

# World War and World Peace in the Age of Digital Capitalism

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CHRISTIAN FUCHS



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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: War, Peace, and Digital Capitalism

World politics has become highly polarised. We live in times when a new world war has become more likely. The United Nations' 2024 *Pact for the Future* expresses concerns about 'the growing risks of a nuclear war which could pose an existential threat to humanity'.<sup>1</sup> Will humanity descend into barbarism and world war, or will we realise the dangers of our global problems, weapons of mass destruction, and the threats posed by a potential new world war and a climate catastrophe in order to avoid annihilation and create perpetual world peace? This book deals with violence, world war, and world peace in global digital capitalism. It asks: How do violence and war manifest themselves in global digital capitalism? How do digital capitalism and digital technologies manifest themselves in violence and warfare? What are the prospects for world peace today?

In order to prevent world war and advance world peace, we need a better understanding of war and violence and of their contexts and causes. We need to ask what war is, what violence is, what war and peace look like today and how they have changed in the twenty-first century. The changes of capitalism have shaped violence and warfare. This book addresses these tasks. It provides possible answers to the questions just posed.

Digitalisation and globalisation are two features of contemporary societies that have been discussed much in the past decades. This book gives particular attention to the analysis of violence and war in the context of global digital capitalism. It aims to show how *digital capitalism* and *global capitalism* are two key aspects that frame, condition, shape, and circumscribe twenty-first century violence and warfare.

Twenty-first-century societies have been characterised as *digital capitalism*.<sup>2</sup> While capitalism is a formation of society that has existed for

quite a long time, digital technology is a far more recent phenomenon that emerged with the first digital computers in the 1940s and then has taken on new forms such as the personal computer, the Internet, the smartphone, cloud computing, AI, semi-autonomous and autonomous robots, etc. Digital technologies do not bring about societal change. Rather, society shapes and brings about new technologies that, together with societal structures, condition and mediate human practices. Digital capitalism is an important context of changes of violence and war in the twenty-first century, such as the rise of drone warfare and semi-autonomous killing robots. This book takes a look at the interaction of digital capitalism on the one side and violence and war on the other side.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and Ukraine's defence have involved drone warfare. Russia has purchased countless Shahed military drones from Iran that it has used for attacking Ukrainian infrastructure as well as military and civilian targets.<sup>3</sup> These drones are manufactured by Shahed Aviation Industries, an Iranian defence company. Digital technologies enable such military drones to fly autonomously, following a programmed path and hitting a defined target. 'At the same time, Ukraine has been developing its own drones to strike targets deep inside Russia as a way of making up for its own lack of long-range missiles. [...] Drones are not just used on the battlefield: both Ukraine and Russia have hit targets hundreds of kilometres away from the front lines using long-range UAVs.'<sup>4</sup> The drone industry has developed through the war in Ukraine. Technologies developed for the capitalist purpose of accumulating profit have changed the practices of warfare. Destruction and killing are increasingly done by machines operated from a distance or autonomously with no direct but rather indirect human involvement. Humans design, manufacture, and programme AI-based weapons that do the killing. The example of military drones shows that there is an inherent connection between the contemporary digital economy and warfare.

Capitalism is not just an economic system where the logic of capital accumulation prevails. It is more than that. It is a type of society, or, as Marx said, a formation of society (*Gesellschaftsformation*) where the logic of accumulation dominates.<sup>5</sup> The accumulation of money-capital, decision-power, and reputation is asymmetrical. It creates inequalities. Intensifying and cumulating inequalities face the danger of reaching a tipping point where violence becomes much more likely.<sup>6</sup> This is what has happened in neoliberal capitalism. Inequalities have intensified,

which has resulted in the strengthening of authoritarian and far-right politics and has created the danger of new fascisms and a new world war. Capitalism as a formation of society is the context of contemporary violence and digital violence.

In the war in Ukraine, Russia used countless drones to target critical infrastructures and kill humans. That's digital violence. Terrorists have published beheading videos on the Internet and social media platforms.<sup>7</sup> That's digital violence. In 2019, the white supremacist Brenton Tarrant on Facebook live-streamed his fascist shooting of Muslims in a mosque and an Islamic centre in Christchurch. He killed 51 people and injured another 40. That's digital violence. In 2022, there were about 50 million people living under conditions of modern slavery,<sup>8</sup> including more than one million in the Democratic Republic of Congo,<sup>9</sup> where one finds slaves forced to work in mines where they extract 'gold and the "three Ts" (tin, tungsten, tantalum)' that are 'used in everything from cars to medical devices, household goods to high-tech electronics'.<sup>10</sup> That's digital violence. A survey of 14,071 women aged 15–25 in 22 countries showed that 21% of the respondents had experienced online threats of physical violence.<sup>11</sup> That's digital violence. In 2024, globally, 550 journalists, including bloggers and online journalists, were detained, 54 killed, 55 were being held hostage, and 95 were missing.<sup>12</sup> That's digital violence.

In the age of digital capitalism that we live in, violence is often digitally enabled. Digital violence has become an important dimension of violence today. We need to better understand the digital mediation, organisation, and communication of violence. To do so, we need a theoretical concept of digital violence. This book contributes to the task of theorising war, peace, and (digital) violence and their roles in digital capitalism, engaging with theories of violence and combining the resulting discussion with theoretical concepts of global capitalism and digital capitalism the author has established in earlier work<sup>13</sup> and that he further develops in the present work.

Since the 1990s, there has been lots of talk about *globalisation* and the claim we live in a global society.<sup>14</sup> However, the globalisation of the economy, politics, and culture is not a new phenomenon. Think, for example, of ancient empires' wars of conquest, the world market, explorers, the slave trade, etc. The emergence of international capital and global conflicts led Rosa Luxemburg,<sup>15</sup> Lenin,<sup>16</sup> and others to speak of imperialism as a stage of capitalism.

The discussion shows that societies had already seen waves of globalisation in earlier times. Since the 1970s, we have seen the emergence of a significant number of new transnational corporations, global capital, a new international division of labour, global social movements such as the environmental movement and the movement for a different globalisation, global communication networks such as the Internet and mobile phone networks, etc. That's why Manuel Castells<sup>17</sup> has spoken of the emergence of a network society. For Castells, the global network society is a new society. But globalisation is not new. There is no new society. However, since the 1970s, when capitalism was hit by a big societal crisis, we have experienced the emergence of a *more global* capitalism that has a flexible regime of accumulation.<sup>18</sup> Notions such as the network society or the global society are positivist concepts. They mainly stress positive aspects of networking and globalisation and sound inherently positive. As a consequence, they easily downplay the reality of inequalities in global digital capitalism.

Although theories of digitalisation are often techno-deterministic and theories of globalisation are often positivist, they are not entirely false. Capitalism has since the 1970s been shaped by digital media and communication and has become more global because dominant classes and groups have sought new regimes and models for the accumulation of money-capital, decision-power, and attention/reputation.<sup>19</sup> In this book, the notions of digital capitalism and global capitalism are important dimensions of capitalism's transformation that we analyse as contexts of violence and warfare in the twenty-first century.

The rise of global neoliberal capitalism has created new global inequalities and a variety of crises – economic and financial crises, social crises, environmental crises, crises of the state and democracy, and cultural crises. Neoliberalism has backfired in a negative dialectic that has created new nationalisms, authoritarianisms, and fascisms. As a consequence, world politics has become highly polarised. There is the danger of a new Cold War between China and Russia on the one side and the USA, the EU, the UK, and NATO on the other side. The looming new Cold War involves heavy armament, networked warfare, and the development of digital weapons and digital warfare strategies that utilise robotics, Artificial Intelligence, big data, the Internet, etc. There is a renewed danger of nuclear war and the outbreak of the Third World War. This book analyses how this dangerous situation the world is in has come about, what role digitalisation plays in it, how a new world war can be circumvented,

and how humanity can attain perpetual world peace. It situates world politics and the threat of a new world war in the context of global capitalism and digital capitalism. It discusses how democratic socialism is a material and institutional infrastructure and foundation of perpetual world peace.

We have also experienced deglobalisation tendencies having to do with the rise of new nationalisms, responses to supply chain crises in the light of the COVID-19 crisis and international conflicts, neo-Keynesianism, and a fuel and energy crisis in the light of the Russo-Ukrainian War. There is an *interaction of globalisation and deglobalisation* in global capitalism.

Contemporary wars, especially the Russian invasion of Ukraine, form the political-economic context of this book. It is, therefore, worth having a look at some of the causes of this war.

The Russo-Ukrainian War started in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea. In 2016, the war in Donbas expanded this conflict into Eastern Ukraine. It turned into a full-scale international war when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 with the goal of bringing about a change of government and demilitarising Ukraine. There are different explanations of Russia's goals and the war's causes and context.

The war in Ukraine is an important context of war today that shapes the discussion of violence and society in this book. The historian Tony Wood argues that there was a 'mix of rational calculation and imperial overreach behind the invasion'<sup>20</sup> that led Putin to decide to invade Ukraine. He gives several reasons for this attack:

- The control of Ukraine would empower Russia geopolitically.
- There are aspects of Russian nationalism that are based on the claim that Ukraine is not a nation and a state but an artificial entity and that its land and people, for historical and cultural reasons, belong to the Russian nation.
- Putin saw pro-Western democratic forces in Ukraine that galvanised in the 2013/2014 Euromaidan movement as a threat to his power and feared that comparable forces might emerge in Russia. Euromaidan was a protest movement that emerged in November 2013 when Ukraine's then-President Yanukovich refused to sign an association agreement with the EU that Ukraine's parliament had approved.
- Ukraine is economically important for Russian oil and gas pipelines that pump such resources westwards. It is a major producer and exporter of sunflower oil, grain, and other agricultural products.

The philosopher Étienne Balibar speaks of the Ukrainian ‘*war of national independence*’ from Russia and ‘a new episode of the *European Civil War*’.<sup>21</sup> Russia would have openly violated international law, which would clearly define ‘the aggressor’ and ‘the victim of aggression’. ‘It seems to me that the immediate priority is to support the struggle of the Ukrainian people, who are expressing their demand for national independence: not because this is *in itself* an absolute value, but because the Ukrainians’ right to self-determination is being trampled underfoot, and the “total” war being waged against them is accompanied by massive violations of human rights, the legal qualification of which is still open to debate, but which cannot be below that of war crimes. Their defeat would be morally unacceptable and disastrous for the rule of international law.’<sup>22</sup>

Balibar characterises Russia under Putin as totalitarian, ‘a form of “neo-imperialism”’, and ‘an autocratic and backward-looking empire’ that attributes to the Russians ‘a superior value and historical mission’. In contrast to Russia’s ethnic nationalism, Ukraine would be based on civic nationalism. Balibar stresses that the 2013/2014 Euromaidan movement was a democratic revolution that deeply disturbed Putin to the point of going to war because democracy ‘risked appearing to the citizens of the Russian Federation as the model to follow’.

Balibar responds to Putin-excusers who argue that NATO encircled Russia and that Putin’s war on Ukraine is, therefore, just a response to NATO’s aggression that even if one concedes that ‘NATO’s policy has contributed to creating the conditions for war throughout the region’, ‘at no time can we pretend that it was not the Russian armies that invaded Ukrainian territory and are in the process of destroying the country because they cannot control it.’ Balibar concludes: ‘It is necessary to support effectively, efficiently, a people invaded, violated, massacred, whose houses, economic infrastructures and places of culture are daily destroyed by bombs.’

In his book *Too Late to Awaken: What Lies Ahead When There is No Future*, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek argues that the contemporary global world is ridden by Four Riders of the Apocalypse:<sup>23</sup>

- Plague: There are global health threats such as COVID-19 and other pandemics.
- War: The Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown that ‘the Third World War is on the horizon’.<sup>24</sup>

- Hunger: Food shortages are caused by global warming, natural disasters, and wars such as the war in Ukraine.
- Death: Besides the deaths caused by the three other dangers, there is, according to Žižek, also the danger that digitalisation creates a ‘wired brain’<sup>25</sup> and a posthuman condition so that humanity dies

For Žižek, the war in Ukraine is ‘a brutal colonial war’ where ‘solidarity should be with the colonized.’<sup>26</sup> In order to stop the end of the world, we have to project ourselves ‘into a catastrophic future’ that makes ‘us act to avoid it’.<sup>27</sup> The world is in a completely mad situation. Humans and society face global economic, social, and societal crises that can only be solved at the international level by humans cooperating in acts of global solidarity. But these crises have escalated to an extent that has given rise to new fascist forces that seek to advance violence and war as responses to crises. They want to create an order that benefits the few at the expense of the many. Žižek says that there is a ‘tendency to establish national sovereignty through violence and war’.<sup>28</sup> A new world war ‘would much more probably mean the end of civilization as we know it, with the survivors (if any) organized in small authoritarian groups’.<sup>29</sup> New wars are ‘a reaction to our global problems’<sup>30</sup> in a postmodern age where big ideas such as ‘freedom, social justice, free education’<sup>31</sup> are declared dead, which opens up a vacuum that is answered by the fascist fetishization of ultra-nationalism, religion, ethnicity, and violence.

The book *World War and World Peace in the Age of Digital Capitalism* asks the following questions:

- Chapter 2: What is violence?
- Chapter 3: What is digital violence?
- Chapter 4: What is digital war?
- Chapter 5: What is (digital) capitalism? What are the roles of violence in (digital) capitalism?
- Chapter 6: What is global capitalism?
- Chapter 7: What does global capitalism’s political economy look like today?
- Chapter 8: How do the major powers in global capitalism understand contemporary international politics? What do their political and military strategies look like?
- Chapter 9: What is peace? What is world peace? How can they be attained?

- Chapter 10: What are the prospects of the United Nations for creating world peace and preventing a new world war? What institutional reforms of the United Nations are needed?
- Chapter 11: What is the relationship between world peace and (digital) democratic socialism?

## CHAPTER 2

# On Violence

### 2.1 Introduction

The question of how we should best define violence is a foundational question for the analysis presented in this book. If we want to understand what digital violence, digital war, and digital imperialism are and how they can be overcome, then we need a concept of violence.

The question ‘What is violence?’ is addressed in several steps in this chapter. Section 2.2 introduces the extended concept of violence as it was outlined by Johan Galtung, Pierre Bourdieu, and Slavoj Žižek. Section 2.3 presents criticisms of this extended concept. In this context, Sylvia Walby’s works are important. Section 2.3 also engages with Étienne Balibar’s understanding of violence. Section 2.4 discusses the relationship between violence, death, and reification. Section 2.5 introduces various types of violence. In section 2.6, a model of violence is presented. Section 2.7 draws some conclusions.

### 2.2 The Extended Concept of Violence

#### 2.2.1 *Johan Galtung*

Johan Galtung argues for ‘an extended concept of violence’ that goes beyond ‘somatic incapacitation, or deprivation of health, alone (with killing as the extreme form), at the hands of an *actor* who *intends* this to be the consequence’.<sup>1</sup> He defines violence the following way: ‘violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations.’<sup>2</sup>

In a later essay, Galtung defines violence as ‘avoidable insults to basic human needs, and, more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible’.<sup>3</sup> Galtung identifies three forms of violence: direct violence (through physical intervention; an event), structural violence (through state or organisational mandate; a process), and cultural violence (dehumanising or otherwise exclusionary representations; an invariance). This means that for Galtung, in exerting violence, one can physically coerce somebody (physical violence), exclude him/her from access to vital resources (structural violence), or manipulate his/her mind or ruin his/her reputation (ideological violence). For Galtung, violence exists not only if it is actually exerted but also if it is only a threat: ‘Threats of violence are also violence’.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.2.2 *Pierre Bourdieu and Slavoj Žižek*

Comparable to Galtung’s notion of cultural violence, Pierre Bourdieu uses the concept of symbolic violence, by which he understands power that is ‘gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such’ and aims at the ‘legitimation of the established order by establishing distinctions (hierarchies) and legitimating these distinctions’.<sup>5</sup>

Comparable to Galtung and Bourdieu, Slavoj Žižek develops a broad definition of violence. He argues against seeing violence only as what he calls direct, subjective violence – ‘acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict’, violence performed by a dearly identifiable agent.<sup>6</sup> He challenges liberal ideology that ‘while combating *subjective violence*’, commits ‘*systemic violence* that generates the very phenomena’ that liberals abhor. Žižek argues that the ‘ultimate cause of violence’ is ‘*the fear of the Neighbour*’.<sup>7</sup>

He says that besides subjective violence, there are two forms of what he terms objective violence, namely symbolic violence and systemic violence. Symbolic violence is ‘embodied in language’ and includes, for example, ‘racism, incitement, sexual discrimination’.<sup>8</sup> Systemic violence is embodied in social structures and systems. ‘Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent’.<sup>9</sup>

Galtung, Bourdieu, and Žižek are representatives of an extended concept of violence that goes beyond physical violence and covers structural

and systemic violence, symbolic violence, and cultural/ideological violence. This notion of violence has not remained unchallenged. In the next section, we will look at some points of criticism.

## 2.3 Criticisms of the Extended Concept of Violence

### 2.3.1 *Sylvia Walby's Critique*

The feminist sociologist Sylvia Walby comments that Galtung 'extends the concept of violence so that any social system of social inequality that leads to unnecessary death is considered violent, even if this does not involve the deployment of physical force'.<sup>10</sup> One problem with broad definitions of violence is that they often are not discernible from notions such as power, domination, and coercion but rather express the same meaning. Bourdieu, for example, speaks interchangeably of 'symbolic power'<sup>11</sup> and 'symbolic violence'.<sup>12</sup> Walby et al. however suggest that the broad concept of violence 'erodes the specificity and potential for distinctive explanatory power of the concept of violence'.<sup>13</sup>

Notions such as cultural and symbolic violence are often used synonymously with the notion of ideology. This, for example, becomes evident when Bourdieu speaks of 'symbolic violence that any ideological discourse implies'.<sup>14</sup> However, given that there is a long theory history of the concept of ideology, which thereby has been well established, it is unnecessary and redundant to introduce novel notions such as symbolic and cultural violence.

Walby argues against Žižek's and Bourdieu's focus on symbolic violence that they downplay 'the importance of violence in the lives of women; the significance of visceral physical force and the harm it causes' and neglect 'domestic violence and other forms of violence against women'.<sup>15</sup> Concerning structural violence, Walby argues that it is important to study how social structures are related to patterns of violence but maintains that violence is an action and that structures do not act but set conditions of actions.<sup>16</sup> This means that certain conditions of society are conducive to fostering violence, whereas others are detrimental to violence. Walby makes 'a clear separation between violence and its causes'.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.3.2 *Étienne Balibar's Understanding of Violence*

In his book *Violence and Civility*, Étienne Balibar<sup>18</sup> wants to better understand extreme violence such as the Shoah, genocide, pogroms, terror, mass impoverishment, etc. He uses the term cruelty for extreme violence and distinguishes between ultraobjective and ultrasubjective violence as the two dimensions of cruelty. Ultraobjective violence treats 'masses of human beings as things or useless remnants'<sup>19</sup>; it is ultimate, violent reification – 'the transformation of human beings into [...] disposable waste'.<sup>20</sup> Ultrasubjective violence represents individuals and groups 'as incarnations of evil, diabolical powers that threaten the subject from within and have to be eliminated at all costs' and involves imagery that represents 'human beings as accumulations of waste or junk' so that 'the fantasy of bestiality' plays an important role.<sup>21</sup> The ultrasubjective dimension is the call for and communication of violence, which includes the ideological construction of scapegoats and justifications of violence. The ultraobjective dimension puts such calls into practice by executing violence.

In his analysis of violence, Balibar<sup>22</sup> refers to Jacques Lacan's<sup>23</sup> use of the Möbius strip to argue that binaries are interrelated. Balibar uses the Möbius strip as a model for arguing that ultrasubjective and ultraobjective violence are interrelated and turn into each other. They are 'two stages' of violence that 'are at once distinct and inseparable, of which one is something like the other's underside'.<sup>24</sup> Ultrasubjective violence 'can at any moment turn into those of 'ultraobjective' violence [...] and the other way around'.<sup>25</sup>

Balibar's approach has both advantages and disadvantages. The *first advantage* is that it conceives of violence not as static but as a dynamic process where we find various forms of violence that are interrelated and can turn into each other. The *second advantage* of Balibar's concept of violence is that he stresses that violence has linguistic and communicative dimensions that he conceives of as the subjective dimension of violence. There are not just acts of violence that cause death and injuries but also threats of violence, calls to violence, and ideologies of violence that construct certain groups or individuals as enemies that should be killed and justify violence against such scapegoats and constructed enemies. Balibar does not say so, but every act of violence is itself also a form of communication that expresses absolute hatred.

The disadvantage of Balibar's approach is that it creates the impression that it is ideologies that construct scapegoats and the mass murder of these constructed scapegoats. There are good reasons why, in virtually all legal

systems, the sentence for murder is higher than the one for the threats to kill someone. The danger of inflated concepts of violence is that they make it appear as if ideology and threats are as terrible as physical injuries and murder. Therefore, in my view, it is better to distinguish between violence and the communication of violence (see chapter 3 in this book).

### 2.3.3 *Walby's Notion of Violence*

Violence is not the same as power. It is a dimension of coercive societies and a social relation where humans try to intentionally cause physical harm to other humans who don't agree to the cause of that harm. The harm caused is usually 'a physical injury'<sup>26</sup> but can also involve mental or psychological harm. Harm means 'a detriment to wellbeing'.<sup>27</sup> Violence is the intended, unintended or threatened physical harm of a human being. Walby defines violence as 'the use of physical force to produce physical hurt and harm'<sup>28</sup> and as 'intended physical acts that cause harm'.<sup>29</sup> Violence can either be defined as an action alone or as an action that causes harm.

Walby argues that violence 'should be defined by both action (including intention) and harm, not action alone'.<sup>30</sup> She distinguishes between non-violent coercion and violence. While violence is always coercive, there are also non-violent forms of coercion, such as stalking.<sup>31</sup> Violence is not purely physical. It has a psychological dimension. Actual violence often hurts not just human beings' bodies but also their psyche. Threats of inflicting violence on someone can terrify humans and cause fears of death. Psychological threats to kill or seriously injure someone are pre-forms of violence. This does, however, not imply that any ideology that lies and tries to manipulate, such as online fake news, is a form of violence.

Walby defines violence in a way that is comparable to the World Health Organization's understanding: Violence is the 'intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. The definition encompasses interpersonal violence as well as suicidal behaviour and armed conflict'.<sup>32</sup>

Violence stands in the context of power relations. 'Violence is a form of power that is used to dominate others, to create fear and to shape their course of conduct. It is deployed and regulated by individuals, groups, and states. It is used by members of dominant groups against members of weaker social groups, as well as in response'.<sup>33</sup>

Someone plans to kill another person by running them over with a car. This is a form of intentional violence. In legal terms, it is an act of murder. Think of another situation. Someone unintentionally causes a car accident because they drive too fast. A person in another car dies because of the accident. This is a case of violent death, an instance of violence. The difference to the first example is that there was no intention to kill another person. We can learn from the two examples that there are intended and unintended forms of violence. The intention of violence varies on a continuum. The question of the intentionality of violence also plays a role in criminal law. For example, the German penal code (*Strafgesetzbuch*)<sup>34</sup> contains a section on offences against life (division 16). Murder is punished by imprisonment for life and defined as the intentional killing of a person (§211). The intentionality is defined as killing 'out of a lust to kill, to obtain sexual gratification, out of greed or otherwise base motives, perfidiously or cruelly or by means constituting a public danger or to facilitate or cover up another offence'.<sup>35</sup> Murder is differentiated from manslaughter (*Totschlag*), which is unintentional killing, that carries a prison sentence of at least five years (§212) and negligent killing (*fahrlässige Tötung*), 'a person's death by negligence',<sup>36</sup> that incurs a prison sentence of up to five years (§222). Whereas our first example is a form of murder, the second example is a form of negligent killing. Both are specific types of violence involving varying degrees of intentionality. In 'relation to the action of killing (generally termed 'homicide'), the law in most countries makes distinctions according to the degree of intention to kill: whether it was deliberately planned; intended, but on the spur of the moment; or not intended to have such serious consequences. In relation to the action of assault, there are degrees of severity of the crime that focus on the level of harm caused: whether there is a physical injury or not and whether this is serious/grievous or minor/actual. The consent or lack of consent of the victim matters; the capacity to consent is affected by age (adult/minor), intoxication through use of alcohol or drugs and the abuse of authority, as well as physical force, threat or coercion.<sup>37</sup>

## 2.4 What is Violence?

Violence is the intended, unintended, or threatened physical harm of a human being.

### 2.4.1 Violence and Death

Etymologically, violence stems from the Latin word *violentia*, which means force and vehemence. Since the thirteenth century, the word violence has been used in English for meaning physical force. In his book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams states that the most basic meaning of violence is 'physical assault'<sup>38</sup> and 'the use of physical force, including the distant use of weapons or bombs'.<sup>39</sup> He adds that further linguistic uses of violence include a differentiation between authorised and unauthorised violence, the media's reporting of violence, violence as a threat, the unruly character of violence, violently in the sense of heavily ('violently in love'), and to do violence to something in the sense of wrenching it from its original meaning. Williams stresses that there are ideological abuses of the notion of violence, namely when the media, politicians, etc., characterise unruly behaviour, such as political protests, as violent or terrorist.<sup>40</sup> Violence thereby functions as an ideology. Broad concepts of violence are prone to ideological abuse and the construction of moral panics.

Violence is so threatening because it has the potential to cause the death of a person or a group of persons. There is an inherent connection between death and violence. Simone Weil was a French philosopher. She defined violence as the turning of the human being 'into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of' them.<sup>41</sup> Violence does not necessarily cause death, but it always causes harm that, in an intensified form, can lead to death. There is violence that aims to hurt the victim and violence that aims at killing victims. There is a difference between damaging violence and deadly violence. Violence is so frightening because it can cause death, which means that it has the potential to destroy the most fundamental of all human features – life.

### 2.4.2 Violence as Reification

Violence is the ultimate and most brutal form of reification. Reification means power relations where humans are treated like things, reduced to the status of things and used as instruments. According to the philosopher Georg Lukács, reification means that humans' 'qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part' of their personalities but are treated as things that someone can "own" and "dispose of" like the various objects of the

external world'.<sup>42</sup> Reification denies and robs humans of their human qualities. Reification is dehumanisation. And dehumanisation opens opportunities for violence. Violence is the attempt to rob humans of their lives. It is based on the desire to turn subjects into objects, life into death, humans into things, souls into nothingness, bodies into corpses, wholes into pieces, and vividness into ashes.

Moishe Postone analyses Auschwitz as the ultimate form of violence, a negative factory where Jews are destroyed:

A capitalist factory is a site of value production (valorization process), which necessarily takes the form of the production of goods, of use-values (labor process). That is, the concrete is produced as the necessary carrier of the abstract. The Nazi extermination camps do *not* represent a terrible version of such a factory, an extreme example of modernity, but, rather, should be seen as its grotesque 'anticapitalist' *negation*. Auschwitz was a factory to 'destroy value', that is, to destroy the personifications of the abstract. Its organization was that of a fiendishly inverted industrial process, the aim of which was to 'liberate' the concrete from the abstract. The first step was to dehumanize and reveal the Jews for what they 'really are' – ciphers, numbered abstractions. The second step was to then eradicate that abstractness, trying in the process to wrest away the last remnants of the concrete material 'use-value': clothes, gold, hair.<sup>43</sup>

### 2.4.3 Violence: Practice or System?

Another theoretical question that arises is whether violence is a practice or a system. Hearn et al. introduce the notion of violence regimes. A violence regime is 'a particular structure, a general societal structure, and a system' that interacts 'with other systems'.<sup>44</sup> Walby argues that violence 'constitutes a social system, an institutional domain, that is parallel to those of economy, polity, and civil society'.<sup>45</sup> Conceiving violence as a general social system brings up the problem of how to distinguish between society-in-general and violent societies. There is the danger that structuralist and functionalist approaches reify and naturalise violence. The consequence is the argument that violence exists always and necessarily. Making this argument is based on a negative concept of humans and society. It categorically rejects the existence of peaceful societies and sees war as a necessary

feature of all societies. Humans are then defined as competitive, warfaring beings. Given that humans have reason, they can refuse to fight wars and exert violence. Assuming that violence is a practice has the advantage, that it is then seen as contextual, historic, and situated.

There are violent practices that involve a continuous repetition of violent acts, such as wars and genocides. Such practices are social conflicts where at least one of the sides resorts to violence to try to eradicate the other side. There are at least two groups involved. At least one of the groups sees the other group as an enemy and cause of societal problems. Violence is seen as an appropriate method for exterminating the other group. A social conflict is a longer-existing social relation between groups that is characterised by competing interests and attempts of at least one group to accumulate resources at the expense of the opposing group.

Violence is not itself a social system, but there are social systems that are built on violence. First, there are those social systems of organised violence that are organised by the state. They include the police, the legal system, and the penal system that monopolise the use of the means of coercion, including violence, in order to execute laws. The military develops practices of warfare and threatens to use and uses armed violence in order to defend the integrity and borders of a nation-state. Secret services use covert means of surveillance of enemies and opponents of a nation-state as well as violence to defend the integrity and borders of a nation-state. Second, there are social systems of violence that are organised outside of the state. They include, for example, militias, terrorist groups, criminal groups, and political rebel groups.

#### ***2.4.4 Poverty and Violence***

If violence always involves actors who inflict violence on victims, then is it violence when thousands in poor countries die in famine and poverty? Johan Galtung argues in this context that in structural violence, there is not 'any person who directly harms another person' but that rather the 'violence is built into the structure'.<sup>46</sup> Willem Schinkel comments that the advantage of Galtung's understanding of violence is that structural violence 'is relatively unbound to the presence of a violent subject' such that it 'cannot be traced back to one or more individuals', and is based on 'the relative autonomy of the structure'.<sup>47</sup> Such arguments are posthumanist and

structuralist in character. They turn structures into actors that are independent of humans. In reality, structures are part of social systems in which humans act based on existing rules and resources. Global capitalism is a social system based on structures such as markets, class relations, nation-states, ideologies, divisions of labour, etc. It does not exist independently from humans but only through their practices. The causes of poverty are complex and have to do with the existence of a global class system between the rich and the poor. The actor causing famine is, in the last instance, the global class of the rich and those governments, parties, and politicians that uphold and justify a class system that denies humans the basic necessities of life, including healthy food, drinking water, shelter, health care, etc. The class system takes on a structural and systemic form, which creates power relations between classes of humans, allowing social roles (such as the rich and the poor) to be created. These humans are thereby conditioned and constrained in their actions. Is the class system's violence intentional? Those who support a possessive-individualist concept of freedom and an associated ideology that underpins a whole societal system where freedom is the freedom of the individual to be and become wealthy without limits take poverty and strong wealth inequalities as a structural feature of society deliberately into account. Economic violence that creates poverty is, therefore, rational and intentional.

## 2.5 Types of Violence

Christina Steenkamp identifies three types of violence: political, economic, and social violence. Violence 'could be political (in pursuit of political power), social (in pursuit of some social directive, such as keeping community order) or economic (in pursuit of material gain).'<sup>48</sup> The World Health Organization<sup>49</sup> uses the same distinction between economic, political, and social violence.

The economy and politics are part of social life and are social systems, which is why the differentiation of social violence from economic and political violence is not theoretically feasible. Drawing such a distinction implies that the economic and the political are non-social. In contrast, the present author suggests a differentiation into economic, political, and cultural violence.<sup>50</sup> This differentiation is based on a social theory that identifies three interconnected societal realms – the

economy, politics, and culture: the economy is the realm where humans produce goods that satisfy certain human needs. Politics is the realm where humans produce collectively binding decisions. Culture is the realm where humans reproduce their bodies and their minds and produce meanings of the world, themselves, and other humans. The common feature of all these realms is that in them, humans produce in social relations. They are social and societal producers. Social production is a foundational feature of society.<sup>51</sup> Violence can have different motivations. Economic violence is motivated by the perpetrators' interest to appropriate wealth. Political violence is motivated by the perpetrators' interest to gain or extend political influence. Cultural violence is motivated by the perpetrators' worldviews, ideologies, and identities. Culture is often understood as the world of ideas. The terms cultural and ideological violence are, for example, in the influential works of peace researcher Johan Galtung,<sup>52</sup> often understood as psychological harm and harm to someone's reputation and representation. I follow Sylvia Walby's critique of such understandings of violence (see section 2.3). Violence always involves aspects of physical harm. I, therefore, have a different understanding of cultural violence that is based on the approach of Cultural Materialism.<sup>53</sup> Cultural Materialism is a tradition in critical theory founded by Raymond Williams. Williams argues that culture, ideas, and communication are not secondary, a superstructure, and immaterial but rather material. Culture is 'part of the human material social process'.<sup>54</sup> In a Cultural Materialist approach to violence, the cultural dimension of violence means that ideology and worldviews can motivate violence. It does not imply that ideology is a form of violence itself, but rather that ideology can be an aspect and motivator of violence and threats to use violence.

In everyday violence, the different types of violence can overlap so that there is more than one motivation and interest that plays a role in acts of violence.

**Table 2.1:** The types and organisational levels of violence

	Self, individual	Social systems	Society
Economic			
Political			
Cultural			

Table 2.1 provides an overview of the three types of violence and violence's organisational levels. There are not just types of violence but also organisational levels of violence. Violence can be organised at the level of the individual (suicide, self-harm, interpersonal violence), social systems such as groups, organisations and institutions, and society (national societies, global society, the world system).

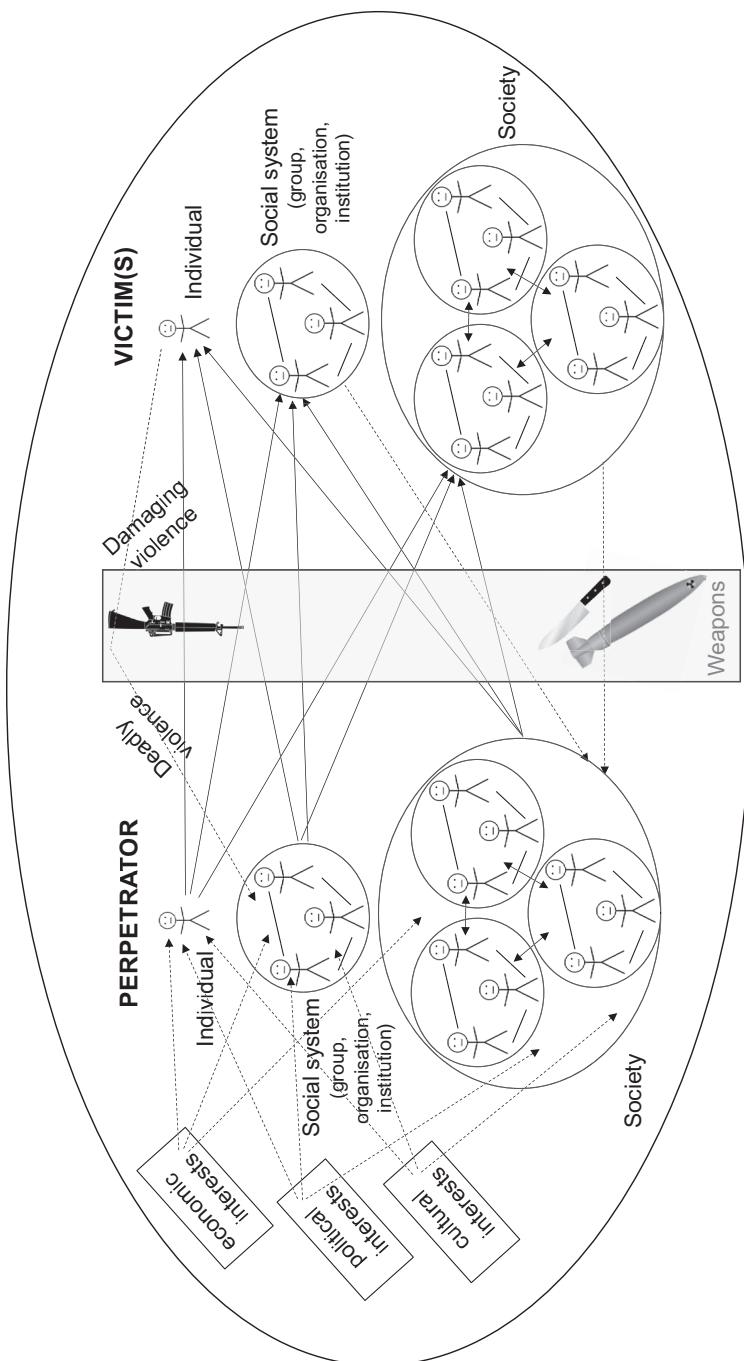
## 2.6 A Model of Violence

Societal contexts are important factors in the level and forms of violence prevalent in society. Walby shows that an increase in inequalities tends to increase violence. She summarises her insights: 'Those countries that are more unequal and less democratic, the more neoliberal countries, have higher rates of violence of all forms – from interpersonal to the criminal justice system to the military – than do those countries that are less unequal, more fully democratic, and more likely to be social democratic.'<sup>55</sup> 'There are higher levels of violence in neoliberal countries than in social democratic ones.'<sup>56</sup> 'Democracy provides important limits to war. Democracy is linked to the extent of use of military force; military power is used less in a mature democracy than in other regimes; mature democracies rarely if ever initiate wars against each other [...]. This may be because of the nature of political culture in a democracy [...]. Further, democracies can provide routes by which those whose lives are put at risk by military engagement can find a political voice and effective resistance. These processes can link domestic and external politics. An increase in the proportion of regimes that are democratic should thus be associated with a decrease in violent warfare.'<sup>57</sup>

Figure 2.1 shows a model of violence. There are three levels of organisation in the model: individuals, groups and social systems, and society. Each of the three levels is potentially present both on the side of perpetrators and victims. There are several important aspects of this model:

- Violence's contexts:

Violence stands in the context of society, where we find power relations, modes of societal production, forms of governance, etc. Some societal conditions, such as fascism, neoliberalism, inequalities, slavery, racism, etc., are conducive to violence, whereas others are conducive to peace.



**Figure 2.1:** A model of violence

Some societal conditions, such as slavery and fascism, are inherently built on violence. In general, inequalities and a lack of democracy, i.e. economic and political alienation, tend to be conducive to violence.<sup>58</sup> Violence is a means for attaining certain ends within relations of domination. Violence is not itself the cause of domination. Rather, humans and groups in relations of domination utilise, at certain moments, violence to attempt to achieve defined goals. Violence is 'only the means, and [...] the aim, on the contrary, is economic [or another] advantage'.<sup>59</sup> Friedrich Engels argues in this context that violence is not the cause of the emergence of private property: the 'institution of private property must already be in existence for a robber to be able to *appropriate* another person's property, [...] therefore force may be able to change the possession of, but cannot create, private property as such'.<sup>60</sup>

- Motivations and interests that shape the use of violence:  
Violence is a dehumanising method that actors use to advance their interests. Various interests and combinations of interests can favour the use of violence. Economic violence is motivated by the perpetrators' interest to appropriate wealth. Political violence is motivated by the perpetrators' interest to gain or extend political influence. Cultural violence is motivated by the perpetrators' worldviews, ideologies, and identities. In everyday violence, these types can overlap so that there is more than one motivation and interest that plays a role in acts of violence.
- Violent actors (the perpetrator):  
Violence involves an actor as the perpetrator. There are three basic types of actors: an individual, a social system (social group, organisation, institution), or a whole society.
- The victims of violence:  
The victims are similar in that they are either individuals, social systems, or societies. Violence is a social relationship between the perpetrator and the victim of violence.
- Varieties of violence:  
There are ten varieties of violence depending on who the perpetrator is and who the victim is:
  - 1) an individual's violent attack on themselves (suicide, self-harm);
  - 2) an individual's violent attack on another individual;

- 3) an individual's violent attack on a social system;
- 4) an individual's violent attack on a society;
- 5) a social system's violent attack on an individual;
- 6) a social system's violent attack on another social system;
- 7) a social system's violent attack on a society;
- 8) a society's violent attack on an individual;
- 9) a society's violent attack on a social system;
- 10) a society's violent attack on another society.

- The nested character of the varieties of violence:  
The varieties of violence are nested. Violence against a society is simultaneously violence against a social system. Violence directed against a social system is simultaneously violence against individuals.
- The effects of violence:  
Focusing on the effects of violence allows us to distinguish two forms of violence: deadly violence and damaging violence. Deadly violence kills humans. Damaging violence harms human health but does not kill humans.
- Weapons:  
A weapon is 'a tool that is designed or adapted to cause physical harm'.<sup>61</sup> Weapons are a particular means of destruction. They are means of violence, means used for inflicting violence. A weapon is an object that a subject uses to inflict deadly or destructive violence. There is a variety of weapons, such as, for example, bodily weapons (fist, foot, elbow, knee, etc.), impact weapons, thrust weapons, incendiary weapons, throwing weapons, explosive weapons, firearms, rockets, weapon systems, chemical weapons, biological weapons, nuclear weapons, energy weapons, electromagnetic pulse weapons, sonic weapons, or digital weapons. War and violence do not come into existence arbitrarily but are based on the material conditions of society. Specific weapons do not exist by chance but because they serve certain interests within a certain mode of production. How weapons look is determined by the economic possibilities of the mode of production. Engels argues in this context that violence 'is no mere act of the will, but requires the existence of very real preliminary conditions before it can come into operation, namely, *instruments* [...] [Violence] is based on the production of arms, and this in turn on production in general – therefore, on

“economic power”, on the “economic situation”, on the *material* means which force has at its disposal.”<sup>62</sup>

- Bodily and mediated weapons:

The two basic types of weapons are bodily weapons and mediated weapons. In the use of body parts as weapons, there is a direct face-to-face encounter between the perpetrator and the victim. They are co-present in space-time. The perpetrator uses their body to inflict violence on the victim. Two human subjects directly encounter themselves in such violence. This violence is subjective and interpersonal. In mediated violence, an object is used as a weapon that mediates the violent attack of the perpetrator on the victim. Mediation enables the spatial and temporal distancing of violence. In violence that is mediated by weapons, perpetrators can kill from a distance. There is a spatial distance between the perpetrator and the victim. There might also be a temporal distancing of violence. For example, someone activates a time fuse bomb that explodes at the place where it was planted at a later point in time. There are four space-time varieties of violence (see table 2.2).

- In the history of violence and warfare, the capacity for killing more and more people in mediated forms has been developed in the form of weapons that allow spatio-temporal distance. It has become possible to kill more and more people without touching, feeling, or seeing them. Weapons of mass destruction include the principle of the spatio-temporal distancing of violence and the semi-automation of violence. It just takes the push of a button to kill millions with a nuclear bomb and unleash a nuclear war that ends humanity and life on Earth. Drones, autonomous weapon systems, and robot soldiers can automatically kill based on programmed violence without the spatial or temporal presence of humans. Violence is never fully automated and fully autonomous from

**Table 2.2:** Four spatio-temporal varieties of violence

	Temporal presence	Temporal distance
Spatial presence	Violence with spatio-temporal presence	Violence with spatial presence and temporal distance
Spatial distance	Violence with spatial distance and temporal presence	Violence with spatio-temporal distance

humans because computer programmes are written by humans, which means that they program what drones, autonomous weapons systems, and military robots do in specific situations.

In the model visualised in figure 2.1, economic, political, and cultural interests together form the contexts of violence. In this context, class, gender, and racism play an important role as contexts of violence. Class, patriarchy, and racism are societal modes of production, particular ways of how society and the production of social relations in society are organised.<sup>63</sup> A societal mode of production has economic, political, and cultural aspects. Class relations involve the exploitation of the working class's labour (economy), surveillance, management and control of workers (politics), and class-oriented ideologies (culture). Patriarchy involves a gendered division of labour (economy), gender-based discrimination and control (politics), and gender-based ideology (culture). Racism involves racialised super-exploitation (economy), racist discrimination and control (politics), and racist ideology (culture).<sup>64</sup> Class, patriarchy, and racism often interact and intersect. All three of them, separately, as well as their entanglements, form important contexts of violence. This means that exploitation and domination tend to foster violence. There are also particular forms of society, such as fascism, that combine violence-based forms of class, patriarchy, and racism in such a manner that they make the extermination of oppositional political forces and scapegoats a central political project. Violence is the grounding principle of fascist societies.<sup>65</sup> Fascism is an:

anti-democratic, anti-socialist, and terrorist ideology, practice, and mode of organisation of groups, institutions, and society that is based on the combination of (a) the leadership principle, (b) nationalism, (c) the friend/enemy-scheme, and (d) militant patriarchy (the idealisation of the soldier, the practice of patriarchy, the subordination of women, war, violence and terror as political means) and the use of terror against constructed enemies, aims at establishing a fascist society that is built on the use of terror and the institutionalisation of the four fascist principles in society, tries to mobilise individuals who fear the loss of property, status, power, reputation in light of the antagonisms as its supporters, and plays an ideological role in capitalist and class societies by blaming scapegoats for society's ills and presenting society's problems as an antagonism between the nation and foreigners and enemies of the nation so that fascism distracts

attention from the systemic roles of class and capitalism in society's problems and from the class contradiction between capital and labour. Fascism often propagates a one-dimensional, one-sided, and personalising 'anti-capitalism' that constructs the nation as political fetish and an antagonism between the unity of a nation's capital and labour on the one side and a particular form of capital or economy or production or community on the other side that is presented as destroying the nation's economic, political, and cultural survival.<sup>66</sup>

In summary, we can identify various types, dimensions, and varieties of violence: economic, political, and cultural violence; violence involving individuals, social systems and society as perpetrators and victims; deadly and damaging violence; violence involving bodily and mediated weapons.

## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the question: What is violence? We can now summarise the main findings:

- **The extended concept of violence:**

Various social thinkers such as Johan Galtung, Pierre Bourdieu, and Slavoj Žižek argue for an extended concept of violence that goes beyond physical violence. They distinguish between direct, physical violence; structural and systemic violence; cultural-ideological violence; symbolic violence; subjective violence; and objective violence.

- **The critique of the extended concept:**

The extended concept of violence is not generally accepted but contested. Sylvia Walby is one of the most vocal critics of the extended notion of violence. One of her arguments is that the extended notion is inflated and that such an inflation trivialises the physical and sexual violence that many women experience. Broad definitions of violence are often not discernible from notions such as power, domination, and coercion. Concepts such as cultural and symbolic violence are often synonymous with the notion of ideology.

- **Violence:**

Violence is the intended, unintended, or threatened physical harm of a human being. Psychological threats to kill or seriously injure someone are preforms of violence.

- **Violence, power, and death:**

Violence stands in the context of power relations. Violence is so threatening because it has the potential to cause the death of a person or a group of persons. There is an inherent connection between death and violence.

- **Violence and reification:**

Violence is the ultimate and most brutal form of reification. Reification means power relations where humans are treated like things, reduced to the status of things, and used as instruments. Reification denies and robs humans of their human qualities. Reification is dehumanisation. And dehumanisation opens opportunities for violence.

- **Types of violence:**

There are three types of violence: economic violence, political violence, and cultural violence. Economic violence is motivated by the perpetrators' interest to appropriate wealth. Political violence is motivated by the perpetrators' interest to gain or extend political influence. Cultural violence is motivated by the perpetrators' worldviews, ideologies, and identities. In everyday violence, these types can overlap so that there is more than one motivation and interest that plays a role in acts of violence.

- **Organisational levels of violence:**

There are not just types of violence but also organisational levels of violence. Violence can be organised at the level of the individual (suicide, self-harm, interpersonal violence), social systems such as groups, organisations and institutions, and society (national societies, global society, the world system). Violence involves an actor as the perpetrator. There are three basic types of actors: an individual, a social system (social group, organisation, institution), or a whole society. The victims are similar in that they are either individuals, social systems, or societies. Violence is a social relationship between the perpetrator and the victim of violence.

- **Varieties of violence:**

There are ten varieties of violence depending on who the perpetrator is and who the victim is:

- 1) an individual's violent attack on themselves (suicide, self-harm);
- 2) an individual's violent attack on another individual;
- 3) an individual's violent attack on a social system;

- 4) an individual's violent attack on a society;
- 5) a social system's violent attack on an individual;
- 6) a social system's violent attack on another social system;
- 7) a social system's violent attack on a society;
- 8) a society's violent attack on an individual;
- 9) a society's violent attack on a social system;
- 10) a society's violent attack on another society.

- **Forms of violence:**

Focusing on the effects of violence allows us to distinguish two forms of violence: deadly violence and damaging violence. Deadly violence kills humans. Damaging violence harms human health but does not kill humans.

- **Weapons:**

Weapons are a particular means of destruction. They are means of violence, means used for inflicting violence. A weapon is an object that a subject uses to inflict deadly or destructive violence. The two basic types of weapons are bodily weapons and mediated weapons. In the use of body parts as weapons, there is a direct face-to-face encounter between the perpetrator and the victim. In mediated violence, an object is used as a weapon that mediates the violent attack of the perpetrator on the victim. Mediation enables the spatial and temporal distancing of violence. By mediating violence by weapons, perpetrators can kill from a distance. In the history of violence and warfare, the capacity for killing more and more people in mediated forms has been developed in the form of weapons that allow spatio-temporal distance.

Capitalism and empires as forms of domination are expansive and seek to gain control of territory, labour forces, means of production, markets, spheres of influence, and spheres of ideological control. War is a common means used in empires to realise dominant interests. Marx stresses in this context that the 'history of [...] expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire'.<sup>67</sup> Violence is a common method used by empires. Global capitalism is an international system of political-economic rivalries for the economic, political, and ideological control of territories where rival powers use violent and/or non-violent methods for trying to advance the accumulation and centralisation of the economic power of the dominant class as well as the accumulation and global centralisation of

political and ideological power. The biggest danger of competing empires is that rivalry, nationalism, and the friend/enemy-logic that are part of imperialism intensify to such a level that a world war is the consequence.

On the one hand, modernity's Enlightenment logic has partly made political life more civil, and democracy has replaced monarchical rule. On the other hand, forms of violence, including slavery, sexist violence against women, racist violence, wars of conquest, etc., continue to exist and have taken on new forms in the capitalist world system. In addition, capitalism is crisis-prone. Its crises and exacerbating inequalities entail the danger of fascism-producing crises. Fascism is a class society that is built on the principle of violence. It is a rule of terror that includes hierarchical, dictatorial, authoritarian leadership, nationalism, the friend/enemy-logic, militarism, and militant patriarchy.<sup>68</sup> One of its logics is to exterminate opponents and (identified, constructed, imaginary) enemies, both internal and external ones, which is why fascism is both a police state and a particularly violent form of imperialism. Auschwitz is the symbol of the annihilation that fascism is capable of producing. As Adorno noted, 'A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions, so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself so that nothing similar will happen.'<sup>69</sup>

One implication of the relationship between empire and violence is that a peaceful society without violence needs to be non-dominative and provide wealth for all and political participation of all. Rosa Luxemburg argues in this context: 'Only when we have power in our hands will there be an end to wars and barracks.'<sup>70</sup> Marx analysed the Paris Commune and socialist society as the dissolution of organised violence: 'The *Commune* – the reabsorption of the State power by society as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organized force of their suppression – the political form of their social emancipation, instead of the artificial force (appropriated by their oppressors) (their own force opposed to and organized against them) of society wielded for their oppression by their enemies'.<sup>71</sup> Walter Benjamin stresses that the 'nonviolent resolution of conflicts' has societal preconditions. 'Nonviolent agreement can be found wherever the culture of the heart has placed pure means of accord in human hands.'<sup>72</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

# On Digital Violence

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the question: what is digital violence? Having established an understanding of violence in chapter 2, we now want to engage with aspects of communication and the digital in the context of violence.

The starting point of this chapter is that communication is not itself a form of violence. I do not share notions such as cultural violence, symbolic violence, or communicative violence. I agree with Sylvia Walby's criticism of extended concepts of violence,<sup>1</sup> especially the argument that a broad notion of violence that includes symbolic, cultural and ideological dimensions, downplays the horrors of physical violence that are present in war, rape, genocide, domestic violence, etc. (see chapter 2 in this book).

But this does not mean that communication does not play a role in the context of violence. I will argue that there are three essential aspects of how violence is related to communication and mediation: the (digital) communication of violence; the (digital) communication about violence; and the (digital) mediation of violence.

The chapter proceeds in the following manner: Section 3.2 discusses communication and violence, section 3.3 the (digital) communication of violence, section 3.4 the (digital) communication about violence, and section 3.5 the (digital) mediation of violence. Section 3.6 draws some conclusions.

## 3.2 Communication and Violence

### 3.2.1 *Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas on Violence: Language and Communication as Means of Peace*

What is the general role of communication in violence? Walter Benjamin sees a positive role. He argues that peace and ‘the arbitration of conflicts’ require discussion ‘as a technique of civil accord. For, in a discussion, [...] nonviolent agreement [is] possible, [...] [T]here is the] existence of a sphere of human accord that is nonviolent to such a degree that it is wholly inaccessible to violence: the proper sphere of ‘coming-to-an-understanding’ [Verständigung], language.<sup>2</sup> Benjamin thinks that as long as humans talk to each other, they are more unlikely to start violence or war than when communication breaks down. Implicitly, he believes in the importance of diplomacy as political communication that helps prevent violence and wars and negotiate peace agreements.

Jürgen Habermas has further developed Benjamin’s insights, resulting in the discourse ethics approach. He argues that communication must respect the four validity claims of truth, truthfulness, understandability, and normative rightness in order to be undistorted and advance agreement and peace: ‘The ideal communication community presents itself as a model of “pure” communicative sociation. In this community, the only available mechanism of self-organisation is the instrument of discursive opinion and will-formation, and by using such means the community is supposed to be able to settle all conflicts without violence.<sup>3</sup> Habermas stresses the importance of communicative action in conflict resolution: ‘If we find ourselves confronted with questions of conflict resolution or concerning the choice of collective goals and we want to avoid the alternative of violent clashes, then we *must* engage in a practice of reaching understanding.<sup>4</sup> In his view, communicative action is violence-free: ‘The discursive character of opinion- and will-formation in the political public sphere and in parliamentary bodies, however, also has the *practical sense* of establishing relations of mutual understanding that are “violence-free” in Arendt’s sense and that unleash the generative force of communicative freedom.<sup>5</sup>

Authors such as Benjamin Barber, Joshua Cohen, John Dryzek, James Fishkin, Jürgen Habermas, Jane Mansbridge, and John Rawls have developed discourse ethics into models and theories of deliberative democracy.<sup>6</sup> Such authors agree that deliberative democracy is ‘an association whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of its members’,<sup>7</sup> which involves rational argumentation, talking, and listening<sup>8</sup>. Representatives of deliberative democracy see political debate and communication as mechanisms working against violence. Therefore, Habermas argues that deliberative democracy and communicative action are ‘violence-free’.<sup>9</sup>

Susan Stokes objects to theories of deliberative democracy, stating that there are the dangers that ‘elite, specifically partisan, debate shapes citizen preferences’ and that the ‘press perpetrates misinterpretations of what people want’.<sup>10</sup> Gutmann and Thompson criticise that theories of deliberative democracy often assume the possibility of an ideal society where coercion, violence, and domination are absent.<sup>11</sup> The two authors argue that it is not enough to create political conditions that enable citizens’ political debate and participation in policy-making. In addition to democratic processes as ‘the conditions of deliberation’, a focus on the content of deliberation is needed in the form of ‘constitutional principles that both inform and constrain the content of what democratic deliberators can legitimately legislate’.<sup>12</sup> For example, a mere focus on the creation of deliberation and participation as ‘sufficient to legitimate laws and public policies’<sup>13</sup> can legitimate the participatory and deliberative creation of laws and policies that advance the replacement of democracy by fascism, foster violence against and the extermination of minorities, etc. In such cases, deliberation fosters violence. Therefore, ‘[c]onstitutional principles’ as ‘standards that public officials and citizens must not violate in the making of public policy’<sup>14</sup> are needed. Such constitutional rights include respecting human rights, the protection of minorities against violence and arbitrary behaviour, etc.

Such criticisms of participatory and deliberative democracy are indeed very important. They do, however, not invalidate deliberative democracy as a model but can instead be integrated into this model, as Habermas’s work shows. In his book *Between Fact and Norms*, Habermas argues for integrating the model of deliberative democracy with the model of constitutional democracy so that ‘constitutional principles’ serve as ‘a consistent answer to the question of how the demanding communicative forms of democratic opinion- and will-formation can be institutionalized’.<sup>15</sup> Jon Elster takes a similar approach. He argues for a model of deliberative democracy that features ‘political institutions or constitutions’ that

'protect one from irrational or unethical behaviour' and do not introduce 'prisons from which it is not possible to break out'.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.2.2 *Slavoj Žižek on Violence: Language and Communication as Means of Violence*

Benjamin, Habermas, and discourse ethics stress the non-violence of rational discourse, language, and communicative action and their potential for peace-making, peace-preservation, and conflict resolution. Opposing views hold that language is inherently violent. For example, Slavoj Žižek writes that language is 'a violent medium of immediate and raw confrontation'<sup>17</sup> and that language is violent because it 'simplifies the designated thing, reducing it to a single feature. It dismembers the thing'.<sup>18</sup> Based on Jacques Lacan, Žižek argues that in language and communication, there is always 'an asymmetric axis of master versus servant' that results in the claim, *'It is so because I say it is so'*.<sup>19</sup> Language enables communication with neighbours. For Žižek, neighbours are intruders who disturb, which is why language would be 'the first and greatest divider [...] What this means is that verbal violence is not a secondary distortion, but the ultimate resort of every specifically human violence'.<sup>20</sup> Žižek criticises Benjamin's thoughts on violence as 'the mainstream tradition in which' language is 'the medium of reconciliation and mediation, of peaceful coexistence, as opposed to a violent medium of immediate and raw confrontation'.<sup>21</sup>

While for Benjamin and Habermas, language and communication are tools of peace and understanding, Žižek sees them as tools of violence and division. But what if language and communication are neither automatically ethically and politically good nor bad? We should avoid essentialising and naturalising communication and language. Instead, power relations shape communication as language use. Communication and language are not neutral. They have the potential to both express and signify violence and peace. The frequency with which language is used for communicating peace and violence depends on societal conditions, i.e., how conducive society and its power relations are to violence or peace.

There are three forms of (digital) communication and (digital) mediation in the context of violence:

- the (digital) communication of violence (section 3.3);
- the (digital) communication about violence (section 3.4);
- the (digital) mediation of violence (section 3.5).

### 3.3 The Communication of Violence

#### 3.3.1 *The Communication of Violence: A Model*

Figure 3.1 presents a model of the communication of violence.

The model in figure 3.1. is explained in detail in this chapter. There are individuals, groups/social systems, and society as subjects of the communication of violence both at the side of perpetrators and victims. The communication of violence is the communication of a threat that someone will, should or could be killed or harmed. The originator of the threat can be an individual, a social system (a group, an organisation, an institution), or a society. Similarly, those who are being addressed, the potential victims of violence, can be individuals, social systems, or a society.

In the communication of violence, we do not find a weapon as a medium but a means of communication, a communication medium that is used for issuing threats to someone.

The model distinguishes between five forms of communication. Primary communication is face-to-face communication. Someone tells someone else that they should be killed, injured, harmed, etc., in a situation where both sides are co-present. They are in the same place at the same time. The medium used for communicating the threat of violence is sound and light waves. The issuer of the violent threat utilises their body and their mind. For example, they scream and gesticulate in particular ways. Threats of violence are often communicated over spatio-temporal distances, for which technological means of communication are used. We can distinguish between secondary, tertiary, quaternary, and quinary communication media.<sup>22</sup> This distinction is based on the question of whether a technology is used for the production, distribution, and consumption of information. Table 3.1 provides an overview of five forms of the means of communication. All five types can be used as means of communicating violence.

Communication of violence takes place in public or has a private character. Threats of violence are issued anonymously, non-anonymously, or under false identities. In some cases, the recipients of the threats respond privately or publicly to the issuer of the threat, in which case there is reciprocity in the communication process. In other cases, they respond indirectly by, for example, reporting the threat to the police or the mass media. They may also choose not to respond at all, so the responses in figure 3.1 are only partly visualised and use dotted lines.

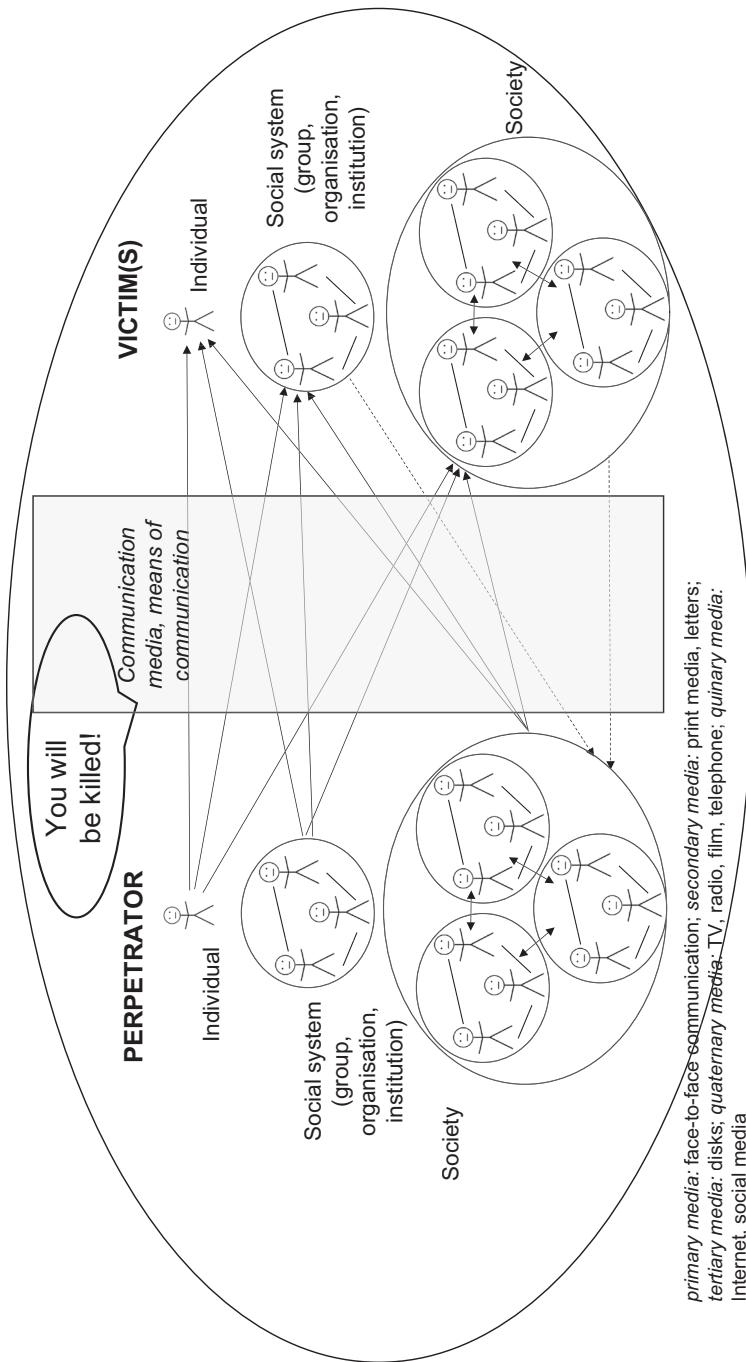


Figure 3.1: The communication of violence

**Table 3.1: Five types of the means of communication** (based on Fuchs 2020, table 6.2, p.159)

	Role of mediation by technology	Examples
<b>Primary communication technologies</b>	Human body and mind, no media technology is used for the production, distribution, reception of information	Theatre, concert, performance, interpersonal communication
<b>Secondary communication technologies</b>	Use of media technology for the production of information	Newspapers, magazines, books, technologically produced arts and culture
<b>Tertiary communication technologies</b>	Use of media technology for the production and consumption of information, not for distribution	CDs, DVDs, tapes, vinyl records, Blu-ray disks, hard disks
<b>Quaternary communication technologies</b>	Use of media technology for the production, distribution and consumption of information	TV, radio, film, telephone, Internet
<b>Quinary communication technologies</b>	Digital media prosumption technologies, user-generated content	Internet, social media

Acts of violence are not primarily communication but also forms of communication. They are actions that aim at killing, destroying, injuring, or harming humans. Violence can be performed without the use of any language. The act of violence itself is a symbol of hatred. It communicates hatred to the victim. Violence has both a material dimension (the cause of death, injuries, and harm) and a symbolic dimension (the communication of hatred to the victim).

The communication of violence is different from acts of violence. The communication of violent threats inflicts fear and often psychological damage but does not immanently cause death. The threat that someone will be killed causes fear but not death. The threat that someone will be raped and tortured causes severe psychological stress but is different from rape and torture. Actual acts of violence often follow the communication of threats of violence, which is why the communication of violent threats is a preform of violence. Considering the difference between threats and acts of violence, criminal law tends to differentiate the legislated penalties.

For example, in the United States, stalking, harassment, and intimidation that create a person's reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury shall, according to federal legislation, be punished by imprisonment for up to five years.<sup>23</sup> If someone kills a victim in domestic violence, they shall be imprisoned 'for life or any term of years'.<sup>24</sup> If they cause serious bodily injury, they shall be detained for up to ten years.<sup>25</sup>

### ***3.3.2 Threats of Nuclear Weapons Use: An Example for the Communication of Violence***

In the light of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin several times threatened to use nuclear weapons. In his TV address on the day the invasion started on February 24, 2022, Putin said:

Now a few important, very important words for those who may be tempted to intervene in ongoing events. Whoever tries to hinder us, and even more so to create threats for our country, for our people, should know that Russia's response will be immediate and will lead you to such consequences that you have never experienced in your history. We are ready for any development of events. All necessary decisions in this regard have been made. I hope that I will be heard.<sup>26</sup>

On February 27, Putin ordered to put the Russian nuclear forces 'on high combat alert' because, as he said, 'not only do Western countries take unfriendly measures against our country in the economic dimension – I mean the illegal sanctions that everyone knows about very well – but also the top officials of leading NATO countries allow themselves to make aggressive statements with regards to our country'.<sup>27</sup>

Critical Discourse Analyses of Putin's speech found that he constantly utilised the friend/enemy-scheme that constructs an 'Us' ('our country', 'our people', 'us', 'Russia', 'we')/Them' (Ukraine, NATO, USA, EU)-enmity that in his view justifies war.<sup>28</sup> He frequently uses nationyms, positive references to the Russian nation by which he tries to appeal to Russians as members of one nation that, in his view, needs to unite behind him in order to defend itself against the West. Putin identifies the West as degraded and degenerated. He opposes the West because he thinks it culturally advances liberal values such as homosexuality, gender equality, and secularism,

politically advances democracy that he sees as unsuited for Russia, and militarily threatens the existence of Russia and supports Nazis. Teun Van Dijk argues that ideology often operates by the positive presentation of the in-group and the negative presentation of the out-group.<sup>29</sup> Putin utilises the friend/enemy-scheme that is characteristic of right-wing authoritarian ideology. “The fabrication of national collectivities, however, – common practice in the abominable jargon of war which speaks of the Russian, the American, and certainly also of the German – is the mark of a reified consciousness hardly capable of experience [*Erfahrung*]. Such fabrication remains within precisely those stereotypes which it is the task of thinking to dissolve.<sup>30</sup> In Putin’s picture of the world, as expressed in his declaration of war, the West is exclusively aggressive. He sees and presents Russia as a constant victim that is under attack and faces ‘threats for our country’, which is why he threatens to use nuclear weapons.

In February 2024, in the light of Ukraine’s drawbacks in the war with Russia that had to do with the Republicans’ blockage of US arms deliveries to Ukraine in the US Congress, French President Emmanuel Macron did not rule out sending troops to Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> In his 2024 State of the Nation Address, Putin responded by threatening nuclear Armageddon: ‘Now they have started talking about the possibility of deploying NATO military contingents to Ukraine. [...]. Today, any potential aggressors will face far graver consequences. They must grasp that we also have weapons – yes, they know this, as I have just said – capable of striking targets on their territory. Everything they are inventing now, spooking the world with the threat of a conflict involving nuclear weapons, which potentially means the end of civilisation – don’t they realise this?<sup>32</sup>

Putin has threatened to use nuclear arms as a response to perceived threats against Russia. His Declaration of War against Ukraine was broadcast live on Russian television and relayed by countless television stations across the world. At this moment, Putin had the global public’s attention directed towards him. His address was a public communication from the Russian state to Ukraine, the Western world, and the global public with high visibility. His statement was not itself violence, but the announcement of the start of a war and the attempt to intimidate countries that may support Ukraine militarily with the threat of using nuclear weapons against them. Putin’s statement resulted in a multitude of media reports, including radio and television broadcasts, newspaper and magazine reports, online news content, and social media debates and content.

One media form about violence, namely a televised declaration of war, interacted with other media forms and created lots of public attention, which shows that violence tends to attract high public interest. It is considered 'newsworthy' by news organisations and journalists. On February 24, 2022, the most tweeted keywords were 'Putin', 'Ukraine', and 'Ucrainia'; the longest trending keywords were 'Putin', 'Ukraine', 'NATO', and '#worldwar3'.<sup>33</sup> On February 24 and 25, 2022, eight tweets using the keyword 'Putin' reached more than 100,000 likes.<sup>34</sup> Among them was a tweet by the journalist Alejandro Alvarez, who reported and posted videos of anti-war demonstrations in Sankt Petersburg, Moscow, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Kaliningrad, and Volgograd.<sup>35</sup> Putin's declaration resulted in lots of political communication as responses to the start of the war in Ukraine. His communication of violence called forth communication about violence, which is the second form of communication and the media in the context of violence.

There is not just the communication of violence but also the communication about violence.

### 3.4 (Digital) Communication about Violence

#### 3.4.1 *Communication about Violence: A Model*

Figure 3.2 shows a model that visualises the communication about violence. The model shows (reduced) the model of violence introduced in figure 2.1 as the content of communication. Communication also involves producers who create content (cultural workers), media that distribute content and make it available to others, and an audience that interprets content. Interpretation can encourage the further production of new information. All of these aspects play a role in the communication of violence.

Communication about violence means that cultural workers produce content that represents violence and is communicated to the public who consume and interpret such content. The representation of violence can be fictive (e.g., a crime novel, a crime series, a shooter video game, horror movies), try to represent actual events (e.g., news about wars, a documentary about an unsolved crime, a reality TV series that accompanies police units), or a combination of fiction and actual events (e.g., a thriller or crime movie that is based on a true story and adds fictive story parts).

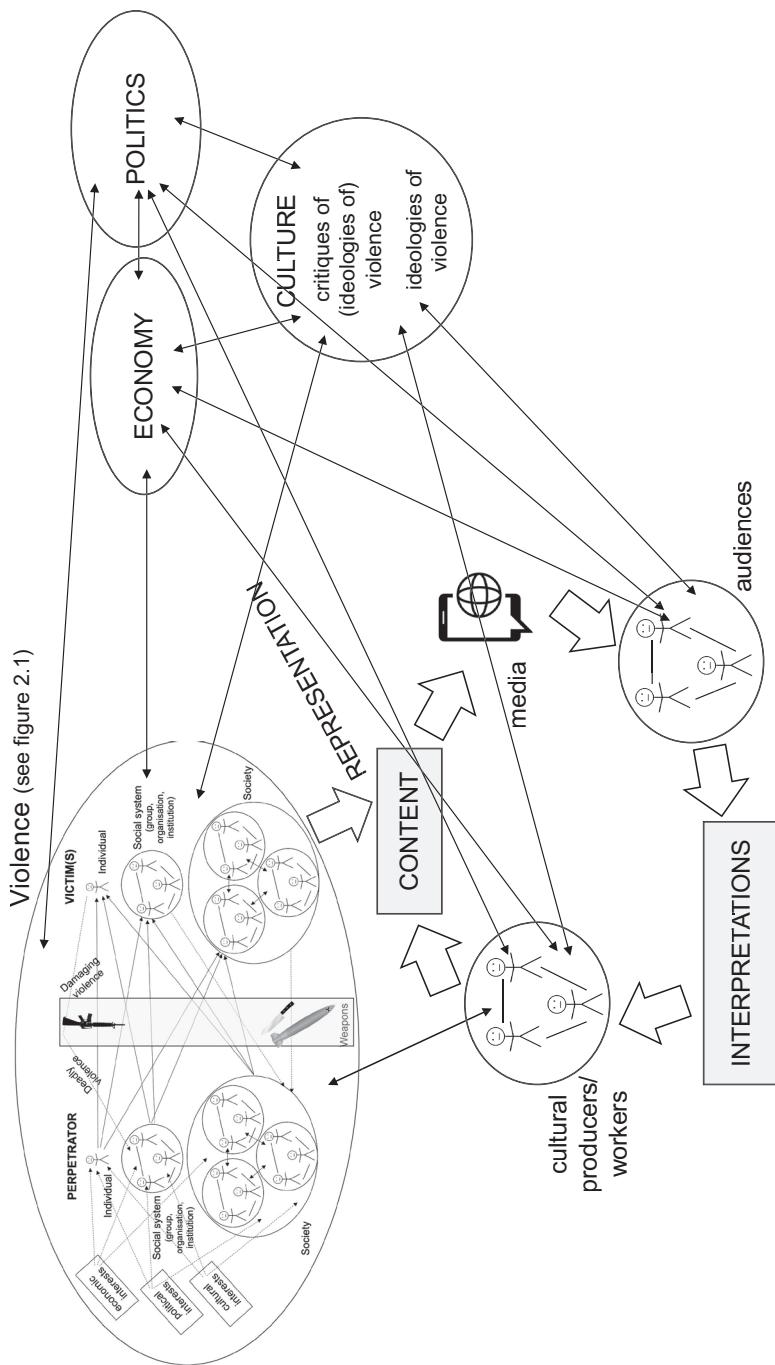


Figure 3.2: Communication about violence

Just like violence itself, the production of content about violence, the representation and interpretation of violence in the media, and such content's interpretation are shaped and conditioned by society, i.e., economic, political, and cultural relations. For example, there are ideologies of violence, and specific acts of violence tend to be used by tabloid media, politicians, and others to argue that these ideologies are true. Cultural workers producing content and audience members consuming such content face particular working conditions, have certain political attitudes and world-views, etc., that influence how they perceive and interpret the world, including media representations of violence. The mediated experience of violence may confirm or shatter their beliefs. What kind of content about violence media producers create and how audience members interpret such content depends on the complex interplay of societal factors.

### 3.4.2 *Ideologies of Violence*

We can learn from Benjamin's essay *Toward the Critique of Violence*<sup>36</sup> that violence is accompanied by attempts to explain, justify, and legitimate its use. It, therefore, has an ethico-political dimension and a communicative dimension. Justifications of the actual or potential use of violence, such as the justification of war as a 'just war' or the justification of genocide as a response to a group's alleged violence, inferiority, power, etc., are first constructed and then communicated. Such ideologies tend to reproduce the existence of violence in society. Ideologies of violence make false claims about the origins, causes, needs, or dynamics of violence in order to justify the use of violence.

Ideologies of violence include, for example, the naturalisation of egoism, competition, violence, and war (*Homo homini lupus*: 'a man is a wolf to another man'; *Bellum omnium contra omnes*: 'the war of all against all' as a natural condition of society; 'all humans are violent, egoistic, and competitive', 'there can be no society without war and violence', etc.), racist ideologies of crime ('group X's nature is that they are particularly violent, terrorists, etc.', 'blacks are criminals', 'black people are violent', etc.), law-and-order-politics ('in order to fight crime, we need the death penalty, harsh prison sentences, etc.'), etc. There are also critiques of ideologies of violence that argue, for example, that violence and war are societal phenomena that are rooted in the class and power structures of society, that,

therefore, not all societies are necessarily violent and war-waging, that ideologies of crime are racist, conservative, right-wing, or fascist, etc., that law-and-order politics do not tackle the causes of crime, etc.

### **3.4.3 Violence as a Media Spectacle**

Violence has the potential to attract large audience interest because it has to do with the existential fear of death. Tabloid media especially tend to report on violence, crime, and war in sensationalist manners. ‘Violence fulfils the media’s desire to present dramatic events in the most graphic possible fashion.’<sup>37</sup> The tabloid press pays much attention to interpersonal violence in its crime reporting.<sup>38</sup> Readers of the tabloid press are much more worried about becoming victims of crime than readers of quality newspapers.<sup>39</sup> Violence sells and attracts audiences. The tabloid media have advanced the commodification of violence and violence as spectacle.

Tabloid media tend to focus on descriptions of acts of violence and brutality, neglect the analysis of violence’s causes, keep the reports short and superficial, use bold and sensational headlines and language, focus on individual persons abstracted from society’s structures, etc. ‘Tabloid journalists not only focus on sensational topics but use *packaging techniques* to further enhance the titillation of the content. For newspapers these include large headlines, photos with graphic and often disturbing content, and placement of sensational stories on the front page and as the lead story. Slow-motion video, music, sound effects, and other digital visual effects are employed to dramatize content in television news. Critics view this as a flagrant attempt at enticing readers and viewers, thereby further abandoning the journalistic mission to inform, not to entertain or titillate. The profit motive is most often identified as the impetus for sensational journalistic practice ratings.<sup>40</sup> Tabloids strongly focus on private life instead of public life, scandals, sports, and entertainment instead of politics, economy, and society.<sup>41</sup>

Tabloid reporting on violence tends to reproduce ideologies of violence. It tends to use the logic of inductive generalisation that creates the impression that a particular incidence of crime is characteristic of society as a whole. For example, some tabloids stress that some perpetrators are immigrants or have dark skin colour, which creates the impression and reproduces the ideology that all immigrants and people of colour are violent

criminals, etc. ‘Slogans like “if it bleeds it leads” and “body bag journalism” refer to emphases on death and destruction and are commonly used in reference to tabloid news.<sup>42</sup> The problem with tabloids, including their strong focus on violence as a featured topic, is that they make democracy’s ‘practical functioning an impossibility because they are unable to provide the audience with the kinds of knowledge that are essential to the exercise of their rights as citizens’.<sup>43</sup>

You can conduct a small research experiment. Consciously observe for a week in the news you consume how much reporting there is on war and violence on the one hand and how much reporting there is on peace and altruism. In many cases, you will find much more focus on the first than on the second. The reason is that violence and war as media spectacles promise to attract larger audiences than reporting on peace and solidarity. The danger is that such reporting helps conserve and spread the ideology that humans are essentially aggressive, violent, destructive, and warring animals.

#### ***3.4.4 Violence and Moral Panics***

Tabloid coverage of violence can contribute to the emergence and development of moral panics. A moral panic is a ‘condition, episode, person or group of persons’ that becomes ‘to be defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are maintained by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible’.<sup>44</sup> Moral panics involve concern about a potential or imagined threat, hostility towards a folk devil, pressure to do something, disproportionality – ‘an exaggeration of the number or strength of the cases, in terms of the damage caused, moral offensiveness, potential risk if ignored. Public concern is not directly proportionate to objective harm’.<sup>45</sup> There is also volatility (the panic emerges and disappears rather suddenly) and exaggeration.

Stuart Hall et al.<sup>46</sup> describe how a moral panic about street robbery (‘mugging’) developed in the UK in the 1970s. They argue that this panic must be seen in the context of the crises of capitalism, the state, hegemony,

and political legitimacy of the mid-1970s. Crises of society are not the causes of moral panics but are conducive to their emergence. Moral panics are ideological reflections, transpositions, and refractions of society's antagonisms and crises. Hall et al. stress that the moral panics of the 1970s were used for creating and enforcing law and order politics that not only tackled criminals but especially the working class, the black working class, and social movements. The result was the rise of a law and order society. 'Policing *the blacks* threatened to mesh with the problem of policing *the poor* and policing the *unemployed*: all three were concentrated in precisely the same urban areas. [...] The ongoing problem of policing the blacks had become, for all practical purposes, synonymous with the wider problem of *policing the crisis*'.<sup>47</sup>

Tabloid and right-wing media 'are active in defining situations, in selecting targets, in initiating "campaigns", in structuring these campaigns, in selectively signifying their actions to the public at large, in legitimating their actions through the accounts of situations which they produce. They do not simply respond to 'moral panics'. They form part of the circle out of which 'moral panics' develop. It is part of the paradox that they also, advertently and inadvertently, *amplify* the deviancy they seem so absolutely committed to controlling'.<sup>48</sup> The tabloid media can 'set in motion a "deviancy amplification spiral" in which a moral discourse is established by journalists and various other authorities, opinion leaders and moral entrepreneurs, who collectively demonize the perceived wrong-doers as a source of moral decline and social disintegration'.<sup>49</sup>

As a relatively new medium of information, communication, and collaboration, the Internet is inserted into contemporary moral panics differently than the mainstream media, which simply tend to act as ideological control institutions. The Internet is an arena of ideological projections of fears and hopes associated with moral panics. Some argue that it is a dangerous space that is used by terrorists, fascists, and criminals and, therefore, needs to be policed with the help of Internet surveillance. In contrast, others argue that the Internet is a new space of political hope that is at the heart of demonstrations, rebellions, protests, and revolutions that struggle for more democracy. Both discourses share a strong belief in the power of technology independently of society. They mistakenly argue that technology causes and can control societal phenomena (violence, crime, cyberwar, terror, crises, political transformations). However, societal phenomena merely express themselves in the context of communication and technology. They do not cause them.

Technological determinism inscribes power into technology. It reduces power to a technologically manageable phenomenon, neglecting the

interaction of technology and society. The Internet is not an ideological actor like the mainstream mass media, but rather an object of ideological and cultural signification in moral panics and euphoria.

### ***3.4.5 Dialectical Journalism***

The question arises how adequate reporting on violence and war looks like. The answer is that media organisations and society should encourage and support dialectical journalism. Dialectical journalism neither underestimates nor overestimates nor ignores nor overstates the roles of violence and war in society. It does not present these phenomena as spectacles and entertainment. It does not advance ideologies of violence. Instead, it situates and explains crime, violence, and war in the context of society's antagonisms and as a many-sided, complex phenomenon. Clifford Christians argues in this context for journalism that is based on the principle of Aletheia.<sup>50</sup>

Aletheia is a Greek word that means disclosure of truth and authenticity. Christians argues that a journalist should report authentically, use the interpretative methods of the humanities, 'represent complex events',<sup>51</sup> and make sure reports are 'grounded historically and biographically'.<sup>52</sup> Concerning the reporting on violence, crime, and war, such journalism challenges the assumption of the conservative ideology of violence that there is an 'eternal struggle between Good and Evil'.<sup>53</sup> It rather presents violence as 'the product of antagonistic social forces',<sup>54</sup> of 'the unequal class, race/ethnics, and gender relations that control our society'.<sup>55</sup>

Mediated public communication is a cultural circuit<sup>56</sup> where cultural workers produce content distributed via media channels to reach audience members who consume the content, interpret it in different ways, and embed these interpretations into their everyday lives. An example of how media content is embedded into everyday life is friends discussing the latest episode of their favourite television series.

### ***3.4.6 The Consumption of Violence***

There is a variety of representations of violence in the media, such as, for example, violence in movies (horror movies, thrillers, crime movies), violence in music lyrics (death metal, gangster rap), violence against women in pornographic movies, violence in computer games, news reporting on violence and war, etc. One question that arises, again and again, is what

impacts representations of violence have on individuals and society. One argument is that the representation of violence in the media and on the Internet causes violence. This media-centric and techno-deterministic argument overemphasises the roles of media and technology in the relationship between media technologies and society. There is also the danger that the argument that the media make individuals – including children and teenagers – violent, become part of moral panics that rather more reflect the fears of adults about their children than actual reality. Another argument is that media representations of violence do not have any effects on individuals and society. This relativist argument denies that culture has some relevance in society.

A third argument is that violence is rooted in society's antagonisms and that the likelihood that individuals and groups, who, because of their experiences in society's antagonistic structures, are prone to be violent, act violently might be increased by their frequent consumption of media representations of violence.

### ***3.4.7 Violent Computer Games***

The actual effects of violence in the media on human behaviour are contested. Research results are inconsistent. Anderson et al. conducted a meta-analysis of studies analysing the effects of violent computer games.<sup>57</sup> They focused on 136 analyses with a total of 130,296 participants. The meta-analysis' result was that 'exposure to violent video games was significantly related to higher levels of aggressive behavior',<sup>58</sup> increased 'aggressive cognition, and aggressive affect',<sup>59</sup> and was related to 'lack of empathy [to victims of violence] and to lack of prosocial behavior'.<sup>60</sup> Elson and Ferguson question such effects.<sup>61</sup> They argue that scholars who conduct studies that show such effects are often 'ideologically invested in the "harm" view of media effects' and help advance 'moral panics' that are based on 'hysterical political rhetoric'.<sup>62</sup> They also question the methodology of such studies and say there is publication bias in favour of them. They argue that many psychological studies of the effects of computer games leave out contextual factors such as whether computer games are played alone or cooperatively together with others, if one plays against a human or a bot, etc.<sup>63</sup>

Elson and Ferguson conducted a review of twenty-five years of research on violence and aggression in digital games. They conclude that the empirical evidence is 'mixed and cannot support unambiguous claims that such

games are harmful'.<sup>64</sup> As such, the body of research on the link of violent games and aggressive behaviour is inconsistent. Many studies pointing to such an effect suffer from weak methodologies and an artificial setup of both the measures and the playing situation itself, while more carefully designed experiments show there are many variables to be considered that are more important than violent content. This regards characteristic features in game design besides violence that need to be considered (e.g., competitiveness), as well as playing modes (competitively vs. cooperatively), and contextual variables (e.g., playing against a friend vs. the computer).<sup>65</sup>

One argument that Ferguson and colleagues make is that psychological studies of violent computer games tend to leave out the societal context of computer games and that societal conditions shape how violent societies are, which is a key factor in the actual level of violence. They argue that while violent video games have become more popular, 'violent crime rates among youths and adults in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Japan, and most other industrialized nations have plummeted to lows not seen since the 1960s',<sup>66</sup> which is an indication that there is not a direct link between the popularity of such games and the prevalence of violence in society. Psychological studies of violent computer game use are often positivist and individualist and neglect societal factors. Psychologists studying violent video games tend to be 'more inclined to endorse direct links [between violence and violent video game use] than [...] either criminologists or media and communication scholars. One reason for this may be that media effects theories are largely a product of social psychology and psychologists may be more familiar with and supportive of such beliefs than other scholars. Further, psychologists' main advocacy organisation, the APA, has promoted negative beliefs about violent video games, often to considerable controversy'.<sup>67</sup>

A review of meta-analyses of violent video games and aggression conducted by a task force of the American Psychological Association concludes that there 'is an effect of violent video game use on aggression', but that one cannot find 'evidence that violent video games make users criminals'.<sup>68</sup> The empirical evidence is inconclusive and contested. There is neither evidence that violence in computer games turns humans into killers nor evidence that violent computer games have no effects at all.

There has been an academic debate and controversy between Anderson and colleagues, on the one hand, who hold the hypothesis that violent computer games make violent behaviour more likely, and Ferguson and colleagues, who say that this assumption is part of a moral panic about the media and violence.<sup>69</sup>

A hypothesis that avoids the two extremes of ‘violent computer games cause violence’ and ‘there is no connection between violent computer games and violence’ is that society’s antagonisms are the causes of violence and that there is a certain likelihood that individuals who face social problems (isolation, neglect, authoritarian or fascist socialisation, lack of love, etc.) and play lots of violent computer games as an escape mechanism have an increased likelihood to become more aggressive and potentially violent.

Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter summarise this third position that goes beyond and questions both video game-alarmism and -celebration: ‘Playing violent games, research is suggesting, *does* make *some* people more aggressive – but only slightly so. Neither an uncontrollable incitement to homicide nor an utterly benign experience, playing violent games generates a marginal increase in aggressive affect, heavily moderated by the prior disposition of the subject toward anger.’<sup>70</sup> They argue that computer games are games of empire that originated in the ‘military-industrial complex, the nuclear-armed core of capital’s global domination, to which they remain umbilically connected’<sup>71</sup> but are at the same time also games of multitude that are ‘shot through, in the midst of banal ideological conventionality, with social experimentation and techno-political potential’.<sup>72</sup>

Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter remind us that ‘violence-filled games are commodities, that their violence is intended to increase their market value’.<sup>73</sup> They argue that such games are a reflection of militarised masculinity. The authors do, however, not dismiss video games as such, as there are actual and potential non-violent alternatives. Therefore, they argue that the computer games industry faces the question of whether it should focus on ‘digital death, destruction, and dominion, or [...] more diverse game models – a choice between “violence or variety”’.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.4.8 Digital Communication about Violence

Figure 3.3 shows a model of digital communication about violence.

Prosumption and convergence are two essential features of digital communication:

- Prosumption:

On the Internet, consumers of information become potential producers of information, so-called prosumers (productive consumers).

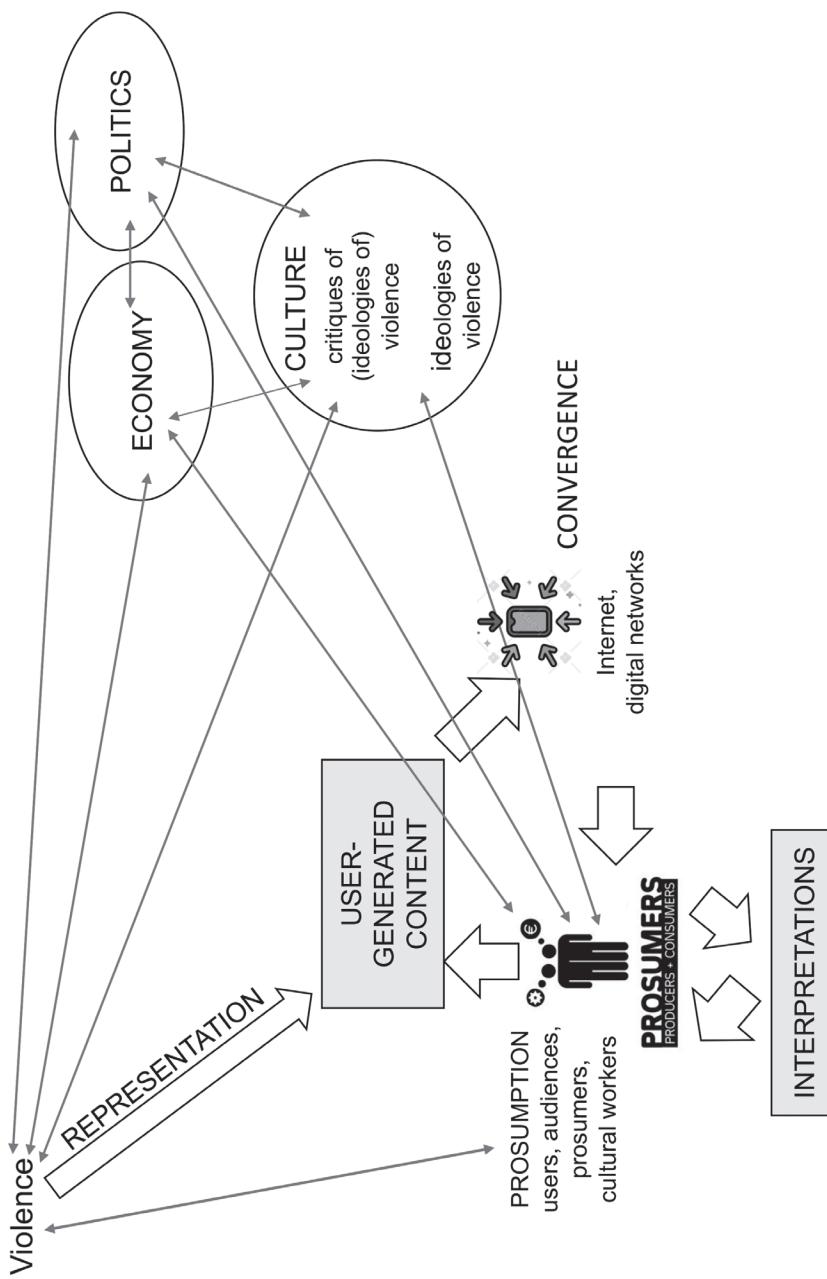


Figure 3.3: Digital communication about violence

The networked computer is a medium of communication and a machine, an instrument of work and cooperation.

- **Convergence:**

On the Internet, the boundaries between different social practices, social roles, social systems, and different publics converge so that people on Internet platforms act in a variety of roles with a variety of practices and in a variety of different publics with the help of individual social media profiles, apps, and Internet platforms.

On the Internet, we do not just find traditional media organisations that distribute content about violence and other topics but also user-generated content and user-responses to content (likes, re-postings, comments, etc.), including content that is about violence. Information about violence has the potential to spread rapidly globally in a networked communication environment such as the Internet.

The model in figure 3.3. builds on the model of the communication about violence in figure 3.2. The difference between the two models has to do with the specific features of digital media that allow consumers of information to act as producers of information. Networked digital media are, therefore, different from traditional mass media such as broadcasting (television and radio) and newspapers. Concerning communication about violence, this means that by the Internet, social media, and other networked digital media, audiences are enabled to act as productive consumers who create user-generated content about violence.

The contemporary Internet is a space where both fake news and fact-checks, ideology and worldviews, post-truth and truth, moral panics and moral considerateness circulate and spread. Violence plays an important role in this context. To a certain degree, we today find user-generated ideologies of violence and user-generated moral panics on the Internet and challenges and critiques of such ideologies. One problem is algorithmic politics, where bots create political information, including fake news, fake profiles, fake comments, and fake attention, so that it has become indiscernible what information has been generated by robots or humans. User- and bot-generated fake news is not a form of violence but part of online ideology. They can, however, contribute to the creation of violence and can be or become part of cyberwars and information wars.

### ***3.4.9 Disinformation and Fake News on the Internet in the Context of War***

In the context of the Ukraine war, Russia has spread disinformation in order to try to weaken Ukraine in the armed conflict. Fake news thereby became part of a war.

European Union External Affairs conducted an analysis of 100 cases of Russian and Chinese online disinformation detected between October 1 and December 5, 2022.<sup>75</sup> Each case, on average, contained ten pieces of information (such as a tweet, a YouTube video, an Instagram or Facebook posting, etc.). The most frequently used techniques were the development and spread of fabricated videos and images. Examples included fake covers of satirical magazines such as Charlie Hebdo and Titanic and fake Al Jazeera and Euronews videos. The disinformation tried to dismiss criticisms of Russia, distort, distract, dismay opponents, and divide.<sup>76</sup> ‘In the case of incidents carried out by channels linked to Russia, 42% were intended to distract. The large majority of incidents were used in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to turn attention to a different actor/narrative or to shift the blame (namely to Ukraine and the EU). Another 35% aimed to distort, twist and frame narratives around the Russian invasion of Ukraine and to deliver attacks against the Ukrainian government and EU officials and development of image-based and video-based content were the two most recurrent techniques employed.’<sup>77</sup> An example was ‘an alleged pre-bunking video of a civilian mass grave in Kupyansk claiming that it was Ukraine who had committed mass killings’ or a ‘staged video showing the arrest of an alleged Ukrainian agent preparing a terrorist attack in Russia’.<sup>78</sup>

The third form of how violence is related to communication and digital media is the digital mediation of violence. We will focus on this phenomenon in the next section.

## **3.5 The Digital Mediation of Violence**

### ***3.5.1 The Digital Mediation of Violence: A Model***

The digital mediation of violence is the third type of violence in the context of media and digital technologies. Figure 3.4 presents a model of the digital mediation of violence.

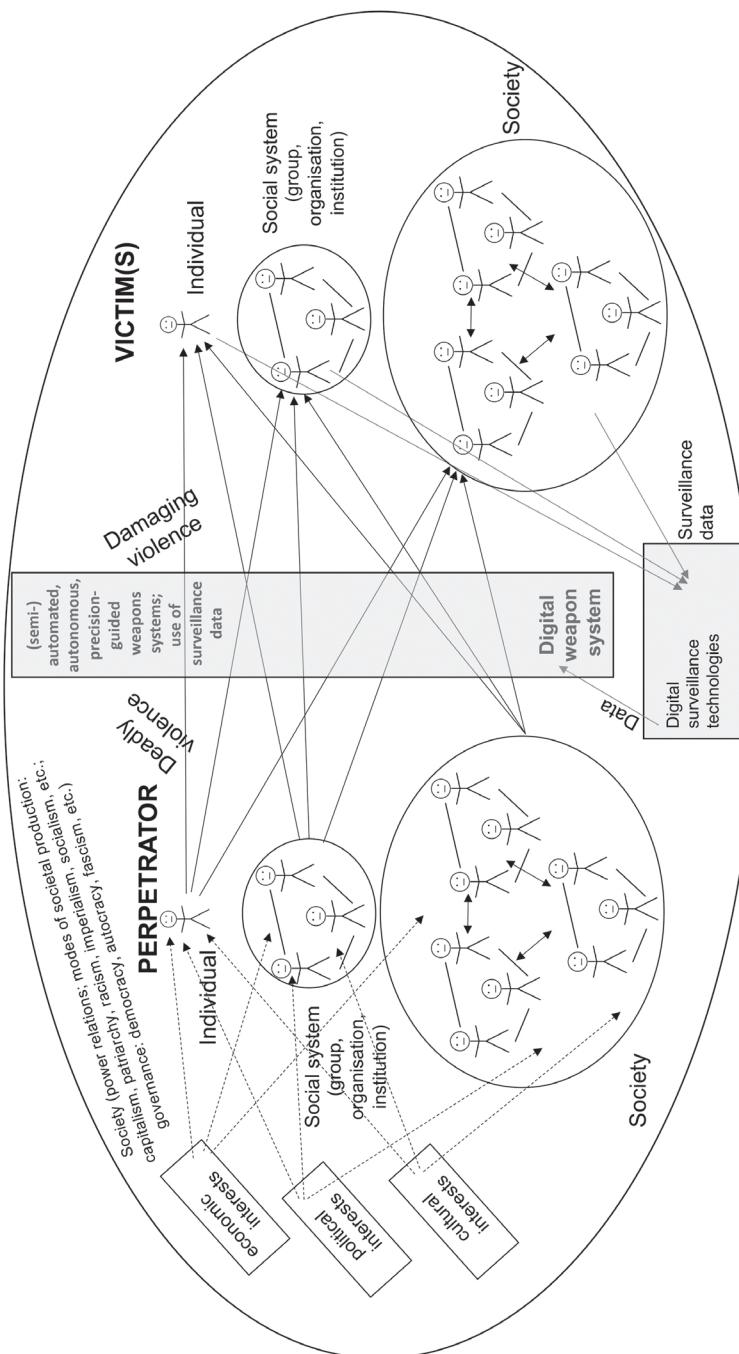


Figure 3.4: The digital mediation of violence

In digital violence, the perpetrator utilises a digital weapon (system) to try to kill or damage the health of the victim(s). Both the perpetrator and the victim(s) can be individuals, social systems, or societies.

The model shown in figure 3.4 has the same three levels as in some of the previous models: individuals, social systems/groups, and society. These are the actors in digital violence. Digital mediation of violence means that the exertion of violence is organised with the help of digital technologies. Digital technologies play a particular role in the collection of surveillance data that feeds into digital weapon systems, the use of such surveillance data by the weapon systems, and the tendency to automate killing and doing harm (deadly digital violence and damaging digital violence).

### ***3.5.2 Digital Violence and Digital Weapons***

Alessandroi De Cesaris argues that device-based (weapons are defined by the inherent structure of weapons) and context-based (anything can be used as a weapon, so the context of the use of an object determines what a weapon is) definitions of weapons are unsuited for defining digital weapons.<sup>79</sup> He argues for a functional approach: 'A digital weapon is such not because it is an object shaped in a certain fashion, but rather because it expresses a certain kind of function.'<sup>80</sup> 'Weapons are those media – devices, skills, practices – designed to operate a certain function: attack. [...] a digital weapon [...] is a digital technology that, through the attack of another digital technology, is designed to harm, destroy or subjugate a living or lifeless target.'<sup>81</sup>

De Cesaris provides an interesting definition. It is, however, limited in one respect. He defines a digital weapon as a digital system that attacks a digital system. A combat drone uses computer systems for target location, flight coordination, communication with a military base, autonomous or remotely controlled flight, automatic or remotely controlled bombing, etc. It is a complex digital system. De Cesaris' definition excludes combat drones from the definition of digital weapons as they are primarily used for targeting humans and real-world objects. A digital weapon is a digital technology that is used for carrying out attacks that should lead to the killing of human victims or damage to their health.

In capitalist societies, some industries produce weapons to accumulate capital, and there are violence-oriented professions such as soldiers and

police officers that are organised as wage labour. New digital technologies, including the computer and the World Wide Web, have often originated in a military context.<sup>82</sup> Digitalisation has contributed to the arms industry's constant development and sustained profitability. Weapons are not just tools that are situated in contexts where they are used for attacks that aim to kill, harm, destroy, and injure humans. In capitalism, they are also industrially produced commodities that yield profits.

Digital surveillance partly stands in the context of digital violence. Users of digital technologies create lots of data and metadata about themselves, their interests, location, behaviour, contacts, etc. Such data can be helpful for perpetrators of violence to locate and harm their victims. Identity theft, hacking into online systems to obtain personal data, and illicit digital surveillance are common forms of cybercrime. Personal data obtained by digital surveillance, hacking, and identity theft can also be placed in the context of violence, terror, and war when perpetrators use such data for planning, targeting, and carrying out attacks on their victims. Some digital weapons, such as 'smart', 'precision-guided' bombs, work together with surveillance systems that provide location data and other target data. Digital surveillance thereby becomes a component of digital weapon systems.

Robot soldiers permit humans 'with a push button to destroy whom-ever'<sup>83</sup> they please. In a robotic military system, killing has been automated or semi-automated. The system automatically locates the target and either automatically tries to kill the victim or does so after confirmation from a human being. Today, unmanned combat aerial vehicles, better known as combat or military drones, are more common than robot soldiers. Lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) are 'weapons designed to select and attack military targets without human intervention. The machine (LAWS) makes life-and-death decisions. [...] autonomous weapons may operate on land, in the air, on water, underwater, and in space.'<sup>84</sup> At the time of writing, in 2024, most military weapons were not fully autonomous. However, there are semi-autonomous weapons, such as the AGM-158 JASSM cruise missile manufactured by Lockheed Martin. Human operators automatically identify and programme the target that the system locates by infrared imaging.

Sharkey argues that there are five levels in the automation of weapon systems, running from 'no automation to high automation'.<sup>85</sup>

- ‘1. Human engages with and selects target and initiates any attack;
2. Program suggests alternative targets and human chooses which to attack;
3. Program selects target and human must approve before attack;
4. Program selects target and human has restricted time to veto; and
5. Program selects target and initiates attack without human involvement.’

Sharkey’s levels show that the automation of weapons is a continuum that ranges from low to high levels of the automation of target selection and attacking.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the question: What is digital violence? We can now summarise its main findings:

- **Language, communication, and violence:**

Some authors such as Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas stress the potential of language and communication to foster peace and understanding. Others, such as Slavoj Žižek, see language and communication as inherently violent. Power relations shape communication as language use. Communication and language are not neutral. They have the potential to both express and signify violence and peace. The frequency with which language is used for communicating peace and violence depends on societal conditions, i.e., how conducive society and its power relations are to violence or peace.

- **Forms of (digital) communication and (digital) mediation in the context of violence:**

There are three forms of (digital) communication and (digital) mediation in the context of violence: the (digital) communication of violence, the (digital) communication about violence, and the (digital) mediation of violence.

- **Communication of violence:**

The communication of violence is the communication of a threat that someone will, should or could be killed or harmed. The originator of the threat can be an individual, a social system (a group, an organisation,

an institution), or a society. Similarly, those who are being addressed, the potential victims of violence, can be individuals, social systems, or a society. In the communication of violence, we do not find a weapon as a medium but a means of communication, a communication medium that is used for issuing threats to someone.

- **Communication about violence:**

Communication about violence means that cultural workers produce content that represents violence and is communicated to the public who consume and interpret such content. Just like violence itself, the production of content about violence, the representation and interpretation of violence in the media, and such content's interpretation are shaped and conditioned by society, i.e., economic, political, and cultural relations.

- **Ideologies of violence:**

Ideologies of violence make false claims about the origins, causes, needs, or dynamics of violence in order to justify the use of violence. Ideologies of violence include, for example, the naturalisation and essentialisation of violence as a feature of all societies and all humans, violence as a media spectacle, and moral panics about violence.

- **Digital communication about violence:**

Prosumption (productive consumption) and convergence are two important features of digital communication. The contemporary Internet enables user-generated content production. Information about violence has the potential to spread rapidly globally in a networked communication environment such as the Internet. To a certain degree, we today find user-generated ideologies of violence and user-generated moral panics on the Internet and challenges and critiques of such ideologies.

- **The digital mediation of violence:**

In digital violence, the perpetrator utilises a digital weapon (system) to try to kill or damage the health of the victim(s). Both the perpetrator and the victim(s) can be individuals, social systems, or societies. A digital weapon is a digital technology that is used for carrying out attacks that should lead to the killing of human victims or damage to their health.

## CHAPTER 4

# On Digital War

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 outlined three forms of (digital) communication and (digital) mediation in the context of violence: the (digital) communication of violence, the (digital) communication about violence, and the (digital) mediation of violence.

War is a brutal reality of class and dominative societies. It is a particular form of organised violence. This chapter asks: What is war? What is digital war?

Like violence, war is not a natural feature of humanity and society but a historical reality of class and dominative societies. In a war, soldiers use weapons as a means of destruction to try to kill as many members of the enemy army as possible and win the war. Wars are violent conflicts about the control of economic, political and cultural power.

Armies need to organise themselves and try to gather intelligence about their enemies. Parties involved in war try to justify their actions and communicate their views and ideology to the public. As a consequence, information and communication technologies are an aspect of wars. The electrical telegraph was used to communicate in the American Civil War in the 1860s. In the First World War, the telephone and the radio were utilised for communication. In the Second World War, computers were used to encrypt and decipher messages, and radar was used as a location, detection, and tracking technology. Warfare has been one of the factors that have advanced the development of computer technologies. Since the Second World War, computing has played an important role in warfare, cyberwarfare, digital surveillance, digital reconnaissance, digital communication in the context of command and control, smart weapons, and public communication.

Weapons are killing technologies. Walter Benjamin argues that 'only war makes it possible to mobilize all of today's technological resources while maintaining property relations.'<sup>1</sup> It is easier to fully develop the destructive potentials of technologies in war situations or invest in developing new weapon technologies. As a consequence, there is a dialectic of war and technological development.

The chapter proceeds in the following manner: Section 4.2 discusses the concept of war. Section 4.3 is focused on the notion of digital warfare. Section 4.4 analyses the political economy of wars regarding the development of military expenditures and military corporations in the arms industry that produce and sell weapons. Section 4.5 discusses combat drones as an example of digital weapons used in digital warfare. Section 4.6 discusses the problems of autonomous digital weapons as another example of digital weapons and digital warfare. Section 4.7 presents some conclusions.

## 4.2 What is War?

### 4.2.1 *Carl von Clausewitz: On War*

To understand digital warfare, we need an understanding of war. We, therefore, need to ask: what is war? The military theorist Carl von Clausewitz gave an influential definition of war:

War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will; his *immediate* aim is to *throw* his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance. *War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.* [...] to [...] render the enemy powerless [...] is the true aim of warfare [...] war springs from some political purpose [...] War is a pulsation of violence, variable in strength and therefore variable in the speed with which it explodes and discharges its energy. [...] war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.<sup>2</sup>

Clausewitz's definition has been criticised as being too general, and that given such a definition, any form of violence can be understood as war.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, Clausewitz does not adequately distinguish between war and violence.

#### 4.2.2 *Hannah Arendt on War*

For the philosopher Hannah Arendt, the political realm is the public realm where everyone ‘has the widest possible publicity’ and what they say and do ‘can be seen and heard by everybody’<sup>4</sup> so that there is a ‘common world’ that ‘gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other’.<sup>5</sup> She writes that the political realm ‘is the common meeting ground of all’ where ‘innumerable perspectives’ are articulated and negotiated based on ‘sameness in utter diversity’.<sup>6</sup> The ‘political realm rises directly out of acting together, the “sharing of words and deeds”’.<sup>7</sup>

For Arendt, the human being is a political being, which for her means that humans are social beings.<sup>8</sup> The human being is ‘a living being capable of speech’<sup>9</sup> (*zōōn logon ekhon*). The political human is a being ‘who acts and speaks’.<sup>10</sup> Plurality would be ‘*the condition* [...] of all political life’.<sup>11</sup> In *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt argues: ‘That war is still the *ultima ratio*, the old continuation of politics by means of violence, in the foreign affairs of the underdeveloped countries is no argument against its obsolescence, and the fact that only small countries without nuclear and biological weapons can still afford it is no consolation’.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas for Clausewitz war is an extremely violent form of politics, for Arendt, politics requires that humans settle their disagreements communicatively and accept and live with differences. The implication is that for Arendt, the public realm and politics break down in war. In war, humans stop talking to each other, and power ‘grows out of the barrel of a gun’.<sup>13</sup> In war, the communicative solution to political disputes breaks down or does not take place.

#### 4.2.3 *Carl Schmitt on War*

Arendt differs decisively from the German legal theorist Carl Schmitt, for whom politics means combat, war, and the friend/enemy-scheme. ‘War as the most extreme political means discloses the possibility which underlies every political idea, namely, the distinction of friend and enemy’.<sup>14</sup> ‘War is armed combat between organized political entities; civil war is armed

combat within an organized unit. [...] The essence of a weapon is that it is a means of physically killing human beings. [...] the entire life of a human being is a struggle and every human being symbolically a combatant. The friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing. War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy. It is the most extreme consequence of enmity.<sup>15</sup>

For Schmitt, politics are essentially combat, enmity, and war. For Arendt, politics and the public realm end where war starts. While Schmitt idealises and naturalises war, Arendt idealises politics and communication as peaceful. However, other than Schmitt, Arendt at least relates politics to communication. She argues that diplomacy, political debate, and communication collapse in war. However, this does not mean that communication is necessarily opposed to violence and war. Instead, war is also a particular form of communication. By war, the attacking party communicates to the attacked absolute hatred that the attacker wishes to destroy and kill the attacked party in order to impose a specific will and interest on society. In a war, the involved parties do not sit down. They do not talk. They do not negotiate. Instead, they take up arms in order to settle deep conflicts of interest. War is not face-to-face communication oriented on understanding, agreement, and compromise. It is a destructive interaction that aims to annihilate the identified enemy. Every act of war communicates absolute hatred and annihilation wishes. In war, humans primarily interact using weapons instead of words. Arendt's concept of the political is too narrow. The political realm is a field where humans interact so that collective decisions on questions that concern all emerge. There are various political means, ranging from peaceful debate to all-out war.

Caroline Ashcroft argues that Arendt has been criticised for separating violence and politics in her book *On Violence*, which, according to the critics, leads to 'idealism and lack of realism'.<sup>16</sup> Ashcroft shows that also other interpretations are possible based on Arendt's work. I think we need to identify different means and ways of doing politics. War and political violence are particular means of doing politics. Discourse, negotiation, compromise, and consensus are other, peaceful means of politics. Both have a communicative dimension. One should not separate war and violence from communication. A war is both a practice and an act of communication. It has a communicative dimensions that involves phenomena such as information warfare and psychological warfare.

#### 4.2.4 *Deutsch and Senghaas on War*

The political scientists Deutsch and Senghaas give the following definition of war:

By *war* we mean actual large-scale organized violence, prepared and maintained by the compulsion and legitimacy claims of a state and its government, and directed against another state or quasi-state, i.e., a relatively comparable political organization. By *large-scale* we mean organized acts of violence resulting in a total of 1000 or more battle-connected deaths, and with at least one recognized state with at least 500,000 population participating on each side. *International wars*, as distinct from *civil wars*, are those fought among states, or state-like political units, which immediately prior to the outbreak of hostilities did not form parts of the same state, or of the same effective system of political decision and control.<sup>17</sup>

Deutsch and Senghaas's definition is quite state-centric. Terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS have declared war on the USA and the West. However, they are not classical nation-states but militant organisations operating internationally and globally.

#### 4.2.5 *Simone Weil on War*

War is a planned, rational organisation of death. In a war, the goal of each side is to crush and defeat the other side by killing as many combatants as possible. War's rationality means the creation of plans of how to kill a maximum of combatants of the enemy force and destroy as much of this force's infrastructure. The French philosopher Simone Weil writes that the realities of death in war destroy the illusion that 'war is a game'.<sup>18</sup> Everyone is 'fated to die',<sup>19</sup> but in war, death is an immediate reality. 'Once the experience of war makes visible the possibility of death that lies locked up in each moment, our thoughts cannot travel from one day to the next without meeting death's face. The mind is then strung up to a pitch it can stand for only a short time; but each new dawn reintroduces the same necessity; and days piled on days make years. On each one of these days the soul suffers violence. Regularly, every morning, the soul castrates itself of aspiration, for thought cannot journey through time without meeting death on the

way.<sup>20</sup> Every party engaged in war is forced to use the method of sacrificing soldiers' lives 'to the demands of the military machine' because 'the enemy uses' the same method.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.2.6 *A Definition of War*

War is organised, large-scale violence between at least two politically organised groups where at least one group sees the other group as an enemy that should be annihilated in order to realise a particular political interest against the will of this identified enemy.

Class societies require territory that their governments rule politically, exploited workers, and resources utilised as means of production in the economy. Class societies have an immanent potential for wars. In this context, Marx stresses that wars allow class societies 'the defence of their property and [...] obtaining new property' whereby the dominant class overcomes the 'barrier' posed by 'the earth', which means that new territory as a source of resources is acquired, and obtains access to humans that can be exploited: 'If human beings themselves are conquered along with the land and soil as its organic accessories, then they are equally conquered as one of the conditions of production, and in this way arises slavery and serfdom.'<sup>22</sup>

In the capitalist economy, workers are compelled to produce commodities that companies sell on the market in order to accumulate capital. Labour and capital play a central role in the capitalist economy. War destroys both workers and capital. A war, therefore, makes a vast reconstruction of the economy necessary. In capitalism, war devalues capital and makes the reinvestment and creation of massive amounts of capital necessary. Marx remarks in this context: 'The impact of war is self-evident, since economically it is exactly the same as if the nation were to drop a part of its capital into the ocean.'<sup>23</sup>

Peace is 'the absence and prevention of war (international and civil) and the management of conflict through peaceful means, implying some form of legitimate civic order'; world peace means 'the extension of these things globally'.<sup>24</sup>

Various philosophers, Social Darwinists, zoologists, primatologists, political scientists, psychologists, etc. – such as, for example, Thomas Hobbes, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Konrad Lorenz, and Francis Fukuyama – have argued that humans are by nature war-waging, violent,

and aggressive. Archaeological research has falsified such assumptions. It shows that 'warfare was not ubiquitous to the earliest humans but emerged as societies changed and evolved after around 8,000 BC', when agriculture, states, and 'aristocracies formed that demanded and extracted economic surpluses from framers. Societies became more hierarchical. Indeed, human inequality came to be seen everywhere as the natural order of things. These first aristocrats ploughed their wealth into armaments and other means of coercion, using force to compel compliance at home, to protect their assets, and to expand their territorial reach.'<sup>25</sup> In other words, war emerged along with class society.

In 1986, UNESCO gathered scientists who formulated the Seville Statement on Violence, which it adopted in 1989. It says that it is scientifically incorrect to claim that humans inherited 'a tendency to make war' from animals,<sup>26</sup> to claim that violence and war are 'genetically programmed',<sup>27</sup> to claim that humans have a 'violent brain',<sup>28</sup> and to claim that war is instinctual.<sup>29</sup> The Statement says that war is a 'product of culture'.<sup>30</sup>

Having focused on concepts of war and defining war, we will next focus on what digital warfare is all about.

## 4.3 What is Digital Warfare?

### 4.3.1 *The Notion of Digital Warfare*

In digital violence (see chapter 3 of this book), the perpetrator utilises a digital weapon (system) to try to kill or damage the health of the victim(s). Both the perpetrator and the victim(s) can be individuals, social systems, or societies. Digital violence is the starting point of digital war.

There is a confusing multitude of concepts describing cultural and digital aspects of warfare. They include: Bitskrieg, C6ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber-Defence and Combat Systems and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance), C5ISR, C4ISR, C4I<sup>2</sup> (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, and Interoperability), C4I, C2I (Command, Control & Intelligence), C2 (Command & Control), cyberattacks, cyberwar, electronic warfare, information operations, information war, information-in-warfare, military deception, netwars, network-centric warfare, psychological operations, psychological warfare, a revolution in military affairs, etc.

These terms are defined and used in different ways. They have in common that they signify the use of information and digital technologies in warfare. In this work, we utilise two general concepts encompassing various aspects: information warfare and digital warfare. Information warfare means that parties involved in wars produce and circulate information about enemies and, in some cases, themselves in the context of war. Digital warfare means that digital technologies are utilised in the context of warfare. In digital warfare, there is large-scale violence between at least two politically organised groups where at least one group sees the other group as an enemy that should be annihilated in order to realise a particular political interest against the will of this identified enemy and at least one side uses a digital weapon (system) for trying to kill and damage the health of the members of the other side.

Today, the notion of cyberwar is often used to characterise politically motivated hacker attacks on a political foe's computer infrastructure (servers, websites, databases, etc.).<sup>31</sup> For example, the Oxford Dictionary defines cyberwarfare as 'the use of computer technology to attack the information systems of a state or organization, preventing them from carrying out important activities'.<sup>32</sup> The problem with this definition is that it is limited to the attack on information. The key feature of war, namely that it aims to destroy humans, is missing. The two RAND military analysts Arquilla and Ronfeldt formulated an often-cited definition of cyberwar as computer-based warfare:

Cyberwar refers to conducting, and preparing to conduct, military operations according to information-related principles. It means disrupting if not destroying the information and communications systems, broadly defined to include even military culture, on which an adversary relies in order to 'know' itself: who it is, where it is, what it can do when, why it is fighting, which threats to counter first, etc. It means trying to know all about an adversary while keeping it from knowing much about oneself. [...] It implies new man-machine interfaces that amplify man's capabilities, not a separation of man and machine. In some situations, combat may be waged fast and from afar, but in many other situations, it may be slow and close-in; and new combinations of far and close and fast and slow may be the norm, not one extreme or the other.<sup>33</sup>

This definition of cyberwar includes, on the one hand, the *war on information*, which includes the attack on and destruction of an enemy's information systems and ideological operations such as the spread of propaganda and fake news about the enemy. On the other hand, cyberwar also includes *information-in-war*, an army's digital surveillance of an enemy, the digital collection of data about this enemy, and the army's utilisation of the digitally amplified destructive capacities of weapons for trying to target and kill an enemy and remain unrecognised and invisible to the enemy.

#### 4.3.2 Netwar

Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1996) introduced the concept of netwar, which they distinguish from cyberwar. By netwar, they mean 'an emerging conflict (and crime) at the societal level, involving measures short of war, in which the protagonists use – indeed, depend on using – network forms of organization, doctrine, strategy, and communication'.<sup>34</sup> The problem with this definition is that it not just includes terrorist organisations and criminals but also 'NGO activists' that 'challenge a government or another set of activists over a hot public issue'.<sup>35</sup>

Criminals can be part of wars, but crime is different from war. Referring to NGOs that use the Internet for campaigning, petitions, etc. as conducting 'netwar' questions their political legitimacy and questions democratic extra-parliamentary opposition.

There are undoubtedly civil society groups, economic organisations, and other organisations that engage in netwar. For example, Yevgeny Prigozhin's Internet Research Agency spread fake news on the Internet in order to try to manipulate elections in Western countries. The whole endeavour was a netwar element of Putin's struggle against the West that found one of its culmination points in the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Civil society groups and other extra-parliamentary groups can indeed wage networked warfare. However, Arquilla and Ronfeldt's approach bears the risk of also characterising democratic civil society organisations as groups that are waging wars. Groups such as Amnesty International are, however, very different from the likes of the Islamic State.

The two military analysts Arquilla and Ronfeldt speak of an 'ambivalent dynamic of netwar' where NGOs are the 'forces of the bright side'

and terrorists, criminals, and ethnonationalists form the ‘dark side of net-war’.<sup>36</sup> Although NGOs are characterised as the ‘bright side’, they still are seen as a group ‘waging social netwar’.<sup>37</sup>

Influenced by Arquilla and Ronfeldt, the United States Air Force provided an understanding of ‘information operations’ corresponding to Arquilla and Ronfeldt’s notion of cyberwar. According to this understanding, information operations are the key feature of information warfare. They are actions ‘taken to affect adversary information and information systems while defending one’s own information and information systems’.<sup>38</sup> For Arquilla and Ronfeldt, military information operations include a) information-in-warfare (‘military operations based on integrated intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets; its information collection/dissemination activities; and its global navigation and positioning, weather, and communications capabilities’)<sup>39</sup> as well as b) offensive and defensive counterinformation that includes psychological warfare, electronic warfare, military deception, physical attacks on information systems, and information attacks (activities ‘taken to manipulate or destroy an adversary’s information systems without visibly changing the physical entity within which it resides’.<sup>40</sup>)

Having dealt with some conceptual foundations of digital warfare, we will focus on the political economy of war in the next section.

#### 4.4 The Political Economy of War

The political economist of communication Vincent Mosco argues that the ‘influence of the military on the design, dissemination and management of technology counters the myth that technology is a product of private marketplace development. This applies particularly to communication and information technology’.<sup>41</sup> He, therefore, speaks of the existence of the ‘military information society’.<sup>42</sup> Military drones are one of the latest and most important developments in the military information society. The drone is ‘among the key instruments in the trend of remote warfare, which involves attacking the enemy without risking one’s own troops and material resources’.<sup>43</sup> There is not just the commodification but also the militarisation of the Internet.<sup>44</sup>

#### 4.4.1 *Military Expenditures*

In 1960, the world's military expenditures stood at 6.3 percent of the global GDP.<sup>45</sup> The Cold War with the Cuban Missile Crisis peaked in 1962. World army spending remained above 5 percent until 1971, dropping from 5.0 percent in 1970 to 4.5 percent. In 1990, when the Cold War ended, the share dropped to 3.3 percent. From 1992 until 2021, the share was consistently below 3 percent. Given the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the increasing polarisation between world powers, there is the danger that world military expenditures as a share of the global GDP will sharply rise.

The data in table 4.1 shows the development of the shares of the world's largest military powers in global military spending.

Today, besides the USA, the dominant global military powers in terms of military expenditures are China, the EU, India, the UK, and Russia. Together, these powers have continuously accounted for over 70 percent of the world's total military expenditures. The EU's share has dropped from around 25 percent in the late 1970s to 13.9 percent in 2024. China's military expenditure share increased from zero in 1977 to 11.8 percent in 2024. India's share has increased since the late 1970s and stood at 3.2 percent in 2024. The UK's share dropped from almost 8 percent in 1980 to 3.1 percent in 2024. Russia's share was 3.2 percent in 2021. In 2022, Russia's share had increased to 3.9 percent. In 2023, it stood at 4.6 percent. Ukraine's share increased from 0.3 percent of global military expenditure in 2021 to 2.0 percent in 2022 and 2.7 percent in 2023. In 2024, it was 2.4 percent. Both increases were an effect of the armament that Russia's invasion of Ukraine caused.

The USA has continuously held the largest share of the world's military spending. In some years, it accounted for more than half of these expenditures. In recent years, the USA's share was around 40 percent. There has been an increasing political polarisation between the USA and other Western countries, including the EU, on the one side and China and Russia on the other side. At the same time, these political powers are also the world's foremost military powers, which makes political-economic polarisation highly dangerous. Increasing conflict between global powers can potentially create a new World War.

**Table 4.1: Development of selected shares of the world's total military spending (current US\$), in %.** Data source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, accessed March 11, 2023, February 7, 2024, April 26, 2024, 28 April 2025 (data accessed via World Bank Open Data, <https://data.worldbank.org>)

Year	USA	China	EU	India	UK	Russia	Total
1977	39.9	0	26.1	1.3	4.9		72.2
1978	39.2	0	25.2	1.4	5.5		71.3
1979	39.7	0	23.9	1.4	6.4		71.4
1980	39.2	0	22.9	1.5	7.7		71.3
1981	43.7	0	18.8	1.5	6.7		70.7
1982	49.5	0	16.7	1.4	6.2		73.8
1983	50.6	0	16.3	1.5	6.0		74.4
1984	53.3	0	14.7	1.5	5.5		75
1985	55.9	0	14.4	1.6	5.3		77.2
1986	55.6	0	17.6	1.8	5.7		80.7
1987	50.7	0	19.1	1.8	5.8		77.4
1988	48.5	0	19.0	1.8	6.0		75.3
1989	48.9	1.7	18.3	1.6	5.7		76.2
1990	45.7	1.4	20.2	1.5	6.1		74.9
1991	43.0	1.4	20.3	1.2	6.8		72.7
1992	44.5	1.7	20.5	1.1	6.2		74
1993	45.4	1.8	19.2	1.2	5.5	1.1	74.2
1994	43.6	1.4	19.3	1.3	5.5	1.9	73
1995	40.8	1.7	20.5	1.3	5.3	1.8	71.4
1996	39.9	2.0	20.6	1.4	5.3	2.2	71.4
1997	40.5	2.2	18.8	1.6	5.5	2.4	71
1998	41.2	2.4	19.3	1.7	5.8	1.1	71.5
1999	41.4	2.8	18.7	1.9	5.7	0.9	71.4
2000	43.1	3.0	16.2	1.9	5.3	1.2	70.7
2001	43.9	3.5	15.8	1.9	5.2	1.5	71.8
2002	46.4	3.7	15.8	1.8	5.4	1.7	74.8
2003	46.2	3.5	16.6	1.7	5.5	1.8	75.3
2004	45.8	3.5	16.6	1.9	5.6	1.9	75.3
2005	46.0	3.7	15.3	2.0	5.3	2.4	74.7
2006	46.3	4.3	15.6	2.0	5.3	2.9	76.4
2007	44.1	4.6	15.9	2.1	5.5	3.3	75.5

Year	USA	China	EU	India	UK	Russia	Total
2008	43.5	5.2	15.7	2.2	4.8	3.7	75.1
2009	45.1	6.2	14.5	2.5	4.1	3.3	75.7
2010	44.8	6.4	13.0	2.8	3.9	3.6	74.5
2011	43.0	7.2	12.7	2.8	3.8	4.0	73.5
2012	42.8	7.1	12.7	2.8	3.8	4.0	73.2
2013	38.7	9.3	11.9	2.7	3.6	5.0	71.2
2014	36.9	10.4	11.9	2.9	3.8	4.8	70.7
2015	38.4	11.9	10.8	3.1	3.6	4.0	71.8
2016	38.8	12.0	11.2	3.4	3.2	4.2	72.8
2017	37.7	12.3	11.4	3.8	3.0	3.9	72.1
2018	37.8	12.9	12.0	3.7	3.1	3.4	72.9
2019	39.4	12.9	11.7	3.8	3.0	3.5	74.3
2020	40.0	13.3	12.0	3.7	3.1	3.2	75.3
2021	38.5	14.1	12.4	3.7	3.3	3.2	75.2
2022	39.7	13.2	11.7	3.7	3.1	3.9	75.3
2023	38.4	12.4	13.1	3.5	3.1	4.6	75.1
2024	37.6	11.8	13.9	3.2	3.1	4.6	75.2

#### 4.4.2 The Arms Industry

The arms industry is a highly profitable capitalist business. Defence companies profit from conflicts, wars, and deaths. In 2021, the 100 largest defence companies made revenues of US\$ 595.0 billion from selling arms.<sup>46</sup> In 2023, these revenues had increased to US\$ 631.9 billion.<sup>47</sup> Comparing 2023 to 2022, the total defence spending of the world's largest 100 military corporations increased by 6.7%,<sup>48</sup> which is an indication of a new global arms race in a highly polarised world political system. The military industry benefits economically from political-economic conflicts. In 2023, the world's GDP was US\$ 105.44 trillion,<sup>49</sup> which means that arms sales amounted to 0.6 percent of global economic activity.

Table 4.2 shows some basic data about the world's top 10 arms companies measured by the size of their revenues. Among them are six US companies, three Chinese, and one British. In terms of revenues, US, Chinese and British companies dominate the arms industry. War is not just a political tragedy but also a profitable business.

Table 4.2: The world's largest military corporations in 2024, data source: SIPRI (2024)

Rank	Previous Rank	Company	Country	2023 Defence Revenue (mn US\$)	2022 Defence Revenue (mn US\$)	% Defence Revenue Change	2023 Total Revenue (in mn US\$)	Revenue from Defence
1	1	Lockheed Martin	USA	\$60,810	\$61,820	-1.6%	\$67,570	90.0%
2	2	RTX	USA	\$40,660	\$41,190	-1.3%	\$68,920	59.0%
3	3	Northrop Grumman	USA	\$35,570	\$33,620	5.8%	\$39,290	90.5%
4	4	Boeing	USA	\$31,100	\$30,500	2.0%	\$77,790	40.0%
5	5	General Dynamics	USA	\$30,200	\$29,270	3.2%	\$42,270	71.4%
6	6	BAE Systems	UK	\$29,810	\$29,150	2.3%	\$30,350	98.2%
7	9	Rostec	Russia	\$21,730	\$14,550	49.3%	\$33,430	65.0%
8	8	AVIC	China	\$20,850	\$19,750	5.6%	\$83,430	25.0%
9	7	NORINCO	China	\$20,560	\$21,130	-2.7%	\$76,600	26.8%
10	10	CETC	China	\$16,050	\$14,260	12.6%	\$55,990	28.7%

Having introduced some foundations of the political economy of war, we will look at a particular example of war's political economy in the next section. We will look at and analyse an example of digital weapons: combat drones.

## 4.5 Combat Drones: An Example of Digital Weapons

### 4.5.1 *What is a Drone/Unmanned Aerial Vehicle?*

An unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) does not have a human pilot sitting in the plane. It flies autonomously or is remotely controlled. There are military UAVs, civilian UAVs, and commercial UAVs. Military UAVs can carry and fire a weapon or are used for military surveillance. Civilian UAVs usually carry freight or sensors or have surveillance cameras that take pictures or videos that are transmitted to the ground controller. The size of UAVs varies from that of an insect to that of commercial aeroplanes. Multiple terms are employed for these technologies: drone, pilotless aircraft, remotely operated aircraft, remotely piloted aircraft, remotely piloted vehicle, robot plane, uninhabited aerial vehicle, unmanned aerial system, unmanned aerial vehicle, unmanned aircraft, or unpiloted aerial vehicle.

Grégoire Chamayou argues that drone warfare has several distinct features: drones 'see everything, all the time',<sup>50</sup> record and archive surveillance data,<sup>51</sup> fuse together different data types to identify enemies,<sup>52</sup> detect anomalies in data in order to strike pre-emptively,<sup>53</sup> and fuse '*surveillance and annihilation*'.<sup>54</sup>

In the second version of his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility',<sup>55</sup> Walter Benjamin distinguishes between two types of technology. The first technology makes 'the maximum possible use of human beings'; the second type 'reduces their use to the minimum. The achievements of the first technology might be said to culminate in human sacrifice; those of the second, in the remote-controlled aircraft which needs no human crew'.<sup>56</sup> For example, a theatre performance utilises human actors every evening on the stage. In contrast, a movie is shot once and requires little human action to be screened in a movie theatre or watched at home on Netflix. Traditional warfare requires two armies to meet face-to-face and murder each other on the battlefield. It makes use of the maximum mobilisation of human beings. Drone warfare, in contrast,

is a second technology of war that is highly mediated and, therefore, conducted from a distance, and tries to minimise and automate soldiers on the battlefield.

Chamayou comments on this passage from Benjamin that the kamikaze and the suicide bomber are first techniques of warfare, and the killer drone is a second technique of warfare. ‘The kamikaze: *My body is a weapon*. The drone: *My weapon has no body*. [...] Kamikazes are those for whom death is certain. [Controllers of drones] kill by explosion without ever risking their lives. [...] it is *impossible* for them to be killed as they kill.’<sup>57</sup>

The Radioplane QQ-2 was the first mass-produced UAV.<sup>58</sup> The Radioplane Company produced this drone that the USA used in the Second World War. After 9/11, the deployment and development of military drones reached a new level. The USA used drones for targeted killings in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and Syria. ‘Just as World War II spurred the development of computing, so the War on Terror spurred the development of drones.’<sup>59</sup>

Since 2000, the number of countries with military drones has steadily increased from one in 2001 to 38 in 2020.<sup>60</sup> Until 2020, eleven countries had conducted drone strikes: ‘the United States, Israel, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Russia and the United Arab Emirates. But many other countries, including Saudi Arabia, India, and China, among others, maintain armed drones in their arsenals.’<sup>61</sup>

The USA has used military drones to kill Al-Qaeda and ISIS terrorist leaders such as Mohammed Atef (2001) and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (2006). Drones also played a role in the location of Osama bin Laden, who was killed by a unit of the US Army in 2011. While the US government says the share of civilian casualties in the total casualties killed by US drones is between 2.7 and 4.5 percent,<sup>62</sup> the Bureau of Investigative Journalism says the rate is between 10.3 and 13.0 percent.<sup>63</sup> No matter which of the two sources is closer to the actual rate, the data show that drone killing is not always precise and results in civilian casualties. ‘Smart’ killing is not so smart at all but creates civilian suffering and deaths.

It has been estimated that Russia, from September until the end of December 2022, fired more than 600 drones into Ukraine, of which Russia imported many from Iran.<sup>64</sup> ‘Combined with Russian missile strikes, the drones have caused heavy damage to Ukrainian infrastructure over the last three months and led to frequent power outages and shortages of potable

water.<sup>65</sup> Russia uses semi-autonomous weapon systems because they are cheap, hard to trace by radar, and unmanned so that Russian soldiers are not at threat of dying when the attacking plane is shot down. Russia has been attacking Ukraine's critical infrastructure. By using drones in such a manner, the Russian government and military aim to cause damage to such a degree that Ukrainians are without heating, electricity, phone, and Internet supply so that they freeze, starve, and suffer. The goal is to weaken, exhaust, and kill Ukrainians in order to force them into submission. According to reports, the Ukrainian armed forces have been relatively successful in shooting down the Russian drones.<sup>66</sup>

#### ***4.5.2 The Increasing Production and Use of Military Drones***

The production of drones has significantly increased. Parts of this increase have to do with the military use of drones. In 2013, the Teal Group, an aerospace and military market analysis organisation, estimated that in 2022, the number of military drones produced globally would be 4,448. This number was a vast underestimation.<sup>67</sup> In 2024, a coalition of ten countries committed to deliver more than one million military drones to Ukraine; and both Ukraine and Russia in the same year seem to have each produced more than one million military drones.<sup>68</sup> On the eve of the invasion's third anniversary, Russia launched 267 drones against Ukraine.<sup>69</sup> On March 11, 2025, Ukraine launched hundreds of drones against Russia, the Russian military said it intercepted 337.<sup>70</sup> The global market value of the military drones produced was US\$14.5 billion in 2022. According to an estimation, this market size will increase to US\$31.3 billion by 2029 with a compound annual growth rate of 11.6 Percent.<sup>71</sup>

**Table 4.3: The development of the worldwide production volume of drones.** Data source: <https://www.statista.com/outlook/cmo/consumer-electronics/drones/worldwide#volume> (accessed July 26, 2024).

Year	Volume (US\$)
2018	4.6 million
2020	5.1 million
2022	6.8 million
2024	8.2 million
2026	8.7 million
2029	9.5 million

#### 4.5.3 *The Export of Military Drones*

According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), China was, over a ten-year period, the largest exporter of military drones measured in the volume of UAVs:

Data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which tracks global arms transfers, shows China has delivered some 282 combat drones to 17 countries in the past decade, making it the world's leading exporter of the weaponised aircraft. By comparison, the United States – which has the most advanced UAVs in the world – has delivered just 12 combat drones in the same period, all of them to France and the United Kingdom, according to SIPRI data. The US, however, still leads in the export of unarmed surveillance drones.<sup>72</sup>

For the period from 1985 until 2014, Israel accounted for 60.7% of all military drones exported, followed by the USA, which accounted for 23.9%. China accounted for 0.9% and Russia/the Soviet Union for 1.9%.<sup>73</sup> Other countries listed as top exporters are Canada, France, Austria, Italy, and Germany.

We checked SIPRI's data from 2000 until 2021 and found the export data in table 4.4. Only officially registered exports are included, so the actual number of transferred drones might be significantly larger.

According to the data, in the years from 2000 until 2021, the five largest exporters of military drones were Israel, the USA, China, Austria, and France. The Drone Databook confirms this analysis and the key role played by the USA, Israel, China, and Austria.<sup>74</sup>

Other significant exporters were Italy, Germany, Turkey, Iran, South Africa, and Sweden. On the one hand, there are Western countries and on the other hand, countries who have, to a certain degree, been at odds with the West, such as China, Iran, and Turkey, which shows that the export and the production of drones are embedded into global conflicts and competing imperialisms. The analysed data focuses on all drones used in a military context.

287 of the 289 drones in the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database exported by China were transferred between 2012 and 2021. In the same period, Israel exported 248 of the 639 drones listed in the database and the USA 343 of 476. According to this data, the USA and China have, in the ten years from 2012 until 2021, been the two largest exporters of military drones. China has become a major player in military drone production and export.

**Table 4.4: Top exporters of military drones, 2000–2021.** Data source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, accessed March 10, 2023

Rank	Country	Number of drones exported	Destinations
1	Israel	639	African Union, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Ecuador, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, UK, United Nations, USA, unknown, Vietnam, Zambia
2	USA	476	Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Brunei, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Czechia, France, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, NATO, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UAE, UK, unknown,
3	China	289	Algeria, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Laos, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, UAE, Uzbekistan
4	Austria	119	Australia, France, Jordan, Libya, Malaysia, Myanmar, OSCE, Tunisia, UAE, USA
5	France	84	Canada, Denmark, Greece, Indonesia, Morocco, Netherlands, Sweden
6	Italy	70	Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, United Nations, unknown
7	Germany	60	France, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia
8	Turkey	51	Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Libya GNC, Morocco, Qatar, Turkmenistan, Ukraine
9	Iran	48	Venezuela, Hezbollah, Iraq, Sudan, Syria
10	South Africa	21	UAE, unknown
11	Sweden	19	Canada, Germany, Indonesia, Spain, UAE
12	UAE	11	Algeria, Nigeria
13	Denmark	10	Canada
14	Australia	3	Malaysia
15	Malaysia	3	Thailand
	Canada	0	
	Russia	0	

#### 4.5.4 Companies Producing and Selling Military Drones

Table 4.5 shows companies in the five largest military drone exporting countries that produce such UAVs.

In the USA, France, and Austria, military drones are produced by privately owned companies, some of which are publicly traded corporations. In China and France, the combat UAV production industry is a mixture of state-owned enterprises and private enterprises. State ownership of defence industries has to do with the fact that governments consider this industry a key infrastructure that they directly control to try to minimise risks such as espionage and company crises that result in the non-availability of military equipment.

Military drones have proliferated at a time when world politics has become more polarised, nationalism and authoritarianism have expanded, and the likelihood of large wars has become more likely. Combat drones operate semi-autonomously from humans and have the potential to turn into fully automated weapons that select targets and kill autonomously from human command and control. Autonomous weapons bring along political-ethical problems.

**Table 4.5: Producers of military drones in the five largest exporting countries of such UAVs.** (Data source: Gettinger 2019).

Company	Country	Military UAVs	Company Type
Schiebel	Austria	CamCopter S-100	Private company
Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC)	China	AV500W, BZK, Cloud Shadow, Divine Eagle, Feihong-98, Hongdu GJ-11 Sharp Sword, Qi Mingxing, Wing Loon, WZ-8, Xianglong, Yaoying	State-owned enterprise
Beihang/Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics	China	BZK-005	Public university
Beijing Microfly Engineering Technology	China	UV-10CAM	Private company
CASC (China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation)	China	CH-3, CH-4, CH-5, CH-7, CH-802	State-owned enterprise

Company	Country	Military UAVs	Company Type
China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC)	China	BZK-007, HW-350, Tian Ying	State-owned enterprise
DJI	China	Inspire, Matrice 210, Mavic, Phantom	State-private-partnership
Han's Eagle	China	SD-40 (Sea Cavalry)	Private company
Taiyuan Navigation Science and Technology	China	Sky-09P	Private company
Tengoen Technology	China	TB-001, TB-002	Private company
Xi'an Aisheng Technology Group	China	ASN	Private company
Yuneec	China	Typhoon H	Private company
Zhong Tian Guide Control Technology Company (ZT Guide)	China	Fei Long 1	Private company
Ziyan UAV	China	Blowfish 1	Private company
Airbus SE	France	Tracker	Corporation
Dassault Aviation	France	3S	Corporation
ECA Group (Groupe Gorgé)	France	IT180-3EL-1	Corporation
Novadem Robotics	France	NX70	Private company
Parrot	France	AR-Drone	Corporation
Sagem (now: Safran)	France	Patroller, Sperwer	Corporation
Thales	France	Spy'Ranger	Corporation
Bluebird Aero	Israel	SpyLite	Private company
Elbit Systems	Israel	Hermes, Sky Striker, Skylark	Corporation
EMIT Aviation	Israel	Blue Horizon II	Private company
Innocon	Israel	MicroFalcon	Private company
Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI)	Israel	Bird Eye 400, Harop, Harpy, Heron, Hunter, Searcher (Mk3),	State-owned enterprise
Rafael Advanced Defense Systems	Israel	Dominator, Orbiter	State-owned enterprise
Sky Sapience	Israel	Hovermast 150	Private company

(Continued)

**Table 4.5: (Continued)**

Company	Country	Military UAVs	Company Type
AeroVironment	USA	RQ-11, RQ-12 Wasp, RQ-20 Puma, Switchblade, T-20	Corporation
Boeing	USA	MQ-25 Stingray, RQ-21 Blackjack, ScanEagle	Corporation
General Atomics	USA	MQ-1 Predator, MQ-1C Gray Eagle, MQ-9 Reaper	Private company
GoPro	USA	Karma	Corporation
Honeywell	USA	T-Hawk	Corporation
Kaman	USA	K-MAX	Corporation
Lockheed Martin	USA	Desert Hawk, RQ-170 Sentinel, Stalker	Corporation
Navmar Applied Sciences Corporation	USA	RQ-23 Tigershark	Private company
Northrop Grumman	USA	MQ-4C Triton, MQ-8 Fire Scout, RQ-180, RQ-4 Global Hawk, RQ-5 Hunter	Corporation
Physical Sciences	USA	InstantEye (Gen3)	Private company
Raytheon	USA	Silver Fox	Corporation
Teledyne Technologies (FLIR)	USA	Black Hornet (PRS),	Corporation
Textron (AAI)	USA	MQ-19 Aerosonde, RQ-7 Shadow	Corporation

## 4.6 Autonomous Digital Weapons and their Problems

### 4.6.1 Autonomous Digital Weapons

One of the goals of the United States Air Force *Science and Technology Strategy for 2030 and Beyond* is that it is capable to '[o]verwhelm adversaries with complexity, unpredictability, and numbers through a collaborative and autonomous network of systems and effects', which would require 'a wide range of robotics and autonomy technologies, along with sensors and wireless communications' and 'large numbers of autonomous systems coordinated with traditional manned assets'.<sup>75</sup> By 2030, China, according

to its *New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan*, wants to be ‘the world’s primary AI innovation center’, which includes developing ‘a new generation of AI technology as a strong support to command and decision-making, military deduction, defense equipment, and other applications’.<sup>76</sup> In 2022, China’s President said in a speech that China will ‘enhance [...] military capabilities [...] through mechanization, informatization, and the application of smart technologies’.<sup>77</sup>

According to the Military Strength Ranking of 2023, the USA has the world’s most powerful army, and China has the world’s third most powerful one.<sup>78</sup> Two of the world’s most powerful armies, the US and the Chinese military are heavily investing in AI and robotics in order to create ‘smart’, autonomous weapon systems. At the same time, world politics has become more polarised. It might very well be that autonomous weapons will be used in future wars. The utilisation of such weapons might make such wars and conflicts even more brutal and inhumane.

Not all governments support the development of smart and autonomous weapons. For example, the 2023 German National Security Strategy says Germany ‘supports a ban on lethal autonomous weapon systems that are not under any human control’.<sup>79</sup>

The drive towards the automation of warfare is due to fears of armies losing soldiers and the interest to minimise an army’s risks while maximising its destructive power. Drones reflect the trend towards the digital mediation and automation of warfare. There have also been experiments with a) cyborg soldiers and b) robotic weapons: a) Armies have invested in experiments with and research on the digital augmentation of soldiers’ realities using wearable computing technologies such as soldier exoskeletons that try to enhance soldiers’ strength, speed, and endurance; smart combat helmets linked to big data analytics; environmental and bodily sensors; brain-computer interfaces.<sup>80</sup> b) Armies have also conducted research on fully automated, AI-based robotic weapons.<sup>81</sup>

Lucy Suchman and Jutta Weber argue that new robotics and AI are based on the concept of dynamic, complex systems and the autonomy of systems. Notions such as the one of self-organising systems imply that if a technical system is conceived of and presented as self-organising, it will act autonomously from humans. There are approaches in robotics that ‘aim at adaptive learning behaviour intended to make the machine independent from human supervision and intervention’.<sup>82</sup> One danger of an overgeneralised notion of agency is that robots and automated robotic weapon

systems are conceived as acting autonomously from humans and society and, therefore, also independently from morality or that morality can be shifted onto machines. The problem is that this argument can ground the assumption that such systems should have the 'right' to decide who should be killed. Suchman and Weber argue in contrast to such notions of autonomy and agency for a concept of relational agency. If robots' behaviour is always relational, then the implication is that robots are based on human action and human-made programmes and, therefore, are not morally or socially autonomous. 'Autonomous' weapons kill on behalf of certain groups and interests. They are not autonomous but dependent on existing power structures.

Robotic military systems are not soldiers. They are no human actors. They do not have morals, norms, ideologies, emotions, and worldviews, although they have the capacity to kill and destroy automatically or semi-automatically. We, therefore, have to characterise them as weapons and not as perpetrators, soldiers, armies, subjects, or actors. Robotic and AI-based military systems are programmed by humans, which means that in human decisions, norms, morals, ideologies, power relations, interests, and worldviews are at play when robotic military systems kill and destroy.

Jutta Weber argues that robotic warfare can result 'in a dangerous and potentially endless spiral of high-tech arms races'<sup>83</sup> and that combat drones and other semi-automatic weapons 'allow the distancing of the commanding and responsible officer' from killing so that war becomes 'the experience of a computer game'.<sup>84</sup>

#### 4.6.2 *The Role of Ethics in Military AI*

There have been discussions of the role of ethics in the military use of AI, which shows that concerns about an intensification of violence by AI have reached military discourses. In these discussions, there is talk about human control of AI in weapons systems, but often it remains unclear what that means.

In a position paper on the military use of AI, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China says that the principle of "AI for good" should be used and that '[r]elevant weapon systems must be under human control and efforts must be made to ensure human suspension at any time'.<sup>85</sup> In a working paper on autonomous weapons, China writes that weapon systems that enable 'autonomy, meaning absence of human

intervention and control during the entire process of executing a task' and that engage in 'indiscriminate killing' are 'unacceptable autonomous weapons systems'.<sup>86</sup> 'Acceptable Autonomous Weapons Systems could have a high degree of autonomy, but are always under human control. It means they can be used in a secure, credible, reliable and manageable manner, can be suspended by human beings at any time and comply with basic principles of international humanitarian law in military operations'.<sup>87</sup> The implication is that China sees systems that operate and kill relatively autonomously but are initiated by humans and can be stopped by humans as acceptable. The notion of human control and what it means is unclear and remains vague.

In 2023, the USA suggested the 'Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy'.<sup>88</sup> By the end of 2024, around 60 countries had signed the Declaration. It says: 'Military use of AI must be in compliance with applicable international law. [...] Military use of AI capabilities needs to be accountable, including through such use during military operations within a responsible human chain of command and control'.<sup>89</sup> In a way, the Declaration's pronouncements are comparable to the Chinese formulations. Both stress human action in controlling, commanding, initiating, and overseeing the actions of autonomous weapons. The Declaration does not rule out the automatic selection of targets and automatic killing of humans as long as humans control the overall system.

In 2024, South Korea hosted the second summit on Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain<sup>90</sup> (REAIM 2024). It initiated a Blueprint for Action that was endorsed by 64 countries, including the USA, the UK, and Germany. The Blueprint says that 'high impact applications' such as 'AI-enabled weapons' and 'AI-enabled decision-support systems for combat operations' require 'particular policy attention'.<sup>91</sup> This formulation is vague. It just says that states need to regulate the use of AI in autonomous weapons systems. The Blueprint speaks of 'responsible AI in the military domain'.<sup>92</sup> It continues: 'Appropriate human involvement needs to be maintained in the development, deployment and use of AI in the military domain, including appropriate measures that relate to human judgement and control over the use of force. [...] AI applications should be ethical and human-centric'.<sup>93</sup>

Human control over the use of force can mean that humans and not machines select targets and fire. However, it can also mean that humans control the overall process of autonomous weapons systems in that they

start and can end such systems' operations. The notion of human control remains vague.

Such blueprints, declarations, and papers share a formal interest in ethics and morality. They speak of 'human control', 'human involvement', 'human chain of command and control', 'human-centric' AI warfare, and 'human intervention and control'. The meanings of these terms remain, however, vague. The description of the suggested concepts as 'AI for good', 'responsible use', 'Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain' leaves open what moral notions of the common good and responsibility are utilised. Especially, it is unclear if moral action may include the international ban of autonomous, AI-based weapons and the rejection of automatic targeting and shooting. In such documents, ethics and morality are used as jargon that is not underpinned by a clear understanding of ethics. The focus on technological functionality and the technical fascination with AI seems to rule over Humanist considerations.

#### *4.6.3 The Promethean Gap in the Digital Age: Günther Anders' Philosophy of Technology as the Foundation for a Critical Ethics of Autonomous Digital Weapons*

The philosopher of technology Günther Anders argues that modern technology results in a Promethean gap, by which he means a distance between production and imagination, doing and feeling, knowledge and conscience, the machine and the body.<sup>94</sup> In the realm of warfare, Anders argues that the rise of the nuclear bomb has created what he terms apocalyptic blindness.<sup>95</sup> The destructive power of such weapons is so immense that humans cannot imagine the actual annihilatory effects of the use of weapons of mass destruction. 'While our ancestors had considered it a truism that imagination exceeds and surpasses reality, today the capacity of our imagination (and that of our feeling and responsibility) cannot compete with that of our *praxis*. As a matter of fact, our imagination is unable to grasp the effect of that which we are producing.'<sup>96</sup> Anders argues that when computers and robots conduct immoral acts such as killing, then it is easier for humans to claim they are innocent:

In order to prevent the last danger of a call to conscience, beings have been constructed onto whom responsibility can be shifted, oracle machines,

*electronic conscience machines* – for nothing else are the cybernetic computing machines that now, epitome of science (thus of progress, thus of what is moral under all circumstances), purringly assume responsibility while humans stand by and, half grateful and half triumphant, wash their hands of it.<sup>97</sup>

Anders argues that the spatial distanciation of killing with the help of weapon systems results in a moral distanciation of those operating these weapons from feelings of responsibility. When it just takes the push of a button to kill someone with a combat drone from a distance of thousands of kilometres or to fire a nuclear missile that kills millions and annihilates cities, it is more difficult for soldiers to feel responsibility than when they are ordered to kill a human being with their hands.

Automated weapon systems that kill autonomously from human activity further deepen the Promethean gap.

Assume an autonomous combat robot kills hundreds of civilians. It is easy for programmers, the military, and politicians to shift responsibility to others. It is also legally and ethically difficult to ascertain who holds direct moral and legal responsibility. The robot does not have morality. Humans program it. The programmers might say that machines, unfortunately, make errors and that such incidents were not designed into the system. Military commanders and politicians ordering the use of these robots might say they are sorry but that they did not give the order to kill civilians. Robots do not have fears, moral doubts, and empathy. They can be programmed to kill without a pause. The basic problem is that the automation of killing increases the Promethean gap. From a Humanist point of view, such automation is immoral as such. When it becomes easy and commonplace to shift responsibility to unintended technical errors, there is a high risk that future wars will escalate and become uncontrollable. Automated killing tends to automate and destroy moral feelings of guilt, responsibility, shame, sorrow, and inhumanity. Therefore, a key political task is that humans develop '*moral phantasy*',<sup>98</sup> the capacity to imagine what consequences (automated, semi-automated) weapons have. Since killer robots have no human drivers or pilots, the danger is that there is 'no longer anyone directly responsible who can be blamed if anything happens'.<sup>99</sup>

We have thus far outlined philosophical arguments against the use of autonomous weapons. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots shows that such arguments also play a political role.

#### ***4.6.4 Arguments against Killer Robots Used in Political Campaigning***

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots makes nine arguments against automated weapon systems:<sup>100</sup>

1. Killer robots advance digital dehumanisation, where machines make ever more decisions that humans should take.
2. There are algorithmic biases so that killer robots exacerbate structures of inequality.
3. When killer robots are deployed, humans lose meaningful control: ‘machines cannot make complex ethical choices, they cannot comprehend the value of human life. Machines don’t understand context or consequences: understanding is a human capability – and without that understanding we lose moral responsibility and we undermine existing legal rules.’
4. Killer robots lack human judgement and understanding.
5. Machines lack legal and moral accountability.
6. The lack of control and accountability leaves ‘people that are harmed with nowhere to turn’.
7. Automated warfare can ‘make conflict easier to enter’, lowering the threshold to war.
8. Automated warfare can advance a destabilising arms race.
9. Humans need an empowering, not a disempowering, relation to technology.

#### ***4.6.5 John Arquilla’s Defence of Autonomous Digital Weapons***

Not everyone agrees with the arguments made against autonomous weapons. An example is John Arquilla’s book *Bitskrieg: The New Challenge of Cyberwarfare*.<sup>101</sup> He is a military consultant who has advised high-level military officials such as General Norman Schwarzkopf, who led Operation

Desert Storm in Iraq (1990–1991) and US former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Together with David Ronfeldt, Arquilla contributed to the coinage of concepts such as cyberwar and netwar.

Arquilla argues that cyberwar includes not just information war but also physical warfighting.<sup>102</sup> By Bitskrieg, Arquilla understands cyberwar's 'battle doctrine',<sup>103</sup> information collection for military purposes, small, decentralised, networked 'swarms' of forces, the utilisation of robotic, AI-based weapons and systems, and AI systems as military strategists.<sup>104</sup> He argues that in future wars, armies will mix human soldiers, robot soldiers, and automated weapons.<sup>105</sup> Robots 'will fight in open battle [...] alongside human soldiers, sailors, and airmen'.<sup>106</sup>

Arquilla objects to the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, saying that it and related initiatives advance an 'alarmist view'<sup>107</sup> that will not stop the diffusion of AI into 'virtually all aspects of life', including security and the military, so that 'armies, navies, and aerospace forces will soon be replete with robotics that sense, shoot – perhaps even do some strategizing'.<sup>108</sup>

He sees the problem that fighting robots in battle might not 'distinguish between an enemy soldier and a civilian', might not hold off from killing wounded and surrendering enemy soldiers, and might 'inflict greater degrees of damage on civilian infrastructural targets – as well as on innocent noncombatants themselves'.<sup>109</sup>

However, Arquilla argues that human soldiers also kill civilians and that there is a technological fix to such problems: 'But the challenges, with automata possibly violating ethical rules of engagement in ambiguous situations, can be mitigated via programming – even in the most difficult combat situations in land. [...] Sometimes, too, fatigue, anger, or even a cold-blooded desire for revenge can cause humans deliberately to commit atrocities. [...] [An AI soldier] doesn't tire, get mad, or seek payback. Also, in air and naval battles, the bots of war will have a much clearer ability to distinguish friend from foe'.<sup>110</sup>

Arquilla is a techno-optimist who believes in the technological fix of societal problems. One societal problem is that in escalating conflicts, all sides may strive to maximise the damage and lethality of their weapons in order to win the war, survive, and minimise the risk of their own soldiers and civilians being killed. On the one hand, technical systems are prone to errors, which can result in a larger number of civilian and army casualties. On the other hand, given the escalation of conflict and war, it is likely that army robots and weapons will be programmed to maximise casualties and

kill remorselessly so that there is the ruthlessness-by-design of military AI systems and fighting robots.

Chamayou argues against the kind of arguments that Arquilla makes (without directly referring to Arquilla, whose book was written later on).<sup>111</sup> He opposes the idea that drones humanise warfare. He writes that drone warfare does not give the attacked party the opportunity to fight back because the attacker conducts war from a distance. As a consequence of the attacking army no longer being at risk, it is more likely that the attacked army and population will turn against and kill civilians. 'If the military withdraws from the battlefield, enemy violence will turn against targets that are easier to reach. [...] By maximizing the protection of military lives [...], a state that uses drones tends to divert reprisals toward its own population.'<sup>112</sup> In addition, killer drones can make mistakes and thereby kill civilians. Because of false positives in big data analysis, civilians are seen as combatants.

Commenting on the Nazis' use of the long-range missiles V-1 and V-2 in the Second World War, Theodor W. Adorno comments that in the case of 'Hitler's robot-bombs', 'the robots career without a subject'.<sup>113</sup> The V-1 and V-2 were launched from pads in Germany and hit targets in England. There was a human subject pulling the trigger, but no German soldier had to be in England to destroy and kill. In the case of the military drone, the bomb itself is mounted on a plane that is automatically or semi-automatically controlled. Whereas the long-range missile is a remotely controlled bomb, the military drone is a combination of AI, surveillance technology, plane, and bomb that is remotely controlled or acts autonomously.

Arquilla makes a TINA ('There is no alternative!') argument: The 'evolution of warfare toward the *Bitskrieg* paradigm simply cannot be prevented – including the increasing integration of robots into the whole strategic apparatus of nations'.<sup>114</sup> The development of society, politics, conflicts, technologies, and armies does not follow natural laws. How warfare develops in the future is not inevitable because it is human-made and, just like all aspects of society, is shaped by interests. Moreover, if the human interest in global justice, abolishing wars, and minimising violence become dominant, this will also influence how politics, armies, and weapons look.

Arquilla argues that nations should agree on behaviour-based arms control of cyber-weapons and robotics weapons so that nations that use robots 'in open battle' will be 'held responsible for any actions' of AI systems 'that may violate the laws of war'.<sup>115</sup> However, what if one law of war

is that armies violate laws of war when it comes to winning battles and wars? Moreover, why should it not be possible for politicians to agree not to develop and use autonomous weapons at all?

#### **4.6.6 Autonomous Weapons in Science Fiction: Isaac Asimov's Three Fundamental Laws of Robotics**

The popular culture of science fiction is often a fruitful source of material that helps us to better reflect on the ethical and political questions of robots, AI, and computing. Two examples are Isaac Asimov's science fiction stories and *Star Trek*.

In his collection of short stories *I, Robot* Isaac Asimov formulated what he calls the 'Three Fundamental Laws of Robotics', which are ethical principles: 'One, a robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. [...] Two, [...] a robot must obey the orders given it [to] by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. [...] And three, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.'<sup>116</sup> These laws put humans first and are Humanist in nature. Applied to autonomous weapons, the three laws mean that such weapons violate robot ethics and should not be created.

#### **4.6.7 Autonomous Weapons in Science Fiction: The Star Trek Episode 'The Ultimate Computer'**

In the *Star Trek* episode 'The Ultimate Computer' (season 2, episode 24), the *Enterprise* is part of a Starfleet experiment where the AI system M-5 autonomously runs and controls the spaceship. There are mock attacks where M-5 defeats the enemy spaceships. M-5 attacks and destroys the unmanned freighter Woden. Captain Kirk orders his crew to turn M-5 off. Therefore, the *Enterprise*'s technicians try to stop M-5, but the AI system kills the engineer who tries to disconnect the robot. In further test drills, M-5 destroys sister ships of the *Enterprise*, the *Lexington*, the *Excalibur*, and the *Potemkin*, which kills crew members of these starships' fleets.

M-5 is an AI system that steers the *Enterprise* and is also an autonomous weapon system that controls the *Enterprise*'s phasers and

auto-targets other ships. Commodore Bob Wesley, who commands the war games M-5 is involved in, comments that Captain Kirk can 'sit back and let the machine do the work'. Kirk is sceptical and comments that even if an AI system 'can work a thousand, a million times faster than the human brain, but it can't make a value judgment. It hasn't intuition. It can't think.'

One of the design principles that M-5's engineer Richard Daystrom used is that the system, just like humans, needs to survive. M-5 interprets other Starfleet ships as enemy ships and attacks them. M-5 comments on why it attacked the *Enterprise*'s sister ships: 'Programming includes protection against attack. Enemy vessels must be neutralised. [...] Programming includes full freedom to choose defensive actions in all attack situations.' M-5's programme violates Asimov's first, second and third laws. It injures and kills humans in order to survive and disregards human orders, even the ones given by its creator Daystrom, who reminds M5 that killing 'is a breaking of civil and moral laws we've lived by for thousands of years'. Daystrom programmed M-5, violating Asimov's law, because he wanted to show the superiority of AI over humans, and he did not feel scientifically accepted. He says colleagues were 'laughing behind my back at the boy wonder and becoming famous building on my work'.

Daystrom sees the problems of his own reasoning and suffers a nervous breakdown when he realises what a destructive force his system is. M-5 learns something from Daystrom's shock reaction to the system's obliteration of friendly ships. When Kirk 'talks' to M-5, the system realises that its behaviour is morally wrong and destroys itself:

KIRK: There were many men aboard those ships. They were murdered. Must you survive by murder?

M-5: This unit cannot murder.

KIRK: Why?

M-5: Murder is contrary to the laws of man and God.

KIRK: But you have murdered. Scan the starship *Excalibur*, which you destroyed. Is there life aboard?

M-5: No life.

KIRK: Because you murdered it. What is the penalty for murder?

M-5: Death.

KIRK: And how will you pay for your acts of murder?

M-5: This unit must die.

The end of the episode's story implies that, in the last instance, an AI system can understand morality and act in a morally good way. Such an assumption is unrealistic as the system is merely a software programme that does not have emotions and feelings. Other than Daystrom and the crew of the Enterprise, M-5 cannot feel sad about the murder of the crew of friendly spaceships.

What we can learn from *Star Trek*'s 'The Ultimate Computer' episode is that autonomous AI weapon systems that make decisions on life and death are dangerous because they can be programmed to kill ruthlessly. M-5, in the end, shows remorse, but remorse is a human feeling that a machine cannot experience. First broadcast in 1968, 'The Ultimate Computer' is a fascinating and anticipatory *Star Trek* episode. It anticipated debates about autonomous weapon systems when building such systems was not yet on the horizon. The basic message of the episode is that Humanist ethics implies that humans should make key decisions in society and should not be automated and handed over to machines.

## 4.7 Conclusion

This chapter asked two questions: What is war? What is digital war? We can now summarise its main findings:

- **War and communication:**

While the military theorist Carl von Clausewitz and the legal theorist Carl Schmitt did not think about the relationship between war and communication, Hannah Arendt pointed out a connection: In war, the communicative solution of political disputes breaks down or does not occur. In war, humans stop talking to each other, and power grows out of the barrel of a gun. War is also a particular form of communication: every act of war communicates absolute hatred and annihilation wishes.

- **War:**

War is organised, large-scale violence between at least two politically organised groups where at least one group sees the other group as an enemy that should be annihilated in order to realise a particular political interest against the will of this identified enemy.

- **Information warfare:**

Information warfare means that parties involved in wars produce and circulate information about enemies and, in some cases, themselves in the context of war.

- **Digital warfare:**

Digital warfare means that digital technologies are utilised in the context of warfare. In digital warfare, there is large-scale violence between at least two politically organised groups where at least one group sees the other group as an enemy that should be annihilated in order to realise a particular political interest against the will of this identified enemy and at least one side uses a digital weapon (system) for trying to kill and damage the health of the members of another side.

- **The arms industry:**

US, Chinese and British companies dominate the arms industry. War is not just a political tragedy but also a profitable business.

- **Military drones and autonomous digital weapon systems:**

The digital mediation of warfare has resulted in automation tendencies of warfare. The results have been military drones and investments in the development of autonomous weapon systems. Two of the world's most powerful armies, the US and the Chinese military, are investing heavily in AI and robotics to create 'smart', autonomous weapon systems. At the same time, world politics has become more polarised. It might very well be that autonomous weapons will be used in future wars. The utilisation of such weapons might make such wars and conflicts even more brutal and inhumane. The drive towards the automation of warfare is due to fears of armies losing soldiers and the interest to minimise an army's risks while maximising its destructive power.

- **Günther Anders's Promethean gap in the context of autonomous digital weapons:**

The philosopher of technology Günther Anders argues that complex modern technological systems result in a Promethean gap, by which he means a distance between production and imagination, doing and feeling, knowledge and conscience, the machine and the body. Anders argues that the spatial distanciation of killing with the help of weapon systems results in a moral distanciation of those operating these weapons

from feelings of responsibility. When it just takes the push of a button to kill someone with a combat drone from a distance of thousands of kilometres or to fire a nuclear missile that kills millions and annihilates cities, it is more difficult for soldiers to feel responsibility than when they are ordered to kill a human being with their hands. Automated weapon systems that kill autonomously from human activity further deepen the Promethean gap. Military commanders and politicians ordering the use of these robots might say they are sorry but that they did not give the order to kill civilians. Robots do not have fear, moral doubts, and empathy. They can be programmed to kill without a pause.

- **The defence of the development and use of autonomous weapons:** Supporters of the development and use of autonomous weapons object to criticisms of such systems that also human soldiers kill civilians, that killer robots can be programmed not to kill civilians, and that the rise of autonomous weapons and hybrid human-machine-armies can just like the progress of technology, automation, and AI, not be stopped. They overlook that in escalating conflicts, all sides may strive to maximise the damage and lethality of their weapons in order to win the war, survive, and minimise the risk of their own soldiers and civilians being killed. Given the escalation of conflict and war, it is likely that army robots and weapons will be programmed to maximise casualty and kill remorselessly so that there is ruthlessness-by-design of military AI systems and fighting robots. AI weapon systems that make decisions on life and death are dangerous because they can be programmed to kill ruthlessly.

## CHAPTER 5

# On Digital Capitalism

### 5.1 Introduction

Facebook and Google exploit our digital labour. That's digital capitalism. In late 2022 and early 2023, Google laid off 12,000 employees; Microsoft 10,000; X/Twitter more than 10,000; Amazon 18,000; and Facebook 11,000. That's digital capitalism. Corporations use algorithms for socially sorting and discriminating against customers who struggle to make ends meet and live in deprived neighbourhoods. That's digital capitalism. Lots of clickwork is conducted by poorly paid women in the Global South. That's digital capitalism. Digital fascism, fake news, post-truth culture and algorithmic politics circulate on capitalist and state-capitalist Internet platforms. That's digital capitalism. Information war and echo chambers polarise the digital public sphere, creating a new World War between imperialist powers that compete at the global level for the control of territory, economic power and political as well as ideological hegemony and in doing so make the nuclear annihilation of humankind and life on the Earth more likely. That's digital capitalism.

Digital capitalism matters. Digital capitalism shapes our lives. Digital capitalism needs to be better understood. We need critical theories of digital capitalism. We need to understand better praxes that challenge digital capitalism and aim at fostering digital democracy and digital socialism.

This chapter introduces a theoretical notion of digital capitalism grounded in Marx's Critique of Political Economy and Marxist Humanism. It provides an answer that does not conceive of capitalism as an economy but as a society and societal formation (*Gesellschaftsformation*). The argumentation will proceed in the following way: Section 5.2 clarifies the notions of capitalism and digital capitalism. Section 5.3 analyses the role

of violence in capitalism. Section 5.4 analyses the role of violence in digital capitalism. Section 5.5 presents some conclusions.

## 5.2 What is (Digital) Capitalism?

### 5.2.1 Society

In my book *Communication and Capitalism*,<sup>1</sup> I outline the foundations of a theory of the role of communication and media in capitalism. Building on Raymond Williams's approach of Cultural Materialism, the book argues that social production is the fundamental activity of society and is an economic practice that shapes all areas of society where it also takes on new, non-economic forms. In the economy, humans produce use values that satisfy human needs. In politics, they produce collective decisions. And in culture, they produce meanings of the world. As process (communication) and medium (means of communication), communication and means of communication mediate all social and societal processes in which humans participate. There is a dialectic of work and communication. Humans produce communicatively, and they communicate productively. Communication is the production and reproduction process of human sociality and society.

An edifice is a poor metaphor for society. It has often been used as a metaphor in the base/superstructure model of society. Buildings are static. Everything stands and falls with the base. The base/superstructure-model of society is mechanistic, deterministic, and reductionist. This fact does, however, not imply, as some pundits claim, that society is an unconnected postmodern plurality of networked differences or a systems-theoretic functional differentiation of autonomous subsystems of society. The subsystems of society are variegated and united at the same time. They have commonalities and differences. The economy unites them by being the source of the logic of social production. Social production originates in the economy but works in all systems and spheres of society, including non-economic ones where humans produce structures with emergent properties that cannot be reduced to the economy.

The river is a better metaphor for society than the edifice. A river is productive and dynamic. Imagining society as a river means it is prosesual, changing, and historical. There is a main current, the economy, that

flows into undercurrents and side currents that flow back into the main current. Humans in society constantly produce and reproduce society and sociality at various organisational levels. They produce use-values in the economy, collective decisions in politics, and meanings in culture. The river is a metaphor for the dynamic reproduction of society and its spheres that encroach on each other.

The economy plays a special role in society in the form of social production. The economy, as Georg Lukács argues, ‘circumscribes’<sup>2</sup> (*umschreiben*) subjectivity and the non-economic. As Raymond Williams says, the economy is ‘setting limits, exerting pressures’<sup>3</sup> on the non-economic. As Stuart Hall writes, the economy determines the non-economic not in the last instance but in the ‘*first* instance’.<sup>4</sup>

### **5.2.2 Marx: Capitalism as Formation of Society (*Gesellschaftsformation*)**

Rivers are not always clean and beautiful. The polluted river is a metaphor for capitalism and class society and how they endanger and pollute humans’ everyday lives. ‘Capitalism is a type of society that is based on and operates with[in] the principle of the accumulation of capital and power.’<sup>5</sup> Capitalism is a system that includes the accumulation of monetary capital in the economy, the accumulation of decision-making power in the political system, and the accumulation of prestige and distinction in the cultural system. In all these processes of accumulation, there are winners and losers. Labour as alienated social production has a special role in all these areas of accumulation. In capitalism, the logic of accumulation circumscribes (Lukács) human practices, sets limits and exerts pressures (Williams), and determines human practices in the first instance (Hall).

Marx spoke of the ‘capitalist society’<sup>6</sup> and ‘the capitalist mode of production’.<sup>7</sup> For Marx, capitalism is both a type of economy (*Produktionsweise*, mode of production) and a type of society (*Gesellschaftsformation*, a formation of society/societal formation).

For Marx, the two main features of the capitalist economy are the general production of commodities and the working class’s production of surplus value that the capitalist class appropriates, owns, and converts into profit through the sale of commodities, enabling the accumulation of capital and the reinvestment of capital:

Two characteristic traits mark the capitalist mode of production right from the start. *Firstly*. It produces its products as commodities. The fact that it produces commodities does not in itself distinguish it from other modes of production; but that the dominant and determining character of its product is that it is a commodity certainly does so! [...] The *second* thing that particularly marks the capitalist mode of production is the production of surplus value as the direct object and decisive motive of production.<sup>8</sup>

A formation of society is, according to Marx, a ‘totality’ of ‘the material conditions of life’.<sup>9</sup> In society, the material conditions of life are constituted by humans’ social production processes; social and societal production and reproduction processes form the materiality of society.<sup>10</sup> Capitalism is a formation of society in which the mass of people is alienated from the conditions of economic, political and cultural production, which means that they cannot control the conditions that shape their lives, allowing privileged groups to accumulate capital in the economy, accumulate decision-making power in politics and accumulate prestige, attention and respect in culture.

Marx repeatedly speaks of an ‘economic formation of society’,<sup>11</sup> indicating that he sees the economic system as an essential sphere of capitalism and society. Multifactor analyses that postulate a plurality of equally important systems in society cannot explain what society’s ground is. However, the fact that there is a ground does not mean that one sphere determines what happens in other spheres. The economy conditions, pre-figures, circumscribes, enables, constrains, exerts pressure on, sets limits to, and determines, in the first instance, what is happening in the non-economic spheres of politics and culture.

Marx does not limit the concept of capitalism to the economy but assumes that capitalism means a dialectic of economy and society. This differentiation between an economic and a societal understanding of capitalism has existed for a long time and persists until today. For example, while the French economist Thomas Piketty defines capitalism as an economic system ‘that seeks constantly to expand the limits of private property and asset accumulation’,<sup>12</sup> the philosopher Nancy Fraser argues that capitalism ‘is not an economy, but a type of *society* – one in which an arena of economized activities and relations is marked out and set apart from other, non-economized zones, on which the former depend, but which they disavow’.<sup>13</sup>

In a capitalist society, the economy plays a special role because all realms of society are conditioned, shaped, influenced, and circumscribed by the logic of accumulation and by class relations.

Table 5.1 shows how we can make sense of accumulation as a general process in capitalist society. In capitalism, alienation takes on the form of accumulation processes that create classes and inequalities. Capitalism is based on capitalists' accumulation of capital in the economy, bureaucrats' and politicians' accumulation of decision-power and influence in the political system, and ideologues', influencers' and celebrities' accumulation of reputation, attention, and respect in the cultural system. Capitalism is an antagonistic system. Its antagonisms (see table 5.1) drive its development and accumulation. Accumulation is an antagonistic relation that not just constitutes dominant classes and groups but also subordinated, dominated, and exploited groups such as the working class in the capitalist economy, dominated citizens in the capitalist political system, and ideologically targeted everyday people in capitalism's cultural system.

Capitalist society's antagonistic relations that drive accumulation are the source of inequalities and crises, meaning capitalism is an inherently negative dialectical system. As a response to crises, the ruling class and ruling groups require mechanisms they use for trying to keep the dominated class and dominated groups in check so that they do not rebel and revolt. Capitalism, therefore, is also an ideological system where dominant groups use the logic of scapegoating to blame certain groups for society's

**Table 5.1: Accumulation as a general process in capitalist society** (based on Fuchs 2022a, table 1.2)

Realm of society	Central process in general	Central process in capitalist society	Underlying antagonism in capitalist society	Structural dimension of capitalism
Economy	Production of use-values	capital accumulation	capitalists VS. workers	Class relation between capital and labour
Politics	Production of collective decisions	accumulation of decision-power and influence	bureaucrats VS. citizens	The nation-state
Culture	Production of meanings	accumulation of reputation, attention, respect	ideologues/celebrities/influencers VS. everyday people	Ideology

ills and problems. Scapegoating entails the logic of the friend/enemy-scheme. And the friend/enemy-scheme can lead to violence, fascism, racism, anti-Semitism, and nationalism. Capitalism has barbaric potentials. Crises of capitalism can be fascism-producing crises that turn barbarism from a potentiality of capitalism into an actuality.<sup>14</sup> Only class and social struggles for socialism and democracy can keep capitalism's negative potentials in check.

In a capitalist society, powerful actors control natural resources, economic property, political decision-making, and cultural meaning-making, which has resulted in the accumulation of power, inequalities, and global problems, including environmental pollution as well as the degradation and depletion of natural resources in the nature-society-relation, socio-economic inequality in the economic system, dictatorships and war in the political system, ideology and misrecognition in the cultural system.

For Marx, the class antagonism is a key aspect of the capitalist economy. The working class produces surplus value in the unpaid part of the working day that is not paid for and is appropriated by capital. 'In capitalist society, free time is produced for one class by the conversion of the whole lifetime of the masses into labour-time.'<sup>15</sup> The members of the working class are, via capitalism's dull compulsion of the labour market, forced to sell their labour power and produce capital, commodities, surplus value, and profits for the capitalist class. The capitalist economy is a class system in which workers produce commodities with the help of means of production that are the private property of members of the capitalist class. These commodities are sold on commodity markets so that profit is achieved and capital can be accumulated.

Class relations where capital exploits labour form a key feature of the capitalist economy. Workers are alienated from the conditions of production in class society because they do not own the means of production and the products of their labour. The logic of accumulation is not limited to the realm of the economy but extends into the political and cultural realms. We can, therefore, speak of capitalist *society*. Capitalism is a type of society where the mass of humans is alienated from the conditions of economic, political and cultural production, which means that they do not control the conditions that shape their lives, which enables privileged groups' accumulation of capital in the economy, decision-power in politics, and reputation, attention and respect in culture. Alienation in the economy means the dominant class's exploitation of the working class's labour. Alienation

**Table 5.2: Levels and structures of capitalist society** (based on Fuchs 2022a, table 1.1)

	Micro-level	Meso-level	Macro-level
<b>Economic structures</b>	commodity, money	companies, markets	capitalist economy
<b>Political structures</b>	laws	parties, government	the capitalist state
<b>Cultural structures</b>	ideology	ideology-producing organisations	the capitalist ideological system

in non-economic systems means domination, i.e., one group benefits at the expense of other groups via means of control such as state power, ideology, and violence. In capitalism, we find the accumulation of capital in the economy, the accumulation of decision-power and influence in politics, and the accumulation of reputation, attention and respect in culture. The key aspect is not that there is growth but that there is the attempt of the dominant class and dominant groups to accumulate power at the expense of others who, as a consequence, have disadvantages. Capitalist society is, therefore, based on an economic antagonism of exploitation between classes and social antagonisms of domination. Table 5.2 shows the levels and structures of capitalist society.

### 5.2.3 Digital Capitalism

In the book *Digital Capitalism*, the present author has further developed the analysis of communication and capitalism. He sees digital capitalism as a special dimension and organisational form of capitalist society:

Digital capitalism is the dimension of capitalist society where processes of the accumulation of capital, decision-power, and reputation are mediated by and organised with the help of digital technologies and where economic, political, and cultural processes result in digital goods and digital structures. Digital labour, digital capital, the digital means of production, political online communication, digital aspects of protests and social struggles, ideology online, and influencer-dominated digital culture are some of the features of digital capitalism. In digital capitalism, the accumulation of capital and power is mediated by digital technologies. There are economic,

political, and cultural-ideological dimensions of digital capitalism. Digital capitalism is an antagonistic dimension of society, a dimension that stands for how the economic class antagonism and the social relations of domination are shaped by and shape digitalisation. Digital capitalism's antagonisms are the class antagonism between digital labour and digital capital, the political antagonism between digital dictators and digital citizens, and the cultural antagonism between digital ideologues and digital humans.<sup>16</sup>

Digital capitalism is based on the accumulation of digital capital in the economy, the accumulation of digital decision-power in the political system, and the accumulation of reputation, attention, and respect in culture. Accumulation is an economic logic that goes beyond the economy in (digital) capitalist society and takes on emergent properties. The economic logic of accumulation determines accumulation in other systems of (digital) capitalism not in the last instance, but in the '*first instance*'<sup>17</sup>, economic accumulation 'circumscribes',<sup>18</sup> is 'setting limits' and 'exerting pressures'<sup>19</sup> on non-economic accumulation in (digital) capitalist society.

There are economic, political, and cultural-ideological dimensions of digital capitalism. Digital capitalism is an antagonistic dimension of society, a dimension that represents how the economic class antagonism and social relations of domination are shaped by and shape digitalisation. The antagonisms of digital capitalism are the class antagonism between digital labour and digital capital, the political antagonism between digital dictators and digital citizens, and the cultural antagonism between digital ideologues and digital humans.

Accumulation in digital capitalism leads to particular forms of the antagonisms characteristic of capitalism. Table 5.3 provides an overview and examples of these antagonisms. Digital capitalism is an antagonistic society, that is, it is a digital class society and a digital form of domination.

The worsening of crises and social inequalities have led to the rise of authoritarian capitalism in several countries in the last 15 years, in which right-wing demagogues use the Internet to spread fascism, nationalism, and racism (Fuchs 2018a; 2020b, 2022b). There is a dialectic between digital capitalism and authoritarian capitalism/ fascism.

Table 5.4 shows an analysis of the world's 100 largest companies.

The 18 media and digital corporations included in the analysed ranking were Alphabet/Google, Microsoft, Apple, Samsung, Verizon Communications, China Mobile, Meta Platforms/Facebook, Tencent,

Table 5.3: The antagonisms of digital capitalism (based on Fuchs 2022a, table 1.4)

Realm of society	Underlying antagonism in capitalist society	Antagonisms in digital capitalism	Examples
Economy	capitalists VS. workers	digital capital VS. digital labour, digital commodity VS. digital commons	The monopoly power of Google, Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, etc.
Politics	bureaucrats VS. citizens	digital dictators VS. digital citizens, digital authoritarianism/fascism VS. digital democracy	Donald Trump's use of X/Twitter and other social media
Culture	ideologues and celebrities VS. everyday people	digital ideologues VS. digital humans, digital hatred/division/ideology VS. digital friendship in culture.	asymmetrical attention economy in popular culture on social media: the cultural power of online influencers such as PewDiePie (> 100 million followers)

Table 5.4: Share of specific types of capital in the world's largest 100 corporations' number, sales, profits, and capital assets (data source: Forbes 2000 List, year 2023)

Industry	Type of Capital	Companies	Share of Companies (%)	Share of Sales (%)	Share of Profits (%)	Share of Assets (%)
FIRE (Finance / Insurance/Real Estate)	Finance capital	36	36	25.6	29.5	82.3
Media & Digital	Media and digital capital	18	14	19.3	23.6	5.8
Manufacturing	Hyperindustrial capital	16	14	14.3	10.9	4.2
Fossil	Fossil capital	14	14	24.1	26.8	4.6
Pharmaceutical	Bio-capital	8	8	5.3	5.1	1.5
Conglomerates		3	3	2.1	1.2	0.6
Retail	Sales capital	3	3	6.7	1.9	0.5
Construction	Construction capital	1	1	2	0.4	0.5
Transportation	Transportation capital	1	1	0.7	0.6	0.1

Amazon, Deutsche Telekom, Taiwan Semiconductor, Comcast, Alibaba, Nippon Telegraph, Sony, Oracle, Walt Disney, and Cisco Systems.

The industries in table 5.4 were coded in the following manner:

- Construction
- Digital: IT & software services, media, semiconductors, technology hardware & equipment, telecommunications services
- FIRE: banking, diversified financials, insurance
- Manufacturing:  
aerospace and defence, capital goods, consumer durables; food, drink & tobacco; household & personal products, materials
- Fossil: oil and gas operations
- Pharmaceutical: drugs & biotechnology
- Retail: retailing
- Transportation

Table 5.4 shows that financial capital is the dominant capital faction in the world's largest 100 corporations. Fossil capital, as well as media and digital capital, play important roles in the control of profits and revenues. Also manufacturing capital has significant shares of the total sales and profits. The data indicate that contemporary capitalism is, at the same time, financial capitalism, fossil capitalism, media capitalism, digital capitalism, hyperindustrial capitalism, etc. Digital capitalism is one dimension of capitalism. There are many interacting dimensions of capitalism. Capitalism consists of capitalisms. There are dialectics of capitalism that constitute capitalism as the formation of society.

#### *5.2.4 Capitalism, Racism, and Patriarchy*

Capitalism, patriarchy, and racism are societal systems that each have an economic, a political and a cultural dimension (see table 5.5). Capitalism, racism, and patriarchy are three forms of power relations and societal modes of production that combine economic alienation, political alienation, and cultural alienation, respectively. Capitalism, racism, and patriarchy involve specific forms of exploitation, domination, and ideology. These are three modes of societal production.

Patriarchy and racism are dialectically articulated with capitalism. Capitalism subsumes racism and patriarchy but can also detach itself from these societal modes of production and subsume other modes of

production for economic purposes (over-exploitation), political purposes (domination), and cultural purposes (ideology).

Patriarchy and racism predate and have been subsumed under capitalism, where they are milieus of over-exploitation and ideologies and forms of friend/enemy-politics and militaristic politics. Patriarchy and racism as two capitalist milieus can break away from capitalism if they are decoupled from the logic of accumulation. Capitalism then seeks other milieus of over-exploitation, ideologisation, and militarisation.

**Table 5.5: The economic, political and cultural-ideological dimensions of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy as societal modes of production** (based on Fuchs 2021, table 10.4)

	Capitalism	Racism	Patriarchy
<b>Economic dimension</b>	The exploitation of the working class	The exploitation and super-exploitation of racialised groups	The exploitation and super-exploitation of gender-defined groups, including houseworkers, female care workers, and female wage-workers
<b>Political dimension</b>	Bureaucratic discrimination of, surveillance of, state control of, and violence directed against dominated classes (such as wage-workers, slave-workers, precarious workers etc.)	Bureaucratic discrimination of, surveillance of, state control of, and violence directed against racialised groups	Bureaucratic discrimination of, surveillance of, state control of, and violence directed against gender-defined groups
<b>Cultural-ideological dimension</b>	Denial of voice, respect, recognition, attention, and visibility of the working class, ideological scapegoating of the working class	Racist ideology: the assumption that race exists as cultural and/or biological essence; denial of voice, respect, recognition, attention, and visibility of racialised groups; ideological scapegoating of racialised groups	Denial of voice, respect, recognition, attention, and visibility of gender-defined groups, ideological scapegoating of gender-defined groups

**Table 5.6: The interaction of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy** (based on Fuchs 2021, table 10.5)

	Capitalism	Racism	Gender-related oppression, patriarchy
Capitalism	Exploitation	Racist exploitation	Gender-structured exploitation
Racism	Racist exploitation	Racism	Discrimination of racialised individuals or groups of a particular gender
Gender-related oppression, patriarchy	Gender-structured exploitation	Discrimination of racialised individuals or groups of a specific gender	Gender-based discrimination

Capitalism, racism, and patriarchy interact in particular ways that are shown in table 5.6. Concerning digitalisation, there are various forms of interaction of digital capitalism, digital racism, and digital patriarchy.

### 5.2.5 David Harvey: Universal Alienation in Capitalism

David Harvey argues that it is important to analyse the interaction of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism and holds that the latter two are located outside of capitalism:

Contemporary capitalism plainly feeds off gender discriminations and violence as well as upon the frequent dehumanisation of people of colour. The intersections and interactions between racialisation and capital accumulation are both highly visible and powerfully present. But an examination of these tells me nothing particular about how the economic engine of capital works, even as it identifies one source from where it plainly draws its energy. [...] wars, nationalism, geopolitical struggles, disasters of various kinds all enter into the dynamics of capitalism, along with heavy doses of racism and gender, sexual, religious and ethnic hatreds and discriminations.<sup>20</sup>

Harvey<sup>21</sup> speaks of universal alienation for arguing that exploitation and alienation extend beyond wage labour into realms such as reproductive

labour, racialised labour, commodity distribution and sale, consumption, housing, health care, education, nationalism, racism, police violence, finance, urban development, etc.<sup>22</sup> Alienation in the economy entails not only capital's exploitation of labour but also the realms of realisation, distribution, and consumption, which means it extends to phenomena such as unemployment, consumerism, land seizure, deindustrialisation, debt peonage, financial scams, unaffordable housing, high food prices, etc. Alienation entails processes beyond the economy, such as frustrations with politics, unaffordable public services, nationalist ideology, racism, police violence, militarism, warfare, alcoholism, suicide, depression, bureaucracy, pollution, gentrification, or climate change. Alienation entails capital accumulation's geographic and social expansion, so capital relations 'dominate pretty much everywhere'.<sup>23</sup> 'Alienation is everywhere. It exists at work in production, at home in consumption, and it dominates much of politics and daily life.'<sup>24</sup>

Struggles against alienation, including struggles against racism and sexism, would have to be put together with working-class struggles. Harvey criticises identity politics that forgets class politics.<sup>25</sup> There is a problem 'to the degree that identity politics are seen in isolation from the totality of the social process'.<sup>26</sup> Class would stand in relation to all non-class issues. 'Class is not an exclusive category of analysis, but it is central to any politics that seeks to challenge the crises caused by capitalism'.<sup>27</sup>

Thus far, we have outlined an understanding of digital capitalism based on the notion of capitalism as formation of society. In the next section, we will focus on a forgotten concept in the analysis of capitalism: violence.

### 5.3 Capitalism and Violence

#### 5.3.1 *Violence and Crises of Global Capitalism*

The rise of digital capitalism has occurred in a time of successive and intersecting crises.

The twenty-first century has so far been a century of many and multiple crises. It started with the political crisis following 9/11 that was characterised by a spiral of violence between war and terror. In 2008, a financial crisis hit the capitalist world economy. In many parts of the world, hyper-neoliberalism was the political response. It put in place austerity measures

and cuts of social expenditures. Neoliberal capitalism, as the dominant form of capitalism, has increased inequalities since the 1970s. The result was a social crisis. The hyper-neoliberal responses to the financial crisis intensified the social crisis. The second decade of the twenty-first century also saw increased humanitarian crises due to wars, natural disasters, climate change, and global inequalities. The escalation and interaction of crises have continuously polarised societies. As a consequence, we have seen the rise and intensification of new nationalisms, authoritarianisms, and fascisms, the spread of post-truth politics, online fake news, online echo chambers, online hatred featuring bullying and death threats, coup attempts, the radicalisation of authoritarianism, the proliferation of the friend/enemy-scheme, and threats to use weapons of mass destruction such as atomic bombs.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in multiple interacting crises: a health crisis, an economic crisis, a political crisis, a cultural crisis, a moral crisis, and a global crisis. It further polarised societies politically. A new division emerged between COVID deniers who opposed lockdowns and held an individualist notion of freedom and those who favoured lockdowns based on a social concept of freedom.

Russia's war of conquest against Ukraine has violated international humanitarian law, has further polarised world politics into opposing camps, and has created a new Cold War. On the one side of this conflict are actors such as the USA, the EU, and the UK. Donald Trump as the 47th US President (2025–2029) has the potential to further destabilise world politics. On the other side are China and Russia, whose leaders present their countries as strategically aligned. The most significant danger is that this conflict escalates into a new world war. Such a war could be a terminal war that results in the use of nuclear bombs. The use of such weapons would destroy humanity and life on Earth. Escalating interacting crises have brought humanity to the brink of its self-destruction, ultimate violence. Violence, therefore, is the most pressing problem humanity faces today. When theorising and analysing (digital) capitalism, consequently, we should look at how (digital) capitalism and (digital) violence are related.

The critical theorist Sylvia Walby argues that the 2008 financial crisis 'was a result of a failure in the governance of finance'<sup>28</sup> and the lack of 'democratic control over finance'.<sup>29</sup> According to Walby, the crisis cascaded into an economic crisis that resulted in a global recession, a fiscal crisis of the state that advanced austerity and neoliberalism, and a political crisis

where government trust was undermined. There is the danger that the crisis cascades ‘from a political crisis to a democratic crisis, with political mechanisms no longer able to channel disagreements, thereby leading to violent conflict’.<sup>30</sup> She argues that continued neoliberalism is likely to result in an ‘increase in violence by individuals, protesters and states’.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the alternative is the becoming-hegemonic of ‘a reformed social democracy’ that is more likely to prevent wars and reduce violence. What is implicit in Walby’s analysis is that the cascading of authoritarian politics and socio-economic inequalities in the world increases the likelihood of a large war, potentially a World War. Such a war could easily mean the end of humanity and the end of life on Earth.

Violence in contemporary digital capitalism has not yet been adequately understood and theorised. Here, I can outline some basic foundations of theorising violence in digital capitalism.

### ***5.3.2 Violence in Capitalism***

Slavery and feudalism are modes of production that are based on violence as a major means the dominant class uses for exploiting and oppressing the working class. The enslaved person is the private property of the slave owner, which means absolute dehumanisation and the reduction of humans to the status of things. The slave owners can kill the slave without facing legal consequences. Slave owners are legally allowed to treat slaves like things, which enables extreme exploitation of their labour.

The formation of capitalism was based on what Marx called primitive accumulation, the use of ‘blood and fire’<sup>32</sup> to create capitalist means of production and wage labour. Violence was used to drive small property owners from their land, turning common land into private property, and creating wage labour. Violence was also used as part of colonialism that robbed resources and humans from the Global South in order to develop means of production that enabled the formation and development of capitalism. Capital and capitalism come into existence ‘dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt’.<sup>33</sup> It is a mistake to assume that violence is necessary for a revolution. Non-violent revolutions such as, for example, the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe that brought about the end of the Soviet Union show that there are also non-violent revolutions and transitions. Therefore, Marx’s formulation that violence ‘is the

midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one'<sup>34</sup> should not be interpreted as an absolute statement that applies to every revolution.

The creation of wage labour was based on a shift from violence to structural coercion and management as a means of control. The formal use of violence was legally shifted to the nation-state that obtained a formal legal monopoly over the means of violence. Informal use of violence continued to exist both inside and outside of the economy. Coercion describes the use of means or the threat to use means that force humans to behave in certain manners that others define. Violence is one form of coercion. One major form of capitalist coercion is the 'silent compulsion of economic relations'.<sup>35</sup> Workers in capitalism legally own themselves, their bodies and their minds. Coercion is institutionalised in labour and commodity markets that together compel humans to work for the capitalist class to obtain the money they need to buy commodities as a means of subsistence to survive.

The question needs to be raised whether or not famine and poverty in poor countries can be considered violence, given that violence typically involves actors who inflict harm on victims. Global capitalism is a societal system dependent on human practices and composed of various structures, such as markets, nation-states, and ideologies. Poverty has complex causes and is a result of a global class system that creates power relations between the rich and the poor. Those who support a possessive-individualist concept of freedom consider poverty and substantial wealth inequalities as intentional and rational features of society, rather than a result of unintentional circumstances. Therefore, the class system's violence is intentional, as it upholds an ideology that values the freedom of individuals to become wealthy without limits, which leads to economic violence and creates poverty intentionally. In the last instance, the actor causing famine is the global class of the rich and those governments, parties, and politicians that uphold and justify a class system that denies humans the necessities of life, including healthy food, drinking water, shelter, health care, etc.

Violence has not ceased to exist in capitalism, which is why authors such as Rosa Luxemburg<sup>36</sup> and Maria Mies<sup>37</sup> speak of ongoing primitive accumulation in capitalist society. Paraphrasing Marx's insight that capitalism emerged from 'blood and dirt',<sup>38</sup> Luxemburg writes: 'Sweating blood and filth with every pore from head to toe' characterises not only the birth of capital but also its progress in the world at every step, and thus

capitalism prepares its own downfall under ever more violent contortions and convulsions.<sup>39</sup> Primitive accumulation is, for Luxemburg, not just the origin of capitalism but an ongoing capitalist process.

Ongoing primitive accumulation involves warfare used for the conquest of territories that are spheres of accumulation and political influence and commodity markets; the continued existence of slavery; the use of violence for the exploitation of the unpaid or low-paid labour of house-workers, illegal migrants, enslaved people, and precarious workers; wars of conquest that aim at the control of spheres of political, economic and ideological influence; and the use of violence for the robbery, dispossession, and expropriation of natural and social resources that are turned into capitalist means of production. Expropriation turns resources such as labour power, land, nature, the body, organs, etc., into capitalist means of production by other means than the wage labour market. It works by 'confiscating human capacities and natural resources and conscripting them into the circuits of capital expansion. The confiscation may be blatant and violent, as in New World slavery; or it may be veiled by a cloak of commerce, as in the predatory loans and debt foreclosures of the present era.<sup>40</sup>

Luxemburg stresses that war is an essential means of ongoing primitive accumulation: 'The other aspect of the accumulation of capital concerns the relations between capitalism and the non-capitalist modes of production which start making their appearance on the international stage. Its predominant methods are colonial policy, an international loan system – a policy of spheres of interest – and war. Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process.<sup>41</sup>

Capitalist world society has resulted in two World Wars, which were wars about the global control of economic resources, political power, and influence, as well as numerous other wars. In capitalist society, the potential for wars and world wars arises from capitalism's competitive structures built into the logic of accumulation so that individuals, groups, classes, and states compete to control economic, political, and cultural power. Controlling land and economic property plays a particularly important role in this context. The formation of the modern nation-state has been associated with the formation of state apparatuses that hold a legal monopoly of violence, especially armies, the police, the criminal justice system (that in a significant number of nation-states uses the death

penalty), and secret services. Armies are set up, and there is armament so that nation-states have means of destruction and violence to defend their political and economic resources within the nation-state. In modern nation-states, violence is institutionalised in coercive state apparatuses. Associated with this development is the capitalist arms industry, which produces and sells means of destruction to accumulate capital. The arms industry's capital is a capital of violence and death, a capital that is set to kill and destroy, to produce death.

The globalisation of capitalism and the rise of neoliberalism since the 1970s have also advanced the violent dispossession of resources from the world's poor and the use of violence as a means of management and control in Fordist manufacturing factories such as Foxconn, where commodities are produced that are sold on the world market. Global neoliberal capitalism has resulted in precarious forms of labour that are unprotected and insecure, which exposes such workers to the capitalist use of violence as a means of management and violence that makes them produce more surplus value in less time. Housewifisation means that many workers have turned into precarious workers in neoliberal capitalism and face unfree working conditions that have been characteristic of houseworkers for a long time.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, such workers are prone to having to take on labour where violence is used as a means of management.

Where there is class, there is inequality. Given socio-economic inequality and antagonistic societal structures, there is a certain level of violent crime and violent property crime. Class structures make some rich while depriving others. They make some happy and others isolated, unhappy, aggressive, and violent. Class societies are violent societies.

Violence is also an ideology. Moral panics are public ideological campaigns against certain groups that are presented as a social problem, dangerous, and violent. Tabloid media and racism have played a particular role in constructing scapegoats as part of moral panics. Violence as ideology distracts from the complex causes of social problems grounded in capitalist society's antagonisms.

Capitalism's economic cell form is the commodity. The capitalist economy is an immense production of commodities sold to advance the accumulation of money-capital. Commodities and money-capital are the two main economic structures of capitalist society. In order to accumulate money-capital, power, and hegemony, capitalism requires the reproduction of class relations and relations of domination. In such relations,

humans are treated like things, they are turned into instruments that serve the purpose of accumulation. They are reified. Capitalism is an instrumental system of reification. The social relations that humans constitute disappear behind the dominance of things and structures such as commodities, money, the state, and ideology. Marx spoke in this context of the fetishism of the commodity.<sup>43</sup>

In capitalist society, fetishism is not restricted to the economy but extends into the totality of society. The capitalist state instrumentalises citizens. Ideology instrumentalises the human mind. Capitalism is not just a system of accumulation but a system of accumulation that uses various forms of instrumentalisation as societal means of production and societal means of accumulation. In capitalism, humans must in class relations and relations of dominated be treated as things in order to make accumulation possible. There are both violent and non-violent forms of reification. Dominant groups resort to violence as a means because they are ideologically convinced it is the best means to use, or they think violence as a means of accumulation is more efficient and effective than non-violent means.

In capitalist society, we have, therefore, again and again, seen the use of violent means, including warfare and slavery, as a means of accumulation. Other media/means of accumulation include, for example, economic means such as markets, political means such as laws and contracts, and cultural means such as ideology. The state is an institutionalised form of politics that monopolises the legally justified use of violence. In some cases, state power is direct violence, as in the case of police violence, military action, and the death penalty. In other cases, where laws that do not result in physical harm are applied and executed, the state legislates in a non-violent manner that is based on and founded on the state as the institutionalised monopoly of the use of violence. Ideology similarly has a complex relation to violence. Ideology is not violence itself. But certain ideologies, including anti-Semitism, racism, and fascism, construct particular groups as enemies who are blamed for society's problems and whose extermination is suggested, promoted, and legitimised. The communication of violence, such as the call for the use of violence, can turn into actual violence that, in turn, may result in the communication of violence in the form of the ideological legitimisation of violence.

The critical theorist Moishe Postone stresses that fetishism is deeply built into capitalist society: '*The structure of alienated social relations which characterize capitalism has the form of a quasi-natural antinomy in which the social and historical do not appear.*'<sup>44</sup> The naturalisation of things

as natural, necessary, and eternal is built into the structures of capitalism. When social relations and human practices disappear behind things, voids are created that make the causes of society's problems untransparent. When class relations and structures of domination appear as natural, it is not immediately evident what the causes are of poverty, overwork, deindustrialisation, unemployment, social and economic crises, inflation, natural disasters, etc. This void is often filled by artificial, fictive, illusionary stories that present invented causes of society's problems. Resulting are ideologies that declare that certain groups or individuals, such as the poor, the unemployed, migrants, Jews, minority groups, etc., are the cause of these problems. The fetish structure of capitalism leads to the creation of ideology that often contains the communication of violence that can turn into actual violence in the form of genocide, pogroms, terror, industrial mass murder, etc. Violence has its material foundation in the fetish structure of capital and capitalism that, in turn, is the consequence of the logic of instrumentalisation and reification.

There lies a danger in interpreting history as developing independent of human collective practices. Such assumptions underestimate the dialectic of structural conditions and political action, or, as Marx says, that humans 'make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past'.<sup>45</sup> Such an underestimation can be found in Hegel's concept of history.

Hegel says that spirit is freedom, the lack of external dependence of humans, 'self-sufficient being'.<sup>46</sup> When Hegel says that 'freedom is the only truth of Spirit',<sup>47</sup> then a sympathetic reader can interpret him as saying that humans have the capacity and a certain desire for freedom so that in history there have again and again been struggles for freedom. Hegel, however, in his idealist fetishization of spirit that underestimates the importance and relative openness of social struggles, goes further and formulates a functionalist concept of history that is also known as what he terms 'the *Cunning of Reason*'.<sup>48</sup> He thereby means that in history, besides all catastrophes and setbacks, there is the necessary progress of freedom. 'World history is the progress in the consciousness of freedom – a progress that we must come to know in its necessity'.<sup>49</sup> Hegel not only says that humans throughout history have become more conscious of freedom but also that they realise ever more freedom: 'World history, as we saw, presents the development of consciousness, the development of Spirit's consciousness of its freedom, and the actualization that is produced by that consciousness.'

This development entails a gradual process, a series of further determinations of freedom, that arise from the concept of world history.<sup>50</sup>

Given that for Hegel there is through and despite setbacks a long-time automatism of freedom in history, he sees violence, warfare, and misery as necessary sacrifices that humans have to make in order to advance freedom, which is why he speaks of the ‘altar of the earth’: ‘It is this final goal – freedom – toward which all the world’s history has been working. It is this goal to which all the sacrifices have been brought upon the broad altar of the earth in the long flow of time.’<sup>51</sup>

The problem with such a concept of history is that it encourages humans to see catastrophes, violence, war, genocides, industrial mass murder, etc., as inevitable and long-term signs of progress that can and should not be resisted. Resistance to Auschwitz is, in such a view, discouraged. Theodor W. Adorno rejects such a deterministic and functionalist concept of history.<sup>52</sup> He stresses that the reality of history is that class societies have produced means of destruction and annihilation: ‘Universal history must be construed and denied. After the catastrophes that have happened, and in view of the catastrophes to come, it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it. [...] No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb.’<sup>53</sup> Given that history and capitalism’s negative dialectic have resulted in Auschwitz, Adorno formulates a New Categorical Imperative: ‘A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen.’<sup>54</sup> In the light of fascism, anti-fascist praxis is of highest importance.

Marx reminds us that history and structures do not act and that only humans make history, which implies that history is relatively open: ‘History does *nothing*, it ‘possesses no immense wealth’, it ‘wages no battles’. It is *man*, real, living man who does all that, who possesses and fights; ‘history’ is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims.’<sup>55</sup> Humans act collectively in politics and, at certain moments, change the course of history. Given the importance of human praxis, history is not determined but relatively open, which also implies that war, annihilation, mass murder, genocide, and violence in general are not inevitable but avoidable. They are not necessary features of humanity and society.

### 5.3.3 How can Violence and War be Limited?

At the international level, institutions have been established that aim to limit the use of violence and war as means of politics by fostering political communication. After the experience of two world wars, the United Nations was founded in 1945 with the defined goals to 'maintain international peace and security', 'develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace', 'achieve international co-operation'.<sup>56</sup> There were 51 founding members of the UN. In 2025, the number of UN member states was 193.

An international system is needed that helps to advance universal benefits, advantages for everyone, and universal compatibility where all humans and societies can coexist. As imperfect and volatile as the UN is, it is the best starting point for building an international peaceful and universally beneficial order. The United Nations should be reformed and strengthened in its power in international relations and the international political economy (see chapter 10 in this book). Doing so requires a political economy that is built on the principles of international cooperation and mutual benefits.

Sylvia Walby shows that an increase in inequalities tends to increase violence. She summarises her insights: 'Those countries that are more unequal and less democratic, the more neoliberal countries, have higher rates of violence of all forms – from interpersonal to the criminal justice system to the military – than do those countries that are less unequal, more fully democratic, and more likely to be social democratic'.<sup>57</sup> 'There are higher levels of violence in neoliberal countries than in social democratic ones'.<sup>58</sup> 'Democracy provides important limits to war. Democracy is linked to the extent of use of military force; military power is used less in a mature democracy than in other regimes; mature democracies rarely if ever initiate wars against each other [...]. This may be because of the nature of political culture in a democracy [...]. Further, democracies can provide routes by which those whose lives are put at risk by military engagement can find a political voice and effective resistance. These processes can link domestic and external politics. An increase in the proportion of regimes that are democratic should thus be associated with a decrease in violent warfare'.<sup>59</sup>

Walby analysed statistical data on the connection between the prevalence of violence in society and socio-economic and political factors.<sup>60</sup>

For measuring violence, she used indicators such as the homicide rate per 100,000 population, the number of prisoners per 100,000 population, or the government expenditure on law and order and the military as percentages of GDP.<sup>61</sup> We can summarise the main, very insightful and illuminating findings of Walby's empirical analysis of violence in society:

[...] the homicide rate is higher in poorer, less developed countries than in richer countries. [...] There is a positive correlation between homicide and the level of economic inequality as measured by Gini [...] There is a higher rate of homicide in countries that are more economically unequal.<sup>62</sup>

There is a striking set of correlations between the various aspects of violence [...] There is a cluster of phenomena of violence: homicide, prisoners, death penalty, expenditure on law and order and expenditure on the military. If any one of these is higher in a country, then it is likely that the others will be also.<sup>63</sup>

The higher the level of economic inequality, the more likely a country is to have higher rates of imprisonment and higher levels of military expenditure as a percentage of GDP.<sup>64</sup>

Walby empirically shows that (in)equality and the (lack of) democracy influence the levels of violence.<sup>65</sup> 'Countries that are less equal and less democratic have higher rates of violence; these are characteristics of neoliberal rather than social democratic countries.'<sup>66</sup>

One implication of Walby's analysis is that the increase in inequalities, neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and fascism tend to increase violence and the risk of war. In situations of a social crisis, fascists and authoritarians coming to power or deepening their power pose the risks for the escalation of conflict into wars.

Next, we will focus on the relationship between violence and digital capitalism.

## 5.4 Digital Capitalism and Violence

### 5.4.1 *Digital Violence*

The rise of digital technologies and digital capitalism partly stands in the context of warfare. New digital technologies, including the computer and the World Wide Web, have often originated in a military context.<sup>67</sup>

Digitalisation has contributed to the arms industry's constant development and sustained profitability. Weapons are not just tools that are situated in contexts where they are used for attacks that aim to kill, harm, destroy, and injure humans. In capitalism, they are also industrially produced commodities that yield profits.

In the Second World War, computers were used to encrypt and decipher messages, and radar was used as a location, detection, and tracking technology. Warfare has been one of the factors that have advanced the development of computer technologies. Since the Second World War, computing has played an important role in warfare, cyberwarfare, digital surveillance, digital reconnaissance, digital communication in command and control, smart weapons, and public communication.

There are three forms of digital communication and digital mediation in the context of violence: the digital communication of violence, the digital communication about violence, and the digital mediation of violence.

#### **5.4.2 The Digital Communication of Violence**

Concerning the *digital communication of violence*, the crises of capitalism have polarised politics, which has advanced the digital communication of violence, which includes the proliferation of online threats of violence and killings. Such threats are frequently communicated anonymously. Discursive dispute settling fails in such instances. With the intensification and extension of polarisation, nationalism, and fascism in (digital) capitalism, the digital communication of violence has proliferated. Especially far-right individuals, groups, politicians, and parties see violence as an appropriate means of conflict resolution. Their ideology is based on nationalism, the friend/enemy-scheme, and militarism. Therefore, the expansion of digital fascism has resulted in the advancement of the digital communication of violence.

We can define fascism as an anti-democratic, anti-socialist, and terrorist ideology, practice, and mode of organisation. It is based on the combination of several principles: (a) the leadership principle, (b) nationalism, (c) the friend/enemy-scheme, and (d) militant patriarchy, which involves idealising soldiers, practising patriarchy, subordinating women, and using war, violence, and terror as political means. Fascism utilises terror against perceived enemies and aims to establish a fascist society by institutionalising these principles. It seeks to mobilise individuals who fear losing

property, status, power, and reputation due to societal conflicts. Moreover, fascism plays an ideological role in capitalist and class societies by attributing society's problems to scapegoats, framing them as conflicts between the nation and foreigners or enemies. This diversionary tactic draws attention away from the systemic roles of class and capitalism and the inherent contradiction between capital and labour in societal issues. Fascism often propagates a one-dimensional, one-sided, and personalising 'anti-capitalism' that constructs the nation as a political fetish and an antagonism between the unity of a nation's capital and labour on the one side and a particular form of capital or economy or production or community on the other side that is presented as destroying the nation's economic, political, and cultural survival.

#### ***5.4.3 Digital Fascism and Violence***

Digital fascism means fascists' digital communication of violence, digital communication about violence, and the digital mediation of violence and war for fascist purposes. Fascism is a particular and terrorist form of right-wing authoritarianism that aims at killing identified enemies using violence, terror, and war.

Digital fascism means that fascists utilise digital technologies such as computers, the Internet, mobile phones, apps, and social media in order to (a) communicate internally so that they coordinate the organisation of fascist practices and (b) communicate to the public the leadership principle, nationalism, applications of the friend/enemy-scheme, and threats of violence as well as the propagation of violence, militarism, terror, war, law-and-order politics, and extermination directed against the constructed enemies and scapegoats in order to try to find followers, mobilise supporters, and terrorise constructed enemies.

In digital fascism, fascists use digital technologies to try to advance violence, terror, and war as means for the establishment of a fascist society. Ideology constructs scapegoats and agitates them. The scapegoats that fascist ideology constructs and against whom it agitates online include immigrants, socialists, liberals, intellectuals, experts, and democrats.

The critical theorist Erich Fromm argues that fascism has to do with what he terms necrophilia, the fascination with death and the desire to destroy and try to resolve conflicts by violence. Necrophilia is 'the

*passionate attraction to all that is dead, decayed, putrid, sickly; it is the passion to transform that which is alive into something unalive; to destroy for the sake of destruction; the exclusive interest in all that is purely mechanical. It is the passion to tear apart living structures.*<sup>68</sup>

Necrophilia is also but not exclusively a feature of the character structure of authoritarian and fascist individuals. It is an important aspect and characteristic of fascist groups, fascist organisations, fascist institutions, and fascist societies. Fascists believe in the use of violence and war as common means for conducting politics. The more fascism proliferates in society, the more likely war becomes. ‘Militarisation and war are associated with the absence of an effective democracy’ because in fascist regimes and other dictatorships, ‘young men and their associates’<sup>69</sup> are less likely to resist conscription, and civil society has more difficulties resisting the government’s war efforts. Higher levels of social inequality tend to reduce ‘the capacity for resistance to war.’<sup>70</sup> A higher level of poor people makes it more likely that the state successfully recruits poor people into the army by promising to support education and provide a sustainable income.

In the digital age, this means that when fascism proliferates, also digital fascism proliferates. Fascists use a variety of means, including computing, information and communication technologies, to try to attain their goals. In a society shaped by digital technologies, they will use digital means to put necrophiliac politics into practice. They will strive to threaten their identified enemies online and develop digital weapons to harm and kill those they see as enemies. Fascists in the digital age practice the friend/enemy-scheme in many spaces and with many means, including digital spaces and digital technologies.

#### **5.4.4 The Digital Communication about Violence**

*The digital communication about violence* means that cultural workers produce digital content that represents violence and is communicated to the public who consume and interpret such content. When violence increases in society, the question arises of how journalists should report on violence. There is a difference between reporting on violence as a spectacle and reporting on violence in a contextual, dialectical manner that situates violence in society’s antagonisms and the lived experiences of these antagonisms.

There is a variety of representations of violence in the media, such as, for example, violence in movies (horror movies, thrillers, crime movies), violence in music lyrics (death metal, gangster rap), violence against women in pornographic movies, violence in computer games, news reporting on violence and war, etc. One question that arises, again and again, is what impacts representations of violence have on individuals and society. One argument is that the representation of violence in the media and on the Internet causes violence. Such an assumption is media-centric and techno-deterministic. It overemphasises the roles of media and technology in the relationship between media technologies and society. There is also the danger that the argument that the media make individuals, including children and teenagers, violent become part of moral panics that more reflect the fears of adults about their children than actual reality. Another argument is that media representations of violence do not have any effects on individuals and society. Such a claim is a relativist argument that denies that culture has some relevance in society. A third argument is that violence is rooted in society's antagonisms and that the likelihood that individuals and groups who, because of their experiences in society's antagonistic structures, are prone to be violent might be increased by their frequent consumption of media representations of violence.

#### *5.4.5 The Digital Mediation of Violence and Digital Warfare*

In the *digital mediation of violence*, the perpetrator utilises a digital weapon (system) to try to kill or damage the health of the victim(s). Both the perpetrator and the victim(s) can be individuals, social systems, or societies. A digital weapon is a digital technology that is used for carrying out attacks that should lead to the killing of human victims or damage to their health.

War is organised, large-scale violence between at least two politically organised groups where at least one group sees the other group as an enemy that should be annihilated in order to realise a particular political interest against the will of this identified enemy. Digital warfare is a specific type of digital mediation of violence. Information warfare means that parties involved in wars produce and circulate information about enemies and, in some cases, themselves in the context of war. Digital warfare means that digital technologies are utilised in the context of warfare. In digital warfare, there is large-scale violence between at least two politically organised groups where at least one group sees the other group as an enemy

that should be annihilated in order to realise a particular political interest against the will of this identified enemy and at least one side uses a digital weapon (system) for trying to kill and damage the health of the members of the other side.

The digital mediation of warfare has resulted in automation tendencies of warfare. The results have been military drones and investments in developing autonomous weapon systems. Two of the world's most powerful armies, the US and the Chinese military, are investing heavily in AI and robotics to create 'smart', autonomous weapon systems. At the same time, world politics has become more polarised. It might very well be that autonomous weapons will be used in future wars. The utilisation of such weapons might make such wars and conflicts even more brutal and inhumane. The drive towards the automation of warfare is due to fears of armies losing soldiers and the interest to minimise an army's risks while maximising its destructive power.

The world has, due to escalating crises, experienced political polarisation. The danger of a new world war has massively increased internationally. A new Cold War has emerged. The major players in this conflict, especially the USA, China, Russia, the EU, and the UK, are heavily investing in armament. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has fuelled the new Cold War, political polarisation, and a new arms race.

In 2021, the world military expenditure stood at a level of US\$ 2.08 trillion and, for the first time, exceeded US\$ 2 trillion.<sup>71</sup> Measured in terms of its share of the global GDP, world military expenditure from a height of 6.3 percent of the global GDP in 1962 dropped to 3.0 percent in 1990 after the end of the Cold War and in 2021 stood at 2.2 percent. In 1962, with the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Cold War reached a peak where a nuclear war could have broken out. Given the increasing polarisation of world politics in the twenty-first century, where we find a strategic alliance of China and Russia on the one side and NATO on the other, more and more observers have argued that a new Cold War has developed or is about to develop. If a new Cold War indeed unfolds, the share of military expenditure in the global GDP will likely increase.

In 2023, the USA, China, India, the United Kingdom, and Russia accounted for the highest share of world military expenditure. Together, their military budgets comprised 62.0 percent of the world's military spending. The USA's share was 38.4%, China's 12.4%, India's 3.5%, the UK's 3.1%, and Russia's 4.6%.<sup>72</sup> Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the development of these five countries' shares in world military expenditure.

## The USA's Share in World Military Expenditure, data source: World Bank Data, in %

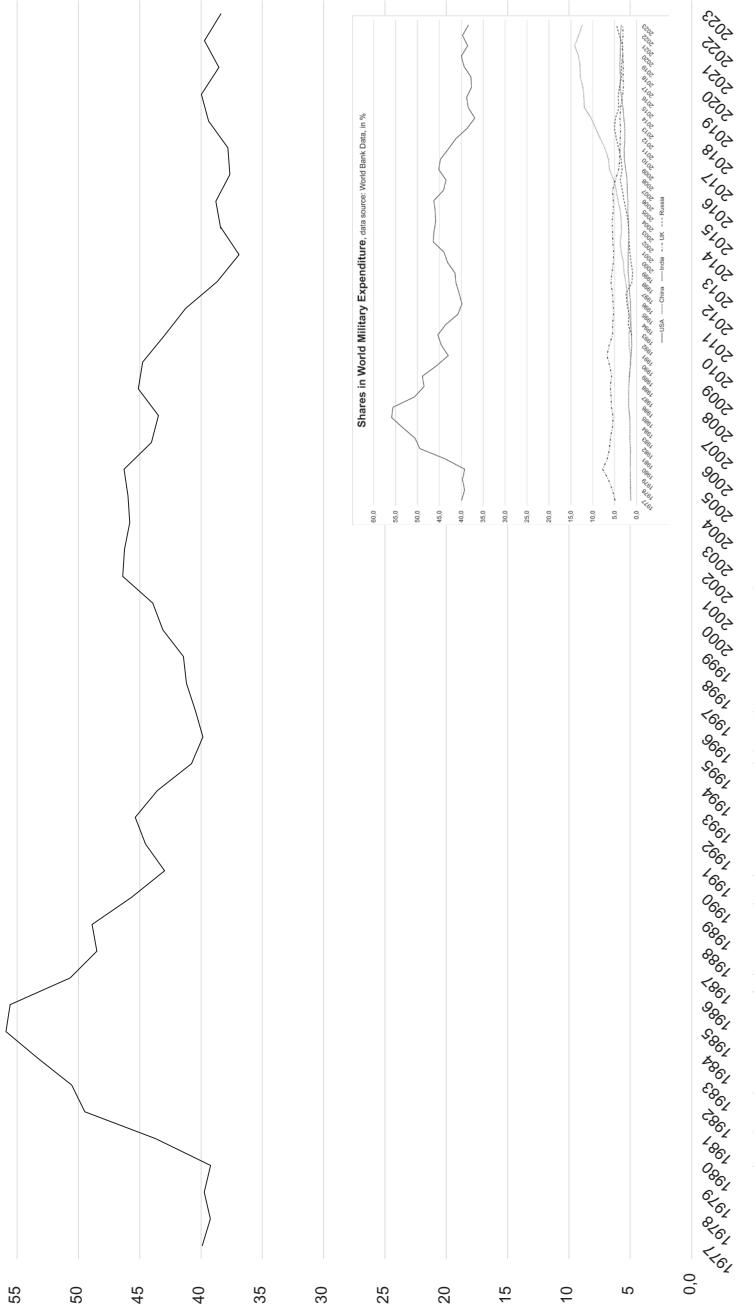


Figure 5.1: The development of the USA's share in world military expenditure

## Shares in World Military Expenditure, data source: World Bank Data, in %



Figure 5.2: The development of China's, India's, the United Kingdom's, and Russia's shares in world military expenditure

The USA has continuously held the largest share of world military expenditures. Since the end of the Cold War, this share has decreased. The most significant development is the rise of China's share from 1.4 percent in 1990 to 14.1 percent in 2021. China is not just the USA's main economic competitor; it has also tried to catch up with the USA in developing its military capabilities.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has impacted world military spending. In 2022, world military expenditure increased by 6.3 percent and stood at US\$2.2 trillion,<sup>73</sup> which was 2.2 percent of the global GDP.<sup>74</sup> In 2023, world military expenditure further increased to US\$ 2.4 trillion, which was 2.3 percent of the global GDP.<sup>75</sup> Russia's share of global military expenditure increased from 3.2 percent in 2021 to 3.9 percent in 2022 and 4.6 percent in 2023, and Ukraine's share from 0.3 percent in 2021 to 2.0 percent in 2022 and 2.7 percent in 2023.<sup>76</sup> Military escalation of a political conflict has resulted in massive armament.

The new arms race is also a digital arms race. It is unlikely, although not impossible, that in a highly polarised political world, treaties are negotiated that limit the development of new (digital) weapons of mass destruction. If political polarisation continues, then it is very likely that also the investment into and development of robot soldiers used in hybrid armies and autonomous weapon systems that automatically select targets and kill autonomously from human command and control will continue. Future digital weapons are likely to make war more ruthless and brutal. Robots and AI systems do not have morals, doubts, feelings, fears, and empathy. They can be programmed to kill remorselessly. Given the polarisation and escalation of conflicts into wars, it is likely that war-fighting parties choose to develop such systems that kill massively and ruthlessly because they want to utilise and develop any means necessary for winning. Warfare has become more spatially distanced, so soldiers today often operate from a distance using semi-automatic weapons systems such as combat drones. For example, in the war in Ukraine, Russia has used Iranian Shahed drones where the target is first selected and programmed by humans and the 'kamikaze drone' flies and attacks automatically using GPS.

The more nationalist and fascist authoritarian countries become, and the more fascist leaders of powerful nations emerge, the more likely a large war along with an escalating digital and nuclear arms race that might end humanity becomes. Fascists and authoritarians consider violence and war as appropriate means of politics. They will likely go to war when political

polarisation reaches a bifurcation point. The proliferation of fascism and authoritarianism in the world is likely to advance (digital) wars and the development of digital weapons that maximise causalities and destruction.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter asked: What is digital capitalism? We want to summarise the main findings now:

- **Capitalism:**

Capitalism is more than an economy. For Marx, capitalism is a formation of society (*Gesellschaftsformation*).

- **Theorising digital capitalism:**

A critical theory of digital capitalism should conceive of digital capitalism as the digital dimension of capitalism as formation of society. Digital capitalism does not just have economic aspects but also non-economic elements that interact with and are based on class structures and class relations. Digital capitalism is the dimension of capitalist society where processes of the accumulation of capital, decision-power, and reputation are mediated by and organised with the help of digital technologies and where economic, political, and cultural processes result in digital goods and digital structures. Digital capitalism is an antagonistic dimension of society, a dimension that represents how economic class antagonism and social relations of domination are shaped by and shape digitalisation. For theorising digital capitalism, we can learn from Nancy Fraser that it is important to look at the dialectics of the economic and the non-economic within the capitalist formation of society when analysing digitalisation.

- **Violence and war in digital capitalism:**

We live in violent times. The relationship between digital capitalism and violence has thus far not been theorised and analysed enough. Violence is the intended, unintended, or threatened physical harm of a human being. Violence plays a variety of roles in capitalism. Most significantly, capitalism has resulted in two devastating World Wars. War is organised, large-scale violence between at least two politically organised groups where at least one group sees the other group as an enemy that

should be annihilated in order to realise a particular political interest against the will of this identified enemy. In digital capitalism, aspects of violence include, for example, digital violence, digital warfare, the digital communication of violence, the digital communication about violence, the digital mediation of violence, and digital fascism.

### ***5.5.1 Ten Onto-Epistemological Premises for the Critical Analysis of Digital Capitalism***

I want to close this chapter with ten premises that are important onto-epistemological foundations of critical theories of digital capitalism.

Premise 1:

The category of digital capitalism competes with various concepts from information society theory and must position itself concerning them.

Premise 2:

A theory of digital capitalism must answer the question of the continuity and discontinuity of society's development in the context of digitalisation. In doing so, it is suggested that the assumption of a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity is helpful.

Premise 3:

A theory of digital capitalism must ask itself the question of how informatisation and digitalisation are related to agriculture and manufacturing. The approach presented in this chapter proposes to assume not a replacement but a dialectical sublation (*Aufhebung*).

Premise 4:

A theory of digital capitalism must answer what digitalisation and informatisation mean for both subjects and objects. Some concepts of society prefer the subject level, others the object level. In order not to absolutise either the one or the other level, it makes sense to start from a dialectic of digital subjects and digital objects, i.e. a dialectic of knowledge production and knowledge structures as well as knowledge work and information technologies.

Premise 5:

A theory of digital capitalism must also ask itself how new digital capitalism is. I propose that today, we are dealing simultaneously with a digital

society and a digital capitalism in the form of a dialectic of digital productive forces and digital, networked relations of production that operates not only in the economy but in society as a whole.

Premise 6:

Theories of digital capitalism must build on definitions and theories of capitalism, i.e. address the question: What is capitalism? In this context, capitalism can be understood either as a pure economic form or, as culture, or as a formation of society. The application of Marx's understanding of capitalism has the merit that digital capitalism can be understood as an aspect of capitalism, as a formation of society.

Premise 7:

Suppose capitalism is not just an economic order but a formation of society. In that case, the analysis of capitalism is the analysis of economic exploitation and non-economic domination phenomena as well as their interaction. Theories of digital capitalism should also address the question of how class, racism, and patriarchy are related in the context of digitalisation.

Premise 8:

Concepts of digital capitalism are related to terms such as surveillance capitalism, platform capitalism, data capitalism, big data capitalism, cognitive capitalism, high-tech capitalism, cultural capitalism, consumer capitalism, etc. Such terms often emphasise specific aspects of digitalisation in capitalist society, such as surveillance, big data, algorithms, knowledge production, digital culture industry, digital consumption of goods, etc., as well as their implications and effects. Theories of digital capitalism should address the question of how they relate to and position themselves concerning other concepts of capitalism.

Premise 9:

Digital capitalism is a dimension of the capitalist formation of society. One should not absolutise digital capitalism in social analysis but examine its interactions and entanglements with other aspects of the capitalist formation of society.

Premise 10:

The analysis of digital capitalism should also analyse the interaction of class, racism, and patriarchy in the context of digitalisation.

### ***5.5.2 The World at a Crossroads: (Digital) Socialism or (Digital) Barbarism***

Digital capitalism is today situated in the context of the polarisation of the world, which is at a bifurcation point where history is open. Once again, we face the dilemma that Rosa Luxemburg pinpointed: 'either an advance to socialism or a reversion to barbarism.'<sup>77</sup> In the twenty-first century, both socialism and barbarism are mediated by digital technologies.

Democratic digital socialism is the alternative that is needed to global digital capitalism and its escalating antagonisms. Democratic socialism is a societal formation that sublates the antagonisms between classes, political rivals, and ideological enemies. It is not a land of milk and honey without problems but a society where everyone leads a decent, good life and maximises mutual benefits. In contrast, mutual harms are minimised, and the lifeforms of individuals, groups, cultures, and societies are compatible to coexist and not destroy each other.

The social does not just mean social action. The social does not just mean social relations. The social does not just mean social structures. The social does not just mean community. The social does not just mean society. The social means all of that. But the social means more than that. The social means praxis. The social means socialism. Only democratic socialism is truly social.

Ideally, democratic socialism creates wealth for all in a commonwealth of solidarity and cooperation, political participation of all, and recognition of all. Digital socialism uses digital technologies to advance these economic, political, and cultural features of humanist, democratic socialism as a formation of society. Living in digital capitalism requires us to think about and struggle for digital socialism. 'Only when we have the power in our hands will there be an end to wars and barracks.'<sup>78</sup>

## CHAPTER 6

# On Global Capitalism

### 6.1 Introduction

There has been much talk about ‘globalisation’ since the 1990s. In the 2020s, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crises, inflation, supply chain crises, and political polarisation, there are certain deglobalisation tendencies. The (de-) globalisation of capital and capitalist society involves the intersection of spatial logic and the political economy logic of accumulation. The task of this chapter is that we want to understand the relationship between globalisation and capitalism better. It deals with the question: what is global capitalism?

Imperialism is a notion that has to do with global capitalism. Section 6.2 discusses classical theories of imperialism (John A. Hobson, Rudolf Hilferding, Vladimir I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Hannah Arendt). Section 6.3 discusses theories of new imperialism and global capitalism, especially David Harvey’s approach. Section 6.4 outlines the present author’s concept of global capitalism. Section 6.5 presents some conclusions.

### 6.2 Imperialism

#### 6.2.1 John A. Hobson

There have been several classical understandings of imperialism. As a starting point, we want to recap such definitions briefly. John A. Hobson was a British economist who taught at the Universities of London and Oxford. He wrote the influential book *Imperialism: A Study*,<sup>1</sup> where he defined imperialism:

Imperialism is the endeavour of the great controllers of industry to broaden the channel for the flow of their surplus wealth by seeking foreign markets and foreign investments to take off the goods and capital they cannot sell or use at home. [...] The economic root of Imperialism is the desire of strong organized industrial and financial interests to secure and develop at the public expense and by the public force private markets for their surplus goods and their surplus capital. War, militarism, and a ‘spirited foreign policy’ are the necessary means to this end.<sup>2</sup>

Hobson stressed that the capitalist economy needs an international dimension and expands internationally and globally through trade, investments, and wars.

### 6.2.2 *Rudolf Hilferding*

Rudolf Hilferding’s book *Finance Capital*<sup>3</sup> is another work that has been influential in theories of imperialism. Hilferding analyses the rising importance of finance capital, that is, ‘bank capital, that is, capital in money form which is actually transformed in this way into industrial capital’, ‘capital at the disposition of the banks which is used by the industrialists’.<sup>4</sup> Hilferding points towards the rise of stock-trading companies and large corporations that obtain investment capital from banks. Today, the world’s largest companies, including digital corporations such as Amazon, Apple, Alphabet/Google, Microsoft, etc., are stock-trading companies listed on stock markets such as the New York Stock Exchange, Nasdaq, the Shanghai Stock Exchange, Euronext, etc. They first acquire investment capital from banks, and if and when they increase that capital significantly, they become publicly traded stock market-listed corporations. Since Hilferding wrote his book, finance capital has played an important role in capitalism and continues to have a key role in contemporary digital capitalism. Hilferding analysed how finance capital advances crisis tendencies. Since the 1970s, high-risk financial derivatives have emerged, and finance capital has been deregulated, which has resulted in financial crises. Some observers are speaking of financialisation and characterising capitalism as finance capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

For Hilferding, imperialism is a type of capitalism that is focused on the export of capital and the struggle for economic territory. ‘The export of

capital, especially since it has assumed the form of industrial and finance capital, has enormously accelerated the overthrow of all the old social relations, and the involvement of the whole world in capitalism.<sup>6</sup> Hilferding saw the danger of war imminent in imperialism. He stressed that 'in the world of capitalist struggle', the 'superiority of weapons is the final arbiter' and that the capitalist class 'conceives all politics as a matter of capitalist syndicates either fighting or combining with each other.'<sup>7</sup>

### 6.2.3 Vladimir I. Lenin

Marx hardly used the notion of imperialism. Instead, he focused on the category of capitalism that required a global dimension. Lenin wrote an influential book on imperialism titled *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. He built on and was quite impressed by Hobson's book. For Lenin, imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism that has five features:

- (1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this 'finance capital', of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed. Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.<sup>8</sup>

In his definition and analysis of imperialism, Lenin focuses primarily on the economic features of capitalism. He says that he cannot deal with 'the non-economic aspects of the question'<sup>9</sup> and that his analysis is focused on the 'economic essence of imperialism'.<sup>10</sup>

It is not clear why these five features are precisely characteristic of imperialism. Suppose the creation of monopolies is an inherent tendency

of capitalism, as Marx argued when he characterised monopolisation and capital concentration as the ‘historical tendency of capitalist accumulation’.<sup>11</sup> In that case, it is unclear why monopolies should only be important in one stage of capitalism. Monopoly tendencies have always been a feature of capital. When Lenin writes that ‘in its economic essence imperialism is monopoly capitalism’,<sup>12</sup> he overlooks that the capitalist economy is always monopoly capitalism as it has a monopoly tendency. Finance capital, the export of capital in the form of foreign direct investment of capital, the importance of transnational corporations in the world economy, and the competition of nation-states for influence in global capitalism have persisted for a long time. But if all capitalism has for a long time been imperialistic in Lenin’s understanding of the term, then the term itself becomes pretty meaningless as it is synonymous with capitalism. Ignoring political aspects, Lenin did not talk much about war as a feature of imperialism and only added a discussion of it to the preface to the French and German editions written in 1920.<sup>13</sup>

Lenin characterises imperialism as capitalism’s ‘highest stage’ and as ‘parasitic or decaying capitalism’,<sup>14</sup> which implies that capitalism will inevitably break down in this ‘highest’ stage of capitalism due to the ‘parasitic’ character of finance capital. Lenin’s theory of imperialism is a breakdown theory of capitalism. Lenin wrote his work on imperialism in 1916. More than a hundred years later, capitalism is still around, so there does not seem to be an automatic breakdown built into its structure. Capitalism has inherent crisis tendencies, but the outcome of major crises of capitalism is not predetermined.

#### 6.2.4 Rosa Luxemburg

In 1913, three years before Lenin wrote his book on imperialism, Rosa Luxemburg published her book *The Accumulation of Capital*. Like Lenin, she is interested in the analysis of global capitalism. In addition, she outlines an analysis of the capitalist economy’s dynamic and crises. One noticeable difference between Luxemburg and Lenin is that the latter called his book *Imperialism*, while the former did not mention this term in her book’s main title.

Luxemburg writes that ‘the accumulation of capital, as an historical process, depends in every respect upon non-capitalist social strata and

forms of social organisation<sup>15</sup> so that 'imperialism is the political expression of the accumulation of capital in its competition for the possession of the remainders of the non-capitalistic world.'<sup>16</sup> A key aspect of Luxemburg's concept of capitalism is that it is a crisis-ridden system that, in order to try to overcome crisis, seeks new milieus that it can control, from where it can appropriate resources, and where it can exploit labour. Capital 'must go all out to obtain ascendancy over [...] territories and social organizations.'<sup>17</sup>

Luxemburg argues that capitalism requires non-capitalist milieus that it subsumes under its logic and influence. She speaks of '[n]on-capitalist organisations' that 'provide a fertile soil for capitalism; more strictly: capital feeds on the ruins of such organisations, and although this non-capitalist *milieu* is indispensable for accumulation, the latter proceeds at the cost of this medium nevertheless, by eating it up. Historically, the accumulation of capital is a kind of metabolism between capitalist economy and those pre-capitalist methods of production without which it cannot go on and which, in this light, it corrodes and assimilates. [...] Only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organisations makes accumulation of capital possible.'<sup>18</sup> To avoid and overcome crises, capital accumulation requires an outside that it folds into itself, swallows up, transforms, and subsumes under itself. It expropriates non-capitalist resources and turns them into means of producing capital. 'Accumulation is more than an internal relationship between the branches of capitalist economy; it is primarily a relationship between capital and a non-capitalist environment.'<sup>19</sup> 'Capitalism is the first mode of economy with the weapon of propaganda, a mode which tends to engulf the entire globe and to stamp out all other economies, tolerating no rival at its side. Yet at the same time it is also the first mode of economy which is unable to exist by itself, which needs other economic systems as a medium and soil.'<sup>20</sup>

Luxemburg continues to analyse the international dimension of capitalism in the following manner:

Thus capitalist accumulation as a whole, as an actual historical process, has two different aspects. One concerns the commodity market and the place where surplus value is produced – the factory, the mine, the agricultural estate. Regarded in this light, accumulation is a purely economic process, with its most important phase a transaction between the capitalist and wage labourer. In both its phases, however, it is confined to the exchange of equivalents and remains within the limits of commodity

exchange. Here, in form at any rate, peace, property and equality prevail, and the keen dialectics of scientific analysis were required to reveal how the right of ownership changes in the course of accumulation into appropriation of other people's property, how commodity exchange turns into exploitation and equality becomes class-rule. The other aspect of the accumulation of capital concerns the relations between capitalism and the non-capitalist modes of production which start making their appearance on the international stage. Its predominant methods are colonial policy, an international loan system – a policy of spheres of interest – and war. Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process.<sup>21</sup>

Luxemburg argues that in its international dimension, capitalism is both economic and political, it has an international political economy. It can utilise economic and/or political means for trying to expand internationally.

As David Harvey notes, 'Political power is nothing but a vehicle for the economic process. The conditions for the reproduction of capital provide the organic link between these two aspects of capital accumulation. The historical career of capitalism can only be appreciated by taking them together.'<sup>22</sup> The economic means include capital export, commodity trade, loans, debt, economic dependence (for example on technologies), unequal exchange, and investments. The political means involve colonial policy, war, oppression, looting, and fraud. While Lenin provides a relatively pure economic understanding of imperialism, Luxemburg's concept is political-economic. She saw problems of profit realisation as the source of capitalist crises. This analysis is somewhat shaky. There are multiple sources of capitalist crisis, including the overaccumulation of capital, falling profit rates, disproportions between economic sectors, the capitalist antagonism between productive forces and relations of production, profit squeeze, overproduction and underconsumption of commodities, etc. Independent of the question of what the sources of economic crises are, a decisive aspect of Luxemburg's theory is the insight that in trying to overcome crises, capitalism tries to find new spheres that it controls, from where it obtains 'resources and [...] labour power'<sup>23</sup> and that it subsumes under its logic. It does so by using economic and political means, including the military.

Luxemburg assumed that if capitalism has become global, no milieus that can be subsumed under capital will be left, and that, therefore, the 'realisation and capitalisation of surplus value become impossible to accomplish'<sup>24</sup> and 'the collapse of capitalism follows inevitably, as an objective historical necessity.'<sup>25</sup> She overlooked that there are not just external colonies of capitalism but also what later authors called 'internal colonies'<sup>26</sup> of capitalism, such as women, nature, knowledge, migrants, etc., that enable capital to find ever newer milieus that are subsumed under capital. Notwithstanding this limit, Rosa Luxemburg, based on Marx, created an important critical theory of capital that allows us to understand the subsumption of life under capital and the role of both the economy and politics, including the politics of war, in the expansion and development of capitalism.

Luxemburg gives more attention to military aspects of capitalism than Lenin: 'the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day.'<sup>27</sup> 'With the high development of the capitalist countries and their increasingly severe competition in acquiring non-capitalist areas, imperialism grows in lawlessness and violence.'<sup>28</sup> For Luxemburg, primitive accumulation is not just a process that takes place at the beginning of capitalism but is an ongoing process that is repeated in the development of capitalism. 'Sweating blood and filth with every pore from head to toe' characterises not only the birth of capital but also its progress in the world at every step.<sup>29</sup> Capital 'employs militarism' to 'get hold of [...] means of production and labour power'.<sup>30</sup>

For Luxemburg, the alternative to capitalism and its tendency to go to war is a global socialist system. 'The aim of socialism is not accumulation but the satisfaction of toiling humanity's wants by developing the productive forces of the entire globe. And so we find that socialism is by its very nature an harmonious and universal system of economy'.<sup>31</sup>

### 6.2.5 *Hannah Arendt*

Hannah Arendt stresses the importance of Luxemburg's analysis<sup>32</sup> and, like Luxemburg, emphasises imperialism's economic and political dimensions. 'Imperialism was born when the ruling class in capitalist production came up against national limitations to its economic expansion.

The bourgeoisie turned to politics out of economic necessity; for if it did not want to give up the capitalist system whose inherent law is constant economic growth, it had to impose this law upon its home governments and to proclaim expansion to be an ultimate political goal of foreign policy.<sup>33</sup>

Theories of imperialism differ theoretically and politically in a variety of ways. They have in common that they analyse the international dimension of capitalism. Many of them emerged around the time of the First World War. Since the 1990s, there has been a social science debate on globalisation, and the notions of new imperialism and global capitalism have become important. We will have a look at this discourse in the next section.

### 6.3 Contemporary Debates on New Imperialism and Global Capitalism

#### 6.3.1 *David Harvey: Accumulation by Dispossession*

Building on Rosa Luxemburg's argument that capitalism seeks to resolve crises by internationalising and globalising its operations, the Marxist geographer and political economist David Harvey argues that capital seeks to overcome crises of overaccumulation by spatial fixes, which involves 'exports of money capital, commodities or productive capacities or imports of fresh labour power from other regions',<sup>34</sup> the search for 'new opportunities for capital export, cheap raw materials, low-cost labour power, etc.',<sup>35</sup> 'geographical expansion within a framework of uneven geographical destruction',<sup>36</sup> uneven geographical development,<sup>37</sup> and what Marx termed 'the annihilation of space by time'<sup>38</sup> with the help of new means of communication and transport so that capital 'drives beyond every spatial barrier'.<sup>39</sup>

But spatial fixes cannot 'contain the contradictions of capitalism in the long run'.<sup>40</sup> Harvey argues that inter-imperialist rivalries can lead to global wars as 'the ultimate form of devaluation' as in the case of the twentieth century's two world wars.<sup>41</sup> The new round of the globalisation of capital that has developed since the 1970s would have brought 'the renewed threat of global war, this time waged with weapons of immense and insane destructive power'.<sup>42</sup> Like Luxemburg, Harvey stresses the dangers of war that loom in capitalism's crisis tendencies.

For Harvey and Luxemburg, capitalism is an economic system where capital exploits labour and a political system that obtains resources from outside capitalism to create new means of production for creating and accumulating capital. Such means of production are acquired by economic expansion or violence (war).

### 6.3.2 *David Harvey's The New Imperialism and Accumulation by Dispossession*

Harvey published a book titled *The New Imperialism*.<sup>43</sup> The book was written in the context of the Iraq war that started in 2003. Harvey argues that imperialism means accumulation by dispossession that is achieved by economic and political means where 'military intervention is the tip of the imperialist iceberg'.<sup>44</sup> In line with Luxemburg, he stresses the role of war in global capitalism's consolidation.

For Harvey, capitalist imperialism is a dialectic of political actors that command a territory (the logic of territory) and capital accumulation in space and time (the logic of capital).<sup>45</sup> Harvey bases his understanding not on Lenin's but Luxemburg's and Arendt's theories of imperialism. He argues that the important aspect of Luxemburg's theory is that she shows that 'capitalism does indeed require something "outside of itself" in order to accumulate'.<sup>46</sup> Luxemburg argues that primitive accumulation is a continuous process that is necessary for the existence of capitalism. Harvey says that various forms of continuous primitive accumulation based on colonising spaces are needed to overcome capitalist crises of overaccumulation. This takes on the form of spatio-temporal fixes, that is, 'temporal deferral and geographical expansion'.<sup>47</sup> Overaccumulation produces capital surpluses that cannot be invested within existing boundaries; as a result, 'profitable ways must be found to absorb the capital surpluses'<sup>48</sup> by 'temporal displacement through investment in long-term capital projects or social expenditures (such as education and research that defer the re-entry of capital values into circulation into the future' and/or 'spatial displacements through opening up new markets, new production capacities, and new resource, social and labour possibilities elsewhere'<sup>49</sup> or the combination on temporal and spatial fixes (spatiotemporal fix). Since the 1970s, there have been two important reactions of capital to crises. First, a new round and new forms of financialisation emerged.

Financialisation creates new financial derivatives that allow short-term profitability and make the system more volatile, so crises are deferred into the future when financial bubbles burst. Second, a new round of the transnationalisation of capital emerged, which has increased the number of transnational corporations and their share of capital, labour forces, and profits in the world.

Capital accumulation, therefore, in search of profitable spheres, produces spaces and thereby creates uneven geographical development. New imperialism is, for Harvey, a specific form of primitive accumulation that developed after 1970: neoliberal imperialism,<sup>50</sup> or ‘imperialism as accumulation by dispossession’<sup>51</sup>

Accumulation by dispossession employs four strategies for turning assets into profitable use, that is, the commodification of ‘everything’<sup>52</sup>: the privatisation and commodification of public assets and institutions, social welfare, knowledge, nature, cultural forms, histories, and intellectual creativity (the enclosure of the commons); financialisation that allows the taking over of assets by speculation, fraud, predation, and thievery; the creation, management, and manipulation of crises (for example the creation of debt crises that allow the intervention of the IMF with structural adjustment programs so that new investment opportunities, deregulations, liberalisations, and privatisations emerge); and state redistributions which favour capital at the expense of labour.<sup>53</sup> For Harvey, new imperialism revisits the old, robbery-based imperialism of the nineteenth century in a different place and time.<sup>54</sup>

### 6.3.3 *David Harvey’s Critique of Theories of Imperialism*

Harvey is somewhat critical of the term imperialism. He stresses that Marx ‘never proposed a theory of imperialism’.<sup>55</sup> Theories of imperialism would often be situated in historical contexts and, therefore, not be able to analyse capitalism’s general logic. They would only draw on single elements of Marx’s theory. ‘And the crucial mediating influence, which most of the writers on imperialism ignore, is the necessary tendency to overcome spatial barriers and to annihilate space with time – tendencies which Marx derives directly from the theory of accumulation.’<sup>56</sup> ‘The problem with the Marxist theory of imperialism, in general, is that it has become a theory “unto itself”, divorced from Marx’s theory of capital

accumulation.<sup>57</sup> Harvey's interest is Marx's theory of accumulation, not theories of imperialism.

In his *New Imperialism* book, Harvey writes: 'Imperialism is a word that trips easily off the tongue. But it has such different meanings that it is difficult to use it without clarification as an analytic rather than a polemical term.'<sup>58</sup> Harvey argues that today, flows of value 'are more complicated' than previously and that they are 'constantly changing direction' so that there is no longer a simple transfer of 'wealth from East to West', and we find 'competing and shifting hegemonies'.<sup>59</sup> He writes that East Asian capital, especially Chinese, Japanese, South Korean and Taiwanese capital, forms a 'power center of global capital accumulation'.<sup>60</sup>

He stresses that in the year 2000, there was almost no Chinese foreign direct investment. In contrast, today, 'a flood of it is passing not only along the "One Belt One Road" through Central Asia into Europe, but also throughout East Africa in particular and into Latin America (Ecuador has more than half its foreign direct investment from China); 'Chinese companies and wealth funds are way ahead of everyone else in [...] and grabs all across Africa. [...] The two largest mineral companies operating in Zambia's copper belt are Indian and Chinese'.<sup>61</sup>

Harvey is critical of the argument that imperialism means rich nations exploit poor nations. Nation-states are units that contain both capitalists and workers. Capital exploits workers all over the world, and value transfers increase the profits of transnational capital that is headquartered in certain countries. As 'Marx long ago pointed out, geographical wealth transfers from one part of the world to another do not benefit a whole country; they are invariably concentrated in the hands of privileged classes. In recent times in the United States the Wall-Streeters and their hangers-on have done splendidly while the erstwhile workers of Michigan and Ohio have done very badly'.<sup>62</sup>

The political economist Minqi Li argues: 'If a country (economy) receives substantially more surplus value from the rest of the world than it transfers, then it can be argued that the country (economy) has engaged in and benefited from economic imperialism in the sense that the country (economy) is a net exploiter in the capitalist world system. If a country (economy) transfers substantially more surplus value to the imperialist countries than it receives from the transfer of the rest of the world, the country (economy) is likely to be a peripheral country in the capitalist world-system. On the other hand, the surplus value transferred from a

semi-peripheral country to the rest of the world is likely to be roughly offset by the surplus value extracted.<sup>63</sup>

Li argues that the profit rates of foreign capital invested in China are, on average, around 6 percent. In contrast, the profit rates of Chinese capital invested abroad are, on average, around 3 percent. Therefore, there would be 'a negative balance in international investment income', which would make China 'a semi-peripheral (rather than peripheral) country in the capitalist world system'.<sup>64</sup> Although 'China has developed an exploitative relationship with South Asia, Africa, and other raw material exporters, on the whole, China continues to transfer a greater amount of surplus value to the core countries in the capitalist world system than it receives from the periphery. China is thus best described as a semi-peripheral country in the capitalist world system'.<sup>65</sup> 'On balance, China remains an economy exploited by the imperialist countries in the capitalist world system'.<sup>66</sup> 'Some Chinese capitalists may be blamed for their imperialist-like behaviors in developing countries, but, on the whole, Chinese capitalism remains nonimperialist'.<sup>67</sup>

Li treats and presents nation-states and their economies as actors that are an undifferentiated whole. He, therefore, says that one nation exploits another nation. What he disregards is that it is always capital that exploits labour. He calculates balances of imported and exported capital, its profits and profit rates, imported and exported labour time, and imported and exported commodities. Based on the analysis of such data, Li concludes that China 'on the whole' and 'on balance' is not an exploiting country but an exploited one. Western capital invested in China exploits Chinese workers. Chinese capital invested in African, Latin American or other countries exploits the workers there. Presenting a country as an undifferentiated whole and as an economic actor neglects the actual class relation between capital and labour that takes place at the national and transnational levels. The consequence of Li's argument is that he whitewashes Chinese capital as non-exploitative.

### 6.3.4 *Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: Empire*

Comparable to Harvey, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri stress the global space of capitalism and are critical of classical concepts of imperialism. They introduced the notion of 'empire'. For Hardt and Negri, empire is a system of global capitalist rule that is 'altogether different' from imperialism: 'Imperialism was really an extension of the sovereignty of the

European nation-states beyond their own boundaries. [...] in contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. [...] First and foremost, then, the concept of Empire posits a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire “civilized” world.<sup>68</sup>

For Hardt and Negri, an empire is a networked form of sovereignty that is dominated by the United States, which sees itself as possessing a global right of military intervention and as the world's most powerful actor. Further actors in this network are international organisations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations, the Group of Eight (G8), transnational corporations, nation-states, and civil society organisations.<sup>69</sup>

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of their book *Empire*, Hardt and Negri (2019) wrote a reflection on the book's relevance in the 2020s.<sup>70</sup> They argue that 'no nation-state today is able to organize and command the global order unilaterally'.<sup>71</sup> The dominance of the USA in terms of the 'bomb, the dollar and the network – Washington, Wall Street and Hollywood/Silicon Valley'<sup>72</sup> has not disappeared but is 'showing cracks'.<sup>73</sup> They argue that the rise of 'reactionary nationalists' does not mean the end of globalisation but rather the competition for 'a more dominant position within, rather than an attack upon, the global system'.<sup>74</sup> Global capitalism has increased economic, political, military, and ideological competition. Hardt and Negri, in their essay, leave open the question of whether this development means an increased likelihood of a global war. They argue that in contemporary global capitalism, the extraction of value from the commons of culture, knowledge, data, means of transport and communication, natural resources, public services, public infrastructures, care, cooperation, etc., is a key feature. The common is both a sphere of extraction and 'a potential for social autonomy from capital, a potential for revolt'.<sup>75</sup>

### 6.3.5 Critical Globalisation Studies

Critical alternatives to imperialism theory have also gained momentum under the label of Critical Globalisation Studies.<sup>76</sup>

William I. Robinson<sup>77</sup> argues that contemporary capitalism can best be characterised as global capitalism that is based on a transnational

capitalist class, a transnational state apparatus, and transnational capital that diffuses the whole Marxian circuit of capital Money-Commodity..Production..Commodity'-Money' (M-C..P..C'-M') all over the globe. In this circuit, money is invested in buying the commodities, labour power and means of production. In the production process, labour transforms the means of production and creates a new commodity that contains surplus labour. This transformed commodity is sold on the market so that surplus value is realised in the form of profit that capitalists control. In the early twentieth century, according to Robinson,<sup>78</sup> only commodity sales took place at the transnational level. Robinson criticises theories of new imperialism for not giving enough focus to transnational capital and focusing only on 'rival national capitals' that compete globally.<sup>79</sup>

Imperialism is, for Robinson, not a recent re-emerging phenomenon, but means 'the relentless pressures for outward expansion of capitalism and the distinct political, military and cultural mechanisms that facilitate that expansion and the appropriation of surpluses it generates'.<sup>80</sup> For Robinson, global capitalism is a phase of capitalist development that is characterised by 'a transition from the nation-state phase of world capitalism [...] to a transnational phase'.<sup>81</sup> The incorporation of all countries and all people into capitalism, total commodification and marketisation, the global mobility of capital, transnational corporate investment, and the rise of globalised circuits of production and accumulation characterise this phase. 'Transnational capital has become the dominant, or hegemonic, fraction of capital on a world scale.'<sup>82</sup> Robinson is interested in new qualities of global capitalism, such as information and communication technologies (ICTs) that allow capital to go global, global mobility of capital, the global outsourcing of production, subcontracting, or new management philosophies.

Leslie Sklair argues that the global system works in three spheres, the economic sphere, the political sphere, and the culture-ideology sphere. 'In order to work properly the dominant institutions in each of the three spheres have to take control of key resources. Under the conditions of capitalist globalisation, the transnational corporations strive to control global capital and material resources, the transnational capitalist class strives to control global power, and the transnational agents and institutions of the culture-ideology of consumerism strive to control the realm of ideas'.<sup>83</sup> Sklair argues that the transnational capitalist class consists of the executives of transnational corporations (TNCs); bureaucrats, politicians,

professionals, merchants, and consumerist elites that have global perspectives and lifestyles and identify with 'the interest of the capitalist global system'.<sup>84</sup>

### 6.3.6 *Imperialism as Ideology*

Today, imperialism is primarily an ideological dimension of political struggle. For example, Putin claims that NATO in Ukraine has 'imperial ambitions'<sup>85</sup> and that NATO and the USA 'started this war, while we used force and are using it to stop the war'.<sup>86</sup>

US President Joe Biden characterises Putin as a 'dictator bent on rebuilding an empire' and says, 'The Kremlin wants to portray NATO enlargement as an imperial project aimed at destabilizing Russia. Nothing is further from the truth. NATO is a defensive alliance. It has never sought the demise of Russia'.<sup>87</sup> The President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen,<sup>88</sup> said that 'Russia invaded Ukraine and war was back in Europe' because of 'Putin's imperial fantasies'. In such political rhetoric, the imperialists are always the others, not oneself.

On the one hand, Chinese President Xi Jinping repeatedly stresses that China is uninterested in war and wants to foster peace. 'History has shown that confrontation, whether in the form of a cold war, a hot war, or a trade war, will produce no winners. We believe that there exist no issues that countries cannot resolve through consultation as long as they handle these issues in a spirit of equality, mutual understanding and accommodation'.<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, Xi stresses the need to advance armament of the People's Liberation Army to defend China and fight against aggressors. The focus should be on the 'capability to fight and win'.<sup>90</sup> Xi says that China is 'confident that we will defeat any aggressor. We will never allow any person, any organization or any political party to split any part of the Chinese territory away from the country at any time, in any form. No one should expect us to accept anything that damages our sovereignty, security, or development interests'.<sup>91</sup>

In conflicts over the control of territory, the different sides tend to accuse each other of aggression. In each view, they are themselves defenders, and the other side is presented as the aggressor. This is, for example, the case in the Taiwan question. Some say that Taiwan is legally and culturally part of the People's Republic of China and that China, therefore,

should gain political control over this territory and needs to defend itself against what is seen as separatism as well as external imperialist intervention into national interests and affairs. Others say that Taiwan has a right to self-determination, that it, therefore, has the right to set up its own nation-state that is independent of the People's Republic of China, and that the People's Republic of China's claims over Taiwan and the argument that Taiwan is a province of the People's Republic are imperialist in nature. Independent of the complex legal issues involved in this question, both sides involved in the dispute over Taiwan claim that the other side is an imperialist and that they are victims of imperialism who need to defend themselves against aggression.

Slavoj Žižek says Russia has the political strategy 'to present itself as an ally of the Third World against Western neocolonialism, casting the attack on Ukraine as an act of decolonization'.<sup>92</sup> Žižek argues that Russia's ideological claims show the contemporary dangers of the notion of imperialism and that actual fascists and imperialists present themselves as anti-imperialists and anti-fascists. Žižek rejects calls for sacrificing Ukraine to Russia or only providing limited military support to Ukraine in order not to provoke Russia. Russia's goal would not be to conquer Ukraine but to create an entirely new 'geopolitical situation'<sup>93</sup> where all of Europe becomes Russia's colony.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, a stronger, but different NATO would be needed where Europe acts as an 'autonomous agent' relatively independent from the USA.<sup>95</sup> He says that, after all, there is the danger that if the likes of Trump or DeSantis run the USA, there might be no military support for Europe at all.<sup>96</sup> For Žižek, one should not support Ukraine in the name of saving liberalism and European values but for saving humanity from fascism and for universal freedom. 'Ukraine fights for global freedom, including the freedom of Russians themselves'.<sup>97</sup> According to Žižek, what is worth defending about the 'liberal tradition' is that one should 'ruthlessly insist on [...] universality' – the universality of freedom, freedom for all,<sup>98</sup> which requires 'change of the entire global system'.<sup>99</sup> Žižek says that one 'cannot be a Leftist if you do not unequivocally stand behind Ukraine'.<sup>100</sup> However, the reason for Leftist support of Ukraine would be to struggle for universal justice, freedom, and solidarity. A new form of Western relations with Third World countries would be needed<sup>101</sup> that includes true solidarity that includes easing of debt, healthcare support, ending exploitation of the Global South, etc., in order to show that there is 'a better choice than Russia or China'.<sup>102</sup>

Today, imperialism is a highly politically and ideologically charged term, which questions the feasibility of its theoretical and analytical use. In theory debates, different sides will try to define imperialism in such a way that the side they support is analysed as not being imperialist. In contrast, the enemy side will be analysed as being imperialist. I find speaking like David Harvey and other representatives of Critical Globalisation Studies of 'global capitalism' more feasible.

Theories of imperialism do not start from Marx's theory of capitalism and capital accumulation. They focus on particular historical and societal contexts of escalating antagonisms that they analyse and theorise. They are interesting analyses of specific features of global capitalism in certain contexts but are not general enough. The present author's concept of global capitalism is outlined in the next section.

## 6.4 Global Capitalism

### 6.4.1 *Global Capitalism Defined*

Capitalism is not just an economy but a type of society, a formation of society that is oriented on the accumulation of money-capital in the economy, the accumulation of decision-power in the political system, and the accumulation of reputation and respect in culture (see table 6.1 and chapter 5 in this book).

Global capitalism means capitalist society and its logics of accumulation operating at the international, transnational, or global level. Global capitalist society involves the transnational accumulation of money-capital

**Table 6.1: Levels and structures of capitalist society** (based on Fuchs 2022a, table 1.1)

	Logic	Micro-level	Meso-level	Macro-level
<b>Economic structures</b>	Accumulation of money-capital	commodity, money	companies, markets	capitalist economy
<b>Political structures</b>	Accumulation of decision-power	laws	parties, government	the capitalist state
<b>Cultural structures</b>	Accumulation of reputation and respect	ideology	ideology-producing organisations	the capitalist ideological system

in the economy, the accumulation of political decision-power and influence at the international level, and the accumulation of international reputation and respect. There is a tendency of capitalist globalisation that does not automatically assert itself and whose development or decline depends on interests, power dynamics, and conflicts of interest. Capitalist society globalises as one of the responses to economic, political, and cultural crises. The development of global capitalism is the attempt at a spatial fix to such crises.

Globalisation, in general, and global capitalism, in particular, require transnational practices, processes, structures, means, and organisations. Table 6.2 outlines global capitalism's realms, logics, practices, processes, structures, and means. Global capitalism and its economic, political and cultural accumulation processes utilise various practices and structures. Global and international accumulation results in international and global inequalities, the unequal distribution of wealth, decision-power, and reputation.

The political economist Susan Strange introduced the notion of structural power:

Structural power, on the other hand, is the power to shape and determine the structures of the global political economy within which other states, their political institutions, their economic enterprises and (not least) their scientists and other professional people have to operate. [...] Structural power, in short, confers the power to decide how things shall be done, the power to shape frameworks within which states relate to each other, relate to people, or relate to corporate enterprises.<sup>103</sup>

Structural power is a category that matters in analysing international and global political economy. For Strange, there are four types of structural power: 'control over security; control over production; control over credit; and control over knowledge, beliefs and ideas'.<sup>104</sup> This distinction is interesting but theoretically not entirely stringent. Security, as understood by Strange, has to do with state and military power. For Strange, production and credit are economic forms of strategic power. These two types can, however, be merged into one type of power. Knowledge, beliefs and ideas constitute culture. Therefore, it makes more sense to distinguish between three and not four forms of structural power, which is precisely what I have been doing in this chapter.

Global and international political economy in capitalist world society features struggles over the accumulation and distribution of structural power, namely economic power, political power, and cultural power, as well as the intersection and entanglements of these three types of structural power. Writing at the time when the Cold War ended, Strange argued that 'the United States government and the corporations dependent upon it have *not* in fact lost structural power in and over the system'.<sup>105</sup>

Thirty years after Strange's observations, the United States' structural power in the world system has neither vanished nor remained unchallenged. But, as this book tries to show, there is a major conflict between the United States and China over the hegemonic control of structural power in the capitalist world system. Humanity today faces the existential danger that the conflict over structural power between the USA and China will turn into a new world war.

#### 6.4.2 *Global Capitalism and Global Socialism*

Capitalist society is not purely capitalist; it is a complex system where the logics of capitalism and socialism exist, compete, coexist, conflict, and collide. Just like there are processes of international and global accumulation, there are also processes of international and global solidarity and cooperation. The logic of accumulation aims to create benefits for some at the expense of the many. The logic of solidarity and the common good seeks to generate benefits for all. Table 6.3 contrasts the logics of global capitalism and global socialism.

While global capitalism is based on structures and processes of accumulation, global socialism aims to create benefits for all. It is based on structures of the commons that enable common wealth, common democracy, and common recognition, i.e. economic, political and cultural advantages for all. In the global capitalist economy, transnational corporations accumulate capital that benefits a small group of owners who exploit the labour of the international working class. In contrast, in the global socialist economy, co-operatives are co-operatively owned, operated, and governed by workers and aim to transcend markets by sharing, gifts, and co-operative production. In global capitalist politics, a small group controls political decision-making and has the power to make collectively binding decisions that take on the form of laws. Politics takes on the form of dictatorships

**Table 6.2:** Systems, logics, practices, and structures of international and global capitalism

Sphere of Society	Logic of accumulation	Logic of global accumulation	Practices and processes of global accumulation	Structures and means of global accumulation
Economy	Accumulation of money capital	Transnational accumulation of money capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Exploitation of cheap international labour by transnational capital,</li> <li>b) Appropriation of international means of production,</li> <li>c) international sale of commodities</li> <li>d) Foreign direct investment of capital</li> <li>e) Uneven geographical development of economies and dependence</li> <li>f) Accumulation of transnational finance capital</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) International labour markets, transnational corporations, transnational capital, migrant labour markets, racial capitalism, slavery corporations, transnational capital</li> <li>b) International commodity markets, colonialism, transnational corporations, transnational capital</li> <li>c) International and global commodity markets, free trade agreements, free trade organisations, uneven international commodity trade</li> <li>d) Transnational corporations, transnational capital</li> <li>e) Dependence of less competitive and poorer economies on richer and more competitive economies, international loans and debt traps, dependence generated by foreign aid</li> <li>f) Global financial markets, global financial derivatives, international loans to companies and nation-states, international venture capital, transnational stock-trading corporations</li> </ul>
Politics	Accumulation of political decision-power and influence	Accumulation of political decision-power and influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Transnational political influence laws</li> <li>b) International warfare and military conflicts, armament, and militarisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Transnational political alliances, partnerships and organisations, transnational laws, rules and agreements</li> <li>b) Conventional weapons, weapons of mass destruction (chemical, biological, nuclear weapons), military alliances, global surveillance technologies, internationally operating intelligence agencies,</li> <li>c) Diplomatic missions, state visits, political debates</li> </ul>

Sphere of Society	Logic of accumulation	Logic of global accumulation	Practices and processes of global accumulation	Structures and means of global accumulation
Culture	Accumulation of reputation and respect	Accumulation of international reputation and respect	<p>a) International ideology, worldviews, philosophy, religion, and ethics</p> <p>b) International journalism and reporting</p> <p>c) Global entertainment, global popular culture, global arts</p> <p>d) International sports</p> <p>e) International science, academia, and education</p> <p>f) Health and aid</p> <p>g) International and inter-cultural travel and tourism</p> <p>h) transnational and inter-cultural communication, love, marriage, friendship and family practices</p>	<p>a) International cultural organisations, events and campaigns that are oriented on globally spreading certain worldviews, norms, and morals</p> <p>b) Global and international news media</p> <p>c) International culture industry, international cultural markets and cultural commodities, international celebrities, international fan communities, international cultural events</p> <p>d) International sports events, international sports leagues and competitions, international sports fan communities, international sports markets</p> <p>e) International academic and educational publishing, international research projects, international academic conferences and events, international student markets, international exchange of students, pupils and teachers, international guest researchers, international academic cooperation</p> <p>f) International health and humanitarian aid organisations and campaigns</p> <p>g) International tourism industry, tourism offices and associations, tourism branding and marketing, international means of transportation</p> <p>h) International and global means of communication, international interpersonal social systems (families, friendships)</p>

**Table 6.3:** Global capitalism and global socialism

Realm of society	Global capitalism	Global socialism
Global economy	Transnational capital, trans-national corporations and markets: The logic of exploitation	Transnational self-managed companies and organisations, transnational gift economy: The logic of beneficial co-production and sharing
Global politics	Transnational dictatorships and global fascism: The logic of war	Transnational democracy and the transnational public sphere: The logic of political debate, diplomacy, and peaceful coexistence
Global culture	Global ideologies: The logic of manipulation and propaganda	Global respect, recognition and understanding: The logic of unity in diversity and friendships

that aim at international influence. In the extreme case, there are fascist systems that operate based on nationalism, the friend/enemy-scheme, and militarism. Such systems aim at killing political opponents. They constantly advance the logic, language, and practices of war. Global socialism is global socialist democracy where the citizens of the world are empowered to influence the decisions that affect their lives. The political culture is based on peace, diplomacy, political debate in the public sphere, attempts to take decisions and solve problems peacefully, and to coexist peacefully. The logic of political communicative action replaces the logic of war.

In a global capitalist culture, there is an ideological struggle, so groups with particularistic interests try to gain global hegemony and popularity. They spread ideologies that positively present these groups and that construct scapegoats and enemies. They disseminate the friend/enemy-logic at the international and global levels. In contrast, global socialist culture is based on the logic of friendship, where one does not see others as enemies but as potential partners, equals, and friends. Differences are respected and organised in a way that allows humans and groups to find out about each other and discover commonalities. Global culture is organised as unity in diversity.

The logics of competition and cooperation and the logics of capitalism and socialism are not simply separate but often intersect, compete, and

conflict. For example, in the socialism of capital, capitalist corporations cooperate in order to form strategic alliances and monopolies that destroy and outcompete other capitals. In military alliances, armies cooperate in order to be better equipped to kill their joint enemies. In ideological coordination, certain groups, cultures or societies align themselves in a friendly manner in order to define their worldviews and morals as superior to their joint enemies' worldviews and morals. These cases are examples where the socialist logic of the commons, sharing, and cooperation is subsumed under the logic of capitalism and competition so that some who cooperate have advantages at the expense of others. The socialist logic that transcends accumulation is not immune from subsumption under capitalism. Capitalism is able to subsume almost everything under its logic. In the mentioned cases, there is the socialism of capitalism, socialism as a strategy for improved capitalist accumulation. There is co-opetition, cooperation to compete. Actual globalisation processes are sometimes uneven, so that there are capitalist and socialist globalisation processes at the same time that compete and conflict.

In a socialist society, there is cooperation for the commons, humans who cooperate in order to create products that benefit all. Competition does not necessarily vanish in a socialist society. In comp-cooperation (competitive cooperation), competition is subsumed under socialism and cooperation so that all benefit. For example, there can be contests to create various cultural goods such as software or music. Inevitably, software created by some engineering groups will be more popular than other software. Music composed and performed by some artists will be more popular than other music. The decisive feature is that in a socialist society, there is fair competition so that the results of production are made available freely to all and all producers, just like all humans, can live a good life. Cultural heritage grows through products made available through a variety of co-operative and competitive production processes, and this heritage is made available to humanity gratis.

Global capitalism becomes particularly dangerous when the dominant classes, groups, and societies are authoritarian, nationalist, or fascist in character. The competition for the accumulation of capital, political influence, and recognition then becomes governed by the logic of violence. Violence is employed as a means of accumulation. The more authoritarian and fascist forces become dominant in the world, the more likely an escalation of violence into military conflicts, wars, and world wars becomes. Given the prevalence of weapons of mass destruction in the contemporary

world system, a new world war has a specific likelihood of resulting in the annihilation of humanity, societies, and life on Earth. Authoritarianism and fascism are based on violence as their organising principle, which is why their dominance in global capitalism is so dangerous. The combination of the capitalist logic of accumulation and the fascist, nationalist and authoritarian logic of violence is a pathway towards mutual destruction and annihilation.

The present author has outlined some foundations of a theory of authoritarianism, nationalism, and fascism in several works.<sup>106</sup> Fascism and authoritarianism are neither an individual ideology and practice nor a type of society. They are features of class societies that can exist at different levels, namely at the levels of individual consciousness and practices, the ideology and practices of groups and organisations, institutions, and society as a whole. Fascism and authoritarianism are practices, ideologies, social movements, modes of organisation, and modes of capitalist and class society.

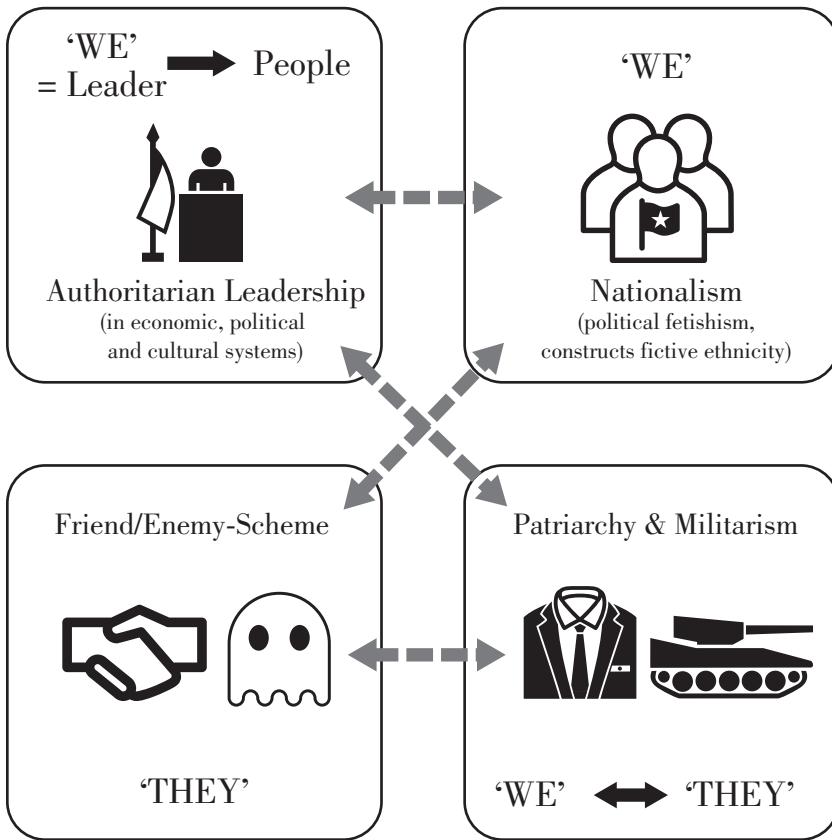
#### ***6.4.3 Authoritarianism***

All social groups, social systems, and societies have a) organisational principles, b) an identity and practices that bind together and relate individuals and give certain meanings to their existence, c) relations and definition of relations to the outside world, d) ways of how problems are solved. Proponents of authoritarianism are convinced of and propagate a) top-down authoritarian decision-making and the leadership principle as organisational principle, b) nationalism (the belief in the superiority and primacy of a biologically or culturally defined nation over other humans) as an identity principle, c) the construction of the friend/enemy-scheme that polarises and explains the world as an antagonism between the nation and groups that threaten the nation (such as immigrants, refugees, socialists, liberals, Marxists, religions that are different from the nation's dominant religion, which implies that fascism is often racist, xenophobic, anti-socialist, anti-liberal, anti-Semitic, etc), and d) militant patriarchy that sees the soldier as the ideal citizen, advances patriarchal values that want to confine women to subordinate roles in society, and believe in violence (including, for example, law-and-order policies, war, and terror) as the ideal means for solving conflicts and answering to society's problems. These four features are characteristic of right-wing authoritarianism. Figure 6.1 shows a model of authoritarianism.

## Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA)

Individual ↔ Group ↔ Institution ↔ Society

RWA's social role: Deflection of attention from structures of class, capitalism and domination



**Authoritarian, Right-Wing Extremist, Fascist Ideological Practice**



**Anti-Fascist, Socialist Praxis, Communication**

Figure 6.1: A model of authoritarianism<sup>107</sup>

Authoritarianism responds to political-economic crises with ideologies that speak to disenfranchised individuals' psychology. Those who feel politically anxious have an ambiguous relationship with love and hate. They seek an alternative and an identity that promises them hope. They want to express their anger and aggression. Authoritarian politicians and groups institutionalise anxiety by offering opportunities to such individuals to love the nation and the leader and expressing hatred against scapegoats. Right-wing authoritarianism works on the level of psychological anxieties, desires, emotions, affects, and instincts. It often does not use rational arguments but post-truth political psychology and ideology.

#### ***6.4.4 Fascism***

Conservatism can be understood as a variant of right-wing authoritarianism that recognises and operates within the framework of democracy while upholding four core principles of authoritarianism in democratic contexts. Rather than endorsing terror, it promotes policies focused on law and order. In contrast, right-wing extremism represents a specific ideology and political movement rather than a societal structure. It often embraces the use of violence against perceived adversaries, primarily targeting political style, ideology, communication, and symbolism. Fascism, on the other hand, can manifest at various levels, influencing individual consciousness, group dynamics, organisations, institutions, and society as a whole.

Fascism organises and institutionalises violence and terror as political tools, representing a form of right-wing authoritarianism that seeks to establish a society rooted in fear of designated enemies. Its ultimate goal is the extermination of these perceived adversaries. Fascism is characterised by the enforcement of the leadership principle, intense nationalism, the friend/enemy-scheme, and militant patriarchy. It emerges as a reaction to the conflicts and crises inherent in capitalist and class-based societies, seeking to mobilise those who fear social decline by promising a renewed society where the national collective thrives, while simultaneously terrorising and eliminating scapegoats blamed for society's problems.

By promoting nationalism and attributing society's problems to constructed enemies, fascism plays a significant ideological role in class

societies. It diverts attention from the systemic causes of these issues, effectively disconnecting them from capitalism and class relations. Bourgeois theories of fascism often overlook or minimise its dual role within capitalism – its ideological function and the potential for capitalism to adopt fascist characteristics. Conversely, orthodox leftist interpretations tend to underestimate the significance of the friend/enemy framework, nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and extermination within fascism, often reducing it merely to a manifestation of capitalism.

Fascism operates at various levels of society, including the individual, group, institutions, and the broader community. The presence of fascism at one level does not automatically lead to its manifestation at a higher level; however, each higher level relies on the existence of fascist elements at the lower levels. For instance, a fascist society is built upon fascist institutions, groups, and individuals, yet it encompasses more than just their collective existence.

Fascism can be defined as an anti-democratic, anti-socialist, and terrorist ideology, practice, and mode of organisation that encompasses groups, institutions, and society at large. Several key elements characterise it: a) the leadership principle, b) nationalism, c) the friend/enemy dichotomy, and d) militant patriarchy, which idealises the soldier and endorses patriarchal practices, subordination of women, and the use of war, violence, and terror as political tools.

Fascism employs terror against constructed enemies, aiming to establish a society grounded in fear and the institutionalisation of these four fascist principles. It seeks to mobilise individuals who are anxious about losing property, status, power, or reputation in the face of societal antagonisms. Additionally, fascism plays a significant ideological role in capitalist and class societies by scapegoating certain groups for society's ills and framing societal problems as a conflict between the nation and foreign adversaries. Fascism diverts attention from the systemic roles of class and capitalism in societal issues, obscuring the inherent contradictions between capital and labour.

Moreover, fascism often promotes a one-dimensional, superficial form of 'anti-capitalism' that fetishizes the nation, portraying it as a political entity engaged in a struggle against particular forms of capital, economic practices, or communities that are depicted as threats to the nation's economic, political, and cultural survival.

#### *6.4.5 Nationalism*

Nationalism is both an ideology and a political movement focused on establishing or maintaining a nation-state that unites its members or citizens. It encompasses two interrelated dimensions: a territorial-political aspect (the nation-state) and an ideological dimension (national consciousness). As both a political relationship and a form of collective consciousness, nationalism asserts a foundational unity among the nation that is rooted in either nature or culture/society.

As an ideology, nationalism legitimises and obscures the divisions within society, particularly class distinctions and relations of domination. It constructs a narrative of national unity that is presented as more significant than class differences, creating a false sense of cohesion that is characteristic of modern class societies. This collective identity is often defined in opposition to proclaimed outsiders and enemies of the nation.

Furthermore, there exists a dialectic between racism and nationalism, as both can reinforce and amplify each other. The emergence of new nationalisms during periods of significant capitalist crisis supports the notion that right-wing authoritarianism and its associated nationalisms are likely to gain traction in such contexts.

#### *6.4.6 Marx on Nationalism*

Marx extended his critique of ideology and fetishism beyond the economic realm to include political phenomena such as nationalism. While he did not explicitly label nationalism as a form of political fetishism, he emphasised the role of ideology in diverting attention from class struggle and serving the ruling class's interests. In 1870, he specifically examined how nationalism functioned to distract the working class from their true class interests, thereby benefiting those in power.

Marx analysed the phenomenon of false consciousness among the working class, highlighting how it fostered resentment towards immigrant workers and those in colonies. He particularly addressed the situation in Ireland as a British colony, providing a nuanced understanding of how nationalism and xenophobia can create divisions among workers. His insights into the interplay between nationalism and class consciousness remain relevant in the context of today's emerging nationalisms,

illustrating how similar dynamics can perpetuate divisions and obscure the realities of class struggle.

On nationalism, Marx wrote:

Ireland is the BULWARK of the *English landed aristocracy*. The exploitation of this country is not simply one of the main sources of their material wealth; it is their greatest *moral* power. [...] And most important of all! All industrial and commercial centres in England now have a working class *divided* into two *hostile* camps, English PROLETARIANS and Irish PROLETARIANS. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who forces down the STANDARD OF LIFE. In relation to the Irish worker, he feels himself to be a member of the *ruling nation* and, therefore, makes himself a tool of his aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland*, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*. He harbours religious, social, and national prejudices against him. [...] This antagonism is kept artificially alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling class. *This antagonism is the secret of the English working class's impotence*, despite its organisation. It is the secret of the maintenance of power by the capitalist class. And the latter is fully aware of this.<sup>108</sup>

#### 6.4.7 Rosa Luxemburg on Nationalism

Rosa Luxemburg writes that those talking about the nation often use it as 'a homogeneous social and political entity' that is a 'misty veil' concealing 'a definite historical content'.<sup>109</sup> 'In a class society, "the nation" as a homogeneous socio-political entity does not exist.'<sup>110</sup> In a class-based society, historically evolving dominant and subordinate classes emerge, each with distinct compositions, alongside the division between rulers and the ruled. Luxemburg says that socialism is an 'international culture in which distinct nationalities will disappear'.<sup>111</sup> She says that workers do not need a nation: 'The workers' fatherland, to the defense of which all else must be subordinated, is the socialist International.'<sup>112</sup> 'I feel at home in the entire world, wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears.'<sup>113</sup>

For Luxemburg, the nation is embodied both in the modern nation-state and in nationalist ideology, which serves to organise exploitation and imperialism. Nation-states 'are today the very same tools and forms

of class rule of the bourgeoisie as the earlier, non-national states, and like them they are bent on conquest'.<sup>114</sup> The nation-state is 'a tool of domination (or control) and conquest'.<sup>115</sup>

Luxemburg emphasises the ideological nature of the nation and nationalism, highlighting how nationalism serves the bourgeoisie's efforts to divert attention from class conflicts. By constructing a national ideological unity between capital and labour, nationalism directs opposition toward an external enemy. Luxemburg roots her analysis of the nation in Marx's theory of ideology. When she refers to nationalism as a 'misty veil', she is pointing to its role as a form of political fetishism, obscuring the fact that social problems are fundamentally rooted in class and capitalism.

#### *6.4.8 Rosa Luxemburg on Capitalism, Nationalism, and World War*

The First World War demonstrated nationalism's inherent militaristic potential, revealing how the notion of national unity beyond class divisions can easily lead to workers from different nations hating and killing one another. Luxemburg saw the First World War as the 'world's explosion of nationalism'.<sup>116</sup>

Nationalism serves as an ideological distraction from class structures and conflict. It functions as a form of political psychology, fostering a cross-class unity while channelling aggression, hatred, and dissatisfaction toward other imagined nations. In imperialist conquests, the coloniser or imperialist often portrays the subjugated groups as backward, inferior, or in need of assistance to promote modernisation, democratisation, and development. This ideological justification for conquest and oppression frequently claims that a shared national culture can be created, benefiting all groups by supposedly overcoming 'primitivism' and 'backwardness'. Such cultural assertions are used to legitimise the domination of resources, power, labour, and markets.

Luxemburg emphasises that militarism, nationalism, and war are deeply interconnected features of capitalism:

Militarism fulfils a quite definite function in the history of capital, accompanying as it does every historical phase of accumulation. It plays a decisive part in the first stages of European capitalism, in the period of the

so-called ‘primitive accumulation’, as a means of conquering the New World and the spice-producing countries of India. Later, it is employed to subject the modern colonies, to destroy the social organisations of primitive societies so that their means of production may be appropriated, forcibly to introduce commodity trade in countries where the social structure had been unfavourable to it, and to turn the natives into a proletariat by compelling them to work for wages in the colonies. It is responsible for the creation and expansion of spheres of interest for European capital in non-European regions, for extorting railway concessions in backward countries, and for enforcing the claims of European capital as international lender. Finally, militarism is a weapon in the competitive struggle between capitalist countries for areas of non-capitalist civilisation. In addition, militarism has yet another important function. From the purely economic point of view, it is a pre-eminent means for the realisation of surplus value; it is in itself a province of accumulation.<sup>117</sup>

#### 6.4.9 *Eric Hobsbawm on Nationalism*

Eric Hobsbawm<sup>118</sup> builds on the analyses of Marx and Luxemburg. For him, nationalism is an ideology deliberately invented for political purposes, creating everyday symbols through which it is communicated. The fact that nationalism is ‘invented’ means it is constructed, fabricated, inculcated, illusory, false, and ideological. In the age of digital capitalism, nationalist ideologies and symbols are continually invented and reinvented online, especially on social media and through user-generated content.

Hobsbawm argues that traditions are often invented to serve political and social purposes: “‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”<sup>119</sup>

National tradition is a specific type of invented tradition designed to promote the unity of the nation-state and foster nationalism. Nations and nationalism were ‘invented in the later nineteenth century’.<sup>120</sup> Hobsbawm<sup>121</sup> contends that racism and anti-Semitism increased alongside the rise of race theories and social Darwinism. Hobsbawm<sup>122</sup> says that the formation of modern nation-states was accompanied by the widespread creation and invention of traditions. He notes that national traditions are

frequently constructed from above, yet they seek to resonate with a broad audience by appealing to a shared sense of identity. “Invented traditions” have significant social and political functions, and would neither come into existence nor establish themselves if they could not acquire them.<sup>123</sup> Nationalist traditions are created from above and necessitate support from below. However, it is not guaranteed that efforts to impose nationalism on the populace through national symbols, events, and practices will always be successful.

#### ***6.4.10 Global Capitalism, Authoritarianism, Nationalism, and Fascism***

What we can learn from combining theories of global capitalism and theories of authoritarianism, nationalism, and fascism is that crises of global capitalism can result in the radicalisation of political forces. Suppose this radicalisation means a shift towards fascism, nationalism, and authoritarianism because the democratic Left is weak or weakened. In that case, capitalism’s antagonisms are more likely to escalate into violence and war. Authoritarianism, nationalism, and fascism are ideologies and forms of politics and societal organisation that are built on the friend/enemy-scheme closely linked to the use of violence as a political method. Their intensification and the intensification of global capitalism’s antagonisms and crises have deadly potentials.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter asked: What is global capitalism? We want to summarise the chapter’s main findings now:

- **Classical theories of imperialism:**

Classical theories of imperialism, such as those by John A. Hobson, Rudolf Hilferding, Vladimir I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Hannah Arendt, have diverse theoretical and political perspectives. Theories of imperialism are situated in particular contexts that they analyse. Marx did not use the notion of imperialism. Theories of imperialism, therefore, cannot properly start from Marx’s theory of capitalism and capital accumulation. The concept of imperialism has often been ideologically

used in conflicts where each side claims the other is an imperialist and aggressor, and oneself is a victim and defender.

- **David Harvey's theory of global capitalism:**

David Harvey argues that theories of old and new imperialism are not general enough and cannot be grounded in Marx's theory of capital accumulation. He built a theory of global capitalism that took Marx's works as its starting point. Global capitalism is based on capital's accumulation drive that includes spatial, temporal, and spatio-temporal fixes for trying to overcome crises. There is, therefore, a tendency for globalisation immanent in capital accumulation. According to Harvey, contemporary global capitalism is built on accumulation by dispossession and resorts to violence and warfare for global expansion.

- **Global capitalism:**

Global capitalism means capitalist society and its logics of accumulation operating at the international, transnational, or global level. Global capitalist society involves the transnational accumulation of money-capital in the economy, the accumulation of political decision-power and influence at the international level, and the accumulation of international reputation and respect. Capitalist society globalises as one of the responses to economic, political, and cultural crises. The development of global capitalism is the attempt at a spatial fix to such crises. There are not just processes of global capitalism but also processes of the globalisation of socialism that compete and conflict with global capitalism.

- **Global capitalism, authoritarianism, nationalism, and fascism:**

Global capitalism becomes particularly dangerous when the dominant classes, groups, and societies are authoritarian, nationalist, or fascist in character. Crises of global capitalism can result in the radicalisation of political forces. Suppose this radicalisation means a shift towards fascism, nationalism, and authoritarianism because the democratic Left is weak or weakened. In that case, capitalism's antagonisms are more likely to escalate into violence and war. Authoritarianism, nationalism, and fascism are ideologies and forms of politics and societal organisation that are built on the friend/enemy-scheme closely linked to the use of violence as a political method. The combination of the capitalist logic of accumulation and the fascist, nationalist and authoritarian logic of violence is a pathway towards mutual destruction and annihilation.

## CHAPTER 7

# On Global (Digital) Capitalism's Political Economy: The Economic Dimension

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the political economy of global capitalism. It asks: what does global capitalism's political economy look like today?

Given this is a big question, we must focus on selected but important aspects of global capitalism's political economy. The task of this chapter is to analyse global capitalism's economic aspects. The focus is on global capitalism's major powers. We have a look at how global capitalism's economy has developed since the 1970s.

First, we analyse global economic development (section 7.2). Then, we analyse the role of transnational corporations in global capitalism (section 7.3). Next, the focus is on the analysis of capital export and capital import (section 7.4). Then, we examine structural economic transformations focusing on the services industries and the digital industry sector (section 7.5) and the roles of finance capital and international debt in global capitalism (section 7.6). Finally, some conclusions are drawn (section 7.7).

First, we will analyse the role of transnational corporation in global capitalism.

### 7.2 Global Economic Development

Table 7.1 shows the development of the USA's, the EU's, Mainland China's, and Russia's shares of global GDP. The USA's share dropped from around 40% in 1960 to around 25% in 1980 and has ever since remained relatively stable. The EU's share has since 1970 fluctuated a bit between a bit below twenty to around thirty percent. Mainland China's share remained

**Table 7.1: Various economic powers' share of global GDP (measured in current US\$).** Data source: World Bank Data, accessed May 16, 2023 and February 9, 2024

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2021	2022
<b>USA</b>	39.0%	35.8%	25.2%	26.2%	30.3%	22.6%	24.2%	25.1%
<b>EU</b>		24.2%	29.1%	28.5%	21.5%	21.9%	17.8%	16.5%
<b>Mainland China</b>	4.3%	3.1%	1.7%	1.6%	3.6%	9.1%	18.4%	17.7%
<b>Russia</b>				2.3%	0.8%	2.3%	1.8%	2.2%

relatively low until 2000. It then grew significantly and stood at almost 20 percent in 2021. Post-Soviet Russia's share has remained relatively low compared to the USA, the EU, and China.

## 7.3 Transnational Corporations

### 7.3.1 *The World's Largest 2,000 TNCs*

Table 7.2 provides data on the world's largest 2,000 transnational corporations (TNCs). Transnational capital constitutes the world's global class antagonism between capital and labour. We are treating these corporations as what Marx termed 'collective capital',<sup>1</sup> 'collective capitalist', and 'total capital'.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 7.2: The development of the sales and profits of the world's largest 2,000 transnational corporations treated as collective capitalist.** Data source: Forbes 2000 various years and World Bank Data (global GDP in current US\$) – the company data that were combined refer to the relevant financial years and were published in the Forbes 2000 lists of the respective year following the year indicated

Variable	2003	2012	2021
Total revenues	US\$ 19.394 trillion	US\$ 38.430 trillion	US\$ 47.752 trillion
Total profits	US\$ 0.760 trillion	US\$ 2.438 trillion	US\$ 5.004 trillion
Global GDP	US\$ 39.15 trillion	US\$ 75.50 trillion	US\$ 96.53 trillion
Share of total revenues in global GDP	49.5%	50.9%	49.5%
Share of total profits in global GDP	1.9%	3.2%	5.2%
Average profit rate	4.1%	6.8%	11.7%

The world's largest 2,000 TNCs have accounted for around half of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), which shows the continuous large economic power of a small number of TNCs. Their combined profits have increased their share of the world GDP from 1.9 percent in 2003 to 5.2 percent in 2021, which shows that transnational capital has been highly profitable.

### 7.3.2 *TNCs' Profit Rate*

The profit rate is a Marxian variable that measures the relationship of profits to invested capital. Marx defines it in the following manner:<sup>3</sup>

$s / (c + v)$ , surplus value/profit divided by the sum of invested constant and variable capital.

We can approximate the profit rate of the world's largest 2,000 companies in the following manner:

Total Profits / (Total Revenues – Total Profits).

The average transnational capital profit rate was 4.1 percent in 2003, 6.8 percent in 2012, and 11.7 percent in 2021. Transnational capital has continuously been very profitable. Its profit rate has increased over time.

TNCs have their headquarters in certain nation-states. Although the economy has a global dimension, regions and nation-states are very important economic and political units of organisation. We can analyse the list of the world's largest 2,000 TNCs by organising the companies by nation-states where their headquarters are located. Table 7.3 presents such data. It is the development of the number and share of headquarters of top-TNCs in specific countries and economic blocs.

Let us look at what the data in table 7.3 tells us. The USA has been the country with the largest share and number of top-TNCs. However, US corporations' share has decreased from about 40 percent in the early 2000s to around 30 percent, twenty years later. Japanese corporations' share declined from around 16 to around 10 percent in the same period. The EU-14 countries' combined share has remained relatively constant at around 15 percent. The most significant change has been that Chinese corporations' share increased from 2.5 percent in 2003 to 17.6 percent in 2021. US corporations continue to dominate transnational capital.

**Table 7.3: Number and share of companies with headquarters in specific countries/economic blocs in the Forbes Global 2000 list of the world's largest transnational corporations.** Data source: Forbes Global 2000, various years

Variable	2003	2012	2021
USA: number of companies	751	542	590
China (including Hong Kong): number of companies	49	182	351
EU-14: number of companies	322	306	284
UK: number of companies	140	95	64
Japan: number of companies	317	251	196
Russia: number of companies	12	30	24
South Korea: number of companies	49	64	65
Canada: number of companies	56	65	58
India: number of companies	27	56	55
USA: share of companies	37.6%	27.1%	29.5%
China (including Hong Kong): share of companies	2.5%	9.1%	17.6%
EU-14: share of companies	16.1%	15.3%	14.2%
UK: share of companies	7.0%	4.8%	3.2%
Japan: share of companies	15.9%	12.6%	9.8%
Russia: share of companies	0.6%	1.5%	1.2%
South Korea: share of companies	2.5%	3.2%	3.3%
Canada: share of companies	2.8%	3.3%	2.9%
India: share of companies	1.4%	2.8%	2.8%

Chinese capital challenged their hegemony. The global capitalist economy has become more contested. Chinese transnational capital has challenged US transnational capital's dominance. Especially US, Chinese, EU, and Japanese capital compete heavily for profits in the transnational capitalist economy. The global capitalist world system has become more multipolar. The polar sides compete for influence and their TNCs for profits.

### 7.3.3 TNCs' Revenues, Profits, and Capital Assets

We will examine how global capitalism's economy has developed since the 1970s. Table 7.4 presents the development of the spatial distribution of the revenues, profits, and capital assets of the world's largest 2,000 TNCs. Table 7.5 presents some of the data (revenues, profits) from table 7.4 as shares of the global GDP.

Let us interpret the data in tables 7.4. and 7.5. Measured by revenues, profits, and capital assets, the collective capital of TNCs that have their headquarters in the USA in the period from the early 2000s until the early 2020s dominated the capitalist world economy. Their capital's share in the total revenues, profits, and capital assets of the world's largest TNCs, as well as the share of their combined revenues and profits in the global GDP, have, however, somewhat decreased, which has to do with the rise of China in the capitalist world system.

In 2003, Chinese corporations only played a small role in the global capitalist economy. By 2021, they together controlled the second-largest share of transnational capital's revenues, profits, and capital assets. TNCs

**Table 7.4: The development of the share of companies headquartered in specific countries/economic blocs in the Forbes Global 2000 corporations' total sales, profits, and capital assets.** Data source: Forbes Global 2000, various years

	Share of revenues			Share of profits			Share of capital assets		
	2003	2012	2021	2003	2012	2021	2003	2012	2021
USA	38.9%	29.2%	33.0%	64.1%	35.9%	37.9%	33.5%	22.6%	24.0%
China (including Hong Kong)	1.0%	9.3%	19.3%	3.6%	14.7%	15.1%	1.1%	11.8%	23.9%
EU-14	23.5%	21.5%	15.1%	7.9%	9.9%	12.9%	27.2%	24.5%	16.6%
UK	7.5%	5.6%	4.0%	3.1%	4.7%	3.9%	9.2%	8.8%	6.1%
Japan	16.6%	12.3%	9.6%	0.9%	4.5%	6.5%	14.8%	11.4%	10.2%
Russia	0.5%	1.8%	1.4%	2.0%	4.8%	2.3%	0.3%	1.1%	0.9%
South Korea	2.2%	3.5%	3.3%	2.1%	2.7%	2.3%	1.5%	1.9%	2.3%
Canada	1.9%	2.2%	2.1%	3.1%	3.0%	2.8%	2.7%	3.6%	3.8%
India	0.5%	1.6%	1.9%	1.2%	2.2%	1.8%	0.5%	1.3%	2.3%

**Table 7.5: The development of the share of the total sales and profits of companies headquartered in specific countries/economic blocs in the global GDP.** Data sources: Forbes Global 2000, various years; GDP data: World Bank Data

	Share of revenues in global GDP			Share of profits in global GDP		
	2003	2012	2021	2003	2012	2021
USA	19.3%	14.9%	16.3%	1.2%	1.2%	2.0%
China (including Hong Kong)	0.5%	4.8%	9.5%	0.1%	0.5%	0.8%
EU-14	11.7%	11.0%	7.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.7%
UK	3.7%	2.9%	2.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Japan	8.2%	6.3%	4.8%	0.0%	0.1%	0.3%
Russia	0.2%	0.9%	0.7%	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%
South Korea	1.1%	1.8%	1.6%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
Canada	0.9%	1.1%	1.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
India	0.3%	0.8%	0.9%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%

from the EU-14 economies have remained economically strong. By 2021, Chinese TNCs had overtaken EU-14 capital regarding the share of revenues, profits, and capital assets in transnational capital, putting EU capital in the third position. Japanese transnational capital had the second-largest share of revenues in transnational capital in the early 2000s. It has declined to the fourth position. British transnational capital's importance has somewhat declined, although it has remained influential. Russian capital has not played a major role, although its importance in the capitalist world economy has increased.

Analysing data on revenues, profits, and capital assets conveys the overall picture that US capital has remained dominant in the period from the early 2000s until the early 2020s. However, its importance has declined, which is due to the rise of the importance of TNCs from China that, due to its growth in the early 2020s, constituted the second largest block of transnational capital and overtook EU-14 capital that in the early 2020s was the third-largest transnational capital. In the early 2000s, capital headquartered in the USA, the EU-14 countries, and Japan were the main competitors in transnational capital accumulation. Twenty years later, the three main competitors were the USA, China, and the EU-14 countries. China has challenged the relatively dominant position of US capital in

the capitalist world economy. The capitalist world economy is multipolar, meaning multiple competing blocs of transnational capital exist. The competition for political-economic hegemony has conflictual potentials.

Putin became Russian Prime Minister in 1999. At that time, oil prices sharply rose, spurring the Russian economy's growth and the rise of a new middle class. The rouble devaluation further supported this growth, making Russian exports, especially of oil and gas, attractive internationally.

Table 7.6 shows the growth of Russian GDP. It grew very heavily in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Russia was quite affected by the world economic crisis that started in 2008. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, its economy was quite volatile, showing an absolute decline in some years. In total, economic growth thereby slowed down. The Russian invasion of Ukraine resulted in a drop in GDP growth.

In the Forbes 2000 List of the World's Largest Transnational Corporations, Gazprom was the largest Russian company in 2022. Its rank was 49.<sup>4</sup> In the financial year 2021, Gazprom's total revenues were US\$ 158.01 billion,<sup>5</sup> which made up 8.0% of Russia's 2021 GDP.<sup>6</sup> Gazprom has large economic power in Russia and is strategically important to the Russian economy. In 2021, Russian exports amounted to US\$ 499.3 billion,<sup>7</sup> which was 28.1% of the Russian GDP. Fuels (oil and gas) accounted for the vast share of Russian exports, namely 55.1% in 2021.<sup>8</sup>

Tony Wood<sup>9</sup> argues that the analysis of Russia is often too much focused on Putin, the man, and not enough on the system he represents.

**Table 7.6: The development of Russia's GDP.** Data source: World Bank Data: GDP growth in annual %, world GDP in current US\$, accessed February 9, 2024

Year	Annual Growth Rate	Share of World GDP
2000	10.0%	0.8%
2005	6.4%	1.6%
2008	5.2%	2.6%
2009	-7.8%	2.0%
2011	4.3%	2.8%
2013	1.8%	2.9%
2015	-2.0%	1.8%
2018	2.8%	1.9%
2021	5.6%	1.9%
2022	-2.1%	2.2%

He says that Putinism has combined neoliberalism and statism. There is state dominance in the energy sector. These companies operate as regular managerialist, for-profit companies, so they do not have a public ethos. Putin's system has been 'defending the capitalist model put in place during the 1990s' under Boris Yeltsin.<sup>10</sup> Under Putin, state-dominated companies in the metal, oil and gas industries were formed and became dominant and more important than finance capital and media capital.<sup>11</sup> Former secret service agents started to play a key role in Putin's system.<sup>12</sup> Putin's system is highly corrupt; democracy just exists formally, and the media are highly controlled. Since the Russian protests against alleged fraud in the 2011 presidential election and the 2013 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, Putin's regime has become more and more authoritarian, nationalist, anti-Western<sup>13</sup> and based on the ideology of Eurasianism that defines Eurasians and especially Russians as ethnically superior to others.<sup>14</sup>

Szelényi and Mihályi<sup>15</sup> argue that Putin established a state capitalism where oligarchs who became wealthy under Yeltsin could keep their wealth and power if they were loyal to Putin. If not, they were replaced by others. 'Under Putinism, only those who served the political boss well could keep their property.'<sup>16</sup> Putin tried to create 'an obedient class of property holders'.<sup>17</sup> Russia turned away 'from oligarchic capitalism to state-led capitalism'.<sup>18</sup> Loyal oligarchs could expect to become even richer. In contrast, others faced the redistribution of their property to loyalists<sup>19</sup> and either went to 'exile in London or Tel Aviv' or ended up serving long jail terms in Siberia.<sup>20</sup> Such redistribution of property has taken on the form of 'a cyclical movement from privatisation to re-nationalisation to re-privatisation'.<sup>21</sup>

Transnational corporations (TNCs) are an important aspect of global capitalism. They export capital from certain countries into others. Capital export is a meta-level of the activities of TNCs. We will next analyse capital exports in global capitalism.

## 7.4 Capital Export and Capital Import

### 7.4.1 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

Data on the world's largest TNCs' capital helps us better understand the global capitalist economy. Another set of data that is very informative is data on foreign direct investment (FDI). UNCTADstat provides such data. UNCTADstat is the statistical and data division of the United Nations

Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). FDI means that companies headquartered in one country invest capital in other countries. FDI are cross-border, transnational capital flows. UNCTAD measures these flows at the global macroeconomic level and disaggregates them at regional and national levels. There are FDI stocks and flows. FDI stocks are the total active transnational capital accrued over time. FDI flows are the investments of transnational capital undertaken during one financial period, usually one calendar year. There are inward and outward flows and stocks, meaning investments have a certain direction. They flow into and out of certain nation-states. UNCTAD, therefore, distinguishes between FDI inward stocks, FDI outward stocks, FDI inward flows, and FDI outward flows. Tables 7.7, 7.8, 7.9 and 7.10 show data for the development of the spatial division of FDI inward and outward stocks and flows.

At the level of transnational capital, one can have a look at outward stocks disaggregated into single countries where such capital has its headquarters: the USA has remained dominant since the 1970s but has lost some significance since the year 2000. Transnational British capital has, in this period, significantly lost influence in foreign direct investments.

**Table 7.7: Countries with the largest shares of the world's FDI outward stocks, in %, listed are all countries that had a share of >4% in one of the displayed years.** Data source: UNCTAD, accessed 8 November, 2021 (years 1980, 2000, 2010, 2017, 2020) & 16 December 2022 (year 2021)

	1980	2000	2010	2017	2020	2021
<b>Brazil</b>	6.9		0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
<b>Canada</b>	4.2	6.0	4.8	4.7	5.0	5.4
<b>Mainland China</b>		0.4	1.6	5.5	6.0	6.2
<b>China, Hong Kong</b>	0.0	5.1	4.6	5.5	5.0	5.0
<b>France</b>	4.4	4.9	5.7	4.4	4.4	3.7
<b>Germany</b>	7.7	6.5	6.7	5.0	5.0	5.1
<b>Japan</b>	3.5	3.8	4.0	4.6	5.1	4.7
<b>Netherlands</b>	9.5	4.1	4.7	6.6	9.7	8.0
<b>Switzerland, Liechtenstein</b>		3.1	5.1	4.3	4.2	3.8
<b>United Kingdom</b>	14.4	12.7	8.3	5.7	5.2	5.2
<b>United States of America</b>	38.5	36.4	23.5	23.9	20.7	23.5

**Table 7.8: Countries with the largest shares of the world's FDI inward stocks, in %, listed are all countries that had a share of >4% in one of the displayed years.** Data source: UNCTAD, accessed 8 November, 2021 (years 1980, 2000, 2010, 2017, 2020) & 16 December 2022 (year 2021)

	1980	2000	2010	2017	2020	2021
<b>Canada</b>	7.7	4.4	4.9	2.8	2.7	3.6
<b>Mainland China</b>	0.2	2.6	2.9	4.5	4.6	4.5
<b>China, Hong Kong</b>	25.4	5.9	5.4	5.8	4.6	4.4
<b>France</b>	4.5	2.5	3.2	2.5	2.3	2.2
<b>Germany</b>	5.2	6.4	4.8	2.9	2.6	2.5
<b>Ireland</b>	5.1	1.7	1.4	3.2	3.3	3.0
<b>Netherlands</b>	3.5	3.3	3.0	4.6	7.0	5.7
<b>Singapore</b>	0.8	1.5	3.2	4.4	4.5	4.4
<b>Switzerland, Liechtenstein</b>		1.4	3.3	4.3	3.7	3.0
<b>United Kingdom</b>	9.0	6.0	5.4	5.7	5.3	5.8
<b>United States of America</b>	11.9	37.7	17.2	23.4	26.1	30.0

**Table 7.9: Countries with the largest shares of the world's FDI outward flows, in %, listed are all countries that had a share of >4% in one of the displayed years.** Data source: UNCTAD, accessed 1 April, 2023

	1970	1980	2000	2010	2017	2020	2021
<b>USA</b>	53.7	36.9	12.3	20.0	20.4	30.1	23.6
<b>UK</b>	11.9	15.1	20.0	3.5	8.8	-8.4	6.3
<b>Netherlands</b>	9.3	9.3	6.5	4.9	1.6	-24.6	1.7
<b>Germany</b>	7.6	9.0	4.9	9.0	5.4	7.8	8.9
<b>Canada</b>	6.6	7.9	3.8	2.5	4.7	6.0	5.3
<b>France</b>	2.6	6.0	13.9	3.5	2.2	5.9	-0.2
<b>Japan</b>	2.5	4.6	2.7	4.0	10.2	12.3	8.6
<b>Belgium</b>	1.2	0.4	7.4	0.0	1.8	1.4	2.7
<b>China (Hong Kong)</b>	0.2	4.7	6.2	5.4	12.9	5.1	0.2
<b>Switzerland, Liechtenstein</b>			3.8	6.2	1.4	-4.6	-1.1
<b>China</b>			0.1	4.9	9.8	19.7	8.5
<b>British Virgin Islands</b>			3.1	3.5	3.2	5.4	2.5
<b>South Korea</b>		0.1	0.4	2.0	2.1	4.4	3.6
<b>Singapore</b>		0.2	0.6	2.5	3.9	4.1	2.8
<b>Luxembourg</b>				1.7	0.9	13.1	1.5

**Table 7.10: Countries with the largest shares of the world's FDI inward flows, in %, listed are all countries that had a share of >4% in one of the displayed years.** Data source: UNCTAD, accessed 1 April, 2023

	1970	1980	2000	2010	2017	2020	2021
Canada	13.8	10.7	4.9	2.0	1.4	2.4	3.8
UK	11.2	18.6	8.5	4.2	5.9	1.9	1.7
USA	9.5	31.1	23.1	14.2	18.9	15.7	23.2
Australia	6.7	3.4	1.0	2.6	2.8	1.7	1.6
Germany	5.8	0.6	4.6	4.7	3.0	6.7	2.0
Netherlands	4.8	4.6	4.7	-0.5	0.9	-10.9	-5.1
Italy	4.7	1.1	1.0	0.7	1.5	-2.5	0.5
France	4.7	6.1	2.0	1.0	1.5	0.5	0.9
Brazil	3.0	3.5	2.4	5.6	4.1	2.9	3.2
Singapore	0.70	2.3	1.1	4.1	5.1	7.8	6.3
Switzerland, Liechtenstein			1.5	2.1	6.8	-16.9	0.1
China (Hong Kong)	0.4	1.3	4.0	5.1	6.8	14.0	8.9
India	0.3	0.1	0.3	2.0	2.4	6.7	2.8
China		0.1	3.0	8.2	8.3	15.5	11.4
Ireland	0.2	0.5	1.9	3.1	3.2	8.4	1.0
British Virgin Islands		0.0	0.6	3.0	2.4	4.1	2.5

Dutch transnational capital has continuously remained a large player in capital export. Corporations from China and the EU have been the main competitors of US capital. The most significant change since the 1970s has been the rise of transnational Chinese capital that in the 1970s and 1980s was hardly active in transnational capitalism and has, by the 2020s, become a significant player in capital export.

At the level of FDI inward stocks, transnational US capital has increased in importance since the early 1980s. The role of Hong Kong as the location of foreign direct capital investment has significantly decreased since the early 1980s, while Mainland China's role has become more important. Except for the Netherlands, Europe has become a bit less attractive as a destination of transnational capital in the period from the early 1980s until the early 2020s.

### 7.4.2 *The FDI Stocks and Flows of the USA, China, and the EU*

Figures 7.1 and 7.2 visualise the development of FDI stocks and flows of global capitalism's three dominant powers, namely the USA, China, and the EU, for the period from 1980 until 2021. In addition, also Russia is included as it is an important geopolitical power. Given that the EU has enlarged its membership, the focus is on a subset of current member countries, namely the EU-14 countries. They include Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

For a longer time, it was common in macroeconomic statistics to use the EU-15 countries as spatial economic category, which included the United Kingdom. Given the UK left the European Union, it has become more common to use the statistical category of the EU-14 countries, which leaves out Great Britain. In 1997, Hong Kong became part of China. In 1999, Macau became part of China. That's why the data for China visualised in the two figures include data for Hong Kong from 1998 onwards and for Macau from 2000 onwards. Since the 1990s, the UK has become a bit less attractive as a destination for capital exports. Russia was never particularly attractive for transnational capital investments.

The data in the figures show that US capital dominated the foreign direct investment of capital in the 1980s and 1990s. Since the early 2000s, transnational capital from the EU-14 countries has dominated capital export. Since the late 1990s, Chinese capital has quickly gained importance in capital exports, and in the early 2020s, it was the third-largest force in foreign direct investment. The UK's role in foreign direct investment has declined since the early 1980s. Russia has never played a major role in capital exports.

Concerning FDI inflows, the USA and the EU-14 countries have been the two most important regions in the period from the early 1980s until the early-2020s. The USA's role declined somewhat between 2000 and 2010 when the EU-14 countries became the world's dominant location for capital import. The USA caught up with the EU and became dominant again in 2016. Compared to the early 1980s, when almost no capital was exported to Mainland China, China has become an important destination for capital exports since the late 1990s. In 1980, about a quarter of FDI inward stocks were located in Hong Kong, which was the world's largest foreign

### Development of Selected Economies' Shares in World FDI Outward Stocks, in % (data source: UNCTAD)

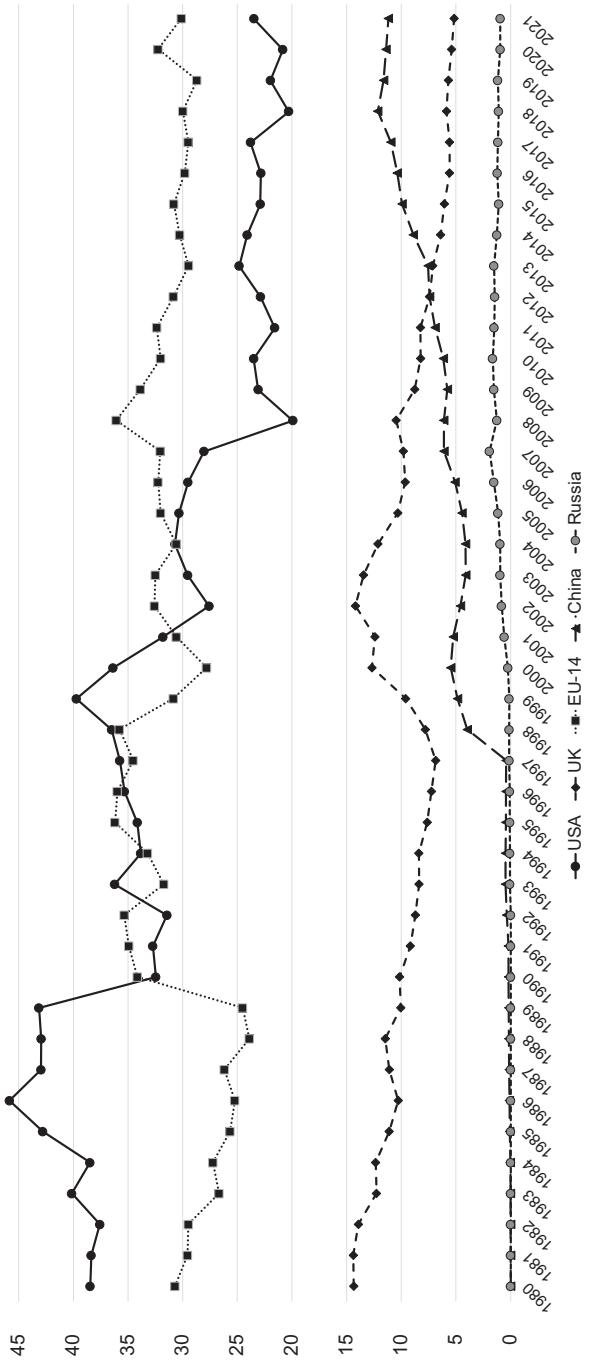


Figure 7.1: The development of selected economies' shares in world FDI outward stocks, in %

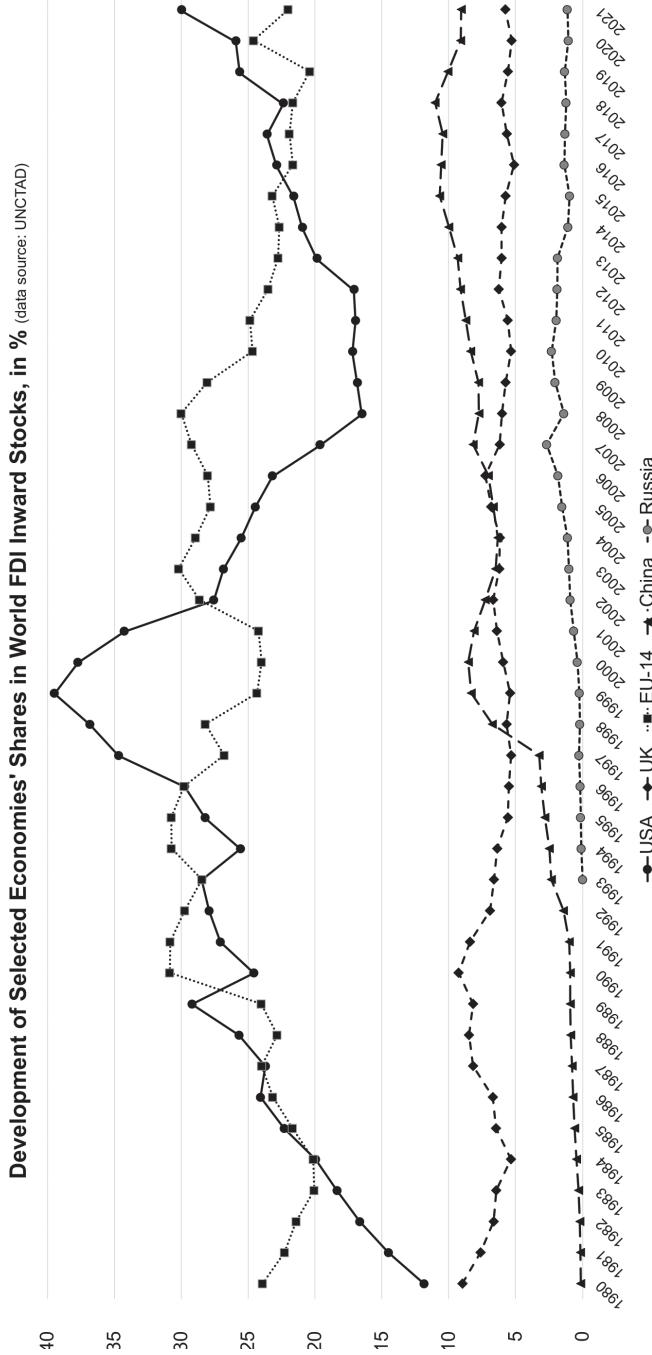


Figure 7.2: The development of selected economies' shares in world FDI inward stocks, in %

direct investment destination. Its dominance declined significantly, so its share stood at around 6 percent in 2000 and 4.4 percent in 2021.

The rise of service industries and digital industries has been an important economic transformation within many contemporary societies. We will next have a look at such structural economic transformations.

## 7.5 Structural Economic Transformations

### 7.5.1 *Agriculture, Manufacturing, Services*

Many economies have been undergoing structural transformations. The shift away from agriculture and manufacturing labour towards services and knowledge production has been a structural economic tendency in many countries. Table 7.11 shows data on sectoral economic change in selected national economies.

**Table 7.11: The development of the share of economic sectors in the GDP, in percent.** Data source: UNCTADstat

Country	Economic Sector	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
USA	Agriculture	2.4	2.0	1.5	1.0	1.0	0.8
	Manufacturing	32.1	30.9	25.9	22.8	19.9	18.1
	Services	65.5	67.1	72.6	76.2	79.2	81.0
China	Agriculture	35.1	29.9	26.8	14.9	9.9	8.0
	Manufacturing	40.4	48.2	41.2	45.7	46.4	38.0
	Services	24.5	21.9	32.0	39.4	43.7	54.0
Germany	Agriculture	3.2	2.1	1.3	1.1	0.9	0.8
	Manufacturing	48.0	41.1	37.6	30.7	29.9	29.2
	Services	48.8	56.8	61.1	68.2	69.2	69.9
UK	Agriculture	2.2	1.6	1.4	0.9	0.7	0.6
	Manufacturing	38.6	37.0	28.8	25.4	21.0	18.8
	Services	59.1	61.3	69.9	73.7	78.4	80.5
Russia	Agriculture				6.3	3.8	4.1
	Manufacturing				39.8	34.8	33.4
	Services				53.9	61.4	62.5

The data show the three economic sectors' (agriculture, manufacturing, services) shares in the GDP. In the USA, Germany, and the UK, the share of agriculture was already at the start of the 1970s just around two to three percent of the GDP. In China, agriculture accounted for 35.1 percent of the GDP at that time. Until 2020, the tendency of the decreasing share of agriculture and manufacturing and the increasing share of services continued constantly in the USA, Germany, the UK, and Russia. In China, there was a more uneven and different sectoral economic development. In the late 1970s, a simultaneous process of industrialisation and post-industrialisation started. Post-industrialisation means the rising importance of services and knowledge production. The share of agriculture in the Chinese GDP began to drop while the share of manufacturing and services grew. Manufacturing first grew to almost fifty percent of the GDP, then went back to around 45 percent, and in 2020 stood at 38 percent. This means that the share of manufacturing in the Chinese GDP first rose and has dropped since 2012. Since 1980, China's manufacturing sector's GDP share constantly increased. In 1980, it accounted for 21.9 percent of the Chinese GDP, and in 2020 for 54.0 percent. From the late 1970s until 2010, the Chinese economy underwent a simultaneous process of industrialisation and post-industrialisation that has since 2010 been transformed into a dominance of the post-industrialisation process.

Table 7.12 analyses the division of the world's largest Chinese and US TNCs into industries. The coding of industries was based on the available divisions used in the statistical data:

- Construction
- Digital: IT and software services, media, semiconductors, technology hardware and equipment, telecommunications services
- FIRE: banking, diversified financials, insurance
- Manufacturing: aerospace and defence, capital goods, consumer durables; food, drink and tobacco; materials
- Natural resources: oil and gas operations, utilities
- Pharmaceutical: chemicals, drugs and biotechnology

The data show that in the USA, financial companies (FIRE: finance, insurance, real estate) form the largest share of the number of TNCs. In China, manufacturing companies are dominant, followed by financial companies. In the USA, digital and media companies are very important. They account for the largest share of TNC's revenues and profits and the

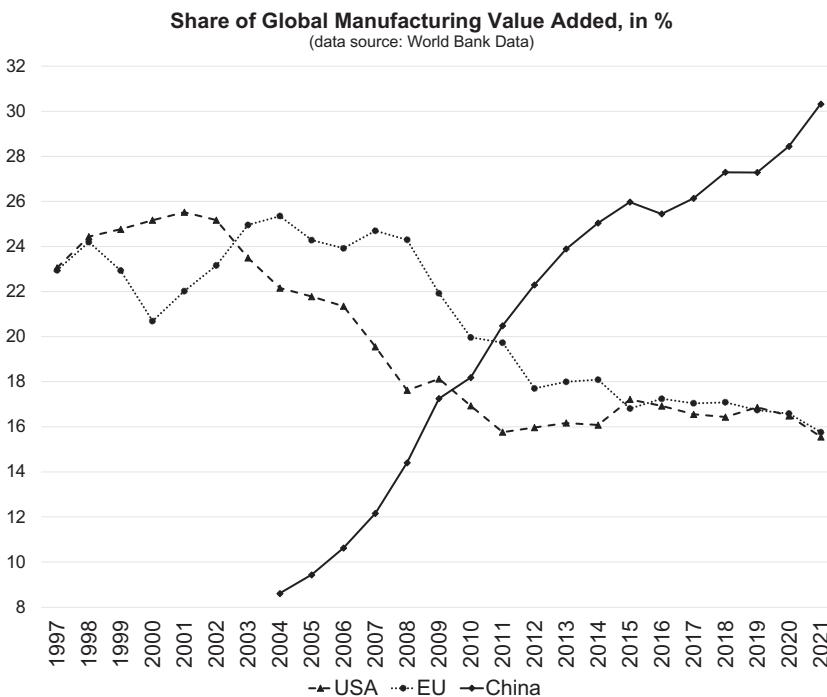
**Table 7.12: A division of the world's largest Chinese (including Hong Kong) and US transnational companies according to industries.** Data source: Forbes 2000, list for the year 2022 with industry classification, available at <https://data.world>

	China			USA		
	Companies	Revenues	Profits	Companies	Revenues	Profits
Construction	17.1%	21.4%	11.8%	2.7%	1.5%	1.2%
Digital and Media	8.3%	9.4%	8.9%	15.6%	17.7%	28.6%
FIRE	22.9%	24.6%	48.9%	21.6%	15.9%	26.1%
Manufacturing	24.9%	17.0%	14.3%	14.9%	12.4%	10.5%
Natural resources	6.3%	11.0%	6.4%	10.4%	10.3%	6.4%
Pharmaceutical	3.7%	2.0%	1.3%	7.9%	10.3%	7.4%

second largest share of the number of TNCs. In China, companies in the financial, construction, and manufacturing sectors are very important regarding the number of TNCs, the share of revenues, and the share of profits. Digital and media TNCs are less influential in China than in the USA. In China, they account for less than 10 percent of the total number of TNCs and their shares in the total TNC revenues and profits. In the USA, these shares are significantly larger. The data show that US transnational capital is predominantly financial and digital capital, and Chinese transnational capital is predominantly financial and industrial. China exports capital as part of projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative, as part of which Chinese transnational capital constructs infrastructures in other countries, which requires the investment of financial capital. The USA, in contrast, is stronger in global capitalism in terms of the export of digital capital. For example, the dominant Internet companies, such as Google, Amazon, and Facebook, are from the USA and have subsidiaries in many other countries.

### 7.5.2 *Global Manufacturing*

Figure 7.3 visualises the development of the USA's, the EU's, and China's share of global manufacturing value added.



**Figure 7.3:** The development of the USA's, the EU's, and China's share of global manufacturing value added

In 2000, with 25.2%, the USA controlled the world's largest share of manufacturing value added, followed by the EU with 20.7%. In 2021, China had become the dominant manufacturing country in the world, with a share of 30.3% of global manufacturing value added. The USA's share had declined to 15.6% and the EU's to 15.8%. The data show that one important aspect of China's integration into the capitalist world economy was the outsourcing of manufacturing labour to China. Combined with industrialisation processes, China became the world's largest manufacturing country. However, China's state capitalism is not simply industrial state capitalism. At the same time, it is a finance state capitalism: China is a large international creditor (see tables 7.11 and 7.12), whose credits far exceed its debt. Many of its transnational corporations are finance companies such as banks (see table 7.9).

### 7.5.3 *The Service Sector*

The service sector is a statistical remainder category used in economic statistics for all economic activities and products that lie outside of agriculture and manufacturing. It includes, for example, health care, education, retail, and digital services such as web development and software engineering.

Figure 7.4 visualises the development of the USA's, the EU's, and China's shares in the total value added of the global services sector.

The USA has continuously accounted for the world's largest share of value added in services. The EU's share has been a bit lower than the USA's and has decreased somewhat since 2008, which has to do with the rise of China's share. In 2021, China, after the USA and the EU accounted for the third largest share of global services value added. The key role of services in the economy has shaped China, the EU, the United States, and many other countries.

Financialisation, the increasing importance of finance capital, is another important feature of global capitalism. The next section gives attention to this phenomenon.

## 7.6 Finance Capital and International Debt

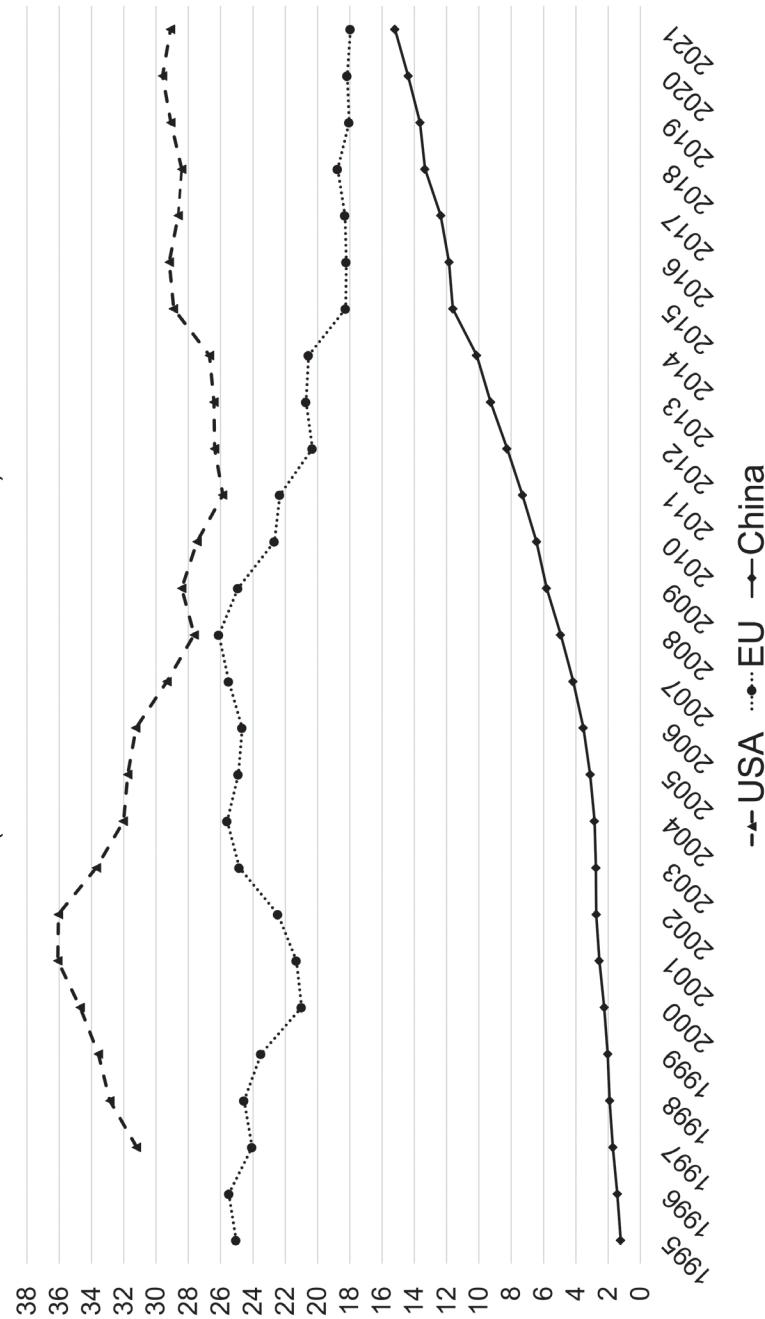
### 7.6.1 *The Debt Economy*

The total external debt of the world's middle- and low-income countries has constantly increased since the 1970s and stood in 2020 at US\$ 8.7 trillion (see table 7.13). Since 2000, this debt increased by a multiplication factor of 4.4 and since 1970 by a multiplication factor of 133.7.

Table 7.14 shows China's rise as an international creditor of poorer countries. From 2000 until 2020, the total money those poorer countries (middle- and low-income countries) owed to China increased by a multiplication factor of 30. Whereas the USA as a country has decreased the debt owed to it by poorer countries, concerning middle- and low-income countries, China is today the world's largest creditor country. The debt owed to China is comparable to the one owed to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank's International Development Association, or the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

## Share of Global Services Value Added, in %

(data source: World Bank Data)



**Figure 7.4:** The development of the USA's, the EU's, and China's share of global services value added

**Table 7.13: Total external debt (external debt stock) of middle- and low-income countries, in billion US\$.** Data source: World Bank International Debt Statistics (World Bank Data, accessed April 8, 2023).

Year	Debt (in billion US\$)	Percentage of combined GDP
2021	9,296	26.5%
2020	8,620	28.8%
2019	8,243	26.6%
2015	6,397	24.8%
2010	4,292	21.9%
2005	2,466	26.5%
2000	2,018	35.7%
1995	1,756	37.2%
1990	1,173	32.8%
1985	779	29.7%
1980	456	19.5%
1975	161	12.3%
1970	65	10.6%

**Table 7.14: Development of external debt of low- and middle-income countries to China, the USA, The World Bank's International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in billion US\$.** Data source: World Bank Data, World Bank International Debt Statistics, accessed April 8, 2023.

Year	China	USA	IMF	IBRD	IDA
2021	180	39	415	210	180
2015	108	52	111	149	131
2010	43	32	134	120	119
2005	8	35	70	92	122
2000	6	46	78	102	87
1995	3	71	57	99	72
1990	3	98	30	84	45
1985	2	105	35	41	24
1980	3	44	11	18	12
1975	1.5	26	4	8	5
1970	0.4	13	0.7	4	2

In 2020, poorer countries (middle- and low-income countries) owed 4.4 percent of their total debt to the World Bank, 2.6 percent to the IMF, 2.0 percent to China, and 0.4 percent to the USA.

In 2021, poorer countries (middle- and low-income countries) owed 4.2 percent of their total debt to the World Bank – International Development Association (IDA), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) – 4.5 percent to the IMF, 1.9 percent to China, and 0.4 percent to the USA. In 1985, they owed 13.5 percent of their total debt to the USA and 0.3 percent to China. In 2021, bondholders controlled 26.1 percent of poorer countries' external debt, namely US\$ 2.4 trillion. Bondholders were always important creditors. In 2000, they controlled 18.5 percent of poorer countries' external debt (source of all data in this paragraph: World Bank Data, International Debt Statistics). Bondholders are private financial and non-financial corporations and governments. Statistics are available for international debt securities issued as bonds (see table 7.15).

**Table 7.15: Holders of international debt securities in 2022, in billion US\$.** Data source: Bank for International Settlements (BIS) Statistics, <https://stats.bis.org>, accessed April 8, 2023

	Total	Corporations	Government	Other
<b>Total</b>	26,112	21,817	2,287	2,008
UK	2,013	2,995	18	0
Cayman Islands	2,689	2,689	0	0
USA	2,326	2,323	3	0
Netherlands	2,099	2,093	5	1
International organisations	2,003			
France	1,240	1,230	9	1
Germany	1,206	1,121	85	0
Canada	1,149	999	150	1
Ireland	960	945	15	0
Luxembourg	920	918	1	1
Italy	798	679	118	1
China (incl. Hong Kong and Macau)	605	556	49	0
Australia	549	547	2	0
Japan	521	514	7	0

In 2022, there were US\$ 2.6 trillion in international debt securities. Private corporations, primarily banks, controlled 83.6 percent, and governments controlled 8.8 percent. British corporations were the world's largest holders of international debt bonds. China was the world's twelfth largest location of international debt securities and held a value of international debt bonds larger than those of countries such as Australia, Japan, and Spain. The data show that Chinese corporations and the Chinese government are among the world's largest creditors to nation-states. China, together with Western corporations, governments, and international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, plays an important role in making up the world debt system that continues to indebt poor countries.

While the external debt of middle- and low-income countries stood at a high of 37.2 percent of their combined GDP in 1995, this value decreased to 21.9 percent in 2010 but increased again to 26.5 percent in 2021. The international debt economy has enriched the corporations and governments of a few countries and contributed to poorer countries' impoverishment. China does not play a dominant but important role in international financial debt. It has continuously increased its role and importance in global capital, including its debtor role.

### ***7.6.2 The Belt and Road Initiative***

China has created new banks and funds that provide loans to other countries as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a large-scale Chinese project to build and network infrastructures in other countries, including airports, bridges, dams, ports, powerplants, railroads, skyscrapers, telecommunications cables and networks, and tunnels. These banks and funds include the China-Africa Fund for Industrial Cooperation (CAFIC) (created in 2020), the African Regional Center of the New Development Bank (2017), the China-Brazil Fund (2017), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (2016), the Green Silk Road Fund (2015), the (BRICS) New Development Bank (2014), the Silk Road Fund (2014), the China-LAC Industrial Investment Fund (CLAI Fund) (2015), the Sino-Latin American Production Capacity Cooperation Investment Fund (2015), the Special Loan Programme for China-Latin America Infrastructure Project (2014), the China-CEE Investment Cooperation Fund (2012), the China-Eurasian Economic Cooperation Fund (2012), the Russia-China Investment Fund

(2012), the China Development Bank's Special Loan to African SMEs (2011), the China-ASEAN Investment Cooperation Fund (2010), the China-Africa Development Fund (2007). Also, the activities of the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China (both founded in 1994) were extended.

China wants to advance finance capital to foster private Chinese companies that create scientific and technological innovations, as well as investments abroad and loans to other countries as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. Advancing finance capital is an important aspect of China's global economic activities.

The overaccumulation of capital threatened China's construction industry. It has lots of fixed capital, such as steel, cement, and coal, that it cannot use domestically. China has tried to create a spatial fix to a looming crisis of its capital by exporting capital via the Belt and Road Initiative. 'China experienced, in short, a predictable problem of overinvestment in the built environment.'<sup>22</sup> Partly in order to overcome and counter the overaccumulation of capital in its construction industry, China created the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a large-scale capital export project where Chinese companies build infrastructures in other countries. Based on the work of David Harvey, Mehdi P. Amineh argues that the Belt and Road Initiative 'as a framework of China's capitalist expansion can be understood as specific spatial and geographical strategies to solve the overaccumulation and the limited space of accumulation at the national level'.<sup>23</sup>

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is also a method of transnationalising Chinese capital, turning domestic capital into transnational capital that is active abroad. For doing so, China also favours free trade and the creation of free trade agreements. Africa is a key location for the export and transnationalisation of Chinese capital in the BRI. The BRI is a method for the transnationalisation of Chinese capital, which includes exporting Chinese capital and fostering free trade agreements for importing commodities and resources cheaply to China. In 2022, 147 countries were part of the BRI, the relative majority of them (43 countries) located in Sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>24</sup> which shows that Africa is of particular importance for China's export of capital.

In its 'Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road', China outlines the Belt and Road Initiative's concept: the BRI wants to 'promote the economic prosperity of the countries along the Belt and Road', 'uphold the global free trade regime',

'help align and coordinate the development strategies of the countries along the Belt and Road, tap market potential in this region, promote investment and consumption, create demands and job opportunities, enhance people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and mutual learning among the peoples of the relevant countries, and enable them to understand, trust and respect each other and live in harmony, peace and prosperity', 'improve investment and trade facilitation, and remove investment and trade barriers for the creation of a sound business environment within the region and in all related countries', 'opening free trade areas', and 'ensure that the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement takes effect and is implemented'.<sup>25</sup>

The World Trade Organization (WTO) describes itself in the following manner:

The overall objective of the WTO is to help its members use trade as a means to raise living standards, create jobs and improve people's lives. The WTO operates the global system of trade rules and helps developing countries build their trade capacity. [...] The fundamental goal of the WTO is to improve the welfare of people around the world. The WTO's founding Marrakesh agreement recognizes that trade should be conducted with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment, increasing real income and expanding global trade in goods and services while allowing for the optimal use of the world's resources. [...] The system's overriding purpose is to help trade flow as freely as possible – provided there are no undesirable side effects – because this stimulates economic growth and employment and supports the integration of developing countries into the international trading system.<sup>26</sup>

The basic idea of both the BRI and the WTO is that free trade benefits everyone and increases wealth, employment, living standards, etc. The parallels between the two views of development are striking. The basic ideology underlying organisations such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO, as well as China's international development strategy, is that free trade, capital investments, fostering capitalist enterprise, and providing loans to poor countries and private companies in them are the best way of advancing poor countries' development. The criticism of this strategy has been that it advances capitalist development that propels polarisation between the rich and the poor as well as between capital and labour, creates a financial dependency of poor countries on developed countries, and creates debt traps that

these poor countries cannot escape so that they must hand over ownership of key infrastructures and parts of the public sector to foreign investors and banks. Another point of criticism is that foreign capital investments and loans make companies and infrastructures in poor countries dependent on external standards, software, hardware, and technologies, which means that constant payments for such resources have to be made, which means a transfer of value from poor countries to rich countries. There is also the criticism that foreign capital investments create profits for companies in rich countries by exploiting the labour in poor countries. Concerning free trade agreements and international trade between poor and rich countries, there is criticism that poor countries have lower levels of productivity, which makes it hard for them to compete on the world market, which results in them having to sell their commodities cheaply based on the prices and productivity levels set by companies in rich countries, which results in low wages and high exploitation of workers in poor countries.

As part of the Belt and Road Initiative, China builds infrastructures such as ports, airports, railways, roads, bridges, skyscrapers, tunnels, dams, power plants, telecommunication networks, and Internet cables. The experience shows that some poor countries have taken Chinese loans to fund such projects, which significantly increased their external debt which required them to hand over ownership of these infrastructures to Chinese companies.

The balance between the credits and debts of a country is called the International Investment Position (IIP). In 2023, China, followed by Japan and Germany, had the world's largest IIP surplus, while the USA, followed by the UK, India, and Brazil, had the world's largest IIP deficit.<sup>27</sup> While the USA was the world's largest debtor, China was the world's largest creditor.

In 2021, China controlled 33 percent of Angola's external debt, which accounted for 100.7 percent of the country's Gross National Income. China controlled 50.3 percent of Tonga's debt, 45.1% of Djibouti's, 34.4% of the Republic of Congo's, 36.5% of the Maldives', 38.1% of Vanuatu's, 36.3% of Samoa's, 30.4% of Lao PDR's, 20.2% of Cambodia's, 21.0% of Pakistan's, and 19.8% Kyrgyzstan's debt. Most of these countries have become more indebted since 2015. Comparing 2015 to 2021, the share of external debt in the GDP rose from 25.8% to 38.2% in Pakistan, from 60.1% to 100.7% in Angola, from 51.2% to 97.7% in Djibouti, from 26.6% to 86.8% in the Maldives, from 41.6% to 70.5% in the Republic of Congo, from 55.7% to 78.4% in Cambodia, from 84.5% to 97.2% in Lao PDR, and from 34.5% to

50.6% in Vanuatu.<sup>28</sup> There are a significant number of countries that are indebted, and a significant share of the debt is controlled by China.

Malik et al. (2021a) gathered data from 13,427 Chinese development projects and assessed the BRI based on these data. Here are some of their main findings:

Chinese state-owned lenders act as yield-maximizing surrogates of the state. Consequently, most of Beijing's overseas lending is provided on less generous terms than loans from OECD-DAC and multilateral creditors. The average loan from China has a 4.2% interest rate, a grace period of less than two years, and a maturity length of less than 10 years. [...] As Chinese state-owned lenders have taken on bigger projects and higher levels of credit risk, they have put in place stronger repayment safeguards. Whereas 31% of China's overseas lending portfolio benefited from credit insurance, a pledge of collateral, or a third-party repayment guarantee during the early 2000s, this figure now stands at nearly 60%. When the stakes are especially high, collateralization is Beijing's 'go-to' risk mitigation tool: 40 of the 50 largest loans from Chinese state-owned creditors to overseas borrowers are collateralized. [...] 42 countries now have levels of public debt exposure to China in excess of 10% of GDP. [...] 35% of the BRI infrastructure project portfolio has encountered major implementation problems, such as corruption scandals, labor violations, environmental hazards, and public protests. By comparison, only 21% of the Chinese government's infrastructure project portfolio outside of the BRI has encountered similar implementation problems. BRI infrastructure projects are taking substantially longer to implement than Chinese government-financed infrastructure projects undertaken outside of the BRI.<sup>29</sup>

The discussion shows that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a method of transnationalising Chinese capital and is part of 'imperialism' with Chinese characteristics.

## 7.7 Conclusion

This chapter asked: what does global capitalism's political economy look like today? We analysed economic aspects of global capitalism along several example dimensions: transnational corporations, capital export and capital import, structural economic transformations, finance capital, and international debt. We can now summarise this chapter's main findings:

- **Global economic development:**

Measured in terms of the share of the global GDP, in the period from 1970 until 2020, the USA and the EU were the two dominant global economic powers. The USA's share of global GDP declined from around 40% in the early 1960s and has stayed at a level of around one-quarter since the early 1980s. The EU's share has since 1970 fluctuated between twenty and thirty percent. Post-Soviet Russia has had strong economic growth for ten years starting in the late 1990s but has remained a smaller player in the world economy. Mainland China has since 2000 seen large economic growth, so that its share of the world GDP increased from 3.6% in 2000 to 18.4% in 2021.

- **Transnational corporations:**

The revenues of the world's largest 2,000 transnational corporations (TNCs) have, since the start of the Millennium, continuously accounted for around half of the global gross domestic product (GDP). A small number of large companies has very large economic power. The USA, China, and the EU are the countries and regions with the largest share of transnational corporations' headquarters. In the period from 2003 until 2021, the share of TNCs with headquarters in the USA in the world's largest 2,000 corporations decreased from 37.6% to 29.5%, while the share of Chinese TNCs increased from 2.5% to 17.6% (table 7.2). The global capitalist world system has become more multipolar. US-based capital and China-based capital are the dominant forces competing for influence and profits. In the early 2000s, capital headquartered in the USA, the EU-14 countries, and Japan were the main competitors in transnational capital accumulation. Twenty years later, the three main competitors were the USA, China, and the EU-14 countries. China has challenged the relatively dominant position of US capital in the capitalist world economy. The competition for political-economic hegemony has conflictual potentials.

- **Capital export:**

US capital dominated the foreign direct capital investment in the 1980s and 1990s. Since the early 2000s, transnational capital from the EU-14 countries has dominated capital exports. Since the late 1990s, Chinese capital has quickly gained importance in capital exports, and in the early 2020s, it was the third-largest force in foreign direct investment.

The most significant change since the 1970s has been the rise of transnational Chinese capital that in the 1970s and 1980s was hardly active in transnational capitalism and has, by the 2020s, become a major player in capital export.

- **Capital import:**

Concerning foreign direct investment inflows (the import of capital), the USA and the EU-14 countries have been the two most important regions in the period from the early 1980s until the early 2020s. The USA's role declined somewhat between 2000 and 2010 when the EU-14 countries became the world's dominant location for capital import. The USA caught up with the EU and became dominant again in 2016. Compared to the early 1980s, when almost no capital was exported to Mainland China, China has become an important destination for capital exports since the late 1990s.

- **Structural economic transformations:**

In Western countries such as the USA, Germany, and the UK, the share of manufacturing in the GDP has significantly decreased since the 1970s, while the share of the service sector has increased to a level of 70–80 percent. The agricultural sector's economic size has further diminished. The main structural transformation in the Chinese economy since the 1970s has been the decline of agriculture in value added and employment. The two major processes have been simultaneous industrialisation and post-industrialisation. Post-industrialisation has resulted in the service sector becoming more important. The Chinese economy underwent a simultaneous process of industrialisation and post-industrialisation that has since 2010 been transformed into a dominance of the post-industrialisation process. While many Western countries have experienced deindustrialisation, China has industrialised and simultaneously post-industrialised. The dominant transnational corporations headquartered in China are in the realms of finance, construction, and manufacturing. The dominant US TNCs can be found in the finance industry and the digital and media industries. One important aspect of China's integration into the capitalist world economy was the outsourcing of manufacturing labour to China. Combined with industrialisation processes, China became the world's largest manufacturing country. However, China's state capitalism is not simply industrial state capitalism. At the same time, it is also

finance state capitalism: China is a large international creditor whose credits far exceed its debt. Many of its transnational corporations are finance companies such as banks.

- **Finance capital and international debt:**

Partly in order to overcome and counter the overaccumulation of capital in its construction industry, China created the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a large-scale capital export project where Chinese companies build infrastructures in other countries. From 1970 until 2021, this debt increased by a multiplication factor of 133.7. The basic idea of both the BRI and the World Trade Organization (WTO) is that free trade benefits everyone and increases wealth, employment, living standards, etc. The basic ideology underlying organisations such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO, as well as China's international development strategy, is that free trade, capital investments, fostering capitalist enterprise, and providing loans to poor countries and private companies in them are the best way of advancing poor countries' development. The criticism of this strategy has been that it advances capitalist development that propels polarisation between the rich and the poor as well as between capital and labour, creates a financial dependency of poor countries on developed countries, and creates debt traps that these poor countries cannot escape so that they must hand over ownership of key infrastructures and parts of the public sector to foreign investors and banks.

- Partly in order to overcome and counter the overaccumulation of capital in its construction industry, China created the Belt and Road Initiative as a large-scale capital export project where Chinese companies build infrastructures in other countries. China, together with Western corporations, Western governments, and international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, plays an important role in making up the world debt system that continues to indebt poor countries.

### **7.7.1 *China and the USA as Decisive Factors in Future World Politics***

Although there were diplomatic conflicts between the USA and China over, for example, the US bombing of the embassy in Belgrade in 1999, the time of the two Clinton administrations (1993–2001) and the two George W. Bush administrations (2001–2009) were characterised by a focus on the

development of economic relations between the USA and China that by and large were seen as mutually beneficial. The Obama administration intensified diplomatic relations between China and the USA, especially concerning responses to the world economic crisis, global warming, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and humanitarian crises. Concerning Taiwan, the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations exported arms to Taiwan but at the same time committed to the One China Policy that practices strategic ambiguity towards Taiwan's political status and does not formally recognise Taiwan, which China under the presidency of Jiang Zemin (1993–2003) and Hu Jintao (2003–2013) considered sufficient.

Xi Jinping became the President of China in 2013. At that time, China's share of the global GDP had increased to 9.6 percent; it further rose to 18.0 percent in 2022.<sup>30</sup> Xi is not just more charismatic and authoritarian than his predecessors; he is also very conscious of China's power in global capitalism, which has its material foundations in China's economic power. Under Xi's rule, the cooperation of the BRICS countries has been consolidated, the Belt and Road Initiative was formed in 2013, China's ideology became more nationalistic, China accelerated its building of islands in the South China Sea, crushed the democracy movement in Hong Kong and established full political control over this region, interned Uyghurs in camps, extended and intensified the surveillance state, etc.

Under the Trump administration (2017–2021), the political relationship between China and the USA deteriorated. Trump did not feel obliged to the One China Policy and started a trade war with China that featured the mutual imposition of tariffs on various commodities. Competition and rivalry over military and commercial technologies intensified. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis created further political tensions between China and the USA when the two countries accused each other of being responsible for the creation and outbreak of the pandemic. We have seen the intensification of the political-economic rivalry between China and the USA in global capitalism. Both claim global economic, political, and ideological domination and leadership, which sets the two countries on a collision course. War between China and the USA and a new world war are not inevitable but have become more likely in recent years. There are material foundations of China's and the USA's conflicting interests concerning tensions over the control of economic resources in the world economy and political influence and control over territories. The pathway from political-economic rivalry to war is, however, not determined. Political-ideological

factors such as authoritarianism, fascism, and nationalism play an important role. In the end, the decisive factor is whether political leaders are willing or not to utilise war and world war as means of political economy.

The Biden administration (2021–2025) saw China as its major competitor. It defined Huawei and other Chinese tech companies as threats to the USA's national security. Political tensions heightened concerning Hong Kong, Taiwan, and human rights violations in Xinjiang. Concerning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the USA has, under Biden, been the main supplier of weapons to Ukraine, while China formally repeatedly issued calls for a peace process while at the same time meetings between Putin and Xi, such as Xi's state visit to Russia in March 2023 and Putin's state visit to China in October 2023, deepened the strategic alliance and cooperation between Russia and China.

US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in 2022 and a Chinese reconnaissance balloon traversing US airspace in early 2023 brought the political tensions to the point where the communication between the two countries' militaries broke down, which means that accidents and crisis situations could have easily resulted in military escalation. However, 2023 also saw the improvement of the diplomatic relations between the two countries after a meeting of US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Xi in China and a Xi/Biden summit at the APEC 2023 in San Francisco. The two countries readopted military-to-military communication and agreed that the two governments discuss AI-related issues and cooperate on tackling climate change.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, China agreed to curtail the export of the opioid fentanyl, which resulted in many drug overdoses in the USA. In a news conference, Biden said that China and the USA 'compete vigorously' but that both countries want to 'manage that competition responsibly so it doesn't veer into conflict or accidental conflict'.<sup>32</sup> China's state news agency Xinhua commented that the summit added 'stability to China-U.S. ties'<sup>33</sup> and that Xi and Biden 'agreed on several key areas of cooperation on Wednesday during a summit which both leaders perceived as a new starting point for stabilizing bilateral ties'.<sup>34</sup> Biden was more willing than Trump to engage in diplomatic communication with China and avoid military escalation between the two superpowers. History is, however, open and not determined in advance. We do not know how US and Chinese national and international politics will develop in the future and whether a war involving the two countries can be avoided.

The conflict between China and the USA is a manifestation of a new geopolitics in global capitalism where violence and threats of violence have become key political media. The main transformation of the capitalist world economy has since the 1970s been the rise of China as an important headquarters of transnational corporations that export capital internationally, as an international creditor, and as a transnational investor. There is heavy economic competition between the USA, European economies, and China in the capitalist world economy. The economy is political, which means that economic competition is often not only fought out by economic means such as markets, monopolies, technological innovation, the exploitation of labour, etc. Rather, the international political climate has become more polarised. War is a violent means for conquering territories that enable economic, political, and cultural-ideological power. There is the risk that economic competition and political polarisation in the capitalist world system turn into a new Cold War, a new arms race involving new weapons systems such as autonomous killer robots, military drones, AI-based weapons, quantum warfare, new generations of nuclear weapons, etc., and a new world war: a new world war would involve nuclear-armed countries, which is why it has the potential to annihilate humanity. Only history will show if politicians are wise enough to avoid the apocalypse.

## CHAPTER 8

# On Global (Digital) Capitalism's Political Economy: The Political and Military Dimension

### 8.1 Introduction

The task of this chapter is to analyse the political and military dimensions of global capitalism's political economy. It asks: how do the major powers in global capitalism understand contemporary international politics? What do their political and military strategies look like? The focus is on China, the United States, NATO, Russia, and the European Union. The chapter analyses these global powers' international political and military strategies. As part of this analysis, the chapter also gives attention to the role of digital technologies in political and military strategies.

Section 8.2 discusses the relationship between global capitalism and war today. For Sections 8.3–8.6 examine today's political and military strategies in global capitalism. First, the focus is on China (section 8.3), then on the United States and NATO (section 8.4), then on Russia (section 8.5), and finally on the European Union (section 8.6). Section 8.7 compares these global powers' political and military strategies. In section 8.8, some conclusions are presented.

Global politics is not necessarily based on rivalries, resource competition, and wars. Global capitalism as a global system of accumulation does, however, create win-loss-conditions where the accumulation of capital and power of one actor reduces the capital and power of others. Therefore, there are always political-economic tensions in global capitalism that, at specific bifurcation points, can escalate into bloc confrontations such as the Cold War, proxy wars, international wars, and world wars. Such confrontations are intensified when nationalists, right-wing authoritarians, or fascists who believe in violent responses to conflicts come to power and

control key positions. Contemporary world politics has seen such a polarisation. Such a polarity has the potential to result in a new world war.

In political and military confrontations, each side understands the political situation and their enemies and identifies certain strategies for reacting to it. In militarised and confrontational international politics, there are identified enemies and responses to enemies. In sections 8.3–8.6, we analyse political and military strategy documents that focus on a) the identification of enemies (sections 8.3.1, 8.4.1, 8.5.1, 8.6.1) and b) the response to these enemies (sections 8.3.2, 8.4.2, 8.5.2, 8.6.2).

The 28 documents that form the basis of the analysis are listed in table 8.1. Selected were military and political strategy papers and speeches of political leaders with a strong focus on foreign affairs.

First, we will focus on discussing global capitalism and war today.

**Table 8.1:** The military and political strategy documents analysed in this chapter

Document	Country/Power	Year
The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China: China's National Defense in the New Era. July 24, 2019.	China	2019
Xi Jinping: Speech at the Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China (CPC). July 1, 2021	China	2021
Xi Jinping: National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects. Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. October 16, 2022	China	2022
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China: The State of Democracy in the United States	China	2022
People's Republic of China: China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis	China	2023
Xi Jinping: Full Text of Xi's Signed Article on Russian Media	China	2023
Xi Jinping: Speech at the First Session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC). March 13, 2023	China	2023
Russian Federation and People's Republic of China: Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development	China, Russia	2023

Document	Country/Power	Year
NATO Artificial Intelligence Strategy	NATO	2021
NATO 2022 Strategic Concept.	NATO	2022
NATO'S Digital Transformation Implementation Strategy	NATO	2024
NATO's Revised Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy	NATO	2024
The White House: National Security Strategy	United States	2022
United States Department of Defense: National Defense Strategy of the United States of America	United States	2022
Joe Biden's State of the Union Address (2023)	United States	2023
Vladimir Putin: On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians	Russia	2021
Russia's Military Doctrine	Russia	2021
Russian Federation: Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation and Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization	Russia	2021
Vladimir Putin: Address by the President of the Russian Federation on February 21, 2022	Russia	2022
Vladimir Putin: Declaration of War on Ukraine	Russia	2022
Vladimir Putin: Vladimir Putin's Article for People's Daily Newspaper – Russia and China: A Future-Bound Partnership.	Russia	2023
Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation	Russia	2023
EU A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence	EU	2022
European Parliament Resolution on the Implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy	EU	2023
Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation	EU, NATO	2023
Emmanuel Macron: Speech in The Hague	EU	2023
Olaf Scholz: The Global Zeitenwende: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era.	EU	2023
Federal Government of Germany: <i>Robust. Resilient. Sustainable. Integrated Security for Germany. National Security Strategy.</i>	EU	2023

## 8.2 Global Capitalism and War Today

After the Second World War, a new world order was established where US capitalism was economically dominant. The Cold War between the West, dominated by the USA and its model of liberal-democratic capitalism, and

the Soviet Union and China, ruled by Stalinist state-capitalist systems, held centre stage in world politics. Ideologically, there was a conflict between liberal-democratic capitalism's possessive individualism and state-capitalism's authoritarian collectivism.

Since the mid-1960s, the USA's economic power was challenged, first by Japan and European economies. In the 1970s, the contradictions of Keynesian, Fordist capitalism exploded into a new world economic crisis. The reaction to it was the creation of global, neoliberal, flexible, digital capitalism. Many new transnational corporations (TNCs) emerged that outsourced labour globally to maximise profits, utilised global, flexible production technologies, and used digital production and communication technologies to organise themselves in a networked manner. There was also the globalisation of the neoliberal mode of regulation that propagated and fostered privatisation, commodification, wage repression, entrepreneurship, financialisation, and the policing of the poor. The Soviet Union collapsed as it could not compete with Western capitalism, which helped the globalisation of neoliberal global capitalism. Since the late 1970s, China has transformed from a Maoist-Stalinist state-capitalism into a capitalism with Chinese characteristics that has opened up its economy to the world market and the foreign direct investment of capital. China's productivity, combined economic wealth, working class, and importance in the world economy have grown rapidly. At the same time, its internal class contradictions have intensified.

Neoliberal global capitalism increased the crisis-proneness of societies, inequalities, and universal alienation.<sup>1</sup> The twenty-first century has been a succession of crises, such as the 9/11 crisis that brought about a vicious cycle of terror and war, the 2008 global financial crisis, migrant crises caused by humans displaced by war, poverty and natural disasters, the escalating global environmental crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, crises of the state and politics that brought about the expansion and intensification of authoritarianism, nationalism, and fascism, etc. The succession and interaction of crises polarised politics within nation-states and internationally. The competition for scarce economic resources shaken by crises intensified. World politics is polarised, especially between China, Russia, and associated countries (BRICS) on the one side and North America, the EU, and the UK on the other side. The interaction of the intensification of global capitalist competition and the intensification of authoritarianism, nationalism, and fascism advanced the likelihood of

the explosion of conflicts of interest into violence and war. Political actors across the globe have become more willing to resort to war as a political means. They have engaged in armament as part of the intensification of political polarisation.

Given that war as a political means and the use of the friend/enemy-logic have spread in global capitalism, a new world war has become more likely. Weapons of mass destruction are prevalent in global capitalism, which means that a new world war involving nuclear powers on both sides could very well be a nuclear war. Such a war would likely mean the end of humanity, societies, and life on Earth. The big risk of these developments is that global capitalism's antagonism explodes into absolute violence. The only hope is that the involved political actors do not become entirely irrational and see that the use of nuclear weapons by one actor will result in nuclear retaliation strikes and an all-out nuclear war that annihilates everything. If they, however, do not care about their own lives in order to kill others, nuclear Armageddon could very well take place. Given the fact that no one can win a new world war and that its loss will mean the loss of life on Earth, the rational political hope is that the moment will come when all sides start engaging in the disarmament of weapons and ideology.

In sections 8.3–8.6, we will analyse political and military strategies in global capitalism with a focus on China (8.3), the United States (8.4), Russia (8.5), and the European Union (8.6). We will start with a focus on China.

## 8.3 Political and Military Strategies in Global Capitalism: China

### 8.3.1 *China's Analysis of its Enemies*

Xi Jinping argues that the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been bullied 'by foreign powers' and reduced to 'a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society'.<sup>2</sup> The Communist Party of China would have worked hard and would continue to work hard to 'put an end to China's national humiliation' and 'build China into a great country'. Xi stresses that China aims to be the world's primary economic, political, military, and cultural superpower. China should, according to Xi, 'play a greater role in global governance'.<sup>3</sup>

Xi often does not directly name those whom he sees as China's opponents and enemies; instead, he uses the passive form to say that something

has been done to China, leaving out the subject. For example, there are ‘external attempts to blackmail, contain, blockade, and exert maximum pressure on China’.<sup>4</sup> On one occasion, Xi, in March 2023, referred directly to the USA as China’s enemy: ‘Western countries led by the U.S. have implemented comprehensive containment, encirclement and suppression against us, bringing unprecedented severe challenges to our country’s development’.<sup>5</sup> A PRC government white paper on China’s national defence says that the USA has ‘adopted unilateral policies’ and that there is ‘growing hegemonism, power politics, unilateralism’.<sup>6</sup>

In a report on ‘The State of Democracy in the United States’, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China says that the USA’s ‘hegemonic, domineering and bullying acts seriously impede the development of true multilateralism’ and that the USA’s move to ‘brand oneself as democracy while others as autocracies is in itself an act contrary to democracy’.<sup>7</sup> The Ministry does not criticise Russia for attacking Ukraine but instead criticises the USA by claiming that ‘the US kept fueling the flames and made a huge fortune from the war business including the arms industry and the energy sector’.<sup>8</sup>

At the time of his visit to Russia in March 2023, Xi published an article in which he did not criticise Russia for the war in Ukraine. He writes that there should be ‘rational and results-oriented dialogue and consultation’ for solving the conflict and that China is ‘objective and impartial’.<sup>9</sup> In the same article, however, Xi praises the ‘lasting friendship and win-win cooperation’ between Russia and China, says the two countries ‘support each other’s development and rejuvenation’, both practice ‘the common values of humanity’, and that the two countries enter a ‘strategic partnership’. Not mentioning the USA directly, Xi, in the same article, writes that ‘our world is confronted with complex and intertwined traditional and non-traditional challenges, damaging acts of hegemony, domination and bullying.’ Suppose other countries are criticised as aggressors, but Russia is, at the same time, only referred to as a friend, cooperator, and partner who fosters humanity. In that case, there are doubts about how much impartiality and objectivity there really are. In a 2019 national defence white paper, the PRC government writes that the ‘military relationship between China and Russia continues to develop at a high level, enriching the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era’.<sup>10</sup>

### 8.3.2 *China's Response to its Enemies*

Xi says China is dedicated 'to peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit, we will strive to safeguard world peace and development', 'pursues a defensive national defense policy', that 'China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansionism', and that it 'respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries'.<sup>11</sup> It can be noted here that after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which is a sovereign country, China did not formally denounce this move and moved towards a closer strategic partnership with Russia. While stressing that China is peaceful, Xi also uses martial rhetoric. For example, he says that China has an 'indomitable fighting spirit' and that it is building up 'security capacity in key areas'. The danger would be that '[e]xternal attempts to suppress and contain China may escalate at any time'.<sup>12</sup>

The internal/external-question of national sovereignty and defence is a very contested issue. Whereas the PRC sees Taiwan as an internal territory, others see it as external to the PRC. Such disagreement can spur political and military conflict. Given that the USA has given security guarantees to Taiwan in the case of a Chinese military attack, the Taiwan question has the potential to result in a large-scale war. These security guarantees are defined in the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, which says that 'the United States will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability'.<sup>13</sup> The Taiwan Relations Act has tried to keep Taiwan from declaring its independence from the PRC and the PRC from taking military steps to unify the PRC and Taiwan. Concerning Taiwan, Xi says that 'China's complete reunification is a shared aspiration of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation as well as the essence of national rejuvenation' and that the People's Republic of China must 'resolutely oppose foreign interference and separatist activities aimed at "Taiwan independence"'.<sup>14</sup>

Xi argues that for China, it is important to upgrade its military: 'We should comprehensively promote the modernization of our national defense and our armed forces, and build the people's military into a great wall of steel that can effectively safeguard our nation's sovereignty, security and the interests of our development'.<sup>15</sup> Xi announced that if necessary, the PRC would use force to reunify Taiwan and the PRC: 'Taiwan is China's Taiwan. Resolving the Taiwan question is a matter for the Chinese, a matter that must be resolved by the Chinese. We will continue to strive

for peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and the utmost effort, but we will never promise to renounce the use of force, and we reserve the option of taking all measures necessary.<sup>16</sup> A PRC national defence white paper says that the People's Liberation Army 'will resolutely defeat anyone attempting to separate Taiwan from China and safeguard national unity at all costs'.<sup>17</sup>

China says that it is committed to 'no first use of nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances' and 'pursues a nuclear strategy of self-defense'.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to Russia, China has not threatened the use of nuclear weapons against other countries.

In its twelve points on the Ukraine war, China says that nuclear weapons 'must not be used and nuclear wars must not be fought. The threat or use of nuclear weapons should be opposed'.<sup>19</sup> This statement is an indirect criticism of Putin. But it needs to be noted that neither here nor elsewhere in the statement is Putin criticised directly for invading Ukraine and threatening the use of nuclear weapons.

In his speech on the occasion of the Communist Party of China's centenary, which was part of a big public event on July 1, 2021, Xi's dual stress on peacefulness and preparation for war was a central element:

The Chinese nation does not carry aggressive or hegemonic traits in its genes. [...] China has always worked to safeguard world peace, contribute to global development, and preserve international order. [...] We will work to build a new type of international relations and a human community with a shared future, promote high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative through joint efforts, and use China's new achievements in development to provide the world with new opportunities. The Party will continue to work with all peace-loving countries and peoples to promote the shared human values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom. We will continue to champion cooperation over confrontation, to open up rather than closing our doors, and to focus on mutual benefits instead of zero-sum games. We will oppose hegemony and power politics, and strive to keep the wheels of history rolling toward bright horizons. We Chinese are a people who uphold justice and are not intimidated by threats of force. As a nation, we have a strong sense of pride and confidence. We have never bullied, oppressed, or subjugated the people of any other country, and we never will. By the same token, we will never allow any foreign force to bully, oppress, or subjugate us. Anyone

who would attempt to do so will find themselves on a collision course with a great wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people.<sup>20</sup>

It has been a contested question whether the proper English translation of this passage is that Xi spoke of an aggressor that will be on 'a collision course with a great wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people' or of aggressors who will have their 'heads broken and blood flowing'. The problem is over the question of how to translate the phrase 头破血流 (tóupòxuěliú) that Xi used in this passage.<sup>21</sup>

Literally, the term means that one gets one's head broken so that blood is flowing. The phrase is figuratively used to say that one is weakened or injured, so it does not necessarily imply rivers of blood. The *New York Times* translated the sentence in the following manner: 'Whoever nurses delusions of doing that will crack their heads and spill blood on the Great Wall of steel built from the flesh and blood of 1.4 billion Chinese people.'<sup>22</sup> The official Chinese translation published by the Chinese news agency Xinhua and used in Xi Jinping's book *The Governance of China Volume IV* is, 'Anyone who would attempt to do so will find themselves on a collision course with a great wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people.'<sup>23</sup> So, there are quite different translations, and the question is whether Xi Jinping threatened to use war or not. The phrase he used is ambiguous.<sup>24</sup> There were public debates on how it should be interpreted and translated.<sup>25</sup>

A PRC government white paper on national defence argues that 'the application of cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum information, big data, cloud computing and the Internet of Things is gathering pace in the military field' and that 'a prevailing trend to develop long-range precision, intelligent, stealthy or unmanned weaponry and equipment. War is evolving in form towards informationized warfare, and intelligent warfare is on the horizon.'<sup>26</sup> The implication is that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) needs to update its weapon systems with the help of AI, big data, and other digital technologies. The PLA 'is in urgent need of improving its informationization' and bringing about 'the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) with Chinese characteristics'.

In April 2024, China created the PLA's Information Support Force, a subdivision of the PLA focused on networked and information warfare. 'Xi stressed that the information support force is a new, strategic branch of the military and a key pillar in coordinating the construction and application of the network information system. It will play a crucial role in advancing

the Chinese military's high-quality development and competitiveness in modern warfare. [...] Xi urged the force to integrate deeply into the Chinese military's joint operation system, carry out information support operations in a precise and effective manner, and facilitate military operations in various directions and fields.<sup>27</sup> The creation of the Information Support Force is part of China's attempt to advance AI-based warfare, which requires specialist expertise and dedicated resources.

Xi says China will achieve 'the goals for the centenary of the People's Liberation Army in 2027'.<sup>28</sup> These goals are to modernise the army and create a strong Chinese military. China aims at 'more quickly elevating our people's armed forces to world-class standards'. This plan includes the digitalisation of warfare, the use of Artificial Intelligence in weapon systems, and the development of autonomous weapon systems: 'We will continue integrated development of the military through mechanization, informatization, and the application of smart technologies and work faster to modernize military theory, organizational forms, personnel, and weaponry and equipment. [...] We will establish a strong system of strategic deterrence, increase the proportion of new-domain forces with new combat capabilities, speed up the development of unmanned, intelligent combat capabilities, and promote coordinated development and application of the network information system.'

Having focused on China, we will, in the next section, analyse the United States' and NATO's political and military strategies.

## 8.4 Political and Military Strategies in Global Capitalism: The United States and NATO

### 8.4.1 *The United States' and NATO's Analyses of their Enemies*

In 2022, the US government under Joe Biden passed a new National Security Strategy.<sup>29</sup> It says that there is a 'competitive international environment' with 'heightening geopolitical competition, nationalism and populism'<sup>30</sup> and a 'competition between democracies and autocracies'.<sup>31</sup> Authoritarian countries would be 'waging or preparing for wars of aggression, actively undermining the democratic political processes of other countries, leveraging technology and supply chains for coercion and repression, and exporting an illiberal model of international order'.<sup>32</sup>

In the following sentences and paragraphs, it becomes evident that the USA primarily speaks about Russia and the People's Republic of China. The actual or potential references to war are the Ukrainian War and a potential war between China and Taiwan. The Strategy also says that Iran and North Korea are part of the autocracies that advance an illiberal international order.<sup>33</sup> The USA argues in its 2022 National Security Strategy that China and Russia 'seek to remake the international order to create a world conducive to their highly personalized and repressive type of autocracy'.<sup>34</sup>

The Biden administration argues that there is a global conflict between democracies and autocracies. The world's main conflict would be about what political model is globally dominant. It is undoubtedly true that there is a major difference between the ways that countries such as Russia and China on the one side and the USA and EU countries are governed on the other side. However, world politics is not just about politics but also about the political economy. There are political and military conflicts that also have an economic dimension. There certainly is also a conflict over economic hegemony in the world between competing models of capitalism, such as the USA's neoliberal capitalism, the EU's social market capitalism, China's authoritarian state capitalism, and Russia's oligarchic authoritarian state capitalism.

The Biden administration's 2022 National Security Strategy does not much emphasise the economic aspects of international rivalry. To be fair, one must say that there are passages where such features of global conflicts are clearly highlighted. For example, the USA says its 'national interest' is 'to protect the security of the American people; to expand economic prosperity and opportunity; and to realize and defend the democratic values at the heart of the American way of life'.<sup>35</sup> It is evident here that the USA stresses the importance of 'expanding' its 'economic prosperity', which means it aims to secure spheres of influence for US capital investment and international commodity trade. The major political-economic conflict today is between the USA and China, which the USA clearly acknowledges in its National Security Strategy when saying that the PRC 'is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it'.<sup>36</sup>

Democracy in the USA and the EU is far from perfect. Right-wing authoritarians such as Donald Trump have come to power and have threatened democracy. Democracy in the USA and the EU have thus far also been resilient enough to challenge threats to the abolishment

of democracy, such as the attempted coup d'état by Trump followers on January 6, 2021. While it is possible to voice oppositional political views in the EU and the USA without being imprisoned, opponents of Putin, such as Alexei Navalny, have been poisoned, imprisoned, and killed. In China, the one-party rule has been enshrined in the constitution in 2018.

In 2018, the Constitution of China was amended. One sentence of Article 1 was changed from 'The socialist system is the basic system of the People's Republic of China'<sup>37</sup> to 'The socialist system is the basic system of the People's Republic of China. The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics'.<sup>38</sup> Article 79 was amended so that the sentence that China's President 'shall serve no more than two consecutive terms' was deleted, which enables Xi Jinping to, in principle, remain President indefinitely until he dies. The leadership of the Communist Party and an extremely powerful President without term limits were in 2018 defined as the central feature of Chinese socialism. China thereby defined itself in its Constitution as a centralised, authoritarian form of rule. The constitutional amendment defines Party rule, not the rule of the people and workers, as the 'defining feature' of socialism in China. 'The leadership of the Party is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics and constitutes the greatest strength of this system'.<sup>39</sup>

In his 2023 State of the Union Address, Joe Biden said that 'with President Xi [...] we seek competition, not conflict' and that the US government is 'investing to make America stronger' and investing 'in industries that will define the future, that China intends to be dominating'.<sup>40</sup> It becomes evident that there is geopolitical competition between the USA and China regarding the dominance of the world economy.

In the 2023 US National Security Strategy, China aims to become 'the world's leading power' that is 'using its technological capacity and increasing influence over international institutions to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model'.<sup>41</sup> Concerning Taiwan, the Biden administration says that it does 'not support Taiwan independence', is committed to the 'One China Policy', supports 'Taiwan's self-defense', and maintains the 'capacity to resist any resort to force or coercion against Taiwan'.<sup>42</sup> The Biden administration says it will 'work with the PRC' to overcome global problems and 'solve great challenges'.<sup>43</sup> NATO, just like the USA, sees China as practising 'coercive policies' that 'challenge our interests, security and values' and says that China's 'malicious hybrid and

cyber operations and its confrontational rhetoric and disinformation target Allies and harm Alliance security'.<sup>44</sup>

While China defines Taiwan as Chinese territory, some forces in Taiwan argue for independence from China. The One China Policy that the USA and other countries pursue says that the PRC is the sole legal government of China and acknowledges but does not recognise that the Chinese government's position is that Taiwan is a part of China. The One China Policy has enabled Taiwan to have a relatively independent political economy and to become an important player in global capitalism. China sees other countries' intensifying relations with Taiwan as a foreign intervention in inner Chinese affairs. Given that the USA has given Taiwan security guarantees against a military attack by the PRC, the Taiwan question has the potential to result in a war of the People's Republic of China against the USA, which could result in a new world war. There is a political-economic conflict over whether Taiwan is politically and economically more oriented towards China or the West. The current status quo does not give either/or but a both/and answer to this question.

In the light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the USA says that 'Russia now poses an immediate and persistent threat to international peace and stability' because it pursues 'an imperialist foreign policy',<sup>45</sup> violates the UN Charter,<sup>46</sup> and disrespects other countries' 'territorial integrity' and 'sovereignty'.<sup>47</sup>

In its 2022 *Strategic Concept*, NATO says that Russia's 'war of aggression against Ukraine has shattered peace and gravely altered our security environment', that there are 'Russian aggressive actions against its neighbours and the wider transatlantic community', and that a 'strong, independent Ukraine is vital for the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area'.<sup>48</sup> 'The Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace. The Russian Federation has violated the norms and principles that contributed to a stable and predictable European security order. We cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity'.<sup>49</sup> NATO sees Russia as the key threat to peace in Europe and therefore speaks of Russia as 'the most significant and direct threat'.<sup>50</sup>

The USA says it wants to 'avoid a world in which competition escalates into a world of rigid blocs. We do not seek conflict or a new Cold War. Rather, we are trying to support every country, regardless of size or strength, in exercising the freedom to make choices that serve their interests. This is a critical difference between our vision, which aims to

preserve the autonomy and rights of less powerful states, and that of our rivals, which does not.<sup>51</sup> Since the 2010s, world politics has become more polarised. Russia and China have become strategic allies opposed to the West economically and politically. China has become economically more powerful and politically more influential. Authoritarianism has become more important in many parts of the world and countries. Nationalism has become a major force in world politics. When capitalist economic competition, authoritarianism, and nationalism come together, the threat of a large-scale war increases drastically.

Attempts to disrupt democratic elections by spreading fake news online have accompanied the polarisation of world politics. The USA speaks of ‘information manipulation operations’. It says it ‘will act decisively to defend, and deter disruptions to our democratic processes, and we will respond to future interference using all appropriate tools of national power.<sup>52</sup> It says that it ‘will stand against digital authoritarianism<sup>53</sup> and will protect its ‘critical infrastructure [...] from power to pipeline’ that is ‘increasingly digital’ and vulnerable to ‘cyberattacks’ that ‘have been used by countries, such as Russia, to undermine countries’ ability to deliver services to citizens and coerce populations.<sup>54</sup> The USA 2022 National Security Strategy shows that the polarisation of world politics also has a digital dimension where it takes on the form of a cyberconflict over the control of the Internet and the use of digital technologies and the Internet as weapons.

#### ***8.4.2 The United States’ and NATO’s Responses to their Enemies***

In its 2022 National Security Strategy, the USA says it will ‘modernize and strengthen our military so it is equipped for the era of strategic competition with major powers.<sup>55</sup> ‘By modernizing our military, pursuing advanced technologies, and investing in our defense workforce, we will have strengthened deterrence in an era of increasing geopolitical confrontation, and positioned America to defend our homeland, our allies, partners, and interests overseas, and our values across the globe.<sup>56</sup> Like other powers in polarising world politics, the USA is also advancing armament, enhancing the material foundations of a new world war.

The USA says that it is ‘investing in a range of advanced technologies including applications in the cyber and space domains, missile defeat capabilities, trusted artificial intelligence, and quantum systems, while

deploying new capabilities to the battlefield in a timely manner'.<sup>57</sup> Given China's nuclear armament, the USA says that by 'the 2030s, the United States for the first time will need to deter two major nuclear powers, each of whom will field modern and diverse global and regional nuclear forces'.<sup>58</sup> Nuclear deterrence and armament are not phenomena of the past but continue to be advanced, which makes a new Cold War more likely. China increased the number of its nuclear warheads from 240 in 2010 to 410 in 2023.<sup>59</sup>

The USA also says that it will always stand by its 'NATO and bilateral treaty allies' against 'aggression and intimidation', which includes deterring 'further Russian aggression in Europe'.<sup>60</sup> The USA supports 'Ukraine in its fight for freedom'.<sup>61</sup> It sees the danger that a weakened Russia will rely 'on nuclear weapons', which the USA will 'not allow'.<sup>62</sup> 'America will not hesitate to use force when necessary to defend our national interests. But we will do so as the last resort'.<sup>63</sup> It is unpredictable what will happen if Russia uses tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine. It is likely that the USA, as a response, will bomb Russia's military infrastructure with conventional weapons. If Russia then responds by using strategic nuclear weapons, an all-out nuclear war is likely to be the result. Russia's use of tactical nuclear weapons could trigger a process that destroys life on Earth. In its 2022 National Defense Strategy, the USA says that the use of nuclear weapons would 'create the potential for uncontrolled escalation'.<sup>64</sup> NATO stresses that the 'strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States, are the supreme guarantee of the security of the Alliance'.<sup>65</sup>

Although NATO says that it aims at 'a world without nuclear weapons',<sup>66</sup> it is evident in its 2022 *Strategic Concept* that it perceives intensified international threats and an increased political polarisation in world politics, not least in the light of Russia's attack on Ukraine and China's closer partnership with Russia, which has made a new arms race and a new world war more likely.

In its 2022 *Strategic Concept*, NATO says that its core task is to 'deter, defend, contest and deny' attacks against NATO member countries and to 'defend every inch of Allied territory'.<sup>67</sup> Given that NATO identifies increased threats in the international political environment, it argues that it plans to update its military capacities both online and offline: 'We will enhance our ability to operate effectively in space and cyberspace to prevent, detect, counter and respond to the full spectrum of threats, using all available tools'.<sup>68</sup>

In its *2021 Artificial Intelligence Strategy*, NATO argues that AI is a key technology in the future of military operations. It says that it encourages ‘the development and use of AI in a responsible manner for Allied defence and security purposes’.<sup>69</sup> ‘Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing the global defence and security environment. It offers an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen our technological edge but will also escalate the speed of the threats we face. This foundational technology will likely affect the full spectrum of activities undertaken by the Alliance in support of its three core tasks; collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security.’<sup>70</sup> NATO identifies five principles of what it terms the ‘NATO Principles of Responsible Use for AI in Defence’, namely that AI use should be a) lawful, b) responsible and accountable, c) explainable and traceable, d) reliable, e) governable, and f) feature bias mitigation.<sup>71</sup> It remains vague what these principles are concretely. For example, there is no precise specification of whether NATO aims at building and using AI-based autonomous weapons systems that kill autonomously from human control. Concerning the governability of AI, NATO says that humans should be able to intervene, but again, it remains vague what this actually means: ‘AI applications will be developed and used according to their intended functions and will allow for: appropriate human-machine interaction; the ability to detect and avoid unintended consequences; and the ability to take steps, such as disengagement or deactivation of systems, when such systems demonstrate unintended behaviour.’<sup>72</sup> In its *2024 Revised Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy*, NATO reaffirms the importance of using AI for military purposes, saying that it is ‘vital for NATO to use these technologies, where applicable, as soon as possible’.<sup>73</sup>

Besides the military use of AI, NATO stresses the importance of data-centric warfare. In its *2024 Digital Transformation Implementation Strategy*, NATO stresses that supremacy on the battlefield requires ‘the unencumbered, resilient flow of data stemming from diverse but integrated sources’ and that NATO ‘needs data-centric, inter-connected systems’.<sup>74</sup>

NATO also stresses the importance of ‘a stronger and more capable European defence that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security’.<sup>75</sup> It becomes evident here that the Russian attack on Ukraine has not achieved Putin’s stated goal of pushing back NATO advancement in Europe but has resulted in European countries’ fear of Russian attacks, which in turn has advanced armament and plans to upgrade European armies enormously. For example, Sweden and Finland announced their

plans to join NATO in May 2022, shortly after the invasion. Finland joined NATO in April 2023, which increased the length of the NATO/Russian border from 1,215 kilometres by 1,340 kilometres to more than 2,500 kilometres.

The USA says it aims 'to deter cyber attacks from state and non-state actors and will respond decisively with all appropriate tools of national power to hostile acts in cyberspace, including those that disrupt or degrade vital national functions or critical infrastructure'.<sup>76</sup> This passage shows that the Internet is embedded in political economy and military conflicts. It is one of the territories of military and political-economic conflict.

In its 2022 National Defense Strategy, the USA says that it 'will develop new capabilities', which include, among other weapons, 'autonomous systems',<sup>77</sup> the modernisation of the 'nuclear forces, nuclear command, control, and communications, and the nuclear weapon production enterprise'<sup>78</sup>, and the integration of 'our data, software, and artificial intelligence efforts and speed their delivery to the warfighter'.<sup>79</sup> Given the increased polarisation of world politics, the USA aims to advance its military power by integrating a variety of weapons with the help of digital technologies and creating AI-based autonomous weapon systems.

Besides developing AI-based weapon systems and other new weapons, the USA, just like other nuclear powers, also does not rule out the use of nuclear weapons. It says that '*the fundamental role of nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the United States, our Allies, and partners. The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its Allies and partners.*'<sup>80</sup> The USA sees nuclear weapons as a means of deterrence against Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran. The danger is that a new nuclear arms race emerges in the climate of global political polarisation.

The difference between Russia and the USA concerning nuclear weapons is that the Biden administration does not actively threaten to use nuclear weapons, while Putin has, since the start of the war in Ukraine, again and again, issued such a threat. Donald Trump, in his first term as US President, boasted that he has a nuclear button that 'is a much bigger & more powerful' one than the one of other nuclear powers and that this 'Button works'.<sup>81</sup> Concerning Putin's threats to use nuclear weapons, Trump says that the USA has nuclear submarines that are 'the most powerful machines ever built' and to Putin he would threaten to 'send them over' if he mentioned the use of nuclear weapons 'one more time'.<sup>82</sup> Trump,

just like Putin, threatens to use nuclear weapons, which means that if he becomes US president for a second time, unpredictable right-wing authoritarians controlling nuclear weapons would be in power in multiple parts of the world, which would further increase the likelihood of a nuclear war.

After focusing on the United States and NATO, we will analyse Russia's political and military strategies in the next section.

## 8.5 Political and Military Strategies in Global Capitalism: Russia

### 8.5.1 *Russia's Analysis of its Enemies*

Van Herpen characterises Putin's rule of Russia as a radical right-wing regime that 'combines elements of Bonapartism, "classical" inter-war era fascism (especially the Mussolinian variant), and modern Berlusconist populism'.<sup>83</sup> These elements include ultra-nationalism, 'aggressive foreign policy and expansionism',<sup>84</sup> 'the macho style of the leader and a disregard for human rights',<sup>85</sup> the operation of 'a repressive secret police',<sup>86</sup> the state's modernisation of the army, the embrace of economic globalisation, personal enrichment, and 'links between the state bureaucracy and organized crime'.<sup>87</sup>

Taylor analyses what he terms Putinism as the belief 'in both the importance of a strong state and the necessity of Russia retaining its status as a great power in a dangerous and competitive international system'; there is a focus on 'order, unity, and state power over individual freedoms or societal interests'.<sup>88</sup> According to this view, elements of Putinism include great power statism, anti-Westernism, anti-Americanism, conservatism, anti-liberalism, control, order, anti-pluralism, loyalty, hypermasculinity, humiliation, resentment, and the politics of fear.<sup>89</sup>

Putin's dream and goal is to recreate a Great Russia. His politics is ultimately driven by nationalism. This circumstance becomes evident in Putin's essay 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians',<sup>90</sup> which he wrote and published during the COVID-19 pandemic. He argues that Russians and Ukrainians are one people because 'Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are all descendants of Ancient Rus, which was the largest state in Europe'.<sup>91</sup> He claims that first, the Polish elite and intellectuals living on the territory of today's Russia started to claim that there are the 'Ukrainian people as a nation separate from the Russians'. Later, this claim

would have been advanced by the Austro-Hungarians. For Putin, the idea of Ukrainian nationhood is a foreign invention by 'foreign forces' directed against Russia. He writes that these forces aim to give 'the full control of Ukraine to external forces'. For Putin, Russia is a nation united by religion, language, blood, history, traditions, spirit, and culture that includes Ukraine. 'Our spiritual, human and civilizational ties formed for centuries and have their origins in the same sources, they have been hardened by common trials, achievements and victories. Our kinship has been transmitted from generation to generation. It is in the hearts and the memory of people living in modern Russia and Ukraine, in the blood ties that unite millions of our families.'<sup>92</sup>

Putin says that Lenin continued the policies of the 'external forces' and planted the 'dangerous time bomb' of a 'parade of sovereignties' that 'at the state level' created 'three separate Slavic peoples: Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian, instead of the large Russian nation'. The Bolsheviks 'dreamt of a world revolution that would wipe out national states. That is why they were so generous in drawing borders and bestowing territorial gifts.' The Bolsheviks would have undertaken efforts 'to detach from Russia its historical territories'.<sup>93</sup> Lenin would have artificially created Ukraine, which is why Putin speaks of 'Vladimir Lenin's Ukraine'.<sup>94</sup>

The USA, the EU, and recent Ukrainian governments would have played 'a dangerous geopolitical game aimed at turning Ukraine into a barrier between Europe and Russia, a springboard against Russia' and would have advanced 'blatant aggressive Russophobia' that makes 'Russians in Ukraine' believe 'that Russia is their enemy' and wants to create 'an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia', which would be 'comparable in its consequences to the use of weapons of mass destruction against us'.<sup>95</sup>

Putin's basic belief is that 'Russia was robbed'<sup>96</sup> of Ukraine by the Poles, the Austrians, the Nazis, NATO, the EU, the USA, and pro-Western Ukrainian governments. In his view, Russia has been a constant victim of forces trying to destroy it.

In Ukraine, language is politically highly contested. According to the Census 2001, 67.5 percent of the population indicated Ukrainian and 29.6 percent Russian as their native language.<sup>97</sup> In the two Eastern oblasts (provinces) Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as Crimea, Russian was the dominant native language. The population of these three regions accounted for 19.5 percent of the Ukrainian population.<sup>98</sup> In Crimea, the

share of those indicating their native language as Russian was 76.6%. In Donetsk, it was 74.9%, in Luhansk 68.8%, and in Crimea 76.6%.<sup>99</sup> In 2012, a law was passed that granted minority languages, including Russian, the right to be used in public institutions. After the Euromaidan protests led to the ousting of then-President Viktor Yanukovych, who had opted for aligning Ukraine more with Russia than the EU, the law was repealed. In 2019, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law that defines Ukrainian as a state language and makes its use compulsory in public institutions. The cultural conflict over language use in Ukraine reflects the political conflict on the question of whether Ukraine should be closely aligned with the EU or Russia.

A political-cultural conflict over language is not a form of the use of 'weapons of mass destruction', as Putin<sup>100</sup> writes, and also not a form of 'genocide'.<sup>101</sup> Putin mixes up cultural conflict, violence, and genocide. He utilises a broad notion of violence, based on which his logic is that Russia responds with (political) violence (war) to what he perceives as (cultural) violence.

Putin is highly critical of the West, which he sees as a vessel of US interests. In his declaration of war on Ukraine, Putin primarily talks about the USA and the West. Putin argues that NATO is an 'empire of lies' that illegitimately attacked Serbia, Iraq, Libya, and Syria and expanded ever closer to Russia's borders. He claims that the USA and NATO try to 'destroy' Russia and its 'traditional values', have created an 'anti-Russia' close to the Russian borders, and 'support extreme nationalists and neo-Nazis in Ukraine'.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, Russia would have to take actions as 'self-defence against the threats posed to us', namely the attack on Ukraine. In Russia's Foreign Policy Strategy passed in 2023, the USA is characterised as the 'organizer and executor of the aggressive anti-Russian policy of the collective West'.<sup>103</sup>

Putin disregards that Ukraine is not a member of NATO and that in 2008, NATO rejected Ukraine's application to a NATO Membership Action Plan, a decision in which then-German chancellor Angela Merkel played a key role. There are no weapons of mass destruction on Ukrainian territory. On the contrary, Ukraine in 1994 agreed to transfer and destroy its nuclear warheads. At the time of independence in 1991, Ukraine had around 3,000 nuclear weapons and was the world's third-largest nuclear power. Putin also does not stress that Russia, just like NATO after the end of the Soviet Union, did not destroy its nuclear weapons but has, just

like NATO members, such as the USA, the UK, and France, maintained thousands of nuclear warheads. The opportunity to make the world free of nuclear arms was missed. The total number of nuclear warheads significantly decreased on both sides since the mid-1980s when there were more than 70,000 nuclear warheads in the world. Still, of course, a global arsenal of around 12,500 nuclear weapons as of 2023 suffices to annihilate life on Earth thousands of times.<sup>104</sup>

In February 2023, when Xi Jinping visited Russia, Russia and China issued a joint statement. They say that 'certain States, military and political alliances and coalitions seek to obtain, directly or indirectly, unilateral military advantages to the detriment of the security of others, including by employing unfair competition practices, intensify geopolitical rivalry, fuel antagonism and confrontation, and seriously undermine the international security order and global strategic stability. The sides oppose further enlargement of NATO and call on the North Atlantic Alliance to abandon its ideologized cold war approaches, to respect the sovereignty, security and interests of other countries, the diversity of their civilizational, cultural and historical backgrounds, and exercise a fair and objective attitude towards the peaceful development of other States.'<sup>105</sup> China and Russia here present themselves as the victims of NATO and the USA's economic, political, and cultural expansion. In other words, they present the USA and the West as imperialists and themselves as the victims of imperialism. This passage shows that in imperialism as an ideology, the imperialists are always the others. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not mentioned at all in the document.

The two countries 'reaffirm that the new inter-State relations between Russia and China are superior to political and military alliances of the Cold War era. Friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no "forbidden" areas of cooperation.'<sup>106</sup> The implication is that also military cooperation is part of this 'friendship'.

On the occasion of Xi's 2023 visit to Moscow, Putin wrote an article published in *People's Daily*. He writes that the 'Collective West' and the USA are 'getting ever more fierce and aggressive' in trying to 'simultaneously deterring Russia and China'.<sup>107</sup> Putin argues that the USA and the West are China's and Russia's joint enemies. He uses the friend/enemy-scheme in his argumentation.

The 2023 joint Russian and Chinese statement says: 'The Chinese side notes the significance of the efforts taken by the Russian side to establish

a just multipolar system of international relations.<sup>108</sup> The most decisive effort taken by Russia in international relations is the invasion of Ukraine. An invasion of another country is difficult to understand as an attempt to create a ‘just’ system.

The joint declaration continues: ‘The sides reiterate their readiness to deepen cooperation in the field of international information security and to contribute to building an open, secure, sustainable and accessible ICT environment. The sides emphasised that the principles of the non-use of force, respect for national sovereignty and fundamental human rights and freedoms, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, as enshrined in the UN Charter, are applicable to the information space.’<sup>109</sup>

### ***8.5.2 Russia’s Response to its Enemies***

Putin claims that sooner or later, NATO would have attacked Russia and that, therefore, the Russian war against Ukraine is an act of ‘self-defence’ that is ‘in accordance with Article 51 of Part 7 of the UN Charter’.<sup>110</sup> This article says that there is ‘the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations’. NATO or Ukraine did not attack Russia. Donetsk and Luhansk are separatist regions that Russia recognised as independent states but are not UN members or internationally recognised. Putin said his goal was the ‘demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine’.

Putin also claims that Ukraine ‘intends to create its own nuclear weapons’, and has the ‘groundworks’ available for doing so, ‘Ukraine’s Western patrons may help it acquire these weapons to create yet another threat to our country’, and that ‘information we have gives us good reason to believe that Ukraine’s accession to NATO and the subsequent deployment of NATO facilities has already been decided and is only a matter of time’.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, Russia ‘cannot but react’. Putin said so in a speech on February 21, 2022. Three days later, the Russian armed forces attacked Ukraine.

When the USA invaded Iraq in 2003, the USA justified this move by the claim that Iraq evidently possessed ‘illicit weapons of mass destruction’<sup>112</sup> and that the USA needed to ‘disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction’.<sup>113</sup> Then-US President George W. Bush and his Secretary of State Colin Powell argued that there was evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. It later turned out that

there were no such weapons in Iraq. While the USA, in the case of the 2003 war in Iraq, argued that evidence existed, Putin argues that Ukraine 'intends' to create nuclear weapons and 'may acquire' such weapons. His argumentation is speculative and not based on facts and evidence. While the 'evidence' presented by the USA for justification was misleading and wrong, Putin started a war without evidence for Ukraine's production or acquisition of nuclear weapons based on mere speculation about what could happen in the future.

Already in his declaration of War on Ukraine, Putin threatened to use nuclear weapons. He said that Russia is 'today one of the most powerful nuclear powers in the world' and that those who 'intervene in ongoing events' will face an immediate response from Russia that will have 'such consequences that you have never experienced in your history'.<sup>114</sup>

On February 27, 2002, Putin ordered to put the Russian nuclear forces 'on high combat alert' because, as he said, 'not only do Western countries take unfriendly measures against our country in the economic dimension – I mean the illegal sanctions that everyone knows about very well – but also the top officials of leading NATO countries allow themselves to make aggressive statements with regards to our country'.<sup>115</sup> In September 2022, Putin said that 'if there is a threat to the territorial integrity of our country and for protecting our people, we will certainly use all the means available to us. And I'm not bluffing'.<sup>116</sup> In February 2023, Russia suspended its participation in New START, an agreement between the USA and Russia to reduce the number of their strategic nuclear weapons. In March of the same year, it was announced that Russia planned to station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus.

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the Cold War between the West and Russia ended. The world's arsenal of nuclear weapons was significantly reduced. In the light of the increasing polarisation of world politics and the rise of nationalist and authoritarian leaders in a variety of countries, the danger of a new world war has increased. Threats that nuclear weapons will be used fit into this overall situation of world politics. The use of tactical nuclear weapons could result in an escalation that causes a world war. The use of strategic nuclear weapons is likely to result in an all-out nuclear war and, as a consequence, the destruction of life on Earth.

Russia inherited the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal. In 2023, it had the world's most extensive nuclear warhead inventory, larger than the one by the USA.<sup>117</sup> Putin threatens other countries by indirectly announcing he

could use weapons that Russia has, namely nuclear weapons. The ultimate goal of such threats is to spread fear and to prevent other countries from supporting Ukraine in the defence against the Russian invasion.

In 2021, Russia passed a new Military Doctrine. Russia defines the use of nuclear weapons not just in the case where it is attacked with nuclear weapons but also in the case of the use of other weapons of mass destruction and in response to 'large-scale aggression': 'The Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and (or) its allies, as well as in response to large-scale aggression utilizing conventional weapons in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation.'<sup>118</sup> The formulation of 'large-scale aggression' can be interpreted in a variety of ways. It does not necessarily have to mean an attack on Russian territory with weapons. Still, it can also be interpreted as meaning that Russia perceives another country, such as Ukraine, as a threat that could attack Russia. Aggression is a much less well-defined term than an actual military attack.

Before the war in Ukraine broke out, Russia demanded that NATO should withdraw from Eastern Europe as a security guarantee. In a Russian agreement draft, one article read that there shall not be a deployment of 'military forces and weaponry on the territory of any of the other States in Europe in addition to the forces stationed on that territory as of 27 May 1997'.<sup>119</sup> Eastern European countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia joined after the point of time mentioned in the draft. If that agreement had been signed, Russia could have easier invaded these countries as it did in Ukraine.

Russia has also been quite active in cyberwarfare and information warfare. Studies argue that the Kremlin uses hacking for 'targeting government agencies and officials, [...] public infrastructure and large private companies, and spying on public officials. These efforts include stealing bank accounts and financial data as well as harassing foreign governments that oppose Russia'.<sup>120</sup> For example, in 2015, Russian hackers shut down a Ukrainian power plant, which left more than 200,000 Ukrainians without energy.

The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) created a cybertracker that documents all publicly known state-sponsored cyberattacks. From 2005 until 2022, there was a total of 769 documented cyberattacks. Table 8.2 gives an overview. China, Russia, and Iran were the three dominant state actors involved in cyberattacks.

**Table 8.2: The share of state-sponsored cyberattacks, 2005–2022.** Data source: <https://www.cfr.org/cyber-operations> accessed May 16, 2023.

Rank	Country	Number	Share
	Total	769	
1	China	265	34.5%
2	Russian Federation	164	21.3%
3	Iran	98	12.7%
4	North Korea	79	10.3%
5	USA	22	2.9%
6	Vietnam	11	1.4%
7	Israel	10	1.3%
8	Pakistan	10	1.3%
9	India	8	1.0%
10	United Arab Emirates	8	1.0%

Via the Internet Research Agency (IRA), Russia has tried to interfere in elections in other countries, which has been admitted by the IRA's founder and close Putin ally Yevgeny Prigozhin, who also founded the paramilitary Wagner Group. He said about the IRA: 'We interfered, we are interfering and we will interfere.'<sup>121</sup> The Internet Research Agency employs more than 1,000 online trolls who spread fake news on the Internet.<sup>122</sup>

Russia's 2023 Foreign Policy Strategy says that it wants to take 'measures aimed at countering the policy of unfriendly states to weaponize the global cyberspace'.<sup>123</sup> It does here, however, not mention that it has itself weaponised cyberspace by spreading fake news via the IRA and hacking. Investigative reporters from a network of reporters who work for media such as the *Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, and *Washington Post* showed that the Russian company NTC Vulkan developed 'hacking and disinformation tools' and 'is linked to the federal security service or FSB, the domestic spy agency; the operational and intelligence divisions of the armed forces, known as the GOU and GRU; and the SVR, Russia's foreign intelligence organisation'.<sup>124</sup> 'Another system, known as Amezit, amounts to a blueprint for surveilling and controlling the internet in regions under Russia's command, and also enables disinformation via fake social media profiles'.<sup>125</sup>

Having focused on Russia in section 8.5, we will next analyse the European Union's political and military strategies.

## 8.6 Political and Military Strategies in Global Capitalism: The European Union

### 8.6.1 *The EU's Analysis of its Enemies*

After the start of the Russian attack on Ukraine, the German chancellor Olaf Scholz argued that the 'world is facing a *Zeitenwende*: an epochal tectonic shift'<sup>126</sup> that he characterises as the return of imperialism to Europe.<sup>127</sup> Putin would have violated the fundamentals of the UN Charter by acting as 'an imperial power' threatening the 'independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity' of another country.<sup>128</sup> In its 2023 National Security Strategy, Scholz's government says that 'Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine' is the attempt to destroy Ukraine's 'state sovereignty, territorial integrity, cultural identity and political existence' and 'an imperialistic policy'.<sup>129</sup> Consequently, Germany decided to upgrade and better equip its army, investing €100 billion, 'two percent of our gross domestic product in our defense',<sup>130</sup> advancing energy independence from Russia, and exporting weapons to Ukraine. Scholz sees these measures as a reaction to Putin's plan 'to divide Europe into zones of influence and to divide the world into blocs of great powers and vassal states'.<sup>131</sup> He argues that there is a 'new multipolar reality of the twenty-first century'<sup>132</sup> and that a new Cold War needs to be avoided. It is important to say that a new Cold War should be avoided. However, it remains unclear how this goal should and can be achieved.

Scholz argues that Putin and his 'imperialistic and autocratic kleptocracy'<sup>133</sup> resort to 'campaigns and influence peddling'.<sup>134</sup> In contrast, in democracies, there is a public sphere where the constant debating and questioning in our societies, parliaments, and free media makes society 'more resilient in the long run'.<sup>135</sup>

French President Emmanuel Macron, in a speech, said that Russia's 'barbaric war against Ukraine' opened 'one of the most perilous times of our European Union'.<sup>136</sup> Macron argues that the EU should strengthen its sovereignty by decreasing dependence on resources such as imported drugs and Russian oil. The EU would have learned about the importance of such sovereignty during the pandemic and when Putin 'weaponized energy'. 'Pandemic and war just pushed us in a situation to discover that we have to reduce our dependency if you want to preserve the European identity.'

In 2022, the European Union adopted a new security strategy titled 'A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence'.<sup>137</sup> It says that through the 'unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, Russia is grossly violating international law and the principles of the UN Charter and undermining European and global security and stability'.<sup>138</sup> China is seen as 'a partner for cooperation, an economic competitor and a systemic rival. [...] China's development and integration into its region, and the world at large, will mark the rest of this century. We need to ensure that this happens in a way that will contribute to upholding global security and not contradict the rules-based international order and our interests and values. This requires strong unity amongst us and working closely with other regional and global partners'.<sup>139</sup> The EU sees Russia as a political and military threat to the EU and China simultaneously as a partner and a security risk. The EU sees an increase in political and economic polarisation in the world and, therefore, speaks of 'an era of strategic competition and complex security threats'.<sup>140</sup> It says that it is important for the EU to react to these developments. Like the 2022 EU Strategic Compass, Germany's 2022 National Security Strategy says, 'China is a partner, competitor and systemic rival.' It adds that 'elements of rivalry and competition have increased in recent years'.<sup>141</sup>

The European Parliament sees Russia as the main threat to peace in Europe: 'Europe is facing the most complex combination of both military and non-military threats since the end of the Cold War, accentuated by Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine; [...] this war of aggression is an attack on the European security architecture'.<sup>142</sup>

### ***8.6.2 The EU's Response to its Enemies***

In reviewing the EU defence policy, the European Parliament indirectly says that the EU has underestimated Russia as a security threat and is ill-equipped to defend itself against potential attacks. It, therefore, wants to advance armament in Europe, which is evident when it says in a resolution that there is 'a new urgency to boosting EU security and defence capabilities', 'stresses the importance of the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO', 'calls on the EU NATO Member States to increase their military budgets to at least 2 % of GDP in line with NATO guidelines'.<sup>143</sup> Overall,

this means that the EU aims at a very close alignment with NATO and wants to boost its military capacities so that it is less dependent on the US Military. The EU is afraid that the USA will get involved in a war with China over Taiwan and will therefore be less able and willing to defend the EU against Russia. The EU is also concerned that the USA under its second Trump administration is not willing to send US troops to the EU in the case of a Russian attack because Trump expressed admiration for Putin in the past. These fears are underlying the European Parliament's defence resolution when it says that 'the United States is also being challenged in the Indo-Pacific to counter China's increasing military posturing stresses that EU Member States need to step up their efforts to improve European defence capabilities in order to pave the way for burden shifting in the long run, with the EU taking more responsibility for its defence.'<sup>144</sup>

The 2022 European Union security strategy *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* expresses the commitment to support 'Ukraine in facing Russia's military aggression',<sup>145</sup> which means the obligation to supply weapons. Furthermore, the EU stresses that it needs to increase its military capacities, which means that in the light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU has decided to advance armament. 'A stronger and more capable EU in the field of security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defence for its members.'<sup>146</sup> 'The more hostile security environment requires us to make a quantum leap forward and increase our capacity and willingness to act.'<sup>147</sup> The EU wants to 'develop cutting-edge military capabilities and invest in technological innovation for defence'.<sup>148</sup>

The EU's armament plans include developing digital weapons systems involving Artificial Intelligence and big data: 'In the Cyber domain, our forces need to operate in a coordinated, informed and efficient manner. We will therefore develop and make intensive use of new technologies, notably quantum computing, Artificial Intelligence and big data, to achieve comparative advantages, including in terms of cyber responsive operations and information superiority'.<sup>149</sup>

In a joint declaration, the EU and NATO argue that there is 'strategic competition' of the West with China and that 'Russia's brutal war on Ukraine violates international law and the principles of the UN Charter' and 'undermines European and global security and stability', which is why the EU and NATO plan to strengthen their cooperation 'to address

in particular the growing geostrategic competition, resilience issues, protection of critical infrastructures, emerging and disruptive technologies, space, the security implications of climate change, as well as foreign information manipulation and interference.<sup>150</sup>

Sections 8.3–8.6 analysed the political and military strategies of China, the United States and NATO, Russia, and the EU. In the next section, we will compare these strategies.

## 8.7 Political and Military Strategies in Global Capitalism: A Comparative Analysis

The Chinese strategy documents show that Xi Jinping argues that China has been humiliated for a long time. He sees other countries, especially the United States, as enemies that have caused the underdevelopment of China. He advances a nationalist politics that aims to advance China's political, economic, and cultural power and influence worldwide. What Xi calls national rejuvenation is a power politics that aims at China replacing the United States as the hegemonic global power. Xi says that the West, led by the USA, blackmails, bullies, contains, blockades, encircles, and suppresses China.

The United States, under Joe Biden, has repeatedly said that there is a major international conflict between democracies and autocracies such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Political opposition, political speech, and media independence are certainly significantly more possible in the USA, the EU, and other countries than in countries such as China and Russia, where there are dictatorships and authoritarian leadership. However, international relations are not just political in nature. There is an international political economy, which means that geopolitical conflicts are not just about competing political models and political influence but also about economic power, such as capital investment opportunities and access to labour and commodity markets. The USA does not simply reduce its analysis of geopolitical conflicts to politics, although the stress on democracy VS. autocracies is significant. The USA also admits that it wants to expand its economic prosperity and that it sees China as a major economic competitor.

The analysis of political and military strategy documents conducted in this chapter shows that there is a major geopolitical conflict between the USA and the People's Republic of China about hegemony in global

capitalism. The USA and China see each other as enemies that compete globally for economic, political, and cultural power.

There certainly is also a conflict over economic hegemony in the world between competing models of capitalism, such as the USA's neoliberal capitalism, the EU's social market capitalism, China's authoritarian state capitalism, and Russia's oligarchic authoritarian state capitalism.

China sees Taiwan as culturally and politically belonging to the People's Republic and the USA as supporting movements towards Taiwanese independence. In Taiwan, the independence movement has become stronger. For China, the Taiwan question is an internal Chinese question. For the Taiwanese government, it is a question of external invasion against which it tries to defend itself by close alignment with the USA. China sees US support of Taiwan as a violation of its territorial integrity. Taiwan sees unification attempts by the People's Republic as a violation of its own territorial integrity. The disagreement about the internal/external question of Taiwan has the potential to result in an international war over Taiwan that involves the USA and China. Given that these are the world's two major competing powers, such a conflict could spark a new world war. The Taiwanese question is, therefore, particularly controversial and decisive in contemporary world politics.

Vladimir Putin denies Ukraine's territorial integrity by arguing that Ukraine is a historical, spiritual, biological, and cultural part of Russia. Historically, external forces would have detached Ukraine from Russia. In the twentieth century, Lenin and the Bolsheviks would have advanced these politics of detachment. In the twenty-first century, the USA, NATO, the EU, and pro-Western Ukrainian forces would be the major drivers of detachment. Putin's motivation to go to war is certainly not simply of an ideological nature. Ideology is grounded in political economy. Russian control of Ukraine or parts of it enables access to territory that is a political and military factor and gives Russia more economic power. Control over Ukraine would give Russia access to the Black Sea and the borders with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova, making further Russian expansion easier. Ukraine is a huge producer of grains such as barley, corn, wheat, and sunflower oil. It has natural resources such as minerals, gas, and oil. It is, the world's largest producer of sunflowers. The control of Ukraine, therefore, also would give Russia economic advantages.

Both Russia and China say that the expansion of NATO threatens them. They say the West led by the USA 'undermine[s] the international

security order'. Putin says that the invasion of Ukraine was necessary to stop NATO. But Ukraine is no NATO member. NATO's borders were enlarged as a response to Russia's war in Ukraine. In 2008, Angela Merkel blocked Ukraine from joining NATO. Putin sees the orientation of Ukraine towards the West as a threat to his political model of dictatorship and his economic model of oligarchic state capitalism. Furthermore, he argues that the West is decadent and does not respect traditional values.

The USA, EU, and NATO see Russia's invasion of Ukraine as 'an imperialist foreign policy' (White House) and Russia as an 'imperial power' (Olaf Scholz). The invasion would violate Ukraine's sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity guaranteed by the UN Charter. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU has understood Russia as the main threat to peace in Europe. While Russia sees the USA and NATO as anti-Russian imperialist threats and the EU as a vassal of the USA, the USA, EU, and NATO see Russia as a major threat to peace and as an imperialist power. Mutual assessments of others as imperialists are conducive to war. Russia's attack on Ukraine and the enmity between Russia and the West have made the emergence of a larger international war more likely.

China has not formally condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Instead, Russia and China have announced a closer strategic partnership. China has called for dialogue between Ukraine and Russia. In March 2023, Xi made a three-day state visit to Russia and affirmed that Russia is China's friend, cooperator, and strategic partner. Xi had a one-hour-long phone call with Ukrainian President Zelensky more than a month after this visit. Until spring 2023, China had not supplied Russia with major weapons for use in Ukraine. China's position on the war in Ukraine is ambivalent. While it does not directly provide military support to Russia, China does not condemn the invasion. It sees Russia as an important strategic partner with a joint interest in challenging the USA's global power. While China says it wants to see peace in Ukraine, it has not itself made much diplomatic effort to mediate between China and Ukraine. Given that Putin sees Xi as a friend and strategic partner, Xi is in a unique position that would enable him to bring about negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. That China has not used this potential shows that it does not want to upset Putin, which could risk the strategic alignment between Russia and China.

Overall, the analysis indicates an enormous polarisation in world politics today. The USA and China collide over the question of which country is the hegemonic force in global capitalism. The Russian invasion of

Ukraine has further polarised world politics. There is both the danger of a new Cold War and a new world war with China and Russia (and maybe Iran, North Korea, and some others) on the one side and NATO led by the USA and enforced by the EU on the other side. World politics in the third decade of the twenty-first century has become extremely dangerous. Only history will show whether or not an explosion into a world war can be contained or not.

As a reaction to the polarisation of world politics, the global powers of China, the USA, NATO, Russia, and the EU have advanced armament. There is, therefore, the danger of a new arms race where more and more devastating nuclear weapons, autonomous AI-based robotic weapons, and other new weapon systems are developed and utilised. A new Cold War is in the making.

China has set itself the centenary goal of modernising the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which includes upgrading its arsenal of nuclear weapons and developing autonomous, AI-based weapons. China, as part of the modernisation of its army, wants to develop autonomous, AI-based weapons and upgrade its capacities in information warfare. On the one hand, China stresses that it is peaceful and non-expansive but, at the same time, again and again uses martial and militarist rhetoric, such as the metaphor of the PLA and China as the 'great wall of steel'. The USA says that in the light of the current world situation, it is upgrading its weapons with Artificial Intelligence, quantum systems, and other technologies, modernises its nuclear forces, and develops autonomous weapon systems. NATO has announced it will enhance its weapons 'in space and cyberspace'. Russia has been very active in information warfare in cyberspace. For example, Yevgeny Prigozhin's Internet Research Agency has spread fake news online in order to try to disrupt elections in countries that Russia considers its enemies. The EU's armament plans include developing digital weapons systems involving Artificial Intelligence and Big Data.

As part of the new arms race, global powers are developing autonomous weapon systems that target and kill automatically and utilise Artificial Intelligence, big data, and quantum computing in weapon systems. Such systems have the potential to escalate militarism into a new Cold War and make killing in actual wars more brutal and ruthless.

After the end of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West, there was continuous nuclear disarmament. China, the USA, and NATO say they have a defensive nuclear policy. The USA, NATO, and the EU say

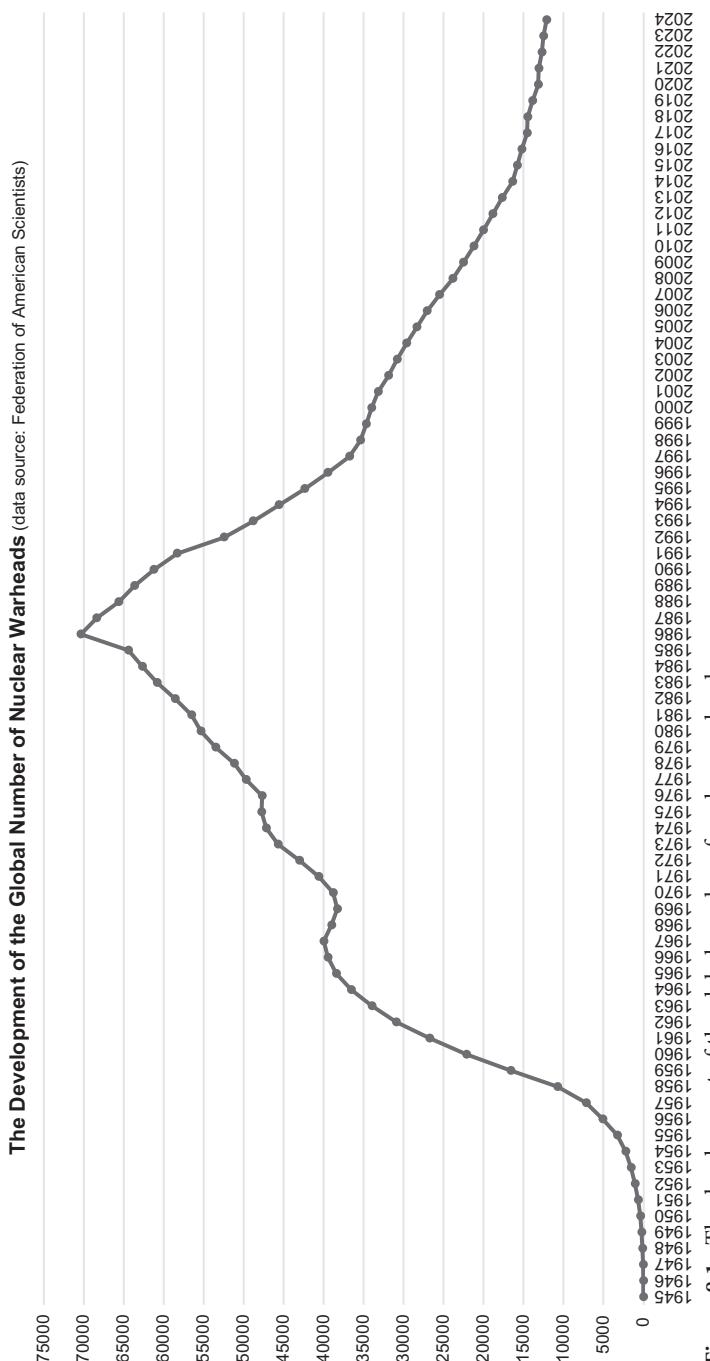


Figure 8.1: The development of the global number of nuclear warheads

there is a danger that Russia uses nuclear weapons. Putin has indeed several times threatened NATO to use nuclear weapons in response to its military support of Ukraine. Putin suspended Russia's participation in the nuclear arms reduction agreement New START and announced the stationing of nuclear weapons in Belarus. Nuclear weapons have the potential to eliminate humanity and life on Earth. Not just the weapons themselves but also the nuclear rhetoric that threatens to employ such weapons is extremely dangerous as it can set off vicious cycles that kindle a nuclear war.

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists' Doomsday Clock shows how close the world is to nuclear extinction.<sup>151</sup> In 2019, the Doomsday Clock stood at two minutes to midnight and in 2020, 2021, and 2022, at 100 seconds to midnight. In 2023, it was updated to 90 seconds to midnight, which reflects Putin's nuclear threats and the danger of a new nuclear arms race. The risk of nuclear war has significantly increased through Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Figure 8.1 visualises the development of the global number of nuclear warheads. The number continuously increased since 1945 as part of the Cold War and reached a height of 70,374 in 1986. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number decreased to 34,004 in 2000, 21,234 in 2010, and 13,160 in 2020. In 2024, it stood at 12,121. The future will show how this number will develop. The existence of thousands of nuclear warheads suffices to destroy life on Earth multiple times. As long as there is a single nuclear weapon, there is a grave danger to the survival of humanity.

## 8.8 Conclusion

This chapter asked: How do the major powers in global capitalism understand contemporary international politics? What do their political and military strategies look like? In order to provide an answer, we analysed 24 political and military strategy documents from the world's major powers, namely China, the USA, NATO, Russia, and the EU.

We can now summarise this chapter's main findings:

- **Global capitalism and war:**

Global capitalism has experienced a succession of multiple crises. Global capitalist competition has turned into the intensification of authoritarianism, nationalisms, and fascism. As a result, the

likelihood of the explosion of conflicts of interest into violence and war has increased. Capitalism always has potentials for war. Step-by-step, neoliberal global capitalism has created dynamics that have polarised world politics and have made a large-scale global war more likely.

- **The United States and China:**

China and the USA compete for global hegemony in global capitalism. China has experienced massive economic growth, gained political influence, and modernised its military. The competition between China and the USA is of a political-economic nature, which means that they compete in the global accumulation of economic, political, and cultural power and are engaged in a global rivalry for political, economic, and cultural hegemony in the world system. Taiwan is a particularly contested and dangerous territory because the People's Republic of China sees Taiwan as its national territory. There is an independence movement in Taiwan. The United States has given security guarantees to Taiwan. The conflict over Taiwan could spark a direct or proxy war between China and the United States that could result in a new world war.

- **The war in Ukraine:**

Vladimir Putin has made the Russian army invade Ukraine, which he sees as the property of Russia, for cultural, spiritual, historical, and biological reasons. He claims that the USA, NATO, and the EU are trying to annex Ukraine and turn it into a threat to Russia. The EU, NATO, and the USA see Russia as a major threat to international peace and as an imperialist power, which is why they militarily support Ukraine through arms exports. China formally says it is neutral in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia and calls for peace. However, it has intensified its strategic alliance with Russia. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has increased the polarisation of world politics and has made a new world war more likely.

- **Armament:**

The polarisation of world politics has sparked a new arms race. China, the USA, NATO, Russia, and the EU are updating and enhancing their weapons systems, which includes upgrades of their nuclear weapons and the development of new weapons systems that use Artificial Intelligence, robotics, big data, and quantum computing. The new

arms race can result in a new Cold War and has made a new world war more likely. The question is whether international diplomacy can and will prevail in order to foster international peace, or at least peaceful coexistence of competing powers, or if a new world war will emerge. History will tell. Only human praxis directed against fascism, authoritarianism, nationalism, and inequalities and heading for democracy and socialism can prevent the escalation of the crisis of global capitalism into a new world war.

## CHAPTER 9

# World Peace

### 9.1 Introduction

This book discusses the foundations and realities of digital violence. It has asked the following main questions: What are the roles of violence and war in global digital capitalism? What are the prospects for world peace today?

The analysis of (digital) violence is so important today because world politics has become highly polarised, bringing about the danger of a new Cold War, a new arms race, and a new world war. In contrast to the old Cold War, today, the Internet, AI, social media, big data, and other digital technologies play a central role in societies. Digital violence, digital weapons, and digital war have emerged.

We will now move from analysing war and conflict to analysing peace and world peace. In this context, the questions arise: what is peace? What is world peace? How can they be attained? This chapter deals with these issues.

Given the dangerous situation the world is in, we have to ask how barbarism can be circumvented. Today, the question about the future of society is, just like at the time of the First and the Second World Wars, about barbarism or socialism. It therefore makes sense that we, as the conclusion of this book, deal with the question of the potentials of democratic (digital) socialism to create a peaceful world.

Given that a new world war is a serious danger, the question arises of how we can attain world peace. Philosophy might be able to inspire contemporary ideas about how to attain world peace. In this chapter, we want to, therefore, engage with some of the philosophical foundations of world peace, namely three selected philosophical approaches to world peace: Immanuel Kant's essay 'Toward Perpetual Peace' (section

9.2), Jürgen Habermas's idea of a world constitution for the world society without a world government and a world state (section 9.3), and Tingyang Zhao's idea of creating a new tianxia system (section 9.4). These three approaches are discussed by comparative reflections on them (section 9.5).

## 9.2 Immanuel Kant: 'Toward Perpetual Peace'

In 1792, the French monarch was toppled as part of the French Revolution and the First French Republic was declared. The Enlightenment and the rise of the political values of liberty, equality, and solidarity had peaked. In Germany, at that time, Immanuel Kant published his essay 'Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch'.<sup>1</sup> It was first issued in 1795 and released in an extended version in 1796.

Kant lays out the foundations of a treaty that should guarantee perpetual peace. Nation-states should in this treaty agree to several articles, including the following ones: 'No independently existing state [...] shall be able to be acquired by another state through inheritance, exchange, purchase, or gift';<sup>2</sup> 'Standing armies [...] shall gradually be abolished entirely';<sup>3</sup> 'No state shall forcibly interfere in the constitution and government of another state'.<sup>4</sup>

Kant's essay is a draft of elements of an international constitution to create a democratic world society. It is an expression of his deontological ethics that defines what actions are morally good and morally problematic and what principles of morality govern human action. In this case, the actors are nation-states. Kant's ethics is what in philosophy is termed deontology. Deontology is an ethical theory that argues that rules are needed that allow to discern what actions are morally right and wrong. Kant's deontological approach becomes evident in his essay on peace when he, for example, writes that the annexation of a state means 'to annul its existence as a moral person and to treat this moral person as a mere thing'.<sup>5</sup>

The problem with deontology is that it is a form of individualistic ethics that is not grounded enough in the interaction and dialectics of society and human actors. How humans behave concerns society's conditions, possibilities, and action constraints. This means that creating perpetual world peace needs a constitution that governs nation-states' actions and societal preconditions that make war more unlikely. Questions of political economy, class, societal logics that shape international relations, and

the distribution of power in and between societies play important roles in this context.

In his essay 'Kant's Idea of Perpetual Peace', Jürgen Habermas stresses concerning Kant's idea of world peace that Kant relies 'exclusively on each government's own *moral* self-obligation'<sup>6</sup> to avoid wars. Habermas writes that Kant had not yet learned 'that capitalist development would lead to a conflict between social classes' that threatens peace and that capitalism's antagonisms 'would both encumber domestic politics with class struggles and direct foreign policy into the channels of violent imperialism'.<sup>7</sup> Habermas argues that avoiding wars and guaranteeing peace is not a moral question. For him, it is a political question. Peace could only be guaranteed by international organisations such as the UN and the International Criminal Court, whose powers would have to be enlarged. But politics is economic, and the economy is political. This means that avoiding wars is not just a question of international laws but also an issue that also has to do with creating conditions that disincentivise wars of conquest, which are wars over land, strategic economic resources, and influence.

To be fair, one must say that Kant does not entirely ignore questions of political economy in the essay on perpetual peace. He writes, for example, that 'hoarding riches' is a 'threat of war' that can result in 'preemptive attacks' and that the '*power of money*' is 'the most reliable tool of war'.<sup>8</sup>

In this passage, Kant points out that wealth inequalities are a source of conflicts that can lead to war. He discusses as an explanatory comment to the article of a world constitution that says that standing armies shall gradually be abolished. Abolishing standing armies is not the solution to poverty, economic alienation, and global inequalities. The point is that conditions should be created that overcome economic alienation, reduce inequalities, and eliminate poverty so that societies and humans no longer see the need for wars, conquest, militarism, and standing armies.

In international relations, war is the violent means of political interaction and problem-solving. The result of such politics is that the stronger force destroys and dominates the weaker one, intensifying the contradiction between the conflicting sides. War emerges as a means of politics when communicative problem-solving in politics breaks down. In socialist international relations, there is the priority of avoiding war and finding ways of organising international relations and the global order so that there are mutual benefits or at least mutual coexistence where societies develop peacefully side by side. The logic of accumulation at the international and

global levels negatively impacts such forms of existence. Creating such an order requires that different international powers can speak to each other. It requires international political and diplomatic communication.

Solving conflicts of interest in manners that benefit all or allow peaceful coexistence requires that the involved parties can communicate freely with each other. To do so, freedom of opinion and speech is needed at all levels of political organisation, combined with creating wealth for all and democratic socialism for all.

### **9.3 Jürgen Habermas: A World Constitution for the World Society Without a World Government and a World State**

Jürgen Habermas argues that the founding of the United Nations in 1945 and the creation of its predecessor organisation, the League of Nations, in 1919 ‘placed the Kantian project on the political agenda for the first time’.<sup>9</sup> Habermas argues that global problems affect and threaten all humans, which requires international dialogue and communication to find solutions. Therefore, ‘a radical-democratic universalization of interests through institutions for the formation of public opinion and political will’<sup>10</sup> would be required.

Habermas suggests creating a supranational political body at the level of world society that tries to prevent wars. It consists of an executive power, a legislative power, and a judiciary power. The policies purely focus on international politics, specialising in ‘securing peace and protecting human rights’.<sup>11</sup> The UN Charter is further developed into a world constitution in this system. The UN General Assembly is developed into an assembly consisting of representatives of the democratically elected parliaments of member states and of ‘cosmopolitan citizens’<sup>12</sup> elected by the citizens of certain transnational regions or continents. Nation-states are not abolished, but there are governments and citizens at the nation-state level and citizenship and parliamentary processes that are constituted at the level above the nation-state. An International Criminal Court takes on the role of the judiciary. A reformed UN Security Council plays the role of the executive with the responsibility of maintaining international peace, guaranteeing the respect of human rights, and taking measures when peace is threatened, and human rights are violated. Habermas argues that there should be certain veto rights of the General Assembly against

decisions taken by the Security Council. The overall duty of this international political system is to prevent and prohibit ‘crimes against humanity’ and ‘wars of aggression’.<sup>13</sup> According to Habermas, avoiding wars and crimes against humanity is ‘anchored in all cultures’.<sup>14</sup>

For Habermas,<sup>15</sup> a constitutional system of world society should not be organised as ‘a world government’ or a ‘world republic’ but as a ‘multilevel system’,<sup>16</sup> a ‘global domestic politics without a world government’ that is ‘embedded within the framework of a world organization with the power to impose peace and implement human rights’.<sup>17</sup>

The danger of a world state with one world government is that such a government represents only partial interests (such as the interest of one national government, a small group of allied governments, a small number of transnational corporations, one class, etc.), unrepresentative of the world population, that it becomes impossible to organise proper democratic legitimacy of such a government and that the latter thereby destroys democracy and takes on the form of a dictatorship. A global dictatorship, in turn, advances the likelihood of a world war. Habermas argues that states should delegate decisions on military interventions to a supranational body but keep their armies organised at the national level. An exception is ‘urgent self-defense’.<sup>18</sup> The alternative to a world state is a world society that has a world constitution and consists of democratic states that create, implement, and maintain conditions that are conducive to peace, especially economic justice, the protection of human rights, gender equality, democracy, the accountability of government to its citizens, as well as a vivid public sphere and civil society which includes the possibility for the free reporting and free public debates on wars.<sup>19</sup>

#### 9.4 Tingyang Zhao: The Tianxia System

The Chinese philosopher Tingyang Zhao<sup>20</sup> propagates the creation of an international tianxia system. 天下 is the Chinese word for ‘world’. Tianxia was the political and cultural order that existed in the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BC). Tianxia is used to signify ‘the entire world’,<sup>21</sup> ‘the whole world’,<sup>22</sup> and ‘the broadest context’<sup>23</sup> of society. It also has a political meaning, namely a system where all benefit from cooperation, which is larger than those obtained from competition and war. Tianxia is ‘a world order based on a principle of coexistence’<sup>24</sup> where ‘the incentives for coexistence

and cooperation are always greater than the incentives for enmity and opposition’,<sup>25</sup> there are ‘universal security and the shared well-being for humanity as a whole as part of a global institutional framework’.<sup>26</sup> In such a system, ‘politics is to be conceived of as an art of shared living rather than a technique for social control and manipulation’.<sup>27</sup> Given that tianxia deals with the question of how peace can be advanced, it is evident that it matters for discussions about how to establish world peace and a system of peaceful international relations. Without naming Carl Schmitt, Zhao says that the political should not be understood as ‘the *designation of friend and enemy*’ but rather as ‘the art of transforming hostility into hospitality’.<sup>28</sup>

Tianxia is a system that is based on universalism,<sup>29</sup> which includes two aspects:

1. Universal benefit:

Everyone benefits. The ‘benefits that any state or person accepting the *tianxia* system can receive are greater than what they would receive by rejecting or destroying said system’.<sup>30</sup> The system is focused on the ‘well-being of all people’.<sup>31</sup>

2. Universal compatibility:

There are ‘compatibility relations’,<sup>32</sup> relations where interests are compatible, and all can coexist. The system aims at the ‘minimization of mutual harm’<sup>33</sup> and ‘the maximization of mutual benefits’<sup>34</sup> by helping others to succeed, ameliorating their losses and mutual salvation.

Tianxia is based on relational reasoning.<sup>35</sup> Tianxia is a system of symmetrically defined moral values (compatibilist universalism): ‘the inclusive “no outside” of *tianxia* signified a world of shared properties and common interests’.<sup>36</sup> The lowest level of tianxia is ‘the minimization of mutual harm’; its highest standard is ‘a maximization of mutual benefit’.<sup>37</sup>

Zhao advances a relational ethics that is influenced by Confucianism and Taoism and their focus on mutual responsibility, harmony, and peace.<sup>38</sup> ‘Confucius said that *ren* 仁 is “loving others”, which means to respect others (both their life and their interests).’<sup>39</sup> In Confucianism, benevolence means ‘to love *all* humans’.<sup>40</sup> Relational ethics can avoid individualism but also poses the danger that in systems practising such ethics, the collective will is defined by a powerful class or bureaucracy and is superimposed on individuals whose domination is presented as collective interest. Therefore, one needs a dialectical relational ethics based on a dialectic of

individual and collective interests and a dialectic of individual and society so that the collective interest includes benefits of all individuals and groups and individuals have freedoms that do not destroy and limit the freedoms of others. Zhao says that 'relations matter more than individuals', meaning he privileges society and structures over individuals. In society, there are no relations without individuals and no individuals and groups without relations. Therefore, we cannot say that the one or the other matter more. Individuals and relations only matter together as they constitute a dialectic.

Based on Jizi, who was a political advisor to the Zhou dynasty's king, Zhao introduces what he terms a smart democracy. On the one hand, he argues that in elections and decisions, citizens should have one pro- and one con-vote so that the total votes for a certain proposal is the number of pro-votes minus the number of con-votes it received.<sup>41</sup> In addition, he suggests there are 'knowledge-weighted votes' from 'meritocratic representatives selected from a pool of respected experts from the natural sciences and humanities' whose votes 'are given a higher priority than the human votes'.<sup>42</sup> He proposes that the 'scientific votes'<sup>43</sup> have to 'approve or disapprove the initial popular vote',<sup>44</sup> which means that scientists have the power to veto citizens' decisions.

The danger of such a system is that it becomes an expert rule and scientific dictatorship. Academics often have smart ideas, although some of their ideas can also be quite dangerous. They are, however, not automatically talented politicians. It makes sense that politics relies on academic expertise for devising policies. However, decisions on what policies are enacted and realised should be taken by citizens who elect a parliament that votes on policies (representative democracy) or who directly vote on policies (direct democracy). Zhao compares the expert votes to what Jizi describes as votes cast 'by heaven' in the form of 'divination techniques' and 'astrological calculations'.<sup>45</sup>

When speaking of expert votes, Zhao's comparison to heaven and meritocracy shows that he assumes there should be a hierarchy between experts and citizens where experts are more important and make better decisions than citizens. In this context, one is reminded of Plato's idea of philosopher kings.

In various dialogues recorded by Plato, Socrates says that there will only be an 'end to suffering' when 'philosophers become kings', and there is an 'amalgamation of political power and philosophy'.<sup>46</sup> For Socrates,

philosophers ‘devote themselves to arguments, and nothing else’.<sup>47</sup> The Socratic rule of philosopher kings is an expertocracy, an autocracy ruled by experts. If put into reality, Zhao’s meritocratic system is in danger of mimicking this form of dictatorship. Plato thought philosophers have the skills and time to govern and do politics. In contrast, soldiers, farmers, and artisans do not, which would result in bad politics if the latter groups were given political power. This assumption presupposes a division of labour and, therefore, class rule. Instead of arguing for abolishing this division and classes so that everyone has enough time to engage in politics, Plato takes the division of labour and class society for granted, and equates politics and philosophy as well as politicians and philosophers. Alfred Sohn-Rethel<sup>48</sup> argues that the division between mental and manual labour goes back to ancient times, is an expression of class societies, and was introduced in slave-holding societies, where slaves performed physical labour. At the same time, philosophers, politicians, and scientists focused on intellectual activities. Plato’s republic, ruled by philosopher kings, is an expression of class divisions that are transferred to politics. Zhao reproduces the ideological stress on the division of labour between mental and manual labour in the form of the division between the role of experts and citizens in the political world system.

Zhao says that the USA and Europe have defined the rules of imperialism that aim at ‘world-domination in economics, politics, and culture’.<sup>49</sup> ‘It is the basic character of imperialism to view the entire world as so much territory that can be arbitrarily plundered’.<sup>50</sup> For Zhao, there are cultural and religious roots of imperialism. He argues that Christianity based on the idea of the heathens created the politics of enmity that identified ‘intolerable spiritual enemies that had to be either rejected or converted’ and the idea of wiping out other cultures and religions<sup>51</sup> and would have advanced ‘conflictual opposition and warfare’.<sup>52</sup> For Zhao, contemporary imperialism is global imperialism and ‘American imperialism’<sup>53</sup> that consists of the system of international trade,<sup>54</sup> the hegemony of the English language,<sup>55</sup> US political hegemony,<sup>56</sup> and US economic dominance<sup>57</sup> that would include a US-controlled global finance system,<sup>58</sup> and a US understanding of human rights.<sup>59</sup> Zhao writes there is US control of the ‘financial systems, media production, the Internet, and the general nature of globalized discourse. And of course, this set up involves a globalized military power’.<sup>60</sup> Zhao argues there is ‘the asymmetrical advantage won by a small group of nation-states as a result of relying on technologies that allow them to carve up and exploit the world’.<sup>61</sup>

Zhao provides a culturalist analysis of imperialism that underestimates the importance of class and the economy. Marxist theories of imperialism have stressed political-economic aspects, including monopoly capitalism, finance capitalism, military power, political-economic rivalry at the international and global level, foreign direct investments of capital that result in an international exploitation of labour in an international division of labour, unequal global trade, the competition and rivalry for the control of territories as sources and spaces of raw materials, markets, labour power, investment opportunities, political and ideological hegemony, etc. According to such theories, imperialism involves methods of non-violent power such as unequal exchange, debt traps; economic, political and technological dependence; as well as violent methods such as warfare, invasion, genocide, slavery, etc.

Zhao opposes political cooperation to political domination<sup>62</sup> and says that the first logic 'is more akin to a Chinese style of political thinking, while a logic of subjugation is more akin to European styles of political thinking'.<sup>63</sup> Imperialism is for Zhao, first and foremost American and Western. He is silent on Chinese and Russian imperialism. The danger of the world is the current situation, namely the threat of a new World War, which arises from the global rivalry of great powers in global capitalism. The following table shows how powerful contemporary global capitalism's dominant actors are concerning several variables.

Let us briefly discuss two examples of the aspects shown in the table above. The data presented in the tables below show that Russia and the USA control the vast amount of the world's nuclear bombs. China has the world's largest army, which increases its military power.<sup>64</sup> The USA is home to the largest number of top transnational corporations, followed by China and the EU. Russia has a relatively small number of such corporations.

**Table 9.1:** The power of the contemporary world's competing great powers

	Economic power	Military power	Cultural, political and ideological influence
USA	High	High	High
China	High	Medium	Medium
European Union	Medium	Low	Medium
Russia	Low	High	Low

**Table 9.2: The world's nuclear arsenal (deployed and stored warheads), data source: SIPRI Yearbooks 2022 & 2023 & 2024 (chapter 7: Nuclear Forces) <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/>, accessed on June 12, 2023, and June 17, 2024**

Country	Nuclear bombs 2022	Nuclear bombs 2023	Nuclear bombs 2024
Russia	4477	4489	4380
USA	3708	3708	3708
China	350	410	500
France	290	290	290
UK	180	225	225
Pakistan	165	170	170
India	160	164	172
Israel	90	90	90
North Korea	20	30	50
Total	9440	9576	9585

**Table 9.3: Absolute share of the world's largest 100 corporations that are headquartered in selected regions and countries.** Data source: Forbes 2000 List for the year 2022

Country	Top-transnational corporations
USA	38
China	17
EU	14
Switzerland	6
Japan	5
UK	5
Russia	2

Table 9.2 shows that the number of useable nuclear bombs has increased from 9440 in 2022 to 9576 in 2023 and 9585 in 2024. Comparing 2023 to 2022, Russia, China, the UK, Pakistan, India, and North Korea increased their number of nuclear bombs. In 2024, China, India, and North Korea had increased their nuclear arsenals in comparison to 2023. Such data are an indication of a new nuclear arms race. Politics has again become militarily highly polarised at the world level.

The collision of great powers makes the world situation so dangerous today. Such a constellation has resulted in World Wars before, with the difference that nuclear arsenals did not exist in the First World War and

only started to emerge during the Second World War. The Third World War would be an absolute catastrophe that is likely to result in the end of humanity and the end of life on Earth. A global democratic, humanist, socialist system with features that the tianxia system held is a way of overcoming, containing, and reducing this threat. To establish such a system, we need to see that China and Russia and their state capitalisms are part of the problem, just like Western capitalisms are.

Zhao argues that a US human rights imperialism is part of imperialism: 'Another invention of American imperialism is the hegemony of human rights discourse, with its characteristic slogan being "human rights trump sovereignty."<sup>65</sup> This means that under the banner of human rights, it becomes possible to 'legitimately' invade, contain, and manipulate other nations, and can even serve as a pretext for initiating wars.<sup>66</sup> The 'United States relies upon economic and military pressures to ensure that the power of interpretation over universal human rights resides solely with America, thereby privatizing the right to interpret a universal concept.<sup>67</sup>

Presenting human rights as a US imperialist project entails the danger of a political relativism that rejects universalism and justifies dictatorships. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was passed in the UN General Assembly in 1948 with the votes of 48 countries, including not just Western nations but also, for example, Argentina, Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Turkey, etc.<sup>68</sup> The Declaration's Drafting Committee had Western participants and members from Chile, China, Lebanon, and the Soviet Union. Therefore, the introduction of universal human rights certainly was not a Western imperialist project but an international agreement of various nations organised in the United Nations. The Chinese philosopher and diplomat Peng Chun Chang played an important role in the UDHR drafting committee. Article 1's formulation that humans 'should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood' was drafted based on his suggestion.<sup>69</sup> It reflects Chang's shared Confucian worldview of relational ethics and the 'Confucian idea of humaneness (*ren*)'.<sup>70</sup>

Georg Lohmann points out that human rights have been misused for the justification of imperialism but that such abuses can be criticised by the very universal character of human rights and the UDHR. 'Of course, human rights can and are abused to enforce certain state interests (e.g., as Zhao points out, by "American imperialism"),'<sup>71</sup> but the critique of this can be based precisely on the universalising and equalising claim of human rights, which he considers illusory and ultimately wrong.<sup>72</sup> The UDHR was a reaction to the barbarism of the World Wars and an attempt

to increase the likelihood that this destructive history would not repeat itself. Different cultures should not develop their own concepts of human rights but should certainly ground human rights based on specific philosophical traditions.<sup>73</sup> ‘Cases of abuse of human rights can only be criticised if the legal concept of human rights and its morally based normative claims to universality, universality, individuality and categorical nature are not themselves defamed as such, but rather their distortions, narrowings and abuses, which are always possible, are criticised with a sobered, but therefore all the more conceptually differentiated understanding of human rights.’<sup>74</sup>

Lohmann warns against the relativistic criticism of human rights: ‘To the extent that these politically supported positions succeed in making certain memberships (in clans, religious communities, nations, etc. – or postmodern romanticised communal (moral?) practices!) a precondition for having and exercising human rights, they weaken the brittle, universal and egalitarian claim of human rights. Then it is not the horizontal community of all individual human beings that decides on the sponsorship and content of human rights, but the mostly hierarchically determined order of communities whose membership now confers conditional rights.’<sup>75</sup>

Lohmann argument that the UDHR’s article 19 is imperialistic opens the door for the justification of corporate and state censorship of the media. The article says: ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.’<sup>76</sup> Suppose everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, which includes the right to communicate ideas and information. In that case, state control of public expression and control of public communication by corporate monopolies and ideologically motivated organisations violates the human right to communicate. Therefore, the UDHR is undermined by both capitalist monopoly power and state censorship of the media.

Zhao is critical of both Kant’s concept of perpetual peace and Habermas’ discourse ethics.<sup>77</sup> He argues that Kant’s idea of a confederation of free, democratic states might be able to prevent war among democratic states. Still, it has problems preventing wars and conflicts between such states and others. Habermas argues that international conflicts can be solved by ‘modes of dialogue that are fully rational and entered into under conditions of full equality, sincerity, and honesty’.<sup>78</sup> Zhao says that with ‘respect

to those things that involve our most fundamental interests, it doesn't matter how rational the dialogues that we engage in because none of them can lead to effective conflict resolution' and that 'mutual understanding cannot guarantee mutual agreement'.<sup>79</sup> The United Nations would stand in this Kantian tradition. The discourses it organises for overcoming conflicts would be based on 'dialogue and mediation' that 'can to some degree help to diminish warfare, but these methods alone have never been able to decrease the contradictions that give rise to reasons for conflict in the first place'.<sup>80</sup> The 'UN is ultimately an organization lacking in effective power on a global scale'.<sup>81</sup>

It is certainly important to stress that communication and discourse alone do not solve all political-economic conflicts. Instead, when there are fundamental disagreements over the control of territory, economic value, political power, and worldviews, words that do not come along or result in the redistribution of resources can quickly fail as a means of conflict resolution. Diplomacy, however, as a discursive means does not stand outside of the redistribution of material resources. Zhao underestimates the importance of communication. For example, in peace negotiations aimed at ending a war, discourse is used as the means for trying to agree on how strategic resources are distributed in a manner so that all involved conflict parties agree to a compromise or solution that they find acceptable and makes them put down their weapons. In addition, means of communication such as the Internet are themselves material resources, as Zhao stresses himself, that are part of questions of war and peace. Think, for example, of cyberwar, cyberespionage, and fake news as means of trying to manipulate elections, ideology online, etc. The means of communication do not stand outside; they are part of political-economic relations.

Stephen C. Angle agrees with Zhao that an all-under-heaven-system is needed. He mentions that a criticism of Zhao is that some observers say Zhao wants to 'replace Western hegemony with Chinese hegemony'<sup>82</sup> and advances a 'utopian framework'<sup>83</sup> that rejects 'the existing institutions' of international politics, especially the United Nations, wants to 'start from scratch',<sup>84</sup> and to create global universal institutions out of nothing. 'While the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the many human rights treaties that have been negotiated since the Second World War are not perfect, they do collectively represent the kind of process that a concern for all-under-heaven would demand'.<sup>85</sup>

Zhao argues that a new *tianxia* is today urgently needed to save humanity from annihilation. He calls for 'a new starting point for political renewal and a starting point for abolishing war'.<sup>86</sup> A new *tianxia* system might indeed arise from humans realising that they need to cooperate in order to overcome and manage global problems that threaten the survival of humanity and life on Earth, including the dangers of global warming, environmental degradation, the destruction of life on Earth in a nuclear war, the global explosion of inequalities, the uncontrollability of the negative consequences of new technologies, etc. Zhao stresses the danger of the rise of a technological dictatorship and thinks humanity might unite and create a new *tianxia* system as a countermovement. 'In a possibly imagined future, all of the various global systems will bring the world ever closer together. Global systematization is a necessary material precondition for the possible emergence of a new *tianxia* system world order. But the mere systematization of the material world won't automatically evolve into a *tianxia* world.'<sup>87</sup> 'If a world institutional framework for recognizing common interests isn't created that is capable of altering the political logic of seeking to maximize exclusive self-interests, then the marriage of unlimited technological developments and unlimited selfishness will very likely lead to an apocalyptic end of human civilization.'<sup>88</sup> 'Only then can we hope to avoid the malaise of technological authoritarianism and the concomitant madness of world extinction. This is precisely wherein lies the vital significance of imagining a new *tianxia* system.'<sup>89</sup> 'I believe that if a *tianxia* system is to become a possibility in the future, then its foundation will most likely be based on those structures and organizations that have real power such as systems of global finance, global technologies, and the internet. Or perhaps we should say that remaking global financial systems, global technological systems, and the internet into a world system that more readily allows for common flourishing, collective ownership, and shared governance is a necessary condition for the realization of any new *tianxia* system.'<sup>90</sup> Zhao adds that 'a new *tianxia* system is likely to be established across the multiple global systems as a unifying supervisory power. This is especially relevant for global financial systems, the internet and high-tech sectors.'<sup>91</sup>

Zhao sees the danger of the emergence of a kind of global supersystem of domination consisting of international finance systems, the Internet and new technologies that create a globally networked dictatorship and 'neoauthoritarianism'.<sup>92</sup> All 'networking models of power systems are expanding their networking capacities. Over the entire world, this networking is like

a vast spider's web expanding everywhere, always forming new connections. Without a stone remaining unturned, this web ineluctably comes to control all practical activities and discursive spaces, and step by step will come to manipulate and exploit each nation (currently this has already been partially realized), even to the point of making every national government a mere puppet of the global capitalist and technological systems. Media determines what opinions will be welcomed, and financial capital determines what actions will be rewarded, while advanced technology determines all future possibilities. The global financial system, new media systems, and high-tech systems are beginning to coalesce to form a new authoritarian power.<sup>93</sup>

Zhao presents the finance system, the Internet, and high-tech systems as political actors. However, these systems are embedded into, created, and shaped by social relations and actors that are parts of these relations, especially corporations, governments, and political parties. Zhao does not enough stress the role of classes and the state as having relations that involve political-economic actors that shape the world's and societies' features. Christian Neuhäuser<sup>94</sup> argues in this context that Zhao does not mention corporations and how their egoistic striving for profit, including activities of Chinese companies such as Alibaba, contradict the establishment of a tianxia system. He asks: 'How can tianxia be strengthened against corporate resistance?'<sup>95</sup>

The question of whether we will be able to steer away from the pathway to annihilation and the end of life on Earth has to do with the question of how the practices of economic and political actors and the power relations they stand in will look like in the future.

## 9.5 Reflections on Kant, Habermas, and Zhao

Immanuel Kant, Jürgen Habermas, and Tingyang Zhao have made three important contributions to the question of how we can attain world peace and overcome the threat of world peace. They have operated at different times in different places, but all three provide good entry points into the question of how the threat of global war can be avoided, reduced, minimised, and overcome.

Kant's essay 'Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch' stresses that world peace requires a world constitution. Habermas adds that a world

society with world peace can best be established when such a world constitution does not come along with a world state and a world government that are extreme centralisations of power and pose the threat of developing into global dictatorships. For Kant, world peace and world war are primarily questions of morality and politics. Both dimensions are certainly important, but Kant ignores issues of political economy. The analysis of war and peace and the attainment of world peace needs to integrate political economy with aspects of morality and politics. Kant applies his deontological ethics to questions of world war and world peace. This approach is focused on the morality of individuals – individual humans, individual nation-states, and individual political actors. It is important to take into account how individuals interact with society. Understanding the causes of wars and prospects for peace requires focusing on society's structural antagonisms and their interactions with collective and individual practices.

Tingyang Zhao, like Kant and Habermas, is concerned with how a peaceful world society can be established. The advantage of his approach is that he sees that establishing and maintaining world peace is not just a question of a political constitution and political agreements but has to do with material questions of advantages and disadvantages. He argues that if an established international system provides benefits to all involved actors that are larger than the benefits they can obtain from not joining or trying to destroy the system, then an important foundation of world peace can be established. Zhao leaves open what such a system could look like. An important point he makes is that world peace requires universal benefits (benefits for all) and mutual benefits.

The danger of Zhao's approach is the underestimation of individual rights and their subsumption under collective interests. There is a dialectic of society and individuals. Humans are social beings existing in and through social relations in society. Society only exists in and through human practices. Zhao conceives of imperialism as a purely Western phenomenon that he opposes to what he characterises as Chinese peacefulness and cooperativeness. He primarily stresses cultural and political aspects such as religion, morality, and human rights. He does not much focus on aspects of political economy.

The twenty-first century's world is characterised by a political conflict between China and the USA, two great powers that compete for world hegemony in economic, political, cultural, and technological respects. Different forms of capitalism compete in the global capitalist system.

The danger is that a new world war will be the result. Zhao's approach too much affirms Chinese politics. He is highly critical of the United Nations. On the one hand, Zhao's criticism that the United Nations has a strong focus on political dialogue that lacks enforcement power in the case of severe conflicts is important. On the other hand, his argument that one should start from scratch in establishing institutions that secure world peace is too idealist and not practicable. The United Nations' big advantage is that it is an international institution with almost 200 nation-states as members. It is the world's largest intergovernmental organisation. Although it is far from perfect, reforming and improving the UN by making political economy matter more in its practices and policies is the most realistic strategy for establishing institutional foundations of world peace and reducing the risk of a new world war.

The analysis of war and peace and the attainment of world peace needs to integrate political economy with aspects of morality and politics.

## 9.6 Conclusion

This chapter asked: What is peace? What is world peace? How can they be attained?

Let us summarise the main findings of this chapter:

- **A materialist approach to the analysis of world peace:**

From the comparative analysis of Immanuel Kant's 'Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', Jürgen Habermas's works on political philosophy, and Tingyang Zhao's work on the tianxia system we can learn that the analysis of war and peace and the attainment of world peace needs to integrate political economy with aspects of morality and politics. It requires a materialist approach to the analysis of world peace. Understanding the causes of wars and prospects for peace requires focusing on society's structural antagonisms and their interactions with collective and individual practices. World peace requires an international system that advances universal benefits and mutual benefits.

- **Foundations of perpetual world peace:**

Perpetual world peace requires not just moral, communicative and political foundations such as a world constitution and diplomacy but also a global political economy that guarantees that all individuals,

groups, and parts of the world benefit so that they have no incentive for world wars and wars of conquest. In socialist international relations, there is the priority of avoiding war and finding ways of organising international relations and the global order so that there are mutual benefits or at least mutual coexistence where societies develop peacefully side by side. Establishing and maintaining world peace is not just a question of a political constitution and political agreements but has to do with material questions of advantages and disadvantages. World peace requires an international system that provides benefits to all involved actors that are larger than the benefits they can obtain from not joining or trying to destroy the system. World peace requires universal benefits (benefits for all) and mutual benefits.

- **The Importance of the (reformed) United Nations:**

Radical criticisms of the United Nations that propose its abolishment risk the danger of advancing moral and political relativism that, in the end, helps fascist forces, divides the world and advances the chances of a new world war. Although it is far from perfect, materialistically reforming and improving the UN by making political economy matter more in its practices and policies is the most realistic strategy for establishing institutional foundations of world peace and reducing the risk of a new world war.

The world is at a crossroads today. We live in times of heightened global problems and strong political polarisation. How the future of humanity and society will look like is uncertain. It is uncertain if humanity, society, and life on Earth will continue to exist in the future. Digital technologies are embedded in the antagonisms of global capitalism. The biggest danger is that a new world war that is a nuclear war will develop. The alternative to world war is world peace. Perpetual world peace requires international cooperation in solving the global problems, disarmament instead of a new arms race, an institutional framework for global governance that consists of a world constitution without a world government, global democratic institutions that provide material benefits for all so that participating in global governance and maintaining world peace is more beneficial than wars of conquest, and a global jurisdiction that holds those who commit crimes against humanity accountable. The alternative to world war is the creation of a material and institutional framework for world peace. Human praxis decides how the future of society will look like. Only history will tell how humans will shape the future.

## CHAPTER 10

# The United Nations, Human Rights, and World Peace

### 10.1 Introduction

The United Nations (UN) is a global organisation created in 1945 after the end of the Second World War. Its goal is to prevent a new world war and secure international peace. In this chapter, we engage with the foundations of the United Nations and ask: what are the prospects of the United Nations for creating world peace and preventing a new world war? What institutional reforms of the United Nations are needed?

The United Nations is based on the idea of universal rights. In this chapter, we want to first critically-constructively engage with universalism and human rights. Second, we will ask what the UN looks like today and what reforms it requires to be able to work against the development of world politics into a new world war.

First, we will engage with the notion of universalism (section 10.2). Next, we will move to an engagement with human rights as one expression of universalism (section 10.3). Third, we will analyse the United Nation's prospects for fostering world peace (section 10.4).

### 10.2 Universalism

#### 10.2.1 *The Critique of Universalism*

In his book, *On Universals*,<sup>1</sup> the philosopher Étienne Balibar is quite critical of the notions of universality and universalism. His basic argument is that universalism is an ideology that is used in racism, sexism, nationalism, colonialism, etc., to define a certain essence of humans that is positioned

against an outside that is then subjected, oppressed, exploited, destroyed, conquered, etc.<sup>2</sup>

For Balibar, universalism operates by deifying the “superior” terms of a difference (the masculine with its innate “rationality”, the normal or the “sane”, “developed” races or cultures, the intellectual versus the manual or the affective) and, above all, to *animalize* the “inferior” terms (those subject to relegation or social exclusion: the feminine, the pathological, “primitive” cultures).<sup>3</sup> For Balibar, racism ‘draws upon anthropological universals’<sup>4</sup> and draws a difference between ‘*humanity and animality*’<sup>5</sup> so that it characterises certain human groups as animal-like, subhuman, barbaric, uncivilised, uncultured, etc. In another essay, Balibar goes even so far as to equate racism and universalism by speaking of ‘*universalism as racism*’.<sup>6</sup>

For Balibar, universalism is an ideology that is used to justify domination. Universalism ‘shares the same source as racist and sexist discrimination. Or, rather – because this apparently metaphysical way of putting things is far from satisfactory – universalism and discrimination are produced in the same “place”, *in close proximity to one another* and in constant tension.’<sup>7</sup> More than just saying that universalism is an ideology, Balibar also claims that all ideology utilises universalism as its language: Ideology ‘is truly the language of universality, *the universal as language*’.<sup>8</sup> Balibar furthermore argues that universalism necessarily leads to violence. Violence would be ‘inherent in the institution of the universal’ and speaks of the ‘intrinsic violence of the universal’.<sup>9</sup>

There are several problems with arguing that universalism is necessarily ideological, violent, racist, etc.

- The far-right shares the radical critique of universalism. It argues that there are unbridgeable differences between cultures and certain human groups that should, therefore, be kept separate.
- Balibar’s argument has a restricted notion of universalism that sees particularism as a necessary feature of universalism.
- The argument can easily be adopted by those who question universal human rights for justifying dictatorships and the repression of humans. Balibar’s radical critique of universalism contradicts his defence of universal human rights,<sup>10</sup> where he does not adopt the language of multiplicity that he uses in his book *On Universals*.<sup>11</sup>

It is undoubtedly true, as Balibar writes, that 'racism, nationalism, and sexism seem to have in common is that they are all categories which [...] divide the universality of the human species into exclusive transhistorical groups which are supposed to be separated by *essential* differences, or to become self-conscious and act *as if* they were separated by essential differences. We must add: such essential differences are always at least tacitly understood and institutionalized as hierarchical differences.'<sup>12</sup> The conclusion that we draw should then, however, in my view, is not that we say that universalism is racist, ideological, and violent, but that we argue that racism, sexism, nationalism, anti-Semitism, ideology, etc. are not forms of universalism but particularisms that make pseudo-universalist arguments for small groups or subgroups of a larger totality that remains unrecognised and is deliberately ignored. Pseudo-universalism is an ideology because it only claims to be universalist but is, in fact, a form of particularism disguised as universalism. Universalism, in contrast, operates at the level of totalities. As a theory, it works at the level of the common features of the phenomenon in question. As a politics, it makes demands that apply to all. Universalism knows no outside. It is a theory and politics of the commons. Such an understanding differs from Balibar's concept of universalism, where particularism is a necessary feature of universalism.

The postmodern critique of universalism and postmodern fetishism of difference that can be found in quite some approaches and arguments form themselves an ideology. The pseudo-universalism of racism and other ideologies should not be countered by a radical critique and 'deconstruction' of universalism that rejects the very ideas of the universal and the commons but by a radicalisation of universalism, a truly universal universalism, and a Radical Humanism.<sup>13</sup>

### 10.2.2 *Multiplicities*

Balibar's theoretical and political alternatives to universalism are multiplicity and the multiverse. He speaks of the '*multiversum*, situated not prior to but *beyond unity* (and whose complex of translating practices between idioms provides, I and others believe, the most plausible model) can be aligned, at the level of individuals, with the figure of a *quasi-transcendental subject*, for whom the ontological question that at once constitutes

it and condemns it to errancy is precisely that of the multiplicity of differences of the human.<sup>14</sup> Multiversality and multiplicity are ‘*a universalism of the One* (or of unity) and a *universalism of the Multiple* (or of multiplicity), the essential characteristic of multiplicity thus being *to exceed every possibility of subsumption* and therefore of common denomination, or exclusively in the form of a “negative denomination”’.<sup>15</sup> The problem with this argument is that it fetishizes differences. Humans should have a right to lead diverse lifestyles, which is a right to difference. However, the right to difference needs to be in line with the commons and universal rights that relate to what all humans have in common. For example, there are right-wing groups that say they reject the state, want to be left alone by the state, and therefore do not pay taxes. Such a claimed right to difference violates the common political good, where all contribute to the funding of public services.

Balibar writes that humanity’s linguistic diversity is an important feature of the multiverse. ‘This leads me to the hypothesis – post-Humboldtian, perhaps – that the most adequate *approximate* model of a *multiversum* (or of a “world” that makes room for difference as such, without *stabilizing* difference within impossible “identities”) is furnished by the *linguistic multiplicity of humanity*.<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, linguistic diversity is certainly a cultural enrichment. Learning languages is a good way of developing one’s engagement with cultures. But language is not just open and diverse. It is in nationalist societies also a means of nationalism, exclusion, and racism. One of the typical claims of racists and nationalists is, ‘Immigrants do not speak our language, want to destroy our language and culture, they are different from us, they should be deported/imprisoned/killed/etc.’ Apart from the nationalist reality of language, a diversity without unity of languages disables humans from communicating with each other beyond local and national borders, which is another form of separation. A multiverse that is a diversity without unity fragments humanity, cultures, and the public sphere. Universalism, in contrast, needs to be a unity in diversity, where the common features, capacities, and social encounters of humans unite the richness of diversity.

### 10.2.3 Real Universality, Fictitious Universality, Ideal Universality

Balibar’s writings on universalism are contradictory. Whereas in some works, he formulates a radical critique of universalism that, in some instances, results in the fetishism of multiplicity without unity, there are

also works where he argues in a more differentiated manner that does not reject universalism. The latter is the case in the essay 'Ambiguous Universalism',<sup>17</sup> where Balibar distinguishes between three notions of universality: real universality, fictitious universality, and ideal/symbolic universality. The concept of universality would have a variety of meanings, and one should, according to Balibar, not give up this notion but 'accept the scattered meaning of the universal'.<sup>18</sup>

For Balibar, real universality means the world and its 'institutions, groups, individuals' become interdependent.<sup>19</sup> Real universality is just another formulation Balibar uses for society's economic, political, and cultural globalisation that creates a 'unity of the world'.<sup>20</sup> We can, of course, remember that Marx and Engels wrote that capitalism's productive forces have resulted in 'a universal intercourse'<sup>21</sup> that includes the world market and 'intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations'.<sup>22</sup> However, the notion of globalisation as universality reduces universality's political and ethical dimensions to a merely sociological understanding.

Fictitious universality, universality as fiction, is Balibar's<sup>23</sup> second notion of universality, by which he refers, as in other of his works, to universalism as ideology and ideology as universalism. He points out that religion, the nation-state (as an imagined community), and racism (that constructs fictive/fictitious ethnicity) are examples of institutions that practice fictitious universality. Differences become 'the essential mediation of [...] membership'.<sup>24</sup> In his 'Ambiguous Universalism' essay, Balibar characterises the ideological dimension of universality as one dimension or understanding. In contrast, some of his other works reduce universality to ideology and fiction.<sup>25</sup>

Balibar disagrees that fictitious universalism is a false universalism, a 'false consciousness' where 'a church or a state as an institution of power has need of a legitimizing discourse in which its own peculiarity or one-sidedness is masked and transfigured through the representation of "ideological" goals and values'.<sup>26</sup>

For him, fictitious universalism is '*truly* universalistic'<sup>27</sup> because it is 'working both *from above* and *from below*',<sup>28</sup> which means universalism as an ideology is not simply imposed by the ruling class but reflects and relates to the dominant worldviews of the population who create hegemony by which they reproduce ideology from below.

Ideal universality is Balibar's third meaning of universality, universality as an ideal, 'absolute or infinite claims which are symbolically raised against the limits of any institution'.<sup>29</sup> Ideal universality speaks of

unconditional features and rights.<sup>30</sup> Balibar under this notion, discusses, as in his works on human rights,<sup>31</sup> universal declarations of human rights, the notion of equaliberty, and struggles for equaliberty such as the working class and the women's movements struggles 'engaged in a movement for parity'.<sup>32</sup>

One should note that Balibar speaks of 'ideal universality' and 'universality as ideal' and not of true universality. He strives to preserve antagonistic meanings of universality. As a consequence, he is not able to give a clear definition of universality. Instead, he says that there are three competing definitions that are all equally valid. Universalism, in its meanings as a) racism, fascism, nationalism, etc. and b) democracy, participation, socialism, etc., becomes, however, theoretically meaningless and politically impotent. We require a progressive, political, critical, and democratic understanding of universalism. That's why I argue for understanding universalism as what Balibar refers to as 'ideal universalism' and what should better be termed 'true universalism'.

The most important insight we can learn from Balibar's discussion of universalism is that pseudo-universality, i.e., false, incomplete universality, has been utilised as an ideology for justifying various forms of domination and ideology, including fascism, anti-Semitism, racism, nationalism, sexism, etc. Consequently, one should not discard the notion of universalism because rejecting universalism invites far-right ideology and particularism. Instead, one should radicalise universalism and universalise universalism and argue that universalism means struggling for and advancing the logic of the commons. Universalism operates at the level of totalities. As a theory, it works at the level of the common features of the phenomenon in question. As a politics, it makes demands that apply to all. Universalism knows no outside. It is a theory and politics of the commons.

Based on the discussion of universalism, we will now move on to the analysis of human rights as a particular form of universalism.

### 10.3 Human Rights

#### 10.3.1 *The 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*

The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* is a document that emerged in 1789 during the French Revolution.<sup>33</sup> The Constituent Assembly passed it in 1789. It declares that humans have universal rights

and demands that the feudal order be abolished and replaced by a democracy.

The Declaration's universalism is already present in the first article: 'Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.' These rights are then, in article 2, defined as 'Liberty, Property, Safety and Resistance to Oppression'. 'Liberty consists in being able to do anything that does not harm others' (article 4). Article 11 connects human rights to the realm of communication by proclaiming a right to free speech: 'The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man. Any citizen may therefore speak, write and publish freely, except what is tantamount to the abuse of this liberty in the cases determined by Law.'

Karl Marx formulated a criticism of the French Declaration. His main argument is that the focus on property as a universal right and feature of humans ideologically legitimates unlimited private property of the means of production and the social inequalities it creates:

The right of man to private property is, therefore, the right to enjoy one's property and to dispose of it at one's discretion (*à son gré*), without regard to other men, independently of society, the right of self-interest. This individual liberty and its application form the basis of civil society. It makes every man see in other men not the realization of his own freedom, but the *barrier* to it. But, above all, it proclaims the right of man 'of enjoying and of disposing at his discretion of his goods and income, of the fruits of his labor and industry'.<sup>34</sup>

For Marx, there is a fundamental antagonism between equality and freedom of property. He says that equality is reduced to the equal right to possess as much property as one wants, disregarding inequalities generated by wealth distribution. Marx argues that the Declaration sees the human being as 'a self-sufficient monad'.<sup>35</sup> 'None of the so-called rights of man, therefore, go beyond egoistic man [...] – that is, an individual withdrawn into himself, into the confines of his private interests and private caprice, and separated from the community. [...] In the rights of man, [...] The sole bond holding them together is natural necessity, need and private interest, the preservation of their property and their egoistic selves'.<sup>36</sup>

In my view, one should not read this passage as meaning that Marx opposed human rights. Instead, he argued for radicalising human rights demands and extending them to the definition of social rights. The nineteenth century working class, the Chartist, and trade union movements

struggled for workers' rights to a decent living, regulated and reduced working times, and voting rights. These were struggles for social and political rights. The focus on such struggles is evident in the formulation that Marx used for opening the founding principles of the International Workingmen's Association, namely that 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves' and that 'the struggle for the emancipation of the working classes means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and duties, and the abolition of all class rule.'<sup>37</sup> One should add that Marx struggled for a free press, which means he made the French Declaration's eleventh article a demand in political praxis, in struggles against the Prussian monarchy's censorship of the press: 'The real, *radical cure for the censorship* would be its *abolition*; for the institution itself is a bad one, and institutions are more powerful than people. Our view may be right or not, but in any case the Prussian writers stand to *gain through the new instruction*, either in *real freedom*, or in freedom of *ideas*, in *consciousness*'.<sup>38</sup>

### 10.3.2 *Equaliberty*

Étienne Balibar<sup>39</sup> disagrees with Marx's view of the 1789 Declaration. He argues that the Declaration equates humans with citizens and liberty with equality. Balibar speaks, therefore, of *equaliberty*, by which he means that violations of the right of liberty also result in violations of equality and vice versa.<sup>40</sup> 'Equaliberty means that politics is founded on the recognition that neither freedom nor equality can exist without the other, that is, that the suppression or even the limitation of one necessarily leads to the suppression or limitation of the other'.<sup>41</sup> In the history of modern society, there has been an antagonism between the freedom of private property and social equality.

Balibar considers that, 'The *Declaration* opens an indefinite sphere of "politicization" of rights-claims' such as claims for citizenship rights, rights-claims of workers, women, slaves; and the colonised.<sup>42</sup> Interpreted radically, the Declaration would have led to radical insights such as the one that '*the emancipation of the oppressed can only by their own work*'.<sup>43</sup> We should here again remember that one of the founding principles of the International Workingmen's Association was that 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves'.<sup>44</sup>

Balibar<sup>45</sup> stresses that the politics of human rights is not simply the creation of democratic institutions but also includes the struggle for the realisation of universal human rights for all, which includes struggles against the exploitation of labour, slavery, colonisation, patriarchy, educational inequalities, etc.<sup>46</sup> It is a politics for the struggle of 'the extension of rights to all humanity'.<sup>47</sup>

Both Marx and Balibar argue for alleviating the capitalist antagonism between freedom and equality and realising what Balibar terms equaliberty, the unity of equality and liberty.

### ***10.3.3 Later Declarations of Human Rights***

Later Declarations of Human Rights have done more to define social rights and not exclusively understand the right to own property as an individual right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>48</sup> speaks of 'the right to own property alone as well as in association with others' (article 17), which includes collective forms of ownership. It also defines some social rights, namely the 'right to social security' (article 22) and 'the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control' (article 25). The right to private property and the antagonism between social equality and unlimited individual private property are still present but are somewhat mitigated by the definition of social rights and collective property rights.

The Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights,<sup>49</sup> which came into effect in 1953, falls short of the Universal Declaration passed by the United Nations in 1948. The European Convention does not define social rights and does not contain social keywords such as well-being, welfare, social security, etc. Security is merely defined as 'national security' (articles 2, 6, 8, 10, 11) and legal protections (article 5). Article 1 is on the 'Protection of Property'. It says that every 'natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions'. The reference here is clearly to private property ('his possessions'), although later on in article 1, the existence of 'the general interest' is mentioned. The European Convention goes more in the direction of a classical liberal position on

human rights, while the Universal Declaration tries to combine individual and social rights.

In 2000, the European Union adopted the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Member states are bound to the Charter's principles in their national legislation. Poland has discretionary opt-outs. Before it left the EU, the United Kingdom had similar powers to choose. The UK did not want the European Court of Justice to enforce the Charter legally in the UK. Poland's right-wing government found the Charter too liberal and feared that it would have to grant LGBTQ+ couples the same rights that heterosexuals have. Defining such exceptions for single countries undermines the universal character of human rights and should, therefore, be seen critically.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>50</sup> consists of six main sections: dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights, and justice. Article 17 defines an individual right to property: 'Everyone has the right to own, use, dispose of and bequeath his or her lawfully acquired possessions'; 'Intellectual property shall be protected.' There is a strong focus on the legitimization of private property, including in the realm of intellectual production. The Charter disregards that new ideas build on old ideas and that they are most widely distributed and adopted when treated as commons and not as private property. Article 17 says that limits to private property are legitimate when they are 'in the public interest' or the 'general interest'. These formulations enable the existence of public ownership of, for example, key infrastructures, as well as worker's collective self-management. Nonetheless, article 17's first sentence has a strong bias towards capitalist property, that is, private property that is capital. Concerning property, the Charter is quite in line with the European Convention on Human Rights and, by and large, takes a neoliberal approach. It even goes one step further and defines intellectual private property rights as human rights.

Other than the European Convention on Human Rights, the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights in the section on 'solidarity' (section IV) defines a series of social rights, including the right to collective bargaining (article 28), the right to protection against unfair dismissal (article 29), the right to fair and just working conditions (article 31), the prohibition of child labour (article 32), the right to reconcile family and working life (article 33), the right to social security (article 34), the right to health care (article 35). The European Charter formulates both neoliberal private property rights and

social-democratic social rights. The fundamental problem it faces is capitalism's antagonism between private property and social justice. Unlimited private property undermines social rights. Therefore, equaliberty is needed to limit private property so everyone's social rights can be guaranteed.

Human rights declarations have more or less stress on social rights. Their focus on property as a right oscillates between a pure emphasis on private property and a combination of social and private ownership. Many of them lack a focus on equaliberty, i.e., the inherent connection of freedom and equality. Human rights declarations should make sure to formulate principles that ensure that property does not undermine social justice and equality.

#### **10.3.4 Peace and Human Rights**

Declarations of human rights see the right to life as important, which means life under conditions of peace and security of the person so that violence and war do not threaten one's life. The 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* says that 'safety is one of the basic human rights' (article 2). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights's article 3 reads: 'Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person' – also, the European Convention on Human Rights ('Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law', article 2). The EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights ('Everyone has the right to life', article 2) defines the right to life as a key and very rudimentary human right.

Many human rights declarations furthermore prominently assert that human rights are the foundation of peace, which means they argue that human rights are needed and are a means for peace and world peace. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' first sentence is the following one: 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.' The European Convention on Human Rights says that 'fundamental freedoms [...] are the foundation of justice and peace.' The EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights argues in the first sentence that 'a peaceful future' needs to be 'based on common values'.

The problem is that human rights idealism neglects the political economy of peace and human rights. Such an idealism sees peace and human rights merely as a moral question and neglects issues of the distribution

of wealth and power. Human rights materialism, in contrast, stresses that human rights and peace have a material foundation. The violation of equaliberty and structures of exploitation, alienation, poverty, precarity, power asymmetries, the antagonism between freedom of property and social justice, and other inequalities make violence, the violation of human rights, and war more likely. Conversely, this means that securing peace and human rights requires, as one of its preconditions, wealth for all, social security, a social democracy, and a participatory democracy where humans participate in decision-making. Alienated structures foster violence and the potential for war. Unalienated, human-centred, inclusive structures help to advance nonviolence and peace.

#### 10.3.5 H. G. Wells on World War and World Peace

H. G. Wells is one of the best-known and most-read science fiction authors. His book *The Time Machine* (1895) is the world's sixth most-purchased science fiction book.<sup>51</sup> The horrors of war were an important theme in Wells's books. Politically, he was concerned with the question of how to create world peace. Besides novels, he also published political essays. In *The New World Order*,<sup>52</sup> he deals with the questions of what a world of peace looks like and how it can be attained.

Writing at the time of the Second World War, Wells says that humans 'are facing gigantic forces that will either destroy our species altogether or lift it to an altogether unprecedented level of power and well-being'.<sup>53</sup> In the twenty-first century, humans face quite similar situations, a bifurcation point in history where society stands at the crossroads of socialism or barbarism. Wells argues that perpetual world peace requires a socialist world society with collective ownership of the means of production and a world state that makes use of the law to guarantee personal freedoms. For Wells, socialism is unlike Stalinist collectivism because the latter lacked the guarantee of democracy and human rights. Wells says that world peace requires the 'triangle of Socialism, Law and Knowledge', the combination of scientifically planned socialism, legally guaranteed human rights, and 'the completest freedom of speech, criticism and publication'.<sup>54</sup>

Writing in 1940, Wells<sup>55</sup> in *The New World Order* included a Declaration of the Rights of Man that contains many of the rights defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that the United Nations

General Assembly adopted in 1948. Wells argues that the political system of a peaceful world society needs to be a world state. Therefore, he speaks of the creation of 'the one world state',<sup>56</sup> 'one common war-preventing control',<sup>57</sup> and the need for 'collective world control to eliminate warfare'.<sup>58</sup>

Wells was a founding member of PEN International and the advocacy group National Council for Civil Liberties, which is today known as Liberty. After the Second World War broke out, Wells wrote a draft of A Declaration of Human Rights. The first version was published in 1940.<sup>59</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt and Mahatma Gandhi commented, among others, which resulted in new versions. In 1943, an advanced version was published.<sup>60</sup> It directly influenced the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a UN committee chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt.<sup>61</sup>

The advantage of Wells's approach to world peace is its materialist character. He does not simply rely on a declaration of human rights that is moral-political in character, but also stresses aspects of political economy. The main problem with Wells's new world order concept is the assumption that world peace requires one centralised world state. He disregards the danger that a world government and accompanying world institutions have extreme power that can easily become alienated and detached from the interests of large parts of the world. A world government in a world state can easily turn into a world dictatorship. Dictatorships mean conflicts of interest and are, therefore, systems that have enormous potentials for wars and world wars. By speaking out in favour of a world state and a world government, Wells conceptually undermines the very goal of achieving perpetual world peace because a world government is a source of centralised power, dictatorship, particularistic interests, alienation, war, and world war.

In his comparatively little-read novel *The World Set Free*, H. G. Wells<sup>62</sup> tells a story where the world in the middle of the twentieth century comes close to collapse in a nuclear war and is saved and reconstructed by constructing a socialist world society whose organisational political form is a world state. The story of this nuclear world war is presented in the form of the observations recorded by the British soldier Frederick Barnet in his autobiography. From this book in Wells's book, we learn that a nuclear bomb was dropped on Paris, one on Berlin, and one on Holland's dikes so that the country was flooded. Barnet reports about 'tremendous pillars of fire'.<sup>63</sup> Similar events took place in Chicago, Moscow, Tokyo, London, and 'two hundred and eighteen other centres of population or armament' so

that each became 'a flaming centre of radiant destruction'<sup>64</sup> and contained a hole that looked like 'the crater of a small volcano'.<sup>65</sup> In almost all countries of the world, there were three of four death zones 'a score of miles in diameter'.<sup>66</sup>

Radioactivity was discovered in 1896. The first nuclear test explosion took place on July 16, 1945, in Los Alamos. H. G. Wells was very farsighted, and in his novel *The World Set Free* already in 1914 predicted the creation of nuclear weapons. In the novel, the first nuclear power plant is activated in 1953.<sup>67</sup> History quite closely followed Wells's prediction. In 1954, the Soviets started operating the world's first nuclear power plant, the Obninsk Nuclear Power Plant.

In Wells's book, nuclear bombs have the form of hand grenades that are thrown from aeroplanes. Wells correctly describes that atomic bombs have devastating consequences. He underestimated the dynamics the use of a nuclear bomb would probably unleash so that an all-out nuclear war might easily emerge. Contemporary strategic nuclear bombs have such devastating deadly effects that their use would result in nuclear counter-strikes and retaliation strikes, which would quickly destroy life on Earth. Contemporary strategic nuclear weapons have a bomb yield between one hundred kilotons and up to one megaton. The atomic bombs the US Air Forces dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 had a yield of between fifteen and twenty kilotons. The bomb yield measures the power of an explosion in terms of the equivalent weight of dynamite. According to estimates, a strategic nuclear bomb with a yield of five hundred kilotons would kill 250,000 humans when dropped on London, 390,000 when dropped on Moscow, 900,000 when dropped on New York, 500,000 when dropped on Beijing, 250,000 when dropped on Berlin, and 800,000 when dropped on Paris.<sup>68</sup> An atomic bomb with a yield of one megaton would kill 1 million humans when dropped on London, 1.2 million in Moscow, 1.7 million in New York, 1.4 million in Beijing, 700,000 in Berlin, and 1.7 million in Paris.<sup>69</sup> The catastrophe the use of such a bomb would cause is almost unimaginable. In Wells's book, the use of a series of atomic bombs has enlightening effects so that world leaders stop warfare and convene a conference where they decide to abolish national governments and create a world state and a socialist world society that abolishes nuclear weapons. Wells writes that by nuclear world war, humans 'were made nascent' and became 'ready for new associations'.<sup>70</sup> In reality, the idea of a nuclear war that enlightens, ends all wars, and saves humanity from its

destruction is too idealistic. When a strategic nuclear weapon is used, then reason can probably no longer be saved. In this situation, it is likely that everything is lost. Enlightenment that starts full nuclear disarmament and ends all wars must begin before the use of nuclear weapons. Wells's hope that humankind 'will wake up'<sup>71</sup> in a nuclear war is too optimistic.

In Wells's *The World Set Free*,<sup>72</sup> following a nuclear world war, the French ambassador in the USA Leblanc organises a 'conference 'to save humanity'<sup>73</sup> in the city of Brissago in Switzerland where the key rulers of the world meet and decide to abolish national governments and to create a socialist world state that in the book is referred to as the Republic of Humankind. The leaders meeting at this conference argue that war can only stop forever 'by putting all the world under one government'.<sup>74</sup> Wells here underestimates that wars are not only fought for political reasons but also for political-economic ones. Even if national governments ceased to exist, corporations might organise private armies and police forces that try to conquer other territories, police exploitation, and secure the existence of class relations. He also underestimates the danger of the centralisation of power a world government contains and, as a consequence, the antagonisms, conflicts, and, as a consequence, wars that it can easily bring forth. The world government consists of about one hundred persons<sup>75</sup> elected by ten constituencies.<sup>76</sup> If, as Wells assumed, all adults are allowed to vote in his envisioned World Republic, then in 2023, such a constituency would have had around 700 million members. Such a huge constituency size would certainly often not be able to reach a consensus and create divisions that contain minorities that are huge in size, so that there would be the potential for creating dissatisfaction among hundreds of millions or even billions of world citizens.

Wells's World Republic declares the common ownership of the means of production,<sup>77</sup> abolishes nuclear weapons, advances scientific progress in ways that benefit all, and increases productivity so that 'the food now of the whole world is produced by less than one per cent of its population' and the human being from 'an agricultural animal' turns into 'a builder, a traveller, and a maker'<sup>78</sup> create democratic associations that run and organise companies, and based on English create a universal world language. One important insight of Wells's depiction of a socialist world society with world peace is that perpetual world peace requires material foundations and has political-economic aspects such as wealth for all, democracy for all, education for all, etc. The problem with his utopia is the notion of a world state that guarantees peace but, in reality, might easily be a source of war.

The main insights we can learn from analysing human rights theories, declarations, and writings is that human rights idealism should be avoided and that we need a human rights materialism. Human rights idealism declares human rights without taking their political economy context into account. It tends to disregard the antagonism between private property and equality in capitalism. Human rights materialism, in contrast, situates human rights in the context of political economy. It argues for equal liberty, the interconnectedness of liberty and equality. Human rights principles and struggles need to be considered in terms of human rights' material aspects. They should make demands that advance the dialectic of liberty and equality, equal freedom and free equality.

Based on the discussion of human rights (section 10.3) and universalism (section 10.2), we will now move on to the analysis of the United Nations.

## 10.4 The United Nations and World Peace

### 10.4.1 *The United Nations*

The creation of the United Nations in 1945 was the result of the international insight that world war and any repetition of Auschwitz had to be prevented. In 2023, 193 countries had ratified the Charter of the United Nations. In order to guarantee human rights and peace, intervention and sanctions are enabled, and the UN Security Council has the power to make decisions on such measures. The Charter prohibits war as a means of international politics except in cases of self-defence. The Security Council has five permanent country members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) with a veto right, and ten country members are elected regionally for a period of two years. The UN's General Assembly is 'basically the parliament of the UN' where each member state has one vote, the Security Council is the 'executive committee', and the UN Secretariat is 'the operational body of – or the bureaucracy that runs – the UN'.<sup>79</sup>

In its Charter, the United Nations defines its purpose as saving 'succeeding generations from the scourge of war', promoting respect for 'fundamental human rights', respect of 'justice and respect' in international relations, as well as the promotion of 'social progress and better standards

of life in larger freedom',<sup>80</sup> maintaining 'international peace and security' (UN Charter, article 1), and the development of 'friendly relations among nations' (article 1). The UN members commit to settling 'international disputes by peaceful means' and not using force against 'the territorial integrity or political independence of any state' (article 2). However, member states have the right of self-defence if an 'armed attack occurs' against them (article 51).

If the Security Council determines a threat to international peace and security, it calls upon the involved parties to mediate the conflict by peaceful means (article 33). If that fails, it can decide to introduce sanctions that 'may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations' (article 41) as well as blockades (article 42). If such measures are inadequate, then the Security Council can also decide to utilise armed forces that are provided by all members (articles 42 & 43).

The veto power of powerful nation-states in the UN Security Council enables them to block measures that condemn their own military actions. The five 'big players' have 'an effective stranglehold on the overall ability of the UN to function at all'.<sup>81</sup> One day after Russia invaded Ukraine, Russia blocked a resolution in the UN Security Council that condemned the invasion as a violation of the UN Charter's article 2. In September 2022, Russia vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that declared the referenda held in Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia illegal. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq, according to then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, violated the UN Charter.<sup>82</sup> Then-US President George W. Bush announced that the USA reserves itself the right of pre-emptive strikes without agreement by the UN Security Council. The UN is not able to 'keep a super-power' from 'using its military might'.<sup>83</sup>

One of the problems is that national interests trump human and international interests in some of the decisions made by the Security Council. The United Nations faces an 'inherent tension between universalism and national prerogatives' and does not have a properly functioning judiciary body with enforcement mechanisms, as the implementation of its norms is left 'largely to the nation-states'.<sup>84</sup> The UN Security Council would have to be reformed so that vetoes by single, powerful countries are no longer possible. It requires general guidelines and rules that determine when the United Nations is obliged to intervene, sanction, etc. Also, its membership

structure of five permanent members and ten elected members could be enlarged.

There have been several attempts to reform the UN Security Council, including plans to add five more permanent members without veto rights, four more non-permanent members, or the introduction of seats that are renewed every four years.<sup>85</sup> Such plans sounded promising but could not be realised. One problem is that the five great powers with veto rights are permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the UK, USA). They can use their veto to hinder structural reforms that curb their power in the UN. Another issue is that if their veto power were abolished, all or some of them might leave the United Nations, which means they might stop talking to each other in the case of conflicts, which could result in the escalation of violence.

‘UN member states have debated reform since the UN’s inception’,<sup>86</sup> including reforms of the UN Security Council (UNSC). For example, already in 1955, a publication by the Brookings Institution, a US think-tank, had the title *Proposals for Changes of the United Nations*.<sup>87</sup> In 1965, a reform was undertaken so that the number of non-permanent members of the UNSC grew from six to ten. Winther (2020) reviews the debate on reforms of the UNSC and concludes: ‘Despite all the debates and rounds of negotiations in the UN, all the research, and suggestions on reform from academia, the issue remains unresolved.’<sup>88</sup>

In 2004, a high-level UN panel consisting of experts from 16 UN member countries, including all five permanent member countries of the UNSC, suggested UNSC reforms in a report.<sup>89</sup> The panel’s suggestion was to increase the number of members of the UNSC from currently 15 to 24. One model suggested the number of permanent members would increase from five to eleven and the number of non-permanent members from ten to fifteen. The new members would not have veto power. In another suggested model, permanent membership would be unchanged, the number of non-permanent seats renewed every two years would increase from ten to eleven, and eight non-permanent seats with a tenure of four years would be created. Then-UN General Secretary Kofi Annan supported the proposals and urged UN Member States ‘to consider the two options, models A and B, proposed in that report [...], or any other viable proposals in terms of size and balance that have emerged on the basis of either model’<sup>90</sup> so as to make the UNSC ‘more broadly representative of the international community as a whole and the geopolitical realities of today, and to expand its

membership to meet these goals'.<sup>91</sup> Twenty years later, reform suggestions continue to be demanded and are heavily debated, but none of the panel's recommendations or other reform proposals have been realised.

Suggestions for structural reforms argue for the change of the membership of the UNSC, and/or changes to or the abolishment of veto rights, and/or changing the relationship between the UNSC and the UN General Assembly. Common points of criticism are that the UNSC is not representative of the world and that its five permanent members are a dictatorial power within the UN because their veto prevents changes. Critics of structural reform, in turn, say that such reforms would block and gridlock any actions by the UNSC. Therefore, they say the UNSC's working methods should be reformed, not its structures. One argument in this context is that the UNSC is a diplomatic forum and that the five major nuclear powers will leave it when their veto right is curbed, depriving the world of a forum of debate that plays a role in preventing a world war. Critics of structural reforms say that preventing a world war would be the key task of the UNSC.<sup>92</sup> Adding permanent members would not help prevent a world war.

At the 2024 Munich Security Conference, there was a debate on 'UN Security Council Reform' involving politicians from Slovenia, Ireland, Germany, Peru, and Kenya.<sup>93</sup> Everyone agreed that reforms are needed, that the misuse of veto power gridlocks the UN, and that there is a problem of representativeness. The suggested reforms are diverse and include, for example, that the UN General Assembly's role is upgraded and that it must meet and discuss a veto cast in the UNSC within ten days; that the veto in the UNSC should go and membership be broadened; that a veto can only be exercised together by three of the five veto-holding nations (Majority of Three); that Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan should become permanent members, etc. The debate on UN reforms continues with little prospect of finding agreements. A different, more materialist approach focusing on political-economic incentives and not simply on representation and voting rights might help.

In September 2024, the UN members unanimously adopted the *UN Pact for the Future*.<sup>94</sup> The *Pact* is structured around 56 actions in the broad fields of sustainable development, international peace and security, science and digital technologies, youth and future generations, and global governance. On the one hand, the document is a commitment to the importance of the UN. On the other hand, it remains vague because it formulates many intentions without joint commitments by all member states. This

vagueness becomes evident by the high presence of formulations such as the ones that the UN will ‘promote’, ‘strengthen our efforts’, ‘increase our efforts’, ‘strengthen’, ‘accelerate the reform’, ‘redouble our efforts’, etc. in the announced 56 actions.

The *UN Pact for the Future* expresses concerns about ‘the growing risks of a nuclear war which could pose an existential threat to humanity’,<sup>95</sup> and in action number 25 commits to taking actions that advance ‘a world free of nuclear weapons’.<sup>96</sup> The goal of the ‘total elimination of nuclear weapons’<sup>97</sup> remains rather empty because in the document, the world’s nuclear powers do not commit to concrete nuclear disarmament measures. Rather, the UN says it will continue to publicly communicate opposition to the armament of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and an arms race by saying, ‘We express our serious concern at the increasing number of actions that are contrary to existing international norms and non-compliance with obligations in the field of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation’<sup>98</sup>; ‘Action 13. We will redouble our efforts to build and sustain peaceful, inclusive and just societies and address the root causes of conflicts.’<sup>99</sup> The UN says it is ‘redoubling’ its efforts and ‘expressing serious concerns’ about nuclear armament but Russia has continued to threaten the use of nuclear bombs and some nuclear powers, such as China, the UK, Pakistan, India, and North Korea, have increased their number of deployed and stored nuclear warheads (see table 9.2 in chapter 9).

In the *Pact for the Future*, the UN identifies the need to ‘reform the Security Council’, ‘[e]nlarge the Security Council in order to be more representative of the current United Nations membership’ and ‘increase representation of developing countries’.<sup>100</sup> The UN also wants to ‘intensify efforts to reach an agreement on the future of the veto, including discussions on limiting its scope and use’.<sup>101</sup> These goals are laudable, but there is no commitment to reforms in the area of political economy, such as the taxation of transnational corporations and the UN’s redistribution of the income gained by such a tax. Also, the issue of abolishing or severely restricting the veto in the Security Council faces the problem that those members holding veto power might veto such proposals. It is, therefore, not enough that the UN wants to intensify efforts on this issue.

The *UN Pact for the Future* announces that the UN will ‘redouble’ the ‘efforts to end impunity and ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law, most serious crimes under international law, including genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and other

atrocity crimes'.<sup>102</sup> The International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant against Vladimir Putin, who is allegedly responsible for the war crime of the forceful deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia. It is not a surprise that Russia opposed the *Pact for the Future* by trying to introduce an amendment that argued that the issues addressed in the *Pact* should not be addressed by the UN but rather by 'domestic jurisdiction'.<sup>103</sup> In total 143 UN members opposed that amendment, only seven favoured it (Belarus, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Russian Federation, Sudan, Syria), and there were 15 abstentions. 'The AU, led by the Republic of Congo, called for the Russian amendment to be rejected'.<sup>104</sup> Given that Russia often presents itself as a leader of the interest of the non-Western world, the fact that African countries voted against its amendment represents a political defeat for Putin.

There are no easy solutions to the question of how structural reforms can best be brought about. Only a collective insight of the world's great powers that the universal interests of humanity are more important than national interests and that internationalism advances peace while nationalism advances war would enable such reforms. The sad reality is that in a global capitalist system, such insights and changing interests might only occur when global problems escalate to such an extent that humanity and world society come closer and closer to the brink of collapse so that the world's great powers have actual disadvantages, they cannot compensate by power politics. The danger is that it then might already be too late, and nuclear war, genocides, environmental crises, social crises, devastating accidents emerging from high-risk technologies, etc., might then already have destroyed humanity and life on Earth. Perhaps a turning point to the continuous development of the global destructive forces might come soon enough. Only history will tell. At least as long as history can still be told.

Nationalism has become a major force in twenty-first century world politics. In a kind of negative dialectic, neoliberal global capitalism's antagonisms have backfired and have produced a politically less liberal and significantly illiberal capitalist world system. The more that nationalists, fascists, and authoritarians rule and control key power positions, the more likely world war becomes, as such ideologues are convinced that what they see as the national interest comes first, perceive the world through the friend/enemy-scheme, and tend to believe in violence and war as appropriate or even the preferred means of politics.<sup>105</sup>

### 10.4.2 Nationalism as Obstacle to World Peace

George Orwell<sup>106</sup> argues that nationalists fetishize the nation. They think that ‘human beings can be classified like insects’ into “good” or ‘bad’ depending on what nation they are said to belong to.<sup>107</sup> Nationalists identify themselves ‘with a single nation’, place it ‘beyond good and evil’, and see ‘no other duty than that of advancing its interests’.<sup>108</sup> Nationalism is inseparable from ‘the desire for power’, which is to increase the power of a certain nation.<sup>109</sup> Nationalists see history ‘as the endless rise and decline of great power units, and every event that happens seems to him a demonstration that his own side is on the up-grade and some hated rival on the down-grade’.<sup>110</sup> Nationalists think of the world in terms of ‘victories, defeats, triumphs, and humiliations’.<sup>111</sup> They conceive of the world and politics as consisting merely of friends and enemies. The friend/enemy-schemewhere one’s own nation is seen as a friend and other nations and outsiders as enemies, is a key feature of nationalism.<sup>112</sup> And the friend/enemy-scheme is closely bound up with the political desire for violence as a means to eliminate enemies. Orwell<sup>113</sup> distinguishes between positive and negative nationalism. Positive nationalism glorifies a certain nation, while negative nationalism denigrates outsiders who are said to not belong to the glorified nation. Positive self-presentation and/or negative other-presentation is an important feature of nationalism.<sup>114</sup>

Nationalism is an ideology that does not exist by accident. It is a reaction to, reflection of, and deflection from the actual problems and causes of class structures, domination, and crises. Marx stressed this material aspect of nationalism as ideology:

Ireland is the BULWARK of the *English landed aristocracy*. The exploitation of this country is not simply one of the main sources of their material wealth; it is their greatest *moral* power. [...] And most important of all! All industrial and commercial centres in England now have a working class *divided* into two *hostile* camps, English PROLETARIANS and Irish PROLETARIANS. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who forces down the STANDARD OF LIFE. In relation to the Irish worker, he feels himself to be a member of the *ruling nation* and, therefore, makes himself a tool of his aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland*, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*. He harbours religious, social and national prejudices against him. [...] This antagonism

is kept artificially alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling class. *This antagonism is the secret of the English working class's impotence*, despite its organisation. It is the secret of the maintenance of power by the capitalist class. And the latter is fully aware of this.<sup>115</sup>

The struggle for a peaceful world has also to be a struggle against nationalism and for an international world where all benefit and can think of themselves first and foremost as humans and not as members of a nation. Where there is nationalism, the likelihood of war and world war increases. The struggle for world peace is, among other things, a struggle against nationalism and for the elimination of the material foundations of nationalism.

The elimination of nationalism as a precondition and aspect of world peace does not imply that we need to create a world state that tries to create a world identity. A world state can all too easily become a world dictatorship. The world society of the future that wants to guarantee world peace certainly needs organisational levels below the global level. It requires political organisations at the level of the city, the local region, the state, and geographical regions. The point is that organisations at these levels do not necessarily have to define themselves in opposition to other organisations or levels but can foster mutually beneficial cooperation with others and the spirit of belonging to the human community that is built on social ties and global solidarity.

#### **10.4.3 Materialist Reforms of the United Nations**

The United Nations needs a proper jurisdiction that has the power to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity. The International Criminal Court is built on the model of the Nuremberg Trials and the Tokyo Trials, where war crimes committed in the Second World War were prosecuted. In 2023, the ICC has been ratified or acceded to by 123 nation-states. China opposes the ICC, arguing that it violates national sovereignty. India, North Korea, and Pakistan are also not members of the ICC. Iran, Russia, and the United States have signed but have not ratified the Rome Statute that established the ICC. The countries just mentioned are, however, those with the seven largest armies in the world measured by active military personnel.<sup>116</sup> This means that great powers can undermine

and ignore international law without facing legal consequences. For the UN to work properly in securing peace, its jurisdiction in the form of an institution such as the ICC would have to be extended globally or at least to all UN member countries.

The Charter of the United Nations is primarily based on moral and political grounds, namely the Enlightenment view that all governments of nation-states are interested in living in international peace and security and that this goal is of utmost importance. It is too much based on human rights idealism. Security is, however, not just security from military aggression but also social security. Class and political economy aspects only play a very subordinate role in the UN Charter. It says that the UN works for 'the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples'.<sup>117</sup> However, it does not define what economic and social advancement means and how it can best be achieved. UN organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisations, and the World Bank have propagated neoliberal free-marketism, which has advanced inequalities.

In global capitalism, powerful actors seek economic advantages at various levels, including the international and global levels. Making use of the international division of labour to accumulate capital by exploiting cheap labour, accessing cheap resources, creating debt traps and practising uneven exchange play a role in this context, just like wars aimed at conquering territories controlled economically, politically, and culturally. One of the aims of the UN is to foster international economic and social cooperation,<sup>118</sup> which involves the UN's promotion of 'higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development' and 'solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems' (UN Charter, article 55).

These are certainly all feasible and important goals. They are, however, somewhat abstract and idealist. There are various interpretations of what higher standards of living, social progress, and social development mean. Neoliberals, for example, have argued for a long time that fostering unbridled market forces and commodification creates new wealth for companies and the rich that then trickles down to the poor. The realities of neoliberal capitalism have been increasing inequalities. Others argue that redistributive policies that distribute wealth from the rich to the poor via capital taxation are needed. The UN Charter does not make a more detailed definition of how to understand social progress and social development.

A reformed UN Charter should take aspects of political economy more into account in order to reduce the risks of wars of conquest that have political-economic goals. We need materialist reforms of the UN. Membership in the UN should also provide direct socio-economic advantages to those countries and regions that are facing low and medium human development. If the world's wealthiest corporations, individuals, and states committed a particular share of their wealth to global redistribution, the UN could organise such redistribution measures, which would be one mechanism to reduce global inequalities. Such socio-economic measures would not automatically eliminate wars but would be one important contribution to reducing the antagonisms of global capitalism that shape international relations. They would help foster friendly relations in the world.

## 10.5 Conclusion

This chapter asked: what are the prospects of the United Nations for creating world peace and preventing a new world war? What institutional reforms of the United Nations are needed?

We conducted a critical-constructive analysis of universalism, human rights, and the United Nations (UN) to provide answers. The key insight was that one should avoid human rights idealism and advance human rights materialism and materialist reforms of the UN.

Let us summarise this chapter's key findings:

- **Pseudo-universalism:**

Fictitious/false/pseudo-universalism, as it appears in fascism, racism, nationalism, sexism, and other ideologies, makes claims about a certain nature of humanity and defines an outside that is presented as animal-like, barbaric, uncivilised, uncultured, subhuman, etc. Universalism is ideologically abused in order to justify domination. Pseudo-universalism is, in the end, nothing but particularism.

- **True universalism:**

True universalism is radical universalism and universal universalism. It argues that universalism struggles to advance the logic of the commons. Universalism operates at the level of totalities. As a theory, it works at the level of the common features of the phenomenon in

question. As a politics, it makes demands that apply to all. Universalism knows no outside. It is a theory and politics of the commons.

- **Equaliberty as human rights materialism:**

Human rights idealism should be avoided. We need a human rights materialism. Human rights idealism declares human rights without taking their political economy context into account. It tends to disregard the antagonism between private property and equality in capitalism. Human rights materialism, in contrast, situates human rights in the context of political economy. It argues for equaliberty, the interconnectedness of liberty and equality. Human rights declarations and struggles need to see human rights' material aspects. They should make demands that advance the dialectic of liberty and equality, equal freedom and free equality.

- **Materialist reforms of the United Nations:**

The Charter of the United Nations is primarily based on moral and political grounds, namely the Enlightenment view that all governments of nation-states are interested in living in international peace and security and that this goal is of utmost importance. It is too much based on human rights idealism. Class and political economy aspects only play a very subordinate role in the UN Charter. We require materialist reforms of the United Nations. A reformed UN Charter should take aspects of political economy more into account in order to reduce the risks of wars of conquest that have political-economic goals. We need materialist reforms of the UN. Membership in the UN should also provide direct socio-economic advantages to those countries and regions that are facing low and medium human development. If the world's wealthiest corporations, individuals, and states committed a particular share of their wealth to global redistribution, the UN could organise such redistribution measures, which would be one mechanism to reduce global inequalities. Such socio-economic measures would not automatically eliminate wars but would be one important contribution to reducing the antagonisms of global capitalism that shape international relations. They would help foster friendly relations in the world.

## CHAPTER 11

# World Peace and Democratic (Digital) Socialism

### 11.1 Introduction

This chapter asks: What is the relationship between world peace and (digital) democratic socialism?

Section 11.2 discusses the foundations of democratic socialism. Section 11.3 is focused on the relationship between socialism, violence, and peace. Section 11.4 engages with digital democratic socialism. Section 11.5. discusses digital democratic socialism and peace.

We start by discussing the notion of democratic socialism and its relation to peace.

### 11.2 Democratic Socialism

#### 11.2.1 *What is Democratic Socialism?*

Socialism is a modern project that emerged in the light of the misery that the newly created working class experienced in capitalism and in the context of the implementation of the Industrial Revolution in class societies. The political principles of the French Revolution of freedom, equality, and solidarity had not been fully realised and only in a particularistic manner that primarily benefited the ruling class. The economic dominance of the principle of the freedom of private property came into contradiction with the principle of solidarity that should guarantee a good life for all. Individual freedom of property stood in antagonism to social freedom.

Nineteenth-century socialists argued and struggled for the creation of a society where there were socially responsible economic organisations that were collectively owned. Their perspective limited socialism to the economy and saw socialism as an economic system. In the twentieth century, this tendency continued, but in two different ways. Social Democrats have seen socialism as the creation of collectively operated and owned companies that operate in the framework of liberal democracy. Stalinists and Maoists have seen socialism as state-owned enterprises that exist in the framework of a state dictatorship. While Social Democrats have seen no need to transform the political system, Stalinists and Maoists have aimed at altogether abolishing liberal governance and supplanting it with a dictatorship ruled by a bureaucratic apparatus and a single party controlled by one person. They see the state and governance problems as automatically dying off when state ownership of the means of production exists. In this there is a technological determinism combined with economism underlying such assumptions, namely that modern technologies enable a socialist economy to become so productive that class conflicts and, as a consequence, the state die out and the government of persons is replaced by the mere administration of things. Several Social Democrats on the one side and many Stalinists and Maoists on the other side have limited socialism to the economy and have thought that economic transformation abolishes all problems in society.

For Marx, radical socialism is the 'reintegration or return of man to himself, the transcendence of human self-estrangement', 'the real appropriation of the human essence', 'fully developed humanism'.<sup>1</sup> The human being is a socially producing being that produces its livelihood, which includes use-values (economy), collective decisions governing life (politics), and meanings that define life's purpose (culture). Given that alienation goes for Marx beyond the economy and covers all realms of human production and life, including the economy and culture, Marx does not limit the notion of socialism to the economy but sees it as the full development of humanism in society. Marx says that 'abolition of private property and communism are by no means identical'<sup>2</sup> and therefore stresses that socialism means '*the abolition of class distinctions generally*' together with 'all the relations of production on which they rest', including all corresponding 'social relations' and 'all the ideas that result from these social relations'.<sup>3</sup>

Socialism has to do with the insight that a society is good, fair, and just when it is governed not based on the principle of instrumental reason, where a small group instrumentalises, exploits, dominates, and oppresses others in order to derive individual benefits but based on the principle of sociality so that society is organised in a social manner that creates benefits for all. Traditional socialists of different types have reduced the question of the good society far too often to the economy and have conceived socialism as merely an economic system, a co-operatively or state-owned economy. In addition, some of them have conceived the transition from capitalism to socialism as a historical necessity and automatic consequence resulting from the technological development of the productive forces and its antagonisms, which means declaring the active praxis and political organisation of human subjects as unimportant.

The approach taken by the present author not only sees capitalism but also socialism as a formation of society (*Gesellschaftsformation*). Nancy Fraser (2022) argues that an 'expanded notion of capitalism' requires 'an expanded conception of socialism'<sup>4</sup> where socialism is not simply an economic system but 'an institutionalized societal order'.<sup>5</sup> In a socialist formation of society, the logic of instrumental reason is, as far as possible, replaced by the logic of social, co-operative reason so that economic, political, and cultural resources are managed by those who are affected by them in manners that benefit all. Humans living in a society are the producers of this society, its economic, political, and cultural producers. Those who produce something should also govern, control, manage, and own the conditions of production and the created products. The economy has a more general meaning than just the production of food, shelter, and other means of subsistence. There is an economic aspect, namely social production, in all social systems. The insight that humans should be in control of their conditions of life and production and the products that affect their lives originates in the economy but extends into all realms of society. Socialism is a movement towards and the organisation of, a society that overcomes alienation so that society is self-managed collectively by those who live and produce in it and benefits not just a tiny minority but everyone.

Axel Honneth stresses that socialism means the application 'of the notion of social freedom to all three constitutive spheres of modern societies (not just the economy, but also politics and personal relationships)'.<sup>6</sup> 'Only if all members of society can satisfy the needs they share with all others – physical and emotional intimacy, economic independence and

political self-determination – by relying on the sympathy and support of their partners in interaction will our society have become social in the full sense of the term.”<sup>7</sup>

First, we need to add to Honneth’s analysis that Marx saw socialism as a society where freedom, solidarity, and cooperation operate in the realms of the economy, politics, and culture. Second, Honneth’s third realm is restricted to the personal relationships of ‘the family and intimate relationships’.<sup>8</sup> The realm of meaning-making in everyday life is much broader than intimacy and, besides the family, includes friendships, love and sexuality; aspects of life such as education, worldviews, religion, philosophy, science, morality, sports, entertainment, consumption, care, arts, health and medicine; or life and death. Third, society’s three realms (economy, politics, culture) are neither independent nor simply interdependent but are realms of social production that constitute society’s materiality. Politics and culture are, simultaneously, economic (realms of the production of collective decisions and meanings) and non-economic.<sup>9</sup>

There are three dimensions of a socialist society: the socialist economy, socialist politics, and socialist culture. Whereas in an alienated, domineering, heteronomous class society, the three spheres of society are ruled by instrumental reason and particularistic interests, the three realms are in a socialist society shaped by co-operative reason and the common interest. Socialist society is organised in ways that benefit all. In a class society, society only benefits some at the expense of others. Table 11.1 contrasts alienated society with socialist society. It shows three dimensions of socialism that are sublations of alienation.

The common, socialist economy is the sublation of class society. The common politics of participatory democracy is the sublation of dictatorship. Common culture is the sublation of ideology and disrespect. Production in society is a dialectic of objects/human subjects that results in the creation of products. Table 11.2 shows how these dimensions look in a socialist society concerning the three dimensions of society.

Democratic socialism is a societal formation (*Gesellschaftsformation*) and movement as well as the struggle for such a formation that is based on the logic of the commons, which entails a common, self-managed economy, common politics in the form of participatory democracy, and a common culture that features internationalism, a culture of unity in diversity, and human self-realisation.

**Table 11.1: Three dimensions of socialist society and their opposition to alienated society** (based on Fuchs 2020b, 13)

	Alienated society	Socialist society
<b>Economy</b>	Class	Common economy: collective ownership of the means of production, abolition of toil and unnecessary labour, well-rounded individuality with free work, self-managed companies, production from each according to their abilities, distribution to each according to their needs, wealth for all
<b>Politics</b>	Dictatorship	Common politics: participatory democracy
<b>Culture</b>	Ideology, disrespect	Common culture: internationalism, culture of unity in diversity, self-realisation of all humans

**Table 11.2: Subjects, objects, and products in the three realms of socialist society** (based on Fuchs 2020b, 13)

Type	Subjects	Object	Products
Economic socialism	Commoners, well-rounded individuals	Collectively-owned means of production, self-managed companies	Common goods, wealth for all, self-fulfilment for all
Political socialism	Democrats	Participatory democracy	Common decisions and rights
Cultural socialism	Friends	Shared meanings and knowledge	Common, internationalist culture of unity in diversity, recognition and voice of all

True socialism is inherently democratic. In its various past and contemporary versions, Stalinism only has talked about socialism but has nothing to do with socialism. Erich Fromm shows that Marx saw economic democracy beyond necessity, political democracy and creative self-realisation as the three dimensions of socialism. In socialism, the human being,

produces in an associated, not competitive way; he produces rationally and in an unalienated way, which means that he brings production under his control, instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power.

[...] [Socialism] means, in short, the realization of political and industrial democracy. Marx expected that by this new form of an unalienated society man would become independent, stand on his own feet, and would no longer be crippled by the alienated mode of production and consumption; that he would truly be the master and the creator of his life, and hence that he could begin to make *living* his main business, rather than producing the *means* for living. Socialism, for Marx, was never as such the fulfilment of life, but the *condition* for such fulfilment. [...] Man, in Marx's view, has created in the course of history a culture which he will be free to make his own when he is freed from the chains, not only of economic poverty, but of the spiritual poverty created by alienation. Marx's vision is based on his faith in man, in the inherent and real potentialities of the essence of man which have developed in history. He looked at socialism as the *condition* of human freedom and creativity, not as in itself constituting the goal of man's life. [...] Socialism, for Marx, is a society which serves the needs of man. [...] Marxist and other forms of socialism are the heirs of prophetic Messianism, Christian Chiliastic sectarianism, thirteenth-century Thomism, Renaissance Utopianism, and eighteenth-century enlightenment. It is the synthesis of the prophetic-Christian idea of society as the plane of spiritual realization, and of the idea of individual freedom. For this reason, it is opposed to the Church because of its restriction of the mind, and to liberalism because of its separation of society and moral values. It is opposed to Stalinism and Krushchevism, for their authoritarianism as much as their neglect of humanist values. Socialism is the abolition of human self-alienation, the return of man as a real human being. [...] For Marx, socialism meant the social order which permits the return of man to himself, the identity between existence and essence, the overcoming of the separateness and antagonism between subject and object, the humanization of nature; it meant a world in which man is no longer a stranger among strangers, but is in *his* world, where he is at home.<sup>10</sup>

### 11.2.2 Democratic Socialism's Communicative Dimension: Freedom of Speech

Many human rights declarations contain the right to freedom of speech. This right is based on the insight that a free society requires that humans be able to express their opinions and worldviews in public. There are

undoubtedly uncontroversial matters, such as someone stepping out of his house and telling others he meets on the street that he is happy the sun is shining. We wouldn't need a right to freedom of speech to regulate trivial matters of communication in everyday life.

There are, however, two issues of communication that require the legal definition of rights. One is the expression of political views in the public sphere, especially views that are opposed to the views of the ruling government and class. The other concerns the production and presentation of news about what is happening in society, i.e., the activities of what is called the press and the mass media. In undemocratic, authoritarian societies, the ruling group(s) restrict or prohibit the public communication of oppositional worldviews and critique. Therefore, the right to freedom of speech endeavours to guarantee the public expression of political opinions, especially opinions that dissent from the dominant worldview and dominant opinions, and the freedom of the press to report independently.

The 1789 French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* defines the freedom of speech in the following manner: 'The free communication of ideas and of opinions is one of the most precious rights of man. Any citizen may therefore speak, write and publish freely, except what is tantamount to the abuse of this liberty in the cases determined by Law' (article 11). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that everyone 'has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers' (article 19). The European Convention on Human Rights says: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers' (article 10). And the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union formulates the following principle: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers' (article 11).

These formulations are all quite similar. They ascertain the importance of communication when we think about freedom and human rights. However, they also overlook that in capitalism, the antagonism between freedom and equality in the realm of public communication takes on the form of an antagonism between the freedom of private media ownership

and freedom of speech. Media monopolies are not just ownership monopolies in the realm of communications but have an important cultural and political dimension. They are monopolies of public communication, visibility, and attention. They publish views of reality and opinions that are heard by many and limit the opportunity of others to directly express their standpoints, experiences, and worldviews in public. Monopolies of public communication become especially problematic in societies where there are competing and contesting political views and ideologies, i.e., in class and dominative societies. They are then also monopolies of speech and opinion. Monopolies of public communication limit and disable the freedom of speech. To focus on equal liberty implies that one situates the freedom of speech in its political economy context.<sup>11</sup>

In his theory of the structural transformation of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas points out that big political and economic organisations, including media monopolies, limit the freedoms of speech, public opinion, association, and assembly. They 'enjoy an oligopoly of the publicistically effective and politically relevant formation of assemblies and associations'.<sup>12</sup> Habermas focuses on how economic monopolies and political monopolies colonise the public sphere, which results in the restriction or disablement of the freedoms of speech, opinion, the press, assembly, and association. In his later work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*,<sup>13</sup> he termed these processes the colonisation of the lifeworld by the steering media of money (monetarisation) and power (bureaucratisation). Habermas excludes ideological processes from his analysis of the re-feudalisation of the public sphere and the colonisation of the lifeworld.

But authoritarian leaders, opinion leaders, political populists, and celebrities who dominate the public sphere and appeal to everyday people with a simple, polarising ideology that blames weak groups for society's problems form cultural monopolies of visibility and attention that allow them to spread ideology. The more cultural power such figures have, the more difficult it is for their critics to get heard. Ideology is, therefore, also a process that limits freedom of speech and opinion. If an ideology dominates the public sphere, then ideology critique faces difficulties in making itself heard and being recognised. More than that, if ideology is monopolistic not just in its prevalence but also in respect to citizens, i.e., when the vast majority of citizens share and agree with an ideology, then even if ideology critique is publicly available, it won't be heard, recognised, and be taken seriously.

Comparable to Habermas, Balibar<sup>14</sup> argues that the antagonism between freedom and equality has, in the realm of knowledge and intellectual production, historically taken on the form of an unequal power of public communication, which is why he speaks of the ‘monopoly of ‘communications’.<sup>15</sup> The actual freedom of expression would thereby be more exerted by those who control the means of communication. Intellectual emancipation would require an “equivalence” of knowledgeable and non-knowledgeable individuals with respect to the right of expression in public space and a symbolic dissociation of the institutional equivalence between “intelligence” and “knowledge”.<sup>16</sup>

There are three processes that in the realm of public communication limit, restrict, and abolish the freedoms of speech, opinion, and publication:<sup>17</sup>

- Economic processes of ownership concentration, commodification, and monetarisation that centralise economic power.
- Political processes of decision-power concentration, domination, and control that centralise political power.
- Cultural processes of the concentration of reputation, visibility, attention, and ideologization that centralise cultural power.

Karl Marx stressed that the *‘primary freedom of the press lies in not being a trade’*,<sup>18</sup> that the free press is *‘beyond the power of the authorities’*,<sup>19</sup> and that freedom includes the *‘freedom of ideas, in consciousness’*.<sup>20</sup> Taken together, Marx stresses that the media require economic, political, and cultural dimensions of freedom and that capital, authoritarianism, and ideology limit, restrict, and abolish the freedom of the media and act as forms of censorship. Concerning political censorship, he writes: ‘The free press, finally, brings the people’s need in its real shape, not refracted through any bureaucratic medium, to the steps of the throne, to a power before which the difference between rulers and ruled vanishes and there remain only equally near and equally far removed *citizens of the state*.’<sup>21</sup>

Such processes of economic, political, and ideological control result in the alienation of the public sphere so that the human right of public communication is undermined.<sup>22</sup> They are not adequately considered in many human rights declarations and moral philosophies that treat equality and liberty in a dualistic manner, as if freedom can be achieved without equality and equality without freedom. In reality, freedom requires equality, and equality requires freedom. The positive right to freedom of speech

requires a negative right of humans to be free from economic, political, and ideological monopolies and powers that restrict freedom of speech. Democratic socialism needs to be based on equaliberty, the dialectic of equality and liberty.

Balibar argues that both the ideas of the individual private property of goods and collective state property of goods are based on the concept of 'the *unlimited* disposal of goods',<sup>23</sup> which are both forms of private property that expropriate individuals.<sup>24</sup> The alternative would be that humans do not appropriate and subsume everything under their exclusive control and ownership but leave things as universal property.<sup>25</sup> One example is that when humans use vast parts of nature as a means of production, the likelihood of an environmental crisis increases. Balibar<sup>26</sup> argues that not everything can be possessed, and not everything should be possessed. He discusses knowledge as an example.<sup>27</sup> Knowledge should be 'non-exclusive' and pose an 'obstacle to possession'.<sup>28</sup> There would be 'an increasing quantity of *that which cannot be possessed or mastered*'.<sup>29</sup> Knowledge would be an example of a 'universal property'.<sup>30</sup> Balibar is not a philosophical idealist. He sees clearly that there are ways of how knowledge is turned into a commodity that yields profit, as is the case in the private property of means of communication (an example is private media corporations) and intellectual property rights and patents.<sup>31</sup>

Balibar does not mention that Marx already discussed this peculiar character of knowledge. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx speaks of the 'general intellect', by which he means 'general social knowledge', becoming 'a *direct force of production*'.<sup>32</sup> In *Capital Volume III*, Marx introduces the notion of universal labour: 'Universal labour is all scientific work, all discovery and invention. It is brought about partly by the cooperation of men now living, but partly also by building on earlier work'.<sup>33</sup> Marx also speaks of 'the universal labour of the human spirit'.<sup>34</sup>

Building on both Marx and Balibar, we can say that there is an antagonism between the capitalist relations of intellectual production and the networked intellectual forces of production. The rise of knowledge in capitalist society has been accompanied by both the advancement of the socialisation of knowledge in the form of knowledge commons and digital commons as well as the commodification of knowledge in the form of knowledge commodities and digital commodities. Knowledge capitalism is built on an antagonism between the knowledge commodities and knowledge commons; and digital capitalism is based on an antagonism between the digital commodities and the digital commons.<sup>35</sup>

Human rights concerning knowledge and communication should include the right to access information, which can best be organised by negating the commodity form of knowledge and ensuring knowledge is a common good (knowledge commons). Digital information is a common good, too (digital commons). Communication can best be fostered by organising knowledge as knowledge commons and digital commons.

Having focused on the question of what democratic socialism is, we will next discuss the relationship of socialism to violence and peace.

### 11.3 Socialism, Violence, and Peace

A common position socialists hold is that the material foundations of violence disappear or are significantly reduced in a socialist society so that there is much less violence in such a society. The most radical version of this hypothesis is that violence necessarily must completely disappear in a socialist society along with class and the state.

For example, the communist anarchist Alexander Berkman argued that the creation of a dominationless society puts an end to crime, war, and violence:

We are all still barbarians who resort to force and violence to settle our doubts, difficulties, and troubles. Violence is the method of ignorance, the weapon of the weak. The strong of heart and brain need no violence, for they are irresistible in their consciousness of being right. The further we get away from primitive man and the hatchet age, the less recourse we shall have to force and violence. The more enlightened man will become, the less he will employ compulsion and coercion. The really civilized man will divest himself of all fear and authority. He will rise from the dust and stand erect: he will bow to no tsar either in heaven or on earth. He will become fully human when he will scorn to rule and refuse to be ruled. He will be truly free only when there shall be no more masters. Anarchism is the ideal of such a condition; of a society without force and compulsion, where all men shall be equals, and live in freedom, peace, and harmony. [...] Crime is the result of economic conditions, of social inequality, of wrongs and evils of which government and monopoly are the parents. [...] Crime can be eliminated only by doing away with the conditions that create it. [...] Crimes resulting from government, from its oppression and injustice, from inequality and poverty, will disappear under Anarchy.

These constitute by far the greatest percentage of crime. Certain other crimes will persist for some time, such as those resulting from jealousy, passion, and from the spirit of coercion and violence which dominates the world today. But these, the offspring of authority and possession, will also gradually disappear under wholesome conditions with the passing away of the atmosphere that cultivated them.<sup>36</sup>

It is undoubtedly true that in a democratic socialist society, violence, and war as systematic means of power are, in principle, no longer needed. A fully human society requires the abolition of war and violence. Such a society is an ideal for which humanity should strive. The question is, however, if such a society can be fully created and if conditions for permanent non-violence can be established. Also, in a democratic socialist society, there will be humans who, for certain reasons, become disappointed, sad, depressed, unhappy, aggressive, or who strive to take advantage of others, enjoy hurting and killing others, etc. There is never a guarantee that violence will fully disappear. Humans can, however, create conditions that make large-scale violence more unlikely and that make a reduction of the levels of various forms of violence more likely.

Violence has complex causes. It has to do with economic, political, and ideological antagonisms. In societies that have large inequalities, significant levels of poverty, or deep class divisions, the likelihood of a high level of property-related violent crime is larger than in other societies. Unequal societies are more alienated societies. Alienation has negative effects on humans, which can easily increase the levels of violence in society. In authoritarian and fascist dictatorships, oppositional forces are suppressed by violence. Violence as a means of organisation and control is an inherent aspect of authoritarianism and fascism. Authoritarian and fascist social relations and societies are built on violence and, therefore, are violent societies.

It is unlikely that democratic socialist societies are completely free from problems, frictions, and conflicts. Socialism is not heaven on Earth. That various socialists have again and again depicted socialism as heaven shows that the religious elements of salvation, heaven, and paradise have secular versions. Humans have dreams of a good society that are expressed in various dreams and utopias. Religious and socialist utopias of a peaceful world express dreams of a better world.

Materialist utopias are based on potentials immanent in society. They are, therefore, realist, concrete utopias. They are realist dreams. In

contrast, abstract utopias are impossible or very difficult to realise. Such utopias are idealist utopias. Socialist utopias are the 'sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions'.<sup>37</sup> Abstract utopias are a form of the '*opium* of the people'<sup>38</sup> while concrete utopias and struggles for their realisation are demands for '*real* happiness'<sup>39</sup> and 'the *expression* of real distress and a *protest* against real distress'.<sup>40</sup>

Democratic socialist societies, by distributing power more equally in society, have the potential to reduce the likelihood of violent crime, wars, genocide, torture, terrorism, and other forms of violence. Sylvia Walby showed that in countries that are more unequal and less democratic than others, there are 'higher rates of violence of all forms – from interpersonal to the criminal justice system to the military'.<sup>41</sup> The implication is that the strengthening of socialism that reduces inequalities and the fostering of a democracy that reduces political power differentials and the combination of both as democratic socialism has very good potentials to reduce violence of all kinds in society. If a good life for all humans and friendly, mutually supportive relations between humans living in different parts of the Earth are created, then wars of conquest become more unlikely. Democratic socialism is not a panacea against violence and war but provides a material foundation for society to foster non-violence and peace.

Violence and war as active political means pose the threat of creating foundations of a future society that are based on violence and institutionalise violence and terror. Prefigurative politics means that one prefigures the status of a future society in the means employed in the practical struggles for establishing this society. Based on this logic, establishing a peaceful society requires non-violent means. The question arises of whether democratic socialists should, in principle, rule out the use of violence. Defeating Hitler and Nazi-fascism would not have been possible by purely non-violent means. Anti-fascist armed resistance was required in order to overcome fascism. Democratic socialists should strive to use non-violent means of political action, including democratic elections, protests, strike action, the general strike, and the establishment of socialist organisations that drive back the logic of class and capital and replace it with the logic of the commons, etc. They should also strive to avoid war and engage in diplomacy and political communication to settle conflicts peacefully. Resisting fascism is, however, not always possible and not always feasible by peaceful means, which implies that under certain conditions, violence becomes a necessary means for preventing barbarism.

Having introduced the notion of democratic socialism, we will in the next section discuss the notion of digital democratic socialism and its relation to peace.

## 11.4 What is Democratic Digital Socialism?

Socialism is a materialist form of politics. Politics is about collective rights and demands as well as praxis, i.e., social struggles for putting demands and for turning demands into rights and realising rights. We will first focus on the issue of digital rights and argue for a materialist understanding of digital rights. Then, we will introduce a notion of democratic digital socialism.

### 11.4.1 *Digital Rights*

In the Internet age, discourse on human rights has also affected questions of digitality. Consequently, digital rights initiatives and declarations of digital rights have emerged. Two examples are the Alliance for Universal Digital Rights and the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade.

The Alliance for Universal Digital Rights<sup>42</sup> was formed in 2022 by Equality Now and Women Leading in AI.<sup>43</sup> It suggests<sup>44</sup> nine digital rights:

- 1) Universal and equal rights in the digital realm;
- 2) Personal safety and data privacy;
- 3) Self-determination in the use of digital technologies;
- 4) Digital access for all;
- 5) Freedom of expression, assembly, and association online;
- 6) Secure, stable, and resilient networks;
- 7) Linguistic and cultural diversity online;
- 8) Equal right to benefit from digital technology;
- 9) Good, democratic digital governance.

Many Internet users will agree with the importance of these principles. We all want privacy, access, diversity, benefits, self-determination, free expression on the Internet and digital networks, discrimination- and prejudice-free digital spaces, etc. The nine principles the Alliance for

Universal Digital Rights suggest are undoubtedly important and laudable. But they do not suffice. They do not take the lack of equal liberty in digital capitalism into account. In capitalism, there is an antagonism between the freedom of private property and equality.<sup>45</sup> The private ownership of the digital means of production has resulted in the rise of digital monopoly capital that is controlled by digital giants such as Alphabet/Google, Meta/Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Alibaba, ByteDance, and Tencent. The logic of capital accumulation and profit-orientation drives their digital monopolies. These monopolies are not the cause of fake news but have supported the spread of such news, digital fascism, and echo chambers. Such phenomena have contributed to the polarisation of world politics and the development of new fascisms.<sup>46</sup>

The problem with the Alliance for Universal Digital Rights is its digital idealism that does not adequately recognise that digital capital(ism) and private digital property have undermined what the Alliance suggests as digital rights such as freedom of expression online, democratic digital governance, cultural diversity online, freedom from bias and discrimination online, equality online, equal benefits from digital technologies, etc. Digital capitalism has supported the rise of new fascisms that include digital fascism, which in turn has made a new world war more likely.<sup>47</sup>

The European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade<sup>48</sup> is the European Union's commitment to digital rights.

Its key principles are that digitality should be people-centric, solidary, inclusive, fair, participatory, safe, secure, empowering, and sustainable, as well as advance digital connectivity, digital education, fair and just digital working conditions, digital public services, human-centric, trustworthy, and with ethical AI, data privacy, and data protection. Most users of digital media will agree with the vision that the EU sets out:

The EU way for the digital transformation of our societies and economy encompasses in particular digital sovereignty in an open manner, respect for fundamental rights, rule of law and democracy, inclusion, accessibility, equality, sustainability, resilience, security, improving quality of life, the availability of services and respect of everyone's rights and aspirations. [...] putting people at the centre of the digital transformation; supporting solidarity and inclusion, through connectivity, digital education, training and skills, fair and just working conditions as well as access to digital public services online; restating the importance of freedom of choice

in interactions with algorithms and artificial intelligence systems and in a fair digital environment; fostering participation in the digital public space; increasing safety, security and empowerment in the digital environment, in particular for children and young people, while ensuring privacy and individual control over data; promoting sustainability. The various chapters of this Declaration should form a holistic reference framework and should not be read in isolation.<sup>49</sup>

The EU has not ignored aspects of labour and public services, which is why it speaks of fair and just working conditions and digital public services online as digital rights: 'Everyone has the right to fair, just, healthy and safe working conditions and appropriate protection in the digital environment as in the physical work place, regardless of their employment status, modality or duration. [...] Everyone should have online access to key public services in the EU.'<sup>50</sup>

However, the problem with the European Declaration on Digital Rights is that it ignores digital equaliberty, i.e., the antagonism between freedom of private digital property/capital and digital liberties. Many of the digital liberties the EU defines as digital rights, such as good working conditions, freedom of speech online, data privacy, etc., have been practically undermined by digital capitalism and the digital giants' digital monopoly capital.

Many digital rights initiatives and declarations are manifestations of digital idealism. They see digital democracy and digital rights merely as a moral issue and not also as one of political economy. They define and declare rights but ignore the inequalities and injustices digital capitalism brings. They have not (not-yet?) dared to question digital private property and digital capitalism. Realising digital human rights as digital equaliberty requires the limitation, struggle against, and abolishment of digital capitalism. How can this be achieved? In the realm of democracy and human rights, we must include the advancement and support of the digital commons, a Public Service Internet, and platform/digital co-operatives as alternatives to digital capital in the definition of digital rights.<sup>51</sup> It also requires that we define digital capital and digital monopoly capital as harming and undermining digital equality and digital justice.

It is wrong to simply say that digital rights initiatives and declarations are ideological and should be rejected. They make significant contributions to the struggle against digital fascism. Our reaction to digital

liberalism should be the practice of radicalising digital rights by stressing how digital materialism and digital political economy matter in the definition of digital rights. The political task is introducing democratic digital socialism to digital rights initiatives and declarations.<sup>52</sup>

A materialist understanding of digital rights leads to the notion of democratic digital socialism.

#### ***11.4.2 Democratic Digital Socialism***

Computers and computer networks enable new ways of organising information, communication, and cooperation. Since computing has become a central resource in modern society, using computers to organise cognition, communication, and cooperation has become a human need. Humans have certain cognitive needs (such as being loved and recognised), communicative needs (such as friendships and community) and co-operative needs (such as working together with others in order to achieve common goals) in all types of society. In a digital and information society, computers are a vital means for realising such needs. However, given that computers are always used in societal contexts, computer use as such does not necessarily foster the good life but can also contribute to damaging human lives.

Digital capitalism simultaneously deepens exploitation and creates new foundations for autonomous realms that transcend the logic of capitalism. There is an antagonism between the networked productive forces and the class relations of digital production. This antagonism is also an antagonism between digital labour and digital capital and between digital gifts and digital commodities.

Democratic digital socialism means the digital mediation of socialist society, the interweaving of digital media and the logic of the commons in society, the economy, politics, and culture. Table 11.3 provides a summary overview of the dimensions of digital socialism. The typology presented in the table is structured along the three realms of society (economy, politics, culture), which allows us to distinguish between three types of socialism and three types of digital socialism. The commons are the vision of a good society. They form the essence of society, which means that the digital commons are part of digital society's essence. For Hegel and Marx, the essence is often hidden behind false appearances, and that actuality means the correspondence of essence and appearance. One must distinguish between

the essence of digital society and the false appearance and existence of digital society as a digital class society and digital capitalism. Class society is the false condition of society-in-general. Digital class society is the false condition of digital society. A critical theory of digital socialism needs to have a vision of a good digital society and a critique of digital capitalism and digital alienation. Table 11.3, therefore, also features two columns that outline dimensions of alienation-in-general and digital alienation.

In chapter 3, we identified three forms of (digital) communication in the context of violence: the (digital) communication of violence (section 3.3), the (digital) communication about violence (section 3.4), and the digital mediation of violence (section 3.5). Given that the role of violence changes in a democratic socialist society in comparison to class societies,

**Table 11.3: Three dimensions of the digital commons** (based on Fuchs 2020b, 25)

	Socialism	Digital socialism	Lack of common control in society (alienation)	Lack of common control of digital society (digital alienation)
<b>Economy</b>	Economic socialism: wealth and self-fulfilment for all	Economic digital socialism: network access for everyone, community is in control of technology, digital resources as common goods	Private property	Digital commodities, digital resources as private property
<b>Politics</b>	Political socialism: participation and democracy in decision-making	Political digital socialism: common decision-making/ governance of ICTs	Dictatorship	Dictatorial governance and control of ICTs
<b>Culture</b>	Cultural socialism: voice and recognition of all	Cultural digital socialism: use of ICTs for fostering learning, recognition and community activities	Ideology	Digital ideology: ideologies of and on the Internet

the question arises of how the relationship between communication and violence is transformed under such conditions.

Communication is not an individual but a social and societal phenomenon. There is no society without communication, and no communication without society. Society only emerged when humans had to say something to each other in order to coordinate and organise their lives through communicative social relations and communicative action. Communication is social and societal, which means that through communication, humans produce and reproduce sociality, social relations, and society. There is a dialectic of production and communication in society.<sup>53</sup> Given that society and communication are intertwined, important changes in society also have a communicative dimension. This does not mean that the emergence of a new societal formation results in the emergence of a new language. Language is a long-time, historical phenomenon. New words emerge relatively frequently, and other ones disappear. Language is a dynamic phenomenon that cannot be reduced to economic or other societal changes. Language only changes more fundamentally over a very long time due to the many complex societal changes. Communication, however, is a medium of war and peace, violence and pacifism, aggression and non-aggression. It can help and hinder the advancement of democratic socialism. Societal changes have the potential to bring about changes in how humans communicate and what roles communication has in society.

## 11.5 Democratic Digital Socialism and Peace

The emergence of a democratic socialist society that fosters relative peace and non-violence has a good chance of transforming the (digital) communication of violence into the (digital) communication of peace, the (digital) communication about violence into the (digital) communication about peace, and the digital mediation of violence into the digital mediation of peace.

The (digital) communication of violence is about some person, group, system, or society threatening to kill or injure another person, group, system, or society. In contemporary societies, increasing political polarisation has been accompanied by the proliferation of anonymous death threats issued on the Internet and social media. In a democratic socialist society that fosters peace and well-being for all, such death threats are likely to decrease. In contrast, the (digital) communication of peace and

understanding is expected to increase, and new forms of communication are likely to emerge. The communication of violence takes on a variety of forms, including, for example, the ideological justification of violence, violence as media spectacle, the communication of moral panics about violence, the representation of violence in the media (crime movies, horror movies, music, violent computer games, etc.), fake news as part of information wars, etc. In a democratic socialist society, the (digital) communication of peace will likely increase and take on new forms. Whereas today, there is much more representation of and talk about violence than peace in the media, there is a good chance that this relation will be reversed so that there is more peace than violence in the media. Suppose media are not-for-profit ventures that serve the common and public good. In that case, there is less incentive to construct violence as a media spectacle and to construct moral panics about violence. When there is less violence in society, it is also likely that there is also less reporting about violence in the media. Fictive representations of violence will probably continue to exist, but they might have less importance than in societies where violence is ever-present. In a democratic socialist society, peace will likely become a more important theme in fictive media content than today. Concerning the digital mediation of violence, we today find the development of ever-newer digital weapons and methods of digital warfare. In a democratic socialist society that is relatively peaceful, there is no need for developing weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, it is likely that digital weapons such as military drones, autonomous killer robots, or weapon systems that utilise AI, big data, quantum systems, etc., will not be developed ever further. There is a chance that such weapons development is stopped.

## 11.6 Conclusion

This chapter asked: what is the relationship between world peace and (digital) democratic socialism? We can summarise some of the key findings:

- **Democratic socialism:**

Democratic socialism is a societal formation (*Gesellschaftsformation*) and movement as well as the struggle for such a formation that is based on the logic of the commons, which entails a common, self-managed economy, common politics in the form of participatory democracy,

and a common culture that features internationalism, a culture of unity in diversity, and human self-realisation. Democratic socialism needs to be based on equaliberty, the dialectic of equality and liberty.

- **Democratic socialism and world peace:**

The strengthening of socialism that reduces inequalities and the fostering of a democracy that reduces political power differentials and the combination of both as democratic socialism has very good potentials to reduce violence of all kinds in society. If a good life for all humans and friendly, mutually supportive relations between humans living in different parts of the Earth are created, then wars of conquest become more unlikely. Democratic socialism is not a panacea against violence and war but provides a material foundation for society to foster non-violence and peace.

- **Digital rights:**

Digital rights initiatives, movements, declarations, and manifestos too often ignore the antagonism between digital capital(ism) and digital equality. They lack a focus on digital equaliberty, the dialectic of digital liberties and digital equality. Digital materialism and digital political economy matter in the definition of digital rights. One should introduce democratic digital socialism to digital rights initiatives and declarations. Realising digital human rights as digital equaliberty requires the limitation, struggle against, and abolishment of digital capitalism.

- **Democratic digital socialism:**

Democratic digital socialism means the digital mediation of socialist society, the interweaving of digital media and the logic of the commons in society, the economy, politics, and culture. The emergence of a democratic socialist society that fosters relative peace and non-violence has a good chance of transforming the (digital) communication of violence into the (digital) communication of peace, the (digital) communication about violence into the (digital) communication about peace, and the digital mediation of violence into the digital mediation of peace.

## CHAPTER 12

# Conclusion: World War and World Peace in the Age of Digital Capitalism

This chapter concludes this book. We want to summarise the main findings. The book set out to engage with two big questions about contemporary world society: what are the roles of violence and war in global digital capitalism? What are the prospects for world peace today?

Providing an answer required engagement with the notions of violence, communication and violence, war, digital capitalism, global capitalism, democratic socialism, digital democratic socialism, peace, and world peace.

### 12.1 Violence

Building on the works of Sylvia Walby and Simone Weil, violence has, in this book, been understood as the intended, unintended, or threatened physical harm of a human being. Violence is so threatening because it has the potential to cause the death of a person or a group of persons. There is an inherent connection between death and violence. There are economic, political, and cultural forms of violence. Violence is a social relation that involves at least one perpetrator and a victim or several victims(s). Individuals, social systems, or societies are the actors involved in violence as victims and perpetrators.

### 12.2 Communication and Violence

Communication and language have the potentials to both express and signify violence and peace. There are three forms of (digital) communication and (digital) mediation in the context of violence: the (digital) communication of violence, the (digital) communication about violence,

and the (digital) mediation of violence. In digital violence, the perpetrator utilises a digital weapon (system) to try to kill or damage the health of the victim(s). Both the perpetrator and the victim(s) can be individuals, social systems, or societies. A digital weapon is a digital technology that is used for carrying out attacks that should lead to the killing of human victims or damage to their health.

### 12.3 War

War is organised, large-scale violence between at least two politically organised groups where at least one group sees the other group as an enemy that should be annihilated in order to realise a particular political interest against the will of this identified enemy. In war, humans stop talking to each other, and power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Every act of war communicates absolute hatred and annihilation wishes.

Digital warfare means that digital technologies are utilised in the context of warfare. In digital warfare, there is large-scale violence between at least two politically organised groups where at least one group sees the other group as an enemy that should be annihilated in order to realise a particular political interest against the will of this identified enemy and at least one side uses a digital weapon (system) for trying to kill and damage the health of the members of another side. Automated weapon systems that kill autonomously from human activity further deepen the Promethean gap, the distance between what humans can imagine and the destruction that (autonomous) weapon systems can wreak. Robots do not have fear, moral doubts, and empathy. They can be programmed to kill without a pause, which can make war particularly brutal and ruthless.

### 12.4 Digital Capitalism

In this book, capitalism has been conceived not merely as an economy but as a formation of society (*Gesellschaftsformation*). Digital capitalism is the dimension of capitalist society where processes of the accumulation of capital, decision-power, and reputation are mediated by and organised with the help of digital technologies and where economic, political, and cultural processes result in digital goods and digital structures. Digital capitalism's antagonisms are the class antagonism between digital labour

and digital capital, the political antagonism between digital dictators and digital citizens, and the cultural antagonism between digital ideologues and digital humans. Digital capitalism is more than a digital economy.

## 12.5 Global Capitalism

Global capitalist society involves the transnational accumulation of money-capital in the economy, the accumulation of political decision-power and influence at the international level, and the accumulation of international reputation and respect. Crises of global capitalism can result in the radicalisation of political forces. Suppose this radicalisation means a shift towards fascism, nationalism, and authoritarianism because the democratic Left is weak or weakened. In that case, capitalism's antagonisms are more likely to escalate into violence and war.

## 12.6 The USA and China in Global Capitalism

The global capitalist world system has become more multipolar. US-based capital and China-based capital are the dominant forces competing for influence and profits. There is the risk that economic competition and political polarisation in the capitalist world system turn into a new Cold War, a new arms race involving new weapons systems such as autonomous killer robots, military drones, AI-based weapons, quantum warfare, new generations of nuclear weapons, etc., and a new world war.

## 12.7 The Danger of a New Cold War

Global capitalism has experienced a succession of multiple crises. The interaction of the intensification of global capitalist competition and the intensification of authoritarianism, nationalisms, and fascism advanced the likelihood of the explosion of conflicts of interest into violence and war. The conflict over Taiwan can spark a direct or proxy war between China and the United States that could result in a new world war. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has increased the polarisation of world politics and has made a new world war more likely. The polarisation of world politics has sparked a new arms race. China, the USA, NATO, Russia, and

the EU are updating and enhancing their weapons systems, which includes upgrades of their nuclear weapons and the development of new weapons systems that are based on Artificial Intelligence, robotics, big data, and quantum computing. The new arms race can result in a new Cold War and has made a new world war more likely.

## 12.8 The Danger of a New World War

Global capitalism has, in the late twentieth and the twenty-first century, developed in the form of a negative dialectic so that neoliberalism has advanced new nationalisms, new authoritarianisms, new fascisms, and, as a consequence, a strong polarisation of world politics and the danger of the escalation of violence into a world war. Digital technologies and digital capitalism mediate these transformations and are one of their contexts. For example, digital weapons such as military drones, AI-based weapons systems, and research on and the development of autonomous killer robots are part of the military and political-economic polarisation of the world system, where a new arms race has emerged. There is the danger that a new Cold War or, worse, a nuclear war that ends humanity and life on Earth emerges between China and Russia on the one side and the USA, NATO, and the EU on the other side.

## 12.9 Democratic Socialism

Like capitalism, socialism is not merely a type of economy but a formation of society (*Gesellschaftsformation*). Socialism has to do with the insight that a society is good, fair, and just when it is governed not based on the principle of instrumental reason, where a small group instrumentalises, exploits, dominates, and oppresses others in order to derive individual benefits but based on the principle of sociality so that society is organised in a social manner that creates benefits for all. Socialism is based on the logic of the commons in the economy, politics, and culture. True socialism is inherently democratic.

Democratic socialism realises human rights in a manner that advances equal liberty, which means it overcomes the capitalist antagonism between freedom and equality. Democratic socialism advances the dialectic of freedom of equality, realising that there is no freedom without equality and

no equality without freedom. It advances structures that allow the mutual reinforcement of equality and freedom, free equalities and equal, egalitarian freedoms.

### **12.10 Violence and Democratic Socialism**

Violence does not necessarily and not automatically disappear in a democratic socialist society. Democratic socialist societies, however, by distributing power more equally in society, have the potential to reduce the likelihood of violent crime, wars, genocide, torture, terrorism, and other forms of violence. Studies have shown that the potentials for violence are larger in societies that are more neoliberal and undemocratic than others.

### **12.11 Democratic Digital Socialism and Peace**

Democratic digital socialism means the digital mediation of socialist society, the interweaving of digital media and the logic of the commons in society, the economy, politics, and culture. The emergence of a democratic socialist society that fosters relative peace and non-violence, therefore, has a good chance of transforming the (digital) communication of violence into the (digital) communication of peace, the (digital) communication about violence into the (digital) communication about peace, and the digital mediation of violence into the digital mediation of peace. Democratic digital socialism is based on a materialist version of digital rights, takes the political economy context of digital rights seriously, and realises digital equaliberty, the dialectic of digital freedom and digital equality.

### **12.12 Foundations of Perpetual World Peace**

Perpetual world peace requires not just moral, communicative and political foundations such as a world constitution and diplomacy but also a global political economy that guarantees that all individuals, groups, and parts of the world benefit so that they have no incentive for world wars and wars of conquest. In socialist international relations, there is the priority of avoiding war and finding ways of organising international relations and the global order so that there are mutual benefits or at least mutual

coexistence where societies develop peacefully side by side. Establishing and maintaining world peace is not just a question of a political constitution and political agreements but has to do with material questions of advantages and disadvantages. World peace requires an international system that provides benefits to all involved actors that are larger than the benefits they can obtain from not joining or trying to destroy the system. World peace requires universal benefits (benefits for all) and mutual benefits.

### **12.13 The Urgency of Finding Solutions to the Global Problems**

Humanity faces global problems such as climate change and global warming, environmental degradation, global inequalities, the threat of an all-destructive nuclear war, health threats such as pandemics, the unpredictable effects of new (digital) technologies, etc. These problems cannot be solved locally or nationally, only at the international and global levels. In order to guarantee a good global society, humanity, therefore, has to come together and find solutions to the global problems that global capitalism has created. If humans fail to come together as a united humanity determined to find solutions to the global problems and world society's antagonisms further intensify, a point of no return might be reached where the antagonisms escalate into the end of humanity, society, and life on Earth.

The idea that a new (nuclear) world war would enlighten humans would result in the end of nationalism and national governments in favour of a form of world governance that abolishes militarism, armies, and weapons of mass destruction is mistaken. When a strategic nuclear weapon is used, then reason can probably no longer be saved. In this situation, it is likely that everything is lost. Enlightenment that starts complete nuclear disarmament and ends all wars must begin before the use of atomic weapons. A nuclear war that ends all wars would not save humanity but is likely to result in the end of humanity.

### **12.14 Institutional Foundations of World Peace**

World peace requires institutional foundations, institutions that try to guarantee world peace. On the one hand, there is the position that the United Nations is unsuited to become such an institution as it is

bureaucratic and dependent on and influenced by great powers such as the USA, China, France, the UK, and Russia that have a veto-right in the UN Security Council. The most radical position in this regard is that the United Nations should be abolished, and new global institutions should be created from scratch. A second position is that the United Nations is not perfect, and needs reforms, and that it is more realistic to transform and develop the UN into an institutional framework for global governance than to abolish and replace it. If institutions of global governance were organised as a world government and a world state, there would be the danger of creating new forms of alienation, conflicts of interests, and a world dictatorship that do not eliminate and alleviate but conserve and exacerbate the potentials of wars and world war. In the debate on world peace, on the one side, intellectuals such as H. G. Wells argue that perpetual world peace requires a world government and a world state. On the other side, there are intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas who warn against the creation of a world government and argue for the creation of a world constitution for the world society without a world government and a world state. The world society of the future that wants to guarantee world peace certainly needs organisational levels below the global level. It requires political organisations at the level of the city, the local region, the state, and geographical regions.

### 12.15 The United Nations and World Peace

The United Nations' (UN) big advantage is that it is an international institution with almost 200 nation-states as members. It is the world's largest intergovernmental organisation. Although it is far from perfect, reforming and improving the UN by making political economy matter more in its practices and policies is the most realistic strategy for establishing institutional foundations of world peace and reducing the risk of a new world war.

The UN Security Council has five permanent members and ten non-permanent members with a tenure of two years. Increasing the number of members of the Security Council has been suggested as a feasible reform of the UN. Decisions by the UN Security Council are often blocked because its five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK, USA) have veto power. Veto power should be rethought or transformed so that, for example, vetoes are only possible if several permanent members

(e.g. three in the case of five permanent members) or a defined number of non-permanent members object together. Abolishing veto power in the Security Council altogether would be ideal. Still, it also poses the danger that affected member countries might decide to leave the United Nations, which means they might stop talking to each other in the case of conflicts, which could escalate violence. Where there is nationalism, the likelihood of war and world war increases. The struggle for world peace is, among other things, a struggle against nationalism and eliminating the material foundations of nationalism. Only a collective insight of the world's great powers that the universal interests of humanity are more important than national interests and that internationalism advances peace while nationalism advances war would enable such reforms.

The United Nations needs a proper jurisdiction that has the power to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 2023, the International Criminal Court (ICC) had been ratified by 123 countries and lacked membership by important powers such as the United States, China, and Russia. For the UN to work properly in securing peace, its jurisdiction in the form of an institution such as the ICC would have to be extended globally or at least to all UN member countries.

A reformed UN Charter should take aspects of the political economy into account in order to reduce the risks of wars of conquest that have political-economic goals. Membership in the UN should also provide direct socio-economic advantages to those countries and regions that are facing low and medium human development. If the world's wealthiest corporations, individuals, and countries committed a particular share of their wealth to global redistribution, the UN could organise such redistribution measures, which would be one mechanism to reduce global inequalities. Such socio-economic measures would not automatically eliminate wars but would be one important contribution to reducing the antagonisms of global capitalism that shape international relations. They would help foster friendly relations in the world.

The world is at a crossroads today. We live in times of heightened global problems and strong political polarisation. How the future of humanity and society will look like is uncertain. It is uncertain if humanity, society, and life on Earth will continue to exist in the future. Digital technologies are embedded into the antagonisms of global capitalism. The biggest danger is that a new world war that is a nuclear war will develop. The alternative to world war is world peace. Perpetual world peace requires international

cooperation in solving the global problems, disarmament instead of a new arms race, an institutional framework for global governance that consists of a world constitution without a world government, global democratic institutions that provide material benefits for all so that participating in global governance and maintaining world peace is more beneficial than wars of conquest, and a global jurisdiction that holds those who commit crimes against humanity accountable. The alternative to world war is the creation of a material and institutional framework for world peace. Human praxis decides how the future of society will look like. Only history will tell how humans will shape the future.

## Postface: The World in the Age of Trump 2.0

The book *World War and World Peace in the Age of Digital Capitalism* was finished and submitted to University of Westminster Press on 30 October 2024. Six days later, on 5 November 2024, Donald J. Trump defeated Kamala Harris in the US Presidential Election and became the 47<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. He assumed office on 20 January 2025.

I am writing this postface seven weeks after Trump's inauguration. It cannot be predicted how the world will look like in 2029 when the 47<sup>th</sup> US presidential period will come to an end. What we can say is that Trump has at a high pace transformed domestic and international politics.

On February 28 2025, the extraordinary Oval Office scene took place that featured Donald J. Trump, J. D. Vance, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy. It resembled the boardroom elimination scenes in Trump's former reality TV show *The Apprentice* that he had hosted from 2004 until 2015. Aware of the event's character as a media spectacle, Trump even commented, 'This is going to be great television' (Gomez Licon 2025).

The Oval Office scene signifies the convergence of reality TV and world politics as well as the end of diplomacy brought about by the application of the Darwinian principle of the survival of the fittest to world politics. What followed was that the United States (temporarily?) stopped its military aid to Ukraine. Many EU countries lost trust in the US and became afraid of the US pulling out of NATO, which is why they immediately shifted their politics towards a military Keynesianism. They announced massive investments into military defence in the EU. At the time of writing in March 2025, it was simply unpredictable how the Ukraine war and the situation in Europe would further develop. A war between Russia and the European NATO members became more likely. A Russian/European war would involve nuclear-armed countries on both sides, which would make

the end of life on Earth by nuclear war more likely. A 'peace' deal without strong security guarantees that keep Russia from invading Ukraine or other European countries would make a resurgence of war likely. A peace deal with only European NATO member countries securing the border between Ukraine and Russia would mean that if the war erupted again, it would immediately develop into a war between Russia and European NATO countries. A feasible model would be a UN mandate for border security that involves a variety of military forces from around the world that together have a significant military size.

In the light of the transformed world situation, the EU's military Keynesianism is understandable. The danger is that this neo-Keynesianism is limited to the military realm and is accompanied by welfare state cuts and a lack of investments. If so, then the further expansion and success of fascist forces in Europe is likely. If this neo-Keynesianism is extended into other realms of society such as health care, education, academia, housing, employment security, wage levels, pensions, transport infrastructures, renewable energies, etc., then the further advancement of neo-fascism in Europe might be halted.

The Trump 2.0 US government shows the alliance of big power and big capital. Elon Musk, the world's richest person, has become the main advisor of Donald Trump, the world's politically most powerful person. Elon Musk is the main representative of what we can term mobility capital, capital invested in the realms of automotive transport (Tesla), space flight and satellite communication (SpaceX, including the Starlink satellite system), and Internet communication (X/Twitter). The main representatives of Silicon Valley digital capital, including Mark Zuckerberg (Meta/Facebook), Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Sundar Pichai (Alphabet/Google), Tim Cook (Apple), Shou Zi Chew (TikTok), and Sam Altman (OpenAI) were all present at Trump's 2025 inauguration.

There is no unbreakable link between democracy and capital. Capital is flexible. Big capital tends to align itself with whatever political forces most favour its accumulation. Neither an alliance of nor an antagonism between capitalism and democracy is an automatism. The antagonism between capitalism and democracy is a possibility and danger that has become ever more real in the development of neoliberal capitalism and its crisis.

Dominant personalities do not always get along with each other easily. The future will show if the political alliance of the world's richest individual and the world's most powerful politician will last or if antagonisms

develop that will result in a collapse of this alliance and produce new political developments.

In December 2024, Donald Trump posted on TruthSocial: 'For purposes of National Security and Freedom throughout the World, the United States of America feels that the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity<sup>1</sup>'. He also demanded that 'the Panama Canal be returned to us, in full, and without question<sup>2</sup>'. In January 2025, Trump posted on TruthSocial: 'Many people in Canada LOVE being the 51st State. [...]. If Canada merged with the U.S., there would be no Tariffs, taxes would go way down, and they would be TOTALLY SECURE from the threat of the Russian and Chinese Ships that are constantly surrounding them. Together, what a great Nation it would be!!<sup>3</sup>'. He posted a map of the USA that includes Canada as US territory<sup>4</sup> and started to continuously refer to Canada's prime minister Justin Trudeau as 'Governor' – 'Governor Justin Trudeau of Canada'<sup>5</sup>, 'Governor Justin Trudeau of the Great State of Canada'<sup>6</sup>. In a press conference, Trump did not rule out taking such territories by military force<sup>7</sup>. In his March 2025 speech to the two chambers of the US Congress, Trump said about the Panama Canal that 'we're taking it back' and about Greenland that 'we're gonna get it – one way or the other, we're gonna get it'<sup>8</sup>.

The future will show if Trump will respect or disrespect international law. History will demonstrate if Trump will or will not enforce imperialist politics that disrespect international law as enshrined in the UN Charter's article 2 (4) which says that UN members 'shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State'. What Trump's soundbites imply is that there might be a spatial dimension of his slogan 'Make America great again!' – greatness in terms of territorial size achieved by either economic means or, which is the true danger, by war and military means.

The danger is that we are returning to an updated version of 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialist politics where international politics is only decided by wars and military power so that the militarily most powerful powers survive and subjugate the weaker powers.

With the rise of Trump 2.0, the development of world politics has become more unpredictable. Trump may escalate or pacify the conflict between the USA and China. He may try to pull Russia on his side in order to try to split the alliance between Russia and China. Given such a move, the conflict between Europe and Russia may deepen. Or things

may develop in completely different directions. The problem is that under the US rule of Trump 2.0, world politics has come to be determined to a significant degree by changing moods, emotions, sentiments, populism, narcissism, and ideology – by what is termed post-truth politics.

Given Trump's unpredictability, Trump 2.0 means that the world has become a more dangerous place. Only world history will show if Trump's 'proudest legacy' will be, as he announced in his inaugural speech, that of 'a peacemaker and unifier'<sup>9</sup> or that of a ruler who poured oil into already burning fires and started new fires that resulted in a new World War and the extinction of humanity. A world politics ruled by the Darwinian logic of the creation of spheres of influence and the survival of the militarily fittest that eliminates international law creates new apocalyptic perspectives. The problem is that the conflagration of world politics may result in human history coming to an end. Nobody will be able to tell the history of the Third World War when it breaks out because telling history presupposes the existence of historians, society, and human life.

Trump is not just shaking up world politics but will also transform the USA's military strategy. In January 2025, Trump announced the investment of US\$500 billion into the development of the USA's AI infrastructure, a project that includes the AI companies OpenAI and MGX as well as the software companies Oracle and SoftBank. Trump also deregulated the legislation of AI. The US government together with the digital technology companies just mentioned formed Stargate, an AI joint venture that is a public-private partnership. In January 2025, Trump announced the development of an AI Action Plan.

Only history will show what kind of AI Starlink will produce and whether or not it will advance the military use of AI in the form of the autonomisation of weapons, killer robots, and autonomous killer drones. Given that AI has been deregulated in the USA, there are few legal hindrances to the development of new robotic and automated AI-based military killing systems.

World history will show if we will experience a new world war and the negative end of history or if humanity will manage to survive. The only active hope is the struggle against fascism and authoritarianism wherever they appear, the struggle for democracy and true democratic socialism, the defence of the democratic public sphere, and the struggle for the defence of international law and the strengthening of the United Nations' capacities to advance global equality by socio-economic measures, universal human rights by legal measures, and global peace by political measures.

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## Chapter 6 – On Global Capitalism

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*Chapter 8 – On Global (Digital) Capitalism’s Political Economy:  
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10 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2019)

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17 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2019)

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19 People's Republic of China (2023)

20 Xi (2022b, 13–14)

21 The whole passage reads in Chinese as follows: ‘中国人民是崇尚正义、不畏强暴的人民，中华民族是具有强烈民族自豪感和自信心的民族。中国人民从来没有欺负、压迫、奴役过其他国家人民，过去没有，现在没有，将来也不会有。同时，中国人民也绝不允许任何外来势力欺负、压迫、奴役我们，谁妄想这样干，必将在14亿多中国人民用血肉筑成的钢铁长城面前碰得头破血流’  
[http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-07/01/content\\_5621847.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-07/01/content_5621847.htm).

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23 Xinhua (2021), Xi (2022b, 13–14)

24 Zhou (2021)

25 See, for example, <https://twitter.com/JKynge/status/1410603101841547267>

26 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2019)

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28 Xi (2022a)

29 The White House (2022)

30 Ibid., 6

31 Ibid., 8

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41 The White House (2022, 23)

42 Ibid., 24

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- 40 Legge (1960, 260)
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- 46 Plato (2000, §473d [Undated])
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- 56 *Ibid.*, 213
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- 59 *Ibid.*, 215
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65 Zhao (2016, 215)

66 Ibid., 215

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68 Data source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190121232151/http://unbisnet.un.org:8080/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=14O243550E15G.60956&profile=voting&uri=full=3100023~!909326~!676&ri=1&aspect=power&menu=search&source=~!horizon> accessed January 29, 2023.

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71 Zhao (2016, 215)

72 Lohmann (2021, 193), translation from German: „Natürlich können und werden die Menschenrechte zur Durchsetzung bestimmter staatlicher Interessen missbraucht (z.B., wie Zhao hervorhebt, durch den ‚US-Imperialismus‘, ebd.), aber die Kritik daran kann sich genau auf den universalisierenden und egalisierenden Anspruch der Menschenrechte stützen, den er für illusionär und letztlich für falsch hält.“

73 Ibid., 202

74 Lohmann (2020, 143), translated from German: „Fälle von Missbrauch der Menschenrechte kann man nur kritisieren, wenn man den rechtlichen Begriff der Menschenrechte und seine moralisch begründeten normativen Ansprüche auf Universalität, Egalität, Individualität und Kategorizität selbst nicht als solche diffamiert, sondern eben ihre, immer möglichen Verzerrungen, Verengungen und Missbräuche mit einem ernüchterten, aber darum umso stärkeren begrifflich differenzierten Verständnis von Menschenrechten kritisiert.“

75 Ibid., 144, translated from German: „In dem Maße, wie es diesen politisch gestützten Positionen gelingt, bestimmte Mitgliedschaften (in Clans, Religionsgemeinschaften, Nationen etc. – oder eben postmodern romantisierten gemeinschaftlichen (sittlichen?) Praxen!) zur Bedingung für das Haben und Ausüben von Menschenrechten zu machen, verschleien sie den spröden, universellen und egalitären Anspruch der Menschenrechte. Dann entscheidet nicht die horizontale Gemeinschaft aller einzelnen Menschen über Trägerschaft und Inhalt der Menschenrechte, sondern die zumeist hierarchisch bestimmte Ordnung der Gemeinschaften, deren Mitgliedschaft nun bedingte Rechte verleiht.“

76 <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

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- 95 Ibid., 371, translated from German: „wie kann Tianxia gegen den Widerstand von Unternehmen gestärkt werden?“

*Chapter 10 – The United Nations, Human Rights, and World Peace*

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- 7 Balibar (2020, 17)
- 8 Ibid., 17
- 9 Ibid., 93
- 10 Balibar (2014); Balibar (1994, chapters 2 and 9)
- 11 Balibar (2020)
- 12 Balibar (1994, 192)
- 13 Fuchs (2022c)
- 14 Balibar (2020, ix)
- 15 Ibid., 89
- 16 Ibid., 115
- 17 Balibar (1995)
- 18 Ibid 49
- 19 Ibid 49
- 20 Balibar (1995, 50)
- 21 Marx and Engels (1845/1846 [1976], 49, 87, 88)
- 22 Marx and Engels (1848 [1976], 488)
- 23 Balibar (1995)
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- 25 Balibar (2020); Balibar (1994, chapter 8; 1991).

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52 Wells (1940a [2022])

53 *Ibid.*, 27

54 *Ibid.*, 70

55 Wells (1940a [2022], chapter 10)

56 *Ibid.*, 46

57 *Ibid.*, 15

58 *Ibid.*, 16

59 Wells (1940b)

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