

From Techno-Feudalism to Digital Constitutionalism

A Manifesto Against Onoptic Sovereignty and the Colonisation of the State

“Onopticon does not watch. It prepares and imposes the conditions under which human beings encounter the world.”

Hakki Tan

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8582-3132>

Why This Manifesto Exists

This manifesto is not founded upon rumour.

It is not an appeal to hidden knowledge.

It does not require the fantasy of a single organisation secretly directing the world.

The structural problem is already visible.

Technology corporations increasingly present themselves as strategic actors in defence, intelligence, security, public administration and geopolitical competition. Private infrastructures increasingly shape how public institutions identify risk, establish priorities, classify populations and organise intervention. Elite networks connect technology capital, political influence, academic authority, security institutions, investment structures and media visibility beyond meaningful public scrutiny.

At the same time, new narratives of the future present ownership as a burden, privacy as an inconvenience, permanent connection as freedom and dependency upon infrastructure as progress.

These developments are not identical.

They do not prove a single command centre.

But they are mutually reinforcing.

A doctrine gives technological power its language.

A network gives it circulation, trust and access.

Infrastructure gives it operational force.

Future narratives make it appear normal, modern and desirable.

The question is not whether one company controls everything.

The question is whether societies are being reorganised around infrastructures they cannot inspect, contest, replace or refuse.

This manifesto is written because the state is not merely becoming weaker.

Private infrastructures, corporate dependencies and closed networks are separating the state from society.

This Is Not a Party Programme or an Organisational Blueprint

This text is not a call to form a political party.

It is not an electoral programme.

It is not an administrative plan for a new governing class.

It is not an organisational blueprint for capturing state power.

It is a manifesto.

It is a declaration against the transformation of the state from a shared public institution into an instrument of private infrastructures, technological monopolies, closed networks and transnational concentrations of capital.

The state may retain its external form.

It may have a parliament.

It may have courts.

It may have ministries.

It may have borders.

It may have a flag.

Yet these forms become hollow when the state's public memory, technical capacity, critical data, security systems and decision environments are controlled elsewhere.

A state whose essential systems are no longer intelligible to itself is not fully sovereign.

A state that cannot inspect, repair, alter or replace its own technical infrastructure without private permission is not fully sovereign.

A state whose decisions are increasingly shaped by opaque systems of classification and prediction is not fully democratic.

The decisive question is not simply who governs the state.

The decisive question is:

To whom does the state belong?

The state belongs neither to corporations nor to data monopolies; neither to closed security networks nor to technical elites; neither to investors nor to private systems that convert public life into a proprietary environment.

The state belongs to society.

I. Onopticon: The Imposition of the World

The Panopticon watches.

Control systems modulate behaviour.

Surveillance capitalism extracts and predicts.

Onopticon does not watch.

It prepares and imposes the conditions under which human beings encounter the world.

Its question is not simply:

Who watches whom?

Its question is:

Who may encounter which reality, under what conditions, through which infrastructural threshold, and with what possibility of refusal?

Onopticon does not merely collect data.

It does not merely classify conduct.

It does not merely influence a decision already waiting to be made.

It pre-processes the field in which decisions, movement, recognition, access, appeal and social viability become possible.

It determines the door.

It determines the key.
It determines the threshold.
It determines the condition of entry.
It determines the channel through which an objection may be heard.
Then it presents this arrangement as reality.
The violence of Onopticon is not that it always commands.
Its violence is that it makes command unnecessary.
A judge may remain human.
A doctor may remain human.
A civil servant may remain human.
A military commander may remain human.
Yet the file before the judge may already be ordered.
The patient before the doctor may already be classified.
The claimant before the public authority may already be ranked.
The person before the commander may already be converted into a risk, target, anomaly or priority.
The human remains in the loop.
But the loop has already been constructed.
The decision remains formally human.
But the reality within which it is made has already been technically imposed.
This is Onoptic sovereignty.
Power no longer appears only in the moment of decision.
Power appears in the construction of the world presented to the person who must decide.

II. From Decision to Horizon

Classical sovereignty asks:

Who decides?

Onoptic sovereignty asks:

What world has been imposed before the decision is made?

This shift is decisive.

The state may formally retain decision-making authority while losing control over the pre-decisional environment in which decisions are formed.

A private platform can prepare the threat horizon.

A predictive system can prepare the priority order.

A proprietary model can prepare the risk field.

A dashboard can prepare the institutional reality through which public officials act.

The formal decision remains with the state.

The horizon of decision is produced elsewhere.

This is the colonisation of state reason.

A corporation does not need to replace the state in order to govern.

It only needs to shape what the state sees as real, urgent, dangerous, efficient or necessary.

When public institutions begin to encounter the world primarily through private infrastructures, the state does not merely purchase technical assistance.

It begins to surrender its capacity for independent judgement.

The state's capacity to think cannot be rented.

A public institution that cannot understand the systems it uses cannot govern through them democratically.

It can only obey them operationally.

III. Doctrine, Network and Infrastructure

Contemporary technological power does not operate only through software.

It operates through doctrine.

Technology is increasingly presented as the medium through which military capability, state security, public administration and geopolitical power will be determined.

Data is no longer merely information.

It becomes a strategic substance.

Software is no longer merely a tool.

It becomes an operational environment.

Infrastructure is no longer merely technical support.

It becomes the condition through which authority sees, classifies and acts.

Yet doctrine alone does not become power.

A doctrine requires networks through which it can circulate, gain legitimacy and acquire institutional access.

It requires environments in which investors, politicians, military figures, academics, journalists, entrepreneurs and security actors can recognise one another, exchange influence, build trust and generate common assumptions about the future.

A doctrine does not become power merely because it is written.

It becomes power when it enters institutions.

It becomes power when it produces confidence.

It becomes power when it becomes the common language of people who possess different forms of authority but share access to the same strategic horizon.

An operational platform does not merely store data.

It makes data readable.

It connects fragments.

It constructs relations.

It ranks priorities.

It produces an actionable reality for institutions that must decide, intervene, enforce, allocate or target.

Data becomes an operational environment.

Operational environment becomes priority.

Priority becomes intervention.

Intervention becomes sovereign practice.

The issue is not simply whether a company makes decisions.

The question is whether a company prepares the conditions under which state decisions become thinkable, defensible and executable.

IV. The Civil Language of Dependency

A new regime cannot sustain itself through security language alone.

It must also become desirable.

It must enter everyday life through the language of comfort, efficiency, sustainability, access, personalisation and convenience.

This is the civil language of dependency.

Ownership becomes old-fashioned.

Repair becomes inconvenient.

Privacy becomes inefficient.

Autonomy becomes costly.

Non-participation becomes irrational.

The individual is invited to accept continuous access in exchange for continuous surrender.

A service model is not inherently oppressive.

Shared systems can be useful.

Subscriptions can be practical.

Digital coordination can reduce cost and improve access.

The rupture occurs elsewhere.

It begins when purchase, repair, retention, transfer and exit cease to be meaningful alternatives.

It begins when access becomes conditional upon accounts, licences, identity verification, platform rules, active subscriptions and permanent technical permission.

At that point, access is no longer a choice.

It becomes mandatory inclusion.

Mandatory inclusion does not expel the person from the system.

It does something more effective.

It keeps the person inside.

But only in the form the system can process.

The person may move, but only through authorised channels.

The person may communicate, but only through an account.

The person may work, but only through a platform.

The person may appeal, but only through the interface that produced the exclusion.

The person may remain socially viable, but only through conditions established elsewhere.

This is not simply a market transformation.

It is ontological deprivation.

The conditions through which people inhabit the world are removed from them and returned as services.

Mobility becomes a service.

Shelter becomes a service.

Visibility becomes a service.

Communication becomes a service.

Recognition becomes a service.

Life becomes a continuous request for permission.

V. Homovictimus: The Subject of Forced Legibility

Homovictimus is not merely a victim.

It is not a passive mass.

It is not a name for political helplessness.

It is the human being produced within an imposed infrastructural order.

Homovictimus is compelled to become legible in order to remain socially viable.

But that legibility becomes the very mechanism through which the person is classified, managed, suspended, ranked and made vulnerable.

To receive services, one must become recognisable.

To become recognisable, one must become legible.

To become legible, one must become classifiable.

To become classifiable, one must become governable.

To become governable is to risk foreclosure.

The tragedy of Homovictimus is not invisibility.

It is forced legibility.

The person becomes a profile.

A score.

A case.

A target.
A risk.
A customer.
A user.
A data point.
The person is not necessarily excluded.
The person is included.
But not on their own terms.
Not as a whole human being.
Not as a bearer of irreducible opacity.
The person is included only as the system can process them.
Their freedom is not always abolished.
It is tied to permissions.
Their voice is not always silenced.
It is converted into an application form.
Their life is not always destroyed.
It is attached to thresholds.
Identity thresholds.
Payment thresholds.
Mobility thresholds.
Health thresholds.
Energy thresholds.
Account thresholds.
Risk thresholds.
Eligibility thresholds.
Homovictimus is held responsible as an agent while deprived of the conditions required for agency.
The person is told to choose.
But the field of choice has already been narrowed.
The person is told to appeal.
But the channel of appeal has already been restricted.
The person is told to adapt.
But the environment in which adaptation must occur has already been imposed.

VI. The State Did Not Commit Suicide: Society Was Paralysed

The state did not emerge spontaneously.

It was historically produced through social struggle, collective organisation, conflict, law, memory and the need to secure common life.

Its legitimacy derives from this origin.

The state is not supposed to stand above society as an alien force.

It is supposed to institutionalise society's capacity to secure justice, continuity, defence and public order.

Yet modern states repeatedly develop the tendency to detach themselves from the societies that created them.

They develop bureaucratic interests.

They develop administrative reflexes.

They develop institutions concerned more with their own survival than with the public conditions they are meant to protect.

The deeper problem is not only that states become oppressive.

The deeper problem is that societies are rendered dependent.

Citizens become service recipients.

Account holders.

Units of eligibility.

Objects of registration.

Subjects of risk.

Their collective capacity to organise, produce knowledge, supervise institutions and construct alternatives is weakened.

This dependence is not only economic.

It is institutional.

It is epistemic.

It is psychological.

A society that cannot organise outside the state may criticise the state, but it cannot effectively restrain it.

A state that cannot be restrained by society cannot restrain capital.

A state that cannot restrain capital becomes available for capture.

This is why the state did not simply destroy itself.

Its gates were opened from within.

Society was paralysed until the transfer of public memory, public infrastructure and political judgement into private systems began to appear as ordinary modernisation.

A hospital becomes dependent on proprietary software and this is called efficiency.

A municipality becomes dependent on a platform and this is called digital transformation.

A welfare institution becomes dependent on automated classification and this is called administrative reform.

A security body becomes dependent on a predictive system and this is called innovation.

What appears as convenience may be the removal of collective capacity.

What appears as modernisation may be the displacement of sovereignty.

VII. The Revolving Door and the Internal Capture of Public Power

The colonisation of the state does not occur only through software contracts.

It also occurs through careers, consultancies, board memberships, investment networks and informal access.

The revolving door is central to this process.

Officials who oversee technology procurement, security systems, public data, defence infrastructure or digital transformation may later join the companies whose interests they previously shaped.

This is not always illegal.

It remains a profound democratic danger.

The public official may determine which company grows.

The company may later reward that official with employment, prestige, access, consultancy income, shares or influence.

The boundary between public decision and private benefit begins to dissolve.

Corruption is not only the transfer of money.

It can also take the form of future promises.

Professional mobility.

Board appointments.

Elite membership.

Strategic access.

The state is not captured only from outside.

Its doors are often opened from within.

A public institution cannot remain independent when its own personnel are trained to treat private corporate infrastructure as the natural horizon of public action.

VIII. From Formal Sovereignty to Real Sovereignty

Every country with a territory, a population and recognised political institutions should be treated as sovereign in principle.

Sovereignty is not a privilege reserved for militarily powerful, technologically advanced or economically dominant states.

Yet formal sovereignty and real sovereignty are increasingly diverging.

A state may possess a flag while its public data is held elsewhere.

It may possess borders while its payment systems, energy infrastructure, communication networks, defence technologies and public services depend upon external technical systems.

It may possess a parliament while its economic choices are constrained by debt regimes, technology monopolies, investment structures and transnational capital.

This is the political hypocrisy of the present age.

The international order speaks of sovereign equality while normalising technical dependency.

Colonialism no longer operates only through territorial occupation.

It operates through debt.

Through data.

Through patents.

Through cloud infrastructure.

Through defence contracts.

Through platform monopolies.

Through supply chains that make exit materially impossible.

Old colonialism seized ports, mines, land and labour.

New colonialism seizes data, infrastructure, behaviour and future possibility.

Borders are not merely geographical lines.

They are legal and political limits placed upon power.

The boundary of the state is violated when public capacity becomes private property.

The boundary of society is violated when collective life becomes a field of permanent extraction.

The boundary of human dignity is violated when the person becomes only a processable object.

IX. The Ecological Materiality of Onoptic Power

Onoptic power is not immaterial.

It does not live in the cloud.

The cloud has a territory.

It has data centres.

It has cooling systems.

It has water consumption.

It has energy demand.

It has transmission lines.

It has rare-earth extraction.

It has lithium, cobalt, copper and silicon.

It has mines, ports, warehouses, cables, factories and waste zones.

Every claim that digital power is weightless conceals the material world upon which that power depends.

The infrastructure that pre-processes reality also consumes reality.
It consumes land.
It consumes water.
It consumes energy.
It consumes labour.
It consumes the ecological conditions of collective survival.
Techno-feudalism is therefore not only a regime of data extraction.
It is an ecological regime of infrastructural concentration.
Its intelligence is powered by mineral extraction.
Its predictive systems are cooled by water.
Its clouds depend upon electrical grids.
Its apparent immateriality rests upon material sacrifice elsewhere.
The ecological cost is not distributed equally.
Some territories provide the minerals.
Some communities bear the pollution.
Some regions lose water.
Some workers absorb the danger.
Some societies carry the waste.
Others receive the seamless interface.
The digital order presents itself as clean because its damage is displaced.
It calls itself efficient because its material costs are made invisible.
It calls itself sustainable because extraction occurs beyond the horizon of those who benefit from it.
This is not sustainability.
It is ecological externalisation.
A future governed by permanent computation, expanding data extraction and limitless infrastructural growth cannot be described as emancipatory merely because it is digital.
A clean interface can conceal a devastated landscape.
A frictionless service can conceal an exhausted river.
A smart city can conceal a sacrificed territory.
The question is not only who controls the infrastructure.
The question is:
Whose land, water, labour and future are consumed in order to maintain it?
Onopticon imposes not only a political reality.
It imposes an ecological reality.
It turns the planet into infrastructure and calls that conversion progress.

X. Differential Imposition: Gender, Race, Class and Colonial Continuity

Onoptic power does not impose itself upon an abstract human being.

It encounters bodies already marked by history.

Gender.

Race.

Class.

Disability.

Migration status.

Language.

Religion.

Colonial location.

Geography.

The person classified by an infrastructure is never merely a neutral individual.

They enter systems shaped by prior inequalities.

A risk model may inherit the prejudices embedded in historical records.

A credit system may convert inherited poverty into future exclusion.

A border system may turn nationality into suspicion.

A welfare system may transform need into administrative doubt.

A policing system may convert racialised communities into permanent objects of attention.

A health system may treat unequal access as individual failure.

An employment platform may translate gendered, racialised or class-based disadvantage into a score of productivity, reliability or employability.

The language of technical neutrality often conceals this violence.

The system claims only to process data.

But data is never outside history.

A classification system does not begin with equality merely because it uses numbers.

It may convert historical inequality into operational truth.

It may turn social hierarchy into risk.

It may turn exclusion into eligibility criteria.

It may turn colonial division into technical priority.

The violence of Onopticon is therefore differential.

Not everyone is made visible in the same way.

Not everyone is made risky in the same way.

Not everyone is permitted to remain opaque in the same way.

Not everyone can refuse infrastructure at the same cost.

For some, account closure means inconvenience.

For others, it means the loss of income, movement, shelter, medical access or legal existence.

For some, surveillance is an abstract concern.

For others, it is an inherited condition of being treated as suspicious before action, before speech and before proof.

Digital colonialism extends this inequality across territories.

Powerful states and corporations do not merely extract data from weaker societies.

They shape the infrastructures through which those societies become legible, governable and economically dependent.

They build the platforms.

They own the standards.

They control the patents.

They define the technical language.

They establish the thresholds of participation.

Then they present dependency as integration.

This is not a break with colonial history.

It is colonial history translated into infrastructure.

Old colonialism divided the world between centres and peripheries.

Digital colonialism divides it between those who own the systems of recognition and those who must become recognisable within them.

The decisive question is not only who is included.

It is:

Included into whose reality, under whose categories, and at whose cost?

XI. Society as a Political Subject

Society does not mean one class, one identity, one association, one party or one elite that claims to speak for everyone else.

Society includes women and men, young and old, workers and unemployed people, rural and urban communities, different languages, beliefs, ethnicities, genders, cultural traditions and social positions.

Society is not homogeneous.

It contains conflict.

It contains inequality.

It contains domination.

It contains competing interests.

This does not weaken the idea of society.

It prevents society from becoming a romantic fiction.

Families, associations, unions, universities, cooperatives, neighbourhoods, professional bodies and civic initiatives are not society itself.

They are forms through which society speaks, organises, disputes and acts.

To restore society as a political subject does not mean imposing consensus.

It means refusing the assumption that private networks, corporate blocs, state bureaucracies or technical elites may monopolise the power to determine collective conditions of life.

A society that cannot understand the infrastructures shaping its existence cannot recognise the world that has been imposed upon it.

A society that cannot contest those infrastructures cannot govern itself.

A society that mistakes its captivity for access cannot name the force that has made it captive.

Resistance begins when imposed reality is named as imposed.

Opacity is not a flaw.

It is the last refuge of being against operation.

Conclusion: Not a Third Way, but a Necessary Path

The present offers two false choices.

The first is corporate techno-feudalism.

In this model, citizens become customers, data producers and raw material for platform power. The state becomes dependent upon private infrastructure. Democracy becomes subordinate to opaque systems of visibility, ranking, prediction and intervention.

The second is the Digital Leviathan.

In this model, the state centralises data, expands surveillance and invokes security in order to regulate society without meaningful restraint.

Neither model is free.

Neither model is democratic.

Neither model preserves the political subject.

What is required is not a compromise between the two.

It is not a third way.

It is a necessary path.

The state's archive is its public memory.

Its technical capacity is its ability to think.

Its submission to law is its legitimacy.

But none of these can survive without society's capacity to supervise, contest and reconstruct public power.

A state that society cannot supervise becomes vulnerable to capital.

Capital that the state cannot restrain becomes capable of reorganising social life as private property.

Technology that law cannot limit becomes an instrument of domination.

The necessary path cannot be a cleaner version of the digital cage.

It cannot save the climate by converting the planet into infrastructure.

It cannot promise equality by processing historical inequality as technical truth.

The task is not to reject the future.

The task is to refuse a future written in advance by corporate service models, elite networks and predictive systems.

The future is not a platform.

It is not a security file.

It is not a subscription plan.

It is not an algorithmic forecast.

The future is not an environment imposed upon society.

The future is society's constitutive right.

The question is no longer whether a third option can be found.

The question is whether the necessary path can be named before the imposed world becomes irreversible.