

Ghosts Haunting Our European Nations

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In order to take into account and come to an understanding of some of the ghosts haunting our democratic European nations, we will present some vital characteristics related to our contemporary societies and then to democratic nations.

Our Contemporary Societies

The sociologist Norbert Elias wrote in 1939 that our modern societies are replete with contradictions, tensions and explosions. This is confirmed by contemporary sociologists such as Edgar Morin (1984) who believes that our contemporary societies bear within them an 'unheard degree' of disorder through the very development of their complexity, or rather of their 'extreme complexity'. Through these very aspects, they are at once evolving and in permanent crisis. This constant instability means that the play of social complementarity is also a play of antagonisms, that of differences likewise being a play of oppositions. Moreover, Morin considers that they are sparsely integrated culturally. The relentlessness of norms and prohibitions has diminished in them. Nonetheless more zones of anomie, marginality and originality are more or less tolerated.

But these societies, while more tolerant towards deviance and originality, including artistic, intellectual and scientific, open themselves up at the same time to the hazards, events, disparities and innovations produced by one or several individuals.

Consequently, our societies are undergoing experiences of rupture correlative of a failure of the 'work of continuity' guaranteed by a cultural heritage or, to use our own formulation, of a failure of collective *Kulturarbeit* and of disorganising-reorganising transformations which are weakening, attacking and upsetting their principal symbolic guarantors (notably, the family, Church, State and models of thought and instituted behaviour). We are all, as members, quite obviously caught up in this historic turbulence and socio-cultural loss of control and further carried away by these disintegrating-reintegrating currents.

With regards to ourselves as individual members, we are caught between the social, paradoxical exigencies or injunctions and our individual needs. These disintegrating-reintegrating movements contribute to the weakening of individual identity increasingly torn between multiple components.

Moreover, we observe a singularising of individuals in their relationships with each other, as well as greater freedom of choice between a greater number of possibilities together with an increase in risks.

Social evolution towards a higher degree of individualisation has unlocked for the individual the way towards certain forms of satisfaction or accomplishment at the same time as painful disappointments and failures due to the fierce competitive system instituted by our contemporary societies.

Democratic European Nations

Our contemporary societies, sociologically and briefly characterised, are principally organised into a multiplicity of nations or nation-states of which the European ones were historically the first.

In his article of 1920, Mauss defined the nation as being a socially integrated society with centralised, stable and permanent power within well-defined borders. It implies economic and political unity, that is, military, administrative and legal unity. It possesses its aesthetic, moral and material civilisation, and almost always its language. It further has its mentality.

He observed that in a modern nation everything is tailored to individual needs and make its members uniform. It is homogenous and presumed to be composed of equal citizens. It is symbolised by its flag. It has its religion, the Country. It possesses domestic law opposed to international law. It has its borders and colonies.

If nationalism isolates the nation, internationalism is the entirety of ideas, feelings, rules and collective groupings, which has as its goal conceiving and directing the interrelations between nations and between societies in general.

Edgar Morin (1984), in turn, considers that the nation, nationality and nationalism have spread across the planet. The demands of nationality have become universal demands. Moreover, the nation makes it possible for any individual member to construct and bind his national identity—one of the predominant identity components in the present day—within a geographic territory with well-delimited borders but also in the frame of a glorious history and a rich cultural complexity.

Lastly, he believes that today's world arouses in individuality such uncertainties and worries, frustrations and injuries, owing notably to the formidable competition between men and nations leading to experiences of failure and isolated behaviour, that national identity makes it possible to respond to the need for assertiveness and security. Further, such profound investment of each individual in his nation—the objective source of power that the State constitutes—competes in concert to turn nationalism into a 'quasi-religious' attitude. For him, nationalism is by far the predominant religion of the western world.

As to democracies, their life is full of 'sound and fury' owing to the very fact of its constitutive principles, liberty and equality.

Following on from Eugène Enriquez (1983), equality leads to intensive competition for power and, the likeness of conditions, to the will to differentiation.

At its very foundations, democracy constructs a world in which the management of each individual's violence is poorly resolved and whose functioning leads to the growth in this violence either inside or out-. This will, in principle, be contained and 'settled' by a new agency: the State, representing the people. It gives it not only a physical body (the bureaucratic apparatus) but also a mystical body (the idea of nation and country), which, if it were lacking, would lead to the definitive division of the people into categories and antagonistic classes (Enriquez, 1983). The State thus presents itself as the indispensable body in which multiple differences, instead of entering into competition with each other, tend to combine their efforts.

The Ghost of Our Democratic Nation-States

We may identify three categories of collective, commonplace ghosts shared by their members: those which are particular to any society; those which are characteristic of our contemporary societies; and lastly, those more specific to the history of European nations.

Thus, among those particular to any society thusly threatened and haunted from the inside, we may cite, in accordance with Freud:

- the drive of aggression and destruction, 'derivative and representative of the death drive', which is at the basis of the primary hostility of men toward each other and which thus threatens all societies with disintegration. The principal means of protection, according to Freud, would be the establishment of an individual superego maintaining joint relationships with the cultural superego. However, it also participates in vital movements of social change;
- the 'narcissism of small differences' underpinning the latent, omnipresent current of xenophobia;
- the danger of a lack of differentiation of individuals-members, thus the threat of identity disintegration;
- lastly, individualism or the prevalence of narcissistic interests over objectal interests, of individuals to the detriment of the group, of the 'I' over the 'we'.

Among those which are characteristic of our contemporary societies, we find that the exacerbation of contemporary individualism and the proliferation of subcultures, the crucible of numerous innovations, contribute to social and cultural fragmentation and thus participate in the disintegrating current of our societies, one of the principal dangers. Just as individuals are taken in by numerous heterogeneous socio-cultural and institutional affiliations, which contribute to the fragmentation of identity.

Moreover, freedom and equality, the founding values of our democracies, are hindered by the growth of inequalities, frustrations and injustices due notably to a restrictive push towards consumption and fierce competition in the economic sphere, which reigns within any society and which thereby abandons the 'losers', awakening in them latent hostilities, movements of destructive envy and jealousy. It is a question of the ghost of continuously present violence within any society and democratic ones in particular.

Furthermore, the demand for freedoms and rights by citizens, specific to democracies, which thus take risks, is correlative of a weakening of the means of protection and security that must be guaranteed by State bodies. The State however plays neither its protective role nor that of symbolic guarantor as it is far more concerned with wielding its power, just as with its competitive, indeed, war relationships with other States.

In fact, any State, even a democratic one, assumes a paradoxical role: it must protect, limit, prohibit, regulate, arbitrate and exercise its role as *Father*, but it is omnipotent, through mendacity, manipulating and feeding its subjects' illusions and beliefs. It thus represents the contemporary ghost of the 'omnipotent primitive father' who mistreats its protégés and maintains the constant splitting between government and governed. The current state-related breakdown of our European democracies in the exercising of their *paternal function*, which is not counterbalanced by international bodies such as the United Nations, for example, thus exposes us more readily to all sorts of attacks, in particular those of an individual or group terrorist nature.

Lastly, the trend of the international spreading of different economic, social, cultural, political and legal phenomena, notably, tends inevitably towards a standardisation of societies, of how they are portrayed, models of thought and their practice, but likewise leads to an inexorable submission to a new order and global functioning. This considerably threatens the identity autonomy and integrity specific to each nation in danger of dependence and alienation but also dedifferentiation. These anxieties reactivate an omnipresent current of libertarian and identity demands, which has the effect of a repetition compulsion assuming the form of defensive nationalism.

As to the ghosts particular to European nations, some are tantamount to historical traumas likewise having the effect of a repetition compulsion, in this case revived by current events. They are

particularly related to their history of the Christianisation of the non-Western world, of slavery and colonialism, and of wars that have brought about genocides and ethnocides underpinned by an ideology, that of considering non-Europeans as subhuman and fit for domination and merchantable as slaves, convertible into good Christians and educable into newly civilised people. Imposing the new European civilisation on these peoples, who were still free of it during the massive colonisation of the nineteenth century, and then the disastrous phase of decolonisation, just like certain genocides and ethnocides, in all likelihood engendered, (following on the heels of a certain period of latency), varying degrees of an unconscious feeling of guilt in function of the colonising nation in question, which is manifested by different forms of responsibility with regard to the new particularly unstable economic and social situation of these new nations. This is to say nothing of their political situation owing to the fact that those who govern are motivated solely by exercising power and amassing wealth to the detriment of those they administer. What is more, they consistently remain under more or less direct guardianship vis-à-vis their former colonising nations.

Moreover, the phenomena of economic 'globalisation' and 'internationalisation' in the service of the interests of multinational companies bring about an increase in economic inequality between nations. Indeed, the violent contrasts between developed or industrialised nations—the wealthy ones—and these new nations stemming from decolonisation belonging to the 'Third World'—the poor ones—, stimulate and force increasingly massive migratory movements from poor countries towards the so-called rich ones, which revives ever present and more or less latent xenophobic trends within all European societies, braced by feelings of intrusion, invasion and persecution. It is all the more intense because these nations are going through a state of serious social and economic crisis. Nevertheless, this revived xenophobic trend enters into conflict with a current of desire for reparation and 'expiation of historical faults' expressed by the various aid measures of States and humanitarian non-governmental organisations. Consequently, our response is by nature highly ambivalent, just like the migrants' state of mind characterised by mourning and a crisis of identity.

Our democratic European nations, troubled by these many ghosts and torn by these conflicts and splittings, are undergoing intense suffering, which attests to a major failure of collective and individual *Kulturarbeit* (Smadja, 2015). This failing is further correlative of an operative weakening of the State and of its representatives—those who govern us—, just as of other symbolic guarantors in the exercise of a *paternal function* assigned to them and expected by all, in vain.

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