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Ecology and war: Between Nationalism, Capitalism and Class

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Abstracts

War, capitalism and ecology

After the End of the World: Another Season of War in South Lebanon

Munira Khayyat (New York University Abu Dhabi)

The end of the world is nothing new for many inhabitants of the Global South, and South Lebanon has just lived through another end of the world. This talk insistently speaks from the spacetime of devastation, after the end of the world, and describes resistant ecologies that have taken root through generations of military destruction in this landscape of war. In this apocalyptic moment, and with the Lebanese military resistance in momentary abeyance, the inhabitants of Lebanese frontline villages continue to resist occupation and annihilation through ordinary acts of living. When life is the intentional target of the settler-colonial war-machine, life in all of its forms becomes resistance.

Munira Khayyat *is an anthropologist whose research revolves around life in war, intimate genealogies of empire, and theory from the South. Her first book, A Landscape of War: Ecologies of Resistance and Survival in South Lebanon (University of California Press 2022) examines resistant ecologies in a world of perennial warfare. Drawing on long-term fieldwork in frontline villages along Lebanon's southern border with Israel, she examines war not only as a place of death and destruction, but also necessarily, as an environment of living. Khayyat is currently working on a second book that fleshes out the complex heart of empire in Saudi Arabia. Heart of Black Gold draws on a personal archive meticulously created by her maternal grandfather, who was among the first Arabian employees of ARAMCO, the Arab American Oil Company. How has oil — its extractive, shiny*

infrastructures, camps, big men, politics and corporations, its global ecologies — shaped lived environments? Insisting on a feminist and multidisciplinary rearranging of the archive, the book inhabits history-in-the-making as it unfolds in domestic scenes, lived quarters, the affective terrains of oil. Khayyat's research has been supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, the Rachel Carson Center. Her writing has appeared in American Ethnologist, Public Culture, JMEWS, Cultural Anthropology, Anthropology News, HAU, and a number of edited volumes. Khayyat was a Member of the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton (2018-2019). Before joining NYUAD, she taught at the American University in Cairo (2013-2023) and the American University of Beirut (2011-2013). She holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Columbia University (2013), an MPhil in Social Anthropology from Cambridge University (1998) and a BA in history (1997) from the American University of Beirut.

Not All Circular Futures Are Green: On Ecological Transitions, Militarism, and Autarky

Andrea Genovese (Sheffield University)

This talk examines the possibility that circular economy initiatives may evolve along trajectories that diverge from democratic or socially equitable ideals. Rather than treating circularity as inherently progressive, the talk will explore its conceptual ambiguity, showing how circular principles, such as repair, reuse, and resource efficiency, can, under certain conditions, be co-opted into authoritarian governance models or militarised industrial agendas. Through a series of concrete cases, I consider how circular practices have already been used, or could plausibly be used, to support rearmament strategies, military supply chains, and autarkic economic planning. The aim is to open a space for critical reflection on the political dimensions of ecological transitions.

Andrea Genovese *is a Professor of Logistics and Supply Chain Management at Sheffield University Management School (SUMS). He joined SUMS in February 2010, working first as a Research Associate, then as a Lecturer and as a Senior Lecturer. Andrea holds a PhD in the area of Operational Research from University of Naples "Federico II" (Italy). His education also includes a MSc (with BSc) in Industrial Engineering from the same institution and a Master in Business Administration (MBA) at the Whittemore School of Business and Economics of University of New Hampshire (USA). Prior to his PhD, he has worked as Logistics Central Planner for a MNE operating in the tyres industry. His primary research interest lies in the development and application of decision support methodologies (based on both qualitative and quantitative paradigms) in order to solve complex problems in the field of Supply Chain Management, with a special emphasis on Environmental and Social Sustainability of Logistics and Production Systems. He has published several papers in leading international journals (such as Omega, International*

Journal of Production Research, International Journal of Production Economics, Expert Systems with Applications, European Journal of Operational Research, International Journal of Operations and Production Management). He has acted as a committee member of several international conferences (including EWGLA 2010, ISAHP 2011, IPSERA 2012, ISOLDE 2014, ISAHP 2016). He has been involved in several research projects funded by national and international bodies. Andrea is also delivering training and consultancy activities within the Logistics and Supply Chain Management (LSCM) Research Centre at the University of Sheffield.

Round table: Rethinking Class Conflict in a Post-Globalized World

The incredible and sad story of Hitler's posthumous victory and its (potential) disastrous consequences. World ecologies, military escalation and changing socio-technical paradigms

Alfredo Agustoni (University of Chieti-Pescara)

Roberto Guiducci's provocative statement in his book “Ti uccido come un cane. Magia nera e violenza nell'età nucleare” (I'll kill you like a dog. Black magic and violence in the nuclear age), in which he refers to a “posthumous victory for Hitler”, provides an opportunity for a series of reflections on the relationship between military competition and the redefinition of technological scenarios. Guiducci's contribution dates back to the early 1980s, when, in a phase of resurgence of the Cold War, the mutual annihilation of the two superpowers, as a consequence of a nuclear escalation that began in response to German attempts to develop weapons of mass destruction, seemed anything but a political fantasy scenario. If the two superpowers that won the Second World War were to annihilate each other, the crux of the argument is that Hitler would have achieved a paradoxical posthumous victory, having triggered a process destined to lead his victors to mutual destruction. Beyond the discourse on the paranoid and necrophilic nature of military escalation, which is particularly dear to the author, our discourse focuses on the leading role of military escalation in the reconfiguration of socio-technical paradigms, in close connection with the creation of capitalist relations of production. This is also in contrast to a

certain liberal, neoclassical and neoliberal narrative, which sees not only innovative processes but also paradigm shifts as a consequence of market dynamics.

Resisting and promoting peace through practices of "civil science" in contexts of war

Anna Berti Suman, Paolo Giardullo (University of Padova)

Armed conflicts are multiplying and moving closer to our borders, as in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Such conflicts have devastating socio-ecological consequences. However, this could also represent a catalyst for demonstrating the potential contribution that "civil science" practices – understood as the application of participatory citizen science methodologies to monitor and assess the environmental impacts caused by armed conflicts, both during the conflict and in the post-conflict phase – can make in showing the localised impact of war damage and assessing the loss of natural resources from a socio-cultural perspective. The collection of evidence can be seen as a form of resistance that both reveals and strengthens the bond between local communities and their territory. We aim to develop a reflection on the mobilisation of such practices in war contexts to demonstrate existing damage and to promote long-term environmental peacebuilding.

The path of weapons: the genesis of capitalism in Valtrompia. Ecological notes for the study of weapons and the places where they are manufactured

Nicola Cavallotti (University of Milan)

Valtrompia has historically focused on the production of firearms. A geopolitical analysis of the role played by the valley over the last five hundred years reveals this peculiarity: its operational function for the world system, a strategic vocation that has had a profound impact on the local population. This configuration has manifested itself through a structural ecological conflict, marked by human domination and exploitation of the territory, and has found in the manufacture of firearms the fulcrum around which power and the mechanisms of social and ecological control have been articulated. The resulting production of localities has gradually become part of a capitalist-industrial regime, which has amplified and consolidated those modes of social and environmental organisation already established around certain structural persistences. Among these, the Beretta family factory is one of the most emblematic expressions. The historical-economic perspective from which this process has already been observed has highlighted the resilience of a sector subject to profound crises, which have also proved to be key steps in determining the structure of the district and, consequently, that of the entire Valtrompia. But it has also highlighted the entrepreneurial skills of some local players, who have been able to maximise the ecology of the valley to their advantage in order to overcome crises and contain conflict in the factories and gain power. The centuries-old presence of Gardonese within the global arms market has created a culture that normalises and justifies the product, as well as a dependence on it. Arms manufacturing (civilian and

military) in Valtrompia is still an object of worship and an indicator of role and status, with cultural and symbolic significance linked to intrinsically violent practices such as hunting and war, which are dominated by male roles. Individual actions directed towards this particular institution in the Valtrompia context are daily, repeated and widespread. Messerschmidt, echoing Giddens, explains how every social action performed individually contributes to the construction of structures. In Valtrompia, this constructive dynamic has been massively directed towards the arms industry. Berger and Luckmann, in describing the process of constructing social reality, had already seen this fundamental interaction between product and producer. What implications did this process have? How was it experienced by whom and how did it shape the territories, in the face of an activity with such a peculiar meaning? Reading the centuries-old history of this company, it is possible to recognise the history of Triumplino capitalism. Not only that, but Beretta's persistence has coincided with that of the arms industry, whose production has been kept alive despite the numerous crises that have affected the sector. Through these two closely intertwined stories, it is possible to deconstruct the origins of capitalism in Valtrompia.

The possible change in the status of the climate emergency

Luigi Doria (Ca' Foscari University Venice)

The issue of the climate emergency has evolved on different levels, oscillating between two macro-dimensions. On the one hand, it has been constructed on the level of objects (data, essential targets, deadlines) produced by the natural sciences. In other words, it has been presented as an emergency that is constantly reiterated through a flow of "calculative" objectifications that would be impossible to remain indifferent to, unless one denies climate change or its anthropogenic causes. On the other hand, it has been at the heart of profound efforts of interpretation that have focused, in particular, on the links between climate, technology and capitalism. Now, the political and geopolitical events of recent years are rapidly transforming the status (ontic, and in the imagination of some, perhaps even ontological) of the emergency with a singular, brutal naïveté. On the one hand, this is happening through the obscuring of the phenomenon's role in public debate. There is *no time for* climate change (it is not a climate emergency) because old/new urgencies are taking precedence: those of conflicts and geopolitical unrest. On the other hand, some policy choices made at national level seem to undermine (in particular, by brutally backtracking on fossil fuels) the "real" urgency of the emergency. Faced with this fait accompli, there is a sort of ironic nemesis hanging over the rational-scientific pillar of the crisis: if the predicted limits were indeed "real", the steps backwards would make the (supposed, for some) disaster simply inevitable and the climate game, to the delight of some, would no longer make sense. An epochal transition seems to be looming (in more or less uncertain, implicit, subtle ways): the climate emergency would be transformed from a cogent appeal *erga omnes* (calling for action and obliging thought) to a cultural-intellectual option, perhaps relegated by critics of

climate obsession to the category of attitudes characteristic of a particular ecological lifestyle. Given the abysmal danger that such a transition represents, thought is faced with a task that is as urgent as it is arduous.

Weaponizing the smart earth: the “Palazzo” paradigm and the road toward planetary sovereignty

Giovanni Fava, Antonia Majaca (Ca' Foscari University Venice)

This presentation examines the Berggruen Institute's planetary governance framework as instantiated through their Venice Planetary Summit as a case study in advancing technomessianic salvation narratives, that position technological governance as evolutionary necessity. We explore how this vision reframes the planet as a cybernetic system, neutralizes politics through data-driven governance, and enacts a “palazzo planetarity” as an ideological operation that manages contradiction to maintain hegemony.

Labour-environmental coalitions in Denmark and UK

Torsten Geelan (University of Bristol)

This contribution aims to make some observations from my Marie Curie Eco-Unions project, in which I studied coalitions of trade unions and environmental movements in Denmark and England respectively. In particular, how the just transition discourse of labour-environmental coalitions in Denmark, emphasizing green job creation and social partnership, neglects the ecological impacts of war and militarism. In contrast, the UK equivalent, rooted in anti-capitalist and climate justice discourses explicitly links ecological destruction to war, colonial extraction, and capitalist accumulation. These contrasting discursive orientations reveal how trade unions' national histories and political alignments shape their capacity to confront not only ecological degradation but also the militarized and imperial foundations of global capitalism – highlighting the extent to which unions can either obscure or expose the entanglements between climate crisis, war, and systemic violence

Political geo-ecology: a different perspective

Orazio Maria Gnerre (University of Perugia)

The ecological-political approach is linked to a hierarchical view of economic and social relations within the international production system of advanced capitalism. It takes into account not only value chains but also access to resources, extractivism, and the ecosystem disruption imposed on social groups. A geopolitical approach to the ecological question is also possible, in relation to “classical” political ecology, taking into account the relationship between states, systems of exploitation, imperialism and the interrelation of markets in the so-called world-system.

Eco-social convergence in Europe: notes toward a renewed internationalism in times of war

Alberto Manconi (University of Lausanne)

The contribution posits that climate mobilizations can contribute to a renewal of internationalism. The argument develops in three steps: (1) the failure of market-based, UN-led global climate governance (or ecological transition “from above”) is assessed; (2) the rise of a class-based alternative to it, as exemplified by the myriad activist campaigns and industrial disputes fought under the radical “just transition” banner both before (2018-19) and after (2021-22) Covid pandemic (or ecological transition “from below”) is described and analyzed; (3) the current exhaustion of the “expansive” terrain of eco-social convergence (predicated on a large consensus that some transitional policies were in fact needed, and urgently so) is acknowledged as a new “war regime” has materialized worldwide. As things stand, the desirable horizon of a sustainable transformation of productive systems is no longer shared by most European elites. Deprived of its specific hegemonic terrain—the one that guaranteed mass participation in 2019—climate justice is still a resource for rethinking internationalism in Europe, but no longer a mass movement to politically impose it. This scenario can be reversed, but only insofar as climate justice is not conceived as separate from social and anti-war struggles.

Metabolic rifts and global conflicts: the crisis of the nature/capital nexus and the new cycle of accumulation

Dario Padovan (University of Turin)

The ecological crisis has revitalised critical thinking that had remained in recent decades in the shadows and confined to residual components of different disciplines. The challenge posed by the need to create a programme of ecological transformation requires a vast and regenerated theoretical horizon capable of generating the matrix in which to create an ecological subject. This challenge has been taken up by a multitude of visions that have begun to delve into the social and economic causes of the ecological crisis, identifying global geo-capitalism as the main culprit of this situation. This process has been punctuated by tensions and transformations, but it is surprising to note how a part of ecologism has been able to escape from techno-environmentalist outlook to contribute to the constitution of a broad and multifaceted anti-capitalist front precisely from the analysis of the ecological crisis. This process has not been linear and still struggles to identify the links to connect this crisis with the social, geopolitical, economic, democratic, and coexistence crises, an enigmatic mix that is none other than the deep systemic crisis of geo-capitalism.

To make sense of these interconnected crisis’ dynamics, over the past thirty years, a 'metabolic turn' has gradually taken place as a new methodology for the study of the socio-material impacts of systems such as cities, territories, large military, industrial and energy bureaucratic organisations, incontrovertibly revealing the increased

pressure on ecological and social systems to the point of jeopardising their very regenerative processes.

The socio-ecological metabolism constitutes a dialectical field in which the material and social spheres are united despite their differences. The universal society of capital based on commodities and money has disproportionately developed socio-ecological metabolism with the aim of accumulating and consuming capital (both constant in the form of raw materials and machinery and circulating in the form of labour and money) while providing socially useful objects, artefacts and services. Fast and linear metabolic processes such as those required by capital in its accelerated process of spatial and temporal expansion are generating fractures in ecological systems and serious inequalities in social systems. We are thus faced with moments of collapse and overt crises that simultaneously involve the physical and organic dimensions of nature and social organisation.

This approach of socio-ecological 'metabolism' as a means of accounting for material inflows and outflows of a system has been complemented by a theoretical proposal based on the ontological centrality of the Marx' *Stoffwechsel* or capital metabolism, transforming it into a social and political category for understanding the crisis of the capitalism/nature nexus. It can be projected into a critical perspective, noting for instance how the metabolism between society and nature, as it is currently objectified, displays its historically specific fetishised form of capitalism, in the same way that the invisible hand is the fetishised form of the freedom of exchange between humans. The reading of Marx as a theory of the socio-ecological metabolism of capital has had the merit not only of casting an innovative glance at the ecological crisis, but also of settling some accounts in the Marxist camp against its ossified, subjectivist and Promethean versions, as well as bringing Marx's thought closer to ecological thought, generating various syntheses such as ecosocialism, ecomarxism or degrowth communism.

The metabolic perspective is also useful to understand current conflicts, at all social scales. Many ecological conflicts have already been explained in the frame the of socio ecological metabolism showing that peculiar metabolic profiles can trigger social conflicts often among people, residents, workers and companies, corporation, public authorities regarding the impact or the subtraction and deterioration of land and other resources. But recently it is emerging a new prospect on these metabolic conflicts, regarding the competition for the global control and appropriation of resources among states and great companies at the global level. Great conflicts had already happened regarding the control and appropriation of fossil resources, but these kinds of disputes were confined to some areas reach of fossil resources and managed manly by the historical empire – the United States.

The news is that these current conflicts are the consequences of the behaviour of a system under conditions of immediate and impinging limits, even though these limits are apparently surpassed through technological and spatial developments which sustains the growth illusion. The entropy is still there but it is interchangeably

transposed to new material, technical and labour sources. However, the carrying capacity of the ecosystem and social system to absorb the effects unleashed by growth – thus liquidating the negative entropy they contained, is still ruined.

This is precisely why the terms “imperialism” and “empire” are actual. The notion of imperialism as a tool in our analysis becomes more and more important whereas we take in consideration the structural changes within capitalism, such as the rise of oligopolies, militarism and the new global alliances such as BRICS. Here I consider ‘empire’ as an expression of the drive for a periphery into which to dissipate, a sink or source of exergy which is the opposite way of saying the same thing), as well as the psychological dimension of being able to carve out spaces of predictable order, a kind of low order, conducive to exploitation.

We could define imperialism in the broadest sense as the projection of the contradictions of capitalism into the problem of how such a system can, at a global level, be ruled. A specific aspect of is the projection of contradictions into the system of international relations, which means the exploitation of the South’s human and ecological resources and the global distribution of the costs of Empire. Here emerges the paradox of the new imperialism. It is the first imperialism in which military power is designed neither to conquer territory nor even to defeat rivals. It is an imperialism that seeks no territorial expansion or physical dominance of trade routes. His enormous and disproportionate military capability, with an unprecedented global reach, has no clear and finite objectives and this is the reason why it requires such massive military force. Boundless domination of a global economy, and of the multiple states that administer it, requires military action without end, in purpose or time (Ellen Meiksins Wood).

The metabolic rifts generated by this kind of imperialism aimed to maintain the peace in the core of the system and administer several countries and regions to enslave the material metabolism with nature to the abstraction of the modern fetishist form of the commodity, are not only altering the ecological balance of the planet, but causing conflicts and wars, such as the interruption or the modification of food, water, energy, and other commodities flows, at local and global level.

These fractures finally show the difficulties that the empire with its financial, industrial and military determinations is facing in order to remain the hegemonic subject of a new cycle of accumulation, both in terms of geopolitical and geo-economic order. On the one hand, it will have to make concessions and probably yield to a multipolar order. On the other, it needs to understand whether there are the resources for a new cycle of accumulation and growth, which, according to Arrighi, is of the order of eighty to one hundred years.

In my speech I will try to show how the metabolic rift is the cause of such events where states, governments, armies, and corporations play a crucial role. Finally, I will try to show how these fractures impact different classes and social groups and how is possible to respond to these conflicts making them the trigger of insurgencies and revolutions. Metabolic rifts are among the most important causal mechanisms that

produce revolutionary waves, such as the inflation in the prices of agricultural commodities.

The *Zong!* Case and melancholy ecology

Lindsay Parkhowell (University of Basel)

How can ecology be seen today as a non-extractive, non-accumulative, non-dualistic other that promises a salient version of the future? Only melancholically. As Ian Baucom argues in his book *Spectres of the Atlantic* (2005), the legal case of the slave ship Zong, as a foundational locus point for modern subjectivity and finance capital, evinces the historical dichotomy between the affective investment in recovery, or melancholy, and the abstract, legal discourse of rights, or universal humanity, which are still present with us today. My talk will discuss M.Nourbse Phillip's epic poem *Zong!* (2008) as an instance of melancholy ecology that seeks to re-scribe the historical losses of the slave trade with a value that is outside both the subject of finance capital as well as the abstract subject of the discourse of universal rights.