

CAPITAL AND COMMUNITY

I am suggesting, therefore, that this suppression in modern European social theory of an independent narrative of community makes possible both the posing of the distinction between state and civil society and the erasure of that distinction. At one extreme, then, we have arguments proclaiming the sovereignty of the individual will, insisting that the state has no business to interfere in the domain of individual freedom of choice and contractual arrangements. At the other extreme are the arguments that would have the *one* political community, given the single, determinate, demographically enumerable form of the nation-state, assume the directing role in all regulatory functions of society, usurping the domain of civil society and family, and blurring the distinctions between the public and the private. It is to this range of arguments that people must refer when they say that the state-civil society relation in Western thought is not one of simple opposition. I will argue that the possibilities of opposition as well as encapsulation arise because the concepts of the individual and the nation-state both become embedded in a new grand narrative: the narrative of capital. This narrative of capital seeks to suppress that other narrative of community and produce in the course of its journey both the normalized individual and the modern regime of disciplinary power.

The historical specificity of European social thought cannot be described simply by Taylor's conditions (A) to (E). It would not be surprising at all if one finds in the premodern histories of other, non-European, countries similar features in state-society relations. It is also difficult to

explain why, if European thought is indeed conditioned by these specifics, people from Poland to the Philippines to Nicaragua should appeal to these philosophers from Britain, France, or Germany to think out and justify what they do to their own societies and states. If there is one great moment that turns the provincial thought of Europe to universal philosophy, the parochial history of Europe to universal history, it is the moment of capital—capital that is global in its territorial reach and universal in its conceptual domain. It is the narrative of capital that can turn the violence of mercantilist trade, war, genocide, conquest and colonialism into a story of universal progress, development, modernization, and freedom.

For this narrative to take shape, the destruction of community is fundamental. Marx saw this clearly when he identified as the necessary condition for capitalist production the separation of the mass of laborers from their means of labor. This so-called primitive accumulation is nothing else but the destruction of precapitalist community, which, in various forms, had regulated the social unity of laborers with their means of production. Thus community, in the narrative of capital, becomes relegated to the latter's prehistory, a natural, prepolitical, primordial stage in social evolution that must be superseded for the journey of freedom and progress to begin. And since the story of capital is universal, community too becomes the universal prehistory of progress, identified with medievalism in Europe and the stagnant, backward, undeveloped present in the rest of the world.

It could not, however, be entirely suppressed. The domain of civil society, ruled by "liberty, equality, property and Bentham," could not produce an adequate justification for the lack of freedom and equality within the industrial labor process itself and the continued division of society into the opposed classes of capital and labor. What Marx did not see too well was the ability of capitalist society to ideologically reunite capital and labor at the level of the political community of the nation, borrowing from another narrative the rhetoric of love, duty, welfare, and the like. Notwithstanding its universalist scope, capital remained parasitic upon the reconstructed particularism of the nation. (It would be an interesting exercise to identify in Marx's *Capital* the places where this other narrative makes a surreptitious appearance: for instance, money, the universal equivalent, which nevertheless retains the form of a national currency assigned a particular exchange-value by the national state; or the value of labor-power, homogeneous and normalized, which is nevertheless determined by specific historical and cultural particularities.)

We must remember that the rise of a public sphere in Europe, which is said to be a space outside the supervision of political authority where "opinion could present itself as that of society," was also crucial in con-

necting a reconstructed cultural identity of the people with the legitimate jurisdiction of the state. It was principally in this public space where, through the medium of print-capitalism, the homogenized forms of a national culture were forged—through the standardization of language, aesthetic norms, and consumer tastes. The public sphere, then, was not only a domain that marked the distinction of state and civil society; by creating the cultural standards through which “public opinion” could claim to speak on behalf of the nation, it also united state and civil society. Civil society now became the space for the diverse life of individuals in the nation; the state became the nation’s singular representative embodiment, the only legitimate form of community.

But community is not easily appropriated within the narrative of capital. Community, from the latter’s standpoint, belongs to the domain of the natural, the primordial. Only in its sanitized, domesticated form can it become a shared subjective feeling that protects and nurtures (good nationalism). But it always carries with it the threatening possibility of becoming violent, divisive, fearsome, irrational (bad nationalism). It is not so much the state/civil society opposition but rather the capital/community opposition that seems to me to be the great unsurpassed contradiction in Western social philosophy. Both state and civil-social institutions have assigned places within the narrative of capital. Community, which ideally should have been banished from the kingdom of capital, continues to lead a subterranean, potentially subversive, life within it because it refuses to go away.

Recent attempts in social philosophy to produce arguments from a “communitarian” standpoint against the dominant orthodoxy of liberal or bureaucratic individualism have sought either to rediscover premodern forms of the political community, lost under the rubble left behind by the onward march of modernity, or to find them among suppressed groups or deviant cults surviving on the margins of normalized society. Alasdair MacIntyre, for instance, sets up his argument against the Enlightenment project of modernity, and by implication against the Nietzschean critique of modernity, by vindicating a classical Aristotelian concept of virtue.²¹ In doing this, he has to conjure up the vision of the polis, a determinate political community institutionalizing the practices, goals, and tradition of a moral community. Recent theorists of anarchism have looked for support in the ethnographic evidence on stateless tribal communities or in the practices of marginal utopian communities. And Michel Foucault, seeking in the last years of his life to find the ground for resistance to the all-conquering sway of disciplinary power, located it in the possibility of “an insurrection of subjugated knowledges,” a localized but autonomous and noncentralized kind of theoretical production

“whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established régimes of thought.”²²

I am pointing out a different possibility. Looking at the relatively untheorized idea of “the nation” in Western social philosophy, one notices an inelegant braiding of an idea of community with the concept of capital. This is not an archaic idea buried in the recesses of history, nor is it part of a marginal subculture, nor can it be dismissed as a premodern remnant that an absentminded Enlightenment has somehow forgotten to erase. It is very much a part of the here-and-now of modernity, and yet it is an idea that remains impoverished and limited to the singular form of the nation-state because it is denied a legitimate life in the world of the modern knowledges of human society. This denial, in turn, is related to the fact that by its very nature, the idea of the community marks a limit to the realm of disciplinary power. My hypothesis, then, is that an investigation into the idea of the nation, by uncovering a necessary contradiction between capital and community, is likely to lead us to a fundamental critique of modernity from within itself.

But beyond the intellectual history of Europe, our inquiry into the colonial and postcolonial histories of other parts of the world is more likely to enable us to make this critique.²³ The contradictions between the two narratives of capital and community can be seen quite clearly in the histories of anticolonial nationalist movements. The forms of the modern state were imported into these countries through the agency of colonial rule. The institutions of civil society, in the forms in which they had arisen in Europe, also made their appearance in the colonies precisely to create a public domain for the legitimation of colonial rule. This process was, however, fundamentally limited by the fact that the colonial state could confer only subjecthood on the colonized; it could not grant them citizenship. The crucial break in the history of anticolonial nationalism comes when the colonized refuse to accept membership of this civil society of subjects. They construct their national identities within a different narrative, that of the community. They do not have the option of doing this within the domain of bourgeois civil-social institutions. They create, consequently, a very different domain—a cultural domain—marked by the distinctions of the material and the spiritual, the outer and the inner. This inner domain of culture is declared the sovereign territory of the nation, where the colonial state is not allowed entry, even as the outer domain remains surrendered to the colonial power. The rhetoric here (Gandhi is a particularly good example)²⁴ is of love, kinship, austerity, sacrifice. The rhetoric is in fact antimodernist, antiindividualist, even anticapitalist. The attempt is, if I may stay with Gandhi for a while, to find, against the grand narrative of history itself, the cultural resources to negotiate the terms

through which people, living in different, contextually defined, communities, can coexist peacefully, productively, and creatively within large political units.

The irony is, of course, that this other narrative is again violently interrupted once the postcolonial national state attempts to resume its journey along the trajectory of world-historical development. The modern state, embedded as it is within the universal narrative of capital, cannot recognize within its jurisdiction any form of community except the single, determinate, demographically enumerable form of the nation. It must therefore subjugate, if necessary by the use of state violence, all such aspirations of community identity. These other aspirations, in turn, can give to themselves a historically valid justification only by claiming an alternative nationhood with rights to an alternative state.

One can see how a conception of the state-society relation, born within the parochial history of Western Europe but made universal by the global sway of capital, dogs the contemporary history of the world. I do not think that the invocation of the state/civil society opposition in the struggle against socialist-bureaucratic regimes in Eastern Europe or in the former Soviet republics or, for that matter, in China, will produce anything other than strategies seeking to replicate the history of Western Europe. The result has been demonstrated a hundred times. The provincialism of the European experience will be taken as the universal history of progress; by comparison, the history of the rest of the world will appear as the history of lack, of inadequacy—an inferior history. Appeals will be made all over again to philosophies produced in Britain, France, and Germany. The fact that these doctrines were produced in complete ignorance of the histories of other parts of the world will not matter: they will be found useful and enlightening.²⁵ It would indeed be a supreme irony of history if socialist industrialization gets written into the narrative of capital as the phase when socialist-bureaucratic regimes had to step in to undertake “primitive accumulation” and clear the way for the journey of capital to be resumed along its “normal” course.

In the meantime, the struggle between community and capital, irreconcilable within this grand narrative, will continue. The forms of the modern state will be forced into the grid of determinate national identities. This will mean a substantialization of cultural differences, necessarily excluding as “minorities” those who would not conform to the chosen marks of nationality. The struggle between “good” and “bad” nationalism will be played out all over again.

What, then, are the true categories of universal history? State and civil society? public and private? social regulation and individual rights?—all made significant within the grand narrative of capital as the history of freedom, modernity and progress? Or the narrative of community—

untheorized, relegated to the primordial zone of the natural, denied any subjectivity that is not domesticated to the requirements of the modern state, and yet persistent in its invocation of the rhetoric of love and kinship against the homogenizing sway of the normalized individual?

It is this unresolved struggle between the narratives of capital and community within the discursive space of the modern state that is reflected in our embarrassment at the many uses of *jāti*. Kamalakanta, if he is still around, is now, I suspect, laughing at us.

25. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1977), ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 23. Foucault was well aware of the fact that power/knowledge was not quite dramatically, if rather ambivalently, a function of Foucault's vision. In his criticism for the Iranian revolution he said, "These events, he says, 'did not represent a withdrawal of the power assumed by the state, a determination that is too broad. It was, rather, the rejection by an entire people, of a modernization that is no longer in itself.' In their will for 'Islamic government' he added, the Iranian people were seeking, 'even at the risk of their own lives, something that we have forgotten, even as a possibility, the Renaissance and the great crisis of Christianity: a political spirituality that precisely lost the French laughing, and I assume they are wrong.' See Didier Iribarne, *Le Français*, trans. Betty Wing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 24. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 23. "A world without spirit," Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 23. "The power/knowledge complex is not a simple matter of power/knowledge as well as the diffusion of its influence," Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 23. "The power/knowledge complex is not a simple matter of power/knowledge as well as the diffusion of its influence," Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 23.

26. I have discussed this aspect of Gandhi in *Historical Thought*, pp. 85-130.

27. I am grateful to Dipesh Chakrabarty for pointing out to me the implications of this formulation. Chakrabarty has argued this point in his *Provincializing China: History and the Artifice of History*.