

## The New War of Global Capitalism

Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, war was essentially a matter concerning sovereign States with equal rights. As K. Schmitt shows in his masterpiece *The Nomos of the Earth*, European *Völkerrecht* (International Law), overcoming the civil and religious wars which devastated Europe, managed to restrict war by, first of all, turning the question of the justice of war from the material justice of the just cause into the formal justice of how and by whom war is waged; and, secondly, by completely refusing any moral discrimination between contenders. Thanks to that, the enemy was recognised by the contending parties as *iustus hostis* (i.e., as a *just* enemy in the sense, not of 'good', but of *equal*, and, in so far as he is an equal, appropriate) and emphatically distinguished from the rebel, the criminal and the pirate. In addition to that, war lacked any penal and punitive character, as it was confined to a military matter to be sorted out between the state-organised armies of the contestants in particular war scenarios and which concluded by arranging peace treaties; these treaties typically included the exchange of prisoners and amnesty measures. Finally, neutrality became an authentic institution of the *Völkerrecht*.<sup>1</sup>

One cannot but be amazed, in view of current wars, by the extraordinary demonstration of wisdom and realism of the European *Völkerrecht*. In fact, war nowadays, the exemplary case of which is the "war against terrorism" of the North American President and his followers, denies point by point one and every of the restrictions which the *Völkerrecht* consecrated. The main characteristics of current wars could be summarised as follows:

- Utterly criminalising and dehumanising the enemy, who, as a criminal and inhumane being, must not only be defeated but completely annihilated.
- Transforming war into an eschatological war (the last one!) against evil which will not end until evil be extirpated from the face of the earth.
- Considering the whole planet as the characteristic domain of this war; as a consequence, every particular space demarcating a war scenario disappears.
- The impossibility not only of making peace, but of being neutral, since neutrality is regarded as a symbol of war or of aligning with the enemy, and therefore with evil.

It is not by chance that these characteristics go together, for they constitute a form of war coherent with global capitalism as a form of domination. It is a kind of war which has historically taken shape since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in parallel with the development of capitalism and of the USA as hegemonic capitalist State; however, it has only been with the fall of the Berlin wall, which raises North American power to a virtually unchallenged level, and even more after 9-11<sup>th</sup>, that such kind of war has taken its full measure.

How is it possible that war has precisely become that which the European *Völkerrecht* sought to avoid, i.e. a war of annihilation in which it is ever more difficult to distinguish, in view of its global scope and its permanent character, between war and peace situations? And how are we to explain that this form of war is precisely associated with the ideas of 'humanity' and 'universal peace' in the name of which war has been condemned as a criminal and inhumane action and its abolition has been proclaimed? These are, in our view, two questions of the greatest importance which neither analyses in the press nor more specialised studies seem even to ask. To try and answer these questions it is necessary to refer, first of all, to the specifically capitalist form of domination, but also, secondly, to the diffusion and promotion of capitalism, from its very beginnings, in direct connection with the ideas of peace and peaceful relations among peoples, and in opposition to violence and war.

According to Schmitt, the European *Völkerrecht* was above all an inter-state and Europe-centred ordering of the space of the earth which distinguished between a European state space with its politico-territorial borders, and the open or 'free' space (that is to say, subject to occupation and annexation by the Europeans) of the non-Christian peoples. In contrast to this form of domination essentially political and based upon the territorial annexation of the non-European spaces, capitalism is an *economic* form of domination, already present in the European *Völkerrecht*, which maintains the politico-territorial criteria of ordering the world, but subordinating them to the economy. In other words: politico-territorial criteria are subordinated to criteria related to a sphere of human activity, the economic sphere, which not only has become separated from the political sphere, but has acquired absolute primacy as the sphere which embodies what is desirable and even goodness itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Schmitt, K. (1974): *El Nomos de la Tierra en el Derecho de Gentes del «Jus Publicum europaeum»*, Madrid, Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1979 (original German edition published by Duncker & Humblot como *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des «Jus Publicum europaeum»*).

In contrast to European colonial imperialism, the capitalist form of domination, fully deployed by global capitalism, does not consist in the territorial annexation of the subordinated States, but in including them within the geopolitical domain or area of influence of the dominating States. This is what the USA, which were the first in putting effectively into practice this form of domination with the Monroe doctrine of 1823, call zones of *special interests*. These zones were initially confined to the American continent (known in the Monroe doctrine as 'Western hemisphere') as a spatial domain erected in opposition to the European ordering; but they soon were extended to other parts of the world until they embraced the whole planet with the Stimson doctrine of 1932.<sup>2</sup> It comes as no surprise, according to this peculiar way of ordering the space of the earth, that the fall of the Berlin wall hastened in the Western world the political and military strategies, that is, the war strategies characteristic of the capitalist form of domination. For the USA this involved nothing new: all they have to do in the military terrain is readjusting and redistributing their forces, and also assigning NATO new military and police functions, and broadening its scope of action. Meanwhile, the Western European States and the EU itself have hastened to design, of course within the limits set up by the USA, new military programmes, including the creation of a Rapid Intervention European Force, in order to take care of their respective *special interest* in the world.<sup>3</sup>

In this way, global capitalism does not change the formal territorial status of the subordinated States, the sovereign spaces of which continue to be recognised. However, this recognition only obtains in relation to the exterior boundaries of the territorial areas with their linear borders, not in respect of the social and economic *content* of territorial integrity. As a matter of fact, the material content, the substance of sovereignty is defined by the dominant States. An essential aspect of the capitalist form of domination in what concerns the politico-territorial ordering of the world is thus brought out: it consists in transforming territorial sovereignty into "an empty space for socio-economic processes" – to use Schmitt's telling expression (1974, p. 320). These processes are defined by the liberal capitalist standard or model, which involves a specific political order and, above all, a particular economic order to which the subordinated States must accommodate. The political order is based on the constitutional and formally democratic regime, and the economic order on private property and a 'free' (which means 'non State') economy. The former is dispensable, but not so the latter. That is why the political regime of the subordinated States does not have much importance provided that the economic order is respected; and even though the constitutional and formally democratic regime be advisable, the truth is that any other regime is acceptable, including those most dictatorial and bloodthirsty, as it is shown, among many others, by the cases of Chile and Indonesia.

Now, beside the ordering of the space of the earth according to political, state borders, and in truth above this ordering, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century the domain of a 'free', that is, non State, economy, which is understood as a *global* economy spreads out, penetrating everything. This represents a mode of ordering which does not any longer concern the territorial borders, but a human activity, the economy, which subordinates the rest of human activities, over which it has acquired absolute primacy. Implicit in such an ordering of the world based upon the economy is the overcoming of the political, state borders and, in this fashion, of the political itself (and thus, allegedly, of violence and war, as we shall see later). Even though overcoming the political is certainly impossible (unless human beings became gods or animals), in practice the political, state borders are penetrated, but not overcome (after all the State must at least fulfil the police functions of keeping internal order), by subjecting the relationships between States to the capitalist standard of a 'free' worldwide commerce and a 'free' worldwide market. It is by so doing that the dominant States manage to cross, by means of their economic groups and supposedly in a peaceful fashion, the political, state borders. At any rate, the dominant States keep the right of *intervention* to assure that everything be in conformity with their *special interests*.

We are thus faced with a seemingly indirect, allegedly non political, mode of exercising domination, which is supplemented by the political control exercised through *interventions* in the zones of *special interests*, that is to say, in whatever part of the planet and any time in the case of the USA. The aim of this capitalist form of domination is *the control, regulation, commodification, and administration of the*

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<sup>2</sup> Since the late 1920s, everything that happens in any part of the world may be of interest to the USA. "An act of war in any part of the world is an act that injures the interests of my country", stated President Hoover in 1928; these words were highlighted by Stimson, Secretary of State, in the motivation of his doctrine. See Schmitt, 1974, pp. 404-5.

<sup>3</sup> The first pages of Attac Italy's text *Permanent Global War* refers to these strategies and to some of the official documents where they are defined.

*fertility of the earth and the human species* – that is, what M. Foucault called “*bio-power*”, which includes all forms of life and not only human life: from natural resources, including organic matter and microbiological processes, and their routes of circulation and transport, to the human resources and their continuous mobilisation as labour force, both as individual bodies and as population groups. It is this bio-power that, thanks to scientific biotechnological industry, global capitalism has now deployed to its full extent and with utmost intensity, what constitutes the very foundation of the capitalist mode of domination.

What is most extraordinary about this form of domination is the fact that it is associated to peace and freedom, for it is assumed that the economic way of exercising it is intrinsically peaceful, whereas interventions are conducted precisely in order to preserve peace and freedom. In other words: embargoes, cancellation of credit, the fact that external debt payments are prior to the needs of the population, the imposition of structural adjustment plans, economic sanctions, dumping, and the rest of economic methods characteristic of a global capitalist imperialism such as that of the USA are essentially ‘peaceful’. Interventions, on the other hand, i.e. military bases, conspiring to overthrow a government or a regime, deterrent air raids, the creation of exclusion zones and so on, are done in order to preserve world peace and security, in defence of freedom and in the name of civilisation and humanity itself.

Actually this association between capitalism and the values of peace and freedom is not new at all. In a short but highly valuable study, Hirschman has shown that since the late 16<sup>th</sup> century capitalistic forms have been auspiciously promoted and disseminated by means of a whole series of discourses which opposed commerce to violence, war and barbarism, and praised the presumed peaceful character and the civilising effects of purely commercial, economic relations.<sup>4</sup> These discourses in favour of capitalistic forms gradually acquired, in parallel with the development of capitalism, a great coherence, to the point of constituting a veritable *logo-power*, that is, a power over language and the meaning of words, which has been and continues to be the foundation of the cultural hegemony of capitalism. Although we cannot dwell here on this complex process, it may however be necessary to say that thanks to this *power to appropriate, manipulate, and manage symbols and meanings*, a worldview favourable to capitalism was built. According to this worldview, capitalist expansion appeared so tightly linked to the ideas of peace, civilisation, humanity, democracy, and progress that any difficulty in its advance tended to be cast off to the kingdoms of barbarism, anarchy, and darkness – kingdoms the particular manifestation of which the social imaginary has no difficulties in identifying with ‘primitive’ or ‘third world’ contemporary societies, or else with feudalism and the Middle Ages. The utopia of worldwide peace which capitalism would finally bring, as well as the liberal (political) chimera of overcoming the political, were chief components of those logo-power devices. Under their name war is not only condemned, but declared to be abolished; politics is likewise denigrated, for it is identified with war in opposition to the ‘peaceful’ economy. There is nothing basically odd, in view of this ideological context, in the fact that opponents stop being called enemies and be criminalised as disturbers of peace, extremists, and irrational beings who, not just by chance, usually coincide with the poor and the immigrants, and also with the energy-rich States which offer resistance.

The culmination of this process, which marks the emergence of modern capitalism in the domain of the values, rests in considering the economy itself as what is morally good, and, consequently, what dictates the norm to follow. As L. Dumont has brilliantly shown, the economy becomes separated from the moral sphere just as before it had become separated from the political sphere; this time, however, the economy does not subordinate the moral sphere (just as it had subordinated the political one), but assumes itself its own normative character.<sup>5</sup> Once this is done, economic growth and capitalist relations in general come to be regarded as the very embodiment of goodness. In this context, criminalising the opponent as the embodiment of evil is done in a natural way. The Soviet empire was ‘the empire of evil’; and although after its fall some rushed to proclaim, a bit prematurely, the end of history, that is, the end of the enemies, the truth is that, after some doubts (drug-dealers, rogue States), enemies soon had a name: terrorist, no matter whether they are individuals, groups or States. Such is the fate of those who attempt to withdraw from the devastating effects of the ‘peaceful’ and ‘good’ methods of capitalist imperialism: to be treated like criminals and target of *interventions*. For war is condemned, but sanctions, punitive expeditions,

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<sup>4</sup> Hirschman, A. O. (1977): *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, third corrected edition, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> See Dumont, L., *Homo Aequalis: Genèse et épanouissement de l'idéologie économique*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1977, specially ch. 5, p. 83 (English version entitled *>From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology*, Chicago, 1977).

exclusion zones, peace-keeping missions, deterrent air strikes and all the rest of forms of war which massively kill, terrorise, and devastate civilian populations and their life settings, will ever be more necessary to maintain global capitalism.

It goes without saying that those wars shall be 'just wars', but now in the roughest sense of material justice, that is, wars of the good ones against the evil ones, as has been made clear by the sixty North American intellectuals, theologians, and politicians in their manifesto in favour of war – or encyclical, rather than manifesto, as it was called by the Spanish-Italian writer and essayist Sánchez Ferlosio, who entitled it "Nonumquam opus est".<sup>6</sup> The value of this manifesto lies in that it continues the USA tradition regarding war; in fact, since the Great War at least, the USA claim the idea of 'just war' for the wars they have fought. But this is not, as they would have us believe, a return to Medieval Christian doctrines, but simply an effect of the criminalising of the enemy. On the other hand, the defence of peace and freedom will be the aims of those wars. This is nothing new either; it may be worth reminding how the USA entered into the Great War: President Wilson, after having formally proclaimed the neutrality of his country in 1914, and after having been re-elected under the slogan 'he kept us out of war', stated in 1917 that 'worldwide peace' and 'freedom' justified entry into a European war. The same evolution from neutrality to effective entry into war on the basis of similar motives occurred in the II World War with Roosevelt. In truth, the North American dilemma between isolationism and interventionism on a worldwide scale which, according to analysts, constantly appears since the Monroe doctrine, does not exist. There is no such dilemma; what there is instead, as we have already explained, is economic domination (isolationism) and military interventions which occur whenever and wherever somebody attempts to withdraw from, or hinders, economic domination.

Nor is the much talked about 'unilateralism' opposed to an alleged 'multilateralism', for the USA have always behaved unilaterally: today they are against the International Penal Court (IPC) just as after the Great War they were opposed to the creation of a International Tribunal of Penal Law (see Schmitt, 1974, p. 339); they will only subscribe the 1998 Rome Statute setting up the IPC if some clause is introduced which will actually imply the recognition by the IPC of the North American special status. It should come as no surprise that the USA have devoted the last years to dismantling the international architecture of security issued from the cold war, and to beheading the executive boards of the multilateral organisations which, paying respect to the statutes gearing these organisations, refuse to submit to the instructions from Washington, as happened to the General Director of the Organisation For Forbidding Chemical Weapons (OFCW), whom the USA managed to get removed.<sup>7</sup>

In return, the USA are normalising the state of exception in the world: internally, by suspending fundamental rights of their citizens, a practice quickly followed by many States, and, externally, by setting up veritable juridical limboes in accordance with the doctrine of 'interventions'; thus, those captured in the war in Afghanistan are not treated as war prisoners, as they should according to the Geneva Convention, but as terrorists. In truth, the distinction between internal and external has practically lost all its meaning from the moment that the police becomes militarised and the army acts in a police-like fashion in a war which has become a police action.

None of these developments should take us by surprise; after all, controlling, organising, and managing the world is what the global capitalist empire should be expected to do, according to its own criteria. And since the economy represents, as we have seen, goodness and progress of humanity, the war to maintain and extend economic power necessarily becomes, with the help of logo-power, a crusade which divides the world in two camps ("either with us, or with the terrorists") and the last war, for it will only end when evil had been completely eradicated.

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<sup>6</sup> The contemptible piece, as Sánchez Ferlosio called it, is entitled 'What We're Fighting For', and it can be seen in [www.americanvalues.org](http://www.americanvalues.org). In reality it is addressed to the Europeans, and was published by Le Monde as 'Lettre d'Amérique, les raisons d'un combat' (15-02-2002). See Sánchez Ferlosio, R. (2002): *La hija de la guerra y la madre de la patria*, Barcelona, Destino.

<sup>7</sup> See *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2002, 'Washington desmantela la arquitectura internacional de seguridad', P. Conesa y O. Lepick, y 'Golpismo químico a la americana', A. Bourrier.