

Palestine, Ukraine and other wars of extermination: the local and the global**Prof. Etienne Balibar (Paris-Ouest University)****Bisan Lectures Series, December 13, 2023**

Abstract: The war in Ukraine and the war in Palestine are certainly not the only cases of “hot” wars in our present or recent past, and they are likely not to remain the only ones in a predictable future. However, they confront us immediately with equally dramatic interpellations. And, with all their differences, which cannot be neglected, tracing back in each case to a long, complex, tragic history, and referring to the circumstances of their beginning (or new beginning), they raise certain common problems. Some are essentially linked to their “local” determinations, such as the highly conflictual issues of appropriation and expropriation which govern the articulation of population and territory, and above all the moral and juridical issues of justice which arise from relations of domination, aggression, destruction, extermination. Others involve a “global” perspective, which however can be inscribed in very different analytical frames of interpretation: international law and the resolution of conflicts, imperialist and anti-imperialist strategies, nationalist policies of militarisation and cosmopolitan forces of demilitarisation. The lecture has no pretention to cover all these dimensions of the situation, not to mention offering “solutions” to bring about a “just peace” in each case. It will try and reflect on this articulation of the two levels and submit provisional lessons of the comparison for discussion. Never forgetting that – as citizens of the world with more or less direct personal ties to the peoples and places currently under destruction and massacre – our principal duty is to act, not to talk. But acting, where and when possible, also requires thinking in common.

Dear colleagues, dear listeners, I have accepted without hesitation but with some concern the invitation to deliver this Bisan Lecture, which is a great honor for me. We are in the middle of a savage war waged by the State of Israel against the population of Gaza, with thousands of adults and a monstrous number of children already killed and many more maimed. Two million people are being pushed out of their homes only to find themselves again under the bombings on the road; whole urban areas are transformed into rubble; schools, hospitals, universities, mosques, theatres, administrative buildings, archaeological sites, in short a whole society is destroyed for ever. Against every law of civilization and international conventions, supplies of food, water, fuel and medical necessities have been barred access to the population. The UN warns of an imminent humanitarian catastrophe of historic magnitude, if it is not already there. Let me then be very clear. Palestinians from all parts of the country or from abroad hardly need to be lectured about this situation and its responsibilities. They also have their views, perhaps multiple, about which outcome could be sought, if there remains one – something we probably should not deny, even in the most desperate moment. I never thought I should speak *for the Palestinians*, much less *instead of them*. I thought I should *speak to them* with my own words and in harmony with other intellectuals, to express our solidarity and commitment to doing whatever is in our capacity to stop the massacre and help liberate the people of Palestine. But it also occurred to me that I should seize the occasion offered by your hospitality to *speak to myself*, trying to clarify what makes it that the current episode in the “Hundred Year’s War on Palestine”, as historian Rachid Khalidi has called it, reveals a new pattern of murderous conflicts and political *aporias* which will affect the condition of all mankind. This is what led me the hazardous project of comparing the war on Ukraine and the war on Palestine, which are taking place at two “frontiers” of the Euro-Mediterranean space and partially involve the same actors (think of the continuous supply of American weapons to both sites). It seemed to me that, from the vantage point of what is happening now in Palestine, some of the implications of the

Russian-Ukrainian war can be more clearly identified, and that, in light of what is unfolding in Ukraine, the articulation of “local”, “indigenous” historical characters and more “global” *cosmopolitical* determinations in the war of Palestine could be interrogated in a meaningful manner. Of course, I am aware that, in addition to the errors that I will make inevitably, there is here a danger of *artificially* superimposing heterogeneous situations, which raise different problems of genealogy, collective identity, statehood, military strategy, rights, international effects. This singularity of each situation ought never to be blurred for the sake of generalization. I will try and keep this danger in my mind, while asking you to accept the comparison as a working hypothesis and an analytic instrument. I trust that it will not detract us from the urgency that, in both cases, calls for resolute political commitment.

As a preliminary step, I want to justify my use of the term “extermination” in the title that was announced. I already received some queries and objections about this choice, which regard both its definition and its range of applicability. To speak of extermination means that we include in the characterization of a war its destructive effects on *populations*, be they made of civilians or soldiers, or a mixture of both, therefore we discard the misleading terminology of “collateral damage”. Within given limits of territory and time, this may range from targeted massacres to the destruction of the environment with all its inhabitants, or most of them. Whether or not this was part of their plan (I tend to believe it was), Hamas on October 7th committed exterminist massacres in its assault on the Israeli *kibbutzim* and festivals, which seemed to replicate the massacres perpetrated by the Jewish paramilitaries on Palestinian villages during the Naqba. The current destruction of Gaza is of completely different proportions : from one day to the next, if there is no cease fire, the borders remains sealed, the humanitarian aid remains blocked, and epidemics develop, it could turn into one of the worst killings since World War II. The Russian troops invading Ukraine committed massacres in Ukrainian villages (as in Butcha) and reduced the city of Mariupol into rubble (just as they had done in Chechnya). They continuously

target civilian neighbourhoods with missiles and bombs. And although the exact figures are covered with military secret, it seems that the protracted “war of position”, reminiscent of the trenches of World War One, in which Ukrainian and Russian troops are now stuck, amounts to a mutual process of extermination, sometimes called “attrition” in military jargon, meaning that the outcome will be decided by the capacity of the two peoples to accept the decimation of its youth. Of course this “exterminist” character is nothing new : in the past it characterized armed conflicts which became “total wars”, notably the two World Wars (whose figures remain out of reach, but were approached proportionately in “local” conflicts such as the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s). It also characterized colonial wars such as the war of Algeria waged by the French or the Vietnam war waged by the U.S. We are impressed by the “return” of *high intensity conflicts*, which had been declared a thing of the past. And we are concerned by the fact – to which I will return – that “Ukraine” and “Palestine” appear as *conflicts without diplomatic solution in a predictable future*, leaving the door open to various forms of “escalation”.

Now the discussion about the character of the wars cannot remain enclosed in such descriptive formulas, because of the moral, juridical, and political issues that are involved. Two more controversial categories have been invoked which are heavily overdetermined: *terrorism* and *genocide*. I must try and clarify my position on their legitimate use in both cases.

As for “terrorism”, the situation is complicated by the widespread but inconsistent rejection of the idea that a movement or organisation could be at the same time a movement of “resistance” and make use “terrorist” methods, an idea which derives from the fact that every State that confronts armed resistance or insurrection labels it terrorist in order to delegitimize it. It is made worse by the fact that, since the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent “War on Terror”, lists of “terrorist organizations” have been issued by various countries and institutions, including the US, the EU, but also Russia and the United Nations, which means that organizations or movements so identified are outlaws, and negotiations are impossible with them (officially at

least). They are “absolute enemies” which can be only combated and destroyed. But this is a logic in which states are at the same time party and judge. I think that we must restart from a description of the *actions* themselves, to attempt a characterization of the forces or institutions which carry them. Hamas is a long-standing organization of resistance of the Palestinian people, with a religiously based ideology (like many others in the past or the present), a complex history of rivalries with others, a strategy oscillating between violent and non-violent actions, and a capacity to elicit support in the population. I understand why Palestinian intellectuals explain that, facing a total war waged in Gaza, they cannot dissociate themselves from Hamas, even when they disagree with its ideology or its strategy. And I understand why the public opinion in the Arab world (and beyond) chooses to isolate the aspect of heroic challenge to their powerful enemy (albeit sometimes at the cost of denying the most disturbing facts). Nevertheless, I see the massacre on October 7th involving various atrocities perpetrated against civilians as a pure terrorist action (also in the literal sense : meant to spread terror), which forces to confer a terrorist character upon the organization itself. However, if we look at the actions committed since decades towards the Palestinian population by the State of Israel (and before it by the Zionist militias), or today in the West Bank by colonists helped by the army, there is no way we can escape the conclusion that Israel is a *terrorist State* (just as Russia was a terrorist State in Chechnya, the US was a terrorist State in Iraq, France in Algeria and other colonies, etc.). The symmetry does not justify the terrorist method in my eyes, nor does it prevent it from harming the cause of the Resistance in the long run. Only it provides a necessary context for the interpretation of what happened and in which sense we use certain terms.

Perhaps the issue of genocide is more complicated, but it is no less crucial for our evaluation of the situations that we face. In the first place we must be aware of the extent to which the tragic history of the two regions and the two conflicts is haunted by the memory of the greatest genocides of the 20th century, the models that they have created for the evaluation of extreme

violence and the function that they have acquired to cement collective identities of “survivors”: the Holocaust of European Jews perpetrated by Nazi Germany throughout Europe with the help of other fascist regimes, and the planned starvation to death of millions of Soviet peasants, most of which were Ukrainians, also targeted because of their nationality, today known as Holodomor. These memories are instrumentalized in Israel and, in a different manner, in Ukraine, but they are real traumas transmitted from generation to generation, generating contradictory affects which range from the anxiety of repetition to the projection of the image of the past executioners on present enemies. This is a process with ambivalent results to be investigated with the help of such psychoanalytic notions as the death drive, and the transference of the trauma from the victims to their own victims (Edward Said once wrote that the tragic fate of the Palestinians is to have become the victims of the victims). But if we concentrate on our two battlefields, there seems to emerge a clear dissymmetry. The Russian propaganda has argued that Ukraine was carrying on a “genocide” in the Eastern region mainly inhabited by Russophones (Donbass). And many Ukrainians tend to describe the intentions of the Russian invasion as a continuation of the Holodomor. In the first case, the category is clearly irrelevant (even if there are systematic violences committed); in the second case, the correct term would be rather *ethnocide*, because the Russian discourse involves a *negation* of the idea of an Ukrainian nation as independent entity, and the possibility for a Ukrainian people to exist historically with its autonomous government and culture, although some war crimes (such as the abduction and forced adoption of children, verge on juridical marks of genocide). Conversely, the category of genocide, or extermination with a genocidal dimension, seems appropriate to describe the catastrophe taking place in Gaza, and its meaning for the survival of the Palestinian people. It should be no surprise that it is used not only by Palestinians who cry for help and sanctions, but by esteemed scholars, authorized spokespersons of the humanitarian organizations and United Nations agencies. I believe that the exceptional invocation by General

Secretary Gutierrez of article 99 of the UN Charter on December 6th can also be interpreted in that sense. Among the comparisons that come to mind are the genocidal massacres perpetrated by the Serbian forces against Muslims in Bosnia in 1995. The crux of the problem is of course whether the combination of mass killings and deportations which has now affected Gaza – however criminal from the point of view of international law - ought to be considered a side effect of the project of “eradicating” Hamas as claimed by the Israeli government, or it forms the *real objective* of the whole military operation. There is ample evidence that the second is the case, arising not only from the declarations of Israeli leaders who promised a “second *Naqba*” (which can be achieved only through exterminist means) and dehumanized the whole population of the Gaza strip, but the combination of the eliminations in Gaza with a brutal intensification of the murders, expulsions and persecutions in the West Bank and Jerusalem. They are complementary elements of a policy no longer aiming at just discriminating the Arab population in Palestine (for which the category *apartheid* has proved adequate), but finally creating a “purely Jewish” territory “from the River to the Sea”, a long-term dream of the “messianic” Zionist extremism now in power. October 7th has only provided the window of opportunity, also in terms of winning the support of the Israeli population or its passive acquiescence, crushing the oppositions.

I want now to go deeper into the comparison, taking two successive steps. The first will try to articulate the issues of *right and justice* with the specific history of each war, which is the basis on which we must rely in order to *take side* in the conflict, something that we cannot avoid lest we become complicit of historical crimes. The second will try to locate the “alliances” and “solidarities” on which the protagonists rely within a *geometry of imperialism* that could explain the antithetic situations in which the main “victims” of the wars, namely the Ukrainian people and the Palestinian people, find themselves with respect to the geopolitical divisions of the

contemporary struggles for hegemony. So, in a sense, I try to look at the dynamics of the wars *inwards and outwards*.

Let me begin with issues of rights and justice. As our starting point, we may consider the notion of *just war*, which is notoriously contested. Each warring party always claims to be justified either legally or by some “superior” interest. Pacifists or supporters of non-violence always of course rejected the notion : no war can be “just”, even if it is forced upon us, and the imperative of non-violence would impose absolute ethical limits to every project of *resisting* an oppressive order, a violation of one’s “life, liberty, and estates” (in Locke’s famous definition of personhood, which can be extended from individuals to collectives). I will not embark on a discussion of principles, but adopt the point of view of international law as it was codified in the Charter of the United Nations (1945): the only *just wars* are *defensive wars*, waged against an attack or an aggression. It is therefore an absolutely dissymmetric concept : war cannot be “just” *on both sides* (although perhaps it can be *unjust on both sides*). This is where the difficulties begin, in fact, because the codification exclusively referred to the “defense” of *States*, or political entities which can be assimilated to States. This leaves entirely open the question of *wars of liberation*, or wars which are waged by oppressed peoples, communities or groups which are not organized (and recognized internationally) as states, or even it would suggest that such wars are by definition illegitimate or “unjust”. This is of course what the subsequent history of decolonization has entirely recast. Their lesson is that we may consider as a *just war* a combat in which a community with a collective sense of identity (something not always simple to ascertain) historically attached to a territory (again a complex notion, from the point of view of “exclusivity” and “frontiers”) expresses and defends a right of self-determination and self-preservation that is denied or threatened by an alien power (usually called an empire). It applies with significant nuances to both the war in Ukraine and the war in Palestine.

The Ukrainian case could seem very simple, because it can't be reasonably denied that, on February 2022, the Russian state (calling itself a "federation") *invaded* the territory of an independent Republic, whose integrity and sovereignty it had recognized after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The continuity of the cruel war waged on Ukrainian territory since then derives from this initial aggression, and has added to it (in the *conduct of the war*) other criminal dimensions (which logically should be brought before the International Criminal Court). What makes things more complicated however is the fact that a more "limited" conflict had been waged since 2014 in the "border region" of Donbass between local separatists and the central government of Ukraine, combining linguistic, social and ideological reasons, a conflict which the Russian government presented as a civil war, and in which it intervened through military supplies and alleged "volunteers" on the side of its "brothers". This was the very beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine, leading to increasing militarization on both sides, especially after Russia had annexed the contested region of Crimea, legally a part of Ukraine but largely inhabited by Russophones supposedly leaning towards Russia. The annexation coincided with the "democratic revolution" in Ukraine (called the *Euromaidan*) which led to ousting from power some "oligarchs" with strong ties to the regime of President Putin, and initiated a process of negotiations in view of integration into the European Union and NATO, in direct opposition to the "geopolitical" interests of the Russian Federation. To make a long story short, we might say that the Russian invasion in 2022 was based on a double rationale. It was an *imperialist war*, trying to rebuild the Empire that had been formed over centuries under the tsarist regime and sanctified by the messianic mission of "Holy Russia", then secularized and expanded by Stalin under the name of communism, now resurrected with the help of a virulent nationalist ideology that counterposes an idealized traditional "Greater Russia" or "Eurasia" to the "degenerate" democratic West. And it was a *preventive political war*, which sought to crush the liberal-democratic orientation of the Ukrainian state before it could become

a model for reformists in Russia itself, who would take advantage of the solidarities between the various “post-soviet” regimes to challenge the combined power of the economic oligarchs and the authoritarian state (Putin himself being a beneficiary of the corruption and a heir to the tradition of the secret police which controlled the Soviet Union under Stalin and after him). For the Ukrainians this double war creates a single existential threat. Their patriotic reaction however, reinforced by the war but also subjected to its vicissitudes in the long-term, is rooted in the enormous complexity of a “national” sentiment that has continuously intertwined moments of independentist struggle and moments of integration into imperial or federal (or quasi-federal constitutions, as we could label the politics of nationalities in the early, “Leninist”, period of the Soviet Union). In a significant (albeit not exclusive) terminology, they present their current resistance as a postponed war of independence which is combined with a process of cultural decolonization. This is an interesting formulation, because it draws our attention to the fact that colonialism has been also *intra-European*, in the framework of different “imperial states”, of which Russia (continued by the Soviet Union after the Stalinian counter-revolution) is only one, with special characteristics (a double expansion and subjugation of peoples towards the West and towards the Orient). In that sense, the broad issue at stake in the current war on Ukraine and the evolutions of the two nationalisms that it pits against one another, as I have argued elsewhere, is a new phase in the long “European civil war” and a decisive experiment in the governance of Europe’s complex internal “ethnic” *composition*.

Let us now return to the case of Palestine and its protracted war with Israel – a civil war as well in a specific sense, since the population and the state of Israel, albeit arising from a typical process of colonization inspired by the Zionist ideology, have long ceased to form an external or *foreign body* in the space of “historic Palestine” which they exclusively claim for themselves, but by force share with the Palestinians. This is even more the case since Israel, continuously expanding the colonisation process, has created a single political space (what Adi Ophir and

Ariella Azoulay called “the One State Condition”) where it is the only sovereign authority, exercising direct and indirect rule, with the paradoxical exception of Gaza, which is (or rather was, before its current annihilation) at the same time an enclave ruled independently and a penitentiary institution totally controlled and permanently punished for its acts of resistance, whether violent or non-violent.

As a question of two peoples competing for the disposition of the same land, the long war in Palestine formally opposes *claims of right*, or simply “rights”, each of them seeking to establish its legitimacy through a combination of historical narrative and strategic actions. Israel’s legitimacy, which is effective in terms of political cohesion and external recognition, rests on three “sources” or “foundations” whose combination has proved extremely powerful. The first is *imaginary*, it is the Zionist (and, before Zionism, the old Jewish) conviction that the Jews today everywhere in the world are “descendants” of the people supposedly expelled from the Holy Land after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, who always dreamed of returning “home”. The second is the crucial fact that after the partition decided by the United Nations in 1947 and the victory of the Jewish army over the Palestinians and the Arab States in 1948, the State of Israel was *internationally recognized* by all “camps” (with the remaining exception of the Arab states, who nevertheless increasingly cooperate with it economically), and became a full member of the “international community” of Nation-States. And the third, which is not juridical but moral and also political, derives from the fact that Israel has conceived of itself and appeared as a *place of refuge*, a sanctuary for the survivors of the Holocaust and other Jews persecuted in the world, which have no “State of their own”. Leaving aside the imaginary foundation in the “origins” of the Jewish people, I want to concentrate on the other two sources and their historical evolution. Of course I must bracket many significant episodes and details which would impose qualifications, but I will submit the following analysis: albeit strongly rooted in its juridical and moral sources, the legitimacy of Israel (or its “right” to rule over

Palestinian territory and rename it) was always *conditional*. It could be verified over the long term only on the condition of being *accepted* by the Palestinians themselves: a condition obviously very difficult, if not impossible to achieve (or only at the cost of an extraordinary political invention), that in fact was never met. But not only it was not met, it was consciously and systematically destroyed in its very possibility. Over time Israel has destroyed its own legitimacy. The result is a reversal of the initial situation, a radical *delegitimation of Israel as a “decent” State*, something which can give pleasure to its enemies, but is likely to have dramatic consequences, because it will increasingly push Israel towards claiming *unconditional legitimacy*, or right to “defend” itself at any cost against any adversary or critique: which is what we observe today.

But let’s be a little more specific. Israel’s *legal legitimacy* rests on international declarations and acts, but it is bound to be contested, because its territorial basis comes from *colonization*, both in the sense of the *immigration* (“settlement”) into the country of foreigners of various origin and trajectory; and in the more conflictual sense of the *grabbing of land (Landnahme)* taken from the indigenous population through various procedures of dispossession, which always ultimately involve force. Contrary to Golda Meir’s infamous formula, Palestine was not and is not “a land without a people for a people without a land”. Legitimizing colonization is a huge paradox (increasingly so in the age of “decolonization”), but if it can be imagined, as a way to move from partition to transaction or *partage* (sharing, cohabiting), and from *partage* to recognition, or equal dignity, it would require a dramatic moral and political revolutionary change. Israel never embarked on that way: not only it did not acknowledge that its appropriation of the territory on which to establish a “Jewish State” was “opposable” or questionable *with right*, but it expanded it to every part of Palestine which the war allowed them to control (or it waged “preventive wars” to allow for this expansion), ultimately officialising the goal of Jewish rule over the totality of Palestine “from the River [Jordan] to the

[Mediterranean] See”, which had been heralded by its own extremists. With the help of powerful sponsors abroad, it could blatantly contradict international law in implementing the colonization of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. As for Israel’s *moral legitimacy*, resting on the mission to provide a sanctuary for the victims and survivors of the Holocaust, or a place where they could be liberated from *statelessness* and reclaim what Hannah Arendt has called “the right to have rights”, it was also immediately questionable in the sense that it rescued masses of refugees at the cost of creating masses of others, violently expelled, terrorized and denied the right of return. Again, it would be verified only on the paradoxical condition of Jews subjecting their own citizenship (or political membership) to the creation of the *citizenship of the others*, which cannot be paternalistically conceded, but ought to become recognized as their own initiative, and given its institutional conditions, be it in the form of a “two state solution” or a “one state” with multiple modalities of belonging. “Equality or nothing”, Edward Said famously called one of his collections of political essays, after Oslo. Not only Israel allowed no such process of equalization to begin, but it did the exact opposite: instituting discrimination and continuous harassment of the Palestinians, even when they had formal Israeli citizenship, which led to the creation of a state of *apartheid* over the whole territory. The notion of the sanctuary was reversed into what has been rightly called an “ethnocracy”, where Jews from everywhere can come to see themselves as a privileged, or as a “superior” people. To which we may add the deplorable transformation of the memory of the Holocaust from a symbol of inhumanity teaching lessons of political morality to every individual and every people into a “private” instrument of domination and self-justification; This generates another devastating form of delegitimation.

Now the question becomes : does the increasing delegitimation of the State of Israel (of which we are going to observe rapid developments in the wake of the current war), entail an increased legitimacy for the rights of the Palestinian people, or a greater verification of their own claim

of rights? That is the key issue for the anticipation of a reversal of the tendency, a *positive result* of the ongoing confrontation, however unlikely it may appear in the midst of the destructions and the apparent incapacity (or unwillingness) of mediating external forces to detain the catastrophe. It seems to me however that the answer is bound to remain ambivalent: it is yes and no. The answer is *yes indeed*, because the Palestinians have no need to become “recognized” or “justified” for their *right* to inhabit and work on the land where their ancestors have lived for generations to exist. The question is a *practical one*, not a question of “normative” conditionality. And, from the practical point of view, it can be said that, while the State of Israel and the majority of its population does not even admit that there exists something like a *people of Palestine*, with a national identity rooted in the past forming an horizon of expectations for the future, the situation is rapidly evolving on the side of the public opinion in the world at large, which is a crucial condition for the legal constitution of Palestine as a “political subject” at the international level, for instance in the form of *full* acceptance of a Palestinian state by the United Nations (be it a Palestinian state in exile). What for a long period was proclaimed by peoples and – more or less sincerely – governments in the Arab and Islamic States, the “Global Left” including anti-imperialist citizens in the “North”, who viewed Palestine as the last great case of emancipation against the colonial principle after the end of the Apartheid system in South-Africa, is becoming a very widely shared conviction which transgresses barriers of civilization and tends towards *universalization*. But perhaps also the answer is also *No*, because obstacles have accumulated before the constitution of the Palestinian people as an autonomous *political subject*, an effective agent of its own emancipation. The war as it unfolds now will certainly increase the feelings of solidarity within the people, but not necessarily its political capacity to act as one subject. Of course this incapacity has been Israel’s permanent objective, it has been brutally or insidiously imposed from the outside, through repression (particularly the systematic imprisonment of national leaders) and through

corruption, but it has also developed from inside. What has been admirable (and politically meaningful) in the history of the Palestinian people since the Naqba and through all the vicissitudes of the conflict, before and after 67, before and after Oslo, across the intifadas, was the conservation of the *moral unity* and the spirit of resistance among the dispersed fractions of the Palestinian people, outside and inside Israel as a juridical constituency. But what has become increasingly problematic (despite some remarkable attempts at reversing the course, like the “Prisoner’s document” in 2006) was the *political unity* of the organizations and figures which represent the people as a force asserting its place in history and give it a public voice. With the almost complete subordination of the Palestinian Authority to the injunctions of the State of Israel, and the choice of Hamas to periodically make use of terrorist methods that create in the population as much anxiety or repulsion as emulation and encouraging, this internal dissociation seems more insurmountable than ever. At least when seen from my external place of observation, reason why I submit this with extreme modesty and hypothetically. Asking in particular if and how “third parties” could emerge that overcome the rift.

A last observation comes to mind when confronting lessons from the two cases that we discuss: Ukraine and Palestine, from the point of view of their place in a discussion on *justice*: not only the justice that refers to a position in war, on one side or the other of the divide between aggressor and victim, or oppressor and resistant, but the justice that can acquire a universal resonance, the justice that confers a universalistic dimension upon the *claim of rights* that some actors embody in the war (not all of them, obviously). A striking similitude between the Ukrainian cause and the Palestinian cause that creates a virtual convergence among them comes precisely from the fact that they appear as incarnations of *universal principles* of self-determination and resistance to oppression, reason why, in different parts of the world, there are today activists who make valuable efforts to *simultaneously* support and articulate the two causes. However, this remains practically limited because they are also perceived as inseparable

from antithetic *geopolitical alliances* and “camps” engaged in another kind of “war”, sometimes described as the “new cold war”, of which they would form only partial aspects, local “moments”, or into which they would become inevitably absorbed. Paradoxically, because of the tension that tears apart the *cosmopolitical* realm between a point of view of the *universal* values and a logic of the *global* and the global relations of forces, the affinities between the “just causes” of peoples asserting their right to self-determination are not easily perceived, or even denied by their supporters. For this reason, in a brief manner (much too quick, in fact), I want to devote some final considerations to the global dimensions of the two wars, that I will subsume under the name : *geometry of imperialism*, borrowed from the late economist and political theorist Giovanni Arrighi, one of the founding figures of “alter-globalization”.

The first thing that I would insist must never be forgotten, is the fact that the essence of a political cause never resides in their being associated with global oppositions between geopolitical forces which are rooted in economic interests and ideological “systemic” antagonisms. To believe the opposite is a negative legacy of “campism”, the political logic inherited from the divides of the Cold War, to which I will return. This is why it is crucial to reconstruct the specific history of each war, each people, each territory in its own local terms, and to describe the modalities in which a war has developed out of conditions and choices that were made by their *own actors*: Russians, Ukrainians, Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, with all their internal divisions and their complete history. The assessment of justice does not derive from the fact that Ukraine rallies the “free world” or the “world of democracies” against a coalition of authoritarian regimes, or the fact that the Palestinian struggle for dignity and independence forms part of a global “anti-hegemonic” struggle, now challenging the planetary domination of the US. On the other hand, however, there is no such thing as an *isolated* action and transformation of any people in the world, today less than ever. This is clearly true for all the actors of the wars that we discuss, although with radical differences. Contrary to what the

Western coalition supporting Ukraine announced and wanted to believe, the war has not *isolated Russia* economically, diplomatically, even militarily: rather it has created the possibility of a new system of alliances around it, which is perhaps fragile but not arbitrary. And although it may appear that the Palestinian people is tragically isolated in the geopolitical environment, because of the refusal of the American and European powers to impose obligations on Israel, which they “compensate” through humanitarian aid, thus in a sense “subsidizing” colonization, but also because the official support of the Arab states most of the time has proved to be essentially instrumental and self-interested, the fact is also, as I indicated a moment ago, that the Palestinian cause occupies a central place in *popular movements of emancipation*, which periodically challenge the established order. And the Palestinians themselves are part of a broad system of “diasporic” solidarities. However it seems to me that the most interesting and difficult question regards the contradictory relationships of the two causes that I tried to compare with the forces and the policies of American imperialism, an imperialism that perhaps is no longer unrivalled in the world, but still exercises a military and financial hegemony on which the outcome of the wars will completely depend. A simplified but eloquent formulation of the paradox would sound as follows: the bombs that destroy the houses and kill the people in Gaza are provided on a daily basis by the US, just as the imposition of a cease fire reclaimed by the United Nations is prevented by the veto of the United States, which has immediately declared “unconditional support” for the “right of self-defense” of Israel after October 7th. On the Eastern European front, it is becoming increasingly visible that, if the soldiers who die in combating Russian troops (also dying) are Ukrainians (with a few foreign volunteers), the weapons are now European and especially American : a cessation or even a limitation of their delivery (which depends on hazardous political continuities) would almost immediately entail a defeat of the Ukrainian people and a destruction or dismembering of their country, whose integrity they are defending. The US support to the Israeli war is in continuity

with a dependency of its existence and policy on American subsidy that has been so strong over decades that, at some point, Israel could be described as an “externalized” member state of the Federation, albeit enjoying the capacity to impose its own priorities on its metropolis. Whereas the US (and European) support to the Ukrainian independence or “decolonization” is an outcome of the strategic moves that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Socialist “camp”, hence the transformation of the global divide between the capitalist and the socialist powers into a new struggle for hegemony among “neo-imperialist” states of unequal strength and with various internal political regimes. The conclusion to be drawn is that the current wars of extermination are effectively taking place within an “imperialist geometry”, but they are not to be judged according to the old “campist” syntax, be it formulated in terms of a conflict between “democracies” and “totalitarian states”, or a conflict between the “Western imperialism” (under US hegemony, organized by NATO) and the “emerging peoples” with a tricontinental basis. We must invent a new cosmopolitical understanding of the world to orientate our solidarities with the struggles of the peoples who fight for their liberty, and for them to navigate their alliances and enemies.