the Thatcher governments in Britain and the Reagan administrations in the United States, gradually dismantled the network of social safeguards that had protected the rights of the less privileged classes as well as shoring up their standard of living and levels of consumption. It should not be forgotten that the development of the modern state, from patrimonialism to welfare, saw a succession of different models of redistribution of resources, considered at various time as functional to the needs of the economy.

The levels attained by mass consumption in the twentieth century would have been unimaginable if the state had not taken over the burden of guaranteeing essential social services to its citizens, so enabling them to allocate a greater portion of their incomes to non-essential spending. Governments today, by contrast, are seeking to reconcile an increase in consumption, which is still considered necessary to support the demand for goods and services, with a “minimum state”, reducing its function to that of procurement. And they are going further: in the face of substantial wage stability, if not a drastic squeeze on salaries, they have adopted a policy of so-called “privatized Keynesianism” (Crouch, 2011): fuelling private debt through consumer credit supplied for the purchase of all kinds of goods, ranging from Christmas gifts to cars and even real estate, to the point of generating the subprime mortgage crisis that led to the collapse of the global financial system in 2008:

> Household debt sky-rocketed, but this required that financial institutions both support and promote the debts of working people whose earnings were not increasing. This started with the steadily employed population, but by the late 1990s it had to go further because that market was exhausted. The market had to be extended to those with lower incomes. [...] If that had not happened, then who would have bought all the new houses and condominiums the debt-financed property developers were building? (Harvey, 2010: 17).

The government, reduced to the role of a mere procurement agency, is increasingly often requested not to devise large social projects and even withdraw from crucial sectors such as health, social security and defence in favour of private bodies. On the assumption that the free market is always capable of finding the best possible balance between supply and demand, and that competition guarantees the quality and low cost of goods and services, the state is being restricted to deciding which sectors to invest public resources in and for whose benefit, of which businesses. Its function is reduced to acting as a mediator, or rather a channel of transmission, between the demand from citizens and social institutions and the market supply. Its main function, as an authority *super partes*, becomes at most to guarantee the correctness of the procedures for awarding concessions.

In reality, however, the market proves to be far from competitive. It is child's play for companies to collude in cartels to control the supply and so determine the price to be imposed on the contracting body. They even resort to the practice of mergers to absorb smaller and more sectoral businesses, while representing this open violation of competition as an advantage for the contracting body, since it will be able to reduce the number of procurement procedures and so obtain a turnkey service. And often the strengthening of monopoly practices by players averse to business risk tends to transform normal and lawful lobbying into a more lucrative criminal work of corrupting public officials and politicians. To this should be added the difficulties any administration has in effectively controlling the correctness of the procedures and subsequently the performance of the work due to the systematic use of subcontracting.[5]

So it is hardly surprising that the great transformation of the late twentieth century has started an apparently uncontrollable process of building oligopolies in all sectors of the economy, from industry to resources and services. In more general terms, we could say that it has radically changed the traditional conflicts "over short-term or long-term allocations of resources, products, and benefits in the economy" (Rokkan, 1999: 282). The downsizing of the manufacturing economy

5 Contracting out should be governed by the principle of exceptionalism and be applicable in specific sectors contractually defined, but it is becoming a common practice and effectively evades any type of regulation. The main effects, in this case, are uncontrolled cost increases and the dispersal of responsibility, or even the inability to verify the identity and character of the subcontractor.

has produced a significant loss of the working class's bargaining power. On the one hand, unprecedented alliances are sometimes formed between workers and manufacturers in an attempt to oppose or at least restrain financial and speculative interests. On the other—with greater frequency and, we could say, in proportion to the severity of unemployment—the traditional class struggle is giving way to confrontation entirely within what used to be called the proletarian front, between local workers and immigrants, who are perceived as unfair competition because they accept wages and safety conditions unacceptable to local workers.

A further conflict, related to the preceding ones, tends to emerge between capital income (rents, dividends, interest, royalties, profits, capital gains) and labour income (wage income and non-wage income). Thomas Piketty observed that it is right to distinguish these two dimensions when evaluating the trend of inequalities over time and between countries, because historically, if the state does not act to redistribute resources, capital gains tend to grow more rapidly than the economy as a whole and therefore than income from labour, which means capitalism intrinsically tends towards inequality (Piketty, 2014). And it could also be observed that in recent years the processes of deindustrialization, technological innovation and the growing precariousness of employment have made the trend of labour incomes even more uncertain, as well as the very possibility of finding employment. Conversely, the production of capital gains has been favoured by other aspects of globalization, such as the deregulation that followed the end of the Bretton Woods system, the free movement of capital and the proliferation of tax havens. And the only real risk to its reproduction is the propensity of those who manage capital towards speculation and gambling.[6]

But the real conflict arises from the fact that the distribution of income between capital and labour is a zero-sum game, a further factor in increasing inequalities. The greater the profits invested in the stock exchange, the fewer resources will be made available for creating new jobs; and the greater the earnings guaranteed by the mere reproduction of capital, the lower the willingness to accept the risks of business and invest in human capital. This also emerges from the data mentioned above on the propensity of the wealthier classes to reinvest their profits in financial assets rather than job creation.

To sum up, the joint effect of the end of the Cold War and globalization has been a far-reaching change in every area of society. Of course, we still live in a world of states, each of which continues to interact with capitalism. Yet the histor-

6 This was well known to economists as early as the early 1990s: "According to one estimate, in 1979 total exports were $1.5 trillion compared to foreign exchange trading of $17.5 trillion; by 1984, whereas exports had increased only to $1.8 trillion, foreign exchange trading had ballooned to $35 trillion" (Gilpin, 1987: 144).

ical process that seemed to have found a stable point of arrival in the diarchy started up again after 1989, changing its organizational models, sometimes radically, both in their structural and systemic components, and in terms of their imagined communities of reference, a point we will return to shortly. And all of this could only have repercussions on their territorial configuration.

Saskia Sassen made this point, albeit without abandoning the traditional statist perspective, when she observed that "global processes and formations can be, and are, destabilizing the scalar hierarchy centred in the national state"; just as, in its turn, the formation of the nation-state had destabilized the hierarchies of scale of previous ages, "such as the colonial empires of the sixteenth and subsequent centuries and the medieval towns that dominated long-distance trading in certain parts of Europe in the fourteenth century" (Sassen, 2007: 14). In other words, the state is no longer the centre of the political universe.

Even more effectively, we could say that 1989—when the Berlin Wall was demolished on 9 November, an event with the power to evoke 1789 and the French Revolution—marks a rift between the old and new world. It was the point of arrival of a sequence of crises originating much earlier and involving the whole of society.

In other words, 1989, *annus mirabilis*, can rightly stand for the end of the state–capitalism diarchy as it existed in the old millennium and the start of a "global restructuring". This expression is used by the urban planner Neil Brenner, who defines it "as a rescaling of the nationally organized sociospatial configurations that have long served as the underlying geographical scaffolding for capitalist development" (Brenner, 2004: 57). This rescaling does not imply an end to territoriality as such, but rather the consolidation of increasingly polymorphic political geographies, in which territoriality is no longer concentrated in a single predominant centre of gravity, but tends to be redistributed over many sub-state and supra-state institutional levels (municipalities and regions on the one hand, macro-regional and international organizations on the other). Consequently, it creates "qualitatively new geographies of capital accumulation, state regulation, and uneven development" (Brenner, 2004: 64).

Basically, it triggered a process bound to affect all aspects of everyday life, all forms of social organization; to generate new structures, new power relationships, new conceptual categories. The result tends to be configured as a global network of complex systems operating on different levels and using different resources. For example, the philosopher Mark C. Taylor confirms this when he says that "in the world that is emerging, the condition of complexity is as irreducible as it is in-

escapable" and that "what is emerging in this moment is a new network culture whose structure and dynamics we are only beginning to fathom" (Taylor, 2001: 3–5).[7]

3 The triadic society

In the public debate, no less than the academic one, the difficulty of framing the current world in the traditional categories has largely given rise to the idea that post-1989 marked the start of the phase of a new "world disorder". As Anna Caffarena observes in a book entirely devoted to images prevalent in international politics, "if there is one feature that—for reasons that are not always innocent—connotes the discourse on world politics over the last thirty years, it is the centrality of disorder, a non-image and master key, one made to open all the doors that actually fails to open any" (Caffarena, 2018: 114). The prospect of an anarchic future seemed to exempt scholars from the need to question established assumptions. At the same time it also had a reassuring effect on the citizens of countries that could afford the luxury of contemplating from afar the effects this so-called anarchy had on others. I refer, in particular, to the masses of the disinherited produced by the economies of rapine and looting of the territory, or the hundreds of thousands of individuals termed, with an understatement, displaced persons. We are prepared to admit the existence of these men, women and children compelled to escape from conflicts only when, by emigrating, they come to claim their right to survive on our borders—becoming, by this alone, the target of the parties that view (and propagandize) them as a direct threat to the integrity of their communities. The consoling corollary of the idea of world disorder is that, after the storm, everything will again be as it was, falling within the familiar parameters. Basically, within the borders of the state and under its control, regardless of what the costs of the operation may be.

The end of the state–capitalism diarchy, however, does not necessarily entail the absence of a logic or a principle of order. Certainly capitalism seems increasingly capable of doing without the state. Moreover the state has made the rules of the market its own to the point of contracting out to private operators substantial portions of its legitimate monopoly of physical force, so calling into question the very foundations of its own sovereignty. Certain figures that seemed to have

7 And he continues, a little further on in the text, by noting that the transition from modern industrial society to a network culture began in the late 1960s and reached its climax on 9 November 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall (Taylor, 2001). An idea not very dissimilar from that, just explained here, that 1989 was the culmination of a sequence of crises that originated in previous decades.

retreated into history are beginning to re-emerge with an increasingly important role in warfare. Mercenaries are becoming ever more common in the theatres of many wars on the African continent and some Asian and Latin American peripheries, where even children are forced to fight. Then piracy has again become lucrative, especially in Asia and the Pacific, in a region, that of the sea, which still eludes attempts at control and regulation (Armao, 2015). Not to mention the United States, the beating heart of global capitalism, where privatization, in addition to massively affecting the whole military sector and methods of waging wars, now extends to the government apparatus that oversees foreign policy (Stanger, 2009).

Yet the shrinking role of state institutions, as mentioned above, is not creating a power vacuum. If anything, it is giving rise to new forms of social aggregation and a true new type of political regime that I have termed oikocracy. This rests on a return of the clan to the centre of the social context (today much more interconnected than it was in the pre-modern period). We will analyse the concept of oikocracy in greater depth in the next chapter, but this great new transformation can only be understood if we first agree to update our reference categories.

Political thought, from natural law theorists to Hegel, Marx and Gramsci, has long distinguished the state from civil society, understood as "the place where economic, social, ideological and religious conflicts arise and unfold, which state institutions have the task of resolving, mediating, preventing or repressing" (Bobbio, 1985: 25–26). The subjects of civil society, as opposed to the state, are social classes, interest groups, movements, voluntary organizations. In other words, if the state embodies the sphere of coercive power, civil society represents the place of economic interests and class relations—as well as being "the place where de facto powers are formed that tend, especially in times of institutional crisis, to win their own legitimacy even to the detriment of the legitimate powers" (Bobbio, 1985: 27).

With the expansion of representative government and the spread of mass parties with an ideological matrix, however, some scholars held it was necessary to distinguish a specific political society that acted as a sphere of mediation between the state and civil society (Farneti, 1994). The advent of globalization has since tended to broaden the meaning of civil society over time, to the point where today it is defined as "the sphere of uncoerced human association between the individual and the state, in which people undertake collective action for normative and substantive purposes, relatively independent of government and the market" (Edwards, 2011: 4). Civil society is identified variously with volunteer work, the area of application of social norms or the sphere of action and commitment by citi-

zens. Hence, through a sort of spillover process, political society emancipates itself from the state, just as civil society later emancipates itself from the market.[8]

Global restructuring then produces a new society that is the product of dynamic interactions between three different subsets:

1. political society: the sphere of representative government, ideology, relations of authority and, ultimately, relations of force;
2. economic society: the sphere of wealth, economic interests, labour relations and production;
3. civil society: the sphere of participation, voluntary organizations and movements, and citizenship relations.

Drawing on one of the most classic dichotomies, that presented by Hannah Arendt (1958), we can say that if political society is identified with the public sphere and economic society with the private sphere, civil society affirms itself as an original combination of two. It is a non-political public sphere, one that often claims independence of politics as a peculiar feature of its collective action; and at the same time part of the private sphere not engaged in the search for individual profit but capable of becoming a social enterprise and a source of income for a growing number of operators in the voluntary and non-profit sectors, such as NGOs.

But further observations are also called for. Firstly, all three societies develop their own organizational models and specific cultural artefacts. On the one hand they engage in true processes of institutionalization, meaning they produce specific systems of norms, values and structures of authority—each characterized by a different degree of freedom of access, capacity of control and transparent rules—that interact to form areas of interchange, grey areas. On the other, each society creates specific "imagined communities":

> In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities have to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined (Anderson, 1983: 6).

8 It was noted that the success of the category of civil society in recent decades can be attributed to the fact that, in the 1980s, some intellectuals of the Eastern Europe began to interpret the crisis of communism as a "revolt of civil society against the state", attributing to the concept a strong evaluative connotation as the space of mobilization of the most authentic, spontaneous and, therefore, positive forces. This connotation was strengthened by adherence to this idealized conception of civil society also by conservative and neoliberal groups, which displayed a strong anti-state feeling and a growing aversion to any form of welfare (Ehrenberg, 2011: 23).

Imagined communities are not a mere intellectual invention. They become manifest only when they are perceived as authentic by individuals who express the urge to belong to them. Historical circumstances can arise in which there is a perfect fit between a given system and a corresponding imagined community. An example is the idea of the nation, for which Anderson devised the concept of the imagined community: a construction of intellectuals and artists, transmitted (propagandized) by schools, universities and churches, and finally taken up by masses of citizens, who are ready to sacrifice their lives in the wars conceived and fought in its name. But another example could be the working class, a reality in the age of industrialism and a decisive factor in the individual and collective identity of millions of men and women, who sometimes proudly claim to belong to a universal community, the international proletariat.

By contrast, intellectual constructs, such as the idea of cosmopolitanism or merely of Europe, have never been raised to the rank of true imagined communities, precisely because they have never managed to overcome the purely intellectual dimension. And finally, there are historical contingencies such as the current one, in which there is a dramatic disconnect between the forms taken by the systems of the various societies and the prevalent imagined communities. This is the case of the democratic system itself, idealized and desired for decades by populations subject to totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, triumphant after the collapse of communism and the decline of military autocracies, yet destined to survive far more in the collective imagination and rhetoric of political elites than in the daily practice of society.

Secondly, the boundaries between the three political, economic and civil societies exist, and have to be recognized for the sake of analytical clarity, but they are very permeable. The actions of individuals or groups operating within one of these societies can therefore extend to the others. Parties, protagonists of the political sphere, may mobilize elements of civil society for electoral purposes, or strengthen their own role as mediators in relation to the economic system by creating a network of clients and so raising funds to finance their activities. Trade unions and business organizations can turn themselves from institutions representing economic interests into interlocutors of the governing parties, so taking on a role that is in every respect political. Finally, the actors in civil society may at times perform political or economic roles.

Think of the case of non-governmental and non-profit organizations that manage to exploit the consensus and visibility gained internationally through their work to act as pressure groups and influence government policies (civil rights movements) and—far more rarely—industrial and financial choices (ecological and anti-globalization movements). Or, again, social movements that start to par-

ticipate in elections and perhaps play a part in government (the Five-Star Movement in Italy, Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece).

The third observation is that, in processual terms, the dynamics between the three societies can lead to an alternation of phases of hegemony of political, economic or civil society, to the advantage of the systems and actors in which they are respectively embodied. The hegemony of political society is embodied, depending on the circumstances, in the predominance of a party leader, the government or parliament. This may take the form of direct appropriation of appointments or resources in the public sector or even the private sector, the covert appropriation of benefits through clientelism and corruption; or finally it may involve the instrumental and ideological mobilization of the masses together with the use of force against its opponents.

The hegemony of economic society is manifested as the predominance pure and simple of market logic and the economic lobbies, in a context in which civil society does not express the desire for participation and political society tends to disintegrate, losing its ability to present alternative ideologies and failing to represent the excluded. In such circumstances, the politician's role is reduced to that of a "civil intermediary who guarantees the privileged connection with the organs of the state", a condition that "tends to give rise to sometimes pathological alternative political societies (such as the mafia or the political machines in big cities in the United States)" (Farneti, 1994: 117).

Finally, the hegemony of civil society takes the form of the predominance of the crowd, which may arise independently or through the intervention of one of those grass-roots organizations that are its backbone. In historical reality, it is also worth observing, many intermediate forms of hegemony may arise based on a possible convergence of interests between actors belonging to the different societies. In particular, a political hegemony built on clientelism and corruption cannot be separated from the active and often willing participation of individual or collective members of economic society.

The fourth and final factor is that the three societies and the systems that constitute their whole models of organization operate within specific territorial configurations. In a long-term historical perspective, we could say that in the modern period—at least in Europe—there was a transition from a phase termed feudalism, characterized by a marked fragmentation of social bodies into only loosely connected spheres of coexistence, with large empty spaces of "no man's land" yet to be conquered, to a phase when territories were aggregated in the form of modern states.

In the last five centuries, as we have seen, the state has represented the typical territorial context within which political, economic and social society have been able to develop and become integrated, to the point of creating the illusion that

it has always existed and is the only institution possible. The state was able to guarantee internal security; but, it should be clear, not necessarily justice, equity or the freedom of its citizens. Rather it created the basic conditions necessary to administer systems based first on a patrimonialist conception of power, then ones gradually more open to the needs of new emerging social groups (the bourgeoisie in particular). And in territorial terms, once the empty spaces had been filled up, the boundaries of each of these state entities were defined in competition with other similar entities and to their detriment. Power politics, theories apart, was a strategy for delimiting the spheres of cohabitation, which was first carried out on the European continent and then projected worldwide.

Today's transformation of social spaces now produces a global network of complex systems, a pluriverse of political, economic and civil societies that interact with each other, operating on different levels, from local to global, and using different resources, creating dense and at times indecipherable networks of specific territorial configurations. Seen in these terms, sovereignty—the relationship by which the agent of a state exercises a power of command matched by substantial compliance on the part of those over whom the state claims authority (Agnew, 2009)—ceases to be an absolute and indivisible prerogative of the state and becomes a shared and sometimes endorsed resource within specific regions or in the suburban peripheries. In other words, the state is no longer the only possible political and social referent. Apart from the head of government, the leader of a rebel group or gang, the boss of a mafia clan or a cartel of drug traffickers may also seek to win the loyalty (or at least the acquiescence) of the individuals present in a given territory.

This use of the concept of sovereignty is by no means obvious. In fact it might appear to many, even in a period of globalization, to be utterly inappropriate. And if we really wished to extend its meaning, then we should still have to consider supranational entities, such as the European Union (Jackson, 2007; Kalmo and Skinner, 2010). But there are some who argue, after observing the "decline of the state", that it would be at least naive to claim that the significance and functions of sovereignty remain the same and that we have to redefine, if not actually reassess, the very foundations of political thought: "If we want to retain the concept of sovereignty in any meaningful and prospective way, then perhaps the alternative would be to try to rethink it outside the classical notion of the modern state" (Lipping, 2010: 189).

In the world today, therefore, the state is no longer the only possible political and social referent. Hence the preliminary problem is to determine the boundaries of different imagined communities. As has been observed, a head of government, the leader of a rebel group or a gang, the boss of a mafia clan or a drug trafficking cartel all aim to win the loyalty (or at least the acquiescence) of the individuals

present in a given territory. But the identities they offer them are different, and so too are the forms and levels of coercion they resort to, and the welfare models they are capable of providing.

As we have seen, in a world of states the idea of the nation proved to be the strongest cement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to strengthen the sense of belonging to a single community. This made it possible to clearly delimit the boundary between the *internal space* of legitimacy of a sovereign power and the *external space* occupied by other political entities. War was a phase when these borders were crossed, while peace intervened to restore order, redesigning the geographies of power or restoring the *status quo.* The current global restructuring generates a much more fluid territoriality and with it an uncontrollable proliferation of *disputed regions* and *no man's lands*, both between states and above all within them.

Within the urban perimeters of megalopolises, and not just in developing countries, mafias and gangs transform some neighbourhoods into hubs of strategic importance. They do so both in "political" ways, through the effective exercise of coercive power and the extraction of resources (as well as the maintenance of a certain degree of social cohesion), and "economically", by organizing the traffic in illicit goods. The city, even better than the state, enables us to bring out a second aspect of these new imagined communities, namely their transnational character. Organized crime, terrorists and gang members, for instance, follow the migratory flows induced by globalization, most often projecting themselves from the peripheries (developing countries) to the centres of the capitalist economy (developed countries), while retaining their own identity and sense of belonging to a group, first by subjugating the members of their own community and then by shaping the new environment in which they settle to suit their needs.

Everything just said seems to configure the inversion of that process which, to evoke Henry Sumner Maine, led to the transition from a phase "in which all the relations of Persons are summed up in the relations of Family" to one "in which all these relations arise from the free agreement of Individuals"; so that "the movement of the progressive societies has hitherto been a movement from Status to Contract" (Maine, 1906: 163–165). The world today seems to be seeing the decline of individualism as a precondition for a model that seemed capable of satisfying the requirements of political and social progress, as well as economic development, by reconciling the parliamentary system with the market economy. It is restoring the predominance of a model in which the position ascribed on the basis of belonging to a group prevails over the individual's freedom to associate on the basis of voluntary choice (the contract).

As in a spiralling movement, which alternates a cyclical return to the past with a progressive push towards development, history is again bringing the clan to

prominence as a leading actor. But this is happening in a context that has nothing to do with the pre-modern world, being substantiated in the political regime of oikocracy.

To enable us to better understand this veritable revival of the clan, it will be useful to reconstruct the context in which oikocracy is being shaped and explain the reasons for its rapid global success.

4 The vortex of globalization

The easiest way to do this is to start from the observation, widely shared in the literature, that acceleration is one of the main phenomena in which globalization appears. David Harvey, among the best-known scholars who has dealt with the topic, already wrote about it in *The Condition of Postmodernity*. He referred particularly to the acceleration of the production cycle (with effects, sometimes dramatic, in the need to retrain workers, who are also forced to compete with the challenge of robotization and the growing demand for flexibility by entrepreneurs), as well as trade and consumption—not to mention the speed achieved by financial flows with the spread of digital technologies.[9] But, adds Harvey, one also has to consider the effect of "time–space compression", facilitated in particular by the advent of information technology and the new social media:

> I use the word 'compression' because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us. [...] The experience of time-space compression is challenging, exciting, stressful, and sometimes deeply troubling, capable of sparking, therefore, a diversity of social, cultural, and political responses (Harvey, 1990: 240).

Oikocracy is one of the responses. The acceleration induced by globalization unleashes a veritable vortex of reciprocal interactions involving all three societies: political, economic and civil. The three currents they generate clash, mix, spread and disperse depending on the situation, invariably creating new forms of aggregation in response to the need to reorganize global capitalism dictated by neoliberalism.

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9 Likewise, according to another reference text, the term globalization "denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction" (Held and McGrew, 2007: 4).

Drawing on some of the points contained in the previous paragraph, we could compress the vortex of globalization into the following image (Figure 7). It shows how the dynamics between the three societies move the large resources on which depends their very survival.

Under normal conditions, political society is related to economic society by lobbying and to civil society by the mechanism of voting. On the one hand, it needs to secure support (including funding) from the economic elites, and this entails the ability to respond, in some way, to requests from the worlds of business and finance. On the other hand, periodically it still has to be legitimized. If democracies are compelled to do this, to decide who will govern and who remain in opposition, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes likewise feel the need to stage mock elections in an attempt to give themselves some credibility (at least in the eyes of domestic public opinion).

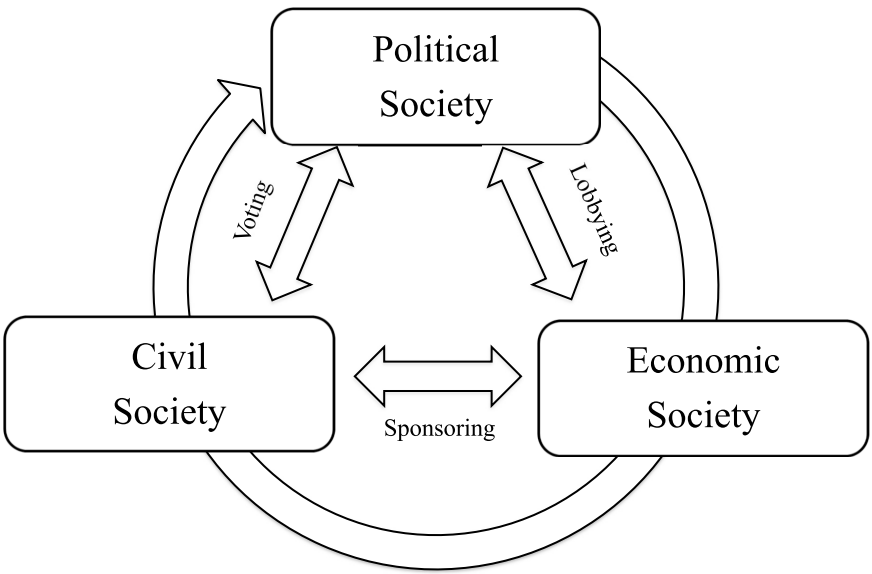

Figure 7: The Vortex of Globalization.

Economic society, for its part, has to be able, through pressure groups, to shape the state's decisions affecting economic and budgetary policy. And it receives a payback that can take the forms of tax breaks and burnishing its image through patronage of cultural or more broadly non-profit activities.

Finally, civil society needs politics to satisfy its demand for participation through the various representative institutions, but it should also be able to

count on contributions from private individuals to respond to the request for resources in the fields of art, research and even welfare.

Now we can look at what happens, in the dynamics between each pair of societies, due to the acceleration induced by neoliberal globalization.

– *Political society – economic society.* The growing costs of political competition, arising largely from the need to gain media access, increase the dependence of parties and candidates on funding by economic society, pathologically increasing the latter's bargaining power (if not its power to actually manipulate parties). Even more significant, however, are policies of privatization, namely the recourse of governments to outsourcing functions essential to the community in an effort to reduce national budget deficits. The process comes to attribute a role that is in all respects political (because it is capable of directing or determining government choices) to an increasingly restricted managerial elite, for instance in the sector of major infrastructure or services, and ranging from healthcare to education and security. The best-known and most widely documented case is in the United States where, as we have seen, privatization has spread over the past decades from running prisons to the whole military sector and even the management of foreign policy (Stanger, 2009).

  What we might call the privatization of government functions tends to deprive public opinion of any residual control over political processes. It also transforms the normal activities of lobbying into ties of a collusive kind, or even open corruption between politicians eager to secure re-election and CEOs whose career depends on the ability to guarantee growing profits for shareholders. In extreme cases, it can even give rise to the revolving door effect, when representatives of the business world are appointed to government bodies or personally present themselves for the highest offices of state, with the inevitable (and insoluble) problem of conflicts of interest. Think of Dick Cheney, who moved in 2000 from his role as CEO of Halliburton to Vice President of the United States in George W. Bush's administration. Other examples are Silvio Berlusconi and Donald Trump.

– *Economic society – civil society.* It is not in itself a novelty for the economic elites to use patronage as a way of reproducing and increasing their power. Without going too far back in time, in the last century, the great American plutocratic families were forced to reduce their economic dominance, because of the market's demand for an ever broader shareholder base. They then took steps to convert their financial resources into social capital by endowing universities and museums (Morck and Sleier, 2005). Philanthropy is looming larger among the institutional aims of the many banking foundations that manage immense quantities of private capital—and, sometimes even of prominent representatives of the criminal economy, like the Colombian drug trafficker

Pablo Escobar (Prolongeau, 1994).

One of the rare comparative studies of the economy of private foundations shows that since the 1980s there has been a veritable third wave of foundations, after those in the Middle Ages that accompanied the beginnings of trade and finance, and in the late nineteenth century, following the industrial revolution. Their spread is closely coupled with the growth of inequality (Anheier and Toepler, 1999). Apparently everyone—from governments to corporations and ordinary citizens—has something to gain from this proliferation of "private centres of public expenditure". In reality, however, the fact of not being accountable for how they use their resources (except to their oversight committees) leaves scope for favouritism and abuses, or even accusations of acting as "shadow governments", as shown by the recurrent controversy surrounding, for instance, George Soros's Open Society Foundations.

What matters most, however, is that the democratic and universalistic principles of taxation and redistribution of resources on the basis of income, which only a state government can guarantee, are replaced in private foundations by criteria whose efficiency and functionality for the purposes of the common good are determined by somewhat random factors, such as the competence, uprightness and social ethics of the board members.

The transfer of an increasingly significant share of wealth to private hands has also led to a growing institutionalization of the organizations of civil society. This is because they are progressively compelled to try to meet the foundations on an equal footing, the more governments reduce funding (or the organizations of civil society defend their independence by refusing it), while voluntary funding is drying up. This helps to explain the growing propensity of this type of association to appoint charismatic leaders and entrust the organization of communication to teams of professionals. More generally, and especially at the local level, this could well forge closer ties between the actors of economic and civil society in more or less pathological clientelistic forms. Reasoning on this in the abstract, we can conjecture that this could have repercussions in politics, affecting the votes of the recipients of funding when the exponents of politics are represented on the boards of the foundations themselves.

– *Civil society – political society.* We can first observe that the crisis of mass parties and traditional mechanisms of democratic representation, plus the need of politicians to guarantee their re-election to remedy the volatility of consensus (which risks frustrating years of investment in social and economic capital), can alter the normal functioning of the vote by fomenting clientelism, if not the actual buying and selling of votes. But the dynamics between civil society and politics generate even more complex phenomena.

On the one hand, the same policy that delegates to private economic agents some of the functions of the welfare state model—transforming a right into a paid service, hence subject to the law of profit—also has a strong interest in contracting out to voluntary associations and the third sector the management of social policies, whose costs have become unsustainable. This greatly enlarges their margins of action and powers of mediation. On the other hand, actors in civil society who do not feel represented by the traditional parties are rediscovering bottom-up forms of participation, giving rise to political movements sometimes destined to develop into new government forces (Della Porta and Diani, 2006)—think of the cases of the Five-Star Movement, Podemos and Syriza mentioned above.

It is perhaps not otiose to add, in conclusion, that the vortex of globalization significantly increases the permeability of the boundaries between the three societies. A private military corporation will inevitably play a political as well as an economic role by becoming involved in a war on behalf of a government. A non-governmental organization, from being merely a protagonist of civil society, also becomes an economic actor when it has to guarantee the salaries of its employees, as well as adequate structures and resources for them to operate in the field. Finally, a think tank that conducts socio-political research and, as such, would be wholly a part of civil society, comes to play a political role when its members enter a government administration. In studying the development of the discipline of International Relations in the United States, Stanley Hoffmann observed that there is a direct and visible link between the academic world and the world of power, developed to the point of placing researchers "not merely in the corridors but also in the kitchens of power" (Hoffmann, 1977: 49). Nevertheless, USA think tanks maintain their scholarly independence, so much so that they participate in the spoils system, entering and leaving the government depending on the orientation of the administration in charge.

In Italy too, in recent decades, there has been a (belated) proliferation of study centres. Their peculiarity, however, is that they are mostly tied to specific politicians and party currents (Diletti, 2009). They are still, formally, actors in civil society, but they also participate in political life as the personal brain trust of a leader and his retinue, albeit in very different ways from the United States. In fact, they usually have no scholarly pretensions, and their entry into the executive depends exclusively on the presence or absence of the politician of reference in government functions (and even then in the ancillary roles of spokesmen or bag carriers). When, finally, they are transformed into collectors of (more or less legitimate) funds for a party, they become themselves lobbyists (hence economic actors), although on their own behalf.

2 The birth of oikocracy

Drawing on Polanyi and paraphrasing him, we could say that the civilization of the twentieth century (unlike that of the nineteenth) has not yet collapsed, because society at the turn of the millennium succeeded in showing a greater degree of resilience during the crisis than did early twentieth-century society. The twofold movement that alternates between phases of prevalence of the self-regulated market with others in which the state claims control of the economy has produced, in this case, its own peculiar synthesis. The result is that state and capitalism both rely to an increasing degree on clan-based groups.

Clans establish themselves as intermediary structures between the individual and a society made ever more complex by globalization. They aggregate the resources and specific skills of the three systems described above: political (representation), economic (wealth) and civil (participation).

Oikocracy as "government by clans" develops a more direct and intense relationship with the local territory. In this way, it eliminates the defect usually attributed to state power: that of being distant, in the twofold sense of remote, because confined to the capital, and aloof, because bureaucratized. In this sense, the clan facilitates the rescaling of the socio-spatial configurations described by Brenner, restoring the city to the centre of the political universe and so effectively multiplying indefinitely the forms of the political geographies.

The clan, however, ends up by calling into question (we might say stressing) the idea of legality itself. It introduces an element of disruption into the dynamic that should guarantee the equality of every citizen before the law—especially democratic law—while it should always be possible to trace a crime back to an individual (hence the individuality of punishment, associated with its proportionality to the offence committed). The clan, by contrast, considers it entirely legitimate to protect its members, if necessary by assuring them of *de facto* forms of immunity from the law that place them in a privileged position compared to the normal citizen. This also allows them to commit crimes in association, with all the advantages that this brings in terms of "competitiveness".

1 The clan past and present

We should not find it in the least surprising that the clan is establishing itself as the new protagonist of social dynamics, acting as a broker between individuals and an increasingly articulated and complex society. The clan has always existed. It is a far more "natural", hence more comprehensible, form of social organization than

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the liberal democratic state (Weiner, 2013). A quick glance at the remote and recent past presents us with an endless series of examples of its enduring pervasiveness.

Think of the role played by the great banking families in the birth and development of capitalism: the importance of the Fuggers to the Habsburg dynasty (Häberlein, 2006) or of Tuscan and Genoese bankers to Spain under Philip II (Dauverd, 2015). Of the chartered trading companies, the East India Company chose its new apprentices from among the sons of the merchants who were its shareholders and it used terms such as "brethren" and "family" for the different ranks within the company, to increase the sense of community among its employees in India (Baskin and Miranti, 1997). But by far the most significant point, and one all too often overlooked, is that consanguinity remains the inalienable foundation of the monarchy—of the royal *family*, of the ruling *house* (in English "kin" and "king" have the same etymological root). Then the political futures of dynasties have often been entrusted to marriage strategies and their ability to extend their dominance throughout Europe and the world.

In particular, after the end of the Cold War, as politics became increasingly privatized, the clan re-emerged with leading roles on the periphery of the international system, in contexts ranging from the former Soviets regimes of Central Asia to the Middle East. But, in reality, not even the major powers are averse to rediscovering the value of kinship (if they ever were).

In Russia, after the collapse of communism, control of the principal and most productive assets of the economy passed into the hands of the so-called oligarchs, the heads of semi-legal or *tout court* criminal clans established on a regional, professional or ethnic basis. In those years they possessed a greater coercive power than even the state, with their tentacles extending inside the Kremlin (Åslund, 2019). In China, as early as the mid-eighties, there was a revival of the clan-based organizations suppressed in the Maoist era as pre-revolutionary institutions. In rural areas in particular, the leaders of traditional kinship-based patriarchal clans have merged with the Communist Party cadres, mutually reinforcing and altering the dynamics between the state and peasants (Lü, 2000).

As for the United States, finally, we can hardly overlook the fact that eight presidents have had family ties.[1] And such cases are much more common among members of Congress and governors of states (Shlapentokh and Woods, 2011). The competition for the presidency favours the proliferation of political clans, capable of giving rise to different models of organization. The case of the Kennedys, for instance, can be described as the traditional domination of a party by a family. The case of the Bushes seems to reveal the logic of the party

1 The Adams, Bush, Harrison and Roosevelt families have had two presidents each.

boss who acted as mediator, at the highest level, between public and private interests by packing his administration with a staff broadly representative of the corporations (and the same was done even more markedly in George W. Bush's administration). Finally, with the election of Donald Trump, a representative of the managerial elite outside the party (and to some extent actually opposed to it) undertook to govern the USA with the direct assistance of numerous family members (especially his daughter Ivanka and son-in-law Jared Kushner).

Italy, for its part, is a true paradigm. It embodies a model of development in its way ideal, the product of an original combination of political, economic and social conditions that came together during the twentieth century, the overriding factor being the importance acquired by clan-based power. The elites who had to administer the process of formation of the new Italian state tackled—pragmatically, one is tempted to say—the problem of uniting a highly varied patchwork of regions using all the resources available at that time. This was done by taking advantage of the semi-feudal relationships prevalent in the Southern regions, relying on the narrowness of the electoral body to favour the notarial nature of political parties (and the oligarchic management of the government), building the state apparatus starting from the Piedmontese bureaucracy, and not skimping on the use of violence in an attempt to simulate a monopoly of force that was still far from being fully acquired (as shown by brigandage). The essential (and in fact paradigmatic) element in Italy's distinctive historical development is the role that the mafias have played ever since unification. This now sees them prominent in political and social developments in the North as much as the South and capable, with their shadow economies, of engrossing an increasing share of GDP.

This is not the place for a case study of the Italian situation.[2] It is, however, worth noting that 1992 marked an essential transition, with the convergence of two fault lines. The first was the evolution of Cosa Nostra, and the mafia more generally, from a local power system into an actor of national importance. The second was the crisis of the old party system clearly revealed by Tangentopoli. As has been observed, this was a lost opportunity, because even though the judiciary managed to destroy the old networks of illicit party finance (as well as the personal enrichment of individual politicians and their entourages), there was no real political will to remove the structural causes of corruption (Della Porta and Vannucci, 1999).

Then 1992 marked the start of a veritable new oikocracy, one that implemented clientelism and corruption rather than curbing them. Mafia organizations successfully stepped in to fill the voids left by the collapse of the old parties in their role as mediators between the local authorities and public administrators (local

2 For an already more thorough analysis the reader is referred to Armao (2018 and 2019).

and/or national), by using their own networks of interpersonal relationships, their own money and, as a last resort, even intimidation and violence. In essence, there was an extraordinary convergence of criminal interests between the mafia and those sectors of the social elites which, as the Clean Hands investigation amply demonstrated, were prone to clientelism and corruption. This convergence explains the ease with which, within a few years, the mafias were able to complete the colonization of Central and Northern Italy almost without obstacles, except for those placed in their way by the judiciary and police, amid a substantial desert of political initiative. The upshot is that in the North the mafias are engaging in all their traditional illegal activities, but in addition they are rampant in the legal economy, from public tenders to real estate, the public and private health system, commerce, tourism and the retail and wholesale business in Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany, Trentino-Alto Adige, Val d'Aosta and Veneto (CROSS, 2015).

One of the most emblematic cases remains the Mafia Capitale investigation. In Rome more than 100 suspects were charged with extortion, loan sharking, corruption, money laundering and other crimes, of which 32 have received a final sentence. In addition to infiltrating and compromising even the non-profit sector, Mafia Capitale brought together a variety (one might call it an ecumenical array) of groups. They ranged from members of the traditional mafia and the Sinti clan of the Casamonica family to exponents of the Banda della Magliana and former members of the neo-fascist NAR terrorist group. Even more recently, one of the largest operations ever conducted against the 'ndrangheta led to the arrest, on 19 December 2019, of 334 mafia mobsters, politicians, entrepreneurs and professionals in Vibo Valentia and in 11 other regions. This happened a few days after the news of another investigation into manipulation of the 2018 regional elections in Valle d'Aosta by members of the Calabrian 'ndrangheta. The president of the region and two of his councillors were compelled to resign after receiving a summons for political-mafia electoral collusion from the Turin District's Anti-Mafia Directorate.

Historical developments in Mexico are in many respects similar to those in Italy, with collusion between political and criminal clans. Both countries, moreover, share factors such as relatively late national unification in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a marginal role in the international political system, and in both cases a strategic relationship with the United States and even a shared experience of Spanish domination (in Italy, especially in the southern regions), which probably helps explain some cultural analogies (such as the role of the family or religion).

In Mexico, the process of democratization began likewise in the 1990s with the advent of the multiparty system. It seems to have aggravated rather than resolved

the problems of impunity and criminal violence. This apparent paradox is explained by the end of the monopoly of power held by the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), triggering competition between the actors, old and new, present in the territory (Davis, 2010). In this struggle, those who sought to reverse the current of history by introducing positive practices were doomed to succumb to those who wanted to continue the current and go with it. To give an example, in an environment traditionally dominated by police corruption and high levels of conflict between the police and armed forces, it is much more difficult to radically reform these institutions than facilitate their tendencies. In particular, the so-called drug trafficking cartels find it easy to aggravate the social disintegration, fuelling corruption and rivalry between state bodies to confirm people's idea that they are unreliable and then presenting themselves as the new guarantors of security.[3]

In the Mexican case, however, the distinguishing (and closely correlated) elements are proximity to the USA and drug trafficking itself. A crucial point, for example, is that since 1965 the long border separating the two countries has constituted, with the start of the Border Industrialization Program by the Mexican government, the main testing ground for a new free trade system. This sought to respond to the profound unemployment crisis by extending tax relief to USA corporations that subcontracted production to local *maquiladoras* (Lugo, 2008).[4] But even more important factors are the dynamics of drug trafficking (fuelled by steadily growing demand from the United States) and the intensified war on drugs conducted in Colombia by the American Drug Enforcement Agency (culminating in the killing of Pablo Escobar in 1993). These two phenomena stemmed from the opening of new routes through Mexico, which help explain the birth of the Gulf cartel and those of Tijuana, Sonora and Juárez, with tragic consequences in the death rate for homicides, as shown by the newspaper headlines quoted in the Prologue.

The same phenomena were also responsible for the proliferation of the *maras* (Cruz, 2010). Formed in the late eighties and early nineties in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala by disbanded members of the guerrilla groups and death

3 The term "cartels" should be used with due caution. In the first place, it only applies to the main drug trafficking organizations and not to the many small groups that operate as subcontractors or in complete independence. Secondly, it should not suggest the existence of rigid and highly hierarchical structures. These are often only temporary groupings created by a set of contingent factors: a more or less favourable political context, or strategies of repression that may enforce changes in the routes taken by traffickers and true changes to the leadership if a drug lord is imprisoned or killed (Campbell, 2009).

4 *Maquiladoras* are mostly textile factories or assembly plants for mechanical and electronic components specifically designed to facilitate the use of cheap labour.

squads, these gangs settled in Los Angeles and other American cities. There they rose to prominence in drug trafficking, bolstered above all by their knowledge of the routes along which Colombian cocaine travelled. Since then, their recruiting power in the streets and prisons has grown considerably, hand in hand with an exponential increase in their income. This prompted them to wage a sort of campaign to recolonize the whole of Central and South America, starting from Mexico and then expanding in more recent years to Europe (Spain, above all, and Italy).

Criminal clans are now the most "successful" case, one that demonstrates an ability to combine the local and global dimensions better than any other actors (and not only in Italy or Central America). Better above all than the state, subject to the (institutional and other) constraints imposed, on the one hand, by the need to take account of national interests and on the other by power and legal relationships in the international community. By adopting a strategy of taking root and then expanding, the criminal clans strengthen their positions in a specific territory and then move on to conquer new spaces, first perhaps in neighbouring regions, then other countries. The increasingly active role they play in the processes of globalization prompts them to travel, usually following the routes of migrants from their own community of origin. This makes them less visible in their destinations, where they mix with other individuals of the same ethnic group and reproduce among them the extortion-protection rackets that made their fortune back home.

This ability to reconcile the various political, economic and social manifestations of the local dimension of power, while creating transnational networks globally, capable of mobilizing men and resources—money, goods or consensus—is also typical of other types of clan. They range from the CEOs of multinationals to activists in NGOs. And this is due to the very nature of the clan, whose characteristics we can now seek to clarify.

2 The law of the clan

The regained competitiveness of the clan derives from its peculiar ability to reconcile different (or even conflicting) interests and mitigate the effects of distortions generated by the vortex of globalization.

Over the millennia, observed Radcliffe-Brown, society has evolved along two different lines of development: from few to many forms of social structure and from simpler forms to increasingly complex ones. Human history can thus be summed up in terms of "the process by which wide-range systems of social structure have grown up out of, or replaced, narrow-range systems" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 204). Today the social structure has taken on such extensive dimensions as to re-

store the clan to a centrality on a microsocial level that it lost at the start of the modern age, as the result of a twofold process.

In political terms, the criterion of consanguinity as the foundation of the social order proved incompatible with the constitution of a *public* space. In the words of Hannah Arendt, the formation of the *polis* had to be preceded by the destruction of communities based on kinship. In the modern world society is affirmed as a single superhuman family (Arendt, 1958). It should be clear that this was a very gradual process, which passed (especially in Europe) through the experience of feudalism and what has been defined, with an effective expression, as a "transpersonal state", based on the vassalatic relationship, one capable of supplementing kinship with a nascent, abstract form of political obligation based on the fiefdom and the territory, the lordship (Reynolds, 2001).

Economically, during the Middle Ages the clan was an obstacle to nascent capitalism, which preferred instead to rely on the nuclear family and the corporations. On the one hand it saw the family as capable of guaranteeing a better concentration of capital, more efficient distribution of labour and greater mobility, and on the other it found corporations a far more versatile tool than extended kinship groups in meeting the needs of a market experiencing unprecedented economic growth: "Corporations provided safety nets, secured property rights (from the grabbing hand of the state, pirates, and each other), provided public goods, supported markets, and fostered innovation and training" (Greif, 2006: 310).

Continuing along the evolutionary path traced by Radcliffe-Brown, we could then say that the degree of complexity attained by today's world has come to question what we had taken for granted: namely that the state, to say it with Stein Rokkan, essentially constituted a point of arrival, because it proved capable of matching physical, geographical space with the socio-cultural space of membership, the concept of territorial identity with that of citizenship (Rokkan, 1999). Nowadays, the clan is therefore restored with its own specific function.

But we have to understand the meaning of the term, which is used in everyday language with an extraordinary wealth of meanings. At one extreme, the clan can still indicate the male unilinear progeny of a single progenitor. At the other extreme, it can be understood as an exclusive group of people united by sharing the same interests, of whatever nature they may be. And an equally broad range of connotations of value accompanies its use, depending on whether the idea of the clan is associated, for instance, with a glorious past of brotherhood and honour or with the underworld of organized crime.

By the clan I here mean an organization whose purpose is to unite and protect the interests and security of its members, based on a subjective sense of belonging and identity rather than on the objective reality of kinship understood as blood ties (Collins, 2006). In other words, the clan is a social construction or, if one pre-

fers, a imagined community on a par with the idea of the nation. But it is capable of offering a much broader range of possibilities for sharing than the nation, including "commensality, sharing food, reincarnation, co-residence, shared memories, working together, blood brotherhood, adoption, friendship, shared suffering, and so on" (Sahlins, 2013: 8). In essence, everything can contribute to forming a clan's sense of belonging. If a relation of kinship does not exist, it can be invented; if it is held to be unsatisfactory, it can be broken off (Nuttall, 2000).

The boundaries of a clan, ultimately, are defined by starting from a claim of identity by the group members. This then has to be confirmed in the relevant social context through a process of acknowledgment. Depending on the nature of the clan, recognition may be limited to the achievement of a degree of visibility or status (for example, in different areas of economic and civil society); or go as far as a demand for the verification of the legitimacy of its power (typically, in the sphere of political society and today, with increasing frequency, in criminal activities), measured in Weber's terms by its ability to exact obedience from its target audience. For this reason, a second essential feature of the clan is that it always needs a territory of reference: "The constitution of persons and of places are mutually entailed aspects of the same process. In this sense kinship is geography, or landscape" (Leach, 2003: 31). And the territory may certainly take on the dimensions of an urban neighbourhood or a whole region, as in the case of clans with an ethnic (or mafia) base, but it can equally well be limited to the offices of a party boss, or a plush corporate boardroom. Or it may even be identified with the virtual boundaries traced online by web tribes.

To fully understand its success today, the clan has to be somehow extrapolated from its original ethno-anthropological context and set in a broader discourse on the role that interpersonal relationships had and still have in the process of building the social order. The social sciences have devoted by far their closest attention to the prevailing macro-processes and institution-building, largely relegating subjects of this kind to the background. There is, of course, an established strand of studies of elites, but here the subject is rather interpersonal relationships in a broad sense: the way they constitute the weft, the texture, of any society, the background against which the institutions act. What's more, interpersonal relationships have accompanied the whole history of the modern state and most recently of democracy, at various times giving rise to veritable intermediate bodies, creating interstitial spaces between the public and private spheres, and between individuals and society as a whole. Attention to this particular dimension of society has been much more sporadic.

Among the few exceptions, the most significant for our purposes remains the comparative research into clientelism conducted by Eisenstadt and Roniger, whose concept of "ritualised interpersonal relations" proves of great use for understand-

ing the world today. The authors themselves, moreover, point out that these relationships have characterized the whole development from tribal to modern societies, and have proven to be of fundamental importance especially for strengthening trust and solidarity within the social body, because that they lie on the boundary between public and private. In modern societies, in particular, interpersonal relationships—often informal and capable of covering a spectrum of possibilities ranging from friendship to mere acquaintance—tend to develop into "areas of institutional discontinuity" between the family and the state, between the political and economic spheres or, again, among the many apparently open social spaces that are created between the family and the class or the relevant occupational group (Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1984: 283).

In other words, relationships between people in the daily and local dimension are decisive in creating and maintaining the social order, since they serve to strengthen the sense of belonging and collective responsibility. Group dynamics constitute the interface between the individual sphere and society as a whole, and consequently "micro-macro consistencies are a fundamental source of social order, and micro-macro inconsistencies are a fundamental problem of order and a source of social change" (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon, 2011: 167).

The formation and reproduction of group ties, it has been observed, are dependent on three factors that influence each other. The first are emotions and affects, which guarantee the resilience and strength of social bonds. They are associated with meanings and identities that tend to be reproduced at the micro level and in local contexts, while escaping from control by institutions and broader communities. The second factor is repeated interactions with their interlocutors themselves, who develop the ability to adapt their behaviours and feelings to the needs of others, favouring both the strengthening of affects and independence from higher impulses. Finally, the third factor consists of shared activities, which increase the understanding of feelings and the sense of responsibility towards the group, through the satisfaction of instrumental needs related to the exchange or transfer of resources (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon, 2011).

The clan is capable of empowering and integrating each of these three factors much more effectively than any other small group. The first element, related to emotions and affects, is guaranteed by the ability to appeal to the evocative power of an *imagined family* as an environment for sharing, say, the same ethnic background, or perhaps just a place of residence, or of professional identity. Moreover, the task of the clans has been greatly facilitated by the fact that democracies, which also need legitimation (and therefore to be "believed") more than any other model of society, have invested very little in the construction of this dimension of the symbolic universes (a topic that will be dealt with in the next chapter).

The insistence on kinship relations, together with the clan's close ties with its territory, enables it to rely on repetitive social interactions, narrow enough to develop its own internal mechanisms of *social control.* In other words, the group's self-regulation and the necessary social conformity are secured by the elaboration of codes of conduct (of "honour") and, symmetrically, by a system of sanctions based on the sense of shame of those who violate the rules and on moral condemnation by the other members of the group, even more than on the explicit exercise of coercive power.

The appeal to an imagined family and the capacity for social control is finally integrated with the development of a network of joint activities that take on features of a new form of *patrimonialism.* This is a system based on clientelistic ties and, to achieve the group's practical ends, it allows for the use of resources of various kinds—private and public, economic, political and social.

The problem, of course, arises in relation to the social order as a whole. As Weiner points out:

> All these new clans [...] offer a wide range of goods and services previously furnished by the state or dispersed under its watchful guidance. [...] But there is a difference. Whereas the state once provided its many goods to individuals *as* individuals, these groups afford them to their members only. [...] Where once liberal nations existed, providing the benefits of citizenship on equal terms, there are now a host of new clans in a horrifying archipelago of Status (Weiner, 2013: 202–203).

From this point of view, the clan does not prove consistent or compatible with the individualistic foundation of democracy, let alone with its ambition to universalize citizenship. On the contrary, it is completely functional to the development of oikocracy, which prefigures a return to that Status society that Maine describes, finding in the clan the perfect solution to finally reconcile the micro and macro dimensions of the social order.

We could sum up what has just been said as follows: the power of the clan and the ultimate reason for its success has to be sought in its peculiar ability to reduce the conditions of uncertainty in which individuals find themselves acting in society. It does this by activating a series of mechanisms capable of: 1) building and maintaining trust-based relations between the members over time; 2) ensuring effective group self-regulation; 3) accumulating a wealth of resources that serve to reproduce the clan.

This last point deserves especial attention, because it is the one that affects the traditional dynamics between the public and private spheres most radically, being interposed between the individual and the state. Clans as intermediate bodies or social mediators, in the infinite kaleidoscopic forms of imagined families, constitute in all respects the true generators of social capital, understood as "the aggre-

gate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986: 248). The clan makes available to its members the social capital owned collectively, which represents its reserves of credit to be spent in interactions with its external environment.

The broader the network of connections that it is capable of mobilizing, and the greater the capital that each of the actors involved in the network holds in his or her own name, the greater will be the volume of capital available to the clan. And this quantity, it should be added, goes beyond the mere sum of the individual capital shares, since the action of the clan (the investments of social capital) helps to generate profits that increase the group's internal solidarity and consequently its cohesion and efficiency.

Social capital thus represents the essential element in clan patrimonialism, since this is what gives substance to the power of the leadership and makes it dynamic. At the same time, it has to be regenerated and increased as far as possible, since the survival of the clan depends on it, by drawing, at least in the first instance, on specific resources in the clan's privileged field of action, whether it is political, economic or civil society: respectively, by affiliating an increasing number of party members and those drawn from the public administration; by increasing its ties with representatives of the financial world and the liberal professions, who are also bearers of a technical and managerial know-how; and by strengthening its mobilization skills by involving representatives of the voluntary and third sector.

But if we take into account the fact that, as we have repeatedly seen, the boundaries between the three kinds of society can prove quite permeable, a further corollary is that the share capital of a clan will be the higher the more it proves capable of incorporating skills and forms of professional expertise not attributable to its own particular sphere of action—i. e. the higher its convertibility rate.

A clan in political society has anyway to be able to count on members of one or more parties, as well as representatives of the public administration (at the central and local levels) loyal to its leader; but it can reap enormous benefits from the admission of representatives of business or culture to its own restricted circle, or from the appointment of its members to key positions in public finance or international organizations. And, if it is unscrupulous, it can also be open to members of organized crime in order to obtain safe packages of votes for its candidates.

A clan in economic society needs to comprise entrepreneurs and professionals (bankers, accountants, lawyers), but it can also benefit by the presence of politicians or functionaries of the state capable of guaranteeing them access to public resources, as well as representatives of social entrepreneurship and NGOs who burnish their credit in ways they can spend to legitimize themselves.

A clan in civil society cannot do without a body of volunteers who identify themselves with the head of the organization and its guiding principles, but it has everything to gain from including affiliates from the political or economic worlds capable of offering support and financial resources.

The power of the clan needs to be assessed in both absolute and relative terms: starting from the scope of its network—the range of action of its leadership and members—in territorial terms, as well as comparing it to that of competing clans and taking into account the degree of institutionalization achieved by the oikocratic regime as a whole, i. e. the extent to which relations between clans tend to configure a true, independent and original system, endowed with its own rules, values and structures of authority and its own specific boundaries.

One final factor remains to be considered. This attributes a completely new significance to the relationship between the membership space and the geographical space as described by Rokkan, while explaining the success of clans in the age of globalization. This is *spatial mobility*. Clans travel and create new offshoots at a distance from their place of origin, giving rise to so many processes of territorial entrenchment, which ignore the state and almost disregard its borders, generally in an urban context.

As we will see in the next section, this veritable strategy of colonizing the districts where it takes root may even be embodied in original forms of enclosure of public spaces that, more often than not, local administrators prove unable to resist. But the point that still needs to be stressed is that its spatial mobility and its capacity to create transnational social networks enable the clan to play a leading role in the processes of globalization. In fact clans are capable of recreating and nurturing their imagined family's sense of belonging in any new destination, regardless of whether the number of members who have moved there is large or small. In other words, it profits from its ability to reproduce its homeland in the hostland, expanding the its family's boundaries to encompass diasporas "as *imagined transnational communities*, as imaginations of community that unite segments of people that live in territorially separated locations" (Sökefeld, 2006: 267).

It is important to get this clear: not all clans necessarily have to produce a diaspora; but the power of a clan *also* depends on its ability to create an imagined transnational community. Although not a necessary condition, it becomes a significant and influential variable. The ethnic–national matrix is certainly one of the possible real or imaginary homelands, capable of a strong attraction for some political or even economic clans (and increasingly for criminal ones). In this case the homeland may coincide with a unit much smaller than the state: a village or even a suburban neighbourhood in the city of origin. An economic clan may be identified with a profession (the managerial role much more than the individual corporation, for instance), while a member of a civil clan may be inspired by an abstract and

deterritorialized idea, such as ecological awareness ("mother earth") or anti-globalization, but always in the form conveyed by the clan membership. In these last two cases, moreover, it is transnationalism itself that is raised to a distinctive feature of the clan's identity, for the chief executive as for Black Bloc, the self-categorization as a member of a clan may be quite distinct from the idea of the nation and have a cosmopolitan connotation.

3 The integral city

One of the many (apparent) paradoxes of the space–time compression produced by globalization is that if, as Harvey points out, it has broken down spatial barriers largely due to digital innovation, it has also led to a rediscovery of territoriality as a "'skeleton' of everyday life": the translation of a system of human relations and the projection of relations of production, work and money, as well as cultural and symbolic (linguistic, ethical, religious) factors by a community into a given space (Raffestin, 2012: 129). A space, of course, that should also be considered the place for the physical exercise of power, bounded by those who are able to control it and decide which individuals (or goods) should be admitted or excluded (Sack, 1986).

Moreover, throughout human history and in every part of the world, governing has always meant occupying spaces and determining the degree of freedom of movement of those who live in them: "From the scale of the body, up through the scale of buildings and cities to the scale of the landscape, power exercises explicit and implicit control over the shaping and occupation of space" (Findley, 2005: 9). The relationship between sovereignty and territory has always been of fundamental importance, observed Foucault in his analysis of biopower. Sovereigns have to be able to count on being effectively rooted in the territory they claim to govern, and their ability to exact obedience is linked, among other things, to the favourable spatial arrangement of the territory itself. The capital, added Foucault, drawing on the thought of a seventeenth-century author, has to be at the centre of the country. It has an aesthetic and symbolic function, as well as a moral and economic role (as a pole of luxury and as a centre for the redistribution of goods): "sovereignty capitalizes a territory, raising the major problem of the seat of government" (Foucault, 2007: 20).

In the social sciences, however, the discourse on territoriality has long been constrained within the rather narrow terms of the city–state dichotomy, with the former being required to play a subordinate role. This has the effect of altering the reciprocal relations and true balance of power between these two spaces, which are at the same time geographical and political. This is to ignore or diminish

the historical role of stimulus performed by towns and so to "mummify" the city within Western political and social theories (Soja, 2010). In one of the best-known and undoubtedly most effective syntheses, Charles Tilly has expressed this dichotomy in terms of the contrast between the geography of capital and the geography of coercion:

> Europe's system of cities represented the changing relations among concentrations of capital, its systems of states the changing relations among concentrations of coercion. [...] Cities shape the destinies of states chiefly by serving as containers and distribution points for capital. [...] States themselves operate chiefly as containers and deployers of coercive means, especially armed forces (Tilly, 1992: 47 and 51).

Through the centuries the two systems have developed irregularly and taken different forms, but it seems clear that, at the end of a long history driven by the growing scale of wars, the nation-state have got the better of other forms of government—from city-states to empires—while cities have become almost invisible as autonomous actors.

But in hindsight, viewed in a spatial perspective, it is the state that turns out to be a mere container, because the borders that delimit its confines are the outcome of political deliberations. Cities, by contrast, are the places within which society, in its many forms, comes to life in daily action. States, and empires before them, are ephemeral, fluid, transitory entities, because they do not exist as such, but only in the representations that are given of them and in the effects that their actions have. But, in Engin Isin's words, "the city is *actual* in the sense that once it comes into being it is permanent (until it is destroyed completely it maintains its capacity to exist), solid and enduring, even when it is transformed" (Isin, 2007: 212).

Being political, observes Isin, means in all respects "being of the city". State sovereignty itself is exercised through the city and its symbolic and material practices: "The state is performed and invented through the city [...] not understood as an isolated entity but as a machine that concentrates and diffuses relations" (Isin, 2005: 385). Moreover, it is significant that the whole vocabulary of politics refers to the urban context:

> The city-state or *polis* gives us policy, polite, police, polity, and, of course, politics; while the Latin *civitas* is linked to civil, civic, citizen, civilization, and city. The Greek word to distinguish the urban dweller from the barbarian outsider or rural *idiotes* [...] is *polites*, a term redolent of the link between being urban and being political (Soja, 2010: 369).

Even in the now firmly established literature on "global cities", there is a tendency to neglect the question of how the city functions as a political actor and the cen-

trality of urban analysis to understand the political organization of the world (Magnusson, 2011: 46). In other words, the city risks falling victim to a new process of subordination, moreover implemented by its own "liberators": those scholars who, having claimed their emancipation from the state, now in fact subject it to dynamics of capitalism, transforming it into the place privileged and preordained for the embodiment of neoliberalism. Analyses of the role of cities in the processes of globalization now risk being rendered sterile by the vain search for criteria capable of classifying them, establishing hierarchies, focusing in particular on megacities as the nodes in an "integrated planetary capitalism" (Ong, 2011: 6).

On the contrary, it is far truer to say that there is no single or predetermined way of being a global city. Each city has its own mode of "being-in-the-world" and giving rise to a multiplicity of "worlding practices" that mix and blend the different components from outside in original ways and then projecting them into the world (Ong, 2011).[5] In other words, the city, like any living system, receives inputs from its surroundings, both local and global, processes them internally and produces outputs that return to the environment, modifying it. And today we are faced with what is increasingly a world of "ordinary cities", all complex and different from each other, integrated into a world of reciprocal influences and flows of different spatial amplitudes and producing original clusters of social, economic and political processes (Robinson, J. 2006).

To paraphrase Gramsci, we could say that in an age of globalization, a city, any city, is bound to become an "integral city", a dialectical interplay between coercion and consent and between the three kinds of society, political, economic and civil.[6] All this in perfect synchrony with the social dynamics described above, which restore a leading role to clans.

The contemporary city sees the copresence of spaces, times and networks of multiple relationships connecting local sites and subjects, which then become fragmented into global networks of various kinds, to the point of being configured as a multiplex city (Amin and Graham, 1997). As noted by Michael Storper, in contrast to the rhetoric of the "death of distance" said to have been produced principally by the advent of Internet, the city's importance arises from being the privileged place for face-to-face relationships:

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5 The term "worlding" goes back to Martin Heidegger and his treatment of being-in-the-world, to signify the world as such. It is common in the literature in English, in fields ranging from philosophy to politics, cultural and communication science studies (Trend, 2016).

6 Gramsci's equation is "state = political society + civil society" or, put in other words, dictatorship and hegemony (Gramsci, 2011 [1948–1951]). An interesting application of his concept to explain the functionality of coercion to neoliberal models of urban governance is in Davies (2013).

> Face-to-face contact is an efficient technology of communication; a means of overcoming coordination and incentive problems in uncertain environments; a key element of the socialization that in turn allows people to be candidates for membership of in-groups and to stay in such groups; and a direct source of psychological motivation. The combined and super-additive effects of these features is buzz (Storper, 2013: 180).

This buzz of face-to-face contacts is generated by the demand for skills in different but related sectors. In Storper's vision, the buzz fulfils the fundamental function of connecting the various activities of increasingly diverse urban economies, which can help explain why large cities manage to maintain their dominant positions in a world in which communication costs (physical as well as virtual) are tending to decline steadily. As he sees it, buzz cities are the most globalized, simply because they are capable of ensuring the copresence ("colocation") of the headquarters of multinationals, as well as extremely important business and cultural networks and migrants with high and low professional skills, further breaking down communication costs and favouring meetings and knowledge in the circuits that count.

The return of clans to prominence offers the opportunity to extend the practices of face-to-face contacts to all sectors of any urban context, with a dynamic and incremental effect on direct communications. The clans exponentially strengthen the potential of existing networks and create new ones. The concept of oikocracy helps us to understand the logic of the multiplex city and to decipher buzz cities.

The clans act as multipliers of social capital. But they do so in a way that, instead of increasing social cohesion, foments the processes of "privatization of the community" that has now been under way for some time and these—as has been observed—also produce inequalities in terms of social capital. Above all, the most exclusive groups, which possess large quantities of social capital, may not confine their spatiality to specific cities:

> Public and institutional spaces become sites where networks are developed with some, but not everybody. [...] new urban constellations have emerged that might provide social capital to some, but do so in more exclusionary ways, thereby confirming rather than challenging inequalities within cities and the various enclaves that can be found there—ranging from gated communities and gentrified neighbourhoods on the one hand to ghettos and poor enclaves on the other—and between central cities and their suburbs (Blokland and Rae, 2008: 36 and 38).

Viewed in this perspective, privatization leads to the end of urbanism, undermining local forms of citizenship and gradual destroying the urban networks available to individual residents, with the consequent collapse of trust in institutions.

It is worth stressing this point. Instead of voicing an increasingly inclusive idea of citizenship, while clearly defining its essential conditions and requisites, the integral city increasingly implements policies that come to marginalize its members and territorial spaces, further fomenting the processes of clan development. On the one hand, it claims, for example, the right to confine (imprison) migrants in detention centres and introduces models of security that come down to a growing militarization of the territory. On the other it promotes a vision of "urban regeneration" that favours the speculative interests of big real-estate groups, resting on the creation of iconic skyscrapers and gated communities, both housing models that are by definition exclusive. And it goes further. The clanization of urban spaces comes to radically question the very idea of state sovereignty, so bringing us back to a topic dealt with in the previous chapter.

In quite recent times, there are still some who have reaffirmed the traditional distinction between city and state, in keeping with the canons previously attributed to Charles Tilly. The city, Magnusson notes,

> is not a miniature state, but rather an order of an entirely different type. It is not organized on the sovereignty principle, but instead on the principle of self-organization, which in turn implies a multiplicity of authorities operating under conditions of rivalry and interdependence (Magnusson, 2011: 118).

In the city there is an order, continues Magnusson, but it is the civil order of the market, which makes the old family or tribal, cultural or religious affiliations completely superfluous (or even damaging). Sovereignty does not create civil life; rather, it makes it safer: "It is not so much the rock on which the city is built, as a part of the rubble the city transforms into the structure of urban life" (Magnusson, 2011: 119). But this is no longer the case. The city has increasingly become the place for the daily, and often dramatically violent, exercise of one or more coercive powers.

Or, one prefers, we might say that in the globalized world sovereignty also becomes a market commodity available to an increasing number of non-state actors, who are *political* insofar as they demonstrate that they are able to violently exert their control over a territory, however small, and *legitimate* if and on the terms by which they obtain obedience from those who live there. In the classic Weberian definition,

> a 'ruling organization' will be called 'political' insofar as its existence and order is continuously safeguarded within a given *territorial* area by the threat and application of physical force on the part of the administrative staff (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 54).

Weber himself, moreover, when further on he addresses the problem of financing political groups, points out that some of them may resort to extorted services, and that

> the type case for compulsory 'intermittent' financing is furnished by such organizations as the *Camorra* in southern Italy and the *Mafia* in Sicily, and similar organized groups elsewhere. In India there have existed ritually separated castes of 'thieves' and 'robbers', and in China sects and secret societies with a similar method of economic provision. The payments are 'intermittent' only on the surface, because they are formally illegal. In practice they often assume the character of periodic 'subscriptions', paid in exchange for the rendering of certain services—notably, of a guarantee of security (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 195).

Each of these clans comes to function like a business within an industrial cluster, developing systemic relationships with the other "businesses" present in the same area in which they are established. And just as some industrial groups tend to branch out beyond national borders, some of these particular political clans also prove capable of cooperating and competing on the global level by starting from an urban neighbourhood. Hence different clusters of sovereignty may be concentrated within a city, where they are bound to coexist and at times clash.

In terms of the physical, military, control of a given territory, the state can become configured as one of the actors that claim (with a degree of success, i. e. an efficacy, that needs to be assessed in each case) a share of the overall coercive power expressed by all the state and non-state agents of violence present in that area. We need only think, in this respect, of the many examples of "failed states", where the government in office in the capital struggles day by day with ethnic clans, liberation movements, gangs or ordinary criminals to control the territory. But it is also increasingly the case that formally democratic regimes are proving incapable of guaranteeing compliance with the minimum requirements of citizenship over more or less extensive areas of their national territory. So, in the outer city, the mafia may be a far more efficient political body than the governing authority itself. In slums or refugee camps, where the state is completely absent, criminal social networks may replace it in the daily exercise of violence. In the scattered zones that produce "luxury goods" (opium and cocaine, diamonds, coltan), even simple clusters of drug traffickers, mercenaries or guerrillas may suffice to ensure the degree of coordination necessary to reproduce the violent expropriation of the resources of the territory (Armao, 2015).

It is worth adding that the strategies of coercion adopted by various groups claiming entitlement to the processes of extraction and redistribution of the resources of a given territory emerge from continuous interactions with the environment, in a reciprocal interplay of influence. Each cluster of sovereignty expresses a particular strategy of violence. Moreover, it varies according to the phase of the life

cycle it goes through in a given historical period. In particular, their coercive power may be used for internal or external purposes. The experience of the modern state teaches us that the monopoly of the use of force is entrusted to the police no less than the army, and that it is governments, depending on circumstances, that decide whether to apply it against their own fellow citizens or foreigners. In the same way, for example, mafia and terrorist organizations use violence to guarantee group cohesion, maintain order and repress any attempt at sedition, as well as to defeat their opponents. The most authoritarian persecute their own members or even their families (in acts of "transversal vendetta"), if they have the least fear there may be some risk of their disassociating themselves from the group's aims and betraying it.

Moreover, each of these groups, possessing economic resources as well as wielding violence, can adopt a distinctive combination of coercion and capital in exerting its control. In this case, however, there is a perceptible departure from the past. The prevalence of coercion or capital was typical of the different developmental models of states and cities in the European experience, determining the success of the former and the substantial disappearance of the latter as independent political subjects. Today, different proportions of these two factors make it possible to distinguish, for example, terrorists from mobsters and mobsters from mercenaries; but, most importantly, cities have acquired an unprecedented role as protagonists in the daily exercise of coercive power.

It needs to be reiterated that democratic countries are not passive spectators of these processes of sovereignty clustering. Sometimes, on the contrary, they support them, or even become protagonists in these processes, in the attempt to bring down the costs of the monopoly of force. In some cases, then, to the widespread and differentiated practices of subcontracting to private actors on the domestic level, they add the rediscovery of an older method, such as co-opting local potentates also on the international level. The example of the United States in this respect is once again the most significant, if only because of its status as the model of a superpower as well as a democracy. It has already been observed that the privatization of security has long been a veritable principle of government in the United States, and one endorsed by Democratic and Republican administrations on both the federal and state levels. And the co-opting of local potentates has always been one of the most widely used tools to limit the direct involvement of states in those conflicts on the periphery of the international system that geopolitical imperatives mean they are unable to ignore.

4 The legal Babel

In the most extreme legal synthesis, law is believed to have the purpose of preserving human society (Bobbio, 1984). In Hans Kelsen's words, it is "the social technique which consists in bringing about the desired social conduct of men through the threat of a measure of coercion which is to be applied in case of contrary conduct" (Kelsen, 1945: 19). Using a perhaps more immediate metaphor, Niklas Luhmann described the law as an immune system: the apparatus that enables society to control behaviours and regulate disputes, including dealing with the structural risks arising from continual outbreaks of conflicts. The legal rules, he says, make it possible to identify pathologies and propose generalized remedies. Despite being unable to offer a prognosis about future conflicts (when and in what context they will occur, who they will involve and their extent), law is still capable of combating their effects, reducing the likelihood of new infections arising.

This is possible, observes Luhmann, because once established, the legal system proves autopoietic. It can only be used within the terms laid down by its own rules, which alone distinguish what is legal from what is illegal. This enables it to assert its independence from politics and the historical forms they have taken, while preventing us from falling into the error of seeing law as identified with the state and limited to it: "The law was already there when the modern state began to consolidate itself politically" (Luhmann, 2004: 357–358), in the form of customary laws as much as written ones, and it was already able to count on some refined legal institutions in both antiquity and the feudal period.

Today hybrid legal forms proliferate *beyond* the state (outside it as well as in "free zones" within it). In a society that is increasingly configured as a global network of complex systems, besides, it could hardly be otherwise. Of course, the different spheres—political, economic and civil—are capable of developing their own strategies to manage disputes or even mitigate and resolve conflicts internally by adopting various mixtures of positive incentives and sanctions. Recourse to the law is, in most circumstances, one of the many options available, but it is still "the one that assumes the function of a reserve currency and provides a kind of ultimate guarantee of freedom of choice" (Luhmann, 2004: 170).

A quick glance at the past offers us guidelines to grasp the effects of today's "legislative frenzy" (Lesaffer, 2009: 510), the unprecedented acceleration of the production of standards. And these, to be deciphered and managed, require an ever wider community of scholars and practitioners of the legal professions capable of both understanding a language that is gradually more complex and filled with technicalities and reconciling different systems (both domestic, from different countries, and international). Without going too far back in time, we need

only observe how law has accompanied and supported the process of institutionalizing power throughout the modern age.

In the first place, it has been able to propose itself as a source of legitimacy, or as a criterion for validating a political authority's claim to domination. Until the end of the Middle Ages, natural law had the task of legitimizing the sovereign power, which, on the strength of this mandate, produced the ordinary laws by which it governed its subjects (Loughlin, 2010 and 2013). Natural law did not need to be established, but learned, and it remained immutable because it was not a human product, but derived its validity from the truth of a sacred revelation or tradition. However, it included some fundamental laws aimed at limiting the prerogatives of the monarch. In medieval times there were still rules to protect the immunities and privileges granted to specific people or families, corporations or cities, safeguarding islands of private jurisdiction outside the central authority of the state then still in the process of formation (Thornhill, 2011 and 2013).

The subsequent process of construction of the modern state proceeded rather hand in hand with a gradual positivization of law, which continued until the nineteenth century. In particular, it envisaged: 1) the secularization of the foundations of sovereign power, with a shift from the divine origin of monarchy to government based on the expression of the popular will; 2) the creation of the legal personality of the state: "The ruler can no longer be 'the state', but only have a role within the state" (Luhmann, 2014: 153).

Secondly, law activated an increasingly sophisticated legislative process capable of adapting the rules to the needs of a continuously changing society and destined in time even to hierarchize the sources and differentiate the forms of law, first into civil and penal, and then public and private. It is worth insisting on this second distinction. The positivization of law consisted above all in the gradual recognition of a specific public sphere distinct from the private one; in the birth of *public law* as "a legal order describing conditions for the use of political power" (Thornhill, 2013: 12), which over time would produce the prototypes for modern constitutions.

Public law, on the one hand, seeks to regulate the use of force by authority and the boundaries of its administrative power; on the other, it offers a new foundation for citizens' freedom as, finally, bearers of universal subjective rights. Like a two-faced Janus, it facilitates and limits at the same time, providing the context in which to exercise power while controlling its excesses: "Public law offers us a vision of public power as both a promise and a threat, varying in form by these markers from system to system" (Tierney, 2013: 153).

In everyday life, public and private law encroach increasingly often on each other's spaces—especially in times of globalization—and their actions end up by intersecting in different places and ways (Barker and Jensen, 2013). On one

point, however, the distance between public and private law has proved (at least to date) unbridgeable: "public institutions [...] make laws that are binding on those who do not necessarily consent to be bound" (Turner, 2013: 140), which means that it envisages the possibility of authority resorting to the "force to impose" (Popitz, 2017).

The relationship between law and force is another point that Niklas Luhmann has clarified in exemplary fashion, observing that the evolution of law depends on the withdrawal of physical force from society and its consolidation within the political system. Its evolution from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century can be summed up as a transition from a simple society, based on segmental differentiation (analogous subsets based on families or clans), to an increasingly complex one (which sees the formation of subsets of a functional type: politics and administration, the economy, education, health, etc.). In simple societies, physical force is incorporated into law; violence fully falls within the law of the social group as a *violation of a victim* who, in turn, has the right to defend himself or to seek redress for the wrong suffered (through revenge). In complex societies, on the other hand, the power to settle conflicts passes into the hands of the political authority which judges *violations of a law* (criminal or civil). Ultimately, "the law has to start from the condition of peace already secured if it is to achieve more than just the conditioning of physical force" (Luhmann, 2004: 262).

However, the outcome of the Cold War and the intensification of the processes of globalization, in addition to sanctioning the end of the state–capitalism diarchy, also caused the breakdown of the historical pact that had been reached between state and law, initiating a radical reconfiguration of the legal system. This was followed by a growing fragmentation of law which, in turn, took the form of both a territorial dispersion of legislative and judicial powers and an out-of-control proliferation of sectors of regulatory intervention.

On the one hand we are witnessing an unprecedented expansion of public law by international organizations, which is added to that produced by individual states and encroaches on an increasing number of fields (sometimes involving skills with an elevated technological content). On the other, private actors, both domestic and international, also incessantly generate rules to regulate activities between them as well as with public agencies: "Public and private law thus increasingly *interact horizontally* across society. Many areas are regulated by both public law and private contracts and organized by both public agencies and private corporations" (Sand, 2013: 205). In the globalized world, in essence, it is no longer just politics that decides what is legally possible.

The debate on these issues is extremely complex and involves conflicting opinions. The point on which most commentators agree, however, is that we are faced with a growing erosion of statehood, which undermines its two foundational boun-

daries: internal–external and public–private (Grimm, 2010). The first boundary is crossed in relations between the individual state and international organizations (think of the subsidiarity principle enshrined in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, or the right to humanitarian intervention). But the distinction between inside and outside is further undermined by the fact that the state, as a legal entity, is no longer capable of responding to regulatory requirements and settling disputes, when the economy, crime or pollution cross national borders: "The spatial presuppositions of the state legislator have lost their self-evident validity: the functioning of social systems—with the economy as the forerunner—pays increasingly less heed to state borders." Nor is international law enough to bridge the gap, precisely because it is "firmly tied to the state in both its creation and its legal effects" (Tuori, 2014: 18).

As for the public–private boundary, some scholars stress the intrusiveness of the state. It is no longer content to limit government power in the interest of individual freedoms and the market economy, but claims the right to regulate the economy and propose models of both social development and welfare policies. Today, however, this position seems to be superseded (with valid arguments) by that of those who argue that at the start of this millennium we are witnessing, on the contrary, an unprecedented proliferation of the body of positive law that governs relations between private individuals, whether it is simple individuals or legal persons such as corporations. Whichever the viewpoint adopted, it is certain that the global restructuring of the 1980s is not slowing the historical process of the positivization of law. On the contrary, it is being immeasurably accelerated, creating new situations that are threatening the traditional order of the legal universe, juridical hybrids "that our inherited conceptual framework is unable to capture and imprison in a determinate conceptual box" (Tuori, 2014: 14). The strangest and most complex of these is transnational law.[7]

Hence this configures an original combination of functional and segmental differentiation, to return to Luhmann. On the one hand there is no slowing, if anything there is an acceleration of the mechanism that differentiates the functional legal subsets. Yet at the same time, since the state is no longer the only or principal unit of reference, the usefulness of a segmental differentiation based on the clan (along the lines of the clanization processes described in this chapter) has been re-

7 This is a rapidly expanding field of study that draws on private and administrative law in single countries as well as international public law (Micklitz, 2014). Neither its primary sources nor its recipients are state institutions, nor even international ones (based on treaties or conventions). Rather they are non-state actors involved in transnational relationships and de facto subject to a multiplicity of legal or semi-juridical regimes of hard and soft law: manufacturers, NGOs, religious institutions, ethnic groups, terrorist or mafia networks (Berman, 2012; Cotterrell, 2012).

discovered as a way of fully responding to the changes taking place in society. In the presence of an increasingly complex, at times even indecipherable, regulatory system, outsourcing to local intermediaries (the clans, in fact, with their networks of interpersonal relationships) may prove to be decisive when the abstract conflict between rules becomes "territorialized" in the centres of the different courts of justice, such as those of corporations, lawyers and other legal professions.

These everyday (and prosaic) practices of law tend to deprive the legal system of the elements of universality that had come to characterize it above all within democratic political systems. If we suppose, for the sake of argument, that everyone really was equal before the law, they no longer are, because of the simple fact that clan membership will increasingly determine the chances of having one's suit heard and settled. Consequently, the rights of the governed will be able to discover forms of (now clan-based) assignment that emulate—or, rather, that replicate and innovate—medieval forms of private jurisdiction, which attributed privileges to specific people, families or other groups of various kinds.

The problem, it must be noted, does not end in the understanding (and management) of this veritable legal Babel. It is necessary to ask, in fact, what consequences this will have on the "power to punish", or on the sphere of the exercise of physical force; whether and in what way the conditions declined that made it possible to withdraw legitimate violence from society and consolidate it within the political system—that enabled law to free itself from the elementary mechanism of revenge and prosecute crimes as violations of a law and not of a victim. If, in the globalized world, it is no longer the political system alone (but not necessarily the state, as we will see) that chooses what is legally possible, it at any rate retains the prerogative to determine what is legally *prohibited* as an offence against the community (even if the victim is an individual).

The historical evolution of criminal law is not only an extraordinarily fascinating subject, but one of great ethical significance, because of the simple fact that its application constitutes the most intrusive and coercive form of exercise of power imaginable. It is, however, a matter of using force to prevent individuals from doing something they might want to do, or compelling them to do what they might not want to do. If we just think of imprisonment, even more than the loss of normal citizenship rights, it is clear that "an encounter with the criminal justice system profoundly disrupts an individual's life" (Schonsheck, 2010: 7).[8]

What, in brief, we could term the cultural production of crime takes on different connotations depending on the historical periods and societies in question. But

8 This point, like the others raised in this chapter, will also be dealt with more fully in a second book of mine, wholly devoted to the analysis of oikocracy.

it can be said that the principal requirement of the criminal law reform movements that began to spread in the eighteenth century was not so much to mitigate punishment but rather to ensure a better economy of the power to punish: "[T]o make of the punishment and repression of illegalities a regular function, coextensive with society; not to punish less, but to punish better; to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body" (Foucault, 1995: 82).

The spread of oikocracy is a serious threat to the regularity of criminal prosecutions. It configures the proliferation of "states of exception" in the twofold form of the issue of emergency rules and the creation of territorial spaces removed from the effective control of state power. In the post-1989 world, the declaration of a "global war on terrorism", for instance, justified the transformation of exceptional and provisional measures into ordinary and dominant government practice. This risks radically altering the traditional constitutional forms, making the boundary between democracy and absolutism increasingly indefinite (Agamben, 2005). The classic example has now become the Patriot Act approved by the United States Congress on 26 October 2001, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, and renewed until 2019 despite the controversy (Etzioni, 2005). Think, moreover, of the "zero tolerance" strategies adopted in an increasing number of countries, from Central America to the Philippines, as a response to the expansion of organized crime.

Besides, the multiplication of non-state actors of violence that compete with greater or lesser success for the control of portions of the state territory (and, sometimes, within the same urban context) has undermined that state of guaranteed peace mentioned by Luhmann and is proliferating clusters of sovereignty. This is leading to a de facto return to irregular and competing forms of "administration of justice", albeit not in the form that characterized the pre-modern age, but in new and highly market-oriented ways.

In the globalized society, the economy of the power to punish sees the traditional public actors (judicial bodies and police forces) being joined by a growing number of private brands, both legal (the various societies operating in the security sector) and illegal (from death squads to vigilantes, mafias and gangs). Both kinds of private brands operate for profit, in the form of payment for services or extortion, so renouncing all claim to universality and equity. The criminal brands, in addition, sometimes act in effect as political groupings, whose respective degrees of legitimacy—as we saw above—depends on whether or not they are able to exact obedience from those subject to their rule.

Finally, in the everyday reality of a growing number of countries, the distance that should separate public action from private in ascertaining guilt and inflicting

punishment is tending to shrink and coming close to disappearing, with the practice of extrajudicial executions spreading among state bodies, while criminal groups are rediscovering the feud as the normalization of revenge. The former —the summary killing of individuals outside any criminal proceedings—are now common practice, not only in wartime and not only by authoritarian regimes (as borne out by the frequent reports of humanitarian organizations).

The feud, on the other hand, is being revived by an increasing number of non-state actors of violence as an additional mechanism of self-regulation within the wider process of clanization. As we have seen, this proves capable of guaranteeing effective social control of the members of the group, in particular by focusing on the sense of shame rather than simply coercion. And it would be a mistake to dismiss it as an archaism, a residue of underdeveloped areas or revived in regions abandoned by the state, since it "does not result in an arbitrary or anarchistic deliverance of sanctions between individuals, but rather [...] serves to create a system of law which is able to maintain order" (Caffrey and Mundy, 2001: 114).

News reports now offer us endless examples of both these developments: feuds and extrajudicial executions, often correlated with each other, are a constant in Latin America, all the more significant the more governments adopt *mano dura* policies (Arias, 2019; Cruz, 2016). The same is true of many African cities (LeBas, 2013); or again, as reported by Amnesty International (2017), in the Philippines, but think, too, of recourse to killing suspected terrorists by the United States and Israel (Kretzmer, 2005).

Two last considerations are still necessary, at the end of this analysis on the evolution of law, above all to confirm how the "clan factor" intervenes to upset the logic that governed the development of law in the long process of building the modern state.

The first is what Foucault calls "the reciprocal interplay of illegalities [that] formed part of the political and economic life of society" and which, again during the eighteenth century, was reversed:

> First, with the general increase in wealth, but also with the sudden demographic expansion, the principal target of popular illegality tended to be not so much rights, as goods: pilfering and theft tended to replace smuggling and the armed struggle against the tax agents. (Foucault, 1995: 84)

This "great redistribution of illegalities" was closely bound up with the development of capitalism and produced a specialization of the legal circuits: there were the ordinary courts and severe penalties for the illegality of the lower classes, special jurisdictions and simple settlements or fines for the wealthy classes. What

most mattered, however, was that "the bourgeoisie reserved to itself the fruitful domain of the illegality of rights" (Foucault, 1995: 87).

Since then, no substantial new reversals of trend have appeared. On the contrary, although the great transformation of 1989 produced an exponential increase in so-called white-collar crimes—to the point where it would be appropriate to introduce a new criminal case: "crimes against society"—today much more attention is still paid to street crimes. And if the courts are really compelled to deal with the illegality of rights, they prefer to prosecute crimes committed against the elites rather than those perpetrated by them (Barak, 2015a). Yet it should be clear that, compared to the weak, the powerful can count on a series of comparative advantages that tend to reinforce each other, sometimes generating a true effect of contagion or, if one prefers, of criminal spillover into sectors other than that of their origin (Ruggiero, 2007):

1. the ability to influence the definition of a crime itself through direct access to or contiguity with the political system, which has the task of determining what is legally prohibited;
2. the power to conceal the criminal nature of its activities by playing on the greater ambiguity of the crimes committed (tax evasion, corruption, money laundering) with respect to street crimes;
3. the possibility of concealing the traces of a crime, to the point of configuring a paradox of (in)visibility: while common criminals live in the shadows and emerge when they commit a crime that produces immediate and evident damage, those who commit power crimes act quite openly, but can count on the invisibility of their crimes;
4. the functionality of their crimes to the survival and expansion of the grey areas that arise between the three societies, political, civil and economic, as well as the dynamics of globalization (especially financial)—think of bribery or the sale of votes, or the market for illicit or counterfeit goods;
5. the ability to shore up their criminal activities with a wide range of professional figures—the managers of major corporations, lawyers and accountants, financial brokers, communication experts, etc.—and vested interests so as to attain economies of scale and systemic advantages.

The second consideration is that, if it is true that any clan, as a place of ritualized interpersonal relationships, is a perfect "deviance amplifier",[9] the clan of an or-

9 This expression is again taken from Niklas Luhmann, who points out that law as an autopoietic system may favour an amplification of deviance, especially by those who can count on a greater capacity of social inclusion. Exclusion, in fact, works in an extraordinarily integrated, almost per-

ganized crime group can count on two further advantages, which place it in a dominant (if not hegemonic) position compared to any actor in the law-abiding world:

1. its superior ability to differentiate its products, in different sectors of the market for both goods and services. It is for this reason that the mafias, in recent decades, have been able to establish themselves as the protagonists of capitalism understood, as Braudel (1977) would have said, as a "countermarket", averse to competition and rather favourable to unequal exchange, which aims to accumulate large profits and has monopoly as its ideal. The mafioso, as a "merchant-capitalist", has in his genetic code long-distance trade on a large scale (in drugs, weapons, slaves, toxic waste), as well as the constant search for the sectors that will in any given case ensure the greatest gains as a form of self-protection, a guarantee against business risks;
2. the possibility of "internalizing" the cost of protecting its members and their trafficking, which amounts to saying that violence is one of the normal rational costs of doing business for mafias. The mafia clans, having weapons and soldiers and no scruples about using them, can use them to protect their own interests and also those of their criminal partners in the licit world; but if conflicts arise between them, the latter will succumb, since they will be unable to aspire to the protection of the state.

This means, in concrete terms, that entering into partnership with a mafioso is even more of a one-way street the greater the profit he believes he can derive from illicit business, in terms of both economic and social capital.

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fect way: those who have no address cannot send their children to school; those who lack proof of registration cannot marry or apply for welfare payments: "Exclusion from one functional area prevents inclusion in others. In contrast, inclusion makes a lesser integration possible, which means more freedom [...]. In this lie opportunities for the violation of law and for corruption" (Luhmann, 2004: 489).

3 The neoliberal absolutism and its principles

To summarize some of the findings of the analysis conducted so far, we could say that in recent decades the contemporary world has seen a gradual, but inexorable retreat of the state (and, with it of democracy). Susan Strange was right when she predicted its decline after observing its growing inability to provide those essential services that the market, left to itself, has never been able to provide: the safety of citizens, an adequate system of shared laws, a stable currency capable of promoting trade and investment, public goods (water, transport, communications, etc.). What, perhaps, she could not foresee in its entirety was that the power vacuum left by the state would immediately be filled—often, as has been repeatedly observed, through delegation (contracting out) by governments themselves—by a plethora of private actors now perfectly capable of taking over its functions, and in any case indispensable to the community.[1]

The transitional phase is represented by what, in the wake of Polanyi, I termed the great transformation of 1989. By bringing to an end the centuries-old state–capitalism diarchy, it avoided a collapse of institutions similar to the one that had put an end to nineteenth-century civilization. This is because, next to the state, reduced to the role of procurement, other clan-based organizations emerged belonging to the three political, economic and civil societies and proved capable of connecting each other in an increasingly complex network and integrating the local and global dimensions more efficiently than any state apparatus, as we saw at the start of the previous chapter. We have termed this new type of regime oikocracy.

Oikocracy, in other words, is the answer to the compression of space and time imposed by neoliberal globalization and rests on the clan as a moderator of the effects produced by the vortex of globalization itself. The oikocratic regime manages to systemize increasingly complex social networks of ritualized interpersonal relationships, so restoring congruence to the micro and macro dimensions of the social order and, where necessary, generating diasporas that give life to imagined transnational communities.

The emergence of oikocracy has produced two further effects. The first is the rediscovery of the urban territory as the framework for all aspects of daily life, from the economic to the purely political, which we were accustomed to confine within the state. In the time of globalization, the city, any city, finds an “integrity”

1 It is worth observing that Strange’s foresight went so far as to devote to the mafia a chapter of *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*, which remains her best-known book. In this respect she was unique in the panorama of the social sciences in those years (Strange, 1996).

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of its own as a place for encounters and interactions (face-to-face relationships) between the actors in political, economic and civil society, acting as a hub in the geography of coercion as well as the geography of capital. The second effect—implicit in the fact that the waning of the state–capitalism diarchy puts an end to the mere identification of the state and law—is a growing legislative frenzy with the fragmentation of law, which manifests itself both in the dispersal of legislative and judicial powers and in the proliferation of sectors of regulatory intervention.

The final outcome of these new dynamics is the formation of a growing number of clusters of sovereignty, each with its own specific territorial dimension, which may be limited to a specific suburban area or even extend to districts of other cities as a result of the diaspora of members of a single clan. The presence of these clusters jeopardizes the very certainty of the law and, in particular, the regularity of the penal action. In fact, they foster a sense of impunity in those elites who engage in an increasing number of crimes against society and who, all too often, have no scruples about allying themselves with criminal clans (which are also claiming with increasing success the power to punish those who do not submit to their will).

If this is the picture, the distance from the twentieth century could not be more evident. Yet, as this chapter will argue, now the world seems to moving towards a new form of absolutism that, in its essence, emulates the five principles at the time identified as typical of Nazism by Franz Neumann in *Behemoth* (2009 [1942]).[2] But this new absolutism, thanks to its clan component, at the same time reveals features of universality, decentralization and flexibility unknown to its historical predecessors.

1 Shadow economy and hegemonic instability

The twentieth century accustomed us to the dominance of nation-states, for evil even more than good. The century, moreover, started with the whole of Europe involved in World War I. In Verdun in 1916, there were more than 680,000 French and German victims in nine months, counting the dead, injured and missing. This was just half of what the Somme offensive in that same tragic year cost the troops of France, Germany and Britain in little more than four months. The whole of the so-called civilized world—or, more prosaically, the ranks of the Great Powers—committed themselves with unprecedented devotion and efficiency

2 I have already drawn on this extraordinary work by Neumann, in particular in my book *Il sistema mafia* (Armao, 2000).

to applying the principles and techniques of Taylorist mass production to systematically destroying infrastructure and the environment and dismembering human bodies.

That same world reiterated its will to destruction not long after in World War II, perfecting the extermination machine to the point of designing and implementing crematoria, gas chambers and concentration camps; and then, again, the terrorist bombing of cities and atomic weapons, used twice, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945.

Today the same kind of alarm at the re-emergence of a state that controls and determines everything is being raised, for example, with China. It is seen as a model of neo-totalitarianism characterized by state capitalism and has a government wielding increasingly unbridled power, capable of proceeding on the path of an "Administrative Absorption of Society" by using an ideology that combines Marxism with Confucianism (Kang, 2018). Likewise, there are those who fear that the militarization of the Internet and cyberspace could lead to the repression of all forms of political opposition or, more simply, the violation of all forms of privacy and freedom of speech (Deibert, 2013).

Sheldon Wolin's book *Democracy Incorporated* used the term *inverted totalitarianism* to explain that, unlike the Nazi or Soviet regimes, in the United States major economic corporations dominate politics, with the effect of demobilizing citizens and reducing American democracy to a pure and simple facade, in which "the leader is not the architect of the system but its product" (Wolin, 2008: 44). Wolin's outlook can be fully endorsed, but it needs to be expanded and extended globally. The new neoliberal absolutism does not end in the domain of corporations, nor are its actions limited to USA territory. It is much more highly articulated, complex and elusive in its ability to conceal its presence in contexts that, at least in appearance, have nothing in common with each other.

Today's neoliberal absolutism is the product of an original combination of the *shadow economy* and *hegemonic instability*. With regard to the first point, the International Monetary Fund proposes including in the shadow economy all legal economic and productive activities—hence, if declared, they will be calculated as part of the gross domestic product—that are concealed from the authorities for reasons that are financial (to evade taxes and national insurance contributions), regulatory (to avoid bureaucratic constraints and the legal burdens they entail) and institutional (due to inadequacies in the political system or the weakness of the judicial system) (Medina and Schneider, 2018). In our sense, however, the term is broader and includes illicit and criminal activities, whose proceeds also swell the global flows of circulating capital.

Agreeing with Wolin on the substantial inversion of the balance of forces between political and economic power, we can trace the foundation of today's mon-

istic, total and authoritarian organization to a mechanism whose strengths lie in the international stock markets and tax havens: in what Susan Strange, already in the eighties, understood had become *Casino Capitalism*, a gambling economy. Strange observed that

> the great difference between an ordinary casino which you can go into or stay away from, and the global casino of high finance, is that in the latter all of us are involuntarily engaged in the day's play (Strange, 2016 [1986]: 2).

Returning to the topic ten years later, she observed that the stakes had been raised, pointing out that finance (increasingly contaminated morally) had further taken over states, now unable to exercise effective control over their economies (and taxation), while globalization had favoured a growing concentration of businesses and an uncontrolled increase in inequalities in the distribution of income. *The casino image gone mad*, she titled her first chapter, in her opening paragraph commenting in no uncertain terms:

> Why mad? Because to my mind it was, and is, 'wildly foolish'—the dictionary synonym for 'mad'—to let the financial markets run so far ahead, so far beyond the control of state and international authorities (Strange, 2016 [1998]: 1).

Stock markets are the hubs of an inextricable network of licit and illicit cash flows, legal and criminal actors, individuals and societies. They are multipliers of profit and loss now governed by automata that might well appear in the old dystopian novels, software operating on the basis of algorithms. Except that in reality there is always a completely human *deus ex machina* capable, if not of determining who is sure to lose, at least of safeguarding who is bound to win: which individuals as well as, often, which societies and states.

Tax havens, on the other hand, are the necessary "repositories", sacred places of physical and virtual evasion where money and transactions can be concealed. Without them, simply, the neoliberal absolutism could not exist. The transparency of financial flows, the unencrypted ownership of bank accounts—the abolition, in other words, of banking secrecy—combined with an internationally agreed tax levy that would solve the problem of competition (often grossly unfair) between countries (even within the European Union itself, to take the most paradoxical example) would mark the triumph of democracy, and do so far more cheaply than any war fought to export it.

And this is where the second political component of neoliberal absolutism intervenes. On a global level, the shadow economy is a choice willed and defended by the hegemonic powers and, to put it plainly, by the West. It could hardly be otherwise. After World War II, the European and American leadership fixed the coor-

dinates of the international financial system at Bretton Woods. They then sanctioned the end of that experiment thirty years later, opening the doors to the uncontrolled growth of private credit and generating an increasingly unstable financial and monetary system (Gilpin, 1987). By doing this—by fully wedding the neoliberal project of reorganizing capitalism to the full benefit of the economic elites, so enabling them to reproduce the original accumulation of resources *ad libitum*—those same powers choose to ignore the fact that "a more equitable distribution of economic growth [...] is not just a question of distributive justice; it is a question of political stability" (Mounk, 2018: 26).

This brings us to the second aspect of the new absolutism: hegemonic instability, which, in hindsight, entails the subversion of one of the most accredited theories among American scholars of International Relations—hegemonic stability.[3] This theory proposed a reformulation of imperialism for the use of democracies (in particular, of course, of the United States itself), which justified its persistent striving to strengthen its power: in military terms, of course, as well as access to raw materials, control of the main sources of capital and high value-added goods and outlet markets for their products. The idea of hegemonic stability stated that the presence of a hegemon would contribute to making relations between states more cooperative and consequently the whole international system more stable:

> If discord is to be limited, and severe conflict avoided, governments' policies must be adjusted to one another. That is, cooperation is necessary. One way of achieving such mutual policy adjustment is through the activities of a hegemonic power (Keohane, 2005: 243).

The current paradox, however, is that in the face of an increasingly paroxysmal concentration of military, economic-financial and natural resources in Western hands, the most developed democratic governments have decided, both at home and in the international arena, to play a wild card: that of the "enemy at the gates", the threats looming at their borders.

As if this were not enough, the enemy is not so much identified in possible real competitors (at least in terms of hoarding resources), such as China and Russia. With these powers, a policy of dialogue prevails and they often back the West in its campaigns (and not just in the media), for example in the "war against global terrorism". As has already been argued in the Prologue, the West prefers to target what Frantz Fanon (2004 [1961]) called "the wretched of the earth". More often

3 As proof of its success, the theory of hegemonic stability has appeared in several versions—some more deterministic (Gilpin, 1981), others "attenuated" (Keohane, 2005)—and generated a broad academic debate. For a summary, see Ikenberry (2014).

than not, this entails selling national public opinion the somewhat improbable image of a Goliath (the hegemonic West) as a victim of the David of the day (the Middle Eastern terrorist or the African or Mexican migrant).

Neoliberal absolutism manages to involve state and non-state actors in developed and non-developed countries, who claim political or even economic roles; but they end up by sharing a community of behaviours and languages; of practitioners capable of optimizing the results by their professionalism; and even of places appointed for exercising their absolute power. In brief, the new absolutism takes the form of a sharing of interests between public and private groups, or even their individual representatives. Hence it does not necessarily require the direct participation of the state apparatus as such and even less the direct mobilization of the masses.

To succeed in this aim, it develops and optimizes, by synchronizing their movements, the two processes already developed by Nazism: the atomization of individuals and the contemporary proliferation of elites. By atomizing individuals, Franz Neumann meant the "the complete depersonalization of human relations and the isolation of man from man" (Neumann, F. 2009 [1942]: 402). This was attained by delegitimizing traditional structures of social aggregation, such as family, church or factory, and replacing them with forced acceptance of the various kinds of apparatus established by the National Socialist system in all the institutions to secure the complete subjugation and regimentation of the whole population.

Today this process must be understood above all as a systematic attack on all forms of collective identity and representation capable of evoking the possession of universal social and citizenship rights. Just think of the drastic shrinkage in the role of trade unions and trade associations, or even of mass parties, which were indispensable interlocutors in the twentieth century for mediating conflicting group or class interests, as well as to successfully claim greater guarantees for their members (for instance, in terms of protecting employment and safeguarding health).

The atomization of individuals, moreover, proves functional to fuel the second, mirrored process of proliferating elites in the form of clans. Its purpose, however, is not limited as in the past to the selection of privileged groups that act "as the spearhead of the regime within the amorphous mass" (Neumann, F. 2009 [1942]: 402). If Nazism, for instance, presented Germans as the chosen race as against those outside Germany, the National-Socialist Party embodied the idea of an elite within the German race. Then within the party, the armed forces (SA and SS) rose above the other groups, and further elite units were identified even within the SS.

In the age of globalization, the promotion of the idea of an elite, meaning delegitimating the idea of equality between individuals, matters much more than

whether or not it corresponds to the attribution of actual privileges. In other words, what really matters is that the principle of the existence of collective interests and a common good is replaced by the superior value of particular interests. The proliferation, even the universalization, of elite-clans (from the board of directors of a corporation to a street gang of young people) is the optimal solution to definitively deal with the problem of managing the masses. On the one hand, it prevents the masses from organizing themselves and perhaps turning against the authorities (whoever they may be: the company management for workers, the government for citizens, the mobster boss or warlord for those who live in regions subject to these criminal groups). On the other hand, it greatly reduces the cost of new absolutism, making it completely unnecessary to create a centralized state apparatus to control and manipulate the masses themselves.

Moreover, the construction of elite-clan networks competing with each other—configured as a sort of neoliberalism of rights—only creates the illusion of a democratic system, because in theory it grants anyone the "privilege" of joining a small and somewhat favoured group. Yet by endlessly reproducing the principle of one's own superiority over others, it negates the very idea of equality.

To sum up, neoliberal absolutism is the political regime that arises from the growing structuring of the transnational network of clan-based oikocracies, capable of reconciling the special interlacing of political, economic and social interests present at the local level with the dynamics imposed by globalization. It does not need an ideology centred on the supremacy of a nation, race or political doctrine. It flows directly from the local level, generated by a market logic and, in particular, by the growing demand for capital prompted by the increasing financialization of the economy. Yet, although it thus frees itself from the purely state dimension to take on a transnational character, the new absolutism does not have an anarchic character.

The imposition on society of a total monistic and authoritarian organization, under the Nazi regime, was the first principle, dictated by the need for totalitarian power to act undisturbed, to prevent the semi-autonomous bodies of the state becoming nuclei of discontent or resistance. Nazism "takes all organizations under its wing and turns them into official administrative agencies" (Neumann, F. 2009 [1942]: 400). Neoliberal absolutism, acting on a global level, tends anyway to generate an elite among the elites, which concentrates an increasing amount of resources in its own hands and asserts the right to use it fully and to its own exclusive advantage.

In a certain collective imaginary, this monistic organization is identified variously with the G8, the Bildenberg group or the Davos or Cernobbio Forums. But this is, to say the least, a simplistic, reductive and on the whole comforting vision. A more truthful interpretation would be to identify it with that 1 percent of the

population that has come to own more than 50 percent of the world's wealth. Provided, however, we seek to analyse who and how they managed to enter that very small circle of individuals. Obviously, it is not a question of "naming names"; rather of identifying the systemic dynamics that have generated this extraordinary forking in the worldwide distribution of resources.

2 The triumph of propaganda

Propaganda is the linguistic code shared today by an extremely wide variety of actors: from non-state violence groups to governments, even in democratic countries. Its aim, by definition, is to use stories, images or other forms of social communication to manipulate the public opinion concerned and keep up a state of constant tension, fuelling animosity against a few enemies while increasing the sense of cohesion within the membership group (Lasswell, 1971).

The content of propaganda is bound to change depending on which actors are involved and the public it is aimed at, but some elements remain invariable. The first is the increasingly professional nature of propaganda. Only in its initial stages can it be satisfied with simple voluntary contributions from amateurs. This was true, in the last century, of the nations involved in the Great War, before they realized the advantages of planning their communication strategy and coordinating it by means of special ministries. Or, to take a more recent example, of Islamic radicalism, which not surprisingly experienced a rapid media escalation in the transition from Al Qaida to Isis (Calculli and Strazzari, 2017). Today, even in elections in democratic countries, which we might suppose to be conducted peacefully, propaganda continues to be conducted by secret service officials who are experts in covert operations, psychological warfare and cyberwar, even as it increasingly draws on the skills of media and communication experts, image consultants and, again, marketing professionals, computer scientists and data analysts.

The second factor that unites the various types of propaganda today concerns the nature of the message. Unlike what one might imagine, it has to be: 1) *informative*, meaning rich in details that can emerge as relevant and worthy of attention in a context that is increasingly saturated by the media and the news they convey; 2) *plausible*, in the twofold sense of anchored in reality and congruent with the stereotypes prevalent in the reference group; 3) *immediate*, so as to discourage any form of reflection and critical thinking. Hence the language of propaganda has to be impoverished and degraded to generate Pavlovian stimuli of hatred for the enemy: it has to be reduced to *pseudo-communication* (Cunningham, 2002).

The third factor in propaganda is its audience, its target group, which has to be considered complicit in the process used to influence it, both psychologically and

behaviourally. Propaganda works only if there are people predisposed to receive the message. This can happen due to the lack of information, or the time it takes to develop an independent judgment, as well as the lack of independent judgment, or a certain preference for easy solutions and readymade opinions—what Jacques Ellul termed the "individual's laziness" (Ellul, 1973: 140). The important point, however, is that propaganda does not exist unless there is someone who wants (or needs to) receive it: the "propagandee" who agree to submit to group thinking and consequently share the responsibility for it (Rohatyn, 1988).

One of today's best-known examples of propaganda is the "mythology of martyrdom" developed by some Islamic fundamentalist groups. To encourage recruitment, they produce videos always based on the same narrative structure in three acts: the humiliations and suffering inflicted by Western "crusaders" on Islamic communities around the world; impotence, corruption and collusion with the Western infidels by the Islamic regimes currently in power; the inevitability of the final victory of the heroic and pious Islamic fighters guided only by faith and the spirit of sacrifice (Hafez, 2007).

But in much the same way and conversely, the rhetoric of the global war on terror declared by the USA administration following the September 11, 2001 attacks also has propaganda aims, with all its baggage of false information and even the *ad hoc* creation of a rhetorical figure: the "enemy combatant", conjured up to deny a presumed terrorist the status of either a soldier in a regular army or a common criminal. This makes it possible to remove such people from the jurisdiction of domestic or international courts martial as well as civil courts, so seeking to justify completely illegitimate forms of detention, torture or targeted killing (Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2008; Greenberg and Dratel, 2008).

Other examples of increasingly common propaganda are the speeches posted on YouTube by the leaders of some Mexican drug trafficking cartels, as well as the music videos extolling their exploits (*narcocorridos*). At the other end of the spectrum are advertising campaigns for private military contractors.

It should be noted, however, that in neoliberal absolutism the use of propaganda is not a prerogative of extremist political movements or non-state actors of violence (terrorist groups or organized crime). It also occurs with increasing frequency in the public debate in Western democracies, characterized by the growing success of populist parties, who turn the poverty of their language into their boast. Populism, it has been observed,

> is not an 'ism' like others we have disseminated in the historical course of modernity: socialism, communism, liberalism, fascism. [...] It is a much more impalpable entity [...]. It is a mindset. A mood (Revelli, 2017: 10).

One can fully agree that it is not an ideology and that, therefore, populism cannot be identified with any specific political system (let alone one that has been implemented historically). Yet it is not just a mood either. Populism is a precise propaganda strategy, a technique of domination that has the advantage of being accessible to anyone who wishes to use it, regardless of their political affiliation or spheres of competence.

Populism:

1. refers to a community so indefinite (ordinary people, the people) that it does not even need to be "imagined" and even less chosen.[4] This lack of attributes and specificity enables everyone to feel they are part of it, without having to worry about expressing opinions or behaving in ways congruent with a specific value system;
2. for this reason, those who appeal to the people find it easy to propose themselves as the only true interpreters of their will, since no one can prove that it is not true or point to intrinsic contradictions in this thought (which simply does not exist). In a contest between populists, the winner is whoever best interprets (in the theatrical sense) the mood, to use Marco Revelli's concept;
3. it theorizes the superiority of a community of limited and uneducated social beings, because it is only by attributing value to the ignorance of others that the populist leader can bring out his own.[5]

The other question which should then be answered is why propaganda has taken root so easily even in Western democracies (in the broad sense). We have reached the point of having to note that in an increasing number of cases—from the United States to Italy, passing through Poland and Hungary—the language they adopt is not so different from the political rhetoric typical of autocratic and totalitarian regimes.

In the first instance, we could say that these countries have not been able to nurture the sense of democratic social identity in their citizens, to adequately explain the advantages (as well as costs) of democratic life. John Dewey observed that society exists thanks to a process of transmission, of communication, between dif-

4 As appeared in the second chapter, an imagined community is not a mere intellectual construct; on the contrary, it takes shape only when it is perceived as authentic by individuals who consciously affirm the will to be part of it (Anderson, 1983). One can claim to belong to a nation or clan, but not to an anonymous and formless community.

5 To speak of populist elites, as is often done in public debate, is actually a contradiction in terms; it would be truer to say that populism is the weapon that elites sometimes use to distract the masses from their political failures and their responsibility for the growth of inequalities.

ferent generations, of the habits, ways of thought and feelings of the group they belong to. This is especially true of democratic societies:

> the devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. [...] But there is a deeper explanation. A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience (Dewey, 1997 [1916]: 87).

In other words, democracy, based by its very nature on citizens' active participation, needs *legitimation* more than any other model of society. And this is even truer in the passage between generations, when the evident character of institutions can no longer be preserved through direct memories and lifestyle habits (Berger and Luckmann, 1991 [1966]). The problem is that the individual is not born a member of society, but becomes one through a process of internalization capable of transforming reality from objective to subjective.

It is worthwhile to dwell on one aspect in particular of this process, because it helps us understand the reasons for both the substantial failure of democracies (whose devotion to education would be very difficult to substantiate at present), and vice versa for the success of the clan today: the social construction of symbolic universes as the highest conceivable level of the legitimation process.[6]

The symbolic universe has, on the one hand, the function of reconciling the institutional order and the biographies (and institutional roles) of individuals, transcending, we might say, everyday reality. On the other hand, it serves to create a real order in historical becoming:

> It locates all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes past, present and future. With regard to the past, it establishes a 'memory' that is shared by all the individuals socialized within the collectivity. With regard to the future, it establishes a common frame of reference for the projection of individual actions (Berger and Luckman, 1991 [1966]: 120).

From this point of view, the construction of the democratic symbolic universe has proved to be deficient, cyclical and contradictory. As for the lack of content, it must be admitted that, compared to other types of regime, democracy started from conditions of relative disadvantage. Compared to the monarchies, for example, it could not count on an equally strong reference to tradition. On the other hand, it could not aspire to emulate totalitarianisms in its power of evocation or indoctrination

6 Symbolic universes are "bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1991 [1966]: 113).

and mobilization of the masses. The need to bridge this gap may help explain the proliferation, especially during the twentieth century, of grand theories and academic debates about democracy, unmatched by any corresponding investment to transfer such a body of ideas and knowledge to the ordinary citizen through educational institutions or even the everyday practice of participation. This led to increasingly widespread forms of political apathy (a lack of interest in government activities or even asserting one's rights), as well as the sale of votes and clientelism (Bobbio, 1987).

The conjunctural character of the construction of the democratic symbolic universe is due, by contrast, to the fact that democracies, more often than not, have defined themselves (and continue to do so) in opposition to their enemies: Nazi-fascist totalitarianism, communism and today the Islamic State. Instead of constructing and nurturing their own specific universe, they have contented themselves with reflecting themselves in the (deforming) mirrors of their antagonists, in part to conceal their intrinsic weaknesses.

The contradiction, finally, stems from the fact that democracy—by definition and, therefore, more than any other model of society—is based on the practice of compromise between interests that are not always congruent. According to a classic definition,

> to a substantially greater degree than any alternative to it, a democratic government provides an orderly and peaceful process by means of which a majority of citizens can induce the government to do what they most want it to do and to avoid doing what they most want it not to do (Dahl, 1989: 95).

The "majority", however, is a very unstable variable, in reality subject to distortions caused by the fact that vested interests can come together in lobbies, pressure groups or actual oligarchies, leaving the individual citizen very little freedom of manoeuvre and choice (so much so that it would perhaps be more correct to speak of *Models of Democracy*, to quote the title of another classic of the social sciences (Held, 2006), so far apart that each of them should be able to produce its own specific symbolic universe).

This situation is made more acute because individuals who are lucky enough to live in a democratic regime perceive the growing discrepancy between this (confused) symbolic universe and everyday reality. At times the divergence is so acute that it distresses even the strongest supporters of democracy, faced with the fact that all too often it foments inequalities, violates the rights of citizenship and practices exclusion instead of inclusion.

Finally, even more difficult is the condition of those who find themselves forced to change country and, consequently, experience a fracture in their subjec-

tive biography and undergo an experience that can prove just as radical as a conversion. A transformation of this kind will require a process of resocialization, since "the old reality, as well as the collectivities and significant others that previously mediated it to the individual, must be reinterpreted *within* the legitimating apparatus of the new reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1991 [1966]: 179). This is the case, for example, of migrants coming from countries with cultures and faiths different from those in the West, who experience their first fracture with their symbolic universe of origin. They then experience a second fracture with the democratic symbolic universe conjured up by the image projected by the Western media and the false information supplied by the intermediaries and traffickers involved in people smuggling, an image that fails to reflect the reality of precariousness, exploitation and racism that they experience daily.

These factors should make it clear why the clan is able to compete with (deficient) democratic institutions. In particular, by rediscovering and making networks of interpersonal relationships efficient, the clan facilitates that psychological process of identification (affiliation) necessary to transform a simple aggregate into a group. Moreover the clan is capable of adapting to the context, variously favouring utilitarian or identitarian ties as required. This reveals a greater ability, compared to other groups, to respond to the needs of their members, to reduce subjective uncertainty about their role in the social sphere and to increase their self-esteem and sense of social distinction. These can take very different forms depending on the class they belong to and their place of origin, but their fulfilment is always functional to reinforcing the sense of inclusion in the ingroup. With regard to the outgroup, however, the clan is able to modulate its attitude and behaviour across a spectrum that ranges from depersonalization—seeing others as belonging to a different category—to dehumanization—an extreme reached most frequently when the clan takes on criminal forms, as in the case of mafias or some youth gangs.

3 The war at home

Hannah Arendt wrote that "to be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence": political action is speech, "only sheer violence is mute" (Arendt, 1958: 26). For this reason, the use of propagandistic pseudo-communication should be considered the antechamber of violence (the one serves the other); and it is all the more culpable if it is used not just by authoritarian regimes or "rogue states", but democracies, whose distinctive feature should be dialogue and the search for compromise.

It should not surprise us, then, that the new neoliberal absolutism confirms another of Franz Neumann's principles: violence, which "not only terrorizes but attracts" (Neumann, F. 2009 [1942]: 403), is the ultimate foundation of society.

Writing about the social structure of totalitarianism in the early 1940s, another Neumann, Sigmund, observed in turn that "the first aim of totalitarian regimes is to institutionalize and to perpetuate the revolution". The state of belligerence is one of its defining elements:

> Belligerence in world politics denotes a major element in the definition of modern totalitarianism. War is its beginning, its demand, its test. It is in the twilight of a world at war that the flames of revolution break through. A constant state of war is the natural climate of totalitarian dictatorship (Neumann, S. 1965: XII and XV).

Unlike in the past, however, today violence is manifested above all in the form of *permanent global civil war:*

- *civil*, because it takes place increasingly frequently within state territories, involving, on the part of the victims, an increasing number of unsuspecting citizens, and, on the part of the combatants, a varied and motley patchwork of non-state actors of violence (warlords, mercenaries, terrorists, narcos and mobsters);
- *global* war, but not world war, because while it does not involve all the great powers at the same time and in the same event, any civil conflict has international repercussions: on the level of politics (involving governments or international organizations), the economy (affecting the prices of raw materials or stock market speculation) and even society (think of the flows of displaced people generated by the fighting);
- *permanent*, in the sense that it becomes an ordinary and everyday state of affairs for millions of men, women and children (above all, but not only) in the many parts of the periphery of the world.

Each of the non-state actors of violence mentioned above claims more or less effectively the right to exercise absolute power in their specific region. At the same time, as an inevitable corollary, they generate a veritable market for illicit goods and services. On the local level, they produce "wages of labour" for the various supernumeraries in the conflict, from the grunts, who are sometimes even guaranteed some form of family welfare, to the many willing or forced workers in the supply chain. At the global level, they create and nurture veritable long-distance commercial supply chains of resources much in demand. This is the case, for instance, of the warlords who control diamond mining or coltan, oilfields or production zones of valuable timber. Or else they rediscover forms of barter economy,

by which the demand for weapons can be matched by the offer of drugs or other "luxury goods" (such as the archaeological relics sold on the black market by Isis fighters).

In general terms, the permanent global civil war reproduces at the molecular level an intensive and daily process of original accumulation of resources by plundering the territory, extortion, exploitation of slave labour, etc. This occurs in a phase of globalization which sees industrial capitalism with a twentieth-century matrix receding decisively into the background in terms of net production of profits compared to the synergies created between commercial capitalism and financial capitalism.

So what distinguishes this new type of warfare from the twentieth-century's totalitarian violence? The most obvious point is that it does not involve (at least for the time being) a direct clash between great powers. This does not mean that they are not involved in it or that they limit themselves to the role of passive spectators of the myriad conflicts at present under way around their borders (think of the news stories summed up in the Prologue). Such events affect them directly only when there are terrorist attacks on their soil. On the contrary, the great powers foment the permanent global civil war, firstly by supplying it with their weapons and secondly by rediscovering the old method of co-opting local potentates internationally.[7]

The United States is again the most significant example, if only because its superpower status (democratic, unlike Russia and China) led it to resort to such means most frequently during the Cold War to limit its involvement in the conflicts on the periphery of the international system that geopolitical imperatives meant they could not ignore. The most controversial and deplorable instance of this remains that of the Afghan mujahideen. Organized, armed and financed by the Americans against the Soviets, they eventually evolved into the Taliban and became one of America's bitterest enemies (Cooley, 1999). But, in more recent times, the same policy of sponsoring local factions even in extremely complex conflicts has been adopted several times by European governments right across the whole of the Middle East, without developing a unified strategy and often competing with each other, in keeping with a logic that rather resembles that of the old colonial attitudes (Calculli and Strazzari, 2017).

More generally, the major difference is that neoliberal absolutism completely dissolves the boundary between peace and war. This appears in the complete aban-

7 Co-opting local potentates has been typical, albeit to varying degrees, of the processes of formation of almost all European states; which then also used them to reduce the costs of governing the colonies. Globalization confines itself to reviving these practices that seemed obsolete and to imposing them as a universally valid model (Tilly, 1975; Thomson, 1994).

donment of the state-based legal practices of declaring war and signing a peace treaty to formally mark the beginning and end of a conflict, replaced, at best, by agreements between factions that invariably last only a few days.

War becomes an endemic condition: a form of "domestic" administration of social relations, as the title of this section suggests. A type of conflict that strategists, reasoning in statistical terms, like to call "low intensity", a term that ignores that the deaths and mutilations are the same as in any other type of war and is an outrage to the innocent victims who inevitably pay its price.

The good news is that, in such a situation, it becomes difficult to even imagine that all the productive resources of a nation can be placed on a wartime footing to defeat the enemy, as happened with the war economy adopted by all the belligerents in the two world wars. The bad news is that the peacetime economy progressively comes to depend on an increasingly privatized market for violence. One that is detached from the obligation to protect the national interest of a specific client and in which the most competitive brands find themselves in the ideal position of being able to manipulate demand as well as supply, by selling arms and services to the legitimate authorities responsible for protecting their citizens, as well as to all non-state actors that heighten the collective insecurity. The results are what Mary Kaldor, in an international best-seller, termed the "new wars". These are the result of a process that is the reverse of the one that led to modern state formation, whose archetype is the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina fought between 1992 and 1995:

> The new wars occur in situations in which state revenues decline because of the decline of the economy as well as the spread of criminality, corruption and inefficiency, violence is increasingly privatized both as a result of growing organized crime and the emergence of paramilitary groups (Kaldor, 2012: 6).

The whole capitalist system—in all its dimensions: productive, commercial and financial—is involved in this process of the privatization of violence: both on the global level of medium- and long-term investment strategies, budget policies and the ceaseless virtual circulation of currencies; and on the local level of exchanges (of work, goods and money) between individuals. To give just one example, the criminal group that produces drugs and reinvests the proceeds from their sale in the legitimate economy travels continuously from one dimension of capitalism to another and operates in the speculative sphere of high finance—to which it also offers a constant and invaluable flow of capital for recycling—no less than in the daily exploitation of the labour force employed in the areas of production and marketing. But the same holds true for all the other private actors, previously identified as protagonists of the processes of clustering sovereignty: from private mili-

tary corporations listed on the stock exchange to Islamic terrorist groups that likewise finance themselves through the transnational networks of the informal economy.

To sum up, neoliberal absolutism has a unified profile within a global market for violence, whose competitiveness and success can be explained by taking into account these features:

– *Invisibility:* the violence market is designed to avoid as far as possible any form of control by public opinion. Individuals and corporations operating in other sectors may certainly have an interest in concealing at least part of their profits in tax havens, but for those whose business is killing, hiding their movements becomes a systemic priority. Arms manufacturers have an interest in not disclosing the names of their real buyers to the governments of their own countries, especially if they are selling to enemy militants. Governments themselves often prefer to keep their citizens in the dark about foreign policy strategies, entrusting the secret services and their covert operations with the task of financing and supplying the belligerent factions considered allies in conflicts they are anxious not to be openly involved in. For terrorist groups and mafias, then, eliminating all the traces and anything that might help identify their members is essential to their survival. Bank secrecy is the essential corollary of their clandestine activities and the black market a natural accessory to the secret nature of their organization.
– *Dynamicity:* privatization has enabled the market for violence to take advantage of the existence of an increasing number of brands. During the Cold War, the only actors were, on the one hand, the big weapons manufacturers and, on the other, states and, in particular, the two superpowers and some European countries in the twofold role of direct buyers and brokers in relation to Third World governments as customers. Today, private military corporations have also entered the arena. The most important of them tend to operate under a regime of oligopoly and develop cartel strategies. Then all the other non-state actors of violence already mentioned several times, including mafia organizations in particular, manage to offer a wide range of goods and services in addition to violence in the strict sense. The number and variety of these actors guarantees unprecedented dynamism in the market for violence. The simultaneous presence of wars involving the use of regular armed forces, ethnic conflicts and social violence on the scale of an epidemic makes it possible to modulate the pressures of supply and demand to avoid any risk of recession.
– *Profits:* unlike other markets, the lucrativeness of investments in the field of violence is not limited to specific production sectors, such as those with a high technological content or one that can attain economies of scale. Even a small workshop is capable of turning out assault rifles or anti-personnel

mines, without even the burden of having to pay royalties under a patent, while amply covering its start-up costs. What's more, the steady growth in demand, due to the multiplication of clusters of sovereignty, makes even the collateral market for used weapons profitable. And since some weapons are very durable, they can be reused in different conflicts, so perpetuating the rate of profit almost indefinitely. In general terms, the violence market is capable of integrating production and distribution in the best possible way. Following the pyramid-selling model, every single consumer also acts as a sales promoter. From the government of a superpower to the lowliest of warlords, they all foment an arms race that seems likely to be endless.[8]

– *Social irresponsibility:* in the market for violence, societies are not required to answer for the consequences of their actions. The only true moral imperative is to maximize shareholder profits. And it could hardly be otherwise, if we only consider that the enrichment of any entrepreneur of violence passes through the end user's death. The marginal utility rate of this particular market grows with the increase in the toll of corpses. In this sense, social irresponsibility goes as far as the theoretical (but sometimes also empirical) extreme of foreshadowing the end of society itself. The only scrap of responsibility that survives is that, jointly and severally, of the individuals managing the material or financial resources of a given group. Any misappropriation of funds or just a misguided investment may be punished by death, a nemesis that overtakes the merchants of death, who are destroyed by the system they helped create. (Think of the cases of the bankers Sindona and Calvi in Italy. They paid with their lives for their failure to manage with due confidentiality the capital of illicit origin entrusted to them by, among others, members of the Sicilian mafia.[9])

These features tend to reinforce each other, to the point where violence today has become increasingly self-sustaining, relegating the immediate or historical causes of conflict to the background and sometimes making it more convenient to continue fighting than to win. Even more than in the Cold War—kept alive by the needs of the military-industrial complex even when victory was secured—the siege of Sarajevo, which lasted from 1992 to 1996, was justified, for example, by the

8 This scheme, generally considered unsustainable for the simple reason that profit margins tend to decrease as one descends the steps of the pyramid, is actually extremely functional as guaranteeing the widest possible diffusion of many of the products of the market for violence.

9 See, respectively, Corrado Stajano (2016 [1991]), who reconstructs the incredible parabola of Michele Sindona starting from the murder of Giorgio Ambrosoli, appointed liquidator of the Banca Privata di Milano, and Mario Almerighi (2002).

sheer need to fuel the thriving black market generated by humanitarian aid, in which the United Nations forces were also involved (Andreas, 2008).[10]

Furthermore, expanding violence involves an increasing number of figures from the liberal professions, indispensable to the market's very survival. They range from the accountants and bank officials in charge of collecting and handling money from sales to the financial experts responsible for reinvesting the profits and the attorneys hired to protect the legal interests (civil and criminal) of the parties involved. The fact that these professionals can put their skills at the service of both legal and criminal figures, alleging the impossibility of telling the difference, and that they are required to bend (or even break) the laws in doing so, makes the borderline between the licit and illicit economy even fuzzier. The objective difficulty of sanctioning their behaviour, finally, not only fuels the feeling of impunity of those who are already accustomed to crossing that borderline every day, now truly no more than imaginary, but risks breaking down the residual resistance of those who respect the rules and find themselves penalized by the market as a result.

Summing up, we can say that the privatization of the violence market has three consequences:

1. replacing (universal) laws with contracts (valid only for the parties to the agreement) as the principal legal instrument for regulating relations between parties;
2. increasing the grey areas in legality, a consequence both of the deregulation associated with liberalization—meaning the lack of the political will to endow the market with at least a coherent regulatory framework—and the fact that anyone with sufficient resources of violence can afford to challenge the law or seek to rewrite it;
3. the extraordinary differentiation in the supply of goods and services, in response to both the stimuli of competition and continuous pressure from demand.

A market of this nature, it is worth stressing, does not respond to the law that theorizes a marginal profit tending towards zero as a consequence of the gradual saturation of consumption. Consequently, it is not liable to incur periodic contractions in the production cycle or significant and generalized price increases.

It remains to be noted, finally, that the triumph of the market does not absolve politics, which remains principally responsible for the drift towards neoliberal absolutism. Without offence to Clausewitz (1976), we might say that his fundamental

10 For a broader, in-depth look at the Balkan region in the post-Cold War period, see Strazzari (2008).

assumption about war as the continuation of politics by other means remains as valid as ever. War has changed its character and been privatized, but as a direct result of a similar privatization that first took place in the sphere of politics. It is the political elites, starting with those in the West, who are leading us back to the "edge of the abyss", to use another expression from the vocabulary of the twentieth-century Cold War.

The reference here is to brinkmanship, the policy of manipulating risk that was characteristic of the bipolar face-off between the two superpowers. At the time, this particular strategy appeared functional to maintaining the balance of terror. It stemmed from the peculiar nature of thermonuclear weaponry, the use of which could really have wiped out humanity (Bonanate, 1971). Already those who theorized it saw clearly that the point of no return might be reached and control of the situation lost, dragging their own and other countries into a third world war. The edge of the abyss, it was pointed out, is found above all on a steep, unstable ridge. The closer we get to tipping point, the more likely that we will all be plunged into the abyss (Schelling, 1966 and 1980).

In its present version, which does not necessarily envisage the use of thermonuclear arsenals (though they remain at the disposal of the main contenders), brinkmanship involves a much larger number of actors, crowding the top of the ridge and elevating the risk to such an extent as to foreshadow (to paraphrase Susan Strange) our entrance into a stage of "casino politics", a deranged politics gambling with our lives.

Epilogue. The autoimmune society

On the eve of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Ulrich Beck published the essay *Risk Society*. It would become a paradigm of the social sciences in the millennium, to the point where the title has entered everyday speech as an expression in particular of the dangers associated with environmental pollution. I will draw on three fundamental passages of that book here.[1] The first concerns the concept of modernization. In the nineteenth century, says Beck, modernization followed a *linear* evolution, as it resulted from the dissolution of its opposite: the traditional, even fossilized, structure of feudal society based on organization by rank and still unable to understand and dominate nature. Today, however, as he wrote on the threshold of the new millennium, we are witnessing the beginning of a new modernity of industrial society, which finds itself forced to observe itself and its results and to question its premises:

> Modernization within the horizon of experience of *pre*-modernity is being displaced by *reflexive* modernization. In the nineteenth century, privileges of rank and religious world views were being demystified; today the same is happening to the understanding of science and technology in the classical industrial society, as well as to the modes of existence in work, leisure, the family and sexuality (Beck, 1992: 10).

In this second modernity, therefore, "the knowledge is spreading that the sources of wealth are 'polluted' by growing 'hazardous side effects'" and that "the social positions and conflicts of a 'wealth-distributing' society begin to be joined by those of a 'risk-distributing' society" (Beck, 1992: 20).[2]

The second passage from *Risk Society* concerns the definition of the concept that gives the book its title. In brief, Beck notes that the processes of twentieth-century industrialization have generated dangers far greater than those in previous centuries (just think of radioactivity). These may not only inflict irreversible damage, but make a mockery of traditional class distinctions (not even the rich and powerful can be considered safe) and national borders (the risks are both local

1 It is impossible here to enter into the merits of the intense debate aroused by the volume, but for a broader look at the issues involved, see Adam, Beck, and van Loon (2000).

2 Beck has developed the concept of reflective modernization elsewhere, revealing that, while in the developed world the very foundations of industrial modernity are beginning to be questioned, many countries are still far from attaining the conditions that were the premises for it, such as the creation of a true constitutional state: "At the turn of the third millennium, civilization finds itself in a chaotic simultaneity of the non-synchronous: the transition into simple modernity now shaking the post-communist world and the countries of the South has its foundations and goals snatched away by self-transformations of industrial society' (Beck, 1997: 16).

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and global). But there is yet another problem. These processes cannot be stopped, because their economic exploitation still produces immense profits, and for this reason they do not make a break with capitalist logic.

For Beck all this was bound to change the forms of social solidarity, replacing the positive ideal of equality—the dream of being able to give everyone a slice of the cake by redistributing income—with the negative and defensive ideal of security, which only aims to avoid the worst and save us from toxins:

> The driving force in the class society can be summarized in the phrase: *I am hungry!* The movement set in motion by the risk society, on the other hand, is expressed in the statement: *I am afraid!* The *commonality of anxiety* takes the place of the *commonality of need* (Beck, 1992: 49).

The third and final step concerns the role of politics. The origins of industrial society, Beck observed very effectively, lie in a clear distinction between the *citoyen*, the holder of political rights exercised in the various spheres of representative politics, and the *bourgeois*, who defends his private interests in the non-political sphere of the economy. For most of the twentieth century, democratization made it possible to expand the political sphere to intervene in the economic one through the mechanisms of the welfare state. At the same time, industrialization remained within the sphere of action of existing political systems. Since the seventies, however, both these processes have been undermined. The welfare state has exhausted its utopian strength due to the growing awareness of its limits and, above all, its economic costs. Innovation has stepped up its pace and consequently amplified the dangers, but technology eludes the controls of a state that is being increasingly scaled down. Technical-economic development

> becomes a third entity, acquiring the precarious hybrid status of a *sub-politics*, in which the scope of the social changes precipitated varies inversely with their legitimation (Beck, 1992: 186).

The more decisions in science take on political implications, the more the state—which still has a democratic form, but has lost the independence that it had won through welfare policies—is discredited. It is reduced to the role of the administrator of a development that it is unable to plan or govern, but which it is required to justify. The upshot is that "the decisions that change society become tongue-tied and anonymous" (Beck, 1992: 187).

What I wish to maintain, at the conclusion of the analysis conducted so far, is that humanity seems to have taken the path of a third modernity, one that, with an oxymoron, might be termed *regressive.* Regressive modernity is fated to reconcile the two earlier forms and resolve the contradictions produced by their forced co-

existence within the same globalized world, but characterized by the presence of countries with different degrees of development. Retracing Beck's three phases, these are the main features of regressive modernity:

1. Entry into the third modernity fails to resolve the social conflicts of the first, bound up with the distribution of wealth, and those of the second, bound up with the distribution of risk. Rather, it makes them more acute, both locally and globally, by granting increasingly restricted and conditional access to wealth and also inflicting on those most excluded from it the burden of a growing share of the collective risk.

   On the one hand, industrial and technological development justify a growing radicalization of the production processes that manage to reconcile in the same cycle the two extremes of robotization of high-tech systems (with consequent job losses) and the rediscovery of slave labour in unskilled tasks, without this provoking any incurable contradiction and still less new forms of class solidarity. Think, to give just one example, of the children used as slaves in African mines to extract the coltan needed to manufacture computers and smartphones. On the other hand, the effects of environmental pollution and, even more evidently, of the sometimes related natural disasters (typhoons, floods, earthquakes) weigh with increasing frequency and intensity on the poorest segments of populations, as in the slums generated by uncontrolled urbanization, above all in developing countries.
2. The uncontrollable character of this process stems from the fact that regressive modernity is not only compatible with the dynamics of capitalism, but at this stage is proving an essential condition for its reproduction. Entry into the third modernity, then, marks the end of any residual utopia, whether it is a more equitable redistribution of incomes or a reduction in risks due to climate change or pollution. Of course, as is inevitable, regressive modernity also generates forms of social solidarity, two in particular, antithetical to each other, which find expression in the statements: *I'm afraid of hunger!* and *I'm hungry for fear!*

   The former tends to prevail among the increasingly large majority of individuals suffering from a shortage of resources, to the point of endangering their safety, if not survival. The second is mostly the prerogative of those who belong to the restricted circle of the privileged and have nothing to fear from the growing inequalities. They practise fear as a preventive strategy for protecting their interests, and even as a luxury, a prerogative of status, going so far as to flaunt it in the collective form of gated communities or the individual forms of armoured cars and bodyguards.
3. Finally, politics is actually capable of emerging from that sort of minority state to which second modernity had relegated it, by demanding—and obtaining—a

> part in the comedy, perhaps even a leading role. However, it does this not by claiming its function of legitimating technical-economic developmental models, much less by proposing a return to the welfare state. The politician, to paraphrase Beck, does not rediscover his soul as a *citoyen* elected as a representative in one of the many arenas appointed to emulate participatory mechanisms. Rather he exalts his own nature as a private *bourgeois* eager to share in the profits made available in the economic sphere.
>
> Democracy gives way to oikocracy, and the clan becomes the systemic and functional solution for enabling the members of the three political, economic and civil societies to communicate with each other, wherever they are on the planet. The clan restores synchronicity and coherence to a civilization marked by the coexistence of various stages of development. It also responds to the need to curb the "individualization" unleashed by reflexive modernity, meaning "*first*, the disembedding of industrial-society ways of life and, *second*, the re-embedding of new ones, in which the individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves" (Beck, 1997: 95).

The outcome of this transition to the third regressive modernity can be summed up as an evolution from the risk society to an autoimmune society.[3] This means that today the social body, instead of perfecting strategies to recognize pathogens and render them harmless by its accumulated historical experience, is endangered by what seems a growing inability to secure its homeostatic balance, hence to implement the constant adjustments needed to respond to the threats from a hostile environment.

Yet the twentieth century alone might have sufficed to construct that historical memory that forms the set of antibodies for society: the century of two truly world wars, of opposing totalitarianisms, the proliferation of authoritarianisms in every continent of the planet; the century in which genius and technology was applied diligently and systematically as allowed by modern bureaucratic apparatuses in order to conceive increasingly sophisticated means of mass destruction, and then to experience them in the equally methodical and scientific annihilation of bodies, cities and nature. And when the twentieth century was almost at an end, it sought to make amends by presenting mankind with a window of unprecedented opportunity. The collapse of communism granted unprecedented numbers of men and women the opportunity to gain access to political participation and the shared enjoyment of those products that industrialization (whose most deleterious

3 For a basic understanding of the nature of an autoimmune disease I have consulted Rose and Mackay (2013).

aspects alone they had experienced till then) placed at their disposal. And all this in a cultural context characterized by a new ecological awareness of the limits of development, which Beck's book clearly represented.

Thirty years since 1989 the window of opportunity seems to have almost completely closed. We are involved in what we have termed a permanent global civil war, which dramatically reveals that our society's immune system is no longer capable of distinguishing the elements in the environment that are a threat from those that are beneficent. The consequence is not only a failure of adaptation, the inability to effectively attack pathogens. It is above all the development of autoimmune diseases, which attack and destroy healthy cells and the very defences of the social organism. Sometimes it even gives rise to a case of "autoimmune psychosis", notably in the form of unjustified fears of false pathogens (migrants are a typical example today).[4] The fact is that syndromes of this kind leave us no consolatory ways of escape, perhaps by accusing others of spreading the infection. An autoimmune disease is not spread by contagion, but produced within the organism itself.

The autoimmune diseases that best represent the human condition in the new millennium, due to their self-inflicted character, for individuals are a drug mistaken for a pharmaceutical; in the case of the group, weapons mistaken for a solution to the problem of violence; for the world, the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources as a remedy for underdevelopment (or, put baldly, for the needs of productivity and consumption). The seriousness of these pathologies is not only, and not even primarily, due to the real damage they do to the physical and mental health of millions of people every day, but the fact that they coincide with some of the most profitable sectors of global capitalism, involved in all its spheres: productive, commercial and financial. And so, on the market level, there remain profit margins that are too small for those wishing to invest in the research and development of alternative and combined "therapies" capable of restoring the necessary homeostatic balance to the social organism.

However, the blame for activating the triggers of society's autoimmune diseases lies wholly with politics, in its essence as the "government" of associated action. And politics is also culpable for continuing to encourage the progression of the autoimmune diseases of society by implementing totally inadequate measures of homeostatic control.

4 "In psychiatry, the link between psychotic disorders, particularly schizophrenia, and immune system deregulations, including autoimmunity, is an old concept that regained strong support", in the light of the results of the most recent research (Ellul, Groc, Tampuza and Leboyer, 2017: 1).

This situation, globally and within a growing number of countries, presents all the typical characteristics of a revolutionary phase,

> one in which confidence in the justice or reasonableness of existing authority is undermined; where old loyalties fade, obligations are felt as imposition, law seems arbitrary, and respect for superiors is felt as a form of humiliation; where existing sources of prestige seem undeserved, hitherto accepted forms of wealth and income seem ill-gained, and government is sensed as distant, apart from the governed and not really 'representing' them. [...] Actual revolution need not follow, but it is in such situations that actual revolution does arise (Palmer, 2014: 19).

In the face of a social crisis that is devastating whole continents, the Western democracies not only refuse to take any responsibility for generating and fuelling this process, but they still try to outsource the domestic costs of their own inadequacy, of their inability to govern. The political debate turns out to be totally unaware of the existence of another world outside its parochial boundaries, in an uncontrollable, extreme and snobbish drift towards narcissism and self-referentiality. The selection of the elites rewards *idiótes*, social beings limited to themselves and marginalizes all those who still defend the legitimacy and usefulness of a shared public space.[5]

There is a serious and evident deficit of awareness and knowledge, one that the social sciences could try and fill, if only they did not content themselves with reproducing established and comforting (and complicit) paradigms and took on the challenge of confronting reality to envisage future scenarios—and perhaps invent therapies, mechanisms of homeostatic adjustment for the autoimmune society. To continue with the metaphor, it is a question of identifying antagonistic receptors, elements capable of responding to specific pressures and developing equally specific reactions, blocking pathogens and cancelling their effects.

For instance, the problem of migration should be met by favouring acceptance and social inclusion, allowing new residents to share the practice of citizenship through the granting of voting power and adequate spaces of representation; certainly not by marginalizing or even enslaving them, so prompting them to rely on criminal services instead of social ones. Likewise, the uncontrolled growth of inequalities should be curbed by revealing the mythical (that is, fictional, fabulous, legendary) nature of the free market as a factor of development and balance—all the less credible, paradoxically, the more "economic science" continues to claim its

5 The Greek adjective *ídios* "is connected with the notion of 'private, what belongs to somebody', as opposed to what is public or common to all. [...] we have here the Greek designation for the 'individual, the private citizen', as opposed to the public personage, the one who holds power or fulfils a public function" (Benveniste, 2016: 267).

validity in theory—while bringing out the prosaic reality of neoliberalism as "as a *political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" (Harvey, 2005: 19). A project that, in fact, is taking us back to a Hobbesian state of nature (and as such prior to the formulation of any social pact) based on the exploitation of the weakest by the strongest.

Furthermore, the struggle against inequalities requires a reduction of the material footprint of Europe and the United States, including the promotion of true corporate social responsibility (Moon, 2014) and guided models of degrowth. (Since the concept of degrowth lends itself to controversy and misunderstandings, it is worth remembering that its best known theorist, Serge Latouche (2009: 8), defines it as a watchword that means radically abandoning the goal of growth for its own sake: "Strictly speaking, we should be talking at the theoretical level of 'a-growth', in the sense of which we speak of 'a-theism', rather than de-growth. And we do indeed have to abandon a faith or a religion—that of the economy, progress and development".) Inequalities have to be dealt with by recognizing that taxation is an essential mechanism for the universal redistribution of resources, and criminalizing, on the global level, the concealment of profits as an anti-social (even more than an anti-democratic) practice—a violation of the fundamental human right to survival.

This entails the development of macro-regional or even global patterns of compulsory taxation on the profits of multinational corporations (Henn, 2013), as well as the outlawing of tax havens, which the United Nations itself is considering proposing to member states.[6] In a nutshell, it is a question of moving from the rhetorical and often corrupt practices of development aid to the affirmation of the right of the supplier countries of raw materials to receive part of the Western profits produced from their use. It also means adopting models of pervasive microcredit to foster a more effective and widespread redistribution of resources at the local level (Niccoli and Presbitero, 2010).

Furthermore, we need to study the shadow economy, to bring it to light and enable it to contribute to our collective well-being. And to do the same with the illegal economy, to reduce its profit margins, so impoverishing the criminal groups that fuel it. There is a need to radically rethink the meaning and scope of prohibition, which today is harsh on drug users (whose basic substances still originate mostly in developing countries) but, not without a fair dose of hypocrisy, sparing

6 An article in UN News reports that, according to a group of independent experts, countries lose hundreds of billions of dollars a year offshore, while individuals are able to conceal between 7,000 and 25,000 billion dollars, which could and should be used to finance public services in health, education, law and so forth (https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/10/542062-after-disclosure-bahamas-tax-havens-un-experts-urge-governments-take-action).

alcohol and tobacco, not to mention weapons—all manufactured goods in which the interests of Western industries are involved. We do not need to raise new barriers, but, if anything, to make high social risk markets as transparent as possible, monitoring the production and sale of such goods and investing in social policies capable of reducing their consumption, or at least limiting the risks of contagion.

All these options are present in the debate, including academic papers, but they are still marginal. They are choices with a strong ethical component but which, to the advantage of those who still express a realistic position in politics, can also be justified in the pragmatic terms of harm reduction (the very approach experimented with successfully against drug addiction), that should be made a keystone of the treatment of all pathologies of the autoimmune society. The examples evoked here (migration, inequality, not to mention the violence perpetrated by an indefinite number of state and non-state actors) are configured as high risk behaviours for those who suffer them first hand, much more than for those who only feel the adverse effects of them indirectly (such as, to be clear, Western countries). We can continue to delude ourselves that it is possible to eradicate them or keep them under control by adopting repressive measures and criminalizing the victims themselves. But the reality is that, in doing this, we merely further exacerbate the situation.

The prospect of harm reduction has taught us that high risk behaviours are in all respects social constructions and, as such, products of a specific age: of the culture, values, norms and beliefs that characterize it. Although they represent a constant of the human condition (and for this reason, among other things, every form of prohibition has always ended up benefiting organized crime), they are influenced by their political, economic and social context. Furthermore, these behaviours are favoured by the fact that the expectation of an immediate positive return, however minimal, may gain the upper hand over the certainty of significant negative effects in the medium and long term; and in some cases they may prove adaptive, that is respond to the need to feel at ease and accepted within a group (Marlatt, Larimer, and Witkiewitz, 2012).[7]

The responses of Western governments, however, seek to ignore this context entirely. On the contrary, the autoimmune psychosis by which they are affected pushes them to give a completely distorted representation of it. The result is that, instead of curbing and solving problems, they compound them. Thinking of blocking migrants by building walls, pursuing development by fostering inequali-

7 These two variables—immediate advantage and imitative effect from adaptation to the group—should be carefully assessed when studying phenomena such as migration or violence by non-state actors of violence.

ties and increasing security by selling weapons are now just so many high-risk political behaviours. In the short term, they seem decisive and capable of generating closer ties between leaders or with the masses, but in the long run they can produce devastating effects on social comity, as well as being economically unsustainable.

Because of the pathological inadequacy of democracies, the adoption of a damage reduction approach cannot, however, be entrusted only to the goodwill of some international organizations (others are themselves the creators of "prohibitionist" strategies). At the same time, it has been observed that international law—in particular conventions such as those on torture or genocide—can be read precisely in terms of a damage reduction policy, which aims to intervene in the internal jurisdiction of states in an attempt to limit human suffering (Linklater, 2011). These are all noble and legitimate efforts, but doomed to clash with the limited power of the international authorities to impose sanctions. Likewise, experience (research and investigations conducted by the judiciary) teaches us that no persons or institutions (civil society), hence much less technologies (Internet), are deputed, by definition, to perform this role. In fact we have to be wary of those who claim, for example, to lead an opposing movement or have a monopoly of the compassionate attitude.[8]

If, as we saw in the second chapter, the city is again the centre of the political as well as the economic universe, and the place where the non-state actors of violence vie with the state with increasing shares of coercive power, it is precisely from a detailed and, one might say, day-by-day analysis of the urban landscape that we have to again start to guarantee the safety of its citizens. If, as has been observed, "today's cosmopolitan cities are much more varied, as well as much more unequal than they were forty years ago", in the period of industrialization and the conflict between the working class and white-collar class, then the solution needs to be sought in the study "of the role that cities' regulatory arsenal plays, or might play, in supporting the kinds of diversity that are not necessarily valued by the new global (and local) economy" (Valverde, 2012: 210).

In the first instance, this means imagining new forms of governance of urban space, intended to promote social inclusion and encourage the construction of networks of resistance capable, in particular, of opposing social mediation based on money and the violence wielded with increasing frequency and effectiveness by criminal clans.

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8 This does not mean that solidarity is a secondary factor within the perspective of damage reduction, which needs to be respectful of individuals and communities at risk and to reflect "a humanistic perspective: people will make more health-positive choices if they have access to adequate support, empowerment, and education" (Marlatt, Larimer, and Witkiewitz, 2012: 6).

But to achieve this goal, to work out a lasting solution, a therapy which seeks to cure the ills of autoimmune society, we have to start to invest resources above all in democratization, understanding it as an educational process aimed at individual citizens, even before concerning ourselves with reforming institutions, whether local or national. Although it may seem utopian, we need to return to basics, initiating the social construction of a new imagined community, a radical alternative to the now prevailing clan-based community, one that can be identified in terms of a convinced trust in democracy as a procedure (and not as a daily plebiscite) and as the non-violent resolution of conflicts. A democracy that is capable of ignoring the ethnic or religious identity of the individuals involved, while showing it is capable of adapting to the different human geographies that their coexistence gives rise to.

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List of figures

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Index

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