

## A Conversation with Étienne Balibar

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Étienne Balibar has become an international voice in recent decades, participating in contemporary debates on global events with the incisive political commentary for which he is well known and respected. Since his collaboration in 1965 with Louis Althusser in *Lire Le Capital*, Balibar has published extensively on a wide range of philosophical figures such as Marx, Spinoza, and Althusser, and on political issues that include transnational citizenship, democracy, equality, liberation, violence, racism, the *sans-papier* of Europe, and the predicament of the Palestinian people. His major translated works include *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (with Immanuel Wallerstein, 1988), *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx* (1994), *Spinoza and Politics* (1998), *The Philosophy of Marx* (2001), *Politics and the Other Scene* (2002), and *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (2004). Balibar teaches at the University of Paris X, Nanterre, and is a Distinguished Professor of Humanities at the University of California, Irvine. The following conversation, a testament to Balibar's passion for understanding the events and ideas of our time, took place in May 2005, on a sunny afternoon in his study in Paris.

ENNS: In a recent essay you discuss the ambivalence of victimhood, describing what you call an antinomy between an attitude or identification with victimhood and an attitude of resistance or agency.<sup>1</sup> I would like to begin by asking you how any critique of an identification with victimhood is possible that does not have as its effect the furthering of victimization. How do we remain wary of the passivity of the victim?

BALIBAR: I am not completely clear about the connotations of the term "victim" in different languages. I have a feeling that it does not sound exactly the same in French as it does in English. In French, the term victim is strong, yet it insists on a dimension of passivity and to some extent also resentment. A very interesting book was published some years ago called *La concurrence des victimes: Génocide, identité, reconnaissance*<sup>2</sup> (*The Competition Among Victims: Genocide, Identity, Recognition*) which launched a controversy around the status of victims. Now it has become a political strategy for groups which are either a minority, oppressed, or discriminated against—or claim to be—to present themselves as victims of genocide, or immemorial injustice, and try, either in the recent or remote past, to base their claims for equal rights, but also for symbolic and sometimes material redress, on the fact that

they have been victims. It is a perverse consequence of the recognition of the official definition of certain notions of genocide and crimes against humanity. The Armenians want their genocide to be officially recognized as the Jewish genocide has been recognized; heirs of the African slaves want recognition from the Western ex-colonial powers, or the states which benefited from slavery in a manner that is very difficult to evaluate. But there are historians now who do that kind of job, economists who try to propose evaluations for how much the North benefited from the slave trade and how much Africa lost in terms of lives and economic development. Chaumant's book was about this type of "business," similar to others which either target one single community, for example, how American Jews are using the memory of the Holocaust to enhance their status or simply create their collective identity. Consequently we have the problem of competition: each and every community finds a narrative that requires official acknowledgement and that will allow the community to acquire the status of victimhood. Many of us object to this as a very perverse way of practicing politics.

ENNS: It locks us into a victim/perpetrator economy or logic in which the purpose of political strategy becomes the separation of individuals or communities into camps: either you are for us or against us; either you are friend or enemy, victim or perpetrator.

BALIBAR: Yes, this issue is significant in France and Algeria. A few months ago in France, a banal event occurred—which is a replica of things that are taking place everywhere, but many French react as if it were something incredible—a call for a public *assises*, which is something like a conference but with more political resonance, a public covenant. It was made by a group against post-colonial racism, who gave themselves the collective name "*Les indigènes de la république*" or "the Indigenous of the Republic," indigenous being the typical term used to designate colonial subjects under French power, literally "native," a term which includes blacks in Africa, Arabs in North Africa, and people of color in general. In this public *assises* they denounced, and rightly so, the racist discrimination to which ex-colonial subjects or people of colonial descent are subjected in France: discrimination at work or the suppression of their cultures in the name of the famous republican universality, for example. The manifesto of this group claims that this racism is not only *not* receding, in spite of all sorts of public discourse, but growing and becoming institutionalized; France is still a colonial country due to its colonial culture and immigrants are therefore experiencing the continuation of the colonial relationship.

This kind of discourse—which has much for it—can be expressed in different ways which are not absolutely equivalent. I was asked to join the list of signatories, having spoken of the legacy of colonialism like many French intellectuals who have voiced their criticism against discrimination. I refused to do so after I had discussions with some of the initiators, both because I could not myself sign the text which talked of "we, *les indigènes de la république*," for I'm not "indigenous" in that sense, and because there were many formulations that I didn't like on sensitive issues such as the banning of the Islamic veil in schools. This was presented as one, if not *the* most typical, example of colonial victimization, a point on which I had my reservations although I was against the banning. I'm not ready to adopt the exact opposite position, however, that we need to present the defense of the veil in the form of resistance against colonialism. I'm especially wary of the way in which certain Islamic religious groups try to manipulate that.

They published this document and now it is the focus of very intense debate, combined with debates on other historical issues which are playing a role because of anniversaries and because of the "return of the repressed." One is the anniversary of the violent suppression of popular protest which took place in Algeria on May 8, 1945, the same day that victory against Nazi Germany took place. This is a special anniversary for a number of reasons.<sup>3</sup> *Les indigènes de la république* decided symbolically—it is a very strong symbol—to have their commemorative celebration on this anniversary.

ENNS: It seems we are caught in a double bind: if we are critical of the identification with victimhood, we risk appearing to contribute to the very victimization a group is remembering and surviving, but if we simply accept the "business," as you called it, of competition for victimhood we remain caught up in the binary logic of victim/perpetrator in which justice can become a matter of vengeance. Could you comment on what relation this might have to a discourse on alterity or otherness? Have we reached a point where the Other has become morally blameless? Is the discourse of the Other exhausted?

BALIBAR: I have no ready answer to that, but I am tempted to say that what is taking place with otherness took place to some extent with difference. Otherness, apparently, is even more radical. Perhaps the category of the Other has to be deconstructed. When the post-colonial critique started—take Edward Said's version of the critique of Orientalism, not as a starting point, but as a typical version of this—it amounted to explaining that the culture of imperialism was not a simple accident, or secondary aspect, or one characteristic among others of the

dominant culture; it was its core, its structuring model. It had to do with the creation of a constitution of what the Germans would call *Selbstthematisierung* or self-identification, a collective self-image of the West or of the North. This self-image which was everywhere in institutions, narratives, popular imaginations, and so on, needed a projected counterpart: the image of the absolute Other, the Oriental. People in the colonies, or in the semi-colonies outside of the West, were immediately replaced in their actual history by this artificial, negative representation that the West had created. In the final step this image of the Other was imposed on them, or at least an attempt was made to impose it on them.

There's no question that this actually captures a very real process. It has the inconvenience, if taken in the most direct and neutral form, to grant non-Western peoples—others with a small "o"—a purely passive role. The only possibility is to think about their resistance. It is a very strange logical figure. They are external to this idea of absolute exteriority. Now maybe we are experiencing a second degree variety of this ideological mechanism in which what reduces or suppresses, I would say, any agency or dialectics is not the cultural image itself but the abstract idea of demarcation between the dominant culture and the projected image of the Other. This is extremely reductive.

ENNS: What about philosophically? I am thinking mostly of Lévinas here. I think that especially in Continental philosophy circles in North America, the notion of ethics has become overly preoccupied with a Lévinasian sense of alterity, to the extent that the responsibility to the other has become overwhelming, hyperbolic even, which could lead to the neglect of the other's own responsibility.

BALIBAR: What I tend to believe is that Lévinas' idea of the Other is a completely theological idea. This does not mean it is not interesting or important. I think that Lévinas has pushed to the extreme or brought to a new achievement, with philosophical skill and an almost unquestionable moral quality, a post-Christian version of Judaism which is certainly based on an extensive study and perfect acquaintance with the Talmudic tradition but which pushes to the extreme the need of modern Judaism to find and discover its own version of the Christian and humanistic rewriting of monotheism. In Lévinas, then, the Other is first of all the divine name. It is the name of God, the absolute Other, *le tout Autre*—we say in France *le tout Autre est tout autre*. Derrida was never tired of playing with this phrase which is untranslatable. The absolute Other, all Other, is any other, which directly expresses the short circuit. The absolute Other is God himself, who has nothing in common with us, who is not thinkable in human terms. It is negative theology, which is very

important in the Judaic tradition. Now this absolute Other in fact is not living in a remote cosmic external region of the world, but is with us, around us: our neighbor.

This of course reverses, if you combine it with the tragic experience of extermination, the originary scene where you meet the absolute Other: the scene of an executioner facing a victim. Any of us could or should imaginarily identify with the executioner who has to choose. In fact it's the absolute moral test, *l'épreuve*, to acknowledge the human in the figure of the Other, or ignore and deny and suppress it. Maybe I simplify enormously.

ENNS: Isn't this theological idea of the Other precisely the problem for Lévinas when making the transition to considering the others our neighbors? The tension in Lévinas between the ethical and the political is significant.

BALIBAR: I wouldn't deny that that tension is there even if you don't refer to Lévinas. The political issues which we are tentatively discussing here concerning victims or concerning racism are immediately ethical issues as well. My tendency would not be to deny that there are ethical issues; it would be to reflect on the way in which the ethical can also be political. By political I mean the problem that has to do with agency, with collective agency, that can be addressed and to some extent transformed through collective institutional, and practical and historical, action. It doesn't amount to denying that this is an ethical issue. Maybe this is where, above all, a distinction between ethics and morals can remain fruitful. Nothing in the idea of an ethical issue forces you to reduce yourself to a level of personal morality and commitment.

What is immediately striking is the enormous ambivalence of the category of Other or absolute Otherness which can shift into as many and perhaps every name of the absolute, from a completely negative to a completely positive and semantic value. Possibly one of the great achievements of Lévinas, or one of the reasons why his work is appealing to many, is that he's not ignoring this ambivalence. He is building it within his own discussion of the question of otherness. The absolute Other is something that emerges whenever the possibility of the inhuman becomes tangible and present within the human itself. The human can be vindicated or recreated only at the expense of reversing the inhuman into the human or achieving a kind of permanent victory within oneself against radical evil.

I'm realizing that possibly one of the reasons why I have such difficulties with Lévinas is that I perceive in him—perhaps wrongly—a presentation of the idea that one can in principle (it's grace) completely

reverse the inhuman into the human with the help of God. This is where I'm afraid that again it could be a distortion of moralism and humanism. I tend to read with greater interest authors who are more tragic. Maybe for each of us it is an impossible task. We'll fail. We'll find ourselves permanently in institutions in which we will treat the other—that is, any other—not as our neighbor but as a victim, as humiliated and suppressed. But these are human individual failures. At the ontological level the absolute good is there in the form of the reversal of the absolute evil. I'm not sure of this. I would avoid the transcendental scheme of reversing evil into goodness through the category of the absolute Other.

ENNS: Do you think that guilt on the part of the privileged, and what we might call a politics of pathos, has something to do with the immense popularity of Lévinas' ethics in certain academic circles? I have just read Kelly Oliver's *The Colonization of Psychic Space* (2004) in which she uses very strong Lévinasian language to argue that we need to think of ethics as a "hyperbolic" responsibility, and relies on what I would call a melancholic reading of Frantz Fanon, to describe the negative affects caused by oppression. I think this text represents a significant change in recent decades, since Hannah Arendt wrote *On Violence* and complained about the glorification of revolutionary violence in Sartre's and Fanon's work. I wonder if we have come to accept the violence of victims as the only recourse to claiming back their own destroyed or denied humanity.

BALIBAR: That's a very strong statement. I've seen some readings of *Black Skin White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* together which produce strange effects. Of course they were written by the same man, but to me they belong to almost completely different moral and intellectual universes. I do not want to be patronizing, but I tend to read *Black Skin White Masks* as a very tragic book in the way that it describes both phenomenological and psychoanalytic concepts of the double-consciousness of the colonial subject, and the Sartrean version of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic. The double consciousness is a fascinating theoretical story. It is tragic in the sense that in the end you hardly see how this condition can be changed. Oppression is not only internalized, it becomes built within the very language and form of writing in which you try to express yourself without despair and resistance. You apparently reach an absolute dead-end. The extraordinary achievement of *Black Skin White Masks* gives it not only an afterlife but makes it productive. Its influence is growing, and also its capacity to change the self-perception of post-colonial subjects all over the world. It also speaks to others who are not colonial but who find themselves for one reason or another in the same double-consciousness situation. But this clearly was

not the effect for Fanon himself. Fanon had to break the circle. The circumstances gave him no choice and offered him the possibility of joining the Algerian liberation struggle identifying somehow as a black Caribbean with the Algerians, in the name of a Third World revolutionary, and to considerably idealize this fight, describe it in apocalyptic terms as a type of final encounter between the human and the inhuman, as well as to anticipate the future of colonized peoples.

It is a tragedy that Fanon died of cancer before the end of the war, and therefore could not play any role or reflect on the continuation of the liberation process. We cannot know or imagine how he would have reacted to the actual post-colonial, post-independence situation. He certainly would not have been uncritical. So we are left with a final prophetic word and a blind apology of emancipatory violence, which I find unreadable. Whenever I say something like this in discussions—more in America than here, but here too—I'm likely to get the typical reactions about the white colonial subject who is horrified by the apology of violence. To which I reply if the discussion is not necessarily an offensive discussion: a good deal of the influence *The Wretched of the Earth* has earned all over the world came from the fact that Sartre had offered him a mirror image of his own phrase which was, in fact, full of the guilt of the white man.

To return to your initial question: you can imagine that somebody like me who has, in a sense, entirely made his political and ethical culture and training with Freud and Spinoza, is not really receptive to the theme of guilt and what Spinoza called "sad passions" as motors in a process of emancipation. So I tend to have very big difficulties with that.

ENNS: Regarding responses to Fanon, do you think that a kind of politics of pathos or affect is developing? I feel a certain horror when I read "Concerning Violence" in *The Wretched of the Earth*, despite also feeling pathos. When I was teaching this text to my students, in conjunction with some perspectives on Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation, I thought I would have to persuade them to try to understand the perspective of the Palestinian before completely judging suicide bombing as the epitome of evil. What happened instead is that many of them were immediately very willing to be apologetic for this kind of violence. Despite the argument—which you have often made yourself—that the practice is harming the Palestinians themselves, that it is self-destructive on many levels, the students quite vehemently claimed that Palestinians have no other recourse. They were convinced by the argument that violence arises from despair and terrible living conditions, which justifies suicide bombing. I found a complete lack of interest in

critique. I wonder whether this is a kind of trend, of pathos for the other, for the victimized other.

BALIBAR: There is apparently a generalized pathos which is extremely communicative, in the West, or the North. I tend to believe—and this will sound strangely Habermasian—that politics (which is about defending interests, claiming rights, changing one's condition) is possible only insofar as a common or public space exists. There are a number of words for this: Machiavelli strangely called it "humors," combining moods, forces, and agencies. This is precisely why the phenomenon of actual exclusion, otherness, or difference, is so crucial because it has always worked and keeps working as a way to prevent different groups from entering the realm of political action, meaning to contest and to claim one's rights. It is a way to disqualify groups already in advance. All the better if you can have them internalize this exclusion. Even violent conflict, then—and this is not a Habermasian conflict—is a form of communication in that sense. What forces me to reflect is the extent to which in the global public or political sphere that tries to emerge through chaotic and extremely violent processes of conflict—not clashes of civilizations, but of societies and powers—it is not only interests or arguments or ideologies that circulate, but also, as you said, pathos and affects and their corresponding images. And they are very communicative.

ENNS: We need this too.

BALIBAR: Yes, we certainly need this too. We cannot stick to a completely rationalist and utilitarian or strategic representation of actual politics. Now to speak of the Palestinian case, what bothers me about the way you asked the question is the fact that you immediately jumped to a universalistic or generalized description. You say, for example, *the* Palestinians: are they right or wrong to use this kind of tactic, suicide bombing? I don't think there is anything like *the* Palestinians to speak about in that case. These are tendencies and tactics which deeply divide the Palestinians among themselves. It's complicated because this division occurs in front of the enemy, so the enemy has its own instrumental views of the situation. There is the tendency of Israeli politics to simply identify Palestinian resistance, including armed resistance, as "religious terrorism," so the Palestinians have the additional difficulty of having to discuss their strategies of resistance, their possibilities, not only in a situation in which they are pushed into a corner and in fact don't have much choice, but one in which the enemy is constantly trying to exploit their own divisions and divergences. Hence the reluctance, to say the least, of Palestinian intellectuals and others to agree to criticize themselves,

others, and actions they in fact do not agree with. It is extremely delicate. I remember discussions regarding the motives of suicide bombers in which every one of my Palestinian interlocutors did not wish to present the question in an apologetic manner but wanted to discuss it in order *not* to readily accept a nihilistic presentation. They tended to explain that it was actually a form of resistance and not a form of despair or a self-destructive act.

The question of the right to kill civilians is a very delicate question. I've read and heard a lot of the discourse of the kind that you see in any colonial situation, in any case the kind of colonial situation in which we live—there are no civilians. The civilian population of Israel is a militarized body of settlers. Then, as always, it comes down to the question of children, which is likely to provoke something like: it's not a moral issue, it's a political issue. But the people with whom I argued could agree sometimes that these strategies, which they thought were more or less imposed on the Palestinian people, had very negative effects on the Palestinians themselves in terms of the actual relations of forces or in terms of socially destructive effects. For example, the way in which youngsters are enclosed in a vicious circle in which a completely futureless kind of life leads to a move away from something that Fanon and any revolutionary would probably have vindicated, namely, the idea that collective emancipation is a value higher than life, to the idea that to harm the enemy is a goal in itself. They reject the notion of the culture of death. They always rejected that in our discussions.

ENNS: A question that I always try to avoid but that I'd like to ask you: Is the violence of resistance justifiable? How would you respond? It's an old philosophical question that I never know how to answer since one can't universalize the question. It depends upon the historical situation.

BALIBAR: It *does* depend on the historical situation, although it is complicated. Recently, my interest in Gandhi has increased. One could not say that Gandhi saw non-violence as one tactic among others depending on circumstances. He certainly viewed non-violence in such a way that defined and organized it as *the* tactic that allowed oppressed people to achieve their goals actually, and so there is no symmetry in that sense. The Marxist tradition—the ideal, typical Marxist tradition, including people like Lenin—would probably defend the idea that there's no reason in the absolute to choose violent or non-violent forms of resistance. It depends entirely on the situation, on the conditions, the kind of adversary, and the relationship of forces that you can achieve. So they would have a more or less relativistic view of the value of the means with respect to the ends. Gandhi, however, has a more

absolute—which does not mean metaphysical or religious—representation of the problem.

I think the difficulty is the following: the political culture, the emancipatory political culture in which we Westerners have been trained, is based on the idea that we have a right, and that sometimes it is necessary, to resist oppression by any means, including violent means. Our memory is full of historical examples which range from slave revolts to de-colonization through independence, popular rebellions, and revolutions which seem to prove both that this is an effective means to fight against oppression and that it is not absolutely good or pure but still morally valuable. On the other hand, we also have a whole range of counter-examples, not of passive or non-violent resistance, but of obedience, voluntary servitude, subjection to the powers that be, which tend to be associated negatively with the culture of heroism. Marx joked about the fact that the French revolutionaries were adopting the gestures, the attitudes, and the customs of republican Rome. It is true, the motives of heroic virtue or of resisting oppression are profoundly permeated by these models of patriotic virtue associated with freedom. They are male models of masculine virtue, also strangely and absolutely non-Christian, which produce, if you push things to the extreme, a very profound rift in the middle of our culture. Religious values have been used for oppression. They are extremely difficult to use for liberation in the active sense of the term, except if we manage to explain that with the help of divine providence, the humiliated in the end will be vindicated, but probably not in this world. So our political culture of resistance, the republican and the revolutionary, is Roman and Greek, not Christian. Somehow this has been generalized all over the world because in fact the struggles of independence and de-colonization were adopting the same point of view.

Now the problem, for me, does not come from Christianity but from the fact that lessons of history (with all the ambiguity of such a formula in the twentieth century—I don't think the twenty-first will be very different, we'll see) have destroyed the notion of infinite right and power that was associated with this and brought in very powerful elements of finitude and ambivalence having to do with two things. One, the result that you achieve through violent resistance is a very fragile one, which doesn't protect you against future reversals and perversions of liberty and independence. Second, which is worse, after the victory or triumph of the resistance movement, some of the elements (I have post-colonial situations in mind) start perverting it from the inside, and reversing it into new forms of national oppression. These elements continue to develop the consequences of the way in which violence had to be systematized, internalized, and justified in a very material manner in the

period of the liberation struggle, simply by the fact that liberation through armed struggle requires an army, and after liberation that army is inherited, it remains there in the middle of the political institutions that have been constructed. This is the case particularly in Algeria after de-colonization. Not only is the army inherited but a certain heroic culture of violence as well, which is not in practice the beautiful image that it is in literature. Thus you have all the perverse effects and after-effects of the use of violence as a means of emancipation.

ENNS: It sounds hopeless.

BALIBAR: Yes absolutely, it sounds hopeless. It sounds hopeless unless you have a more dialectical representation of the process of emancipation where, to put it in very abstract terms, you have dangers on all sides, a sort of Marxist version of the old Roman rule, *cedant arma togae*, which means "the political must maintain control over the military." This was very much a part of the Marxist tradition which has been forgotten or reversed in some theorizations of guerrilla or armed warfare. I remember, for example, very harsh, apparently scholastic discussions around that theme with respect to the Chinese, Maoist theory, and Latin American guerrilla strategy. The orthodox Marxist view was that the political should remain hegemonic. Then the political can mean very different things; it can mean the "party." In a sense it is not any better because it is an ideological control.

I have considerably reevaluated, at least at the level of principles, the legacy of someone like Rosa Luxemburg, and without pathos or sentimentality. During the Russian revolution, Luxemburg tried to explain that a revolution is able to resist its own degeneracy under the impact of the violence—the means that it is forced to use—if it preserves and builds internal defenses. In my terminology I call this "civility." She was criticized for this in the Bolshevik, Leninist tradition, together with the use of certain institutional instruments that had been inherited from the constitutional tradition of the West. Luxemburg was against the suppression of pluralism in the Russian revolution and the abolition of parliamentary democracy which transforms the political party itself into a sort of military body and organization. This sounds weak, but it has to do with an acute awareness of the difficulty, and the idea that it has to be addressed itself in political terms.

ENNS: Do you see this dialectical process happening in the example of Palestine? I would like to know what you find promising in the political ideas or practices among Palestinians and the supporters of Palestinian rights today.

BALIBAR: I think I'm not there. I have a very partial perception of the situation in the occupied territories, in Israel/Palestine. Sometimes I tend to be overwhelmed by a completely pessimistic view of the situation. The balance of forces is extremely unequal. Leaving aside for the moment some forms of resistance that exist within Israeli society, since they are still very minoritarian and basically disagree on tactical issues, and even not taking into account the extremists of the religious far-right who want to regain at any cost the mythical "promised land" of the Bible, there seems to be a very broad consensus within Israeli society on the idea that colonization is an irreversible process and should not halt. Not only that it should keep its conquest from 1948 onward but that it should continue, possibly at the price of dropping Gaza, but certainly not the colonies in the Occupied Territories. If you judge by the facts, by the actions, not only by the discourses, even the left agrees with that in Israel and they are part of the same government—with not trying to end the occupation, or making so many conditions that it practically amounts to the same thing.

If you look at the succession of detailed maps which include not only the territorial results of the wars after 1948 but the continuously expanding colonies, the network of strategic roads, and now the "separation fence," you see that in a sense the West Bank does not exist any longer as an entity, as something that could become autonomous, and form the core of a Palestinian state. If you are the stronger, more or less backed by the whole world, passively or actively, if your adversaries are weak, if you are obsessed with the idea that you should prevent them from rising again because in that case they will want to eliminate you in the end, if you are obsessed with the idea of the "demographic bomb" that is threatening Israel because the rate of growth of the Arab population is two or three times that of Israeli Jews, well, you conclude, as most Israeli (Jewish) citizens do, that it is an irreversible process, and above all that it should never be reversed. Add the fact that the Palestinians are divided and pushed into a corner, and the divisions can become more and more bitter. They are also exploited from the outside, by fundamentalist Islamic groups for one, and in fact the whole Arab world which makes the Palestinians symbolic victims in the global struggle against imperialism. This does not help the Palestinians very much, in my opinion. So we can get to total despair, and while I'm saying this, again, I feel despair. It was exactly my state of mind last year in July when I took part in the conference in Brussels organized by the "Faculty for Israeli/Palestinian Peace" network, where I had to deliver the final talk since Derrida could not come. I put all this on paper and after that it took me months to recover from the absolutely desperate image that I had in mind.

On the other hand, however, I am amazed by the capacity of the Palestinian society not only to resist passively but to find and recreate room for maneuver. This is coming from many different sides. We must observe this with a keen interest, even if it is not our role to say that we are supporting Mahmoud Abbas or Mustafa Barghouti or others. Clearly there are different parties and different strategies. On the occasion of the recent election, it was interesting to see that many of the intellectuals I was having discussions with by email were in fact supporting Barghouti as the candidate in the last elections. Barghouti is a physician who has created a democratic party in support of a more democratized Palestinian authority. He has won something like 25% of the votes, which is not nothing, and he has consistently rejected the strategy of suicide bombing. Abbas has everything against him. He's perhaps trying not only to win time, making some tactical concessions, but in the long run to broaden the possibility of maneuvering for the Palestinians facing the Sharon policy of irreversible conquest. Even Hamas is not a fanatical, blind "terrorist" force: it certainly has a final goal which is installing Islamic law in the future of Palestine, and—since an advantage of this kind of religious/political creed is that you have the infinity of time—it probably dreams of the possibility that in the end the Arab-Muslim world will force the West, the colonial power, to retreat completely. You can imagine that for them the important thing is to be there when Israel will, in the end, be destroyed by history or by God's revenge. But I don't think that this is the only way that they act and think. What I admire in general is the capacity of the Palestinians to take advantage of every possibility in the situation in which they find themselves, even when one could believe that they are lost. In the end, however, the result does not depend entirely on them. It depends also on us. It depends on how the external world handles that problem.

ENNS: Is there something, then, that we could take from this incredibly complex situation between the Israelis and the Palestinians to help us rethink what it means to resist, what it means to engage in politics? Is it dialogue that is required? There are so many elements to intervention.

BALIBAR: I don't want to idealize the Palestinian struggle and to transform it into a model. I will be a little bit provocative, just for the sake of replying to you and developing the problem. I am tempted to do this, particularly since we are speaking in the North, in the West, and we are progressive people with cosmopolitan ideals trying once again to find some common language between a particular resistance and the political movements facing the non-democratic and oppressive character of our own societies. This is not very far from the issue of guilt that you were



mentioning a moment ago. It is another variety of the politics of impotence that a Spinozist has difficulties with. We are somehow trying to derive strength, if only moral and intellectual strength, from our association with the people outside the metropolis, with the others, precisely, who resist what we think is the same system of domination. This creates a tendency to idealize the anti-imperialist struggles on the outside. My youth was full of debates from inside France, and the same happened in the U.S., about the value of these models and the importance of these external struggles.

ENNS: Like Maoism?

BALIBAR: Exactly. So we had, one after the other, the Russian revolution, Maoist China, Castroist Cuba, the guerillas in Latin America, revolutionary Chile, etc. I perceive a tendency now to have the Palestinians occupy this position of revolutionary model. The fact that they are weak is not an objection to this because there are infinite resources of dialectics to transform weakness into strength. This is very ironic; it is a way to defend myself against my own tendency, a sort of permanent warning: don't transform Palestine into the new, yes, holy place of emancipation.

This being said, I think there are at least two very important things to be associated with the Palestinian experience. One is the mere fact of resistance to the development of "empire," in Negri's terms, or the globalized form of politics which is dominated tangentially by the extremely destructive combination of humanitarian intervention and militarization, terrorism and counter-terrorism. In such a conjuncture it's immensely important to observe the capacities of resistance and self-organization of an oppressed people. They demonstrate that there is room for political action which always starts with resistance, and that resistance has infinite resources, is not easily bent or transformed into subjection and victimization. In this sense they do not act like victims; they can't be perceived as victims. They do not present themselves as victims but as resisting superior or destructive forces.

The second, more difficult, issue—you mentioned dialogue—has to do with the fact that with or without the idea of a binational state, or something like it, there are many different possibilities to imagine, many institutional ways out. Maybe my point of view would be rejected by many Palestinians but it would not be rejected by the people who created such groups as Ta'ayush.<sup>4</sup> From the moment you agree with the original idea that the presence of the Jews in Palestine, including their creating a nation, ought not to be reversed and suppressed, even if you admit as I do that their settlement and their conquest of Palestine is a

colonial process (thus it is perhaps no longer the case that the only way to put an end to colonization is to expel the colonizers and to return to some pure form of native independence); if you admit that there's something irreversible—not everything, but something—in the presence of Jews in Palestine and on the other hand that there is something not only absolutely unacceptable, but *nonviable* in the fact that the Palestinian autochthonous population itself has been reduced to a condition of semi-slavery or radical de-proprietation and exploitation on their own historical soil, then this apparently means a situation of difference in which no common language at all can be found, in which the interests are absolutely irreconcilable in the end, especially if you raise them to the level of justice. The reason why somebody like Said objected to the Oslo process was that he rejected any form of unequal solution for the Palestinians. This was very much the discourse, not only of the Israeli left but of everyone belonging to the peace camp in the West. We are offering them, it was thought, although in fact it was not even true, something that is in any case better than the condition they are in today, so why didn't they accept it? Of course, it was supposed to be better, but it was not equality; there was no question, starting with an equal right to discuss the terms of the solution, of negotiating. Said would always reject this. His motto was "equality or nothing," which sounds unrealistic and radical but is in fact imprescindible, I would say. If you put the problem in these terms, then, it seems to be absolutely irresolvable.

We must look at the situation from another angle, however: perhaps this is a situation where justice seems impossible to achieve. But it is also a situation where the *absolute* victory of one camp or the other, in terms of eliminating the Other, is probably impossible and in any case synonymous with absolute catastrophe. It's an exterministic process. Try and imagine, as many Israeli Jews do, that the Palestinians in the end will become convinced that they had better go to Jordan or Lebanon rather than stay, and the Israeli government does everything it can to make their life impossible so that they leave. But this concerns millions of people, including non-Jewish Israeli citizens, so at some point they'll have to realize that the Palestinians will not leave. If they don't leave, what can be done? Kill them all? Keep them as slaves, or simply as second-class citizens in this semi-apartheid kind of society? This is not viable in the long run. But the symmetric catastrophic scenario, the dream of the great revenge of the Arab nation, of the Islamic nation against Western infidels, to destroy the State of Israel and expel the Jewish settlers from the whole land of Palestine, is no more thinkable. It would suppose a complete historical overturn and cost millions of deaths, and the world would not agree to that. There are almost five million Jews in Israel. To where would they return? Many of them, or their parents,



come from European nations such as Germany or France, but many of them also come from Iraq or Northern Africa. And most of them now were born in Israel. So what sounds almost impossible—that a majority among Israelis and Palestinians becomes convinced that the continuation of the war and the state of exception leads only to infinite despair for future generations, and that a solution has to be negotiated on the bases of justice and equality—sounds almost impossible, but it is also *necessary*, unless you accept the prospects of catastrophe.

Something has to be *invented* and that's why Palestine is so important. It is a kind of concentrated and reduced but also intensified image of the kind of problem that has to be solved in a post-colonial era, if we are not to have prominent wars and latent or rampant processes of extermination everywhere in the world. In a sense, they are testing for us the possibility of inventing post-national politics, and in the most difficult of conditions since it is not a dialogue among equals. Equality itself, a vicious circle which is requisite for a solution, is in fact its product. So they are testing the possibility—maybe they'll fail—but since they are testing that possibility for all of us, and since the conflict has repercussions everywhere in the world, throughout the Arab world and the European world, because of the affective side that you mentioned earlier, we have vital interests in not imposing a solution, but helping.

ENNS: This is what we can derive, then, from the Palestinian situation: the idea that we have to continually invent and reinvent solutions. This is true of any political situation, don't you think?

BALIBAR: Oh yes.

ENNS: What I find very striking about your work and your political commitment is your comfort with *aporia* in political thought and practice. I think this is an extremely significant contribution, but I also think it is one of the *most* difficult approaches to convey or teach because most automatically think of it as debilitating for political practice. Perhaps you could say something about this. I would be very interested in hearing how or why this has developed in your work.

BALIBAR: Yes, I could elaborate on that, both personally and theoretically. I've become aware of this, that at some point instead of dealing with the fact that I found myself in an *aporia* I started making it a "trick," a method, a systematic form of writing and thinking. I was reproached for this by someone in France, not only regarding political matters but also in the philosophical realm. I remember when I took my *habilitation* at the Sorbonne there was a jury attending and among the members a

very prominent "master" of Spinoza studies, Alexandre Matheron, who had taught us all how to read *The Ethics*, and who is one of the great representatives of the structuralist school in the history of philosophy. At some point we clashed, and he said to me in a friendly manner: "It's impossible, you read Spinoza as if at every corner of the doctrine you wanted to uncover an *aporia* and prove that he had put himself in a contradictory situation in which he couldn't resolve his own problem, and that's wrong. That's wrong!" I replied: "Not everybody is as capable as you, knowing Spinoza entirely by heart and resolving any difficulty in his doctrine or in the interpretation of his work by finding in a remote corner of a text *the* phrase that resolves the contradiction."

I think the word that I have to add here, although it is almost a repetition of *aporia*, is "skepticism." I became aware of the fact that I was practicing, and therefore probably had to justify theoretically, a skeptical form of philosophy. In the very sense in which you put it, I was completely obsessed with, and perhaps a little bit upset by, the complacency with the *aporia*. I always say to my students (which I apply to myself) whenever you have to write a paper, at a point where you see no solution, why don't you explain why there is no solution, or why you can't see it? At the very least it's a preliminary step, but the preliminary has a risk. Let me qualify that: I think that, first of all, skepticism is a tradition in philosophy which has its "*lettre de noblesse*," as we say in French; it's not shameful. There are great philosophers who are skeptics, like Hume, or de Montaigne. Even for philosophers who are not skeptics—and this is where it becomes more interesting—the skeptical moment is immensely valued. This makes it more difficult, however, to justify the fact that you remain content in this skeptical moment. I would say for the sake of simplification that this is the case with any dialectical way of thinking.

From an analytical point of view, of course, this is either valueless or purely preliminary, but from a dialectical point of view, for Plato, Hegel, Pascal, etc., this moment is crucial because it is only through the complete exposition of the difficulty of contradiction that you can get to the understanding of what the nature of the problem is. As a counterpart, the obligation that skeptics like myself have is that, indeed, we are not providing a practical solution in most cases or an ideological formula which can serve as a solution. Doing exactly the opposite, one constantly destroys the feeling of security, the illusionary element of certitude. But there is also the duty of improving our understanding of the situation itself, historically or politically, for example. There are different ways of improving this understanding. I'm absolutely not renouncing—much the contrary—the idea that one can build concepts or propose explanations for such phenomena as the development of the bourgeois state, the

unconscious roots of racism, or the articulation of the political and juridical in the organization of the political public sphere. Not only am I ready to discuss all this, but I'm hoping to contribute to the actual clarification of what Spinoza called *intelligere* or understanding. His favorite motto was, in the state of affairs where you live, or where you work, the main task is not to ridicule or lament the behavior of people, or protest against this state of affairs, but *sed intelligere*, meaning "the important thing is to understand how things work."

To return to the idea of dialectics: for me there has been a kind of lived experience of the relationship between theory, politics, and teaching which took me from Marxist dialectics—which was associated with the imagining of not necessarily an end of history but a practical solution that could be anticipated from within history itself—to the negative dialectics of Adorno where the main objective becomes to use theory as an instrument to deconstruct or criticize the roots of the various forms of domination and the existing state of affairs. Finally, we move to what I am now calling a certain "neo-skepticism." I think that this has to do with a double conviction which I expressed in an essay on Fichte in *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, regarding the idea of the internal border (which I have since kept working on beyond Fichte). I wrote something like the philosopher is interesting because philosophical discourse has a unique capacity to express the radical character of conflicts and contradictions in the actual world. It was a reply to people like Bourdieu, who explained that philosophy is useless because only positive science can critically describe and transform the actual world. I tried to vindicate philosophy by explaining that what you gain in reading philosophers is precisely the fact that they give the contradictions that lie at the heart of society, history, and also personal life a radical formulation which in principle destroys almost every hope of finding a solution in terms of an intermediary position. This is very opposed to certain liberal traditions. Some people might respond that I'm giving a totalitarian view of philosophy except that I'm not presenting the idea of the extreme on the side of the solution, but on the side of the problem.

This is the virtue of philosophy, which leads to skepticism because although it gives one instruments for understanding reality, it postpones the solution at the theoretical level, driven as it is by the desire and the need to express the reality of contradictions in their extreme, radical form. The counterpart to this, and this will take us back to what we said about Palestine and invention, is a part of the skeptical tradition as well: it is the profound conviction that practical solutions in politics as well as in life cannot be anticipated by theory. That was the terrible mistake of Marxism as a "worldview."

I have become not only more Spinozist, but more Freudian. Freud was politically conservative in many respects, but psychoanalysis gave him a very deep insight into the nature of what Marxists, and particularly Althusser, would call "ideologies" and what he himself called "worldview." In the end, in his last great attempt at systematizing psychoanalytic theory, *The New Introductory Lectures* (1932), there is an entire lecture devoted to the issue of worldview. In fact he is thinking not only of religions, but also of secularized systems, such as Marxism—but liberalism and rationalism do not work in a different manner. It is the closure of the worldview or intellectual system that is at stake here and the closure has to do with the idea that theory anticipates and describes in advance, either in a rationalist, utopian, apocalyptic, or technocratic manner, the moment when the real and the rational will fall together, to put it in Hegelian terms. What I am describing as my skeptical attitude or my taste for *aporía* has to do with the idea that when we elaborate, hopefully in a good and intelligent manner, on *aporía*—digging out contradictions and problems where people would like to have ready-made solutions—we come as close as possible to the possibility of practical invention. This is an offering to the public. But this is not at all trying to describe in advance what it could be. This attitude could have its possibilities, it could be an easy way to live in a purely intellectual world.

ENN: Do you mean with this attitude one could avoid making political judgments or decisions?

BALIBAR: Yes, absolutely. Since Derrida's death it has become important for me to express the reasons why I am not simply adopting some of his formulations, while at the same time I feel much closer to him now, as the tiny differences are no longer important. It was the same with Althusser. I don't want to put a stamp on Derrida. His use of the term *à venir*, translated as "to come," what is to come forever, is very close to my idea that the future of the solution or the practical goal of theory is not something that theory can anticipate because if theory could anticipate it and describe it in advance it would not be new. If it were not new, it would not take us out of the mess we are in. It is a very uneasy situation in which you have to announce the inevitable character of the transformation without allowing yourself to indicate fully what the content of this transformation will be. I find myself in a certain vicinity of these ideas, but at the same time I feel uneasy with prophetic or Messianic terms. I probably have to be more precise on the differences between these two varieties of negative thinking, which aim at preserving the irreducible character of the real with respect to theory.

ENNS: Derrida himself is not always consistent regarding a certain prophetic or Messianic element, especially in "Violence and Metaphysics" when he asks what authorizes Lévinas to say "infinitely other" if the infinitely other does not appear in "the same."

BALIBAR: Derrida himself has been reproached for using something like religious or ethical terms—"ethical" is not very different from religious in his recent work—which apparently coincided with a more explicit concern with political issues or a greater public commitment and sometimes with very precise social and political causes ranging from the death penalty to apartheid and Palestine, among many others. Thus, to suggest more or less that he was more demanding or rigorous in the beginning and retreated on that later would be not only too easy but wrong. This being said, I confess that at the beginning I was surprised when I heard the term "deconstruction" for the first time. That's because I had not yet come to North America so I was not aware that there existed a philosophical tendency (not to say "party") called "deconstruction" that was at the center of forceful clashes in American academia. But then I adopted the term as an index, as a certain method. Deconstruction and skepticism are not very far from one another.

The relationship between dialectics and skepticism is a fascinating story in the history of philosophy. If one is like Hegel, or Plato to some extent, one describes skepticism in the sense of the development of *aporias*, and the deconstruction of every form of dogmatism, every stable system of categories that would seemingly allow one to encapsulate the contradictions of the real world in the form of the rational system of explanation. Skepticism would be the method of philosophy but not its final goal. I have returned to Hegel much more than I have previously, and have become aware of the extent to which our masters—not Deleuze, but Derrida and Althusser certainly—were apparently constantly struggling to distance themselves or their work from Hegel, but were in fact profoundly Hegelian. This provides the possibility of reading Hegel himself not as simply the object of deconstruction but as *self-deconstructive*, which in the end means that such notions as absolute knowledge or absolute spirit are not exactly names for final certitude. These absolutes are, rather, oxymoronic names of formulas that cover the endless character of the skeptic's interrogation, which postpone indefinitely what they seem to name as presence. This is not a standard reading, but a possible reading of Hegel. In any case the dialectical tradition seems to make a transitory and provisional use of skepticism or of the *aporia* and only as a means to reach an end which is not aporetic itself. Retreating from this and cutting off the dialectic from its final

result, one then dwells endlessly in the aporetic moment. This is also very much the Socratic tradition as opposed to the Platonic.

The counterpart seems to be a certain form of irrational or blind faith, the unquestioned adoption of certain convictions or truths that are objects of faith and not reason. In the classical age skepticism was not, contrary to what many believe, a way to suppress every form of truth; it was a way to distinguish between different realms. The existence of God or the basic truths of religion were not natural or even supernatural objects. This was against the scholastic tradition, and against what Kant would criticize as "rational theology." The conclusion was not "we should not believe in God" but that we should believe in God not for rational reasons, since this is absurd; all the reasons you will make will be self-destructive. The generalized critique has a counterpart: the fact that you put beyond the reach of critique certain practical or affective or intuitive forms of truth. If I want to be honest, therefore, I have to ask myself whether my skepticism is not balanced somehow by certain elements of conviction. I'm not going to confess that I'm religious, but I certainly do have convictions.

ENNS: Could this "conviction" also be thought of as "emancipatory desire?" This is the term Derrida uses in *Specters of Marx* to describe a certain "spirit" or attitude he reads in Marx's work. It is very evident in your work as well—a passionate conviction that goes hand in hand with skepticism.

BALIBAR: Absolutely. My sense of "conviction" is exactly that: emancipatory desire. It certainly has to do with the issue of communism or perhaps the relationship between the issue of communism—the desire for emancipation—and what I wrote at some point concerning "equality."<sup>5</sup> When I started to work as a Marxist, and even from a critical point of view—the aim of which I did not invent, of course, it came from Althusser, or broadly speaking from a general tendency in that period of *Reading Capital*—it was a period of different attempts, each on its own conceptual base—Althusser on one side, Henri Lefèbvre, Habermas, and others—to reconstruct or redress Marxism. It left unchanged certain basic elements of the philosophy of history. We made desperate attempts to explain that the motor of history was not the negation of the negation, but something like the overdetermined practice that expressed the social structure. We made desperate attempts to eliminate subjectivity or transpose the idea of revolutionary subjectivity in objective terms. What was left unchanged, however, was the general evolutionary pattern, which meant that communism was the final goal of the historical process. That was not only Marx's absolute conviction, but what he

thought of as his achievement: to have brought the idea of communism from the realm of utopia to the realm of science and actual practice by identifying in history *the* agent of the revolutionary transformation, namely, the industrial proletariat. The concept of the proletariat—and I became aware of this very soon in Althusser—was always a concept with a very strong internal tension; it was an *aporia* with a strong positivistic side. This meant that the causes, rules, and forms of revolutionary practice in the actual condition of workers created by the industrial revolution in the modern world could be discovered. On the other hand, it was a hyperbolic concept in which the proletariat became an allegoric name for everything in the society that was represented by the negative side, irreducible to the logic of commercial, commodity exchanges, or bourgeois life. Marx thought that this double aspect—which meant that the proletariat is a very concrete situated group, yet remains a universal class performing a universal function—was something that emerged in the end of the historical process. It was characteristic of the capitalist mode of production and in fact created by the industrial revolution. On that basis you could believe that communism, which had been a utopia more or less haunting all the rebellions and the struggles for equality and liberty in the past, had finally been brought to earth and become a practical and scientific objective. The only effective form of communism, then, was proletarian communism.

I have reversed this pattern, meaning that I tend to believe that communism has been there as an ideal or object of faith, or as an alternative to the existing forms of domination, throughout history as we know it. It does not only belong to the capitalist mode of production. We have to be aware of the fact that it is a very flexible and plastic idea. There have been communist revolutions or practices throughout history either in very limited groups or in very broader scenes with more or less effective results. We clearly see that twentieth-century communism, tried on a grand scale as a new form of state and mode of production, was no more successful (perhaps less) than it was in the early Christian era or in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the period of St. Francis of Assisi as an ascetic and moral ideal. The goals change but the drive or the desire is the same. Again this appears hopeless because the great advantage of Marxism was not explaining that communism had become scientific, but that in the past it was unachievable, and now it would be not only achievable but necessary and certain. We have to abandon that certainty. In counterpart we gain the conviction that the drive for communism is just as indestructible as the emancipatory desire itself. It is one of its names.

ENNS: What motivates this emancipatory desire in your work? In an interview of 1999 in *Radical Philosophy* you talked about your parents being involved in the left. I wonder whether their political activities and beliefs influenced this bent in your ideas.

BALIBAR: It is fortunate that none of us will ever be able to know and understand whence his or her desires come from. I imagine that to be able to locate the roots of one's own desires, either in a social class or in a private relationship to the father or the mother, would be a nightmare. Having said that, Foucault had a way of describing this, which I think has much truth because it insists on the negative element again: perhaps it has to do not so much with the fact that one desires justice than with the fact that one cannot tolerate injustice or that certain forms of injustice are unacceptable and unbearable. An easy objection to this is that there is a subjective element that cannot be eliminated. I am no longer embarrassed by this subjective element. We see everywhere around us that not everybody reacts the same way. There is no point in denying that the reason why a capitalist or a bourgeois doesn't see or feel the unbearable character of millions of humans dying of hunger or living in humiliating conditions because they have lost their work, is because of capitalist logic, because he or she has a very direct social and economic interest in the situation. The moment when the capitalist starts elaborating reasons to explain that the situation would be worse for the poor of the world if we did not live in a liberal competitive market and that this is what prevents most people from experiencing even worse conditions because a non-liberal economy would be inefficient and unproductive, is a moment which can already be analyzed as a kind of guilt. If one needs reasons to explain that injustice is an indirect form of justice it is perhaps because one is already not so sure.

This being said, I don't think that the ultimate reasons why subjects react in a different manner in the face of injustice are entirely rooted in their interests or their class membership. Class membership is always combined with other structures, so there is an aleatory element as Althusser would say; it can also produce the opposite. How many revolutionaries come from the bourgeois class compared with revolutionaries who come from the working class? I'm not sure we can decide that, and I'm not sure it's the point. There is an element of uncertainty, of unpredictability that cannot be eliminated. It has to do with the experience of the unbearable, and it is not the same for everyone. Possibly culture plays a role, including political culture. If I tried to be honest and asked myself, as you are asking me, why does Edward Said's phrase, "equality or nothing" resound so strongly with me, or why is it the case that some of us find it unacceptable and unbearable that certain humans

are treated as inferior—is it not because we put the value of equality at the top, as something that cannot be negotiated? This must have something to do with a certain political culture—perhaps it's very French, or very republican.

The reasons why I tend to prefer the name "equality" rather than the name "justice," even if in some cases they cover more or less the same thing, may have something to do with a certain political culture, which is perhaps not universal, or not universally understood. To me it is now becoming a great question to know, to understand, at the same time why this language of equality clearly appeals to people all over the world. At the same time, it possibly remains untranslatable and does not express what people in totally different traditions and cultures would find unacceptable and unbearable. Perhaps it is not really a question of civilizations and cultures; it is also a question of belonging to different groups within our own societies. Perhaps it is also unconsciously rooted in the desires and frustrations of our parents. But however important and interesting this question of the sources can appear, I do think that the issue of the implications and consequences is much more decisive. This is where one's emancipatory desires meet with reality, and with the Other's desire (not exactly the same thing as the Other's image, or idea, or face, that we evoked in the beginning.) And to me, probably, this is the crucial test.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

1. I refer to an unpublished essay entitled "Performative Reversals of the Name *Race* and the Dilemma of the Victims," delivered at the inaugural conference of the Center for Race and Gender, UC Berkeley, Feb. 2004.

2. Jean-Michel Chaumont, *La concurrence des victimes: Génocide, identité, reconnaissance* (Paris: La Découverte & Syros, 1997).

3. The same day in which everywhere in France people would greet victory, the Algerian people in Sétif and Guelma rallied and marched to celebrate the victory in which they had themselves played a role. Some of them, however, were also waving Algerian flags and thought it was only a matter of time until their own liberation. The Americans had played a role indirectly in this hope because Roosevelt and others had made proclamations that everywhere in the Western hemisphere the time had come for the freedom of the people, and for anti-colonialist forces. The Algerians took this seriously and thought it was an opportunity. There was an independence movement in the colonies which was suppressed. They demanded the liberation of the nationalist leader who was in jail at the time and the

French suppressed the demonstration—very, very brutally—but also terrorized the population. The number of civilians massacred by the French, according to the Algerians, was 45,000 to 60,000, but the French, of course, say it was much lower.

4. "Ta'ayush" (Arabic for "life in common") is a grassroots movement of Arabs and Jews working to break down the walls of racism and segregation by constructing a true Arab-Jewish partnership. They believe a future of equality, justice, and peace begins through concrete, daily actions of solidarity with each other to end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and to achieve full civil equality for all Israeli citizens.

5. "Equaliberty" (*égaliberté*) is a term Balibar coins to designate both the conditions under which man is a citizen—equality and liberty—in the text of the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen." See "'Rights of Man' and 'Rights of the Citizen': The Modern Dialectic of Equality and Freedom," *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*. Trans. James Swenson (New York: Routledge, 1994), 47.

6. Diane Enns would like to thank Elizabeth Skakoon for transcribing this interview and the Arts Research Board at McMaster University for funding this venture.