



# DOCUMENTOS DE TRABAJO DEL CIES

ISSN 2362-2598

N° 15

MAYO - 2022

## Ukrainian war

Adrián Scribano (Eds.)

Skoll, Geoffrey – Korstanje, Maximiliano – Nieves, Flabián –  
Scribano, Adrián

Vida Cotidiana, espacio-temporalidad y Sensibilidades Sociales

Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Sociológicos

 ESTUDIOS SOCIOLÓGICOS  
EDITORA

## **Documentos de Trabajo del CIES**

**ISSN 2362-2598**

**N° 15**

**MAYO - 2022**

**Publicación electrónica Trimestral**

**Director del CIES:**

Adrián Scribano

**Edición y coordinación general:**

Ignacio Pellón

**Editor responsable:**

Estudios Sociológicos Editora

Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Sociológicos

[editorial@estudiosociologicos.org](mailto:editorial@estudiosociologicos.org) – [www.estudiosociologicos.org](http://www.estudiosociologicos.org)

### **Comité Editorial**

Adrián Scribano

Gabriela Vergara

Ana Cervio

Horacio Machado Aráoz

Claudia Gandía

Pedro Lisdero

Los textos publicados en Documentos de Trabajo del CIES son sometidos al referato de evaluadores internos y externos, a quienes agradecemos su participación.

Diseño de tapa: Romina Baldo

## **CIES Working Documents**

Cies Working Papers is an electronic publication of the Center for Research and Sociological Studies, where researchers in the field of Social Sciences have the opportunity to socialize the advances related to their research as well as the academic and scientific activities in which they participate by disseminating their work.

It is the intention in generating this space that, those of us who are committed to the task of building scientific knowledge from the South, find ourselves in it to write about the inquiries made within the framework of individual and collective inquiries linked to the thematic fields of the areas that convene: Environment and Society, Everyday Life, Space-temporality and Social Sensibilities, Conflict and Social Structure and Methodological Innovations.

This is another opportunity to put on record the interest -shared by many- and the conviction that one of our tasks is to spread the voices of those who have a great deal to say about social, environmental and everyday realities and ways of dealing with them scientifically.

In this sense, the objectives of this publication recover the intentions of the CIES to dialogue and inquire about society from interdisciplinary paths linked to Social Theory and a plurality of research schemes in Social Sciences.

Particularly the creation of this space is carried out with the purpose of making known the projects and lines of work to the scientific community, academic and interested in the topics under study that are developed in this Center.

## **Center for Research and Sociological Studies**

The multiple and complex transformations that are being evidenced at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century in Latin America, the global South and the world are presented to all social scientists as a source of challenges and questions. Therefore, the Center for Research and Sociological Studies (Civil Association – Leg. 1842624) is a space that aims to share, dialogue and investigate society -beyond the adjective from sociology- from interdisciplinary paths that revolve around Social Theory and concrete practices of inquiry.

**Presentation:**

**Means of Destruction and Sensible Surplus Value: Notes for a critique of transglobal capitalism from the Ukraine war**

*Pedro Lisdero e Ignacio Pellón*

It is difficult to imagine the modern world without the place that wars have occupied in the processes of constituting the social as we know it. Ukraine's Postcards of War prints a series of questions that invite us to think about the definitions taken by the transglobal condition of 21<sup>st</sup>-century societies. Ukraine calls into question the implication and conjugation of war with scientific-technological development, the expansion of markets, the reconfigurations of sovereignties, and terms of trade, among other "classic modernity" issues. It also requires thinking about the limits and transitions experienced by those of us who are protagonists of a formless and agonizing *passage d'époque*.

Part of agonism is in tension with this 'productive' dimension of war and can be identified in contrast to one of its characteristic features: its predatory component. Marx warned about the expansive phases of capitalism, underlining this negativity in the relations of destruction: "In the development of the productive forces, a phase is reached in which productive forces and means of exchange arise which, under existing relations, can only be a source of evils, which are no longer such forces of production, but rather forces of destruction (machinery and money)" (Marx and Engels: 69). The image of the possible, of re-production, is combined with destruction as a material and "future" limit, opening up questions about the tensions between "the inside" and "the outside".

On the other hand, if the predatory character is one of the dimensions of transglobal capitalism, the second dimension to highlight is linked to the centrality that social sensibilities acquire in this context. At the sacrificial table of the re-invented spirit of development - even in its "friendlier" versions - the current phase of capitalist expansion offers not only the flesh and blood of the "new global pariahs", but centrally questions "how to feel" about it. Sensibility is not something that is sacrificed (in international agreements and "consensuses"), but a dimension of the social that becomes a renewed (sustainable?) energy source for "productivity". Polluting gases from fossil fuels burned for energy production is one of the consequences that society is forced to accept as a legacy of 19th and 20<sup>th</sup>-century capitalism. Similarly, 21<sup>st</sup>-century capitalism finds in the "ways of feeling", and in the multiple discourses that seek to legitimize them, new fuels to be "burned" so that the wheel of productivity can be "unlocked". From the sacrifice of the "universal" consensuses of much of the 20th century, and amidst the polluting gases, a new global sensibility emerges as an "unintended" consequence. These sensibilities feed a phenomenal

productivist machine and have, at the same time, death and despair as an exponentially growing by-product. Predation and a particular social sensibility are pairs that come together in the configurations of "war" as a mark of the social structuration processes in our societies.

At this point, it is interesting to think about the idea of ideological surplus-value, coined by Ludovico Silva, to ask what will be the "echo" that reverberates in the specific forms of the processes of alienation associated with the transition to a mode of production that valorizes other sources of creation and realization of surplus-value. It is such ideological practices that offer themselves as a "new" source of energy. That is to say, this specific way of "being", characterized by narrow ways of seeing the world, which is "productively" translated into a single possible future: all this constitutes an indispensable guarantee of production and profit (a capital more covetable than the tools for the factory; more important - in terms of functioning - than gold to the financial system). This ideological surplus value is a specific source of energies to be captured and metabolized in the renewed mechanisms of capital accumulation.

Our days we could think of a certain shift from capitalism that emphasizes the production and realization of ideological surplus-value, to one where the focus is on "sensible surplus value". What is profitable in our era, what defines the trans-global processes that are "perceived" through the war in Ukraine, is that even in its current predatory phase, capitalism remains a sacrificial pyre of dispensable bodies (Scribano, 2019). Where the rates of profit from primary extractions of value fall short, new territories will open up - even in intimacy - to feed the vigorous (if senile) apparatuses of accumulation. The capacity to "feel" is what is at stake, and therefore, what is ruthlessly contested. Behind every "centimeter" of occupation in the images of "war", meters of a global intimacy are at stake, which, to the rhythm of spectacle and consumption, renews itself as energy tending to stretch the paradox of decrepit capitalism that is healthier than ever.

The theoretical consciousness of these processes, on many occasions, constitutes a reflection of these predatory movements: oil/gas and social sensibilities are an indissoluble pair for understanding the meanings and artifacts that are deployed in this war. This is why opening a reflective space to the sensibilities that are part of the conditions of production and to the possible views of this conflict is no small task (given the temptation to reproduce the real in consciousness). In such a way, this working paper seeks to be an echo of the untamed sensibilities, which seek to be a source of surplus energies with which to build hope as an emancipatory practice.

In this direction, the texts collected here question in different ways. The confrontation between the United States-NATO and Russia-China is based in Ukraine, inaugurating a new "rupture" in global capitalism. On these materialities, Geoffrey Skoll's text helps to observe the differences between

unorganisation and disorganisation in a scenario that recreates the historical conflict between industrial capital and agrarian peoples (as well as between work camps and death camps). In that direction, the processes of self-determination (always unfinished) are blocked by the "comfort" of dependency. Fuel shortages and economic inflation pave the way for the deepening of extractivism and the multiplication of social income transfer programs. The present, trajectories, and future projections herald the advent of a Universal Basic Income conditional on (restricting) access to a list of "essential" products, services and shops. On another level, and in an associated manner, the expansion of the internet of things to the internet of bodies operates, forcing us to ask ourselves what are the current fears and prejudices (and which institutions dictate, narrate and legitimize them to the "masses").

We are confronted, then, with the moral decomposition of Western democracies, "fertile" ground for an author like Maximilian Korstanje and his attentive look at the culture of fear towards the "Non-Western Other". Ongoing policies are geared towards the eradication of the abject, in military and cultural terms, exposing the ideological mechanism of colonial expansionism. This is visible in the current elements that legitimize colonial epistemologies, rationalities, and practices aimed at domesticating "others" (Easterners, Southerners) and exporting the Western model of democracy. In this framework, what spaces are available for nomadism in times of redefinition of civilization all frontiers? The incorporation of ethnic minorities is one possible and effective avenue (though not to be confused with acceptance). Hospitality conditioned by exchanges for, and over, unequal relations is another "alternative". Both social paths are structured with risk as a preponderant indicator, and over disaster turned into spectacle and commodity for media consumption. The politics of (pretending) to be inwardly democratic and outwardly undemocratic are put in check when "foreign" bodies inhabit the same territory. In this framework, the process of neo-feudalization is invigorated by the reinforcement of biomedical discourses and their dis-anchoring of the causes of the ongoing ecological crisis. Thus, renewed racist and xenophobic perceptions indicate that the other to be eradicated is increasingly within.

Taking up the ethnic heterogeneities of contemporary Ukraine, and the complexities of war, Flabián Nievas synthesizes a history of revolutions, counter-revolutions, and genocides up to the "hybrid war". In a land of nobles, peasants, and Cossacks, of Soviet and Western imperialism, a millionaire businessman is elected president, and the economy is plunged into recession, unemployment and the impoverishment of the people. Then the Cold War scenario begins to be re-created in the heat of the policies implemented by Biden and Zelenski. These actions partially explain Putin's repositioning towards the new People's Republics and Russia's invasion of Ukrainian territory. The (partial) result? Millions of people were exiled and displaced, plus thousands of citizens were killed. Ukraine puts up the losses, NATO and Russia their interests and the armaments to defend them. Unlike in other wars, physical and

digital lines of communication have not been destroyed. Meanwhile China "observes" the fighting while its yuan (especially in its virtual version) is revalued.

The trans-globalization of war - as part of the historical "way of being" in Europe - exposes the politics of the sensibilities that sustain, and extend, the processes of normalization (and colonization) of societies. On this level, Adrián Scribano proposes to analyze the social structuration processes from the re-production of the logic of waste, the politics of perversion and of the trivialising practices of the Good. What a society discards is a privileged indicator of what it consumes, depredates and sacrifices. The sustainability of globalized capitalism pulsates in the dialectical game between consuming, discarding, and enjoying. From there, inter/intra-class relations are reorganized, restructured and extended. For audiences to feel and participate in sacrificial spectacles requires politics of perversion that camouflage, misrepresent and conceal "the state of things" by exuberantly displaying them. The possibilities of social change are finally undermined by practices of the Banalisation of the Good where experiences are no longer lived but faked and fictionalized. Building on this explanatory framework, Scribano shares four postcards from the war in Ukraine: a girl singing in/with Disney senses, announcing that something has changed in territorialities and the regime of sensibilities; millions of Ukrainians who, "dressed as tourists", carry their most beloved animals and join the flow of migrant bodies that strain the links between hospitality, reciprocity, and proximity; soldiers who, between smartphone applications and social networks, socialize the "instant" ways of feeding the hopes of combatants and their families; finally, a series of sanctions and reactions boost business towards the "just transition" and the "sustainability" of geopolitics that is particularly attentive to food and energy, from where it can be seen that "the transglobal is the solidarity reverse of the colonization the inner planet".

Therefore, this working paper proposes to reflect on the aforementioned processes, recognizing the complexities involved and inviting us to question about the war expressions in Ukraine and its meanings.

“(...) what differentiates one period from another is not what is done, but how, with what means of work it is done.” (Marx, El capital, Tomo I/Vol 1. 218)

## References

- Marx, K. & Engels, F. (1959). *La ideología alemana*. Montevideo: Pueblos Unidos.
- Scribano, A. (2021). *Colonization of Inner Planet. 21st Century Social Theory from the Politics of Sensibilities*. UK, Routledge.
- Silva, L. (1984). *La plusvalía ideológica*. Caracas: UCV, Ediciones de la Biblioteca.