Beyond State : drafting a prospective anthropology

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This article proposes the outline of a prospective of the near future, which I hope to show as clearly as possible its anchoring in the discipline of anthropology - and more particularly in the study of the deep past of human societies.

We will first discuss the research program to which this work relates and especially its epistemological regime ; then we will discuss the deep history of state institutions and their likely future ; and finally we will articulate a stylized image of an upcoming post-state society and its present roots.

In addition to the scientific value it claims to have, this document hopes to show the reader the urgent need to abandon the fiction of humans as masters of nature ; and to build today the institutions of a sustainable society.

Cultural evolution, or anthropology as a life science

In order to discuss the near future of humanity, it is first of all necessary to explain how the methodological and epistemological approach that we adopt makes it possible to speak of it as a known object - that is to say, to articulate prospective knowledge about the dynamics affecting the highly complex system that constitutes a contemporary human society.

An a priori objection may be raised to such an approach. Because of the great richness of institutions, cultures, and human behaviour, no mathematical understanding is possible, and any "prediction" would therefore have to be based on necessarily reductive models, and would consequently be of doubtful fragility. I would even agree with this : on the sole basis of the topology of human social networks, one could think that social dynamics are maximally contingent (28; 5). So much for the fictitious discipline of psychohistory - which pretends to guess political decisions in advance on the basis, one imagines, of fine models of human behaviour and the institutions of its time.

The notion of "prediction" is not, however, limited to the case of the laboratory scientist who, thanks to his knowledge of the laws of nature, is able to describe in advance the behaviour of his object. On the contrary, biologists or anthropologists admit to working in total obscurity concerning the intricacy of the phenomena they study. This does not prevent them from articulating minimal explanations of the phenomena they observe, and from testing these explanations on experimental frameworks, empirical methodologies, or data sets to which they have access.

This notion of prediction in the weak sense simply amounts to testing, in an appropriate instrumental framework, the validity of our representations concerning the mechanisms structuring the studied phenomenon - representations that can take the form of an elaborate mathematical framework, a table corner equation, a stylized fact, or even a commented drawing. It is thus an ontological commitment to show the integration of our subject of study in the ecology of causal networks that constitutes "nature" in the Aristotelian sense, rather than an anchoring in an intricate mathematical formalism where the prediction of the future is only a matter of calculation.

In this respect, it is interesting to look at evolutionary sciences which - although they have the public credit of a "hard" science as experimentally anchored as it is infallible in its

discourse - today resist any serious attempt at formal mathematical translation. Although the theoretical framework of population genetics - very well formalized by the theorists of the second half of the twentieth century - is the most well-known part of these disciplines, its limitations have become increasingly clear since the 1980s : (27; 48). If one wanted to present the "mathematical" content of evolutionary sciences today, one would be drowned by the quantity of models representing selection dynamics in different topologies, developmental genetic networks, cultural or environmental heritabilities, ecological networks with varied structural properties... Moreover, it would be difficult to propose general mathematical models of how genetic recombination allows the generation of innovative phenotypes, or even the emergence of new evolutionary units through the alliance of pre-existing entities (56).

What builds the richness of this discipline is not the simple quantity of models associated with it, it is the ecology of concepts and case studies allowing the analysis of the living according to the following fundamental intuition : form follows function - but in a way constrained by the representation and transmission of the information defining this form (13). This structuring intuition, whether we like it or not, does not depend in any way on the material substrate of DNA (33) - even if it was the study of it that re-established in the 1960s the dominance of the Darwinian vision of evolution (11). Human culture, itself inherited due to the advanced capacity of humans to represent and transmit complex information (32), and structuring the life of our species in its smallest aspects, can itself be studied through the prism of evolutionary science (38).

Such an approach cannot be reduced to what Andler calls "neo-naturalism" (2), i.e. a call to re-found the human and social sciences on the basis of the latest knowledge in cognitive and evolutionary psychology - a call whose insistence may border on denial of their purpose. On the contrary, dominant approaches to cultural evolution explicitly involve language, institutions, techniques and other irreducibly cultural or social phenomena in its conception of human evolution. Cultural and social ethnography, while serving specific theoretical purposes, is centrally present in these approaches.

The work of Smith et al. (54), unanimously acclaimed for its rigour and scope, is based, for example, on a field observation of storytelling behaviour in an ethnic group of hunter-gatherers, and shows its functional character for the social group (the tales being semantically oriented towards the transmission of social norms, and effectively resulting in increased social cohesion) as well as the basis for their stability in the population (competent storytellers enjoying a high social status, and therefore having a strong capacity to transmit their genetic and cultural heritage). It thus address, in the case of storytelling, three of Tinbergen's four questions (8) structuring the evolutionary study of a phenomenon : what is the function that can be attributed to it? How does it fulfil it? how does it develop during the life of an individual¹? The fourth, the evolutionary history of storytelling in the human species, remains of course inaccessible to the ethnographic approach.

It is well beyond the mandate of this review to develop a state of the art addressing the current debates on the mechanisms of heritability of cultural information, on the fundamental unity of its transmission, and on the modalities of selection of associated traits. Each of these issues is, however, fundamental to the formalization of approaches to cultural evolution, and it would be wrong of me to suggest that the very viability of a unified theory of cultural evolution does not depend on the resolution of these same debates that I choose to obscure here. It will therefore not be possible for me in the remainder of this paper to rely on hypothetical stone-carved "laws" of cultural evolution. However, the framework of this discipline will allow me to draw on some of the profound qualitative concepts that have emerged in evolutionary science, which themselves will support and formalize my fundamental assertion that knowledge of the past of the human species informs us about its future.

For example, the detailed study of the correspondence between the genetic material of an organism and the characteristics it acquires during its development has led to the emergence of the concept of "modularity" (69), describing the way in which certain functional

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1. Although there is no individual with a well-defined life cycle in this case, I consider that explaining the stability of the trait in the population is a relevant translation.

ensembles are systematically expressed in concert, in a way that is robust to environmental mutations and variations. An example is the members of a vertebrate which, although their number, size or nature can be manipulated through genetic modification, they all retain a similar structure. This notion, although it remains formally vague, is widely recognized as fundamental in the study of the emergence of new traits at the species level (47). It is in fact modularity that allows the identification within an organism of (more or less) delimited functional ensembles, which retain their singularity despite the complex operations of expression, interaction or recombination that they undergo during the life of an individual or the evolution of a species. To take an example closer to our present subject, it is generally accepted that the visual cognition of writing has recruited ancestral cognitive mechanisms, thus modifying the function without modifying the structure (40).

This fundamental notion of modularity, which is associated in the literature with the biological and cognitive sciences, we will recruit it within the framework of historical anthropology in order to motivate the conception of a limited form of structural permanence of social forms that have emerged in the course of human history. For example, we mentioned above the coordinating function of language, and more particularly of storytelling behaviour, in hunter-gatherer societies. The notion of modularity allows us to formulate the hypothesis of a maintenance of this function in contemporary state societies - and this despite the extreme ecological and structural difference between these societies, and the great diversity of contemporary expressions of storytelling behaviour (one can think of the political use of the term, but also of all existing forms of literature, audiovisual production, video games, theatre or artistic performance...). More precisely, it allows us to postulate that the different forms that storytelling takes today have emerged in the course of human history from discrete variations (in their function or structure) around ancestral forms, and are *a priori* understandable as belonging to the same functional structure recruited from a wide diversity of media and social structures.

It is with this concept of modularity in mind that we will look at the deep history of human societies. This will enable us to conceptualize the persistence of functions and dynamics specific to certain social forms over centuries and regime changes, and thus to understand their contemporary incarnations through the conditions in which they emerged. Although we will mobilize some other notions specific to evolutionary theory, and above all a large body of historical anthropology, it is indeed modularity that will allow us to "predict" the near future by highlighting the structural properties of the institutions that will populate it and their power relations.

The State and governance in the long time of human history

States, as conceived in the anthropological literature, constitute a family of institutions practising the extraction of resources from a servile population (mainly through taxation or forced labour) under the control of an administrative elite relying on symbolic (monumental buildings, mastery of particular rituals or languages, mythological lineage), administrative (cadastre, census) and military levers of power. These institutions, contrary to what the study of written sources or contemporary common sense suggests, are extremely marginal on the scale of humanity. They only existed for 5,000 of the 300,000 years of modern humanity's existence, and did not reach a position of dominance until the 1600s. The history of the state is thus, as anthropologist/politician James C Scott points out, a mere movement of a much richer human history - and a movement that seemed to have nothing necessary, given the pre-existence of more robust and adaptable social forms that allowed the populations concerned to achieve incomparably greater material (and, I dare speculate, spiritual) prosperity.

In line with our modularist approach, we will not be interested in the State as a singular entity, but in the way it is inserted into the long time span of the human species, and into the ecology of the various social forms that structure its activity. Our knowledge of pre-state societies is of course fragmented : archaeological or genetic sources are in fact much less precise than written sources, and do not by themselves provide a clear picture of the way of

life of the populations concerned. What we know of human history from the divergence of our lineage from that of the chimpanzees, and up to the emergence of writing, is however sufficient to sketch the nature of the dynamics that state institutions have been able to prolong or recruit.

Self-domestication and cultural evolution : the human evolutionary complex

According to an ambitious review of the field written by science journalist Nicholas Wade (68), the emergence of the human line can be linked to a drought episode that occurred five million years ago. This would have forced certain populations of forest hominids to subsist in open forests or savannahs, which are less rich in easily accessible resources and more exposed to predation. This new ecological niche may have caused greater dependence on hunting, and forced human adaptation to endurance racing (via bipedalism and sweating) but also to more elaborate forms of communication (whether for the purposes of hunting, cohesion of social groups, or other forms of collective action). Whatever the root causes, a high level of instrumental intelligence is evident in *Homo Habilis* populations, which, some two million years ago, produced complex stone tools. Archaeology shows a gradual increase in the complexity of human social and technical forms over the following millions of years, which was accompanied by a progressive brain growth and a lengthening of the juvenile period - signs of increasing specialization in learning complex tasks over the course of an individual's life.

The development of this learning niche was certainly facilitated by access to dense food resources such as meat or fruit, and later by the use of fire for cooking food, which allows less investment in digestion and thus frees up resources for cognitive development. However, it is safe to say that its central determinants were social rather than metabolic in nature. Indeed, the very possibility of a prolonged childhood depends on the presence of advanced forms of cooperation that allow the continuous allocation of resources to the child (20; 67), as well as a strong increase in life expectancy. These in turn are underpinned in the human species by a variety of regulatory mechanisms, including reciprocity (4), reputation and its consequences on the choice of sexual or economic partners (6), punishment (23), and even a fractal social structure (1); as well as the existence of social norms that facilitate the governance of the commons (material and non-material) (71). The systematic selection of psychological traits that promote socially appropriate behaviour, such as the internalization of social norms (25), decreased male aggression (72), and associated juvenile physiological traits, is sometimes referred to as the self-domestication of the human species.

This ecological (towards hunting and gathering) and cognitive (towards massive investment in learning) transition has thus been reflected in the emergence of relatively egalitarian social structures, similar in this respect to contemporary hunter-gatherer societies where the existence of reverse hierarchy mechanisms by which "the weak unite to dominate the strong" has been documented (10). This equality is by no means complete insofar as large asymmetries remain in the social status of the members of such societies. It is, however, incomparable to what is known about the slave societies that subsequently emerged, or the primate societies from which our species descends. Indeed, while physical violence remains the dominant mechanism for allocating resources in contemporary chimpanzee societies, the human species is capable of a level of coordination that allows the most brutal behaviour to be dismissed by mocking, excluding or killing individuals who resort to it (18; 72). More specifically, the transition we are talking about has been made possible by the development of extremely dense and effective forms of communication, without any real counterpart in the rest of life.

In addition to individual cognitive abilities facilitating their coordination (59), humans are indeed able to use syntactic language to exchange information, as well as to transmit complex behaviours through selective imitation. While the former has a central role in coordinating collective action (54; 55) as well as in social cohesion (21; 54), the second allowed the emergence of collective technical capital that multiplied the benefits associated with massive investment in learning (15; 42). The conjunction of new modes of information transmission

with the emergence of egalitarian societies governed by mechanisms that depend on them defines a major evolutionary transition (31; 56), i.e. an episode of emergence of new evolutionary entities responding to their own logic. In the case of the human species, it is cultural evolution that has taken precedence over genetic evolution and which, through the variety of social and technical forms it has generated, has enabled the emergence of Africa and the subsequent adaptation of different human societies to almost all the environments present on our planet (29).

In particular, the mechanisms of cultural evolution make it possible to maintain complex and diverse social structures that are essentially absent from other animal species. Far from lying on a one-dimensional spectrum between savagery and civilization, as nineteenth-century colonial anthropologists believed, human societies vary greatly in their family structure, the cosmology in which they view their social relationships (17), and their organization may even vary between the seasons of the same year. The state cannot, therefore, be seen as a necessary stage of human development. On the contrary, it has had to accomplish the dubious feat of subduing, displacing, or destroying societies that are violently hostile to hierarchy, capable of high levels of mobility as well as varied strategies of subsistence, of passive as well as violent resistance, and all this while offering as their only counterpart a brutal reduction in their standard of living (52).

Norms divergence and fragility : the forge of the primitive State

Indeed, contrary to a deep-rooted misconception, intensive cereal farming only is a viable livelihood strategy in an extreme minority of existing ecologies (mainly in floodplains such as those bordering the Nile), and it remains far less advantageous than the direct exploitation of accessible resources through hunting, fishing, and gathering. The yields associated with wild growth are indeed incomparable to those from intensive agriculture, especially since humans have long been able to develop a "wild" environment to their advantage - essentially cultivating a variety of species under optimal ecological conditions without having to invest significant amounts of labour. Indeed, the archaeological remains of sedentary farmers show a much higher level of exposure to malnutrition and famine than those of hunter-gatherers living in similar ecological contexts, in addition to an endemic prevalence of chronic pathologies linked to their repetitive work. The mobility and diversity of their livelihood strategies spares them these numerous inconveniences, in addition to making them much more resilient to climatic fluctuations or to attempts by armed gangs to monopolize their resources, as well as sparing them the brutal epidemic episodes facilitated by population density and the sharing of living space with livestock.

The emergence of the *domus*, an "evolutionary module" (to use Scott's terms) consisting of a central dwelling and a panel of species domesticated by humans, may seem mysterious in view of its extreme fragility. The thesis of a progressive scarcity of resources, which seems to explain the adoption of more varied and complex modes of subsistence during the last ice age, does not however make it possible to explain the subsequent transition to intensive agriculture. On the contrary, intensive agriculture emerged in extremely rich ecological zones such as the Mesopotamian floodplains, where pre-existing urban sedentary lifestyles prevailed. It would seem, however, that *domus* facilitates incomparably higher rates of reproduction than is permitted by a nomadic lifestyle, explaining its stability in the few ecological zones rich enough to ensure its viability. This new ecological niche, in spite of all its known costs, has continued the domestication trajectory of modern humans by introducing an extreme level of co-dependence between cultivated species and the sedentary peasant - and thus reinforcing the latter's docility, by forcing him to submit to the daily and seasonal rhythms of a single culture on which he is entirely dependent.

Scott shows how the extortion of these populations, whose way of life made them as docile as they were vulnerable to looting, was the central lever of power of the first states. Nomadic populations could easily escape from taxation or conscription, and the maintenance of varied, perishable or hidden cultures within a complex environment did not allow a central power to take advantage of them. Indeed, the first States were only able to emerge under extremely restrictive geographical conditions, which allowed large-scale cereal cultivation,

the transport of goods by river and the maintenance of servile populations in captivity. These specific conditions in no way "caused" directly the emergence of States in the societies concerned - they only allowed the more general phenomenon of inequality in human societies to take on extreme proportions.

Indeed, the egalitarianism of ancestral human societies is, as we have seen, dependent on specific mechanisms, the effectiveness of which is as relative as it is contextual. There is no evidence that these mechanisms have ever imposed absolute equality, and it seems doubtful that their expression would have similar consequences in the extreme variety of social structures in different human societies. For example, it is unlikely that it would be fruitful for a slave costing a third of the price of a mule to mock the authority of his masters in the manner of the Bushmen hunter-gatherers studied by Boehm (10). Inequalities actually take various forms and degrees in known human societies (14). Private property, for example, obviously creates a difference in status between the haves and have-nots, and can give the former a role as facilitators, thereby amplifying their advantage. Even slavery (for debt or as a result of capture in inter-ethnic conflict) is endemic in some non-state societies.

Recent work (36) suggests that the evolution of social forms that facilitate the emergence of inequalities can be promoted where they allow divergence between the norms applying to elites and those applying to the rest of the population. Indeed, such divergence allows institutions or social groups to have the capacity for coordination associated with a domesticated population but also the geopolitical advantages associated with predatory behaviour. In fact, the emergence of states and empires seems to be favoured by social and geographical conditions that facilitate large-scale inter-ethnic conflicts (62). The first states, governed by an elite distinctly separated from the rest of the population, in spaces (linguistic, ritual, and architectural) that were specific to governance, perfectly illustrate this dynamic of norms divergence. By exploiting the very social and psychological mechanisms that founded human egalitarianism, the first States reversed the dynamics of human egalitarianism while extending the trajectory of self-domestication that humans had begun since the emergence of their lineage.

These first states concentrated and amplified all the modes of fragility of the domus : They were highly vulnerable to the vagaries of the climate because of their dependence on cereal monocultures ; to mass exile and revolts due to over-taxation ; to the vagaries of war and trade that determined their access to forced labour ; to violent epidemics forged in the fire of the domus and transmitted through trade routes or troop movements ; and to the extortion of nomadic peoples who also wanted to monopolise the domus surplus and were able to escape State retaliation without too much difficulty. As Scott points out, they were extremely unstable according to archaeological evidence. The persistence of state forms over time, and the gradual stabilization that allowed some states to become secular entities, was only possible through a long process of adaptation, the outline of which we will now outline.

Legitimacy and adaptation : the emergence of the modern State

The central period of the first millennium of the Christian calendar, referred to as the "Axial Age", has often been described as a time of profound transformation of human societies. The great sages who founded the Abrahamic religions as well as the Platonic, Zoroastrian, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian doctrines lived during this period. In the lineage of the philosopher Karl Jaspers, many authors have interpreted this state of affairs as manifesting the emergence of new forms of reflexive thought, questioning the legitimacy of political power and finally succeeding in imposing ethical and legal restrictions on it : (9). Although the systematic analysis of historical data from the SESHAT dynamic database (65) could not show the historical particularity of the given period, nor the existence of a causal relationship between the emergence of reflexive moral doctrines and the different modes of government regulation that were associated with this age (41), there is no reason to doubt the existence of an "axial transition" towards larger, more interconnected, richer, more formalized state societies with less violent government. This transition, far from forming an indivisible unit, seems on the contrary to be made up of a number of distinct cultural traits that have nothing else in common but their ability to coordinate behaviour on a large scale.

The ability of archaic States to project their power was indeed extremely limited, in the absence of regulatory mechanisms other than taxation and physical violence. Moreover, none of the mechanisms that maintain cooperation in tribal societies - essentially based on family ties, reciprocity (which depends on repeated interactions), and reputation (which depends on a relatively tight social network) - are suitable for a society where interactions with strangers are frequent. Even today, a large experimental literature shows that the tendency to cooperate with strangers is strongly dependent on the scale of integration of a given social group (30). In other words, an individual's membership in a large-scale structured social, religious, or economic community is a strong predictor of his or her propensity to be fair when sharing resources across a wide range of controlled conditions as well as ethnographic observations. The extension of political entities beyond the socially restricted domain of an ethnic group, or the spatially and temporally restricted domain of an archaic state, thus depends on the emergence of new forms of coordination that are not dependent on the ancestral psychology of humans or on mere coercion.

From this perspective, it is striking that certain religious forms, whose influence promotes cooperation between unrelated individuals (34; 50), emerge specifically within the framework of state societies. Moralizing religions", i.e. religious systems that postulate the existence of a supernatural judgment on the morality of secular behaviour, are despite their contemporary predominance a recent innovation in human history. Indeed, the only intercultural invariant of religion is the interpretation of phenomena as signifying the will of supernatural agents, an interpretation validated by a common ritual context : (3). Few non-state societies develop the notion of entities capable of, or interested in, judging human activities (although extreme climatic contexts may favour the emergence of such entities (12)). Achuar societies, for example, daily engage with the spirits of the species (animal or vegetal) on which they ecologically depend, without these relationships going beyond an interpersonal framework (16).

These religions extend the pro-social circle of followers by acting on several psychological levers : they extend the community membership beyond the ethnic circle ; they promise cosmic justice that transcends the sentient world and social boundaries ; often they postulate constant surveillance by an omniscient and all-powerful entity, wishing to impose specific moral norms. They thus appear to be a major cement of large-scale organized societies (44), by reducing the costs associated with the massive interactions between strangers on which the latter depend (30). Although the main systematic analysis on the subject highlights the role of war in the emergence of these religious modes (66), the variables chosen (the sophistication of military hardware, as well as the presence of armed cavalry) also seem to correlate with the scale of trade integration. Thus, as of now we cannot distinguish between the role of military coordination and that of economic integration in the development of moralizing religions.

Another potential role of moralizing religions, more in line with historical interpretations of the Axial Age and yet still neglected by the systematic study defended by the creators of SESHAT, consists in the regulation and legitimization of state governance (24). An autonomous body of intellectual elites, legitimized by their adherence to a predefined ethical code and not by their affiliation to political power, is indeed able to project social norms beyond the field of coercive power relations. Such elites could thus legitimise the dominant social order where the state alone would be unable to do so (for reasons of distance or instability), thereby facilitating both the extension and the cohesion of the latter. These elites would also be able to regulate the executive power by diffusing their norms among the ruling elites, but also by cohesively opposing decisions or institutions perceived as violating religious ethics. Moreover, they could indirectly facilitate the emergence of third party institutions to regulate the executive, such as a legal code that applies to the ruling elites as well as to the people.

Although the transformations associated with axiality are, of course, not the only ones to have affected the archaic state during its trajectory to contemporary state forms, I think they can be understood as prototypical. The English enclosure movement, and more generally the various strategies of privatization of the economy, increased the taxable share of labour and handicapped the competition of lower levels of social organization with State order ; the

emergence of nation-states promoted the cultural homogeneity within states and thus their social cohesion; printing has facilitated the large-scale coordination of intellectual elites and the democratization of written language; industrialization has increased the scale of trade integration and arguably the influence of economic elites; the influence of elective republics has prolonged the advance of legal egalitarianism. None of these dynamics is qualitatively different from those that presided over the definition of an "Axial Age", which we will therefore consider as the beginning of a longer process of adaptation that led the state form to the total domination it enjoys today. This process has accompanied millennia of sociological, economic and institutional changes, contributing to the stability and expansion of the State. However, nothing suggests that it has altered its original dynamic : that of an institutional ecology that facilitates social coordination on a very large scale, at the cost of the extraction by a minority of the resources produced by the majority. In other words, the "State module" has evolved considerably over the last few millennia, but has not ceased to exist as such. It is with this characterization of the State in mind that we will approach the outlook for the near future that I am about to articulate.

Humility, sobriety, animism : the next recomposition of the worlds

The prospect of a forthcoming "civilizational collapse" is the subject of an impressive convergence of methodologically and disciplinarily varied studies, ranging from general bio-systemic approaches (7) to contemporary structural observations (53) through inferences about past societies (19) or economic models (37). Although the occurrence of a collapse phenomenon in the strict sense of the term is not known for sure, I will show here that the fundamental dynamics defining the collapsological discourse are in fact ongoing, and I will suggest (on the basis of the methodological tools introduced above) the outline of the recomposition of the institutional, economic, and spiritual worlds that will accompany this process.

Despite the radical transformations that the forms of state have undergone during their existence, they do not seem to have solved the fundamental problem of disorganization due to the capture of resources by a central elite. In the words of the sociologist and philosopher Ibn Khaldun, the "asabiya" (i.e. identity cohesion) of a political or ethnic coalition dominating the Maghreb states of the fourteenth century tends to weaken during the exercise of power, ultimately causing their defeat in the face of invasions by neighbouring Berber tribes. This thesis, corroborated by recent research in the human sciences (ethnological (70) as historical (26)), has survived its formalization and systematic testing within the framework of the *Structural-Demographic Theory* (61; 64).

The central model of the Structural-Demographic Theory describes a cyclical dynamic coupling the median standard of living (whose central indicators are skeletal size and the price of labour relative to the price of food) and the intensity of interelite conflict (whose indicators are more varied, but focus mainly on levels of institutional instability, political violence, and concentration of wealth). These dynamics can be roughly divided into phases of integration, during which the growth of resources accessible to elites facilitates their coordination, and thus the integration of the considered entity into the dominant institutions; and phases of disintegration, during which the limitation of these same resources favours more aggressive capture strategies on the part of the dominant elites, as well as the emergence of conflicts within them, facilitating the disintegration of these same institutions in favour of neighbouring or smaller-scale entities. Importantly, this model purports to describe a specific structural dynamic within a complex if not chaotic system. It therefore does not deny the contingency of each historical event, nor the existence of other dynamics that can be described at different spatial or temporal scales.

While interelite conflicts are less deadly today than they were in the near past, and while median living standards have increased significantly in recent decades in most states, the increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of a small economic elite and the polarization of political discourse within a majority of developed countries suggests that we are entering

a phase of disintegration in the sense of the Structural-Demographic Theory (60). The intensity of such crises remains, of course, radically unpredictable (63), making it impossible to confidently predict the lasting disappearance of the dominant institutions defining a collapse phenomenon. The fact remains that we can predict a progressive degradation of the capacity of these institutions to govern anything, caused by an intensification of conflicts within the ruling classes coupled with their growing inability to reward participation in the economic system on which they depend, and foreshadowing a shift of power to smaller-scale structures.

This prediction, anchored in the socio-institutional dynamics of state societies, is reinforced by taking into account the ecological and economic context. The institutions that have dominated the last few centuries have benefited from economic growth that is exceptional in terms of its scale and duration, based on the abundance of fossil resources, the climatic stability of the Holocene, and the gradual conquest by Western states of previously marginal areas. Such a context is extremely conducive to institutional stability, as it facilitates the recruitment of new elites into the dominant institutions, the association of the wealth created with the specific institutions in which it is created, and investment in large-scale communications infrastructure. The robustness of these institutions in the face of high climate instability, the breakdown of the dominant infrastructures or a prolonged context of stagnation or even decline, remains hypothetical at present.

In other words, we can expect the level of influence of the State and the capitalist elites that depend on it to fall in the near future in favour of institutions defined on a smaller scale, without it being possible to know whether this transition will be catastrophic or gradual in nature, what the triggering events will be, or what the end point will be. Although some of the dominant State societies do not show specific signs of a structural demographic crisis (China, Russia), the interconnection (historical as well as structural) of financial and economic institutions raises the suspicion that such a crisis could occur on the scale of global capitalism. This observation of a progressive disintegration of the dominant social order is essentially similar to that of a "collapse in progress", specific to certain collapsing movements : (39). It underlines the urgent need to build more sustainable models of governance and economic networks in concerned societies than those that exist today.

I wish to suggest here that the construction of these institutions, however marginal they may be in the immediate term, is one of the processes dominating the future redefinition of the balance of power between the dominant elites and the rest of the population. Indeed, although any government policy can be influenced by pressure from civil society, a reformist approach does not make it possible to challenge the political centrality implied by the existence of a "government". Even a successful revolution does not guarantee decentralization of governance, since its object may be the recapture of the state apparatus by a different fraction of the elites. The French Revolution, having preserved and complemented the strategies of population control present under the Ancien Régime, is an example (albeit an anecdotal one) of this fact (43), as are the Soviet and Maoist revolutions. Yet the ability of a central state to impose homogeneous legal and economic norms on a captive population seems to be the main condition for the divergence of social norms between the ruling elite and the rest of the population.

Before documenting the emergence of States, James C Scott studied the flight strategies from state governance in Southeast Asian societies (51). He highlighted the role of "Zomia", a large trans-state mountainous area, in the stability of states in the region. The inability of the latter to project their power into Zomia in a stable manner, or to prevent their populations from migrating there in large numbers in response to abusive policies, has played a major role in moderating their level of violence. This dynamic can be observed from the earliest traces of States in the region to the politics of post-colonial states. Scott notes, however, that modern infrastructure has enabled the latter to considerably intensify their campaign against the mountain nomads, for example by sending the army to regularly burn their crops. In the context of a developed, highly institutionalized state with a much denser infrastructure than in Southeast Asia, one wonders, therefore, how such tactics of evading State institutions would be transposed.

However, the capacity for geographical projection permitted by the development of a State is accompanied by a considerable restriction of its governance strategies. It is more delicate to populate with war captives high-tech start-ups than rice fields, and more risky to massacre insubordinate communes in the presence of a massive interconnection at the regional and national levels. The main lever for the domination of legal institutions is voluntary participation in a capitalist economy under the favourable conditions allowed by the central status of those States and companies which dominated colonisation on an international scale. The day when participation in an economy of the commons (45) appears as an option distinct from participation in a capitalist economy, allowing on average a higher standard of living, I allow myself to doubt the capacity of those developed States to stem a human drain on a scale comparable to those that caused the collapse of the young States described by Scott.

Moreover, the cultural conditions for such a communal organisation are gradually being created. The open source approach, applied to the diffusion of sober and simple technologies, allows today an almost total autonomy (57; 46) with regard to the companies and the technical knowledge they embody. A considerable civil movement campaigns for the decentralization of the economy as well as governance, going in its most radical forms to the development of Communes in the sense of the Parisian uprising of 1871 (57). A currency whose mechanism of generation effectively implements a universal income and handicaps speculative dynamics is in circulation on French territory, without the State being (as of now) able to trace or tax the transitions taking place there (22). Nomadic lifestyles are re-emerging within State territory, accompanied by the economic and legal development of light housing (35), but also by more creative approaches to hijacking commercial vehicles. The gradual emergence of elites capable of coordinating this movement, whether in the context of the import of animist cosmologies (49) and the rituals associated with them, or the construction of a positive imaginary of sobriety (58), is possibly more important than any of these "harder" factors in that they encourage voluntary defection from the state-promoted social order.

Conclusion

We have articulated here a schematic history of the emergence of States and the changes they have undergone during their short existence. States have extended an ancestral dynamic of domestication of the human species, but have subverted its communal origins in favour of symbolic, military, economic and administrative violence exercised solely for the benefit of a small elite. The first States were due to this immoderate violence of fragile and marginal entities, until the emergence of mechanisms for regulating government, the oldest and most important of which appears to be moralising religions - trans-ethnic identities, associated with a code of behaviour favourable to the social order promoted by the State, regulated by an intellectual elite that is autonomous from the ruling elite.

Even after the exceptional growth of the last three centuries, which has allowed states to establish their current hegemony, nothing seems to have fundamentally redefined the exclusive relationship between rulers and governed that characterizes State societies. Contemporary States are therefore likely to be vulnerable to the same failures of coordination among their elites that undermined past States. The study of these phenomena strongly suggests a causal and systematic relationship between such conflicts and the disintegration of the institutions dominating these societies - a disintegration that can manifest itself in a progressive paralysis as well as in a sudden collapse of these institutions. Moreover, the beginning of such a phenomenon is evident in the recent history of several developed states, if not of global capitalism.

On this basis, it seems necessary to prepare for an imminent collapse of the state's ability to govern, accompanied by increasingly aggressive attempts by the ruling elites to capture collective resources. A major strategic axis for this is the construction of geographical or institutional spaces that are by construction inaccessible to capitalist or state capture. Communal movements, whether in the sense of Ostrom or the 1871 insurrection, constitute

such spaces. Their structural importance lies not in their capacity to challenge the centrality of the State, but in their capacity to constitute margins inaccessible to State governance. This position makes it possible to limit the human consequences of a structural demographic crisis through two mechanisms : first, by constituting a margin where populations can threaten to flee in response to state violence or the deterioration of their living conditions ; second, by ensuring the governance of the societies concerned in the event of sudden State failure. It may allow to eventually challenge the hegemony of state governance over domestic or colonized spaces.

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