

## BLOG POST Assignment

### *Chosen Idea:*

I came across Georges Bataille work on economics and capitalism. Bataille lived in the 20th century (1897-1962), and worked as a philosopher, writer and librarian. He explored a variety of subjects and highly influenced later schools of philosophy and social theory.

He was fascinated by human sacrifice and, within the concept of the “Accursed Share” (*La Part Maudite*, 1949), compared **Aztec sacrificial practices to modern capitalism**.

The *accursed share* is an economic concept that brings Bataille’s ideas on **consumerism, communism, and capitalism** into a markedly different position compared to traditional economic theories. He was fascinated by human sacrifice and, within the concept of the “Accursed Share” (*La Part Maudite*, 1949), compared **Aztec sacrificial practices to modern capitalism**. The *accursed share* is an economic concept that brings Bataille’s ideas on **consumerism, communism, and capitalism** into a markedly different position compared to traditional economic theories. In Bataille’s view, capitalism measures utility in terms of **accumulation**—and recent history (in his time) showed continued growth of industrial activity.

He argues that **no system can accumulate indefinitely**: at some point, growth will reach a limit, and there will be **excess energy** that must be spent somehow.

*The closer a system gets to the limits of accumulation, the more excess energy it produces.* Growth will be limited (also, but not only, by) technical and environmental changes that make it unsustainable.

The issue: capitalism does not accept this necessity. There is a continuous inner fight to **minimise waste**, which paradoxically leads to the **non-productive use of excess**. Here, an extreme example is used: the **Sun**. The Sun shines and irradiates the Earth indefinitely; humans use part of that energy productively, but a large amount of excess contributes to well-being, climate cycles, and biodiversity—without necessarily being “productive” in economic terms. **The two World Wars fit into this concept as well**: they represent the enormous excess energy accumulated, which had to be expended. Of course, war is also one of the most destructive options to expend this surplus. **“War represents capitalism’s unconscious recognition of the necessity of expenditure.”**

Within this cycle of contradiction, capitalism must produce weapons that exist just to be destroyed—with the “side-effect” of destroying lives and environments at the same time. What I found most interesting and relevant is **this shift of interest**: Bataille states that there must be an excess of available energy. The point is being aware of it and accepting this fact, in order to use the excess **productively**.

Unproductive use of energy (waste) is, for example, **luxury**. But even in this case, for Bataille, **luxury plays a role in society**. The idea of using excess resources in a non-productive way **transcends traditional economic paradigms**. It shifts attention away from the idea of reducing waste at all costs and toward **accepting surplus as an inevitable condition**—then transforming it into something **meaningful**.

### Connection to Our Course

So far, during the lectures, we understood that sustainability and planetary health can only be addressed by considering their **three main dimensions**: economic, social, and environmental. For this reason, Bataille's work—which has a strong economic focus—does not overlap completely with our class theme. His view was also developed **before the last ~40 years**, which have been crucial to observe the evolution of capitalism, globalisation, and (post-/neo-)colonialism.

At the same time, I find Bataille's work relevant in this field for a few reasons:

- To start, it **refuses some fundamental paradigms of classical economic thought** and, by doing so, manages to highlight a new mechanism driving capitalism and explaining its relationship with growth.
- As a consequence, we access **another point of view** on the forces that actually push growth in a certain modality: if Bataille was right, the continued effort to minimise waste (a key aspect of the modern capitalistic model) is **exactly what prevents us from avoiding harmful waste** and, instead, from utilising “the excess” more productively.
- Lastly, Bataille's work touches upon the **nature of communication and community**, asserting that true communication requires a **contagion-like form of contact**, in which individual boundaries are lost in favour of a strong collective connection.

I believe this thought is crucial when reflected in the idea of **collective awareness and care**: humans should be highly aware of themselves, each other, and the environment we are all immersed in. Only in this way can we “get to care” truly about the fate of our community, culture, traditions—and planet. Moreover, this point also attributes **more importance to human-human connection**, as a necessary goal to include in the vision of a “healthy planet.” In Bataille's idea, only some forms of communication **manage to escape the rationalisation of capitalism**: for example, **laughter**. Laughter is seen as a **light replacement for a more intense practice: sacrifice**. Sacrificial practices have existed across human cultures. For Bataille, this means there is some **persistent human need** these rituals respond to. This need does not disappear just because capitalist rationality **bans** sacrifice—it finds expression through other means, such as war, consumption, or violent spectacle. Lastly, Bataille highlights that the solution to capitalist consumerism and planetary exploitation is **not solved by communism either**. In fact, the communist structure works in the same way—just by being more strict about waste and organising accumulation more systematically.

## Development and Colonialism

During the last lectures, we explored the concept of **development**, and then linked it to the phenomenon of **colonialism**. In fact, the course started from defining the idea of **environment**; we discovered that sometimes, the concept of “nature” dominates over social and cultural environments. We also analysed the **different relationships** that different cultures in the world

have with nature and the environment. The people–environment relationship is **crucial** to consider because it directly influences the concept of development, people's sensitivity towards human and planetary health, and—thus—**what a culture sees as acceptable or unacceptable** for growth and sustainability. After this first step, we looked at the idea of development and realised that, by default, it is often equated with “growth.” But growth can come at an unfair price. There have been proposals to either slow it or reverse it in societies that have reached a certain level of expansion and technological advancement.

This is what happens in the report by **Donella Meadows** and colleagues (*The Limits to Growth*), which is coupled with the identification of the **leverage points** that can be used to modulate a system. Colonialism is related to the idea of development because, as a **justification for invasion**, colonial powers claimed to bring their conquered territories “modern” technologies, refined social systems, and access to global interconnectedness. Looking at history, we saw how these “gifts” often came at a **human, cultural, and environmental cost** that does not justify the process of colonisation. We also discovered that, while the official era of colonialism has ended, the **power mechanisms** underlying it are still active today—especially in economic and ecological terms.

The question that arises is: **has colonialism been a necessary step towards modernity?**

Thanks to a special testimony (Yaneth), we explored **other concepts of growth and advancement**. We observed that a Western-style rush toward the future **puts local arts, languages, traditions, and spiritual beliefs at risk**—elements that have shaped societies for centuries.

## Post-Development Proposals and Alternative Approaches

Considering the interesting perspective of Georges Bataille’s work and our analysis of the **SDGs** (what they are, how grounded they are, and how feasible their application is worldwide), I am encouraged to think that the solution toward a more sustainable future is **not a radical shift from one economic extreme to another** (from capitalism to communism). It is increasingly clear to me that the currently predominant economic model is **fed by consumption**, and somehow needs to **generate a portion of waste to keep growing**.

**Redirecting this waste** toward **non-harmful uses** could already be an important step. The main obstacle is the **convenience and profitability of war and the military-industrial complex**, which both push growth and technical innovation, while feeding colonial-like dynamics. After the analysis and discussions I had in class, I believe that the **direct application of SDGs, as currently formulated, might not be appropriate or possible**:

Different countries and cultures are at different stages of so-called development, have access to different resources, and face different environmental challenges. In addition, formulating a set of planetary goals such as the SDGs is, in my view, **a too vertical form of intervention**—imposed from the top down. Even so, they **provide a starting point**—a shared base from which to work.

It is necessary to start linking healthy people, rich cultures and flourished nature to the idea of development itself.

In these terms, leaving space for various voices, representing an as-wide-as possible range of cultures, beliefs and needs cannot be separated from the design of a plan for improvement.

Reflecting on both Georges Bataille's provocative economic theory and the perspectives we explored in class, I've come to realise that rethinking development is not just about replacing one system with another. It's about **recognising the underlying dynamics**, like accumulation, waste, and power, that shape our world, and consciously choosing to engage with them differently. A sustainable future cannot be achieved by applying one-size-fits-all solutions. It requires us to **question dominant narratives**, accept complexity, and remain open to multiple paths forward. True transformation will only come when development is redefined to include **not just economic growth**, but also **cultural vitality, ecological harmony, and deep human connection**.

To do this, we must give space to diverse perspectives, acknowledge historical injustices, and embrace forms of knowledge that resist being measured purely in terms of utility.

Sources:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges\\_Bataille](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Bataille)