EUROPE OF STRANGERS

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It is not for the first time that the idea of unity hovers, like a spectre, over Europe. It did so once a thousand years or so ago, after the Great Schism between Western and Eastern Christianity: as the spirit of the true and only faith radiating from Rome. It flew again, at the dawn of the modern era, but that time in the dress of Reason, tailored in the workshops of the learned seekers of the one and only - scientific - truth. And there was a third approach as well: in the garb of progress, bound to rise together with smoke from the factory chimneys of industrial age.

If spectres, ghosts and other spooks have the habit of travelling light, scoffing the walls and deriding borders - realities are known for just the opposite inclinations. We call them "tough" or "hard". Realities do not move easily; they resist push and pull, claim solid foundations and surround themselves with thick walls and closely guarded borders.

If unity was Europe's spectre, nations were its realities. Over the years, nations proved to be the grandmasters of the exorcist art. They managed each time to sweep clean the haunted house, chasing the ghost of European unity away or forcing it to skulk and mope in a few dark and musty corners.

Fifty years ago, the day when the bloodiest, thirty-years long and almost uninterrupted mutual massacre of European nations was proclaimed (but not believed!) over, it could have seemed that the spectre of unity would never again haunt the ruins. And yet not only has the spectre returned once more, but this time it has proved to be uncharacteristically immune to exorcisms. Is the fourth approach to succeed where the other three failed?

Yes, this may be the case - many reply. And explain: this time the exorcisms lacked their usual vigour. The spells of the exorcists died on their lips - as if frozen by what the eyes saw. And what the eyes saw were thousands of miles of barbed wire with column after

column of tanks and rocket-launching pads behind. This time round there was nothing artificial or imaginary about a "common European border"; there was little doubt where Europe's joint border ran. And wherever there is a joint border, and particularly a border with a powerful enemy behind, the belief in the commonality of fate, that pillar of all unity, will not be slow to appear. The sight of the gun-studded frontierline proved stronger than faith, reason, or hope; it dwarfed and made the other fences which had withstood all previous assaults pale into insignificance.

That sight, however, has long become just a memory. The tanks have become covered with rust or trudged out of sight, while many a launching pad has been converted into an amusement theme park. But what happened, did; and cannot be undone. The most durable consequence of the Soviet bid for world domination may prove to be - who knows? - the unity of Europe.

There was another reason as well for the exorcisms to be half-hearted this time, relatively low-pitch and in the end ineffective. The spectre of unity entered the European house through the kitchen, not the front door, and picked the larder, not the drawing room, for its headquarters. True, there were visionaries, like Jean Monnet, who demanded that the communion of spirits should not be played down as mere icing on the economic cake, but should serve, on the contrary, as the foundation on which the shared home of all Europeans ought to be erected. But who treats such *Schöngeisten* seriously? Certainly not the cool-headed businessmen who came together to negotiate the Coal and Steel Union. It was from that humdrum seed that the European Economic Community sprouted. This time, it all began with the green light for capital and commodities. And when commodities and money need no entry or exit permits, even the best trained and armed troops of borderguards will not be of much consequence, The poets may go on composing their national songs, the nations may go on singing them on their respective independence days, people may go on

demanding that their "national in form, European in content" governments stand fast against the Brussels bureaucrats. It is not important what people talk about in their sitting rooms. What truly counts is what is being cooked in the kitchen and who are the cooks. The spectres and realities changed places.

The spectre of unity has managed to nest so safely for yet another reason: this time it behaved prudently, making little noise, avoiding excessive publicity and altogether trying to make its presence and its moves inconspicuous. Our "European Union" was not born on public squares, it did not start from public meetings and demonstrations. There were few pep-talks or harangues, little flag-waving and no frenzied mobs in the streets. Instead of bishops, kings or philosophers, it was the likes of Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi, Paul Henri Spaak and Konrad Adenauer, seasoned, adroit and cunning politicians, aware that deeds count more than words - who assisted at its birth. No one asked nations to agree, no one really explained what there was to agree upon - at least until things no more depended on nations' agreement. Whatever was done needed little preaching, few converting missions, no call to arms. As far as public opinion is concerned - even the "enlightened" opinion, let alone the "unenlightened" one - the unification of Europe went on through *faits accomplis* rather, than through the publicly fought battle of ideas. If protests were heard, as a rule they sounded when the point of no return had been already reached or passed.
Unified Europe has by now become a reality. It is as real as the reality of nations. It is not, however, the sole reality of the residents of Europe and still needs another reality to reckon with. The outcome of the battle between the two realities is not yet a foregone conclusion.

For many centuries, perhaps millenia, the European continent was inhabited by tribes and ethnic groups. *Nations,* however, are a modern discovery. Simplifying the matter, one may say that the birth and the maturation of modern times was marked by blending the tribes into nations (more exactly, by some tribes, which managed to lift themselves to the rank of

nations, devouring other less lucky or resourceful tribes); then by nations gaining political sovereignty, and by the replacement of dynastic realms with nations-states as well as the melting of their disparate subjects into nations - unified and indivisible. The sequence of steps was not everywhere the same; the achievements of ethnic groups which managed to become nations tended to set a pattern for the dreams and postulates of other, less successful populations. Gradually yet apparently irreversibly, the idea of the nation and the independent state in European consciousness merged into one.

And so it happened that states and nations could not live without each other. Nations needed states to forge the "locals" into nationals, to melt local dialects into a national language, to replace the local rhythms of rites and celebrations with unified national calendars of commemorative festivities. Only the state, with its monopoly of coercion and canons of obligatory education, could preside over that blending of tribes into nations, which Jürgen Kocka aptly described as "Reduzierung und Aufbau von Unterschieden, Reduktion von Heterogenität, Homogeniesierung von einerseits regionalen Differenzen". The nation building, always a risky and sharply competitive exercise, could not do without crusades and *KulturkSmpfe.* It was always necessary to degrade some languages to the status of dialects, to promote some dialect to the rank of the language; to condemn some memories to oblivion while pulling some real or putative traditions by the ears from the abyss of the forgotten past. None of this could be done without the state, without legal codes, police, courts and jails, and (though by no means least) without *doctorat d'état* (as Ernst Gellner quipped, the first violin in the nation-building symphony was played by professors, not guillotine operators). On the other hand, the state needed a nation - so that it could demand discipline in the name of sentiment, conscience and patriotic duty, prompt its subjects to act in the name of common tradition, and blackmail the lukewarm into compliance through invocation of the common fate. Indeed, a perfect marriage, one made in heaven.

Even the best of marriages are however seldom destined to last forever, and this one was no exception. This marriage stayed perfect as long as the state remained what it had been on the wedding day. In other words as long as "state independence" meant the right to pass laws which bound all its subjects and to deny any other laws the power to bind them; as long as the state kept in its hands, to use Carlo Schmid's formula, the sole power to define and to enforce *Pax*, *Justitia et Disciplina.*

States could keep and wield that power in as far as they rested on the "tripod of sovereignties" - economic, military and cultural: the ability to balance the books, to control its borders and to legislate the norms and the patterns by which all its subjects were to compose their customary conduct. Only such states could be well protected greenhouses inside which the "national communities", or myths of national communities, could take roots and blossom, Only from the inside of such a state could sound Bismarck's derisive words: "I always hear the word "Europe" from those who demand from others what they are not ready to set on their own".

These days however all three legs of the "tripod of sovereignties" are increasingly wobbly, and so the power of governments to rule and control the territories and the populations under their administration is waning. The politics stays territorial, while economy, military force and culture become ever more global and thus extraterritorial. The things most important for the well-being and life-prospects of its citizens are largely beyond the government's control: they are in the hands of the so called "market forces" - that enigmatic entity reminiscent of primeval elements, natural disasters or blind fate, rather than of well considered, purposeful and rational human decisions. Governments can do less and less to influence the course of events which affect directly the livelihood of their subjects. The order of things protected by the state has lost much of its aura of tough and indisputable reality. Order no longer appears preordained, self-evident, secure. Nations can no longer rely on

state protection; the well-being of national identity, or any other identity for that matter, is no longer safe in the national governments' hands, too weak now to hold it fast.

There is a close link between group identities and the distinct pattern of orders which set them securely apart from their neighbours. When an order loses its distinctiveness, so does the identity. The dissipation of orders is another name for the shock of de-differentiation; and de-differentiation is shocking - confusing, frightening, spawning anxiety - because the blurring of differences challenges consciousness, effaces cognitive maps and explodes the codes of legitimate behaviour. In the progressively dedifferentiated world too large a part of daily experience stands (to use Lyotard's expression) "un-ready" rather than pre-formed, predictable, coming complete with its pre-defined meaning.

When people complain that their identity is unclear or under threat, what they worry about is the unclarity of the world around; the enormity of the of the meaning-making task, and so also of the task of identity-building, which now falls fairly and squarely on their own individual shoulders and cannot but overload their mental and emotional capacity. Today, nation-states lack the strength to relieve the individuals of that burden, while "Europe" in the form it has grown from the seedling of the Coal and Steel Union is singularly unfit to step into their place. National identities no longer feel secure, while European identity is nowhere near offering the standards of security once set by the nation-states.

Let us note that under one heading of "identity concerns" hide troubles of various kinds and origins. Many of them are only obliquely, if at all, related to the processes of European unification or the withering away of the nation-state.

There is, first, an increasingly intricate problem common to all people of the Information Age: that of the formation and protection of collective identity under the condition of growing cultural pluralism and the close cohabitation of multiple traditions and styles of life. It is true that cultural plurality accompanied modern history from its beginning, but in the heyday of

state-nation partnership it used to be seen as a temporary nuisance, bound to vanish with the imminent breakdown of parochial customs and local traditions and with the assimilation of foreign elements into one unified national body. Now, however, it has become clear that the end of plurality is not on the cards, and that the coexistence of alternative cultural choices, as well as the absence of a value-cluster likely to be recognised as supreme and binding by all involved, are here to stay. This realisation casts the issue of collective identity in an entirely new light; traditional modern methods of handling it can no more be deployed, let alone relied upon.

This is only part of the story though. Today there are yet more powerful reasons for "identity concerns": reasons to be concerned about the security and constancy of Individual identity, reasons related directly to the growing uncertainty of *individual* livelihood. Twenty years ago eighty per cent of the working and earning people of Great Britain had secure jobs, insured against sudden and unwarranted dismissals and offering their holders a safe future in the form of welfare and pension entitlements; only thirty per cent can boast such jobs now, and the percentage goes falling. Some countries try hard to stem the tide, but the prospects of success are not particularly convincing. In virtually every country the part of work-force still enjoying the old security of employment is crumbling fast, while almost all new jobs are of the part-time, temporary, fixed-term, no-benefits-attached, and altogether "flexible" character. Add to this the new fragility of family units, brittleness of companionship, fluidity of neighbourhoods, the breath-taking pace of change of recommended and coveted life-fashions and of the market value of skills and acquired habits - and it is easy to understand why the feeling of insecurity (better still: of *Unsicherheit* - that complex combination of uncertainty, insecurity, and lack of safety, best conveyed by the German term) is so widespread and overwhelming.

The fates of the two - collective and individual - sides of "identity problem" are not necessarily tied. Anxieties related to each of them do not have to grow together; the poly-culturalism of the Information Age and insecurity of the individual livelihood are two aspects of contemporary living which meet and mix in human experience, but are not reducible to a common cause. The crises of collective and individual identities do not stem from the same root. Psychologically, however, the two anxieties tend to collapse and blend. *Unsicherheit* tends to be experienced as a total condition and to breed nervousness and frantic search of solutions often unrelated to the problems they are hoped to solve. One could say that the complex experience of uncertainty produces a considerable amount of diffuse *Angst,* anxiety and free-floating aggression - all in search of an elusive target. The energy so generated may be channelled in more than one direction, and rational scrutiny of the causes of trouble and of the adequacy of the means chosen to tackle it may be *the least important* factor in deciding which direction is to be followed. And so it happens that the solution to the *Individual* identity crisis is sought in the postulated security of collective identities.

Such a diversion is all the more likely because the sources and causes of individual insecurity, the mysterious "global financial markets", are much less visible to an unarmed eye than are the ostensible threats to collective security: in our world of massive migration, in the world increasingly populated with voluntary tourists and involuntary vagabonds, it is difficult not to notice the stubborn and vexing presence of foreigners, aliens, strangers. Or, rather, the already anxious and sensitive eye is more likely than not to frame the unfamiliar work-mates, neighbours or passers-by into the generic figure of the alien, ill-willed and threatening stranger. And since invisible, difficult to grasp phenomena tend to be explained by the tangible, close-to-hand experience - the mysterious and elusive threats to individual identity tend to be placed at the doorsteps of an all-too-tangible enemy: the stranger next door. It matters little that the deepest causes of the erosion of collective identities lie elsewhere.

Among such deep causes, the increasingly de-regulated market forces, exempt from all effective political control and guided solely by the pressures of competitiveness, must be awarded the pride of place. Thanks to the technical advances aided and abetted by the progressive dismantling of political constraints, capital is now free to move whenever and wherever it desires. Political institutions stay local - while the real powers which decide the shape of things that are and those yet to come have acquired genuine *exterritoriality.* As Manual Castells puts it in his recent monumental three-volume study of *The Information Age,* power in the form of capital, and particularly financial capital, *flows* - while politics remains tied to the ground bearing all the constraints imposed by its local character. Power has been, we may say, 'emancipated from politics'. But once this has happened, the State charged with the promotion and defence of collective identity has become all but a figment of nostalgia-fed fantasy.

But there is also another reason for the collective identities to be shaky and to seek solid foundations in vain. Not only are the holders of real power, particularly economic, today increasingly reminiscent of the pre-modern absentee landlords; also the learned, cultivated and culturally creative, meaning-producing elites of our times show striking likeness to the similarly 'absentee', extraterritorial Latin-speaking-and-writing scholastic elites of mediaeval Europe. One is almost tempted to guess: was the modern two-centuries-long nation-building episode the sole, and no more than temporary, exception to a much more permanent norm?

The excruciatingly difficult task of reforging the mish-mash of languages, cults, lores, customs and ways of life into homogenic nations under homogenic rule brought the learned elites for a time into the direct engagement with 'the people' which the elites undertook to uplift, civilise, enlighten, educate, free of the bonds of stultifying and separatist traditions and otherwise Integrate and reforge into modern nations. That episode by and large over now at least in the affluent part of the globe, there seems to be no need, and no occasion either, to

continue the engagement. Cyberspace, securely anchored in the ethereal websites of the Internet, is the contemporary equivalent of mediaeval Latin - the space which the learned elltes of today inhabit; and there is little which the residents of cyberspace could talk about with those still hopelessly mired in the all-too-real physical space. Even less can they gain from that dialogue. In the present-day rhetoric of intellectual discourse, the word "people" is fast falling out of fashion, except during the electoral campaigns.

The two causes of the present troubles with collective identities have one feature in common: instead of making the roots of the problem more salient and protruding, on the contrary they render the agencies responsible for the troubles progressively more distant and less visible. Since politics remains an essentially local affair, and since the language of politics is the only one in which we can speak of cures and medicines, there is a natural tendency to seek explanations and remedies in an area close to the homeground of daily experience.

That tendency is topped up with another: the well-understandable inclination of political classes to divert the deepest cause of anxiety, that is the experience of individual insecurity, to the popular concern with (already misplaced) threats to collective identity. There is quite a convincing and pragmatic reason for such diversion to be politically attractive. Since the roots of individual insecurity are thrust in anonymous, remote or inaccessible places, it is not immediately clear what the local, visible powers could do to rectify the present afflictions; but there seems to be an obvious, straightforward answer to the other trouble, that related to the collective identity - local state powers may still be used to close the borders to the migrants, to tighten the asylum laws, to round up and deport the unwelcome aliens. The governments cannot honestly promise its citizens secure existence and certain future; but they may for a time being unload at least part of the accumulated anxiety (and even profit from it electorally) by demonstrating their energy and determination in the war against foreign job-seekers and

other alien gate-crashers, the intruders into once clean and quiet, orderly and familiar, native backyards.

And so in the language of vote-seeking politicians, the widespread and complex sentiments of *Unsicherheit* are translated as much simpler concerns with law and order (that is with bodily safety and the safety of private homes and possessions), while the problem of law and order is in its turn blended with the problematic presence of ethnic, racial or religious minorities - and, more generally, of alien styles of life.

In Germany Manfred Kanther, the interior minister in Helmut Kohl's government, in anticipation of September elections declared 1998 to be "the year of security" - promising in one go war against crime and stern measures to curb immigration. Kohl's opponents, the Social-Democrats, neither are nor wish to be seen lagging far behind. And so Gerhard Glogowski, the Social-Democratic interior minister of Lower Saxony, loudly demands the restoration of German border controls since German borders are in his view but poorly, inadequately controlled by the partners of Schengen agreement. On both sides of German political spectrum, the war on crime merges with anti-foreigner (particularly anti-immigrant) rhetorics. The King of Denmark is reputed to have put a yellow band on his arm when the outgoing Germans commanded his Jewish subjects to do so. Fifty years later Pia Kjaersgaard, leader of Denmark's People's Party, who describes herself as "50-year-old middle-class housewife and mother of two grown children", angrily objects to the charges of racism but then points out that "the Muslims are a problem... You must not show a negative attitude towards our traditions and that is the case, I think, for the Muslims. They don't like me."

On these, like on numerous other occasions, the common security arrangements of European Union are called into question and tribute is paid to the memory of the nation-state-administered security. Political leaders of the member states reproach each other for

serving as a sort of "magnet for foreigners" due to manifesting unforgivably tepid or sloppy attitudes to the two-faced threat of foreign influx and rising crime; they exhort each other to strengthen their resolve and to flex their muscles in fighting back that double jeopardy.

Re-moulding the intractable and incurable worries about *individual security* into the urge to defend *collective identity* is politically expedient and may bring handsome electoral rewards. A state television survey conducted in October last year showed that more Danes were concerned with the "foreigners' presence" than with growing unemployment, deteriorating environment or any other trouble. As *The International Herald Tribune* of 17 November 1997 reported, the majority view found resonance in the resented foreigners' sentiments: 22 years old Suzanne Lazare, settled in Copenhagen from Trinidad 12 years earlier, told the IHT correspondent that she was thinking of leaving Denmark. "Their eyes have changed" - she said of her hosts. "The Danes look down on you now. People are becoming very cold." And then came a shrewd, insightful observation: "Funny thing, it's toward themselves, too…"

Perceptive comment it was indeed. Coldness against the "foreigners in our midst", the aliens as neighbours and the neighbours cast as aliens, signals the fall of temperature in all human relations, all over the place. Cold are the people who have long forgotten how warm human togetherness may be; how much consolation, comfort, encouragement and just ordinary pleasure one may derive from sharing one's lot and one's hopes with others - "others like me", or more exactly others who are "like me" precisely for the reason of *sharing* my plight, my misery and my dream of happiness.

In his latest novel, *L'Identité*, Milan Kundera ponders historical fate of human friendship. Once upon a time being friends meant to stand shoulder to shoulder in the battle; to be ready to sacrifice one's welfare, one's life if need be, for a cause which can be defended only as common and in common. Life was fragile and full of dangers; friendship made it a

little more solid and a little safer. The threats to any one of the friends could be averted, the dangers could be made somewhat less terminal, if faced by friends together and resisted in unison. Now, however, neither threats nor dangers are likely to be cured or even made less painful by the friends' united stand. They are, purely or simply, *threats and dangers of different kind* - as if meant to hit each of their victims separately, each one in his or her own time, and destined to be suffered alone. The present-day individual miseries are not synchronised; to each door catastrophe knocks selectively, on different days, at different hours. The visits are apparently unconnected. And the disasters are not misdeeds of an enemy whom one can name, point a finger to, unite against and stand up to together. They are the dealings of mysterious forces without fixed address - hiding under the curious and baffling names of financial markets, global terms of trade, competitiveness, supply and demand. Of what possible use can friends be when one loses one's job in another "downsizing" exercise, wakes up to the obsoleteness of the hard won skills, to the neighbourhood or the family or the partnership suddenly falling apart?

To the kind of disasters which befall people nowadays, Kundera suggests, other people may react in two ways only. They may join the hue-and-cry, add their voice to the chorus blaming the victims, ridicule and deride the good-for-nothings who brought the bad luck upon themselves; such people the hapless victim may justly view as enemies. Or they can show compassion and abstain from rubbing salt into the wound; they may pretend that nothing happened and go on as before, yet all the same do nothing to undo the damage - admitting their impotence and afraid of adding insult to injury. The others of this kind - the restrained, subtle and polite people - come as close as possible to the idea of friends as it can reasonably be conceived nowadays. The choice is now between malice and indifference. Friendship in the old 'one for all, all for one" style has been all but squeezed out. No wonder people are getting cold...

It is not that we have lost the humanity, the charm and the warmth that came easily to our ancestors; it is rather that our hardships are of the kind which only on rare occasions can be cured or mollified by sharing even the warmest of sentiments. The sufferings which we tend to experience most of the time do not add up and so they do not unite their victims. Our sufferings divide and isolate: they set us apart, they tear up the delicate tissue of human solidarities.

The contemporary hardships and sufferings are dispersed and scattered; and so is the dissent which they spawn. The dispersion of dissent, the impossibility to condense it and to anchor in a common cause and unload against common culprit, only makes the pains yet more bitter. Contemporary world is a container full to the brim with free-floating fear and frustration desperately seeking outlets. Life is over-saturated with somber apprehensions and sinister premonitions, all the more frightening for their elusiveness and non-specifity. Like in the case of other over-saturated solutions, a speck of dust is enough to trigger a violent condensation.

Twenty years ago (in *To Double Business Bind,* Baltimore Up) René Girard considered hypothetically what could have happened in equally hypothetical pre-social times when dissension was scattered throughout the population, and feud and violence, fed by the cut-throat competition for survival, tore communities apart. Trying to answer that question, Girard came forward with a self-consciously and deliberately mythological account of the "birth of unity". The decisive step, Girard ruminated, must have been a selection of a victim in whose killing all members of the population would take part, thereby becoming united in murder - helpers or accessories after the fact. That spontaneous act of co-ordinated action reforged dispersed enmities and diffuse aggression into a clear division between propriety and impropriety, legitimate and illegitimate violence, innocence and guilt. It bound the *solitary* (and frightened) beings into *solidary* (and confident) community.

Girard's story is, let me repeat, a fable, an etiological myth - a story which does not pretend to historical truth, only to making sense of the unknown Origins. Like other etiological myths, it does not tell us what actually did happen *in the past;* it is an attempt to make sense out of the *current* presence of a phenomenon which is bizarre and difficult to grasp, and to account for its continuous presence and re-birth. The true message of Girard's story is that *whenever* dissent is scattered and unfocused, and whenever mutual suspicion and hostility rule, the only way forward or back to communal solidarity, to a secure habitat, is to pick up a joint enemy and to unite forces in an act of joint atrocity with a common target.

Girard's is a sad and sordid story. But it goes some way towards "making sense" of the resurgence of tribal hostility which does not seem reasonable in the light of the genuine causes of the current anxiety and fears. One should beware of going too far, however, and to assume that its evident sense-making capacity renders Girard's story the only scenario which these anxieties and fears make plausible and feasible. There are other scenarios as well - like the one emphatically restated by John Rex (in "Ethnic Identity and the Nation State", *Social Identities* 1/1995): one of the "public political culture and a political society based upon the idea of equality of opportunity, but often also on a conception of at least a minimum of social rights for all, i.e. equality of outcome". We will be well advised to remember that neither of the alternative itineraries is a predetermined choice, that both are but plausible scenarios, and that the choice between them and the way they are staged depends each time on the actors who play the leading characters, but also on the crowds of anonymous extras and stagehands.

The decisive factor is that, whatever the future successes of the preachers of national homogeneity and the promoters of the anti-immigration measures may be, one can be pretty sure that Europe is to remain - for a long time yet - *a poly-cultural* site. Cultural variety in our part of the world is likely to increase rather than diminish. Cultural convergence, blending of

cultures, assimilation of the weaker by the "stronger" (that is power-supported) cultures is not however a likely prospect, while the present trend to project new neo-tribal cultural combinations and invention of new traditions is bound to go on. It is becoming more and more evident that rather than being a battle-ground of complete and integrated "cultures" of distinct *cultural totalities* engaged in mutual warfare or exchange, the present-day cultural stage is better seen as a matrix capable of generating a set of endless and varied permutations. *Cultural plurality* does not have to mean *plurality of cultures;* even less (as Alain Touraine recently pointed out) does it have to mean plurality of culture-defined communities. Whatever road to integration is chosen, it starts from diversity, leads through diversity and is unlikely to reach beyond It, at least not in a foreseeable future.

If this is the case, then the choice between Girard's and Rex's scenarios is far from being just a matter of an academic interest. It involves the value which our civilisation rightly considered to be the main, perhaps even the only, title to its glory. Its past readiness to recognise sense and dignity in alternative ways of life, to seek and to find grounds for peaceful and solidary coexistence which are not dependent on compliance with one, homogenous and uncontested pattern of life. The choice between scenarios is also a deeply ethical choice; what depends on that choice, is whether the form of life the chosen strategy is meant to preserve is worth defending in the first place. The future of Europe and every part of it depends on our ability and willingness to learn to live with cultural diversity.

And it so happens that learning to live with diversity is also the condition of coming to grips with the true causes of contemporary discontents. The option portrayed by Girard is not just cruel and inhuman it is also *ineffective.* Only with that option out of the way, we will be able to confront the genuine, deep roots of the fears and anxieties of which the present-day discontents are born.

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