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EDITORIAL

The thematic section "Reflections on Political Ecology II" is a continuation of work in the wider field of political ecology by members of the Centre for Political Theory at the University of Ljubljana. It consists of 5 scientific articles that from a range of perspectives and theoretical frameworks consider various crucial issues broadly related to the present ecological crisis and its interrelationship, mutual influence, and co-determination with other crises of the wider polycrisis. Given the happenings in the last few years, the polycrisis is gradually intensifying in many of its dimensions, while the political focus is less and less pointed to the ecological dimension of the crises, reflections on and tackling them. This is simultaneously interesting and telling of how political, economic, social and intellectual elites misperceive the polycrisis as clearly visible in the now dominant political agenda specifically in the West that relegates the climate and ecological concerns to a less relevant status compared to geopolitical, economic and security concerns. Despite its less prominent character in political agendas, the ecological dimension of the polycrisis remains a crucial dividing line in politics. The right-wing forces are paradoxically becoming bolder and less compromising, while the centrist political forces are doubling down on policies that obviously are insufficient to properly address the crises yet crucial for limiting the possibilities of alternatives in thinking and acting. This situation also reveals the stark discrepancy between the political and the environmental as the ecological crisis and specifically the climate crisis is becoming exponentially worse in the form of annual 'historic' extreme weather events and also according to numerous scientific studies, long-term modelling of climate change, and remeasurements of greenhouse gas emissions, species die-off, average temperatures etc. It appears that as the climate and ecological crisis is intensifying and our scientific understanding of the situation is improving, expanding and turning ever less optimistic, modern societies, elites, structures, institutions are not only doubling down on the status quo, but adopting policies that even further undermine our capabilities of mitigating and adapting to the polycrisis. Reformist positions and policies are re-evaluated as alarmist in the context where they actually represent a dangerous form of "hopium" in face of imminent climate chaos that, as it seems, will be normalised up until the point when this facade will be brutally crushed by the reality of radically deteriorating living conditions. In addition,

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the societal ideological fantasy of magic technological solutions to the climate and other dimensions of the polycrisis not only remains strong, but has even grown with the advent of technologies such as generative AI that ultimately cannot and will not lead to a more sustainable world, and instead a world that is even less sustainable, more authoritarian, less adapted to the effects of the polycrisis, given that it is already producing not only higher emissions, and putting breaks on the green transition, but is also having a generally negative effect on people's capabilities for critical thinking. Critical thinking capacities are not only under threat by technological but also political means as right-wing/far-right forces have not only intensified their denial in societies facing a climate emergency, but begun actively dismantling and silencing scientific insights, analysis, research on the climate and wider ecological crisis, creating further obstacles to tackling the polycrisis.

The five contributions in the thematic section may be considered an intellectual antidote to these processes of the erosion of capacities for critical thinking. In the spirit and wide-ranging scope of political ecology, in an innovative, insightful, lucid and complex manner they tackle novel alternative concrete visions of future societies, the foundational issues of the existing order that need to be overcome, the structures, institutions, practices and relations of power that strive to consolidate the existing unsustainable order and silence and obfuscate alternative visions and policies, and, finally, the political forces that not only stand in the way of alternative sustainable, caring, emancipatory society but are struggling for the establishment of an authoritarian, hyper-capitalist, environment and a people-destroying system.

An innovative alternative vision of a sustainable future society is offered in the first article in the thematic section. **Žiga Vodovnik's** innovative contribution entitled *Pūʻolo of Hope: The Politics of Care from The Shores of Hawaiʻi to the Streets of Europe* is namely focused on re-imagining our socio-political and economic system in an ecologically sustainable way by building upon the native Hawaiian concept of care/mālama. This simultaneously static and dynamic principle is part of the contemporary revival of the so-called Native Hawaiian world or Kanaka Maoli. He argues that this principle has potential beyond its immediate geopolitical context as it can be a fruitful foundation on which to build a vision and ultimately a reality of an emancipatory, solidaristic, emphatic and caring society. As he observes, the latter has an existential urgency considering the convergence of various crises to create an unprecedented polycrisis that is unprecedented and irreversible in the sense that the *old normal* is gone. Existing visions and models are insufficient and structurally incapable of properly addressing our unprecedented challenges. He argues that caring/palliative politics, the politics of care, empathy and solidarity, built around the concept of care/mālama offers us a much-needed framework for thinking and acting that inoculates us from despair and harmful survivalist logic and profoundly shifts our political vision. Drawing from Hawaiian scholars and analysing local

Slovenian expressions of caring politics, Vodovnik posits that the new political vision can only be formulated in dialogue between various contexts, traditions and notions, and that this dialogue must rest on a practice of reciprocal obligation and be grounded in respect and relationality, not appropriation and containment. The dialogue is crucial for connecting related concepts and struggles and enhancing our joint understanding of common challenges and possibilities. This novel vision of caring politics also necessitates the genesis of novel forms of political organisation that are at once more localised and more global than the existing forms.

The article that follows focuses in an innovative way on the foundational issues of the existing order that need to be overcome in order to fashion an alternative sustainable society for all living beings. **Cirila Toplak's** contribution *Forest Politics: (Post)Foucauldian Subjectivity, Genealogy of Resistance and Arborism* takes us in a non-anthropocentric post-humanist direction by contemplating on the forest not as a passive backdrop of human history but a specifically active subject that has shaped our history in a number of ways. She argues that forests have historically conditioned our governance, resistance and ideologies. Fruitfully drawing on posthumanist, ecological and decolonial thought, and specifically Foucault's concepts of biopolitics, governmentality and counter-conduct, she looks at the way forests have functioned as heterotopic spaces of insurgency, of thinking and acting differently. On the other hand, she analyses the way that forests were made the targets of biopolitical interventions and draws an interesting novel comparison with the management of human populations. Here she introduces the concept of arborism that is analogous to the biopolitical racism against the abnormal (part of) populations, where specific tree species have been celebrated, nurtured or ruthlessly cut down depending on their place in the tree-hierarchy of particular human societies. Finally, she persuasively argues for a non-anthropocentric imagining of subjectivity and its opening to also include in a non-exclusive manner other living beings, which is, as she stresses, essential to reposition forests as vital subjects of political ecology and multispecies justice. The latter is crucial for developing and implementing proper emancipatory visions of our future sustainable system.

The following two articles represent a complex and innovative utilisation and upgrade of the Foucauldian eco-governmentality approach to dissect the structures, institutions, practices and relations of power that in the context of EU and its member states strive to consolidate the existing unsustainable order while silencing and obfuscating alternative visions and policies.

Marinko Banjac's contribution *Governing Through Engagement: European Climate Pact Ambassadors and the Post-Political Green Transition* critically considers one of the concrete mechanisms launched by the European Commission within its flagship European Green Deal framework. The latter is not just the paramount framework for addressing the climate and ecological crisis but is also central as a status-quo-reaffirming vision for a more sustainable socio-economic

development of the EU and the member states. He innovatively and productively combines a Foucauldian eco-governmentality approach with the concept of post-politics on which he builds his discursive analysis. This analytical framework enables him to clearly demonstrate the complex ways in which specific *prima facie* neutral and benign policy tools can be understood as a mechanism of power wielded by the centrist political forces and institutions to reaffirm the *status quo* and prevent thinking and acting that would transcend the unsustainable logics and imperatives of the existing socio-economic system. As he persuasively argues, this consolidation of the status quo is undertaken through innovative mechanisms that are part of a post-political form, where via their utilisation of specific environmental and climate problem-solution frameworks the so-called European Climate Pact Ambassadors seek to reinforce neo-liberal economic rationalities and thoroughly depoliticise the green transition. This depoliticisation, in turn, helps to systematically constrain alternatives to mainstream, status-quo-reaffirming ecological activities that would inevitably challenge the dominant governmental rationality and the unequal relations of power. He thereby points to pressing challenges that emancipatory struggles for achieving a sustainable future society face from political forces, structures and institutions that appear to be contributing to tackling crucial issues, but can be understood not as distractions but as difficult obstacles to be faced head on.

Luka Zevnik Tomazin critically interrogates another dimension of eco-governmentality on the EU level that innovatively complements the lucid insights of Banjac's contribution concerning how the latter is functioning as a specific intricate regime of power that is continuously hindering the articulation, popularisation and implementation of alternative visions of a sustainable future order that would move beyond capitalism. In his contribution entitled *Governing the Responsible Self: EU Climate Policy and the Production of Green Subjectivity,* he employs an innovative Foucauldian analytical framework that combines in a fruitful and incisive manner approaches – governmentality and the hermeneutics of the self – that in most existing Foucauldian scholarship remain isolated, and puts them into a productive conversation with each other. This enables him to demonstrate the intricate way in which the individual as a self-forming subject not only contributes to the macro-level eco-governmentality of the EU, but that this relationship is co-determined and co-dependent. The consolidation of this neoliberal regime that depoliticises and individualises the climate crisis and its tackling is performed not only on the level of policies and practices, on the level of subjectivisation, but also on the level of subjectivation of individuals that together contribute to defending the capitalist social form by asserting there are no alternatives. Both Banjac and Zevnik Tomazin show the truly expansive, complex and intensive, continuous ways that the existing status quo is being actively defended regardless of the intensification of the polycrisis and the inadequate nature of the policies, logics and imperatives that direct how it is addressed on the EU, member state, and individual levels.

Blaž Vrečko Ilc's contribution rounds up the thematic issue with a focus on a phenomenon that from a political ecology standpoint is essential for understanding the forces and ideologies that not only stand in the way of the much-needed novel emancipatory visions of a caring, nurturing environmentally sustainable society (see Vovodnik's contribution), and a radical rethinking of the foundations of the existing order (see Toplak's contribution), but are striving to undermine even the inadequate status quo reformist structures, mechanisms, policies, practices and subjectivities (as addressed in Banjac's and Zevnik's contributions).

In his article entitled *The Intensification of the Polycrisis and the Rise of Techno-Oligarchic Ideology in the USA,* Vrečko Ilc employs a materialist-neo-Luddite approach to analyse the rise of a specific potent far-right ideology and the political forces that are promoting it in the USA during the 2nd Trump Administration. He argues that the techno-oligarchic ideology is a novel far-right political ideology of the US techno-oligarchy, whose rise was predicated on intensification of the polycrisis that has destabilised the status quo. He claims that its central purpose is the expansion of the techno-oligarchy's influence, power and wealth and to squash opposition to its dominance and alternative visions and policies that critically interrogate the existing ecologically unsustainable capitalist model of growth and technological development. By critically interrogating the core characteristics of this far-right ideology, its re-imagining of the state and political institutions via the introduction of AI and in the context of Israel's genocide of the Palestinians, he demonstrates its novel unsustainable and oppressive nature and its devastating implications for solving the ecological crisis and the wider polycrisis. Ilc claims the novelty of this ideology stems from the centrality of specifically framed technological development and technology(ies) that establish the basis for its oligarchic, anti-democratic, repressive, neo-imperial, eugenic, hyper-capitalist, extractive and destructive vision of society. He concludes that any emancipatory vision and movements to achieve an ecologically sustainable future society must also focus on delegitimising the techno-oligarchy's authoritarian control over the direction and nature of technological development and their visions of future society that are properly dystopian and will ultimately lead to an uninhabitable earth.