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NO END STATE:

EXPLORING VOCABULARIES OF POLITICAL DISORDER

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ABSTRACT[1]

‘Disorder’ is a prevalent theme of contemporary political analysis, to the extent that some have argued that we are entering an ‘age of disorder.’ Yet, political science lacks a theory of disorder. In this paper I explore what it might mean to bring concepts of disorder in from the margins of political-economic theory, dethroning the ordered institution as the analytical center of the political science episteme. This is not a theorization of disorder, but the preliminary task of exploring a vocabulary which could allow us to talk sensibly about the varieties and logics of disorder. The paper disaggregates ‘disorder’ into five different distinct manifestations, namely lawlessness, chaos, incommensurability, disorder by design, and (revolutionary) disruption. It identifies four processes which generate disorder, namely calamity, violence, markets and democracy. Insights into global power dynamics can be derived from the study of societies in which varieties of disorder can be seen in their most raw forms. It draws upon Ulrich Beck’s insights of the ‘risk society’, suggesting that the very triumphs of modernity are constitutive of the disorders we ourselves generate.

1 Previous versions of this paper were presented at the World Peace Foundation student-organized seminar, ‘Theorizing (Dis)Order: Governing in an Uncertain World,’ (March 2017); London School of Economics, Conflict Research Programme annual workshop (June 2018); and the seminar ‘Disorder and Democracy,’ Graduate Institute, Geneva (April 2019). I have received especially valuable comments from Rebecca Tapscott, Mark Duffield, Sabine Selchow and Veena Das.

INTRODUCTION

Disorder is a rising theme in political commentary and political science. Faith in the Hegelian trajectory towards an ever-more-orderly future is withering. In the tug-of-war between the forces of modernist ordering, and those of disruption and chaos, the latter appear to be winning. Yet we struggle to grapple with what disorder is.

James Davidson and William Rees-Mogg, open their disturbing and prescient book *The Sovereign Individual* that advocates, Ayn Rand-style, that the ultra-wealthy should determine the future of the globe without a care for anything other than themselves, by quoting Tom Stoppard: 'The future is disorder. A door like this has cracked open five or six times since we got on our hind legs. It is the best possible time to be alive, when almost everything you thought you knew is wrong.' (1999, p. i) Theirs is a political, academic and ultimately epistemological challenge to which we should rise.

What is reckless for the planet is a triumph of human institutions, delivering states, industry and social order.

Disorder has no place in high scientism including the dominant epistemologies of economics, sociology, and political science, save as the abyss to be avoided, the wilderness from which we are forever trying to escape. In *Enlightenment Now* Steven Pinker writes, 'the ultimate purpose of life, mind and human striving: [is] to deploy energy and knowledge to fight back the tide of entropy and carve out refuges of beneficial order' (p. 17). The questions posed in the social sciences revolve around equilibrium, institutions, and orderly development, with the implication is that any apparent disorder is either an unfortunate deviation or the manifestation of a deeper order that needs to be revealed by greater effort. Even in the most obvious cases of the triumph of disorder, such as Afghanistan, Somalia and South Sudan, some political scientists claim that they discern the order of state formation. In these and other cases, the disordered society is one that is in a state of temporary aberration from the hegemonic order, its self-evident failures validating the legitimacy of the order from which it deviates.

There is no theory of disorder. Indeed, disorder is heterodox and—I conclude—necessarily escapes any form of disciplinary definition. This paper is a preliminary attempt to provide a vocabulary of the variants.

Let me suggest three particularly pressing reasons for exploring disorder in this way and at this time. The first is the *reckless Anthropocene*: the complex precarity arising from climate change and parallel transformations to our planet's ecosystem. This includes vulnerability to outbreaks of infectious disease: the current pandemic of the novel coronavirus is an acute disordering. At the very simplest level, we expect more extreme weather events, zoonotic outbreaks, pollution crises, and ecological disruptions. But we should not necessarily expect a change in the behavior patterns of modern society that have brought us to this point. What is reckless for the planet is a triumph of human institutions, delivering states, industry and social order.

Second is the evident analytical bankruptcy of theories of state-building premised on the assumption that the norm institutions that make for stable societies must necessarily be manifest in the kinds of formal institutions of north American modernity. What is most remarkable here is that, despite perhaps twenty years of critique, the neo-Weberian state-building paradigm remains intact among policymakers, albeit taking an illiberal turn, as shown by the report of David Cameron's Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development (Collier et al. 2018).

The third reason is the rise of the new brand of authoritarians, in rich and middle income countries, who are making skilled use of disorder as an instrument of power. Typically they are plutocratic populists, fighting intra-elite battles using tools that simulate the mobilization of mass constituencies, but doing so in a manner that circumvents the institutionalization of that mobilization: they want the votes without the party machine. This may involve using social media to disorient citizens and voters (their own and others), stirring up discontent against their rivals within the political-commercial elite, and even using informal paramilitary groups to foment violence. Whether this represents a coordinated and cunning strategy, or is a myriad of opportunistic acts informed by political intuition, is not clear and may not be relevant.

Those of us who have studied the governance of precarious, poorly-institutionalized and conflicted

countries in Africa and Asia, find this familiar terrain. Conventionally called 'fragile states', these are better seen as subaltern open political systems, whose political dynamics show the imprints of global trends more clearly and sooner than they are evident in Europe and North America. The kinds of rulers and governing strategies we have seen in these countries are finding their counterparts in post-industrial nations. If this parallel is more than a comedian's trope (Trevor Noah does it particularly well), we need to take seriously the comparative political science of disorder in those countries where it has been studied deeply.

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF DISORDER

In this section, I suggest that theories of conflict, crisis, state failure and their remedies, all orbit around the singular source of gravity and illumination that is the Weberian state, in ideal form or in a process of formation. Nations, societies, public authority, conflict resolution, political 'rules of the game'—indeed, institutions—are all satellites in this paradigmatic solar system. But—to elaborate the metaphor—perhaps the wandering orbits of some of the planets are better understood if we posit a second, dark twin star coexisting at the center of this system. That nemesis is disorder, the various antitheses of the Weberian state.

This will be no surprise to historians and anthropologists of those places in the world long subject to forces of disordering. Thus Jane Guyer (2004) challenges our 'intellectual "homing instinct" towards equilibrium, systematicity, and slow directional growth' (p. 129). Ulrich Beck makes a comparable critique of sociological and political science theories, which 'focus on the reproduction of social and political systems and not on their transformation into something unknown and uncontrollable. They are end-of-history sociologies.' (2016, p. 70)

The history of modernity can be seen as one of creating measurable, commensurate and disciplined orders from what was considered none of the above. All the paradigms of social and political science are exercises in order-making. Most paradigmatic is the self-professed mastery of chance and danger, in the formulation of risk. Beginning with the task of insuring intercontinental merchant shipping, the history of risk is one of constituting modernity out of rational decision-making based on calculus of uncertainty and probability rather than fatalism and faith (Bernstein 1996; Giddens 1991). At the point of origin, the insured-against dangers were defined as the untamed—storms and pirates.

However, as Beck argues, it is society's *triumphs* that are its greatest perils: 'the semantics of risk refer to the present thematization of future threats that are often a product of the successes of civilization' (2007, p 4). Our insecurities are self-inflicted. As modernization has itself been modernized—Beck's 'second modernity'—we are dealing with technologies and systems that are intrinsically beyond the reach of our knowledge (Selchow 2014; Blok and Selchow 2017). Society is thus constituted by the global risks it has generated. This has the implication that we cannot expect to resolve the disordering impacts of our recklessness by returning to a more rational, Enlightenment order, but we have to embrace the disordering itself.

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In the era of industrial modernity—Beck's 'first modernity'—from the mastery over the risks to colonial merchantmen and the dangers of inoculation against smallpox were derived the tools to fight entropy: life tables, life insurance and demography; the laws of international trade and the suppression of piracy; epidemiological risk calculations; fractal reserve banking and money markets; and the principles of economics and its associated doctrines such as the notion of a market equilibrium. From the efforts to master public administration were derived theories of institutions, both in the everyday sense of formal institutions of government and the extended, sociological sense of the norms that govern societal functioning. Since Max Weber, these have been the primary focus of the social sciences, including theories of institutions (Douglas 1986; North 1991) and their corollaries (Bourdieu 1977). The history and political science of state formation and the creation of nations are stories of ordering (Olson 1993; Tilly 1990; Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; North, Wallis and Weingast 2008). Michel Foucault's concept of 'biopower' and of the 'regimes of truth' that regulate population and health, are paradigmatic mechanisms for ordering (Foucault 1988; 1990; 1995).

We have continued to use the tools of this modernity, designed for 'colonising the future' (Giddens 1991, p. 111), but we are extending them beyond the limits of a future for which they were designed, namely one that remains statistically predictable, into an era in which we are generating endogenous risks, some of which we can measure, and others that we cannot (Kay and King 2020). Nonetheless, the methods of risk calculation remain among our most valued management tools, applied to hazards including financial crisis, famine and conflict. Enormous effort has gone into predicting stock market crises, but still with spectacular failures (Reinhart and Rogoff 2011). Although social scientists agree that all modern famines are anthropogenic, the World Bank and other aid institutions are developing insurance mechanisms to guard against them, as though they were exogenous hazards. The financial instruments will undoubtedly work for some disasters, for example in countries exposed to drought where there is a capable government committed to preventing starvation (Clarke and Dercon 2016). However, in the cases that seize the headlines, famines are invariably caused by war and political repression, starvation brings material, military or political benefits to some, and humanitarian responses tend to solidify those power relations (de Waal 2018). The technologies of famine early warning and response make some elements of the crisis visible and others invisible.

Since the U.S. Administration set up the State Failure Task Force in the 1990s (Esty et al. 1995), political science tools have been honed for the purpose of predicting political crisis and armed conflict. Unsurprisingly, they don't serve that purpose. For example, indicators of state 'fragility' have been shown to have no predictive power, they simply reflect the state of affairs measured at the time (Mueller 2018).

More immediately relevant to the task of cataloguing political disorders, it is notable that frameworks for understanding economic crisis and recovery, state collapse and rebuilding, and armed conflict and its resolution, are all framed as deviations from a Weberian order. Most salient is the theory of 'fragile states', which is a derivation from the order-based new institutional economics (World Bank 2011; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Collier et al. 2018). The framework of fragile states is (first) a euphemism for 'failed states' as it does not deal with fragility in the everyday sense of brittleness (i.e. the risk an intact order breaking), and (second) does not deal with how these countries actually function but is a description of how they fall short of an ideal (Volker, Brown and Clements 2009; de Waal 2015). Conflict resolution and peacemaking, whether narrowly conceived as bringing belligerent adversaries to a workable compromise or a more ambitious 'liberal peace' mold are paradigmatically focused on generating elite bargains, political settlements, or normative and formal institutional dispensations that aspire to be lasting (Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2007; Ghani and Lockhart 2007; Bell 2008; Wanis-St John 2008; Jus Post Bellum Project 2012; Khan 2018).

Critique of such dominant order-making paradigms is a major theme of subaltern and post-colonial literature, including accounts of the experience of Atlantic colonialism and slavery (Dubois 1903; Gilroy 1993; Mbembe 2017), the margins of African imperial states (Donham and James 1986) and Asian state formation (Scott 2009). Guyer observes, with respect to Atlantic Africa, that '[t]he stable, cumulative, and systemic concept of institutions … becomes, however, blunt and illogical when applied to a reality that seems, to those who live it, altogether less settled. Like pragmatists, they have to apply reason and judgment to horizons of contingency rather than applying a narrow calculative rationality to given variables.' (2004, p. 130) There is also a critique from the dark center of political power, both philosophical and ethnographic, elaborating on Lenin's pithy maxim that politics consists of 'who, whom' (Geuss 2008; de Waal 2015)—transactions rather than rules, including arbitrary transactions that do not necessarily follow 'the game within the rules' (c.f. Leftwich 2006).

The most influential frameworks for analyzing contemporary systems of government that do not conform to the normative Weberian institutionalized state are neo-patrimonialism (Bratton and Van Der Walle 1997; Kelsall 2013) and hybrid political orders (Volker, Brown and Clements 2009). These do not abandon the search for order as the principal intellectual task; rather they suggest that there are half-hidden orders that need to be brought to the surface. Another influential strand of analysis is Christian Lund's framing of 'public authority' and 'twilight institutions' (2006). This is particularly significant in three respects. First, it releases us from an obsessive focus on the state. Lund writes:

> [I]t is difficult to ascribe exercised authority to the 'state' as a coherent institution; rather,

> public authority becomes the amalgamated result of the exercise of power by a variety of local institutions and the imposition of external institutions, conjugated with the *idea* of a state. (2006, p. 14).

Second, he notes that the 'contours and features of [twilight] institutions are hard to distinguish and discern' (2006, p. 1 footnote 1). This is an insight ripe for elaboration. Third, Lund recognizes that public authority exists in a context of precarity, 'always undergoing processes of institutionalization and its opposite' (2006, pp. 25-6). This is also an opening for exploration, and this paper tries to identify what that 'opposite' might be.

Liberating political science from the particular manifestation of states that emerged in the colonial metropole allows us to recognize that most of what is written about the formation of nations, identities, and institutions, still retains purchase if we remove the Weberian institutional state from the picture. This is true of Charles Tilly's analysis of how war-making and state-making were intertwined in modern Europe (Tilly 1990). The connection is historical rather than philosophical: war-making could also have made multi-national empires, trading companies, mobile bands of pastoralist-raiders, or other kinds of political formation, and indeed did so. Indeed, Edward Keene's (2002) re-reading of Grotius shows that the Westphalian sovereign state was just one part of the juridical-political-commercial project of 17th century European sovereigns, the other being the disassembly of sovereign powers in the colonized world and their re-allocation among different subaltern, mercenary and commercial entities. Niall Ferguson's (2011) celebratory history of British imperialism describes these instruments of subjugation, without trace of irony, as 'killer apps.'

Ernest Gellner (1983) frames nationalism as a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones. As a political scientist with profound ethnographic sensibilities for the condition of colonized people, Gellner ably critiques the Weberian definition of the state. Nonetheless he succumbs to its gravitational pull, writing, 'The idea enshrined in this [Weberian] definition corresponds fairly well with the moral intuitions of many, probably most, members of modern societies.' He continues: 'Weber's underlying principle does, however, seem valid *now*, however strangely ethnocentric it may be as a general definition.' (1983, pp. 3-4) That moment of ubiquitous modernist intuitions may, however, have passed. As James Ferguson (2006) observes, in many countries (he is concerned with Africa), modernity is a remembered dream.

Perhaps the most persistent advocate of alternative histories of states is James Scott. In his most recent book, Scott (2018) celebrates the 'barbarians' who have, for most of the human era, preferred to remain beyond the reach of coercive government entities. They comprise hunter gathers, pastoral nomads, and fisherfolk. Noting that the first function of writing in the 'quartermaster state' was to catalogue grain harvest so as to tax them, such people have resisted literacy. Histories are written not only by the winners, but by the literate winners, so their values and achievements are voided in the record. But, should we take seriously the record of non-state peoples, we should therefore, among other things, recognize that 'much that passes as [state] collapse [should be seen] as, rather, a disassembly of larger but more fragile political units into their smaller and often more stable components.' (p. 187) His account resonates with the writings of Ibn Khaldun, the great medieval historian and sociologist (Ibn Khaldun 1967), who saw the history of the Middle East—and by extension the world—as a dialectic between the rude energy and tribal solidarity of the nomad, and the order and civility of established states. The ethos of the Bedouins (*badawi*) exemplified in the raid, is anathema to the 'civilization' of the settled state (*hadari*).

Since Hobbes, the central question for political science has been how the capacity to violence should be controlled. Generations of political philosophers have asked, how is arbitrary power to wound, rob and kill to be institutionalized, how are the wild to be tamed? The answer invariably lies with states. But the arbitrary power of the Leviathan, and the wild power of those who live beyond the reach of the state, should not be obscured. This is not to say that we can dispense with states: to repeat, it is to argue that we should dispense with the state as the *singular* center of gravity and illumination.

FIVE KINDS OF DISORDER

There is no single theory of disorder. There are in fact many different kinds of disorder, and let us examine five generic manifestations of disorder in more detail, namely lawlessness, chaos, incommensurability, designed instability, and disruption.

Lawlessness

Lawlessness is the antithesis of the ordered state: it is wild power, a construct embedded deeply in the norms of governance. As emphasized by sociologists from Ibn Khaldun to James Scott, most leaders of states are deeply fearful of lawlessness. A possible date for the dawning of the 'age of disorder' is an article by Robert Kaplan, 'The Coming Anarchy' (1994). This helped spark the fear of disorder in the U.S. leadership, directly contributing to the State Failure Task Force (Esty et al. 1995) and the western preoccupation with 'failed' and 'fragile' states.

The political science fixation with institutions and laws overlooks its twin of an enduring set of practices that are an alternative to stateness, and in some cases its opposite. In Europe, India and China, and in settled and agrarian systems such as Egypt and Ethiopia, the 'other' has historically been the unsettled barbarian, including the nomads of the steppe and the desert, the woodsmen and outlaws, and the pirates and seafaring raiders. Before modern times, the reach of ordered states waxed and waned, and the peoples who lived beyond the reach of settled power were often more numerous and prosperous (Scott 2017). All cultures have their Robin Hood figures; social bandits at the margins who represent an ethic of resistance and critique. The repurposing of the word 'buccaneer' in the English political vocabulary, from 17th century pirates authorized by the Crown to plunder colonial rivals, to bold political-commercial entrepreneurs today, reflects this ambivalence. Outlaws, pirates and nomads occasionally capture institutional power, and sometimes in turn are tamed by it: examples include the Mongols, the Vikings and the Arab Bedouins. However, before celebrating brigandage and raiding as a means for upwards social mobility, it is worth remembering the lawless individuals who seize power—whether their origins are from within the polity or without—are usually of aristocratic lineage. Arab political culture is unusual in that it still retains elements of that nomadic ethic (Mackintosh-Smith 2018). This is signified by the double meaning of the word *'arab* itself—simultaneously a somewhat derogatory term used to describe Bedouins, while also owned and used by those who lay claim to the riches of Arab language, culture and genealogy.

In north America the archetypical lawless figure is the frontiersman, historically seamless with the slaver, gunslinger vigilante, cowboy-ranger who is the exterminator of the indigenous people, deeply distrustful of any institutions beyond the local. American political culture is distinct in that such 'outlaw' figures are celebrated, along with their guns, symbolized by the passionate support for the Second Amendment to the Constitution that guarantees the right to bear arms (Dunbar-Ortiz 2018). Since November 2016, metropolitan U.S. political culture is struggling with the trauma of the elevation of such normative lawlessness to the apex of power and having a president who embraces its practitioners. This is less exceptional than metropolitan U.S. culture is ready to accept, in that political leaders around the world have long made use of extra-legal elements to get their way.

Epidemic disease is in itself a manifestation of disorder and also the occasion for defining a state disciplinary order. Foucault outlined the two different public faces of the plague, as ideal types. One was the dramatic or literary festival, which he depicts as the place and time in which normal rules were suspended and every transgression was permitted. The other was its opposite, the 'political dream of the plague', which was the penetration of surveillance and rule-enforcement into the smallest details of everyday life (Foucault 1997, pp. 197-198). He writes: 'Underlying disciplinary projects the image of the plague stands for all forms of confusion and disorder; just as the image of the leper, cut off from all human contact, underlies projects of exclusion.' (p. 199) The state disciplinary order imposed in the name of controlling epidemic disease requires an intrusive policing, which in turn defines and invites the lawlessness of those who refuse to comply. Accounts of plagues from Boccacio to Defoe are full of stories of the poor who preferred taking their chances with infection when the alternative was the certainty of loss of livelihood and hunger. When cholera—Europe's 19th century plague—broke out it often sparked violent riots and resistance, and rulers responded by imposing martial law.

Chaos

As well as its vernacular, everyday sense, *chaos* has a particular meaning in the physical sciences. It refers to behavior that is unpredictable and apparently random, owing to great sensitivity to small changes in initial conditions but which is nonetheless fully determined. A chaotic system can be understood but is very hard to predict. The relatively simple interaction between two regular systems operating on different frequencies, can generate extraordinarily complex, chaotic systems.

A single pendulum is among the most regular kinetic movements, so predictable that it can be used for timekeeping. Two linked pendula are very complex to model; their movement is highly complex and even tiny variations in initial conditions lead to very diverse patterns. Three linked pendula are so chaotic that even a supercomputer cannot readily compute their movements beyond the first few swings. Many systems in the natural world (such as the weather) are chaotic in this sense. Socio-political systems are also, and the example of the linked pendula shows how improbable it is that even the most sophisticated quantitative political science will be able to make any reliable predictions.

A rule-governed, institutionalized political system may also become so complex that it is opaque to its creators.

The chaotic movement of a liquid or gas can be *turbulent*, in that it retains a recognizable structure over time, while being unpredictable over short periods. Turbulent flow is contrasted with smooth, laminar flow. Turbulence can be episodic or situational. Turbulence in a second-order system can produced through the operation of larger systems that are not intrinsically turbulent; the subordinate system can be said to be *precarious*. In chemistry, *volatility* refers to how readily a substance vaporizes or changes state from liquid to gas. This is qualitatively different from even the most serious turbulence; a distinction that is useful in the vocabulary of disorder.

Physical systems of this kind exhibit 'first order' chaos. In 'second order' chaotic systems, behavior is also influenced by the observer. Thus, the weather is a first order chaotic system, but when technology such as cloud-seeding allows humans to intervene in weather systems, it will become second order chaotic.

Markets are chaotic in all these senses: in their steady state, markets are turbulent, but they are also prone to systemic changes (for example due to technological innovation) which makes them volatile (in the sense used here rather than the everyday sense), and market behavior is strongly influenced by the actions of market traders and regulators acting on the basis of information and prediction. Political economies based on transactional politics, such as the political marketplace (de Waal 2015) or those that function in the 'deal space' (Pritchett, Sen and Werker 2018) may be chaotic (turbulent, volatile and second order) in these senses.

A rule-governed, institutionalized political system may also become so complex that it is opaque to its creators. This is increasingly an issue with technical, economic, and governance systems being administered through an interface of artificial intelligence and humans, with the humans either not fully understanding what the AI can do, or being inattentive or indifferent. This level of complexity may be such that it (in our mathematical sense) chaotic. A small and unexpected factor (change in initial conditions), internal or external, can generate open chaos. (This is an example of how fragility (in the everyday sense) may be quite distinct from the 'open' fragility (equivalent to failure) in the sense of the fragile states paradigm.)

Thomas Homer Dixon (2006) gives the example of what, he speculates, was the final overreach of the most complex piece of social and material engineering of the ancient world, namely the huge 'trilithon' stones at the Roman temple of Baalbeck, Lebanon. The temple is an extraordinary piece of precision engineering, and the stones are the hugest monoliths of the era, which were ultimately too heavy to be hoisted into place. Homer-Dixon wonders what possessed the Romans to try to build this vast temple and draws a moral for the contemporary world.

> [The rock] was a powerful symbol of the exhaustion of an enormous social and political enterprise. It was an enduring symbol of overreach…. [The Roman Empire] couldn't see the multiple stresses converging on it; that it was bounded by the exigencies of the

> natural world; and that, as complexities and entrenched power accumulated, it was inexorably becoming a static, brittle system. (pp. 307-8)

One contemporary example of domesticated chaos might be the U.S. Department of Defense: its administrative and financial systems are so complex that they have proved impossible to audit (Taibbi 2019). It is suitably ironic that the 'unknown unknowns' so poetically described by a U.S. Secretary of Defense can be applied, not just to the dangers of terrorist attack on the homeland, but to the functioning of the institution over which he was presiding.

A frightening example is the dangers of 'normal accidents' causing nuclear explosions or nuclear war. Eric Schlosser, who compiled a minute-by-minute account of the accident involving a Titan II nuclear missile at Damascus, Arkansas, in September 1980, describes how it was set in motion by a trivial event (a technician dropping a tool during routine maintenance), which struck a missile's fuel tank at a crucially bad angle, compounded by the way in which a tightly-coupled and interactive system rapidly meant that the danger escalated (the leaked fuel in the enclosed rocket chamber was likely to ignite as the temperature rose), and the lack of clear on-the-spot information and an inflexible response system. None of these were singularly to blame, especially not the 21-year old whose grip on his wrench slipped. Schlosser concludes that, by good fortune, 'none of those leaks and accidents led to a nuclear disaster. But if one had, the disaster wouldn't have been inexplicable or hard to comprehend. It would have made perfect sense.' (Schlosser 2014, p. 464)

Biological weapons systems are prime candidates for normal accidents that can turn calamitous with an unlucky sequence of mishaps. So too advanced virological research, which has the special twist that its highest-altitude climbers are driven not only by intellectual thrill but also by the noble motive of stopping the deadliest diseases. These have happened. Bio-weapons specialist Martin Furmanski writes, 'Many laboratory escapes of high-consequence pathogens have occurred, resulting in transmission beyond laboratory personnel. Ironically, these laboratories were working with pathogens to prevent the very outbreaks they ultimately caused. For that reason, the tragic consequences have been called "self-fulfilling prophecies".' (Furmanski 2014). And indeed, there is a case, not well-known but generally accepted among virologists, of a laboratory virus going pandemic. This happened in 1977, when a strain of H1N1 influenza virus suddenly reappeared after a 25-year absence, released accidently from a bioweapons laboratory in either Russia or China (Wertheim 2010). Fortunately, it was not a virulent strain and did not cause many deaths. Research virologists are fiercely protective of their research and do not like to acknowledge these dangers (Lentzos 2020).

Another example is the extra dimension of complexity that arises from the development of specialized artificial intelligence, networking both computers and humans, using the Internet. Hyper-capable generalized intelligence robots have been widely feared and forecast for half a century, but have yet to materialize, and there is good reason to suspect that these fears are a distraction from the truly significant role of computational power. What have materialized are hybrid human-computational mechanisms—today's 'superminds' (Malone 2018)—which put advanced digital powers selectively in the hands of well-placed and powerful organizations and individuals. Inserted into the complex ('chaotic') informational ecology that is an advanced democracy, such networked hybrid human-robotic mechanisms can make a democratic system malfunction. The principal danger is pervasive surveillance that provides unprecedented societal control to security agencies. Malfunction can also be engineered through malicious intervention (the types of disinformation that characterized the Brexit referendum and the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign) or through the endogenous process whereby the median voter switches to a 'bad' posture and the election reproduces that result at scale.

The Pentagon's finances, virological research and electoral ecosystems can be seen as exemplars of contemporary risk society—the reality that the risk and disorder is not 'out there' but is intrinsic to the advances of our 'second modernity' (Beck 2007).

Incommensurability

Incommensurability refers to the apparent disorder, or unintelligibility, that occurs when shifting from one set of 'rules of the game' to another. Anglo-Saxon political scientists tend to be monolingual, both literally and figuratively. The figurative monolingualism is that there is only one set of 'rules of the game'; that norm

institutions are homogenous.

The key assumption in the established paradigm is that normatively Weberian state institutions are at the center and are systematically bringing more socio-political worlds into its orbit. However, this assumption involves a linguistic sleight of hand so routine and familiar that it is almost always overlooked. This is a switch from the concept of a political institution as a norm (cf. Douglas 1986; North 1991) to the different, conventional idea of a formal institution. Douglass North's definition of institutions is 'the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic, and social interaction. They consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct), and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights).' (North 1991, p. 97). In subsequent writings, North himself assumes that the best institutions are formal western ones, namely hierarchical rule-governed bureaucracies for the administration of public affairs, and almost all who follow in his footsteps, such as Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) make the same assumption. It is a *non sequitur* grounded in modern Anglo-Saxon intuition, the same intuition that captivated Gellner (1983). In reality, Anglo-Saxon political and economic institutions represent one particular form of institutionalized political life, which has been notably successful, but it is an elementary logical error to assume it is the only possible one.

As different 'rules of the game' are tried out in different parts of the world, notably East Asia, and deliver the kinds of economic development and stability that economists like, at the same time as the shortcomings of western-dictated formulae become more evident, economists and political scientists become more broad-minded in accepting what acceptable 'institutions' might look like. This is less 'disorder' than shifting towards another form of order. The shift towards illiberal peacebuilding (Collier et al. 2018) is symptomatic of the need to accommodate this reality.

Other orderings may be less legible, or involve stretching the metaphor of 'rules of the game' beyond a place where it can reasonably reach. Most importantly, there can be several different sets of rules in play.

Subaltern and post-colonial studies are replete with examples. James Scott (2009) writes of the peasantry's 'art of not being governed'. Africanist scholars describe how political orders have persisted in the face of destruction and turmoil so protracted and overwhelming, that no overt societal coherence is possible, and multiplicities of indeterminate orders are required for meaning to survive (Mbembe 2017; Guyer 2004; Vigh 2015). While the states that ostensibly preside over these societies may be 'fragile' in the sense of being incapable, violent and kleptocratic, there are elements of social organization that have proved resilient in the face of unimaginable stress—the polar opposite of 'fragility' in its everyday sense.

What most often 'works' are creative non-solutions; rather than attempting definitively to resolve the root causes or fundamental axes of conflict, they provide for contained ongoing contestation.

This line of analysis has been explored for the field of peacemaking by Jan Pospisil (2019), who develops the term 'political unsettlement', focusing on the spaces of indeterminacy in real-world peace processes. His analysis identifies the functionality of political deals and peace agreements that contain creative ambiguities, incompletely-determined provisions, and space for the coexistence of the parties through strategies such as indefinitely postponing implementation of key provisions. Pospisil concludes that 'rationalising peacebuilding along solution-based outcomes and, thus, in categories of success and failure is both misguided and problematic' (p. 204). What most often 'works' are creative non-solutions; rather than attempting definitively to resolve the root causes or fundamental axes of conflict, they provide for contained ongoing contestation.

Developing a metaphor from James Scott (1998), socio-political order can be seen as an arrangement of political transactions that works, much like a forest is an ecological system that works. A Weberian state is one variant of that: a geometrically regular plantation of a limited number of species, which sacrifices sustainability and resilience for order and short-term productivity, regulated by impersonal 'rules of the game'. There are other variations of plantation, with different rules. There are also 'wild' variants that have benefits that foresters are only belatedly coming to recognize, such as the transmission among the root

systems of different trees of microbes that play a role in resistance to stress. In these variants the transactions that keep the collectivity functional depend on individual characteristics and positions, rather than impersonal rules. (This is a rather fundamental challenge to definitions of politics that are premised on the 'rules' metaphor, c.f. Leftwich 2004). It follows that some of these 'orders' may in fact be the antithesis of 'fragility' in its everyday sense: in their adaptable, overlapping, complex way, they may be much more resilient in the face of stress than their exactly ordered counterparts. They may not deliver the kinds of long-term economic growth so desired by western policymakers, but they may turn out to be enduring.

Disorder by Design

The third cluster of forms of disorder we may call *disorder by design*. This differs from the previous manifestation in that the architect of turmoil is a ruler; his instrument is arbitrariness. Imperial powers have long used divide and rule as a strategy for sowing dissension among the targets of their colonial ambitions, and counter-insurgents have spread suspicion and conflict among rebellious societies, leaving legacies of trauma, division and tribalism (Porch 2013). Some variants of neo-patrimonialism include disorder as a form of governance (Chabal and Daloz 1999). By extension, governance systems that repress innovation, rule through fear, and keep people poor, unhealthy and ignorant are variants of rule through disorder. This in turn can be divided into distinct aspects: governing *through* disorder, governing *despite* an imposed disorder, and managing an elementary order *in the midst of* disorder.

Within the (expanded) new institutional economics framework, this can be seen as a system that prioritizes the 'deal space' as opposed to the 'rule-governed space' (Pritchett, Sen and Werker 2018), in which rules are enforced used at the discretion of the ruler: 'for my friends: anything. For my enemies: the law'. This can also be conceptualized as shifting corruption from the margins of political order to its center, the totem and taboo of the exercise of 'real' power.

Disruption

Lastly we have *(revolutionary) disruption*. On the political left, there is a long history of faith in the idea that a new order will arise from revolutionary chaos. One of the clearest exponents of such ideas was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who proposed that virtue would prevail in a state of nature. Numerous leftists who believed that it was necessary only to bring down the established order for a socialist Utopia to arise spontaneously, and this was the motivation for the Russian anarchists in the late 19th century. Antonio Gramsci's words much-quoted words from the 1920s reflect the leftist belief that a new order would certainly arise in due course, but perhaps not just yet: 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying but the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.'

A right-wing version of the doctrine that disruption would usher in positive transformation informed the American administrators of Iraq in 2003: they fervently believed that if the institutions of dictatorship were dismantled, liberal democracy would automatically follow, as the end of history had been reached. A subsequent variant is that disruption is not the precursor to a transformed new order but rather to ongoing cycles of disruption—indefinite disorder.

On the right, in fact, 'disruption' has migrated from being a negatively marked word to a term of acclaim, a post-democratic update on Schumpeter's 'creative destruction' of the industrial capitalist era. In the writings of Ayn Rand and her followers, disruption and de-institutionalization are ideologically constructed as liberty and renewal. Wolfgang Streeck (2016) dubs what will follow as 'the age of entropy'. Borrowing from Gramsci's morbid 'interregnum', he suggests that the current trajectory is towards 'a prolonged period of social entropy, or disorder (and precisely for this reason a period of uncertainty and indeterminacy).' (p. 13). Applying the categories of disorder developed in this paper, this is a combination of chaos, incommensurability and instrumentalized disorder, making a 'post-social society'. Streeck continues: 'A society in interregnum, in other words, would be a *de-institutionalized* or *under-institutionalized* society, one in which expectations can be stabilized only for a short time by local improvisation, and which for this very reason is essentially ungovernable. (pp. 13-14, emphasis in original)

Streeck's prognostication is for Europe and America, not places conventionally seen as 'fragile'. Here we run into a cluster of related challenges: bringing subaltern and post-colonial histories to the global center, transcending the limits of methodological nationalism, and recognizing 'theory from the South' (Comaroff

and Comaroff 2011). But the nexus of disruption, the meltdown of institutions, and the orders that emerge therefrom, are more clearly in focus in subaltern open systems. Mahmood Mamdani (2015) critiques American settler colonialism from an African (and in particular South African) vantage point, showing how techniques of law and administration were shared across colonialisms. America is an exemplar of a settler state, but unlike South Africa, it has yet to debate publicly the question of decolonization. Achille Mbembe (2017) observes that the 'Black' experience of the power of capitalism to dissolve social relations and subordinate humanity to a commodity, is not confined to the racially- and geographically-defined margins, but is also occurring as capitalism colonizes its own centers. Similarly, the framework of the 'political marketplace' (de Waal 2015), while stimulated by experience of political operatives in the Horn of Africa, is primarily a theory of the commodification of politics and as such is applicable to Washington DC, London, and the transnational political-economic elite. Syndromes of corruption in poorer countries are becoming replicated in richer ones (Johnston 2005; Milanović 2019). Escalating inequality of income and (even more so) asset ownership, associated with the growth of a globalized ultra-wealthy class, able to use its mobile capital to purchase governmental power across the world in an opportunistic fashion, also means that the geographical definition of state fragility has at minimum to be leavened with a transnational, class-framed analysis of pervasive economic and governance precarity.

The patterns and pathologies of global power can be seen 'in the raw' in these subaltern open political systems, especially at moments of recovery from crisis, when a radically disassembled social system and political economy is reconstituted in a manner that bears the imprint of the forces of the day. Robert Bates (2008) describes how 'things fell apart' in late 20th century Africa: a shock brought about by economic crisis exacerbated by austerity measures, that so disrupted the basics of any social contract that the fundamentals of state function (or lack of) were nakedly exposed. African countries recovered, but in a form molded by the transactional politics of short-term political survival, in which formal institutions were subordinate to the exigencies of the political marketplace (de Waal 2015). The generation that came of age before the crises of the 1980s is possessed by nostalgia for the modernity that has slipped beyond their reach (Ferguson 2006).

A third variant on this is Ulrich Beck's concept of *metamorphosis* (Beck 2016). This builds on his formulation of 'risk society' and, among other things, injects the notion of 'emancipatory catastrophe' (p. 115). One example is how World War II spurred the creation of far-reaching multilateral world order; another is how Hurricane Katrina revealed the racial profile of vulnerability to calamity in New Orleans. There are other cases in which imminent societal collapse has prompted societies to pull themselves back from the brink, such as the mobilization of the northern Ethiopian peasantry to struggle against famine and oppression by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front in the depths of mass starvation in 1984-85 (de Waal 1997, pp. 127-30) and the Sudanese popular uprising against the regime of Omar al-Bashir and his immediate successors in the Transitional Military Council during 2019. We can share Beck's aspiration that climate change and its massive global bads will prompt far-reaching social, political and economic reform. However, the record suggests that rejuvenation in the face of collective near-death experience, while not unheard of, is rare.

FOUR LOGICS OF (DE-) INSTITUTIONALIZATION

In this section I turn to four kinds of disruption; each can be a logic of de- or re-institutionalization, and of emancipation or repression, or indeed all of the above at the same time.

Calamity

Natural disasters—earthquakes and tsunamis, floods or droughts, pest infestations, epidemics—can disrupt a society, and have often done so in the past. Such calamities commonly serve as a trigger to bring about a crisis that has roots in, and is shaped by, deeper societal faultlines. Almost always, it is the poor who suffer most in a disaster—they are less able to escape, they lack savings or financial instruments to protect their assets, their social networks are less able to assist them, their property is less likely to be insured or protected or eligible for official compensation. The disruption that occurs in the wake of disaster is commonly an opportunity for those in power to impose a new order. Very occasionally, a calamity may be an opportunity for emancipatory change, when (for example) a hike in the price of staple food or a famine calls unmistakable attention to the moral bankruptcy of a political order.

In the modern period, calamities have increasingly become the outcome of political economic inequities and political and military decision, though typically camouflaged in dominant narratives so as to lay responsibility for their plight on the victims. This happens within and across countries. Small, weak societies on the margins of the world political economy may be precarious, exposed to disruption by the ‘killer apps’ (cf. Ferguson 2011) of the more powerful. A society exposed to such disruptions over a long period cannot be expected to remain cohesive.

In the era of climate change and other ecological disruption, including pandemic zoonotic pathogens, speaking of ‘natural’ calamity is of course a misnomer. The Anthropocene, brought about by humanity’s norms and practices, entails the normalization of the exception. In the now-passing Holocene era, nature’s general benevolence could be assumed; in the Anthropocene this is no longer. Democratic norms and institutions face the paradox that they have been built, invariably, on the assumption of ever-growing human welfare, but the limits of that model are being dangerously illuminated. To return to Beck, we have constituted the risks through our progress in developing ever-more powerful institutions.

Violence can be used to coerce and terrorize, but it can also be used to tear down the instruments of control and fear—albeit with attendant dangers.

Violence

Violence is multiple and varied; it can create order and it can destroy; it can create through destruction, and it can be an absolute net loss to any forms of order. Violence can be used to coerce and terrorize, but it can also be used to tear down the instruments of control and fear—albeit with attendant dangers. Violence is commonly part of the process that creates and defines ethnic groups and boundaries, administrative tribes, and nation-states. War-making is a fundamental activity in the making of political order, both through disciplining members of the in-group and through creating a polarity between insiders and outsiders.

There is, however, a peculiar characteristic of violence, which is that (in the words of Don Donham) violence is ‘red’: it has an irreducible quality, and its meaning can often be adduced only after the fact (2006, p. 18). Large-scale violence can distort time and can confuse, even invert, cause and effect. It is commonly assumed that ferocious violence requires a comparably profound cause, usually deep hatred between groups. At the time, however, this may not be evident: these meanings may be constructed in the aftermath (perhaps very rapidly) and then projected back in time to become the purported cause. By the time that reporters, politicians, and political scientists arrive on the scene, the narrative has already been constructed, and the violence is framed institutionally. Identities, group boundaries, and political oppositions have been created or reconfigured. In this manner, organized violence is a process of re-institutionalization.

The dead do not speak, and victims’ stories may emerge very slowly and in subaltern scripts. Violence can be fundamentally disruptive; acts of killing can transgress and destroy. The technologies of violence can be widely owned across society and in a sense be ‘democratic’. Perhaps the most significant (and, among political scientists, the least studied) are elite killings. Given that political rules are crafted by members of the political elite, and generally speaking serve their interests, the deliberate killing (by assassination, execution, lethal purge or kinetic action against high-value targets identified as terrorists) of members of that elite, are limiting cases of political rules (de Waal 2020).

Insofar as organized violence between entities such as nation-states or communities is structured, its ordering is entangled in the mechanisms for its resolution. Wars have long been fought in manner that provides for the terms of negotiating the subsequent peace treaty; inter-communal conflicts among pastoralists are organized so that compensation can be paid afterwards; organized crime and law enforcement commonly function in symbiosis, as do smugglers and coastguards, poachers and gamekeepers.

The delicate balance between ordering and disordering—and the 21st century tilt towards the latter—is illustrated by contemporary peace processes in Africa and the greater Middle East and the political settle-

ments to which they aspire. In a subaltern open political system, an armed conflict is a manifestation of most if not all the five forms of disorder listed in this paper, and moreover tends to intersect with the disruptions causes by natural hazards, markets and democratic activism. Violence is organized and disorderly, political and criminal, ideological and opportunistic, collective and inter-personal, and is used to accumulate assets and to destroy. A peace process involves sorting the complexities of armed conflict into a manageable hierarchy, and determining what kinds of violence (by who, against whom) matters—and by implication, what kinds of violence don't matter (or don't matter so much).

The peace process is a path-dependent ordering mechanism. Classically, it begins with a 'mutually hurting stalemate' when a conflict has 'ripened' so that the belligerents' interests can no longer be served by fighting (Zartman 2001). The first concrete step is a ceasefire, that recognizes organized armed groups that control territory and makes them the privileged interlocutors for the next stage. Given that territorial control is usually in the hands of ethnic or sectarian armed groups, this frames the conflict in ethnic or sectarian terms and predisposes towards a territorial consociational formula as a solution. At each stage, some political organizations and issues will be given primacy over others: armed groups over civic organizations, power-sharing over civil rights, accommodating military commanders over seeking accountability for whatever crimes they may have committed. The pragmatics of peacemaking are s notoriously awkward fit with the liberal principles and progressive sensibilities of peacemakers, with the citizens of the war-ravaged country torn between their need for a quick, orderly deal and their aspirations for a democratic future. The texts of peace agreements are typically structured so as to indicate an orderly progressing from ceasefire to interim power-sharing to medium term democratic transformation.

The complex, fluid and unpredictable nature of violent politics in a subaltern open system rarely allows for such an orderly progression. In a turbulent environment, no conflict is ever 'ripe' and there is never a stalemate: even the weakest belligerent has a rationale for hanging on in the hope that untoward events will allow for another roll of the dice. The mediator must therefore become proactive, corralling the actors, interests and issues into a framework of convergent interests. This imposes a template on an intrinsically disordered, fractious and unpredictable reality. As such it is a process of exclusion. A rigid process and agreement run the risk that the groups or issues that are excluded will reappear in a violent form, only this time defined as spoilers or criminals. It is a commonplace to observe that the conclusion of a peace agreement witnesses violence morphing into new forms. If a successful state-building exercise follows, then the casualties of the peace will be forgotten, and violence involved in suppressing them will not matter politically.

But in the age of disorder, the prospects of such a well-structured outcome have become more remote. Peace processes have become more hazardous, their political and military risks harder to calculate. The better outcomes are political *un*settlement: open-ended arrangements that allow for the ongoing management of issues that are too hard or complicated to resolve (Bell and Pospisil 2017). The more skilled mediators—or those schooled by the recursive cycle of negotiating and renegotiating texts so as to accommodate articulate civic activists and the perils of so-called 'spoilers' as well as to adjust to changing circumstances—find ways of creatively managing 'non-solutions' (Pospisil 2019).

Markets

The logic of the market is one of creative destruction—creating a new set of rules and norms. Any marketplace functions as an institution with known rules. Although economists model markets as operating on the basis of individual rational actors (and these frameworks have tremendous explanatory purchase), they can also be seen as operating through the socialized dispositions of the traders themselves. The logic of capitalism, however, corrodes social relations and norms, reducing them to monetary values. Markets are vulnerable to the logic of the concentration of capital in the hands of monopolists, and also to the contrary process of innovative disruption, whereby technological progress creatively destroys the existing industrial order. Capitalist markets are both emancipatory (destroying serfdom and shaking up social hierarchies) and regressive (concentrating unprecedented power in the hands of the winners).

The logic of the market has led to the commodification of labor, land, time, human attention, life-forms and political power itself. The consequence is both introduction of market institutions into arenas where it had

not gone before, and the exposure of these arenas to the disruptive dynamics of market forces.

The marketization of politics is the process whereby the quanta of political power (political office, law-making and law-enforcement, political allegiances, and services ranging from media, legal advice and representation, campaigning skills, and security) are subject to the laws of supply and demand. This can liberate individuals from the straitjacket of patrimonial hierarchies and singular ethnic identities, but also place them at the mercy of oligarchs whose private fortunes have bought them political power. The members of this elite share a common socialization through elite private education, privileged lifestyle and use of secrecy jurisdictions for their financial affairs. Theirs is a cosmopolitan, dollarized set of norm institutions. Their ultimate manifestation is the 'sovereign individual' who escapes the shackles of that taxes them to provide services for the citizenry. According to the prophets of this new order, James Davidson and William Rees-Mogg:

> The new Sovereign Individual will operate like the gods of myth in the same physical environment as the ordinary, subject citizen, but in a separate realm politically. Commanding vastly greater resources and beyond the reach of many forms of compulsion, the Sovereign Individual will redesign governments and reconfigure economies in the new millennium. The full implications of this change are all but unimaginable. (1999, p. 20)

The nature of capitalist markets allows for rules to be broken (through innovation or crime): the political marketplace is *intrinsically* disruptive. The particular challenge of today is that the instruments of disruption are overwhelmingly in the hands of those who have exited from any wider norms of societal responsibility.

Democracy

A constitutional democracy can be defined as the rule of law, not of individual persons. A liberal democracy is the ultimate 'open access order' (North, Wallis and Weingast 2009) and thus the highest form of both norm and formal institutionalization. It is also an open society that embraces change wrought by the creativity of human creativity (Popper 1945) and protects rights to material and intellectual property (Hayek 1944). Popperian political liberalism and Hayekian economic neo-liberalism were both anti-totalitarian projects, seeking to rescue a cosmopolitan liberalism from the ruins of the problematic and doomed imperial former custodian of those norms. Transplanted from the defensive agenda of mid-20th century Europe to the unbridled confidence of late 20th century America, neo-liberalism has incubated the commodification of political power. Twinned with the militarism of both interventionist liberals and neo-conservatives, the consequence has been undemocratic: the corrosion of the liberal egalitarian institutionalization of political order.

Arguably, disruption is the fundamental character of democratic power, an anarchic subversion of any entitlement to rule on the basis of social order (birth, wealth, conquest or power to coerce). In the words of Jacques Rancière, democratic power is 'simply the power peculiar to those who have no more entitlements to govern than to submit' (2014, pp. 46-7). In Rancière's reading, democracy is inherently disruptive and heterotopic, resistant to any institutional or juridico-political formulation, challenging oligarchic manifestations of power in whatever configuration they occur.

Law is Janus-faced; it is both an instrument of control and repression, but also contains openings for challenging order and emancipating people from the authority to which they have been subject. The *idea* of law—what we might call 'lawness'—is something precious for those who live in precarious conditions, onto which they hold tenaciously. The Hobbesian-Schmittian tradition of political philosophy asserts that law derives from authority rather than truth; but the reality of law in post-colonial and disordered contexts is that it is plural, contested 'from below' and can be a mechanism for both re-ordering and disordering (Ibreck 2019).

However, this begs the question, if such a disruptive capability is to be truly *democratic*, must it not be systemically resistant to the logics of violence or the political market? To assert that democracy is fundamentally subversive is an energizing polemical flourish or an emancipatory insurgent agenda, but only in a context in which there is a sound institutional order that protects not just individuals, but society itself, from calamity, violence and rampant commodification.

Liberal democracy and neo-liberal capitalism create

public goods when constrained by norms and institutions; when they break those bounds, the disruption is problematic for democracy itself. We see this in those subaltern open political systems—'fragile states'—where coherent and humane political orders are unsustainable.

CONCLUSIONS: THE AGE OF DISORDER

Any exploration of disorder invites, or even embraces, incoherence. This foray into charting the different dimensions, dynamics and logics of ordering and disordering transgressed the boundaries of disciplines and methods. Principally, it illuminated how little we know about the topic, and the pressing need to articulate what hegemonic uncertainty might mean, in light of the co-occurrence of the disordered Anthropocene and the eclipse of institutional modernity by normatively disruptive agendas and political markets. The main conclusion is an enjoinder to explore this dark star of wild power that is the joint center of our political-scientific planetary system.

The most immediate global disruption is the pandemic coronavirus. The biggest global threat, without question, is planetary environmental calamity—the end to the climatic stability of the Holocene, the era during which human society developed. The disordered Anthropocene threatens this: among other things it unravels the risk-management frameworks on which our current political and economic order is constructed. The formulation of the 'risk society' by Ulrich Beck (2016) and Sabine Selchow (2014) is particularly relevant. Selchow observes that modern industrial society has not only produced scientific knowledge, but in ordering the world has also produced *non-knowledge* in depth. This does not consist of knowledge that is absent today pending scientific advance—it is not things that we don't know *yet*—but those things that we don't know we don't know, which are excluded from our horizons of knowledge by the ways in which we have institutionalized our learning (p. 78). Having quoted Selchow, Beck writes, 'To put it in other words: the notion of world risk society can be understood as the sum of the problems, for which there is no institutional answer.' (p. 68) He continues with an explicit challenge to the possibility of constructing a grand theory in the Anthropocene: 'It is not possible to conceptualize the metamorphosis of the world by following the universalistic understanding of theory, because the notion of universalistic theory excludes what is analytically at stake here—the change of universal assumptions.' (p. 74)

The societies that are most sensitive to the tremors of the age of disorder are those subaltern open political systems at just beyond the frontiers of the metropolitan regions of Europe and North America. Here we see most clearly the full array of forms of disorder, created and reproduced through the exigencies of the politics of survival. The failure of the state-building model is a harbinger of the shift in the balance of forces, in which the logics of the political market and the arbitrary efficacies of violence prevail over the teleology of state formation. The state as destination is an artefact of the period that is now past.

The age of disorder is historically constituted, emerging from the overreach of the norms, logics and institutions that made possible the extraordinary achievements of prosperity and order in the late 20th century. Disorder is embedded in the triumph of modernity and the political ascendancy of its discontents. A common thread among diverse contemporary political thinkers and public intellectuals is the welcoming of disruption and disordering, whether in an emancipatory manner (as with Beck and Rancière), an elitist escapism (as with Davidson and Rees-Mogg) or an angry nostalgic denialism (so prevalent among white nationalists).

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