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**“Do not Get Used to War!”. Voices
and Reflections against the War in
Ukraine**

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Introduction/Introduzione

by

Geraldine Ludbrook and Bruna Bianchi

From our very first issue, which was published in 2004, DEP has focused on the theme of war, the way it is carried out, and growing violence against civilians, women, children, and nature. From a feminist perspective and with an international and multidisciplinary approach, the articles which have appeared over the years have explored the themes of women's activism against war, militarism, nuclear, and the link between war and climate change. They have analysed feminist pacifist thought and explored the roots of ecopacifism.

As academics working on this project, we have invited scholars from various disciplines and with different experiences of activism to submit their reflections on the devastating war which is being fought in Ukraine and which is creating such an enormous humanitarian and ecological catastrophe.

Examining the causes of the war, all the essays agree it should be seen in a wider context, that of a patriarchal world order dominated by military élites; they reflect on the network of power relations that lead to war. In the opening essay, Ray Acheson writes:

War, capitalism, racism, colonialism, border imperialism, the carceral system, the climate crisis—these are all intimately connected and have been built by many governments over many years. And so while we oppose the war in Ukraine, true solidarity means opposing war everywhere, and confronting the aspects of our world that lead to, facilitate, and perpetuate war.

Acheson also writes that nuclear threat is only the tip of the iceberg of a militarised violence that leads to extreme violence towards the civilian population and must be fought by seeking ratification of the prohibition of nuclear weapons and the abolition of bombing of cities.

Gwyn Kirk's essay also focuses on the interlacing of economic interests and values that fuels war. The arms producers lobbies, the mass shootings that take place so frequently in the United States, the culture of militarism, and the war in Ukraine are all systems of an interconnected network of investments, practices and beliefs that find their meaning and value from war, a system based on disregard for life.

In the last part of her essay, Kirk examines the feminist commitment against militarism with reference to the history of feminist pacifism, and in particular to the 1915 Hague Congress when, in the middle of the war, more than a thousand women of various nationalities met to put forward proposals which would have made the end of that war, and of all other wars, possible. Similarly, today we must

strengthen transnational feminist alliances to challenge governments and multinational policies, to require political representatives to justify their actions, to create alternative economies. Kirk concludes “We have the world to lose – and everything to gain”.

The history of pacifist feminist is at the centre of essay by Carmen Magallón who, like Kirk, considers a fundamental reference point the Hague Congress, when the bases were laid for the establishment of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. The essay strongly highlights the importance of continuing the legacy of the pacifist feminist tradition to future generations. This is a tradition that has been rendered invisible, like conscientious objectors and refuseniks, groups with which pacifist feminists can establish alliances, “to return to The Hague to raise once again a powerful dissident voice against war and weapons”.

Rada Iveković explores the theme of the comparison between the wars in ex-Yugoslavia and the war in Ukraine. Iveković writes that from many structural and functional aspects, these post-Soviet wars seem similar, especially regarding the dramatic consequences on local populations. Both wars immediately produced a process of national construction, they unleashed violence at all levels, reciprocal nationalisms, identity dynamics, militarization and masculinization. Their size is however not comparable as the wars in ex-Yugoslavia remained on a regional level and, despite the unfortunate NATO intervention in 1999, were not a threat to the rest of the world, unlike what is happening in Ukraine today.

In the next essay Nela Porobić also writes that the war in Ukraine is indeed a serious threat because the invasion has galvanized a determination that has never been seen before, to respond to violence with more violence excluding all other options. On the basis of the experience of what took place in the ex-Yugoslavian wars, Porobić foresees that this positioning will continue after the end of the conflict when reconstruction policies will follow the liberal model and there will be an increase in poverty, corruption, exploitation of land, resources, and people, and peace will neither be obtained or maintained. Not to mention the arms that have flowed into Ukraine and will end up on the black market, resold in other conflict zones thus increasing the escalation of violence. Porobić continues: “within Ukrainian feminist circles the call for supporting Ukraine with weapons has been strong, prevalent perhaps”; non-violent voices which have been silenced, rejected or maligned, are nevertheless the voices that will save lives. Non-violence and feminist demands focusing on demilitarization, justice, equality and aid are the only strategy to help sow seeds of sustainable peace in Ukraine.

Despite the repression to which voices against the war have been subject, in Russian feminism forms of non-violent protest have prevailed. Using the documentation of humanitarian organizations, interviews, communiqués, and accounts of demonstrations, Bruna Bianchi’s essay analyses the contents and methods used by the women’s protests, Feminist Resistance against the War (FAR), and artists. She ponders on the prospects of a largely underground movement, which has shown it can renew its ways of expression and tactics.

The final two essays focus on the environmental costs of the conflict, on the relationship between war and the destruction of nature. Legal expert Rachel Killean examines the legal paths that could be opened up for Ukraine in the search for re-

sponsibilities and reparation for this ecocide. On the basis of the Rome Statute, the International Criminal Court has jurisdiction over the crime of “intentionally launching an attack in the knowledge that such attack will cause [...] widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment, which are clearly excessive in relation to concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated.” Killean continues that the imputability is therefore based on a subjective military viewpoint and recognizes the principle of military need and that of proportionality of the violence with regard to the objective. Killean concludes that the most opportune solution might be to include the crime of ecocide in the Statute of the International Criminal Court just as it already includes the crime of genocide.

Needless to say, no form of reparation can put right the extinction of forms of life and damage to the ecosystems which, once destroyed, will never return to their original state, a threat that has always been examined by the reflections of ecofeminism, and are picked up again in the essay by Selina Gallo-Cruz. She focuses on the connections between the destruction of human lives and destruction of nature, and points to ways the chain of violence and death can be broken. As Vandana Shiva has recently stated, the enhancement of the flourishing of life requires a decrease in greed on the basis on the basis of a realistic understanding of what has been irreparably altered in the biosphere, from the industrial revolution onwards. Referring to the recent volume curated by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine Wilkinson, *All We Can Save. Truth, Courage and Solutions for the Climate Crisis* (2020), Vandana Shiva writes that such a seemingly formidable task can be faced with reverence and grace.

Claudia Van Werlhof wrote in her 2003 article, which we publish here in the Italian translation in the *Documenti (Documents)* section, on the theme of the relationship between war and the economy. Although it was originally published almost twenty years ago, the article is still relevant. Taking inspiration from Rosa Luxemburg and the concept of “ongoing primitive accumulation”. She writes that the logic of war is to create new growth. Therefore, when our system economically clashes against its limits, it is always ready to use war to force such limits. This way war is a condition for new growth, in other words, the continuation not only of politics but of the economy itself with other means. War and economics no longer form a continuum, but become increasingly indistinguishable, two sides of the same coin. Political “economy” of globalization, with its violence is directly connected with another aspect of globalization: war.

Finally, the section *Interviste e testimonianze (Interviews and testimonies)* publishes a contribution by the Cameroonian scholar and activist Sylvie Jaqueline Ndongmo who focuses on the food crisis in Africa. The reduction of essential goods due to the interruption in imports from Russia and Ukraine is worsening other crises: famine, civil wars, the cholera epidemic. In recent months rebellions against the increase in the cost of living have taken place and diplomatic relations between the countries at war and African countries have weakened. The food crisis, moreover, is creating hardships for women who are no longer able to feed their families, and are increasingly exposed to serious forms of domestic violence.

The issue closes with a short testimony by Debora Pinzana, who has worked for years in human rights projects in Ukraine. Thanks to her experience of living side-

by-side with Ukrainian women affected by the war, Debora Pinzana pays homage to their dignity and their ability for resistance.

* * *

Fin dal primo numero, apparso nell'estate del 2004, la rivista ha posto al centro della sua riflessione il tema della guerra, della sua conduzione, della crescente violenza ai civili, alle donne, ai bambini e alla natura. Da una prospettiva femminista e con un approccio internazionale e multidisciplinare, i contributi raccolti nelle varie rubriche nel corso degli anni hanno esplorato i temi dell'attivismo femminile contro la guerra, il militarismo, il nucleare, del nesso tra guerra e cambiamento climatico; hanno analizzato il pensiero pacifista femminista e ricostruito le radici dell'ecopacifismo.

Come accademiche impegnate in questo progetto, abbiamo fatto appello a studiose di vari ambiti disciplinari e di diverse esperienze di attivismo a contribuire con le loro riflessioni a questo numero straordinario sulla guerra devastante che si sta combattendo in Ucraina e che sta provocando una catastrofe umanitaria ed ecologica di enormi proporzioni.

Nell'affrontare le cause della guerra, tutti i saggi insistono sulla necessità di inserirla in un contesto ampio rinviando ad un ordine mondiale patriarcale dominato dalle élites militari e riflettendo sulla connessione dei rapporti di dominio che conducono ai conflitti armati. Scrive Ray Acheson nel saggio che apre il numero:

Guerra, capitalismo, razzismo, imperialismo di confine, sistema carcerario, crisi climatica – sono tutti rapporti di potere in stretta connessione, costruiti da molti governi per molti anni. Così noi, opponendoci alla guerra in Ucraina, dobbiamo affermare una vera solidarietà e opporci a tutti gli aspetti del nostro mondo che facilitano la guerra.

La minaccia nucleare, scrive sempre Acheson, è solo la punta dell'iceberg di una violenza militarizzata che porta all'estremo la violenza sulla popolazione civile e che deve essere contrastata impegnandosi per la ratifica del trattato di proibizione delle armi nucleari e per l'abolizione della pratica del bombardamento delle città.

Anche il saggio di Gwyn Kirk si sofferma sull'intreccio di interessi economici e valori che alimenta la guerra. Le lobby dei produttori di armi, le spatarie di massa che si verificano con straordinaria frequenza negli Stati Uniti, la cultura del militarismo e la guerra in Ucraina sono tutte espressioni di un sistema interconnesso di investimenti, pratiche e credenze che attribuiscono significato e valore alla guerra, un sistema basato sul disprezzo della vita.

Nella parte finale del saggio, nel tracciare l'impegno delle femministe contro il militarismo, Kirk fa riferimento alla storia del pacifismo femminista e in particolare al Congresso dell'Aia del 1915 quando, in piena guerra, oltre mille donne di varie nazionalità si riunirono per avanzare proposte che avrebbero reso possibile porre fine alla guerra in corso e a tutte le guerre. Allo stesso modo noi oggi dobbiamo rafforzare le alleanze femministe transnazionali per sfidare i governi e le politiche delle multinazionali, chiedere conto ai rappresentanti politici delle loro azioni,

creare economie alternative. “Abbiamo il mondo da perdere e tutto da guadagnare” conclude Kirk.

La storia del femminismo pacifista è al centro del saggio di Carmen Magallón che, come Kirk, individua nel Congresso dell’Aia, quando si posero le premesse per la nascita della Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, un punto di riferimento fondamentale. Il saggio inoltre sottolinea con forza l’importanza di trasmettere l’eredità della tradizione pacifista femminista alle nuove generazioni, una tradizione resa invisibile, come quella obiettori di coscienza e dei refuseniks, gruppi con cui le femministe pacifiste possono stabilire alleanze, “per tornare all’Aia e far sentire ancora una volta una potente voce dissidente contro la guerra e le armi”.

Il confronto tra le guerre nell’ex Jugoslavia e la guerra in Ucraina è il tema affrontato da Rada Iveković. Sotto molti aspetti, strutturali e funzionali, scrive Iveković, queste guerre post-sovietiche appaiono simili, in particolare per le drammatiche conseguenze sulle popolazioni locali. Tutte queste guerre hanno prodotto immediatamente un processo di costruzione nazionale, hanno scatenato violenza a tutti i livelli, nazionalismi reciproci, dinamiche identitarie, militarizzazione e mascolinizzazione. Esse non sono paragonabili, invece, per quanto riguarda la loro dimensione. Infatti, le guerre nella ex Jugoslavia rimasero limitate all’ambito regionale e, nonostante lo sciagurato intervento NATO del 1999, non rappresentarono una minaccia per il resto del mondo, come accade oggi con la guerra in Ucraina.

È una grave minaccia, scrive Nela Porobić nel saggio che segue, perché l’invasione ha galvanizzato una determinazione, che mai si era verificata in precedenza, di rispondere alla violenza con maggiore violenza escludendo qualsiasi altra opzione. Questo orientamento, prevede Porobić sulla base dell’esperienza di quanto è accaduto nel caso delle guerre nella ex Jugoslavia, continuerà anche dopo la fine del conflitto quando le politiche della ricostruzione seguiranno il modello liberale e aumenteranno la povertà, la corruzione, lo sfruttamento della terra, delle risorse e delle persone e non costruirà né sosterrà la pace. Per non parlare delle armi che sono affluite in Ucraina e che finiranno sul mercato nero, saranno rivendute in altre aree di conflitto e andranno ad incrementare l’escalation della violenza.

Continua Porobić: “Nel mondo femminista ucraino la volontà di sostenere il paese con le armi è stata forte, forse prevalente”, ma sono le voci non violente, messe a tacere, respinte o diffamate, quelle che alla fine salveranno le vite. La nonviolenza e le rivendicazioni femministe incentrate sulla smilitarizzazione, la giustizia, l’uguaglianza e l’assistenza sono la sola strategia che aiuterà a gettare i semi di una pace sostenibile in Ucraina.

Nonostante la repressione che si è abbattuta sulle voci contrarie alla guerra, nel femminismo russo sono prevalse forme di protesta nonviolente. Sulla base della documentazione delle organizzazioni umanitarie, delle interviste, dei comunicati e delle cronache delle manifestazioni, il saggio di Bruna Bianchi analizza contenuti e modalità delle proteste delle donne, delle femministe del FAR (Feminist Resistance Against the War) e delle artiste e si interroga sulle prospettive di un movimento contro la guerra, in gran parte sotterraneo, che ha dato prova di saper rinnovare le sue modalità espressive e le sue tattiche.

Gli ultimi due saggi sono dedicati ai costi ambientali del conflitto, al rapporto tra guerra e distruzione della natura. Rachel Killean esamina le vie legali che si potrebbero aprire per l'Ucraina nella ricerca di responsabilità e riparazioni per l'ecocidio. In base allo Statuto di Roma, la Corte Penale Internazionale ha competenza sui "deliberati attacchi nella consapevolezza che gli stessi avranno [...] danni diffusi, duraturi e gravi all'ambiente naturale che siano manifestamente eccessivi rispetto all'insieme dei concreti e diretti vantaggi militari previsti". L'imputabilità si basa dunque, continua Killean, su un punto di vista soggettivo militare e riconosce il principio della necessità militare e quello della proporzionalità della violenza rispetto all'obiettivo. In prospettiva, conclude la giurista, la soluzione più opportuna sarebbe quella di includere nello statuto della Corte il crimine di ecocidio, così come già include il crimine di genocidio.

Ma è certo che nessuna forma di riparazione potrà porre rimedio alle estinzioni delle forme di vita e ai danni degli ecosistemi che, una volta distrutti, non ritorneranno mai più al loro stato originario, una minaccia che è sempre stata oggetto delle riflessioni dell'ecofemminismo a cui è dedicato il saggio di Selina Gallo-Cruz.

La studiosa si sofferma sulle connessioni tra distruzione di vite umane e distruzione della natura e individua le vie per rompere la catena della violenza e della morte. Per favorire il fiorire della vita è necessario, come ha affermato recentemente Vandana Shiva, "decremare l'avidità" sulla base di una realistica comprensione di quanto è già stato irrimediabilmente alterato nella biosfera a partire dalla rivoluzione industriale. Facendo riferimento al recente volume curato da Ayana Elizabeth Johnson e Katharine Wilkinson, *All We Can Save. Truth, Courage and Solutions for the Climate Crisis* (2020), scrive Selina Gallo-Cruz, "un tale compito apparentemente formidabile, può essere affrontato con reverenza e grazia".

Il tema del rapporto tra guerra ed economia è sviluppato in un articolo di Claudia Von Werlhof del 2003 che pubblichiamo in traduzione italiana nella rubrica *Documenti*. Benché siano trascorsi quasi vent'anni da quando lo scritto è apparso per la prima volta, esso conserva ancora la sua rilevanza. Scrive l'autrice rifacendosi a Rosa Luxemburg e al concetto di "*accumulazione originaria continuata*":

La logica della guerra è creare nuova crescita. Quindi, quando il nostro sistema economicamente va a cozzare contro i suoi limiti, è sempre pronto ad usare la guerra per forzare tali limiti. In questo modo la guerra è condizione per una nuova crescita, cioè la prosecuzione non certo solo della politica ma proprio dell'economia con altri mezzi.

Guerra ed economia non formano più solo un continuum, ma diventano sempre più indistinguibili, due lati della stessa medaglia. La politica "economica" della globalizzazione con la sua violenza è direttamente connessa con un altro aspetto della globalizzazione, ovvero la guerra.

Infine, la rubrica *Interviste e testimonianze* ospita il contributo della studiosa e attivista camerunense Sylvie Jaqueline Ndongmo che si concentra sulla crisi alimentare in Africa. La riduzione dei beni di prima necessità a causa dell'interruzione delle importazioni da Russia e Ucraina sta aggravando altre crisi in atto: la carestia, le guerre civili, l'epidemia di colera. Negli ultimi mesi si sono verificate rivolte contro l'aumento del costo della vita, si sono indebolite le relazioni diplomatiche tra i paesi in guerra e i paesi africani. La crisi alimentare, inol-

tre, sta mettendo in difficoltà le donne non più in grado di soddisfare il fabbisogno alimentare delle famiglie e le espone a forme gravi di violenza domestica.

Conclude il numero una breve testimonianza di Debora Pinzana che ha lavorato per anni in progetti per i diritti umani in Ucraina. È in virtù dell'esperienza vissuta a contatto con le donne ucraine colpite dalla guerra che Debora Pinzana rende omaggio alla loro dignità e alla loro capacità di resistenza.

End War, Build Peace

by

*Ray Acheson**

Abstract: Russia's war in Ukraine has been devastating, with cities and civilians being targeted with missiles and rockets, rampant sexual and gender-based violence, and a humanitarian catastrophe unfolding. The threat of nuclear war, the billions of dollars being promised to militarism, racist border crossing restrictions, and the ongoing climate crisis are intertwined with the horrific violence in Ukraine. This situation has arisen because of many complex factors that have been compounded and enabled by capitalism and militarism. Weapons and war cannot offer a solution. To confront these converging crises, war and war profiteering must end, nuclear weapons must be abolished, and we must confront the patriarchal world of war that has been deliberately constructed at the expense of peace, justice, and survival. A people-centred peace process, with equitable and meaningful participation of all those affected, is imperative. De-escalation, demilitarisation, and disarmament are crucial to preventing this war-and the next.

A history of violence

Behind this current crisis lies a history of militarised and economic violence. Both Russia and the United States are settler colonial states, forging their countries by expanding their "frontiers" and killing and repressing Indigenous populations. Both engage in imperialist actions outside of their now-established borders, interfering, through military and economic action, in countries they deem to be within their "spheres of influence". Both use aggression and forced economic ties to guide their conduct in international relations, and both deal with domestic inequality, poverty, and resistance through policing and punishment.

The governments of both countries critique each other for the same type of behaviour. Russia criticises US imperialism, yet invades and occupies its neighbours, bombs civilians, and engages in cyber-attacks against critical infrastructure that

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harm ordinary people. The United States criticises Russia as an autocracy yet overthrows democratically elected governments if they threaten US interests, builds military bases and engages in wars and military operations in hundreds of countries around the world, and spends billions of dollars a year on militarism while so many of its citizens live without health care, housing, or food security.

Both countries have built up their militaries, military alliances, and nuclear arsenals to challenge the other. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)'s expansion eastward is about constraining Russia, just like Russia's invasion of countries to the west are about constraining NATO. Ukraine, in this context, is a pawn being used by both sides.

There is plenty of blame to go around when it comes to the current crisis and the historical moments that have led us here. All parties involved have contributed actively to this situation; arguing that one side or the other has been "provoked" only serves to obscure the reality that each of the countries involved have together, deliberately, built a militarised, capitalist world order that exclusively serves the interests of the war profiteers and the political and economic elite.

Militarised world order and the abstraction of harm

What is happening right now over Ukraine is bigger than Ukraine. Tectonic shifts in global geopolitics are taking place and Ukraine is but one field of "play" for the heavily militarised states. Gamesmanship between the United States and China is on the rise; proxy wars, occupations and aggression, and military and economic pressure is occurring throughout the world; extraction primarily by the global north and exploitation of the so-called global south is rampant, exacerbating and accelerating poverty and inequalities and environmental devastation; militarism and military spending is on the rise globally. Approaching the situation in Ukraine without recognising this larger context is like applying a band-aid to a global hemorrhage. It is a piece of a much bigger puzzle: of a world order dictated and dominated by the militarised elite.

This is a world order that sees war as a legitimate means to an end. It celebrates militarised masculinities, empowering the culture of militarism and violence as brave and noble pursuits, while rendering invisible the gendered and racialised harms of militarism. It is a world order that uses a technostrategic language to sanitise the image of war. Think tanks and politicians, media, and war gamers act as if countries are chess pieces and people are numbers on a page.

Instead of seeing these people as individuals, whose lives have value and meaning, who are part of families and communities, the number crunchers calculate "acceptable loss" and risks of "collateral damage," and look the other way as the bodies pile up. Also unaccounted for is the disruption to daily life – the interruption of education, of food production, of supply chains; the destruction of hospitals, homes, markets, water and sanitation facilitations, and all of the other critical infrastructure that people rely on to survive. These numbers don't account for the psychological terror of living in conflict, of hearing bombs dropped or drones hovering overhead, of being afraid to leave your house, of watching loved ones die.

These figures also don't consider the environmental impacts of war, the toxic or explosive remnants of weapons, the damage to land and water and animals. The conflict in Ukraine has already involved severe environmental impacts, including pollution from military sites and material, as well as from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, radiation risks from fighting at the Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia nuclear power facilities, groundwater contamination, and more (see for example Eoghan Darbyshire and Doug Weir 2022).

These humanitarian and environmental impacts should be at the forefront of all policy making decisions. Yet they are completely ignored by those talking in board rooms in capital cities far from where the harm will be felt, deciding what choices to make for the sake of "geopolitical strategy" or "balance of power".

There are many corporate interests behind the festering conflict, including in relation to weapons production and sale, pipelines and "energy security", and access to "natural resources", with profits to be made at the expense of human lives as well as the protection of the planet. In the midst of a climate emergency, in which capitalist extraction and exploitation has decimated biodiversity, ecosystems, and land, water, and air, the governments of NATO members and Russia continue to use fossil fuels. They refuse to embrace a degrowth economy that would drawdown the use of energy, especially in the global north, and prioritise the creation of systems of care and equality for people and planet.

Just five days into Putin's attack on Ukraine, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022) released its latest report, finding that human-induced climate breakdown is accelerating rapidly. "The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future," said Hans-Otto Pörtner, co-chair of one of the Panel's working groups.

And then there are nuclear bombs

In addition to the existential crisis of climate change, we also face a grave threat to a livable future from nuclear weapons. The geopolitical gamesmanship underway in relation to Ukraine runs the serious risk of global mass destruction.

At the outset of his invasion of Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that other countries "will face consequences greater than any you have faced in history" if they intervened (Dave Lawler 2022). A few days later, he ordered Russian nuclear forces to be put on a heightened alert status (Yuras Karmanau, Jim Heintz, Vladimir Isachenkov, and Dasha Litvinova 2022). Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev later outlined possible scenarios for the use of nuclear weapons and Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said that maintaining "readiness of strategic nuclear forces" remains a priority (Natalie Colarossi 2022). A Russian government spokesperson later said that Russia would only consider the use of nuclear weapons if there was an "existential threat" to Russia (Brendan Cole 2022), but Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned NATO countries not to underestimate the risks of nuclear conflict over Ukraine if it escalates a proxy war with Russia (Reuters 2022).

The words and actions of Putin and other Russian officials have elevated the risks and dangers of nuclear war back into mainstream consciousness. But the threat of nuclear weapons is not limited to the Russian government. Eight other governments – those of China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, France, India, Israel, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and the United States – also possess nuclear weapons, and US nuclear bombs are stored on the territory of five other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) members – Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Turkey.

These weapons are not remnants of a past Cold War – they are actively deployed right now, ready to be used. Each of the nuclear-armed States has been investing billions in the “modernisation” and expansion of their nuclear arsenals, preparing not for nuclear disarmament but for nuclear Armageddon. Each maintains doctrines and policies for the use of nuclear weapons. And some politicians and military officials within these countries apparently believe that nuclear war *can* be fought – and won (see for example Alan Kaptanoglu and Stewart Prager 2022). This is an incredibly dangerous message to be sending to those responsible for the potential destruction of the world, but one that benefits the military-industrial complex.

The technostrategic-speak of “tactical nuclear weapons”

There have been many demands for NATO to impose a “no-fly zone” over Ukraine to end Russia’s airstrikes against Ukrainian cities, with little regard for the fact that this could very well lead to the use of nuclear weapons by Russia or all-out nuclear war. Instead, some politicians and commentators suggested that a no-fly zone is worth the risk of Russia using what are misleadingly called “tactical” nuclear weapons (see for example Ethan Barton and Isabelle McDonnell 2022). Others escalated the rhetoric of potential nuclear war, arguing that Putin is “irrational” and likely to use them, or that the Russian government sees a nuclear exchange as a “viable strategy” (see for example Max Fisher 2022).

In this apparent attempt to either push for or at least normalise the prospect of nuclear war, much of the focus is on the type of nuclear weapon that Putin is “expected” to use. *The New York Times* describes tactical nuclear weapons as “smaller bombs”, “lesser nuclear arms”, “less destructive by nature”, “much less destructive”, and having “variable explosive yields that could be dialed up or down depending on the military situation” (William J. Broad 2022). Even while acknowledging that one of these weapons, if detonated in Midtown Manhattan, would kill or injure half a million people, the *Times* suggests that the use of these weapons is “perhaps less frightening and more thinkable”. The article says the billions of dollars that the Obama administration spent on nuclear weapons went towards “improving” US tactical nuclear weapons and turning them into “smart bombs” that “gave war planners the freedom to lower the weapons’ variable explosive force”, would have a “high degree of precision”, and would lower “the risk of collateral damage and civilian casualties”.

Thus, even in an article warning that tactical nuclear weapons could lead to lowering the threshold for their use, it takes up significant space and employs a

range of euphemisms to suggest that these weapons would cause less destruction if used.

Focusing on the details of the size or type of bomb, warns Russian nuclear forces expert Pavel Podvig (2022), misses an important point: “That bringing nuclear weapons into this conflict, in whatever shape or form, ought to be unacceptable, deplorable, and criminal”. Nuclear war-gaming distracts from this message, he argues, shifting the discussion in the direction of what weapon could be used and how “effective” it could be. “What it does is it normalizes nuclear weapons, making it look like this is all about cost and benefit, political calculation, or military utility”. These discussions condition people into believing that all this is somehow normal. “Let’s keep the message simple”, Podvig urges. “Even the thought of involving nuclear weapons in this conflict should be considered unacceptable”.

The reality of nuclear violence

Measured in terms of destructive force and capacity to kill, there is nothing small about any nuclear weapon. Russian tactical nuclear weapons have an estimated yield of 10 to 100 kilotons (Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda 2021). The yield reflects the amount of energy released when a nuclear weapon explodes. One kiloton has an explosive force equivalent to that of 1,000 metric tons of TNT. The bomb detonated by the United States over Hiroshima in 1945 was estimated to be about 15 kilotons; the one over Nagasaki was 22 kilotons. Approximately 140,000 people died from the bomb in Hiroshima and 70,000 in Nagasaki by the end of 1945. Many more died after from radiation and burns.

The experience of a nuclear weapon detonation says even more than the numbers. Setsuko Thurlow (2014), who was 13 years old at the time of the Hiroshima bombing, witnessed her city “blinded by the flash, flattened by the hurricane-like blast, burned in the heat of 4,000 degrees Celsius and contaminated by the radiation of one atomic bomb”. She has described the experience in vivid detail through first-hand testimony:

A bright summer morning turned to dark twilight, with smoke and dust rising in the mushroom cloud, dead and injured covering the ground, begging desperately for water and receiving no medical care at all. The spreading firestorm and the foul stench of burned flesh filled the air. Miraculously, I was rescued from the rubble of a collapsed building, about 1.8 kilometres from ground zero. Most of my classmates in the same room were burned alive. I can still hear their voices calling their mothers and God for help. As I escaped with two other surviving girls, we saw a procession of ghostly figures slowly shuffling from the centre of the city. Grotesquely wounded people, whose clothes were tattered, or who were made naked by the blast. They were bleeding, burned, blackened, and swollen. Parts of their bodies were missing, flesh and skin hanging from their bones, some with their eyeballs hanging in their hands, and some with their stomachs burst open, with their intestines hanging out. Within that single flash of light, my beloved Hiroshima became a place of desolation, with heaps of rubble, skeletons and blackened corpses everywhere. Of a population of 360,000 – largely non-combatant women, children, and elderly – most became victims of the indiscriminate massacre of the atomic bombing.

This is the immediate reality of nuclear weapons. There are also long-term, intergenerational effects. Cancer rates among survivors skyrocketed in the years after

the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Women were particularly affected by the radiation, and pregnant women experienced higher rates of miscarriage and impaired growth (see for example Gender + Radiation Impact Project).

Every single nuclear bomb is designed to melt flesh, burn cities, decimate plants and animals, and unleash radioactive poison that lasts for generations. Whether the alleged experts call them strategic or tactical, big or small, the experience of the detonation of even a single nuclear bomb will be catastrophic (see for example Beatrice Fihn 2013). Just as it was for those in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; just as it was for everyone whose lands and waters were tested upon in Australia (Tilman Ruff and Dimity Hawkins 2020), Kazakhstan (Togzhan, Kassenova 2022), Kiribati (Matthew Brey Bolton 2018), Marshall Islands (Susanne Rust 2019), Moruroa (Sébastien Philippe and Tomas Stadius 2021), United States (Kyle Mizokami 2018), and many more locations. And there is perhaps forever the trauma and moral injury – individual, social, political, and cultural.

The madness of MAD

The horrific violence described above is from one nuclear bomb. But the core nuclear policy of all nuclear-armed states – so-called “nuclear deterrence” – is that it relies on the idea of “mutually assured destruction” (MAD). The strategic plans for the use of nuclear weapons envision nuclear exchange. The theory is that because such an exchange could end up destroying the entire planet, no one would dare to use them. This is alleged to have maintained “global peace and security” and “geostrategic stability” since the end of World War II.

Except, as we are seeing right now, nuclear weapons have not prevented war. They are actively facilitating Russia’s war on Ukraine. And Ukraine is not the first proxy war fought between the nuclear-armed States. For the last seventy years, the United States and Soviet Union/Russia have been battling for supremacy primarily using the bodies of people from other countries. In many of these wars, as in Ukraine, rather than fight each other directly, one nuclear-armed State would arm those resisting the other nuclear-armed State. While deterrence theorists try to argue that the situation in Ukraine shows the validity of their myths – that nuclear weapons are deterring NATO from imposing a no-fly zone or declaring war with Russia – the reality is that nuclear weapons have only made a horrific war even more dangerous. The solution to this war is not escalation. It is creating space for, and enabling an environment for, dialogue and negotiation. But nuclear weapons stand in the way of peace talks because they are positioned in military doctrines as even more violent options to try to “win” a war. And in this attempt to “win”, there lies the possibility of nuclear war.

That same *Times* piece that talks about “small nuclear bombs” goes on to acknowledge that the use of such weapons could well lead to nuclear war. A simulation devised by Princeton University’s Program on Science and Global Security starts with Moscow launching a nuclear weapon; NATO responds with a small strike, and the ensuing war yields more than 90 million casualties in its first few hours (Alex Wellerstein, Tamara Patton, Moritz Kütt, and Alex Glaser 2019). Millions more would die in the months to come. Our health care systems, already

overwhelmed by two years of a global pandemic, will collapse (Alicia Sanders-Zakre, Michaela de Verdier, and Josefin Lind 2022). The climate crisis will be exponentially exacerbated; there could be a disastrous decline in food production and a global famine that might kill most of humanity.

As the 1980s film *War Games* prophetically declared, “The only winning move is not to play”. Former US and Soviet leaders Reagan and Gorbachev acknowledged in 1985 that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought (Joint Soviet-United States Statement 1985). This was recently reaffirmed by five nuclear-armed States (Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States 2022). Reagan and Gorbachev also agreed “that any conflict between the USSR and the US could have catastrophic consequences”; thus, “they emphasized the importance of preventing any war between them, whether nuclear or conventional” and said that they would “not seek to achieve military superiority”.

Yet the nuclear-armed States still seek “military superiority” and sustain a system in which the use of nuclear weapons is possible. The very existence of nuclear weapons makes their use possible. As long as these weapons exist, there is a risk that they will be detonated. As long as they exist, they will be used to threaten and intimidate. As long as they exist, they will continue to harm people where they are made and where they have been tested and produced – primarily on and near Indigenous nations and communities of colour. As long as they exist, they will extract billions of dollars towards their maintenance, modernisation, and deployment, when that money is so desperately needed to provide for the well-being of people and the planet, now endangered also by climate change.

A continuum of violence

The normalisation of nuclear weapons is also part of the larger, historical project of normalising war.

In his book *The Doomsday Machine*, whistleblower and former military analyst Daniel Ellsberg (2017) explains that nuclear weapon policies grew out of the justifications for bombing cities and civilians during World War II. The willingness, and even desire, to incinerate civilians and destroy civilian infrastructure as part of the war resulted in the practices of firebombing and blanketing wide areas with explosive violence. This approach characterised the latter part of the war, with major civilian centres being deliberately targeted by allied forces long before the US detonated nuclear bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This history provides a disturbing story of how practices previously held abhorrent become normalised during conflict. How what was once held as anathema to “civilised behaviour” becomes entrenched in doctrine and strategy.

The war in Ukraine is not unique in terms of suffering caused. War is always hell. In particular, the bombing of towns and cities causes horrific harm. As Putin’s war in Ukraine is showing again, the effects of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are indiscriminate, with a staggering proportion of death and injuries inflicted on civilians. The explosive blast and fragmentation kill and injure people in the area where they detonate, and damage objects, buildings, and infrastructure. Victims and survivors of explosive weapons can face long-term chal-

lenges of disability, psychological harm, and social and economic exclusion. Destruction of infrastructure vital to the civilian population, including water and sanitation, housing, schools, and hospitals, deprives civilians of access to basic necessities and results in a pattern of wider, long-term suffering.

The potential use of nuclear weapons is an extension of the explosive violence we're already seeing in Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, and elsewhere, and that we already saw in Iraq and Afghanistan, among others. The focus on a potential nuclear war also risks distracting from the lived reality of suffering from "conventional war" going on right now.

The persistence of patriarchy

This mindset – that scores can be settled by bombing homes and hospitals, or that power can be asserted by threatening to wipe out the entire planet – is deeply patriarchal. It is based on an understanding of dominance and violence as the best ways to control and coerce others into bending to your will.

Patriarchy is reflected in every aspect of the war in Ukraine, from the conscription of men and the celebration of the warrior, to the horrific sexual-and gender-based violence being inflicted upon women, LGBTQ+ people, and children, and even to the targeting of civilians and civilian objects. The bombardment of civilian centres is a "deeply gendered strategy with no 'military advantage' other than to demonstrate the failure on the part of the Ukrainian State to protect and thereby to emasculate its leadership," argue feminist international legal experts Louise Arimatsu and Christine Chinkin (2022).

The possession of and threat to use nuclear weapons is also profoundly gendered, with rhetoric of the nuclear-armed states consistently focused on the size of their arsenals, the vitality of their bombs, their worry of impotence if disarmed, and their dismissal of "emotions" of those concerned with the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons (see for example Carol Cohn 1987, 2018; Carol Cohn, Felicity Ruby, and Sara Ruddick 2005; Ray Acheson 2021).

The patriarchy employs technostrategic language to talk about nuclear bombs, as described above, and sanitised language to talk about war – "surgical strikes", "collateral damage", "smart bombs". This patriarchal approach, which discounts and refuses to engage in discussions about the physical, legal, moral, and emotional consequences of weapons and war, has for decades effectively precluded the development of "credible" alternative narratives promoting peace and non-violence. But there are ways to confront and challenge this patriarchal perspective, and the systems of violence it upholds.

Untying the knot of war

In a letter to US President Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev (1962) eloquently described the "knot of war", that their two countries had created, and warned of the risk that they might pull the knot so tight "that even he who tied it will not have the strength to untie it". Sixty years later, that knot has been pulled tighter than ever.

Recognising the failure of the leaders of nuclear-armed States to “untie the knot” – that they cannot or will not take the necessary steps to eliminate or even reduce the risks generated by their nuclear arsenals – the vast majority of countries have revolted. They joined forces with activists in the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) to revitalise a narrative about nuclear weapons in which the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences of the use of these weapons is front and centre. Governments primarily of the global south together with ICAN developed a new international agreement banning nuclear weapons.

On 7 July 2017, 122 Governments voted to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). After receiving the necessary fifty national ratifications, it entered into force on 22 January 2021. This development presents a very significant challenge to nuclear weapons and to the nuclear war machines of the allegedly most “powerful” countries in the world.

The TPNW shows what the world can do in the face of grave injustice and incredible risk. The countries and the activists leading the way in this initiative understood the urgency of dismantling the system of massive nuclear violence that their neighbours and allies have built up. These non-nuclear-armed actors conceived of a role for themselves in this history, of helping to “untie the knot” by working to change the legal, political, economic, and social landscape in which nuclear weapons exist.

The imperative of nuclear abolition

We now need the nuclear-armed States to engage. The solution to the crisis of nuclear weapons is simple: the elimination of nuclear weapons. The only thing that makes it complicated are the capitalist and political interests involved in perpetuating nuclear violence. As with the climate crisis, where we know the solutions to walk us back from the cliff – ending the use of fossil fuels, degrowth in relation to energy use and consumption, etc. – we know the solution to the nuclear crisis. The solution is nuclear disarmament. We already have the TPNW, which provides the legal framework for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. We know, from a technical perspective, how to dismantle a nuclear weapon, how to irreversibly and verifiably destroy bombers and missiles and warheads.

Yet as with the solutions to the climate crisis, we are told that nuclear disarmament is a utopian dream, something that only naïve people demand. We are told that nuclear weapons keep the peace and prevent war. But nuclear-armed States have been warring with each other for decades through proxy conflicts; nuclear weapons have caused harm everywhere they have been used, tested, and produced; and we are now staring into the precipice of a potential nuclear war being launched by one of the two largest nuclear-armed States.

We are told that nuclear disarmament is impossible, that “you can’t put the nuclear genie back in the bottle”. But, of course, we can take things apart. We can dismantle and destroy them, and bolster the legal, political, and economic incentives against possessing nuclear weapons.

We are told that nuclear disarmament is a bad idea because in the future an “irrational actor” might violate international law and norms and build a nuclear bomb. This cannot be the reason we allow a handful of States to possess thousands of nuclear weapons today. “Irrationality” is here and now, in the policies and practices of all of the nuclear-armed States that believe their fantasies of deterrence can proceed uncontested forever.

All of these arguments have nothing to do with what’s actually possible. We have been taught these arguments, and to ridicule the idea of disarmament, because there are vested interests in the maintenance of the fantasy of nuclear deterrence. Private companies, especially those with political entanglements, make nuclear weapons. They profit from building devices of mass destruction. In many cases, these are the same companies profiteering off war in general they also build bullets, bombs, tanks, and aircraft. And in some cases, they are also the same companies profiting from militarising borders, to ensure that people fleeing wars (that their weapons facilitated) and climate change have no escape.

The grand narratives of “geostrategic stability” and “mutually assured destruction” and other such phrases generated by the nuclear-industrial complex are meant to be intimidating, smart-sounding phrases to help manufacture confidence in and consent for what is in reality a policy for the mass murder of civilians and the possible destruction of the entire planet. The nuclear-armed States and several of their allies, including those in NATO, have gone out of their way for years to try to smash any opposition to or stigmatisation of nuclear weapons, to prevent the prohibition of nuclear weapons, and to compel the elimination of these weapons of mass destruction. Now that we are at the nuclear precipice, will their position change?

Disarming and demilitarising

But the knot is not just nuclear. Nuclear weapons are just the tip of vast systems of militarised violence that have been built through more than a century of war. It all must be undone.

This must include ending the practice of using cities as battlefields. It is a violation of international humanitarian law, yet multiple perpetrators continue to bomb and shell civilians. The Irish Government is leading a diplomatic process for a declaration that would see States make commitments against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, to enhance protection of civilians and compliance with international law. Ending the bombing of towns and cities would alleviate much of the immediate and long-term human suffering in armed conflict.

Yet even as many Governments condemn Russia’s bombing and shelling of Ukrainian hospitals, homes, and school, some are trying to water down the draft political declaration’s commitments, to ensure they do not have to change any of their own policies or practices leading to grave civilian harm. The United States, United Kingdom, Israel, Turkey, Canada, the Republic of Korea, and a few other States are actively opposing the creation of strong commitments to prevent the use of explosive weapons in populated areas or to address the reverberating or indirect

and long-lasting impacts of destroying and damaging civilian infrastructure (see for example Ray Acheson 2022).

Many other Governments, however, as well as international organisations and civil society, are pushing for a strong declaration that will help save lives and prevent suffering. Along with the prohibitions of landmines, cluster munitions, and nuclear weapons, and ongoing work on preventing autonomous weapons, the work to stop explosive violence is part of a larger project of humanitarian disarmament. Collectively, these efforts help lay the groundwork for dialing back the international arms trade, weapons production, and war profiteering. The reduction of military budgets, the redirection of funds to meeting social and planetary needs, and a turn in international relations from war to diplomacy, solidarity, and care is imperative for our survival. To this end, all countries should reduce their military spending immediately, and agree to phased reductions through the implementation of Article 26 of the UN Charter, the mandate for which should be taken from the UN Security Council and given to the UN General Assembly.

All countries should join the TPNW and work urgently for the timebound elimination of all nuclear weapons. Through the treaty's provisions for disarmament, the elimination of nuclear weapons could be pursued through verifiable process and achieved within a decade (Moritz Kütt and Zia Mian 2019). The process of nuclear weapon abolition could provide a foundational path to broader changes in the world order. Eliminating nuclear weapons would help establish a new cooperative paradigm in international relations and free up resources help address the climate crisis. It would also help generate momentum for broader disarmament and demilitarisation and redirection of money and human ingenuity towards meeting human and planetary needs.

Instead of maintaining opposing military alliances, all parties should engage in building a common, demilitarised security strategy that places cooperation and the collective fulfilment of the needs of people and planet in the forefront of all policies and actions. NATO, for example, should be disbanded and non-militarised, non-divisive alliances for peace and cooperation should be built instead, with international solidarity as its guiding principle (see for example Ian Davis 2022).

In this moment, in relation to Ukraine, we must put the lives of civilians and care for the planet above perceived military, political, and economic interests. To this end, a people-centred peace process is imperative. In the Ukraine context, the Ukrainian Pacificist Movement (2022) has called for “open, inclusive and comprehensive negotiations on peace and disarmament in the format of a public dialogue between all state and non-state parties to the conflict with the participation of pro-peace civil society actors.”

This type of inclusive process, a process that is not driven or dominated by those who created the crisis in the first place, must be applied to other contexts. We know that more inclusive processes lead to more stable peace, yet time after time, only men with guns dictate the terms of “peace”. These solutions invariably lead to the imposition of neoliberal economic policies, gender and racial oppressions and inequalities, and endless militarisation.

Retrenchment of militarism

Many antinuclear and antiwar organisers, in this moment, are feeling despair. Not just because we are looking at a serious threat of the use of nuclear weapons and potential nuclear war, not just because yet another war is causing horrific human suffering, all of which is devastating. But the despair also comes because we know all too well what the mainstream reaction will be from the nuclear-armed States, and the other heavily militarised countries, and their think tank, academic, and industry cronies. It will be to double down on nuclear weapons. It will be to walk back arms control. It will be to invest billions more into the “modernisation” of weapons and militaries, even after spending billions on these projects already. It will likely be to invest more in new systems of violence, including autonomous weapons and cyber warfare.

We can see this already from Germany’s announcement about investing a hundred billion euros into its military, from Finland and Sweden clamouring to join NATO, from the skyrocketing stock dividends of the major weapon contractors. Looking at this militarised crisis, the Governments that have already invested so much in weapons and war will want to keep on this track. As if they’d only had more militarism, they could have prevented this conflict. As if it wasn’t militarism itself – and the impunity for militarism, such as the US invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, Israel’s occupation and apartheid in Palestine, Russia’s bombing of Syria and imperialist expansionism, NATO’s aggression, etc. – that led to this crisis in the first place.

The world spends more than two trillion dollars a year on militarism (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2022). The United States dominates the charts, followed by mostly western countries, which are also major arms exporters. The world is awash with weapons. People have suffered the impacts of war non-stop since World War II. The horrific attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure we have seen the last few days in Ukraine have been preceded by the devastation and deliberate targeting of civilians in Viet Nam, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen – the list goes on. The kind of imperialist expansion and illegal occupation based on “spheres of influence” at play with Russia’s war have already devastated countless Latin American, Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian, and African countries.

All of this has been primarily about protecting economic interests of the most militarised countries in the world. It has facilitated the extraction of resources and labour, the exploitation of humans, animals, land, and water. As wealth for a few is extracted through war and violence, people everywhere suffer, including in militarised countries launching these wars. The United States spends more than \$750 billion a year on weapons and war while health care, education, jobs, housing, food security, and general well-being flounder. The profound harm caused by militarism occurs on both sides of the gun.

Further, this militarism and violence has reinforced systems of white supremacy and racism, criminalising those on the receiving end of the violence as terrorists or potential militants; criminalising people from the countries suffering from war or economic exploitation – or who just look like people who might be from those

countries – with border restrictions, surveillance, harassment, incarceration, detention, deportation.

This racism is on full display with the reaction to refugees from Ukraine right now, with Ukrainian citizens being welcomed into neighbouring countries while people of colour living in Ukraine are being blocked from fleeing the war (see for example Nadine White 2022). Not to mention that Fortress Europe has spent billions on keeping out refugees and asylum seekers from North Africa and the Middle East and facilitates their drowning at sea or detention in horrific conditions. White supremacy also informs the shock many white people seem to be having at seeing war in a European country, in which commentators express disbelief that this could happen on a “civilised” continent (see for example Jairo I. Fúnez 2022).

Work on in despair

Despair is a natural reaction to what seems like an overwhelming “way of the world”. We know that militarism begets violence and the endless of cycle of death and destruction is constantly perpetuated by so many political leaders and the military-industrial complex.

But despair should not be our only reaction. Resolve, inspiration, hope, and action – these are urgently needed, especially amongst those of us not grappling the immediacy of survival in this moment. Right now, people in Ukraine are opposing the Russian invasion, including through non-violent resistance, with people confronting tanks and soldiers in the street. Russians are taking to the streets to protest their government’s actions, even in the face of detention and incarceration. People around the world are protesting the war and calling for peace, disarmament, de-escalation. Peace groups, antiwar organisers, and disarmament activists are working to mobilise Governments to end this conflict and to prevent its escalation through further militarisation. There are hundreds of petitions, statements, webinars, direct actions, calls to elected officials, advocacy at the United Nations, and more. Humanitarian organisations and ordinary people are working to provide for refugees and displaced people.

Ending this war is crucial. Preventing the next is vital. But to do so, we need to recognise that war is also ongoing around the world, with primarily Black and brown lives on the line. Our opposition to war cannot be limited to Ukraine, it must be about all war. Solidarity for the harm and violence caused by war means acknowledging that this harm and violence is not limited to one place or one situation but is systemic and structural. War is the manifestation of a global, violent political economy that treats some human life as meaningful and most as not, that treats profits as more important than people or planet.

War, capitalism, racism, colonialism, border imperialism, the carceral system, the climate crisis—these are all intimately connected and have been built by many Governments over many years. And so while we oppose the war in Ukraine, true solidarity means opposing war everywhere, and confronting the aspects of our world that lead to, facilitate, and perpetuate war.

Instead of investing in militarism as a response to this war, we need the opposite. We need to reduce military budgets. We need to dismantle the weapons we

have and not build new ones. We need to instead use financial resources and human ingenuity for disarmament, for providing for people everywhere – education, housing, food security, and overall care and well-being – and for confronting the climate crisis. We can find hope in those organising locally, nationally, and globally for these things already. We can find hope in those Governments and people that reject militarism, that see the answer lies not in more weapons but in collective and cooperative approaches to the problems that the capitalist, extractivist, militarised world order has created. We need to double down not on militarism but the value of international law, created painstakingly for generations; the refusals and denunciations of war; the nonviolent resistance and protest; the mutual aid projects.

Abolition for transformation

The old ways of doing things have proven, over and over again, that they do not work. We need a new vision of global peace, grounded in the intersectional experiences of people and the needs of the entire planet. Creating and achieving that vision requires changing who is invited to the table: out with the ruling elites, who are bound to personal interests and gains, and in with everyone who stands to lose from conflict. Land and water protectors, feminists, antinuclear activists, those organising for demilitarisation, equality, and care must lead the work for peace, not the people who profit from conflict. We need a paradigm shift in international relations, stemming from this kind of people-centred peace process. We need to alter the relations between United States and Russia, but more broadly we need to dismantle the militarised global order, militarised conceptions of security, and the dominance of the military-industrial complex over world affairs. The hegemony of colonial-corporate extractivism must also be transformed – for the climate, for relations with First Nations, for the protection of land, water, air, and animals.

An abolitionist framing is useful for cultivating such transformation. Instead of investing in weapons and preparing for war, we must be investing instead of care for people and planet. Abolition is a tool to build a world that works for all, instead of just a few. The abolition of war, globally, requires disarmament and arms control, systems for demilitarisation and reduction of military spending. But it also requires building structures for peace, solidarity, cooperation, and nonviolence to flourish. It means replacing weapons with renewable energy, war with diplomacy, capitalism with a redistributive feminist political economy that is centered on equality, social justice, degrowth and ecological sustainability.

Unlearning the necessity of violence is essential to exploring what could be built in its place. This means turning on its head so much of what we are taught about what's necessary for safety and security in our world. It means learning to reject violence as a solution to all problems, interrogating and challenging systems of power that assert they exist to protect while instead they persecute and oppress. Understanding and responding to the “bigger picture” doesn't mean we each as individuals need to solve every piece of it. But it does mean we need to recognise and support each other's efforts and reflect in our own work the analysis and organising of various movements and projects for peace. The sum of our whole is

greater than our parts, and going up against the machine of capitalist violence can feel immense – unless we break it down and rebuild something else, together.

The value of being “unrealistic”

The abolition of nuclear weapons, of war, of borders, of all the structures of State violence that we can see clearly at play in this conflict is at the core of the demand for real, lasting, paradigm-shifting change that we need in the world. It can feel like vast, overwhelming, and inconceivable. But most change is inconceivable until we achieve it. Even in the midst of crisis, we need to plant the seeds for peace. If the broader context of what led to war is not addressed, if the *process to achieve peace* itself is not feminist, does not put human and planetary well-being at its centre, then we will find ourselves right back here again as we have so many times before. Many will say that doing anything other than sending more weapons or bolstering global militarism is “unrealistic” as a response to this crisis. But it is the credibility of the militarists that must be put in question in this moment, not those working to build the structures and culture for peace, cooperation, and well-being.

Everyone who has ever tried to do anything progressive throughout all of history has been accused of being unrealistic. The only reason change has ever been occurred in the world is because people ignored those criticisms and kept working. Change is not bestowed upon us by benevolent leaders. Change is compelled, by people. Being “unrealistic” means being on the front line of change. It means helping to alter what people conceive of as unrealistic, who they see as credible to speak or act on an issue. And ultimately, it means helping to dismantle the systems of harm and oppression and building something better.

In November 1940, during World War II, French philosopher Albert Camus wrote, “We can despair of existence, for we have no power over it, but not of history, where the individual can do everything. It is individuals who are killing us today. Why should not individuals manage to give the world peace? We must simply begin without thinking of such grandiose aims” (Maria Popova 2014). Hope, then, is not necessarily about us as individuals being able to achieve the abolition of all forms of violence, but about the ability of us as a collective – including future generations – to drive forward the changes we need to bring peace, justice, and well-being to humankind and all relations with whom we share our lives on this planet. We can either accept and succumb to the violence, or we can work to abolish the systems and structures that enable it.

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Feminists Opposing Militarism: Creating Cultures of Life and Connectedness

by

Gwyn Kirk*

Abstract: The gun lobby, the mass shooting and the cultures of militarism in the United States are deeply connected with the relentless devastation in Ukraine: they are all expressions of an interlocking system of militarism-institutions, investments, practices, and beliefs that take their meaning and value from war. This is the main point of this essay in which the author Gwyn Kirk – thanks to her long trajectory of study and militancy in women’s peace movements – describes this underlying network, how it is embedded, normalized and rendered invisible, but also how a feminist understanding of militarism is necessary to bring to light the deep connections between the different forms of violence and domination.

Militarism: The System

Top Gun: Maverick, the 2022 blockbuster starring Tom Cruise, with jaw-dropping aerial-combat sequences¹, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on May 21, and was then released in 37 nations² across Europe, Asia, and North America. The US release date was Memorial Day weekend, with Memorial Day (May 30) a federal holiday honoring men and women who died serving in the military. This timing coincided with the unfolding horrendous war against Ukraine, which rathe-

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¹ <File:///c:/users/djmoreloveandjoy/dropbox/mac/downloads/jaw-droppingaerial-combatsequences>.

² <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1745960/releaseinfo>.

ted up the movie's immediate box-office success. It generated \$291m in North America and \$548.6m globally in its first 10 days³. "It's all there," enthused Emma Brookes, "the jump-jets landing on the carrier ... tight white T-shirts, aviator shades ... and the thrill of watching F-18s fight over unnamed enemy territory"⁴.

Also that weekend the National Rifle Association, which consistently opposes any tightening of US gun laws, held its annual conference in Houston (Texas), only days after the massacre of 19 children and two teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde (Texas) where parents were asked to provide DNA samples to help identify their children, murdered beyond recognition with a military-style assault weapon⁵. It was the 27th school shooting this year⁶, so far. According to the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions⁷, these horrific mass killings, often by white racists using high-powered weapons purchased legally, account for a mere 1 percent of people killed by guns in the US annually. Some 60 percent are gun suicides, mainly white middle-aged men; 35 percent are gun homicides (with roughly 18,000 victims a year), disproportionately young African American men, and often involving illegal handguns. The remainder include shootings by police and border patrol agents, also disproportionately targeting people of color.

The movie, the gun lobby, the mass shootings, and the relentless devastation in Ukraine are all connected, part of an interlocking system of militarism--institutions, investments, practices, and beliefs that take their meaning and value from war. This underlying network is embedded, normalized, and thus rendered invisible. It sees individual gun ownership as manly and generates wars that are both specific and utterly generic, fed by political attitudes, cultural assumptions, and economic investments on the part of governments and corporations. Further, a feminist understanding of militarism views it as an "extreme variant of patriarchy, a gendered regime characterized by discourses and practices that subordinate and oppress women, as well as non-dominant men, reinforcing hierarchies of class, gender, race and ethnicity, and in some contexts caste, religion and location" (Mama and Okazawa-Rey 2012, p. 100).

In the United States, militarism has long been entangled in popular culture, with connections between Hollywood and the Pentagon dating back to the early 1900s. Military personnel based in Los Angeles study film and TV scripts sent by film producers who hope the Department of Defense (DoD) will help them with their project. The military gets publicity and recruitment advantages, and the film in-

³https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/jun/06/studio-behind-tom-cruise-blockbuster-top-gun-maverick-sued-over-copyright?CMP=share_btn_link.

⁴ Emma Brookes, *In Need of Light Relief? Top Gun: Maverick is a Reminder that Tom Cruise Has Still Got It*, "The Guardian", June 8, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/08/top-gun-maverick-tom-cruise>.

⁵ Michael Levenson, *Parents Were Asked to Give DNA Samples to Help Identify Victims*, "New York Times", May 25, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/us/texas-shooting-parents-dna-victims.html>.

⁶<https://choice.npr.org/index.html?origin=https://www.npr.org/2022/05/24/1101050970/2022-school-shootings-so-far>.

⁷ The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence (EFGV), *Gun Violence in the United States*, <https://efgv.org/learn/type-of-gun-violence/gun-violence-in-the-united-states/>.

dustry gets access to equipment, locations, and authenticity from this arrangement⁸, in which, according to *Guardian* reporter Steve Rose, “the DoD manages its screen image so carefully”⁹ some see it as “an unnamed co-producer on thousands of movies, to the extent that Hollywood is operating as it’s propaganda machine”. Films like *Top Gun: Maverick*, marketed and consumed as entertainment, reinforce the everyday “normality” of militarism.

Similarly, candidates for US president must promote this view to be viable contenders. Psychologist Stephen Ducat (2005) called attention to “the wimp factor” in US politics where the president is also Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Although President Obama and now President Biden have made impassioned pleas for restrictions on gun sales in hopes of reducing mass shootings, presidential candidates invariably present themselves as people who will champion military interventions as building blocks of US foreign policy. They must not be seen to be “soft on defense.” Indeed, according to John Bellamy Foster¹⁰, since President Biden came into office earlier US military support for the Ukraine skyrocketed. The war against Ukraine is both a war of aggression waged by Russia and part of a larger geopolitical battle between the US, NATO, and Russia, with the US and Europe providing weapons and Ukraine doing the fighting. Leon Panetta, former CIA director and defense secretary under the Obama administration commented in March: “We are engaged in a conflict here. It’s a proxy war with Russia, whether we say so or not”¹¹.

Together the United States and Russia possess over 90 percent of all nuclear weapons¹². Despite worldwide recognition of the dangers these weapons pose, as reflected in support for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons¹³ that came into force in January 2021, a new nuclear arms race is underway, especially involving Russia, China, and the United States. Indeed, the United States has a 30-year plan¹⁴ “to build new nuclear-armed bombers, missiles, and submarines and new nuclear warheads to go with them at a cost of up to \$2 trillion”. Together with

⁸ Jamie Tarabay, *Hollywood and the Pentagon: A Relationship of Mutual Exploitation*, “Al Jazeera America”, July 29, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/7/29/hollywood-and-the-pentagon-relationship-of-mutual-exploitation.html>.

⁹ Steve Rose, *Top Gun for Hire: Why Hollywood is the US Military’s Best Wingman*, “The Guardian”, May 26, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/may/26/top-gun-for-hire-why-hollywood-is-the-us-militarys-best-wingman>.

¹⁰ John Bellamy Foster, *The U.S. Proxy War in Ukraine*, March 31, 2022, <https://cpmaine.org/2022/04/10/the-u-s-proxy-war-in-ukraine-by-john-bellamy-foster/>.

¹¹ Andre Damon, *Obama Defense Secretary Leon Panetta Says NATO is in a “Proxy War” With Russia*, March 21, 2022, “Monthly Review online”, <https://mronline.org/2022/03/21/obama-defense-secretary-leon-panetta-says-nato-is-in-a-proxy-war-with-russia/>.

¹² <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/global-nuclear-arsenals-are-expected-grow-states-continue-modernize-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>.

¹³ SIPRI, *Global Nuclear Arsenals are Expected to Grow as States Continue to Modernize-New SIPRI Yearbook Out Now*, June 13, 2022, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>.

¹⁴ William Hartung, *Why Are We Still Building Nuclear Weapons? Follow the Money*, “Forbes”, Aug 10, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamhartung/2021/08/10/why-are-we-still-building-nuclear-weapons---follow-the-money/?sh=c4ff77b58887>.

other nuclear nations, the United States and virtually all NATO members, have not signed onto the UN Treaty. As in the 1980s, US nuclear weapons will be deployed in Europe. Kate Hudson, General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament reported that USAF Lakenheath in Britain “currently hosts F-15E fighter-bombers with nuclear capability but these are being replaced by the new nuclear-capable F-35A Lightning”¹⁵. She noted that within the next year US/NATO nuclear bases in Europe “will also receive the new B61-12 guided nuclear bomb which is entering full-scale production in the US,” a major increase in NATO’s capacity to wage nuclear war”¹⁶. Militarism, including the nuclear arms race, is fueled by nation-states’ desire for domination and corporate desire for the huge profits that militarism generates¹⁷. The world’s top arms producers¹⁸ are based in the United States: Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and General Dynamics, followed by three Chinese companies¹⁹ – AVIC, NORINCO, CETC – and BAE (UK). Others include Airbus, Fincantieri (Italy), Hanwha (South Korea), Israeli Aerospace Systems (Israel), Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (Japan), Rheinmetall (Germany), Rolls Royce (UK), Safran (France), and EDGE (a UAE-based conglomerate), plus tech companies such as Hewlett Packard and Microsoft, and university-based research projects²⁰. The USA, Russia, France, China, Germany, Italy, UK, and South Korea are the top weapons exporters²¹, with arms sales an explicit part of foreign policy.

In 2021, world military spending rose to \$2,113 billion, an all-time high. The United States spent 38 percent of this staggering total²². China was second with 14 percent and Russia sixth with 3.1 percent. Much of the rest is accounted for by US allies. In addition to high-tech weapons systems, the global trade in small arms means that guns are bought and sold – using US dollars, British pounds, or euros – by arms brokers on behalf of government agents and paramilitaries. Indeed, earning “hard currency” from weapons sales is one way that poor countries repay foreign debts.

Further, countries of the global North are increasingly militarizing their borders. The US Border Patrol’s budget increased more than ten-fold²³, from \$263 million in 1990 to nearly \$4.9 billion in 2021. Within the United States, spending on poli-

¹⁵ <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/lf/akenheath-starting-today-we-can-send-nukes-back>.

¹⁶ Thanks to Rae Street, long-time activist in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, for information about the renewed US nuclear presence at USAF Lakenheath, and anti-nuclear protests there.

¹⁷ Hartung, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ <https://www.statista.com/chart/12221/the-worlds-biggest-arms-companies/>.

¹⁹ Global Defense Corp, *China is the World’s 2nd Biggest Arms Exporter and It’s Closing the Gap with the US*, <https://www.globaldefensecorp.com>.

²⁰ SIPRI, *The SIPRI Top 100 Arms Producing and Military Services Companies, 2020*, https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/fs_2112_top_100_2020.pdf.

²¹ <https://www.statista.com/chart/18417/global-weapons-exports/>.

²² SIPRI, *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2021*, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/fs_2204_milex_2021_0.pdf.

²³ American Immigration Council, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/the-cost-of-immigration-enforcement-and-border-security>.

cing²⁴ more than doubled from \$42 billion in 1977 to \$115 billion in 2017. This is less than the military budgets of the US and China, but more than all other nations' military spending.

The culture of gun ownership, held by some as an ultimate individual right, means that rates of gun-carrying and gun violence in the United States are far greater than in other high-income nations due to weak laws, and a lack of resources and political will to regulate the gun industry²⁵. Smith & Wesson²⁶ reported that its sales doubled last fiscal year (2020-21) to \$1.1 billion. The company estimated that at least 10 million people, including growing numbers of white women and people of color, bought guns for the first time since the beginning of 2020. Economic turmoil, political volatility, mass shootings, hate crimes against people of color, and outbreaks of civil unrest, including the Capitol riots of January 6 2021, were among reasons cited for bumper gun sales: pistols, rifles, and semiautomatic assault weapons²⁷.

This emphasis on the United States is not intended to let other nations off the hook for their part in perpetuating militarism but because the US is #1 in the world in terms of military spending, overseas military bases, weapons production and sales, and gun violence. War and killing dominate the headlines and the airwaves.

Not often named as such, World War III has been happening since the end of World War II, a dispersed war against many communities with different "fronts" and phases, enmities, and alliances. It includes overt warfare and preparations for war, as well as the persistent extraction of resources, corporate landgrabs, displacement of people from land that used to sustain them, and attacks on progressive politicians, movement leaders, and protesters who oppose these life-threatening systems.

Feminists Opposing Militarism

Militarism is, literally, a dead end. Its central distortion is that organized violence is essential in providing security. On the contrary, feminists, as well as environmentalists and Indigenous people working for sustainability and self-determination, have shown that militarism creates severe insecurities for subjugated peoples, for many within dominant nations, for humankind, and for the planet itself. A fundamental contradiction of militarized security is that nation-states drain their financial, technical, and ecological resources to prepare for war, often to the detriment of their own citizens – especially low-income communities – who live with the in-

²⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-04/america-s-policing-budget-has-nearly-tripled-to-115-billion#xj4y7vzkg>.

²⁵ The Gun Industry in America, Report, Aug 6, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/gun-industry-america/>.

²⁶ Aaron Smith, *Smith & Wesson's Gun Sales Doubled to More Than \$ 1 Billion in Year to May*, "Forbes", June 17, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/aaronsmith/2021/06/17/smith--wesson-says-fy-gun-sales-doubled-to-more-than-1-billion/?sh=28068b0e53bd>.

²⁷ <https://www.guns.com/news/2021/01/05/nics-gun-sale-data-for-2020-best-year-ever-over-21-million-sold>.

security of poverty, inadequate health care, violence, and climate disaster – none of which militarism can solve.

In response to this appalling reality with its endless killing and contempt for life, feminists must counter militarism in our analyses and activism. As we stand in solidarity with those suffering in the Ukraine, we must examine and acknowledge our nations' roles in generating this war, as well as the Euro-centered media reporting of it. We watch images of white children clutching their teddy bears; anguished mothers trying to flee to safety; grandmas facing the wreckage of their bombed-out kitchens. They are people not just statistics. Who would not be moved? And where is the same outpouring of sympathy and human-interest stories for those caught up in wars and violent occupations in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine, to mention only a few?

Feminists in the global North must stand up to our own governments, which are disproportionately responsible for sustaining this system of militarism. We must acknowledge and oppose our nations' war mongering and war profiteering, and the devastating histories of imperialism, colonialism, and racism, which underly current violence. We cannot be bullied, flattered, coaxed, ridiculed, embarrassed, or guilt-tripped into supporting this renewed Cold War. We must define another place to stand, not allowing media reporting and mainstream discussion to manipulate or co-opt us. A place to stand that does not render us either unwilling participants or complicit in other people's vulnerability and oppression. In response to the cacophony of war talk we must continue to speak out against the normalization of militarism, as others have done in the past, using a range of strategies, organizational forms, discourses, and theorizing.

Over a century ago, the International Congress of Women, which cut across national enmities, gathered in 1915 in The Hague (Netherlands) despite the difficulties and risks of war time travel. Women assembled "to protest against war and to suggest steps which may lead to warfare becoming an impossibility" (Bussey and Tims 1980, p. 19). In May and June 1915, delegates visited government officials in fourteen countries, calling for a mediation conference hosted by neutral nations to end World War I, and for women's participation in the peace settlement. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom²⁸ (WILPF), now with international offices in New York and Geneva and 45 national groups worldwide, grew out of that historic event.

Following WWII, the Women's International Democratic Federation²⁹ (WIDF) promoted peace through the advancement of women and by linking racism and imperialism among the causes of war³⁰. The Federation connected leftist women from Europe and North America with African and Asian women engaged in anti-imperial struggles. Feminist historian Elisabeth Armstrong (2016) noted the signi-

²⁸ <https://www.wilpf.org/>.

²⁹ Elisabeth Armstrong, *Before Bandung: The Anti-Imperialist Women's Movement in Asia and the Women's International Democratic Federation*, 2016, Study of Women and Gender: Faculty Publications, Smith College, https://scholarworks.smith.edu/swg_facpubs/1.

³⁰ Thanks to Suzy Kim, feminist historian, and author of *Among Women Across Worlds: North Korea in the Global Cold War* (Cornell University Press), for telling me about this organization.

ficance of international solidarity in WIDF, which involved both “a solidarity of commonality and a solidarity of complicity”.

Its campaign for women’s rights as human rights nurtured a solidarity of commonality... WIDF’s solidarity of complicity emerged in response to the differential power relations between women, power relations that had unequal benefits and incommensurate negative effects. Whether differences of power centered on class or nation, in this solidarity of complicity, women took responsibility for acts of oppression and discrimination committed in their name ... it often meant holding one’s own government accountable for its actions within colonies and former colonies, as well as actions between colonies (p. 311).

A third example is the Greenham Common Women’s Peace movement, which started in 1981 when a group of women, children, and men walked from Cardiff (Wales) to USAF Greenham Common near Newbury, 125 miles away. Their goal was to open a public debate in Britain on NATO’s decision to site nuclear missiles at this base. In towns and villages along the way they spoke about their fears and anger at this escalation of the nuclear arms race. When they arrived, they tried to deliver a letter of protest to the base commander. He refused to accept it. Some women stayed, and others joined a round-the-clock protest³¹ outside the base that lasted many years. Dozens of local Greenham groups sprang up across the country and Greenham women’s nonviolent direct action touched women around the world (Cook and Kirk 1983)³². Women from Pacific islands whose communities had suffered the devastation of atomic bomb tests by the United States and Britain, challenged Greenham women to develop our own solidarity of complicity (Women Working for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific 1987).

Despite ridicule from mainstream media and opposition from the Thatcher government, Greenham women contributed to shifts in Cold War policy in Europe as Reagan and Gorbachev agreed to reduce intermediate-range weapons like those deployed at Greenham. The missile silos, where women had danced defiantly, were emptied and former common land was finally returned to public use. As women of my generation donate our precious Greenham newsletters, leaflets, photos, and badges to libraries and archives, younger activists continue to be inspired by this movement, with the web a powerful symbol highlighting the connectedness of all life on earth. In 2021, filmmaker Sonia Gonzalez made a powerful film for ARTE TV, “Women Against the Bomb”³³, to be broadcast in October this year, which remembers this movement, not just in terms of history or nostalgia, but as a source of ideas, beliefs, and creativity that are equally vital in 2022.

Other inspiring examples include the African Women’s Anti-War Coalition³⁴ and the Mano River Women’s Peace Network³⁵ in Africa, the International Wo-

³¹ <http://www.greenhamwpc.org.uk/>

³² Alice Cook and I wrote a version of this section in 2021 to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Movement. Thank you to Alice for our thinking and writing together over the years.

³³ <http://www.greenhamwpc.org.uk/>.

³⁴ https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Urgent_Action/apic_11499.html.

³⁵ <https://issat.dcaf.ch/Share/People-and-Organisations/Organisations/Mano-River-Women-s-Peace-Network2>.

men's Network Against Militarism³⁶, and Women in Black³⁷ that all link feminist voices and activism transnationally. The Women's Pentagon Action³⁸, Women's Action for New Directions³⁹, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace⁴⁰, and Code Pink⁴¹ are key examples in North America. Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence (Japan)⁴² and Women Making Peace (South Korea)⁴³, are among those active in Asia. In 2005, Peace Women Across the Globe⁴⁴ nominated one thousand women from over 150 countries for the Nobel Peace Prize. Although the group did not win this prestigious award, the documentation of their wide-ranging work for everyday security is an unprecedented resource, and includes the following:

- Promoting gun control.
- Caring for survivors of armed conflicts.
- Promoting conflict resolution and mediation.
- Promoting reconciliation and healing.
- Contributing to peaceful reconstruction and demilitarization of a society.
- Changing priorities in government spending away from military budgets and toward social needs.
- Alleviating poverty.
- Enhancing health and education policies and practices.
- Maintaining a healthy environment.
- Ensuring universal and equitable access to resources, and
- Addressing structural violence and discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity class, sexuality, ability, or culture.

Groups in many countries currently participate in a Global Campaign on Military Spending⁴⁵. And 122 nations, urged on by hundreds of local organizations, supported the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons⁴⁶, a historic legally-

³⁶ [Http://iwnam.org/](http://iwnam.org/).

³⁷ [Https://womeninblack.org/](https://womeninblack.org/).

³⁸ [Http://www.wloe.org/WLOE-en/background/wpastatem.html](http://www.wloe.org/WLOE-en/background/wpastatem.html)

³⁹ [Https://www.wand.org/](https://www.wand.org/).

⁴⁰ [Https://vowpeace.org/](https://vowpeace.org/).

⁴¹ [Https://www.codepink.org/](https://www.codepink.org/).

⁴² [Https://u-ryukyu.re.ii.ac.jp/records/2012349](https://u-ryukyu.re.ii.ac.jp/records/2012349).

⁴³ Kim Jeongsoo, *South Korean Women's Efforts and Activities Towards Peace on the Korean Peninsula: Trust-Building with North Korean Women*, Nov 19, 2019, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)-Northeast Asia, <https://medium.com/perspectives-on-peace-and-security-in-a-changing/south-korean-womens-efforts-and-activities-towards-peace-on-the-korean-peninsula-trust-building-65e98e070b45>.

⁴⁴ [Https://www.1000peacewomen.org/](https://www.1000peacewomen.org/).

⁴⁵ Global Campaign on Military Spending, GDAMS-Global Days of Action on Military Spending from April 13 to May 12 2022, https://demilitarize.org/media_news/gdams-2022-april-13-to-may-12/.

⁴⁶ [Https://www.icanw.org/tpnw_status](https://www.icanw.org/tpnw_status).

binding international agreement mentioned earlier. The first meeting of states that are party to the treaty is scheduled for June 21-23 this year⁴⁷.

These many efforts provide information and analysis, years of experience, political savvy and creativity, practical projects, sturdy networks of inspiring people, and engaging conversations between individuals and organizations as well as transnationally. Much of what has been done is still both necessary and relevant. Our task is to continue and expand this work.

Creating Cultures of Life

All over the world people are suffering from destruction caused by militarism and war, with women bearing the heaviest burden. Terrified children see their homes destroyed; women and girls are raped by enemy men; forests, farms, pastures, and orchards are ruined; people survive in miserable refugee camps for decades. War and preparations for war are also a form of warfare on many communities as public money, land, and resources are channeled into militarism rather than social needs. In their different ways, military officials, pro-military politicians, corporations, and trigger-happy young men are all holding the world hostage.

The current crises facing humankind such as climate change, pandemics, environmental destruction, severe inequality, poverty, food insecurity, misogyny and sexual violence cannot be resolved by militarism and conflict, militarized policing, or militarized borders. For everyday security, people need affordable housing, guaranteed livelihood, opportunities for learning, health care, clean air and water. Communities need support in caring for children, elders, and people with mental health issues, physical disabilities, and addictions. Young people need meaningful ways to develop their skills and talents and to contribute to the welfare and safety of their communities. We all deserve respect for our humanity, and to be able to express ourselves artistically and spiritually. People's lives and environmental sustainability must be at the center of budgets and policies, not violence, property, and profit-making.

To oppose war and militarism is to oppose business as usual. Detractors may call us naïve, ignorant, or unpatriotic. WILPF's historians noted,

To certain sections of the world's press and public opinion, the aims of the [1915] Congress seemed either laughable or deplorable. The women had been called foolish and naïve, interfering, and ill-informed; irresponsibly feminine, and at the same time boldly unwomanly (Bussey and Tims 1980, pp. 19-20).

The repercussions of speaking out vary considerably, depending on class, race, gender expression, culture, or nation, from ridicule and insults to the risk of losing one's job, to arrest, or death threats. And nations have tightened laws regulating protest and dissent. However, there are many roles to play, some more public and visible than others. Acknowledging these complex inequalities among us, we can work together as feminists, sustaining activist communities and networks to encourage, support, and if necessary, defend each other.

⁴⁷ https://www.icanw.org/tpnw_first_meeting_of_states_parties_june_2022.

The current world situation is beyond heartbreaking; it is enraging, intolerable, and frightening. How can we strengthen transnational feminist alliances as we envision sustainable futures, challenge government and corporate policies, hold elected representatives accountable for their actions, seek to shift prevailing mindsets, create alternative economies, and work on practical projects that increase everyday security? We have the world to lose – and everything to gain⁴⁸.

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⁴⁸ Thanks to Sherry Gorelick and Margo Okazawa-Rey for helping me sharpen this article, to Terry Greenblatt and Anasuya Sengupta for your encouragement, and to Bruna Bianchi for inviting me to write for this 'emergency' issue of "DEP-Deportate, esuli, profughe".

¡Desertad!

Reflexiones fragmentarias sobre la guerra, la patria y la igualdad

di

Carmen Magallón*

Abstract: Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, the article draws lessons from the stories of women from the near past, our grandmothers, and presents features of pacifist feminism and the tradition it shaped in the 20th century, presenting women's peace groups and pointing to the birth of pacifist feminism in the strict sense, with the founding of WILPF. She points out the importance of passing on the legacy of this tradition to new generations and questions its invisibility, as well as the legacy suffered by conscientious objectors and refusniks who demand the right not to kill, a group with which pacifist feminists can establish alliances. She defends revisiting the figure of the deserter, granting them the freedom and honor that they are socially denied; also, the need to rethink language, in the time of social networks, and to exert cultural influence. It provides brief reflections on equality, homeland, and heroes in line with Virginia Woolf's thoughts in *Three Guineas* and proposes to return to The Hague to raise once again a powerful dissident voice against war and weapons.

La historia no avanza linealmente. En algunos aspectos estamos retrocediendo, volviendo a lo peor del pasado. Es el caso de la guerra de Ucrania, reproductora en parte de la tensión de la Guerra Fría y la vuelta al enfrentamiento armado en Europa. En esta guerra vemos de nuevo crecer las víctimas, la destrucción de las ciudades, los desplazamientos de población y la reproducción de los estereotipos de género caracterizados como alma bella y guerrero justo. Las viejas nociones de patria y heroísmo belicista laten bajo una mayoría que se aferra a las armas como vía de salvación. ¿Qué historias nos contaron nuestras abuelas que vivieron la guerra? ¿Dónde posicionarnos para avivar lo que aprendimos hace tiempo? En el tiempo de

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las redes sociales y la influencia de los medios, ¿cómo recuperar las experiencias y movimientos invisibilizados contra la guerra, agitarlos y sacarlos a la luz con una voz potente? En esta tarea, que es a la vez política y cultural, el feminismo pacifista no parte de cero. Lo que sigue son reflexiones fragmentarias, al hilo del pensamiento de Virginia Woolf en *Tres Guineas* y años de participación de la autora en el movimiento feminista pacifista.

Lo que aprendí de mis abuelas

Si el feminismo creció en mí como rebeldía a las imposiciones y negaciones ligadas al ser mujer en años de la dictadura franquista, la semilla del rechazo a la guerra fue sembrada por mis abuelas. Ellas fueron mujeres del campo que vivieron la Guerra Civil Española (1936-1939) en un pueblo cercano al frente donde tenían lugar los combates, en el Bajo Aragón de Teruel, España. Cuando era niña, escuché de sus labios muchos relatos de guerra, incluido el bombardeo que sufrió nuestro pueblo, Alcañiz, el 3 de marzo de 1938, un año después del más conocido bombardeo de Gernika. Mi abuela materna María Cortés Terraza, vivía con sus hijas e hijos pequeños en una finca de campo con amplia casa situada a cuatro kilómetros del pueblo. Los hijos mayores habían sido reclutados. Como el frente estaba cerca, los militares ocuparon parte de la casa. Primero se instalaron en ella los defensores de la legítima República, un coronel y varios tenientes, con casi treinta hombres acampados alrededor y varias ametralladoras. Después llegarían los militares franquistas, entre los que había un grupo de italianos. Unos y otros prohibían esconder y dar comida a personas ‘del otro bando’: “Me decían que no diera de comer a éstos, que no acogiera a aquellos y yo contestaba que mi casa estaba abierta a todo el mundo y que mientras tuviera comida, todo el que pidiera comería”, contaba mi abuela María. El caso de mi otra abuela, Tomasa Lizana Torres, es también ilustrativo de una práctica que se coloca por encima de los bandos enfrentados. Se había enterado de que el médico de Barcelona, al que meses atrás había acudido con su hija enferma, había sido traído preso a la cárcel del pueblo. Pues bien, pese a ir contracorriente de los que entonces mandaban, desde el primer momento se ocupó de llevarle a la prisión alimentos y ropa.

Como contrapunto, tengo el relato de la experiencia de mi padre que en los últimos años de guerra fue llamado a filas, tuvo que coger las armas y defender a la República en la llamada ‘Quinta del biberón’. Al finalizar la guerra, acabó en los muelles de Alicante, donde vio cómo se suicidaban quienes esperaban barcos para salir de la España derrotada, barcos escasos hacia el exilio y otros que nunca llegaron. Él, junto a sus compañeros, fue retenido en la plaza de toros de Valencia, donde pasó varios días sin comer, ingresado después en un campo de concentración en Castellón y posteriormente enviado a realizar tres años de Servicio Militar obligatorio en La Coruña, al otro extremo de España. Y aunque, pese a todo, sobrevivió, siete de los mejores años de su vida fueron consumidos, malgastados, pienso yo, en lo que institucionalmente se llama “servir a la patria” o servicio de armas.

Esta introducción histórica de la experiencia de mi familia (Magallón 2006), me permite hablar del comportamiento de hombres y mujeres en guerras actuales, por ejemplo, en Ucrania, con el trasfondo del dolor y vivencias de otra guerra. Sirve de

base así mismo para ampliar la noción de víctima en la guerra, pues a mis ojos, mi padre fue una víctima: un hombre que, por el hecho de serlo, vio truncada su juventud y tuvo que ir al frente, a sus escasos 17 años. Por analogía asimilé como víctimas a muchos de los combatientes, soldados, milicianos, de uno u otro bando, varones todos, obligados por el mandato de género a tomar las armas.

Por su parte, mis abuelas también fueron víctimas, aunque nunca las identifiqué como tales. Por las historias que me contaban, las percibía como mujeres fuertes, imbuidas de valor, capaces de resistir las duras condiciones de la vida cotidiana en una guerra. Ellas fueron protagonistas de una actividad que me parecía, y me parece, realmente importante y básica, a saber: sostener la vida en medio de un enfrentamiento a muerte de dos bandos. Puede pensarse que actuaron así porque no tenían una opción política. Creo que mis abuelas, al elegir el dar de comer, el sostenimiento de la vida por encima de las diferencias ideológicas, estaban optando por una política más radical y civilizatoria asentada en una raíz más básica y potente: la política de priorizar la vida y el cuidado (Magallón 2006). Muchas mujeres campesinas españolas actuaron entonces de modo similar. Ciertamente, no tenían conciencia de ser feministas, pero sus actitudes y acciones encajaban en principios que el feminismo pacifista reconoce como propios.

El feminismo pacifista

Soy consciente de que, a lo largo de este texto, al hablar de feminismo pacifista incluyo acciones o movimientos que no se tildaron a sí mismos de feministas, utilizando de manera indistinta femenina y feminista; intercambio así mismo feministas y mujeres, como si fueran lo mismo. Por supuesto, no lo son, pero no es mi propósito aquí entrar en estos debates. Sólo diré que según el momento histórico y circunstancias contextuales o según qué se considere feminista, a estos términos puede atribuírseles un significado similar. Pondré algún ejemplo: en 1910, las universitarias argentinas organizaron en Buenos Aires el I Congreso Femenino Internacional. En él, y precisamente en el discurso inaugural, debatieron sobre feminismo, pero no tildaron de feminista a su congreso. Pues bien, cuando en 2010, las feministas argentinas quisieron celebrar los cien años de aquel inicial congreso, lo convocaron como II Congreso Feminista Internacional, esta vez sí, nombrado como feminista, asumiendo que ambos lo fueron (Blasco y Magallón 2020). Tampoco inicialmente se etiquetó de feminista la Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad (WILPF), aunque a su nacimiento en 1915 se le puede considerar el origen del feminismo pacifista organizado.

El feminismo nació para defender derechos negados a las mujeres, derechos de ciudadanía como el derecho a voto, a la educación y a ejercer las profesiones. Con el paso del tiempo se fue diversificando y mujeres que no se reconocían en la expresión del feminismo existente lo recrearon desde su realidad y le añadieron adjetivos. De hecho, fue así desde sus inicios, pues las mujeres negras impugnaron el feminismo de las mujeres blancas desde el principio. Es clásica la pregunta de Sojourner Truth en su intervención en la Convención de los Derechos de la Mujer realizada en Akron de 1852: “¿Acaso no soy una mujer?”, momento que se considera el origen de un feminismo negro. Los distanciamientos y conflictos en el seno

del feminismo han sido constantes, pero aun dentro de las discrepancias, las discrepantes continuaron reclamándose feministas. En la acción política de este movimiento diverso, plural e interseccional, Catia Confortini (2013) identifica algunos principios que reconocemos como feministas y que pueden ayudar a evaluar si un grupo o una acción puede considerarse como tal. Estos principios son: el cuestionamiento e interpelación al poder, la ética del cuidado, la empatía y la afirmación de la vida. El feminismo, sigue diciendo Confortini, es un movimiento abierto y en proceso (*work in progress*) y una de sus potencialidades es la capacidad de abrir espacios para que puedan oírse voces no escuchadas de mujeres y otras personas marginalizadas. En este sentido, hay un enriquecimiento del movimiento producido por las nuevas voces que se suman a la corriente feminista. De este modo lo entienden las feministas comunitarias de las Américas, por ejemplo, Francesca Gargallo (2014). Esta autora, tras escuchar a la aymara boliviana Julieta Paredes y a Lorena Cabnal, indígena maya-xinka de Guatemala, ha escrito sobre los feminismos de corte no occidental en Abya Yala (América), explicando que su noción de feminismo se constituye por dos ideas fuerza: la construcción de una buena vida – mejor situación – de las mujeres y la erosión del patriarcado.

Desde esta perspectiva de enriquecimiento del movimiento se añaden adjetivos y proyecciones que si bien no son asumidos por el conjunto del movimiento son parte de él. Así, hablar de feminismo pacifista especifica una línea dentro del feminismo que no abarca al total, pero que es importante y que amplía el tipo de derechos reclamados por las mujeres, en este caso, el derecho a decidir sobre la guerra y la paz. Se trata de una línea que no abarca al total porque no todos los feminismos son pacifistas como tampoco lo son todas las mujeres. La ligazón simbólica entre mujeres y paz se construyó mediante un proceso de naturalización, que dio por esencial lo que en realidad es un mandato de género. El feminismo pacifista rechaza el esencialismo – negador de la libertad humana –, atribuye la fuerte unión entre mujeres y paz a la labor de la cultura – el arte, la literatura, el pensamiento filosófico – a lo largo de los tiempos. Los abundantes datos de la realidad, pasada y presente no corroboran la idea de la mujer pacífica, más bien al contrario, muestran que su participación como combatientes viene de lejos: las mujeres han pertenecido a guerrillas y otros grupos armados, han tomado parte en acciones bélicas y en las últimas décadas han puesto de manifiesto su deseo de participar en los ejércitos profesionales aumentando su presencia en ellos de manera significativa. Con su participación en la lucha armada y en acciones violentas, las mujeres están demostrando que no poseen una naturaleza especial, no son moralmente mejores que los hombres (Magallón 2006). El binomio mujer pacífica/hombre violento o la mujer como *alma bella* y el varón como *guerrero justo*, son dos caras de una misma moneda que se realimentan y se refuerzan mutuamente (Elsthein 1995).

En el feminismo organizado, a principios del siglo XX se va creando un movimiento internacional o transnacional de mujeres que fue diversificándose al hilo de la concreción de los objetivos perseguidos. El movimiento fue dando pasos definitivos con opciones que lo concretaron y enriquecieron: del Consejo Internacional de Mujeres (International Council of Women, ICW, 1888) de amplias pretensiones de carácter socio-cultural, se pasó a la reivindicación de la ciudadanía política expresada en el derecho al voto, objetivo de la Alianza Internacional de la Mujer por

el Sufragio (International Woman Suffrage Alliance, IWSA, 1904) y después a perseguir la erradicación de los sistemas de guerra, fundando la Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, WILPF, 1915) (Leyla Rupp 1997). Precisamente el nacimiento de esta última organización en el Congreso de La Haya de 1915 supuso el inicio de un feminismo pacifista en sentido estricto. WILPF nació de la mano de sufragistas que quisieron parar una guerra en marcha e incidir en una política internacional carente de mecanismos de regulación de conflictos y regida por líderes que conducían a sus países a la guerra. Las mujeres del Congreso de La Haya aprobaron veinte resoluciones que contenían bases, principios y propuestas para crear un entramado institucional y legislativo y líneas de acción política y educativa que posibilitaran encauzar los conflictos de intereses entre países por vías de diálogo, arbitraje y negociación (Tims y Bussey 1980; Foster 1989; Blasco y Magallón 2020).

Contra la guerra, no partimos de cero

Al igual que sucede con la ciencia, actividad en la que somos capaces de avanzar con una mirada poderosa porque “estamos subidos a hombros de gigantes” (Newton, 1676) – nosotras añadimos “y de gigantas” (Morrón 2021) – en el posicionamiento y trabajo contra la guerra las feministas pacifistas no partimos de cero, disponemos de una tradición que nos ha dejado un rico legado de pensamiento y prácticas del que es posible aprender. Precisamente, nuestra fuerza contra la guerra se acrecienta cuando somos capaces de sentirnos vinculadas e insertarnos en esta tradición, visibilizarla, divulgarla y nutrirnos de su legado. Si nos atenemos al siglo XX – antes hubo también ejemplos de mujeres oponiéndose a la guerra – el movimiento feminista pacifista incluye a WILPF, sí, pero hay más grupos de constructoras de paz. Observamos, no obstante, cómo este movimiento no es conocido, está invisibilizado, lo que impide que las nuevas generaciones puedan identificarse con él. Son muchas las autoras que han indagado sobre la devaluación y ocultación de la sabiduría y la acción de las mujeres (herstory), y dentro de ella la opción civilizatoria contra la guerra de tantas mujeres del pasado. Dale Spender (1982) en *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them*, cuyo título es bien significativo, dice claramente que rescatar el pasado de las mujeres es una tarea que cada nueva generación tiene que volver a abordar. La ausencia de transmisión de la experiencia femenina, en la medida en que poder y conocimiento caminan juntos, crece en la misoginia de poder, en la prohibición de la palabra a las mujeres en la esfera pública, donde sus voces “son acalladas (y) el relato está al cuidado de los hombres” (Beard 2018, p. 16).

Insertarnos en la tradición del feminismo pacifista proyecta nuestra acción del pasado al presente y nos da sentido y fuerza para diseñar otro futuro. A lo largo de los siglos hubo grupos de mujeres capaces de afrontar los conflictos de toda índole (intereses, creencias, ideologías...) sin recurrir a la violencia, mujeres que se opusieron a la guerra y los conflictos armados, grupos en los que crecieron visiones y prácticas contrapuestas al militarismo. Las hemos llamado *mujeres en pie de paz*. Lo hicimos para salirnos del aserto latino que afirma *si vis pacem para bellum* (si quieres la paz, prepara la guerra) y colocarnos en otro paradigma que afirme: si

quieres la paz, prepara la paz. Las filosofías y los objetivos que les guiaron fueron diversos, aunque en general compartieron el intento de deslegitimar la lógica que pone en juego la vida de los seres humanos para perseguir intereses materiales, ideológicos o de poder.

Para acercarnos a la rica y plural experiencia del trabajo y las motivaciones de estos grupos, podemos agruparlos en función de los objetivos principales que les llevan a organizarse. Sin ánimo de exhaustividad, en las últimas décadas, Magallón (2007) identifica grupos de mujeres organizados:

a) Para oponerse a la guerra o las políticas militaristas y de agresión que llevan a cabo sus gobiernos (ej. Red de Mujeres de Negro).

b) Para acercar, a través de la relación y la búsqueda de puntos comunes, a personas de grupos enfrentados, de los que ellas forman parte. Para romper las barreras entre bandos que pelean y acercar comunidades divididas y enfrentadas (ej. Mujeres católicas y protestantes en el Ulster).

c) Para la búsqueda de soluciones no militares a conflictos estructurales (ej. Ruta Pacífica de las mujeres colombianas).

d) Contra la impunidad: para que no se repitan los genocidios, las desapariciones y las persecuciones sufridas por determinados grupos humanos (ej., Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Argentina; Viudas de Guatemala).

e) Para apoyar a mujeres que viven en situaciones de guerra o de falta de libertad y derechos humanos, en países distintos al suyo (ej., europarlamentarias, numerosos grupos feministas pacifistas).

f) Para lograr que el trabajo de base de las mujeres cuente en la toma de decisiones a través de un trabajo de lobby en los organismos internacionales e instituciones de todo tipo (ej., WILPF).

g) Para retar y ofrecer líneas alternativas a las construcciones patriarcales en la Academia y el conocimiento instituido, construcciones que históricamente han servido, y siguen sirviendo, de base para legitimar el militarismo y la guerra (académicas-activistas feministas pacifistas).

Esta tradición otorga valor asimismo a la experiencia de una mayoría de mujeres anónimas que trabajaron para mejorar las condiciones de vida, suyas y de la comunidad, construyendo paz positiva y convirtiendo el maternaje o prácticas de crianza y cuidado de los seres dependientes en fuente de recursos para construir cultura de paz (Ruddick 1989; Magallón 2001). Hemos de reconocer, el trabajo de décadas de las filósofas feministas que con su crítica al conocimiento transmitido sentaron las bases de una nueva fundamentación y validación del saber y permitieron sacar a la luz las contribuciones de las mujeres a la ciencia, las relaciones internacionales y a una política de paz. Cuando desde el *Feminist Standpoint* (Hartsok 1983; Collins 1989, 1990; Ruddick 1989) se afirma que todo conocimiento es situado, es decir, que las preguntas y las búsquedas, los problemas a indagar, arraigan en la experiencia de un grupo humano, nos damos cuenta de que el peso de la influencia del patriarcado es clave en la invisibilización del saber y el hacer de las mujeres. Las epistemologías feministas nos ayudaron a ver más allá de las figuras destacadas, las que encajan en el paradigma de *los grandes hombres*. Por supuesto, la primera Nobel de la Paz en 1905, Bertha Von Suttner, su *¡Abajo las armas!* y la larga lista de mujeres de excelencia que le siguieron, con premios o sin ellos, mere-

cen ser conocidas y reconocidas, pero seamos conscientes de que en absoluto agotan la riqueza del trabajo femenino contra la guerra a lo largo de la historia.

Derecho a no matar

Volvamos al hoy y al título de este trabajo, *¡Desertad!* Es este un grito que crece en mí tras contemplar en televisión la noticia de la imposición de medallas a jóvenes mutilados de guerra rusos, jóvenes que aparecen en la pantalla tristísimos. Han perdido una pierna, un brazo, su proyecto vital. Triste escena de hospital que seguramente tendrá su paralelo en Ucrania. Lo pongo en la cabecera para darle visibilidad porque considero que es una llamada que podemos hacer a los hombres y que no hemos de reprimir, es un grito que, en la medida en que puede ayudar a erosionar la guerra y la desconsideración social de la figura del desertor, nos concierne como feministas pacifistas. Una mayoría social denigra al desertor y le atribuye un valor negativo, la cobardía, ignorando la fuerza interior que necesitan quienes reafirman su derecho a no matar. ¿Cómo podemos seguir mirando hacia otro lado? ¿Acaso lo hicieron las Madres de Soldados rusos en Chechenia cuando fueron a buscar a sus hijos al frente?

Sacar de la pelea a los jóvenes es un noble empeño contra la guerra, con un pasado que también está siendo invisibilizado. El movimiento de jóvenes varones contra el reclutamiento forzoso y la instrucción militar tampoco parte de cero. En el caso de España, en las últimas décadas del siglo XX hubo un amplio y exitoso movimiento de insumisión al servicio militar, entonces obligatorio. En él participaron miles de jóvenes hasta lograr eliminar la obligatoriedad de realizar ese servicio, logro alcanzado en 2001 (Ajanzig 2004; Ajanzig y Sainz de Rozas 1992). Este movimiento formó parte de la War Resisters' International, WRI, organización que nació a principios del XX para acoger a quienes se negaban a empuñar las armas, objetores e insumisos y de la que forman parte feministas pacifistas. Durante la guerra de Bosnia-Herzegovina y a través del grupo de Mujeres de Negro fui parte de ella, elegida para su Consejo en Croacia.

En Ucrania, los integrantes de la WRI condenan las acciones armadas de ambos lados, llamando a las partes a negociar seriamente. A través de sus redes internacionales apoyan a quienes, de uno u otro bando, se atreven a desertar. Defienden el derecho a no matar. Porque como afirman sus principios "La guerra es un crimen de lesa humanidad, por lo que estamos decididos a no apoyar ninguna y cooperar para eliminar sus causas". Quienes mantienen estos principios son aliados del feminismo pacifista contra la guerra, que no ensalza la lucha armada como vía de transformación social. Incluso cuando es legítimo defenderse, como es el caso de una invasión, trata de iluminar y dar a conocer ejemplos históricos que abren opciones, alternativas o complementarias, de resistencia civil. No podemos olvidar lo que la historia nos ha mostrado a menudo: cómo atentar contra la vida humana contamina hasta los mejores fines. En estos días, se nos está presentando como evidente que sólo es posible defenderse con las armas. Pero la evidencia es construida, tanto por lo que se nos muestra en los medios como por lo que se visibiliza del pasado. Se necesita una transmisión más rica de cómo los pueblos se han defendido frente a agresiones armadas en épocas anteriores, pueden verse los ejemplos que

aportan April Carter, Howard Clark y Michel Randle (2013) y también Howard Clark (2009). Sin negar el poder de las armas, cuando el planeta puede ser destruido varias veces por el arsenal nuclear, más nos vale educar y cultivar las vías capaces de apelar a la humanidad del agresor.

Sobre igualdad, patria y heroísmo belicista

En su sabio y certero análisis feminista sobre la guerra, Nela Porobić (2022) ha apuntado tres claves sostenedoras del actual desorden mundial que nos aboca a la guerra y la destrucción del planeta: el patriarcado, la militarización y el neoliberalismo. En combinación y reforzándose, generan subordinación y violencia contra las mujeres, negocios de armas y una desregulación que permite la destrucción de ecosistemas y lugares donde la vida en comunidad con la naturaleza es necesaria para sobrevivir. La guerra hace tiempo que ha vuelto, en realidad nunca estuvo ausente: en Siria, en Yemen y en muchos otros lugares sigue latiendo, hay guerra contra las mujeres en Afganistán, se mantiene la violencia contra los seres humanos diversos, también contra la Naturaleza y las comunidades que ven amenazada su subsistencia debido a conflictos medioambientales. En el *Global Atlas of Environmental Justice* puede verse la enormidad del problema, el gran número de conflictos de origen medioambiental, su geolocalización y su contenido explicado. La guerra contra las comunidades que llevan a cabo las industrias extractivistas en la América Latina es un ejemplo sangrante.

Sin olvidar las puntualizaciones anteriores, en los últimos meses nos ha impactado la Ucrania invadida por el ejército ruso, comandado por Putin. Hemos visto cómo se reproducían los estereotipos o mandatos de género, una mayoría de mujeres salió del país con los niños y niñas, mientras los hombres y algunas mujeres se quedaban a pelear. La primera pregunta que emerge es: ¿ha habido libertad para irse del país o quedarse? Parece que sí la han tenido las mujeres para salir, no así los hombres, lo que vuelve a poner de manifiesto que el sistema de guerra se atiene a los límites de los mandatos de género y fuerza su cumplimiento. Si eres una mujer, tu deber primero es asumir el cuidado, aunque en menor medida también se te permite tomar las armas. Si eres un hombre, debes pelear y se te prohíbe escapar de esta obligación. La segunda pregunta es qué valor atribuimos a cada una de estas conductas. Reconozcamos que una mayoría, también dentro del feminismo, sigue mirando con cierta conmiseración a las mujeres que han abandonado Ucrania, huyendo en compañía de las personas más vulnerables, niños, niñas, ancianos, mientras admiran y aplauden el valor de los guerreros y la defensa armada. ¿Qué es lo que hace que mantengan el halo de héroes y heroínas, quienes empuñan un arma? ¿Por qué son devaluados quienes deciden asumir el cuidado de la vida? ¿No es más valioso y defendible cuidar que matar? ¿Por qué los hombres no rompen con su estereotipo guerrero? Teniendo como fondo la guerra de Ucrania es observable que los mandatos de género no sólo establecen una desigual asignación de papeles a hombres y mujeres, sino que también están jerarquizados en cuanto al valor que se les atribuye. Los comportamientos que suenan a evidentes e irremediables están mostrando que las mentalidades que nos conforman están empapadas de patriarcado y militarismo. El feminismo pacifista, además de sumarse a las voces que cla-

man para que haya una mediación que facilite una negociación efectiva que ponga fin a la guerra, puede ir más allá. Puede realizar una labor en el terreno de los discursos, en los medios y las redes sociales, desvelando algunas raíces que arraigan en la cultura profunda y que merecen una revisión crítica. Lo que me lleva a apuntar y cuestionar -volver una vez más a cuestionar- las nociones de *patria* y de *igualdad*, claves conformadoras de identidades, comportamientos y reacciones, en este caso ante la guerra. Y volver a hacerlo, al hilo del pensamiento de Virginia Woolf.

Enseñanzas de Virginia Woolf

El pensamiento de Virginia Woolf sobre la guerra es bien conocido y tiene en *Tres Guineas* una de las reflexiones más lúcidas y profundas que se han hecho sobre los aspectos de género implicados en el problema de la guerra. Escribió este libro cuando algunas fotografías de los horrores de la Guerra de España enviadas por el Gobierno de la legítima República llegaron a sus manos, en un ambiente prebélico en Europa y con dudas en su círculo sobre la posibilidad de mantener el pacifismo ante la amenaza nazi. Quien se las envió le pedía que escribiera sobre cómo podían las mujeres ayudar a evitar la guerra. Publicado inicialmente en 1938, una respuesta sucinta a la pregunta se halla en la conocida frase: “la mejor manera en que podemos ayudarle a evitar la guerra no consiste en repetir sus palabras y en seguir sus métodos, sino en hallar nuevas palabras y crear nuevos métodos” (Woolf 1977, p. 193), una invitación a salirnos del paradigma de pensamiento y acción patriarcales. Comparto profundamente el análisis que hace de *Tres Guineas* Elena Grau, amiga y compañera en el grupo editor de la revista “En pie de paz” (1986-2001), una revista que fue referencia en el movimiento pacifista antinuclear español de los años 80 del siglo pasado. Ella resalta la importancia que otorga V. Woolf a lo que llama lealtades simbólicas de los hombres y fundamentos de la virilidad: la patria, el honor, el heroísmo, lealtades que unen a los hombres con la guerra. Subraya también que Virginia habla poco “de las consecuencias y del horror de la guerra porque parte de una idea, nunca la guerra, y no necesita argumentarla [...] Su esfuerzo es medir la acción humana, de mujeres y hombres, en presencia de este horizonte. Y al poner la guerra como medida, o como horizonte de nuestra acción, trasciende la idea de guerra como hecho bélico y se interesa por todo aquello que en nuestro hacer apunta en última instancia a sostener unas relaciones, una cultura y un mundo simbólico que albergan la violencia y conducen a la guerra” (Grau 2000, p. 43). Aprendiendo de estas enseñanzas, pongamos el foco en la cultura y actuemos en ella, reconceptualicemos nociones rancias del pasado con tanto peso en el presente, interroguémonos acerca de cómo actualizar el pensamiento y lenguaje de Woolf en el tiempo de las redes sociales y las influencer.

Sobre la patria

¿Siguen siendo válidas las preguntas que se hacía sobre este asunto Virginia Woolf (1977) cuando escribió *Tres Guineas*: “¿Qué es este ‘patriotismo’ que lleva a la guerra?” (Woolf 1977, p. 16) “¿Qué significa para mí la patria, siendo como

soy una extraña?” (Woolf 1977, p. 146)”. Para ella, las mujeres no son opuestas a la guerra por naturaleza, ni los hombres son, por naturaleza, favorables a ella. Pero creía que por razones histórico-sociales las mujeres tenían un mayor potencial para oponerse a la guerra, un potencial que no se basa en la maternidad sino en su histórica exclusión del poder y la riqueza. Es por eso que el patriotismo, tantas veces esgrimido para pelear, tiene menos sentido para las mujeres. Desde esta exclusión, ella situaba a las mujeres en el lugar de la extrañeza, dándole a esta extrañeza un contenido que se vuelve positivo al reivindicarse ciudadana del mundo. En lo que puede interpretarse como esperanza para otro futuro defenderá la pervivencia y valor de este lugar simbólico extraño al paradigma de la guerra: “En mi condición de mujer no tengo patria. En mi condición de mujer, no quiero tener patria. En mi condición de mujer, mi patria es el mundo entero” (Woolf 1977, p. 48).

Hoy es posible ver que la patria sigue configurándose en el horizonte patriarcal nacionalista como un territorio, además un territorio con fronteras. Es cierto que nuestras ciudades, casas, paisajes, edificios emblemáticos, están en un territorio dado y que efectivamente estamos ligados afectivamente a ellos. Pero ante el desastre que causan las guerras, tomando como motivo la defensa de la patria, hemos de reflexionar y plantearnos qué sentido tiene la defensa de las fronteras si los seres humanos que vivían en esas ciudades, en esas casas, acaban muriendo sometidos al embate de la guerra ¿Por qué hay que morir por la patria? ¿Qué patria es esa que exige la muerte para su defensa? Tengamos en cuenta así mismo lo que aprendimos de las Mujeres de Negro en los años 90. En su día, de Stasa Zajovic, integrante de Mujeres de Negro de Belgrado y amiga entrañable, obtuvimos una sabiduría que sigue estando vigente. Ante la guerra de Bosnia-Herzegovina, con tantas muertes y violaciones masivas de mujeres, una constante que se repite en la historia, hoy también, le escuchamos decir que la primera patria es el cuerpo de una mujer, un cuerpo que bajo opción libre es capaz de albergar los futuros seres humanos. Desde este pensamiento y desde mi propia convicción concluyo que son las vidas las que conforman la patria que vale la pena.

Sobre la igualdad

La idea de igualdad que predomina en nuestro entorno de sociedades occidentales es la que toma como medida al varón blanco, de clase media y su experiencia histórica, una experiencia salpicada de guerras y actitudes de dominación, en la que la condición de ciudadanía se alcanzaba a través de la propiedad y el servicio de armas. En España, las feministas pacifistas comenzamos a poner en cuestión esta noción de igualdad al rechazar que para ser iguales teníamos que reclamar hacer el Servicio Militar obligatorio. En este caso, decíamos, que sean los hombres los que se igualen a nosotras y rechacen esa obligación. Pienso que una de las tareas del feminismo pacifista es reivindicar una igualdad que contemple e incorpore aspectos de la experiencia histórica de las mujeres, en particular su dedicación al cuidado de la vida de los seres humanos. En esta línea, no me parece criticable, sino todo lo contrario, la opción de salir del país y hacerse cargo del cuidado de los grupos vulnerables, tomada por muchas mujeres ucranianas. Desde esta noción de igualdad, con la llamada a desertar, propongo a los hombres, ucranianos, rusos o de cualquier

país, que hagan lo mismo, que reivindiquen ser iguales a las mujeres y defiendan la libertad de salir de los territorios donde se lucha.

En cuanto a los héroes belicistas, pensemos de donde surgen, cual es el modelo que se presenta a los jóvenes varones cuando se sitúan en un conflicto armado. Es la figura de un guerrero símbolo de poder, protector de mujeres y niños. Pero el reverso de la moneda del protector es un agresor en potencia. Cuando los actores armados son entrenados para matar, pese a la voluntad del entrenamiento para que el ejercicio de la violencia quede limitado a determinadas circunstancias, a menudo la proyectan en otras circunstancias más cotidianas, proyectan la violencia sobre las mujeres con las que conviven. Según el estereotipo más marcado ser masculino equivale a dotarse de la capacidad de ejercer violencia, capacidad controlada pero latente, dispuesta a hacerse presente cuando las circunstancias hagan saltar las claves precisas. En momentos de combate, sí, pero también, por ejemplo, ante compañeros que no exhiben o se identifican con el mismo esquema estereotipado masculino y, sobre todo, ante las mujeres. Volviendo de nuevo a Virginia Woolf y la parte de responsabilidad de las mujeres, ella señalará una clave para el mantenimiento de la guerra en la admiración que muestran las mujeres – hoy ya no tantas, matizaría yo – ante los héroes. Desafortunadamente la educación orientada a las niñas reproduce esta admiración y les empuja asimismo a emular a los héroes y adoptar el rol de guerreras con armas. Así las vemos convertidas en heroínas, heroínas guerreras, en los dibujos animados, donde se ven reflejadas y donde las armas son sofisticadas, sin son láseres mucho mejor, y preparan para añorar esa sofisticación en las armas del mundo real.

Interpelar al poder

Finalmente, rescatar de nuevo uno de los rasgos característicos de la tradición feminista pacifista: la necesaria interpelación al poder. El feminismo pacifista organizado trató de influir desde el primer momento en el ámbito internacional a través de las alianzas y la interpelación al poder. Interpelar es distinto de reclamar, distinto de pedir algo que el otro tiene y tú no. Es apelar a lo mejor del otro desde un plano de igualdad en la diversidad para establecer un diálogo en el que haya un reconocimiento mutuo. Interpelar es sacudir metafóricamente al otro para lograr que abra su mente a nuevas visiones. Es arrastrar al otro a una gestión conjunta y diferente del mundo. Interpelemos pues al poder, juntemos de nuevo en La Haya y levantemos una potente voz disidente contra la guerra.

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Post-Socialist Wars and the Masculinist Backlash

di

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Abstract: The war in Ukraine may be redrawing the contours of our world after the exhaustion not only of the Cold War, but also of the post-Cold War period (not cold anymore, if it ever was). Putin accuses Ukrainians of being Nazis, while he supports and welcomes worldwide neo-fascists and far-right politicians. In the light of recent events and considering the growth of nuclear weapons' role in defense strategy, the author analyses the links between remilitarizations, authoritarianism, retrieving of democracy, and the backlash of antifeminism and misogyny. We need to prevent wars in anticipation, writes the author, but they cannot be stopped with the same logic and excessive of violence because they are part of a masculinist militarist “culture” that needs to be deconstructed and prevented.

“The worst thing about communism ... is what comes after”.
Adam Michnik

The war in Ukraine may be redrawing the contours of our world, after the exhaustion not only of the Cold War, but also of the post-Cold War period (not cold anymore if it ever was) from 1989 till now. Putin's onslaught on the former Soviet republic that once had, like Belarus, a seat in the UN during the socialist period, is motivated by nationalism and is expansionist, denying among other things the rule of law and international law – like any “illiberal democracy”. Putin accuses

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Ukrainians of being nazis, while he supports and welcomes worldwide neo-fascists and far-right politicians, from Le Pen to Orbán, from Trump to Salvini to Zemmour. Who is nazi or fascist here? And what to do about this upside-down language where words acquire opposite meanings? In preparing the Ukrainian crisis from the Maidan revolution and separatist formations in the Donbass in 2014, Putin has developed an upturned version of the history of Russia and Ukraine that tends to deflate the latter country as a nation-state. His is a Russian-centric discourse, asserting that since the fall of the USSR, Russians have been victims of a genocide by others, in this case Ukrainians. In a straight reference to Stalin, Putin wears a historian's garb, and has been minimalizing at length the nationhood of Ukraine. In Putin's history then, Ukrainians would actually be Russians. There is a comparable but *bonzai* example in Montenegro, where parts of the population consider themselves Montenegrins, while another part of the same consider themselves as Serbs, and are supported in this by Serbia and the Serbian orthodox church. The church is split as much as the population.

This state of affairs, as the Ukrainian war now threatens to last for a longer time, only adds to our epoch's epistemological confusion, which must be added to the desperate attempts to restore patriarchy as it once was. During socialism, namely, women had a decent level of women's human rights, and they lost a lot with the capitalist turn. There is an obvious active *coincidence* between re-masculinisation, resorting to ever harder authoritarianism and the retrieving of democracy (or its reduction to mere voting, to formalism, and the exhaustion of representation), remilitarisation, the backlash of antifeminism and misogyny, of different kinds of violence on women, and the worldwide assault, unsupported by research, on gender and feminist studies, all within the *epochal right neoliberal turn* of the whole political scene since at least thirty years ago, or since the end of the Cold War.

This backlash has to do with a nostalgia that has in common the quest for infinite resources – for a time when fossil fuels could be extracted from the earth without having to worry about mass extinction (because of the ecological or climate blind spots), and work could be extracted from women without having to worry about their protest. But times have changed.

Today, as patriarchy has readapted again and a backlash against women has been triggered, there is also a backlash against *the conditions of knowing* women's condition. As Joan W. Scott writes,

This backlash [against gender and women's studies] is cause for concern, but it also testifies to the fact that the work of denaturalizing gender norms carried out by these studies is perceived as a real threat by the enemies of social change. [...] France, where the Macron government, seeking to undermine the growing electoral power of the right, condemned studies on discrimination, gender and intersectionality as foreign imports and considered them in contradiction with the universalist political principles of the Republic. In the United States, wherever Republicans control state legislatures, laws now prohibit teaching related to 'social justice', namely the history of slavery and the analysis of contemporary racial politics, but also studies on the evolution of norms in terms of gender and sexuality. In all these cases, a hysterical indictment was

launched against the word ‘gender’, a notion considered satanic, degenerate, contrary to the very foundations of the State and of human society¹.

Yugoslavia and Ukraine

Although Yugoslavs have a specific experience of the socialist period between WWII and the fall of the Berlin wall, news of a war/civil war in a former USSR state resonates with anxiety for them and brings back tormented memories. Yugoslavia did not belong to the Warsaw Pact, but to the Movement of Nonaligned countries, although this piece of information seems to have become “useless history” today. Ukraine’s conflict looks familiar. During the series of wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, I wrote a paper “*Une guerre de fondation en Europe?*”², in which I said that Europe (and the EU) was being (re)constructed through foundational wars at its eastern periphery. Not only were these wars founding for the new separate post-Yugoslav national states being established in the Balkans, they were foundational for a Europe in the making too. Europe was then at a stage needing a further push in the integration of the EU.

It had not managed to give itself a European people, citizenship, and agency or a sense of unity, and it had no political dimension but at most an economical (market) one. So that defining oneself by an *outer constitutive other* seemed then to be the right recipe, by which the new emerging countries were set into a pre-ordained “transition” that was expected to follow the western blueprint, since they were supposed to be “lagging behind”. At the same time, the new “independent” national states in the making (that *had also been* national states within the Yugoslav federation) were striving for sovereignty but were paradoxically also hoping to join the EU (thus submitting the same sovereignty) in order to move away from the previous Yugoslav construction³. This was presented as independence and liberation from the Yugoslav yoke. What struck me at the time was the element of *war involved in the redefinition and construction of the EU*. It was a scary prospect. The multiple partition of Yugoslavia ended tragically for its population throwing it several decades backwards, killing at least 250.000 people in Bosnia alone⁴, dispersing deported or fleeing populations and destroying the economy, while the inter-

¹ See *Gender Backlash*, in “Analyse Opinion Critique”, March 8, 2022. My translation of the French version of Scott’s paper originally published in “Analyse Opinion Critique”.

² *Une guerre de fondation en Europe?*, in Marie-Claire Caloz-Tschopp, Axel Clevenot, Maria Pia Tschopp (eds.), *Asile - Violence - Exclusion en Europe*, Groupe de Genève et Cahiers de la Section des Sciences de l’Éducation de l’Université de Genève, 1994, pp. 5-10. New edition : *Une guerre de fondation en Europe ?*, in “(Re)Penser l’exil”, Revue en ligne, n. 3, www.exil-ciph.com, 11 september 2013, pp. 387-395; see online: http://issuu.com/exil.ciph/docs/repenserlexil_no3_part1.

³ So far (2022) two former Yugoslav republics, Slovenia, and Croatia, have joined the EU, while the others have filed a demand to join.

⁴ The number of dead in the 1990-decade in Yugoslavia is in dispute, because numbers are part of the nationalist stances of each party in conflict. Or, as Vanessa Pupavac writes: “It is no surprise that the ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia has included disputes over the number of victims of each group.” *Disputes over war casualties in former Yugoslavia*, in “Radical Statistics”, <https://www.radstats.org.uk/no069/article3.htm>.

nationally and juridically illegal intervention of the “international community”⁵ and NATO after ten years of predominantly local civil wars produced an explosive *neither-peace-nor-war* situation which lasts to this day in the Balkans without having solved any problems⁶. But it is different with the Ukrainian war, not the least because Russia is a nuclear power. The Yugoslav wars, remaining of a limited regional outreach in spite of the unfortunate NATO intervention in 1999, did not look as a threat to the rest of Europe or the world. In this sense, they cannot be compared to the threatening and explosive expanse of the Ukrainian war in 2022. But in many of their structural and functional features, they look much alike, especially to the local populations. They both immediately produced nation-building (a quick overnight process), violence at all levels, reciprocal nationalisms (nationalisms are only happy together), identitarianisms, militarisation, and masculinisation. In that respect they are comparable, except for the scale.

In considering the Yugoslav 1990s wars as well as the one in Ukraine nowadays (and the series preceding it), traditional political science would have it that contemporary and today well recognised national states had been formed in the 19th century out of empires (Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Russian), and that this is the origin of understandable nationalisms which could be equated with patriotism. During WWII nationalism had in principle been profoundly discredited because of nazism, a moral-political disposition that lasted on the basis of antifascism during the whole Cold War. Thereafter, with the exception of India and Pakistan that appeared as nation states after WWII, most postcolonial independences over the course of the 1960s were driven and consolidated by nationalisms of a new kind that appeared as positive and liberatory. But along the same line of thinking, *today's nationalisms*, for example those at the beginning of the Arab Spring, were seen from the west as belated and ill placed. With the end of the Cold War (1989, the year of the fall of the Berlin wall) and with 1991 (the establishment of Russia and satellites on the ruins of the USSR) *divisive non-inclusionary nationalisms* re-appeared as a result of conflicts or were provoked, this time in Yugoslavia and its successor countries as well as in post-soviet states. At that time in the 1990s, one might have hoped that, after the bloody episode of the Yugoslav wars, the inclusion into the EU would calm down local ethnicisms and nationalisms under the umbrella of a higher office (the EU). But this is not what happened. On the contrary, as

⁵ “International community” regularly denotes the west + Japan and Australia. Meanings are never questioned in the language of the latter, a hegemonic language.

⁶ While the Warsaw Pact was dissolved after the fall of the Berlin wall, NATO was not, much against any peace-loving logic. It supported the triumphalism of the west and of capitalism regarding the “east” and to socialism, and it remained expansionist, which was felt as a provocation by Russia, also because some former Warsaw pact countries joined NATO. Russia demanded that the expansion to the east stopped. Most wars are accompanied by a civil war, recognized or not. In Yugoslavia coming apart, the term “civil war” was proscribed in official discourse, because those wars were *constitutive and foundational of the new nations* in becoming. There is a parallel in official Pakistan rejecting the at first mainly Indian term “partition,” because that civil war (a term equally rejected) was constitutive of the new nation as well. But we know today that the partition of 1946-48 was a civil war in India. The euphemism for Yugoslavia is now “western Balkans.” No Yugoslav country claims the name anymore, therefore I think we are allowed to call “Yugoslavia” again that past country, but not the successor countries.

nationalisms continued running wild in former European socialist and eastern countries of various origins, and as they became associated with far-right politics, they also spread to the west, to the EU. This was also a systemic worldwide feature and tendency, as nationalisms, or putting one's country "first", spread to India, Brazil, the USA, China, etc. This process of fragmentation was and is parallel to globalisation in the guise of the accomplishment of the *universalisation of the national state* as territory-based domination, or it is its flipside. It includes all aspects of integration, synergy and sharing of activities technological, financial, market, cultural, etc., and produces a kind of global political temper that is locally translated by identitarianisms on the basis of different features (religion, language, belonging, etc.)⁷.

So, there is the "specificity" of the *acceleration machine that wars represent*. Wars have enhanced these processes, which run at different paces in different countries. The theory about the belatedness of (post)socialist countries in nation-building is *flawed*. It produced the concept of *transition* demanded of postcolonial and post-socialist countries alike (with the test by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the "international community's" policing). But there is no specific difference with western countries and their history, considering the brutality and violence *at any time* in the process of introducing capitalism and then its new form, neo-liberalism.

The years following 1989, a knowledge-regime converter through the prism of gender

The 1990's signed the end of the Cold War and were particularly significant years in Europe, while a similar struggle continues in Asia. Some political thinkers and theoreticians at that time predicted the end of the nation state. This is however not what happened. The nation state adapted some of its features and paid allegiance to the corporate international market. The *national state is being reinvented* every time that a new unit appears on the world stage, and there are more and more candidates under these new circumstances. Ukraine too, like the Yugoslav republics and autonomous regions, had been the member of a federation. But the higher office – the federation – having disintegrated by the end of the previous epoch of "Cold War," left no other option for the populations stranded within a massive economic crisis overnight, than to resort to and identify with the next possible "umbrella" – the nation. The only one that was offered. It suddenly received a much heavier and identitarian "blood", "soil", etc., definition than in the finishing period⁸. This has been the birthplace of the *new post-socialist nations*, generally

⁷ See Jean-François Bayart, *La guerre d'Ukraine, passage tragique de l'empire à l'État-nation*, "Analyse Opinion Critique", March 15, 2022.

⁸ Socialist Yugoslavia did not propose or encourage the concept of a "Yugoslav nation" at all. Yugoslavia was to be a paradoxical federation of nations and/or republics, but it was supposed to represent only an "administrative" "secular" loyalty or patriotism that would keep safe national identifications. The latter were given nominal republics and official expression in folklore or through the arts, except for Bosnia-Herzegovina that was "pluri-ethnic," and was therefore literally torn to pieces by the Dayton agreement.

thought to be belated according to the western 19th century pattern, as the norm to be caught-up with. While the nation generally takes its gendered vocabulary from obstetrics, the post-socialist nations took in addition their whole lexicon from older *engaged liberating nationalisms that had been masculinist, but had also been anti-colonial and anti-imperial*. They did not reproduce all the latter's features, to the extent that some of them were right wing but claimed being liberatory. The gendered "obstetrics" language hammered down birth, origin, blood and soil, hierarchy, "priority", and gender inequality. "Narod", people and nation, in Slavic languages, comes from "roditi," to give birth ("rod", Lat. *genus*), much like "nation" from the Latin verb *nascere*, to be born. *Nationalism*, which now comes in a package with *militarisation*, also purposely reinforces patriarchy.

On the occasion of the Russian war on Ukraine, Fabienne Brugère and Guillaume Le Blanc write:

Perhaps, in order to analyse wars, is it necessary to understand them both as high-intensity wars declared by nations headed by men against other nations according to a principle of violation of sovereignty with such obvious masculinist overtones that this is not even worth recalling. But wars are also of low intensity against women, of enemy and one's own territory, if we judge by all these historical examples (Korean women for the Japanese, German women for the Russians). Women had become the vulnerable body of the population to be invaded and conquered as much as the element of comfort enlisted in the service of men who can, in the garb of soldiers, often rape with impunity...Russia is waging war on Ukraine and this invasion of a close, independent, and sovereign country, where the Ukrainian and Russian languages are mixed, has something unrepresentable as we are on the edge of the human. But precisely, this unrepresentable, this brink of the human, is male sovereignty performing it by exhibiting itself in its purest attribute - war. The war against a country, by throwing the civilian populations into the subways, unfortunately makes the nation rhyme with the *hardest patriarchy*⁹.

As Belgrade historian Dubravka Stojanović explains:

[Patriarchy and nationalism] are inseparable. Nationalism sees the nation as an extended family, as a blood relationship of its members in which there must be intelligible roles. And above all, it must be clear who the patriarch and leader is, because only he can achieve his goals and provide for his family. That is why any nationalism must be misogynous, because the very appearance of women, let alone a demand for equality, would destroy that authoritarian pyramidal creation in which the hierarchy is not questioned but obeyed. I am ready to go so far as to say that *nationalism was invented as a means of maintaining patriarchy*, as well as a means of gaining power, strengthening it, preserving it... That is, nationalism is used as a way to immobilise society, for development never to come, to stifle all modernity... [M]aintaining the patriarchal order was one of the strong motives for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, because within closed national constructions this social order is far easier to maintain than in a complex multi-ethnic, multi-confessional community. In essence, it poses a constant challenge to a closed society and a patriarchal matrix¹⁰.

⁹ Fabienne Brugère, Guillaume Le Blanc, *Un peuple des femmes s'unit contre la guerre*, in "Analyse Opinion Critique", March 9, 2022.

¹⁰ Darko Vujica, *Intervju sa Dubravkom Stojanović: Ništa nije večno, pa tako ni nacije (An interview with Dubravka Stojanović: Nothing is everlasting, and neither are the nations)*, in "Prometej", 31-1-

The many thresholds in history

As opposed to earlier anticolonial and defensive nationalisms in the 1960s, these new post-Cold War nationalisms are regressive, and often tend to be expansive. They are never inclusive. They are also confusing, because they use a vocabulary established during the previous period (that of the Cold War and the “30 glorious years”), while inverting political meanings. They tend wanting to make the most of two different or indeed incompatible worldviews, without signalling the *epistemological shift* that is taking place.

I used to try, in my work, to identify *significant historic thresholds of shifting epochs*, those in which big historic changes of paradigm happen to last through the next period: alterations in the organisation of production relationships, of epistemological standards and patterns, etc. Epochs will be remembered and named by such *thresholds* that are better seen *a posteriori*:

- *One such threshold, that of the Cold War*, was inaugurated after WWII, and a binary divide of the world was installed to last for over forty years worldwide, until the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, with its corresponding black-and-white epistemological regime, values, and vocabulary. What was black for the ones was white for the others, and those exclusive “truths” (of capitalism vs. socialism, or “west” vs. “east”) were held as reciprocally incompatible but actually complementary in their mechanisms. That epistemological regime crumbled with the wall. At that time, a third party between the two blocks was the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) and various Bandung and similar options, but one could identify several other “middle ways” too, that I shall skip (for example, women as a *destituting force*, or peasants etc. – as alternative subjectivities). This aspect is complicated by the fact that *two distinct thresholds* dovetail at this point: the 1989 “end” of the post WWII Cold War *and* of the socialist period in central and east-European countries (regardless here of any substantial difference between the two) meets the belated, boiling down effect, of the (first) end of historic colonialism in the 1960s. The important formal decolonisation of third world countries mainly in the 1960s, which was the ground of the Nonaligned movement, did not substantially dawn upon the minds in the west/north, *until this present time*, so that these two historic segments become contemporaneous without ever having been historically simultaneous. The threshold of western modernity and that of 1989 were squeezed together¹¹. Since the end of the Cold War, Europe has sought to rebuild itself, first through wars on its outer edges. Since then, nationalisms have returned (starting with Europe), exacerbated, fragmented, in the proliferation of identity movements. Europe was not really built taking into account its colonial past that was excluded from collective memory. And it made the same mistakes in relation to eastern Europe too, after 1989: the latter was integrated as if it had come from another time and not from a

2022, <http://www.prometej.ba/clanak/intervju/intervju-sa-dubravkom-stojanovic-nista-nije-vecno-patko-ni-nacije-5153>.

¹¹ My paper *The Gendered Politics of Memory. The Women’s Court in Sarajevo 2015*, at the Memory studies association conference in Seoul, postponed because of the covid pandemic.

parallel modernity, that of socialism. So, the “real feel” about these two is very much that they come together, much as (western) modernity pervaded colonies with all the brutality and violence of colonisation. This will influence also the post-1989 period, in the sense that the experience of formerly socialist countries will become more and more comparable to that of the colonies. The two processes mature together. Just as there were two twin modern projects, there were these two – *the post-socialist and postcolonial situation* - pressed a posteriori into one real-feel formatted memory. The EU was not able to avail itself of a social and political project with regard to them or to assume a collective self-representation. The unity of the people or the nation, which intervenes in all collective self-understanding, ignores the “others”, be they included or excluded.

- *But since 1989 we have had a completely new situation* and epistemological construction for some thirty years at least, a situation lasting until the Ukrainian war of 2022. It is still to be seen whether we shall have a reconfiguration or a new epoch identified from here on, but we might. The *epistemological regime* is changing right now. After 1989, we also embarked on generalised *confusionism* in political language¹². This is not limited to post-socialist countries, but extended to all. Over the past thirty years, a rapid and radical desemanticisation of the simplistic black and white political vocabulary pertaining to the Cold War worldwide from left to right, a loss of meaningful landmarks, was followed by the attribution of new meanings. Since collective memories were erased and replaced, these were now “opposite” meanings out of context. General amnesia of selective memories was introduced.

Loss of cognitive landmarks and the epistemological turn

The *loss of cognitive landmarks* struck everyone like a gnoseological curse after 1989, both in the spaces of former socialism as well as in “former capitalism”, now disproportionately triumphant. But it was and is particular and probably distinct in the (post)socialist world that “restored” capitalism as a “homecoming”, while having *not much factual memory* or connection to any real capitalist past¹³. The countries of socialist revolutions in Europe, both USSR and Yugoslavia, imagined having reconnected with their due history, now ridden of the socialist narrative, now painted as a deviation. The post-socialist “memory” of a former but undocumented capitalism, now thought to have been restored, was the repository of a wild post-socialist imagination open to additions, fantasies, conspiracy theories, and escapist dreams. Words could now be made to mean the exact opposite of what they signified in the “epistemologically secure” Cold War era.

Other combinations of meanings were possible too in a world where, essentially, the relation between the political left and right had been disturbed. This anomic

¹² Rada Iveković, *Migration, New Nationalisms and Populism. An epistemological perspective on the closure of rich countries*, Birkbeck Law Press, Routledge, London 2022.

¹³ Czechoslovakia had been an industrialized country even before WWII, but Yugoslavia or Russia and Soviet countries, mainly rural, were not. “Memories” of a happy past capitalism were inbuilt into new national narratives after 1989.

and ectoplasmic epistemological transformation, which did not respond to one algorithm alone, pervaded not only popular culture, but also scholarly texts, and could also stem from individuals who would then feature as “influencers” or *maîtres à penser*. They would all proffer their own “truths”, which would govern their own world. As Pavle Rak shows, at more than thirty years of distance between the Yugoslav and the Russian-Ukrainian war, there is a common pattern and a parallelism between the Russian and Serbian constructions of “our” political truth¹⁴. Both Milošević’s Serbia in the 1990s and Putin’s Russia now denied wars and crimes they committed. It is always the others that are guilty, and true, other players in the same nationalist games in both countries committed similar crimes too. So, Putin, like Milošević at that time, accuses the others of being nazis or ustashas, and proceeds with besieging and destroying cities (Mariupol or Kyiv; Sarajevo), supposedly “preventing” the genocide of Russians or of Serbs. Putin had declared he would never invade Ukraine, but when he did, he prohibited the word “invasion”. It was not war, but a “special operation”.

Twin ideologies of a “Serbian world” (of a greater Serbia) and of a “Russian world” are knitting a common net of “all Serbs in one country” and “all Russians, including Ukrainians and Belarusians within one state in the making”, against the menacing rest of the western world¹⁵. WWII was never considered concluded by its warlords because waging a war keeps a nationalist leader in power, so Putin’s Russians “continued” the Great Patriotic War, and Milošević’s Serbia continued fighting WWII enemies – the ustashas fifty years later. Reciprocally, Croats too fought a past war, against the chetniks. And since, under such misuse of history and memory, the past war was never over, a present or future war too would have to continue forever. Of course, Putin “worked” on the history of the Ukrainian war also from “within” and since at least 2014, when the bordering territories of Donetsk and Lugansk were singled out. He produced a written mythic narrative and a historical theory about Russia’s heritage all the way into its present reconquering wars, shown as the recuperation of old national fame and national territory, all the way into Ukraine as the cradle of Russia. Likewise, Kosovo was painted by Milošević and Serbian nationalists as the cradle of Serbia. And the “nazi character” of Ukraine since WWII was hammered down, forgetting to explain that, after Stalin’s famine imposed on the country in 1932-33 (following the earlier famine from 1922-23) when millions of people starved to death in several federal units but in Ukraine in particular, Hitler’s invasion there had been experienced as liberation.

Rewriting history and memory

The purposeful distortion of history, with Putin, goes all the way down to changing the meanings of words. “Fascist” and “nazi” has now come to denote, in his vocabulary, “the west”. As Pavle Rak says, “Truth is here a metaphysical, not a

¹⁴ Pavle Rak, *O nacizmu, neonacizmu, nacionalnom jedinstvu i istinozborcima*, <https://pescanik.net/o-nacizmu-neonacizmu-nacionalnom-jedinstvu-i-istinozborcima/>

¹⁵ Sonja Biserko, *Serbia between two worlds*, “Helsinki Bulletin”, n. 161, March 2022, <http://www.helsinki.org.rs>

gnoseological category”. And Putin’s army is now to “liberate” Ukraine of the neo-nazis and junkies, through the “special operation”. The same narrative thrives in Serbia, and in Croatia (though with opposite signs) and elsewhere. Regardless the fact that there have actually been neo-nazis (though not as a majority) in these countries during WWII, the “others” are always essentialized as such. Categories and stereotypes are never questioned. Such cognitive insecurity wakes up nationalisms. The philosopher Radomir Konstantinović calls it the *palanka*¹⁶, a peculiar spectral condition of the either-or, of the misty ideal that remains unfulfilled and imaginary, a reality pined for but inaccessible. We have been at such a threshold since the brutal impediment of the *Compromesso storico* in Italy¹⁷. The post-socialist and the postcolonial condition meet the on-going process of the collapse of industrial capitalism and of bourgeois society in the west. This start morphing into more spectral forms, such as financial capitalism and the fragmentation of a negative kind of *post-tourism cosmopolitanism* of social disorientation marked by selfish individualism. Identifying such processes in his country, Radomir Konstantinović, equating nationalism and nazism in the sixties, wrote critically about Serbian nazism (which he analyses, in spite of being a Serb himself). *Nationalism or nazism are possible with any nation* according to him. Having mainly in mind populism in the Balkans and especially Milošević’s nationalist populism during the war-decade through the 1990s, he pinpointed this situation.

Fascisms

Konstantinović’s work is of epochal significance for the constitution of a necessary new *post-1989 (post-socialist) and postcolonial epistemology*, which is only now in painstaking construction. There is a term (*palanka*) by which the author names such a situation in which we are not completely citizens nor subjects, but we could be. “Parochialism” exists only as the *spirit* of the *palanka*, as it is unattainable. *Either* the subject can give itself a political dimension, be anchored in citizenship and act towards emerging from the crisis; *or*, on the contrary it [the would-be subject] can plunge into war and violence overnight. This is what happened. It is also a matter of translation or understanding: “Here, the expression (language) is not a function of creating, it is a function of possessing. The problem with possessing is the highest problem of that spirit which, indeed – always in contradiction with its leanings – doesn’t want what it wishes and rejects what it calls; ... language can only be a function of possessing, or else it cannot be”¹⁸. *Palanka* (provincialism) is about a crisis in modernity that eludes definitions, cannot be materialised, a state which is paradoxically the possibility of all possibilities and which is

¹⁶ Radmonir Konstantinović, *Filosofija palanke*, NOLIT, Beograd 1981; English version: *The Philosophy of Parochialism*, edited and with an Introduction by Branislav Jakovljevic, Translation by Ljiljana Nikolic and Branislav Jakovljevic, Michigan University Press 2021.

¹⁷ “The historic compromise”, in the 1970s, was the agreement between the Communist Party of Italy and the Christian Democrat Party to overcome the division of the country. The Christian Democrat leader Aldo Moro was killed to prevent this agreement.

¹⁸ *Filosofija palanke*, op. cit., Serbian edition p. 105, my translation.

therefore potentially violent. One of the possible results of the spirit of *palanka* can be some kind of (post-)fascism or nazism. There are some similarities but *not identity* between historic fascism and post-fascisms today. And it comes in degrees. According to Rastko Močnik¹⁹, Umberto Eco²⁰, or Leonardo Boff²¹, fascism is present as a *permanent possibility* that will materialise under adequate conditions. Authors like Radomir Konstantinović and Klaus Theweleit share this opinion²². Močnik writes that such suitable conditions, in the case of weak and dependent former socialist states (as post-Yugoslav countries), are particularly receptive to fascism – *ideologically*, because they have inbuilt fascist elements (such as racism, nationalism, national collectivism, the cult of power, hate, anti-intellectualism, etc.) in their basis; and *economically and politically*, because they were eager to join as subordinate within the “world order” in the making. Liberalism unable to resolve its contradictions, as was the case at the partition of Yugoslavia, is prone to embark on fascism under conditions of general confusionism. The new political class in the making since the fall of socialism is opposed to any antifascist tradition because the latter is now attributed to much hated “communism”, while that political class goes *primarily for anticommunism* undisturbed by the banner of fascism, which is not always ideologically recognisable to them. The same is true of what others have called populism. When they explicitly condemn fascism to produce more confusionism, they do so for a European audience because they sense that it is expected, whereby they equate socialism-communism-stalinism *and* fascism. *Any* antifascist position is therefore characterised as communism, says Močnik²³.

Series of wars and civil wars²⁴, displacing knowledge, and useless history

On the eve of WWI, two kinds of imperialisms had come to hand. But it appears also that the *new* unforeseen formation of a series of (new) nations today, which materialized at the fragmentation of federations (Yugoslavia; USSR), popped up after 1989, and not in the 19th century. In the third world’s (today “global south’s”) second wave of postcolonial sovereign states emerging, such dismantled (post)colonial formations were of a different kind than those of the 1960s²⁵. By that

¹⁹ Rastko Močnik, *Extravagantia II, Koliko fašizma? (“How Much Fascism?”)*, Studia Humanitatis Minora, Ljubljana 1995.

²⁰ Umberto Eco, *Ur-Fascism*, “The New-York Review of Books”, June 22, 1995, https://www.pege.us/archive/Articles/eco_ur-fascism.pdf; *Il fascismo eterno*, La Nave di Teseo, Milano 2017.

²¹ Leonardo Boff, *Neo-Fascism: A Worldwide Wave*, “Germ” (2018), <http://www.mondialisations.org/php/public/art.php?id=41907&lan=EN>.

²² Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*, 1-2, Basel-Frankfurt-a/M, Roter Stern Verlag 1977-1978.

²³ Močnik, *Extravagantia*, op. cit.

²⁴ According to Claudio Pavone’s study of the Italian case, a war and a civil war come together. I extend this to most if not all countries. Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1991. According to him, the Italian WWII was threefold: one of “national liberation” or “patriotic” against the German invaders, a “civil” war between Italian fascists and antifascists, and a “class war” between revolutionary components and bourgeois classes.

²⁵ India was an early bird (1946-48) of the 1960s first wave.

time (the end of the 1980s), some theoreticians had announced the end of the nation or national state, which proved wrong (J. Habermas, N. Fraser, etc.), but the error became visible somewhat later. After the fall of the Berlin wall, according to Slavoj Žižek, we had a conflict between “fascist tendencies” on one side and “regular representative bourgeois democracies” on the other²⁶. This became best visible in some east European countries among others. It is true however that the nation now mutated within this new wave of nation-candidates because the understanding, the functionality and perimeter of *sovereignty* had changed and moved out of Europe, basically to Asia. Wars and civil wars in Africa had not receded although new attempts had been made, brutally prevented, to overcome the colonial constellation. While nation states in Asia suddenly fostered modern sovereignty, which may not have been their first direct local heritage, making the centre(s) of the now polycentric world shift to that continent economically. It seems that Europe is today more at risk than Asia or Africa or even Latin America, though probably not more than the USA, from the confrontation of new fascisms and a more traditional bourgeois right, in a non-radical front.

The epistemological question

The question that then arises is: “What and how to learn from the past that we haven’t learned so far?” This worry puts again, and necessarily, epistemology at the centre of our inquiry. Not only because we are “lost in translation” and have misplaced any secure gnoseologic guidance, but also because the knowledge question is political: who and how is to deduct solutions that can benefit us all, now that we know *that our knowledges are reciprocally incomplete*²⁷, and thus in many ways misleading? What is more, this happens while the question arises of the durability of life on our planet, and the urgency to repair what is possible for the benefit *of all species and of life as such*. We now know that we can’t put ourselves at the centre of doing any more. The knowledge question becomes more complex as we are aware that we won’t learn from schools and *national* universities any longer as we once did. We must now make responsible choices *together*, knowing that it will be painful and that our path will be ridden with mistakes.

What about those neglected knowledges, “useless” history? Useless history is a systematic oblivion of that past history that didn’t lead to the present state of affairs, that didn’t lead to Rome. What is usually meant by *useful* history, a deliberate “political forgetting” or erasure, is an unquestionable *conversion to neoliberal capitalism and capitalist globalisation*. According to the mainstream discourse, the

²⁶ According to Žižek, this is what, in the new international configuration, worryingly resembles 1939, without being identical to it. Slavoj Žižek, *Quelle idéologie Vladimir Poutine a-t-il derrière la tête?*, France culture, entretien par Olivia Gesbert, in “La Grande table,” 9-3-2022, <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-grande-table-idees/quelle-ideologie-vladimir-poutine-a-t-il-derriere-la-tete?msclkid=23c983dfa61711ecb504e7de5825d445>.

²⁷ Boaventura De Sousa Santos spots “two ‘nonrelationships’ of western modernity with non-western cultures: destruction and assimilation. They are ‘nonrelationships’ in that both refuse to consider non-western cultures as relevant cultural alternatives”. *Epistemologies of the South. Justice Against Epistemicide*, Paradigm Publisher, Boulder-London 2014; p. 212 of the Kindle edition.

general transition to mainstream “normality” means the catching-up by “backward” countries, including within Europe, and filling the historic gap. That is a regular western injunction valid especially for countries of the global south and post-socialist states. There are several intersections of the two. Alternative options and attempts are erased and forgotten as *useless history*. So are whole chunks of the history of existing people. It so happens that the histories of peoples in eastern, central Europe in the 20th century and the Balkans up to 1989 are now considered as *useless history*, because they have not contributed to the building of triumphant capitalism, or of its extreme form of neoliberalism, supposed to be reached through transition and submission.

The once Nonaligned Movement, now useless history but a very powerful concept and effective in international politics and in the UN, UNCTAD, etc., in the 1960-70, was *at that time* a complex common political, social, and cultural *trans-national* project that included the idea of international equality between states, of a new and just world order. It hailed anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism as well as the cancelling of poor countries’ debt, etc. We now see that Putin’s Russia today acts in the same way in Ukraine as the USA did in Iraq and Afghanistan, or Europe and NATO in Libya, etc., in wanting to impose their order, topple and appoint governments, and decree a value-system. “Useless history” can also be the reverse of factual history and misinterpret the past.

So, the divide is not exactly left and right anymore, and not even eastern Europe vs. west. If you have a perspective from an external, say, abstractly Asian position, the divide in Yugoslavia, where there are practically no left leaning political parties any more (except some modest ones as those at the local level), looks as follows: both eastern and western Europe (Russia and the EU) are structured by constitutive racism and xenophobia and predatory “free market ideologies” as well as brutal anti-migrant policies (unless the migrants are white and “look like us”, as do the Ukrainians fleeing to western Europe) towards other countries and continents, with comparable methods.

NATO: The elephant in the sitting-room and post-socialist wars

Indeed, constantly provoked by an eastwards would-be expanding NATO and by the west, Russia did foster pro-Russian politics all over its territory and towards “frontier” areas. This has been contributing at the speed of light to the construction of EU’s defence; by annexing Crimea²⁸ in 2014 (formally recognised in 2018 by Russia), by leading to the de facto secessions in Luhansk and Donetsk (2014), and by nibbling territories all over the once Soviet space, now the “Russian world”.

A “Minsk protocol” was signed in 2014 to freeze peace. Buffer territories are split by Ukrainian borders east and west. “With [reclaiming from Ukraine] these three localities (Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk) which are the closest to Russia, the latter is more or less reassured to have a strip of territory separating it from Ukraine

²⁸ The attribution of Crimea to Russia or Ukraine is, however, historically debatable, with arguments on both sides. But it *was* annexed in 2014.

and therefore from NATO, if Ukraine were to be admitted to NATO”²⁹. And further: “Thus, the objective according to the Russian authorities is not to attack a sovereign state (Ukraine) but to destroy the weapons and military bases that would threaten two independent states (ibid). (...) So this war is officially to protect Russia’s ‘friendly states’”.

Three southern Soviet Republics with Muslim minorities and enclaves, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, had declared independence after the dismantlement of the Soviet State. Indeed, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Moldavia, Uzbekistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine created the CIS (Community of Independent States) in 1991, joined by Georgia in 1993. Belarus and Kazakhstan failed to recognise two separatist territories within Georgia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia, that were recognised by Russia much as other nibbled boundaries. Russian troops invaded the independentist Republic of Chechnya – two wars followed (1994-96 and 1999-2000). Chechnya ended up under Russia’s domination after the latter levelled and destroyed Grozny, and invaded it in 1999, with the excuse of a rebellion in neighbouring Dagestan. Several Chechen rebel groups continued to harass the Russians in Dagestan and nearby areas.

In the 1990, the three Baltic states left the USSR after the latter’s collapse, but didn’t join the CIS. Important Russian minorities remain in many of the independent republics, including these, which is an incitement to intervention for Russia, and the source of protracted political trouble. Some territories in eastern Europe remained fragile, squeezed between NATO in the west and Russia to the east. Such is the case of Moldova, which is neither in NATO nor in the EU (although wanting to join them), and on whose eastern border towards Ukraine there is a new break-away republic Transnistria supported by Russian troops, not far from Odessa. Within Moldova, there is also a splinter, mainly though not exclusively Turkic (but orthodox), autonomous region of Gagauzia, supported by the Russians. The USSR had waged a bloody war in Afghanistan from 1979-89, which it lost³⁰. Later, having always had interests in the middle east too, Russia waged a war within Syria’s civil war on the side of Bashar al-Assad (since 2011), and treated Aleppo – destroying it completely (2012-2016) – the way it had treated Grozny. There is no principled difference between Russian or USA/western wars and proxy wars in the middle east. The EU has been unduly promising the fulfilment of a rapprochement, but not membership with Europe and NATO to Ukraine. From then on, having no control, Russia will provoke secessions in some of those countries; conflicts in Abkhazia, Transnistria, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh (between Azerbaijan and Armenia), etc., some pro-Russian moves in Kirghizstan (repression of the Tulip revolution), in Kazakhstan more recently, etc. In the past as we know, the USSR in-

²⁹ Chronologie pour comprendre la crise en Ukraine (Entre Histoire et Géographie),

<http://abidjantv.net/monde/chronologie-pour-comprendre-la-crise-en-ukraine-entre-histoire-et-geographie/>. We follow (in a shorter term) the same chronology from the same sources in this section.

³⁰ Svetlana Alexievich, *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War*, Norton, 1st ed. 1992. See also the author’s other books of oral history: *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*, Random House Paperbacks, New York 2018 (reprint); *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets*, Random House Paperbacks, New York 2017; *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*, Dalkey Archive Press 2005.

tervened in Hungary (1956), in Czechoslovakia (1968), and we already mentioned Afghanistan and Syria. Russia is felt as a threat to neighbouring countries even as it considers them a threat through the close presence of NATO on her outer borders without a buffer zone. One could see today's war on Ukraine as Russia's attempt to create buffer zones between itself and NATO. The anxiousness comes from the fact that, while the Warsaw Pact had been abolished at the time of the fall of the Berlin wall, NATO was not, and seems to be expanding. On neither side is there a readiness to dialogue and negotiate, and none of them are prepared to work out the common language (the translation) that is needed for it. While Putin's Russia is directly *guilty* of the assault on Ukraine, the west shares with Russia a *responsibility* in this tragedy³¹.

East-west, what's the difference? What can we conclude?

Since the political parting of ways between Tito and Stalin in 1948 and Yugoslavia's engagement with the Nonaligned Movement, the country was not a part of the "eastern bloc", although this has now largely been forgotten as useless history, so that nowadays you get the opposite assertion in much of the historiography of the present, all over the Internet or on maps that are circulating, and which include Yugoslavia behind the "iron curtain".

Most of the wars that have taken place under east and central-European post-socialism have been to a great extent, if not mostly, *civil wars*, although they do have elements of wars *tout court* because the countries involved had at the same time become "independent", partitioned countries. That doesn't make them different from other wars. Most of these conflicts have also been *territorial wars* of conquest or imposition of primacy and domination. That doesn't make them different either. That they be wars of two centuries belated nationalisms is regularly heard as an explanation, but is irrelevant as an argument. There is no glory or advantage in constructing and privileging one's nation before others, contrary to what we were taught. Latin-American nations have been established through (post)colonial secession by the comprador bourgeois Creoles of the Americas before even some European nations and national states. All of these were actually constructing hierarchical patriarchal vertical states and (early) forms of capitalism that could include "older" modes of production, such as slavery, or of repression, such as "witch-hunt" and the extermination of females or of subordinate colonial populations, for example.

Nothing can be concluded in the sense of comparison to the advantage of current socialist wars, which are as bad as any. But, even though without guarantee, *something may* be concluded *someday* in the comparison with some future socialism. For that, we shall need some re-reading of alternative options that have not been tried out.

There is no need to repeat lessons about the *insufficiency of binary patterns* of knowledge that our post WWII and post-Cold-War generations have critiqued. One

³¹ Guilt and responsibility are to be strictly distinguished. Thanks to Goran Fejić for elaborating this idea and sharing it with me.

such binary was the Cold War itself, including in epistemology. Upstream, the inadequacy of any binary model, be it gender or cold-war politics, is based on the absurdity of wanting to see two irreconcilable modernities, that of capitalism and that of socialism³². They have been twins, *before* any differences are even seen. However: this doesn't mean at all that it is indifferent which of them one is considering. Although related, they don't invalidate discernment, and no "post-truth" attitude can be deduced or recommended. Rather, it will take the construction of a multipolar and plural, non-binary world with a new, alternative civilisational choice. We shall have to examine and take into consideration all alternative histories, instead of repressing them. There is no good binary, no good war, no either-or solution.

Today we know that the Berlin wall came down on *both* sides, east and west, socialist and capitalist. While each still insists on being governed by its own exclusive "truth" and thus by closure to the others, it is on the contrary openness and cooperation that show the way, but then *nothing can be pre-set*. No "truth establishing war," no regime imposing aggression is acceptable, be it in the name of a political order, of a gender or race, national preference, or of a predetermined pattern.

³² The reader will have understood by now that i never use the term "communism" to denote socialist countries and their regimes. In the post-socialist period, "communism" is an ideological anti-socialist allegation thrust on countries that have attempted the socialist way. "Communism" has never been anything, but a utopia placed in the future. It never had any substance. This is not contradicted by the existence of communist parties, which is another story.

Holding onto Nonviolence and Feminism in the Midst of War

by

*Nela Porobić**

Abstract: The imperialist war against Ukraine has made questioning and rejecting violence as the only way forward ever more difficult. The doubling down on the militarisation that is piggybacking on the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led us to a point where war has become glorified, and our empathy and desire to stop the criminal and aggressive acts of Putin co-opted into militarised and binary ways of the political and economic elite; a point where the only option presented is more escalation, never de-escalation, never dialogue and negotiations. Non-violent voices are actively silenced, and peacebuilders actively dismissed, or even worse, made into villains. None the less, in the long run it is the voices for peace that will save lives and not the other way around. This article investigates the reasons why nonviolence and feminist demands centred around demilitarisation, justice, equality, and care is the only strategy that will help sow seeds of sustainable peace in Ukraine. It takes stock of feminist understandings of the gendered workings of war and looks at the insidious ways of militarisation, searching for spaces where feminist demands for demilitarisation and peace can be championed.

When Putin ordered Russian troops to invade Ukraine, attempting to restore Russia's position in the global imperialist chess game, the outrage and disbelief over another war being unleashed was widespread. For us that have experienced war, the images of destruction and suffering were all too familiar. Protests to stop the war, to stop Putin, took place all over the world.

But what followed had nothing to do with de-escalating the situation or ending the war and suffering in Ukraine. Instead, Russia escalated its aggression, the Ukrainian government answered with mass mobilisation and a plea for support in weapons (Reuters 2022), and the political leaders from the European Union (EU), USA, and elsewhere rushed to provide military support to Ukraine (Maïa De la Baume and Jacopo Barigazzi 2022; Steve Holland and Mike Stone 2022; Murray Brewster 2022). We immediately entered a time where shipping weapons into a hot conflict became the only form of “acceptable” support. While there has been some

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provision of humanitarian aid by mostly local organisations, the provision of weapons has been the main action from western governments. It is as if the governments were just waiting for an excuse to further embolden the military-industrial complex, throwing all their energy and all our money into enabling this war to continue.

In Ukraine, people are paying the highest price for this so-called strategy, dying by the thousands. The rest of us have been conditioned to silently accept this as the only adequate response to this conflict, and to accept the increase of militarisation and military spending of our own countries. These days, it is all about building up “defences” (Joseph Borell 2022a) joining military alliances (Jon Henley 2022), buying new weapon systems (Roger Jordan 2022), reintroducing conscription (France24 2022). As if our lives were not militarised enough.

Basically, everyone seems to be preparing for war, and very few seem to be interested in peace. Putin’s imperialist invasion of Ukraine has galvanized unprecedented support for meeting violence with more violence, more than any other conflict has ever managed to do in our recent history. Putin’s Russia is certainly not interested in de-escalation, still believing that its victory is imminent. But neither are Ukrainian’s western allies. Ukraine finds itself fighting an imperialist aggressor in a war that is described as somehow special and different from all other wars that have been waged before. We are made believe that all this bloodshed is worth it (Joseph Borell 2022b) because when it is “done” something will change, something will be different, a brave new world will emerge. But this is nothing but deception. After this war ends, there will be ten others, as there have been hundreds before. Imperialist wars, as the one waged in Ukraine, are all about grabbing power and market-shares and treating people and land as nothing more but resources and spheres of influence.

Dedication to war, indifference to peace

The doubling down on the militarisation that is piggybacking on the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led us to a point where war has become sanitised, perhaps even glorified; a point where our empathy and desire to stop criminal and aggressive acts of Putin has become co-opted into the militarised and binary ways of the political and economic elite, where the only option presented is more escalation, never de-escalation, never dialogue and negotiations. It has brought us to a point where non-violent voices are actively silenced and where peacebuilders are being dismissed, or even worse, made into villains.

The political leadership of our countries seems dedicated to war and there is a huge discrepancy between that and the commitment to the wellbeing of people. Our governments continuously fail to find money for investments in lifesaving social and care infrastructure, but somehow manage to commit hundreds of billions of dollars for militaries and destruction. As an example, according to Fransen et al. the gap in social infrastructure investment in Europe is estimated at 100-150 billion EUR per year. But somehow when it comes to weapons, there are no gaps.

And when it comes to Ukraine, talks about humanitarian relief, negotiation of ceasefire, and securing peace are not prevalent. The governments in the global north in particular seem set on ensuring material conditions for the war in Ukraine to continue (Deutsche Welle 2022). Supplying weapons to Ukraine seems to be their main

tool. But there is something sinister with their militarised “solidarity” with the Ukrainian people: are they trying to save lives, or their own geopolitical positions? Because if it is lives, they are trying to save, more weapons and escalation is hardly the answer.

War, not peace, is in their interest

It is not surprising that there is a conspicuous lack of interest among the USA, EU countries, and other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) member states to truly, beyond declarative words, support negotiations and a peaceful resolution to the war in Ukraine. This is their chance to get rid of, or at least weaken, one of their key opponents in their imperialist game – and they and the people they claim to represent don’t even have to die for it. From these governments’ perspective, it is fully possible to climb over Ukrainian bodies to realise the geopolitical goals of their own countries. As for Russia, it has been clear from day one that Ukrainian lives hold no value for Putin, as he continuous to blast out his lies about how his imperialist war is about correcting a historical wrongdoing (Salvage Editorial Collective, 2022). This is nothing unique, unfortunately. Using nationalism as an easy mobiliser and reinventing history to fit expansionist purposes is as old as imperialism.

So here we are, neither the aggressor nor the victim sees a way out. The only option they see is militarily defeating each other, no matter the costs (counted primarily in Ukrainian bodies, of course). The entrenched positions have created a context where open talks about using nuclear weapons have become normalised (Acheson Ray 2022). Nuclear war is the logical extension of this approach. The ultimate violence against the ultimate enemy.

Justifying the unjustifiable

To justify all of this, these governments dress up political ambitions and geopolitical and economic interests in alluring narratives of belonging, historical rights, and heroism. In these narratives, there is no space for medals and support to peace-builders, service providers, humanitarian workers, and first responders – those that save and not take lives. In these narratives, there is no place for those that refuse to fight, to kill or be killed.

War turns the militarisation of our societies and lives into something that is desirable, and opposition to it something that is punishable (Chico Harlan 2022). Militarisation can come riding on the back of the worthiest causes, like the claim that more weapons are needed to save lives, making it difficult for us to withstand its pull. When it comes to the phenomenon of militarisation, professor Cynthia Enloe is well-known in feminist circles as the one that constantly pushes us to stay “responsibly curious about full accountings of militarization’s gendered processes and costs” (Phoebe Donnelly 2020). I understand this to mean that no parts of war, or its actors, should ever be left unscrutinised – and this includes interrogating what asking for more weapons will mean for women in the long run, but also what it will mean for queer and other people that are marginalised or made invisible in the current narrative of heroic men and victimised women.

Of course, the narratives of heroism are seductive, especially to boys and men who have been raised to believe that soldiering is a passageway to manhood, that dying on the battlefield represents strength, and that refusing to do so is not a demonstration of love for life and fellow human being but a great disappointment and treason to the flag, nation, and country. But dressing up war and necessity to defend oneself in a veil of heroism leads us only to believe that there is something to gain in continuing the violence – whether it is territory or a patriarchal notion of glory.

There is no winning the war

The simple truth is that once war and violence break out, we have already lost. Some have lost their lives, other their homes and close family members and friends. And we have all lost our right to live a life in dignity, as the consequences of war linger on for many years to come. From Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Nigeria, to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the evidence is telling. Waging war has never saved or improved anyone's life. Peace, on the other hand, has.

War is hell for all people affected. Its consequences are manifold and range from physical harm, death, displacement, damage to communities and to the environment to trauma that spans many generations. War causes loss, destruction, pain, suffering, longing for a home and life that was once had. The ability to recover from it stretches far beyond reconstruction of damaged infrastructure. The sense of insecurity and precariousness lingers on for many years, perhaps generations. There is no winning side. The people that are forced to endure unimaginable violence are the ultimate victims, but even the people who are conscripted and forced to inflict violence are victimised, as often refusing to fight is punishable. Both civilians and soldiers are at risk of severe psychological trauma, as the violence they endure, witness – or, in the case of soldiers, inflict – will haunt them for many years to come. Our mental and healthcare institutions are mostly unprepared for massive number of people that exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in a post-conflict context, leaving people to figure out their trauma on their own. Untreated PTSD amplifies the already present violence, not at least gender-based violence, making the harms our societies have to deal with never ending.

Our societies also must deal with other forms of violence, less visible and talked about. When the killing stops, without a vision of peace grounded in justice, solidarity, and care, the path to reconstruction quickly becomes riddled with neoliberal interventions that breed poverty, corruption, and exploitation of land, resources, and people. The approach by the international community when it comes to post-war recovery almost always fails to support building sustainable peace with a focus on the needs of the people. Instead, standardised neoliberal policies are implemented that give preference to private sector actors and the so-called free market over social and care infrastructure. The evidence is telling from conflicts all over the world (Carol Cohn and Claire Duncanson 2020). Things will not be different in Ukraine, as implementation of neoliberal reforms and policies have been long under way, and there is nothing that indicates that things will change after the war (Natylie Baldwin 2022).

The only people that gain from keeping the conflict going are those men that claim decision-making power on behalf of the rest of us; the men (and also few women) that will profit from the arms trade but that will never step foot on the battlefield, never aim their gun at other human beings, never send their children to death. Instead, they will reap the profit of arms sales and then they will continue making profit on the ashes of our destroyed homes and lives.

These profiteers continue to glorify war, working to convince us that there are no nonviolent ways to resolve conflicts, turning the real reasons they wage war into romantic stories about belonging, and how they, once they win the war (no doubt with our bodies), will provide us with freedom, security, prosperity, and peace. Yet that peace never comes. What does come is the perpetual demand for more power, resources, and more bodies to dispose of.

War facilitates violence, hate, misogyny, and othering

Success in war is measured in dead bodies and how much pain and loss can be inflicted on the enemy. There is no playing nice in war – the simple truth is that war normalises and facilitates hate. It facilitates hate and violence on a collective and individual level, and it treats human beings as cannon fodder, as disposable bodies. This process is enabled by the overarching project of “othering” people – of manufacturing consent for violence by building up notions of “us” versus “them” in order to justify the continuation of war and the exclusion of certain people from certain countries, or from peace itself.

Women, queer people (Michael K. Lavers 2022), and other marginalised communities, like Roma community (Sean Benstead 2022), have already ended up at the sharp end of the violence in Ukraine. And that is the thing with weapons: they are hardly ever just used for “worthy” causes. Sooner or later, they are used against everyone that is seen as a threat to power or simply perceived as being different. Sooner or later the violence turns towards feminists, human rights defenders, political opponents, those that voice their disagreement with the war machine, or those who are perceived as different, due to their ethnicity or gender identity (Ben Hunte 2022).

The war in Ukraine has created a perfect opportunity for far-right groups from Europe and beyond (Cynthia Miller-Idriss 2022), who see Putin’s war on Ukraine as an opportunity to both gain military experience and win political points for their fascist ideologies. The men who have flocked to Ukraine from other countries to fight alongside the Azov regiment (Aljazeera 2022) and other units like it, have been given free reign, as for the time being they are fighting the same cause as the Ukrainian government. Their presence, even when previously challenged, has become more acceptable, even praised (Anthony Loyd 2022).

This should be a massive red flag for those supporting the supply of weapons to Ukraine. What will guarantee that those receiving these weapons will allow themselves to be disarmed and demobilised once the war is over? What sort of political (and military) power will these groups wield within Ukraine after the war? What will they do with their newly gained military experience and equipment? Who will they point their guns at next?

And where will these weapons end up? Once conflicts are over, weapons that have poured into countries at war tend to end up on black markets, resold to other conflict zones, to be used far beyond their intended recipients and intended targets. As our governments flood Ukraine with weapons now, what measures are being put in place to prevent this from happening yet again?

But even without asking what happens after the war is over, the arming of these groups right now should be a red flag for feminists, other progressive movements, queer people, and minorities, as they have always been on the receiving end of fascist violence. We must interrogate the narrative that weapons save lives. Nonviolence is the only true protection for women, queer, minority communities, and other marginalised people.

Holding on to non-violence and feminism

This is obviously an incredibly difficult position to hold onto during a time when the violence and injustice towards the people of Ukraine is so blatant. We all witness in real time the destruction and indiscriminate force Putin's troops have unleashed on civilians in Mariupol, Kharkiv, and all around Ukraine; we all see the bombing of towns and cities, the attacks on hospitals and homes. We all read accounts of sexual violence and torture. And we all witness the defiance the people in Ukraine have demonstrated in light of this brutality. But as difficult as this conversation is, it is one that needs to be had, sooner rather than later, because the consequences of accepting that militarisation and violence are the only way forward can be inconceivable for Ukraine, for our common future, and for humanity.

We must reject the framing that violence has no alternative. We must reject the idea that under the current circumstances in Ukraine there is no space to actively work to end the war in nonviolent ways. This position does not stand in contradiction to the fact that the people of Ukraine have a right to self-defence, but it does sketch out an alternative path to the current one where supporting Ukraine is equal with weapons shipments, and nothing else.

Even within Ukrainian feminist circles the call for supporting Ukraine with weapons has been strong, prevalent perhaps, which is explained by the military might of the Russian army, and the need to ensure material conditions for self-defence of Ukraine, and in extension, of Ukrainian women. Feminists and peacebuilders from outside Ukraine that have denounced militarisation as a solution have been called dogmatic and naïve, even colonial for not acknowledging Ukrainian demands for weapons as situated in their experiences of war. But I want to argue that it is exactly the experiences, knowledge, and feminist reflections on so many wars before the one in Ukraine that has forged the feminist, anti-militarist position. It is the outcomes of so many wars before that have convinced feminists of how imperative it is for us to push for peaceful resolution even harder, exactly because we know what is at stake for women and other marginalised people during war.

There is nothing naïve or dogmatic about wanting a negotiated solution to the war in Ukraine, to believe that diplomacy and negotiations can be a way out. There is nothing naïve about the realisation that the longer the war goes on the more people will die and suffer, and the harder it will be for communities to recover, for justice

to even stand a chance. The longer the war goes on, the more entrenched and polarised positions will get. The influence of those committed to violence will grow until there is no space for peace left.

It is of course not surprising that not all feminists share the same understanding of the importance of nonviolent resistance or of de-escalation or negotiation. Feminists are as diverse as any other movement. However, all feminists share an understanding that wars are thoroughly gendered – from the way they are waged and experienced to how we recover from them. That understanding is what has guided feminist interventions in various conflicts throughout decades. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the support and advocacy of international feminists is what pushed the international legal system to improve the way it prosecutes rape and sexual violence as part of war crimes (Kristen Campbell and Gorana Mlinarević 2022). In Syria, feminist demands for effective participation of women during peace negotiations put the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the entire women, peace and security agenda to the test, exposing the complicity of international mechanisms when it comes to exclusion of women, beyond declarative commitments (Madeleine Rees 2014). In Colombia, feminists pushed for the content of their peace agreement to include commitments to reparations, community recovery, and gender equality further than any other peace agreement had done thus far (Catalina Ruiz-Navarro 2019).

Our history is full of examples of the important roll feminists have played in pushing back against war and militarism, at both national and global levels, keeping our communities and planet away from the brink of annihilation. Feminists in each national context have been able to advance their responses to conflicts learning from decades, if not hundreds, of years' worth of collective dedication to peace. Our efforts have not yet led to abolition of violence and war – for that we need to find a way to smash the patriarchy and to demilitarise. But our collective efforts have made life under war more bearable, the crimes more prosecutable, the solidarity more effective. Our failure to abolish violence and war means that we need to step up our game and sharpen our tactics, not surrender to the ways of patriarchy and militarism. In the long run, from the perspective of saving lives and pushing back against patriarchy, feminists have more to gain in demanding peace than demanding weapons.

Denouncing war, demanding peace

There are plenty of spaces where violence and destruction are being discussed and actively pushed for, but hardly any spaces to strategies for peace. If feminists and peacebuilders don't actively work to create these spaces, no one else will. As with other conflicts, eventually the war in Ukraine will reach a point when some sort of an agreement will be made. Hopefully that will be sooner rather than later. If this time comes without a strong presence of a feminist peace voice, the men with guns and bank accounts will shape that vision of peace for everyone. They will be the sole winners of the war and the exclusive architects of "peace".

There are many parallels to be drawn between the war in Ukraine and the war that took place in my home country, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), in the 1990s. Many differences as well, of course, not at least with respect to the response of the

international community – which, unlike in Ukraine, enforced a weapons embargo on BiH. But what has been absolutely the same is the approach that only men with guns matter in war and in peace.

In 2020, BiH marked 25 years since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement. These years have given us plenty of space to reflect, from a feminist point of view, what giving in to militarism has meant for our society, and these reflections are valuable beyond BiH (Gorana Mlinarević and Nela Porobić 2021). Men with guns and power don't demilitarise once the fighting stops, they simply ensure that the society shifts from one form of militarisation to another. They repackage their militarised ways in a way that will ensure they can keep holding on to and expanding their power; they rattle their guns whenever needed; and they point them at us when they feel their positions are threatened. In BiH, the fact that the peace processes were driven by men with guns meant that issues of importance for recovery of the people (not power) were largely unaddressed or addressed poorly. This has had real consequences on our fragile peace, and we find ourselves once again, 27 years later, fearing that the war might return. Not because the people of BiH are specifically prone to fighting, as the mainstream, racist narrative in western media wants us to believe, but because root causes to the previous conflict were never addressed. They couldn't have been addressed, because the only people with capacity to address them – feminists, peacebuilders – were silenced and marginalised.

Being persistently present with feminist demands centred around demilitarisation, justice, equality, and care is the only strategy that will help sow seeds of sustainable peace in Ukraine. While the voices for militarisation are loud and visible, there are indeed many voices for peace that go against the narrative that war is the only solution. The Ukrainian Pacifist Movement Against Perpetuation of War issued a statement condemning “the active burning of bridges for a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine” (Pressenza New York 2022); the Feminists Against War issued a Manifesto signed by feminist from all over the world demanding “a redirection of the situation to break the militaristic spiral initiated by Russia and supported by NATO” (Feminists Against War 2022); Russian feminists have been on the streets protesting against the war from its very beginning (Feminist anti-war resistance 2022).

We need to demand that all governments listen to these voices, acknowledge that there are alternatives to more war, and for all their actions to be grounded in international law and their obligation to maintain international peace and security. This obligation starts with saving lives, not helping to take them. There are plenty of options. They can commit to delivering humanitarian assistance based on solidarity, care, and dignity, planned together with those affected by the war. They can change their public message from one supporting war to clearly supporting peaceful resolution by for example offering to host peace talks or support in organising them in a way that is inclusive of the people and communities that live in Ukraine, with extra effort to include marginalised groups. Organising dialogues and consultations with marginalised groups to ensure their input is reflected in any planned or ongoing peace negotiations is also something the governments can opt for. They can create safe public spaces for voices of war opponents to be heard and use all available dip-

lomatic channels to push for de-escalation and dialogue. They can ensure that resettlement of refugees is efficient, dignified, and delivered without discrimination or racism and provide support and facilitate the resettlement of those who choose not to fight, ensuring that their right to return after conflict can happen without repercussion.

But we also need to make our anti-war feminist demands relevant beyond Ukraine. We need to make them matter for every potential conflict that might follow. Full and unconditional de-militarisation is imperative, including abolishing nuclear weapons, ending the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, stopping the arms trade, reducing military spending, dismantling the systems of war profiteering. These pursuits are concrete actions that will help dismantle the material conditions for war and help put a stop to the militarised binary narratives that keep us divided. In the current context this might seem an impossible task, but to borrow from the wisdom of Rosa Luxemburg: “Before a revolution happens, it is perceived as impossible; after it happens, it is seen as having been inevitable”.

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“La coscienza è più forte della paura”.

La protesta femminile e femminista contro la guerra in Russia¹

di

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Abstract: The essay reconstructs the female and feminist resolve and commitment against war and reflects on the methods of expression of protest, and on the ability to effectively maintain resistance, even as repression continues and escalates. It utilizes the documentation collected by humanitarian organizations on collective and individual anti-war protests, press releases, interviews, and the slogans written on posters.

So che molti di voi ora si sentono disperati, impotenti e pieni di vergogna per l'aggressione del Presidente Vladimir Putin al popolo amico ucraino. Ma io vi esorto a non disperare e a scendere nelle piazze centrali delle vostre città alle 17 di oggi e a dire chiaramente ed esplicitamente che noi, il popolo russo, siamo contro la guerra lanciata da Putin.

Con queste parole l'attivista per i diritti umani Marina Litvinović si è rivolta alla popolazione russa in un appello diffuso su face book immediatamente dopo l'annuncio televisivo dell'inizio della cosiddetta “operazione speciale” in Ucraina².

Quel giorno sono scese nelle piazze di 53 città migliaia di persone, 1702 sono state arrestate. Da allora si sono moltiplicate le manifestazioni, le petizioni, le lettere aperte, le dichiarazioni di condanna della guerra da parte della società civile (del mondo culturale, artistico, letterario³, scientifico, religioso, del lavoro e delle professioni). Frasi di esortazione a non avere paura e ad affrontare con determinazione i rischi che tutti gli oppositori e le oppositrici al regime putiniano da anni ben conoscono, ricorrono negli appelli dei movimenti e dei comitati femminili, primo fra tutti il Comitato delle madri dei soldati russi.

“Guardate negli occhi altri figli e altre madri”

Il Comitato delle madri dei soldati, un gruppo di madri e attiviste per i diritti umani, sorto nel 1989 a Mosca per difendere i giovani coscritti dalle violenze e dagli abusi perpetrati nell'organizzazione militare, è stato il movimento sociale più

¹ Questo saggio riprende e amplia alcuni articoli pubblicati nella rubrica “Voci di pace”, <https://comune-info.net/voci-di-pace/>.

² Il video all'indirizzo: <https://www.facebook.com/530684674/videos/1134555997312487/>.

³ Sugli scritti contro la guerra di poeti e poetesse, scrittori e scritte si veda la raccolta di testi a cura di Mario Caramitti - Massimo Maurizio, ***/*****. *Voci russe contro la guerra*, Università degli studi di Torino, 2022, <https://www.collane.unito.it/oa/items/show/101#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0>.

duraturo e rispettato della Russia post-sovietica. L'assistenza ai singoli soldati e la pressione per l'abolizione della coscrizione, il controllo civile sull'esercito e la smilitarizzazione del sistema giudiziario hanno caratterizzato fin dall'inizio l'azione delle madri⁴. La capacità di praticare un cammino verso l'azione collettiva e la democrazia a partire da una comune esperienza, senza mai trascurare la sfera individuale, è stata la forza del movimento. Il Comitato crebbe rapidamente diffondendosi in tutta la Russia e aumentò la sua influenza nel corso della prima guerra cecena (1994-1996), soprattutto in seguito alla "Marcia della compassione" del marzo 1995 da Mosca a Grozny quando centinaia di madri russe cercarono l'appoggio delle madri cecene nell'azione contro la guerra e negoziarono con l'esercito ceceno la liberazione dei prigionieri. Negli anni Novanta la loro attività ottenne importanti riconoscimenti a livello internazionale⁵.

Con lo scoppio della guerra in Ucraina numerosi appelli disperati sono giunti al Comitato da parte di genitori che non avevano più saputo niente dei loro figli se non che erano stati costretti a firmare contratti con l'esercito e che gli erano stati sottratti i cellulari. Le risposte che hanno dato loro le madri sono quelle che compaiono nella dichiarazione del Comitato di San Pietroburgo il 24 febbraio in cui esse danno indicazioni, incoraggiano, si appellano alla capacità di agire delle singole persone, alla forza dei loro affetti e, soprattutto, esortano a non avere paura.

Cosa possiamo fare in questa situazione, noi comuni cittadini e cittadine che non siamo stati-e consultati-e, nessuno-a di noi, quando è stato deciso di dare inizio alle ostilità? Veramente molto. Noi ascoltiamo e leggiamo numerosi appelli, vediamo l'angoscia delle persone, specialmente dei genitori di uomini arruolati nell'esercito russo. Ma nello stesso tempo, vediamo anche una paura paralizzante, le perdite e le incomprensioni. Tutto questo impedisce l'azione, non ci permette di agire. Madri e padri dei ragazzi nell'esercito! Ci chiedete, "dove sono i nostri figli in questo momento?". [...] Noi vi incoraggiamo con forza ad essere vicini-e ai vostri figli! Mettetevi in contatto con altri genitori, create chat, interagite. Solo insieme, nel sentimento dello stesso angoscioso respiro di compagni di sventura – ma senza mai cessare di esprimere caldamente la speranza – potrete superare tutte le difficoltà. Guardare negli occhi altri figli e altre madri che sono stati-e chiamati-e "vostri-e nemici-che"⁶

Infine, le madri invitano ad esprimere le proprie convinzioni, incessantemente, e cercare ogni via possibile: inviare post sui social, firmare e distribuire petizioni contro la guerra, comunicare con gli amici o parenti in Ucraina.

⁴ Numerosi studi sono apparsi sul movimento. La sua storia è stata ricostruita da Valentina Melnikova, segretaria dell'Unione dei Comitati delle madri dei soldati russi, e da Anna Lebedev in *Les petits soldats. Le combat des mères russes*, Bayard, Paris 2001. Si veda inoltre Anna Colin Lebedev, *Le coeur politique des mères. Analyse du mouvement des mères des soldats en Russie*, EHESS, Paris 2013.

⁵ Ricordo il Sean MacBride Award (1995) e il Right Livelihood Award (1996). Si veda per quest'ultimo prestigioso premio: *For Their Courage in Upholding the Common Humanity for Russians and Chechens and Opposing Militarism and Violence in Chechnya*, <https://rightlivelihood.org/the-change-makers/find-a-laureate/the-committee-of-soldiers-mothers-of-russia-csmr/>. Tuttavia, negli anni Duemila il movimento perse gran parte del sostegno pubblico di cui aveva goduto.

⁶ La dichiarazione è stata pubblicata nel sito "For Nonviolent Revolution. Peace News", <https://peaceneeds.info/blog/2022/russians-protest>.

Ora è semplicemente necessario comunicare, sostenere moralmente e psicologicamente e offrire tutta la più ampia assistenza possibile. Nessuna azione delle autorità, nessuna politica può distruggere questi legami [...]. È agendo uniti-e che non consentirete a voi stessi-e di impantanarvi nell'illusione di essere soli-e con la vostra opinione. Credeteci, molte persone pensano la stessa cosa, ma per molte ragioni hanno paura di parlare⁷.

Da allora le madri hanno continuato a dare suggerimenti sulle istituzioni a cui rivolgersi per avere notizie, sono scese in strada per protestare⁸, hanno agevolato lo scambio dei prigionieri con l'aiuto della Croce Rossa Internazionale, hanno esortato coloro che non volevano tornare in guerra a non avere paura, a resistere e a far valere i propri diritti; hanno cercato di ottenere per le famiglie notizie sui figli prigionieri, morti o dispersi in Ucraina. Hanno inoltre cercato di evitare il rinvio al fronte dei soldati ammalati, specialmente dei soldati traumatizzati, mettendosi in contatto con i servizi sanitari del Ministero della difesa e pretendendo che venisse applicato il decreto che prevede di inviare in osservazione psichiatrica coloro che sono stati in zona di guerra per più di 30 giorni.

Le madri attingono all'esperienza acquisita durante le guerre cecene, ai rapporti con ufficiali e sezioni dell'esercito che hanno consolidato nel tempo, ma ora la situazione è assai peggiorata, come ha dichiarato in una recente intervista Valentina Melnikova: "Oggi non abbiamo neppure idea di quanti siano i corpi non ancora recuperati e sepolti [...]. Non c'è mai stata una cosa simile prima d'ora".

In russo o meglio in tartaro, c'è una parola che ben descrive la situazione: "bardak". Caos. Noi stiamo affrontando il caos, come mai lo abbiamo visto prima, nonostante la nostra vasta esperienza di una grande varietà di situazioni. A causa del mutamento della situazione militare così rapido, così brutale e su una scala così ampia, è la prima volta⁹.

Tutte le vie possibili per proteggere i soldati e i feriti, recuperare i morti e aiutare le famiglie ad avere notizie dei loro cari sono praticate, anche avvalendosi dell'operazione propagandistica del governo ucraino volta a fare pressione sulla popolazione russa, ovvero quello di mostrare i corpi dei soldati uccisi e i volti dei prigionieri. Può sembrare poca cosa nell'immensità delle sofferenze causate dalla guerra, eppure, facendo conoscere alla popolazione russa la drammaticità della condizione dei soldati esse contribuiscono a rafforzare il movimento contro la guerra, danno prova di umanità in una situazione disumana e infondono coraggio.

"Siamo il futuro che prevarrà"

Fondato da Ella Rossmann, storica residente a Londra, e da Dar'ja Serenko, l'artista rilasciata il 23 febbraio dopo una detenzione di 15 giorni per aver diffuso simboli associati alla protesta di Naval'nyj, il FAR (Feminist Resistance Against the War) è la prima organizzazione sorta in Russia contro la guerra in Ucraina. Il

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Un gruppo di madri di soldati a Karačaj, in Circassia, ha bloccato un ponte pretendendo di avere notizie dei figli inviati in Ucraina, OVD-info, 20 marzo. Su questa fonte si veda nota 13.

⁹ "Chaos Like We've never Seen before". An interview with Valentina Melnikova, Who Helps Soldiers and Their Relatives Navigate Russia's Military Bureaucracy, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/05/25/chaos-like-we-ve-never-seen-before>.

25 febbraio ha diramato un manifesto in cui rivolgeva un appello a tutte le femministe di Russia e a quelle di tutto il mondo a partecipare alle campagne contro la guerra. Ad oggi il manifesto è stato tradotto in 30 lingue e il FAR ha costantemente ampliato la sua influenza, ha organizzato proteste in oltre 100 città ed è seguito da 26.000 persone sui social. Nel manifesto si legge:

Come cittadine russe e femministe, condanniamo questa guerra. Il femminismo come forza politica non può essere dalla parte di una guerra di aggressione e di occupazione militare. [...] Guerra significa violenza, povertà, sfollamenti forzati, vite spezzate, insicurezza e mancanza di futuro. Tutto ciò è inconciliabile con i valori e gli obiettivi essenziali del movimento femminista. La guerra intensifica la disuguaglianza di genere e mette un freno per molti anni alle conquiste per i diritti umani. La guerra porta con sé non solo la violenza delle bombe e dei proiettili, ma anche la violenza sessuale [...]. Le femministe sono una delle poche forze politiche attive in Russia. Per molto tempo le autorità russe non ci hanno percepito come un movimento politico pericoloso, e quindi rispetto ad altri gruppi politici siamo state temporaneamente meno colpite dalla repressione statale. Attualmente più di quarantacinque diverse organizzazioni femministe operano in tutto il paese, da Kaliningrad a Vladivostok, da Rostov-on-Don a Ulan-Ude e Murmansk. [...] Siamo tante e insieme possiamo fare molto: negli ultimi dieci anni, il movimento femminista ha acquisito un'enorme forza mediatica e culturale. È tempo di trasformarla in potere politico. Siamo l'opposizione alla guerra, al patriarcato, all'autoritarismo e al militarismo. Siamo il futuro che prevarrà¹⁰.

Il manifesto terminava con queste parole: “Siamo tutte a rischio di persecuzione da parte dello stato e abbiamo bisogno del vostro appoggio”. In questi mesi di guerra le femministe sono state una forza trainante, le donne e le ragazze, una presenza costante e attiva nel corso delle manifestazioni di protesta di massa che si sono verificate dall'inizio del conflitto e sono state le più colpite dalla repressione.

Com'è noto, manifestazioni imponenti si sono susseguite dal 24 febbraio fino alla metà di marzo quando le persone che si trovavano in stato di detenzione erano oltre 15.300 in 151 città¹¹. Da allora le norme e le pratiche repressive, la censura, l'aggressività della propaganda si sono inasprite; gli abusi e le violenze da parte della polizia si sono moltiplicate¹².

¹⁰ Il testo completo si trova in numerosi siti, tra cui <https://jacobinitalia.it/contro-laggressione-militare-di-putin/>.

¹¹ Il 14 marzo 2022, contemporaneamente alla pubblicazione a cura di Amnesty International, *Russian Federation: End Censorship on Voices against the War* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/5345/2022/en/>), è apparso un lungo rapporto sulla repressione della protesta in Russia in lingua russa, inglese e francese, O | OVD-Info, *No to War. How Russian Authorities are Suppressing Anti-War Protests* (<https://reports.ovdinfo.org/no-to-war-en>). OVD-info è “un progetto mediatico indipendente per i diritti umani” nato nel 2011 con lo scopo di monitorare i casi di “persecuzione” dell'esercizio del diritto alla libertà di riunione e di altri diritti politici in Russia e di offrire assistenza legale. Pur essendo stato considerato “agente straniero”, fino ad ora il progetto OVD-info è riuscito a raccogliere le testimonianze di opposizione alla guerra e a diffonderle. A questo rapporto, oggi aggiornato al 14 aprile, rimando per una ricostruzione dettagliata della repressione.

¹² Com'è noto, in base alla nuova legge approvata il 3 marzo che prevede pene fino a 15 anni di reclusione per la diffusione di “false notizie”, giornali, siti, radio, televisioni, social network sono stati costretti a chiudere o hanno limitato la loro attività a causa dei rischi legali. Nel contempo, un nuovo articolo del Codice per i reati amministrativi (20.3.3) che punisce il discredito dell'esercito della Federazione russa, è utilizzato per reprimere ogni forma di dissenso.

Eppure, dal 24 febbraio la protesta non è mai cessata; piccoli gruppi o singoli cittadini-e che con striscioni e cartelli hanno richiamato l'attenzione dei passanti sulla realtà della guerra sono stati-e costantemente presenti nelle piazze e nelle vie dei centri cittadini. Come rivelano le notizie pubblicate quotidianamente da OVD-info¹³, la protesta femminista in Russia è la più radicale, la più organizzata e la più creativa¹⁴. Per aggirare i divieti e sottrarsi alla repressione, ogni giorno le attiviste inventano nuovi modi di protesta: deporre fiori in luoghi simbolici, creare oggetti d'arte e installarli nei parchi, scrivere slogan su banconote e monete, indossare abiti azzurri e gialli, collocare piccoli pupazzi di creta, pane, lana e altri materiali in vari luoghi delle città, sostituire i cartellini dei prezzi nei supermercati con slogan contro la guerra ([fotografia](#))¹⁵.

Sostituendo qualcosa di molto comune con qualcosa di estraneo e insolito, ha dichiarato Julija Kaburkina di Čeboksary, città della Russia centrale, noi dimostriamo che non c'è un solo luogo del nostro paese che non sia toccato dalla guerra e non lasciamo che le persone chiudano semplicemente gli occhi su ciò che sta accadendo¹⁶.

“La situazione cambia ogni giorno, ha affermato in una recente intervista Dar’ja Serenko, ciò che era accettabile ieri non funziona oggi. Una settimana fa si poteva vestirsi di nero e tenere una rosa bianca in mano. Ora per questo c'è la detenzione”¹⁷.

Il FAR è una comunità autorganizzata e decentralizzata che coordina la resistenza contro la guerra e comunica con le aderenti e le sostenitrici attraverso Telegram. Le attiviste di FAR, infatti, sfruttano le comunicazioni digitali per mobilitare, criticare la guerra e catturare momenti di violenza statale; danno

¹³ Per un quadro dettagliato delle manifestazioni di protesta il rapporto rimanda alle segnalazioni quotidiane che appaiono nel sito di OVD-info sia in russo, *Акции в поддержку народа Украины и против войны*, <https://ovd.news/news/2022/02/24/akcii-v-podderzhku-naroda-ukrainy-i-protiv-voyny> che in inglese, *Russian Protest against the War with Ukraine. A Chronicle of Events*: <https://ovd.news/news/2022/03/02/russian-protests-against-war-ukraine-chronicle-events>. Questa sezione del sito raggruppa i casi sulla base delle conseguenze penali o amministrative e rende conto delle varie forme di pressione e delle modifiche della legislazione. Nelle pagine che seguono farò riferimento alle cronache in lingua russa perché più dettagliate, aggiornate e perché contengono numerose immagini. Le notizie sono inserite giorno per giorno, ora per ora, pertanto, nel testo o nelle note ho indicato semplicemente il giorno e il luogo in cui è avvenuta la protesta. I resoconti che ho consultato (relativi al periodo 24 febbraio-8 luglio 2022), necessariamente scarni, riportano le notizie essenziali: le ragioni, le circostanze e le modalità dell'arresto, e talvolta forniscono notizie sugli esiti delle detenzioni e sull'assistenza legale. Spesso manca l'età dei-delle dimostranti e non sempre vengono riportate nella loro interezza gli slogan su cartelli e striscioni, ma in questi casi sono le immagini a parlare di contenuti e stati d'animo. Ringrazio Emilia Magnanini e Serena Tiepolato per il loro prezioso aiuto nella traduzione.

¹⁴ *The Feminist Face of Russian Protests*, “The Moscow Times”, 29 marzo 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/29/the-feminist-face-of-russian-protests-a77106>.

¹⁵ Le immagini dei “piccoli dimostranti” sono state diffuse da “The Moscow Times” il 28 marzo nell'articolo *In Russia Little Picketers Protest the War* <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/28/in-russia-little-picketers-protest-the-war-a77071>.

¹⁶ Amnesty International, *Russia: Feminist Activist Could Be Jailed for Ten Years for Putting Anti-war Slogans on Supermarket Labels*, 13 aprile, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/russia-feminist-activist-could-be-jailed-ten-years-putting-anti-war-slogans>.

¹⁷ *The Feminist Face of Russian Protest*, “The Moscow Times”, 29 marzo 2022.

istruzioni dettagliate per la sicurezza della comunicazione e per evitare di incappare nella polizia per le strade, tengono i contatti con le arrestate, procurano avvocati e forniscono sostegno psicologico a chi ha subito violenze o ha perso il lavoro a causa del proprio attivismo. Anche alcuni uomini e membri della comunità LGBT sostengono la loro protesta.

Come spiegare la capacità di mobilitazione di FAR? “Secondo me – ha dichiarato Dar’ja Serenko – che ho monitorato il movimento femminista russo per tre anni, come aderente e come ricercatrice – ora ci sono più di 45 gruppi femministi di base in Russia. Essi collaborano l’uno con l’altro. Ecco perché le femministe riescono a mobilitarsi rapidamente” e ad affrontare i rischi con coraggio. Ha dichiarato un’altra giovane: “Personalmente non ho paura [...]. Le proteste stanno diventando sempre più creative”¹⁸. “La coscienza è più forte della paura” ha scritto un’attivista sul cartello che teneva tra le mani a Timaševsk, città della Russia meridionale¹⁹.

La polizia ci ha sottovalutate per anni, – ha affermato un’attivista che ha voluto restare anonima – se mettono in prigione qualcuna di noi, un’altra prende il suo posto. Le donne si sono rivelate straordinariamente forti. Ho sempre saputo che le mie amiche erano coraggiose. Ma mi sono resa conto in questa situazione che possono anche rimanere salde e agire senza cedere all’indecisione o abbandonarsi all’autocommiserazione²⁰.

Un esempio di protesta coraggiosa è quella riportata il 21 aprile da “The Moscow Times” dell’artista femminista Dar’ja Apachončič, una delle cinque persone che per prime sono state dichiarate “agenti straniere”, e per questo tenuta a presentare un rapporto trimestrale sulla sua condotta, che ha sfidato l’apparato di controllo illustrando con 18 disegni tracciati sui moduli del Ministero della giustizia i crimini commessi in Ucraina ([immagini](#))²¹. Sulla creatività della protesta si è recentemente soffermata Maria Silina, storica dell’arte e docente presso l’Università del Québec a Montréal che ha analizzato i caratteri dell’attivismo femminista in Russia basandosi prevalentemente su interviste²².

Nell’attivismo del FAR, come normalmente accade nelle campagne di resistenza civile, l’arte ha un ruolo cruciale²³. In Russia, in particolare, negli ultimi anni l’arte è apparsa l’unico modo per esprimere l’opposizione in una società con

¹⁸ *Ivi*.

¹⁹ OVD-info, 7 aprile.

²⁰ *The Feminist Face*, cit.

²¹ L’artista di San Pietroburgo fa parte del gruppo “Rodina” che organizza performance sul tema dell’autocrazia, dell’ecologia e della violenza domestica; essa ha promosso una attività di insegnamento della lingua russa alle profughe, per lo più madri e casalinghe povere. *Russian Feminist Artist Labelled as ‘Foreign Agent’: How We Got Here*, <https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/12451/darya-apakhonchich-russian-feminist-artist-labelled-foreign-agent-explainer>.

²² *Russia’s Feminists Are Protesting the War and Its Propaganda with Stickers, Posters, Performance and Graffiti*, “The Conversation”, 7 aprile 2022, <https://theconversation.com/russias-feminists-are-protesting-the-war-and-its-propaganda-with-stickers-posters-performance-and-graffiti-179989>.

²³ Erica Chenoweth, *Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2021, pp. 40-47.

una lunga storia di repressione politica e culturale e ha contribuito a dare avvio alla protesta nel 2011-2012, e soprattutto a partire dal 2014 con il conflitto in Ucraina²⁴.

In seguito alle leggi repressive e alla censura, molte attiviste si sono rivolte a forme di attivismo sotterranee. Come ha dichiarato qualche anno fa l'artista femminista Victoria Lomasko: “dobbiamo trovare strade simili a quelle percorse dagli artisti russi dopo la repressione della rivoluzione del 1905-1906, ovvero creare opere che abbiano un contenuto critico comprensibile a tutti, ma che non possano essere perseguite”²⁵.

Le femministe del FAR hanno filmato e diffuso le azioni brutali della polizia, hanno usato la tecnica del *détournement*, ovvero l'arte di modificare testi, immagini o suoni al fine di ridicolizzare i messaggi della propaganda e rovesciarne il senso e hanno manifestato apertamente la propria disperazione. Esprimere il proprio dolore in pubblico, come piangere sugli autobus, suscita empatia “da parte dei membri della società russa frustrata e paralizzata” ed è una forma di protesta che, come quelle messe in atto dalle Donne in nero – che appaiono in pubblico vestite a lutto – non si basa sull'attenzione dei media, ma sul contatto diretto e personale.

Come confermano anche le notizie raccolte da OVD-info, le manifestazioni individuali di protesta, i picchetti silenziosi condotti per lo più da donne, studenti e da membri della comunità LGBTQ+ nei luoghi nevralgici delle città, con il loro carattere ripetitivo, sono riusciti ad attrarre l'attenzione della popolazione e a ottenere il sostegno collettivo. Sono molti, infatti, coloro che offrono il loro aiuto nel design, nella stampa e nella distribuzione di volantini contro la guerra²⁶.

L'attuale protesta femminista in Russia attinge da decenni di azioni di resistenza e dissenso e anche dall'attività di una delle sue fondatrici, Dar'ja Serenko, l'artista che nel marzo 2016 ha avviato il progetto “picchetto silenzioso”²⁷ che consiste nell'uscire con un poster e coinvolgere le persone per le vie, le piazze o sui mezzi di trasporto. Niente è fisso o predeterminato, ha spiegato l'artista nel 2016, sul poster ne possono essere incollati altri o possono essere aggiunte frasi, a seconda dell'interesse che suscita. “Io porto con me un poster ovunque vado, sui trasporti pubblici, per le strade, al lavoro [...] parlo costantemente con le persone, quindici, venti volte al giorno” ([fotografia](#)). Normalmente il picchetto è individuale per evitare di essere arrestati e per manifestazione non autorizzata. Possiamo riconoscere modalità simili nei picchetti silenziosi dei mesi di guerra che in qualche caso sono riusciti nell'intento di dialogare con i passanti. “Sono uscita con un poster “pace”, ha dichiarato una giovane, ho svolto una sorta di campagna con le parole: “Io sono contro la guerra in Ucraina, e tu?”. Molte persone mi hanno

²⁴ Lena Jonson, *Art and Protest in Putin's Russia*, Routledge 2015.

²⁵ Si veda la testimonianza dell'artista in Lena Jonson-Andrei Erofeev (eds.), *Russia – Art Resistance and the Conservative-Authoritarian Zeitgeist*, Routledge, London-New York 2018, p. 179.

²⁶ Maria Silina, *Russia's Feminists Are Protesting*, cit.

²⁷ Intervista di Lena Jonson e Marina Simakova, *Daria Serenko's Quiet Picket*, 7 maggio 2016, <https://therussianreader.com/2016/05/27/darja-serenkos-quiet-picket/>

risposto che anche loro erano contrarie. Con una di loro “abbiamo fatto una bella chiacchierata”. Poi sono arrivati gli agenti di polizia²⁸.

Grazie ad una vasta rete organizzativa, le femministe hanno saputo coordinare le azioni dirette di protesta e di sabotaggio a livello di vicinato ed estenderla a molte città della Russia. Il 3 aprile il FAR ha lanciato l'azione “Mariupol 5000”. Per ricordare i morti della città, dal 4 al 12 aprile sono state installate 500 croci in altrettanti cortili condominiali di 41 città con la scritta: “No alla guerra, sì alla pace. 5000 pacifici cittadini sono morti a Marjupol a causa dei bombardamenti russi. Sono sepolti nei cortili delle case. La guerra prosegue” ([fotografia](#))²⁹.

Nei giorni successivi la deposizione di croci è continuata. Lo testimonia una croce rinvenuta a Mosca accanto al monumento di Ivan Danilovič Černjachovskij, generale ucraino “due volte eroe dell'Unione Sovietica” morto a 38 anni ([fotografia](#)).

“La polizia faceva battute sullo stupro”

Non sorprende quindi che questo attivismo sia considerato estremamente pericoloso dalle autorità russe e che sia colpito duramente, con assoluta discrezionalità e facendo ricorso a intimidazioni e minacce di ogni genere. Ne offre un esempio un messaggio diffuso sui social da Anna Loginova. Benché avesse semplicemente partecipato ad una protesta silenziosa delle Donne in Nero a Ekaterinburg, è stata condannata a nove giorni di prigione come organizzatrice perché si era rifiutata di fare i nomi delle altre partecipanti e di coloro che l'avevano informata dell'azione. Sappiamo delle minacce, delle irruzioni a casa di genitori, amici e parenti da parte della polizia da un messaggio diffuso in Telegram³⁰.

Nelle stanze chiuse delle stazioni di polizia lo spettro della violenza sessuale è stato sempre incombente. “Gli agenti facevano battute sullo stupro”. È quanto è accaduto a tre giovani attiviste, Anastasia, Elena e Natalia, arrestate il 24 maggio sulla Piazza Rossa benché in quel momento non stessero compiendo alcuna azione di protesta. Natalia è stata portata in una stanza separata e da lì le compagne hanno sentito delle grida. Durante la detenzione è stata minacciata di stupro; inoltre, gli agenti hanno cercato di farle registrare un video a sostegno della guerra e di portarle via il bambino³¹.

Le vere e proprie torture subite nelle stazioni di polizia da alcune manifestanti di 18-20 anni sono state svelate da “Mediazona” in virtù del fatto che per qualche ragione i cellulari non erano stati sottratti alle detenute che hanno potuto registrare gli avvenimenti: minacce, insulti, percosse, violenze psicologiche e umiliazioni sessuali. “Ci chiamavano puttane – ha dichiarato una di loro – creature che meritano di essere picchiate: ‘Ora sarete tutte private della verginità’. Quando ho

²⁸ OVD-info, Mosca, 20 aprile.

²⁹ Ivi, 3 aprile.

³⁰ <https://t.me/femagainstwar/768>.

³¹ OVD-info, *A Chronicle of Events*: <https://ovd.news/news/2022/03/02/russian-protests-against-war-ukraine-chronicle-events>, rapporto 17-23 giugno.

lasciato la stanza con un poliziotto, ha dichiarato una giovane, un altro vestito di nero mi ha preso a calci e ha gridato: ‘picchiala ancora’³².

La repressione ha colpito con grande severità le artiste. Un caso che ha fatto sensazione, oltre a quello di Dar’ja Apachončič è quello di Šaša Skočilenko, artista e musicista detenuta dall’11 aprile e interrogata fino alle tre del mattino del giorno seguente. Condannata alla carcerazione preventiva, rischia fino a dieci anni di prigione. L’artista aveva filmato le proteste per il giornale “The Paper”, composto musica e parlato in pubblico contro la guerra e, in adesione all’iniziativa lanciata dal movimento femminista, si era recata in un supermercato di San Pietroburgo dove aveva sostituito i cartellini dei prezzi con messaggi contro la guerra. In uno di questi si poteva leggere: “L’esercito russo ha bombardato una scuola d’arte a Marjupol dove si erano nascoste 400 persone”, e su un altro: “L’inflazione settimanale ha raggiunto un picco mai visto dal 1998. A causa delle nostre azioni militari in Ucraina. Stop alla guerra”³³. Anni fa aveva insegnato ai bambini ad un campo estivo in Ucraina e quando è scoppiata la guerra, ha affermato la sua compagna, aveva sempre davanti agli occhi le bombe che cadevano sulle loro teste. Dopo aver subito ogni sorta di abusi in carcere, e di insulti per il suo orientamento sessuale, sofferente a causa della celiachia perché le era stata negata una dieta senza glutine, l’8 luglio è stata inviata in ospedale psichiatrico. “Stroncicare questo movimento contro la guerra guidato dalle femministe – ha dichiarato Marie Struthers di Amnesty International – è un altro tentativo disperato di ridurre al silenzio le critiche all’invasione russa dell’Ucraina”³⁴.

La repressione ha colpito anche l’anziana artista Elena Osipova che, da quando è iniziata la guerra, ha subito almeno tre arresti.

“La Russia vuole essere un uccello di pace, onesto e buono”

Sono le parole che Elena Osipova, l’artista di 76 anni diventata un simbolo del movimento contro la guerra, ha impresso in uno dei suoi poster ([fotografia](#)). L’immagine dell’anziana manifestante, arrestata dalla polizia ai primi di marzo, si è diffusa rapidamente attraverso i social e la rete, suscitando sentimenti di ammirazione e sdegno³⁵. Due lunghe interviste ai periodici “Meduza” e “Novaja Gazeta” consentono di tracciare un ritratto dell’artista che ha dedicato la sua opera all’affermazione dei diritti umani.

Nata l’11 novembre 1945 da genitori sopravvissuti all’assedio di Leningrado, Osipova si è diplomata alla scuola d’arte e per trent’anni ha insegnato disegno ai

³² *Moscow Police Beat and Torture Women after Anti-War Protests* pubblicato da Open Democracy <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/russia-moscow-police-beat-torture-women-ukraine-war-protests/>.

³³ Robyn Dixon, *A Russian Musician Mounts a Modest Anti-war Protest and Pays the Price*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/06/26/russia-protests-dissent-activists-skochilenko/>

³⁴ Amnesty International, *Feminist Activist*, cit.

³⁵ Recentemente il comune di Milano l’ha nominata cittadina onoraria.

bambini. Dopo la morte del suo unico figlio all'età di 28 anni, si è dimessa: "I bambini hanno bisogno di volti sorridenti e io da allora non posso più sorridere"³⁶.

Pur non avendo mai fatto parte di alcun gruppo artistico, fin dalla guerra in Cecenia e per vent'anni, ha protestato contro la politica del governo. È restata per ore al gelo e alla pioggia nelle piazze e per le vie di San Pietroburgo con i suoi poster per esprimere empatia verso le vittime delle ingiustizie, della repressione e delle guerre, per lo più da sola, nell'indifferenza generale. "Se le persone avessero iniziato a protestare dall'inizio, ha commentato, le cose sarebbero andate diversamente"³⁷. Nel 2002, al tempo della tragedia degli ostaggi al teatro di Mosca³⁸, si recò, sempre da sola, di fronte alla sede dell'Assemblea legislativa di San Pietroburgo con un poster in cui era scritto: "Siamo tutti ostaggi della politica violenta, provocatrice e imperialista"³⁹.

"Già nel 2014 mi era chiaro dove sarebbe andata a finire la politica di Putin nei confronti dell'Ucraina. La maggioranza dei miei poster contro la guerra risalgono a quel periodo"⁴⁰. *Non credere alla giustizia della guerra* è uno dei suoi preferiti ([fotografia](#)). Arrestata numerose volte, poco dopo l'annuncio dell'inizio dell'"operazione speciale", con uno dei suoi vecchi poster si è recata nel centro della città.

Il 24 febbraio, disperata, sono uscita a protestare, ma ho incontrato persone che mi hanno incoraggiata e ispirata. Tante persone erano per le strade quel giorno. Mi sono fermata presso il monumento di Caterina II e [vidi] molti che fuggivano di corsa dalla polizia lungo la prospettiva Nevskij gridando "No alla guerra!". Alcuni mi si avvicinarono piangendo e domandando: "Cosa possiamo fare? Come possiamo aiutare l'Ucraina?"⁴¹.

Non potendo seguire i manifestanti, l'anziana artista è rimasta presso il monumento con il suo poster che rappresentava una mummia, due corvi con il becco insanguinato e un adattamento di alcuni versi di Marina Cvetaeva:

Oh mania!
Oh mummia di guerra!
Brucerai, Russia!
È follia, follia quella che compi!
([fotografia](#)).

³⁶ Dalla intervista rilasciata il 19 aprile a Evgenia Sozankova per "Meduza" con il titolo: "*Indifference is Our Main Problem*". *Artist and Activist Yelena Osipova on Russia's War against Ukraine and 20 Years of Protesting Putin's Regime*, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/04/19/indifference-is-our-main-problem>.

³⁷ *Ivi*.

³⁸ Nell'ottobre di quell'anno al teatro Dubrovka di Mosca 40 militanti armati ceceni tennero in ostaggio 850 persone. Dopo due giorni di assedio, le forze speciali russe inserirono una sostanza tossica nel sistema di ventilazione del teatro che ha ucciso 129 ostaggi e 39 militanti ceceni.

³⁹ Tatyana Voltskaya, *Yelena Osipova: "Russia Is a Bird, not a Bear"*, <https://therussianreader.com/2015/11/23/yelena-osipova-petersburg-artist-interview-protest-posters/>.

⁴⁰ "*Indifference is Our Main Problem*", cit.

⁴¹ *Ivi*.

Elena Osipova è stata subito arrestata. Da allora scende in strada tutte le volte che la salute glielo permette. La schiena e le gambe le dolgono; non riesce a stare in piedi se non appoggia i suoi grandi poster a qualche sostegno e quando viene arrestata, deve essere letteralmente trascinata nelle camionette della polizia, non perché faccia resistenza, ma perché non potrebbe salirvi da sola. “Il 27 febbraio sono scesa in strada con un poster che ritraeva un soldato bendato mentre la madre, togliendogli dalle mani il fucile, gli diceva: “figlio mio, non combattere in questa guerra”. E io ho aggiunto la didascalia: “Soldato, getta le armi, non sparare – questo è ciò che fa di te un eroe” ([fotografia](#)). In quell’occasione fu nuovamente arrestata. Il terzo arresto è avvenuto il 2 marzo quando, allarmata per la minaccia di usare le armi nucleari, si unì alla manifestazione contro la guerra tenendo tra le mani due poster per il disarmo ([fotografia](#)). “Arresti, prigionie, processi, multe, sono passata attraverso tutto questo”. Nei suoi poster il dolore delle madri è ricorrente, come in quello esposto il primo maggio e accompagnato dalla scritta:

“1° maggio: Solidarietà internazionale
No alla guerra, no alla guerra
XXI secolo!
La morte dell’umanità è la conseguenza della guerra” ([fotografia](#)).

Una settimana dopo, il 9 maggio, giornata della vittoria, l’anziana artista è stata fermata sulla soglia di casa da due uomini che le hanno strappato dalle mani i suoi cartelli e le hanno impedito di raggiungere il centro cittadino. Infatti, ha affermato, “ci sono anche persone che mi rimproverano, mi aggrediscono” e chiamano la polizia.

Una settimana fa, presso la stazione della metropolitana Černyševskaja dieci *titushky*⁴², mi hanno aggredito [...]. Non mi hanno lasciato srotolare i miei poster e li hanno strappati [...]. È difficile per me dire se sono più numerose le persone che mi aggrediscono e mi condannano o coloro che mi sostengono. Ma sicuramente la maggior parte è indifferente, sono quelle persone che ti passano davanti senza fermarsi e senza guardare. Non vogliono pensare al futuro e ai loro figli. Il problema principale è che tutta questa situazione sarà lasciata ai nostri figli. Dovranno rimediare a tutto ciò quando ce ne saremo andati⁴³.

Ma questo Osipova non riesce a sopportarlo e continua a protestare in nome dei giovani e perché molte persone, come lei stessa, hanno bisogno di non sentirsi sole. Da quando la guerra è iniziata, i poster sono le uniche opere a cui si dedica ed ha abbandonato quelle pittoriche, un centinaio, che coprono le pareti della sua casa, dal pavimento al soffitto. Opere che non ha mai voluto vendere: “Non vendo la mia arte politica, se lo facessi perderei la mia credibilità”. Eppure, l’artista, che vive in un vetusto palazzo ottocentesco, ha una pensione di soli 6.000 rubli (104 euro), oltre a un assegno di povertà, e accetta in dono solo colori e cartone per i suoi poster.

⁴² Mercenari che hanno appoggiato la polizia in Ucraina durante la presidenza di Viktor Janukovyč.

⁴³ Dalla intervista rilasciata il 28 marzo a Nina Petljanova per la “Novaja Gazeta” e tradotta da “The Russian Reader”, “President, Change Course!”: *Yelena Osipova, the 77-Year-Old on the Frontlines of Petersburg’s Anti-War Protests*, <https://therussianreader.com/2022/03/28/yelena-osipova-2/>.

La salute è precaria; “posso morire in qualsiasi momento”, ma “la forza [mi] viene da qualche parte e vado sulla scena pubblica per dire qualcosa di importante finché ne ho ancora il tempo”.

Anche ora, questa situazione, che è follemente tragica, può essere volta al bene, così che coloro che sono morti da entrambe le parti non siano morti invano. Un trattato per la proibizione delle armi nucleari dovrebbe essere adottato subito⁴⁴.

“Io cerco di credere e di dare speranza alle persone. Come si potrebbe continuare a vivere altrimenti?”⁴⁵.

Luoghi e protagonisti dei picchetti silenziosi

Come Elena Osipova, numerosissime persone di varie provenienze sociali e di ogni età hanno protestato individualmente nei luoghi nevralgici delle città. Le piazze, e soprattutto la Piazza Rossa, il Memorial, i monumenti, le sedi di emittenti televisive e di istituzioni scientifiche, le chiese, i parchi, le vie dove compaiono manifesti di propaganda per la guerra, le stazioni delle metropolitane, le sedi dei ministeri, i cimiteri, i centri commerciali e i supermercati, gli asili e le aule scolastiche, le finestre delle abitazioni, i cortili, ogni luogo delle città è stato teatro di forme di protesta individuali, normalmente punite per aver portato discredito alle forze armate russe⁴⁶.

La presenza di donne e ragazze è stata costante. Nei picchetti silenziosi hanno portato con sé striscioni e cartelli con semplici scritte o con disegni: colombe, girasoli, arcobaleni, simboli di pace; hanno tracciato iscrizioni sui muri, appeso nastri verdi (simbolo della protesta contro la guerra), indossato abiti di colore azzurro e giallo o borse e zaini con la scritta, dipinta o cucita, “нет войне!”, “No alla guerra!”, gesti semplici, ma sempre rischiosi. Pronunciare la parola “guerra”, scrivere “No alla guerra” sulla neve, appuntarsi al cappotto una pezza di stoffa con il disegno di un uccello⁴⁷, e persino manifestare “un sostegno silenzioso” alla protesta hanno condotto all’arresto⁴⁸.

Un altro modo di manifestare la protesta è stata la deposizione di fiori, spesso garofani rossi legati con un nastrino azzurro e giallo. Il primo marzo a Mosca una donna e cinque bambini dai 5 agli 11 anni sono stati trattenuti nella stazione di

⁴⁴ *Ivi*.

⁴⁵ “*Indifference is Our Main Problem*”, cit.

⁴⁶ Dall’inizio della guerra al 22 aprile, si sono verificate 1.258 incriminazioni in base all’articolo 20.3.3 del Codice per i reati amministrativi. O | OVD-info, “*I Tell Him: ‘It’s a Bird. And He Quotes Sergei Bodrov Jr. to Me’*”. *How People Are Detained for Anti-war Statements and What This Means for Russian Law*, 22.4.2022, p. 3, consultabile in rete all’indirizzo: https://ovdinfo.org/sites/default/files/files/offline_diskreditaciya.docx_compressed.pdf. La pubblicazione riporta anche l’analisi di 397 casi da parte dell’antropologa Aleksandra Archipova da cui risulta che la maggioranza delle infrazioni riguarda messaggi contro la guerra diffusi in internet (107) e su poster a manifestazioni o picchetti (145), *ivi*, p. 4.

⁴⁷ È il caso di Anna Gorovets, *ivi*, p. 2; 11.

⁴⁸ *Ivi*, p. 9.

polizia e trattati in modo rude per ore per aver depresso dei fiori davanti all'ambasciata ucraina.

Mazzi di fiori sono stati deposti accanto al monumento del milite ignoto, sulla tomba del poeta ucraino Lesia Ukrainka e vicino alla stazione della metropolitana Kievskaja⁴⁹. Parlare o cantare in ucraino è stata considerata una provocazione conclusasi con l'arresto, come è accaduto il 2 aprile a San Pietroburgo a una donna che in una stazione della metropolitana aveva intonato canzoni tratte dalle opere del poeta ucraino Taras Ševčenko (1814-1861). Ugualmente, ha riportato il "Washington Post", una donna è stata arrestata per aver cantato una canzone sull'occupazione nazista dell'Ucraina: "Davanti a noi tutto è in fiore, dietro di noi tutto è in fiamme"⁵⁰.

Né mancano casi di proteste che esprimono rabbia e volontà di sfida. L'8 luglio a Tomsk una quindicenne, Kira Varesova, ha dato fuoco alla bandiera russa ad una fermata dell'autobus. In seguito all'appello del 4 aprile per la destituzione di Putin⁵¹, che ha avuto ampia circolazione e ha ottenuto molte adesioni, parole di accusa nei confronti del presidente ricorrono con grande frequenza: "Putin dimissioni"; "No a Putin"; "Stop Putin"; "Putin, chi risponderà delle atrocità a Buča?"; "Putin, non perdoneremo". A Taldom una giovane studentessa è stata portata al posto di polizia per aver diffuso volantini con il volto di Putin spruzzato di vernice rossa (19 aprile), mentre un'insegnante d'arte del nord del paese è stata accusata di atti terroristici per un cartello che ritraeva Putin circondato dalle fiamme con la didascalia "brucia all'inferno", uno slogan che è apparso sui cartelli dei-delle manifestanti fin dal 24 febbraio ([fotografia](#)).

La Z, simbolo dell'operazione militare in Ucraina, è stata strappata o cancellata da autobus o luoghi pubblici. A Jasnogorsk, nella regione di Tula, una madre ha strappato la lettera Z dalle finestre di un asilo nido e per questo, il tribunale l'ha multata di 48 mila rubli (oltre 600 euro). L'insofferenza verso il simbolo è ben illustrata dall'iniziativa degli studenti e delle studentesse dell'Università di Ekaterinburg che hanno lanciato una sottoscrizione per la sua rimozione dalla facciata dell'Università. Dal 19 al 28 aprile hanno raccolte 570 firme⁵². Alcune dimostranti hanno voluto argomentare la loro protesta, come la giovane donna che a Mosca il 2 aprile, è stata arrestata vicino ad una stazione della metropolitana per aver scritto su un poster un lungo testo contro la guerra: "Durante i 33 giorni dell'operazione speciale per salvare il Donbass, sono già morti più civili del Donbass che nei 1150 giorni prima dell'annuncio di questa operazione. Vuoi continuare?!".

Sempre più numerosi i casi in cui i poster tenuti tra le mani non erano che un foglio bianco con otto asterischi *** ***, quante sono le lettere di нет войне. Già il 16 marzo, a Nižnij Novgorod, la polizia ha arrestato una donna che teneva in

⁴⁹ OVD-info, Mosca, 6 marzo.

⁵⁰ Robyn Dixon-Mary Llyushina-Natalia Abbakumova, *Art of Dissent: How Russians Protest the War in Ukraine* "Washington Post", 7 luglio 2022.

⁵¹ Si veda il testo dell'appello in traduzione italiana: *Hitler non è la Germania, Putin non è la Russia!* All'indirizzo: <https://comune-info.net/appello-per-la-destituzione-di-putin/>.

⁵² OVD-info, *Russian Protest against the War with Ukraine*, cit., rapporto 23-28 aprile.

mano un foglio bianco nella piazza centrale della città. Un video, visualizzato oltre un milione di volte su Twitter, mostra un folto gruppo di persone che chiedono alla polizia di giustificare la detenzione⁵³. Esporsi all'arresto in luoghi molto frequentati è un modo per denunciare la violazione delle libertà fondamentali e l'insensatezza della repressione. L'arresto, normalmente interviene dopo pochi minuti dell'azione di protesta, ma video e, soprattutto fotografie, si diffondono rapidamente sui social. Sono scatti inviati a OVID-info per lo più dalle stesse manifestanti o da amici, amiche e famigliari. Volti, posture e sguardi comunicano il senso di sfida, la determinazione ad uscire dal silenzio, il bisogno di mostrare l'oltraggio provato per le azioni delle truppe russe in Ucraina e, soprattutto, la volontà di testimoniare che queste non sono compiute "in loro nome". Un esempio del valore di testimonianza che viene attribuita all'immagine è quello di una maestra di matematica ed esponente del partito di opposizione Jabloko (Partito unificato democratico russo) che il 25 febbraio ha diffuso sui social una sua fotografia che la ritrae accanto ad una lavagna di un'aula scolastica dove si scorgono piccole calamite di colore giallo e azzurro ([fotografia](#)). Ammonita su "ciò che le sarebbe potuto succedere" se non avesse cancellato la fotografia, sembra che al 18 aprile non l'avesse ancora fatto.

In un mondo in cui non si possono mai prevedere i motivi di un'accusa, i messaggi stanno diventando non solo indiretti, ma espressi in un linguaggio in codice. Per aggirare i controlli sempre più stringenti sui social, ad esempio, quando si vuole annunciare un'azione in cui si prevede di essere arrestati si usa la frase "vado a fare una passeggiata con il passaporto". Anche gli autori e le autrici dei graffiti evitano talvolta messaggi espliciti. Il significato di queste opere non è stato ancora "decodificato" dalle autorità, non è stato discusso nelle aule dei tribunali e pertanto non appaiono nelle segnalazioni quotidiane di OVD. "Sono messaggi meno universali, occorre avere una certa cultura per comprenderli", ha affermato in una intervista del 15 aprile Aleksandra Archipova, l'antropologa del Wilson Center che sta conducendo una ricerca sulla protesta in Russia. Ne sono un esempio i graffiti che rappresentano le ballerine del *Lago dei cigni* di Čajkovskij. Quando Leonid Bréžnev morì, spiega Archipova, la televisione di stato non ne diede subito l'annuncio in attesa di trovare un accordo sul successore e trasmise continuamente *Il lago dei cigni*. Le ballerine, dunque, comunicano l'auspicio che la situazione politica possa mutare radicalmente in seguito alla morte di Putin⁵⁴.

"Non possiamo lavarci il sangue"

Una forma di protesta quasi esclusivamente femminile è quella della performance. Il tema ricorrente è il sangue versato. "Io sono contro la guerra, l'Ucraina è inondata di sangue"⁵⁵. "La Russia ha le mani insanguinate fino al

⁵³ <https://twitter.com/IlyaYashin/status/1502687513655361537>

⁵⁴ Si veda la trascrizione dell'intervista dal titolo *The Scarf and the Snuffbox* all'indirizzo <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1092873168?t|1656248269275>; il tema è poi stato sviluppato dall'autrice in OVID-info, "I Tell Him", cit., pp. 4-7.

⁵⁵ OVD-info, Krasnodar, 16 maggio.

gomito. #No guerra”⁵⁶. Un caso che ha avuto risonanza sulla stampa è quello di Evgenia Isaeva della Kolomna Good Neighbor Community che a San Pietroburgo, sulla prospettiva Nevskij, si è cosparsa di vernice rossa, ripetendo la frase: “Il cuore sanguina”. Accanto a lei era appoggiato un poster con le parole: “Sento che è inutile invocare la ragione; quindi, mi appello ai vostri cuori” ([fotografia](#)). Davanti al Ministero degli affari esteri della federazione russa a Mosca Ljudmila Annenkova, una fotografa che già aveva scontato una pena di una settimana, è stata nuovamente arrestata il 7 giugno con Anna Perova per aver manifestato contro la guerra in abito bianco cosparsa di vernice rossa: “Non possiamo lavarci il sangue”. Erano le 4 di mattina; qualche scatto con il cellulare, trenta secondi di performance e poi l’arresto. Ma le immagini sono circolate rapidamente sui social ([fotografia](#)).

Anche in questi casi le modalità della protesta attingono a quelle degli anni precedenti contro la politica governativa in Ucraina. In quell’anno la giovane artista, nota con il nome di Kado Cornet, a San Pietroburgo, sempre sulla Prospettiva Nevskij, vestita con i colori della bandiera russa, a piedi nudi, occhi bendati e con le mani colorate di rosso, avanzò a braccia protese emettendo grida di dolore. “Questa è la mia patria. Cieca, folle che grida in agonia. Non sa dove sta andando, ma è certo che tutti avranno paura delle sue mani, macchiate di sangue, quello degli altri e il suo”. Il suo messaggio non era diretto a coloro che hanno il potere: “Nessuno di coloro che hanno cercato di ignorare quelle urla potrà lavarsi il sangue”⁵⁷.

Anche le Donne in nero hanno inserito nelle loro proteste silenziose gesti di sfida. A San Pietroburgo il 9 maggio, sulla prospettiva Nevskij, si è svolta una performance delle Donne in Nero. Tenevano tra le mani una rosa bianca e una copia del libro di Svetlana Aleksievič, *Ragazzi di zinco*, una raccolta di testimonianze sulla guerra afgana dedicata agli almeno quattordicimila giovani soldati che tornarono in Russia chiusi nelle casse di zinco e che furono sepolti di nascosto. L’azione era stata proposta dalla “Resistenza femminista contro la guerra” ([fotografia](#)). Un gesto particolarmente coraggioso è stato quello di un’attivista che il 31 marzo a San Pietroburgo si è incatenata ai cancelli di un ospedale militare. Accanto a sé la ragazza aveva posto una croce su cui spiccava la bandiera ucraina con la scritta “Contro la guerra”. “Non si sa dove l’abbiano portata”, si legge nella segnalazione di OVD.

Rovesciare i messaggi della propaganda e mostrare la tragicità della guerra ha motivato il gesto della giovane Olga di Krasnodar. Il 10 aprile, dopo aver appoggiato a terra il suo zaino accanto a un manifesto di propaganda che recava la scritta: “Per i nostri. Per il mondo russo”, si è distesa prona con le mani legate dietro la schiena denunciando in questo modo la vera natura del “mondo russo”: morte e repressione ([fotografia](#)). All’accusa silenziosa di Olga ha fatto eco quella di Ekaterina che una settimana più tardi a Mosca sulla Piazza Rossa ha esposto il suo cartello: “Seminare morte e distruzione nel mondo a costo della propria vita – è

⁵⁶ Ivi, 9 maggio, Samara al Monumento della gloria.

⁵⁷ Anna Dolgov, *Activist Stages Dramatic Protest Against Russia's Policies on Ukraine (Video)*, “The Moscow Times”, 8 settembre 2014. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/09/08/activist-stages-dramatic-protest-against-russias-policies-on-ukraine-video-a39140>

questo il significato del mondo russo?”. Un'altra forma di disconoscimento è stata l'abolizione del colore rosso dalla bandiera russa, sostituita dalla bandiera a strisce bianca-blu-bianca che è diventata il simbolo del movimento contro la guerra e ha fatto da sfondo a scritte e slogan ([fotografia](#)).

“Questo regime non ha niente da dare al mondo eccetto distruzione e morte, il che è perfettamente esemplificato dalla guerra in Ucraina”. È il messaggio che vuole diffondere “Il partito dei morti”, un gruppo artistico composto da uomini e donne che appaiono nei luoghi pubblici, soprattutto nei cimiteri di guerra sovietici e delle vittime di Leningrado, vestiti-e da scheletri per denunciare l'ossessione di morte che caratterizza la politica e la cultura russa, contestare l'idea stessa di immortalità, rappresentare i morti e il loro diritto a non essere sacralizzati per obiettivi politici e al contempo affermare la vita⁵⁸ ([fotografia](#)). Né mancano scritte derisorie della propaganda che vuole presentare i bombardamenti come una necessaria operazione di pace. È il caso di Arina che a Mosca il 15 aprile ha esibito un cartello con la scritta: “bombardare per amore della pace è come scopare per amore della verginità”. L'intento canzonatorio si rispecchia nell'espressione del suo volto ([fotografia](#)).

“Non perdoneremo Buča”

Dopo i bombardamenti di Marjupol e i fatti di Buča i crimini di guerra e contro l'umanità commessi in Ucraina hanno dominato la protesta. Il 5 aprile a Ekaterinburg una ragazza ha scritto sul suo poster: “Il tuo paese sta commettendo un genocidio”. “No al nazismo russo”. A Mosca, il 21 aprile, una dipendente di Memorial, ha esposto un cartello di fronte alla sede dello Stato Maggiore con la scritta: “Non ci sono giustificazioni, non c'è perdono. Fermate immediatamente la guerra”. Sul lato sinistro erano elencate le località colpite da bombardamenti e massacri: Buča, Marjupol, Irpin', Gostomel, Borodjanka, Volnovacha, Charkiv, Kramators'k, Vorzel', Chernigov, Sumy ([fotografia](#)). Anche il rifiuto da parte dei soldati di obbedire e di uccidere è stato ricordato con riconoscenza: il 14 aprile Sulla Piazza Rossa un'attivista è stata arrestata per uno striscione con la scritta: “Grazie a coloro che si sono rifiutati di uccidere e morire! NO GUERRA”.

L'indignazione sollevata dalle notizie degli stupri ha portato nelle strade e nelle piazze donne e ragazze: sulla Piazza Rossa l'8 aprile una giovane ha scritto sul suo poster: “In questo momento, l'esercito russo sta violentando e uccidendo le donne ucraine. Ferma questa guerra!”. Tre giorni dopo a Ufa (Repubblica di Baschiria) sul cartello di una giovane si poteva leggere: “La guerra è stupro e omicidio di donne ucraine. Guerra significa povertà e repressione in Russia”.

⁵⁸ Robin Dixon-Mary Ilyushina-Natalia Abbakumova, *Art of Dissent: How Russians Protest the War on Ukraine*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2022/russia-ukraine-protest-art/>. L'appartenenza al gruppo, fondato a San Pietroburgo nel 2017 da Maxim Evstropov, è fluida e conta una ventina di membri, tra cui artiste e insegnanti. Sul gruppo si veda: Maxim Hanukai, *Resurrection by Surrogation: Special Performance in Putin's Russia*, “Slavic Review”, vol. 79, 4, 2020, pp. 800-824. Nei cartelli che compaiono nella fotografia è scritto: “Per loro non ci sono abbastanza morti” – “I morti non hanno bisogno della guerra”.

“Non dimenticheremo, non perdoneremo Buča” era scritto il 10 aprile sul poster di Maria, un’attivista arrestata di fronte alla sede del Ministero della difesa tre minuti dopo la sua apparizione ([fotografia](#)). Sono sempre le donne e le ragazze, non sappiamo se collegate alla rete femminista contro la guerra, ad essere intervenute numerose denunciando le violazioni del dettato costituzionale e degli articoli del Codice penale. Un esempio è quello di una giovane di Murmansk che il 16 aprile è stata arrestata per un cartello con i numeri degli articoli del Codice penale: 353, 356 e 357⁵⁹. Le cifre erano state spruzzate di vernice rossa e la giovane teneva in mano il codice e una rosa bianca ([fotografia](#)).

A Volgograd il 14 aprile un’attivista è stata arrestata per aver “inscenato una esibizione” in cui chiedeva l’invio di una commissione a Buča per smentire le dichiarazioni del governo che attribuisce i massacri a menzogne. I morti di Marjupol sono stati ricordati anche a Tver da una donna che riuscì per circa dieci minuti a esibire un cartello “Je suis Marjupol” che raffigurava una madre nell’atto di proteggere i suoi figli ([fotografia](#)).

“Ho paura, ma non taccio”

Di fronte alla volontà di mettere a tacere ogni voce di dissenso, non stupisce che molti episodi di protesta vertano sulla libertà di parola. “Ho paura, ma non taccio” ha scritto Julija sul cartello che teneva tra le mani a San Pietroburgo il 12 giugno ([fotografia](#)). Per denunciare la censura, alcuni post sui social hanno raffigurato una Z apposta su una bocca cucita. A Ekaterinburg il 4 maggio Nadežda con ago e filo la bocca se l’è cucita davvero e per questo ha rischiato l’internamento in ospedale psichiatrico. Sul poster che teneva tra le mani era scritto:

Tacere!!!! Non si può!!! Non si può tacere!
 La guerra non è pace!!!
 La libertà non è schiavitù!!!
 L’ignoranza non è forza!!!
 Eccola lì la vostra ideologia⁶⁰.
 ([fotografia](#))

L’ideologia a cui Nadežda fa riferimento è quella espressa dallo slogan del partito nel romanzo distopico di George Orwell *Millenovecentoottantaquattro*: “La libertà è schiavitù, la guerra è pace, l’ignoranza è forza”. L’opera dello scrittore britannico, che è andata a ruba in pochi giorni ed è stata anche offerta

⁵⁹ Nel Codice penale russo con l’art. 353 vengono incriminate le condotte finalizzate alla conduzione di una guerra di aggressione. Il successivo art. 354 punisce i pubblici incitamenti alla guerra di aggressione. L’art. 356 punisce “il comportamento crudele verso i prigionieri di guerra o la popolazione civile, la deportazione dei civili, il saccheggio dei beni nazionali nei territori occupati, l’utilizzo in un conflitto armato di mezzi e metodi vietati da un trattato internazionale della Federazione Russa”. Infine, l’art. 357 sanziona il crimine di genocidio e l’articolo 358 quello di ecocidio, ovvero “la distruzione di massa del mondo vegetale o animale, l’avvelenamento dell’atmosfera o delle risorse idriche e altre azioni atte a provocare una catastrofe ecologica”.

⁶⁰ Sono queste le frasi leggibili.

gratuitamente per le strade⁶¹, rivela ai lettori della Russia di oggi le analogie tra la visione del romanzo e la realtà del regime putiniano ed è diventata un segno distintivo di chi si oppone alla guerra.

La volontà di denunciare la strumentalizzazione dei caduti della Seconda guerra mondiale ha caratterizzato la protesta del 9 maggio, giorno della vittoria, a Mosca, ma anche in altre città in occasione della marcia del Reggimento immortale⁶². In quell'occasione, numerosi cartelli con le fotografie di coloro che avevano combattuto nella guerra di liberazione in divisa militare e medaglie sul petto, apparvero scritte di condanna della guerra. "Ha combattuto per la pace!", ha scritto Ekaterina Voronina, "Non voleva che si ripettesse". Il nonno diceva: "Se solo non ci fosse la guerra!", "Pace al mondo!", "Non voleva la guerra!" ([fotografia](#)).

Un altro tema che ricorre nelle proteste femminili è la denuncia delle distorsioni del discorso mediatico. L'8 maggio, nel Parco della Vittoria a Ekaterinburg, due giovani donne, Svetlana e Galina, sono state arrestate per aver distribuito volantini in cui si rivolgevano con un lungo testo ai cittadini e alle cittadine affinché non guardassero i notiziari televisivi, ritrovassero il proprio giudizio critico, la propria voce e riconoscessero il vero motivo dell'invasione: le ambizioni di Putin.

Con lo stesso scopo a San Pietroburgo Anna Anisimova si è ammanettata a una televisione su cui aveva scritto: Z TV ([fotografia](#)).

Quali prospettive per la protesta?

Di fronte ad una protesta che non accenna a spegnersi, ma che rinnova le sue forme di espressione e le sue tattiche, i provvedimenti adottati o entrati in vigore ad aprile hanno inasprito le pratiche repressive e la sorveglianza. Continuano, infatti, le chiusure dei siti internet per qualsiasi vago accenno alla guerra, le minacce e gli arresti di giornalisti e giornaliste, le pressioni per il licenziamento di attivisti e attiviste, le intimidazioni verso loro amici e congiunti, la persecuzione dei collaboratori di Naval'nyj. Inoltre, sono state inflitte le prime confische dei beni a chi è stato accusato di diffusione di false notizie, almeno quattro di questi casi sono venuti a conoscenza dell'organizzazione per i diritti umani Agora⁶³.

Contemporaneamente, si spinge la popolazione a rendere esplicito il proprio sostegno alla guerra apponendo una Z sui propri social o sulle auto⁶⁴. Nella società civile non vi deve essere più alcuno spazio per i dubbi o il tacito dissenso; se non si è a favore del conflitto si è contro il conflitto, il governo, lo stato, l'esercito, e pertanto si è sempre perseguibili e la discrezionalità è massima: per gli stessi gesti

⁶¹ O | OVD-info, "I Tell Him, cit., p. 11.

⁶² Alla marcia del Reggimento immortale, una nuova tradizione pubblica inaugurata a Tomsk nel 2012 per celebrare il patriottismo, i partecipanti portano in corteo grandi cartelli con le fotografie dei parenti morti nella Seconda guerra mondiale. Con lo scopo di contestare questo uso strumentale della morte e il concetto stesso di immortalità, è nato il gruppo artistico "Il partito dei morti".

⁶³ OVD-info, <https://ovd.news/news/2022/03/02/russian-protests-against-war-ukraine-chronicle-events>, resoconto 4-10 giugno.

⁶⁴ Si veda l'intervista ad Aleksandra Archipova, *The Scarf and the Snuffbox*, cit.

o parole si può ricevere una multa modesta o subire un lungo periodo di detenzione.

Ciò che noi vediamo oggi è solo ciò che affiora in superficie di un movimento sotterraneo e di uno stato d'animo diffuso contro la guerra. “Difficile capire cosa stia avvenendo dietro le quinte”, ha scritto recentemente Erica Chenoweth⁶⁵, studiosa dei movimenti di massa e della resistenza civile. “Se ci sarà un cambiamento decisivo nei rapporti di potere, lo sapremo solo quando accadrà”⁶⁶. In situazioni fluide e imprevedibili, continua Chenoweth, molto dipenderà dalla tenuta della resistenza e dalla capacità di dare avvio ad azioni che vadano al di là dell'espressione del dissenso: scioperi limitati o generali, interruzioni del lavoro e tutto ciò che dimostri la determinazione e l'impegno delle persone coinvolte, ovvero la capacità di passare dalla protesta all'azione collettiva e di influire su persone in posizione di potere o di influenza.

Non sappiamo dunque se la protesta si trasformerà in un movimento di massa in grado di innescare un cambiamento nel corso della politica russa, ma sappiamo con certezza che il coraggio di esporsi, la determinazione e la volontà di “dire la verità al potere” che la protesta sta esprimendo, è l'unica via per scuotere dall'apatia e dallo scoraggiamento che affliggono le nostre società, come l'appello, semplice e chiaro, lanciato da Ekaterina il 22 maggio di fronte alla cattedrale di Cristo Salvatore a Mosca:

“Не привыкай к войне”: “Non abituarti alla guerra” ([fotografia](#)).

⁶⁵ Erica Chenoweth, *Civil Resistance*, cit.

⁶⁶ Eadem, *What Would Be Signs Protests in Russia Are Making a Difference?*, “The Harvard Gazette”, 13 marzo 2022, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2022/03/here-are-signs-protests-in-russia-are-making-difference/>.

Responsabilità giuridica per la distruzione dell'ambiente in Ucraina

di

Rachel Killean *

Abstract: Russia's aggressive military invasion of Ukraine has provided the world with a stark reminder of the human and environmental costs of armed conflict. In this post, Rachel Killean examines the legal avenues that could be open for Ukraine in seeking accountability and redress for environmental damage.

Condanna per danni ambientali

In una lettera pubblicata il 3 marzo, la *Environmental Peacebuilding Association* ha denunciato l'occupazione intenzionale di siti nucleari, incluso Chernobyl, ed ha enfatizzato il rischio che deriva dalle operazioni militari nelle aree densamente popolate, per la popolazione umana e per l'ambiente naturale per gli anni e decenni a seguire. All'incontro dell'Assemblea per l'Ambiente dell'ONU, riunitasi a Nairobi la settimana scorsa, 108 ONG hanno evidenziato i seri rischi che l'invasione pone nei confronti degli ecosistemi e hanno espresso le loro preoccupazioni per la produzione di rifiuti tossici e nucleari come conseguenza dei bombardamenti.

L'attacco russo alle strutture militari, alle aree urbane e alle infrastrutture energetiche si ripercuote potenzialmente anche a livello internazionale, a causa dell'inquinamento diffuso nell'aria, nell'acqua ed anche nel terreno. Gli attacchi russi verso i siti nucleari e gli impianti energetici esacerbano in modo significativo questi rischi. CEOBS ha contrassegnato l'occupazione russa di Chernobyl come sempre più pericolosa, mentre l'occupazione dell'impianto nucleare di Zaporizhzhia a Enerhodar ha ricevuto ampie condanne a livello internazionale e ha fatto aumentare la paura di una catastrofe nucleare.

Sia l'Ucraina che la comunità internazionale hanno richiamato l'attenzione sulla possibilità che vengano accertate in futuro responsabilità penali per le azioni della Russia. Sebbene buona parte di questa discussione sia naturalmente focalizzata sui costi umani dell'invasione, vale la pena anche esplorare quali opzioni esistano per accertare la responsabilità per gravi danni ambientali causati dalle azioni russe.

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Responsabilità a livello domestico per ecocidio in Ucraina?

L'occupazione dell'impianto nucleare di Zaporizhzhia è stata descritta dall'Ufficio del Procuratore Generale e dai Servizi Segreti ucraini sia come un atto terroristico sia come un atto che può qualificarsi come "ecocidio", determinando dunque l'avvio di un'indagine penale. Questo termine è stato anche utilizzato per riferirsi al bombardamento da parte delle forze russe del Centro Scientifico Nazionale Kharkiv – Istituto di Fisica e Tecnologia (National Scientific Centre Kharkiv Physics and Technical Institute), dove è stoccato materiale nucleare a scopo di ricerca.

L'utilizzo del termine "ecocidio" riflette tanto la scala del rischio percepita quanto il particolare contesto giuridico-legislativo dell'Ucraina. L'Ucraina è uno dei pochi paesi (tra cui vi è anche la Russia) che hanno criminalizzato l'ecocidio nelle proprie legislazioni. L'Ucraina definisce l'ecocidio come "distruzione di massa di flora e fauna, avvelenamento dell'aria e delle risorse idriche, ed ogni altra azione che possa causare un disastro ambientale" all'Articolo 441 del proprio Codice penale. Se fosse possibile perseguire penalmente questo reato a livello domestico, ciò significherebbe che questa disposizione potrebbe essere applicata alle azioni dell'esercito russo.

Responsabilità a livello internazionale per la distruzione dell'ambiente

Al di fuori del contesto domestico, esistono delle possibilità di accertare la responsabilità penale internazionale per crimini ambientali perpetrati in Ucraina, ma queste sono piuttosto limitate. L'ufficio del Procuratore della Corte Penale Internazionale ha annunciato che aprirà un'indagine per i crimini perpetrati in Ucraina. Il Procuratore Karim Khan QC ha annunciato che "c'è una base ragionevole per credere che siano stati commessi crimini di guerra e crimini contro l'umanità".

In teoria, Khan potrebbe decidere di indagare sui crimini di guerra della CPI secondo una prospettiva eco-centrica. Stando all'articolo 8(b)(iv) dello Statuto di Roma della CPI, la Corte ha giurisdizione sul seguente crimine: "un attacco intenzionale con la consapevolezza che tale attacco causi... diffusi e severi danni a lungo termine all'ambiente naturale". Tuttavia, per provare questo crimine in ogni successivo procedimento, Khan dovrebbe dimostrare che il danno all'ambiente naturale sia "*chiaramente eccessivo* in relazione al *complessivo concreto e diretto vantaggio militare previsto*".

Il riferimento al "vantaggio previsto" presenta non poche sfide per l'accusa, visto che si basa sul punto di vista soggettivo del presunto perpetratore. Quando richiesto cumulativamente insieme alla necessità che il danno siano diffuso, grave e a lungo termine, questo elemento riduce quindi l'applicabilità della disposizione in pratica. Infatti, ad oggi, l'Articolo 8(b)(iv) non è ancora stato utilizzato in un'indagine della CPI, e spesso si considera come impossibile da applicare.

Riconoscere l'impatto ambientale dei crimini internazionali

L'articolo 8(b)(iv) è, al momento, l'unico riferimento esplicito al danno ambientale che si può rinvenire nello Statuto di Roma della CPI. Nonostante il crescente supporto internazionale nei confronti della campagna per introdurre "l'ecocidio" quale nuovo *crimine contro la pace*, la sua inclusione nello Statuto di Roma resta, primariamente, una questione di dibattito accademico. Viceversa, la futura introduzione del nuovo crimine non avrebbe alcun impatto sui procedimenti legati alla situazione attuale in Ucraina, poiché l'applicazione di un nuovo crimine non avrebbe effetti retroattivi. Ad ora non vi è un equivalente internazionale alla criminalizzazione a livello domestico ucraino delle azioni che "potrebbero provocare un disastro ambientale".

Tuttavia, vi sono altre vie percorribili per far sì che si tenga conto dei danni ambientali in un'indagine della CPI. Come la stessa autrice ed altri autori hanno già evidenziato in altri contributi, sarebbe possibile inquadrare tali danni come un *metodo* o un *risultato* di altri crimini internazionali. Infatti, la CPI stessa ha già riconosciuto questa possibilità in precedenza e si è spinta a tal punto da indicare che l'Ufficio del Procuratore terrebbe in "particolare considerazione il perseguimento dei crimini previsti dallo Statuto di Roma che siano commessi per mezzo di, o come risultato di, *inter alia*, distruzione ambientale, sfruttamento illegale delle risorse naturali o espropriazione illegale delle terre".

Questa interpretazione offre possibilità per accettare la sussistenza di eventuale responsabilità. I crimini di guerra comprendono attacchi contro i civili, attacchi contro beni dei civili, la vasta distruzione di proprietà, attacchi intenzionali con la consapevolezza di causare perdita di vite umane e danni ai civili e attacchi che usano armi in modo indiscriminato. Le notizie di stampa sul conflitto suggeriscono che diversi crimini di questo tipo stiano avvenendo in Ucraina e diverse organizzazioni, inclusa la CEOBS, stanno mappando l'impatto ambientale significativo di questi attacchi. Sarebbe addirittura possibile collegare la distruzione dell'ambiente ai crimini contro l'umanità, che includono "atti inumani" commessi come parte di "un attacco diffuso e sistematico diretto verso la popolazione civile".

Prospettive di responsabilità e riparazione

Sono limitati gli esempi della prassi in cui la CPI abbia utilizzato i propri strumenti normativi per perseguire penalmente danni ambientali. L'incapacità della CPI di perseguire adeguatamente i danni ambientali in tempo tanto di pace quanto di guerra è stata pertanto soggetto di forti critiche. Tuttavia, gli esempi evidenziati suggeriscono che qualsiasi indagine della CPI circa i crimini di guerra e circa i crimini contro l'umanità perpetrati in Ucraina potrebbero includere un'esplicita ricognizione degli impatti ambientali del conflitto. Nel fare ciò, la CPI potrebbe offrire un importante riconoscimento e la condanna dei gravi costi ambientali del conflitto armato. Sul più lungo periodo (le indagini della CPI non sono in alcun modo rapide – un'indagine preliminare delle ostilità nell'Ucraina orientale è durata più di sei mesi) l'inclusione del danno ambientale in indagini future potrebbe aprire una porta in favore dell'assistenza e riparazione per le vittime in Ucraina. Come

l'autrice ha già precedentemente sostenuto, il mandato della CPI sulle riparazioni offre importanti opportunità per la riparazione ambientale nel dopoguerra.

Se l'esecutore del crimine dovesse essere riconosciuto colpevole di crimini di guerra che includano anche i danni ambientali, la Corte potrebbe considerare di concedere riparazioni che riconoscano l'impatto di questi danni sulle vittime del conflitto. Queste potrebbero includere, per esempio, progetti di ripristino ambientale, compensazione per danni ambientali e misure simboliche che riconoscano ciò che è andato perduto.

Sebbene la responsabilità penale e le riparazioni possano apparire come molto lontane di fronte alla violenza in corso, le settimane passate hanno dimostrato che esistono un certo numero di organizzazioni e individui che sono impegnati nel documentare gli attacchi in Ucraina e il loro impatto ambientale. Tali azioni testimoniano la speranza che la pace possa ritornare in Ucraina e che, come minimo, sarà possibile l'attribuzione di responsabilità e la riparazione dei danni. Se così sarà, ciò rappresenterà un momento importante nel quale le istituzioni internazionali potranno riconoscere al meglio e affrontare la relazione tra conflitti, danni ambientali e sofferenza umana.

Awaiting Spring and War: Insights from Ecofeminism

by

*Selina Gallo-Cruz**

Abstract: In her poem, “spring” Iryna Shuvalova describes the seasonality of women awaiting spring and war. In her words, war too often subsumes spring to punctuate women’s lives with the threat of disruption and widespread violence. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, pundits have proclaimed a new era of war, an era they say has ushered in a “colder than Cold War”. While the world watches the war in Ukraine, others suffer through lesser recognized conflicts in Ethiopia, Western Sahara, and Yemen, citizens of Sri Lanka face devastating economic crises, and citizens of India and Pakistan endure record-breaking heat waves. At the same time, African nations brace themselves against crippling price hikes and reduced access to essential grain supplies. The relative invisibility of these nations’ plights deepens both the violence and marginalization they continue to be confronted with, further disrupting the cadences of life. In this essay, I share ecofeminist reflections on war, wherever it happens, seen and unseen, as it overshadows the natural rhythms of life on Earth. I consider how ecofeminism has historically responded to war and how ecofeminists have proposed to mobilize against its structural foundations.

spring

in my
no-matter-what-country

a woman who shall remain nameless
awaits spring and war

she pulls our common future from the closet
tries it on in the mirror
smiles

and only when the air-raid sirens go off
in the background
does her smile fade

she reluctantly lowers her hands
takes off our future

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hides it in the closet
sits out the airstrike on the bathroom floor

not the right season¹.

As women, we too often occupy what peace scholar Elise Boulding (1976) called the “underside of history.” To be beneath, behind, or invisible to the center of attention does not, however, mean one is not fully present. On the contrary, one is perhaps even more present in a conscious sense, attuned to what everyone can see as well as what most tend to disregard. This position makes the marginalized more keenly aware of the hidden logics of social systems. This is poignantly so for women in war. The worlds that surround and engulf the marginalized, however unrecognized by those in positions of dominance, are full worlds, nonetheless. Women scholars have long worked to do what feminists do, make the invisible visible, through investigating, documenting, examining, and reflecting on women’s unique experiences of war. These exercises are intimately tied to advocacy for women’s experiences of peace and security. In the face of a new era of global war marked by Russia’s historic advances into Ukraine, what more can ecofeminists say or do? War affects women deeply in ways that often elude mainstream attention. Ecofeminists have long argued that the horrific dynamics of war against people and against the planet are interrelated. To fully understand this relationship, considerations must be drawn from diverse perspectives using a cultural approach to systems theory and the nature of the global political economy. Ecofeminist peace scholars in particular have helped us to see women’s experiences of war as intertwined with the destruction of nature. This body of work offers vital insights for women now forced to continue picking up the pieces of more war and destruction of life of all kinds. In this essay I critically examine selections of intersecting ecofeminist analysis and critical peace and mobilization studies on how war ties together patriarchal violence against women and the destruction of the Earth and its people. Ecofeminists have long explored the relationship between women’s experiences of patriarchy, violence, militarization, war, and ecological destruction. I first present this ecofeminist framework on the historical legacies of extraction and structural violence that make war possible. I then describe how ecofeminists have examined the common ontological process of objectification that undergirds sexism, destruction of the planet, and violence against humanity. I close by summarizing ecofeminists’ central antiwar tenants before offering insights into resisting armed conflict and suffering from an ecofeminist perspective.

An Ecofeminist systems approach to war

Feminism means many things to many people, and diverse interpretations and applications have been associated with ecofeminism as well. For some, ecofemi-

¹ By Iryna Shuvalova, translated from the Ukrainian by Amelia Glaser and Yuliya Ilchuk, in consultation with the author.

nism serves to pointedly explore the relationship between women and the environment. Some ecofeminists embrace a spiritualist orientation drawing on studies of matriarchal religions and ritual practices honoring the biological bonds between females and the Earth (Daly 1978; Plant 1989; Radford Ruether 1983, 1996; Spretnak 1982; Starhawk 1979, 1982). Others have worked to recenter intersecting systems analysis of the common ontological and epistemological roots of patriarchy and violence against people, through sexism, colonialism, nationalism, racism, and Otherism of various forms, and the planet, through the extractive industrial global economy that benefits and perpetuates violence against people (Collard and Contrucci 1989; Diamond and Orenstein 1990; Griffin 1978; Merchant 1980; Shiva 1988; Spiegel 1988).

Some ecofeminists in this camp place special emphasis on the material realities of the Earth's ecological constitution and women and humanity's dependencies on the planet (Caldecott and Leland 1983; Gruen 1993; Kheel 1989; King 1989; Merchant 1995; Plumwood 1991, 1993; Salleh 1984, 1997; Warren 1991, 1994). Others have rejected certain strands of ecofeminism in a wave of postmodern, socialist, and neoliberal feminisms, sharing an anthropocentric acceptance of human supremacy whereby women are urged to strive for equality in the industrial economy. Many of these environmental feminists (some of whom use this label to distance themselves from other strands of ecofeminism) adopt a postmodernist ideal that would open up, through culture and technology, the possibility for womanhood and women's relationship with nature to be defined in a multitude of ways (Carlassare 1994; Mellor 1992; Molyneux and Steinberg 1995; Salleh 1997, 2009; Sargisson 2001; Soper 1995)². Others have developed an ecofeminist discourse to advocate for addressing women's suffering as related to ecological destruction, especially against marginalized women and in the developing world (Agarwal 1992; Collins 1990; Gebara 2003; Jackson 1993; Jackson and Pearson 1998; Leach 2007; Nhanenge 2011; Jeremiah 2014).

Here I explore the enduring value of a systemic ecofeminist analysis for understanding the nature of war. I begin by describing how and why systems-analytic ecofeminism emerged among women mobilizing against war before summarizing the insights this approach can offer at a moment of heightened geopolitical conflicts and industrial degradation of a planet in peril.

War as a cultural system

Ecofeminists who embrace a systemic and cultural understanding of violence conceptualize war as a social system founded on ideals of dominance and hierarchy, organized through a stratifying Otherism of peoples, nations, and planet. To

² Gaard (2011) explains that this critique became so excoriating that it devolved into a strong "fear-of-contamination," making some people avoid use of the label "feminist" despite ideological alignment with the term, lest their concerns be dismissed through an oppositional framework. See also Cudworth (2005), Seager (2003), and Thompson (2006). Fundamental to understanding what defines this antagonism, I argue, is the stance on anthropocentrism and whether one understands humans as superior to the nonhuman world or as integral to it.

counter war and to recover from it, ecofeminists advocate for systems founded on reciprocity and life-sustaining diversity.

One easy interpretation of war is to document who and what is proclaimed to be in contention. Histories of conflict are important, to be sure, but ecofeminists also develop insights into violence and war as general social forms. These systemic insights broaden our understanding of how any war and war itself might be disentangled from the idiosyncrasies of unique disputes. Foundational forces of war include sexism and ecological destruction, as both are widespread systems of domination. The coexistence of these systems is not coincidental. Rather, they are institutionalized patterns of social life whereby social values and goals emerge from particular forms of organization and behavior. This enables the maintenance of collectively shared world views that allow different forms of supremacy to be safeguarded or expanded through violence. Many books and review articles have been written to document and outline the long and vibrant history of ecofeminist theory, practice, analysis, and debate (Buckingham 2004; Gaard 2011; Parameswaran 2022; Phillips and Rumens 2016; Warren 1997). Here, I highlight only a selection of programmatic writing to present some of the most central tenets of an ecofeminist systems approach. Systems thinking has come first and foremost from feminists who were deeply engaged in antiwar organizing and theorizing, which gained momentum in the 1970s antiwar and feminist movements. These scholars and organizers examined what they came to consider an inextricable relationship between violence against women and the organized, large-scale destruction of humanity brought about by nationalist, colonial, and neoimperial wars. They argued that both draw on comparable conceptualizations of hierarchy and an orientation toward dominating “others.” Violence against the Earth, exasperated by both industry and war, was also observed to emanate from these common ontologies of objectification and superiority.

Betty Reardon in particular is often considered a “mother of peace education studies.” In her now touchstone *Sexism and the War System* (1985) Reardon examines the many ways war and militarization is deeply infused with sexism as a guiding order of stratification. Reardon explains that just as sexism privileges traits and actions characterized as male, so too does the war system forward a “competitive social order, which is based on authoritarian principles, assumes unequal value among and between human beings, and is held in place by coercive force” (p.10). Several elements must be in place to perpetuate war. The establishment of a hierarchy necessitates division. Through sexism, this division occurs in a binary, sex-based system where positive traits like strength, confidence, and assertiveness are assigned to the superior male category and negative traits like weakness, timidity, and frailty are construed as female.

Reardon’s work drew on and was published at the pinnacle of a long discussion among pacifist feminists who theorized violence against women, people, and the planet had common social-systemic origins. Feminist peace activists in the 1970s had begun to critically examine the common institutional orientations towards violence in patriarchy and the military, finding that both infused male sexuality with domination. In sexism, this domination was over women, in militarization the dom-

ination was over a defined Other, and often including women, as a way of bolstering aggressive masculinity in military culture.

Organized violence relies on socialization, activist theorists noted. In militarization, this regularly involves the socialization of boys in military training to realize their masculinity through aggression and conquest. But its cultural-systemic origins reach further back into the typical male's life course of socialization. In her widely distributed essay "Come in Tarzan, Your Time is Up," Anne-Marie Fearon (1978) opined that all babies are born with the capacity to be gentle loving beings, but socialization through a sex-role system positing men as violent aggressors creates the hierarchy of sexism and patriarchy³. As feminist pacifist Jenny Jacobs (1978) explained, it is therefore not surprising that proving one's masculinity comes easily to military men who have long been ingrained with the social imperative to "sort the men from the boys" through displays of violence. Feminist activist Donna Warnock (1982) called patriarchy a "killer" with women identified as prime targets through rape and other forms of everyday violence and domination, causing the cultural logics of sexism to fuel wars of other kinds. Many others noted how women are socialized into war systems, too, both directly through the active recruitment of women into the military and indirectly through being oriented toward male-dominated systems, including war against defined Other-enemies (Ellsberg 1971; Kinchy 1978; Michalowski 1980; Somerset 1978; WRI 1981).

At this point, through systemic analysis, feminism and peace activism began to share foundational concerns, just as ecological care and feminism do. Barbara Zannotti (undated) spoke for a generation of pacifist feminists when she declared in "Undoing the Ravages of War" that rooting out colonization, dehumanization, Othering, and the cycle of "tearing down to build back up" would all be necessary to stop war. Lisa Leghorn (1983) claimed culpability is also located in the "economic roots of violent male culture" arguing that violence depends on exploitation and stark inequities in power. Others have revealed how women suffer along the unseen but essential commodity chains of war. The documentary *Village of Widows: The Story of Sahtu Dene and the Atomic Bomb* (Blow 2018) details the story of a community of women survivors from the shores of Great Bear Lake in Canada, the location of uranium mining for the Manhattan Project, which was responsible for killing over 250,000 Japanese. After approximately twenty years of delivering uranium to the project, most of the miners have died of cancer. From historic hindsight, nuclear bombs mean death both through their production and at the final point of delivery. Winona LaDuke (2002) has documented that the everyday waste disposal practices of North Americans are also experienced as war by Native Inuit communities exposed to dioxins on a daily basis. Native Shoshone peoples are exposed to the radioactivity of nuclear waste and continued uranium mining use to develop nuclear energy. Where Warnock called patriarchy a killer, LaDuke calls uranium one for its life-destroying impacts on the communities who suffer the creation of new mines. Physician and antinuclear activist Dr. Helen Caldicott has

³ In the 1970s, feminists critically identified the "sex-role system" as the foundational institution through which gender roles were assigned to biology at birth, a form of ascribed stratification that relegated women inferior to men.

boldly stated that apart from nuclear war, the development and use of nuclear power is the greatest medical threat posed to life on Earth.

Ecofeminist theorists and historians celebrate the praxis-based knowledge generated across women-led and feminist movements used to organize against the destruction of people and the planet by industry. In the US, Women Strike for Peace (Swerdlow 1993), Women's Pentagon Action (Harris, King, and Cohn 2019), the Baby Tooth Survey (Logan 2010), Lois Gibbs' pioneering work toward establishing the Environmental Protection Agency's superfund act for cleaning up toxic waste dumping sites (Reed 2002), and the Seneca Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice (Krasniewicz 1992) all forwarded strong theoretical frameworks positing that violence against people and the planet were intimately connected. These frameworks position chemical alteration of life as an intrinsic part of this process that must be resisted. Women-led movements like the National Toxics Campaign, the Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA), and Native Americans for a Clean Environment (NACE) (Merchant 2005), the Akwesasne Mother's Milk Project (LaDuke 1999), the Greening of Harlem Coalition (Bernstein 1993), and the Gardening Angels of Detroit (Hawthorne 2002) all emphasized the effects of industrial capitalism and the production of weapons of war on poor communities. Several movements and initiatives emerged to take on environmental degradation and pollution's life-threatening effects on human health. These include the Center for Health, Environment, and Justice (Gibbs 2002), the movement against environmental racism surrounding the Hooker Chemical hazardous waste site in Warren County, North Carolina (McGurty 2009), and the breast cancer awareness movement's emphasis on the role environmental toxins (Clorfene-Casten 1996). A body of works informing Black Feminist Ecological thought reveal the many ways women across the African diaspora routinely experience and confront the most harmful effects of environmental degradation (Craig 2014; Frazier 2020; see also Alvarez, Theis, and Shtob 2021). Around the world, movements like the Chipko movement against deforestation in Northern India and the Green Belt movement to prevent desertification in Kenya sparked consciousness of the integral role women could play in instilling an understanding of the vital interdependencies between human life and the state of the natural world (The Green Belt Movement 2016; Warren 2000). Today, Navdanya continues to work to support organic and bio-diverse small-farms agriculture in India while partnering with Earth University to develop ecofeminist knowledge that can oppose harmful mining and other industrial solutions to climate change.

Academic studies have developed alongside and in the wake of these movements, conducting careful historical and social scientific studies of the origins, dynamics, and impacts of social systems of violence against the Earth and its people, including the role played by patriarchy and other forms of Othering in the destruction of life. These works have helped to organize historical and systemic understandings of the cultural-ideological bases of the violence of war and the destruction of the Earth. Carolyn Merchant's (1980) *The Death of Nature* was formative to the new wave of ecofeminist consciousness the developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Merchant traced the ontological origins of the destruction of nature to the Baconian philosophical program that formed the basis of the Enlightenment in Western sci-

ence. She recounts the dynamics of debate that allowed this one ontology to become vital to the rise of Western thought, containing within it “a set of attitudes about nature...that reinforced tendencies toward growth and progress inherent in early capitalism” (p.185). What lies beneath the systems of war against women, people, and the planet, this suggests, are ideas and understandings common to all of them. Mechanism, the philosophy that came to form the basis of Western thought neglects to account for the environmental consequences of synthetic products as a consequence of human-constructed environments. Maria Mies’ (1986) *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* followed with an analysis that an “accumulation model” has perpetuated global Northern domination through consumerism and growth in waves of global capitalism fueled by colonialism, extractive economies, and conspicuous consumption. She details how wealth from exploitative industries concentrates in the global North and relegates women to a life of poverty and consumption by others as Others at the bottom rung of the global economy. Vandana Shiva’s (1988) *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* elaborated on the focused exploitation of women in the colonized global South, where development programs have destroyed the natural world and the lives of women interdependently linked to these areas. Together, Mies and Shiva then wrote *Ecofeminism* in 1989 to put forth the argument that both capitalism and colonialism are patriarchal forms of violence. In these systems, an epistemology of progress fuels the incessant drive towards “growth” which has left the Earth, women, the poor, and colonized peoples destroyed in its wake. Mies and Shiva delimit how a “myth of catching up” has been propagated so that the developing world de facto consents to its plunder by global capitalist managers of wealth and industrial extraction. This thesis has been further supported in ecofeminist analyses of the declining lot of the poor and women in post-conflict societies, in which extractive industries offer a ladder to development out of the devastation of war only to reignite the same instabilities that instigated prior violent conflicts (Cohn and Duncanson 2020, Gallo-Cruz and Remsberg 2021; Lujala and Rustad 2012; Lujala, Rustad, and Kettenmann 2016).

Since then, the ecofeminist framework has splintered off into multiple perspectives, with some ecofeminists focusing on pursuing equality within an industrial capitalist system, as opposed to transforming that system altogether. Still, the general analytical objective of understanding the relationship between gender inequality and the environment remain significant to many ecofeminists, and a systemic ecofeminist analysis continues to inform critical understandings of the origins of common forms of oppression and violence against people and the planet. This framework puts forth the following tenets as necessary ingredients of the social system of violence against women, people, and the Earth.

Chemicals matter to life, and so does the culture that enshrines their production, consumption, weaponization, and alteration.

A primary concern among ecofeminism that sets it apart from feminist anthropocentric thought is the insistence on a fundamentally material reality indelibly shaped by human culture. Anthropocentrism, the belief in human dominance and primacy, is understood as a cultural form rather than a universal given, with all actions stemming from it conceptualized as human choices. Both elements of this essential material reality – human dependence on the health of the natural world, the

integrity of soil, air, and water to survive, and the cultural world, the ways we think about human needs in relationship to the natural world, that either respect or serve to alter this reality – are necessary to fully comprehend the nature of the violence of patriarchy, war, and ecocide (see Molyneux and Steinberg 1995). This tenet in particular illustrates a fundamental distinction between anthropocentric expressions of feminism that allow for far-reaching chemical modifications of the body and the natural world to enhance human-centered experiences and a cultural-materialist ecofeminism that positions humans' industrial modification of the natural world as destroying the possibility for sustainable reciprocity between humans and nonhumans⁴. From this first tenet, it then follows that:

The destruction of life involves the production, consumption, weaponization, and alteration of chemicals, and these actions follow from organized social forms of domination and hierarchy.

Systems thinking brings together the cultural and material in cause-and-effect analysis. Ecofeminist theory and analysis was born through the early insight that modern technological life and the destruction of the earth share common ontological origins in patriarchy, violence against women, and violence against Others in war. Cultural worldviews of objectification and hierarchy beget acts of domination and violence. Material organization of extraction and production beget the tools and technologies that kill people and the planet.

Ecofeminist research has long focused on tying together the unrecognized relationships between cultural and resource commodity chains, ideas about hierarchy and domination, and a sense of entitlement to production and destruction. In so doing, ecofeminists join political ecologists and political economic historians in making visible those who would otherwise remain invisible despite being both victims of and integral to these chains of violence.

Domination stems from cultural systems that demarcate perceived threats to power and security. These perceptions map onto competition with targeted Others.

Patriarchy, as a system of power, operates according to perceived threats to power, and women can be understood as both prominent threats or assumed to be irrelevant and utterly powerless in patriarchal systems that take on idiosyncratic cultural histories (Gallo-Cruz 2021a and 2021b). Across contexts, patriarchy defines women as lesser-than and ultimately objects of assumed male supremacy. Ecofeminists give careful attention to fully understanding the nature of the origins of domination that fuel violence. Studies of socialization reveal the transmission of ontologies of power and hierarchy through institutions like the family, the nation, and the military. Ecofeminists have also elucidated the central role played by marginalization and Othering, the social dynamics that lead to perceived threats, and the social structures that perpetuate power-over orientations.

Othering is organized through sexism, colonialism, racism, nationalism, and anthropocentrism, among other forms of stratification.

⁴ This topic is undoubtedly a challenging one that invites a difficult conversation about which chemical bodily practices are sustainable and/or helpful to the balance between human life and the natural world and which are not, akin to anti-nuclear activists' concerns over defined and projected energy needs (see above, Sutcliffe 1978).

Multilevel perspectives have been vital to systemic ecofeminist analysis. Socialization studies therefore present a level of understanding that is complementary and interdependent to cultural systems studies. On these five “isms,” consensus has been easier to build among feminists opposed to colonialism, racism, and nationalism. The nature and particular dynamics of sexism and whether ecofeminism should pursue an anthropocentric or reciprocal human-nonhuman systems response has led to deeper disagreements and divisions. Nevertheless, Othering in the form of sexism and anthropocentrism are considered essential to an ecofeminist understanding of violence against women as a culturally imbued category of sex and violence against the Earth through the assumed entitlements of human supremacy⁵.

Modern war demands industrialization.

A generation of feminists have given their lives to organizing against both nuclear weapons and nuclear power. The destructive nature of the production of weaponry is unquestionable. There are no modern weapons that can be produced in an environmentally sustainable way. The tailings from uranium mines used to produce nuclear weapons and power and the waste created by using nuclear weapons are also undeniably threatening to life. This point, too, can invite multilevel scrutiny. Some nations have responded to the interruption of fossil fuels caused by the war in Ukraine by investing in more rapid expansion of nuclear power infrastructure, to name one poignant and recent response. However, feminist antinuclear activists have put responsibility for the ills of nuclear power on an artificial demand for increased energy output, questioning how much power we really need (Sutcliffe 1978: 27). This argument extends beyond industrial manufacturing of nuclear and other modern weaponry into the industrialization of modern life.

Industrialization demands destruction of the Earth and its people.

For ecofeminists, it is not coincidental that industrial life depends on extraction through mining and that mining pollutes both the planet and the human and non-human life that depend on it. Merchant (1980:3) discusses how, for example, modern societies’ transition from ideals of reciprocal relationships between humans and the Earth’s ecosystems to human-dominant ideologies involved more extensive forms of mining. Roman philosophers and stoic thinkers once deplored mining as an abuse of their Mother Earth. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, commercial mining was gaining in pace and scale and these old ways of thinking would soon become incompatible with a rapidly unfolding new economy.

Today, much of modern life, from infrastructure and energy to the development of modern medicine, weaponry, and fertilizers used in agriculture, depends on mining. The great paradox of this age of human dominance – which some have dubbed the “Anthropocene,” as well as the “Capitalocene,” “Plantationocene,” and “Eurocene” (Moore, 2015; Haraway, 2015; Grove, 2016) – is that everywhere there is mining there is violence against earth and water, and the destruction of animal, plant, and human life. Too often, extreme violent conflicts are waged against

⁵ Feminists and ecologists face a common challenge in confronting supremacy thinking. Just as sexists interpret feminism as a ploy to subvert male dominance with female dominance, anthropocentrists struggle to understand the concept of a reciprocal relationship between humans and the non-human natural world, thinking that humans must be either superior or inferior to non-humans.

the human communities inhabiting targeted mining areas. Modern life, with its utter dependence on industrial production, relies upon modern war and the destruction of the Earth. In this system, the threat of modern war is perpetuated by both the rapid production of weapons and the geopolitical tensions of nationalism and political economy.

An ecofeminist response to war

Just as praxis has deeply informed theory, ecofeminist theory sets out to redefine the real material relationships women have with each other and with other humans, species, and the planet. The first principled response of a strong ecofeminist approach is to assert that neither the anthropocentrism so intimately interwoven with neoliberal industrial capitalism nor the cultural relativism favored by post-modern feminists will effectively end violence against people and planet. As Mies and Shiva (1989) contend, ecofeminists must take a clear moral stance on the sanctity of a sustainable way of life in which people and the planet are able to live in harmonious reciprocity.

This involves deconstructing harmful ideologies while also disentangling ourselves from the chokehold of destructive economic and political systems. In Reardon's (1985) *Sexism and the War System*, she offers a vision of what a feminist corrective should involve. The gender binary system that superficially assigns personality traits to sex must be dismantled so that humans can collectively strive to develop positive, peaceful traits while mitigating the effect of traits that can foster violence.

In *Women Who Speak for Peace*, Kelley and Eblin (2001) add that a feminist system, as opposed to a patriarchal one rooted in dominance, embraces diversity and reciprocity: "Whereas patriarchy places value in one perspective and one type of voice, feminism, on the other hand, places value on multiple voices and narratives" (p.146). To take a unified moral stance, however, ecofeminists will have to do the work necessary to achieve consensus. This should begin with affirming the sanctity of the life of women, people, and the planet and committing to taking on the ills of violence enmeshed in patriarchy. Then, systemic transformations would involve instilling new orientations that respect and nurture life from early socialization carrying through into reengineered social institutions. Antiwar feminists have long envisioned such a deep transformation of systems and institutions. Helen Michaelowski in "The Army Will Make a Man Out of You" urges readers that in order to reorganize away from hierarchical competitive systems an emphasis must be placed on teaching men to nurture life and communities, rather than training women to kill. And, as ecofeminists hold concerns about violence against women and violence against the planet in equal measure, political economic solutions are also deemed essential to building peace. In "Nuclear Power: The Future is Fearful," Jill Sutcliffe (1978) explains that low-technology systems are easier to understand and give individuals more control over their lives compared to the great unknowns of modern industrial grids. She underscores that the violence of nuclear energy is ultimately based on a distinctly modern "need" for energy. She reflects:

How many of our present “needs” have been manufactured by the advertisers to secure profits for the producer? Wall-to-wall gadgetry with built-in obsolescence; when it’s worn out chuck it out? Is this the rationale for taking such a lethal course as nuclear power?...Will the throw-away mentality end by turning the world into a nuclear dustbin? What an apt monument to this white male society and its values so destructive of life and the environment.

From resistance has also sprung many creative solutions. Shiva (2009) follows her indictment of the life-destroying industrial extraction and use of oil with a clarion call to life through soil, a perfect ecological system balanced by its intrinsic diversity and life-sustaining forces. To protect the most vulnerable and marginalized, poor women in the exploited “third world,” Shiva (1988) exhorts the world’s citizens to work for deglobalization. Localization could help overcome the destruction caused by the global industrial system of extractive capitalism taking resources from the global South to fill the coffers of the global North (see also Shiva 2020). To grow strong and sustaining roots again, the world’s many communities must work together to nurture organic life, diversity, and respect for women’s wisdom and leadership in their own areas. For marginalized women and women of color, this takes an intentionally subjective and praxis-based stance in reclaiming community histories, and learning from Nature, as much as from within feminist community, gathering and nurturing insights on how to take on violence against Earth and against repressed peoples (Hall and Kirk 2021). In essence, each of these concepts are key: working to counter a cultural system of objectification with subjective reverence and reciprocity; creating a new value of respect for the communion of human and nonhuman life in order to live sustainably; making all that has been rendered strategically invisible visible again so that we may understand and respect the true source and cost of all practices and all we consume; and working towards systemic transformations in culture, economy, and politics based upon these principles of life and diversity.

In the face of an ongoing war of a scale that has had global geopolitical ramifications, including interrupting the global food supply, these long-term cultural and systemic ideals may seem quixotic or tragically unreachable. What then can ecofeminist theory offer during difficult times of active war and violence between nations and their peoples? The consequences of war are unquestionably devastating, to women, to humans, and to all life on Earth. As the words of poet Iryna Shuvalova so movingly communicate, war alters the seasons of life as nature would define them. Beyond this disruption and disconnection from natural cycles, women experience elevated levels of gender-based violence, rape, torture, and killing, and other traumas that continue to unfold long after a war ends. So do men. The environmental consequences of war are catastrophic for life and the air, water, and soil of the biosphere as well, from the debris and waste of spent weaponry and ammunitions to the contamination from damaged infrastructure and the spilling or spreading of toxins. Certainly, antiwar feminists have organized countless campaigns against wars of the present, for healing in the aftermath of war, and for demilitarization. Ecofeminists have, however, thus far focused their attentions on generating a systemic understanding of the necessary and sufficient actions to stop war as an institution and to eliminate violence against women, people, and the planet. Ecofeminists hold a deep longing to break the cycle, making another eruption of atrocity an

impossibility. This requires sweeping transformations of our military industrial and patriarchal systems, all of which can feel desperately far off as war disrupts the seasons of life. To bridge the needs of the present with the visions of the future, therefore, new and serious conversations are needed. Figuring out how to stop those perpetuating war and violence against people and planet and transitioning to a life of resistance and noncooperation to the systems making that violence possible should invite judicious attention and will undoubtedly involve arduous deliberations⁶.

Still, ecofeminists have provided some answers for how to begin breaking the cycle. Dismantling and refusing to participate in structures leading to violence and war is a necessary first step. To grow life, we must, as the title of a recent talk given by Shiva (2022) asserts, “degrow greed”. This can take on a sober and realist understanding of what has already been altered in our biosphere at this historical moment following the long industrial revolution, as the title of the recently published anthology of feminist and womanist statements *All We Can Save* communicates (Johnson and Wilkinson 2021). A seemingly formidable task, it can be approached with reverence and grace. Wabanaki elder and ecologist Judy Dow (2019) writes that we must conjure the courage to accept that the younger generation will not live in the times we have, and we must grow in the wisdom that to prepare them to “travel through the narrows...it’s essential that they be reminded of the old stories of survival, hear the old songs of prayer, learn to read the land, and understand the difference between a want and a need” (p.15). For ecofeminists, this strategy of simplicity interwoven with deference to humans’ small but significant place in the ecosystem involves bringing back a way of life that follows the natural seasons war against people and planet has altered. How we get there from where we are now, at what seems like the dawn of a new age of war, demands our attention. One answer already given by ecofeminists is that living locally and simply with deep respect for our place in an ecosystem greater than ourselves is not just a form of adaptation; it is also a strategy for transformation. Tactics of resistance to war may be added to these strategies, though ecofeminists have dedicated much less attention to such formulations. Nevertheless, dismantling the weaponry of war must take into account the source of that weaponry and the full chain of war-making itself, from industrial mining and manufacturing to the cultural replication of patriarchy, nationalism, and the dominant ideologies of political economy that drive the killing of people and the planet.

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⁶ How should ecofeminists respond to the current state of nations’ climate security planning, for example (à la McDonald 2018)?

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Dalla guerra economica all'economia di guerra. Le armi del “Nuovo ordine mondiale”¹

di

*Claudia von Werlhof**

Abstract: This article is based on a speech held at a meeting of Austrian social movements in 2003 when the US war against the Iraq had just started. Nearly 20 years ago, the economical, political and military tendencies that in 2020 have started to overwhelm the West and the rest of the world as well, could already be seen very clearly. This is due to an approach that combines a longterm analysis of modern civilization as “capitalist patriarchy”, rooted in the despotism of early patriarchies in the Near East, five thousand years ago, with the dynamics of five hundred years of capitalism as the world system of today, led by global neoliberalism and wars of the West for 30 years. From this point of view, a so called “New World Order“, proclaimed from above for decades already, has now begun to be realized concretely. This process is called the new “Great Transformation” and comprises an ever larger accumulation and concentration of capital, unknown in history, in always fewer hands, the impoverishment of always more people worldwide, including the “developed” world itself, and an always growing need for the system to apply all sorts of violence and war in order to maintain the rule of the few against the many, and to get through with the plans to reorganize the world-civilization as a whole.

¹ L'articolo, *Vom Wirtschaftskrieg zur Kriegswirtschaft. Die Waffen der “Neuen-Welt-Ordnung”*, è stato pubblicato per la prima volta in *Nach dem Krieg ist vor dem Krieg. Broschüre der Friedenswerkstatt Linz zu Hintergründen und Folgen des Irak-Krieges. Mit Beiträgen von Claudia von Werlhof, Winfried Wolf, Noam Chomsky, Michael Chossudovsky u. a.*, Friedenswerkstatt Linz, Linz 2003. In seguito è stato pubblicato in Maria Mies, *Krieg ohne Grenzen. Die neue Kolonisierung der Welt*, PapyRossa, Köln 2005, pp. 40-48. La traduzione, a cura di Silvia Alfonsi, si basa su questa edizione.

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Oggi siamo nella situazione in cui svaniscono ai nostri occhi democrazia, pace e benessere anche là dove sono sorte di nuovo dopo l'ultima Guerra mondiale, e al loro posto sono iniziati un impoverimento e una distruzione che assumono in crescendo le caratteristiche di una guerra.

La mia tesi: la logica della guerra è creare nuova crescita. Quindi, quando il nostro sistema economicamente va a cozzare contro i suoi limiti, è sempre pronto ad usare la guerra per forzare tali limiti. In questo modo la guerra è condizione per una nuova crescita, cioè la prosecuzione non certo solo della politica ma proprio dell'economia con altri mezzi. Qui si deve distinguere tra una guerra economica, la quale consiste essenzialmente nel creare una nuova spinta all'accumulazione mediante occupazione ed espropriazione, cioè crescita tramite rapina – si potrebbe anche dire tramite “*accumulazione originaria continuata*”². E la seconda possibilità, direttamente la guerra, dunque la distruzione militare di un territorio, per poi consentire nuovi tassi di crescita grazie ad una cosiddetta ricostruzione di quello che è stato distrutto.

Il tutto si può definire con Hannah Arendt come “banalità del male”. Infatti: chi è contro la crescita, o può permettersi di trovare più importante qualcos'altro, magari sostenendolo anche pubblicamente? Non si renderebbe costui infinitamente ridicolo? Quello che comunque non sembra essere preso in considerazione in questo sistema è una redistribuzione dall'alto verso il basso, una rinuncia cioè all'accumulazione o/e il mantenimento o meglio il rinnovato avvio di produzioni non redditizie, che non si presentino come abbastanza lucrative. Infatti, dal punto di vista del sistema è accettabile solo il denaro orientato al profitto, ma non il generale benessere sociale. Al contrario, c'è di certo una redistribuzione drammaticamente aumentata dal basso verso l'alto.

D'altra parte: è comunque del tutto impossibile alla lunga la crescita a spese dello sfruttamento di cosiddette risorse naturali, prima di tutto di quelle che non si rinnovano, perché prima o poi – e questa volta in realtà inevitabilmente – arrivano alla fine, e così anche il relativo sistema, forse un po' rallentato da eventuali invenzioni tecniche. Questo significa: contro la finitezza della terra anche la guerra in fin dei conti non riuscirà a fare nulla, per quanto contribuisca a scovare risorse terrestri durante e a favore di una guerra successiva, o meglio ad assestare l'economia, ad accumulare, a trasformare in denaro/merce/capitale e infine a distruggere.

E da due decenni si continua a dire con grande enfasi che non c'è alcuna alternativa al neoliberalismo. Ovvero, la politica economica viene definita come una specie di “violenza più elevata”, o meglio come una necessità, appunto: come la guerra. Direi che nel frattempo ciò risulta una vera e propria oscenità, perché tutte le società che hanno applicato questa politica si trovano già “in caduta libera” più o meno dappertutto nel mondo. Gli stati nazionali si sciogliono, i partiti politici non sono più riconoscibili, i governi si trasformano in società segrete, lo stato sociale

² Si veda su questo tema: Claudia von Werlhof, *Cento anni dopo Rosa Luxemburg. Il processo di accumulazione originaria “continuata” e la crisi della riproduzione del capitale oggi*, in “DEP, Deportate esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile”, 28, 2015, pp. 21-45. https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user_upload/dipartimenti/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/numeri/n28/03_n28-2015.pdf. (N.d.T.).

viene distrutto, le famiglie implodono, si mina l'influenza dei sindacati, le imprese spariscono nelle fauci dei colossi industriali, i beni comuni vengono svenduti a gruppi privati, e non sono più garantite le prestazioni di servizi d'importanza vitale. Si sfasciano gli enti culturali, il rincaro della vita è cresciuto enormemente senza che lo si ammetta. Dappertutto si osserva un generale impoverimento, ora anche nei paesi industrializzati, per il rapido aumentare della disoccupazione come dei rapporti di lavoro più precari, casualizzati se non addirittura schiavistici.

A questa cosiddetta "violenza più elevata" segue poi in un certo senso quella che si potrebbe chiamare la "bassa violenza" dell'azione bellica diretta, presunta come altrettanto necessaria. Di conseguenza ci troviamo qui al primo passo sulla via per la guerra. Infatti, nel neoliberalismo globalizzato si tratta di espropriazione intenzionale, saccheggio nonché distruzione dell'economia non ancora diretta dai gruppi multinazionali, quindi soprattutto di quella del settore pubblico, ma anche delle piccole e medie aziende private così come delle maggiori imprese "nazionali".

Dall'altro lato della medaglia alcuni pochi gruppi transnazionali hanno da registrare volumi d'affari e introiti in un crescendo esplosivo, la loro ricchezza è scandalosa e di dimensioni mai esistite al mondo. Ma, in più, tale ricchezza è pagata con il contributo di sovvenzioni, esenzioni fiscali, delle nostre entrate fiscali nonché pagamento di interessi. I beneficiari sono dirigenti di colossi industriali, manager, consulenti d'azienda, assicurazioni, banche ed altre organizzazioni impegnate nel settore multinazionale e spesso al limite della legalità, o che operano addirittura con sistemi mafiosi, le quali sono attive anche nell'economia sotterranea del commercio delle armi, della droga, del traffico di esseri umani e dello schiavismo sessuale, e successivamente riciclano il loro denaro specialmente presso le "serie" banche svizzere, subito qui vicino. Una simile politica ha portato alla formazione di oligopoli e monopoli, che da tempo hanno ripartito tra di loro i mercati.

Riassumendo: negli ultimi decenni si sono realizzati enormi patrimoni in modo sempre più parassitario, senza lavoro e produzione propri, bensì tramite espropriazione, sovvenzioni, prestiti in cambio di alti interessi e speculazione

Da questo punto di vista ci troviamo in una guerra economica/in un'economia di guerra che stanno andando a finire in una vera crisi di civiltà. Perché è prevedibile che questa redistribuzione dal basso verso l'alto continuando debba condurre ad un collasso economico, ecologico e sociale. Probabilmente lo fanno anche i *global players*, poiché si sono lanciati in un attacco di follia a sfruttare gli ultimi mercati, campi di investimento e risorse del mondo con tanta sfrenatezza e per tutto il tempo ancora possibile. Il nome di questo progetto è WTO [World Trade Organisation], Organizzazione mondiale del commercio, ossia liberismo a livello mondiale, sostenuto dal Fondo monetario internazionale, dalla Banca mondiale e dalle Unioni dei gruppi transnazionali.

Infine, come sub-accordo della WTO ha dato il suo contributo al progetto il GATS [General Agreement on Trade in Services, 1995], Accordo generale sul commercio di servizi. È la forma ampliata dell'Accordo multilaterale sugli inve-

stimenti (MAI)³. Nel frattempo, si è capito che il GATS è diventato il problema numero uno anche al nord, però senza che lo si ammetta. Il GATS è per così dire un'arma di annientamento di massa nella guerra economica. Deve procurare nuova crescita. Deve fare in modo che l'intera riproduzione, quello che resta di lavoro domestico e di sussistenza, e anche della previdenza, sia incluso nella privatizzazione e commercializzazione e riorganizzato in prodotti lucrativi. Tutta la vita quotidiana deve essere penetrata capitalisticamente e razionalizzata a scopo di affarismo redditizio. I residui di altruismo, riguardo, compassione, morale e aiuto premuroso vengono così annientati dall'orientamento al profitto. Gli ultimi beni comuni pubblici e i pascoli comunali saranno trasformati in una nuova proprietà privata tramite la nuova corrispettiva politica delle "recinzioni" (enclosures), come a suo tempo nell'Inghilterra del 18. secolo.

Il GATS, come una guerra, è il tentativo di superare anche l'ultimo confine che intralcia la penetrazione capitalistica di tutti i rapporti. Le conseguenze che si possono già osservare a livello mondiale sono: i servizi privatizzati sono scadenti, costosi e stanno diventando scarsi. Moltissime persone muoiono semplicemente perché non possono più permettersi di curare privatamente la propria salute e di approvvigionarsi d'acqua. Succede già adesso nei paesi del sud dove viene esercitata questa politica sin dagli anni '80. La privatizzazione passa letteralmente su cadaveri. Il GATS è parte del nuovo ordine del mondo, già propagato come progetto politico dal padre di George W. Bush nel 1991 nella prima Guerra del golfo.

La politica con il metodo del GATS io la definisco una politica coloniale a scopo di accumulazione originaria continuata ed espropriazione: di appropriazione della ricchezza nazionale e di risorse naturali da parte dei colossi industriali in tutto il mondo. Significa che questa politica "economica" è violenta e direttamente connessa con l'altro aspetto della globalizzazione, vale a dire la guerra. Qui guerra ed economia non formano più solo un continuum ma diventano sempre più indistinguibili nel loro amalgama. Diventano i due lati della stessa medaglia. Che libero scambio, pirateria e guerra vadano insieme lo constatava anche Goethe nel *Faust II*. Qui però abbiamo a che fare con una forma moderna di pirateria: l'assalto militare high-tech. Difatti, cosa vuol dire oggi guerra: è effettivamente un assalto militare o una cosiddetta "guerra di aggressione" delle potenze occidentali a territori dell'est e del sud ricchi di risorse e importanti da un punto di vista geopolitico. Rosa Luxemburg ha definito tale politica nel seguente modo, come faceva d'abitudine nei confronti delle colonie del XIX secolo: il militarismo è "l'esecutore dell'accumulazione del capitale". La guerra, quindi è una specie di ufficiale giudiziario che effettua un'esecuzione forzata per appropriarsi di tutte le risorse disponibili, ossia le ultime, servendosi della violenza. Il "diritto" a farlo – in modo perverso come diritto dei colossi industriali contro i popoli – viene "stabilito"⁴. Il GATS è un passo sulla via che sostituirà alla legittimazione assente di questa politica, ovvero la legalizzazione di una nuova ingiustizia⁵.

³ Multilateral Agreement on Investment: progetto di accordo negoziato in segreto tra i membri dell'OCSE, Organizzazione per la cooperazione e lo sviluppo (1948), tra 1995 e 1998 (N.d.T.).

⁴ In tedesco: gesetzt, da das Gesetz: la legge (N.d.T.).

⁵ In tedesco *Un-Recht*: non-diritto (N.d.T.).

“Chiedi a Bechtel a chi fa bene la guerra”, scriveva Bob Herbert nella Herald Tribune in aprile 2003, perché a Bechtel, la multinazionale americana dell’acqua, erano già stati assegnati il Tigri e l’Eufrate in Iraq per la privatizzazione dell’acqua. Nel frattempo, il petrolio iracheno viene trasferito con approvazione dell’ONU alle potenze occupanti USA e Gran Bretagna per finanziare la “ricostruzione” da parte di multinazionali americane. In questo modo l’invasione dell’Iraq non è stato solo un affare dei colossi industriali delle armi e del complesso dell’industria militare, ma esattamente una rapina di petrolio, acqua ed altre risorse dell’Iraq, così come una appropriazione del provvedimento sulla cosiddetta ricostruzione dopo la distruzione. Dopodiché segue l’affermarsi di una politica neoliberista in Iraq, e in futuro quanto più possibile dappertutto in Medio Oriente, cominciando, diciamo, da Siria e Iran, come già si profila. Il tutto ci viene anche venduto come un “atto umanitario” di liberazione di un popolo dal suo tiranno e dalle “armi di annientamento di massa” di quest’ultimo, le quali finora non sono apparse da nessuna parte – al contrario di quelle dei signori della guerra.

Così l’invasione dell’Iraq diventa *un modello per il futuro. Globalizzazione è l’affermarsi violento del neoliberalismo come di una “licenza al saccheggio” e ugualmente di una “licenza ad uccidere”*, e significa: i colossi industriali vogliono tutto, ogni mercato, ogni campo d’investimento, ogni risorsa solo per sé. Questo è il nocciolo della questione della politica economica neoliberista, la quale con modalità sempre più aggressive ci viene data ad intendere con la pretesa di “serietà” e mancanza di alternative. Se poi non c’è nessun campo d’investimento, allora lo si crea in quanto guerra e tramite essa: come guerra con la guerra. Così, secondo l’analisi di Michel Chossudovsky, vediamo per esempio che sia i talebani in Afghanistan che l’UCK⁶ in Kosovo sono stati messi in piedi con il denaro occidentale della droga, vale a dire della CIA e della NATO.

Il neoliberalismo si capovolge nella guerra come diritto del più forte dappertutto nel mondo, sia sul piano di strategia bellica “low-intensity”, quindi a bassa intensità, sia su quello di “high-intensity-war-fare”, dunque ad alta intensità, come si chiama nel linguaggio specifico (comunque “high-intensity l’ho inventato io). Secondo Paul Virilio ai dominatori importa creare una condizione di “autentica guerra”, ossia di *guerra permanente al centro della vita di ogni giorno, che bandisca dalla società tutto quello che è civile, comprendendo ciò che è democratico, evoluto, umano, propenso alla vita*, che renda le società per così dire militarizzate, decivilizzate (non-evolute).

Ritengo che la penetrazione capitalistica dell’esistenza estorta con l’economia e la guerra sia una nuova Grande trasformazione – “the great transformation” secondo Karl Polany –, ma secondo Robert Kurz anche un programma omicida e suicida, che alla lunga non è attuabile. Fallirà a lungo termine, già a breve, probabilmente.

A questo proposito trovo molto interessante che la guerra come modello per il futuro del Nuovo ordine mondiale sia contemporaneamente il modello del passato,

⁶ Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës: nome albanese dell’Esercito di liberazione del Kosovo (ELK), in inglese KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army), organizzazione para militare kosovaro-albanese, nella lista ONU delle organizzazioni terroristiche (N.d.T.).

ossia dell'*origine del patriarcato proprio in Iraq circa 5000 anni fa*. Là, infatti, ha avuto allora origine ciò che oggi assolutamente chiamiamo guerra: invasione, occupazione, appropriazione e consumo di risorse a vantaggio di alcuni pochi, così come totale dipendenza della maggioranza. Come se il "Dispotismo orientale" sorto nell'antica Mesopotamia, l'odierno Iraq, 5000 anni fa dopo la conquista, oppure "Modo asiatico di produzione", abbreviato APW [Asiatische Produktionsweise] – come un modo che anch'esso operava con un tipo di economia centrale per amministrare l'acqua – venisse oggi nuovamente ideato, cioè come "Modo americano di produzione". Si potrebbe chiamarlo pure APW, oppure "Dispotismo americano". Così lo sviluppo al suo termine torna al punto di partenza.

Ritengo che la prospettiva a breve termine di questa politica sia determinante per il suo prossimo fallimento. Perché le importa solo dell'utilizzo del capitale di alcuni pochi, i quali hanno paura che il loro denaro "svapori", come dice Marx, se non può essere usato a scopo redditizio. Però non si può esercitare una politica che giovi esclusivamente ad alcuni pochi e reagisca sulla maggioranza soltanto con la violenza. La storia lo ha dimostrato continuamente, mentre l'assoluta priorità dell'utilizzo del capitale mette anche in evidenza che l'economia capitalistica in linea di massima sembra essere arrivata al suo termine, e che il cosiddetto "progresso" di tale sistema era una menzogna, altrimenti non ci sarebbero questi enormi problemi di utilizzo. Perciò, se pensiamo a delle alternative, sono in discussione non solo 500 anni di capitalismo e colonialismo, bensì 5000 anni di patriarcato. Il tempo di questo "ordine" sociale, che si trova nel capitalismo magari alla sua ultima fase, sembra vicino alla fine a causa della globalizzazione che evidenzia l'insormontabile finitezza del globo. I metodi usati funzionano in ultima analisi sempre meno anche per i fruitori, e ancora soltanto coadiuvati da un uso sempre maggiore di violenza. Vanno inoltre a finire in un generale annichilirsi di quello che in definitiva è stato accumulato, quindi nel suo continuo annientamento.

Mentre questo è possibile vederlo, il patriarcato capitalistico come pensiero è già al passato. Si intuisce, e le persone ne rinnegano la fede. La "religione" della nostra civiltà, il suo "credo" è nella violenza. Invece, secondo Gandhi la violenza è sempre una menzogna – la verità è non violenta. Così mi chiedo cosa avrebbe detto Gandhi circa il fatto che nel frattempo anche l'acqua di "mother Ganga", del sacro Gange in India sarà venduta, ossia alla ditta francese Suez. "Killing the Gange" lo chiama Vandana Shiva. Per la gente dell'India ciò significa che a causa del profitto anche la propria madre sarà venduta e assassinata. Questo esempio indica dove siamo veramente, qual è di fatto la questione e cosa perciò dobbiamo fare. Perché ora dobbiamo prendere realmente in considerazione il nostro diritto di resistenza garantito dalla costituzione, riconquistare spazi pubblici.

Les ménages africains aux prises avec les effets de la guerre en Ukraine

di

*Sylvie Jacqueline Ndongmo**

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to show the impacts of the Ukrainian conflict on African households. It is based on the assumption that the war in Ukraine has corollary effects in contemporary geopolitics and particularly affects Africa and the status of women within households. We adopted a qualitative and quantitative methodology based on data collection, as well as on the basis of expressed statistics. We find that this conflict does not have isolated effects: it impacts on the African economy with the scarcity of basic goods formerly imported from Russia and Ukraine; it provokes uprisings against the high cost of living in the communities; it weakens diplomatic relations between the warring countries and the African countries to which they were granting subsidies; and it creates problems for women, whose housewife's basket is increasingly empty, due to insufficient food rations.

Au lendemain de la fin de la Covid-19 qui a fragilisé de façon significative la paix mondiale, le monde connaît un nouveau foyer de tension aux effets similaires à celle de la pandémie, notamment en ce qui concerne ces effets sur la stabilité socioéconomique africaine.

Le conflit opposant la Russie à l'Ukraine est, comme nous pouvons l'observer, une menace grave et sans précédent pour la paix dans les pays slaves en particulier, et dans le monde en général. Cette guerre qui se déroule à des milliers de kilomètres de l'Afrique semble, à première vue, ne pas constituer un danger sur la stabilité et la paix africaine. Toutefois, la Ligue Internationale des Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté, région Afrique (WILPF Afrique) à travers son programme de réponse aux crises, pense que le conflit ukrainien en constitue un enjeu majeur, au regard de la conjoncture économique africaine actuelle qui met en évidence les effets de cette guerre sur le continent.

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Le plus grand danger auquel l’Afrique est confrontée est la hausse du prix du pain, la Russie et l’Ukraine fournissant plus de 25% du blé mondial (Duggal et Haddad 2022, online). Le Fonds monétaire international (FMI) a mis en garde contre l’imminence d’une crise alimentaire susceptible de provoquer des troubles sociaux en Afrique subsaharienne, en révisant à la baisse ses prévisions de la région, à 3,8% contre 4,5% initialement prévus (Mombrial 2022, online).

Du point de vue économique, l’Afrique constitue l’un des principaux marchés de consommation des produits qu’exportent la Russie et l’Ukraine ; c’est le cas du gaz, du pétrole, et du blé. Tout d’abord, le secteur des hydrocarbures est affecté par la guerre d’Ukraine dans la mesure où les sanctions imposées par l’Union Européenne sur l’exportation du pétrole russe entraînent une pénurie ou une inflation des prix de gaz, de diesel et de pétrole dans les pays comme la RDC et le Nigéria. Thomas Urbain et Emiline Burckel (2022) donnent un chiffre en l’explication à cette crise : “Les prix du pétrole sont repassés au-dessus du seuil des 120 dollars le baril” (2022, online).

D’autre part, le blé s’avère constituer un enjeu majeur pour la paix en Afrique. En effet, le rapport de la Conférence des Nations Unies sur le Commerce et le Développement (CNUCED) prévient d’entrée de jeu qu’au regard du conflit ukrainien “le risque de troubles civils, de pénuries alimentaires et de récessions induites par l’inflation ne peut être écarté” (ONU 2021, online). Cette mise en garde semble interpeller les pays africains qui au fil des années ont créé une sorte de dépendance vis-à-vis du blé russe et ukrainien, au point d’être à court de blé depuis le début de la guerre. Cette situation concernerait une vingtaine de pays africains qui dépendent partiellement ou entièrement de l’orge slave et dont la pénurie provoque déjà des tensions corolaires en Afrique. Comme le confirme le même rapport des Nations Unies, “pas moins de vingt-cinq pays africains importent plus d’un tiers de leur blé des deux pays et quinze d’entre eux en importent plus de la moitié” (Mulegwa 2022, online).

Parmi ces pays concernés par l’importation de blé, on trouve quatre pays de l’Union économique et monétaire Ouest africaine (UEOMA) que sont le Bénin, le Togo, le Burkina Faso, le Sénégal qui dépendent de l’importation de ces deux pays. En fait, le Bénin importe 100% de son blé de la Russie, le Burkina Faso arrive en deuxième position des pays importateurs, avec 55% de son blé en provenance de la Russie et 5% de l’Ukraine. Le Sénégal importe pour sa part 50% de son blé de la Russie contre 15% de l’Ukraine. Enfin le Togo n’importe pas son blé de l’Ukraine, ses achats proviennent de la Russie à hauteur de 45% (Wandaougo 2022, online).

Cette Crise affecte donc profondément la région Afrique en Général, car même les pays qui n’ont pas d’accords commerciaux avec l’Ukraine et la Russie subissent une pénurie en blé du fait de la crise. Comme le souligne Cédric Gouverneur dans “Afrique Magazine”, “au Cameroun, les exportations de céréales sont interdites vers les pays voisins” (2022, online) en vue de palier la situation de pénurie de blé déjà en quantité insuffisante.

Les conséquences globales sont donc prévisibles ou du moins escomptées. En premier lieu on assiste peu à peu à l’inflation des prix de blé sur le marché, dû à la raréfaction de cette denrée et ses produits dérivés sur le marché de consommation africain. Le cas du pain, ou si on veut, du pain quotidien, est un cas à souligner: son

grammage a diminué et ses prix ont augmenté de 25% de celui d'avant le conflit, passant de 125 FCFA à 150 FCFA (Tjeg 2022, online). Face à cette inflation auxquelles s'associent indirectement ceux des autres produits de consommation, le pouvoir d'achat devient de plus en plus faible et provoqueraient des tensions à deux niveaux: au niveau domestique, les tensions dans les foyers pourraient se faire ressentir, car la ration alimentaire doit être revue à la hausse en vue de satisfaire le panier de la ménagère.

Au niveau communautaire, des soulèvements tendent à s'annoncer pour protester contre l'effet de contagion dont souffrent les autres produits importés par l'Afrique. Le slogan "ça sort d'Ukraine, le prix a augmenté" est devenu une politique commerciale employée par les commerçants pour se faire plus de profit chez les consommateurs. Un cas illustratif est noté entre avril et mi-mai 2022 au Cameroun, où cette tactique commerciale frauduleuse dont serait vecteur le conflit ukrainien a poussé les populations des localités de Foubot, Fouban et Koutaba (Département du Noun, Ouest Cameroun) à se soulever contre l'inflation des prix des produits commerciaux au point de fermer les lieux de commerce, comme semblent indiquer les titres en couvertures du journal "La Gazette du Noun" en date du 9, 11 et 12 mai 2022 l'attestent.



Source : La Gazette du Noun, Facebook, 9, 11 et 12 mai 2022.

Du point de vue politique, la guerre d'Ukraine contribue à fragiliser les relations diplomatiques entre l'Ukraine et les partenaires africains. D'une part, on pourrait noter la réduction des budgets alloués à certaines Organisations de la Société Civile par les partenaires financiers au profit des réfugiés ukrainiens. De même, les étudiants africains placés sur un système de bourse en Ukraine se trouvent dans l'obligation d'interrompre leur cursus académique pour des questions sécuritaires. Comme le souligne le quotidien "Le Monde", "les étudiants camerounais en Ukraine ont lancé un appel de détresse aux autorités camerounaises pour être évacués" (Lassaad 2022, online).

Chez les femmes, l'impact est davantage observable au niveau des ménages. De plus en plus, elles éprouvent des difficultés à remplir le panier de la ménagère compte tenu de la ration alimentaire insuffisante face à la montée vertigineuse des prix des produits dérivés du blé russe et ukrainien. En effet, si la guerre en Ukraine

a contribué à hausser le prix des denrées de premières nécessités importées sur le marché africain, elle n'a malheureusement pas entraîné l'augmentation des revenus des ménages africains ; d'où la vie chère résultant de l'incompatibilité entre les prix élevés sur le marché camerounais et le pouvoir d'achat du consommateur très faible. Il faut d'ailleurs souligner que pour celles qui dépendent entièrement des ressources financières du mari, car n'ayant pas de travail rémunéré, elles se trouvent parfois violentées par leurs conjoints qui les suspectent de s'appuyer sur la crise de l'inflation pour prélever à leurs propres besoins une partie de la ration alimentaire quotidienne, hebdomadaire ou mensuelle.

Des situations semblables, vécues par d'autres pays africains attestent bien de ce que le conflit ukrainien n'a pas que des effets isolés sur la Russie et l'Ukraine, mais aussi sur tous les pays du monde. Inéluctablement, les ménages les plus pauvres se préparent déjà à payer un lourd tribut, car ils consacrent une part importante de leurs revenus à l'alimentation et à l'énergie. Ils sont particulièrement vulnérables à cette flambée des prix. Avec cet impact alimentaire dans la société patriarcale (en Afrique comme dans le reste du monde), c'est encore la femme qui est au centre de la crise aussi bien dans le foyer qu'au niveau communautaire. En Afrique la situation aggrave des autres crises déjà existantes telles que la famine, la sécheresse, les guerres civiles, sans oublier le retour de l'épidémie de Choléra ; d'où l'urgence de penser à une riposte conjointe pour y faire face et préserver la paix féministe pour une paix mondiale durable.

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War in Ukraine: Resistance and strength of Ukrainian women

by

*Debora Pinzana**

From February 2022 to today, because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has turned into a terrible war of attrition, we have witnessed a mass exodus of Ukrainian refugees, mostly women and children, while also a significant number of women remain in Ukraine. For those women and girls who have crossed borders, safety is not guaranteed. Women are first at high risk of sexual exploitation in the transit process as they flee conflict. For those women who remain, especially in the zones of battlefield, the risk of sexual abuse and rape is high.

In this context which exposes women and girls in war to a situation of greater vulnerability, it is indeed important not to forget, however, the contribution of Ukrainians in the resistance. They fight against war, and many are forced to re-invent themselves, losing their old identity and forging a new one shaped by war. When we explore closely the multiple and complex roles that the women play in conflict, the narrative of women in war changes, breaking the stereotypes that see women only as victims. We restore to them the dignity of women who struggle in their daily life, against the atrocity of the war. Focusing on women primarily as victims disguises their agency and contributions in the ongoing war. Fortifying stereotypical assumptions of women as victims only can reinforce ideas about the need for a protective culture in which women's agency and power are belittled. So, it is important to recognize the contribution of the Ukrainian women in the resistance also in the way in which we perceive their involvement in the conflict, with the hope that their contributions will be recognized also at the political level, in the peace talks.

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In my recent work, as human rights and gender advisor at a center for peace and human rights in Norway, I have collected several testimonies and stories of Ukrainian women, both refugees in Norway and from women who still live in Ukraine. Through their voices and their narratives, I learnt about the burden they carry, simultaneously as their immense courage and strengths. Refugees, fighters, human rights activists, laborers, humanitarian workers, mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, partisans. All unify in a common struggle, to fight for the freedom of their country and preserve/rebuild the future of their children and community. Determined to fight, in their different roles and responsibilities, whatever the price to pay.

Amongst these testimonies, a special one involved the story of three Ukrainian women who fled the war with their two children. Originally from Nikolaev, in southern Ukraine, their testimonies tell of a journey undertaken to escape from the war. Their journey over days, crossing borders, and defying every difficulty and fear, represents the journey of many Ukrainian women, forced to leave their home, their country to seek protection¹.

In my several encounters with Ukrainian women between 2014-2017, when I worked in Ukraine, first in Odessa, then in Donbass, I had the honor of encountering the strength of the Ukrainian women more closely. At that time, I was in charge of monitoring and reporting violations of human rights in Ukraine, with particular attention to women's rights. The aspect that emerged in those encounters, regardless of the role that each of them play in the society, was their pride and their personal engagement in the conflict. They were proud in taking care of their family, their children, but, at the same time, aware that their role did not stop only in taking care, but also in fighting and fighting for their country. Women united by their determination to play an important role in the conflict and its resolution, whatever their role in society was.

Their voice is even more powerful today, in this current brutal war. Ukrainian women are at the forefront of fighting this war. Each of them, whether forced to flee the country or remain, they carry with them the burden of the war. In a new shape of their internal lives that war has brought, they fight against this atrocious aggressivity committed by the Russian forces. Strong women determined not to be crushed by the brutality of the war, but to resist, with an inner strength that sees them engaged in a common struggle, in the name of freedom and justice.

This inner strength is something that I felt also in all the latest Ukrainian women's stories I have collected. In the encounters I had with the Ukrainian women refugees, despite their pain in having been forced to flee their country, to ensure safety to their children, their words and voices were clear. Stories of women who don't give up, ready to face any obstacle, every fear, every loss, in the exhausting wait for the war to end. In their tales of lacerations, pains and fight, I recognize, once again, their extraordinary strength.

While I write this simple but sincere homage to the strength of Ukrainian women in their daily struggle against war, my thoughts go to all Ukrainians women whom I

¹ A video of these testimonies can be viewed at: <https://beheard.no/livshistorier/katia-lena-and-nina>.

have met along my path. In particular, to the women I met in Severodonetsk², now under the brutal Russian onslaught. An area surrounded by fields of sunflowers, where the gaze is lost in the horizon, immersed in an intense infinite yellow color. Generous, kind, deep souls as the souls of the women who inhabit those lands. Stories of women struggling for their lives and the lives of their loved ones, struggling in keeping their humanity and dignity, in the midst of the most inhumane of all human acts: war.

Women's war has its own colors, its own smells, its own lighting, and its own range of feelings. Its own words. There are no heroes and incredible feats, there are simply people who are busy doing inhumanly human things³.

² Sievierodonetsk, Sieverodonetsk or Severodonetsk is a city in the Luhansk Oblast of Ukraine, located to the northeast of the left bank of the Siverskyi Donets river and approximately 110 km to the northwest from the Oblast capital, Luhansk. It faces Lysychansk across the river.

³ Svetlana Alexievich, Nobel Prize in Literature 2015. *The Unwomanly Face of War*. Born in the Ukrainian town of Ivano-Frankovsk. Her father was Belarusian and her mother Ukrainian. After her father's demobilization from the army the family returned to his native Belarus.