

From the Ghosts of the Past to Visions of the Future: Europe Stuck Between History and Memory

By Edouard Gaudot

XX. But even now it is manifest and clear that there are neither times future nor times past[...] it might be said rightly that there are three times: a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future. For these three do coexist somehow in the soul, for otherwise I could not see them. The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation.[...] There are but few things about which we speak properly -- and many more about which we speak improperly -- though we understand one another's meaning.

Saint Augustine, Confessions, Book 11, ch. XX.

Responsibility to remember

With the year 2014 the great waltz of dates of historic importance and political celebrations has commenced. The magic of numbers and anniversaries in multiples of five moves the innumerable actors of memory – associations, friendly societies, bureaucracies and other ministries of administered memory – to action. As we prepare to mark the one-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of World War I, we will inevitably commemorate all of the arduous steps along the way, the 75th anniversary of the beginning of World War II, the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall, the 10th anniversary of the enlargement-cum-reunification of Europe... The commemorative tsunami that Europe is gearing up for gives us pause as to our relationship to history and the political use that is made of it.

70 years have passed since Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Kolyma assumed their place at the top of the pantheon of the great horrors of the human adventure. 70 years since the world's collective memory was allowed to be marked by the methodical, technological, industrial annihilation of entire populations of people – many of whom were guilty of nothing more than of being members of a class, culture or race considered the enemy. The memory of World War II – like a sort of modern mythology – is peculiar. It is omnipresent and overbearing; its tormented shadows override all other painful and bloody barbaric acts that have been perpetrated since.

In Asia, from China to the islands of the Pacific, the memory of the Empire of Japan's presence and the war crimes associated thereto, is still very much alive and commonly resurfaces in the tense relations between rival countries still reeling from that past. "The Rape of Nanking" and "comfort women" are commonly referenced to

guilt a Japan reluctant to accept that dark chapter in its history. Nonetheless, the epic and victorious decolonisation effort, at least a little bit anyway, offsets this tragic memory. At times it is even dropped in favour of the triumph of booming economies as Dragons and Tigers and other emerging economies follow in turn in a proverbial flight of geese along the path towards prosperity.

In Europe, on the other hand, nothing seems to be able to replace the nagging memory of the horror of the past. Nothing. Not the mass graves of genocide in Cambodia, nor the madness that drowned the Great Lakes of Africa in rivers of blood, nor the resurgence of the ghosts of concentration camps that came to haunt the Balkans from Sarajevo to Srebrenica. Not even the incredible brutality perpetrated by the erstwhile victims in their pursuit for a sacred haven between Sinai and Jordan. Even World War I, the first industrial massacre on a global scale – in equal parts absurd and modern – is eventually erased by the 60 million spectres, 6 million of which were swept away in the fog and smoke of the death camps.

It is not just a matter of the demographics of the survivors. The memory of World War II is something of a “past that will not pass” – to use the very provocative wording of the historian Ernst Nolte, who sparked the famous *Historikerstreit* at the end of the 1980s. Our memory of World War II is an insurmountable “time present of things past”, to paraphrase Saint Augustine, and this is, in part, by choice. Post-Auschwitz Europe has built its path forward, and its political project, out of a rejection of an insufferable past; and the construction of a community of peace and shared prosperity.

Understandably, Europe upholds such memory for its political purposes. Historian Timothy Garton Ash even goes so far as to say that “Europe needs memory as much as it needs jobs.”¹ Obviously, the more pressing crises faced by the countries of Europe since 2008 have largely, and rightly, overshadowed the issue of a common European memory, which although it has never seemed imperative or urgent, is indeed a real challenge, and one that continues to be of great political relevance. The reason for this is threefold: political, epistemological and even psychological.

First, it is psychological because the process that we refer to as ‘globalisation’ is causing an overwhelming feeling of insecurity in Europe. The feeling of material insecurity is extremely understandable especially if we link outsourcing-relocation of jobs to globalisation; pandemics to globalisation; and even the expansion of fundamentalist terrorism to globalisation. However, there also exists, I would go so far as to say, a psychological insecurity: a lack of self-confidence in one’s identity. Of course, this situation of a “civilization and its discontents” is nothing new. Freud, in the dusk of his life, wrote a book, published in 1929, which bore that very name.² What’s different is that today’s discontent is growing. This has been proven at various levels by an influx of an artificial traditionalist discourse on local authenticity, and by the alarming resurgence of rightist nationalism.

In this context of an uncertainty that strikes so intimately, any positive affirmation, that is stable if possible, is reassuring, gives a sense of meaning, and creates value. Therein lies the first need for collective memory. The idea of a common memory is

¹ Timothy Garton Ash, “Europe needs memory as much as it needs jobs”, in *The Guardian*, 03-11-2005, reflection/opinion piece published after the French no vote on the Treaty establishing a constitution in 2005.

² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its discontents*, PUF, Paris, 1971. In the first pages of chapter 3, Freud speaks of the paradox of a horizon that is simultaneously widened and narrowed by the advancement of technology and the discontent that this causes.

conceived of and perceived of as fundamental to any community, as it establishes and legitimises a feeling of belonging to said community. For that reason, it has remained stubbornly at the centre of all debate on European identity and the future of Europe and vice versa.

Therein lies the epistemological element: national communities, the nation states, who are the primary builders of the European Union, have all been trained in the construction and administration of a national discourse of memory.³ The constructivist reflex comes naturally, and often subconsciously, to those trained and, shall we say formatted in, the school of thought of their nation. The conclusion is clear: if a common memory establishes identity and identity establishes unity, then those in power (in politics, the sciences, academia, and the arts, etc.) must formulate – must **advance** – a memory that is shared by all Europeans.

That is where the political imperative subtly comes in: the traditional drivers of European integration are running out of steam leading the European elite, chronically short on creativity, to turn to the past in order to release a vision for the future. Now, attempts like the quest for A Soul for Europe (2000), the controversial references to Christianity (2005) and to Mozart (2006), and the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism (2008), are all just crutches for Europe's lame identity. Memory does not make the project. And commemorations do not make the unity.

Pierre Nora, in the last volume of his collection *Les lieux de mémoire*, deplored the misappropriations in the “age of commemoration.”⁴ The outbreak of commemorations has invaded everything, and the nature has changed, detached from the historical relationship becoming the only medium for finding identity in a nation searching for itself: France. We are witnessing something similar in Europe, in general, and in the recurring debate on an identity and a memory for Europe.

However, the matter can be taken in terms less tainted with suspicion and political ulterior motives, because the construction of a united and politically integrated Europe cannot be reduced to a simple question of balance of powers in the context of globalisation or to a free trade area. The cultural aspect is fundamental. As we embark on a period highly charged with shared memory, it is fully legitimate to explore the various avenues to a collective memory in Europe.

The cement of cemeteries

“We are what you were, we will be what you are.”⁵

The issue of common memory is considered fundamental for all communities and to establishing a feeling of belonging. It forges and spreads solidarity amongst the various parts of the whole, attempting to coagulate them into one.

“Having suffered, enjoyed, and hoped together, these things are more valuable than common tariffs and strategically coherent borders. These are the kinds of things that can be understood in spite of differences of race and language. [...] Where national

³ Two references, among others, for this process: Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales*, Seuil, Paris, 1999; and one of the pioneers of the analysis of cultural anchoring of national sentiment: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, Londres, 1983.

⁴ Title of his article in the third part of *Lieux de mémoire*: Pierre Nora (dir.), *Les lieux de mémoire, IIIe partie: Les France*, Gallimard, Paris, 1984-1992; tome 1, “De l’archive à l’emblème”, pp. 977-1012.

⁵ A famous Spartan cry, quoted by Ernest Renan in his, equally as famous, speech “What is a nation?” *Conference given at the Sorbonne, March 11, 1882.*

*memories are concerned, grieves are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort.*⁶

By wanting to build its unification out of the pain and horror of a past full of troublesome memories, Europe has adopted Ernest Renan's invocation. The shared historic experience remains now and forever something that establishes lasting bonds. Is Europe to be united by its cemeteries? This is an idea that still has sense – and the many solemn commemorations from D-Day to Trafalgar or others are a reminder of this.

What's more, European cemeteries are not only the little stone ones adjacent to churchyards. From the trenches of the Somme to the mass graves of Galicia, the sediment of European soil packed with mass graves is as fertile as the memories are morbid. Recent work on the memory of the Holocaust is currently re-evaluating the hierarchy of horror between the death camps and the massive executions of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Nazi conquest of Eastern Europe. Jonathan Littell's epic novel *The Kindly Ones* (2006) gives a fictionalised, but historically very realistic, account of this.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that this memory, especially of World War II, is omnipresent across Europe no one would ever dream of speaking of a European nation. In other words, European collective memory is not uniting enough to produce a feeling of common belonging and a continent-wide political community despite systematically including the other members of the family in the national commemoration ceremonies with a view to sharing. Indeed, commemorating together is not enough to establish collective memory.

This simply serves as a candid reminder to the technicians in the building of Europe that it is not enough to make Europe "we still need to make Europeans."⁷ Of course, the difficulty lies in being able to synthesize without impoverishing, unify without diminishing, gather without losing. A European memory cannot simply be the sum, or even the meshing, of all national memories. There exist too many irreconcilables. Take Napoleon or Yalta, or the 8th of May 1945, the meaning and emotional impact of these events is completely different depending on your point of view, from London, Berlin, Warsaw or Moscow. Perhaps the question could be posed as follows: how can you make a community of peoples when they are fiercely attached to all that makes them different from the other members of that community? How can you build a community of states that were for long-time rivals and are still unequal? How can you do that with nations that were built up against each other, more often than not, in pain and blood?

This is precisely the audacious challenge accepted with the decision to build Europe. The whole idea was to learn from the ravages of nationalism and its murderous quarrels. The utopian idea of a European Union has always been something of major political maturity. Rather than repeating all of the historical forms that union on the continent had previously taken Empire (as in Roman or Carolingian or Napoleonic) or sticking to the satisfying comfort of a union realised at an overly elitist level (amongst members of the church, academia, intellectuals), Europe's founding fathers chose to, modestly, throw their weight behind the very concrete forms of solidarity that could be achieved through the pooling of economic interests. But, as concentrated as they

⁶ Renan, *ibidem*, excerpt from the third part.

⁷ Transposition by Bronisław Geremek to Europe of Massimo d'Azeglio's words at the time of Italian unity; cf. Thomas Ferenczi, "L'Europe, sa mémoire, ses valeurs", *Le Monde*, February 18th, 2004.

were on building the solidarity that came from this deft realism, they never neglected to work on the cement of the cemeteries.

Memory is of course fertile ground, where the most tenacious ancestral hate is deep-rooted. But, European construction is proving that if carefully cultivated these same fields can produce the wonderful fruits of reconciliation, cooperation and entente amongst peoples, states and nations.

From national history to collective memory

Fifty years is both a very short period of time, especially on the old continent scale, and a very long one for generations that move at the increasingly rapid pace of change triggered by globalisation – and for which the span of long-term memory tends toward shrinking. Nonetheless, in fifty years Europe has formed a community, a *commonwealth*. However, contrary to what is usually stated, this community is not based on values which are evidently common and exclusively its own.

Actually, values in Europe have more often than not been divisive rather than unifying. Values know how to occupy all space and become implacable as noted by Montaigne, a disgusted witness of the fratricidal wars of his time: “Even opinion is of force enough to make itself to be espoused at the expense of life.” Each European value contains something to contradict the other. Europe knows and remembers that it is frequently a crossroads of contradicting principles. Universal and self-centred, daughter of the Enlightenment and the Inquisition, mother of colonialism and human rights, enslaver and liberal at the same time... Values are not enough to unite, and more often than not, they divide: much like memory and history.

Yet, this is the very history that unites Europeans today – because they did and still do want it that way. The philosopher Tzvetan Todorov noted this when he observed that it is not the contents of a given memory that constitute European unity, but rather the status that we assign to said memory. In other words, we take identity not from the past but from the present; and that comes less from knowledge than from the will of the community. This change in perspective on the issue can be considered in line with what we refer to as work of memory or the commitment to accomplish that work, “obligatory memory” in the eloquent wording of Paul Ricœur.⁸

This work began in and around 1945 in the majority of Western European societies; then, around 1989 in Eastern Europe as well, when the liberalisation of the communist regimes allowed it. This work of memory is first and foremost a work of history, by historians, who have been given the task, summoned even, to compare the feeling of memory and collective memory to the facts and conclusions of scientific knowledge. In recognising, accepting and even encouraging the compilation of a multitude of perspectives on subjects that are as sensitive and painful for the identity and self-esteem of entire nations as collaboration with the Nazi occupation, colonisation, and the status of national heroes, individual countries are essentially abandoning the monopoly on the establishment of a discourse on themselves. This is the process that has been going on, more or less spontaneously, in the majority of European societies as a part of their national memory.

Abandoning the monopoly on the discourse on oneself, if not a direct logical result of the necessary process of putting into perspective national interests for the purposes of European construction, is nevertheless in many ways akin to it. Moreover, some debates are just as much causes for controversy and invective. This is the case when the subject is too weighty (slavery), too complex (colonisation), and especially

⁸ Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Seuil, Paris 2000; pp. 105-111.

when the political stakes of memory clash with the lingering 'romantic' approach to history of heroes, traitors, victims and butchers.⁹

In Eastern Europe, the relationship to the national story – which was for so long subjected to the ideology of a totalitarian state expert in historical manipulation – was dealt with through official memory policies that proved hardly any subtler. For example, the former KGB headquarters in Vilnius have become the “Museum for Genocide Victims of Lithuania”; the first exhibitions in the “Museum for the occupation of Latvia” paid tribute to the Latvian SS divisions that fought for brief national independence from the Red Army; and more recently, in 2011, the ultra-conservative government of Viktor Orbán’s re-writing of the Hungarian constitution showed just how alive historical revisionism can be in a country that has never been able to come to terms with the trauma of the 1918 Treaty of Trianon. Other examples caused complications in German-Polish relations at the time of accession to the European Union of the Kaczynski brothers’ Poland, when a policy of fear mongering helped some radical Polish political parties contend for power.¹⁰

In this case, it is less the relationship to memory and more the way of writing history that is at issue. Nowadays interpretation of national history is no longer a national privilege.¹¹ Enter the European collective memory. Even the prelude to the “Museum of Europe”, the exhibition on Europe’s past which opened its doors in 2007, was entitled “This is our history” and not “our memory.” In fact, this is more accurate: strictly speaking there is no European memory. Or in any case, no memory besides the one that was hashed out and constantly reworked with an incessant crosscheck against each national version.

A broken timeline

So, where does that leave us as to a collective memory for Europe? There are two fundamental problems that exist when it comes to the notion of European memory: first, the lack of a positive collective memory, despite the epistemological and political assumption that one does indeed exist. But, what really threatens the potential for establishing a European collective memory is that most forms of collective memory seem to be waning.

This is something that is happening at an individual level and that goes beyond the observation made by Pierre Nora in his essay “The Generation.”¹² Today the problem is psychological, even physiological: conscious remembrance and the difficulty in rationally apprehending an event, whatever that event may be, are less important than the impact it has on our individual subconscious and the incurred emotional charge. And the very common feeling of being completely overwhelmed by events both quantitatively and qualitatively is a big contributing factor to the feeling of malaise from globalisation that was previously mentioned.

⁹ This is precisely how the Polish minister of defense at the time, Radosław Sikorski, revealed a war plan from the archives of the Warsaw Pact in 2005, and called for “educating the public [because] It is important for people to know who was the hero and who was the villain.” cf. Graham Bowley, “Russian sacrifice: Poland” in *The International Herald Tribune*, November 25th, 2005.

¹⁰ For example the success of *Samoobrona (Self-defense)* the populist political discourse that in part makes an unabashed use of the memorial image of the German invader.

¹¹ Bo Stråth, “Histoire, mémorisation publique et assomption du passé”, in B. Geremek and R. Picht (dir.), *Visions d'Europe*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2007.

¹² Cf. Paul Ricœur, *La mémoire...*, p. 530 à 532.

In today's Western and westernised world, the relationship that individuals have to the news and to the daily flow of information is very telling in this respect. We are witnessing an 'exponential acceleration' or rather an intensification and densification of events. Faced with that, our ability to fully comprehend all this information, i.e. analyse it, place it in the greater context, and remember it, is diminished. Paradoxically, advancements in information technology actually only increase the disconnect by multiplying the various media for information, the links referenced, mixing indiscriminately what can be confirmed and what cannot, what is interpretation and what is fact, what is futile and what is important.

In the end, like the 'favourites' list of an internet navigator where you constantly see the same few regularly consulted web pages, we only actually remember events that go along with a previously established reference framework, or otherwise, when this framework does not exist, we remember just the most superficial interpretations of them in an impression of constant confusion. We eventually come to a point where we can no longer confront a single event but rather a myriad of 'individualised' micro-events, staged in each individual's reality – a phenomenon that is only reinforced by the aesthetic trend of our societies that attributes to artistic expression a declarative value that carries meaning far beyond the intrinsic value that is generally attributed to works of art. So that even when a historical event is planetary, and experienced as such, the historical event quickly becomes an individual event: "9/11 and me" or "Fukushima and me", then Maïdan, Syria, Gaza, etc. and in as much erasing once and for all any possibility for a veritable viable collective memory.

This represents a break with the past. The world as we know it and in which we live has not lost all sense, but it has lost common sense. It is a break because traditionally and more specifically ever since the first works of sociology of memory, notably by Maurice Halbwachs, individual memory has been subordinate to the collective determinant. In *On Collective Memory* Halbwachs goes far into this hierarchy and has no qualms about considering all individual memories as a personal expression of a collective programming; individuality only comes into the process when it comes to selecting memories: "each individual memory is a point of view of the collective memory."¹³

If we accept that Halbwachs was right, and why not, then, what stands out is that in today's world this hierarchy has been flipped: individual perception has surpassed group dominance and collective memory in order of importance. People no longer take their individual point of view to put it into perspective within a social framework. There are several factors that explain this: here are four.

First, there is the eclipse of the duration. Pierre Nora had already pointed out in his abovementioned article "The Generation" that one of the consequences of the shift that he observed in the practice of commemoration is that the duration has been abolished creating a sort of "present without history". That is true, but it is not something that applies solely to the obsession with commemoration in a society, which only its past can reassure. From the moment in which the last hopes for revolutionary *grands soirs* or eternal life have been exhausted (religions and socialist utopia) or vanished into bloody dead-ends (massacres in the name of identity), there is a certain depreciation of the past and an undeniable devaluation of the future that

¹³ Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris, PUF, 1950.

have forever changed the relationship to time, sharpened an impatience that is not just consumerism and locked us in an infinite present – an “eternal instant.”¹⁴

Second, there is the fracture in generational links. “In rural societies, frequently, during the day, while father and mother work in the fields or do thousands of household chores, young children stay with the ‘elderly’ and it is from them that they receive all of the customs and traditions of their culture, even more so than from their parents.”¹⁵ In our modern societies, it is not the move from country to the city that is the biggest shift, nor that school has uniformly replaced the wisdom of the elderly. The major change comes from somewhere else and is two-pronged: first, society has chosen to remove the value that was traditionally placed on age and grant youth a wisdom that would have been unthinkable in the past. Second, society has become the theatre for unrelenting competition between the mass media, television in particular and traditional tools for learning about the world. This unequal battle between two monopolies significantly undermines the traditional process for building vertical social links. Perhaps another way to broach the issue could be to ask the following, somewhat naïve, question: who tells stories today? The families in which oral tradition is transmitted from grandparents to grandchildren, consequently casting a child’s memory back over several generations, have become rare. Today, it is television, cinema and mass media with their amazing ability to enter each household that stories to the family, feeding our imagination and sharing our memories.

This brings us to the third factor, the **media sphere**. Television and audiovisual culture on social media form a forceful horizontal, massive social bond that cannot be ignored. It is a bond that is, perhaps, qualitatively depleted but nonetheless very unifying and very democratic as it simultaneously brings several generations and all social groups a cultural ‘outlet’, even if the programming maintains the strategies of identification and the trajectories of socio-cultural differentiation. It is also an ephemeral bond because each new addition replaces the old, i.e., renders the other obsolete. The best example of this, at least the most meaningful, is the memory and representation of the Holocaust: suffice to compare *Night and Fog* (Resnais, 1955) to *Schindler’s List* (Spielberg, 1993) to *Life is Beautiful* (Benigni 1997), to gauge how much these representations are also dependent on the public and the context that they serve. In a society that is fragmented, infiltrated and increasingly formatted by the workings of mass media, all avenues to collective memory must be navigated cautiously. And it appears that this challenge does not lie with individuals but also with the **fourth factor**: the community. The community no longer has the forms and substance that the traditional memory model assumed it had. That is what will be explored now.

History of Europe for a memoryless community?

The announced end of major collective narratives and of their utopian inspirations sent a shockwave across Europe, probably commensurate only to the advent of humanism.¹⁶ The disenchantment of the world, the collapse of forms of community belonging, is something that has been underscored, assessed and discussed at

¹⁴ Title of Michel Maffesoli, *L’instant éternel*, Denoël, Paris, 2000; a good short work for understanding the changes to mental structures in our hierarchical and vertical societies once they begin to take on a horizontal and reticular organizational structure.

¹⁵ Marc Bloch, “Mémoire collective, traditions et coutumes” in *Revue de synthèse historique*, 1925, n°118-120, p. 79 – discussed by Maurice Halbwachs.

¹⁶ Cf. First chapter “Von großen Erzählungen” in Peter Sloterdijk, *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 2005.

length by many a work of philosophy, sociology and political science. It has become a common occurrence over the last 40 to 50 years to witness the weakening or even disintegration of all types of community structures that up until then had served as the reference framework within which collective identity, and as an extension individual identity, was built.

Obviously, nation, church, school, family, workplace, political parties all still exist. But, their traditional role of producing meaning is no longer absolute, unequivocal and uncontested. New forms of socialising have emerged, first marginally, and then as the margins burst, at the very centre of our societies. This phenomenon is widespread, and has at times been analysed under the somewhat strange concept of tribalism,¹⁷ whatever the case may be we are dealing with a 'sociability' which is different, organic and that is replacing the logic of identity with the logic of affect, placing more emphasis on the roles of the individual within the group that he/she has chosen, than to his/her *function* as it would have been in the past in traditional society.

This link is being forged in a way that is cohesive, informal, ephemeral and based on affinities; it is rooted in the experiences of everyday life and culminates most often in the popping up of festive and oppositional gatherings. These forms are also culminating in new political opposition movements like the *Indignados* in Spain, *Dégage* in Senegal and the *Occupy* movement in the United States. This constant reinvention of a changing community is difficult to systematically grasp as it often layers upon traditional structures of belonging, weakening them, without replacing them. What's more, it is not generalised and does it affect all social groups as distinctly and as acutely. But, it must absolutely be taken into account in the European context, as it is something that goes along with transformation that reaches with more breadth and depth than just political action and public debate and is accompanied by a form of Euroscepticism linked to a rejection of the dominant classes.

The intellectual and political debate on the European project runs up against a double hindrance. First, **sociological**, because the references, or the establishment thereof – which is the same thing because what really matters is how they are received – are not widely shared and is shared at all poorly. This problem is at the core of the schism that exists between the elite and the general public and something that we discover, with a somewhat hypocritical astonishment, is typical of the misunderstandings when it comes to European politics.

This is a key – for this sociological split is first and foremost generational: the European memory chain has been broken. Which brings us to the second part of the hindrance, the **cultural** aspect, and another reason for the disaffection encountered with the European project. For whole generations, especially in the West of course, the referent 'war and peace' that made the European adventure legitimate has lost much of its clout. Of course, this opposition is as well a sign of true consideration for the European project and its implications, because what is being challenged is not the legitimacy of the project per se (or is it?) but rather its direction. Nonetheless, this double sociological and cultural split does block, a little bit more, the way to a collective European memory.

¹⁷ By Michel Maffesoli in his works of the 1980s: Michel Maffesoli, *Le temps des tribus*, La Table Ronde, 1988, in which he maintained that "post-modern tribalism", of which he analyzed the developments, was indicative of the inversion a historic trend, i.e., "the decline of individualism" in our societies.

While the avenues to a European collective memory may seem to be both something of scientific aporia and a political stalemate, nonetheless the increasing demand for *European Histories* is encountering the exponential growth of academic activity on Europe. A thirst for knowledge and an opening up of new historical scope are spurring a continued widening of the scope of historical research. Are all of these histories of Europe for a community starved for in-formation? Intersecting histories, common histories, cross-cutting histories: faced with this contemporary ‘what to do?’ some, like the German historian Ute Frevert¹⁸, insists that we embrace it while staying clear of the 19th century reflex of teaching and spreading teleological history in which European construction begins with Europe’s national liberal democracies, as if it were a linear and necessary process.

Concerned more with ‘making sense’ before ‘making a community’, these historians, respond to the craving for stories by increasing the number of research activities and the large-scale spreading of the results: articles, books, especially movies, all with critical scientific elements and a pedagogical approach accessible to the general public. Essentially, it comes down to transposing the transversal approach of medievalist historians, who are much more accustomed to conceiving of their subjects within a wider European perspective, to modern and contemporary periods of historical research, which are closer to the general public. The most pressing thing in the work of memory in Europe is, to a certain extent, ensuring its ‘Europeanisation’, i.e., moving to a way of writing history.

Since the French Revolution, the nation is not only the major object of but also the dominant framework for the writing of history. The Europeanisation of this framework is a subject of very intense epistemological debate, which benefits from previous research done in social studies and the humanities (political science, economics, social studies and law). The process of writing history sped up considerably over the course of the last decade of the 20th century, challenging the narrow and dilapidated framework of the national scheme for writing history and especially of the implicit mythologies – both positive and negative – that it always promoted voluntarily or despite itself.¹⁹

The Europeanisation of the writing of history should mean a shift from the old national scheme to a new European one for this fundamental exercise of transmission of the past. This would in turn mean that we can forge anew ‘the historical memory’, the – somewhat peculiar – hybrid that was updated by Maurice Halbwachs, and that exists somewhere between history and memory.²⁰

For in the end, the generational fracture may have condemned traditional forms of collective memory.²¹ It is a complex burden as it encompasses European history in

¹⁸ Professor at Yale (USA) and Bielefeld, in various fields of historical research; cf. Ute Frevert, *Eurovisionen. Ansichten guter Europäer im 19 und 20 Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt, Fischer, 2003.

¹⁹ Amongst the pioneers of this new scheme for writing history, it is no surprise to find many German historians, who because of their recent past have sought to draw a forge a new approach to the history of the nation. Hartmut Kaelble’s work, *Auf dem Weg zu einer europäischen Gesellschaft*, München, 1987 or in another branch the work of Heinrich-August Winkler, *Deutsche Geschichte vom Ende des Alten Reiches bis zum Untergang der Weimarer Republik. Der lange Weg nach Westen*, München, 2000, are emblematic.

²⁰ Title of Chapter 2, “Mémoire collective et mémoire historique”, by Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, op. cit.

²¹ Pierre-Yves Gaudard, *Le Fardeau de la mémoire. Le deuil collectif allemand après le national-socialisme*, Paris, Plon, 1997 – the extension of this collective grief, the Europeanisation of all issues that resulted from Nazi guilt were taken up by all with varying levels of resistance from some countries

its entirety: its religious memory, made of conflicts and unity; its artistic memory; its intellectual and scientific history, which previously accounted for its domination, etc. Everything would be there: the middle class and the three orders²², Omar, Cesar, Adolf and Genghis, the slaves of Athens, in Nantes and Bristol, the flames of the auto-da-fé, the fog of Treblinka and the mud of the trenches, *The Enchanted Flute*, and Mona Lisa's smile, the rhymes of *Les Châtiments*, Louis, Karl and Alexander, Hagia Sophia, Reims and Westminster, *Il principe*, *Civitas Dei*, *L'esprit des lois* and *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, the Pope, the sciences and the university, Colomb, Brazza and the Jesuits, the Field of the Cloth of Gold and the vineyards of Burgundy; Mantzikert, Lepanto, Tannenberg, Stalingrad and Trafalgar, the Tuileries (1789), the Winter Palace (1917) and the Brandenburg Gate(1989), the Treaties of Verdun, Westphalia and Rome...

It is this complexity, duration, this incredible gravity that must be embraced by all. The challenge is precisely in the imperative that each citizen of Europe does not have the luxury to ignore the memory of his/her fellow European.

Breaking free of World War II

The shift to European history, rather than searching for a hypothetical European collective memory, is likely one of the priority areas for renewal of Europe's discourse on itself. For the memory that underpins our common project is today a memory that has been worn down, reduced to a few political reflexes. A memory built on a mythology of evil, made up of fascist and soviet totalitarianism, abandonment of democratic freedoms by disoriented citizens in the face of a fanatisised minority, and an inexorable march towards the military clash of nationalisms, total war and the massacre of innocents. From the mythology of evil emerge the symbols of redemption: founding fathers, prophets of a new golden age of peace, shared prosperity and caring figures protective of a benevolent new order.

This worn out memory of World War II no longer unites Europeans enough. The social and economic crisis does not explain everything. Forms of community belonging are being weakened and this is coupled with a general questioning of the powers that be. All of this has been going on for a long time and must be fully understood and not just treated as a passing fever. Obviously, giving in to a worrying resurgence of nationalist contestation of European construction is not the answer; nor is moral condemnation, scorn for the dynamics and isolation behind a political Maginot line.

Au contraire, it should be taken as a healthy wakeup call, a symptom that reveals the ailment. There is an urgent need to find new common ground for Europeans, 'common places' if the building of Europe is to continue to be considered, as it should be, a desirable endeavour. Because, by definition, common places are a meeting point, and the memory of World War II can no longer be that ground. In Eurojargon – the poetryless Newspeak that simultaneously distances us from thought as it brings us closer to action – we call these 'common places' a 'narrative'. But, in fact, its actuality is a 'rationale'. Let's face it: the rationale for Europe can no longer remain locked up in the justification of the past. We must move beyond the founding myths on which it was built and begin to write its history in the present. When it comes to building Europe, we know the 'why?' – it is time we started asking ourselves 'what for?'

(in France, in Poland, in the Czech Republic, the mythology of the victim had to systematically give way with each historic work published). This is just one example.

²² Georges Dumézil, *L'Idéologie Tripartite des Indo-Européens*, Bruxelles, Latomus, 1958.



© Edouard Gaudot

Edouard Gaudot (born 1974), historian and political scientist, has lived and worked in Australia, Poland, Austria, Belgium and France. A former history teacher, Edouard Gaudot worked with Prof. Bronislaw Geremek, at the College of Europe in Warsaw, and later in Brussels at the European Parliament. During a brief passage at the European Commission's Representation in France, he met Dany Cohn-Bendit and joined the Europe-Ecologie movement as a campaign advisor. Since April 2010 Edouard Gaudot has worked as an adviser for the Green group in the European Parliament.