

The Collective West Is NOT Finished. How The Empire Fights Its Decline | Nel Bonilla

Europe and North America are clearly on a declining trajectory, but that does not mean that have given up on their designs for World Domination. Something far more dangerous is going on. Kyoto University Symposium 2026: "Geopolitics in the Time of Monsters" Presentation 4: Nel Bonilla Nel Bonilla challenges the assumption that Western decline necessarily leads to collapse or a peaceful multipolar order. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci, she examines how weakened legitimacy can coexist with coercion, institutional survival and the obstruction of alternatives. Her account of the bunker state connects austerity, militarization and elite power. The Kyoto Symposium discussion considers European dependence, competing interests and the fragmented forces opposing the existing order, asking what shared political language, organization and institutions might make meaningful systemic change possible. Nel's Links: Worldlines: <https://worldlinesletter.substack.com/> Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support Neutrality Studies: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Neutrality Studies shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Time Stamps 00:00 Introduction and Gramsci's time of monsters 03:20 Authority, consent and coercion 08:42 Why the Cold War was an exception 15:09 Different crises and the assumption of collapse 22:40 Why a new order cannot be born 27:50 The bunker state 33:08 Q&A: state power and European dependence 50:30 Democracy, capital and political organization

#Pascal

With that out of the way, the next on our program is Nell Bonilla, who, again, has a very insightful Substack, and she's also finishing up her PhD at the moment. But I believe the topic that you're going to talk to us about is actually the core of your research, which is on elite networks and transatlantic...

#Nel Bonilla

Yes. So first of all, thank you for inviting me. I'm glad to be here. And second of all, so I want to talk about, yes, actually, like one could say transatlanticism, elite networks, but I want to also, or rather, start with the title of the symposium, which is "The Time of Monsters," which is a paraphrase from a passage and a sentence that Antonio Gramsci wrote in the Prison Notebooks. And I want to talk about it because I think many, many—like, there is a certain way to interpret the sentence, which is basically about, okay, the old is dying, the new cannot be born, and in the interregnum, in the interval, symptoms, or rather monsters, appear, or sometimes it's paraphrased like monsters.

And I think this reading leads to thinking about this historic inevitability, like reading it almost as a prophecy. And I want to go into this passage of Gramsci to show that it was actually embedded in

questions. It was about a crisis of authority that he talks about. And I also want to say, of course, so I'm not denying that if we call the U.S.-led transatlantic bloc, for example, an empire, that it is in many ways or at many levels in decline. There are many crises of a material, but also of human and ideological nature going on there. And that then we say, okay, the increased organized violence that we are seeing, those are actually the monsters.

They are a symptom of decomposition. And I want to argue, or rather add an argument to this, that it is not only about this idea of an existential threat to the, let's call it, U.S.-led empire, but it's also about it adapting, like seeking adaptation. And why? Partly because it has shattered the constraints it had, for example, during the Cold War, and still some remnants during the moment that we call, like, unipolarity. And then I want to say, well, actually, because—and I will get into this in detail later—because these constraints have been removed, then we see the so-called morbid symptoms or monsters. So let's talk about the Gramsci passage.

What he's saying is, as I said, the old is dying, the new cannot be born, and morbid symptoms appear. And in this longer passage, he asks—well, or rather he says—okay, the dominant classes have lost consensus. And because they have lost consensus, they aren't anymore leading, but they are using coercion, which is violence in all of its forms, more than before. So this is one part of the passage. And then he also says the masses, or the popular masses, no longer actually believe in the old order and the old and traditional ideologies and have lost that belief. And they now have skepticism. There is also a turn toward materialism.

And at the same time, like, the old order or the old ideologies are not simply, like, vanishing, and that's it. At the same time, the same actors, the same, like, U.S. ruling strata in the case of today, are saying, well, but we will use force to make up for the lost consensus. We will use force to block any type of new frameworks through which we can see the world that could be a threat to our way of, in this case, since we are in a capitalist system, unrestrained capital accumulation, hyper-exploitation, resource extraction, and so on. And then he asks, can the old order actually use force to prevent these new ideologies from asserting themselves? And he answers, well, force cannot actually restore the old ideology in an absolute sense, but in a new combination sense, it can.

And what he means, I guess, is that, of course, the police or the military cannot make or beat into the population that they have to believe again in the old ideology. In this case, for example, this idea that markets will bring prosperity, open markets or things like that. You cannot beat that into a population that is experiencing material deterioration. So that is one other part of the passage. So he's saying force can actually obstruct and stop the new from forming and asserting itself. And then a new combination emerges, but a new combination of what? Of the old order, which means it's not about trying to get back to the old ways, but finding new ways of rule, of domination, and so on.

And I have, or try to work on, a concept that I call the bunker state, which is like a qualitative transformation of the state, mostly of what we could call the imperial core and its surroundings, but not only of that. And it's a tendency, a tendential development, but I will explain more about this

later. And so before I explain the one-crisis concept, I want to first also explain why it is that we perceive and experience the present in a particular way that then, for example, leads to this reading of passages or concepts through the lens of the past, right? So why, for example, do we see declining crises and then think of collapse, think that collapse will automatically maybe lead to emancipation and liberation or a more peaceful order?

I'm not saying that's not possible, just that let's think about steps in between. So, in that sense, why do we read the present as a generalized time of collapse, possible collapse, and decline? There are several crises, for example, of—oops, sorry—more austerity, deindustrialization, more financialization, more polarized opinions, and many, many more crises and ways of seeing the decline of, well, in many countries, of course. In, for example, the U.S. and Europe, we see that, I think, more than in other ways, or in a more rapid way. And I would say that we then say, okay, this will lead to collapse because these categories and frameworks we use right now, all of us, were formed during the Cold War. And in the Cold War, we had very different, like, a different context than we have right now.

#Pascal

Hey, just a very quick note. The best way to support this channel is by signing up for my free Substack. You can also help with a paid subscription there, or you can get some of our new merch on neutralitystudies.com. Links below. See you there.

#Nel Bonilla

And what do I mean by this? I mean by that that during the Cold War, there was an attempt by the U.S.-led power elites, the transatlantic elites, too, but more the U.S.-led elites, to make capitalism appear as capable of more progress, more peace. It doesn't mean that the Cold War was totally peaceful. No, of course not.

#Nel Bonilla

But there was an unusual combination of restraint and an unusually dense attempt at seeking the consensus of the populations in many countries, not only in the imperial core, but also even in countries in Latin America and Asia and so on, in Africa, through the theories, for example, of developmentalism and dependency theory and so on. So we had— and why was that? Because we had, on the one hand, the Soviet Union, the socialist bloc, the anti-colonial movements, liberation movements. We also had organized working classes, or more organized working classes than we have today, in a more coherent and massive manner in Europe, for example. So in that sense, welfare back then, or the social welfare, the common good, all of this appeared to be a normal product of modernization, of growing institutions.

Organized violence, for some at least, appeared maybe as an externality to the major form of modernity in capitalism. And even international organizations seemed to have some weight and meaning at the time. But why did all of this happen? Why were there these constraints? We could say there were even more levels of equality in many countries. There was not this inequality that we see today. Why was that? Because these were the effects, or partially because these were the effects, of an organized and coherent counterpower, let's call it. And it was even so much so that during the end of the 1970s, in the, for example, U.S. ruling strata, they were already thinking about, like, loudly, "Okay, here's actually too much democracy, too much equality going on."

There was, for example, that so-called Powell memorandum of a judge called Powell, who sent this memorandum to CEOs of corporations and so on and said, well, there's too much going on with the people. They have too much influence in the government. We need to do something. So they actually were feeling that there were too many constraints for this logic of, for example, capital accumulation and so on, which then led, of course, to the slow and growing politics of neoliberalism, what we call today that. So that was one part of the story.

And what I didn't mean by that is that today we mistake, like, the effects, the constraining effects that existed back then in the Cold War, for the achievements of just modernization, maybe even of capitalism for some. And it is not right. Not only that, it's rather that nowadays we have more organized violence carried out by the U.S. and transatlantic empire because this former counterpower that was more coherent, that had a common language and a common horizon, has been fragmented. Which doesn't mean, again, that there's no resistance at all today. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that it is more fragmented. So now this is, of course, not only about saying there's more violence.

Again, this is also about saying there's more, or an attempt at more, hyper-exploitation of resources and so on. So we are basically, I would say, reading the present through categories of the past. For example, and what I mean by that, for example, is also categories like diplomacy, like containment, like peace. All of that we think about, and we think, okay, why did it work back then and not now? And shouldn't it be that way? Wasn't it common sense? So in that sense, I would even add that it is not only that we think about the categories of the past and use them until now, where we have a different situation, but also that we are projecting our own experiences as citizens, as a population, our logic of everyday life, of social reproduction, in one way or another, to concepts that are then also used by these U.S. and transatlantic power elites in a very different way.

So if we think about peace and order in our terms, it means, of course, at least the absence of violence. But if we try to imagine ourselves with the experiences and formations of the highest 0.1 percent of the transatlantic and U.S. ruling strata, then for them peace, order, and so on is not at all about absence of violence, but rather about capital accumulation, resource extraction, and so on without problems, in an easy way, so to speak. So now I want to come to the point about decline. So what is declining? Of course, on the one hand, this idea of hegemony, of consent, of having an

ideology that many people then see as common sense. That is declining, and also the expansive social compromise, this idea of a social welfare state and all of that, that too is declining.

And of course, like the territorial capacities of, for example, the U.S. and Europe too, is also declining in some way, like industries and so on. So there are many layers of decline, but what I would say here is, what is also declining is this idea or the willingness of the population at large to believe, for example, in the institutions and the political leaders and so on. And furthermore, for example, government planning also has changed in its purpose. It's not only, or it's not anymore, about trying to find a positive future horizon, trying to plan for the common good in any way, but rather the opposite, almost. But all of these crises and all of these types of decline, they are happening, of course, simultaneously, but at the same time, not at the same speed.

And furthermore, I would say that the crisis of authority here is quite important and interesting. I will say a bit about this in a minute. But I would advise against thinking about all of these crises converging and then leading again to this idea of, okay, the state, the U.S., Europe, the European Union, and so on will just collapse because, in a way, there are these crises, but the ruling bloc, the power elites, and so on, they are still governing despite having such low rates of approval and so on. They are governing. So they are still administering, collecting taxes, and all of it. What they cannot do is rule through consent, through expansive consent. They are ruling in a different manner. So they basically do not need everybody to believe enthusiastically in their project, or whatever nature it is.

But they do need to have at least some constituencies, some selected parts of the population that, in some way, still believe in what they are doing or the narratives they talk about. So this is, for example, something that is going on too in these different countries. So we could even say that the current moment is one of low-consent equilibrium. There's low consent, but there is still governability in some ways.

And what I also would then add is that even if, let's say, okay, the U.S. is going to decline and fragment tomorrow, just as an example, I would still argue that the process of creating networks over many different layers of financial, logistical, administrative nature, and so on, they will survive such a collapse because the political elites of a country are not necessarily the same as, for example, its financial, its administrative, or other types of elites that also have these levers of power that still exist, which doesn't mean they aren't being contested at all, but they exist. So, in that sense, I want to also say, why does even a decline in consent make organized violence more available as something that is being used more by the U.S.-led empire?

Why isn't it just collapsing? Well, I like to always base my analysis on many theoreticians and so on. But for this question, on German historian Heide Gerstenberger. She has a book that's called *Market and Violence*, and therein she has this thesis, or she researched this, of course, that capitalism, since its origins, was actually not peaceful in any way. Capitalism is always tied to organized violence in many ways. And I'm not even talking only about the violence of colonization, genocide, slavery, but

also even about armed trade, about warrior merchants, about robbery. All of these things are actually tied to the capitalist system itself. And every time there is more peace, it is because there are more constraints.

It is because there are more constraints, because the relation of social forces between social groups allows for it or makes concessions possible. So, in that sense, instead of thinking of the Cold War as the normality, we actually should be thinking the Cold War was the anomaly. And what we have right now, that's more like what has happened often and every time in this system. So, in that sense, when social and coherent forces, politically organized forces, weaken or fragment, then we see more organized violence, the removal of the restraints, but not automatically collapse. Furthermore, I would also argue and add that I'm not arguing about the morality or the moral compass of leaders and that these are simply bad leaders.

But again, this is more of a structural argument that the forces of the system, economic system and so on, lead to this type of behavior, these types of social processes. And the other thing is, why do I make such an emphasis on the coherence and organization of social forces? Because these, for example, also make defection possible, which means if somebody, whether an individual, a country, or whatever, wants to defect the current system as it is, the imperial one, it could do that during the times of the Cold War, more or less. Nowadays, it's a little bit more difficult. Now, the other question I want to talk about is the one that Gramsci asks himself in this passage about why can the new not be born? Because it is being obstructed by force repeatedly.

So it is not that we are waiting for a new order to be born. It is that it is being obstructed by force, specifically, repeatedly. And this also means that if we think about this use of force, there are like two characteristics of it. On the one hand, again, this idea of the vulnerability of any resistance, specifically because of the lack of shared—not only because, but this is one point—because there is a lack of a shared conception of the world, of its phenomena and so on, a lack of common language, or the usage of a language that is actually being used by the US and the transatlantic power elites.

What I mean by that is, for example, that actually the language we see now, or hear nowadays, or read nowadays in foreign policy speeches and reports and so on from many different countries all around the world—I'm not only talking about the US and Europe—it speaks in the language of strategic resources, of, what else, supply chains in a strategic sense, the strategic nature of territories, choke points, et cetera, et cetera. So everything is being conceived through the lens of militarization, of war. So this is another point. Like, if there is a common language within a resisting and forming resisting bloc, it might be—it shouldn't maybe be like the language of the imperial court itself. And there is also, like, a strategic coordination that isn't maybe there as it was during the Cold War.

And the shared horizon, the shared horizon to say that it is peaceful multipolarity, that is a description of the endpoint of the symptom, but it is not a shared horizon in the sense of saying, okay, therefore we need to do this, this, and this, like the steps that lead to such a peaceful

multipolarity, multipolar order. The other characteristic of why the new cannot be born is then also active obstruction through forces, dominant forces, by repressing organizations, criminalizing dissent, criminalizing movements that are nascent, trying to co-opt and incorporate any leaders, divide groups that are trying to dissent and construct something, and try to redirect, like, the grievances, the real material deterioration grievances, into antagonisms.

So in that sense, I would say what also then Gramsci calls, like, the interregnum, or this interval between the old order dying and the new that cannot be born, is about an organized and repeated, continuous obstruction of whatever new there is that wants to be born. It is like an attempt at preventing them from joining together whatever they have as resources and capabilities. And this obstruction doesn't only work through organized violence in the sense of military violence, but also through other layers. I call it a multi-layered cage, but it basically is about having this interconnected financial, technological, logistical, and military architecture that is mostly still in the hands of U.S. and transatlantic power elites. And through this, the U.S. power elites at least attempt to manage multipolarity.

They say, okay, we accept the fact that multipolarity exists, but we will do everything that we still have in our power to not allow the consolidation of capacities, forces that have been developed by different countries, specifically China, Russia, and also Iran. And then I would add that this cage also operates at different levels. So we have the global level, which is then about preventing multipolarity from consolidating its infrastructure into an autonomous project, about keeping any countries that might want to join these more resistant forces from developing their financial or technical or logistical independence, also infrastructure and military infrastructure. And at the regional level, it's, for example, preventing Europe from becoming too autonomous. But also other regions in the world, for example, also in Latin America, we see such processes happening right now.

And at a domestic level, it's about preventing dispersed grievances about real conditions, material conditions that are in existence right now, from consolidating into a shared narrative, into a shared idea of, okay, now we are going to organize against this. So I'm saying this is like the idea behind whatever levers of power the U.S. and transatlantic core still has, not saying that they will succeed or already are succeeding. So in that sense, I want to now introduce a little about my concept that I call the bunker state, which is still in development. Because the bunker state, I would say, is in a way this new combination in Gramsci's terms. And what does it consist of? Well, it is mostly about the qualitative transformation of the state, mostly from the U.S.-led and transatlantic core, but not only. And in what way a transformation?

Well, it is a transformation not in the sense that this is about, like, having a military dictatorship or such a thing. It is about a new combination of characteristics. For example, the state still provides public goods in some way, but it is increasingly about austerity, about fiscal discipline, and of course about the narrative of security, of defending oneself, whether one believes it or not, that this is, like, the process of geopolitical competition in some way. And then the population itself, like its citizens, are not anymore seen as capable subjects that have rights, that can in some way or another

influence their collective futures, but they are then seen as objects of security, as assets, vulnerabilities, as viruses even, as objects that need to be managed in this time of hybrid warfare.

And then I would also add it is about subordinating the planning level. And I mean by that, like, the urban regional planning that we know from the civilian side is being subordinated to this idea of hybrid warfare, this idea about managing, well, multipolarity. So this is just the bunker state concept. And here then I would add that Europe or different European countries are like a condensation point, a place of crystallization, where we can see many of these transformations being very visible. On the one hand, of course, we have this thing, NATO 3.0, where the different European countries are being militarized more and more, but at the same time tied to the command-control structures of the U.S. military, but through technology, through building infrastructure, and so on.

And on the other hand, we have all these protests that maybe some of you have noticed in France, in Spain, in Portugal, in Belgium, that are often about exactly protesting the material deterioration in different aspects, like housing, like education, like payment of workers, etc. So existential necessities exist. But now I would say it's not just about saying, okay, there are protests and they are occurring, but are they creating solidarity? Is there cross-border resonance? Is there an attempt to construct, one could even say, a European historical bloc? Is that happening? And if so, well, I would say this would then be regarded as a threat definitely by the U.S. and the European ruling strata.

So to conclude, I would say, well, Gramsci didn't say just, well, okay, the old has to disappear and then the new will arrive. He was really embedding this statement in a set of questions such as, can force prevent the birth of the new? And will the crisis that exists produce restoration of the old or a new combination? And then I would say the outcome, and so did he in this passage, is open, is uncertain. The new, I would say, is born whenever and wherever people experience themselves as isolated objects of history and begin to act as political subjects, where they construct a shared horizon, shared language, give it all organizational and institutional form.

And such projects and such movements may be defeated here and there, but if they can manage to survive with some of their institutional structures, their language intact, then there is still hope. So I would say the task is to build and preserve all these social relations, organizations, shared horizon and language, the institutions that eventually will replace, then, when such a collapse happens, the old or the combined order. So we hope that the old will disappear and collapse, but I would say we need to have an organized hope to build all these relationships so that then you can survive long enough to replace the old. Thank you.

#Pascal

Thank you. Thank you very much. And before I open the floor, I just would like to ask you, because you have actually a very interesting concept of the bunker state, which is closely tied to something that usually in this discourse we actually call securitization, and how society is securitized. Can you

just say a few words about how you view this shift, this qualitative shift that is going on, especially inside the NATO crowd, from, you know, just thinking of everything as a threat to actually thinking of, you know, the population as something that's threatened and being under hybrid attack and needs to be defended? Because that's actually, I think, a very valuable concept you've got.

#Nel Bonilla

One of the characteristics of this qualitative shift is, yes, I would argue, this type of securitization. But why is that? Well, on the one hand, it is simply under the pressures of capital accumulation. If we have already industrialized and financialized everything, then finding this way through technology related to administrative tasks of surveillance, but also militarization itself, is one avenue of trying to solve this crisis. And I'm not saying the crisis in the sense that, oh, not that they will generate jobs or spend whatever money is generated from these developments into social welfare. No, just using this as a fix for the contradictions as good as possible. That's one.

And the other is, of course, that, yes, having accepted multipolarity as a fact, I'm saying, like U.S. strategists, military planners, and so on, in their reports say, yeah, this is a multipolarity, we are already in it, but they want to manage it in their image, in their way, and specifically to prevent a potential new order. Not because it's not there already; they want to prevent it. So therefore, they also need to convert everything from society into militarization, into militarized public purposes. And also, again, because there is a lack of social forces that could restrain them within these NATO countries, for example. And again, there are signs of protests and so on. But we would have to see whether these will then consolidate, for example, to see, okay, the material deterioration we are seeing is actually tied also to the conversion of infrastructure and so on for military purposes.

#Pascal

Thank you. Then let's start in the back, and then David.

#Speaker 1

Thank you very much. Perhaps I'm misunderstanding it, but the bunker state, it sounds to me not simply securitization, but a combination of austerity combined with securitization, where the austerity measures hollow out parts of the state, make it more dependent, while keeping it strong in a specific area. If that's the case, it seems like Poland, the Baltic states, Germany—they seem to perhaps be embracing this. But in Europe, perhaps France maybe is pushing a little bit away, seeking more military autonomy and even pushing maybe to change the strategic direction from the eastern flank to the Mediterranean.

So I'm wondering if you think, is there a split in Europe in regards to responses towards this bunker state pressure coming from NATO and the USA? And secondly, just in terms of East Asia, there's been a lot of pressure recently to integrate Japan more strongly into NATO's framework, especially in

defense industrialization, where last year they set up, or they're trying to adopt, common standards between Japanese defense production and NATO production. And Japan is sending representatives to NATO, and even in the Ukraine headquarters, there's JTAI members there now. Yeah. But obviously, Japan and South Korea, they're a little bit behind the European states in terms of this bunker mentality. But do you see them progressing in that direction? And how long do you think that kind of shift would take in East Asian countries to follow the European pattern?

#Nel Bonilla

Okay, so on this idea of this tendency of seeing splits in Europe, for example, with Spain and then we had the Baltics and Germany, I would say there are different layers. There's one layer which is like the political sphere, right, of trying to say, and even maybe genuinely wanting, to break away from NATO, from these militarized structures and interdependencies. But at the same time, there is, like, one can say, the fear, like the completion already of having integrated the countries of NATO into the command structure, into the infrastructural structure, planning cycles, into technological and software interdependencies. So even if they say no, and even if they want to break away from it, let's say they do, they would then leave their military in a state that wouldn't be capable to function in the way that most militaries function today, because the technological side of it would be not usable anymore, so to speak.

So I'm saying there could be such a split, and hopefully there comes something out of it. But the interdependencies, material ones, ideological ones, that have been created over decades, and I would say in the last 30 years more and more. I mean, even France was not part of the command structures of NATO, and then it was. So, well, these things have been going on, and to break away from them will be very and extremely difficult, not to mention that, of course, the U.S. and transatlantic power elites that believe in this project, or at least cynically believe in accumulating more and more whatever, will, of course, also try to obstruct such a split if there is a genuine attempt at it.

Then to the second question about, okay, where do I see the time horizon? Well, here I would say what I also said about, okay, can the new be born and so on? It all depends on the relation of social forces. If there are some, let's say, counterpowers, counter-hegemonic movements, I must say I don't know enough about Southeast Asia to say, okay, this will definitely happen, or it won't, or it will take five or ten years, or maybe not at all. But it's always a question about analyzing these social forces, social groups, potential movements against militarization, against NATO integration, and so on.

#Speaker 2

Okay. You know, one interpretation of—I should use the microphone? All right, fine. One interpretation, I suppose, of European motives with regard to pursuing a policy of war essentially against the Russians is that it solves multiple problems for them, or at least there's the perception of

it solving them. I don't know if it really does. That's a separate issue. The perception being, at the economic level, Europe suffers from economic malaise, low rates of growth, low rates of productivity, increasing social dissatisfaction as a result, and that military Keynesianism will come to the rescue. It'll be a salvation for them.

There was just an article, I think, a couple—like a week or two ago—in the Financial Times about how the European automakers are seeing military production as a potential way of rescuing their situation. You know, at the elite level, there's the prospect, I guess, of profitability; at the mass level, maybe some alternative to austerity, that kind of thing. To me, it looks like obviously a mirage for all sorts of very obvious reasons, but it seems to have a hold upon European elite and mass opinion to some degree. I don't know. What are your thoughts on that as a motive, in other words, this mirage of military Keynesianism as a motive for pursuing war?

#Nel Bonilla

Well, I would say partly because, at the end of the day, it's hard to really extract the genuine perception, opinion of ruling strata, political elites, and so on. But I would say partly there are certainly some that might believe that military Keynesianism would solve the downturn, the decline in economic, industrial terms, and so on. On the other hand, I think those that do not believe it and simply do it, on the one hand, because it's about, well, increasing profits in some way, because they are already, again, in this interdependency with the U.S. security and so on establishment. For this part, I think they are being more cynical, maybe more realist, and saying, yeah, we're going to do this. It doesn't matter that it will actually not solve the industrialization, not give any type of improvement of quality of living standards. So I think there are certainly, or there are in my perception, different experiences of ruling strata. But again, who knows what who exactly thinks, yeah.

#Speaker 3

Yeah, thanks for a really interesting presentation, very complex analysis. But my question is perhaps very simple: what is the cause of the organic crisis that you are describing? I mean, you are using Gramsci's notion of organic crisis. What is the cause of the crisis in your analysis? Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

#Nel Bonilla

Yes, the cause of crisis. I would, well, in my analysis and my perception and research, what I see as the cause of these different crises is precisely that. Specifically after the fall of the Soviet Union, and then through the 1990s, exactly through the war against Yugoslavia, the fragmentation of it, and other types of such wars, all of this was ultimately aimed at, well, destroying, fragmenting any type of resistance and remnants of this past for the future.

And because I'm not saying it succeeded, like, 100%, but because there was a certain success in it, like, the capitalists, let's call them, the U.S. and transatlantic power elites, they now felt, okay, there will actually be no resistance towards more organized violence, towards more hyper-exploitation, resource extraction, robbery, piracy, et cetera, et cetera. So I would say, like, this is one cause. And the other, I would even say, maybe technological development itself has brought about maybe new ways to create interdependencies too. So, yeah, I would say these are some, not the sole cause, but some of the causes of these different crises.

#Speaker 4

Yes, thank you. This is quite interesting, and it ties into this notion of the lost future, the lost horizon for hope on the part of the collective West, the collective modern West, post-war West in a sense. So, just to throw my two cents out there, there's a sense in which the secular utopia has sort of collapsed. There's a notion of an existential crisis because there is no sort of collective future to look forward to. If I read you correctly, there's a resulting kind of vacuum where there is no unified worldview. And in this context, perhaps one can say that the securitization discourse emerges as a kind of stopgap solution on a narrative background of impending collapse. That makes total sense to me. Do you think this is a reasonable reading? And if so, is this partly a theological problem, broadly speaking?

#Nel Bonilla

So if I understand your question correctly, you're asking whether the sense of collapse creates a more secularized narrative, and this is what I was saying, or a vacuum?

#Speaker 4

Rather that the secular horizon for hope and for the future collapses, which creates a vacuum wherein this securitization emerges as an existential solution.

#Nel Bonilla

Ah, okay, okay. Yeah, that's a good question. I would say, yes, well, partly, of course, as soon as a cohesive, organized, and on a large scale horizon, secularized or otherwise, like for the common good, a positive planning, a positive horizon, collapses or becomes more fragmented or weaker or other adjectives that we could use to describe it. As soon as something like this happens, then yes, at least there will be a sense of disbelief, maybe a sense of skepticism towards the current order. And is there a securitization or militarization attempt to fill that vacuum?

I would say, again, partly. And why do I say partly? Because there are different narratives. One narrative is, for example, the one that currently, in many European countries, their political leadership is very popular, like having this idea of the external threat, like Russia, China, et cetera,

are the external threat, and that's why we need to militarize. So this is one narrative that tries to fill this vacuum or void. And I think the other narrative could be one of, in some parts, I'm not saying it's very strong, but I see there are seeds of it.

Of this narrative of ethno-nationalism, like that to restore Western civilization, we need to renew it through militarization, which will bring social cohesion and so on and so forth. So I think there are these two narratives, and at the same time, I perceive in my research there's also the possibility that, in a larger part, like, there's not this attempt to seek expansive and whole content from the population, just from some parts of it. And if they are radicalized, for example, and polarized, the better. And if some other parts of it are apathetic, skeptical, isolated, lonely, et cetera, et cetera, then that's good too, as long as they are not consolidating and trying to organize.

#Speaker 5

I'm picking up, I think, on Rashida's question about this sort of labor thing in the whole thing. So I understood, I mean, first I think that what Gramsci is saying, "the old can't die, the new can't be born," is basically what we hear from Hegel: something needs to die before something can too. Or Peter Schumpeter, creative destruction. So every crisis, whatever, something needs to go. But I think there is something in humankind that we don't allow states to go, although we are experiencing it all the time. I mean, if you look at an atlas, a school atlas, you basically change borders and states every now and then. But still people, you know, like Fritz Stern, "The Five Germanys I Have Known." You have a person which goes to five different countries, but is still the same person. So this letting go of states, and I think we are facing the experience.

For me, you know, I'm pretty sure that the French Republic won't survive. We'll have Jean-Marie Le Pen in the next election. I'm pretty sure that the Federal Republic is deeply sort of divided on East and West and former GDR, blah, blah, blah. But what we do not look upon, and here I go with Rashida, is the economic sort of underpinning of this dying of states. What I mean is that when you talked, I remember Acemoglu saying, "The economic origins of totalitarianism." And the economic origin is basically when the capital-labor rapport is no longer intact. Then basically capital decides whether you have a democracy or not. And so Acemoglu argues that democracy was only a limited phase in history, when the labor-capital relation was intact and when democracy actually was cheaper than control.

But with all this cell phone business and Peter Thiel and whatever, where we voluntarily surrender our freedom, control is basically very, very cheap. We all buy an iPhone and we are controlled. And so the capital-labor thing is broken, and then capital decides to do whatever authoritarian sort of ruling, which comes today in a much more sublimated way because they have learned that if they do it like in the '30s, it wouldn't work, so they do it much smarter. So I think there's a learning curve by them. And I think as long as we haven't decided—and that's my question, sorry for being long—we are talking geopolitics in times of the monsters, but the real monsters seem to be elsewhere. We no longer know what labor is in times of 3D printers.

We no longer know what knowledge is in times of AI. So as long as we do not have—because you said that in the moment of institutional breakdown we are experiencing, there's still the network of people, and this will survive. So society only needs to reconstitute in a different institutional order. But if now we are in an edgy time in which also society is falling apart, and AI is taking our knowledge, and we no longer know what work is and production, and we know from Marx that robotics can't create value added, then I think we are in an even deeper circle of understanding why the new cannot come, and that it's much more about rebuilding states which are more social or economic. You understand what I mean? Okay. Sorry. Welcome back.

#Nel Bonilla

Yes, yes, I understand it. And I think it's actually partly what I was trying to say when I said that states around the world, or countries around the world, and their foreign policy establishments are adopting the language of, like, the imperial language, so to speak, like the militarized language, seeing everything in security-strategic terms and strategic or operational terms, military terms. Because if, like, if every country or almost every country on Earth is trying to adopt the same language, this means they are adopting the frameworks through which to see, like, reality. And what I mean by this, like, one example: let's say artificial intelligence. We say, okay, maybe you're right, like, we need to understand words, social phenomena, and give them maybe the appropriate term.

This sounds weird, but bear with me. So artificial intelligence, for example, what we are calling artificial intelligence, we are seeing as an external entity, as an alien type of technology maybe that will supersede us, maybe control us, etc., etc. But what if—and of course, changing a name doesn't solve it all, but it is a step—what if we called it collective intelligence and thereby made visible that actually the intelligence that is going into it, even the creation of the code and all of it, the infrastructure for it, all of it is actually from the collective, from every one of us, from everyone? It's the extraction of knowledge, etc., in a collective way, and then we could actually say, oh, okay, collective intelligence, we can actually use it for a common good, for a positive horizon.

So this is why I ponder on this idea of a shared horizon, political organization, and so on, and creating a new language. I mean, not in the sense of German, French, Japanese language, but a shared political language, because this will then allow us to understand the different social phenomena in a way that then will allow us to say, okay, maybe we can use this differently, maybe we can do something differently. And so this is one or two points, I think, that I want to make. And the other one about this: okay, the state is not so important anymore, or it is made unimportant by these power elites, U.S. and transatlantic ones, I would say yes.

This is exactly what, for example, I forgot to mention, but one of the qualitative transformations of the state in this idea that I call a bankrupt state is also about, actually, that every country, every territorial entity that we then call a state is actually not anymore seen as a state by, let's say, the imperial court, power elites, but rather specific territories that have specific or more strategic

functions, strategic military functions. And then this idea of sovereignty, of independence, autonomy, etc., etc., becomes buried or is subsumed underneath this idea of militarization and threats and so on.

#Speaker 6

Thank you. I really enjoyed your presentation. I've even gone to sign up to your Substack, so you'll have like 8,001 people. So clearly I'm missing something here with everyone on YouTube and Substack, so I'm excited to follow more of your work. But I have two questions. One is international, and one is domestic. So in the first one, in the way that you described the view of the world, you're seeing European states becoming increasingly subordinate to the U.S. architecture, right? But how do you account then for the agency of some European allies that actually seek deeper U.S. integration because they see it as serving their own security interests? So here I'm really thinking about the eastern flank, NATO's eastern flank countries.

So the question is, you know, can dependence and allies' strategic agency both coexist in your framework rather than just being one? That's the international question. Then I have a domestic question, which is that you're also critical of the move towards whole-of-society resilience and the idea of a new social contract, because the argument is this makes citizens objects of national security. And so where would you then draw the line between that and more legitimate democratic preparedness? So is there a version of societal resilience that does not produce the bunker state? Like, where is that line? And I think that's quite an interesting question, even being here in Japan, where there's a lot of societal preparedness and resilience in relation to not just what it does externally, but the natural hazards here too. Thank you. Okay. Okay.

#Speaker 7

So the first question, I must ask—

#Nel Bonilla

Okay, next question. Yeah, now I remember. I'm sorry. I had a moment of blankness. So yeah, the first question: whether agency and dependency maybe can converge, coexist, or even whether agency in the structure of dependency, does it exist? Is it there? I would say yes, with some caveats, in the sense that we need to, when we see or talk about countries, states, governments, and so on, we always need to differentiate between political elites, power elites, economic ones, et cetera, and populations, then parts of the population, the different social groups, and so on.

So, for example, it might very well be that in some countries, maybe, for example, in the Baltic states, there is indeed this belief, sincere belief, that they need NATO for their own security because the other, like Russia, for example, is a serious threat to them. So I would say, yes, they can coexist because as soon as they say, yes, we want to be in NATO and all of it, they, of course, then sign up

to every process, every type of process, that will make them more and more dependent and bound to NATO and then ultimately also to the U.S. security and technological and so on establishment. So I would say yes. And then I would say it always depends, like, on the historical trajectory of every region and country where such a thing can then occur and so on.

And then the other question about resilience on the domestic level, I would say yes, yeah, of course, there can be resilience that is not part of the bunker side, as you say, with examples like natural disaster preparedness and, for example, even such things as foreign invasions. Yeah, therein you can actually, I think, when the idea is to protect, like, the population at large, the civilians at large, in any way. And I mean, for example, in the bunker state, the resilience is not about protection. It's about using the people as assets, as resources, or, if they are dissidents or what have you, well, exclude them. So this is a very different type of resilience that they are talking about. But yes, of course, there can be resilience as long as it is oriented, like, toward the common good, towards protecting people for people's existence, for their own sake, so to speak.

#Pascal

And I want to add one more thing, which is, like, when it comes to these shared concepts, I find it interesting how we also recently just went through the reconceptualization of how we thought about ourselves. Do you remember, for the longest time, we talked about the post-Cold War? And did you realize how we're not talking about the post-Cold War anymore? We are post the post-Cold War. It always struck me post-Cold War will not stick because anything post is by definition anti-something else. And as apparently, I think, all of us intuitively get, we are in the new thing. But again, what is it? And in what way is it born? But the post-Cold War is over. We are now calling that period, those 30 years, we tend to call it now the unipolar moment, which is also interesting because it gives us, of course, implicitly what it is opposed to, right? To the multipolar moment. Well, thank you very much, Nele.