

ARTICLES : SPECIAL ISSUE  
CONFRONTING MEMORIES – REFLECTING HISTORY

## Methodological and Substantive Remarks on Myth, Memory and History in the Construction of a European Community

By Bo Stråth\*

### A. Methodological Considerations

Over the last decades, a shift has occurred in the methodology of academic historiography, from an earlier focus on the quality of the sources towards the narrative framework of the history. The point in the new approach is that the sources are interpreted and put together into a narration. In the earlier approach, there was a kind of myopic source criticism, which stopped at the sources and never really questioned the way in which they were put together into a narration. The way in which this composition is made is as biased as the sources on which the narration is based. For this reason, critical scrutiny must move one step forward, instead of halting at the sources. The path-breaking *Metahistory* by Hayden White in 1973 demonstrated, in a provocative way, the bias in narrative structures.<sup>1</sup> He moved the focus from the sources as such, towards the manner in which they were employed. When the book was published, it was generally rejected and marginalized by the historians' craft. Today, it is no exaggeration to say that, even if it is not generally recognized, at least it is widely accepted. *Metahistory* alluded, of course, to metaphysics. White's conclusion was that history is basically ideology. History is not the past *per se*, nor, as Ranke argued, is it *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, but a reflection on the past from the present.<sup>2</sup> This methodological shift does not deny

---

\* Bo Stråth has been Professor of Contemporary History at the *European University Institute* in Florence since January 1997. From 1990 to 1996, he was Professor of History at the *University of Gothenburg*. Professor Stråth's research focuses on modernization and democratization processes in Western Europe in a comparative context. He has published widely in this field. E-mail: bo.strath@iue.it.

<sup>1</sup> HAYDEN WHITE, *METAHISTORY. THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY* (1973).

<sup>2</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *On the historical-political semantics of asymmetric counter-concepts*, in: *FUTURES PAST. ON THE SEMANTICS OF HISTORICAL TIME* (1985) (2004) (German original, *VERGANGENE ZUKUNFT. ZUR SEMANTIK GESCHICHTLICHER ZEITEN*, 1979).

the continued importance of a critical approach to the sources and does not reject the existence of events and facts. Methodological rules of how to evaluate sources critically are still valid. The events and the facts based on the events can be documented. No serious historian founding his or her work on sources would deny the fact that, for instance, the Holocaust really did occur.

On the other hand, the fact that history is interpretation and translation means that there is no zero point of absolute security. However, this does not mean a collapse into the other extreme of total relativity or that anything goes. The growing plurality in the views on the past does not mean that there is no possibility of discerning what is more or less probable. The emancipation from the strait-jacket of the quest for the final and absolute truth, through a growing role for the critique of how narrations are constructed, opens up for a pluralist and vital debate. The deconstruction of old myths through critique opens up new perspectives with the construction of new myths, which, in turn, in an ongoing process, in which the past is seen from an ever changing present, sooner or later become the targets of a new deconstruction. No critical deconstruction of myths is value-free but contains the germs of a new narrative. This is a view of historical construction, which is more realistic and less naïve than the old one, which does not believe that history is precisely a matter of construction, and therefore halts at the source criticism. History is not the past, but about the past. History is a translation of the past into our time, an act of interpretation. This translation necessitates a critical approach not only to the sources but also to their narrative embedding, and to the act of interpretation.

This view on myth and history also comes close to Hans Blumenberg who has demonstrated that no society can describe and conceptualize itself without myths and metaphors. Every theoretical reflection on society brings its proper iconography. In particular have organic metaphors and biological language been used.<sup>3</sup>

The slowly emerging shift of the methodological focus that followed Hayden White's book meant a growing attention to history as construction. History became a key dimension of the cultural construction of community. This approach emphasizes that social cohesion and community are invented rather than discovered, that they are constructed rather than existing "out there", derivable, for instance, from real economic structures.

This does not mean, of course, that events as such are also invented. Instead, the facts, and, based on them, the narrations, are constructed by reflection upon the documents that attest to the occurrence of the events. The construction of commu-

---

<sup>3</sup> HANS BLUMENBERG, *ARBEIT AM MYTHOS* (1979).

nity means that images and myths emerge from the transformation of existing inventories of historical heritage and culture. Successful construction appeals to certain cultural chords and conceptual tropes, to narrative plots and discursive frames. Such tropes and plots are, of course, not primordial; they, too, are the products of human creation. In these processes of community construction, the idea of a collective memory and a specific history is a tool that bridges the gap between high political and intellectual levels and the levels of everyday life. What constitutes collective memory and what is consigned to collective oblivion, in other words, taboos and what we do not talk about, is a highly disputed question, which reflects power relations in the definition of social problems.<sup>4</sup>

The break-through of the new epistemological view should be seen not least in the framework of the end of the Cold War, which provoked an intense search for new meaning and interpretation. The collapse of the Soviet Empire also heavily eroded epistemological perspectives based on materialism and socio-economic structures as prime movers of social change. The break-through has meant new challenges for professional historiography and has given a concept such as history new perspectives, not least with the growing insight that there is no reality which can be conceptualized and analysed beyond the limits that language sets upon its meaning. When coping with reality, the constraints of language mean, among other things, that the discourse creates its own interests. One might choose to see this 'linguisticism' as a burden, but it also justifies a certain optimism as a result of the interpretative freedom that it gives. Language is multi-vocal and constitutes a huge semantic field with vast ranges, and for this reason it offers greater freedom in the selection of perspective.

In this view, myth, in this sense of constructed memory and oblivion, is emancipated from its pejorative connotation and assumes the role of the provider of meaning, thus becoming a constituent element of politics and social cohesion. In this context, emancipation takes on a different meaning from that of the self-understanding of positivist historiography, in which activity in the name of science and source criticism is seen as an emancipation or liberation of the sources from the myths which enshroud them. This positivist approach was embodied by Leopold von Ranke and his followers, who believed that they stood outside and above the processes that they studied. They believed that they were the judges or referees

---

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Nora holds that each nation has its canonical memories and myths that bind the community together and create social identities. Myth and memory give the community a narrative through which it can continue to forge its identity. The act of remembering is related to the repository of images and ideals that constitute the social ties of a community. PIERRE NORA, REALMS OF MEMORY: RETHINKING THE FRENCH PAST vol 1-3, vol. 1 xv-xxiv (LAWRENCE D. KRITZMAN, ED., TRANSLATED BY ARTHUR GOLDHAMMER, 1996) (French original LES LIEUX DE MÉMOIRE 1-3, 1984-1986).

who were capable of disclosing the truth, *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, and failed to realize that they, too, were party to the production of the past.<sup>5</sup>

In the European *Mythosforschung* of the 19th and 20th centuries, myth implied irrationality and was thus separated from rationality in the form of *logos* and reason. The key theoretical question which this dichotomy produced was whether mythical thought was prior to or parallel to scientific thought. And it was through this debate that the myth of rational science emerged.

Chiara Bottici has investigated how, in a long historical perspective the separation between myth and logic emerged. She demonstrates how, in a chain from Ancient Greece, *mythos* and *logos*, which both were once synonymous for *word*, separated and took on oppositional meanings. The decisive links in the process of this separation were the triumph of monotheistic religion over Greek pluralism, and the quest of the Enlightenment for truth, which can be seen as a transformation of monotheism under the maintenance of its core dimension of absolutism. To close the emerging gap between myth and truth, the works by Spinoza, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein can be seen as being connected to the romanticist critique of Enlightenment. Already Spinoza delivered important contributions to the epistemological debate in this vein. Nietzsche's deconstructivist and historicising approach to the concept of the *logos* ("*was definierbar ist, hat keine Geschichte*") and the Wittgenstein's language game theory were both important contributions in a process towards a more sophisticated view of the concept of myth as a political category. Horkheimer and Adorno (*Dialektik der Aufklärung*) and Cassirer (*Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*) worked somewhat in the direction of maintaining the gap. This is particularly true for Cassirer in his heroic attempt to save the values of the Enlightenment from their

---

<sup>5</sup> The idea of "scientific history" as formulated by Leopold von Ranke was based on the study of new source materials. It was assumed that close textual criticism of the hitherto undisclosed records buried in state archives would once and for all establish the facts of political history. The idea of Ranke became a dogma during the period from the 1870s to the 1930s through the professionalization of academic history writing under development of precise rules for the source criticism. Ranke's statement about *wie es eigentlich gewesen* has often been misunderstood, and Ranke has been attributed with a rather naïve viewpoint on the historian's task. However, in the preface of the history of the Romance and Germanic peoples Ranke demonstrates, as opposed to what is argued about him, that he was well aware of the bias in history writing. He reflected on the connection between intention, subject-matter and form of his book. The intention of a historian is dependent on his opinion and perspective ("*Ansicht*"). Out of intention and subject-matter emerges the form. History is thus not free evolution but creative ordering of the past, or, in the language of today, construction. History has been given the task to judge the past in order to teach for the future. However, so great tasks were beyond Ranke's ambition with his book in 1824. He just wanted to show *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. LEOPOLD VON RANKE wrote his famous formulation about history as it really was in the preface of his *GESCHICHTEN DER ROMANISCHEN UND GERMANISCHEN VÖLKER VON 1494 BIS 1514* (1824) (VII in the edition published by Duncker und Humblot 1874).

surrender to holistic and totalitarian overstretching. In contrast, Sorel, to some degree, reinforced the Nietzsche-Wittgenstein axis and paved the way for a more political understanding of the myth. At this end of the chain, Carl Schmitt's view on political myth must also be critically analysed.<sup>6</sup>

The examples of Cassirer and Schmitt emphasize how important it is to approach the concept of myth carefully and critically with full awareness of its explosive force. The analysis of a myth cannot be restricted to examining its function. Analysing the function of a myth means deconstructing that myth, which, at the same time, provokes the question of what new forms of history are being constructed. To what extent can the new history, that is, our re-telling of history, be accepted as a definitive history based upon assumptions of discovery rather than invention?

One answer to this question is that we can never recreate the past 'as it really was', at the moment before the future of that past was known, a future which has become, in turn, our past. We can only try to translate the past in order to produce meaning for ourselves, in our present. For this reason, we must make 'translation' a key methodological concept. This translation can only be made from our point of view of today, and never from the point of view of that past's present. In this sense, concepts such as objectivity and Ranke's *wie es eigentlich gewesen* become ideology.<sup>7</sup> Both *wie es eigentlich gewesen* and the cumulative view of history as an inexorable process of mapping reality in a total and definitive sense, through the addition of ever more and better data, become vain undertakings. The truths about the past are conditional and dependent upon the present in which they are formulated.

This was the point of view promoted by Lévi-Strauss when he described myths as something which give order and meaning to the universe, in the sense that they give us the illusion that we understand the universe. To create myth is to create 'order, an intellectual, cognitive order principally, an order that has as its focus the always problematical relations between man and nature'.<sup>8</sup> Barthes defines myth as a semiological system (form) and an ideology (content) consisting of three elements: form (signifier), concept (signified) and signification (sign). A myth hides

---

<sup>6</sup> CHIARA BOTTICCI, A PHILOSOPHY OF POLITICAL MYTH Ph.D. Thesis, European University Institute (2004).

<sup>7</sup> Cf., Georg Iggers, *Historiography and the Challenge of Post-modernism*, in: THE POST-MODERN CHALLENGE. PERSPECTIVES EAST AND WEST 281 (BO STRÁTH / NINA WITOSZEK, EDS., 1999).

<sup>8</sup> CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS, MYTH AND MEANING (1978).

nothing, but it distorts, that is, it functions in such a way as to give historical intention a natural justification.<sup>9</sup>

Collective memory is 'the result of a selective process of remembering and forgetting the past' and only exists where there is a group that remembers. The construction of a collective memory interacts with deep-rooted myths of the national community. In a sense, these myths assign the limits to memory, defining what is possible and what is impossible to remember. The construction and invention of future horizons is not a totally free enterprise. Images of the past and of the future are not just linear relationships from the present, but also depend on the accumulation of previous such relationships and their continuous constitution and reconstitution.<sup>10</sup> The past, as well as the history of relating past and present, constitutes a contingency, which cannot be freely done away with. German post-1933 history, for example, imposes, after 1945, a series of constraints on the way in which any form of German nationalism is able to manifest itself. Even if all the elements necessary for a typical nationalist discourse are available (flag, national anthem, constitution, a history), the accumulated experiences of the past set limits on how such representations can be combined. On the other hand, such limitations through experiences are not eternal, but fade with the distance to the past. Not only do societies remember, they also forget.

The historians' approach to the issue of collective memory has suffered from a lack of future perspectives in the past, a view on past futures. The processes in which collective memories are constructed are about the horizons of future expectations as much as about past experiences. It is Reinhart Koselleck who has opened up this future-oriented perspective more than anybody else.<sup>11</sup> And, in this vein, although coming from a more Habermasian perspective, it is Jörn Rüsen, in particular, who has studied the construction of collective memory and the use of history in order to provide future orientation.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> ROLAND BARTHES, MYTHOLOGIES 124-125 (1957). Cf., Bo Stråth, *Introduction. Myth, Memory and History in the Construction of Community*, in: MYTH AND MEMORY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY. HISTORICAL PATTERNS IN EUROPE AND BEYOND 19 (BO STRÅTH, ED., 2000).

<sup>10</sup> STATES OF MEMORY. CONTINUITIES, CONFLICTS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN NATIONAL RETROSPECTION (JEFFREY K. OLICK, ED., 2003). See, also, CARSTEN HUMLEBAEK, RETHINKING SPAIN: CONTINUITIES AND RUPTURES IN NATIONAL DISCOURSE AFTER FRANCO Ph.D. Thesis, European University Institute (2004).

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Koselleck (note 2).

<sup>12</sup> GESCHICHTSBEWUSSTSEIN IM INTERKULTURELLEN VERGLEICH (BODO VON BORRIES / JÖRN RÜSEN, ED., 1994); WESTLICHES GESCHICHTSDENKEN - EINE INTERKULTURELLE DEBATTE (JÖRN RÜSEN, ED., 1999); DIE UNRUHE DER KULTUR. POTENTIALE DES UTOPISCHEN (MICHAEL FEHR / ANNELIE RAMSBROCK / JÖRN RÜSEN, ED., 2004).

History and memory are about meaning. Language produces meaning, which is multi-dimensional and relationally formed, in an existing discursive field, at the same time as new fields are created. Meaning is contingent. Positive definitions are dependent on negative ones and *vice versa*, concepts such as “class”, “Islam”, or “Europe” are established through distinction. They are politically constructed. Consequently, they must be relativized and historicized instead of being reified. Instead of being seen as objective structures as such, *an sich*, they must be seen as potential, which can be mobilized through language.

Production of meaning is not a completely fortuitous affair, but stands in some kind of relationship to social and economic processes. However, the different patterns of organization of production and coercion demonstrate that production of meaning is never *a priori* causative, but always contingent. Collective protests cannot solely be attributed to changes in the economic basis of society. Nor can structural changes be expressed solely in intentional terms. The causal powers are emergent ones. As in hyperdynamic processes, where very small unforeseen changes suddenly become greatly magnified in an unpredictable way, contingency means that very little is predictable and most things are of uncertain occurrence. The historian’s reconstruction *ex post facto* means that the lines of developments are drawn, but that these lines should not be mistaken for the *ex ante facto* perspective of the actors studied or for *a priori* explanative power.

When development trajectories are outlined through retrospection, it is important to pay attention to the openness towards the future which, in the past, must have been the same, rationally speaking, as it was and is for us. Past futures are of the same category as the potential futures of the present.<sup>13</sup> Having said this, it should be added that openness is a relative concept. The degree of openness and freedom of action varies.

### **B. Three European “Zauberwörter”: Integration, Identity, Constitution**

The concept of a European identity was launched in 1973, at the European Community summit in Copenhagen. This concept was advanced and elaborated in a context marked by an experienced lack of identity and the erosion of interpretative frameworks and orientation. If there had been a sense of identity, there would have been no need to invent the concept as a means by which to induce a new community in the Community. Exactly what is meant by the concept

---

<sup>13</sup> For a development of this argument, see Koselleck (note 2).

of a European identity is unclear.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, the concept was scarcely employed at all during the campaign for European unification in the 1920s.<sup>15</sup>

In retrospect, it is striking how, at the same time as “identity” was being launched, attempts within the European project to intensify the process of “integration”, the watchword of the 1950s and 60s, were running into difficulty. In a situation in which both labour markets and the capacity of national economies for political government was diminishing, identity was launched by the European Council as a key concept in order to infuse new confidence in the project of unification. From our perspective today, it seems clear that identity replaced integration as the buzzword for the European unification project at a time when the project was experiencing severe strains.<sup>16</sup> The concept emerged in a situation in which the very legitimacy of the European integration project was at stake. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the increased attention to the legitimacy and democratic accountability of the structures of the EC was accompanied by reflection upon European identity.<sup>17</sup>

If the concept of “identity” is vague, then the term “integration” is no less so. The concept of integration originally meant “to make whole”, or “to form an entirety or entity”. Elements are brought together to become “integral” parts of a larger whole. This meaning establishes “integration” as an antonym for “dissolution”. Integration comes from the Latin *integer* meaning intact, untouched, whole, complete, unimpeachable (the same root as “entire”). *Integrare* means to restore or make whole. In the social sciences, integration refers to processes of unification of separate units, processes in which societies are established and maintained, or in which they merge to form larger entities. Some historical examples of this are the unification of Italy and the creation of the German Empire in the 19th century.

After the early use of the concept in classical sociology, “integration” re-emerged after the Second World War as a key social science concept in the federalist, functionalist and neo-functionalist discourses on Europe. It was used to describe not only the transformation of Western European societies after World War II, but also in the wake of the Cold War. By 1945, nationalism and national arrogance were

---

<sup>14</sup> Lutz Niethammer, *A European Identity?*, in: EUROPE AND THE OTHER AND EUROPE AS THE OTHER 87 (BO STRÅTH, ED., 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Katiana Orluc, *The Transformation of European Consciousness after The First World War*, in: STRÅTH (note 14), 157.

<sup>16</sup> For a development of this argument, see Bo Stråth, *From the Werner Plan to the EMU*, in: AFTER FULL EMPLOYMENT. EUROPEAN DISCOURSES ON WORK AND FLEXIBILITY (BO STRÅTH, ED., 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Bo Stråth, *Multiple Europes: Integration, Identity and Demarcation to the Other*, in: STRÅTH (note 14), 385.

discredited as political instruments and interpretative frameworks, yet, ironically and paradoxically, this was at precisely the same moment that the nation-state emerged as more consolidated than ever, following the mass participation involved in the mobilization for war. The contradiction between transnational free-trade theories and national welfare strategies for promoting mass production and mass consumption was concealed behind the concept of integration. This merger of transnational ideas and national performance was particularly distinct in Western Europe<sup>18</sup>.

Integration became a buzz word with a high political charge. The phenomenon that the concept claimed to describe was twofold: first, the institutionalization of in-tragovernmental co-operation, in which the point of departure was the nation-state, reinforced through welfare strategies, and secondly, the simultaneous condensation of transnational networks of communications and organized interests in Western Europe. A corresponding process of political, economic, and communicative condensation occurred in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, although this was through the use of Soviet military power and physical repression rather than through the concept of integration.

Integration became a key concept not only in the social sciences but also in politics. As such, its value was in its vagueness and ambiguity, as well as in its openness to interpretations. It produced both a political contestation over the precise content of the concept, and, at the same time, political concord that integration was a good thing. In 1949, when the US administration realized the magnitude of European resistance to the economic and political unification of Western Europe implicit in the Marshall Plan and in the American ideas of a United States of Europe, the concept of integration became the palliative to avoid a deadlock situation in the relationship between the US and Western Europe. While the Marshall administration (ECA) continued to talk about "European unification" and supranational institutions, the State Department preferred "integration", because it provided more room to manoeuvre, with respect to both the European nations and to Congress. To continue to require European "unification" would have provoked resistance from several European governments because of its connotations of surrendering national sovereignty.<sup>19</sup> From a political language making use of an old concept in the social sciences, "integration" was re-induced in the scientific theorising around a specific political process. The concept of integration was thus launched with the intention of introducing meaning that went beyond that which was contained in the concept of co-operation. The emerging phenomenon that "integration" claimed to describe

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf., ALAN S. MILWARD, *THE EUROPEAN RESCUE OF THE NATION STATE* (1994).

<sup>19</sup> MIKAEL AF MALMBORG, *DEN STÅNDAKTIGA NATIONALSTATEN* (1994).

was, in Western Europe, understood to be the construction of a new entity that represented something more than the sum of its participating elements, although not going as far as the concept of unification where the participatory elements were dissolved and merged into a new unit. While “co-operation” described a static structure of interaction between separate elements, “integration”, which had the goal of holistic unification, had more processual and transformative connotations. In this new role, the term “integration” was soon embedded in a symbolic context. Integration became a concept charged with signification and value. From the earliest moments, the connotations of “integration” moved in one specific direction. In its European context, “integration” became a functionalist concept, heavily dependent upon theory in mainstream American sociology. Integration began to imply a smooth, linear evolutionary development towards ever higher or more condensed levels of co-existence, with the result that the final goal was the same as that of “unification”, only achieved more slowly. Thus, European integration became an illustration of functionalist and teleological theorising about society.

In this context, integration was not only an analytical instrument in the social sciences. The term also became politically attractive, since it promised to prevent war and promote peace through the intensification of communication, trade and other economic and political networks throughout industrial societies. The social sciences operated as a form of feedback, legitimising the policy-making undertaking which had reactivated the concept of integration. In this optimistic scenario, political scientists and Europe’s political élite argued that the merging and interweaving of Europe into this new functional system of elements, which had previously been oppositional and competitive, would dramatically decrease the risks of warfare and increase the prospects of welfare in Europe. This was how the concept was generally understood in both the social sciences and politics.

In the debate, which took place at both intellectual and political levels, over the construction of this (Western) European image and on how to describe the envisaged new functional system, historical prototypes were mobilized. The question was whether the emerging entity was best described in terms of a “confederation” or a “federation”, in terms of interstate or supra-state co-operation. In the social sciences, this was a debate with clear political undertones, while, in the political debate, the concept had pretensions of scientific legitimization. The target of the debate, and the object for the concept of integration, was the European Community. While integration was a concept with generalized ambitions, its test bed was Western Europe as a project for peace and social welfare. The framework for the experiment was the Cold War and the demarcation of the Soviet sphere. In this framework, the liberal market order was seen as the guarantee of peaceful co-operation and increasing welfare, not in a neo-liberal sense, but in the context of ideas of politically managed economies.

The opposing image in the emerging Western world-view was the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites. Western Europe's own reflection in the Eastern European mirror served to reinforce the Western vision of democracy, peace, and welfare. This self-reflection appeared unambiguous and well-defined and was thus virtually unproblematized. The issue of the Cold War as a driving force behind the integration of Western Europe was hardly ever addressed directly. The idea of peaceful co-operation in the West was more or less derived from visions of eternal peace built on the ruins of World War II, and in opposition to the suppression of democracy in the East.

The confidence in this interpretative framework eroded heavily in the 1970s, as has been mentioned. It was in this framework of lost legitimacy that the concept of European identity was launched in 1973. European identity was put on the agenda at the moment that political economy, in its form that had been established since the 1950s, was becoming exposed to severe strains.

Up to this point, the idea of European unity was not supported by the concept of identity. A few references to a "European identity" were certainly made in the 1920s, but if the Utopia was ever described in social psychological terms, it was more often as a "European consciousness".<sup>20</sup> The concept of "European identity" was diffused in the 1970s in the framework of attempts to establish a European tripartite order of corporatist bargaining with which to replace the collapsing national frameworks. The concept emerged in a situation in which Europe was experiencing a profound crisis in national economic government.

Luisa Passerini has recently drawn attention to the way in which European identity was designed at the Copenhagen EC summit in December, 1973.<sup>21</sup> The idea of identity was based on the principle of the unity of the Nine, on their responsibility towards the rest of the World, and on the dynamic nature of the European construction. The meaning of "responsibility towards the rest of the World" was expressed in a hierarchical way. First, it meant responsibility towards the other nations of Europe with whom friendly relations and co-operation already existed. Secondly, it meant responsibility towards the countries of the Mediterranean, Africa and the Middle East. Thirdly, it referred to relations with the USA, based on the restricted foundations of equality and the spirit of friendship. Next in the hierarchy was the narrow co-operation and constructive dialogue with Japan and Canada. Then came *détente* towards the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe. At the bottom of the list came China, Latin America, and, finally, a reference was made to the

---

<sup>20</sup> Orluc (note 15). See, also, Lutz Niethammer (note 14).

<sup>21</sup> LUISA PASSERINI, IDENTITÀ CULTURALE EUROPEA. IDEE, SENTIMENTI, RELAZIONI 4-5 (1998).

importance of the struggle against underdevelopment in general. The fact that the USA was mentioned after the Middle East must be understood in the framework of the prevailing oil price shock.

Passerini is undoubtedly correct in her assertion that this mode of argument for a European identity demonstrates the danger contained in the concept. Beyond this emergence of a rhetoric of European identity, seemingly of a rather innocent kind, history shows in more general terms how risky the ideological charge built into the identity concept can be, and how entrenched the processes of exclusion and inclusion which it involves can become. At the end of the road, the 'Europe as an identity' project took on essential proportions. The extreme of identity in essential terms was identity politics on the Balkans and a new European genocide.

In a situation in which identity as a concept for cohesion, after the experiences following the implosion of Yugoslavia, has become problematical, to say the least, it seems as if the new buzzword launched to fulfil the function of unification is "constitution". The identity concept has become problematic not only because of the Yugoslavian collapse, however. The loss of orientation, confidence and political legitimacy was around 2000, ten years after the cease of the Cold War, as massive as in the 1970s. The infusion of new confidence among Europe's citizens required a new language. In this framework "constitution" should be seen as a new *Zauberwort*.

Normally, constitution refers to a moment of condensed political foundation in which a new entity of transgressing dimensions emerges. The cases in point are the constitutions in the wake of the French and the American Revolutions. Constitution in this sense connotes a distinct, not to say charismatic, text. Constitution creates a political community that abolishes previous unifications. It is difficult to see anything of these dimensions in the proposal for a European constitution, which was put on the table in 2004. In crucial respects, the act remains an intergovernmental agreement. In referendums, it will be subject to the approval of the European peoples (in plural) nation per nation, not a European people as the constitutive entity. However, as a concept to conjure up a 'community', it can be seen as a new link in the chain of integration and identity.

The conclusion is that we should be sceptical *vis-à-vis* the mythical underpinning of the institutional dimension of European society. The story of the eponymous heroine that Europe revived from Greek mythology, for instance, closes the meaning of the European construction into its problematical Greek origin. The myth of *Europa* raped by the bull, however interpreted, remains a Greek myth that recalls the exclusivist idea of a European inheritor of a pre-given Greek civilization. There is no more reason to link the European Union to Ancient Greece than to its Latin or Ara-

bic origins or to the historical German-French conflict and the European crisis in the 1930s.<sup>22</sup>

By looking for the mythical among the extraordinary stories of heroines and Gods, the risk is, as Chiara Bottici argues, to become myopic towards the much more powerful and apparently banal myths that we live by. In the case of the European Union, she refers to at least two other political myths at work.<sup>23</sup> One is the political myth of Europe as the land of freedom and welfare. The clearest sign of the working of this myth is the number of immigrants that are prepared to die at Europe's borders. The second myth is derived from the banal history of the European construction itself, first born as an institution which aimed to solve the historical conflict between Germany and France over coal and steel, then developed into the European common market through integration, and later into the European Union through identity. This is the myth of Europe as a teleological progress.

### C. Europe as Teleology

According to the official historiography, today's EU is built on the Schuman Plan. One important specificity of the European Coal and Steel Community, which continued in the EEC and the EU, is that political power and authority is more centralized than the possibility of claiming political responsibility. This is an obvious difference in comparison to national parliamentary democracies. There is a discrepancy between the European Union as an economic project and as political and social project.

Interestingly enough, this discrepancy can be attributed to the experiences of Fascism and Communism at the time of the foundation of the ECSC. Out of bitter experiences, the Christian Democrats in Europe after 1945 had learnt how the rule of the people could be abused. Democracy had brought Fascism and Nazism to power. At the time of the Berlin Blockade and the Korean War, the Moscow-controlled Communist Parties in France and Italy had the support of some 25-30 per cent of the electorate. Through the institutional construction of the ECSC, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide de Gasperi thought that they would create an order where the executive power was safeguarded from attacks from populism and unreliable voters as well as made more robust than the League of Nations had been.

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf., *FIGURES D'EUROPE/IMAGES AND MYTHS OF EUROPE* (LUISA PASSERINI, ED., 2003). Cf., also, BOTTICI (note 6), 258-259.

<sup>23</sup> BOTTICI (note 6), 259.

Their primary aim was never to create a democratic organization but to establish a system of protection that would make their nation states safe for democracy. The language to describe the new institutional setting is a case in point, with the High Authority as the expression of centralized power.

The official historiography about the European project of unification, with 1945 or 1950 as the starting point, is too simplistic and too propagandistic. It is a historiography in which the men of 1950 saw the light and where the Good stood up against the Evil, an Evil located both in the East and in History. The political task has, ever since, been to convince the citizens of the superiority of the model that was shaped.

The problems are obvious when this teleology is confronted with claims for democracy, and when claims are raised to transfer democratic power from the Member States to the Union level. Such a transfer would mean a clash with the ideas of the founding moment of the European post-1945 project, ideas which received intentional expression in the High Authority, later re-named to the Commission. The difficulty for the European Parliament to define its role is obvious. In its self-understanding, the Parliament is the expression of the will of a European people that does not, however, exist. The enactment of a people's will in democratic societies emerges not in terms of consensus, as is so often erroneously argued, but through contention, debate and compromise. Political conflict has historically since the French Revolution been measured along a right-left scale. This right-left dimension is the core axis that has been institutionalized in national parliamentary democracies. In the European Parliament, however, it is much less developed. At the core of the debate, there is a contention with the Commission and the Council about the power distribution within the institutional government triangle of the EU. The institutional setting from the early 1950s is, in this respect, still in operation. National sovereignty was not transferred to the European Parliament but to the High Authority/the Commission. It is in this light that the talk about the democratic deficit at European Union level should be seen. A democratic break-through would mean a rupture with this well established institutional structure. However, it is difficult to see any sign of such a break-through. In any case, it has not come from the proposal for a European constitution.

On the other hand, the legitimacy problem of EU is obvious. There can be no clearer expression of the Peoples' disinterest than the participation rates in the elections to the European Parliament. Today, popular mobilization occurs in referendums on politics against a reinforced European institution-building, and not for a European democracy. This is the paradox of the European democratic deficit today.

This interpretation of the developments around 1950 and afterwards provokes an important question. How could democracy pave the way for Fascism and could it happen again?

#### **D. An Alternative Perspective: a Brief Sketch**

The answer to the second part of this question is for the future. To answer the first part of the question, we must go back to 1919. The Peace Treaties (in Versailles, Saint-Germain, Neuilly, Trianon and Sèvres) in 1919-1920 created an order of weak democracies which lacked the capacity to guarantee social welfare and minority rights. Poverty, inflation, unemployment and social frustration in general provided a situation which could be exploited by Fascism. In a few years, the redrafting of the map of Europe in 1919-1920 had totally failed. The principle of one state, one people, and one democracy, with guarantees for national minorities, developed into something very different from what Woodrow Wilson had had in mind ("make the world safe for democracy"). In the wake of the economic crisis, the national issue received a totally different and unforeseen direction. Some fifteen years after World War I, not only Italy and Germany but also the voters in several East and Central European states had elected governments that did not respect basic human rights. Finland was on the brink of becoming a Fascist regime, and Spain was an especially dramatic case, which went through this process in a civil war.

Against the backdrop of this development, it is easy to understand why the architects of the ECSC 15-20 years later, who also had the additional experiences of still another World War, found it crucial to build an institution which was untouchable for unstable electorates in the Member States.

Instead of uncritically celebrating both the European élite's fear of popular rule as an expression of democracy and 1950 as the constitutional moment in modern European history, a more fruitful perspective would be to take 1919 as the point of departure, a point of departure in terms of both experiences and ambitions, as the Swedish political scientist Sverker Gustavsson has recently argued.<sup>24</sup>

He sketches a scenario of such experiences and ambitions. Before 1914, the Left throughout Europe was animated by a belief in a democratic destiny. In the progressive march towards the future, no repercussions were imagined. Nothing but political, economic and social improvement was imagined. The interwar democracies knew better. They concentrated on building sustainable democracies with Versailles 1919 as their starting point and with the experiences of World War I fresh in their memories. They failed, as we know. Why?

---

<sup>24</sup> Sverker Gustavsson, 4 TIDEN (Stockholm) (2004).

The “supra-state” of the interwar period was too thin. The League of Nations failed to guarantee living standards and welfare as well as democracy and security for minorities. From this conclusion, it does not, of course, follow that a maximally thick European supra-state would have provided the corresponding guarantee. The key question is what we mean by thin and thick. Furthermore, the issue is more complex than being just a question of supra-national institutional and normative density.

The goals of “never more war” and “ever democracy” were never realized because of at least three miscalculations. Economic policy, based on economic theory, regarded inflation as a worse evil than unemployment and failed to build up long-term confidence and trust in the economy; Germany had to pay an unreasonably high war indemnity; in practice, it was impossible to adjust the borders of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia in such a way that they did not contain considerable ethnic minorities. Or, rather, the way of coping with the situation of these minorities, and of combining them with the claim for national autonomy, was insufficient. Within the framework of the League of Nations, International law did not offer sufficient protection for the many minorities, and, as a result, claims for revision of the Peace Treaties of 1919-1920 emerged.<sup>25</sup>

What is at stake today is that the internal market has developed into something much more than the customs union of the 1950s. Many factors other than customs have an impact on the free flow of commodities, services, capital and labour today. The barriers to trade today can be found in the various labour and environment laws, the various wage levels and the social standards. Democracy in Europe has produced various currency schemes, wage systems, labour laws, social insurance systems, energy policies, views on the connection between alcohol and people’s health, degrees of tax financing and employer contributions to social welfare, and so on.

This variety, as an expression of democratic politics, becomes a problem for the internal market. The crucial question is how to prevent these various solutions from being played off against each other in the name of economic efficiency and competitive market power. It is not, at least, unthinkable, to place a regressive scenario of nationalistic rhetoric and social downgrading against this backdrop, which uses 1919, instead of 1950, as its starting point. The question of a Europeanization of social inequalities is not irrelevant and does not, necessarily, remain a historical category forever. The question from a less teleological perspective than what the dominating historiography provides: the question is

---

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

what kind of European institutions can make Europe safe for democracy and prevent developments in uncontrollable directions, developments which might occur in the name of democracy.