



## **Our Wound is Not So Recent\***

### **Alain Badiou**

This evening I would like to talk about what happened on Friday 13 November; what happened to us, what happened to this city, to this country, and ultimately to this world.

First of all I'd like to say in what state of mind I think we should speak of what is an atrocious tragedy: because, obviously, as we know, and as is being dangerously hammered home by the press and by the authorities, the function of affect, of sensible reaction, is inevitable in this kind of situation, and in a certain sense indispensable. There is something like a trauma, the feeling of an intolerable exception to the regime of ordinary life, an unbearable irruption of death. This is something we all feel, and which we can neither contain nor subject to criticism.

But all the same, we must know—and this is the starting point for considering what I call our state of mind—that this inevitable affect, in these kinds of tragic circumstances, exposes us to many risks, risks that I would like to enumerate, so as to indicate what my method here will be.

I see three principal risks to which, following this drama, the unadulterated domination of trauma and affect exposes us.

The first is that of authorizing the state to take pointless and unacceptable measures, measures which, in reality, function only for its own profit. The state is abruptly brought to the fore and for a moment rediscovers, or thinks it has rediscovered, its function of symbolic representation, as the guarantor of the unity of the nation, and other such postures. Which allows us—and I'll come back to this—to perceive in the senior staff a rather sinister but undeniable enjoyment of this criminal situation. In such conditions, we must all the same maintain a certain measuredness. We must remain capable of discriminating, in what is done, in what is pronounced, between that which is inevitable and necessary, and that which is useless and unacceptable. This is the first precaution that I think is necessary: that of remaining measured in regard to—let me say once again—the both inevitable and indispensable nature of affect.

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\* Originally delivered at *La Commune* theatre, Aubervilliers, on November 23, 2015.

The second risk of this domination of the sensible, let's call it that, is the reinforcing of identitarian drives. This, also, is a natural mechanism. Obviously, when a family member accidentally dies, the family regroups, pulls together and, in a certain sense, reinforces itself. In recent days, we have been assured, indeed they tell us again and again, with the tricolor flag in hand, that a horrific massacre on French territory can only reinforce national sentiment. As if trauma automatically referred us back to an identity. Hence the words 'French' and 'France' are heard from every quarter, as a self-evident component of the situation. Well, let's ask the question: How so? What actually is 'France' in this affair? What do we speak of when today we speak of 'France' and the 'French'? In reality, these are very complex questions. We absolutely must not lose sight of this complexity: the words 'France', 'French', today have no simple, self-evident meaning. Moreover, I think that we must make the effort, precisely against this identitarian drive which would incorporate the terrible event into a sort of false pretext, to remind ourselves that such terrifying mass murders have happened and are still happening every day elsewhere in the world. Yes, every day, in Nigeria and Mali, very recently indeed, in Iraq, in Pakistan, in Syria.... It's important also to remember that, just a few days ago, two hundred Russians were massacred in a sabotaged airplane, and that in France, emotions didn't run particularly high about it. Perhaps the supposed 'French' identify all Russians with the wicked Putin!

I think it's one of the fundamental tasks of justice to always broaden, as far as possible, the space of public affects, to struggle against their identitarian restriction, to remember and to know that the space of misfortune is a space that we must envisage, ultimately, on the scale of all of humanity, and that we must never retreat into declarations that limit it to some identity or other. Otherwise, misfortune itself ends up attesting to the notion that what counts are identities. Now, the idea that what counts in a misfortune is only the identity of the victims is a perilous perception of the tragic event itself, because inevitably, *this idea transforms justice into vengeance.*

Obviously, the temptation to vengeance, with this type of mass criminal act, is a drive that seems natural. The proof of this is that, in our country, which always boasts of its rule of law, but which rejects the death penalty, the police, in the type of circumstance that we have seen here, kill the murderers as soon as they find them, without—make no mistake—without any kind of trial; and that no one, it seems, takes offence at this. However we must remember that vengeance, far from being an action of justice, always opens up a cycle of atrocities. Long long ago, the great Greek tragedies opposed the logic of justice to the logic of vengeance. The universality of justice is the contrary of familial, provincial, national, identitarian vengeance. This is the fundamental subject of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. The identitarian outcome of tragedy is that one opens oneself up to the danger of conceiving the search for the murderers as a pure and simple vengeful hunt: 'We will kill those who killed'. Perhaps there is something inevitable in the desire to kill those who have killed. But there is certainly nothing to celebrate in it, nothing to proclaim and sing out as if it were a victory of thought, of spirit, of civilization, or of justice. Vengeance is a given that is primitive, abject, and, what's more, dangerous—the Greeks taught us this, a long time ago.

From this point of view, I would also like to voice my disquiet about things that have been hailed as self-evident. For example: Obama's declaration. It didn't amount to much, this declaration. It came down to saying that this terrible crime was not only a crime against France, a crime against Paris, but a crime against all of humanity. Very good, quite right. But President Obama doesn't make such a declaration every time there is a mass murder of this kind: he doesn't do so when such things take place far away, in an Iraq become incomprehensible, in a hazy Pakistan, in a fanatical Nigeria, or in a Congo at the heart of darkness. So the statement contains the idea, a supposedly self-evident idea, that this wounded humanity lives in France, and doubtless also in the US, rather than in Nigeria or in India, in Iraq, in Pakistan, or in Congo.

In truth, Obama wanted to remind us that, for him, humanity can above all be identified with our good old West. And that one can therefore say: humanity = the West—we hear this, like a *basso continuo*, in many declarations, whether official or journalistic. One of the forms of this unacceptable identitarian presumption takes the form, to which I shall return, of the opposition between barbarians and the civilised. Now, it is scandalous, from the point of view of the most elementary justice, to let it be understood, even if not deliberately, even indirectly, that there are parts of humanity that are more human than others; and I fear that, in this affair, this is what has been done and continues to be done.

I think we need to break with the habit that is very much present, including in the way in which things are told, presented, arranged, or on the contrary are killed, redacted, yes, we must lose the habit, almost embedded in the unconscious itself, of thinking that a death in the West is terrible but that a thousand deaths in Africa, in Asia, or in the Middle East, or even in Russia, is ultimately no big deal. This is of course the heritage of colonial imperialism, the heritage of what we call the West, that is, the advanced, civilised, democratic countries: the habit of seeing oneself as representative of all humanity and human civilisation as such. This is the second danger that lies in wait for us, if we react on the basis of our affects alone.

And then there is a third danger, which is to do exactly what the murderers want—that is to say, to obtain a disproportionate effect, to occupy the scene interminably in anarchic and violent fashion, and ultimately to create in the entourage of the victims a passion such that, in the end, one will no longer be able to distinguish between those who initiated the crime and those who suffered it. Because the aim of this kind of carnage, this type of abject violence, is to arouse in the victims, in their families, their neighbours, their compatriots, a sort of obscure subject, I'll call it that, an obscure subject at once depressed and vengeful, a subject constituted by the nature of the crime as a violent and almost inexplicable strike; but one that is also homogeneous with the strategy of its sponsors. This strategy anticipates the effects of the obscure subject: reason will be lost, including political reason, affect will take the upper hand, and in this way one will spread everywhere the couplet of dejected depression ('I'm stunned', 'I'm shocked') and the spirit of vengeance, a couplet that will leave the state and the official avengers free to do anything whatsoever. Thus, in accordance with the desires of the criminals, this obscure subject will reveal that it is capable in its turn of worse,

and in the end will have to be recognised by all as symmetrical with those who organised the crime.

So, to counter these three risks, I think that we must manage to *think* what has happened. Let's set out from a principle: *nothing that anyone does is unintelligible*. To say 'I don't understand', 'I'll never understand', 'I can't understand', is always a defeat. We can't leave anything in the register of the unthinkable. It is the vocation of thought, if we want to be able, among other things, to oppose that which we declare unthinkable, to think it. Of course there are absolutely irrational, criminal, pathological behaviours, but all of these constitute objects of thought like any others, which do not leave thought lost or unable to take stock of them. The declaration of the unthinkable is always a defeat of thought, and the defeat of thought is always precisely the victory of irrational and criminal behaviours.

So I will try to give you a comprehensive elucidation of what has happened. In a certain way I will treat this mass murder as one of a number of current symptoms of a grave malady of the contemporary world, of this world as a whole, and I will try to indicate the exigencies or the possible paths for a long-term recovery from this sickness, of which the proliferation of these kinds of events in the world is a particularly violent and particularly spectacular symptom.

This aim of giving a comprehensive elucidation will govern the sequence of my exposition, its logic.

First of all I'll try to go from the situation of the whole world as I see it, as I believe it can be thought synthetically, to the mass crimes and to the war which, on the part of the state, has been pronounced or declared. And then I will track back from there, in an inverse movement, toward the overall situation, no longer as it is, but as we must desire that it becomes, as we must will and act in order that such symptoms might be banished.

In a first stage, then, we'll move from the general situation of the world to the event we are concerned with; and then we'll go back from the event to the world situation as we have clarified it. This there-and-back movement should allow us to indicate a certain number of necessities and tasks.

It will comprise seven successive parts. So it will take a while!

The first part will present the objective structure of the contemporary world, the general framework of what is happening, what has happened here, but is happening elsewhere almost every day. It is the objective structure of the contemporary world as it was established starting in the eighties, in the last century. Where is our world in all this, from the point of view of what has been—at first insidiously, then quite visibly, and then stubbornly—put into place over the last thirty years or so?

Secondly, I will examine the major effects of this structure of the contemporary world upon populations, their diversity, their entanglement, and their subjectivities.

This will make way for my third point, which concerns the typical subjectivities that are thereby created. For I believe that this world has created singular subjectivities, characteristic of the period. As you will see, I distinguish between three typical subjectivities.

The fourth part, which will bring me close to the primary object of this exposition, will bear upon what I would call the contemporary figures of fascism. As you will see, I think that the perpetrators of what happened in Paris deserve to be called fascists, in a renewed, contemporary sense of the term.

Once we reach this point, then I'll go back in the other direction, towards what we must do to change the world, so that such criminal symptoms may be excluded. My fifth part will therefore be dedicated to the event itself, in its different component parts. Who are the killers? Who are the agents of this mass murder? And how can we describe what they did?

Sixthly, we will have the state's reaction and the shaping of public opinion around the two words 'France' and 'war'.

The seventh part will be entirely dedicated to the attempt to construct a different thought, that is to say to subtract ourselves from this shaping of public opinion and from the reactive orientation of the state. It will bear upon the conditions, clarified by this entire trajectory, of what I would call a return to politics, in the sense of a return to the politics of emancipation, or the return of a politics that refuses all inclusion in the schema of the world from which I set out.

## **1. Structure of the Contemporary World**

I want to talk about the structure of the contemporary world such as I see it and, of course, such as it will help us to clarify what is at stake here. I think that one can describe it, in broad brushstrokes, by way of three themes, themes that are profoundly intertwined, entangled with one another.

Firstly—and this may seem like a crushing banality, but in my view, the consequences of this banality are far from having been drawn: for thirty years now, what we have seen is the triumph of globalised capitalism.

This triumph is first of all, and in a particularly visible way, a return to a sort of primitive energy of capitalism, in what is known by the contestable name of

neoliberalism, and which is in fact the reappearance and the rediscovered efficacy of what has always been the constitutive ideology of capitalism, namely liberalism. The 'neo' is not necessarily justified. I don't think that what is happening is as 'neo' as all that, when we look at it closely enough. In any case, the triumph of globalised capitalism is a kind of rediscovered energy, the return of an uncontested capacity to display, now quite openly and, if I might say so, without any shame whatsoever, the general characteristics of this very particular type of organisation of production, of exchanges, and ultimately of entire societies; and also its claim to be the only reasonable path for the historical destiny of humanity. All of this, which was invented and formulated around the end of the eighteenth century in England, and which subsequently dominated unchallenged for decades, has been rediscovered with a sort of ferocious glee by our masters of today.

When globalised, it takes on a somewhat different inflection. Today we have a capitalism explicitly installed on a new scale, the planetary scale. Which is what makes globalised capitalism not only a capitalism that has rediscovered its solvent energy but one that, also, has developed it in such a way that, right now, we can say that, considered as a global structure, capitalism exercises a practically unchallenged mastery of the whole of the planet.

The second theme is the weakening of states. This is a rather subtle consequence of the first, but one whose identification is wholly pertinent here.

As you'll know, one of the most widely mocked themes of Marxism has been that of the withering away of the state. Marxism announced that the reorganisation of the state, following the revolutionary destruction of nation-states dominated by capitalism, would ultimately deploy, through a powerful collective communist-type movement, a society without a state, a society which Marx called that of 'free association'. Well, today we are seeing a wholly pathological phenomenon, namely a capitalist process of the withering away of states. It is a fundamental phenomenon today, even if it is masked by the subsistence, which will probably continue for a lengthy historical period, of state poles of substantial power. But in truth, the general logic of globalised capitalism is to have no direct or intrinsic relation to the subsistence of national states, because its deployment today is transnational. The multinational character of large companies came to light during the sixties. But since that time, these large companies have become transnational monsters of an entirely other nature.

Finally, the third theme is what I would call the new practices of imperialism, the forceful modes of action, if I can put it that way, of the global extension of capitalism, the new figures of imperialism—that is to say, of the conquest of the planet qua basis of capitalism's existence and profit.

I'll take up these themes one at a time.

## **I. The Triumph of Globalised Capital**

The triumph of globalised capitalism is a self-evident fact of which everyone is conscious. Today, the world market is the absolute reference of planetary historicity. At every moment, it is a question of the world market. We know very well that, when the Shanghai exchange wobbles, the whole world becomes anxious, seems terrorised, wonders what's going to happen, and so on....

The aggression that accompanies this extension of the dominance of the world market as the sole reference of planetary historicity is particularly spectacular. Today we are seeing the destruction, everywhere, of all prior attempts to introduce into capital some kind of measuredness. By which I mean past compromises, in particular during the postwar period, between the logic of capital and other logics. Other logics such as the logics of state control, concessions to unions, caution about concentrations of industrial and banking power, logics of partial nationalisation, measures for the control of certain excesses of private property, antitrust laws.... There was also the introduction of measures that extended social rights to the population, such as the possibility of access to healthcare for all, or forms of limitation of the private exercise of liberal professions, etc. etc.

All of this is being methodically destroyed, even in the countries that were once its paradigms. I don't even mean socialist states, the late socialist countries: France was one of the countries that offered the most examples of this spirit of measuredness. But all of this is being destroyed today with great determination. It obviously began with denationalisations, privatisations. The word 'privatisation' is entirely aggressive, even if we no longer realise it. It is a word that directly designates the fact that activities designed for the public good must be handed over to private property as such. It is an extraordinarily aggressive word, even if it has now become a banality. In the same way, and incessantly—whether from the right or the left, there is no difference between them on this point—entire swathes of social legislation are being undone, whether we are talking about labour law, social security, or the education system....

It must be seen that the objective victory of globalised capitalism is a destructive, aggressive practice. It is not merely some kind of reasoned or reasonable expansion of a particular system of production. And one cannot help but be disquieted by the feeble resistance put up against these successive destructions. This resistance is in fact a constant retreat. It is localised, dispersed, very often corporatist, sectorial, and does not seem to be supported by any vision. In reality, for thirty years now it has been an uninterrupted retreat.

The trend is toward a dominant representation that prohibits the least measure or restraint being placed on capitalism. In this sense, we can say that the logic of capital has been liberated. Liberalism is liberated. There we go. For thirty years now what we have seen happening, as we stand idly by, is the liberation of liberalism. And this liberation takes two forms: globalisation—that is to say, the uninterrupted expansion of capitalism to whole territories, such as China, and at the same time the extraordinary power of the concentration of capital—that is to say, of that dialectical movement

characteristic of capital: it spreads, and in spreading it concentrates. Expansion and concentration are two modalities, absolutely linked to one another, of the protean form of capital.

Concentrations thus proceed at the same time as privatisations and destructions accelerate. You will all have heard, since it has a somewhat spectacular aspect, about the recent merger of Fnac and Darty, two French retail giants. Here we have the fusion of books and refrigeration. Clearly the aim is strictly financial, and is characteristic of a purely capitalist fusion, with no public interest. These concentrations thus progressively create poles of power that are comparable to states, if not more powerful than some states. These are financial concentrations of power, sometimes productive, speculative, always involving a substantial personnel, often endowed with powerful militias, and they spread everywhere, often by force, always by corruption. These concentrated poles are transnational, even if they have a diagonal relation to states. In regard to these massive transnational powers, state sovereignty cannot at all be taken for granted.

Thus we see that large firms—for example the largest French firm, Total—pay no tax in France. So in what does their “frenchness” lie? Well, their headquarters are somewhere in Paris, but.... The French state, as you can see, does not really have any hold, even on concentrated poles of power that proclaim their French nationality. What is in progress is a victory, a vast and ramified victory, of transnational firms over the sovereignty of states.

But there is also a subjective victory that accompanies this objective victory of capitalism. It is the total eradication of the very idea of any other path. And this is of great importance, because it is the affirmation, in a certain sense a strategic one, that another global, systemic orientation for the organisation of production and the social is possible, that at the moment is practically absent. So that all proposals, including proposals for resistance, propositions to reintroduce some kind of restraint, etc. are already situated within a defeatist vision of the general movement. They are not embedded in a strategy for the reconquering of the territory of the Idea. They are just impotent nostalgia for the epoch of social compromises and semi-statist measures for the control of capital.

It is striking to see how the programme of the *Conseil National de la Résistance* has become such a grand nostalgic model for France—the period when, coming out of the Nazi occupation, the alliance between the Gaullists and the Communists imposed important measures of statization and social redistribution.

But this nostalgia for the reformist programme of the end of the war forgets that, at the time, firstly, we had just come out of a world war; secondly, that the collaborationist bourgeoisie dared not show its face; and thirdly, that there was a powerful communist party. Today, none of this exists. And the nostalgia for the social programme of the CNR is a dream completely disconnected from the spectacular subjective victory of globalised capitalism. The result of this victory has been that, over a relatively short time, between 1975 and today, the force of the idea that, whatever the difficulties might

be, another possibility existed, has been annulled, reduced to almost nothing. And this is an idea which, still in the 60s–70s of the twentieth century, throughout the world, was a driving force for millions of political rebels.

This idea, whose generic name, since the nineteenth century, has been ‘communism’, is today so sickly that we are ashamed to even name it. Well, I’m not. But on the whole, it is criminalised. This criminalisation may have its reasons: Stalin, etc. But the aim pursued by the advocates of capitalist globalisation is not at all an ethical aim, as their media hacks would have us believe. Their aim is the eradication, definitive if possible, of the very idea of a global, systemic alternative to capitalism. We have moved from two to one. This is fundamental. It is not the same thing when, on the same question, there are two ideas in conflict, as when there is only one. And this unicity is the key point in regard to the subjective triumph of capitalism.

## **II. The Weakening of States**

Today, states are ultimately just the local managers of this vast global structure. They represent a kind of mediation—an unstable one, moreover—between the general logic I have just described and particular situations defined by countries, coalitions, federations, states...on a case-by-case basis. And it is far from being the case that the norm of power is represented by states and by them alone. Of course, there still exist established state poles, states which still manifest a certain vigour, large poles of power such as the US and China. But even in these cases, the process is the same one that we have described. These major poles are not vehicles for anything else. As I have said, large firms have the lead on medium-sized states. What is more, it is very striking that the banks themselves have become so important that it is admitted, as an axiom, that they are ‘too big to fail’—this is what is often said of the large American banks. Which means that economic macroscopy trumps state capacity. This is what I call the weakening of states. Not only have states largely become what Marx already thought they were, namely ‘the delegates of capital power’ (but I don’t know whether Marx ever imagined the extent to which, over the last thirty years, reality would prove him right); not only are states the delegates of capital power, but there is increasingly a kind of discordance between the scale upon which large firms exist and the scale upon which states exist, which makes the existence of large firms diagonal to that of states. The power of the great industrial, banking, and retail conglomerates coincides neither with the state sphere, nor even with that of coalitions of states. This capitalist power crosses over states as if it were at once independent of them and mistress of them.

Which brings me to my third point—the new practices of imperialism.

## **III. The New Practices of Imperialism**

As you know, the old imperialism, that of the nineteenth century, was entirely governed by the idea of the nation, the nation-state. Its global organisation was a matter of a dividing up of the world between powerful nations, which took place at summits such as the Berlin conference in 1885, where Africa was cut up like a cake, with this part given to France, this for England, this for Germany, etc. And where a metropolitan

power of direct management of these territories was established, naturally along with the presence of large companies on the hunt for raw materials, and the complicity of certain important local figures.

And then there were the world wars, there were the wars of national liberation, there was the existence of the socialist bloc supporting the wars of national liberation. In short, all of that progressively put an end, over the course of the sixties and seventies, to this regime of direct administration that we called colonialism in the strict sense—that is to say, the installation of a metropolitan power in the dominated regions.

Despite all of this, the sovereign tasks of the protection of companies and the control of circuits of raw materials or energy sources were still pressing, and were taken on in part by statist means. They could not be entrusted to the mercenaries of private companies alone. Thus, for years, decades even, there was incessant military activity on the part of Western states. Remember that, just taking France's military interventions in Africa over the last forty years, there were more than fifty such episodes! We might say that France was in an almost chronic state of military mobilisation in order to maintain its African turf.... And there were, as we know, great expeditions, gigantic conflicts, the Algerian War, the Vietnam War, and finally the destruction of Iraq, and then what is happening today.

So the point is not the end of imperial interventions, absolutely not. The question is one of different modes of imperial intervention. The question still remains: What to do in order to protect our interests in distant countries? On the question of the intervention in Mali, I read in a very serious journal that this intervention had been a success, because we had succeeded in 'protecting the interests of the West'. It was said just like that, in all innocence. So, in Mali, we protect the interests of the West.... We don't first of all protect the Malians, apparently. What is more, we cut their country in half. Defence of the West demands as much. So even if the modes of intervention have changed, the necessity of imperial interventions remains pressing, given the dimensions of the capitalist interests in play: uranium, petrol, diamonds, precious woods, rare metals, cocoa, coffee, bananas, gold, carbon, aluminium, gas, you name it.

I think that what is appearing on the horizon is the idea that, rather than taking control of the arduous task of establishing states under the supervision of the metropolis, or further still, of directly metropolitan states, the possibility is that we simply *destroy states*. And you can see how consistent this possibility is with the progressive destatization of globalised capitalism. After all, in certain geographical spaces full of dormant wealth, we can create free, anarchic zones where there is no longer any state, and where, consequently, we no longer have to enter into communication with that redoubtable monster that the state always is, even when it is weak. We can shield ourselves from the permanent risk that a state may prefer another client, and other commercial snags. In a zone where all true state power has gone, the whole petty world of firms can operate without any overall control. There will be a sort of semi-anarchy, with armed gangs, maybe controlled, maybe uncontrollable—but business can continue as usual, or even better than before. Even so, we must realise that, contrary to what is

often said, contrary to what we are told, companies, their representatives, the general agents of capital, can perfectly well negotiate with armed gangs, and in certain ways can negotiate with them more easily than with established states. It is not true that stateless anarchy and the unimaginable cruelty that goes along with it are necessarily in formal contradiction with the structure of the world as it is today. Everyone can see that we've been talking for quite some time now about crushing Daesh but that, in reality, so far, nothing really serious has been done, except by the Kurds, who are there on the ground and have their own interests in the region. Everyone says: 'Oh dear, send three thousand men over there? Maybe we should just carry on trying to more or less contain it, reduce it to a normal regime for doing business...'. After all, Daesh is a commercial power, a competent and multifaceted commercial enterprise! It sells petrol, it sells works of art, it sells a lot of cotton, it is a major power in cotton production. It sells many things to everyone—because to sell something, there must be two. It's not Daesh who is buying Daesh's cotton.

To designate these new practices of imperialism, namely destroying states rather than corrupting or replacing them, I have proposed the word 'zoning'. I have suggested that the imperialism that fabricated cut-up pseudo-countries any old how, but countries that had the status of countries under the supervision of the metropolis, has now been replaced, in Africa, in the Middle East, and in certain regions of Asia, by infra-state zones which in reality are areas of non-state pillaging. In these zones, we must no doubt intervene militarily from time to time, but without truly having responsibility for the laborious integral management of colonial states, nor even needing to keep in place, through corruption, a whole clique of local accomplices who profit from the functions granted them to pillage resources and wealth.

Let's recapitulate. We have a contemporary world structure dominated by the triumph of globalised capitalism. We have a strategic weakening of states, and even an ongoing process of the capitalist withering away of states. And thirdly, we have new practices of imperialism that tolerate, and even encourage in certain circumstances, the butchering and the annihilation of states.

This is not a negligible hypothesis if we ask, for example, what was the real interest of the expedition into Libya. A state was completely destroyed, a zone of anarchy was created that everyone complains about, or pretends to, but after all the Americans did the same thing in Iraq, and the French before them in Mali and Central African Republic. It even seems to me that the complete destruction of Yugoslavia, for which heavy Western interventions were necessary, already signalled the practices of zoning. Across substantial zones almost nothing—that is to say, just fragile agreements between minorities, religions, various armed gangs. The Sunnis were replaced by the Shiites, or one tried to do the opposite, but all of this amounts to operations that are, in the serious sense of the term, non-state operations. It's totally obvious. But this had disastrous effects on the populations concerned, which we must now examine.

## 2. Effects on Populations

The first striking effect of everything that I have set out here is that unequal development is at unprecedented levels. Even the parliamentary right wing are sometimes shocked by it. There are inequalities so monstrous that, given the weakening of states, we no longer know how to control its effects on the life of populations.

On this point there are some fundamental figures that everyone should know, that everyone should have at hand, figures that underlie what we must indeed call a class logic—an extremely strict, extremely trenchant one which renders even the most formal democratic norm fatuous and impracticable. At a certain degree of inequality, to speak of democracy or of the democratic norm no longer makes any sense at all.

Let me remind you of these figures:

- 1% of the global population possess 46% of available resources. 1% – 46%: that's almost half.
- 10% of the global population possess 86% of the available resources.
- 50% of the global population possess nothing.

Thus, the objective description of this matter, in terms of population, in terms of masses, tells us that we have a planetary oligarchy which represents around 10% of the population. This oligarchy, I repeat, owns 86% of the available resources. 10% of the population—not so far from the aristocracy of the ancien regime. It's pretty much of the same order. Our world reinstates, reconfigures, an oligarchical situation that it has passed through and known for a long time and to which, in other forms and under other aspects, it is now returning.

So, we have an oligarchy of 10%, and then we have a destitute mass of almost half of the global population, the mass of the destitute population, the overwhelming majority of the African and Asian masses. The total now comes to around 60%, and there remain the other 40%. These 40% are the middle classes. The middle classes who, laboriously, share out between them the remaining 14% of the world's resources.

This is a very significant vision of the structure of the world: we have a mass of destitute people who make up half of the global population, we have an oligarchy whom I could well call aristocratic, from the point of view of their number. And then we have the middle class, that pillar of democracy, who, representing 40% of the population, must share between them 14% of global resources.

This middle class is principally concentrated in the so-called advanced countries. So it is largely a Western class. It is the mass support for local democratic power, parliamentary power. I think that we can say, without wanting to insult its existence—since we're all more or less a part of it, aren't we?—that a very important aim of this group, which, even so, only has access to quite a small part of global resources, just 14%, is not to fall back into, not to be identified with, the immense mass of the destitute. Which we can well understand.

This is why this class, taken as a whole, is porous to racism, to xenophobia, to hatred of the destitute. These are the subjective determinations that threaten this median mass which defines the West in the broad sense, or the representation it has of itself; and they are determinations that fuel a sentiment of superiority. We know very well that the Western middle class is the vector of the conviction that the West, in the end, is the place of the civilised.

When we read everywhere that we must wage war on the barbarians, it is obviously being said in the name of the civilised, and in so far as these barbarians come from the enormous mass of those who are left behind, with whom the middle class does not want to identify, at any cost.

All of this clarifies the singular position of the middle class, especially the European middle class. It is like a photographic plate sensitive to the difference—which is constantly threatened by the capitalist real—between itself, the middle class, and the enormous mass, faraway, a little distant, but which also has its representatives in our own countries, of those who have little or nothing. And it is to this middle class threatened by precarity that we owe the discourse of the defence of values: ‘We must defend our values!’ In reality, to defend our values means to defend the Western way of life, that is to say the civilised sharing-out of 14% of global resources between 40% of the ‘median’ people. Pascal Bruckner, head held high like Hollande in his role as warchief, tells us that this way of life is not negotiable. ‘The Western way of life is not negotiable.’ This is the phrase of Pascal Bruckner who, himself, in any case, will not negotiate. With anyone. He is already convinced, Bruckner is; he dons his uniform: War! War! Such is his wish, his catechism.

This is one of the reasons why the mass murder of which we speak this evening is significant and traumatising. For it strikes within this Europe, which, in certain regards, is the soft underbelly of globalised capitalism, it strikes at the heart of the middle mass, the middle class which represents itself as an island of civilisation at the centre of a world—whether it is a matter of the oligarchy who are so few that we can hardly see them, or the immense mass of the destitute—that surrounds them, enframes them and presses close to them, this middle class. This is the reason why the sinister event was experienced as a crisis of civilisation, that is to say as an attack on something which already, in its historical and natural existence, is threatened by developments underway in globalised capitalism, but to which nevertheless we cling.

This is the first effect of the structure of globalised capitalism on populations. But apart from this there is something else very important to understand about what has happened. In the world today there are a little over two billion people of whom we can say that they are counted for nothing. It is not even that they belong, as they obviously do, to the mass of the destitute 50%. It’s worse: they are counted for nothing *by capital*, meaning that from the point of view of the structural development of the world, they are nothing, and that therefore, strictly speaking, they should not exist. They should not be there. It would be better for them not to be there. But they are there all the same.

What does it mean to say that they are counted for nothing? It means that they are neither consumers nor a labour force. Because there are only two modes of existence for capital, if you don't belong to the oligarchy: you must be an employee, making a bit of money, and then you must spend this money by consuming products that are manufactured by the same capital. Your identity in the eyes of the dominant tendency of today's world is the double identity, structured by money, of employee and consumer.

Now, there are two billion adults who have no access to either of these identities. They have no access to work, nor are they students, or retired, and, by way of consequence, nor do they have access to the market. From the point of view of the general logic of the world, of imperious and self-satisfied capitalist globalisation, they are as if non-existent. What is more, we are beginning to hear propaganda concerning the extremely dangerous threat of an invasion of our dear civilised Europe by these people who do not exist or should not exist. Everything around the question of migratory movements, the question of the birth rate in Africa, is directly connected to this agonising question: 'My God! Are we going to see a massive influx of these people into our country because their number is growing, even though there are already probably two billion of them?' Once we have got to that point, to go from the fact that they should not exist to practices that ensure their inexistence is only one more step.

But where does this mass of people come from, these people whose existence the contemporary world counts for nothing? To understand this point, it is enough to be a little bit—just a little bit—Marxist. Capital, and thus those who own it, only value the labour force—meaning: they only employ people in the companies they direct—because they can make a profit from doing so. This is what Marx called, in his jargon, the extraction of surplus value. So there is no necessary reason to think that capital is able to value *all* of the available labour force. There have already been other periods of mass unemployment, notably in the thirties, after the great crisis of 1929. But today it seems that, beyond the crisis that began in 2008, this impasse of employment is more structural, and even definitive. Globalisation perhaps makes it intrinsically impossible for a capitalism that has achieved its maximal extension to value, in the form of the profits that can be made from them, the available labour force. And perhaps this is aggravated further: perhaps the system of profit, which is the unique source of the dynamic of capital, has hit a barrier created by its own extension, where, in order to value the totality of the available labour force, average working hours will have to be lowered considerably, so as to be able to hire the two billion people who have been stranded.

Now, this can't happen. Why can't it happen? Because average working hours can't be lowered. And why not? Well, very simply because of the mechanisms of profit production: we know that a significant number of work hours are destined for the production of surplus-value and that, below this number, a profit will no longer be made. We might consider that, in all probability, to have a reasonable capitalist valuation of the labour force today, average working hours, on a global scale, would

have to continue to be situated in the region of forty hours per week. And that during this time there will be two billion people, and probably more, who have no work.

One could therefore calculate in the opposite direction. One could say: taking account of the situation, a reasonable global government which cares about the public good might consider that one must decide—as Marx imagined would take place—that average working hours on a global scale must be reduced to twenty hours. Perhaps less. Obviously we would then see a rapid absorption of this enormous mass of people who cannot find work—they would become employed. The decrease in working hours was a central point of Marx's reformist-revolutionary propositions, since he saw very well that, in order to tear work away from the domination of capital, mass worker action would have to push for a decrease in working hours, to the point where capital would no longer be able to tolerate it.

But for the moment, it is capital that has won out. And since it is capital that has won, not only does it not tolerate a decrease in working hours, not even to the meagre thirty-five hours proposed by Martine Aubry. And those who cannot find their place within this framework—well, it fearlessly declares that they are nothing. This is why in our world there is an enormous mass of people who are counted for nothing. This is a point that is absolutely necessary to take into account if we want to understand what has happened.

Let's note also the geography of all of this: the division in space of this available labour force counted for nothing is clearly linked to zoning. In the zones where the situation is anarchic, where the state is absent, and where armed gangs circulate, one resigns oneself without much bother to the fact that the populations there will, strictly speaking, be without any established defence, and that they will rot away in 'humanitarian' camps. Why worry too much about their existence, since they are neither consumers nor a labour force? They will just have to make their way, between armed gangs and capitalist predators of every stripe, and live however they can.

This explains the fact that entire zones are given over to a fascist-type political gangsterism—which would not be the case, which could not be the case, if there were not billions of people who are counted for nothing. If, through a rational system of working hours, everyone was integrated into the figures of ordinary sociality, of common sociality, these situations of banditry and human trafficking would be impossible. But the combination of zoning—that is, the destruction of states by Western predators—and the phenomenon of the existence of millions or billions of people who are counted for nothing, leads to the existence, across substantial swathes of the planet, sometimes immense countries like Congo, of what can be called a gangster-type domination.

What do we mean by this? Certain kinds of savage, armed capitalist firms occupy the spaces left empty where the state has disappeared, conscripting those who have been left abandoned, in particular children and adolescents, and indulge in a pillaging articulated to the global market. As when Daesh sells columns of trucks carrying petrol

to Turkey. It is in this context that fascist armed gangs with a religious coloration begin to appear.

Ah! Religion! Islam! At last you got there, our great islamophobic thinkers will be saying. Yes, yes, I'm getting there. But I want to say straight away that religion has always been available to be used as a pretext, a rhetorical cover, manipulable and manipulated by fascist gangs. Christianity is no exception. Just take Spanish fascism, Franco's fascism, extremely keen on mass executions, even a long time after the end of the Civil War: this fascism was literally glued to the Catholic religion. Franco's armed gangs were blessed by priests, and one spoke of the great Catholic Spain that was going to replace the terrible republican Spain. Yet in reality it was just a question of state power and its sacking by the fascists. So it is not very serious to lay the blame on Islam, frankly. Above all, the nature of these armed gangs is to occupy a devastated capitalist-type terrain in order to establish a profitable gangsterism, which subsequently, to appeal to young people in revolt, may take on the most various of spiritual aspects. Religions, as is the case with other ideologies, including, alas, revolutionary ideologies, have always been susceptible to being combined with mafia-like practices. The Italian mafia themselves, the mafia of the godfathers, still profess a punctilious Catholicism.

But all of this relates to the subjective aspect of our situation.

### **3. Reactive Subjectivities**

Now I want to come to the typical subjectivities that appear in our conjuncture. By 'typical subjectivity' I understand the psychic forms, the forms of conviction and of affect, that are produced by the world of which I speak. This is not a catalogue of all possible subjectivities, but of those that I consider as being induced or produced by the structure of the contemporary world.

I think there are three: Western subjectivity, the subjectivity of desire for the West—which is not the same thing—and the subjectivity that I would call 'nihilist'. I think that these three subjectivities are the typical creations of the contemporary state of the world.

Western subjectivity is the subjectivity of those who share the 14% left over by the dominant oligarchy. It is the subjectivity of the middle class, and in addition it is largely concentrated in the most developed countries. It is here that the crumbs can be shared out. This subjectivity, as we see it in action today, is in my view worked through by a contradiction. A first element is a great self-satisfaction—westerners are very happy with themselves, they like themselves a lot. There is a historical arrogance behind this, of course: it was not that long ago that westerners held the world in their hands. At that time, one needed only to add up the possessions, conquered by pure violence, of the French and the English, and one would have practically the whole map of the extra-European world. What remains of this direct and immense imperial power is a self-image of the westerner as, in some way, the representative of the modern world, as having invented and as being the defender of the modern way of life.

But this is just one side of things. The other side is a constant fear. The constant fear of what? I would say, employing a rather brutal materialism, the fear of sliding from the side of the shared 14% onto the side of the 50% who have nothing. In the world such as it is, members of the middle class are what one might call a privileged few. And the constant fear of a privileged few is to lose their privilege.

For perhaps, given the tensions of contemporary capitalism, a middle class will no longer be able to exist as before. This is not impossible. It's not impossible, given the increasing rapacity of the oligarchy and the costly conflicts that it is bound to pursue in order to defend its profit zones, that the middle class will no longer be allowed its 14% of available resources, but only 12%, for example. And then we'll see the looming spectre of what has been called the 'pauperization of the middle classes'.

This is why we have a typically Western dialectical relation between an extreme arrogant self-satisfaction and a constant fear. Whence the definition of the art of democratic government these days: the art of directing this fear, which animates their ideological and electoral base, the middle class, not against them—the governments—but against this or that representative of the destitute masses. This is a major operation: to convince the middle classes that there are indeed risks; that their fear is legitimate; but that this fear is not at all motivated by the wise measures put in place by the government and by the democratic management of business, but that its unique cause is the intolerable pressure exerted constantly on the middle classes by the enormous destitute masses, and in particular by its representatives inside our societies: foreign workers, their children, refugees, the inhabitants of dark cities, fanatical muslims. Here is the scapegoat sent out to pasture, by our masters and their media hacks, to feed on the fear of the middle classes; the organisation of a sort of rampant civil war whose sinister effects we are seeing more and more of. Such are the subjective hazards of those who represent, in a certain sense, the very body of the West.

Now consider those who are neither of the oligarchy, nor of the middle class. That is to say, those who are neither consumers nor employees, and who therefore are situated outside of the world market. It must be understood that they are constantly exposed to the spectacle of the luxury and arrogance of these first two groups. The mass media purveys it, and the mass media everywhere accompanies the global expansion of capitalism, and organises the permanent spectacle of this expansion. Here we have two absolutely linked phenomena. And what is more, the planetary media are concentrated in gigantic multinational firms such as Apple, Google, and so on.

The effect of this spectacular accompaniment is that not only is the Western way of life, the dominant mode, non-negotiable, as the valorous Bruckner says, but what's more, it is shown to the whole world as such. And so the destitute, wherever they may be, enjoy the constant spectacle of the luxury and arrogance of the others. And this (although hopefully not definitively) without giving rise to any overall ideological and political movement that would aim to counteract, and then do away with, the hegemony of capitalism; so, these destitute masses, they see that there is somewhere a nucleus of

luxury, of arrogance, of pretention to civilisation, to modernity, which they do not have the means to really oppose in thought or in action, any more than they share in its reality. And the result is a bitter frustration, a classic mixture of envy and revolt.

Whence the other two typical subjectivities. The one that comes first is what I call desire for the West: the desire to possess, to share what is represented, and what is vaunted everywhere as the luxury of the West. Thus one adopts middle-class behaviour and consumption, without having the means to do so. This obviously gives rise to phenomena such as migratory flows, for the elementary form of desire for the West is quite simply the desire to leave the devastated zones to join this famous Western world, since life is so good there, since everyone is happy and bathes in magnificent modern luxury. And if one cannot go there, then one can indulge in local alienations—that is to say, tendencies to copy, with impoverished means, the configurations of Western modes of life. One might speak at length on this theme of desire for the West, which is fundamental today in the world and which has considerable effects, all disastrous.

The last subjectivity, nihilist subjectivity, is a desire for revenge and destruction which, obviously, is coupled with the desire for departure and alienated imitation. It is natural that this violent desire for revenge and destruction is often expressed, formalised, in reactive mythologies, in the exaltation of traditionalisms that one claims to be defending, possibly by force of arms, against the Western way of life, against desire for the West.

Here it is a question of the nihilism of he whose life is counted for nothing. This nihilism is seemingly constituted against the desire for the West, but only because desire for the West is its hidden phantom. If the nihilist did not activate the death drive, if he did not give free reign to his aggression, ultimately a murderous aggression, he knows very well that in reality he too would succumb to the desire for the West, which is already present in him.

We must see clearly that these two typical subjectivities—the subjectivity of desire for the West and the nihilist subjectivity of revenge and destruction—form a couplet that gravitates, like a positive and negative version, around the fascination exerted by Western domination.

And all of this in a context where there is no proposal for any sort of collective uprising that would affirm and organise the perspective of another structure of the world. So that these three typical subjectivities are really entirely internal to the structure of the world as I have described it. And it is on the basis of this interiority that I will characterise what I call contemporary fascism.

#### **4. Contemporary Fascism**

Generally speaking, I think that we can call ‘fascism’ the popular subjectivity that is generated and aroused by capitalism either when there is a grave systemic crisis—as

was the case in the thirties—or, perhaps more profoundly, under the effect of the structural limits of capitalism brought to light by its globalisation. A globalisation which, let us recall, is at once an expansion and a revelation of its incapacity to value the whole of the available labour force.

Fascism is a reactive subjectivity. It is intra-capitalist, since it proposes no other structure of the world, and it installs itself within the world market, in so far as it reproaches capitalism for not being able to keep the promises that it makes. In fascizing, the disappointment of the desire for the West becomes the enemy of the West, because in reality its desire for the West is not satisfied. This fascism forms an aggressive, nihilist and destructive drive because it is constituted on the basis of an intimate and negative repression of desire for the West. It is largely a repressed desire for the West the place of which is taken up by a deadly nihilist reaction whose target is precisely that which was the possible object of desire. A classic psychoanalytical schema, then.

As for its form, we can define modern fascism as a death drive articulated in a language of identity. It is entirely possible for religion to be an ingredient in this articulation: Catholicism played this role for Spanish fascism during the Civil War, Islam is playing it today for the Middle East, particularly where imperial zoning has destroyed states. But religion is just a cover, it is not at all what is at the bottom of all this, it is a form of subjectivation but not the real content of the thing. The real content to which the debris of the religious fable lends its identitarian representation derives from the omnipresence of the desire for the West, whether in its affirmed and explicit form or in its deadly repressed form.

The practical form of these fascisms is always the logic of the gang, criminal gangsterism, with the conquest and defence of territories or business monopolies, just like the dealer in his 'hood. To keep a grip, one needs the spectacular character of cruelty, pillage, and, in the case of other mafia, the permanent recycling of things in the global market. Just as nihilist desire is only the flipside of desire for the West, so the destatized zones where nihilist subjectivity prospers are articulated with the global market, and thus with the real of the West. Daesh, as I have said, is a commercial company which sells petrol, artworks, cotton, arms, a whole heap of things. And its mercenaries are in fact employees, with certain extra privileges due to their pillaging and their reduction of captives to slavery.

In reality, then, this fascizing form is internal to the globalised capitalist structure, of which it is in a certain sense a subjective perversion. Everyone knows, what is more, that companies, but also confirmed Western clients such as the Saudi government, are continually negotiating with fascist gangs installed in the middle-east zones, and that they negotiate their own interests as best they can. Let us finally say that this fascism is the obverse of a frustrated desire for the West, organised more or less militarily on the flexible model of the mafia gang, and with various ideological colourings in which religion plays a purely formal part.

What interests me here is what this fascizing subjectivity offers to the young. After all, the killers of this January, like those of November, were young people, young people from France. They are young men between twenty and thirty years old, mostly from an immigrant worker background, second or third generation. These youths consider themselves as without prospects, without any place in society they could occupy. Even those who are educated to some extent, who have a baccalaureate, have no vision for themselves: no place for them, in any case no place that conforms to their desire. These youths therefore see themselves as being on the margins of the salaried class, of consumption, and of the future. So what fascization offers to them (what is stupidly called ‘radicalisation’, when it is a pure and simple regression) is a mixture of sacrificial and criminal heroism and ‘Western’ satisfactions. On one hand, the youth will become something like a mafioso, and proud of it, capable of sacrificial and criminal heroism: kill the westerners, wipe out the killers of other gangs, practice a spectacular cruelty, conquer territories, etc. This on one hand, and then on the other, touches of the ‘good life’, various satisfactions. Daesh pays its group of thugs rather well, much better than they would ‘normally’ get in the zones where they live. They have a little money, they have women, they have cars, etc. So it’s a mixture of deadly heroic propositions and, at the same time, Western corruption by products. And this is a consistent mixture that has always, fundamentally, been characteristic of fascist gangs.

Religion can perfectly well act as an identitarian sauce for all of this, precisely in so far as it is a suitably anti-Western referent. But as we have seen, in the final analysis, the origin of these youths doesn’t matter much, their spiritual or religious origin, as they say, and so on. What counts is the choice they have made about their frustration. And they will rally to the mixture of corruption and sacrificial and criminal heroism because of the subjectivity that is theirs, not because of their Islamic conviction. What is more, we have been able to see that, in most cases, islamization is terminal rather than inaugural. Let’s say that it’s fascization that islamizes, not Islam that fascizes.

## **5. Who are the Killers?**

Given these conditions, who are the November killers, and what can we say of their acts? Let’s say that the killers are young fascists, in the sense I just described. A comparison I would willingly make is between them and certain of the fascizing *miliciens* in France during the last war. In these bands of young *miliciens*, collaborators with the Germans, there was also an aspect of ‘Viva la muerte!’, the aspect of: we can do what we like, we’re armed, we can kill, we can torture. There was an openly advertised cruelty. And then there were also a whole heap of petty profits—the good life, barcrawls, nice cars, cash, girls.... So it was a mixture of the same ingredients. And, in a sense, for the same reasons. What were they, these *miliciens*? They were French but the French of civil war, acting against the most self-evident national interests, since they collaborated with the Nazi occupiers and killed other Frenchmen. There was something conflicted in this. Like their imam, Pétain, they abundantly saluted France, with the national flag—“La France! La France!”—even while they worked, in the most sordid conditions, against the most elementary national interests, the perennial interests of not being occupied by a foreign power. This is what I call an internal scission within this fascist subjectivity. The killers of today are, in a certain sense, typical products of frustrated desire for the West, people inhabited by a repressed

desire, constituted by this desire. They imagine that they are driven by anti-Western passion, but they are only one of the nihilist symptoms of the blind emptiness of globalised capitalism, of its inability to count everyone in the world that it has shaped.

Their act—a blind mass-murder—is not an attack. An attack is something organised by Resistants against the Nazi occupants and their Pétainist accomplices, or better still, the attack that the glorious Russian populists mounted to kill the Tsar. In fact, if we look at how the massacre of Friday November 13 played out, it was neither an organised affair nor a military attack, it was, ultimately, a bloody but mismanaged affair. But it didn't matter, since the young fascists had decided that their life did not count. This is the absolute wellspring of this kind of affair. Their own life did not count. And since their own lives did not count, the lives of others meant nothing to them either. It is truly nihilism that is at the bottom of all of this. In the end one is going to burn out one's life in a 'heroism' as ridiculous and artificial as it is criminal. I think that we should call it a horrific 'mass-murder' in which, just as horrific, the murderer includes himself. Here we have a suicidal form of crime that takes the death drive to its lowest point. Nothing left, neither victims nor assassins.

As we can see, it is an atrocious and criminal fascist act. However, is it enough to speak of 'barbarians', as has become the official appellation? This word 'barbarian' has always been opposed to 'civilised'. The 'war on the barbarians' is the war of the civilised against the barbarians. But there is no reason to concede to Western arrogance that it represents civilisation when faced with an atrocious criminal act. And this is the moment to recall that Western killings are today permanent and extraordinarily bloody.

Just three examples: Westerners now have the power, with drones, but also with teams specialising in what in France are called "homo" (for "homicide") missions, to assassinate people on the secret orders of heads of state. Murder is more convenient with drones, for one no longer even needs to leave the office. Neither Obama nor Hollande scorn these means, the convenient and the less convenient alike. But in the case of drones, statistics have been recorded: for a really targeted death (say, a gang chief), there are in general nine collateral victims, who could be anyone, children from the neighbourhood perhaps. That's drones for you. So, if you multiply the targeted drone assassinations that the calm Obama has carried out throughout his term of office, you very quickly end up with hundreds and hundreds of people who have been massacred for nothing. So if we call killing people for nothing 'barbarian', then the West are barbarous every day, and we should realise this. Quite simply, in the first case of barbarianism, the barbarianism of the barbarians, we have a deliberate and suicidal mass murder. In the case of the barbarianism of the civilised, it is a technological mass murder, dissimulated and self-satisfied.

Second example. The proportion of western deaths in explicit wars, such as Iraq or Palestine, is around 1 in 20. The West have gone so far as to claim that the aim is zero deaths on their side and all deaths on the other side, which is a very particular mode of warfare. They haven't quite got there yet. But nearly, if we count the deaths in the Iraq, Afghan, Palestinian etc. conflicts, which average one death on one side for twenty on

the other. This fantastic disproportion is registered by people: people who live in this type of situation see very well that this is how it works, and for them, the greatest barbarian is the West.

Third example. Take, even without going into its political significance, the matter of Gaza: 2000 Palestinian deaths, including 450 children. So this is civilised? Just because it was airplanes that killed, shredded, crushed, and burned people, and not young idiots who opened fire into the crowd before killing themselves?

The killers are young fascists who are like Pétain's *miliciens*, and whose motives are hazy, deadly, and what's more, without any real content. But there is no particular reason to act as if, in regard to these people, the Western armies represent civilisation. It's something that just isn't admissible. War is war, it is always more or less murky slaughter, and we ourselves have tortured, killed, deported just as many, and more, in the colonial wars, and since then. And we will continue to do so on a grand scale, if, as our governments proclaim, the time has come for a final war on 'terrorism'.

## **6. The State's Reaction: 'France' and 'War'**

I think that the fundamental function of a state such as the French state is to discipline the middle classes. And this is spectacularly the work of the Left. The Left is excellent when it comes to disciplining the middle classes. Let me remind you that during my youth, during the Algerian war, the Left, who, with Guy Molet, were in charge of the government, obtained 'special powers'—just as today they obtain with almost unanimous support a 'state of emergency'—to launch a total war. It does indeed seem that, in order to discipline the middle classes by saying to them 'war, war'—when war is hardly a feature of the habits of the aforementioned class—what is really needed is the authority of an arrant socialist.

So obviously this disciplining of the middle classes under the slogan of war is also a fiction. It's a deception, no one is ready to go to war here, in this country. The word 'war' is not in its place. In January the state used republican laicity, this time it tries to use the old nationalism, France, the tricolor flag coupled with what is their perennial trump card: 'it's war'. But today, this coupling is obviously aberrant. And what is more, in my view, it will not work for long.

So I want to say a few words about these two words.

Let's start with 'France'. France, today, is a signifier with no definable affirmative content. What is 'France' today? It is a second-class actor within the world structure that I have described. And then we say 'our values!', but what are the values of France? I have my own point of view on this. France, what is singular about France—because if there are French values, we must ask what is singular about them—is the revolutionary tradition. Republican first of all, from the '89 revolution. And then socialist, anarcho-syndicalist, communist, and finally leftist, all of this between 1789 and, let's say, 1976.

But all that's over. It's over. France can no longer be represented today in any credible way as the privileged site of a revolutionary tradition. Rather, it is characterised by a singular collection of identitarian intellectuals. This is also manifested by something that has never happened anywhere else: openly discriminatory laws concerning a part of the poor that it has created. The laws on the Islamic veil, all of that, this is awful, these are laws of stigmatisation and segregation, targeting what? Targeting the poor, the poor populations who have their religion, just like the Breton domestics and workers were Catholic in times past. Demonizing them, when it is French capitalism that has created their poverty. Why? Because it is capitalism that destroyed French industry. Why did so many people come from the Third World to France? Because we went to get them! We must remember the period, between the fifties to the eighties: we flew to Morocco to collect workers, who were needed for work on factory production lines. These people brought their families, there was a second generation, there were youths whose normal destiny would be to become workers, qualified workers, technicians.... But we destroyed the apparatus of production, the factories are almost gone, everything is increasingly outsourced. So these youths have no future. But all of this is founded on a deception, a detestable fraud. We imported them with no guarantee, and now we want to export them again.... But you can't do that, you don't treat 'human material' like that, surely.... So I really think that today 'France' means a bit of all that, and it doesn't add up to any significant, visible, or interesting emblem. And those who are having identitarian jitters over France, we can see very well what they want. Ultimately, as is always the case, they want us to persecute the others. Because identity is always ultimately that, in the final analysis, when it is not of universal significance as in the revolutionary tradition. An identity that does not have a universal signification can only be defined by persecution of those who do not fall under it. There is no other way to give it a semblance of life. Those who say 'France, France', what are they doing for France? Well, they bellow against the Arabs, that's pretty much it. And I don't see that as an eminent service rendered to France. It doesn't particularly honor the French. Meanwhile, less than 3% of these courageous 'French' would agree to die for their country (the poll has been done...).

As for war, one thing is clear: it is not 'barbarians' who have declared a war, it is the French state that, in the wake of private firms and sometimes the Americans, has gone to mix itself up in murky imperial affairs, to participate in zoning, to destroy states, and in doing so created the whole situation whose panorama I've tried to paint here. And this situation includes the subjective genesis of young fascists in the devastated zones of social life, and the fact that a whole section of the global population is counted for nothing.

## **7. The Conditions of a Return to a Politics of Emancipation, Detached From the Schema of the Contemporary World**

I am coming to what will bring this to a conclusion: How, in these conditions, can we try to construct a different way of thinking? How can we tear ourselves away from all of this? I mean to say: tear ourselves away from the propaganda that accompanies every declaration of war, even if this 'war' is fictional, falsified. There is a great tradition of declarations of war, nationalist rants, absolutely fictional propaganda. You only have to

look at the literature concerning the 'Boche' in 1914. Monsters! Assassins! But in truth, we must say, the Boche in 1914 was not that different from the French.

So, what to do? I think firstly that, as to the space defined as 'France' and the phantomatic French, we should replace them, mentally and practically, with an international space. A way of thinking internationally, I would even say transnationally, that would be able to measure up to capitalist globalisation. Because the capitalists stopped being French a long, long time ago; they have a headstart on us. They are at home in Shanghai, they are at home in San Francisco, in Morocco, in Congo, in Sao Paulo....

And as for us, we want to be little middle-class French huddled together in France? Pretty retarded, that is. And all the more so if we aggravate this retardation with our inability to recognise as being with us, and of us, the people who are here, on the ridiculous pretext that they're muslims, or that they come from Africa, or, worse still, that they dress like this and not like that, or that they eat meat prepared in a particular way! If, in our turn, we count for nothing—or even as enemies—people who live here but who, for capital, count as nothing. If we are incapable of speaking with and acting with these people—especially with them—so as to create an opening in the situation, a new political path. If we are unable to undertake with them our affirmative, creative exit from an benighted West.

It is terrible to consider that the revolutionary defeat has been such that we are not even in a position to be able to put together a globalised mental representation of the problems, whereas our immediate adversaries mastered this a long time ago. And they mastered it precisely to the detriment of everything that the protection of states had to offer. In turn, we must have the force to partially disinterest ourselves in the state itself, or at least in the state as it is. Stop voting! Don't lend any importance to the lying, vain proclamations of our governments! Let's go elsewhere, to the places where, sometimes indistinct, but always real, the popular will lives. Because the state is what comes along when 'France' no longer means much. It is then that the state calls us, as it does today. But we know that the state, in every way, is at this moment nothing but an agent of the new globalised spread of capital.

There is certainly a contradiction between the fascist and criminal destination of frustration on one hand, and the global development of capitalism and its mass support, the middle class, on the other. There is a deadly contradiction, we see it well. However, it is a subjective contradiction internal to capitalism itself. It is not a contradiction between Good and Evil. It is not a contradiction between the values of Civilisation and Barbarianism. It is a kind of internal torsion that signifies that a part of the West's impotence has turned against it. Its impotence when it comes to creating a habitable subjective space for all the youth of the world.

This excuses nothing, it excuses no crime. Fascism in all its forms is horrific. But we must understand this contradiction, the contradiction between the deadly nihilism of fascists and the destructive and empty imperial deployment of globalised capitalism, of

which we cannot and must not become the agents. In none of our most essential determinations can we allow ourselves to be structured by this contradiction.

What we are suffering from is the absence, at the global scale, of a politics that would be detached entirely from the interiority of capitalism. It is the absence on the global scale of this politics that means that a young fascist appears, is created. It is not the young fascist, banditry, and religion, that create the absence of a politics of emancipation able to construct its own vision and to define its own practices. It is the absence of this politics that creates the possibility of fascism, of banditry, and of religious hallucinations.

I think now of the tragedy of Phaedra, in Racine's play, when Phaedrus says, at the moment when she must declare her love which, to her own eyes, is a criminal love: 'My wound is not so recent'. We, also, can say that our wound is not so recent as immigration, as Islam, as the devastation of the Middle East, as Africa being subjected to pillage...our wound comes from the historical defeat of communism. Indeed, it is not so recent.

By 'communism' I understand simply the name, the historical name, that was given to a strategic thought detached from the hegemonic structure of capitalism. This failure was probably sealed in the middle of the seventies of the previous century. And it is because of this that the periodization that I propose starts with the eighties, when we began to feel, in the form of a new energy of capitalism, the deleterious effects of this failure.

Where are we today? There are local experiments, there are convictions, I'm not saying that there is nothing. There is a whole series of things that need to be irrigated by a new thinking. And there is also a very clear representation of the forces at our disposal. There is a nomadic proletariat come from the most devastated zones. This nomad proletariat is very strongly internationalized already, and spread across the whole earth. Many workers in Korea are Nepalese, or come from Bangladesh, just as a whole mass of workers here have come from Morocco or Mali.... There is this enormous nomadic proletariat, which constitutes a virtual advance guard of the gigantic mass of people whose existence, in the world today, is not counted.

And then there are also intellectuals, middle-class people, Western ones included, who are available for this new thinking, who bear it, or try to do so. The whole problem lies in their connecting themselves with this nomad proletariat, going to see them, talking to them. No new thinking in politics will be born except in unexpected, improbable alliances. In egalitarian trajectories and encounters.

And then, there is the youth.... There is a youth who, for the reasons I have mentioned, when it arrives on the verge of the world, asks what the world has in store for it. And it perhaps doesn't want to embed itself in one of the three figures that I've called typical. Perhaps it doesn't want to intone the song of the glory of the West; perhaps it doesn't want to be driven by a desire for that glory or to try to invest its destiny in it; but

perhaps it also doesn't want to invest its destiny in a murderous nihilism. So long as some other proposition is not made to it, it will remain essentially disoriented. Capitalism is a machine for disorienting subjects, if they don't resign themselves to simply installing themselves in the vacuity of the duality consumer/employee.

And if this proposition is made, if there is an irrigation by this new thought, this will be what will overcome contemporary fascism—not the sordid wars of the state, which promise us nothing good. It will be the capacity to absorb, to annul, rampant fascization, because something else will have been proposed. We will create a fourth typical subjective figure, one that seeks to go beyond the domination of globalised capitalism without installing itself in nihilism, that murderous avatar of desire for the West. This is what is essential. And in order for this to take place, peculiar alliances must be forged; we must think on another scale. Intellectuals, different components of the youth, must become organically linked, by experiments at first local, and then more generalised, the scale of these things doesn't matter so much given where we are right now. What matters is that youths of every provenance, and intellectuals, make a gesture, carve out a path, make a step toward the nomad proletariat.

There is an urgency here, but a strategic urgency, proposed to all. It is a task, and a task for everyone. It is a work of thought, but it is also the work, the path, of going to see who is this other of whom you speak, who he really is, to gather his thoughts, his ideas, his vision of things; and for you to inscribe him—he, and you yourself in your time—within a strategic vision of the destiny of humanity that will try to change the direction of the oblique history of humanity, try to make humanity tear itself away from the opaque misfortune into which, at the moment, it has sunk.

I am an incurable optimist, aren't I—so I think that this is what will be done. But time is running out. Time is running out....

*Translated by Robin Mackay*