



## Introduction<sup>\*</sup>

The editorial board of *Conflitti Globali*

War is the father of all and king of all and some he shows as gods, others as men; some he makes slaves, others free. (Heraclitus)

Conflict, movement and organisation are intimately connected both theoretically and historically. Movement creates conflicts and conflicts create movement: there would be no movement without conflict. And among the things that war generates, we find organisation and the problem of organising. It no longer makes any sense to write about political and social conflicts – in the widest sense of these terms – without considering them at a global level. They are immediately global and have a tendency to involve global communities. This is not to suggest that conflict be interpreted in a univocal sense – as it happens in the most popular theories: on the basis of strongly held ideological assumptions of both the right ('clash of civilisations') and the left ('global civil war'). Rather, it is to suggest that we attempt to account for the networks of dynamics and implications to which contemporary conflicts are ultimately tied. In this sense, for instance, the control of the energetic resources in the Middle East must be considered as a network of stakes at multiple levels: US hegemony, the roles of Europe(s) (with its internal divisions and different spheres of influence), global economies, oil markets, crises of Arab nationalism, and variegated religious movements – to name but a few. Each of these is both local and global, and interconnected through lines of transformation that, in different periods, create various strategic scenarios.

To try to explain these scenarios on the basis of a single cause and a binary rationale (as, for instance, the conflict between the empire and the global resistance), or as the result of the simple mechanics of forces (geo-politics), is misleading. As Alessandro Dal Lago suggests in this special section of *ephemera/Conflitti Globali*, war and conflicts must be considered as social facts, and as such they should be studied in ways that respect their complexity.

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Lately it has become quite fashionable to explain conflicts in cultural terms; but in our opinion such a route cannot take us very far. The processes under scrutiny are much more complex and cannot be crystallised in a simple cognitive formula. This is very clear in the present Iraqi situation, where the anti-Western tactical alliance is formed by heterogeneous groups which refer us to various cultures and religious faiths. There are a-religious former Baath party members, nationalists, diverse Sunnite groups, pro-Iranian and independent Shiite groups, various Islamists, members of Bin Laden's international network etc. It therefore would be meaningless to offer a mono-causal explanation – religious or cultural – for the war that started in Iraq after Bush's astonishing declaration of 'mission accomplished'. This does not mean that we have to ignore the role of religions and cultures in the analysis of social and political conflicts. But what must be avoided is the idea that conflicts are between well defined and compact religious or cultural entities. We should instead consider the political nature of many supposedly religious or cultural conflicts.

An important aspect of the analytical style of the essays of *Conflitti Globali* presented here is an interest in the uncertain character of contemporary conflicts, following Clausewitz's suggestion that wars and conflicts are 'risky games'. To talk about uncertainty means to stress the fundamental unpredictability of the outcome of any 'battle', from the local battlefield to the global strategic level. Indeed, there exists no universal model of organising or resolving a conflict. The forces of which a conflict is an expression are unique in their composition, and it is short-sighted to reduce them to a single space or homogenous temporal dimension. Since contemporary conflicts are widespread and interconnected (in this sense, they are global), it must also be considered that there is a continuous acceleration, with 'political' processes changing at a much faster rate. Today's various conflicts must be compared to what happened during the Cold War, when the modern promise of a universal inclusion in the international system still seemed feasible (see Walker's 'The Double Outside of the Modern International' in this issue). Also, these processes have become faster and thus less predictable because of the role played by arms in the definition of conflicts. The ubiquity of war makes topical, as it were, political and social phenomena that we tend to think of as slow in their development and as long in duration. When the decision is to fight, a risk, by definition, is to lose. The simple fact of passing into an armed conflict brings with it unpredictable feed-backs, which no strategic analysis can ever forecast.

Of course, war always entails a resistance which is something different from the mere or apparent defeat on the battlefield of the weak – as the situation in Iraq clearly shows. The resistance tends to become a victory when the defeated refuse to fight in the particular manner which the strong desire. That is, resistance can consist in the imposition of change in the battlefield, changes of method and changes of armament. Napoleon had begun to lose his empire in Spain, where the Spaniards had refused to fight in open field and practice instead guerrilla warfare; so was it in Russia, where the adversaries beat a strategic retreat over border-less spaces. Americans lose wars that do not accept their strategic models (Vietnam, Iraq), and so do Russians (Afghanistan, Chechnya). Clearly enough, models do change. And since popular resistance à la Vietnamese is very costly for lives (one million and a half dead Vietnamese people, against 58,000 dead Americans), it is sensible to imagine – independently from any moral consideration – that 'terrorism' had come to be a normalized form to be assumed

by any resistance to hyper-technologically armed enemies. What we now call 'terrorism' has permitted the success of the clandestine Jewish groups against the British in Palestine, and the victory of the Algerian national liberation front against the French paratroopers...

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This special section of *ephemera*, and the work of *Conflitti Globali* in general, must be far from a set of general military affairs publications. Rather: a collection of analyses of local-global conflicts that consider military interfaces in their social and political dimensions. Considering the practices adopted in Putin's Russia for the war on terrorism (massacres of both terrorists and hostages in Moscow and Beslan), Federico Rahola asks whether the friend/enemy distinction is still useful to understand the State management of citizenship rights. This is why, together with the ubiquity of war, important themes of analysis become questions: about the militarization of society at the time of terrorism, surveillance, urban conflicts and control; about the military management of migrations; about new modalities of imprisonment (from the detention camps for 'unlawful combatants' in Guantanamo, to the temporary camps for migrants built all over Europe); about the transformation of domestic and international law as a reaction to 'emergencies'; about the transformation of borders and peace-keeping. In few words, the essays presented in this special section of *ephemera/Conflitti Globali* propose analyses which seek to comprehend the bio-political and strategic dimension of conflicts in the era of globalisation. The reference to bio-politics shouldn't be understood as a strict adherence to Foucault's theories, but, importantly it should be noted that the method – a radical empiricism or happy 'positivism' – as elaborated by Foucault for nation-level analyses – appears extremely useful to be applied at the global level for several reasons some of which are the following:

- There is no such thing as a global Power or Empire, but rather a network of neo-colonial and regional imperial powers always redefining their mutual interference and exclusion areas. On the subject of borders in this sense see Cuttitta's essay. If from a strictly military point of view the US today is hegemonic at global level, it is important to note that the capacity of American intervention finds objective limits; the point is relevant also for how we construe the actual or potential politico-military forces of China, Russia and other countries.
- Power develops on several structural levels: political, military, financial, economic, technologic, mass-mediatic, cultural etc., and there is no a priori necessity of their solidarity – if in the long run the price of oil will grow too much, probably Bush will have to pay the price of his military and political adventurism – and what must be studied are their contingent coincidence, divergence or conflict.
- The temporary and stable constellations of powers provoke, because of their dynamicity and productivity, the birth of resistances; and resistances in their turn are not necessarily internally coherent and in agreement. There is therefore no Subject of the global resistance; there are only subjects in relations to powers, and powers in relations to subjects. To try to unify at least on a categorical level the 'resistants' may have millenaristic purposes, but it tends to ignore the empirical constellations of

powers/resistances. What is important to stress, as Dal Lago does in this special section, is the constituent role played by all conflicts and wars; we might say with Heraclitus that “conflict is the father of all things...”.

- There are no unified – nor deliberate and omniscient – strategies of the global powers. The imperial wars may manifest in some cases to spectacular victories (Gulf war 1991, Kosovo 1999). But they also manifest as sudden retreats (Somalia 1993) and as defeats or impasses (Iraq after 2003). This means that strategic plans are continuously reformulated in the terms of armed *politique politicienne* on a global level. Foucault’s language – strategies and tactics, alliances, advances and retreats etc – then appears especially useful to describe these empirical plots of powers.
- Internments, controls, borders, and internal and external barriers all evolve on the basis of management by the different powers of conflicts. Both Walker and Cuttitta, from different points of view, deal extensively with the changing role of borders in the study of global conflicts.
- Life in society cannot be accounted for without considering this context of global conflicts. Without imagining it unified, in the short or long run, we can still think that the world will become a global society of controls, where the individuality of existences, political choices of groups, the initiatives in defence of individual and collective freedoms, will be more and more conditioned.

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