REDEFINING VIOLENCE FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE: FROM ECOCIDE TO ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION[1]

Toni Ruuska, Pasi Heikkurinen, Todd Levasseur & Arran Gare

ABSTRACT: The Anthropocene puts humanity within the continuum of long-running Earth processes, but what does it mean to be violent in deep time? This article aims to redefine violence for the Anthropocene. It does so by first examining the temporal dimensions of violence, where violence is claimed to be a historic and stratigraphic phenomenon, as much as it is present, immediate, and abrupt. Violence is relational, slow, and often accumulating, but there exists also violence that is stratigraphic, which bears the witness of and that will impact organisms and ecosystems other than us, the humans, in the distant future. Second, the article links violence to violation, and shows how violence is an evaluative term. In short, this means that violence should always be treated on a case-by-case basis. Third, the article posits that the notion of violence should be extended to the more-than-human world, as other beings, habitats, landscapes, and ecosystems can be, are, and have repeatedly been violated by human actions. Following these claims, the article proposes a non-anthropocentric definition of violence as encounters entailing the use of force that violates life-supporting processes. For reducing violence in ecosystems, the article calls for a withdrawal from the industrial-capitalist megamachine and placing more emphasis on the provisioning of fundamentals of life and other collective efforts advancing an ecological civilization.

KEYWORDS: Violence; Anthropocene; Deep Time; More-than-human; Ecological Civilization; Sustainability

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INTRODUCTION

Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Word for World Is Forest* (1972) is a story of interstellar colonization, violence, and otherness. Intergalactic distances are vast in Le Guin's universe too, which provides a different kind of perspective to decision making, commerce, and even colonization. The same goes for violence, as the human colonizers of the Athshe planet and the human subjugators of the Athshean (a furry and half-human-sized people) must plan their colonization strategies and their counter-aggressions toward the Athsheans in interstellar time. However, and much more than about time, the novel is actually about fighting back and becoming violent to save oneself, the community, and the planet from colonial oppression and extractivism. Formerly known as non-violent and non-aggressive people, the Athsheans turn to violence to repel the conquistadors and to save their world—that is, the lush forest. Turning violent—the mass murdering of colonizing humans—leaves traces to the Athsheans, and there are hints that the violent burst changes them altogether. Physical and emotional pain, trauma, and suffering are at the heart of the matter, as is the inability (from both sides) to understand their aggressors. The forest is protected but at a high cost for the Atheans.

In the novel, Le Guin treats violence as something that leaves a trace, something that violates. Violence violates not only the victim but also the aggressor. War is portrayed as tragic but also as something inevitable—there is no talking sense to the colonizers. The justification is straightforward: the interstellar colonizers violate the planet by cutting down the forest and by raping the soil. Then, an abrupt war is fought, but there are no winners. All the parties have been violated. What is especially important for us here is how Le Guin portrays violence as a more-than-human phenomenon, as she extends violence to habitats, landscapes, and ecosystems. Her narration portrays the humans as colonizers as capable of altering their planet/earth systems, which on our day feels too familiar and horrifying. Though written well before the Anthropocene concept, and in the shadow of the Vietnam war, today the novel very much feels like a commentary of the geology of humankind. In any case, the novel condemns the colonial aggressors, as it justifies self-defence by whatever means necessary—but not without repercussions.

As we know today, the Anthropocene concept and the argument for the proposed new geological epoch is based on natural scientific discoveries that

trace the stratigraphic evidence of the impacts of the human species to the Earth. With industrialization, nuclear technologies, technologization, and population growth, signs of humans and their cultures can be found in bedrock and water bodies as well as in the atmosphere. The geology of humankind indicates that humans have become a global force, and their effects will remain in the sedimentary-rock-layered memory of the biosphere for millions of years to come. The natural scientific research on the Anthropocene stresses that the power in this new epoch lies specifically with the human species. However, critical and mostly social-scientific Anthropocene studies point out that power is extremely unequally distributed among humans. The different views produced by these two scientific paradigms and the level of analysis have sparked a lively debate as to whether the Anthropocene is the right name for the proposed next geological epoch after all.[2] This is especially due to the fact that different people, communities, and cultures have not equally participated in ecological destruction or in producing the human-created hallmarks of the epoch. Disregarding the omissions and problematic ahistorical arguments, such as the *anthropos*, the concept does come with a shock reaction: humans (or, rather, certain humans and organizations) have become planetary agents! At the same time, and while the Anthropocene places humanity within the continuum of long-running Earth processes, it also challenges us to think about how the present is "in contact with distant times beyond the scope of human experience or even imagining."[3]

The common understanding of violence points to abrupt and immediate outbursts and misuse of force, slandering language, or racist discrimination, for instance.[4] Some ten years ago, Rob Nixon's notion of slow violence rightfully challenged this conception by coupling violence with delayed destruction and incremental build-up across space and time, as well as to the struggles for

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[2] See e.g., Pasi Heikkurinen, Toni Ruuska, Kristoffer, Wilén, and Marko Ulvila, "The Anthropocene Exit: Reconciling Discursive Tensions on the New Geological Epoch," *Ecological Economics*, 164, 2019, 106369.

[3] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 197–222.

[4] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, New York, Picador, 2008; Gennado Shkliarevsky, "Overcoming Modernity and Violence," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 11, no. 2, 2015, pp. 299-314.

environmental justice.[5] The notion of slow violence certainly points to a longer timeframe in perceiving and experiencing violence but does not reach the magnitude of deep time. The challenge is, of course, that we never really encounter deep time.[6] Perhaps deep time even equals "forever" to us, both being equally difficult to grasp through experience and imagination. However, this should not stop us from theorizing or conceptualizing violence in a more holistic fashion, with deep temporal continuum, and with more-than-human imagination.

Building on recent work in ecological Marxism, feminism, deep ecology, and critical studies on technology, our aim is to redefine violence for the Anthropocene. We do this first by claiming that *violence has temporal dimensions*. Violence clearly is a historical phenomenon, as much as it is present, immediate, and abrupt. Violence is also processual, slow, and often cumulating; for instance, think of the chemical build-up in our bodies.[7] In addition, there is violence of geological or deep time—violence of the forever kind that probably bears witness of someone other than us, humans, in the distant future. This way, we want to set the phenomenon of violence to a temporal and very long processual continuum, from pre-history to today, and to the future all the way to forever, by acknowledging that the past is here with us as is the future. Past violent acts carry their weight today, and today's planetary-scale wrongdoings stay with future generations and far beyond.

Second, we argue that *violence is something that violates*, and as a term it is *an evaluative* one *with a normative orientation*. This means, for us, that violence should always be treated case-by-case. Following this notion, we give a general definition to violence as encounters entailing the use of force that violate and/or leave undesired traces and/or impede the fulfilment of primary needs. Central to our definition and analysis, though, is that violence is also what obstructs the reproduction of life's fundamental processes, such as photosynthesis and healthy bioregional habitats.

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[5] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011.

[6] Franklin Ginn, Michelle Bastian, David Farrier and Jeremy Kidwell, "Introduction: Unexpected Encounters with Deep Time," *Environmental Humanities* 10, no. 1, 2018, pp. 213-225.

[7] Nixon, *Slow Violence*.

Third, and given the above, we argue that the notion of *violence should extend to the more-than-human world*, as other beings, habitats, landscapes, and ecosystems can be, are, and have repeatedly been violated by human actions. The colonialist, imperialist, and ecocidal capitalist industrialism, however, is not commonly interpreted as violence, at least in the West, but rather as "progress" and "development." But since the planet does not belong to humans, it is time—if not already too late—to redefine what violence means in a non-anthropocentric manner. Finally, and to reduce violence, in the discussion to follow we point to a purposeful and designed withdrawal from the industrial-capitalist megamachine, and turning to the provisioning of the fundamentals of life. Such a normative and structural turn ideally results in humans cultivating ecological worldviews and seeking possible avenues toward an ecological civilization.

TEMPORAL DIMENSIONS

Siding with critical Anthropocene research, the new geological epoch can be considered the result of the colonial and capitalist domination and exploitation in which the biosphere is considered to exist mainly for the sake of accumulating capital.[8] Such an Anthropocene critique draws, for instance, from the (eco-)Marxist and -feminist canon, and is correct in that the alleged and executed supremacy of (certain) humans over other species has been made possible by the utilization of fossil fuels and the underlying material-intensive technological development; by capitalist relations of production; but also by the values, practices, and structures connected to the hegemonic economic system based on perpetual economic growth.

Colonial, imperialist, and capitalism-laden violence is both historical, present, and future-oriented. It is processual, fast in the sense of industrial war, clear-cut, and mega-sized mineral extraction; and slow in the sense of structural discrimination, toxin build-up, and indoctrination under Western ideology and school curriculum. Critical social sciences have a vibrant tradition in treating and exposing these violent human affairs and their impacts on natural processes and ecosystems. It is understandable that most of the attention has gone to the

[8] E.g., Stefania Barca, *Forces of Reproduction: Notes for a Counter-Hegemonic Anthropocene*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020; Kohei Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023.

immediate and abrupt impacts of (neo-)colonialism and exploitation of habitats on a global scale. Recently, however, the slower and quieter processual destruction of the world-eater was exposed by Nixon in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). In the introduction, Nixon writes that our notion of violence is too "immediate in time" and bound for the "explosive and spectacular." While violence certainly has this abrupt dimension, Nixon argues that we should also engage with the kind of violence that is "incremental and accretive."[9]

In a sense, Nixon pays attention to the more structural, systemic, and continuous violence of the capitalist world-system of domination and exploitation, as he "draws a parallel between the way perpetrators of ecocide—the resource extractors, the colonizers—dismiss our harmfulness and the way domestic abusers gaslight their victims."[10] The processual violence, the ongoing ecocide, is in many ways a "delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space."[11] At the same time, Nixon draws our attention to the vulnerable local human and non-human populations that are violated and exposes how the mainstream media and politics obscure these prevailing destructive processes. What is more, the notion of slow violence, in some ways, confronts the liberal idea of war as a temporary event. Quite the contrary, industrial war in particular leaves generational traces and stays in the spaces of conflict well beyond the troops and artillery, as pain and trauma are left behind for generations, as well as the lethal repercussion of chemicalized war.[12] Violence is therefore both a historical and processual phenomenon, where the harms of a conflict, procedure, and/or structure are displaced and its/their violent impacts manifest in temporal scales. This then delays and disperses the resulting violent destruction across time/place, which does not do away with the consequences but slows down their tempo and implications making them invisible, at least for the outsider eye.[13] These invisible zones of slow violence are often what Stefania Barca has called sacrificial zones inhabited by disposable bodies as collateral damage in the

[9] Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 2.
[10] Ibid., p. 16.
[11] Ibid., p. 2.
[12] Vasiliki Touhouliotis, "Weak Seed and Poisoned Land: Slow Violence and the Toxic Infrastructures of War in South Lebanon," *Environmental Humanities* 10, no. 1, 2018, pp. 86-106.
[13] Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 2; Irvine, "Seeing Environmental Violence in Deep Time," p. 263.

"triumph" of capitalist industrialism.[14]

Nixon's slow violence is an important addition in conceptualizing, acknowledging, and resisting today's violence. However, as Ginn and colleagues have argued, "the violence that accompanies deep time encounters may be slower than slow; it may be even less visible and less anthropogenic than Nixon's formulation allows."[15] As the Anthropocene brings the prospect of human extinction to the present, deep time violence is clearly also something other than violation and rather something that "is threaded through the very relations of life."[16] Therefore, in the era of a global ecological crisis, the conception and the actual acts of violence, as well as the call for their reduction, must also include deep time. We currently inhabit a self-destructive world-system based on capital accumulation and production for the sake of production, entailing violence in the past, present, and future in planetary and geological scale, also carrying the potential, if not the probability, of self-extinction.[17] Deep time violence thus equals to mass extinction, climate change, nuclear residue, technofossils, and plastic in rock sediment.

EVALUATING VIOLENT ENCOUNTERS

Moving from the general to the particular, we argue that violence should carry a more general definition but should always be judged case-by-case. To do this, we first discuss violence as an evaluative and normative term. To start off, we want to acknowledge that we (i.e., the authors—the "West," broadly speaking) live in a culture that has more recently denied a transcendent, objective status to evaluations, treating them as subjective—or if not subjective, then culturally relative. Secondly, we, the authors, inhabit a culture ("Western") characterized by a history of brutality in which violence has come to be accepted as "natural," essential to security, and economic progress, while the others, whether businesses, individuals, races, or species, are subsumed and oppressed as the "fittest" accumulates "wealth" at the expense of the rest.

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[14] Stefania Barca, "Telling the Right Story: Environmental Violence and Liberation Narratives." *Environment and History* 20, no. 4, 2014, pp. 535–546.
[15] Ginn et al., "Introduction", p. 220.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Cf. John Rundell, "Violence, Cruelty, Power: Reflections on Heteronomy," *Cosmos & History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy 8, no. 2, 2012, pp. 3-20.*

Violence is thus taken to be merely a descriptive term for the use of force, with those objecting to violence assumed to be doing nothing more than expressing their dislike of such action. Ethical terms are still used, but their evaluative claims are not taken seriously by those who have power, or even by those resisting this power. As the German sociologist Ulrich Beck observed, "Concepts are empty: they no longer grip, illuminate or inflame. The greyness lying over the world […] may also come from a kind of verbal mildew."[18]

While the separation of description from evaluation, argued for initially by Thomas Hobbes and defended by David Hume, might appear to be common sense, even this description of the current state of culture reveals this claim to be fallacious. If traditional ethical concepts have lost their force, it is because they have been replaced by other concepts that are both descriptive and evaluative, notably those associated with economics and growth. If some action is uneconomic, that defines it as bad, and conversely, if it facilitates economic growth, providing more goods to satisfy unlimited wants, it is good. Ethical prescriptions that challenge people's right to sell what they own or consume what they can afford to buy, are seen as infringements on people's rights. Aligned with this, the notion of development is identified with economic growth and what is good, although there might be competing goods.

Almost all languages are made up of words that are simultaneously descriptive and evaluative, which imply how people should define their situations and place in the world. They prescribe how to behave and what people should aim for to live a "good life" and what behaviour is wrong or bad. This is evident in the professions, insofar as their services have not been redefined as nothing but commodities. A medical doctor, for instance, is expected to be committed to improving the health of their patients, a commitment that goes back to the Hippocratic Oath. These evaluations are objective, at least in the sense that within a particular culture they are intersubjectively valid.

Where does the notion of violence then fit into this scheme of things? Like most other ethical concepts, its evaluative force has been greatly weakened, especially in a world built on colonial and imperial violence and standing armies and high-tech weaponry, whose existence justifies trillions of dollars globally

[18] Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000, p. 8.

spent on their maintenance. Is it then even possible to revive the concept's force so that those who complain about violence cannot be dismissed as "standing in the way of development or progress," "losers without paid jobs," or "broken-hearted activists" who are losing out in political struggles?

One way to recover the evaluative force of concepts is to examine the history of words. Examining the etymological history of "violence" reveals its broader assumptions and its full evaluative force. The word has its origins in the 13th century Anglo-French and Old French *violence* deriving from the Latin *violentia,* meaning "vehemence," related to *violare,* which is understood as "violation." So, violence was assumed to be a vehement violation of another. It was a term embedded in a culture in which respect for others, or at least some other people, was taken for granted, imposing limits on how these people should be treated. Tacitly, it assumed that others have an integrity that should be respected.

This understanding of violence has not been completely lost, and efforts have even been made to extend the concept for today's circumstances. For instance, the radical environmentalist Lierre Keith recommends a tripartite distinction in evaluating violent encounters.[19] The first distinction is hierarchical violence vs. violence as self-defence. The second is violence against property vs. violence against people. The third is violence as self-actualization vs. violence for political resistance. Hierarchical violence points to oppression practiced by those in power to the persecuted or subjugated groups of people. Self-defence, then, refers to the means of protecting oneself against an attacker or a destroyer of a local environment, i.e., the use of force to defend either one's own integrity or, for example, one's own culture, livelihood, or environment. The training and use of armies as an offensive tool to conquer other people and the natural environment is an example of the former—the same analogy applies to industrial organizations exploiting both the human and non-human worlds for monetary gain. In the latter case, violence can be used as a defence or a means of resistance to overthrow oppressive systems like the previous one (e.g., the French and Cuban revolutions). However, and similar to Le Guin's novel, violence may not produce the desired results (e.g., Palestine-Israel conflict or Syrian civil war) and might

[19] Lierre Keith, "Liberals and Radicals," In *Deep Green Resistance: A Strategy to Save the Planet*, Aric McBay, Lierre Keith and Derrick Jensen (eds.), New York, Seven Stories Press, 2011, p. 79-83.

leave generational trauma and traces to the violated and violators.

Thinking through Le Guin's novel, and Keith's dichotomies, we can justifiably ask: Is violence sometimes needed, or justified, and by whom? Does political oppression justify violence or does the violence of certain people or organizations toward local environments grant permission to use some degree of violence against the perpetrators? And is eco-terror or sabotage against property and, for example, production facilities a form of ontological (vs. legal) violence?[20] Clearly there are no universal answers to these questions. Consequently, and in our view, violence should always be judged case-by-case, but we do feel we need more than this. Because we do perceive that things like "history," "tradition," "indigenous," "local environmental knowledge," "species-like behaviour," and "embeddedness to the local environment" pay much more weight than, for instance, "civil," "development," "profit," and "wealth." Thus, we suggest that violence should be evaluated based on the notion of *primary needs* and the *reproduction of the fundamentals of life*, which are again, and at least partly, situational. Furthermore, we note that there is wide room for debate in who gets to determine what is considered primary needs or life's fundamentals, although in seeking clarity to this, we advocate that the criteria should always err on the side of intersectional ecological justice.[21]

Arguably, the above distinctions render the concept of violence and its evaluation as more comprehensive. And although many modern people swear by non-violence, it may be difficult to find a person who opposes all the above-mentioned dimensions or who has not participated to some extent in them. As the poet William Blake musingly asked, "does the cut worm forgive the plough/plow?" Perhaps a more sensible analytical road is to avoid talking about violence only as an abstract concept and rather break it down into separate and concrete acts.[22] For this, however, we also feel that a general definition of violence is needed. To gather up what has been discussed, *we define violence as encounters*

[20] Andreas Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World of Fire*, London and New York, Verso, 2021.

[21] Kylie Flanagan, *Climate Resilience: How we keep each other safe, care for our communities, and fight back against climate change*, Berkeley, North Atlantic Books, 2023.

[22] Benjamin Sovacool and Alexander Dunlap, "Anarchy, war, or revolt? Radical perspectives for climate protection, insurgency and civil disobedience in a low-carbon era," *Energy Research & Social Science* 86, 102416.

entailing the use of force that violate and/or leave undesired traces (e.g., ecological, emotional, mental, physical, religio-spiritual, socio-cultural, stratigraphical) and/or impede the fulfilment of primary needs and/or obstructs the reproduction of life's fundamental processes now and in the future. We will focus on the latter part of the definition, namely needs and life's fundamentals, next, and in so doing invite academic analyses of violence to move such analysis beyond the human.

NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC NOTIONS OF VIOLENCE

Perhaps it is still true that a narrow and reductive understanding of violence generally characterizes both modern and post-modern human-centred subject conceptions, where people are treated both as special cases and as separate units from the rest of nature. To us this manifests the idiosyncrasy of Western civilization. Indigenous peoples have often been appalled by such attitudes and clearly recognize and condemn violence in a more-than-human sense. For instance, a conflict arose between the Columbia Basin indigenous tribes and American settlers when the U.S. government tried to force the indigenous peoples to become farmers. They resisted. The reasons for the resistance were given by their leader, Smohalla:

> You ask me to plough the ground; shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask me to dig for stones; shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again. You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it and be rich like white men; but how dare I cut off my mother's hair?[23]

Acting on their beliefs, the peoples revolted. They were crushed by U.S. troops who killed both the adults and the children.

The ill treatment of all living beings, other than humans, has also been traditionally understood as violence in Indian cultures. This is exemplified in its strongest form by the Jains who embraced the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence or non-injury) as one of their fundamental tenets. According to this principle, people should abandon all violating activity against any living being, whether tiny or large, movable, or immovable, as exemplified in their monks and nuns. This also shows the tension between expressing values and evaluating a group's fidelity to them in actual lived behaviour.

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[23] Brian Easlea, *Witchcraft, Magic & the New Philosophy,* Sussex, Harvester Press, 1980, p. 140.

Many other indigenous cultures have recognized behaviour toward non-human life as violent, which shows there is no *a priori* reason for Western civilization to extend the notions of violence and violation in the same way. However, is this just a matter of arbitrary choice of particular cultures, or is proscribing such activity as violent and as a violation of life objective in a strong sense, transcending all cultures and by which the culture of Western civilization can be judged as defective? This is the view of those arguing for a radical rethinking of ourselves and our place in nature through advances in ecology in which ecosystems, as biotic communities, are recognized to have their own integrity.

For instance, in deep green schools of thought, like eco-feminism, the kind of dualist thinking and division of Western civilization has been interpreted to have led, among other things, to the supremacy of humans (mostly white men) over the rest of the ecosystem in a way that is destructive to the ecosystem and, ultimately, could lead to the destruction of humanity.[24] Perhaps for this reason, the abuse of the non-human world by humans is rarely considered in analyses of violence, as the centring of humans in logics of domination over nature results in a hierarchical, oppressive framework that justifies such violence. In addition to eco-feminism, in deep ecology,[25] violence can be defined as any activity that is unnecessary in terms of satisfying people's basic needs and that damages nature (including human nature). Violence as a concept, practice, and phenomenon thus extends to relationships that cross species boundaries, where no boundaries are drawn even between animate and inanimate, or between pain-sensing and non-pain sensing, or along the sentiocentric scale, and even drawn between known and unknown nature. Rather, and key for our argument, violence can also be applied to stones, the atmosphere, and deep time.

In the ecosophical thinking of Arne Næss,[26] humans do not have the right to satisfy their secondary needs at the expense of the primary needs of other species. This definition could be expanded even further beyond the species categories.

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[24] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, New York, Routledge, 1993.

[25] E.g., George Sessions (ed.), *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism*, Boston and London, Shambhala, 1995.

[26] Arne Næss, "The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 16, 1973, pp. 95-100.

However, going back to Næss and Sessions and their work on developing the deep ecology platform[27], we recognize the importance of intentionally leaving open necessary primary needs, as this allows for local consideration, tradition, and deliberation. Moreso, a universal ideal, especially prescribed from outside of a community, is a form of onto-epistemological violence. For example, a subsistence hunter in the Antarctic will require at a primary level the killing of seals in order to live. Clearly, this is a form of violence against any and all seals, who we can assume do not want to be killed. Yet, this primary need must be met for the hunter and their people to survive or to be forced to migrate into another community's land base. The only other solution to this that will not require structural or long-term violence, and thus a form of violence enforced from outside the community, is for the hunter and their community to voluntarily kill themselves. This is an absurd suggestion that we will not entertain in this article, as no humans anywhere should purposely kill themselves as an "out" to escape the necessity of killing that accrues to satisfying primary needs within the evolutionary dictates of trophic energy flows and laws of thermodynamics.

In any case, when defining primary needs, the key conditions for existence, such as food and shelter, as well as people's needs for social and cultural interaction, should be taken into account. To be sure, per the above, in different contexts and ecosystems, primary needs vary, which means that the definition of violence is also context-, history-, and ecosystem-bound. However, few dare to claim that the current level of Western consumption or the extent of industrial production is about satisfying the primary needs of the human species. Rarely have violent revolutions or indiscriminate acts of terrorism been about primary needs or life protection, unless perpetrated by land defenders who are protecting their autonomy and/or land-health from violent colonization and dispossession, such as with the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico.

In accordance with deep green ways of thought, the actions of people and cultures should always be placed in relation to the rest of the ecosystem. Even though violence requires some degree of power or at least some kind of autonomy, a position of power does not automatically mean its abuse or the violation of

[27] Arne Næss and George Sessions, "The Deep Ecology Eight Point Platform," 1984, http://www.deepecology.org/platform.htm.

others. It is therefore possible to imagine that humans have power in the ecosystem in relation to its other creatures, but the human individual or collective does not have to use it incorrectly, i.e., against the rest of nature. Many individuals and communities already live in this ecosophical way, as they satisfy basic primary needs in ways that entail violations but that also actively assist in regeneration.

The still widely existing aspiration for care and regeneration is overshadowed by the uncertainties of human time and by industrial capitalism and its technological industrial machinations, which are inherently violent due to their enormous resource-intensity, extractivism, and global supply chains. Paradoxically, many of our contemporaries intuitively warn of the danger of an increase in violence at the point when the structures of fossil-fuelled civilization based on colonial inheritance and global relations of oppression begin to falter, or if they are actively undermined. This is a possibility;[28] however, the opposite can also be seen if violence is understood holistically. Of course, it may be that clashes and conflicts between people will increase as various natural resources become scarcer, but it can be assumed that violence, as more-than-human violations, will decrease—at least at the latest when food is no longer available in grocery stores and electricity is cut. This is especially since the global capitalist production, consumption, and distribution system appears already at the point of collapse, and at the same time the efficiency of the "utilization" of non-human beings to various "economic" purposes is decreasing. In addition, it is possible that violence will also decrease between people because the maintenance of huge industrial armies, militarized police forces, and other repressive organizations will (hopefully) no longer be successful on the same scale as they are now.

Power, like violence, is largely a relational concept, although it is not limited to mere relationships. Individuals, communities, and cultures have been, are, and will likely be in the future more or less violent. Nonetheless, a life without violations or without power relations is impossible because it would mean, from our point of view, that secondary needs and desires would have to be given up

[28] Todd LeVasseur, Toni Ruuska, and Pasi Heikkurinen, "Imagining a Prosperous Periphery for the Rural in 2050 and Beyond," In *Handbook of Sustainability Science in the Future: Policies, Technologies, and Education by 2050*, Walter Leal Filho (ed.), Cham, Springer, 2023, pp. 1501-1518.

while implying all primary means are met through breatharianism and living unclothed only in the tropics, never swatting a mosquito. At the same time, we strongly feel that it is possible to strive to form ecocentric values, practices, and structures that support a more equal distribution of power and recourse to violence only when the fundamentals of life are threatened. Here, the goal is to lessen unavoidable primary forms of violence and to recognize the shame that entails this.[29] On the other hand, this requirement is difficult or even impossible to fulfil in our time because the life of the (post)modern human, and especially the human of Western industrial capitalism, is based almost entirely on measurable indices of violence: ecological, economic, social, psychological, spiritual, and temporal. How could we even begin to imagine a life with reduced violence, when until now, and especially since Columbus departed from the Iberian peninsula, it has been almost completely saturated with it? Perhaps admitting a violent life (and given our audience, the complicity of the academy within this) is one of the significant first steps?

While we are all, by definition, complicit, especially from a biological reductionist viewpoint, there are gradations of violence that are able to be ranked, and that must be ranked, given the Anthropocene. We call for scholars across disciplines to be clearer in formulating such ranking and to embed such insights into discussions of violence and discussions of human-nonhuman interactions. For example, in this article, we have presented the idea that violence is a violating encounter, which also impedes the fulfilment of primary needs. From the point of view of ecological sustainability, this seems like a meaningful definition, as the discussion then focuses on needs and what people need to live a meaningful life or what cultures require to flourish. It also asks these questions to be asked over long temporal dimensions. Such level of analysis also recognizes that violence would arise on the basis of desires rather than needs, which, from various ethical points of view, is wrong. It is also wrong ecologically and, therefore, wrong when measured against base survival. In other words, wanting things that require unnecessary efforts to dominate and of control by humans acting in any ecosystem, is violent.

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[29] William R. Jordan III, Nathaniel F. Barrett, Kip Curtis, Liam Heneghan, Randall Honold, Todd LeVasseur, Anna Peterson, Leslie Paul Thiele, and Gretel Van Wieren, "Foundations of Conduct: A Theory of Values and its Implications for Environmentalism," *Environmental Ethics* 34, no.3, 2012, pp. 291-312.

In contrast, we see protecting, supporting, and creating local sustainable livelihoods—subsistence cultures—and communities of commoning and self-provisioning as the best and most responsible ways to protect life and reduce violence. The reasoning behind this argument is that when we, the moderners, start breaking away from our violent societies by participating more directly in practices and processes of self-provisioning and commoning and community development, we will also have less time for and interest in violent activities, like fast fashion and intercontinental tourism. We want to stress that every step out of the global techno-capitalist megamachine toward local self-reliance decreases violence. Nevertheless, and like in Le Guin's novel, this does not rule out the fact that, if necessary, defending communities, local habitats, and the diversity of life by resorting to the use of force may come into question, for example, when resisting oppressive policies pursued by the colonizers, mining industry, or industrial forestry.[30] In so many ways, this resembles Berry's agrarian pacifism,[31] without romanticizing the rural, communal, or self-provisional. Perhaps we are truly noting Candide's lesson, to cultivate one's own garden as the world collapses but with the twist that the garden might have to be defended from time to time from resource extractivism and repressive organizations.

DISCUSSION: FROM THE ECOCIDE TO AN ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION?

The Anthropocene concept heralds the next geological epoch relevant for studying societies and their environments. It suggests that after the Holocene, since the latter part of the 18th century, humankind has gradually become the dominant species on the planet. As noted, some humans, organizations, and cultures more than others have contributed to global ecological destruction. In other words, the problem is not the human species per se but those parts of humanity that are overproducing waste and overconsuming natural resources—based on our reasoning and argument, these are forms of violence. We hold this

[30] Joan Martinez Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation*, Chelteham and Northampton, Edgar Elgar, 2002.
[31] William Major, "Other Kinds of Violence: Wendell Berry, Industrialism, and Agrarian Pacifism," *Environmental Humanities* 3, no. 1, 2013, pp. 25-41.

true both descriptively and evaluatively from various justice-based perspectives,[32] including but not limited to restorative, procedural, distributive, and intergenerational theories of justice. It also holds descriptively and evaluatively from an ecological perspective and from an interspecies-justice perspective. It is this unnecessary, intensified matter-energy throughput of societies that has contributed more than any other factor to the current state of planetary overshoot and to the multiple forms of violence that attend to such overshoot. Within this, there is extra blame for unnecessary violence to be placed on the rich and super-rich specifically, regardless of where they are now located on the planet.[33]

While the Anthropocene concept is certainly more than a new term to characterize the devastating ecospheric crisis of ever-worsening ecocide, and it can function as a transdisciplinary platform for bringing scholars and policy makers together, it also reproduces a one-dimensional view of the *anthropos* as a root problem. To avoid this misinterpretation, studies on the Anthropocene should be complemented with a more culturally sensitive examination of the organization and environment at issue, with a specific focus paid to typologies of (at times, unavoidable) violence. Second, the Anthropocene discourse is prone to create a cleavage between those who are willing and able to engage with the embodied experience of deep time with those who are not. For understanding the relevance and importance of this new claimed epoch, we must experiment with an extremely wide temporal horizon—ranging at least from the beginning of the Neolithic Revolution 12,000–15,000 years ago to the present, and far beyond. In this temporality, the Anthropocene is an anomaly of the Earth's geological processes.

The threat of the Anthropocene is, of course its ecocidal effect, a runaway climate change, made possible not only through the emissions of greenhouse gases, but also the weakening of the current regime of the global ecosystem through destruction of local ecosystems, biodiversity loss, and super storms, floods, and droughts. To take the active violence of the Anthropocene seriously, and to strategically intervene in order to reduce such violence, we need to reconnect the notion of violence with the notion of violation to resuscitate its

[32] Nixon, *Slow Violence*.

[33] Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, "Why the World Cannot Afford the Rich," *Nature*, 627, 2024, pp. 268-270.

ethical force as a term that is first and foremost a term of condemnation, even if it might be shown that the use of force to violate aggressors is justified as a means to prevent greater violence.

Conjointly, the notion of violence as violation involves recognizing the reality and value of the integrity of whatever is being violated, be that fellow humans, other animals, or biota; it also challenges us to think of the integrity of ecosystems and a stable climate that future organisms (including of the humankind) will require to have chances to live lives of flourishing. This in turn focuses attention on the root cause of this violence toward all of the planet: a culture dominated by analytical, reductionist thinking[34] that both in theory and practice does not acknowledge the reality of such integrity that could be violated. This is because this mode of thinking conceives nature as nothing but atoms, elementary particles, self-replicating genes, or bits of information and communities as nothing but egoistic profit-maximizing and selfish individuals. Together this creates a conception of the world denying any intrinsic significance to nature, communities, or subjugated people. From treating the Earth as the repository of the grossest dregs of the universe in the Middle Ages, Western Europeans went on to treat nature as nothing but immutable bits of matter moving endlessly, meaninglessly according to immutable, mathematically describable laws and people as machines moved by appetites and aversions, committed to the technological domination of not only the rest of nature but also of each other.[35]

Incorporated into the science of economics, these values were further advanced through Darwinian evolutionary theory and then social Darwinism. This is the worldview that has underpinned the insatiable politics and economics of capitalist accumulation and perpetual economic growth, in relation to which all other societal goals and values must be understood. This is the culture and violence of fossil-fuel based, techno-capitalist modernity. This is the worldview embodied in the practices and major institutions defining modernity and that through positions of power these have continuously enacted and elaborated.

While this cosmology has frequently been challenged by those promoting

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[34] Shkliarevsky, "Overcoming Modernity and Violence".

[35] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution,* New York, Harper & Row, 1980. See also Luisa Muraro, "The Symbolic Independence From Power," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5, no. 1., 2009, pp. 57-67.

organic views of the world, organicism is little different from mechanism, in which parts of organisms are seen as merely instruments of the whole. The real challenge to this cosmology emerged with the development of ecology based on a process-relational ontology, the study of the system of "households" or "homes" of biotic communities with each community involved in multiple levels of communities, both spatially and temporally.[36] In accordance with developments in science transcending atomism and the mechanistic view of the world, biotic communities or ecosystems are conceived as patterns of activities or processes, organized in such a way that component processes are constrained to act and interact to augment their conditions of existence. We reside in a queer pluriverse, and some are violently destroying it.

In dialectical understanding, organisms are highly integrated to ecosystems defining their environments as their worlds and interacting with these accordingly. And human communities, organizations, societies, and civilizations are also parts and particles of ecosystems, participating in broader biotic communities and providing homes for other biotic communities. Ecosystems are "healthy"—that is, have integrity—when their members augment the conditions for the life of their members, and they are "sick"—that is, lack or undermine this integrity—when they undermine these conditions.

This ecological worldview puts the violence of the Anthropocene in a new light. Recent developments of global capitalism have been characterized as a cancer. As David Korten put it: "As I learned more about the course of cancer's development within the body, I came to realize that the reference to capitalism as a cancer is less a metaphor than a clinical diagnosis of a pathology to which market economies are prone in the absence of adequate citizen and government oversight."[37] Cancerous processes develop in such a way that they violate rather than augment other life processes, and ultimately, this violates the integrity of the body, or ecosystem, of which they are part of and on which they are dependent.

At the same time, this ecological worldview upholds different values, those based on valuing life itself and actions and practices augmenting the conditions for life. As Aldo Leopold wrote after having embraced an ecological perspective:

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[36] Robert E. Ulanowicz, *Ecology: The Ascendent Perspective,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1997.
[37] David C. Korten, *The Post-Corporate World*, West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 2000, p. 15.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."[38] As the ultimate violence against people is to see them and treat them as nothing but objects, the ultimate violence against nature is to view it as nothing but a realm of objects. Removing the fundamental violence and root cause of other violence that has engendered the Anthropocene necessarily involves replacing the mechanistic conception of nature originating in the scientific revolution of the 17th century, the foundation of modernity, with an ecological worldview. To do so is to transform civilization. It is to create a new civilization based on radically different ways of understanding the world and our place within it and the beings that compose this world. This involves reorienting the whole of humanity based on this ecological worldview and the values implied by it. It is working toward an ecological civilization.

TONI RUUSKA, (D.Sc.) is Senior Researcher and Adjunct Professor of Sustainable Economy at the University of Helsinki. He is the co-editor of *Sustainability beyond Technology: Philosophies, Critique, and Implications for Human Organization* (Oxford University Press, 2021) and the author of *Reproduction Revisited: Capitalism, Higher Education and Ecological Crisis* (Mayfly Books, 2019). In his research, Ruuska seeks to find avenues for an alternative agrarian political economy. Theoretically, he is involved in critical theory, ecological Marxism, eco-feminism, and (eco)phenomenology.
toni.ruuska@helsinki.fi (corresponding author)

PASI HEIKKURINEN, (D.Sc.) is Professor of Sustainable Business at Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology, LUT Business School, Finland, and Chair of the Finnish Society for Environmental Social Science. He also acts as Adjunct Professor of Sustainable Economy at the University of Helsinki and Adjunct Professor of Sustainability and Organizations at Aalto University. Heikkurinen is the author of *Degrowth: An Experience of Being Finite* (MayFly Books, 2024). His work mainly deals with questions of the economy, technology, and culture for sustainable change from an eco-phenomenological point of view.
pasi.heikkurinen@lut.fi

TODD LEVASSEUR, (Ph.D.) is Senior Instructor in the Environmental and Sustainability Studies program at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina, USA. From 2022–2024 he was on a leave of absence to be Senior Lecturer in the Environmental Studies program

[38] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, London, Oxford University Press, p. 224f.

at Yale National University Singapore College (YNC). He has published numerous books, edited volumes, journal articles, and chapters related to climate change, religion and nature, sustainable agriculture, gender and the environment, and pedagogy.
levasseurtj@cofc.edu

ARRAN GARE, (Ph.D.) is Associate Professor in Philosophy and Cultural Inquiry, Swinburne University Australia. In 1997 he founded the Joseph Needham Centre for Complex Processes Research and in 2005 founded the online journal *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, of which he is the editor-in-chief. The focus of his research is on transforming culture to create an environmentally sustainable global civilization. He is the author of a number of books, including *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (Routledge, 1995), *Nihilism Inc.: Environmental Destruction and the Metaphysics of Sustainability* (Eco-Logical Press, 1996), and *The Philosophical Foundations of Ecological Civilization: A Manifesto for the Future* (Routledge, 2017).
agare@swin.edu.au