Antifascism and Wildness. “Partisan Ecologies” between the Spanish Civil War and the Global Warming Era

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Antifascism and Wildness. “Partisan Ecologies” between the Spanish Civil War and the Global Warming Era

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Abstract

This short essay uses the concept of “partisan ecologies” in order to analyse certain past and present chapters on the relationship between anti-fascism and nature. According to the Swedish eco-Marxist Andreas Malm, wilderness has not only represented an essentialist idea resulting from the projections of conservationist environmentalism about a supposedly untouched nature, but has also been one of the real spaces of a modern antagonism. Taking this theoretical point of departure, the text describes the Alpine Battalion of the Sierra del Guadarrama during the Spanish Civil War and its resonances in some contemporary events.

Résumé


Nowadays, the need to return to partisan geologies is essential, at a time when the tensions of the past, particularly those of the 1930s and 1940s, seem to be re-emerging in a new form. Partisan memories have been constructed along different axes, ranging from historical narratives to testimonial literature. This short essay aims to complement this work with a critical analysis of the counter-hegemonic visualities produced around the partisan struggles. In this sense, the case study I propose below, focusing on the images of the Guadarrama Alpine Battalion, reveals how diverse documents of partisan activity produced a distinct imaginary of the border territory between the warring sides during the Spanish Civil War. In that imaginary, the political culture of resistance and the physical relationship with the mountains composed what we can call a partisan political ecology.

From this perspective, the following paragraphs trace a triangular relationship between aesthetics, politics and ecology that expands the memory of partisan genealogies from a new angle. Explaining the political ecology of partisan counter-visualities becomes essential today, when the consequences of the Great Acceleration of the ecological crisis, whose origin coincides with the end of the epic period of partisan culture (late 1940s and early 1950s), places the trajectory of industrial civilisation at a critical point. In this sense, the aim of this text is not only to approach the visual legacy of the historical partisans from a different perspective, but also to allow it to flash up in the present at the moment of danger (to put it in Walter Benjamin’s terms).

Images of the Alpine Battalion

The snow blizzard gives them a ghostly air. The images of the Alpine Battalion along the Sierra de Guadarrama [Guadarrama mountains], situated in a region north-west of Madrid, make up the graphic repertoire of this squad of the People’s Army, founded during the Spanish civil war to fight Franco’s troops. The battalion occupied a series of strategic points which formed the front line in a rugged territory with a cold climate, particularly during the winter months. The harshness of the conditions invests the images that sustain our memory of the partisan fight with a special aura (Fig. 1). The battalion was created with the intention of dominating the geographic space that delimited the border between the two conflicting sides. Its main function was the surveillance of the mountain passes, especially such strategic ones as Marichiva, Fuenfría, Navacerrada and Cotos. The defence of the front line formed by the Sierra de Guadarrama was essential to prevent Franco’s troops from advancing towards Madrid.

The battalion started its activities in September 1936, at a time when the front line was already stabilized. It quickly grew to 600 men and was composed of two different groups. A first section, of communist ideological affiliation, was integrated within the 5th Regiment of the People’s Militias. The second group was made up of members from the Unified Socialist Youth (JSU), which had been founded in March that

Figure 1. Martín Santos Yubero, “Exercises by the Alpine Battalion of the 5th Regiment”, 1936-1937, Regional Archive of the Community of Madrid, Martín Santos Yubero’s Collection, COD. ES 28079 ARCM 201.001.43597.1

1 This essay has been written thanks to the aid RYC2018-024943-I financed by the MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and the FSE “El FSE invierte en tu futuro”; as part of the CSIC (PIE 202010E005) and the Ministry of Science and Innovation (PID2019-109252RB-I00, PID2019-107757-RA-100 and PID2020-113272RA-100, financed by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033/FEDER “Una manera de hacer Europa”) research projects that I lead or in which I participate; and in the framework of the research project “Ré.Part. Résistance(s) Partisane(s): Culture visuelle, imaginaires collectifs et mémoire révolutionnaire/ Partisan Resistance(s): Visual culture, collective imagination and revolutionary memory” (Idex de l’Université Grenoble Alpes, ANR-15-IDEX-02).
same year as a result of the merger of the Union of Communist Youth of Spain (UJCE, which was linked to the Communist Party of Spain /PCE)) and the Socialist Youth of Spain (JSE, which was linked to the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party /PSOE)). Eventually, these two initial groups of the battalion would be integrated into a single unit.

The recruitment announcement for the battalion had first been published on September 16, 1936 in the journal of the 5th Regiment Milicia Popular (number 45) reading: “BATTALION ALPINE. For skiers and mountaineers in general. The Alpine Battalion has begun to be organized as part of the 5th Regiment of People’s Militia, and skiers and people in general will be able to take part in it”. The enlistment took place in Madrid, at first in the headquarters of the 5th Regiment at Calle de Fran
cos Rodríguez 5, and later in the headquarters of the 5th Regiment at Calle Gaztambide 42. On September 19, a new call was published specifying that “preference would be given to those who have practiced mountain sports”, since “the extreme harshness of their objectives makes iron discipline and adequate physical preparation indispensable”.

The set of posters for the recruitment shows an agit-prop aesthetic, following textual and visual montage procedures characteristic of the political graphics of the time (Figs. 2 and 3).

Despite being part of the People’ Army, organized by the PCE with the objective of disciplining the popular militias, the battalion was deployed along the territory of the Sierra de Guadarrama in an improvised manner. The partisans of the Alpine Battalion had diverse political commitments, ranging from the militants of the organizations that were part of the battalion to inhabitants of the mountain villages without a precise ideological orientation. Although

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2 For a brief history of the formation of the battalion, promoted by Teógenes Díaz Garín (an experienced climber and founder of the High Mountain Group of the Peñalara club), Luis Balaguer Secourum and Joaquín Rodríguez López, see Jacinto M. Arévalo Molina, El batallón alpino del Guadarrama (Madrid: La Librería, 2006), 47–90.

3 “Only one bond unites them, their passion for the mountains and the defence of the legally established government. But there are not enough of them. Some asiduous
the first priority had been to recruit skiers, the battalion later opened its doors to sportspeople with ties to the high mountains, who could after a brief instruction join the unit. Those who took charge of the instruction were sportsmen with knowledge of skiing and a certain familiarity with the paths that cross the Sierra de Guadarrama. The white clothes they wore were provided by the USSR, whose combatant, skiing forces were uniformed in this manner. However, it must be stressed that the battalion was not an assault or collision force. It was primarily responsible for surveillance of the area, as well as the “construction of trenches, forts, bunkers and case-mates at the highest points of the mountain range along the line from the Alto del León pass to Canencia, just over 30 kilometres”.

The value of the visualities produced by the battalion lies above all in their documentary component, but also in the performative effects of a mise-en-scène that associated the gallantry of the fighters for the Republican cause with the harshness of the snowy mountain landscapes. Particularly in their photographic elements (drawings of various scenes of the daily life in the battalion have also been preserved), the images pay tribute to the precariousness embodied by the partisan culture of resistance. The photographs that make up the dispersed archive of the Alpine Battalion

4 “El Alpino del Guadarrama, un batallón de Nobel”, available at: https://www.publico.es/politica/alpino-del-guadarrama-batallon-nobel.html. As an exception, we should note the battalion’s participation in the Republican offensive on Segovia, between May 30 and June 4, 1937.
are metonymic indexes of an immeasurable experience: that which confronted the bodies with the geological materiality and the meteorological events of the mountain. Captured by the battalion’s archive photographs, the temporality and the perception that walking in the mountains implies is situated at the antipodes of the contemplative experience that has defined the history of landscape painting. Actually, the latter’s history had in its Spanish version a relevant chapter in the Sierra de Guadarrama’s valleys and passes. For example, the nineteenth century canvasses by Martín Rico y Ortega and Aureliano Beruete show the towering pine forests of the Fuenfría valley, the same place where the Alpine Battalion would take up its activity. In those paintings, the pine silhouettes stand out against the granite massif of the Guadarrama mountains, transferring the geological roughness of the environment to pictorial materiality. The photographs of the Alpine Battalion supplemented that visual memory with the geology and meteorology of the civil war, where walking was exposed to the uncertainty of the future and the risk of death. The Alpine Battalion drew with a few bodies, a few sticks and a few skis the geography of resistance. From this collective experience emerged a kind of spontaneous comradeship, which can be glimpsed

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5 The documents that make up the legacy of the Alpine Battalion are not centralised in one institution, but dispersed in various documentary collections. For the reflection proposed in this essay, I have mainly used two documentary collections related to the Alpine battalion: the Martín Santos Yubero’s collection, hosted by the Regional Archive of the Community of Madrid, and the collections of the National Library of Spain. In the future, I hope to extend my research to the visual repertoires of the Alpine Battalion hosted by other institutions, such as the Pablo Iglesias Foundation.

6 The image is available online in the Museo del Prado website: https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra-de-arte/en-los-altos-de-fuenfría-sierra-de-guadarrama/fddf7376-4409-434e-a5e1-5fdedf43309.

Figure 5. “Fighting under the first snow. A group of sportsmen enlisted in the Alpine Battalion of the 5th Regiment, on the fronts of the mountains, already under the first snow”, 1936-1937. Image from the collections of Spanish National Library.
in several of the images that the battalion has bequeathed to us.

**Partisan Imaginaries**

The provisional presence of the battalion in the mountain’s rugged landscapes had to do, at the same time, with the *openness* to the territory that Swedish eco-Marxist Andreas Malm attributes to partisan struggles, and with the passion for defending the land (even in a telluric sense, revealing partisan ties to the territory and the local population) that Carl Schmitt links to the historical essence of partisan passion: the resistance to the invasion by a foreign army. The heterogeneity of the members of the battalion, which was open to the participation of very diverse actors, was related to an occupation of the mountainous territory that did not claim an essential conception of it. Although nationalist discourses were present in the war-civilian literature of the Republican side (which sometimes identified the national side as a fascist invasion alien to national sovereignty), the presence of the Alpine Battalion in the Guadarrama had a character of resistance in a borderline territory in dispute. Even the uniforms of the battalion, with their neutral white and Soviet origin, undo the identitarian appropriation of the space. Nevertheless, it is as naïve to think that anyone could have worn them, as it is to deny the contingency of the way in which the battalion was formed and embraced a territory lacking strong regionalist traits.

Schmitt situates the origin of the modern articulation between territoriality, guerrilla warfare and nationalism in another history of the Sierra de Guadarrama: the resistance against the Napoleonic invasion at the beginning of the 19th century, witnessed by French engravers such as Louis Albert Ghislain or the Baron Bacler D’Albe. However, the association between this territory and the figures of the guerrillas who resisted the French army at the beginning of the 19th century did not play an extremely relevant role during the Spanish Civil War. It is curious that in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), also set in the Guadarrama mountains during the civil war, Ernest Hemingway contrasted the figure of the combatants in the Republican battalions with the guerrilla partisan, who was capable of infiltrating enemy territory beyond the front line. Although Hemingway’s text images should not be taken literally (for instance, the legendary bridge that Robert Jordan, the epic protagonist of the novel, wishes to destroy was very close to the Fortified House, occupied by the Alpine Battalion8), it allows us to understand the way in which the battalion inhabited an intermediate territory in between the regular army and the mountain raids of the guerrillas.

The parallels between the War of Independence against the French army and the Spanish Civil War were based more on the imagery of popular resistance against the foreign invader than on the more anarchic figure of the guerrilla fighter. For example, the journal *ABC*, renamed *Diario Republicano de Izquierdas* [Left Republican Journal] when it became an organ of the *Unión Republicana*, opened its editorial on July 25, 1936 with the headline “Second War of Independence”; one of the text’s fragments, in a patriotic tone, reads in anti-colonial terms the civil war as a collective “work of the people”: “Spain is facing its second War of Independence. Sadder, more bitter than that of 1808, because there it was against foreigners, and today, because of an odious betrayal, the people have to face men born in Spain, but who renounce all connection with the noble ideology of the fatherland”. The real aim was to avoid becoming a “colony” of “black” fascism, an adjective that alluded to the absolutist and anti-liberal core of very diverse actors, was related to an occupation of the mountainous territory that did not claim an essential conception of it. Although nationalist discourses were present in the war-civilian literature of the Republican side (which sometimes identified the national side as a fascist invasion alien to national sovereignty), the presence of the Alpine Battalion in the Guadarrama had a character of resistance in a borderline territory in dispute. Even the uniforms of the battalion, with their neutral white and Soviet origin, undo the identitarian appropriation of the space. Nevertheless, it is as naïve to think that anyone could have worn them, as it is to deny the contingency of the way in which the battalion was formed and embraced a territory lacking strong regionalist traits.

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8 It was therefore a border territory, far removed from the symbolic meaning with which it was associated in Sam Wood’s film version of the novel (1943).

9 The narratives surrounding the battalion’s trajectory have been subjected to historical revisionism, denouncing the dark side of the Alpine Battalion’s actions. For example, the website “Guerra en Madrid” recently published a post denouncing the purges carried out by the battalion’s political commissioner Antonio Palmer: “Así fue la purga comunista del Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama”, available at: https://guerrasmadrid.net/2019/03/31/asi-fue-la-purga-comunista-del-batallon-alpino del-guadarrama/. On their behalf, Enrique Herreros also denounces the interrogation to which he was subjected after being accused by some members of the battalion of trying to go over to the rebel side, *Enrique Herreros, La Codorniz de Enrique Herreros* (Madrid: EdE, 2005), 67.

of the Spanish Church and the “black” biennium of the conservative CEDA government during the Second Republic.

The period stimulated polyhedral and contradictory imaginaries of resistance. The regenerationist imaginaries presented the people as the repository of the nation’s racial essences in the face of fascism as a foreign invasion. But anti-colonialism could also adopt an internationalist rhetoric, associating the people’s war with the global class struggle against fascism.11 Both sensibilities also coexisted within the PCE. On the tactical-military level, the PCE encouraged the formation of a regular army to discipline the popular militias, a strategy aimed at overcoming the spontaneity and voluntarism associated with the romanticism of guerrilla warfare. As far as the historical imagination was concerned, the PCE spread the idea of the campaign of the People’s Army as an update of the Reconquista, destined to end the Moorish support to the fascist uprising troops. But this patriotic historical reference was intermingled with proletarian internationalism of the International Brigades (IB). Thus, in the same territory where the Alpine battalion was active, the Thälmann Battalion (its name was a tribute to the German communist leader Ernst Thälmann), composed of exiled German fighters and integrated into the IB, was decisive in consolidating the Republican positions at the passes of Cotos and Navacerrada.

The civil war acted as a dialectical condensation between the nationalism and the cosmopolitanism of partisan modernity. The importance of the Spanish conflict in the history of the partisan figure cannot be underestimated. As Enzo Traverso points out, although the Hague Convention of 1907 had recognized the legitimacy of these irregular combatants, the partisans were hardly relevant during the First World War. This legal recognition became essential in the case of the Spanish Civil War, insofar as the troops of one of the sides (the Republican) had to be formed from the popular militias.12 Apart from their links with the USSR, the white uniform worn by the members of the Alpine Battalion expressed their hybrid status. While the partisans were characterised by the fact that they did not wear uniforms and waged a war parallel to that conducted by the regular armies (as in the Second World War, which subverted the international law of wars between states), Alpine Battalion’ soldiers did not reflect an identity and organisation comparable to those conventional armies either.

Partisan Ecologies

Andreas Malm was awarded the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize in 2016 for his book *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, published by Verso.13 In this volume, Malm offers a class-based explanation of the emergence of fossil modernity. In order to give a historical substratum to the concept of the Capitalocene, Malm emphasizes that the use of fossil fuels with the objective of promoting industrial development did not respond to a providential destiny of the human species. There is no ‘pyromaniac theology’ that allow us to connect the invention of fire with industrial civilization. On the contrary, the recourse to the massive burning of coal, an event that first triggered the historical origin of global warming, was related to the decision of the British capitalist class to increase productivity after the conquest by the labour movement of the ten-hour working day (the Ten Hours Act, passed in 1847) and the regulation of women and children’s work. The emergence of fossil capital established the transition from exploitation-based on absolute surplus value (the total number of hours worked) to relative surplus value (the productive intensity during working time).

One year after winning this prestigious award, Malm gave a lecture with the title “In Wildness is

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11 This imaginary would be taken up in an anti-imperialist key by the radical left of the late Franscist period and the transition to democracy: Jaime Vindel, *La Familia Lavapiés. Arte, cultura e izquierda radical en la Transición española* (Santander: La Bahía, 2019).


the Liberation of the World: On Maroon Ecology and Partisan Nature, which was eventually published in the journal *Historical materialism*. Therein, the author makes a claim for the concept of “wildness”, which has usually aroused suspicion in the field of political ecology, particularly in its Marxist tradition. Wilderness, which Malm sees dialectically connected to wildness, tends to express a pristine and romantic vision of nature that overlooks its material integration into the productive processes that run through modernity. Frequently, this image of nature hides the intensification of extractive, neo-colonial and biotechnological policies that have enabled the diverse developments during that period in human and natural history. Furthermore, wildness has also remained associated to the conservationist and bourgeois ecological imaginaries. In their eagerness to preserve nature from the effects of human action, those imaginaries have proposed policies characterized by their ethnocentric—if not racist—profile, encouraging the expulsion of indigenous communities who occupied the territories they wished to be protected.

Marxism with ecological concerns, particularly through the works in the field of critical geography by authors like Neil Smith, has tended to defend a constructivist interpretation of nature. Not only in conceptual terms (nature as a linguistic construct), but also in material terms: the development of modernity would have produced an anthropized nature, to the point that it is increasingly difficult for us to establish the border between nature and society. This is a long discussion with multiple aspects, which I will not go further into right now as it has been addressed in depth (and quite brilliantly) by Malm. I will simply take up his argument according to which human action extends its effects to the whole of the planet, which does not imply the impossibility of establishing degrees. Following this logic, the geographical area of Los Angeles responds more to the human tasks of material transformation of nature than a relatively isolated ecosystem in the Amazon.

What Malm seeks is to disconnect his concept of wildness from its conservationist connotations and reconnect it with the history of the class struggles. To do this, he draws on the history of the plantations and the politics of the Maroons, descendants of Africans in the Americas, who took refuge and conspired in the Caribbean jungles as they fled exploitation. The wild(erness) of the forests allowed them to imagine the forms of conspiracy and the production of alternative ways of life, thus escaping the colonial domination. Something similar would have happened during the Second World War. In contrast with the identity or ethnic roots of the ghettos in the cities controlled by Nazism, the wild(erness) of the mountains and the woods would have represented a cosmopolitan meeting place for the Jewish and partisan cultures of the resistance. In this imaginary, nature ceases to be a space of conservation and becomes a place of conflict. Partisan ecologies in the past would therefore have been a geographical and existential expression of the class conflicts, which would somehow prefigure the post-national component that eco-social struggles possess today. The Swedish eco-Marxist is aware that in the current context of eco-social crisis it is necessary to promote a geopolitical space for partisan struggles opposed to the identity limits of the nation-states—a green internationalism. Although Malm’s reflection focuses primarily on partisan Jews and the forest environment, the mountains inhabited by the Alpine

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15 Malm establishes a dialectical discussion between the concepts of wildness and wilderness. The former refers first and foremost to the idea of nature as a realm outside social processes, which in the imaginaries of conservation ecologists should be preserved from human action. In contrast to Marxist approaches that characterise this vision of wilderness as idealistic, Malm defends a political (not ontological) conception of wildness, associated with the struggles that have taken place in those territories idealised by bourgeois environmentalism.

16 It seems no coincidence that some of the promoters of conservationist environmentalism, such as William Temple Hornaday, promoted practices such as the establishment of human zoos with people from the colonies, as happened in the Bronx Zoo in 1906. The preservation of natural environments was compatible with the imperialism that extracted their material and energy resources. The aesthetic reification of the bodies inhabiting these geographical areas was a sign of the way in which racialised relations of domination were normalised. We have developed these ideas in a so far unpublished article: Alejandro Pedregal and Jaime Vindel, “The Aesthetic Rift. An Eco-Marxist Critical Synthesis of the Relationship Between Artistic Spatiality and Capitalist Modernity”.


Battalion represent a further example of such partisan ecologies, albeit the nuances and contradictory features introduced above.

**After the Snow: Partisan Ecologies Today**

In any case, it’s necessary to discuss the relevance of Malm’s partisan ecologies in our times, characterized by the reduction of wilderness bastions produced by the extension of the Anthropocene, and by the improvement of the mechanisms of surveillance over the territory. In drone societies, it no longer seems necessary to employ alpine battalions to control the mountains. The construction of a satellite image of the planet’s surface, which is a product of the Cold War’s space race, has been decisive in disseminating a unified point of view that confirms the technical domination of Humanity over the Earth. The technological enterprise thus creates a planetary vision, erasing the asymmetries (in terms of class, race and gender) that have defined the historical period of the Capitalocene, to use a term that Malm considers more appropriate to describe our age. At the same time, these asymmetries are exacerbated at ground level by the migratory borders that the global North imposes on the population from the South, which degrade the working and living conditions of these people.

What we should immediately ask ourselves is: where can we currently detect the link between partisan passions and wild territorialities? If one visits the enclaves inhabited, even provisionally, by the members of the Alpine Battalion, the effects of fossil capital are felt there. Global warming causes that the presence of snow has diminished considerably compared to the civil war era. Today it is much less torturous to walk in the Sierra de Guadarrama during the winter, including the historic footpath that pays tribute to the Alpine battalion. This path starts at the Cotos pass, one of the strategic points originally guarded by the battalion, whose 1969-built ski resort had to close its doors in 1999 due to the lack of snow. Moreover, the presence of a territorial memory of the Alpine Battalion path is an exception. Actually, what predominates in the Guadarrama mountains today is the (collective) oblivion of the conflictive history of this geography. There are hardly any thematic panels that alert the visitor about what happened there during the civil war, although the ruins of trenches and watchtowers that the walker can find along the way are numerous.

If the Sierra de Guadarrama has become an area overcrowded by weekend tourism from Madrid, its symbolic memory has recently accumulated an additional layer of meaning with an event that tells us a story connected to struggles and skiers—but this time not the ones of partisans. I am referring to the suicide of Blanca Fernández Ochoa, the first Spanish sportswoman to win a medal in the winter Olympics. Fernández Ochoa had strong ties to one of the most famous villages in the Guadarrama mountains, Cercedilla, where the Alpine Battalion was born. She represented in the post-Francoist imaginations the integration of Spanish women’s sport into the international concert of developed nations. It is curious that this integration took place in a sport such as skiing, which is not very popular in Spain, where it is practised by the most privileged segments of the population.

Fernández Ochoa won the bronze medal in Albertville in 1992, the year in which the Barcelona Olympic Games were celebrated. The Summer Olympics of Barcelona marked Spain’s definitive leap into capitalist modernity through the spectacular (and

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20 Apart from the scientific debates in the field of geology, which, starting with a conference of Paul J. Crutzen, discuss whether or not it is appropriate to identify a new geological epoch after the Second World War, derived from the consequences of human action on the planet as a whole (from the proliferation of radioactive isotopes to the Great Acceleration of the ecological crisis), the social and human sciences have advocated the use of the concepts of Anthropocene and/or Capitalocene on the basis of various theoretical paradigms. These paradigms seek to substantiate the historical origin of the dynamics of ecological overshoot that have now reached a critical point. Interpretations range from the association between the human species and an evolutionary habitus dating back to the invention of fire (in this narrative, fossil fuels would only take humanity’s pyromaniac passion to the extreme), to socio-political explanations which, as in the case of Malm, underline the relevance of the emergence of industrial capitalism, and in particular its fossilist version, in the detonation of phenomena such as global warming.

21 For a (Spanish) description of the route with several photographs of the landscape and the trenches see the informative website Senderismo Madrid [Hiking Madrid] of the Madrilenian association Club de Senderismo NC: https://www.senderismomadrid.es/senda-batallon-alpino/.
speculative) version of national neoliberalism. Fernandez Ochoa’s suicide spread a melancholic halo over the past and present glories of national sports. Although sports plans have been generous in training and promoting athletes, they have not contemplated the social insertion of their beneficiaries after their professional careers have ended. This feeling of abandonment has generated depressive disorders such as those of Fernandez Ochoa, who walked during the summer of 2019 to one of the peaks with the best views of the Sierra de Guadarrama, La Peñota, near Cercedilla, to kill herself.

For a week, hundreds of volunteers were searching for the body in a previously unknown, collective undertaking. Although significantly larger in their numbers than the Alpine Battalion, they surveyed a territory similar to that occupied by the civil war partisans. Assisted by the army and the state security forces, the search party was mainly composed of non-uniformed civilians, whose mode of involvement had not much in common with the discipline represented by the white uniforms of the Alpine Battalion.22 The commitment of these non-combatants to solidarity spoke to us of another historical moment, very distant from the partisan ecologies of anti-fascism. In 2019, those citizens searched for several days for the dead body of an athlete who had become a symbol of the sporting and gender success of the Spanish transition to neoliberal democracy. But in the end, what they were looking for was not a living being, but a corpse. The media covered the event as if it were...

22 A photographic report of the search for the skier can be found at this link in the digital website of the Spanish newspaper El País: https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/09/01/album/1567347095_203004.html#fotogal.1. Curiously, the members of the forensic police sent to the area wore a white uniform reminiscent of the clothing used by the Alpine battalion.
a national salvation enterprise. A nation in shock, shaken by the economic and social crisis of 2008 and Catalan separatism, clung herself to the aura of a sport-woman’s glorious image. That happened in a country which, however, never wanted to dig other ditches, to find other corpses: the number of Franco’s disappeared is estimated at 140,000 victims and the democratic state has tended to disregard their memory.\textsuperscript{23} The place where the body of Blanca Fernández Ochoa was eventually found is just a few meters from the ruins of several civil war forts, trenches and casemates that represented the southern limit of the area covered by the Alpine Battalion. Nevertheless, while her destiny was discussed all over the medias, the historic past was largely left untouched, showing that in Spanish public opinion, the sport heroes are given much more social recognition than those of anti-fascism. To put it in Gramscian terms, the trenches and casemates of cultural hegemony, the shared imaginaries of civil society, are no longer occupied by partisans.

Culture Wars and Climate Crisis

Climate change has made the snow disappear that is present in the photographs of the Alpine Battalion and that facilitated the development of the career of Fernández Ochoa. What might be asked from today’s perspective is: what dialectic image (in Walter Benjamin’s sense) can make up the semantic constellation between the visual archive of the Alpine Battalion, Málm’s partisan ecologies and the skier-woman’s suicide? Is it still possible to deploy wild(ness) politics in the age of the drone war?\textsuperscript{24} It is not easy to answer these questions. Nature and politics seem to have removed wildness from its heart. The Anthropocene’s Great Acceleration has not only caused ecological degradation unknown in the preceding history of the Holocene, but also challenges the idea of the world (and thus of nature) as an identifiable entity beyond the processes derived from human interaction. Although this end of the world idea has inspired affirmative aesthetic proposals by authors such as Timothy Morton,\textsuperscript{25} it seems difficult to reconcile these post-nature poetics with the concepts of wilderness or wildness.

Moreover, we live in an age characterised by the transition from a form of power-based, direct domination to a hegemony-focused, consent-based domination, with the social consolidation of late-capitalist values (consumerism as mass hedonism) and the intensive use of media and social networks as a political trench of neoliberalism. The centrality of politics seems to have moved away from direct partisan confrontation or guerrilla tactics into the territory of the so-called “culture wars”. However, we should not assume that both elements (societies of control as an overcoming of societies of domination, and culture wars as a privileged model of political dispute) will continue to set the tone for the world to come. Subjective control and bodies direct discipline are beginning to be recomposed in the present, as we can see from the repression of popular protests in various parts of the world—including in so-called “developed” countries—to border violence targeting the migrant population. At the same time, the eco-social crisis is likely to bring about a certain return of class politics in a more classical sense, insofar as disputes over material issues related to human needs (such as access to food, water or energy) will shape the immediate future.

In this context, it is possible to detect among various leftist intellectuals the desire to displace the centrality that culture wars possess in the current socio-political context. In an essay devoted to the concept of culture, Terry Eagleton stated that

\textsuperscript{23}The memory policies promoted during the democratic period by progressive governments have been extremely timid. Although aid has been allocated to the location of mass graves and the identification of people executed by Franco’s regime, the fact is that this issue has never acquired the status of a state policy, and its support has even been withdrawn with the arrival of conservative governments. The latest cultural dispute on this subject has taken place over the Valle de los Caídos, an enormous underground basilica, adjacent monastery and mausoleum that have been built during the dictatorship to glorify those who “fell” in the crusade, as which the regime regarded the civil war against the Republic. The remains of the dictator buried in the basilica on November 23, 1975 were eventually unearthed in 2019 and transferred to a family pantheon in the cemetery of Mingorrubio (El Pardo). Nevertheless, the enormous cross, built on top of the basilica-mountain of the Valle de los Caídos, continues to reign over the landscape of the Sierra de Guadarrama. The monument is visible from the summit of La Peñita, where Fernández Ochoa had committed suicide.

\textsuperscript{24}At that point, I would like to point out that it was not the drones used in the rescue of Fernández Ochoa who found the corpse, but a member of the guardia civil with knowledge of the mountain paths.

the primary problems which we confront in the new millennium—war, famine, poverty, disease, debt, drugs, environmental pollution, the displacement of people—are not specially ‘cultural’ at all. They are not primarily questions of value, symbolism, language, tradition, belonging or identity, least of all the arts. (. . .) In the new millennium, astonishingly, humankind faces pretty much the kinds of material problems it always has. (. . .) They are cultural problems only in a sense which risks expanding the term to the point of meaninglessness.26

More recently, Malm suggests that the conflicts of the future can take us back to situations of famine and shortage similar to that which have triggered the insurrectionary cycle of the Russian Revolution. In an essay entitled “Revolution in a Warming World: Lessons from the Russian to the Syrian Revolutions”, which analyses the impact of climate change and drought on crops at the start of the war in Syria, the Swedish eco-Marxist predicts a renaissance of a less culturalist mode of politics.27 As if the global warming and the end of cheap oil announced a sudden reconnection with the memory of the Bolshevik revolution, of which the partisan imaginary of the Alpine Battalion was an historical heir; as if the Leninist assault on state power was ready to replace the war of positions defined by the cultural struggles à la Gramsci.28

Although we cannot disregard these opinions in the face of the degradation of the state apparatus in many societies, they also run the risk of feeding a certain ideological illusion. Nowadays, we live in a time in between the inherited imaginaries of abundance and the pressure deriving from a possible future ecological collapse of the industrial civilization. It would be a very serious mistake to yield hegemonic politics and cultural struggles to the forces of the extreme right, waiting for a critical moment that allows partisan politics a more direct conquest of the structures of power. In addition to that, against the culture of consensus that has formed the self-perception of collective progress in countries such as neoliberal Spain, from the economic and social crisis of 2008 (and specially after the eruption of the 15M movement) a series of crevices have opened up that will not be easy to close. Nevertheless, those crevices also represent an opportunity for political forces that are taking up the legacy of historical anti-fascism. In contrast to the melancholic image of Fernández Ochoa’s corpse, the photographs of the Alpine Battalion return from the past as a dialectical lightning, with the promise to inspire new struggles. The visual remains of its partisan ecology have much more to tell us about how to inhabit from an anti-fascist position the ecological ruins of the Capitalocene.

In his attempt to trace a popular history of the wilderness, Malm wonders: “Is it possible to redeem a politics and aesthetics of the wild from the past centuries or even millennia of struggle between the classes?”29 Who could be considered the political subject and heir to these conflicts? Perhaps, the 21st century’s partisan ecologies are represented by those who today promote the movement for environmental justice throughout the planet, whose media presence was multiplied by the climate demonstrations prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. They emerged with a cosmopolitan spirit that seems indispensable to face the dimension of the eco-social crisis in which we are immersed. Without denying that the know-how about “geographical specificities” of the territory, which Schmitt associated with the telluric passions of the partisans and that will certainly also play a role in the forms of politics to come, it seems necessary to extend these struggles beyond concrete geographies. Partisan internationalism is, in this sense, more essential than ever. This requires not only forms of resistance, but to being able to collectively imagine an exciting and feasible

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28 Malm makes this wish explicit in a recent interview, in which he insists on the need for ecological Marxism to transgress the boundaries of the Academy: “Ecological Marxism has a tendency to cripple itself by staying inside academia. It needs to engage with and reach out to the actual movements in the field. Anarchist ideas should be combatted; they will take us nowhere. I think it’s time to start experimenting with things like ecological Leninism or Luxemburgism or Biaquism. But the weaknesses of Marxism in ecological politics is of course inextricable from its nearly universal weakness at this moment in time”, available at: https://mronline.org/2019/10/12/it-is-time-to-try-out-an-ecological-leninism-interview-with-andreas-malm/.

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Partisan Genealogies

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systemic alternative. From this point of view, I propose an expanded vision of the figure of the partisan that links her/him to the incipient ecological global movement. Given that the ecological crisis speaks to us first and foremost of the power relations implanted on a global scale by fossil capitalism, then the partisans of the present and the future must reinvent wild politics in a paradoxical time, characterised by the simultaneity between the zenith of the modern project of domination of nature and the emergence of a new “agency” of the Earth, linked to phenomena whose control is beyond the reach of human action.

At the beginning of the 1990s, in the midst of the debacle of real socialism, Michel Serres intuited that the old geopolitics of confrontation between blocks of the Cold War would be replaced by the clash between late capitalist civilization and the rebellion of nature. Nowadays, the era of biotechnology and synthetic biology, of demiurgic control of the organic being, coincides with the conversion of nature into an autonomous, potentially catastrophic force: for instance, if global warming goes over one and a half degrees above the pre-industrial average temperature, it will accelerate the so-called positive feedback loops, causing thus a kind of climate tsunami. Somehow, just when it seemed to have disappeared, the wild(erness) of nature returns with a sublime, unknown and devastating dimension. The maximum control corresponds to the maximum threat. The moderation of emancipatory politics, captured by the devices of capitalist power, is combined with the radicalization of nature. In fact, the defeat of 20th century’s emancipatory projects helps to explain why the rising climate movement is more cosmopolitan than internationalist. Its future fortunes are likely to depend on its ability to ally itself with the anti-fascist forces that are responding across the world to the rise of the new right and post-fascisms. It is also true that its middle-class profile and its generic appeal to the economic and political powers have so far made it difficult to develop a more explicit and elaborate class position. But it is too early to tell whether or not the global climate movement will evolve into a more radical and antagonistic environmentalism (maybe a class anti-(eco-)fascism?).

Added to this context of climate crisis is the energy crisis, which stems from having reached the peak oil (the peak of profitability of fossil-fuel-based energies). Several voices have pointed out that the emergence of the far-right can also be understood as an anticipated response to the growing scarcity of such resources. The implementation of “conservative prefigurative politics” takes the form of an experiment in proto-fascist management of the ecological crisis (eco-fascism). Despite his recent electoral defeat, Donald Trump, with his climate denialism and his geo-strategic impulse on fracking, could have just represented an avant-garde element. Trump’s biopolitical populism would embody a project of elite self-preservation, a fore-taste of eco-fascist solutions to the ecological crisis that turns social resentment on the most vulnerable, from black national populations to migrants from Latin America, Asia or Africa. Through a reactionary neo-Malthusianism paradigm, the responsibility for the biophysical overshoot of the capitalist system is dumped on them: they must be subjugated or expelled.

The gradual evolution of Western democracies towards an illiberal paradigm may be only the first stage in a historical process that will bring about increasingly aggressive forms of segregation, exploitation and extractivism in racial, labour and ecological policies. The global North, while deepening extractivist policies that revalidate unequal exchanges with the global South (and which have been instrumental in the implementation of consent strategies such as mass consumption), tends to undo the privileges of the working and middle classes in developed countries. This epochal

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transformation paves the way for eco-fascist solutions, but also opens up the possibility of creating new transnational alliances among the most disadvantaged.

We are at a decisive historical crossroads. In the face of the collapse of the left political imagination to promote systemic alternatives after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the only real opposition to the collapse of capital neoliberalism may be the climate collapse. An exaggerated assumption? No doubt, but do we not find, here and there, symptoms that point in that direction? If the tricontinental anti-colonialism and non-aligned communism of the Cold War tried to prevent the submission of politics to the bilateralism of real socialism and liberal capitalism, perhaps the political task of our time is to prevent the dialectics of history from being reduced to a struggle between eco-fascism and nature. From this perspective, the return of the ghostly images of the Alpine Battalion may allow us to imagine an environmentalist (and anti-colonial) anti-fascism—the reinvention of partisan ecologies in times of the end of the world.