

1 | *A Most Bourgeois Ambition*

Europe drew the map of the world as we know it—a ranked array of nation-states—using the tools of white supremacy and capitalism. We don’t have to use nationhood or nationalism to try to find ourselves on their map. The map, the nation, and the state must go. We did not draw them, and they do not serve us. They never did.

– William C. Anderson (2021)

‘Look for Me in the Whirlwind’

On 13 December 1986, Kuwasi Balagoon died of AIDS-related pneumonia in Auburn Prison, New York. A poet, a queer man, an organiser of tenant struggles in Harlem, and a member of the Black Panther Party (BPP) and Black Liberation Army, Balagoon was a founding figure of the black anarchist movement in the United States. During his short life, he escaped from prison twice, expropriated banks to fund the resistance, and – rumour has it – helped free Assata Shakur¹ from jail. His way was one of autonomy, self-determination, and direct action: as he puts it in ‘Anarchy Can’t Fight Alone’, a short essay written behind bars, ‘The landlords must be contested through rent strikes and rather than develop strategies to pay the rent, we should develop strategies to take the buildings.’² In 1969, he was part of the landmark Panther 21 case, which marked the start of the state’s sustained attack on the black liberation movement. *Look for Me in the Whirlwind*, the collective autobiography of the Panther 21, recounts these events through a collection of essays, photographs, pamphlets, and some of Kuwasi’s poetry.³ In 1981, Kuwasi was arrested yet again, this time for taking part in an attempt to expropriate a money transport armoured car. During the subsequent trial, he refused to recognise the authority of the court and argued that he was fighting a war of liberation against the US state. In response, the court sentenced him to seventy-five years in prison. ‘I am not really worried’, he afterwards

explained, ‘not only because I am in the habit of not completing sentences or waiting on parole or any of that nonsense but also because the State simply isn’t going to last seventy-five or even fifty years’.⁴ Yet this time Kuwasi was wrong: he would live for only five more years. The state, meanwhile, would continue to grow, assuming proportions more hegemonic than ever before.⁵

Kuwasi Balagoon is one of several black, indigenous, and anti-colonial (feminist) anarchists who in recent years have garnered a growing scholarly interest. Alongside thinkers and organisers such as Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, the Ghadar Movement, Lucy Parsons, and Luisa Capetillo, Balagoon is increasingly remembered and celebrated for his revolutionary opposition to the state.⁶ In this chapter, I place Balagoon’s anarchism in conversation with Cedric Robinson’s work on the history of racial capitalism. I argue that this approach sheds new light on the deeply political dimension of capitalist political economy. The state is not a neutral entity – formed by individuals freely consenting to be ruled – but ‘a most bourgeois ambition’⁷ which is central to upholding and entrenching racial capitalism’s violent regimes of extraction and accumulation.

To develop these arguments, I revisit the question of state formation through Robinson’s work on racial capitalism, medieval socialism, and the making of the political paradigm. Where the existing literature has theorised the origins of the modern state in terms of warfare, class rule, and/or overseas colonialism, I argue that the state arose as a revanchist response to the popular struggles for freedom, equality, and democracy that engulfed Europe in the late medieval period. As a revolution from above, state formation went hand in hand with the making of whiteness as a distinctive European ruling-class identity. State-building was thus from the beginning a racial-colonial project, entailing both *internal* centralisation and domination as well as *external* conquest and enslavement. Since then, the state and its systems of administrative, legal, and coercive violence have been central to mastering, domesticating and, ultimately, *governing* people and places deemed wayward, surplus, and undeserving. What C. L. R. James called *state capitalism* – referring, as he did, to the Soviet Union – here turns out to be *all* of capitalism.⁸

The chapter proceeds in three steps. It first turns to the leading critiques of liberal theories of the state. I show that while these

approaches have troubled the view of the state as a peaceful and pacified entity, they have often neglected its racial and colonial history. Post- and decolonial scholars have done much to recover these dynamics but have often done so by relying on the ‘boomerang thesis’, which reverses rather than transcends the ‘diffusionist’ narrative of more orthodox accounts. To think beyond this unidirectional logic, I next offer an alternative genealogy of the state. Building on Robinson, I theorise state formation as a counterrevolutionary response to the medieval socialist movements that challenged the European feudal order. Racism and colonialism are here revealed as structural features of the state already *within* Europe, before they were later extended to the rest of the world after 1492. In the final section, I show how this analysis sheds new light on the political dimension of capitalist political economy, including the ways in which state-sponsored violence operates to produce a bourgeois global order premised on racial-colonial hierarchy, stratification, and domination. As black anarchists have long maintained, ‘The government will not free us and is part of the problem rather than part of the solution.’⁹ If we look for Kuwasi in the whirlwind, then we too will see that ‘[t]he state’s task is to make us appear to be everybody’s enemy—however, truth and history make it clear who is the real enemy of the people’.¹⁰

Modern/Colonial State Formation

Unlike Kuwasi Balagoon, the Western tradition of political thought has overwhelmingly regarded the state as a guarantor of order, progress, and non-violence. Liberals in particular have insisted on seeing the state as a bulwark against chaos, violence, and disorder: the state is ‘an essentially benign institution: a sovereign entrusted with a monopoly over violence, legitimately exercised by its criminal justice system, in the name of protecting its citizenry from the threat of criminal disorder’.¹¹ Within this framework, the state is a solution to ‘private’ violence and a precondition for the attainment of rights and justice.

Two origin stories are central to this view of the state. The first is the story of the social contract, which presents the state as a rational response to the state of nature with its war of all against all. This story specifically frames state power as an outcome of people freely consenting to be ruled, as symbolised by the contract. The second story yields

similar conclusions but revolves around the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. As David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah summarise, Westphalia is here considered as marking the inauguration of state sovereignty: it entailed ‘a movement from the religious to the secular, from the idea of Europe as unified by Christianity to a European system of independent states, and from a web of overlapping and competing authorities to a modern state system based on the demarcation of exclusive territorial jurisdictions’.¹² While state sovereignty might have begun as the exclusive property of European states, it was later extended to the rest of the world in the aftermath of decolonisation and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late twentieth century.¹³

There is, of course, a substantial body of literature that challenges this view of the state as peaceful and progressive. Political realists from Machiavelli to Clausewitz and Weber, for example, have regarded violence as the defining quality of state power.¹⁴ As Weber argued in his ‘Politics as Vocation’ lecture, delivered in January 1919, just two weeks after the socialist-led Spartacist uprising had been violently crushed by the German state: ‘In the last analysis the modern state can only be defined sociologically in terms of a specific means which is peculiar to the state ... namely, the use of physical violence.’ In short, the state ‘is a relation of men dominating men’, a relation ‘founded on force’.¹⁵ Weber, of course, was no socialist: speaking of the two Spartacist leaders who were murdered and dumped into the Landwehr canal in Berlin, he remarked that ‘[Karl] Liebknecht belongs in the madhouse and Rosa Luxemburg in the zoological gardens.’¹⁶ In spite of this, his analysis of the state as a relation of violence has influenced generations of critical scholars interested in understanding the origins and operations of state power. Today, this literature consists of at least three broad streams, which respectively centre geopolitics, capitalism, and overseas colonialism as the main drivers of state-building. Let us take a closer look at these.

Geopolitical approaches understand European state formation as a product of war and conflict. Spearheaded by historical sociologists such as Anthony Giddens, Michael Mann, Theda Skocpol, and, in particular, Charles Tilly, this literature emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as part of a wider attempt to ‘bring the state back in’ as an explanatory variable in social analysis.¹⁷ The state is here regarded as an autonomous entity that emerged in Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Geopolitical rivalry and military competition, it

is argued, fuelled the process of state formation by encouraging political centralisation, the rise of a modern taxation system, and the development of other institutional innovations associated with the modern state. As Tilly famously puts it, 'war made the state, and the state made war'.¹⁸

Unlike geopolitical explanations, Marxist thinkers typically regard the sovereign state as an organ of class rule. The literature is nonetheless divided on the question of whether the state emerged before, with, or after the transition to capitalism. On one end of the spectrum, Political Marxists argue that capitalism was born into a world that already consisted of absolutist and dynastic states. These regimes were organised according to a logic of (geo)political accumulation, including 'empire-building, political marriages, wars of succession, dynastic "international" law ... and bandwagoning'.¹⁹ The first modern state, which signalled a break with these logics, would only emerge in England in the seventeenth century, after the transition to capitalism. As Benno Teschke concludes, 'It follows that capitalism did not cause the territorially based state-system, nor that it required a state-system, but that it is nevertheless eminently compatible with it.'²⁰ In contrast, world-systems theorists regard the state as a distinctively capitalist entity. Fernand Braudel, for example, argues that 'Capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, when it is the state.'²¹ The development of a European world economy was from its inception dependent upon the development of strong states. As such, there exists a 'close historical tie between capitalism and the modern interstate system'.²²

These approaches offer a variety of correctives to liberalism's view of the state as peaceful and progressive: the state is here revealed as a violent entity that is premised, not on consent, but on war-making (geopolitical theories) and capital accumulation (Marxism). Even so, the analysis that they provide has often overlooked some of the state's most violent aspects, including the history of empire, plantation slavery, indigenous dispossession, and indentured servitude. This is in part a result of the methodological nationalism that haunts these literatures: namely, the idea that the state has a clearly defined inside and outside and that the outside (including colonialism) has no relation to the inside (domestic politics). Weber himself, for example, shuts out any consideration of imperial violence by conceptualising the modern state as a *national* entity that has a monopoly of coercive power *within*

a given territory. This is despite the fact that the German state, just thirteen years after its unification in 1871, began a process of colonial expansion and domination. As Gurminder Bhambra explains, ‘At the same time as establishing itself in Europe, the incipient German state was consolidating its hold over external territories through a variety of violent colonial expeditions, including in South-West Africa (where the Herero and Nama people were dispossessed and effectively exterminated in the desert regions), Samoa and Qingdao in China.’²³ That the German nation-state from the beginning was an imperial state is, however, given no attention in Weber’s analysis.

This methodological nationalism also frames geopolitical and Marxist approaches. Take, for example, Charles Tilly’s bellicist theory of state formation, which emphasises the role of war-making, military competition, and geopolitical rivalry *within* Europe – but leaves out indigenous dispossession, enslavement, and so called ‘small’ wars in the (settler) colonies.²⁴ While later scholars have extended Tilly’s insights by showing how colonialism shaped the foundation of states in the non-European world,²⁵ the idea that European states *themselves* might have been products of empire is typically left out of the analysis. Marxists, too, have reproduced this assumption, most often through an insistence that capitalism is a system that is uniquely premised on the exploitation of ‘free’ wage-labour. Political Marxists, in particular, insist that so-called ‘extra’-economic coercion is a feudal and pre-modern dynamic that is separate from the ‘actual’ process of capital accumulation. This narrow definition is what leads them to see post-1688 Britain as the first distinctively modern state – even though the rise of capitalism in Britain was fuelled by ‘the slave plantations in the West Indies and peasant agriculture in India’,²⁶ and notwithstanding that the British state itself would grow to become the world’s largest empire. While world-systems theorists such as Braudel and Wallerstein go further in considering how state violence helped fuel capitalist development, they too have little to say about how the history of enslavement and colonisation shaped state formation. With that, the ‘violence, terror, subjugation and coercive exploitation’ that were ‘meted out by ruling classes to populations across the globe’ are written out of the history of both capital and the state.²⁷

In the last decade, an emerging body of scholarship – located at the intersection of postcolonial theory and global historical sociology – has sought to move beyond the pitfalls of these approaches by

examining how empire and (settler) colonialism were integral to the development of the modern state. This literature builds on the concept of the ‘imperial boomerang’, associated with the works of Aimé Césaire, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault, which postulates that techniques and technologies experimented with in the colonial periphery eventually found their way back home to the metropole. Taking such an approach, Jordan Branch argues that some of the foundational features of modern statehood were formed through a practice of ‘colonial reflection’ whereby ‘European colonial powers implemented some of the key practices of modern territoriality in the New World first, and only later applied them within Europe’.²⁸ Radhika Mongia, similarly, shows that ‘colonial sites were often central to the making of principles, the shaping of doctrine, and the emergence of state institutions and practice’.²⁹ For both of these scholars, state formation cannot be understood in isolation from its colonial history.

While this literature has done much to retrieve the state’s history of colonial dispossession, enslavement, and racial violence, it has sometimes ended up inverting – rather than transcending – the diffusionist narrative of ‘first the West and then the Rest’. The state and its repertoires of power are here seen as flowing from the colony to the metropole (via the boomerang), rather than from the metropole to the colony, as in more orthodox accounts. This reverses rather than transcends the dominant narrative and ultimately leaves little room for considering the complex relationship between the use of state power abroad *and* at home. As Jeanne Morefield notes, by focusing on the corrupting influence of overseas colonialism, scholars risk obfuscating the fact that the European domestic realm was ‘already racialized, already violent, already corrupted’ and that what followed was not a linear dispersion from a ‘debased imperial periphery to an otherwise untarnished domestic arena’,³⁰ but a back and forth between different, *interconnected* geographies of racial and colonial capitalism.

In the next section, I build on this analysis to provide an alternative genealogy of European state formation. By reading Robinson through a Balagoon-inspired lens, I argue that racism and colonialism were structural features of the state already within Europe. Europe was never an ‘uncontaminated’, ‘enlightened’, or ‘civilized’ space that – much like the figure Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* – was tragically corrupted by its own violence in the colonial periphery; rather, European state formation was from the beginning a violent

process of conquering and colonising racialised groups within Europe itself. As we shall see, the state emerged as a counterrevolutionary project that also saw the birth of the political paradigm: an antidemocratic and hierarchical vision of society centred around the question of *how to be governed*.

Race, Counterrevolution, and the Birth of the State

Born Donald Weems in 1946, Kuwasi Balagoon was a self-described ‘wild-child’ who declared war on the US state. Like many other black anarchists of his generation, he first encountered anarchist philosophy behind bars. He had previously been a member of the BPP, the Oakland-based black power movement that stood for a ‘Marxism for the despised, a class-politics for the sub-classed and de-classed’.³¹ Over time, he would grow critical of what he saw as the BPP’s hierarchical leadership structure and its commitment to Marxist–Leninism, but he continued to build on the Panther’s internationalist critique of imperialism and the carceral state.³² The result was a black or pan-African anarchism which rejected both capital and state power, and which sought ‘to make anarchism a living, breathing practice, applied in [his] own context’.³³ As he explains in one of his letters sent from prison:

We are left with ourselves. Left in homes that police drop bombs on from helicopters, and without any shared sense of outrage.... Left in the ghettos, barrios, and other reservations. I feel that we must build revolutionary institutions that buttress on survival through collectives, which in turn should form federations. Grassroots collective building can begin immediately.³⁴

These ideas also resonate through Cedric Robinson’s scholarship. Born six years before Balagoon, Robinson grew up in the same era of racial segregation, police violence, and truncated hope. He was no anarchist, but like Balagoon he took a keen interest in the history of state violence and its relationship to global capitalism. Today he is of course most well known as a scholar of racial capitalism. In *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, he famously theorises racial and colonial violence as a permanent feature of capital accumulation. ‘Extra’-economic measures such as land expropriation, enclosure, dispossession, and enslavement, Robinson argues, have never been confined to a pre-capitalist era of feudalism or primitive accumulation: rather, they pervade the history of racial

capitalism in its entirety. He develops these arguments by drawing on an eclectic archive of radical thought, including the *longue durée* approaches of world-systems theory and the ground-breaking work of Oliver Cromwell Cox,³⁵ the Dar es Salaam School and the broad constellation of pan-Africanists that converged in Tanzania in the years after independence,³⁶ theories of race and class produced by intellectuals clustered around the Institute of Race Relations in London,³⁷ and Norman Cohn's work on millenarianism and medieval socialism, which he encountered while he was a visiting researcher at the University of Sussex in Brighton.

In recent years, a growing interdisciplinary body of literature has built on Robinson to re-examine the relationship between capitalism and state violence.³⁸ In spite of this, the state form itself has often been left out of the analysis. While most scholars agree that 'There has never been a minute in the history of capitalism lacking the organized, centralized, and reproducible capacities of the state',³⁹ there have been few attempts to think more concretely about the history of the state and its relation to racial capitalism. In what follows I address this lacuna. By drawing on Robinson's less well-known writings – in particular, *The Terms of Order* and *An Anthropology of Marxism* – I argue that the state is a set of carceral, administrative, legal, and extractive systems without which capital cannot function. To develop this argument, I re-examine the birth of the state through a Robinsonian lens. State formation is here revealed – not as a product of geopolitical conflict or overseas colonialism, as discussed earlier – but as a revanchist response to the popular struggles for freedom, equality, and democracy that swept through Europe in the late medieval era. As we shall see, the state not only emerged as a counterinsurgency but – as Kuwasi knew all too well – it also continues to function as one.

At the heart of Robinson's scholarly corpus is an attempt to rework Marxism's parasitism on 'bourgeois hagiography'⁴⁰ and its linear conceptions of history. As he explains in *An Anthropology of Marxism*, his book from 2001, Marxism is based on the assumption that bourgeois society constitutes a *progressive* development from feudalism and that it, moreover, is a precondition for socialist transformation.⁴¹ He marshals two interconnected arguments to challenge this. First, the socialist critique of property, domination, and inequality actually precede the emergence of bourgeois society and 'a specific laboring class, the proletariat'. Well before the rise of capitalism, earlier forms

of socialism had existed: in fact, ‘the rudiments of Western socialism appeared as early as the thirteenth century—without industrial production’.⁴² As Robinson elaborates:

Western socialism had older and different roots. It radiated from the desperation, anguish, and rage of the rural poor of the medieval era, assuming expressions as diverse as the politically secular, the mystical, and the heretical. It manifested in mass movements of violent rebelliousness, in hysterical devotion as well as ecclesiastical debates. And its moral and social denunciations stung temporal rulers, the wealthy classes, and the clerical privileged alike.⁴³

Second and relatedly, Robinson argues that capitalism was never a revolutionary negation of feudalism, as Marx insisted, but rather signalled the intensification and global extension of its ‘social, cultural, political, and ideological complexes’.⁴⁴ That is, capitalism ‘did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of “racial capitalism” dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide’.⁴⁵ Through these two arguments – which both challenge linear and teleological accounts of history – Robinson sheds new light on the state and its origins. Let us explore this in further depth.

In *An Anthropology of Marxism*, Robinson outlines an alternative history of socialism. Here it is no longer the industrial proletariat, but a medieval motley crew of ‘poor rural and urban rebels, female mystics and “pious women,” Latin medieval philosophers, radical communitarians and communists, as well as “thieves, exiles, and excommunicates” [that] take center stage’.⁴⁶ In the late medieval period, these groups challenged the authority of the feudal lords, the Catholic Church, and the secular ruling classes. Opposing rich town-dwellers, merchants, landowners, and the Church alike, they called for the abolition of rent and private property, as well as an end to enclosures and economic exploitation. In contrast to the secular orientation of Marxism, these movements were driven by ideas of millenarianism, mystical anarchism, and a long-lost Garden of Eden in which ‘all things on earth’ had belonged ‘to all human beings communally’. In this egalitarian state of nature, there had been no inequality, serfdom, private property, or coercive rule: indeed, these ‘had no part in the original intention of God and had come into being only as a result of the Fall’.⁴⁷ The idea of a lost Golden Age thus functioned much like a revolutionary myth, fuelling visions of a new society based on equality, communal ownership, and a refusal of

authoritarian rule.⁴⁸ It was well-captured by John Ball, the radical priest who led the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and who anarchist painter William Morris would later depict in his novel *A Dream of John Ball*. Ball preached that:

If we are all descended from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve, how can the lords say or prove that they are more lords than we are—save that they make us dig and till the ground so that they can squander what we produce? They are clad in velvet and satin, set of with squirrel fur, while we are dressed in poor cloth. They have wines and spices and fine bread, and we have only rye and spoilt flour and straw, and only water to drink. They have beautiful residences and manors, while we have the trouble and the work, always in the fields under rain and snow. But it is from us and our labour that everything comes with which they maintain their pomp.... Good folk, things cannot go well in England nor ever shall until all things are in common and there is neither villein nor noble, but all of us are of one condition.⁴⁹

Radical anti-property movements such as these existed all across medieval Europe. In England, the Peasants' Revolt saw thousands of peasants march from Kent to London demanding an end to serfdom and private property; when they arrived in the capital, 'the populace of the city also arose, prevented the gates being shut against the oncoming hordes and then joined forces with the rebels'.⁵⁰ In Bohemia, the Hussite revolution brought together workers, peasants, prostitutes, beggars, indentured servants, slum-dwellers, and radical priests in rebellion against the established authorities. In Germany, a series of revolts eventually escalated into the Peasant's War of 1524–25. They were led by Thomas Müntzer, who preached that 'All the world must suffer a big jolt. There will be such a game that that the ungodly will be thrown of their seats, and the downtrodden will rise.'⁵¹ In France, the Jacquerie of 1358 inspired a rapid proliferation of country-wide struggles against the nobility. A series of uprisings also swept through Catalonia, culminating in the War of the Remences. In Florence, the Ciompi Revolt of 1378 led to a three-year-long rule of wool workers.

By the fourteenth century, the European feudal order was in a state of crisis. The revolts, combined with the Black Death, the Hundred Years War, and the intensification of famines, had 'a devastating impact on western Europe and the Mediterranean—decimating the populations of cities and countryside alike, disrupting trade, collapsing industry and agricultural production—leveling, as it were, the bulk of the most developed regions of western European bourgeois activity'.⁵²

This was heightened by the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, which made the Ottomans the leading naval power in the Eastern Mediterranean and blocked Europe access to Asian markets. It is within this context of permanent crisis that the state rose to power. Silvia Federici has elsewhere described this as a counterrevolution, whereby capitalism emerged as a conservative ‘response of the feudal lords, the patrician merchants, the bishops and popes, to a centuries-long social conflict that in the end shook their power’.⁵³ Robinson’s analysis not only lends support to this argument but also goes further in demonstrating how this revolution from above unfolded on two separate but interconnected fronts: as internal centralisation and domination, on the one hand, and external conquest and enslavement, on the other. The ascension of the capitalist state was central across both spheres.

On a domestic plane, the conservative backlash against the medieval socialist movements reorganised ruling-class power into the centralised state, which increasingly came to be regarded as the sole agent capable of confronting the spiralling crisis. In short, ‘by revealing the evil effects of a breakdown in authority, the troubled times established the case for centralization’.⁵⁴ Where Marxist historians such as Perry Anderson and Ellen Meiksins Wood have attributed the rise of the absolutist state to ‘the needs of landed aristocracies for a stronger central power to maintain order against the threat of rebellion’,⁵⁵ the state in fact brought together a *coalition* of elites, including the bourgeoisie. Federici elaborates:

the mounting class conflict brought about a new alliance between the bourgeoisie and the nobility, without which proletarian revolts may not have been defeated ... the forces of feudal power—the nobility, the Church, and the bourgeoisie—moved against them united, despite their traditional divisions, by their fear of proletarian rebellion. Indeed, the image, that has been handed down to us, of a bourgeoisie perennially at war with the nobility, and carrying on its banners the call for equality and democracy, is a distortion. By the late Middle Ages, wherever we turn, from Tuscany to England and the Low Countries, we find the bourgeoisie already allied with the nobility in the suppression of the lower classes. For in the peasants and the democratic weavers and cobblers in the cities, bourgeoisie recognised an enemy far more powerful than the nobility.... Thus it was the urban bourgeoisie ... who reinstated the power of the nobility, by voluntarily submitting to the rule of the Prince, the first step on the road to the absolute state.⁵⁶

Capitalism, then, was never an evolutionary progression from feudalism that resulted in a more 'advanced' stage of history. Rather, it was a 'counter-revolution that destroyed the possibilities that had emerged from the anti-feudal struggle'.⁵⁷ Across Europe, the emerging centralised states instituted a range of terror campaigns to curb the uprisings and restore internal order: The heretic and millenarian movements were persecuted through the Holy Inquisition and punished with excommunication, torture, and death at the stakes. In Germany, the peasant uprisings 'ended catastrophically, in a series of battles, or massacres, in which perhaps 100,000 peasants perished'.⁵⁸ In England, Parliament introduced the Ordinance of Labourers in 1349, which fixed wages and compelled all able-bodied people below the age of sixty to work; those who refused were imprisoned. Across Europe, attempts were made to reinstitute serfdom and other forms of coerced labour. In Eastern Europe there was a 'second serfdom', whereas Western Europe saw a wave of land enclosures, witch-hunts, executions, and incarceration of vagrants in workhouses.

These measures were frequently articulated through a racial logic. As Robinson is at pains to explain in *Black Marxism*, the European feudal order was saturated with 'racial, tribal, linguistic, and regional particularities'.⁵⁹ While racism and racialisation are often seen as hierarchies that emerged through overseas colonialism, racial thinking already suffused the consciousness and identity of the medieval European ruling elites: 'The bourgeoisie that led the development of capitalism were drawn from particular ethnic and cultural groups; the European proletariats and the mercenaries of the leading states from others; its peasants from still other cultures; and its slaves from entirely different worlds.'⁶⁰ The lower orders of European society – including Jews, Muslims, the Irish, Romani and traveller communities, Slavs, and Catholics in Ireland – were frequently imagined in racial terms. With the rise of the capitalist state, these existing ethnic, religious, and cultural hierarchies were gradually transformed into racial differences.

Crucially, then, state formation was from the start a racial project. As states harnessed more power, the radical anti-property movements increasingly came to be regarded as a separate race, 'set apart by absolute and fundamental differences within Christianity'.⁶¹ Jews and Muslims were similarly subjected to heightened repression, state surveillance, land expropriation, and expulsion. In England, a range of statutes and laws – monitored by institutions such as the Exchequer

of the Jews – eroded the economic and social status of the Jewish population, limiting where they could live and who they could meet; Jews over the age of seven were also required to wear a badge on their chest to distinguish them from the rest of the English population. In 1290, Jews were finally expelled en masse from England; elsewhere in Europe, Jewish populations were frequently scapegoated for the Black Death, resulting in massacres and pogroms.

Muslims fared no better. The Ottomans had long been regarded as Christendom's main international foe, but this escalated after the year 1100 when the Latin Church unleashed a series of wars to retake the Holy Land. The First Crusade succeeded in establishing four crusader colonies (known as the Outremer) in the Near East: the County of Edessa, Principality of Antioch, County of Tripoli, and Kingdom of Jerusalem. Increasingly, Christians came to regard themselves as 'a blood race, linked by the shedding of Christ's blood, and by the blood suffering of Christian bodies at the hands of the Islamic foe'. Muslims, in contrast, were seen as 'an infernal race, a race incarnating evil, whose extirpation would be a form of *mali-cide*'.⁶² These racial formations would grow increasingly dominant as the Ottomans pressed westward and Christian Europe found itself gripped by panic and revenge-seeking. In 1250 – three years before the fall of Constantinople – Muslims were finally expelled from Portugal, whereas in Spain a series of edicts outlawed Islam in the aftermath of the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 1492.

While the rise of the capitalist state went hand-in-hand with the making of racialised others who could be exploited, enslaved, persecuted, and dominated, it also saw the emergence of whiteness as the integral element of European ruling-class identity: a process that Geraldine Heng calls the birth of *homo europaeus* and which Sylvia Wynter has theorised as the rise of the European ethnoclass of Man.⁶³ As Heng notes, 'race makes an appearance in the Middle Ages not only through fantasmatic blackness, Jews, Saracens, Mongols, Africans, Indians, Chinese, tribal islanders, Gypsies, indigenes in the Americas, and the collections of freakish and deformed humans pressing upon the edges of the civilized world'. Crucially, race 'is also to be found at the center of things, in the creation of that strange creature who is nowhere yet everywhere in cultural discourse: *the white Christian European in medieval time*'.⁶⁴ The thirteenth-century Hereford world map offers a vivid depiction of this process whereby the European

ruling classes came to regard themselves as white. The map portrays Europe as a space of cathedrals and civilised cities, whereas the rest of the world is inhabited by ‘human monster of many kind ... pygmies, giants, hermaphrodites, troglodytes, cynocephali, sciapods, and other part-human, misshapen, deformed, and disabled peoples’.⁶⁵ It is from within this whitened landscape – surrounded, as it is, by the ‘threat’ of racialised internal and external Others – that the state rose to power.

Now, if one part of the counterrevolution entailed *internal* centralisation and pacification then it also sparked a new wave of *external* conquest and enslavement. While 1492 is often regarded as the starting point of the colonial project, European expansion began much earlier. The twelfth-century Crusades were in many ways a prelude to the colonisation of the ‘New World’, as was the English annexation of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland and ‘the recuperation by Christian Europe of the Balearic Islands, Sardinia, and Corsica, the Norman conquest of southern Italy and Sicily’.⁶⁶ In Eastern Europe, Scandinavian and German crusaders had similarly conquered, colonised, and converted Baltic, Finnic, and Slavic people around the Baltic Sea well before 1492.

Like colonialism, slavery was also a time-honoured European practice. Portugal had been bringing enslaved Africans to Europe since 1444, whereas the enslaved population of Spain included ‘Circassians, Bosnians, Poles, Russians, and Muslims of various ethnicities’.⁶⁷ In Genoa and Venice, enslaved persons constituted as much as 5 per cent of the total population. The post-1492 world, then, marked not so much a rupture with the past as an acceleration and intensification of its logics. In the context of the feudal crisis – brought about by a concatenation of forces, including the Black Death, escalating rebellions from below, and pressure from the Ottomans – Westward colonial expansion offered a way out, promising lucrative overseas markets and new pools of enslaveable labour. All along, the hardening of religious, cultural, linguistic, and regional differences into racial ones – culminating in what Robinson calls the invention of ‘the universal Negro’⁶⁸ – was to be the grease that made the capitalist wheels turn.

The Spanish *reconquista* stands as a watershed moment in the unravelling of this two-pronged strategy of internal centralisation and repression, on the one hand, and external conquest and enslavement, on the other. When al-Andalus fell in 1492, it was the climax of a long intra-European imperial struggle, marking the end of 800

years of Muslim rule over the Iberian Peninsula. The Spanish state – formed just twenty-three years earlier through the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon – now found itself ruling over a multireligious and multiethnic population. To consolidate its power, the Spanish state proceeded to expel, expropriate, and forcibly convert its Jewish and Muslim inhabitants.⁶⁹ As Robinson makes clear, it is not a coincidence that Europe’s colonisation of the Americas began at this very ‘moment when the Spanish Crown was intent upon its self-appointed mission to unify Spain, centralise state authority, vanquish its rivals among its own aristocracy, and acquire an independent source of capital for itself’.⁷⁰ Just eight months after the fall of al-Andalus, Christopher Columbus would set sail for the ‘New World’, backed by the same Spanish monarchy. This was the product of years of state-bourgeoisie geopolitical and financial cooperation:

When Columbus came to terms with Ferdinand and Isabella, the road had been paved for him by Genoese admirals who had served Portuguese and Spanish kings for centuries; by Genoese, Piacentine, and Florentine merchants who had assumed the primacy financial risks in colonizing the Portuguese Azores and Madeiran islands, and Spain’s Canary Island group; by Italian factors and money lenders who had strung their capital from Algiers and Ceuta in north Africa, to Elmina and Luanda on the west coast of that continent, and east to the Moluccas and Nagasaki; and by an Italian bourgeoisie whose financial and technical character and business affairs had become totally assimilated to the interests of the Spanish and Portuguese states and their most adventurous aristocracies.⁷¹

Consequently, 1492 marks the global inauguration of racial capitalism and state formation as two sides of the same counterrevolutionary project, symbolised by the simultaneous start of ethnic cleansing in Iberia and the colonisation of the Americas.⁷² Over the next five centuries, state and capital would operate *together* to extract, expropriate, and exploit: from the dispossession and forced labour of indigenous peoples in the Americas, to the enslavement and coerced migration of Africans, the export of the Chinese and Indians as indentured labourers, the imposition of plantation regimes, militarised trading, and various forms of resource extraction, racial capitalism would depend upon the exercise of state power. As Robinson puts it, “expanded bureaucratic state structures” became the major conduits of capitalist expansion: determining the direction of investment, establishing political security for such investments, encouraging certain commercial networks and

relations while discouraging others'.⁷³ From the start, state and capital existed in symbiosis, with race as their lifeblood.

*

To summarise, at least three conclusions follow from this analysis. First, there is nothing inherently, or even potentially, progressive about the state. In contrast to the fiction popularised by liberalism – namely, that the state is a product of individuals freely consenting to be governed – the European state emerged as part of a conservative backlash against the medieval popular struggles for freedom, equality, and democracy. While the critical literature has done much to recover the violent origins of state formation, it has often overlooked the centrality of racial and colonial violence to this process. Racism and colonialism, I have secondly shown, were from the start structural features of the capitalist state. These were never just ‘corrupted’ elements that were imported from the colonial periphery but were central aspects of the state’s genealogy *within* Europe itself. The colonial conquest, enslavement, exploitation of migrant labour, and religious persecution that had been developed by elites within Europe would later form the basis for the techniques and technologies that after 1492 were projected on a global scale. Consequently, and as David Theo Goldberg notes, ‘Race is integral to the emergence, development, and transformations (conceptually, philosophically, and materially) of the modern nation-state. Race marks and orders the modern nation-state, and so state projects, more or less from its point of conceptual and institutional emergence’.⁷⁴ Finally, and as I elaborate in the next section, this re-worked history of state formation has serious consequences for our understanding of the political in capitalist *political* economy. As a system built on violent, coercive, and hierarchical relations, racial capitalism has always been premised on the use of state power. We now turn to this.

Racial Capitalism and the Political Paradigm

In the Western tradition of political thought, the political and the economic have often been imagined as belonging to two distinct spheres of power. Since Adam Smith’s critique of mercantilism, liberals, in particular, have insisted that ‘commercial society’ is a self-correcting system

that is governed, not by the state, but by the invisible hand and the laws of supply and demand. While Marxist scholars have challenged liberalism's association of capitalism with freedom, they have often reproduced its distinction between politics and economics – implicitly accepting the liberal assumption that capitalism is a system of 'free' wage-labour and peaceful market exchange.⁷⁵ Marx, of course, recognised the centrality of state violence to the making of capitalist social relation (through the history of 'what she calls primitive accumulation'), but he importantly regarded the *actual* process of capital accumulation as uniquely premised on the exploitation of wage-labour. Many later Marxists have built on this to argue that 'extra'-economic coercion in fact is external to capitalism as a mode of production. Ellen Meiksins Wood, for example, contends that pre-capitalist (what she calls 'Asiatic' and 'African') modes of production are characterised by a fusion of economic and political powers: in these systems, 'economic and extra-economic, class power and state power, property relations and political relations' have not yet been separated.⁷⁶ In contrast, with the rise of capitalism the economic sphere broke free from the political. From now on, Wood argues, the market would be governed, not by the state, but by the invisible hand.⁷⁷

There are, of course, a variety of Marxist thinkers that have challenged this perceived separation between the political and the economic, of Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, in defining capitalism through an exclusive focus on the capital-labour relation, they have often overlooked the state's history of colonial conquest, plantation slavery, indigenous dispossession, and racialised indentured servitude. In contrast, once we dethrone the abstract, deracinated, and asexual worker – recognising that wage-labour is just one of many forms of exploitation under capitalism – a rich avenue for thinking anew about the interplay of the political and the economic is opened up.

The analysis developed in the last few pages pushes us in precisely this direction: state power has from its inception been central to upholding and entrenching capitalism's violent regimes of extraction and accumulation across both metropole and colony. The carceral, legal, administrative, and extractive systems of the state do not just *maintain* capitalism – by protecting private property, enforcing contract law, preserving order, and so on – but they actively *fashion* it.⁷⁹ Crucially, a Robinsion-inspired analysis not only compels us to consider the distinctively political dimensions of capitalist *political*

economy but also exposes the state as an ongoing war on people and places deemed wayward, waste, and wild: in short, as an accumulation strategy without which capital cannot function.

In *The Terms of Order*, Robinson demonstrates how, with the advent of capital and the state, a hierarchical conception of the political – centred around the problem of governance – came to dominate Western social and political thought. ‘The political came to fruition’, he writes, ‘with the theory of the State as the primary vehicle for the organization and ordering of the mass society produced by capitalism’.⁸⁰ As states harnessed more power, a ‘new science of politics’⁸¹ emerged, offering a justification for sovereign rule by discrediting other cosmologies and modes of life. Political theory thus came to revolve around questions of rulership, mastery, hierarchy and, ultimately, the state. In developing these arguments, many political theorists found themselves returning to the antidemocratic ideas that had animated Greek philosophy and its disdain for common people ‘as simple, traditional and ponderous ... ridiculous, vulgar, and obscene’.⁸² Plato’s *Republic* was to be particularly influential. With its depiction of the poor as idle, incompetent, ignorant, and unfit for political life, it is not a coincidence that the *Republic* gained currency yet again in the fourteenth century. As Robinson notes, Plato became the central thinker of Western political thought because he offered a philosophical justification for keeping the masses out of politics: ‘Plato survives because if he had not existed, he would have had to be invented.’⁸³

The Platonic disdain for common people – the ‘mob’ – is particularly evident in social contract theory. Take, for example, Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. Published in 1651, the book famously justifies the state by contrasting it with the horrid state of nature. Where the medieval anti-property movements had imagined the state of nature as ‘a state of affairs in which all men were equal in status and wealth and in which nobody was oppressed or exploited by anyone else; a state of affairs characterized by universal good faith and brotherly love and also, sometimes, by total community of property and even of spouses’,⁸⁴ Hobbes subverts this image into a war of all against all. No longer a Garden of Eden, life in this original state is ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’.⁸⁵ The conclusion is obvious: the state of nature is to be *feared*, not desired. Hobbes arrived at this argument – not because of the English Civil War, as is often suggested – but because of the ongoing colonisation of the Americas, where indigenous societies served as inspiration for the idea

of the state of nature. 'There are many places where they live so now', he wrote: 'the savage people in many places of America ... have no government at all; and live at this day in that brutish manner'.⁸⁶ Hobbes was not alone in making such arguments: if anything, 'the emergence of possessive individualists from their wanderings in the wilderness of the state of nature into the promised land of civil society is the great theme of moral and political thinkers in the developmental era of our capitalist society'.⁸⁷ In Locke, the state of nature is imagined in terms of 'Indians' in the 'woods of America' and the 'Hottentots' of Africa; in Pufendorf, it is the space of the 'New World peoples'; and in Rousseau, it is through the trope of the 'noble savage'.⁸⁸

Bourgeois political theorists, then, framed the absence of politicality as chaotic, disorderly, primitive, and, ultimately, as distinctively non-white. 'The meaning of *the political*' for those racialised as black and brown, writes Joshua Myers, 'has been captivity and exclusion. Modernity has rendered the political as the space beyond accessibility for racialized others'.⁸⁹ This was premised on a racist philosophy of history in which indigenous societies were made to represent an earlier phase of history, which Europeans had long left behind. As Hegel famously put it, Africa is outside of history; 'The Negro ... exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state' and hence Africa 'is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit'.⁹⁰ While Hegel believed that world history had culminated with the creation of the European state, the threat of racial regression – that is, of falling back into a racialised state of barbarism and savagery – would continue to haunt Western political thought. Keeping race at bay (through discipline, sanitation, apartheid, and/or eugenics) would accordingly emerge as a core logic of capitalist governance.

In *Black Marxism*, Robinson places the birth of this political paradigm in the context of racial capitalism. Where scholars such as Wood regard modernity as the historical era where the economic realm 'emancipated' itself from the political, Robinson helps us understand how they evolved *together* as part of the political economy of capitalism. Contra Marx's linear history, there was never a clear progression from one mode of production to another; rather, feudal social formations remained engrained in capitalism. By de-centring Marx's focus on the capital-labour relation, Robinson shows how state-sponsored violence – including colonial conquest, enclosure, dispossession, extraction, and enslavement – has been central to the history and development

of racial capitalism. The state is here revealed as an assemblage of carceral, administrative, legal, and extractive systems which are aimed at (re)producing a bourgeois order grounded in racial-colonial hierarchy, stratification, and domination. Capitalism has never been confined to an 'economic' sphere of labour exploitation but has always relied on a wider realm of state-sponsored violence and coercion. Marx's claim that capital ceases 'to be capital without wage labor' is here revised to account for the ways in which capital, in fact, cannot function without the political: that is, without governance, domestication, and hierarchy.

In theorising capitalism as a system of *political* economy, Robinson ultimately pushes us to understand state power as a force that is simultaneously repressive and productive. The state is more than just a night watchman that *represses* social unrest, protects property, and pacifies the unruly; indeed, it is also a *worldmaking* force that creates, maintains, and polices the hierarchies and stratifications that capital needs to profit and thrive.⁹¹ This organised violence splits humanity into those associated with property, citizenship, and wages, on the one hand, and those subjected to super-exploitation and dispossession, on the other. While Robinson's work predominantly focuses on racism, ethnicity, and nationalism, later thinkers have suggested that gender, sexuality, religion, indigeneity, and disability function in much the same way: that is, as regimes of domination, stratification, and hierarchisation that enable capital to extract, exploit, and expropriate.⁹²

One way in which the state has created and maintained these conditions of extractability and disposability is through the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor: that is, between those seen as 'hardworking' and 'morally pure', and those who are disregarded as a burden on society. As I explore in further detail in Chapters 3–6, an array of state technologies has been directed against populations deemed unworthy, idle, surplus, parasitic, and bereft, in both the (post)colony and the metropole. While marking these populations for super-exploitation, dispossession, and 'slow death',⁹³ these technologies have also sought to eliminate cosmologies and genres of life that provide alternatives to the dominant terms of order. As we shall see, the state not only began as a counterinsurgency, but it also lives on as one: that is, as an ongoing project of domestication, hierarchisation, and 'organized abandonment'.⁹⁴ As Plato maintained already in 375 BC, and as bourgeois political theorists have insisted again and again, the masses must be *governed*.

Into the Whirlwind

Almost forty years have passed since Kuwasi Balagoon's died on a cold December day in 1986. 'A warrior born on a Sunday who died in the bowels of the state', writes poet Jasmine Gibson, 'Balagoon reminds us that if we must die, it must be in light to guide others out of fascist recuperation. That living under the current conditions given to us is not enough, and is not even a fraction of the sensuousness that can be afforded only in a world that has undergone liberatory revolution.'⁹⁵

In this chapter, I have followed Balagoon in arguing that the history of racial capitalism is a history of state violence. From its inception, the state has been a key vector through which capitalist modes of accumulation, exploitation, and dispossession are organised, executed, and rendered possible. As Cedric Robinson was well aware, the state has never been a pacified or progressive entity ensuring non-violence, freedom, or justice: rather, the state is a counterrevolutionary project premised on hierarchisation, domination, and antidemocracy. The state first arose from a crisis-ridden European feudal order that was already infused with racial and colonial violence: since then, politics as we know it has revolved around governance, domestication, and mastery.

These insights have radical implications for how we think about justice today. If state violence is a constituent element of racial capitalism, then justice cannot be limited to making claims on the state, whether through appeals to rights, law, or recognition. Rather, the state is itself something to be resisted and struggled against. This might, of course, sound naïve and utopian. After all, the hegemony of the political paradigm has made it virtually impossible to conceive of freedom and sociality outside the state. As Robinson explains, with the rise of the capitalist state 'the antipolitical was translated and transformed into ethical theory, theology, and philosophy, that is into forms of idealism'.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, and as we shall see in the next chapter, outside the dominant terms of order exist people and communities that have continued to explore alternatives to politics. By stepping into this whirlwind – what C. L. R. James calls 'beyond the boundary' – the next chapter traces the antipolitical visions that have continued to persist in the margins. We now turn to these dreamworlds.