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The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe

Fifty years after the catastrophe, Europe understands itself more than ever as a common project, yet it is far from achieving a comprehensive analysis of the years immediately following the Second World War. The memory of the period is incomplete and provincial, if it is not entirely lost in repression or nostalgia.

—Hans-Magnus Enzensberger

FROM THE END OF WORLD WAR II until the revolutions of 1989, the frontiers of Europe and with them the forms of identity associated with the term “European” were shaped by two dominant concerns: the pattern of division drafted at Yalta and frozen into place during the Cold War, and the desire, common to both sides of the divide, to forget the recent past and forge a *new* continent. In the West this took the form of a movement for transnational unification tied to the reconstruction and modernization of the West European economy; in the East an analogous unity, similarly obsessed with productivity, was imposed in the name of a shared interest in social revolution. Both sides of the divide had good reason to put behind them the experience of war and occupation, and a future-oriented vocabulary of social harmony and material improvement emerged to occupy a public space hitherto filled with older, divisive, and more provincial claims and resentments.

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In this article I want to propose some reflections upon the price that was paid for this deliberate and sudden unconcern with the immediate European past and its replacement by “Euro-cant” in its various forms. I shall argue that the special character of the wartime experience in continental Europe, and the ways in which the memory of that experience was distorted, sublimated, and appropriated, bequeathed to the postwar era an identity that was fundamentally false, dependent upon the erection of an unnatural and unsustainable frontier between past and present in European public memory. I shall suggest that the ways in which the official versions of the war and postwar era have unraveled in recent years are indicative of unresolved problems which lie at the center of the present continental crisis—an observation true of both Western and Eastern Europe, though in distinctive ways. Finally I shall note some of the new myths and mis-memories attendant upon the collapse of communism and the ways in which these, too, are already shaping, and misshaping the new European “order.”

THE PAST IS ANOTHER COUNTRY

World War II was a very particular, and in certain respects novel experience for most Europeans. It was in the first place horribly, unprecedentedly destructive, especially in its final months. In particularly devastated countries like Yugoslavia, approximately 66 percent of all livestock, 25 percent of all vineyards, most railway rolling-stock, and all major roads were destroyed. Western countries too suffered terrible material loss—during the fighting of 1944–1945, France lost the use of some 75 percent of its harbors and railyards and half a million houses were damaged beyond repair. Even unoccupied Britain is calculated to have lost some 25 percent of its entire prewar national wealth as a result of the war.¹

But the scale of material destruction pales in comparison with the human losses, in Central and Eastern Europe in particular. There is no need here to go through the familiar statistics of death, suffering, and loss. On the one hand, the human cost has to be calculated on an industrial basis, so efficient was the machinery of extermination elaborated and operated by Germans and their associates; on the other hand, the war saw an unanticipated return to older terrors—in the weeks following the Soviet army’s capture of Berlin some 90,000

women in the city sought medical assistance for rape. In Vienna, the Western allies recorded 87,000 rape victims in the three weeks following the arrival of the Red Army. From the Volga to the Elbe, World War II constituted an experience whose special combination of efficiency, fear, violence, and deprivation was comparable to nothing in local memory (though Armenians and Spaniards had been afforded a brief foretaste in earlier years).

However, the Second World War was not the same for everyone. Some places had quite a “good” war, at least until the very last months. Bohemia and Moravia, for example, did relatively well under Nazism, favored for their natural and industrial resources, their skilled and pliant workforce, and their proximity in manner and outlook (if not race) to their German neighbors. Most Czech workers and peasants were coddled by the Germans, securing high wages, full employment, good rations and so forth—only resisters, Communists and Jews, here as elsewhere, were seriously at risk and exposed to the constant threat of harassment, loss, and deportation. Slovaks and Croats finally got their own “independent” states, albeit run by collaborators, and many were pleased with the achievement. Germans and Austrians suffered badly only towards the latter part of the war, their economies sustained until then by the forced extraction of materials and labor from the occupied territories. Even France, perhaps especially France, did not do so badly—most of French wartime losses and some of the worst acts of collective punishment came only after the Allies landed (which accounts for mixed French memories on that subject). Overall, it was clearly not good to be a Jew, a Gypsy or a Pole in World War II, nor was it safe to be a Serb (in Croatia), a Russian (until 1943) or a Ukrainian or German (after 1943). But if one could stop the clock in, let us say, January 1944, most of occupied Europe would have had little of which to complain by contrast with what was about to come.

Another way of putting this is to say that most of occupied Europe either collaborated with the occupying forces (a minority) or accepted with resignation and equanimity the presence and activities of the German forces (a majority). The Nazis could certainly never have sustained their hegemony over most of the continent for as long as they did, had it been otherwise: Norway and France were run by active partners in ideological collaboration with the occupier; the Baltic nations, Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, and Flemish-

speaking Belgium all took enthusiastic advantage of the opportunity afforded them to settle ethnic and territorial scores under benevolent German oversight. Active resistance was confined, until the final months, to a restricted and in some measure self-restricting set of persons: Socialists, Communists (after June 1941), nationalists, and ultramonarchists, together with those, like Jews, who had little to lose given the nature and purposes of the Nazi project. Such resisters were often resented, opposed, and even betrayed by the local population either because they brought trouble by attracting German retaliation, or else because the indigenous ethnic and political majority disliked them almost as much as the Germans and were not unhappy to see them hunted down and removed.

Not surprisingly, then, the war left a vicious legacy. In the circumstances of the liberation, everyone sought to identify with the winners—in this case the Allies and those who had sided with them before the final victory. Given the nature of the war, which by its end had mutated into a whole series of brutal local civil wars, it was for most Europeans a matter of some urgency that they emerge on the correct side. This in turn entailed distinguishing and distancing oneself from those who had been the enemy (within and without), and since the actions of this enemy had been without precedent in their brutality and scale, there was universal agreement that it should be punished. Even those like Albert Camus who came to doubt the possibility of identifying “war criminals” with any accuracy or justice recognized the emotional and political necessity of such a judicial purge and retribution. The question was who and how.²

At this point we leave the history of the Second World War and begin to encounter the myth of that war, a myth whose construction was undertaken almost before the war itself was over. Everyone had an interest in this affair, the context of which ranged from private score-settling to the emerging international balance of world power. Indeed, it was the years 1945–1948 which were the moment not only of the division of Europe and the first stage of its postwar reconstruction but also, and in an intimately related manner, the period during which Europe’s postwar memory was moulded.

THE EUROPEAN WARTIME EXPERIENCE

There is space here to note only briefly the factors which contributed to the official version of the wartime experience which was common

European currency by 1948. The first was the universally-acknowledged claim that responsibility for the war, its sufferings and its crimes, lay with the Germans. "They" did it. There was a certain intuitive logic to this comforting projection of guilt and blame. After all, had it not been for the German occupations and depredations from 1938 to 1945, there would have been no war, no death camps, no occupations—and thus no occasion for the civil conflicts, denunciations, and other shadows which hung over Europe in 1945. Moreover, the decision to blame everything on Germany was one of the few matters on which all sides, within each country and among the Allied powers, could readily agree. The presence of concentration camps in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and even France could thus readily be forgotten, or simply ascribed to the occupying power, with attention diverted from the fact that many of these camps were staffed by non-Germans and (as in the French case) had been established and in operation before the German occupation began.³

Moreover, this focus upon Germany made it possible to resolve by neglect certain tricky subjects such as the postwar status of Austria. Beginning with the Moscow Declaration of 1943, Austria was established as the "first victim" of Nazi aggression, something which suited not only Austrians but also the prejudices of someone like Churchill, for whom Nazism was a natural extension of Prussian militarism and expansionist ambitions.⁴ If *Austria* was guiltless, then the distinctive responsibilities of non-German nationals in other lands were assuredly not open to close inspection. Hence the achievement of Nuremberg, where *German* guilt was in turn distilled into a set of indictments reserved exclusively for German *Nazis*, and then only a select few. This was a matter of some concern to the Soviet authorities involved in the war crimes trials; they wished to avoid any discussion of broader moral and judicial questions which might draw attention to the Soviet Union's own practices, before and during the war. That the Nuremberg trials served an important exemplary and jurisprudential function is beyond doubt; but the selectivity and apparent hypocrisy with which the Allies pursued the matter contributed to the cynicism of the postwar era, while easing the consciences of many non-Germans (and non-Nazis) whose activities might easily have been open to similar charges.

Next there was the issue of de-Nazification. Within a very short time after the Liberation it became clear that Germany (and Austria)

could not be returned to civil administration and local self-government, even under Allied supervision, if the purging of responsible Nazis was undertaken in a sustained and consistent manner. Moreover, the local Social-Democratic and Christian Democratic parties in both countries could not be expected to ignore the votes of former Nazis, once they were allowed to reenter public life; thus the 1948 amnesty in Austria, which returned their full civil rights to some 500,000 former registered Nazis, inevitably resulted in a sort of instant amnesia, whereby all sides agreed that these men and women were henceforward no different from the rest. Even the remaining "more incriminated" Nazis, some 42,000 of them, were nearly all amnestied within the following seven years, as the Western Allies sought to minimize the risk of alienating Austrians and Germans from the Western bloc through any excessive emphasis upon their past and its price. In a process that would have been all but unthinkable in 1945, the identification and punishment of active Nazis in German-speaking Europe had effectively ended by 1948 and was a forgotten issue by the early 1950s.

The association of wartime responsibility with Germans, and of Germans with Nazism, sat all the more comfortably with non-German nations in that it provided a context and an excuse for a "final solution" to the nationality problem in continental Europe. Woodrow Wilson and the treaties of Versailles notwithstanding, the 60 million Europeans living under an "alien" jurisdiction in 1914 had not all achieved self-determination after World War I: there were still some 25 million persons living in "someone else's state." The Nazi occupation had gone some way to resolving this perennial European problem by killing most of the Jews and some of the smaller stateless groups. After the war, the liberated states took the occasion to further this process by removing the Germans themselves. As a result of the shifting of Poland's frontiers agreed at Potsdam, the expulsion of the *Volksdeutsche* from the Balkans and the collective punishment visited upon the Sudeten Germans, some 15 million Germans were expelled in the postwar years: 7 million from Silesia, Pomerania, and East Prussia; 3 million from Czechoslovakia; nearly 2 million from Poland and the USSR; and a further 2.7 million from Yugoslavia, Romania, and Hungary. After some 2 million died in flight or during the expulsions, the majority ended up in Western Germany (especial-

ly Bavaria), where as late as 1960 some 28 percent of the Federal government employees were *Vertriebene* (expellees).⁵

Beyond its significance for postwar German domestic politics (which were considerable), this process had a marked impact upon the states whence these Germans came. Poland and Hungary (as well as Western Germany itself) now became ethnically homogenous states as never before. Others felt free to indulge in further exercises in ethnic purification: the Czechs especially took the opportunity to expel or transfer hundreds of thousands of ethnic Hungarians from Slovakia (in some cases forcing them to occupy the vacated Sudeten regions), the liberal Benes announcing the day after his country's liberation that Czechs and Slovaks "did not want to live" in the same state as Germans and Hungarians.⁶ It might be thought that such actions, and the sentiments they reflected and aroused, would have caused misgivings in a Europe so recently liberated from similarly-motivated collective miseries brought upon the continent by the occupier. On the contrary: a clear and quick distinction was made between the sorts of collective violence and punishment visited on these lands by German war criminals, and the mass, racially-motivated purges represented by these expulsions and undertaken by freely-elected or newly-liberated national authorities.

Two sorts of memories thus emerged: that of things done to "us" by Germans in the war, and the rather different recollection of things (however similar) done by "us" to "others" after the war (taking advantage of a situation the Germans had obligingly if unintentionally made possible). Two moral vocabularies, two sorts of reasoning, two different pasts. In this circumstance, the uncomfortably confusing recollection of things done by us to others *during* the war (i.e., under German auspices) got conveniently lost.

It was in these circumstances that the "Resistance" myth emerged. If there was to be a reference point in national memory for the years between 1939 and 1945 it could only be the obverse of that now firmly attached to Germans. If Germans were guilty, then "we" were innocent. If guilt consisted of being German or working for Germans and their interests—and it could hardly be denied that in every occupied country such persons had been present and prominent—then innocence had to mean an anti-German stance, after 1945 but also before. Thus to be innocent a nation had to have resisted, and to have done so in its overwhelming majority, a claim that was perforce

made and pedagogically enforced all over Europe, from Italy to Poland, from the Netherlands to Romania. Where the historical record cried out against this distortion—in France, in Italy where the anti-Fascist resistance came late and was confined to the North, in the Netherlands where grossly exaggerated accounts of heroic farmers rescuing downed British airmen became part of the postwar national mythology—national attention was consciously diverted, from the very first postwar months, to examples and stories which were repeated and magnified ad nauseam, in novels, popular histories, radio, newspapers, and especially cinema.

POSTWAR MYTHMAKING

It is understandable that former collaborators, or even those who simply sat it out, should have been happy to see the wartime tale thus retold to their advantage. But why did the genuine resisters, who in most cases were also those in power in the immediate postwar years, agree to retouch the past thus? The answer is twofold. In the first case, it was necessary somehow to restore a minimal level of cohesion to civil society and to reestablish the authority and legitimacy of the state, in countries where authority, trust, public decency, and the very premises of civil behavior had been torn down by totalitarian government and total war. Thus de Gaulle in France, de Gasperi in Italy, and the various Communist-dominated National Front governments in Eastern Europe all found it necessary to tell their citizens that their sufferings had been the work of the Germans and their handful of traitorous collaborators, that they had suffered and struggled heroically and that their present duty, the war now over and the guilty suitably punished, was to address themselves to postwar tasks, place their faith in constitutional regimes, and put the war behind them. Seeing little option but to concur, the domestic resistance movements abandoned their plans for radical domestic renewal and went along with the priority accorded to the search for stability even if (as in the Italian case) it entailed signing the Rome Protocols of November 1944 which effectively secured the continuity of the Fascist state apparatus into the postwar era.⁷

Secondly, the Communists, whose agenda was of course distinctively different from that of their allies in the domestic resistance, nevertheless had reasons of their own to recast the wartime record of

their fellow citizens in their own heroic image. In the West, they could hope to capitalize on their war record by claiming to have spoken for the nation in its time of trial, and thus seek the authority to speak for it still. For that reason the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) in France or the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) in Italy had no objection to exaggerating the resistance record of the mass of the French or Italians, so long as they could themselves inherit the benefits of this illusion at the voting booth and in the national memory. It was thus ironically appropriate that it should be Togliatti, the Italian Communist leader, who drafted the 1946 amnesty which ended the foreshortened and selective postwar Italian purges.

In the East, where communism everywhere except in the special cases of Yugoslavia and Albania had returned to the country not through the heroic efforts of the local resistance but in the baggage train of the Red Army, the Communists had an interest in flattering the recalcitrant local population by inviting it to believe the fabrication now deployed on its behalf by the USSR—to wit, that Central and Eastern Europe was an innocent victim of German assault, had played no part in its own downfall or in the crimes perpetrated on its territory, and was a full partner in the work of liberation led by Soviet soldiers abroad and Communist partisans at home. This story, which found its way into forty years of school texts in the “Peoples’ Democracies” was actually even less credible than the fibs being told in Paris and Rome, and few in Central and Eastern Europe believed it, even among those who had strong motives to do so. But since no one had an interest in denying it—and within two years to do so was anyway no longer possible—the story took root.

Moreover, the Communists’ emphasis in Eastern Europe upon identifying and punishing those few “traitors” who had betrayed the otherwise heroic local people offered them the occasion to indict, try, and imprison or execute a lot of people whom they feared might impede their path to power. Thus in January 1945 “Peoples’ Courts” were set up in Hungary to try war criminals. Initially these functioned with reasonable integrity, but later the crimes of “sabotage” and “conspiracy” were added to their remit, with somber consequences; something similar happened in Romania and especially Bulgaria, where the Fatherland Front settled postwar scores with thousands of real or potential political rivals, making no distinction between pro-German, pro-Western, and anti-Communist candidates for pun-

ishment, all in the name of the nation and its wartime sufferings. Meanwhile the construction of war memorials was undertaken, all of them with the same pedagogical message: the Second World War had been an “antifascist” war in which the Nazi-Germans had served capitalist and imperialist ends and been opposed by the undifferentiated “people” whose lands they occupied. Atrocities were described as perpetrated by “fascists” (foreign and domestic) against the local population, and no mention was *ever* made of the sufferings of national, ethnic or religious minorities, whether at the hands of Russians (of course), the local population or even the Germans themselves. This process reached its purest form in the officially-approved version of the wartime experience and postwar character of *East Germany*, a land of workers and peasants hitherto oppressed by and now liberated from a handful of Nazi-capitalists from the West.

That is why, in East and West alike, the process of punishment and purge which was supposed to hand down justice upon criminals and collaborators in the postliberation era was so partial and aborted. The issue was of course inherently complicated and paradoxical: how do you punish tens of thousands, perhaps millions of people for activities which were approved, legalized, and even encouraged by those in power (in the case of Vichy France, the heirs to a constitutionally-elected parliament)? But how do you justify leaving unpunished actions which were manifestly criminal even before they fell under the aegis of “victors’ justice?” How do you choose whom to punish and for which actions? Who does the choosing? At what precise moment is a purge sufficient to meet elementary demands for justice and revenge, and not yet so divisive as to damage still further an already-rent social fabric? The point I wish to make here is simply that under almost any conceivable good faith response to these questions the postwar response proved tragically inadequate.⁸

Most of the acts of retributive punishment which took place in this period happened before the countries in question had been liberated, or else at the very moment of that liberation, as German authority lapsed and new powers had yet to be installed. Of the approximately 10,000 summary executions in France which marked the transition from Vichy to the Fourth Republic, about a third were carried out before D-Day and a further 50 percent during the battles of the following weeks. Similarly in Italy, most of the 12–15,000 persons shot for fascist or collaborationist activities at this time were dealt

with before or during the weeks of final Liberation. In other words, the majority of the most severe “punishments” meted out for wartime activities were completed *before* formal or official tribunals had been set up to pass judgment.⁹ The same is true in Eastern Europe (Yugoslavia included) where partisan score-settling was the primary form of semiofficial retribution for collaboration and war crimes.¹⁰

Thus at least two of the functions of retributive jurisprudence—the administration of natural justice and the canalization of private violence—had been coopted and largely dispatched before legitimate postwar institutions came into force. What remained were the establishment of public security to protect new political institutions, symbolic acts of justice to legitimize the new authorities, and public words and deeds designed to shape and circumscribe the moral regeneration of the nation. Here the postwar European experience of justice was universally unsuccessful and inadequate. Of de-Nazification I have already spoken. But even when it came to dealing with serious criminals, the exercise was half-hearted. The Austrian and French instances are exemplary (the Eastern European experience was distinguished by the abuse of court procedures already noted). In Austria, 130,000 persons were investigated for war crimes; of these 23,000 were tried, 13,600 found guilty, 43 sentenced to death (about the same number as were condemned to death in Denmark), and 30 actually executed. In France, 791 death sentences were carried out, of the 2,640 passed by the courts. More telling were the overall figures: whereas in Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands the number of persons sentenced for collaboration varied between 40 and 64 per 10,000 inhabitants, in France the numbers were just 12 per 10,000.¹¹

In both France and Austria, then, the emphasis was clearly placed upon the need to reduce to the minimum the number of convictable and convicted persons, reserve for this select few a sort of symbolic and representative function as criminals and traitors, and leave the rest of the social fabric untouched or, where this was not possible, to repair the damage as soon as possible through a process of benign collective neglect.¹² It should also be noted that in many countries those who were in the end punished were more likely to have been chosen for the egregious nature of their activities—the record left by their writings—or for their prewar prominence than for the extent or

consequences of their actions, a basis for selection which did not pass unnoticed and helps account for the public skepticism of the era.¹³

In Italy, where the matter was further complicated by the need (or, rather, the inability) to come to terms with not just war and occupation but twenty years of domestic fascism, the purges and retribution which followed the initial bloodletting of the Liberation were almost cynically inadequate. Membership in the Fascist Party having been obligatory for Italian civil servants, it was simply not possible to undertake a thorough and consistent purge of the government and administration of the country. Instead, nothing was done. As late as 1960, 62 of the 64 prefects of the Republic had been functionaries under Fascism, as was also true of *all* 135 police chiefs! Whether something different was possible in the difficult circumstances of Italy, France or Austria in 1945–1947 is unclear.¹⁴ But what *is* clear is the result of these murky transactions: for most of the population, and especially for those whose own wartime record was ambivalent, the apparently random and ultimately benign exercise of justice after the war made it all the easier to forget, and to encourage others to forget, the circumstances and actions which had marked the fascist and occupation years.

The last point to note in the context of the postwar years concerns the international arena. With the exception of a series of imposed agreements with minor belligerents, signed in Paris in 1946, the Allies never resolved their postwar dealings with former enemy states by any final peace treaty. In contrast with the experience after World War I, World War II petered out in a string of ever more contentious and unproductive meetings of Foreign Ministers, culminating in those of 1947 and 1948 in Paris, Moscow, and London which saw an end to the wartime Allied collaboration and the onset of the Cold War. The main issue was of course disagreement over the division of Germany; the formal creation of the Federal Republic and its Eastern *doppelgänger* in 1949 was thus the effective end of the immediate postwar era, with the Western Allies nonetheless waiting until July 1951 to declare that their “state of war” with Germany was now over. The significance of the absence of any peace treaty of the kind traditionally signed after major European conflicts was this: World War II lost its original and particular meaning as a struggle between Germany and its Allies and became instead a sort of bloody prelude to other arrangements and new confrontations, a situation which

produced different configurations and thus further confused an already obscure memory of the war itself.

Thus Western Europeans, having begun the postwar era by thrusting all responsibility for the war upon Germany found themselves in a short period of time having to think of Germany, or at least some part of Germany, as an ally in a different sort of struggle whose meaning could not easily be related to that which had been given to the war. In Eastern Europe a war of national liberation from Germans became the overture and starting point to a domestic revolution which forced inhabitants of the region to describe the wartime years in a way which made no sense and could only be achieved by an act of voluntary amnesia. It was necessary to forget everything one had known not only about Germans and Russians and Americans, but also about one's neighbors, one's friends, and even oneself. A peace treaty would not, of course, have changed this outcome very much if at all. But it would have ended the Second World War and thus given it a distinctive framework, in time and in memory. Until such a treaty came along, Europeans (governments and people alike) postponed any collective effort to come to terms with the memory of the war it would have rounded out. When it never happened, they simply left the matter unresolved, buried, neglected, and selectively forgotten.

Up to this point, I have treated the experience of East and West Europe as one. Despite the obvious differences in the wartime and postwar history of Europe's two halves, in the respects relevant to this paper they had much in common. But from 1948 their histories diverge in ways which are also directly pertinent to the theme of memory and national mythology. Only in the later process of recollection and awakening do their paths again converge. From 1948 the Western nations of Europe waved goodbye to the immediate past and embarked on the "European adventure" to which their national energies and prospects have been officially attached ever since (with the exception of Britain, for whom the story begins distinctly later, for reasons not unconnected with its good fortune in missing the sorts of experiences continental Europeans were in a hurry to forget). In the course of this new-found Europeanism, Western Europeans settled for some twenty-five years into a comforting "collective amnesia" (the phrase is Enzensberger's), resting

their half of the continent on a number of crucial “foundation myths.”¹⁵

These myths were in essence the obverse of the wartime and postwar histories noted above. They required common acceptance of the claim that Nazism was a strictly German phenomenon, that Western Germany had been effectively de-Nazified, and that those who ought to be punished had been, with certain notorious individual exceptions. France’s Vichy interlude was treated as an aberration in the national history, brought about by the circumstances of war and occupation and foisted on an unwilling country by the treasonable activities of a minority. Italy’s experience with Fascism was left largely unrecorded in public discussion, part of a double myth: that Mussolini had been an idiotic oaf propped into power by a brutal and unrepresentative clique, and that the nation had been purged of its Fascist impurities and taken an active and enthusiastic part in its own liberation. Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium were accorded full victim status for their wartime experience, and the active and enthusiastic collaboration of some Flemings and Dutch was stricken from the public record. Austria, returned to full independence in the 1955 State Treaty, extracted from the Allies an agreement to relieve it of any responsibility for its years under Nazi rule, and thereby relieved its citizens in their turn of any last remaining need to remember those years or the enthusiasm with which *all* sides (many Social-Democrats included) had greeted the idea, if not the reality, of *Anschluss*.¹⁶ Sweden and Switzerland too managed to share in this “Era of Good Feelings,” of Franco-German reconciliations and economic miracles, purged of any vague abiding memories of Sweden’s economic dealings with wartime Germany and the Swiss insistence on distinguishing Jews from non-Jewish Germans and returning the former to the Nazis whenever they attempted to make their way across the border.¹⁷

It is not easy today to recall this particular Europe, the one which held sway from the Marshall Plan into the early 1970s. It, too, is another country. It was characterized by an obsession with productivity, modernity, youth, European economic unification, and domestic political stability. Symptomatically, it was largely the creation of politicians who came from the geographical margins of their respective nations—Schumann, de Gasperi, and Adenauer—and who encouraged their more typical countrymen to think beyond their

traditional terms of national and local reference.¹⁸ While the accumulation and relatively radical redistribution of wealth and services displaced national traumas and unhappy memories, the idea of “Europe” was refurbished as a substitute for the sorts of national identifications which had caused such wounds in the recent past. I say “refurbished” because the notion of a united Europe was not new. The very phrase “Etats-Unis d’Europe” was first used in the Paris journal *Le Moniteur* as early as February 1848, and the concept of a European identity had in fact flourished in certain circles during the interwar decades and in the war itself. But the problem was that it was the Right, specifically the fascist Right, which had made much play with the idea in that time, contrasting a new European order with the anarchic and febrile democracies of the liberal era, and proposing it as a bulwark against the imperialist challenge of the “Anglo-Saxon-Jewish plutocracies” which threatened the old continent from the West and the “Judeo-Communist-Slavic” danger from the East. Thus after 1945 “Europe,” too, remained to be invented, benefiting from a line drawn under the past and dependent for its credibility upon a refusal to acknowledge its own provincial, defensive, and exclusive roots.

THE STORIES UNRAVEL

The revenge of history has been slow, and remains partial. For many years the teaching of modern history in West Germany did not pass beyond Bismarck, and it is well-known that the French government refused for more than a decade to allow Marcel Ophul’s film, *Le Chagrin et la Pitié*, to be shown on national television. But in both France and Germany a new generation began to ask embarrassing questions, prompted in Germany especially by the series of trials of concentration camp administrators held in the years 1963–1965. These, together with the trial in Jerusalem of Adolf Eichmann, in turn prompted the passage in France, on December 26, 1964, of a law making crimes against humanity imprescriptible.¹⁹ Despite this evidence of a growing concern with the crimes committed in France under the auspices of the German occupation, it was often left to foreign scholars to raise and investigate the hard questions; the “Vichy Syndrome” described so well by Henry Rousso (himself born in 1954), which can stand for similar historical mystifications

throughout Western Europe, has only really begun to unravel in the last few years.²⁰

The forms of that unraveling have been various. In France, and to a lesser extent in the Netherlands and Belgium, it has been the work of professional scholars working in relative obscurity, their conclusions and evidence surfacing into the public realm only when a particularly egregious case—those of René Bousquet, Maurice Papon, and Paul Touvier in France being the best-known—caught the headlines.²¹ In Germany the *Historikerstreit*, a much publicized argument among professional historians over the proper way to interpret and contextualize the Nazi years, did not so much reveal new material about Nazism (for the reasons noted earlier the sins of the Germans had been widely advertised) as open for the first time a discussion of the relative status of Nazism in the context of other contemporary state crimes, notably those of Stalin's Soviet Union.²² In Austria it took the presidential candidacy and election of Kurt Waldheim to shake the nation (or some of it) from its historical complacency, the widely-held opinion that 1945 was "Year Zero" in Austrian history, with all that preceded it dismissed as being of no consequence.²³

The common theme of these uncomfortable revelations and discussions has been the degree of *refoulement*, of public and private denial, upon which democratic Western Europe was reconstructed. Older Europeans still cling to this alternative past—polls in France suggest that the majority of persons over the age of 50 would rather the matter just went away and cannot wait for Touvier and his like to die and be buried along with their crimes. They see little benefit in rehashing the atrocities committed by Vichy even when they themselves bear no possible personal responsibility for them. In Austria, the Waldheim experience has exacerbated the generation gap: in a March 1988 poll, Austrians under the age of 30 were evenly divided on the question of whether Austria was a victim of the *Anschluss* or its accomplice, whereas for those over the age of 50 the status of victim was selected by nearly twice as many as those who assigned blame.

A further element in the opening up of the past has been the steady decline of communism. Once the French and Italian Communist Parties lost their stranglehold upon some of the electorate and much of the political imagination of their countries, it became easier to ask

hard questions about their role in the Resistance and the real dimensions of the latter itself. Now that everyone is jumping on this bandwagon and a virtual subdiscipline of critical Resistance historiography has emerged, it is sometimes difficult to remember that until just recently the dispassionate analytical studies of historians like Claudio Pavone or Henry Rousso would have been unthinkable—and in certain circles unpublishable. It is a curious irony that it should be the decline of the anti-fascist Left which makes it possible to acknowledge the true dimensions of domestic fascism and collaboration in an earlier era. Yet there is some logic in this: few in France wished to acknowledge the elements of continuity between Vichy and the preceding and subsequent republics, both because of the implicit downgrading of the “break” of 1945 and the apparent “normalizing” and relativizing of the Vichy years that such an acknowledgment might entail.²⁴ Similar constraints impeded close attention to continuities in modern Italian history, not to mention the sort of study of Mussolini’s true place in the Italian imagination recently published by Luisa Passerini.²⁵

Because so much of this troubled and troubling renegotiation with the past is directed towards the public rather than the scholarly community (few of the debates alluded to above have added much to our knowledge of past events, any more than the seminal impact of the *Gulag Archipelago* depended upon the new information it imparted, which was minimal), it has had its most important impact only in the countries directly concerned. Foreign, especially British and American, interest has been occasional, selective, and perhaps just a little *schadenfreudlich*. But even in France, Italy, and Western Germany the impact of the newly-acknowledged past, bubbling its half-digested way back into the throats of politicians and journalists whose real attention is elsewhere, has been as nothing compared to the dramatic implications of the recovery of memory in Central and Eastern Europe.

If the problem in Western Europe has been a shortage of memory, in the continent’s other half the problem is reversed. Here there is too much memory, too many pasts on which people can draw, usually as a weapon against the past of someone else. Whereas the West European dilemma was confined to a single set of unhappy memories located in the occupation years 1940–1944/45, the East Europeans have multiple analogous reference points: 1918–1921, 1938, 1939,

1941, 1944, 1945–1948, 1956, 1968, and now 1989. Each of these moments in time means something different, and nearly always something contentious and tragic, to a different nation or ethnic group, or else to succeeding generations within the same group. For Eastern Europeans the past is not just another country but a positive archipelago of vulnerable historical territories, to be preserved from attacks and distortions perpetrated by the occupants of a neighboring island of memory, a dilemma made the more cruel because the enemy is almost always within: most of these dates refer to a moment at which one part of the community (defined by class, religion or nationality) took advantage of the misfortunes of another to help itself to land, property or power. These are thus memories of civil wars, and in a civil war the enemy is still there once the fighting stops—unless some external agency has been so helpful as to impose a final solution.

The coming of communism seemed to put an end to all this. Soviet power appropriated national myths for its own ends, banned all reference to uncomfortable or conflictual moments save those which retroactively anticipated its own arrival and enforced a new “fraternity” upon the Eastern half of Europe. But it did not just abolish the past, of course, it also reinvented it. We have already seen how and why Communist regimes inflated the myth of wartime antifascist resistance. More subtly, the Communists deemphasized the revolutionary nature of Nazi occupation—the fact that Eastern Europe’s social revolution, completed under the Soviet aegis after 1947, was in fact begun by the Germans, sweeping away old elites, dispossessing a large segment of the (Jewish) urban bourgeoisie, and radically undermining faith in the rule of law. But the historical reality, that the true revolutionary caesura in modern Eastern European history came in 1939 and not 1945, could not be acknowledged. The continuities between Nazi and Soviet rule were necessarily denied and the alternative myth of revolutionary *postwar* transformation took their place.

From Bulgaria to Poland this process was more or less similar. In East Germany a special national history was conceived, whose emphases varied with the needs of Soviet foreign policy, but whose consistent impact upon the local population was disastrous. After initially aggressive pursuit of de-Nazification, the Communists reversed their strategy and announced to the East Germans that their

own history was unsullied. Meanwhile significant numbers of low-ranking Nazis pursued their careers in police and bureaucracy under the new regime. East Germans, all too knowledgeable about their real past and the initially violent way in which the Russians had extracted revenge for it, were now invited to sit back in officially-mandated approval while the essential characteristics of the Nazi state apparatus were reconstructed before their eyes. The consequences of what Peter Schneider has called the “double zombification” of East Germany are now clear to all.²⁶

The silence which fell across Eastern Europe was unbroken for forty years. The revolts of 1956 and the reforms of 1968 did not crack this frozen past; on the contrary, the memory of them, and the fact that it could not be acknowledged except mendaciously, added to the strata of public mythology. In private many people of course scorned the official version of the past; but having only their personal or communal recollection to put in its place and pass onto their children, they contributed inadvertently to the double crisis of history which now afflicts Eastern Europe. On the one hand, cynicism and mistrust pervade all social, cultural, and even personal exchanges, so that the construction of civil society, much less civil memory, is very, very difficult. On the other hand, there are multiple memories and historical myths, each of which has learned to think of itself as legitimate simply by virtue of being private and unofficial. Where these private or tribal versions come together, they form powerful counterhistories of a mutually antagonistic and divisive nature.

MIS-MEMORIES IN THE NEW EUROPEAN ORDER

In the present situation there are certain chronically intertwined themes which are reshaping and further distorting the Eastern European past.

Communism

The first is guilt over the Communist era itself. No matter how many times people proclaim that “they” did it to “us,” the fact is that very few people could or did object to Communist power (in some places, notably Czechoslovakia, it was even initially welcomed in free elections by a large minority of the electorate). It was in the nature of “real existing Socialism” in Eastern Europe that it enforced the most

humiliating, venal kinds of collaboration as a condition for rendering daily life tolerable. And most people, sooner or later, collaborated: intellectuals, priests, parents, managers, workers, shoppers, doctors, and so on. It is not for any real or imagined crimes that people feel a sort of shame at having lived in and under communism, it is for their daily lies and infinite tiny compromises. Until the coming of *Solidarity* this pattern was unbroken, and even the uniform heroic picture of Polish resistance in the 1980s is not without its self-serving mythological dimension. In Czechoslovakia, only 1,864 persons in a population of 15 million signed Charter 77. Even in June 1989, with the repressive apparatus relatively relaxed and well into the Gorbachev era, only 39,000 signed "A Few Sentences," the first manifesto of what would become Civic Forum.²⁷

It is this sense that whole nations share a dirty little secret which accounts for the present obsession, in eastern Germany, in Czechoslovakia, and to a lesser extent elsewhere, with retribution, purification, and purge. The analogy with 1944 in France is striking. There is an epidemic of finger-pointing and blame, with all opinions represented, from those who wish to restrict guilt, indictment, and punishment to a representative or egregious few to those who would have whole nations atone for their past. What is getting lost in all this is any dispassionate appreciation of the Communist era in Europe. Few dare to point out that Communist rule differed from previous regimes in most of the region mainly by virtue of its cynical exploitation of national resources for a *foreign* (Soviet) interest. As governments, regimes, and elites, post-Stalinist Communists were not always so very unlike what had gone before—and will thus have to be absorbed and included in any understanding of the history of these lands. They cannot just be written out and written off.

Here too the analogy with Vichy, or with Italian Fascism, is perhaps appropriate. The Soviet-imposed regimes of Eastern Europe are part of their respective national histories; they continued in certain local traditions, pursued preestablished patterns of economic policy, and have contributed to the post-Communist character of their societies. As with Pétain and Mussolini, so with the puppet authorities of the "Peoples' Democracies": however tempting it may be, they cannot be eliminated from their country's history, nor "bracketed" from it, as an alien and passing aberration. In addition, the arrival of the Red Army saved what remained of certain minor-

ities (Jews, notably); this was an important strand in the arguments of some of the protagonists in the German *Historikerstreit*; but in a region where anti-Semitism remains endemic it is hardly a popular argument in defense of regimes which were often themselves charged (in private) with being the work of Jews. My point here is not to attempt any sort of a balance sheet for Soviet rule, but to note that the Communist experience did not come from nowhere, did not disappear without leaving a certain record, and cannot be written out of the local past, as it had earlier sought to extrude from that past those elements prejudicial to its own projects.

The mis-memory of communism is also contributing, in its turn, to a mis-memory of anticommunism. General Antonescu, the wartime Romanian leader who was executed in June 1945, defended himself at his trial with the claim that he had sought to protect his country from the Soviet Union. He is now being rewritten into Romanian popular history as a hero, his part in the massacre of Jews and others in wartime Romania weighing little in the balance against his anti-Russian credentials. Anti-Communist clerics throughout the region, nationalists who fought alongside the Nazis in Estonia, Lithuania, and Hungary, right-wing partisans who indiscriminately murdered Jews, Communists, and liberals in the vicious score-settling of the immediate postwar years before the Communists took effective control, are all candidates for rehabilitation as men of moderate and laudable convictions; their strongest suit, of course, is the obloquy heaped upon them by the former regime.²⁸

As to the issue of retribution and rehabilitation, here too the historical record is hostage to contemporary sentiment. The "lustration" project in Czechoslovakia, intended to deprive of their civil rights all who had the slightest association with the former ruling Party, is the most extreme option, pernicious in its application of collective responsibility and opportunistic in its appeal to the right-of-center parties who saw in it a chance to embarrass their leftist and liberal opponents in the recent elections. Bulgarians have established "civic tribunals" to pronounce a sort of public "degradation" upon those convicted of active collusion in past crimes. Even the Hungarians are in angry dispute: there is a running argument over whether to indict Andras Hegedus, a man who took the wrong side in 1956 and abetted the fall and murder of Imre Nagy, but who some see as

having rehabilitated himself by his later conversion to “reform communism.”

The most telling crisis of all concerns the theme of restoration of property. In most of Eastern Europe there has been or is about to be legislation to restore land and buildings to those who lost them in 1948. But this raises hard questions. Why 1948, just because it was the Communists who at that point began a program of expropriation? What of those whose homes, farms, and businesses were expropriated in the years 1945–1948? Or the millions whose possessions were illegally taken during the war itself and, in the Czech and Slovak cases, after 1938? If the Communist regime alone is to be treated in this way, what of those who benefited from the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans, the forced transfers of Hungarians in Slovakia, the deportation and murder of the Jews everywhere? Was illegal expropriation, collective punishment, and loss of material goods and livelihood wrong in itself or only if undertaken by Communists?

The complication here of course is that there are many in all these countries who benefited from the sufferings of others in the years 1938–1948. This is not something on which the Communists laid any emphasis after 1948, and it is not something the beneficiaries, their heirs, and their fellow countrymen want to hear about today. It explains why so many Czechs and Slovaks resented Havel’s apology to Germany for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans (almost his first public act upon entering the presidency), and it is also part of deeper complexes and silences about wartime and postwar collusion and worse in the treatment of minorities. The problem of Poles and Jews in Polish history, including the traumatic experiences of Jews in Poland *after* the war, is the most dramatic and best-known of these issues, but it is far from unique.²⁹ Finally there is another, utterly unresolvable dilemma: what good does it do to restore property when you cannot return to tens of millions of people the loss of opportunity and liberty they suffered after 1948? Is there not something wrong in an outcome whereby the Schwarzenberg family gets back its palaces, and long-departed emigrés are paid for a loss which their descendants have turned to advantage, while those who had nothing get nothing and watch bitterly as their own and their children’s lost chances go for nought? It may or may not be just but it certainly does not look very fair and it is politically most imprudent.

These and other ironies of present attempts to resolve unhappy memories help explain the resurfacing of older sentiments and allegiances in post-1989 Eastern Europe. This was in some measure predictable, of course. The Communist era did not forge new ways of identifying and describing local and national interests; it merely sought to expunge from public language all trace of the old ones. Putting nothing in their place, and bringing into terminal disrepute the socialist tradition of which *it* was the bastard product, it left a vacuum into which ethnic particularism, nationalism, nostalgia, xenophobia, and ancient quarrels could flow; not only were these older forms of political discourse legitimated again by virtue of communism's very denial of them, but they were the only real terms of political communication that anyone could recall, with roots in the history of the region. Together with religious affiliation, which in pre-1939 Eastern Europe was often itself the hallmark of nationality, they and the past they describe and represent have returned to haunt and distort post-Communist politics and memory.

This has to be understood on its own terms. Unlike France or Britain, for example, the little nations of Eastern Europe have lived for centuries in fear of their own extinction. It is truly tragic that on those occasions when they were afforded a measure of autonomy or independence it was usually at the expense of someone else and under the protection of an authoritarian foreign interest. Many Slovaks today speak enthusiastically of Father Tiso, the Slovak leader hung in April 1947 for his collaboration and war crimes during the years of Slovak independence from 1939 to 1944. This helps explain both the current Slovak drive for separation and the recent refusal by some Slovak representatives to vote ratification of the accords with Germany which declared Munich null and void. The cruel fact is that for many Slovaks, then and now, Munich *was a good thing*.³⁰

Croats by contrast are largely unenthusiastic about the brutal rule of the Ustashi regime which took advantage of the German-protected independent Croatian state to exterminate Jews and Serbs on a massive scale; but they can hardly be blamed for a degree of confusion when they are asked to disassociate utterly from that brief memory of autonomous national existence. Polish national sentiment can be an ugly thing, rooted in an unhealthy Catholic exclusivism. Jews and Ukrainians have good reason to fear it (as do Czechs, who know something of Poland's opportunistic land grab after Munich).

But Polish memory has for two generations been force-fed a counterintuitive affection for Russian-imposed internationalism, and it would be surprising indeed were the nation to have turned directly from a “fraternal Socialist Europe” to the cosmopolitan (Western) Europeanism of optimistic dissident imaginings without passing through some such nostalgic engagement with a properly *Polish* past.

Anti-Semitism

Of all the old languages which have rushed in to fill the space left by Communist discursive power, anti-Semitism is the most striking. It is almost irrelevant that there are hardly any Jews left in contemporary Eastern and Central Europe.³¹ Anti-Semitism in this part of Europe has long had a central political and cultural place; it is as much a way of talking about “them” and “us” as it is a device for singling out Jews in particular. What is striking, though, is the discomfort aroused by any suggestion that Eastern Europeans today need to come to terms with their *past* treatment of Jews. That particular past has been so profoundly buried, by Communists and non-Communists alike, that attempts to disinter it are resented by everyone, including Jews. Indeed, the Jewish intelligentsia of Budapest and Warsaw (which includes a goodly portion of the dissident intellectuals of the past twenty years) does not like to be reminded that its own and its parents’ recent past was closely tied to that of the Communist movement and that Jews in Eastern Europe who survived the war and chose not to emigrate often made considerable efforts to hide their Jewishness—from their colleagues, their neighbors, their children, and themselves. They are often the first to insist that anti-Semitism ended in 1945—indeed they will sometimes claim that its earlier presence in countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and even Romania was much exaggerated.³²

The special difficulty of coming to terms with the treatment of Jews, especially during the war, is that it is hopelessly imbricated with other buried histories already mentioned. For some time now there has been an interesting debate among Hungarian historians over whether the extermination of the Hungarian Jews could have been prevented. Certain of the historians involved in this debate were Jews, from different generations. The older scholars (including Jews) were often very reluctant to concede that Hungarians could have done more to prevent the deportation of their Jewish community in 1944;

what was at issue was less the fate of Hungarian Jews than the responsibility of Hungarians for their own dealings with the Nazis in the last stages of the war.³³

Curiously, this syndrome has its close equivalents further West. Postwar Austrians, Jews and non-Jews alike, preferred to think of Hitler's Austrian victims as a single undifferentiated category: Jews, Social-Democrats (and Jewish Social-Democrats), Christian Socials, and so forth were conflated after 1945 into a single memory of the oppression of the Austrian nation by Prusso-German Nazis. In Austria as in her eastern neighbors, this misrepresentation of history and memory (which in 1945 was certainly recent enough) did little to help Jews melt back into the fabric of Austrian society. There are about 10,000 Jews in Austria today, but in an opinion poll taken in October 1991, 50 percent of respondents thought "Jews are responsible for their past persecution," 31 percent said they did not want a Jew as a neighbor and 20 percent said they wanted no Jews in the country.³⁴

Further west still, in France, returning Jewish survivors of the camps were tacitly invited to merge into the general category of "deportees." Only men and women deported for acts of anti-Nazi resistance received special recognition—indeed, in the 1948 parliamentary discussions of a law defining the status and rights of former deportees no one made any reference to Jews. It has taken some forty years for the distinctive experience of Jews in occupied France and the manner in which Vichy singled them out for punishment to become a central part of the debate over the memory of the Occupation. In France, too, this neglect was in some measure the responsibility of the Jewish community, which sought to reclaim for itself an (invisible) place in the universal Republic and had little interest in inviting further discrimination by arousing unpleasant memories—its own and those of its persecutors. This stance only began to alter with the next generation of French Jews, their consciousness "raised" by the Six-Day War of June 1967, and de Gaulle's ill-starred remarks. It is for this reason that the special responsibilities of the Vichy regime, which lie in its autonomous and thoroughly French reasons for seeking out and disadvantaging Jews in particular, were for so long shrouded in ambiguity.³⁵ If Helmut Kohl can today speak of the extermination of Jews as a crime "committed in the name of Germany" (and thus not by any particular Germans), it is not

surprising that for the best part of half a century French politicians saw little reason to arouse any sense of guilt among the French for crimes committed “in their name.”³⁶

NEW MYTHS AND NEW PASTS

And now? Goodbye to all that? The revolutions of 1989 have forced open the East-European past, just as the historiographical transformations in the West have removed decades-long taboos on parts of the wartime memory.³⁷ There will be infinite revisions and reinterpretations, but the recent past will never look the same again, anywhere. However, even the most superficial survey of the present scene reveals new myths and new pasts already in the making.

To begin with, there is something to be said, socially-speaking, for taboos. In Western Europe, for forty years after the end of World War II, no respectable scholar or public figure would have thought to attempt a rehabilitation of fascism, anti-Semitism or the hypercollaborationist regimes and their doings. In return for the myth of an ethically-respectable past and an impeccably untainted identification with a reborn Europe, we have been spared the sorts of language and attitudes which so polluted and degraded the public realm between the wars. In Eastern Europe the brutal, intolerant, authoritarian, and mutually-antagonistic regimes which spread over almost all the region in the years following World War I were cast into the dustbin of history. The many unpleasant truths about that part of the world were replaced by a single beautiful lie. For it must not be forgotten that communism was constrained by its own self-description to pay steady lip service to equality, freedom, rights, cultural values, ethnic fraternity, and international unity. By its end few questioned the hypocrisy of the affair; but in public at least there were certain things no longer said and done which had once been the common currency of hatred throughout the area.³⁸

These constraints are now loosened, if not altogether swept away. In the words of Bruno Mégret, Jean-Marie Le Pen's deputy in the *Front National*, “Nous sommes en train d'assister à la fin du monde reconstruit depuis Yalta. Toutes les idéologies, tous les tabous (*sic*) qui ont été fondés alors sont en train de tomber.”³⁹ Monsieur Mégret knows whereof he speaks. His party has made no small contribution to the process. Without the loss of such taboos could one really

imagine that by October 1991 some 38 percent of Giscard d'Estaing's supporters and 50 percent of Jacques Chirac's would be "globally in agreement" with Le Pen's views? Only two years earlier the respective figures were 20 percent and 38 percent. Had anyone even thought to ask the question ten years ago the figures would have been negligible. The fact is that the selfsame myths which protected the French against the memory of Mégrét's Vichyite forebears also acted as a sort of prophylactic against contemporary echoes of that past. It is a cruel and paradoxical truth that the work of historians like Henry Rousso, Jean-Pierre Azéma, and their colleagues has made it possible to tell the truth about the past—and thus allowed men from that past to tell their *own* truth in the present.

Hence, too, the circumstances in which Benito Mussolini's granddaughter Alessandra can get elected to the Italian parliament this year in part *by virtue of her name*, something of which she need no longer feel ashamed, it being rather better established today that *Il Duce* was not so unpopular as people liked to think, and that his institutional legacy is with Italians still. So it is in Eastern Europe, where the helter-skelter rush to dismantle and deny communism and all its works has, as noted above, begun to legitimize the earlier doings of men who combined prewar or wartime anticommunism with attitudes and acts which were until just recently literally unspeakable.

What we are witnessing, so it seems to me, is a sort of interregnum, a moment between myths when the old versions of the past are either redundant or unacceptable, and new ones have yet to surface. The outlines of the latter are already beginning to form, however. Whereas for the purposes of European moral reconstruction it was necessary to tell a highly-stylized story about the war and immediate postwar trauma, the crucial reference point for Europe now will be the years immediately preceding the events of 1989. This is not to say that the earlier mis-memories will henceforth be recast in tranquility into objective and universally-recognized histories. As I have suggested, East Europeans in particular have not yet begun to sort through and understand the multilayered pasts to which they are the unfortunate heirs, including the past which began in 1948 and has just ended. The war and especially the postwar years are still largely unexplored territory in the historiography of this region (in any language), and Leszek Kolakowski is doubtlessly correct when he

predicts that Eastern Europe is in for a painful *Historikerstreit* of its own. But the crucial new myths will be about something else.

Western Europe is already afloat in a sea of mis-memories about its own pre-1989 attitude towards communism. Whatever they now say, the architects and advocates of a unified Europe à la Maastricht never wanted to include a whole group of have-not nations from the East; they had yet fully to digest and integrate an earlier Mediterranean assortment. The Soviet grip on Eastern Europe had the double virtue of keeping that region away from the prosperous West while at the same time allowing the latter the luxury of lamenting the very circumstances from which it was benefiting. In a like manner, the non-Communist European Left is already forgetting just how very defensive it had been for the previous two decades on the subject of Soviet rule. Between Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and the fantasies of the extreme disarmers, the Western Left not only discouraged criticism of the Communist regimes but was often quite energetic in their defense, especially in the later Brezhnev era. Even now there are suggestions of an attempt to cast perestroika as the missed occasion for a renewal and rebirth of the Communist project, with Gorbachev as the would-be Bukharin of a different road to socialism. The history and memory of Western political and cultural attitudes towards the East is an embarrassing one; if Václav Havel and others do not allude to it as often or as acerbically as they once did, this is because they must look ahead to their immediate needs. But they have not forgotten that the Western Left played no role in their own liberation, nor are they insensible to the manifest lack of enthusiasm displayed by French and other statesmen at the fall of the Wall and its consequences. If the West forgets its own immediate past, the East will not.⁴⁰

But Eastern Europe, too, is in thrall to freshly-minted versions of its own recent history. Of these the most disturbing may be, as I have already noted, a denial of the Communist experience. That the years 1948–1989 were an ugly parenthesis in the history of Central and Eastern Europe is of course true; their legacy is mostly ashes, their impact mostly negative. But they did not come from nowhere, and even ashes leave their mark. That is why the debates over collaboration and collusion in Germany, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere are so crucial and difficult. But these very debates and the revelations surrounding them risk repeating the experience of the French post-

war *épurations*: the whole episode was so shot through with private score-settling and bad faith that within a few months no one any longer believed in the undertaking and it became difficult (and eventually unfashionable) to distinguish between good and evil in such matters. To avoid this result—to avert the danger of arousing sympathy for Communist “victims” of revenge and public cynicism as to the motives of the revengers—some political leaders in the region have already begun to suggest that it might be best just to draw a veil over the whole uncomfortable Communist episode.

But that same veil would also blur our understanding of the place of communism, for good or ill, in the modern transformation of Eastern Europe. This would be a mistake: communism in Eastern Europe has some achievements to its name, paradoxical though these may now appear; it industrialized certain backward regions (Slovakia being a notable case), it destroyed old castes and structures which had survived earlier wars and revolutions, and they will not now return. Moreover, the Communists pursued and accelerated programs of urbanization, literacy, and education which were sadly lacking in this part of Europe before 1939; their drive to nationalize production and services was consistent in form, if not in manner, with a process which had begun in Poland and Czechoslovakia before 1939, was pursued by the Nazis and maintained and extended by the coalition governments of the postwar years before the Communists seized power. To insist, as many now do, that communism in Eastern Europe was an alien and utterly dysfunctional imposition of Soviet interests is as misleading as to claim that the Marshall Plan and NATO were forced upon an unwilling and supine Western Europe (one of the more enduring myths of an earlier generation of Western critics).

Finally, the very events of 1989 themselves may be about to enter the no-man’s-land of mythical and preferable pasts. It will be hard to claim that any of the liberations of Eastern Europe, even those of Poland or Hungary, would have been possible without at least the benign neglect of the Soviet Union; indeed there is some reason to believe that in Czechoslovakia and perhaps Berlin the Soviets played an active part in bringing down their own puppet regimes. This is not a very appealing or heroic version of a crucial historical turning point; it is as though Louis XVI had engineered the fall of the Bastille, a course of events which would have had detrimental consequences

for the identity of nineteenth-century republicanism in France. It is also a sequence of developments humiliatingly familiar in Eastern European memory, where the wheel of history has all too often been turned by outsiders. The temptation to tell the story in a different and more comforting way may become overwhelming.⁴²

The new Europe is thus being built upon historical sands at least as shifty in nature as those upon which the postwar edifice was mounted. To the extent that collective identities, whether ethnic, national or continental, are always complex compositions of myth, memory, and political convenience this need not surprise us. From Spain to Lithuania the transition from past to present is being recalibrated in the name of a "European" idea which is itself a historical and illusory product, with different meanings in different places. In the Western and Central regions of the continent (including Poland, the Czech lands, Hungary, and Slovenia but not their eastern neighbors) the dream of economic unity may or may not be achieved in due course.

But what will not necessarily follow is anything remotely resembling continental political homogeneity and supranational stability—note the pertinent counterexample of the last years of the Habsburg Monarchy, where economic modernization, a common market, and the free movement of peoples was accompanied by a steady increase in mutual suspicion and regional and ethnic particularism. As for Eastern Europe, the "third" Europe from Estonia to Bulgaria, the idea of European identity there is fast becoming the substitute political discourse of an embattled minority of intellectuals, occupying the space which in other circumstances would be taken up by liberal and democratic projects, and facing the same formidable opponents and antipathies which have weakened the latter on past occasions. At a time when Euro-chat has turned to the happy topic of disappearing customs barriers, the frontiers of memory remain solidly in place.

ENDNOTES

¹See figures given in Gerold Ambrosius and William H. Hubbard, *A Social and Economic History of Twentieth-century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), passim; Kenneth Morgan, *The People's Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 52.

- ²For an extended discussion of Camus's shifting position on the dilemma of revenge and retribution in postwar France, see Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944–1956* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992).
- ³In addition to the concentration camp established by the Nazis at Struthof in Alsace, there were several internment camps in southern France. Some of these had been set up in the last months of the Third Republic to handle Republican refugees from Spain; under Vichy they served as holding pens for Jews, refugees, and other undesirables prior to their deportation, in most cases, to the East. See Anne Grynberg, *Les camps de la honte. Les internés juifs des camps français, 1939–1944* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), as well as the haunting memoir by Arthur Koestler, *The Scum of the Earth* (London: Gollancz, 1955).
- ⁴A view shared by de Gaulle, which helps explain his occasional inability to grasp the essential distinction, when it came to postwar retribution, between Prussian “barbarism” and Nazi genocide.
- ⁵For a somewhat partial, but well-documented account of the expulsion of the Germans, see Alfred M. de Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Expulsion of the Germans from the East* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).
- ⁶On the unhappy history of postwar, pre-Communist Czechoslovakia's treatment of some of its national minorities, see Radomir Luza, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans: A Study of Czech-German Relations, 1933–1962* (New York: Atheneum, 1964); Petr Pithart, “Let us be kind to our History,” *Kosmas* (Winter 1984); and Kalman Janics, *Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority, 1945–1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
- ⁷See Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy, 1943–1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), 53 ff.
- ⁸I am thus inclined to agree with Henry Rousso, who has suggested that although the postwar purge in France can now be seen to have been tragically inadequate, its failure was probably inevitable under the circumstances. See Rousso, “L'épuration en France: une histoire inachevée,” in *Vingtième Siècle* 33 (janvier-mars 1992): 78–106.
- ⁹Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 64–70. On later charges leveled at the partisans for their acts of summary justice, see Luca Alessandrini and Angela Maria Politi, “Nuove fonti sui processi contro i partigiani, 1948–1953,” *Italia Contemporanea* 178 (1990): 41–62.
- ¹⁰As in the case of the massacre of Hungarians in the Voivodina by Tito's partisans, revenge for the Hungarian military's activities began there in January 1942.
- ¹¹For the Austrian figures, I am indebted to Dr. Lonnie Johnson of the *Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen* in Vienna. For France, see Rousso, “L'épuration en France,” but also Marcel Baudot, “L'épuration: bilan chiffré,” in *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent* 25 (septembre 1986): 37–53.
- ¹²In which the French at first proved remarkably adept. In July 1951 one observer wrote of their “alarming” success in putting Vichy out of mind. See Janet Flanner, *Paris Journal 1944–1965* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1977), 153.
- ¹³For the benign and limited character of the purge of economic collaborators, see Henry Rousso, “Les élites économiques dans les années quarante,” *Le elites in*

Francia et in Italia negli anni quaranta (Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, tome 95, 1982–1983).

- ¹⁴In the Italian instance a further question arises, obscured by the aura surrounding the Resistance coalition. If Mussolini had chosen to keep out of Hitler's war, and had succeeded remaining aloof, are there not some grounds for speculating that his regime might have survived into the postwar era? The comparison with Franco is not so implausible as it seems; the short history of the Italian nation-state had provided little occasion for the cementing of democratic or constitutional habits.
- ¹⁵Enzensberger's phrase suggests a sort of passive collusion, an agreement not to discuss certain matters in public, as a result of which they become obscured in recollection. To the extent that historians contributed to this situation, they did so mostly through omission; the war years were too recent, and primary or official sources too scarce to permit serious historical accounts of collaboration or resistance. As time passed and archives opened, some good scholarly studies were indeed undertaken, despite the problems of contemporaneity. But they were not necessarily read outside of a narrow circle of specialists. When their influence *was* finally felt, it was usually for reasons that had little to do with the formal conditions of academic production.
- ¹⁶See William B. Bader, *Austria between East and West, 1945–1955* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966) and Robert E. Clute, *The International Legal Status of Austria, 1938–1955* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1962).
- ¹⁷See Rudolf Bindschedler, Hans Rudolf Kurz, Wilhelm Carlgren, and Sten Carlsson, *Schwedische und Schweizerische Neutralität im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Basel: Helbing and Lichtenhahn, 1985), notably the contributions by Carlsson, Bindschedler, and especially Samuel Werenfels ("Dis Schweizerische Praxis in der Behandlung von Flüchtlingen, Internierten und entwichenen Kriegsgefangenen im Zweiten Weltkrieg," 377–405). Also Sven-Olof Olsson, *German Coal and Swedish Fuel* (Göteborg: Institute of Economic History, Göteborg University, 1975).
- ¹⁸A further shared characteristic of the Community's Founding Fathers—their common Catholicism—may help account for initial suspicions and reticence on the part of Scandinavian and especially British politicians in the postwar years. I am indebted to Stephen Graubard for this observation. The British, of course, had many other reasons for seeking to remain aloof from European projects—see the interviews with senior British politicians and civil servants in Michael Charlton, *The Price of Victory* (London: BBC Publishing, 1983).
- ¹⁹It should be noted, however, that France has never ratified the international and European conventions of 1968 and 1974 which make *war crimes* also imprescriptible. As a result, under French law it is only possible to prosecute someone for actions undertaken during the war if his handiwork falls under the at once restrictive and nebulous heading of "crimes against humanity."
- ²⁰Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours*, 2nd edition (Paris: Seuil, 1990). Examples of the seminal contributions of foreign scholars include Eberhard Jäckel, *Frankreich in Hitlers Europa* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966), of which a French translation finally appeared in 1988; Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (New York: Columbia

University Press, 1972); Dennis Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), and *Mussolini* (New York: Knopf, 1982). Note, too, the work of Gerhard Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration: The Netherlands Under German Occupation, 1940–1945* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 1988). A translation of *Fremdherrschaft und Kollaboration. Die Niederlande unter deutscher Besatzung 1940–1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1984) provided a much needed corrective to even the best Dutch historiography on the subject. See also Nanda van der Zee, “The recurrent myth of ‘Dutch heroism’ in the Second World War and Anne Frank as a Symbol,” in G. Jan Colijn and Marcia S. Littell, eds., *The Netherlands and Nazi Genocide* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1992), 1–14.

²¹All three men have been “investigated” for their active roles in Vichy’s treatment of Jews—and in each case the wheels of justice have turned with excruciating and suspicious slowness. The motive for this disinclination to raise again the old, uncomfortable issues is the same as it was in 1946; the Under-Secretary of State for Justice in a Socialist-led government, M. George Kiejman, declared on 19 October 1990 that “au-delà de la nécessaire lutte contre l’oubli, il peut paraître important de préserver la paix civile.”

²²The German arguments raged not so much over issues of resistance and collaboration, which were marginal to the German experience, but rather around the problem of responsibility (and the limits of responsibility) for the policy of racial extermination. After four decades during which the subject was at once acknowledged and yet curiously undiscussed, some conservative scholars, taking advantage of the passage of years and the declining legitimacy of Soviet communism, suggested that the time had come to “historicize” the Holocaust, to concede the comparability of Nazism and Stalinism and even to suggest that the Nazi policy of genocide was in some measure a rational and explicable response, however awful, to the threat posed to Germany by her totalitarian neighbor to the East. The moral and political shock waves of this historical dispute have been somewhat muted by the unexpected unification of Germany and its attendant moral dilemmas, but they remain potent and their implications endure. See Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow* (New York: Pantheon, 1989); Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), and Peter Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust and the Historians’ Debate* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), notably the contributions by Saul Friedländer, Hans Mommsen, and Hagen Schulze. See also the acerbic commentary by one of the participants in the argument, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Die Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit. Ein polemischer Artikel zum ‘Historikerstreit’* (Munich: Beck, 1988).

²³For the Waldheim presidency and its ramifications in Austria, see the new book by Richard Mitten, *The Waldheim Phenomenon in Austria: The Politics of anti-Semitic Prejudice* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992).

²⁴See the reflections on this theme by Rousso, Daniel Lindenberg, Stanley Hoffmann, and others in “Que faire de Vichy?” *Esprit* (mai 1992): 5–87.

²⁵Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhien, 1991); Luisa Passerini, *Mussolini immaginario* (Bari: Laterza, 1991), and the editorial, “Il nuovo processo alla Resistenza,” *Italia Contemporanea* 181 (December 1990): 645–51. See, in addition, Passerini’s

earlier work, *Fascism in Popular Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), a translation of her *Torino Operaia e Fascismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1984). The steady disaggregation of the Resistance coalition in postwar Italy, and with it the attendant foundation myth of the Republic, has also, of course, affected the standing and support of the Christian Democrats. But it is the decline and fall of the ex-PCI which has done most to facilitate and even encourage public debate over the wartime experience of the country. For an authoritative instance of the traditional Communist position on the war and postwar years, see Luigi Longo, *Chi ha tradito la Resistenza* (Rome: Ed. Riuniti, 1975).

²⁶Peter Schneider's most recent work, *The German Comedy: Scenes of Life After the Wall*, was published in New York by Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux in 1991. On the way in which historians in the German Democratic Republic handled the issue of anti-Semitism, see K. Kwist, "Historians of the German Democratic Republic on anti-Semitism and Persecution," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook XX* (1976): 173–198.

²⁷See Tony Judt, "Metamorphosis: The Democratic Revolution in Czechoslovakia," in Ivo Banac, ed., *Eastern Europe in Revolution* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992).

²⁸More problematic still is the case of someone like the Romanian writer Mircea Eliade, a liberal intellectual nowadays much admired for his prescient critiques of Stalinism in the 1950s and after. It is all too easy to forget that before World War II, like much of the intelligentsia of Central and Eastern Europe, Eliade was a supporter of the extreme nationalist Right.

²⁹In the pogrom at Kielce on 4 July 1946, 41 Jews died. There were many similar, lesser outbursts of anti-Semitism in postwar Poland. But there are some grounds for thinking that these atrocities (like the murder of two Jews at Kunmadaras in Hungary on 21 May 1946) were provoked by the Communist police, who had an interest in exacerbating already strained relations between Jews and non-Jews. See Aleksander Smolar, "Jews as a Polish Problem," *Dædalus* 116 (2) (Spring 1987): 31–73 and Yosef Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union to Poland at the end of the Second World War and Afterwards," in Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–1946* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). I am indebted to Professor Istvan Deák for his observations on this point.

³⁰The Treaty on Cooperation and Friendship between Czechoslovakia and Germany was signed on 27 February 1992 and ratified in the Czecho-Slovak Federal Assembly on 4 April 1992, by 226 votes to 144. Deputies from the Communist, Social-Democratic, and Slovak Nationalist parties voted against, the Slovaks objecting to the phrase which affirmed the "continuity of the Czechoslovak state since 1918."

³¹Only in Hungary is the Jewish presence significant. It numbers about 100,000 persons, most of them in Budapest.

³²According to Joseph Rothschild, in interwar Eastern Europe "the only really potent international ideology . . . was anti-Semitism based on both conviction and experience," *East-Central Europe Between the Two Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 9. For some interesting remarks on the "hyper-assimilationism" of postwar Hungarian Jews (those who chose to remain), see

Maria Kovacs, "Jews and Communists: A View After Communism," unpublished paper.

- ³³See Istvan Deák, "Could the Hungarian Jews Have Survived?" *New York Review of Books* 29 (1) (4 February 1982); Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); György Ránki, "The Germans and the Destruction of the Hungarian Jewry," in Randolph L. Braham and Belá Vago, eds., *The Holocaust in Hungary: Forty Years Later* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); András Kovács, "Could Genocide Have Been Averted?" *Budapest Review of Books* 1 (1) (1991): 20–25.
- ³⁴On postwar Austrian handling of indigenous anti-Semitism and the memory of local enthusiasm for the Nazis, see Bruce F. Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 301–10.
- ³⁵See Annette Wievorka, *Déportation et Génocide. Entre la mémoire et l'oubli* (Paris: Plon, 1992), notably pages 19–159 and 329–433; Serge Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz. Le rôle de Vichy dans la solution finale de la question juive en France*, 2 vols (Paris: Fayard, 1983).
- ³⁶Note that François Mitterrand avoided any official acknowledgement of Vichy's role in the deportation of Jews during his 1982 visit to the *Yad Vashem* memorial in Jerusalem, a silence that he has maintained in spite of impassioned pleas from many quarters in French society. But France is not unique—historiographical and public interest in the circumstances of Jewish deportations in Belgium, Italy, and elsewhere is of very recent vintage. It is hard now to recall how small a part the extermination of Jews, and the sensitive issue of latent anti-Semitism, played in the political consciousness of Europe in the immediate postwar decades.
- ³⁷One of the more optimistic signs in Eastern Europe has been the organization or reorganization of centers for historical research, oriented in many cases to making good the damage done to historical studies in the region over the past forty years. In Prague, the *Pamatník odboje* (Memorial of the Resistance), part of the former History Institute of the Czechoslovak army, now has a department, directed by Dr. Frantisek Janacek, devoted to the historical study of collaboration and resistance in Czechoslovakia, during and after World War II.
- ³⁸The glaring exception, of course, was the ugly outbreak of officially-condoned anti-Semitism in Poland in the years 1967–1968. But for many people this has already been cosmetically reshaped as the work of a few hotheads in the political apparatus, with no support or roots in the Party or nation at large.
- ³⁹"We are witnessing the end of the post-Yalta order. All of the ideologies, all of the taboos which were then founded, are now collapsing." 30 August 1991, cited in *Le Monde* (31 August 1991).
- ⁴⁰Nor should it be forgotten that Socialists in Italy, especially, were happy to join with communists in applauding the East-European show trials of the 1940s and 1950s, a subject over which they and their heirs now prefer to maintain a discrete silence. Even Aneurin Bevan in Britain's Labor Party was not exempt from temptation; in 1959, reiterating his faith in the future of the Soviet Union, he declared that "... the challenge is going to come from those nations who,

however wrong they may be—and I think they are wrong in many fundamental respects—nevertheless are at long last being able to reap the material fruits of economic planning and of public ownership,” in Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan: A Biography, Volume II, 1945–1960* (New York: Antheneum, 1974). All in all, it is hard to dissent from the bitter conclusion of Paolo Flores d’Arcais: “. . . nel comunismo la sinistra europea è stata coinvolta quasi tutta, direttamente o indirettamente. Per scelta, per calcolo, per omissione.” See his editorial in *Micro-Mega* 4 (1991): 17.

⁴¹In 1939, illiteracy levels were still 32 percent in Bulgaria, 40 percent in Yugoslavia, and nearly 50 percent in Romania. See Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 242.

⁴²Witness the speech by Jozsef Antall, historian and Prime Minister of Hungary, on 11 January 1992, where he describes to his Hungarian audience the West’s lack of appreciation for East-Central Europeans’ heroic efforts on its behalf: “This unrequited love must end because we struck to our posts, we fought our own fights without firing one shot and we won the third world war for them.” This stirring revisionist interpretation of the Kadarist years is excerpted in *East European Reporter* V (II) (March–April 1992): 66–68.

⁴³See David F. Good, *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1750–1914* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984).