

**The  
Cry  
for  
Peace**



# The **Cry** for **Peace**

Andrea Riccardi

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The Cry for Peace  
Andrea Riccardi

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## The Cry for Peace

### Another War

Edgar Morin recently published a small book called *Di guerra in guerra* (From War to War), written with undiminished passion despite the fact that, at the time of writing, he was 101 years old, and had seen a great many wars.<sup>1</sup> In fact, one understands the value of peace, above all when it is lacking, like the absence of air. Morin, a theorist of complexity, stated an undeniable truth: “The more war escalates, the more difficult and urgent peace becomes. Let us prevent a world war. It would be worse than the previous one.”<sup>2</sup>

With the continuation of the war in Ukraine, the possibility of peace seems to be moving further and further away, at the risk of more countries getting involved and the still present threat of an atomic bomb. Faced with this ongoing war, a reflection on peace may seem anachronistic. However, it is important to develop this thought because it would be absurd if a peaceful future really were an anachronism. Nonetheless, peace is actually perceived as less and less feasible, almost as though it were a utopian objective. It seems incredible, but over the years, the perception of the importance of peace, of the need for it in human society has become uncertain.

Far too many people are paying the price of the peace currently lost. I am thinking in particular about Ukraine,

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1. Edgar Morin, *Di guerra in guerra. Dal 1940 all'Ucraina invasa*, trans. Susanna Lazzari (Milan: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2023).

2. Ibid, 104.

a country of almost forty-five million inhabitants. I love Ukraine, which I have known since it was part of the Soviet Union. At that time, I had the opportunity, in particular in Galicia, a region in the west of the country, to meet groups of people who longed for their independence. I remember, again during the Soviet rule, a demonstration for independence in Kiev, and people waving the Ukrainian flag that we are so familiar with today. Ukraine became independent in 1991, and for a short time was a free country with a complex relationship with the nearby Russian Federation, since a lot of people spoke Russian and many were pro-Russia, whereas many others were attracted to Europe and the West. Putin's attack on the country has had the opposite effect to what he hoped for: the surprisingly strong Ukrainian resistance has unified almost the whole country.

Ukraine has suffered dreadfully for years, and it is important to know the history of a population because every nation is a child of its history. When I see the masses of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war and when I think about the country's history, I am reminded of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "a man who knows well the suffering" (Isaiah 53:3). Just thinking of the terrible twentieth century in Ukraine is sufficient to be aware of this.

To start with there was the civil war after the Bolshevik Revolution; the one between 1918 and 1921 between the Soviets and independent Ukraine; then the 1920s with the anti-Semitic pogroms; the violence of the Soviet security service against the separatists, against the Christians, and the intellectuals, and the middle class resulting in the death of thousands of people. In 1932, a famine caused by the new economic policies gripped Ukraine, and four million people died. Travelers to the country told of dreadful scenes, even of cannibalism, as the population was starving. Stalin refused to help Ukrainians and left them to die. The Holodomor (a

combination of two Ukrainian words: hunger and killing) was recognized by the Ukrainian state and a number of other countries as a genocide.

In 1941, in the middle of World War II, Hitler attacked Soviet Ukraine and reached Kiev. Between three and five million people lost their lives, and a vast number of buildings were destroyed, including the cathedral of the country's most symbolic monument, the Kiev Monastery of the Caves. That year, between September 29 and 30, over thirty thousand Jews were exterminated in the Babi Yar gorges, near the capital. Altogether 1.6 million Ukrainian Jews were assassinated. Those who fled to the forests were killed by Polish and Ukrainian resistance fighters. A significant number of Ukrainians participated in the massacre of the Jews, and this assisted Nazi operations.

The life of the Jews of Eastern Europe was very tough during the first half of the twentieth century, and they accounted for one-third of those exterminated by the madness of the Holocaust. However, even before World War II their life was extremely difficult. Jeffrey Veidlinger, an American historian, wrote a dramatic book, *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The 1918–1921 Pogroms in Ukraine and the Onset of the Holocaust* in which he documented the pogroms against the Jews that took place in Ukraine and in Poland, as one of the origins of the slaughter of the Eastern European Jews.<sup>3</sup> Veidlinger wrote, “The Germans took strategic and deliberate advantage of the existing anti-Semitic sentiments and used the local motives to unleash another wave of massacre and stage a copy of what was executed by the previous generations.”<sup>4</sup>

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3. Jeffrey Veidlinger, *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The 1918–1921 Pogroms in Ukraine and the Onset of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan, 2021).

4. Ibid, 374–375.

The Ukrainians suffered immensely during the Second World War. The Nazis forced men and women to carry out hard labor, and when the Soviets took over the country again, the result for what was considered a Soviet Union Republic was disastrous: between three and five million people had died and 770 towns and eighteen thousand villages had been destroyed. At the end of the war, the country fell under heavy-handed Soviet control again. The repression was harsh, not only among the groups of separatists, but also in the Greek-Catholic Church, which had been linked with Rome for centuries and was mainly based in Galicia. It was viciously forced to become part of the Russian Orthodox Church, while all its bishops were deported to the gulags and some of the clergy and the churchgoers were arrested.

## A Country Familiar with Suffering

Ukraine is historically a multiethnic country with a strong Ukrainian majority and is becoming increasingly conscious of its identity. In its thirty years of independence, despite its fragility, and amid great political and economic difficulties, Ukrainian democracy has nonetheless developed its own personality. After all, the name Ukraine means a frontier or a border country. Jürgen Habermas said, “Amongst the European nations that were lagging behind, Ukraine has arrived as the last one. Probably it is still a nation in the making.”<sup>5</sup> As a reaction to the devastating attack by the Russians, on February 24, 2022, the national identity has become more compact, since even Russian speakers have joined the Ukrainian resistance.

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5. Jürgen Habermas, *A Plea for Negotiations*, “Süddeutsche Zeitung,” Jürgen Habermas: A Plea for Negotiations – SZ.de (sueddeutsche.de), February 14, 2023.

Ukrainians were living in Italian and European towns well before the war too. In Italy there were already 230,000 Ukrainian women, often employed as household help or to look after the elderly. They were strong women, who with their work supported their families at home. Their work illustrates how important immigrants are for Italy's future. It shows us how we Italians are unlikely to even have a future if we do not open up and welcome immigrants.<sup>6</sup>

When the war broke out, at the border between Ukraine and Slovakia, I met Ukrainian women fleeing their country and taking their children and the elderly with them. They were strong, dignified women representing an important aspect of their country. The men obviously could not go with them because they had to stay and fight.

Encounters with other people (in this case Ukrainian women), open us up, if only we have the patience to listen and talk to them. Thanks to them, we can find out about previously unknown worlds. In our excessively self-absorbed world, despite being bombarded by so much news, getting to know immigrant Ukrainian women reveals a universe of stories, hardship, and pain. The prophets of Israel taught us: "Who is a wise man? The one who learns from other men." These women too, despite the humble work they do, have so much to teach us; they can explain a lot about suffering, both that of days long past and of recent ones as well. They can tell us, in a very personal way, about the pain of their country through the experience of their own families. They talk about the pain of having lost their homes and about their relatives who have been affected by the war. I met some women in Kiev who came from Donbass, and they told me, "We had to run away. We got on a bus, and we did not even

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6. Andrea Riccardi and Lucio Caracciolo, *Accogliere* (Milan: Piemme, 2023).

know where it was going!” Understandably, many Ukrainian women who fled abroad closely follow the news on the war, which is reported extensively by the international media.

I was impressed by the welcome given to Ukrainians by people from all walks of life, from the very beginning of the invasion. In fact, many European towns, sometimes even small towns, become cosmopolitan, thanks to the presence of immigrants. They bring their history with them, even if we do not often ask them any questions because they seem to be unimportant. The Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko whose mother was from Ukraine and whose father was Russian, wrote:

If someone lived without attracting notice  
and made a friend of their obscurity –  
then their uniqueness was precisely this.  
Their very plainness made them interesting.<sup>7</sup>

Meeting the sons and daughters of other populations broadens the mind and opens the heart, and it also limits the arrogant and selfish ego. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, teaches us: “The ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters, is paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives.”<sup>8</sup>

During the Russian attack on Ukraine, around ten million Ukrainians came to Western Europe, some of whom returned home after a few months. Much of Western Europe (starting with Poland, which admitted most of them) has

7. Yevgeny Yevtushenko, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/06/saturday-poem-there-are-no-boring-people-yevgeny-yevtushenko-boris-dralyuk>

8. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2020) | Francis (vatican.va) no. 48.

Ukrainians living there. This is one of the many dramas caused by war: the depopulation and the forced exile of large numbers of people.

Ukraine is paying a very heavy price and if we are talking about peace, it is above all for Ukraine, whose land has been devastated and whose children are scattered across Europe. The country's infrastructure has also been destroyed: five million Ukrainians are homeless, and 2.4 million homes have been damaged; 1,206 health centers and 2,300 schools have been hit, 438 of them razed to the ground. This war has not only caused destruction but has also involved widespread cruelty. There are at least six million internally displaced people, and many are missing.

Ukraine is the poorest country in Europe: its economy was reduced by 30 percent in 2022. Twenty million Ukrainians have lost their income, and sixteen million people are out of work. The World Health Organization says that around nine million people in Ukraine risk suffering from mental illness. Moreover, in 2023, over 17.5 million Ukrainians needed humanitarian aid. However, after the initial enthusiasm, there is a decrease in aid sent, partly because countries in Europe are going through a difficult period due to the increase in the cost of gas and fuel resulting from the sanctions imposed on Russia.<sup>9</sup> This is precisely why, since the winter of 2023, Ukraine has been experiencing a real humanitarian emergency.

Although the Russian attacks are being averted and most of the country is being spared from the invasion, the Ukrainian people are still paying a very heavy price. It is not easy to count the casualties because both sides keep the information related to the war secret, but it is said that

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9. As of the moment, Western European nations have solidified their support for Ukraine.

between Russians and Ukrainians, around two hundred thousand people have died in action. I have seen the sections of Ukrainian cemeteries where soldiers killed at war are buried and, regardless of how many flags and flowers there are, they cannot hide the pain and sorrow. One's thoughts go out to everyone, especially to young people, a generation that, unlike their European peers, have a personal experience of the war and have seen their dreams for the future swept away by it. Young Ukrainians have been increasingly determined to defend their country from Putin and his armed forces' attacks, whereas many of the Russian soldiers appear to be demotivated despite Moscow's massive propaganda. The death of young Ukrainians and Russians makes one ask an unavoidable question: why was their fate so different from that of young Europeans? The answer is, "Because there is no more peace in their country." Is that too simple an answer?

## Lost Peace: A New International Order That Has Not Come About

The question posed above is not in fact easy to answer, because we are living in a time of "terrible simplifiers," an effective expression of the nineteenth century historian Jacob Burckhardt, that indicates a tendency, which by now is firmly consolidated in the news and in the social media. War leads to a militarized way of thinking, it makes one take sides, and encourages or rather forces one to simplify everything. Instead, the complexity of the world and the different histories throughout the world make it clear that a simplification of the facts should be resisted because, by simplifying them, nothing is explained, yet one is reassured. Above all, in this way, it is possible to avoid asking oneself difficult questions.

To achieve peace, one has to understand the populations of a country and the people who lead them, and this is not



easy at all. Polarization, which is typical of journalism and of politics, encourages simplifications, and they are almost always in conflict with each other. Moisés Naim says, “Relentless demonization of enemies is the dynamics of fandom.”<sup>10</sup> Simplifications, polarizations, and fandom go together. This is not enough to be able to understand the reality of our times, not because one has to be a refined geopolitician or a learned historian, but because a sense of its complexity is necessary in order to understand history, above all contemporary history. Complexity is fundamental in people who cultivate a thinking approach to reality and do not close themselves in the militarization of thinking. Complexity is the great lesson that educates one to carry out research and strive for freedom. However, as Naim said, the dynamics of fandom, refusing dialogue and complex thought, is typical of authoritarian and populist regimes and can also lead to the breakdown of democracies.

Why has the world lost peace? This phenomenon started a long time ago. With the advance of the globalized world, after 1989, with the strong emergence of national identities, but also of transnational powers and networks, the contemporary world acquired such a degree of complexity that it is not easy to navigate. The Cold War split the world roughly into two empires, with two ideologies and two markets. . . . It was not, in fact, so clear-cut, but it was easy to opt for one side or the other. Today, however, to orient oneself, one needs endless information, culture, thinking, and an ability to be critical. Therefore, one tends to spontaneously close oneself in one’s own little bubble, or in one’s tribal provincialism, perhaps despising those who are not part of

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10. Moisés Naim, *The Revenge of Power. How Autocrats are Reinventing Politics for the 21st Century* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2022), xvii.

it, or else relying on culturally inadequate but personally reassuring simplifications.

After 1989, globalization was discussed at length, and its great opportunities and limits were highlighted, but basically public opinion generally believed in a kind of global opportunism. This meant that the markets, financial transactions, networking, communications, and transport would be unified, and, with the decrease of borders, this would all gradually create a prosperous world, in which democracy would make progress, and people would live together peacefully throughout the world. This was going to be the “end of history” predicted by Francis Fukuyama, who in the end had to admit he had been wrong.<sup>11</sup> Over the last thirty years, international relations have not moved in the providential direction of peace and democracy that was hoped for and expected as the natural outcome of globalization.

The events of September 11, 2001, brought to light the clashes between civilizations and religions in conflict with the globalization of the markets. This is the well-known theory of the “clash of civilizations,” in which Samuel Huntington aimed to explain the ethnic and religious reactions to Western globalization, considered invasive. At the same time, strong national identities that the West was not really aware of, were emerging throughout the whole world, as in, for example, the Balkans (following the breakup of Yugoslavia) or in the former Soviet Union (Ukraine). The contested emergence of some countries caused bloody conflicts that still have not been completely resolved. The world did not seize the great opportunities in 1989 to build new, stable, international relations. One thinks of the openness of Russia toward a new European and world order after the

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11. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Washington, D.C.: Free Press, 1992).

trauma of the end of the USSR. (The end of empires often result in conflicting reactions, as happened in Turkey under Atatürk, after the end of the Ottoman Empire), and also of the emergence of China, as a decisive international player alongside the United States.

December 11, 2001, is an important date too because that is when China became a member of the World Trade Organization. The West thought that opening up the world market would lead to spreading values and the implication of freedom and human rights. However, it did not happen. In the following twenty years, imports into Europe from China increased from 80 to 383 billion dollars, but China still has a single-party political system. In fact, today the Chinese model presents itself as a viable system for other countries too. Moreover, democracies do not appear to be particularly successful models, and actually they often find themselves in trouble, whereas new populist, Bonapartist, “*democratures*,” or illiberal democracies (as Eduardo Galeano called governments characterized by authoritarianism under a democratic guise) are asserting themselves.

## The Justification of War

In 2003, a great peace movement brought together millions of people in protests against the Iraq War. Despite the dreadful attacks of September 11, 2001 (and Al Qaida’s responsibility for Islamist terrorism), and the spreading of the theory of the clash of civilizations and religions, there was still a deep awareness of the horrors of war, which had developed in more than one generation of people who recognized the value of peace.

John Paul II, who was born in 1920 and was praised for his commitment to the liberation of Eastern Europe from communism, was strongly opposed to the military inter-

vention in Iraq. In March 2003, he said, "I belong to the generation which lived during and survived World War II. It is my duty to tell all the young people, all those younger than myself, who did not have the same experience, no more war!"<sup>12</sup> The poet David Maria Turollo, who was born in 1916 and was not yet thirty during the World War, also challenged young people saying, "Do not follow the road we did. I am not ashamed of my participation in the war since I only fought in the resistance, which meant a human being against an inhuman one."<sup>13</sup> The generation that lived through World War II still remembers the horrors of war, even though their countries were liberated from the Nazi regime and from fascism.

Soldiers have a keen sense of peace, knowing they fight in order to achieve it. Yitzhak Rabin, a great politician, and an Israeli soldier, who fought for his country, had the political courage to negotiate the Oslo Accords, which created the basis for peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. Rabin won the Nobel Peace Prize together with Shimon Peres, his former political rival, and the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Unfortunately, in 1995, Yitzhak Rabin was killed by a Jewish extremist.

In the twenty-first century, there was the arrival of new generations of people born long after World War II. What has become even more crucial to the passing of whole generations is the passing of the survivors of the Holocaust who played a decisive role in the development of Western consciousness regarding its responsibility toward history. One should be grateful to them for having talked and written

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12. These words were spoken spontaneously during the recitation of the Angelus on March 16, 2003.

13. David M. Turollo, *La guerra sconfitta di Dio* (Treviso: Colibri 1993), 35.

about their experiences and remember not only their suffering but also their generous efforts to provide evidence of the Holocaust. Their words are particularly relevant because these people actually witnessed the most harrowing aspect of World War II, the extermination of six million Jews.

However, it is important not to forget that the massacre of the European Jews by the Nazis and their anti-Semitic European collaborators, took place in a systematic and industrial way in the middle of a full-scale war. A world war, and war in general, encourages countries, and therefore people, to carry out atrocities. This also happened during World War I, when the genocide of the Armenians and of Christians in the areas belonging to the Ottoman Empire, was carried out in order to accomplish the ethnic cleansing of a minority that was considered dangerous for the Turkish-Muslim identity<sup>14</sup>.

The memory of the Holocaust has conveyed to the younger generations the horrors of war, anti-Semitism, the Nazi regime and fascism, the horrors of the Croatian Ustasas, the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party, the Romanian Legionaries, the Slovak Populists, and also of the other collaborators, mainly of Eastern Europe, involved in the Ukrainian or Baltic massacres.

I remember the impact that the Eichmann trial had in revealing the Holocaust to public opinion. I was eleven years old, and it was the first time I came into contact with real horrors of the war, the extermination of the Jews. These were facts and not just what families remembered. The memory of the Holocaust had a decisive function in developing our repulsion for war and in showing us its most despicable side. During the Cold War, despite the risk of war and the threat of

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14. Cf. Andrea Riccardi, *La strage dei Cristiani: Mardin, gli armeni e la fine di un mondo* (Roma-Bari: GLF Editori, 2015).

a nuclear bomb, it was clear to most people that if humanity was to survive, keeping peace was the priority.

This awareness has gradually waned. With fewer and fewer witnesses of World War II left, people are once more considering war as an instrument for resolving conflicts and for asserting their own interests. In Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, despite the negative effects of military intervention, we have seen war justified as an instrument of international politics. For that matter, after 1945, for us Europeans war was something that concerned other people, except for the war in the Balkans. We enjoyed great peace but paradoxically, we gradually lost awareness of a policy of peace. The prevailing image became one of a technological war, almost “clean,” basically a game, far removed from the “dirty war” in the trenches during World War I, or in Vietnam. The British Prince Harry wrote in his book *Spare*, that he remembered killing, from his Apache helicopter in Afghanistan, twenty-five people whom he considered pieces on a chess board.

## The Legacy of War

It is worth going back to the insights on World War II, the result of meditating on the brutality of the war, which still provide decisive indications. These insights formed thought and the law and changed people’s consciousness. The introduction to the 1945 Charter of the United Nations contains a mission, “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.” It goes on to say, “to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest.” The diminished international relevance of the United Nations is also the result of a reduced perception of the ideals proclaimed in the 1945 Charter.

From the UN Charter, it is a small step to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, established in 2002, and which, according to Habermas, “revolutionized international law . . . This revolution was born from the shock of the violent excesses of war.”<sup>15</sup> It was based on the Rome Statute, which was signed at the height of globalization, when people optimistically believed that the unification of the markets would lead to a widespread increase in democracy and peace.

The legacy of war urged people to be wary of the risks of war. It was considered necessary to include this memory in the postwar constitutions and to define the *jus ad bellum*. This was the case for the introduction of the Constitution of the Fourth French Republic, and it was maintained in the Fifth one: France “shall undertake no war aimed at conquest, nor shall it ever employ force against the freedom of any people.”

The French text influenced our Constitution to the extent that Giuseppe Dossetti was inspired by it in his proposal to the Constituent Assembly.<sup>16</sup> Palmiro Togliatti, in his speech on December 3, 1946, talked about “opposition . . . to the war that has ruined the country.” Hence the idea expressed by the verb “reject.” Meuccio Ruini from Reggio Emilia specified that “It has a strong emphasis and in this way implies a definite rejection of war.” This is how Article 11 came into being and it is still a decisive guideline in Italian government policy making: “Italy rejects war as an instrument of aggression against the freedom of other peoples and as a means for the settlement of international disputes. Italy agrees on conditions of equality with other States, to the limitations of sovereignty that may be necessary to a world order ensuring peace and justice among the Nations.”

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15. Habermas, *A Plea for Negotiations*.

16. Giuseppe Dossetti, *La ricerca costituyente: 1945–1952*, ed. Alberto Melloni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994).

After 1989, this legacy found itself struggling with the complex globalization of the world and with simplistic optimism, and it was not readily acknowledged. It was almost as though one were living in another period of history, that of the new century. The message appeared to have less of an impact on young generations: looking at the endless stream of images of war from all over the world became a habit encouraged by social media, without us ever being affected by the suffering of the victims and the soldiers. Has war once again become an inevitable element of history and of our future?

War brings out the forces of evil, as can be seen by all the violence that goes with it. A man from biblical times will see the stormy sea as uncontrolled chaos. War is chaos, the worst forces are released, and the worst of men stand out. Anne Frank, who was hiding in Amsterdam while the hunt for Jews was increasing, wrote in her diary, "There's in people simply an urge to destroy, an urge to kill, to murder and rage, and until all mankind, without exception, undergoes a great change, wars will be waged, everything that has been built up, cultivated, and grown will be destroyed and disfigured, after which mankind will have to begin all over again."<sup>17</sup>

We cannot resign ourselves to a war that devastates a population and risks never ending. This is often a characteristic of the wars of today, the fact that they never end with a victory or a defeat. Moreover, as one of the great Western leaders, who is not a pacifist, once told me, a lot of money is a stake too. One cannot underestimate Pope Francis's insistence on limiting the economic interests that dominate the arms market. The longer a war lasts, the more difficult it is to find peace, it is almost like going into a tunnel and not being able to see the end of it. Talking about peace does not

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17. Quoted from Harold Bloom, *A Scholarly Look at the Diary of Anne Frank* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2010) 244.



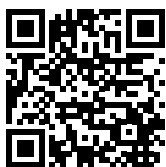


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