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RESISTANCE OR DEATH: THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE UNDER IMPERIALISM

An interview with Dr. Ali Kadri

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Editor's Note: In “No Life for a Society Without Resistance,” published in Al-Akhbar newspaper on the first anniversary of the Aqsa Flood operation, Arab academic Ali Kadri challenges readers to rethink the nature of ongoing struggles and underscores the urgency of revolutionary thought and action. His analysis exposes the deep-rooted structures of imperialism, capitalism, and militarized accumulation that sustain war and exploitation.

This interview, conducted by Khalil Kawtharany and Karim al-Amine, goes beyond analyzing the wars ravaging the region. It is a critical intervention that examines how the logic of waste, capital accumulation, and imperialist violence shape the entire Global South. At the same time, Kadri underscores that effective resistance compels capital to confront the true costs of production, intensifying its inherent crises.

To make this important conversation accessible to a wider readership, we have translated it into English with minor revisions for length and clarity.



For instance, peasants sustain their lives through their relationship with both the land and the landowner, engaging with historically inherited relations of production to survive. This is why the category of the “peasant” is structurally related to that of the “working class.” The same applies to “internal” and “external” rentiers, both of whom consume produced wealth for profit.

Internal rentiers, like their external counterparts, are shaped by shifts in the international monetary market. Together, they form a unified class structure, ranked hierarchically according to the balance of power between the North and the South. Applying abstract logic, however, like mathematical equations, to historical realities reflects a core method of thought enforced by capital. This approach obscures society’s awareness of itself, preventing true self-consciousness. As a result, society exists in a constant state of decline, trapped in a negative dialectic. Yet, it remains immersed in an idealist and illusory mode of thinking, espousing formulations devised by capital to restrict alternatives to those that serve its own interests.

Similarly, capital imposes a profit-driven sense of time, aimed at reducing socially necessary labor, onto the lived experience of society and its suffering. The abstract time of capital reshapes real, tangible time, forcing its logic onto daily life. Speculation, for instance, increases exploitation rates, ultimately shortening the average lifespan of the productive class — even when resources exist to extend it. In this way, the abstract time dictated by market forces and financial speculation imposes a social reality that leads to regression rather than progress. Imperialism, as a historical phase, deepens these capital relations, where money dictates the intensity of exploitation. It is marked by an excess of capital’s hegemony over not just space but also over time itself.

Mass indoctrination is rooted in idealist logic rather than historical dialectics, thus reinforcing the ideological dominance of capital.

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Historical Western Marxism, having absorbed some of the poison of liberalism, plays a role in aborting revolutionary thought. This abortive role can spread to revolutionary parties in the Third World, leading them to overlook the distinction between the working classes in the Global South and the Global North. As previously discussed, this distinction is not just about differences in wages or living standards. Rather, it is a structural divide: the working classes in the North are integrated into capital and sustain themselves on the waste produced in the South. As a result, they do not represent a revolutionary horizon within capital but function as part of it.

Zionism does not just uphold settler-colonial ideology; the Global North actively reproduces it as a way of life. Settler-colonial entities cannot be dismantled solely through internal dissent—just as the Zionist entity will not be undone unless the balance of power shifts against it.

Therefore, revolutionary action in the North bears fruit when it directly targets imperialism as a unified class system. This, of course, is rare and sometimes has limited impact, as seen in the case of the Zionist entity. What's more, the demand for higher wages in the North does not necessarily challenge capital because it is confined to the domain of circulation and does not seek true equality between the Global North and South.

The heroic al-Aqsa Flood Operation and its aftermath have intensified the cultural struggle while reigniting structural analyses of liberation and development in the midst of genocide. However, such readings, particularly the theory of dependency at their core, will inevitably face criticism. Detractors will argue that they overlook local hierarchies and risk justifying tyranny and underdevelopment.

The notion that one form of tyranny stems from local structures while another arises from external structures is a flawed dichotomy. Essentially, under universal interconnectedness, all such dualities originating from the process of historical transformation are flawed. The only exceptions are formal or idealistic dualities, which exist purely as theoretical constructs with no real historical basis.

Attempting an idealistic duality to analyze an interconnected and ever-changing reality can sometimes help clarify complex ideas. Such an approach becomes weak, however, when it contradicts the unity of rational and historical processes. The duality of “internal” and “external” (or national vs. foreign) bears no relation to the class structure, which, at its core, is defined by the social nature of self-reproduction.

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His publications include: “The Unmaking of Arab Socialism,” “The Cordon Sanitaire: A Single Law Governing Development in East Asia and the Arab World” and “Arab Development Denied.” A translation of his book “Imperialism with Reference to Syria” is forthcoming from the Center for Arab Unity Studies.

This interview was published on the first anniversary of the October 7 operation and with the expansion of the war on Lebanon, as an attempt at a theoretical reading on the longest war between the Arab resistance and Zionism, backed by US imperialism.

Al-Kadri, whose research focuses on a theory of capitalist accumulation through war, explores the utility of resistance against wars driven by accumulation. He argues that “resistance forces capital to bear the real costs of production, thereby deepening the crisis of capital.” He also elaborates on the importance of effective resistance in removing the historical burden from society as capitalism commodifies knowledge and turns it into an ideology that prevails as a hegemonic tool. This commodification makes the reincarnation of capitalist thought seem voluntary. Kadri does so by paying attention to the role of violence, stating, “Violence plays a dominant role in tempering the masses, through its combination with the propagation of defeatism.”

Without imperialist violence, the people of the Global South would not find themselves in their current state of ideological defeat. Various entities modeled after the West model, such as Taiwan and Israel, along with hundreds of U.S. military bases acting as permanent military aircraft carriers, reinforce this condition.

Zionism does more than uphold settler-colonial ideology; the Global North reproduces this ideology as a way of life. These settler-colonial entities cannot be dismantled only through internal dissent, just as the Zionist entity will not be dismantled unless the balance of power shifts against it.

In your research, you have elaborated on your theory of accumulation by waste, particularly through war and extermination, within your structural reading of the dynamics of subordination and its production of value through violence. What route should political actors in the peripheries follow to confront the imperial core?

Resistance is the foundation of human reproduction as a social being. Why do we say “social being”? Because no human exists in isolation from society. Humans are a reflection of the totality of social relations, and are reified in a physical and psychological entity that reflect what society has invested in them. Therefore, work is social, meaning individuals emerge from society, mediate its abilities, and are shaped by its social relations. A human, for instance, is both a father and a citizen. In short, humans are products of society; they do not appear out of nowhere.

Resistance is the foundation of social production. It is the logical and historical characteristic of successive production processes that shape society. Individual wages are merely a portion of an accumulated social wage extracted from the overall social product. As technological development advances, the social product grows. Its distribution between labor and capital, however — specifically between worker wages and capitalist profit — is determined by the power of labor in the class struggle.

How does this happen under the shadow of capitalist relations, the most dominant of all social relations? Because capitalist society uses one compass — profit. The law of profitability reduces costs in the most brutal ways to maximize profit.

Capital, in its pursuit of profit, prioritizes speculation over consumption. This means that production, or the production cycle, takes precedence over consumption. This dynamic makes overproduction crises a constant and inherent feature of capitalism.

Every producer must reduce costs, and the political power of producers ensures the degradation of society’s political will — often through violence. While violence is not the only tool, it serves to reorganize intellectual forces in a way that suppresses society’s revolutionary spirit. The production process is globally interconnected, involving all national societies, either through direct participation or forceful exclusion. Subsequently, global society as a whole functions as a producer across all classes, but the formation of an international division of labor, shaped by imperialist terms, allows societies in the Global North to absorb capital through imperialist rents.

These so-called armies of democracy are responsible for the largest massacres against the Third World. For the record, François Mitterrand was the scourge of Algeria and the first to sign off on the execution of the freedom fighters. Arghiri Emmanuel, in his work, points to the difficulty of a universal revolution. He argues that the obstacle lies in capital’s organizational capacity — its ability to suppress revolutionary movements by granting advantages to some groups at the expense of others. This is because capital’s priority is not the economy itself, but politics and power relations. While the economy is ultimately decisive, capital first establishes itself as a power structure that organizes production through concrete, militarized means. Only then does it deploy ideology to secure long-term profits.

Third Worldism, as a system of thought, focuses on the primacy of politics. It views the Western metropole, including its working class, as an imperialist formation where workers lose sight of revolution because they are predefined by imperial rent, which sustains them through a wasteful process of exploitation in the periphery, reinforcing the existing system rather than challenging it.

The consciousness shaped by this social cycle in the metropole, stemming from self-reproduction through imperial wars, is deeply embedded in Eurocentric culture, from which its theories emerge. Even Western Marxism struggles to break through this cultural framework. Marx himself faced this dilemma when he examined the Asiatic mode of production. Western Marxism obstructs revolutionary development not only because it centers the Global North and limits its engagement with material and imperial conditions, but also because its growth has depended on the historical surplus value accumulated in the West. Alongside this economic foundation, institutional forces in the West recognize that the war of ideas is central to class struggle. As a result, Western Marxists are subjected to both flattery and pressure designed to distance them from the very concept of imperialism.

There is considerable literature that outlines how certain Western Marxist institutions have been funded by national security apparatuses, effectively making them part of the military-industrial complex. This conclusion is not drawn from a facile empirical method that merely measures capital’s fluctuations through time — as those rubrics are themselves a product of capital’s fetishism. Rather, it is based on a historical logic of causality, in which the foundational principle of capital — the law of waste exploitation — serves as the cornerstone of international accumulation.

It is worth noting that time is qualitative, and comparing time today to that of the distant past is misleading. As a result, the key historical agent in the present is the international financial class centered in the North. This class plunders wealth, that is, accumulated value, from the lives and labor of those in the South.

Only living labor creates surplus value. Southern societies, as a whole, work, and their working hours define their life cycle. Thus, shortening life itself becomes necessary to capital's pursuit of surplus value. Life is wasted, and that waste is commodified when capital turns death into a commodity. Environmental waste comes to create dead labor, and nature, debilitated, becomes a machine that shortens lifespans and feeds the process of exploitation. Waste, and the demand for it, which society is forced to accept, forms the first cycle of accumulation.

Capitalism is a unified global system, with its most oppressive force being a single class in the North with its appendages in the South. There is no such thing as a successful capitalism in the North and a failed capitalism in the South, as is commonly claimed. The planet is overflowing with commodified waste and is on the brink of major calamity.

Capitalism's survival depends on the systemic extermination of social nature, that is, the unity of the environment and society. The Global North sustains capitalist ideology by continuously waging war against humanity. With overwhelming military power, the North creates the illusion that the South's defeat is inevitable. This force does more than maintain capitalism; it actively renews and reinforces its ideological grip on the world.

What is the role of social democracy and Western Marxism, and what is their position in the state of universal waste?

The Western left, represented by social democracy, serves as a key force for capitalism in the metropole, generally attempting to restore balance in capital relations. Because imperial rent underpins the economic reproduction of the metropole, demands for higher wages at the center becomes a process of further distribution in imperial rent, as the working class in the metropole functions as an extension of imperial power.

Another example: The profits gained from any commodity during its production process are those which capital does not pay for itself but which it forces society to pay for. Any production process begins with the extraction of raw materials, and there are no raw materials in a land without people. To lower the cost of raw materials, capital must squash the political will of societies living on the territories containing said materials. Hence, the extraction of raw materials also means simultaneously diminishing the share of societies and shrinking their livelihoods.

As such, the extraction of raw materials is inseparable from the extraction of human lives. War, as an industrial process with an economic component, employs advanced technology to lower the costs while increasing production. And since the product of war — of death and destruction — is commodified and consumed within the cycle of social life, wars generate enormous profits, far beyond what capital accounts for in its national calculations. Furthermore, the victory of imperial wars drains societies of their energy and sovereignty, leaving a lasting negative impact on the world.

Thus, resisting capital is the cornerstone for societies to sustain and improve their reproduction. Simply put, if people want to live better lives, they must resist. Effective resistance shifts the burden of production costs, currently borne by society to sustain capitalists' profits, back onto capital itself. In doing so, resistance forces capital to absorb the real costs of production, thereby deepening its crisis.

When we talk about capital, we are talking about a social class that reproduces itself by dividing society — particularly the working class — and reshaping its ideology to align with capital. Labor becomes a form of capital when it internalizes capitalist hegemony, transforming into both a reification and an extension of the capitalist class.

The cornerstone of capital's internalization is the division of society, which is to say the working class, into competing identities. Violence plays a central role in this process, reinforcing mass submission through the synergy of physical force and the spread of defeatism. By fostering a sense of inevitability and powerlessness, violence helps maintain capitalist dominance. Without violence, the masses would not be tethered to the logic of capital; their existence and self-reproduction depend on the counter-violence they enact in resistance. Conversely, capital — as a dominant social relation — can only be dismantled when society unites in collective struggle.

This analysis holds when we take things to their logical endpoint. However, from a practical standpoint, history's fluctuations often favor the most powerful, particularly when ideological strength is factored in. More specifically, limiting the scope of social change without addressing capital's core principle — ownership of the means of production, banks, and the extraction of national wealth in its monetary form — fails to challenge the system at its root.

This extraction process operates through an alliance between the internal national comprador class and the international financial elite, primarily centered in the West. However, framing this as a simple dualism between national rentier capital and international monetary capital is misleading. The profit of national rentier capital is derived from the liquidation of national assets, including human resources, through migration and premature death.

Alongside structural or genocide, capital orchestrates structural massacres — the commodification of what is historically recognized premature death. By erasing lives, as in shifting production costs onto society through the destruction it leaves behind, capital reduces the necessary value required for survival, such as food, drink, and medicine. Consequently, the surplus extracted by capital increases relative to total production.

Here, I reiterate that the share of the working class from the social product depends solely on its political effectiveness in the class struggle, which, in the imperial phase, is shaped by international relations. Given the asymmetry of power, realigning anti-imperialist forces is essential for confronting this global imbalance.

According to the theory of accumulation by waste, does this mean that the Israeli economy, supported by the United States, benefits from this war, or does the act of resistance impact the war economy?

Waste multiplies or diminishes as a function of the power of labor in the class struggle, or the extent to which the working class develops and embraces revolutionary thought as a driver of history. Without revolutionary thought, the working class is not the proletariat in the sense of being an agent of change. In this non-revolutionary state, it reproduces capital because it functions as a form of capital, just like commodities or money. However, it is a form of capital distinguished by existential consciousness. If its material conditions erode to the point of self-devouring, rebellion becomes inevitable. But the absence of self-consciousness can affect the circumstances of such an irruption.

War and genocide are producers-consumers of accumulation by waste, fueling militarization and militaristic expansion. Militarization, in particular, benefits capital because it is an immediately consumable product, with society forced to bear its cost. Unlike other commodities that rely on societal income for demand, militarization generates its own demand through its production. In war, societies pay with everything they have — including their lives.

The war in Gaza is a priority for capital because it fuels death and weakens international labor, which is essential for capitalism to prevail. This point is crucial: a victory for the resistance, demonstrating the power of a people's war, exposes the true nature of imperialism and its primary instrument, Zionism.

As noted, capital is primarily financial — essentially rentier — and operates as a unified system. Weakness in one area reverberates elsewhere, reducing waste accumulation. These victories come alongside the rise of China, Russia, and other resistance nations, disrupting the global balance of power. This shift shakes the existing systemic order by weakening international norms and institutions. As a result, these structural fractures influence national movements seeking to change the rules of the game, igniting a transition from passive politics to revolutionary action.

With this in mind, what does the term “Asian” or “Oriental despotism” mean in contrast to “liberal Western democracy”? Does it not reflect the worldview of the dominant classes of the North?

The planet, its people and ecosystems, has already been devastated and continues to move towards even greater destruction. The planet has been wasted.

Western democracy is simply a particular way of exercising power. It serves as a mechanism through which the ruling classes of the North join forces to secure their own reproduction by relentlessly exploiting and destroying the South. Because capitalism's crisis demands ever-increasing exploitation and greater surplus extraction from living labor, it shortens human lives even as productive forces continue to advance.