



Topic: Under a cloak of terror: violence and armed conflict in Europe

Description:

What can terror mean from a conceptual point of view? What does it mean for people? Do populations feel it? Is terror the same as fear? Has Europe **always** been under a cloak of terror? Is there a feeling of terror even during periods of “peace”? Causes, characteristics, permanencies, changes, consequences, overcoming trauma, post-war coexistence, resilience, solidarity, legal implications in terms of human rights, mass mobilization for a culture of peace are the main issues focused on this topic. When the questions are more than the answers, we believe we are going on the right path.

Concepts

Absurdism (Feeling / Sense of the absurd)

Total war

Industrialisation of War

Colonialism

Imperialism

Trauma

Memories of War

Propaganda

Heritage

Totalitarianism

Genocide

Socially Acute Questions (SAQ)

Resentment

Culture of peace



Chronological Axis

The axis covers a period of more than two centuries, which begins in the second half of the 18th century and is extended to the present day. This option is justified by the need to exam it carefully, allowing a deeper focus on the contemporary period, sorrowfully fertile in episodes of armed conflicts and cloaks of terror that covered the whole Europe.





The war from within: weapons, soldiers, and war spaces.

In “The Art of War”, written by Sun Tzu more than two thousand years ago, the warrior-philosopher prophesied one of the most widely generalised maxims, accepted by those who see in the military exercise an authentic form of “artistic expression”. In fact, the great strategist states “the ability to obtain victory by changing and adapting according to the opponent”, in a Darwinian logic applied to conflict. As Tim Newark writes, “adaptation to changing circumstances is indeed the key to military success. In war, victory depends more on ingenuity, creativity and innovation than on brute-force.” In other words, the outcome of a war depends on how many weapons and soldiers are placed on the battlefield.

Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) can also be mentioned, when he stated that “war is a mere continuation of policy by other means”, anticipating “two centuries of increasingly pointless, financially disastrous, and above all, lethal conflicts”, “culminating in the discovery and proliferation of nuclear weapons, have rendered this venerable institution virtually incapable of performing any of the roles classically assigned to it” (O’Connell, 1989: 3).

The paradigm of War shifts as it becomes more surgical, deadly, “clean”. The professionalism of those who handle this machine take on grotesque contours in a time when, in the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski: “war today is a luxury that only the weak and the poor can afford”.

In fact, over the last seventy years, is safe to say that the war between powers holding a nuclear arsenal would only happen by “accident or madness”, mainly because, in such scenario, murders and suicides would happen. Therefore, the possession of nuclear and chemical weapons has turned out to be convincing enough to dissuade the most powerful countries from embarking on a path of no return.

However, deterrence is neither infallible nor capable of preventing conventional warfare between countries that do not possess nuclear arsenals. And there are numerous examples that show “the ingenuity, creativity and innovation” of those who create weapons with what they have “more at hand”. Rape or the sterilisation of human beings may not be new, but the width and science invested in the profitability of this “weapon of war” has certainly gained expressive contours. In fact, this would only be surprising if we were unaware that “weapons are among man’s oldest and most significant artifacts; it makes sense that their development would be affected by their users’ attitudes toward them” (O’Connell, 1989: 4-5).

Weapons

The relationship between human beings and weapons is much more intimate and complex than we think or admit. The length of time in which weapons are dealt with, the profound effect they have on political and military systems, and the psychological impact that comes from the fact that “pulling the trigger” can make the difference between life and death are powerful enough arguments to defend that weapons are very special devices, artifacts with great significance.





Nonetheless, the arguments presented in the previous paragraph convincingly compete for a very seductive idea: a non-human participation. This is a dangerous illusion, because at the beginning and end of every sequence of development is a point where human choice can and must be exercised. This same choice is as valid when we talk about pulling a trigger as when we refer to the use of chemical and biological weapons (banned by the international community after the Great War).

In the shoes of a soldier

a) From the peak of the efficiency of light infantry visible in the performance of French and English forces in the Napoleonic wars, where compact formations, organised in columns or squares, defeated the enemy b) passing through the severe test of resilience and the soldiers' spirit of sacrifice in the Crimean War (1853-56), due to Russia's inhospitable climate and soil; c) realising the legacy of the Civil War (1861-65) that led to the signing of the First Geneva Convention in 1863, with the agreement of a series of premises that went down in history; d) observing the "return" to the inhumanity of the War – which Jean-Henri Dunant fought against – with World War I e) and the worsening of the savagery visible throughout the 20th century with the affirmation of total war capable of making one believe that the end of history had been reached; f) ending with reflections on what the soldier of the future will be – a man or a robot (?) – to be in the soldier's shoes is to walk on the razor's edge and make their daily life a normality that remains in the lives of those who go to war long after their return.

War spaces

Between 1815 and 1914, Europe experienced a period of peace between the great powers, a calm feeling that contrasted with the course of previous centuries. If we ignore insurrection phases related to the unification of Germany and Italy, between 1845 and 1871, we can consider that the armed conflicts had little expression because they remained in marginal lands of the interior or surroundings of the Ottoman Empire. However, this climate of rotten peace does not disarm countries during times of peace, which allow themselves to be invaded by a wave of nationalism aggravated by the growth of tensions.

Europe considers itself to be on a stage of war, either hot or cold, several times throughout the 20th century. The Great War, with its muddy trenches, the Spanish Civil War, with Guernica serving as a training center for German aviation, the World War II, sweeping almost the entire old continent as if a cloak of terror had fallen over the whole land, and the relocation of conflicts to other stages after 1945 (there was not a single day without a conflict in any part of the world – Korea, Vietnam, colonial and post-colonial wars...), as a result of a new world order, are the great moments that mark the history of war and peace during the last two centuries.





Colonialism and Imperialism in the History of Europe.

Colonialism and Imperialism (first contemporary moment: late 18th century and early 19th century)

In the 19th century, Europe lived under the influence of nationalism and liberalism. Some Nation-States emerge such as Greece, Belgium, or Romania; others such as Italy and Germany are moving towards unification.

Meanwhile, in the early 1800s, America went through **decolonisation processes**, however, hegemonic ambitions led to **aggressive imperialism** in European territory. In one sense or another, the American Revolution and the French Revolution set the pace of the great ideological and political transformations in the 19th century.

In the 1770s and 1780s, European lights illuminated America. The protagonists of the American Revolution claim to be Locke's supporters of the philosophers of enlightenment, however, its implementation will also influence European events. The Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, in May 1775, and, above all, the Declaration of Independence of the 4th of July 1776, claimed the beginning of the end of European colonialism in the American continent.

In France, the end of feudal society implied a period of great instability, where the conservatism of several European countries (for example Prussia and Austria) faced Napoleon's imperialist ambitions that had been evidenced in Italy's campaign against the Austrians. His conquests and defeats created a European remodelling sponsored by the Austrian Metternich, the British Castlereagh, the French Talleyrand, and Tsar Alexander I at the Congress of Vienna.

Colonialism and Imperialism (second contemporary moment: late 19th century and early 20th century)

In the last quarter of the 19th century, European nations shared almost the entire African territory, expanding, or creating vast colonial empires. The Conference in Berlin (1884-1885) made neo-colonialism official in the 14 participating countries ^[1]. The new configuration of Africa, for example, remained until the end of World War II. Nations, especially the industrialised ones, took advantage of the universal exhibitions to flaunt their economic capacity, but also their colonial grandeur. This neo-expansionism had tragic implications for the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Australia, concerning the exploitation of resources as well as demographic and social consequences (new diseases, mortality, migrations, working conditions).

World War I shows other features of imperialism in Europe (each belligerent party considers its cause just and its interests rightful) and a strengthening of colonial positions with military mobilisation including the defence of territories, especially African ones. The end of WWI marks the closure of European supremacy in the world, but also the emergence of pacifist movements and the strengthening of a "united Europe" (Pan-European movement) ^[2]. The signing of the Locarno Agreements (October 1925) between Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, and



Czechoslovakia, which pledge to abide by common borders, seem to be a brake on new imperialist attempts.

[1] Italy, France, Great Britain, Denmark, Spain, United States, Germany, Ottoman Empire (modern-day Turkey), Portugal, Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden, Russia, and Austro-Hungarian Empire (modern-day Austria and Hungary).

[2] See the success of the book by the Danish author Arzt Heerfordt, *Nova Europa* (New Europe), or the pan-European ideas of the Flemish Coudenhove-Kalergi, among others.

Colonialism and Imperialism (third contemporary moment: since the mid-twentieth century)

The rise of authoritarian regimes in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Hungary, the USSR, Spain, and Germany allowed reigniting the flames of colonialism and imperialism. Borders are broken again, and the historical reminiscences of former empires leave deep ideological, political, and military marks. Europe between 1939 and 1945 will be the scene of a border fluidity that will shatter old ties of 1800s nationalism and leave internal wounds and traumas that will take time to be sublimated and integrated into a peaceful coexistence.

The destroyed, dominated, and divided Europe that emerged in 1945 gave the concept of imperialism a more ideological content, with repercussions on military organisations and on economic structures capable of creating blocs that only coexist based on the fear of confrontation. The two rising powers – the United States and the Soviet Union – embody the leadership of a geostrategy with imperialist objectives that will last until 1985, the year that marks the split between Brezhnev's immobility and the reforms proposed by Gorbachev. Following Spinelli's initiative and the Treaty of San Francisco, in 1952 (establishing the European Defence Community), in December 1985 the Single European Act was adopted and an agreement was born between the Ten to review the Treaty of Rome and establish, before December 1992, a borderless economy. The imagery of imperialism gives way to the will (mirage?) of cooperation and solidarity.

The end of World War II also confronted Europe with the need to abandon quickly, willingly, or unwillingly, its colonial possessions. The two great areas of colonisation were South Asia and Africa. From 1945 to 1962, decolonisation took place in two stages: the first covered Near and Middle East and Southeast Asia; the second that began in 1955 reports mainly to Africa. The United Kingdom, Netherlands, Italy, France, and Portugal will be the most affected countries by this process.

Decolonisation will be implemented by zones: first the Middle East – where the British had to renounce their influence in Egypt and Iraq (independent since 1922 and 1932), abandon the Transjordan mandate in 1946 and, two years later, Palestine; France



granted independence to Syria and Lebanon (1946). In South Asia, three major powers had to withdraw: England (India), France (Indochina) and Netherlands (Indonesia).

1955 is the year that will mark this sense of (de)colonisation. The Bandung conference was held in Indonesia this year, which, unanimously, intended to accelerate and generalise decolonisation. The neutralism of *Third World countries* in the conflict between the two blocs is proclaimed, but above all the announcement of total decolonisation. The United States and the USSR even decided to limit the admission of new members to the United Nations until decolonised people are liberated. World War II had profoundly altered the relations between the colonies and the metropolises, having the new countries the support from the USSR, for ideological reasons, and from the USA, for sentimental and historical reasons.

Borders as “scars of History”. Changes and permanence in Europe.

Space: stability and tension on Europe's borders

The European Union has around 14,000 kilometres of borders. The continent, from the Atlantic to the Urals, has more than 37,000 km and about 90 km of interstate borders. The multiplicity of political borders, which often have the same amount of languages, has always been the hallmark of Europe.

Some are among the oldest in the world (Portugal-Spain; Spain-France; Andorra; Switzerland; Norway-Sweden), but half of them are very recent, dating from 1989 onwards. Representing a quarter of world borders and recognised states by the UN, it has only about 8% of the world's population, which does not prevent it from playing a very particular and important role in the world context.

The European space, writes the geographer Michel Foucher, is the result of reduced, fragmented units, crafted by History and the ever-living aspirations of sovereignty, even for entities with uncertain viability.

Structural fragmentation is still seen in our contemporary world, such as in the war in Ukraine, the return of the post-Brexit secession of Scotland or other regions in the United Kingdom, whether abroad or within the European Union, as proved by the case of Spain or Belgium.

The impact of the collapse of the Iron Curtain, even before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the bloody dismemberment of the Yugoslav Federation, the autonomy of spaces in Czechoslovakia, this constant tension between territories led the historian Krzysztof Pomian to state in 1990 that “l'Histoire de l'Europe est celle de ses frontières”.

This uncertainty and tension is reflected in the memories of its inhabitants. The feelings that this situation provokes are profoundly disturbing and traumatising: exalted passions, memories recovered in the present, individual experiences that become collectivised, institutional records that claim ownership of certain territories, pedagogical and didactic concerns so that future generations can live together





democratically, cultural memories that convey representations and imply individual and collective behaviour due to the borders.

Most significant moments in contemporary history:

1. The Napoleonic Empire

Napoleonic Europe brought us an ephemeral spatial construction, but with implications of an ideological and political nature, expressed in the Congress of Vienna. The reactions that the *expansion* triggered in Spain, Austria, Prussia, Russia as well as in the Kingdom of Naples helped to reinforce identities and prevent future abuses. The Vienna meeting will imply a simplification of the political map of Central Europe: the Kingdom of the Netherlands brought together the United Provinces and the Austrian Netherlands; Russia, Austria and Prussia benefited from the dismemberment of Poland and, in relation to Prussia, it also gained Westphalia and Rhineland on the west side, becoming one of the most important members of the Germanic Confederation that included 39 States (kingdoms, principalities and free cities) under the presidency of the Emperor of Austria. The Austrian Empire continued to dominate the Danubian regions with German, Magyar and Slavic population, having in Italy the Lombard-Venetian kingdom. The rest of the Italian peninsula was divided: the most important states were the Kingdom of Naples, the states of the Church and the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. To the east the tsar kept Finland and Bessarabia and dominated an autonomous kingdom of Poland, on the surroundings of Warsaw.

1861 to 1871 marks the transition from nations to states with the unification of Italy and Germany. The first, carried out by Vitor Manuel helped by Cavour, resulted in his proclamation as King of Italy, in 1861. The second resulted from the meeting of 21 States around Prussia and having Bismarck as the protagonist, which led to the proclamation of the German Empire in January 1871. In fact, the creation of this Empire with 41 million inhabitants and rapid economic growth will jeopardise the European balance.

2. Europe in 1914 (p.323 – Idem) and in 1918 (p. 329, Idem). Unsolved issues (ver p. 331 com legenda)

“Europe at the beginning of the 20th century imposed its dominion over the world and believed to form it, but there was an obstacle to this action: the internal divisions of the continent and national conflicts posed a threat that could be deadly” (CARPENTIER and LEBRUN: 1993, p. 353)

Europe in 1914 presents rivalries of influence and prestige externalised in premonitory alliances of a future conflict. The Triple Alliance of 1882 includes Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. The Triple Agreement from 1907 contemplates the harmony between France, the United Kingdom and Russia. The generalisation will go through allied countries of one group and the other. At the beginning of the war,



there were few neutral European territories: Switzerland, Spain, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and Albania.

In 1918, the spatial rupture between the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman empires was visible, as well as the emergence of new states, especially on the eastern front. Many of the identity ties created throughout the 19th century to justify certain countries are broken and the borders resulting from the War respect political agreements more than the characteristics of their inhabitants.

The borders that the Treaties of 1919-1920 imposed made the fragmentation of Eastern Europe stand out, forcing the existence of States where there were no Nations, but a tangle of nationalities. Problems with German or Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland or Yugoslavia are the evidence of this border fragility. The Treaties gather nationalities with religious, economic and cultural differences in a single State. This heterogeneity will cause difficulties in inclusion and means a dangerous seed in the medium-term.

3. Europe of 1944-1945

“Six years of war, triggered by Hitler's ambition and by the impotence of the democracies and the USSR to understand each other, led Europe to the downfall... On the ruins, two powers - one of which was not European and the other one not all of it was European - produced two split, exhausted, dependent Europes.” (CARPENTIER and LEBRUN: 1993, p. 413)

One of the most visible consequences of the “post Yalta order” was the loss of Central European identity with the imposition of the East-West dichotomy. Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill, when defining the spheres of influence, accepted the establishment in Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania pro-Soviet regimes. Germany is divided and the Berlin Wall built in 1961, which is the symbol of the European division, par excellence. From 1945 onwards, as Tony Judt says, “Central Europe becomes invisible”. The Nazi genocide of Europe's Jews, the expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe, and migrations of population between countries that were created after the War, dilute the region's identity and diversity. The return to this space will take place after 1989 following the events that marked the end of the Cold War.

4. The European construction

The two post-World War II Europes created separate worlds: the West on the path to prosperity and unity and the East subject to Soviet authority and ideology. It was only in 1989 that the wall that separated them collapsed and the path of reconstituting the unity became possible again.

The creation of the OEEC, on the 16th of April 1948, responsible for the management of American aid creates a cooperation between Europeans. A movement in favour of the creation of a European federation gave rise to the Hague Congress in May 1948,



where the foundations of the Council of Europe (1949) were built, symbolically established in Strasbourg (a city that reflected the Franco-German antagonism), and thus it became a *forum* for reconciliation, but also for economic, political and socio-cultural cooperation.

The transition from simple cooperation to a supranational community was due to the impulse of Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman (May 1950). The creation of a common European high authority independent of governments was the first step taken in the construction of Europe. The successive accessions since 1957 (25th of March, Treaty of Rome) show a growing spatial stain, but also the integration of different political, economic, social, cultural and religious sensitivities, sometimes with difficulties in accepting common non-negotiable principles, in terms of human rights, justice, solidarity, and cooperation.

5. From the fall of the Wall to the present (1989 to 2021)

Some predicted the end of History, or the end of conflicts, painting a radiant horizon of access to freedom. The future, however, brought weaknesses and a recurrence of historical border tensions that were thought to be resolved.

The sequence of revolutions in the communist system – Poland, Hungary, GDR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania – share the demands of free parliamentary elections, new constitutions and a new concept of citizenship. These young democracies express the desire to quickly integrate the European community, where the political and moral values of freedom and democracy would help to accelerate transformations.

The reunification of Germany, sponsored by Gorbachev – “Il est claire à présent que la réunification est inévitable, et nous n’avons aucun droit moral de nous opposer”¹ – and implemented by Willy Brandt and Helmut Kohl did not make the ideological nuances disappear but instead brought access to behaviours and archives (Stasi, for example) which opened new wounds and traumas that nowadays still seek to be overcome.

The division of Europe has given way to ghosts. East-West historical differences reappear with every crisis: Iraq, 2003; refugees 2015; Ukraine 2021. From the Bastille to the Wall, the borders left scars that only a Democratic Culture grounded in historical context can lessen and integrate into more solidary and cooperative values that guarantee respect for the essential (human rights) while marginalising the accessory.

¹ FRANÇOIS, Étienne et SERRIER, Thomas (2017). *Europa. Notre Histoire*. Paris: Éditions des Arènes, p.306.



On the other side of the war: economic and social consequences for civilians in armed conflicts.

According to Arendt (2006, p. 124), “we know these processes of devastation throughout history”, as it is mainly in this curricular component that armed conflicts of greater or lesser scale and their consequences are studied.

In fact, wars, such as other subjects that oscillate between history and memory, more than being analysed in a logic of regret or guilt in the face of a painful or uncomfortable past/present (Traverso, 2012), need to be thought of historically, “sin simplificación ni falsificación de ningún tipo” (Morin, 2009, p.92), stimulating skills such as empathy, argumentation or multiperspective.

In this sense, what concerns to the teaching and learning of History at the Secondary Education, the study of 'the other side of the war' can focus on the geopolitical, social and economic changes resulting from the two World Wars 1914-18 and 1939-45), without “denying the shocking of the facts, [or] eliminating the unprecedented from them” (Arendt, 1989, p. 12). The development of their historical awareness, preferably approaching the ontogenetic level (Rüsen, 2010), will involve a thoughtful analysis of aspects such as two ideological models, two economic conceptions and two disparate, even antagonistic, visions of social organisation.

In the first case, those four years shook the foundations of Europe, now marked by an unprecedented world conflict, contributing to the end of old empires and the emergence of new states. If in various parts of Europe parliamentary democracy gained ground, in the Soviet Union a dictatorship of communist nature emerged. Even so, the economic (inflation, public debt, constraints on investments and exports,...) and social difficulties resulting from that conflict, as well as the problems associated with the expansion of socialism around the world, favoured the emergence, in power, of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, controllers of public life and repressors of individual liberties.

With regard to the second case, the 'total war' not only involved the military, but also led millions of civilians to situations of mass execution, forced labour or deportations in absentia. Therefore, it proved to be a fertile ground for massive violations of human rights, as stated by Amnesty International. In turn, the weakening of fundamental political institutions or the alteration of the current social fabric has become a fundamental element for the reformulation of norms, values or ideologies previously defended (Colletta & Cullen, 2000).

From then on, and until 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world became bipolar at political, economic and social levels. If, on the one hand, with the western being influenced by the United States, liberalism was affirmed based on the principle of individual freedom, on the other hand, the eastern dominated by the Soviet Union, prevailed the Marxist conception that emphasised collectivity to the detriment of the individual.

It is important to stress, after World War II, the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC, or European Union nowadays), especially as a symbol of the union



that aimed at economic prosperity and, again, greater political influence disappeared in the meantime as a result of world armed conflicts.

Even considering that “*pensar la barbarie es contribuir a recrear al humanismo*” (Morin, 2009, p. 94), the investigation of topics such as the outbreak of the first independence movements for the emancipation of colonised people from the first to the second half of the 20th century will be inevitable, as well as the persistence of religious, ethnic or nationalist tensions at the end of the Cold War. Those movements, with an unequivocal impact on Sub-Saharan Africa, looked to the recovery of the national and cultural identity of the countries occupied by European colonists, in a logic of self-determination and action against economic backwardness. In the Balkans, after the end of the division of the world into two distinct blocks, various crimes, including genocide and war, took place in the form of bombings against local populations, concentration camps and violent massacres of civilians. Religious rivalries or ethnic cleansing actions have spread to countries such as Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia, as well as to the Kosovo region.

Despite efforts in this direction, the United Nations, created in 1945 with the aim of maintaining international peace and security and repressing acts of aggression, has not been able to counteract such harmful effects on the lives of many civilians. Regardless of the work being done in the opposite direction to the armed conflicts, “*la barbarie de la guerra resulta por lo demás inseparable de los tiempos históricos*” (Morin, 2009, p. 17).

In turn, the transformations related to the mentality of individuals, whether their visible reflections in behaviour, in the arts, in literature or in science, deserve didactic exploration, so that History is not interpreted as the subject that only studies wars and battles, alienating from other parallel and distinct memories (Traverso, 2005).

Still in the first half of the 20th century, following the world conflict, Europeans also began to interpret the world from other lenses: female emancipation took place, namely through the conquests of the right to political participation; positivism is questioned, with science being 'fallible' and knowledge subjective; visual arts and literary manifestations acquire subversive contours, sometimes showing more refined techniques and breaking the old canons. Since the mid-century, it is possible to recognise the emergence of a global society, marked by the role of information and communication technologies or by the generalised civic commitment against environmental degradation and social exclusion, as well as by recurrent scientific innovations or by the urban culture with reflections in several artistic domains.

Then there are the daily changes, banal and linked to each one's life, such as illnesses associated with the Hiroshima and Nagasaki radiation or the psychological effects resulting from daily experiences of war, such as anxiety, depression or obsessive-compulsive disorders. In addition to all the points mentioned, wars, whether from another century or the current conflicts that, for example, put Russia and Ukraine in confrontation, are responsible for situations of greater insecurity for civilians, poor mobility or reduced job opportunities. Furthermore, the refugee status repeatedly



becomes a reality, due to the destruction of housing, the absence of sanitary and food conditions or the high levels of pollution.

To observe, discuss and understand such scenarios, perhaps in the context of the classroom, is, in some way, to agree with Morin (2009, p. 94), “pensar la barbarie es contribuir a recrear el humanismo”.

Propaganda, speeches, and cultures war before and during armed conflicts in the History of Europe.

National identity, “una mirada inicial y afectiva que es previa a la enseñanza de la historia e incluso a la alfabetización” (Carretero & Kriger, 2006, p. 3), is also a cultural product, fed by everyday speeches and created symbols.

In times of armed conflicts, and even before them, that identity tends to be particularly exalted, namely through propaganda and artistic manifestations. Above all, because images and words “build public visions [...], create representations, reinforce stereotypes, synthesise imaginaries, interfere in our resignation about the lived ‘reality’” (Maia & Heras, 2020, p. 7).

History shows several wars where propaganda was used to convince the population of its need in favour of freedom and the importance of their voluntarism and commitment to a collective cause. For instance, during World War I, artistic and intellectual movements, of young or older individuals, highlighted the advantages of a pro-war attitude, fighting against social immobility and appealing to a more evolved society, made of 'new' men and a 'new' homeland. Although the importance of *enlightening historical learning* is recognised and that allows to circumvent the “fanaticism and [the] instrumentalisation of History” (Aprendizagens Essenciais, 2018, p. 7), at that point of History the values of virility, camaraderie or intuition were exalted, particularly to manipulate public opinion and ensure that it showed war as an unequivocal means of social regeneration, personal freedom, and modernisation.

Thus, it worked as a stimulus to the collective hatred towards the opponent, the enemy, responsible for the war and its most negative consequences. That instinct easily gave rise to an effective 'transmission chain' for the circulation, and resignation, of certain “representations of the State, national identity, future projects and the nation” (Maia & Heras, 2020, p. 9).

Being that first world conflict a “positive ultra-realism” (Neves, 1987, p. 43), propagandistic actions and respectful speeches aimed at enemies to naturally appeal their surrender, mentioning the desire for peace, pain, evidence of superiority.

On the contrary, in the antechamber of World War II, the so-called German counter-propaganda, safeguarded national honour and blamed the allies for the situation. Somehow, a certain mysticism and traditionalism seemed to be reborn, also associated with the submission of culture to a nationalist and even racist criteria. Therefore, the more or less metaphorical images of a confident victory and a



necessary war contributed to “forging collective identities and establishing cultural standards” (Maia & Heras, 2020, p. 7).

In this and in other historical armed conflicts, official narratives become visible, in different contexts and in different ways, which often recovered, uncritically, the performances of personalities and the most glorious historical events, made the actions of the group stand out romantically to the detriment of others, opted for essentialist foundations (VanSledright, 2008). Therefore, the interpretation of the facts was limited and frankly biased.

However, there is no such single and finished narratives and “History is not just written by winners and majorities: cultural, ethnic and others” (Aprendizagens Essenciais, 2018, p. 7), it is imperative to explore this eminent aspect in a context of classroom with students of different age groups and nationalities. Also, in the sense of stopping the trivialisation of war, which occurred after some armed conflicts that involved European countries, such as the Spanish Civil War, the Portuguese Colonial War or the Balkan War, in the form of military board games, 'lead soldiers' toys, touristic tours of torture or battlefields, cemeteries for the cult of fallen soldiers.

Occasionally, the images that circulated favoured the ‘banalisation of evil’, in the words of Arendt (1989), as the illustrated scenarios were peaceful, the wounds not bloody and the caregivers appeared to be gentle and calm. Somewhat, a nurturing of feelings of compassion and hope, as well as a tribute to the 'heroic deaths'.

During the Cold War period, until the symbolic fall of the Berlin Wall, perhaps the ideological fanaticism prevailing in each of the opposing blocs gave rise to narratives with different formats that, above all, *demonised the 'enemy'*. Appearing as advertising posters, sometimes the just cause and the triumph of good were defended, sometimes onslaughts were discouraged (for example air attacks); on the other side, through exaggeration, distortion, and a steeped official vision (Lasswell, 1927); through comics, the attention was captured by the use of colour, by disguised criticism, by the animated character; caricatures made it possible to control anguish through ridicule.

It should be noted that, concerning the war, a certain culture of resistance has always been clear. Literature of social contestation, for example, emerged as ideologically committed and mobilising, for instance, André Malraux portrayed the anti-Franco resistance (A Esperança, 1937) and Ernest Hemingway or John Steinbeck questioned, through their books, the promotion of war and its defining dehumanisation. Certain explicit and/or provocative television images brought about the end of certain armed conflicts. Protest music, full of literal and second meanings, was a serious attempt, as well as quality cinematographic work, to promote “a more solid historical awareness, a more reflective identity, a more intelligent and adequate civic intervention” (Alves & Alves, 2020, p. 29).

Moving away from presentism or even everyday nationalism (Edensor, 2002), it is important to understand that propaganda, speeches or cultural manifestations have been attracting supporters along with common sense that is insufficiently



questioning, reflective or rigorous. Therefore, the preponderance of “mobilising a critical thinking based on the consolidation of a democratic culture” (Aprendizagens Essenciais, 2018, p. 19) becomes increasingly clear to all those who are citizens and part of a society. Naturally, from a History that is built with criteria and methodology.

Narratives and uncomfortable heritage in Europe: genocide, ethnic cleansing and socially acute questions

Talking about narratives and uncomfortable heritage leads us to remember that “history is a narrative, a writing of the past according to the modalities and rules of a craft [...] that tries to answer questions raised by memory. History is born, therefore, from memory, freeing itself from it by putting the past at a distance” (Traverso, 2005).

Often, the narratives of the most uncomfortable legacies are crystallised because of the subjectivity of memory, seizing the strength of the lived experience, anchored in what we witness, either as protagonists or as extras. “Memory is qualitative, singular, little concerned with comparisons, with contextualization, or with generalisations. Whoever carries it does not need to provide evidence. Reports of the past given by witnesses – as long as they are not conscious liars – will always be their truth, which is the image of the past deposited in them (Traverso, 2005).

Therefore, the different narratives and representations of a phenomenon, a process or an event often bring to a boil the feeling of reckoning with the past, as if there were debts to settle whenever discordant voices are heard.

Alongside individual narratives – and not forgetting collective memories – there are official memories, supported by States, which perpetuate or withhold the “ghosts of the past”, making them underground, hidden and forbidden.

Even so, observing the pain of “others” – assuming that we are oblivious to our own pain – does not leave us indifferent. At least it should not...

Ignorance and contempt for the “ghosts of the past” can lead to ignorance, fanaticism and the instrumentalisation of History.

To “Resentment in History”, in line with what Marc Ferro wrote at the beginning of the new millennium, trying to find in the remote past the roots of actions observed in the present.

Recently, Johann Michel, in the article “Le devoir de mémoire” (“Sciences Humaines”, no. 315, June of 2019, pp. 20-25) took stock of the conceptual framework that the Social Sciences and Humanities and, in particular, History were incorporated in the approach of these themes. This article is particularly interesting because it brings us face to face with some dangers that are sometimes forgotten or underestimated, such as the fact that “le devoir de mémoire peut conduire à un culte du passé plus ressassé que réfléchi qui risque d'inhiber le présent” or that “a saturée mémoire par la douleur inhibits the construction of nouveaux horizons d'attente et charrie avec elle le repli des individus et des groupes sur eux-mêmes” (p. 25).





Genocide

The concept “genocide” was coined by Polish lawyer Raphaël Lemkin in 1944 in the book “Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation – Analysis of Government – Proposals for Redress”, following the Nazi “final solution to the Jewish question” during the Holocaust (or Shoah), but not forgetting the systematic murder of certain groups of people that took place before the World War II, such as the massacre of the Armenian people by the Turks or the “Great Famine” (Holodomor) in 1931-32 to which Ukraine was destined by Stalin's will.

In 1946, the General Assembly of the United Nations recognised “genocide” as a crime under international law, and on the 9th of December 1948, it achieved its own status as an independent crime in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, ratified by 152 States (data from July 2019).

As the Convention embodies principles of international law, even countries that have not signed the Convention are bound by the principle that genocide is a crime prohibited by international law.

Ethnic Cleansing

The term “ethnic cleansing” began to be used in the 1990s, arising from the conflict in the territory of the former Yugoslavia and seems to be inspired by the literal translation of the Serbo-Croatian expression “etničko čišćenje”. Although the term is not recognised by international law, it has been used in Security Council and General Assembly [United Nations] resolutions and has been recognised in ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) judgments and indictments. It was, in fact, within the scope of the interim report S/25274, from 1993, produced by the United Nations Committee of Experts, and following a visit to former Yugoslavia, that the term “ethnic cleansing” is defined as follows:

6. “Ethnic cleansing”

"55. The expression 'ethnic cleansing' is relatively new. Considered in the context of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, 'ethnic cleansing' means rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons of another ethnic or religious group. 'Ethnic cleansing' is contrary to international law.

"56. Based on the many reports describing the policy and practices conducted in the former Yugoslavia, 'ethnic cleansing' has been carried out by means of murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extra-judicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, deliberate military attacks or threats of attacks on civilians and civilian areas, and wanton destruction of property. Those practices constitute crimes against humanity and can be assimilated to specific war crimes. Furthermore, such acts could also fall within the meaning of the Genocide



Convention. (*Final Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992)*, p. 16.)

Socially Acute Questions (SAQ)

Legardez and Simonneaux (2006) proposed the term «Questions Socialement Vives» – (QSV) in English «Socially Acute Questions» (SAQ) – to describe the complex issues open to controversy and integrated in real context. These issues place social and scientific controversy, complexity, consistency of knowledge, evaluation of evidence, uncertainty and risk at the centre of the teaching-learning process.

These aspects are considered “live” when they are controversial in the following three areas:

- in society, as they generate debate. There is media coverage of these issues and therefore students may have superficial knowledge;
- in research and in the professional world;
- in the classroom, they are often perceived as “alive”. In this context, teachers often find it difficult to approach them in the classroom because they cannot rely solely on the use of consistent scientific facts and fear that they will not be able to manage students' reactions.

The Armenian Genocide

Occurred between 1915 and 1923, the Armenian Genocide is considered the first example that happened in Europe. Meticulously planned by the political movement “Young Turks”, the program of mass extermination of the Armenian people and other established minorities in the Ottoman Empire was aimed at eliminating all who would oppose the creation of a great Turkish empire. About a 1.5 million Armenians were murdered, i.e. about two-thirds of the Armenian population living within the borders of the Ottoman Empire.

Soviet Gulag – Soviet Union

Despite existing before the Stalinist era, it was during Stalin's leadership that the Soviet Gulag system – forced labour camps – took on frightening proportions, with around five hundred camps. It is estimated that between 1929 and 1953, the date of the dictator's death, more than 28 million people were deported to forced labour camps, with records of more than three million deaths due to cold, hunger, disease, work and exhaustion.

The nazi extermination

Determined to put an end to all human beings who questioned racial purity, the Nazis carefully designed the process that would lead to the extermination of millions of Jews, Slavs, communists, homosexuals, Romani, people with physical disabilities and





mental illnesses, among others. The Jews, the main target of the bloodthirsty maelstrom, accounted for more than 90% of the deaths, constituting the genocide of people with impressive numbers. It is estimated that between 1939 and 1945, around six million Jews were murdered at the hands of the Nazis.

Glossary of concepts

Concepts were described in the text, during the explanation of the contents.

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