

## ***Facing the War on Ukraine***

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Here we are in the ninth month of the war triggered by the Russian invasion. In this article, I will try to put in order some of my reflections on the situation in Ukraine and its planetary extensions [1]. I will formulate hypotheses and pose questions, but I have no absolute certainty as to how to answer them. On several points I even wonder if these answers exist without the desire to project ready-made ideological categories onto the reality that besieges us. But this is not a reason, quite the contrary, not to try to articulate what we already knew and what we are learning from day to day, so as to shed light on the stakes and the possibilities of a conflict that concerns us all directly. Facing the war in Ukraine, facing the battle raging around the villages of Donbass, facing the threats that are accumulating in the vicinity, we cannot behave as mere "engaged observers" who are more or less affected by events. It is our future, our "common world," that is at stake and its physiognomy will also depend on our interpretations and our choices. In this sense, all things considered, though we are neither combatants nor the direct victims of the conflict, let us never forget, I would nevertheless say that we are in the war, because it is taking place "at home" [chez nous] and "for us" [pour nous]. We have no choice, alas, as my friend the philosopher Sandro Mezzadra proposes in a beautiful lesson in revolutionary pacifism, to "desert the war" [2]. I do not conclude, however, that we should let ourselves be "mobilized" and carried away by it in an unreflective way. The margin of choice is very frail, but should we decide in advance that it is non-existent?

What war, however, are we talking about here? On this point, already, uncertainty reigns. For beyond the fact that the Ukrainian territory (partly occupied or annexed since 2014) was invaded on the morning of February 24, 2022 at the behest of Vladimir Putin, and that the Russian army continues to perpetuate abuses there, day after day, that have led to gigantic displacements of populations –also to exceptionally courageous and intelligent actions of resistance by the Ukrainian people– we would need a more complete view of the ramifications and backlashes of the war in a series of other places, perhaps throughout the world. A perception of the spaces that form the "theatre" of the war, and how they change as it lasts and changes pace, will determine not only our judgement of its historical "character," but also our idea of the politics it calls for or, conversely, prohibits. We never tire of repeating the "formula" of Clausewitz's *Vom Krieg*: "war is the simple continuation of politics by other means." [3] Would it not be just as relevant to ask ourselves, here and now, what politics "continues the war," or will emerge in its aftermath (if there is to be one), as an institution and as a praxis, on the basis of the conditions it will have created and the problems it will have revealed?

I would like to begin the instruction of these questions, for the moment without response, in choosing three points of entry: "What's in a name?" or how do we define the war in order to name it? What does it tell us about the functions of nationalism, its fluctuations, and its relationship to the "form of the nation" (or "nation form") itself? What are the political spaces whose "borders" intersect and, possibly, become displaced in the war?

## Names and definitions

In order to grasp the character of the ongoing war, I believe that several grids must be applied, operating at different levels and highlighting different modalities of the conflict. The war is developing in multiple "theatres" with different intensities and rhythms. It is crucial to describe this intrinsic overdetermination, upon which its evolution and consequences will depend, even if our uncertainties are increased rather than dissipated. This will not prevent us from deciding what the main aspect is, a decision based on the most rational possible analysis of the multiple dimensions of war, but which will never be simply deducible from them and will therefore remain subjective. This decision "commands" our political judgment on the stakes of the war and our attempts to intervene from the place where we are situated by history and geography, that is to say in Europe and as "citizens of Europe" (which includes many foreigners from all over the world, because Europe is de facto a cosmopolitical entity).

I propose to consider at least four superimposed levels, but this enumeration calls for some preliminaries which I will pass over as quickly as possible. First of all, the character of a war certainly depends on the objectives pursued by the belligerents, but it cannot be defined simply on the basis of their intentions or their declarations: they must be related to the constitution of the institutions and forces (generally nations) which give them effectiveness, which always depends on determined historical conditions. This is why there are, without doubt, major types of war, beyond even legal distinctions (civil or foreign wars, wars that are compatible with international law or not...) and polemological categories (wars of conquest or defense - or even of "preventive" defense, of "high" or "low" intensity, symmetrical or asymmetrical...), which we are seeking to identify by resorting to comparisons. Several would be relevant here, some of which have been regularly invoked since the beginning of the Ukrainian War, and others carefully avoided: the wars in Algeria and Vietnam, the occupation of Palestine, the wars in Yugoslavia, the war in Chechnya, the invasion of Iraq by the United States... But in the final analysis, any war that begins anew is a new war and comparisons, although they may serve to avoid biased evaluations, provide counterexamples above all. Finally, any war that lasts and generates what Clausewitz called "friction" effects, undergoes several phases of movement or position, often associated with the drawing of fronts and borders, which cause its character to evolve and the relations of forces to change. In this case, after the invasion phase itself, in which the Ukrainian army and territorial units succeeded in pushing back Russian tanks and regaining the initiative, the war became frozen in an uncertain and devastating confrontation, devouring both humans and munitions, concentrated in the eastern and southern regions of the country that Russia is seeking to annex. Thus, we apparently return, but with greater intensity, to what had been the initial theatre, which also means that its true beginning dates from 2014 and that we are not on the hundredth day but, already, in the eighth year of conflict. However, it is only in light of current developments that the full implications of the conflict are beginning to be seen.

Let's try a first definition. The war of the Ukrainians is properly what must be called a war of national independence, which in Ukrainian is called maïdan, and calls for comparison with other historical moments when the constitution of a sovereign nation, "liberating" itself from subjection to an empire, passed through armed confrontation with the latter: the secession of Ireland from British rule at the beginning of the last century, the wars of national liberation of the European colonies (or semi-colonies) in Africa and Asia, but also, more distantly though symbolically significant, the "insurrections" that gave birth to the modern nations detached from the English, Spanish or Ottoman Empires. And here one will undoubtedly observe that Ukraine (which had

enjoyed within the USSR the status of a "federal republic" and, under this title, held a seat in the United Nations) had already become a sovereign state, internationally recognized, following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. This point is fundamental because it makes the Russian invasion an open transgression of international law, which qualifies one of the belligerents as the aggressor and the other, the victim of aggression (the "aggrieved" [agressé]), as entitled to call on foreign aid to defend itself. But on the political level, as reflected in Putin's speeches and in all of the propaganda justifying the occupation and "Russification" of the conquered territories, we see that the imperial power - continued on this point by the communist regime despite the democratic and federative principles proclaimed by the October Revolution of 1917 - had never considered the independence of the territories that had belonged to the Empire as legitimate. It pretends to exercise something like a right of "return." [4] That is why it can be rightly said that the Ukrainians are engaged in a war of independence that had been postponed. If they win, the sovereignty and very existence of their nation will become a *fait accompli* and will no longer be contestable. Of course, they will have paid a hefty price in terms of destruction and suffering.

We cannot, however, leave it at that. The reference to imperial continuity in the space that stretches from the Pacific Ocean to the Polish border (and sometimes beyond), but above all the reference to the way in which the Russian Revolution challenged this imperial form in order to finally restore and "modernize" it, imposes on us the need to consider things from another angle and on another stage. [5] The comparison that is necessary here, too often censored in commentaries, is with the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s –even if the scale of destruction and the number of troops and equipment involved is disproportionate (though the nature of the war crimes being committed then and now is of the same order). [6] From this point of view, what we have characterized as a war of independence must also appear to us as an example of a post-socialist war, having its source in the collapse of the communist regimes in Europe and, more profoundly, in the inability of these regimes to find a solution to the 'question of nationalities' inherited from the empires: which ultimately led to an intensification of nationalisms and their mutual hostility, further aggravated by the social disaster of the "over-liberalization" policies applied to them after 1989 by triumphant neoliberalism. But the historical depth of which we have need is greater still, because the history of European Communism is an integral part of a larger and more complex cycle, that of the "European Civil War" that began in 1914, linking imperialist war and revolution, then leading to the triumph of Nazism in defeated Germany, surrounded by a constellation of fascist regimes and movements across Europe, followed by the Second World War, and then by the Cold War between the two "camps" and the division of the continent, which was brought to an end by the democratic revolutions of 1989 and the fall of the Iron Curtain (if that truly was an "end"). Considered in this context –that of a tragic continental history, made up of revolutions and counter-revolutions, of nations annihilated or restored (like Poland), splintered or reunited (like Germany), of destructions and reconstructions, of massacres and genocides, of displacements of populations and borders, of a to and fro circuit between totalitarianism and democracy, of which the traces are omnipresent throughout our continent– the current war is not only a European war, as I and others have said elsewhere, but it is a new episode of the European Civil War. [7] It demonstrates at the same time that the European Civil War was not concluded, that the problems from which it arose and which it reproduced were not solved by the post-communist order which, for a moment, made some believe in an "end of history." As a result, the repetition of destruction, terror strategies, and mass exoduses, all of which constitute a manifestation of total war, become less enigmatic without being justified in the least. Perhaps we Europeans had forgotten the history that, all together, we "make" through our hot and cold wars interspersed with truces, and state or diplomatic re-foundations.

Once again, however, having reached this point, we must change our perspective and consider vaster expanses. The European wars of the twentieth century were, intrinsically, World Wars, and conversely, the World Wars gave Europe a place that was not exclusive, but always central, as the theatre of battles, as the historical seat of the "powers" that confronted each other, and of the peoples that suffered the greatest effects. The current war in Ukraine –which is likely to overflow this initial "theatre"– is taking place at a time when Europe has been irreversibly provincialised (which does not mean, as we can see, that it has lost all strategic and geopolitical function): this would be more like a globalised war, or one "in the process of globalisation."<sup>[8]</sup> This only makes sense, however, if we begin to think of it as a "hybrid" war, both "hot" and "cold", conducted on the terrain of technology and the economy, policy areas from which combat and bombing cannot be dissociated, and into which several regions of the world with their populations and their states are gradually being drawn in a distribution that is essentially dissymmetrical. Indeed, the belligerents are parties to global alliances that provide them with direct or indirect support, which, one could say, allows alliance members to wage a "war by proxy." Given the "reserved" posture adopted by China on the military level (which can be explained by the apparent self-sufficiency of Russian armaments, but also undoubtedly by the fact that, from a geopolitical perspective, China's strategy consists of both supporting Russia in the face of the "West" while also dissociating itself from Russia in order to advance other objectives), this last characteristic obviously applies above all to the "Western" camp. It is clear that without a constant, ever-growing, flow of arms, military technology, and intelligence, the Ukrainian army, despite its valor and spirit of sacrifice, would not withstand the onslaught of the Russian army. And above all, notwithstanding the terminology, the Western coalition that has come to the aid of Ukraine is in fact waging an "economic war" to try to force Russia to buckle. It is highly significant that, on both sides, the name "war" becomes an object of denial: the Russians speak of a "special military operation" and the West says that they are applying "sanctions". Above all, one must take the measure, on a global level, of the combined effects of material destruction, the blockade prohibiting the export (and leading to the loss) of millions of tons of cereals, and the rampant economic crisis induced by sanctions on energy: the world is entering into an inflationary spiral fraught with social conflicts and the threat of famine or even starvation is looming. Naturally, it is the countries of the "Global South" that are threatened most directly or are already suffering the repercussions of a total, hybrid, war. In reality, they too are now "in the war" with us, without being officially "at war". <sup>[9]</sup>

Finally, I think we need to add to our definitions a "virtual", but not imaginary, characteristic that has to do with the intensity of war rather than the extent of it. A few weeks ago, in an article in support of his government that immediately caused controversy in Germany, Jürgen Habermas raised the possibility that escalation would lead to the outbreak of a nuclear war between Russia and NATO (thus, essentially, the United States) in which all of Europe would be threatened with annihilation.<sup>[10]</sup> Many commentators have already pointed out that Russian leadership is mobilizing the possible use of nuclear weapons (including the occupation of nuclear power plants) as an instrument of blackmail or intimidation, and the idea of a "colonial war under a nuclear umbrella" to force the adversary (i.e., NATO, the United States) to limit the level and scope of its intervention has been suggested by others. But what Habermas is suggesting is a more general issue: as soon as we enter a total war, which carries with it the risk of a "rise to extremes", the evolution of the balance of forces and in particular the inability of one of the belligerents to achieve its objectives, considered "vital", by conventional means, or the need for the other to raise the level of its commitment to longer-range weapons, may lead to the use (tactical or strategic) of the nuclear weapons at their disposal. As analysts of the new

configuration of wars such as Günther Anders and Edward P. Thompson argued in their time (criticizing the idea of a "balance of terror" that would paradoxically guarantee peace through mutual deterrence), it is the very existence of nuclear weapons that brings with it the possibility of a catastrophe, or of a collective suicide of humanity, in the face of which it cannot be guaranteed that states will have the "intelligence" (Clausewitz) to hold back. What Thompson called the exterminism at the time of the "Euromissile" crisis (in the early 1980s) cannot be considered as "unthinkable".<sup>[11]</sup> Because it is not unthinkable, it must be thought of, or its possibility must be included in the definition of the war in progress.

This brings us back to the need for a subjective decision— if possible an enlightened one, though, by definition, also uncertain and risky— as to the articulation and hierarchy of the dimensions of the current war, and the judgment we apply to them. It seems to me that the immediate priority is to support the struggle of the Ukrainian people, who are expressing their demand for national independence: not because this is in itself an absolute value, but because the Ukrainians' right to self-determination is being trampled underfoot, and the "total" war being waged against them is accompanied by massive violations of human rights, the legal qualification of which is still open to debate, but which cannot be below that of war crimes. Their defeat would be morally unacceptable and disastrous for the rule of international law (as have been, previously, the defeat of other nations, including recent ones – think of Iraq in 2003). This support is wholehearted, but it is not blind to its conditions and implications. I therefore turn to the other two points I announced earlier in this text.

### **Nations and nationalisms**

"Nationalism": the fatal word is once again at the center of the European political space, with its procession of killings, intolerance, and exclusions. It is necessary to reconsider what seems to give the "nation form," among other social formations, a singularity and a privilege: what legitimizes it? To what extent and why should it be the unsurpassable framework of collective consciousness and historical action? It is clear that Ukrainians who fight for their independence and heroically resist forces many times their size are animated by a sense of national unity and a corresponding desire for autonomy. In this sense they are all nationalists, there is no other word to describe it. This does not imply that they are all nationalists in the same way or for the same reasons. Above all, it does not imply any equivalence with the official nationalism of the Russian state although, at a very abstract level, they are two species of the same genus, which are reinforced by their antagonism. Not only because it is not possible to assimilate such unequal forces and such asymmetrical positions under international law (which makes the self-determination of peoples an unconditional value, provided that it is recognized by the community of other nations, which gives rise to many fluctuations). But because the objective, the ethical and political substance of these opposing nationalisms is not the same on both sides. The propaganda of the Russian regime exploits without measure the "extremist" (even fascist) components of Ukrainian political life in recent years (which are real, but very much in the minority), as well as the imaginary of the Great Patriotic War against Nazism as "Russified" by the state already in the time of communism, to describe Ukrainian nationalism as a resurgence of Hitlerism. But it is clear that in reality it is the current Russian regime that is displaying totalitarian characteristics, ranging from the violent repression of opponents by political police and the suppression of freedom of expression to the ideological construction of an official neo-imperialism, attributing to the "Russian people", portrayed as a true people of Masters, a superior value and historical mission. Two political axioms, it seems to me, follow from this. The first is that there is no national formation without "nationalism." To reject nationalism completely

as an absolute reactionary ideology is meaningless, unless we believe that we should (and can) get rid of the form of the nation itself (which, of course, has been the position of part of the socialist and anarchist tradition). But the second is that the fluctuations of nationalism and the metamorphoses of the nation in history are correlated. The history of nations (largely determined by the wars they have fought or in which they have been caught: such wars, such nations, I have proposed elsewhere)[12] generates spectacular changes in the meaning and in the function of nationalist discourse, which can go so far as reversing their meaning (think of French nationalism in the years 1940-1945, and then in the colonial wars). But the latter in turn is likely to push the nation or the "national defense" in the most opposing directions (the same case in point). What is politically decisive, therefore, are the proportions, the "unstable balances" that are established between antithetical forms of nationalism, all under the same name. This is why it is not really relevant, in my opinion, to ask what Ukrainian nationalism is "in itself", because the question does not admit a univocal answer. Rather, the question is: what happens to Ukrainian nationalism during the war and under its influence?

Once again, I feel the fragility of the hypotheses I am about to formulate. I know that they could be disproved overnight, and yet I think it is useful to consider them. The key issue, it seems to me, is the status of cultural difference, particularly of multilingualism, in the institutions of the nation-state. The meaning and political effects of Ukrainian nationalism depend on it now and will depend on it in the future. Using categories that have become commonplace in political sociology and proposing an "optimistic" scenario inspired by the Ukrainian resistance and the kind of patriotism that it expresses, I will say that the identity of the Ukrainian nation is ideally shifting from ethnos to demos, from "ethnic nationalism" to "civic" nationalism, or better, to a tendential prevalence of the latter over the former.[13] This is the lesson of what happened when, thwarting the plans of the invader, the two "linguistic communities" coexisting in Ukraine and which, let us never forget, are not separated from each other, but largely overlap genealogically, sociologically, and geographically (so that the majority of citizens are in fact bilingual depending on many variables), have united in the same patriotic resistance and with the shared goal of an independent Ukrainian nation-state.[14] Many forces are undoubtedly pulling in the opposite direction, but they are not the majority. This fact is decisive.

Let us take a quick detour here to compare the "nationalist" ideologies involved. On the Russian, neo-imperial side, it is the very possibility of a separate nation-state that is rejected from the start. There are internal contradictions, no doubt, between several discourses. One variant is centered on the idea of the "Russian world" (Ruskyi Mir), a single substantial entity to which the three "brother peoples", Great-Russian, White-Russian and Little-Russian (Ukrainian), are supposed to belong indissolubly under the eminent authority of the first. This genealogy is characterized by the close combination of the religious and the linguistic spheres, and its meaning is given symbolically by the "transfer" of the Metropolitan See from Kiev to Moscow in the fifteenth century. Another variant, quite similar to the discourse of Western colonialism, presents Ukrainian as a provincial "dialect" and those who speak it as representatives of an inferior race (of muzhiks), whose incorporation into the (great) Russian Empire would finally permit them to "enter history". But these contradictions in no way prevent the spokespersons of these respective ideologies (such as the Patriarch of Moscow, Cyril, or the "Eurasian" theoretician Alexander Dugin, both of whom are close to Putin) from finding themselves in the service of the same imperialism and the same denial of the Ukrainians' right to exist as a people. And one understands, as a result, how Ukrainian nationalism has constructed its own discourse, affirming the continuity of the people-nation in Ukraine through the centuries, and identifying its existence with its permanent resistance to the enterprise of elimination led by the

Empires that have dominated it. This narrative projects a mythical continuity between completely heterogeneous social formations (the Kiev Kingdom or the Rus' of the early Middle Ages, and the contemporary constitution of the Ukrainian nation), separated from each other by long periods of alienation and acculturation (despite the symbolic events that would attest to the same "project" of refoundation and return to the origins, for example the principality or "hetmanate" of the Cossacks in the seventeenth century, or the "Central Rada" contemporary with the Russian revolution and a stakeholder in its internal struggles between 1917 and 1922). Obviously, the idea of an underground continuity based on language, in accordance with Romantic theories of the constitution of peoples, goes hand in hand with that of a collective identity that the imperial power (essentially that of the Russian Empire, since "multicultural" Austria had other priorities) would have sought in vain to eradicate, in what today would be called an ethnocide. Let me be clear, however: this historically problematic narrative is the analogue of a very large number of other national myths of origin and of descentance that can be found all over the world, with their specificities and institutional functions. I do not seek to oppose it with another term, but - with what I think I know - I want to indicate why the heritage of the past in Ukraine is probably a little more complex.

As its name already indicates (meaning "march," and thus "border region" in Slavic, and which began to be claimed in the nineteenth century before being formalized by the USSR), Ukraine is a Borderland, or "pays-frontière" (border country) whose limits have always been floating in the North, South, East, and the West, and whose popular culture has been marked over the centuries by the seal of multiplicity and hybridity. The conflicts of class, as much as of power and of state formation, that took place there never ceased to (re)configure the sense of "belonging," while the country was divided and re-divided between empires (or kingdoms, like the great Polish-Lithuanian state of the Renaissance), each of which had its own privileged class, its own way of building hegemony. The history of Ukraine, therefore, is the history of changes in identity, but also the history of demographic revolutions that pass through colonizations, deportations, and migrations of population. It is also the history of genocides that leave an indelible mark: the Holodomor or the extermination of peasants through famine organized by the Bolsheviks at the time of collectivization, and the Shoah or extermination of Jews through massacres and death camps perpetrated by the Nazis with the help of Ukrainian auxiliaries during the Second World War. And what "survives" this history in the memory strata of today's nation is not so much one single identity (even if that is what is officially promoted), as is the bilingualism and the biculturalism of the majority of the population, probably reinforced by the long-term effects of Soviet schooling, under which the majority of the current generations of middle and working classes were formed.

The main factor in the constitution of patriotism as illustrated in the current war is not to be sought in the ethnic narrative (at least not in that narrative alone) but rather in the democratic invention (as Claude Lefort would have said) embodied by the Euromaidan revolution of 2013 and 2014: it engenders and underpins a notion of citizenship as participation in the public domain, distinct from, or capable of overcoming, membership of the ethnic community. It may be that this invention is not pure, that it is crisscrossed by sectarian conflicts, that it is the object of manipulation on the part of "oligarchs" and corrupt politicians (even though it was mainly directed against their influence), and that it ended in confrontations between "nationalist" militias (in the narrow, exclusive sense): what is indisputable, however, is that this revolution was a mass popular and democratic insurrection, all the more significant if we compare it to the developments towards authoritarian ideologies and "post-democratic" regimes that are taking place throughout the region (including within the European Union).[15] This is clearly one of the

reasons why the dictatorship set up in Russia, under the authority and for the benefit of Vladimir Putin, wanted this invention's immediate disappearance, and sought to obtain it at the price of war: because this invention based on a revolt against corruption and attracted by the democratic form of the liberal political systems of the West (which guarantee political pluralism, even if they have their own "oligarchic" dimension), or even by more radical forms of "assembly democracy," risked appearing to the citizens of the Russian Federation as the model to follow in order to fight against the same evils as their neighbors and "brothers."

It must be said here again: there are forces pushing in diametrically opposing directions, and I am fully aware of this. The most powerful and dangerous is the war itself, because it cannot fail to sow in the brutalized Ukrainian population the seeds of a tenacious Russophobia that will not only target Russia as a state or its regime, but will reach its people and its culture, and even its language as many Ukrainian citizens themselves are accustomed to using it (and which is therefore also "theirs"). How will this antithesis charged with contradictory potential evolve? This is the great unknown on which hangs, in the war and beyond the war, the destiny of the national formation long underway.

### **Geopolitical Spaces**

I now return to the idea of the multiple 'wars' that are superimposed on the Russian- Ukrainian war and their political spaces, each with its own 'borders.' What is immediately striking is a paradox inherent in the contemporary situation and increasingly accentuated by the war itself: nations fighting for their independence, especially if they are dealing with an empire or a political system seeking to resurrect the form of an old empire, have as their main objective the recognition and respect of their sovereignty. Hence the insistence on territorial integrity, freedom of diplomatic choice, etc. But all sovereignty in reality is limited, even for powerful nations and even more so for "small" nations, because in today's world it is based on the existence of "guarantees" and therefore of alliances, which are correlative with constraints. Obviously, things have not stopped changing in this respect, in Europe or elsewhere. At the time of the Cold War, which we now understand opposed two "imperialist" systems of a different nature, the autonomy of the "sovereign" nations within each camp became more and more formal, apart from the hegemonic powers, albeit according to very heterogeneous diplomatic, military, and economic modalities (the European Union in its successive formats has played an ambiguous role in subjugating its members to the objectives of the "Western camp" while at the same time strengthening the negotiating capacities of the European bloc, while NATO served to domesticate allies as much as to balance the power of the opposing socialist camp where only "limited sovereignty" reigned - with the notable and decisive long-term exception of Chinese dissidence). Has this framework disappeared today? The war shows, it seems to me, that this is not entirely the case, even if the balance of power and the institutional arrangements have changed profoundly. It is rather a renewal of the mechanism of constraint within new geopolitical conditions. It is very clear that Ukraine has no chance of defending and constructing itself as a stable nation-state, assured of its future, unless it is incorporated into a dual supranational system. On the one hand, it must be integrated into the Western military alliance, i.e., NATO, a structure which is not imperial but "imperialist," at the service of the interests of the United States (or, in any case, placed under the condition of not contradicting them). Or, on the other hand, it will consolidate its institutions and develop them in the direction of democratic liberalism if it becomes, as soon as possible, a member state of the European Union, entering, thus, a "quasi-federal" structure.[16] These two processes make dependence the real content of sovereignty (hence the paradox, and occasionally the discomfort): they are closely articulated



and could seem materially indistinguishable from each other in the current situation which, despite some symbolic proclamations of independence, is pushing for greater military integration of the EU member states, inevitably under the umbrella of NATO, thus strategically and technologically dependent on the United States. Above all, whereas in the recent past political and military developments seemed to be gradually dissociating from one another, which gave relative autonomy to politics and opened the possibility of more radical democratic developments, the two bodies are once again presenting themselves as the front and back of the same process. The consequences are not felicitous, to say the least: a return to a logic of "camps" on the international scene, the postponement to an indeterminate future of the end of what I have called the "European Civil War," the verticalization of political authority within the federation, and the increased distortion of economies in the direction of the production of armaments. All at a time when we should be considering as a priority the reconversion of our industries to the economy of energy and raw materials.

Do all these considerations support Russian propaganda, for which the war (although never called so) would be the response to NATO aggression, now engaged in a policy of repression ("push back") of its former communist adversary? This is indeed the plan that American neo-conservative ideologists (such as Zbigniew Brzezinski) had drawn up and which materialized, so far as the retreats of American power allowed, through the incorporation into NATO of countries in Russia's "close neighborhood," or through its support for the "color" revolutions, and even through the installation of military bases in Asia linked to the intervention in Afghanistan. But even if it is true that NATO has developed a policy of "encircling" the Eurasian space traditionally considered by Russia as its sphere of geopolitical influence (a *Grossraum* in the sense of Schmitt), it remains true –and this is the decisive point– that NATO has not attacked Russia militarily. We may think (and I personally think) that NATO's policy has contributed to creating the conditions for war throughout the region, but at no time can we pretend that it was not the Russian armies that invaded Ukrainian territory and are in the process of destroying the country because they cannot control it. I would add that, even if it were necessary to negotiate with Putin's regime or to seek "mediation" in order to obtain a cease-fire in the interests of the people, no concession to his demands will get us (and the Ukrainians) out of the "paradox of limited sovereignty" that I mentioned just now. That is to say, the only conceivable form of independence today lies in subjection to a body larger than the nation. And these entities are today controlled by antagonistic war machines. But from the point of view of democratic politics, there is a clear asymmetry between the two perspectives: that of being absorbed again, in a violent and revanchist way, into an autocratic and backward-looking empire, and that of adhering to a federation that perpetuates, admittedly, all sorts of national, social and cultural inequalities, but includes negotiable rules of participation and exit. We can see here the need for a great debate on the contemporary forms of imperialism, a notion which has lost none of its relevance but whose content cannot remain fixed to the geographies and the relations of forces of the twentieth century, and one of the aspects of which concerns precisely the modalities of the political, military and economic "dependence" of nations.[17] Beyond this question, when trying to imagine the future, it would be necessary to evaluate the chances that remain, for Ukraine and for Europe itself, of a political integration and an enlargement of its territory that does not coincide purely and simply with inscription in a system of camps, one that is not synonymous with the militarization of social life. Everything will obviously depend on how long the war lasts and how it "ends," as well as the attitude of public opinion (including that of the Russian people) towards solutions imposed either by force or through negotiation.

But perhaps the most important point about geopolitics and "cosmopolitics" has not yet been made. Should we take for granted that the conflict between military alliances and the evolving cartography of global imperialism (of which China will no doubt ultimately emerge as the arbiter) constitutes the final instance of our reflection? By outlining the concept of a "hybrid war," one that would not be so much a world war as a globalized war, I wanted to indicate another possibility. Wars are always fought on the basis of fronts and borders, but there are several kinds of borders. A first level is constituted by the network of national borders (doubled by their "internal borders" which fix the rules of inclusion and exclusion in the community of citizens and determine the feelings of belonging): normally States are in charge of enforcing them, with or without the consent of the people. But at another level, the population is distributed among planetary "regions", separated by lines or transition zones that result from long-lasting historical phenomena such as religious conversion, migrations, colonization and decolonization, the unequal development and hegemony of complementary forms of capitalism, with their corresponding "world views." I am thinking here in particular of the great division between the "North" and the "Global South," which is not identically reflected in all regions of the world today, but leaves none untouched. It is clear that this division is decisive in the way the European war is perceived by the citizens of other regions of the planet, especially those of the global South, who tend to see it as a conflict within the "imperialist North," or even a "war by proxy" that the most powerful empire (assuming it is still as powerful), namely, the United States, would conduct against its adversaries.[18] But I want to suggest above all that this division, however real and politically decisive it may be, is increasingly exposed to the effects of another "planetary" phenomenon that is both underlining and displacing this division: global warming, and the "great derangement" that it is causing in the environmental balance. [19] All the world's borders are affected and called into question, insofar as they separate (more or less) habitable areas from others that are becoming uninhabitable, or that they move the "front" of territories open to the extraction of raw materials, at the cost of catastrophic attacks on the stability of natural environments. This process is underway, it seems inexorable, but we did not anticipate the "extra" layer that war brings today, by increasing the probability of shortages of basic resources and even famines in various regions of the world (mostly located in the countries of the South, which lack both agricultural resources and financial reserves to buy from the world market what they no longer produce themselves because of the destruction of traditional economies), not to mention the direct climatic effects of increased production and the use of armaments. Russia is at the heart of these processes (especially on its Arctic "border"). Bruno Latour, in several recent speeches, has proposed to juxtapose in the picture of current events two wars that would be waged simultaneously: the one waged against the freedom of the Ukrainian people in the name of the "Russian world", and the other waged against the Earth in the name of post-industrial "modernity." [20] Shouldn't we agree that in reality these two wars are one and the same if we rise to the consideration of the planetary scene and the superimposed phenomena of "hybrid" violence? The immediate future does not offer, it must be said, very encouraging prospects for getting out of this "generalized war."

I will not conclude. But I will try to take sides, with and against my own "camp." I am very attached to the principled pacifist position which is part of the tradition of the global left and, correlatively, of the internationalism inherited from revolutionary communism and renewed by the anti-imperialism of the 20th century. But, today, pacifism is caught between contradictory demands, especially on the European continent, as has been the case in other conflicts where fundamental human rights were at stake. And internationalism, more necessary than ever in its political "methodology," appears tragically disarmed when the logic of war is not accompanied by an at least virtual transnational mobilization, with its own "myth" or "utopia" as cement. The

steel cage has closed. I see no other immediate perspective than a "unity of opposites," hoping that it will develop dialectically. It is necessary to support effectively, efficiently, a people invaded, violated, massacred, whose houses, economic infrastructures and places of culture are daily destroyed by bombs. They have the right to defend themselves by all means at their disposal and to defeat their invader. This means an enemy who is also ours, but who is not a foreigner in the exclusive sense of the word. We must therefore not give in to the idea that President Putin's dictatorial regime is the emanation of an "imperial essence" of the Russian people, any more than Nazism embodied the imperial essence of Germany, or Bush and Trump expressed that of America. We must fight stupid Russophobia and seek every opportunity for active solidarity with Russian dissidents, who fight the regime and oppose the war from within at the risk of their own freedom. For they are the bearers of hope. Last but not least, we must urgently relaunch the campaigns for nuclear disarmament and against the militarization of our societies, for the construction of an international order based on the independence of nations and the interdependence of peoples, on collective security instead of a balance of terror. An order that puts an end to military interventions across borders and to "sanctions" that affect civilian populations as much as –and even more than– the aggressor states and the ruling classes. Our priority should be interests that unite the entire human species and pose her questions of life and death, not only in the long term, but urgently and immediately.

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## Notes

[1] This piece is an adaptation of my lecture "In the War: nationalism, imperialism, cosmopolitics", London Critical Theory Summer School, Birkbeck College, 27 June 2022. The text that follows was partially published on Monday, 4th of July 2022 in AOC Media under the title "We are in the war" (<https://aoc.media/analyse/2022/07/04/nous-sommes-dans-la-guerre/>). English Translation by Marianna Poyares.

[2] See Sandro Mezzadra, "Disertare la guerra", Euronmade, 11 March 2022 (<http://www.euronmade.info/?p=14889>) (English: <https://transversal.at/transversal/0422/mezzadra/en?hl=> ).

[3] Carl von Clausewitz, *De la guerre*, translation by Denise Naville, Les Editions de Minuit, 1955, Book I, chapter I, §24, p. 69. Commentators generally spare themselves the discussion of the "simple".

[4] This is generally true for all the territories that belonged to the Russian Empire or to the USSR after 1945 and constitute what the official Russian discourse, in a quasi-constitutional way, designates as the « near abroad ». But within this group, which includes the Baltic States, it is clear that Ukraine, for economic, demographic, historical, and ideological reasons to which I will return below, occupies a very special place, perceived not only as « non-negotiable » but as « existential».

[5] The revival of the empire form by the USSR is an object of discussion in itself. It obviously cannot be conceived as the effect of Stalin's power and his ideology alone. Perhaps we should

even see things in the opposite direction: it is the return of the imperial repressed within the revolution that explains the rise of Stalin and the modalities of his exercise of power.

[6] A particularly important aspect of the comparison concerns violence against women, and more generally the "virilist" character of the war. Hence the importance of taking into account the analyses and proposals of feminists, who are among the few to actually implement an internationalist method. See the recent text by Rada Ivekovic: Postsocialist Wars and the Masculinist Backlash, Alienocene March 30, 2022  
<https://alienocene.com/2022/03/30/post-socialist-wars-and-the-masculinist-backlash/>

[7] The concept of 'European Civil War' is not the exclusive property of Ernst Nolte, whose 1997 book (*Der Europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917-1945*) launched the "historians' quarrel" in Germany. On the contrary, it has been used (with various "periodizations" and interpretations) by conservative, liberal, socialist historians. See my commentary in E. Balibar, *Histoire interminable. D'un siècle l'autre*, Editions La Découverte 2020, pp. 40-41.

[8] I borrow this formulation from Denis Sieffert's excellent editorial in *Politis*, March 16, 2022: "Ukraine: A conflict that is becoming global".

[9] Addendum 1st September 2022 : an agreement has been signed on July 22 between Russia and Ukraine (under the aegis of Turkey and the UN) to make it possible for ships to leave Ukrainian ports with cargoes of hitherto blocked cereals. As a consequence, it seems that some ships have started to reach the Middle East and East Africa. However the magnitude of this delivery remains to be seen, and, due to the combination of inflation and "exceptional" climatic circumstances, the possibility of famine is far from eliminated in countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya.

[10] Jürgen Habermas zur Ukraine: Krieg und Empörung, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 28. April 2022.

10 See Edward P. Thompson et al, *Exterminism. Armement nucléaire et pacifisme*, tr. fr. Presses Universitaires de France 1983.

[11] See Edward P. Thompson et al, *Exterminism. Armement nucléaire et pacifisme*, tr. fr. Presses Universitaires de France 1983.

[12] E. Balibar, *Cosmopolitique. Des frontières à l'espèce humaine*, Editions La Découverte, 2022, p. 17.

[13] I agree with Erri de Luca: "We are witnessing the transformation of an entire people into a single form of resistance, armed or not", <https://generationsnouvelles.net/lecrivain-erri-de-luca-frappe-par-la-transformation-de-tout-un-peuple-en-une-seule-forme-de-resistance/>

[14] See the very enlightening article published in the Ukrainian journal "Commons : Journal of Social Criticism" (15.06.2022): Denys Gorbach: "Ukrainian identity map in wartime: Thesis-antithesis-synthesis?" <https://commons.com.ua/en/ukrainian-identity-map-wartime-thesis-antithesis-synthesis/>. A striking symbol of this situation is the fact that the *European Vocabulary of Philosophies* (Paris, 2014) was the subject of a double translation into Russian and Ukrainian published in Kiev/Kyiv under the editorship of Konstantin Sigov, today one of the spokespersons of the resistance among intellectuals.

[15] See the very interesting volume published by Suhrkamp in 2014: *Euromaidan. Was in der Ukraine auf dem Spiel steht*, ed. Juri Andruchowytch (5ème revised edition 2022).

[16] In the past, I have characterized the structure of the European Union as "pseudo-federal", and more recently as "market statism", following Carlos Herrera (see Ninon Grangé and Carlos M. Herrera (eds.), *Une Europe politique? Obstacles and possibilities*, Kimé, Paris, 2021). The aim was to show what the European Union lacks in order to truly become a federal type of organization. But in the context of the great antithesis between the two forms of "supranationality", it is obviously the promise of this antithetical structure of the empire that must be evoked in order to understand the attraction exerted on the nations of the former Soviet bloc.

[17] This debate has been powerfully revived among Marxists (or post-Marxists) since the beginning of the war in Ukraine by the very differences that have opposed them. I point out the interesting exchange between Gilbert Achcar and Alex Callinicos: <https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2022-03-31/ukraine-and-anti-imperialism-exchange>.

[18] See the article by Boaventura de Sousa Santos in the Wall Street International Magazine of 10 March 2022: *Ukraine: complexity and war. Is it still possible to think?* (<https://wsimag.com/economy-and-politics/68875-ukraine-complexity-and-war-1/8>).

[19] Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement. Other narratives in the age of climate crisis*, Wildproject Editions, Marseille, 2021.

[20] Bruno Latour: "Is the European soil changing under our feet?", Proceedings of the Sorbonne Colloquium, 17 May 2022, *Le Grand Continent* 23 May 2022 <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2022/05/23/le-sol-europeen-est-il-en-train-de-changer-sous-nos-pieds/>