

Il tema

# Beyond Deglobalization. The World, the Globe, and the Planet

## Oltre la deglobalizzazione. Il mondo, il globo e il pianeta

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**Abstract.** The article challenges contemporary claims of ‘deglobalization’ by critiquing the 1990s understanding of globalization as a homogenizing, market-driven project under U.S. hegemony. Drawing on and extending the authors’ work on ‘global processes’, it proposes an alternative analytical framework that foregrounds the heterogeneous, frictional, and infrastructural dynamics of finance, logistics, extraction, and digital platforms. Situating the current conjuncture within a conflictual multipolar order marked by war, pole formation, and disrupted relations between capitalism and territorialism, the authors reconceptualize transition as an open and contested spatiotemporal process. They call for a renewed internationalism capable of confronting the global operations of capital and articulating a politics of liberation.

**Keywords:** war, globalization, territorialization, blocs, temporality of transition.

**Riassunto.** L’articolo mette in discussione le contemporanee tesi sulla “deglobalizzazione” criticando la lettura degli anni Novanta che intendeva la globalizzazione come un progetto omogeneizzante e guidato dalle logiche di mercato, esercitato sotto l’egemonia statunitense. A partire dal lavoro degli autori sui “processi globali,” e sviluppandolo ulteriormente, viene proposto un quadro analitico alternativo che porta alla luce le dinamiche eterogenee, di frizione e infrastrutturali della finanza, della logistica, dell’estrazione e delle piattaforme digitali. Collocando l’attuale congiuntura all’interno di un ordine multipolare conflittuale segnato dalla guerra, dalla

formazione di poli e dalla rottura delle relazioni tra capitalismo e territorialismo, gli autori riconcettualizzano la transizione come un processo spazio-temporale aperto e contestato. Essi invocano un rinnovato internazionalismo, capace di contrastare le operazioni globali del capitale e di articolare una politica di liberazione.

**Parole chiave:** guerra, globalizzazione, territorializzazione, blocchi, temporalità di transizione.

## 1. Globalization: what's in a name?

One may say that globalization is another name for capitalist modernity. World system theorists explain that in history there were many 'world systems', but that the capitalist one is the first in which the world coincides with the globe. Using a different conceptual language, Karl Marx famously argues in the *Grundrisse* that "the tendency to create the world market is directly given in the concept of capital itself."<sup>1</sup> Carl Schmitt, writing from a legal and political viewpoint in *The Nomos of the Earth*, observes that once the earth emerged as a measurable globe rather than a mythic imaginary, an entirely new problem arose: how to order the earth's space in terms of international law.<sup>2</sup> The world as a globe thus provides the spatial coordinates for economic, political, and legal history since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, framing it as a world history. The organization of global space is a key stake in that history, and while Europe and the broader West have long and violently struggled to occupy and maintain the center of the system through colonial and imperial expansion, the 'rest' of the world has never been a passive and peripheral actor. It has asserted multifarious forms of resistance, contestation, and negotiation that have shaped the very core of the system.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to keep in mind this general meaning of globalization (a word that did not exist in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, of course). It is not, however, what is meant by those who – facing 9/11, the 'global war on terror', the 2007/8 financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war, and the current global turmoil – repeat from different and even opposite viewpoints that 'globalization is over. At stake here is the meaning of globalization acquired in the 1990s, when it was popularized as a word and became a widespread signifier framing debates on the state of the world in the wake of the end of the Cold War. The spirit of that moment can

<sup>1</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 408.

<sup>2</sup> Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 86.

<sup>3</sup> Hall, "The West and the Rest."

be conjured through a handful of catchphrases: the space of flows placing the space of places under duress; the image of a borderless world; the cultural effects of McDonaldisation; the US as 'lonely superpower' disciplining 'rogue states' through international police interventions. Together they indicate how globalization was cast, by apologists and critics alike, as a set of powerfully homogenizing processes, reshaping the world within the framework of a universal expansion of liberal democracy and market economy. At the core, it was the market that defined globalization, and globalization was deemed measurable through trade flows and the degree of openness of national economies.

We have two points to make regarding this. The first is that in current debates on deglobalization – as well as decoupling, reshoring, and the like – globalization continues to be understood as it was in the 1990s. The second is that in those years globalization basically named the contours of a specific project of capitalist and imperial reorganization of the world under US leadership. It was the time of uncontested neoliberal hegemony in the form of the Washington consensus, a time when China was preparing to join the WTO, and when, in July 2001, we stood in Genoa against a meeting of the G8 with the participation of Vladimir Putin – a moment that felt like the beginning of an ending. The project of global reorganization of capitalism associated with 1990s globalization was vast in ambition and consequential in effect. What matters most, however, is that this project collapsed in the years that followed and we are living today in the rubble generated by its defeat and failure. Abandoning the picture of globalization forged in that conjuncture is necessary. But we are equally wary of the notion of deglobalization – not only because it is built as a reverse image of globalization, but because it obscures the persistent relevance of vectors of unification in a world torn by fractures, tensions, and wars. A different conceptual language is needed.

In our previous work, we address this question by returning to methods and concepts tested in the critical discussion of globalization since the 1990s. Beyond the quick profile offered above, there were many notable attempts to come to grips with the world emerging after actually existing socialism. Étienne Balibar's work on the global relevance of borders and on the violence associated with their operations provided a powerful counterpoint to the prevailing rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> Stuart Hall's idea of a 'subaltern proliferation of difference' that exists alongside and in tension with 'globalization's homogenizing tendencies' pointed to a tension between homogenization and heterogenization that remains important today.<sup>5</sup> Hall

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<sup>4</sup> Balibar, *Les Frontières de la Démocratie*.

<sup>5</sup> See Hall, "Conclusion."

also challenged the idea that globalization was a unilateral process driven by capital alone – a challenge that set the stage for Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's *Empire* (2000), which placed workers', anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist struggles at the center of globalization's genealogy rather than its margins.

Working with these and other sources, we propose in *Border as Method* and subsequent works to distinguish from the rhetoric of globalization what we call actually existing global processes.<sup>6</sup> This distinction is a foundational point of method for the investigation of capital and power in global space. Focusing attention on processes in the plural, we do not presume that they compose a system in the manner implied by the singular globalization. Rather, we emphasize the frictions and tensions generated among global processes, including those driving the development of finance, extraction, and logistics. In this way, we demonstrate how global processes, despite their relatively homogenous character, have heterogeneous effects when they 'hit the ground' in specific material contexts that deserve empirical observation.<sup>7</sup> Our subsequent writings on digital platforms and related processes of 'platformization' have further tested this framework, tracing the rapid spread of these processes across regions and continents and the different assemblages of power and resistance within which they operate.<sup>8</sup> A focus on global processes opens new viewpoints on the constitution of global space and the tensions that crack it, allowing us to hold together, rather than dissolve, both the unifying and fragmenting forces in an emerging multipolar world.

## 2. Global processes and infrastructures

One pitfall of the rhetoric of globalization was its impulse to identify a unit that was transformed by the singular process at hand. Most often this unit was the nation-state. If the world was being globalized, the argument went, changes would be evident at the national level. Consider the globalization index compiled by the KOF Swiss Economic Institute. Based on a series of data indicators, primarily economic but also social and political, this organization produces annual country rankings for globalization, ranging from the most to least globalized (in 2022, the Netherlands and Somalia respectively). Countervailing arguments have long contested this emphasis on the nation-state. Saskia Sassen's work on the global city posi-

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<sup>6</sup> Mezzadra, Neilson, *Border as Method*.

<sup>7</sup> Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Politics of Operations*.

<sup>8</sup> Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Rest and the West*.

tioned urban space as more sensitive to globalization's pressures,<sup>9</sup> while analysts of global governance such as argued that globalization extends beyond state-centric systems to encompass international institutions, businesses, and civil society.<sup>10</sup> Yet the claim that the nation-state is the primary unit of globalization has remained prevalent. The notion of deglobalization does nothing to dislodge this notion. On the contrary, it entrenches and amplifies the primacy of the nation-state by suggesting that a reversal of globalization is evident in national level policy changes such as the raising of tariffs, the making of sovereign wealth funds, the support of state-owned enterprises, the introduction of industrial policies, or the imposition of export controls. We do not deny the importance of such measures, nor of the broader shift in relations between state and capital they reflect.<sup>11</sup> It seems clear today not only that capital is a direct political actor but also that the state has returned as a prominent economic actor, taking forms such as owner, promoter, supervisor and investor, especially since the 2008 economic crisis. But this is less an effect of nationalism or ideology than one of broad geopolitical, economic, and financial changes in the global development of capitalism. Placing an analytical emphasis on global processes means paying attention to the shifting spaces and scales of capital operations rather than just seeking to track or register their effects upon nation-state policies or the international system.

While global processes can loosely be classified as operating across the domains of finance, logistics, and extraction, we are less interested in proposing a taxonomy of these processes than in their material manifestations.<sup>12</sup> Observed through the lens of infrastructures, global processes at once materialize in physical configurations of hubs, routes, and connecting devices, and expand the powers of abstraction that enable the production and circulation of capital. Beyond the nexus of state and infrastructure long ago identified by Michael Mann,<sup>13</sup> contemporary large scale infrastructure projects like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which was interrupted by the Gaza war, have both geopolitical and geoeconomic relevance. These initiatives produce vast operational spaces that reorient geopolitics more toward connectivity than territoriality. They also seek to establish paths of capital circulation that buttress the integration of states with the global economy and offset the increasing inability of even the most powerful states to guarantee social reproduction – i.e., the reproduc-

<sup>9</sup> Sassen, *The Global City*.

<sup>10</sup> Ruggie, "Global Governance and 'New Governance Theory'."

<sup>11</sup> Alami, Dixon, *The Spectre of State Capitalism*.

<sup>12</sup> Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Politics of Operations*.

<sup>13</sup> Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State."

tion of both labor and capital. This competition over connectivity has a commodity dimension too. Items such as silicon chips, critical minerals, electric vehicle batteries, and photovoltaic panels have become critical to interstate tensions, with the mounting China-US conflict occupying center stage. Yet the expectation that US hegemonic decline will produce a Sino-centric replacement underestimates the complexity of the current moment. Multipolarity is not a stable destination but an unstable process: pole formation simultaneously registers a return to direct imperial domination – visible in the blackmailing and bullying of US foreign policy under Trump – while offering little sign that any emerging power can assume the role of global hegemon, whether through military coercion or the subtler work of cultural leadership.

Joyce C.H. Liu characterizes China's BRI as a new *Tianxia*, invoking a classical Confucian concept 'all under heaven' to understand this infrastructural and economic initiative as "a mode of ordering space and sovereignty [...] beyond national borders, shaping transnational zones of control through economic corridors, special economic zones (SEZs), and logistic networks."<sup>14</sup> Key to Liu's critical vision of China's infrastructural expansion is the reemergence of a certain political theology, which while not rooted in the monotheistic Catholicism favored by Carl Schmitt, rests in a similar link between law, land appropriation, and spatial ordering. It is certainly possible to associate other instances of pole formation with analogous claims for spiritual or civilizational destiny – think, for instance, of the centrality of *Hindutva* to the emergence of contemporary India, or the concept of the *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) that animates the neo-Eurasianism espoused by Aleksandr Dugin and influential in the Putin regime. Some thinkers have gone so far as to argue that critical intellectual work on postcolonialism and decolonization, such as the writings of Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty on resistance to European colonialism in India, have, however unintentionally, paved the way for this kind of civilizational thought.<sup>15</sup> This is a serious charge, deserving a fuller rebuttal than we can offer here; we note it as a symptom of the contested intellectual terrain on which any critique of pole formation must operate. Seen from the perspective of global processes, the theological and civilizational registers of pole formation are less its animating logic than its ideological expression. What drives pole formation is a more mundane set of pressures: propping up state power within circuits of capital circulation, securing logistical and infrastructural advantage, and controlling the extraction and flow of critical resources. Its geographies are consequently

<sup>14</sup> Liu, *Tianxia and its Discontents*, 39-40.

<sup>15</sup> Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*.

nested and overlapping rather than homogeneous or neatly bounded – less a world dividing into blocs than a world of tangled and competing operational spaces, in which territorial ambitions like the Ukraine war or US designs on Greenland and the Panama Canal represent one register of a much wider and more dispersed struggle.

### 3. A conjuncture of war

It is important to keep global processes in view when accounting for the brewing geopolitical mess in today's world. The current proliferation of wars and processes of militarization beyond war certainly has multiple and complex causes, rooted in histories both national and imperial, as well as in intersecting patterns of racial, gender and nationalist domination. But the nexus of capital and war remains a crucial analytical conduit that complicates visions in which war is fought out against a background of international law, either upheld or violated, or impelled by its own logic of power and might, often defined in exclusively military or geostrategic terms. An attention to global processes puts war in a frame where the tensions between capitalism and territorialism, to use the terms of Giovanni Arrighi,<sup>16</sup> have come to a head. This approach highlights both the relevance of military activities other than war, including security operations like border control, and the role of wars conducted by non-military means, such as tech wars, trade wars, sanctions, and the like. Moreover, it highlights the unstable and shifting processes of pole formation and their relation to capital operations at once materialized in infrastructures and abstracted from labor and life.

A multipolar world need not be a more belligerent world than one patrolled by a lone superpower, yet it is a world in which the fiction of a retreat back into the national threatens to exacerbate the linkage of capital and violence. Realizing this is crucial to any politics that seeks to oppose current regimes of war. The current conjuncture is peculiar because the articulation between the international and the world systems has been disrupted, fracturing the alignment between territorialism and capitalism at the level of the world market. This is the most blatant manifestation of the collapse of the project of 'globalization' that we discuss in the first section of this essay. While we do not think that we are living through a linear 'hegemonic transition,' as we explained above, it is hard to deny that the present situation exhibits many characteristics typical of past periods in

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<sup>16</sup> Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*.

which the world system was reorganized.<sup>17</sup> In such periods increasingly devastating wars – from the Napoleonic wars to the 20<sup>th</sup> century's World Wars – played important roles in facilitating transition. Recognizing this provides us with a point of entry for analyzing the current conjuncture, in which the weakening of US global hegemony runs parallel to a persistent interdependence that remains particularly apparent despite the rhetoric of 'decoupling' between China and the US, and the unifying vectors associated with global processes. What is distinctive about the present moment is that deepening fractures, tensions, and conflicts must be analyzed against the backdrop of the globality of economic and political developments. The same is valid for current wars and for the proliferation of war regimes across regions and continents.

The emergence of a multipolar world reflects the gaps between operations of capital – and the operative spaces they concur to create – and the territorial logic encapsulated in existing political spaces.<sup>18</sup> Our focus on processes of pole formation is an attempt to grasp those gaps and their workings. Today the world faces a centrifugal and conflictual multipolarism, in which the complex constitution of poles – understood in terms of relations between territorial and capitalist actors, as well as among capitalist actors themselves – can be organized and simplified in different ways. In particular, poles can be turned into *blocs* through processes of militarization that do not merely anticipate future wars but constitute the conditions for them. An analysis of imperialism today should focus precisely on such processes, identifying the fractions of capital and state apparatuses that push in the direction of bloc creation. At stake is the reorganization of global spaces as spaces both of political influence and of the valorization and accumulation of capital. Here the analysis of imperialism proposed by Rosa Luxemburg (1913) remains indispensable.<sup>19</sup> Where Lenin understood imperialism as capitalism's highest phase, Luxemburg grasped it as a structural feature of the capitalist mode of production itself, one whose violence and genocidal effects are not aberrations but conditions of capitalism's dynamism.

Today, imperialism operates against the background of a tendency to stagnation that has fundamentally altered the temporal horizon of capitalist development and crisis. This framework highlights something important in the international turmoil brought about by the initiatives of the second Trump administration in 2025. In a way, these initiatives register the weakening US global hegemony and aim – from what might be called

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<sup>17</sup> Arrighi, Silver, *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*.

<sup>18</sup> Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Rest and the West*.

<sup>19</sup> Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*.

a post-hegemonic perspective – to redraw the spaces for the projection of US political and economic power. Russia, and above all China figure in different ways as limits to the scope of this project, making the negotiation of ‘deals’ unavoidable, although particularly complicated in the Chinese case due to persisting interdependence.

This repositioning has multiple fronts. In the Middle East, the ongoing genocide in Gaza has been incorporated into a risky wager to foster a convergence of capitals from the region to turn the strip into a logistical and real estate “special economic zone.”<sup>20</sup> Across the Atlantic, the renewed aggressive focus of the US on Latin America, with Trump backing Bolsonaro in Brazil and Milei in Argentina and with growing tensions and warmongering in the Caribbean against Venezuela at the time of writing, forms another dimension of the same reorientation. The emphasis on the national denomination of US capital, which appears as the guiding principle in current tariff and trade war policies, is crucial in this context: it can be read as an attempt to fill the gap between capitalism and territorialism, foreshadowing a new alliance between capital and the federal executive.<sup>21</sup> There is no shortage of similar tendencies in other parts of the world. That liberal commentators point to a kind of mirror effect in the relation between the US and China – both regarding a presumed ‘state capitalism’ and negotiating tactics – may be considered as symptomatic in this regard. Nonetheless we take the new alliance between capital and the state (whose transformations over the last decades deserve closer investigation) as a political project more than as an established fact, as was the case in classical theories of imperialism.

An important condition for this project is provided by the momentous processes of capital concentration witnessed in recent years. The global Covid-19 pandemic both revealed and intensified such processes, particularly in the digital domain, driving an unprecedented acceleration of the monopolistic tendencies long identified by scholars of digital platforms.<sup>22</sup> The huge infrastructural platforms of ‘Big Tech’ instantiate such a concentration of capital that now bears directly on the very infrastructures and codes of social cooperation. This scale of concentration has led several thinkers to speak of an emerging new feudalism<sup>23</sup> – an analogy that recalls the Gilded Age in the US. We do not think that we are living on the brink of ‘capital’s grave’ and we remain unconvinced that the notion of feudalism is analytically or politically adequate to the stakes of the cur-

<sup>20</sup> See Bhandar, Toscano, “Property as Warfare.”

<sup>21</sup> Hardt, Mezzadra, “Capital and the Global War Regime.”

<sup>22</sup> Peck, Phillips, “The Platform Conjuncture.”

<sup>23</sup> Morozov, “Critique of Techno-Feudal Reason”; Varoufakis, *Techno-feudalism*; Dean, *Capital’s Grave*.

rent conjuncture. But its widespread resonance is itself significant – symptomatic of the stagnation and exhausted dynamism that haunt contemporary capitalism. It is precisely in such situations that wars and war regimes can proliferate.

#### 4. The globe and the planet

It has become commonplace to claim that the pandemic and the conjuncture of war has displaced climate change as the central global problem – pushing to the margins not only global warming but associated challenges such as resource depletion, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and urbanization. This displacement is visible in the terrain of social movements. The years prior to the pandemic saw prominent protests and campaigns by groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Last Generation. In the wake of Covid, energies have shifted to opposing the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, not to mention the necessary mobilizations against internal war regimes such as the US ‘civil war’ against migrants<sup>24</sup> or the ‘war against social reproduction’ in Argentina.<sup>25</sup> This shift seems paradoxical given that the pandemic was a biopolitical event on a massive scale, a kind of dress rehearsal for the privations, divisions, and mobility restrictions that climate change might bring. Ida Dominijanni<sup>26</sup> offers one way to make sense of it: the impotence of states before the microbial threat of Covid, she argued in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, precipitated a backlash in which the old specters of sovereign violence and territorial control assumed new and frightening dimensions. Whatever the adequacy of this argument, the post-Covid period has drawn renewed attention to matters of human history, empire building, colonization, and capitalism – precisely the issues that a thinker like Dipesh Chakrabarty associates with the category of the globe as opposed to the planet.<sup>27</sup> For Chakrabarty, the planet refers to Earth as a vast, dynamic natural system that exists independently of human perspectives. It encompasses geological, atmospheric, oceanic, and biological processes unfolding over immense timescales, many of which have occurred long before humans appeared. The globe, by contrast, is a human construct, emerging about five hundred years ago and linked to politics, development, narratives of economic expansion, social processes, and cultural meanings.

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<sup>24</sup> De Genova, “From Border War to Civil War.”

<sup>25</sup> Gago, “The Fascistisation of Social Reproduction.”

<sup>26</sup> Dominijanni, “L’escalation delle parole.”

<sup>27</sup> Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*.

Chakrabarty's insistence on thinking the planet and the globe in relation to each other is a productive starting point, though not all commentators follow him there. Some argue that the planet presents "a radical new way of understanding the world" at odds with globalization, which offers rather "a totalizing and capitalist centric concept that homogenizes the entire planet into a territory to conquer."<sup>28</sup> This contention that the planet replaces the globe as a historical-philosophical category for understanding the world does not accord the social movement dynamics discussed above. Moreover, it rests on the same homogenizing narrative of globalization that our conception of global processes seeks to contest, both conceptually and empirically. Missing here is an analysis of how capital operations take heterogeneous forms across different scales and spaces, despite the unifying tendencies that compose global capitalism. Chakrabarty is right that "the history of capitalism alone is not enough for us to make sense of the human situation today."<sup>29</sup> But this doesn't mean that climate change and its associated problems can be addressed in the current conjuncture without a critique of capitalism. 'Class struggle', as we have written before, "is not suspended in the Anthropocene."<sup>30</sup> There are several impressive attempts to come to terms with climate change in a frame that accounts for contemporary capitalism, from Jason W. Moore's work on the Capitalocene<sup>31</sup> to Andreas Malm's account of 'fossil capital'.<sup>32</sup> There are also disagreements about how anticapitalist politics should respond to ecological collapse. Kohei Saito<sup>33</sup> advocates a 'degrowth communism' that would heal the metabolic rift between humans and nature by a planned reduction of economic activity focused on democratic reforms in labor and production. Ecomodernists like Matthew T. Huber<sup>34</sup> argue that only a working class seizure of the means of energy production can establish the conditions for decarbonizing the economy. Although a dialogue between Saito and Huber suggests points of convergence, we are not interested here in reconciling these positions.<sup>35</sup> Rather we note that both degrowth and ecomodernism face a situation in which the prospects for any transformative ecological politics are conditioned by the conflicts between capitalism and territorialism, and the related tendency for poles to harden into blocs.

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<sup>28</sup> Mould, "From Globalisation to the Planetary," 1.

<sup>29</sup> Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Rest and the West*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?*

<sup>32</sup> Malm, *Fossil Capital*.

<sup>33</sup> Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene*.

<sup>34</sup> Huber, *Climate Change as Class War*.

<sup>35</sup> See Future Histories, "Matt Huber & Kohei Saito on Growth, Progress and Left Imaginaries."

This hardening is nowhere more visible than in the domain of energy. Jean-Baptiste Fressoz<sup>36</sup> argues that the energy transition to renewables is not a simple replacement of fossil fuels but an addition to the overall energy mix, likely to result in increased total energy consumption. But clearly this mix takes different forms across the emerging poles of today's world. Energy production and distribution is hardwired into contemporary regimes of war, and, alongside militarization, contributes to the imperial vectors that push toward bloc formation. Although US investment in renewables has continued to grow under the second Trump administration, federal support for the energy transition has been severely restricted and there has been an effort to maximize fossil fuel production and export as a geopolitical strategy. At stake is not only the assertion of US dominance through energy control but also an effort to counter China's rise and bind allies through energy dependence. In the case of Russia, fossil fuel revenues, including from sales to geopolitical agonists in Europe and the renminbi denominated trade with China, have been crucial to funding the military aggression in Ukraine. And while China remains the world's largest consumer of fossil fuels, its preeminence in the production and export of renewable energy technologies is not only shifting its domestic energy mix but also contributing to its growing geopolitical influence. These developments shift the spatial dimensions of global politics in ways that modify the articulation of the international and world systems. To analyze their implications adequately, we need to approach the energy transition not only as a temporal process of technological and economic change but as a spatial dynamic that reconfigures the geographies of power, extraction, and circulation. This is an observation that extends beyond energy: it applies to the political analysis of transition as such.

## 5. Living in transition

Space and time have been strictly interwoven in debates on globalization. It is worth reading again from this viewpoint the original essay on the 'end of history' published by Francis Fukuyama in 1989, months before the fall of the Berlin wall. Building on Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, Fukuyama frames his argument from the beginning in geographical terms. "The triumph of the West, of the Western *idea*," he writes, was foreshadowed in the battle of Jena in 1806 and accomplished in "the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism" toward

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<sup>36</sup> Fressoz, *More and More and More*.

the end of the Cold War.<sup>37</sup> The issue of the geographical conditions of ‘world history’, of the specific understanding of the ‘world’ upon which it is based,<sup>38</sup> was already clear in Kojève, who speaks of the ‘vanguard of humanity’ with respect to the French revolution and Napoleon. For Kojève, what had happened since 1806 “was but an extension in space of the universal revolutionary force actualized in France by Robespierre-Napoleon.”<sup>39</sup> This ‘extension of space’ is not difficult to read as a figure for European colonial expansion. While Fukuyama takes critical distance from ‘imperialism’, the ‘end of history’ also appears as the accomplishment of that colonial expansion.<sup>40</sup> Its philosophical foundation is Kojève’s notion of the ‘universal and homogeneous State’, homogeneous in the sense of “free from internal contradiction: from class strife, and so on.”<sup>41</sup> Not only time, but also space becomes therefore homogeneous and void, to recall Walter Benjamin’s quip on historicism. There is no alternative. The hallmark of temporality becomes repetition – a repetition that has haunted debates on globalization and neoliberalism since the 1990s, and whose affective register is perhaps better captured not by any theorist but by Shakespeare’s Macbeth: “tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow/creeps in this petty pace from day to day/to the last syllable of recorded time.”<sup>42</sup>

Against this backdrop, something has radically changed in recent years, not necessarily for the better. Let us focus on two key points in Fukuyama’s diagnosis of the end of history. First, the triumph of the West – as we wrote above – can no longer be taken for granted. It is challenged from without by the rise of other poles and world regions, and destabilized from within by mounting tensions between the US and Europe – tensions that have caused the very meaning of the West, always a meta-geographical notion<sup>43</sup> with a far from linear history, to begin to totter. Second, Fukuyama rehearses the vexed liberal opposition between trade and war, which found many instantiations between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Herbert Spencer’s distinction between ‘militant’ and ‘industrial’ societies. The death of Marxism-Leninism, Fukuyama writes, “means the growing ‘Common Marketization’ of international relations, and the diminution of the likelihood of large-scale conflict between states.”<sup>44</sup> That optimism is difficult to sustain today, when trade

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<sup>37</sup> Fukuyama, “The End of History,” 3.

<sup>38</sup> See Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History*.

<sup>39</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 160.

<sup>40</sup> Fukuyama, “The End of History,” 16.

<sup>41</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 90.

<sup>42</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 287.

<sup>43</sup> Lewis, Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*.

<sup>44</sup> Fukuyama, “The End of History,” 18.

wars and increasing geopolitical tensions arise not despite commercial interdependence but from within its own dynamics.

The end of history takes different shapes today, for instance in the apocalyptic tones that abound in discussions of climate change and in the specters of decline that haunt Western societies, more often than not nurturing reactionary and even fascist political discourses. We do not follow these tendencies. We are more interested in analyses that identify contradictions and tensions as constitutive features of current temporality – analyses that can account for what Murray and Nir<sup>45</sup> describe as “intolerable stasis in the face of sharpening antagonisms and ‘frantic overactivity’.” While we have always contested the idea of an overcoming of all contradictions and ‘class strife’ in the global age (or since the battle of Jena in 1806, for that matter), our work has been inspired by an awareness of the density, heterogeneity, and multiplicity of historical time, which was nurtured in part by postcolonial critiques of ‘historicism’.<sup>46</sup> This also informs our interest in the proliferating transitions (ecological, digital, energy, hegemonic, and the like) that characterize the present conjuncture. What makes up the temporality of transition? How are its spatial dynamics projected onto time in uneven and fractured ways? These questions require moving beyond the ‘historicist’ and teleological ‘narrative of transition’ that has prevailed in theories of modernization and capitalist development.<sup>47</sup> Transition today shares crucial characteristics with crisis: the accomplishment of transition, like the overcoming of crisis, matters less than the spaces of government and accumulation that its deployment brings into being. We understand transitions, more generally, as open processes in which different temporal vectors and spatial conditions are contradictorily articulated against the background of shifting compositions of social forces and persisting clashes. The temporality of transition is therefore far from linear – it is open to a panoply of interruptions. Transition is, at the end of the day, a field of struggle in which heterogeneous assemblages of space and time provide the ground not only for domination and the valorization of capital but also for struggles that may foreshadow a new politics of liberation.

We have lived through the exhaustion of philosophies of progress, and when we think of Benjamin’s image of the “pile of debris”<sup>48</sup> too many concrete instances come to our mind, including pictures of Gaza today. Yet it is at the level of the world and at the intersection between the globe

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<sup>45</sup> Murray, Nir, “Introduction,” 1.

<sup>46</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

<sup>47</sup> Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 258.

and the planet that a new politics of liberation needs to be invented. The world, however, is not a simple object. Grasping its totality raises philosophical problems and confronts thought with its limits. Writing in 1994, Paolo Virno drew on Kant's notion of the sublime to contend that the idea of "world is both the totality of the sensible context and the supersensible realm to which we are introduced by the 'unattainability' of totality".<sup>49</sup> The 'suprasensible' here names the epistemic conditions under which the world becomes an object of knowledge. From our viewpoint, this is an important reference: it points to the cracks and fractures that make the unity of the world, its totality, both apparent and materially impossible. What we call global processes cut through the world, deploying unifying and even homogenizing effects but at the same time inciting heterogeneity and concurring to produce fractures with both temporal and spatial qualities. Today the rule of capital negotiates its relations with territorial actors through this interplay of unity and fractures in ways that drive the proliferation of wars and war regimes. We are confronted with a logic whose operative code is global, and which must therefore be confronted at the global level if we are to hijack the temporality of transition and bend it towards a politics of liberation. This bending becomes possible only if we approach the global not from above, taking it as an abstract totality, but from below, attending to the materiality of its constitution and the myriad of struggles crisscrossing it. Drawing out what is common in these struggles, articulating a new political language, and working through translation to foster its effectiveness in radically heterogeneous contexts is a very general, but for us necessary task. At stake is the invention of a new internationalism, capable of addressing the heterogeneous conditions of domination and exploitation and of articulating a common desire for liberation.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Virno, *The Idea of World*, 16.

<sup>50</sup> Mezzadra, Neilson, "Reframing Internationalism."

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