The UNESCO COURIER

MAY 1994

A NEW LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF COMMUNISM

INTERVIEW WITH TRINH XUAN THUAN

INVENTING THE URBAN FUTURE

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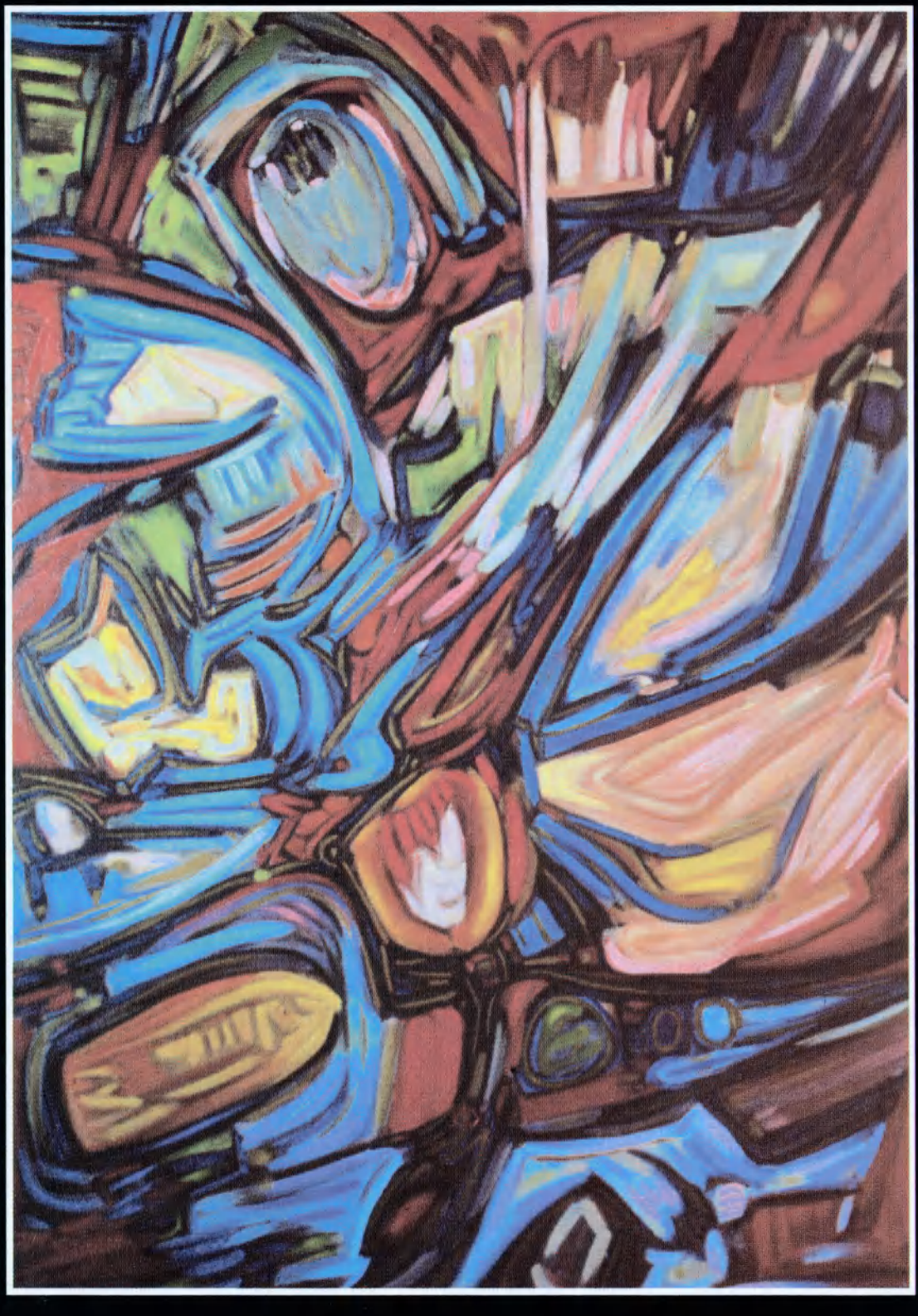
ENCOUNTERS

We invite readers to send us photographs to be considered for publication in this feature. Your photo should show a painting, a sculpture, piece of architecture or any other subject which seems to be an example of cross-fertilization between cultures. Alternatively, you could send us pictures of two works from different cultural backgrounds in which you see some striking connection or resemblance. Please add a short caption to all photographs.



Orient and Occident

by Jean Tallaron

An admirer of Arabic calligraphy and Oriental painting and poetry, Jean Tallaron (1933-1977) was a teacher before devoting himself entirely to a form of experimentation in painting that focused on the beauty of gesture. Of the work shown here, he wrote: "The art of the Scythians, Slav or Persian iconography and Arabic calligraphy are the meeting point between the Orient and the Occident."

Contents
MAY 1994

Special consultant for this issue:
François Hartog

The UNESCO COURIER

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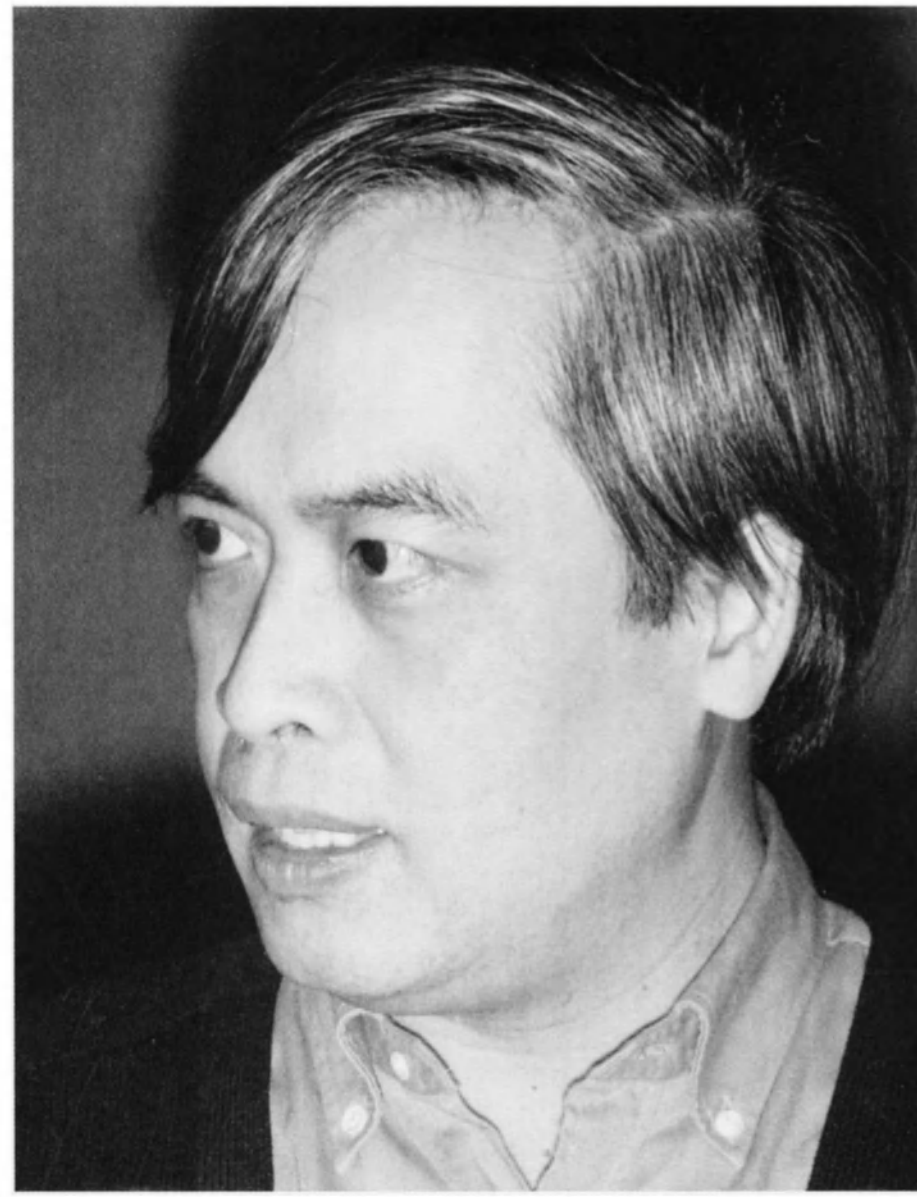
"The Governments of the States parties to this Constitution on behalf of their peoples declare,
"that since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed...
"that a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that the peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.
"For these reasons, the States parties ... are agreed and determined to develop and to increase the means of communication between their peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other's lives...."
EXTRACT FROM THE PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION OF UNESCO, LONDON, 16 NOVEMBER 1945

INTERVIEW

TRINH XUAN THUAN

talks to Neda El Khazen

Trinh Xuan Thuan is an astrophysicist from Hanoi (Viet Nam). At the University of Virginia in the United States he teaches a course on astronomy for poets. As a "surveyor of the universe," he tries to understand its structure using the most sophisticated instruments of observation available today, such as the Hubble space telescope. He has written widely and with great clarity on the formation and evolution of galaxies. His *The Birth of the Universe: the Big Bang and After* appeared in 1993 (Harry N. Abrams, New York and Thames & Hudson, London) and *Secret Melody* will be published later this year (Oxford University Press).



■ *Astronomy has made amazing strides since the time of Galileo's telescope. How does an astronomer work today?*

—The telescope is still the astronomer's favourite instrument because communicating with the universe is usually done via light and this light has to be captured. Since the telescope that first enabled Galileo to discover the mountains on the moon and the satellites orbiting Jupiter, telescopes have continued to improve, growing bigger and better. In the world today there are about fifteen giant telescopes with mirrors measuring more than three metres across. On top of an extinct volcano in Hawaii, at an altitude of 4,500 metres, a colossus of a telescope with a diameter of ten metres has just been completed.

By putting telescopes into orbit around the earth, we have been able to completely escape turbulence from the earth's atmosphere. The Hubble space telescope, which was launched in 1990, is one of the greatest achievements of contemporary astronomy. It weighs eleven tons and is eleven metres long—it is as big as a locomotive. Because of

■ *It is the stars that made the elements necessary for life.... The story they have to tell is one of the utmost importance to us because it leads to our own. We are only stardust.*

an optical flaw, it suffered from myopia, but thanks to repairs done by astronauts from the American space shuttle, it has now regained its sight. Already it is beginning to give us a vision of the universe in all its splendid clarity, pick up even weaker radiation, and perceive objects at even greater distances. For the astronomer, to see far is to see early, because it takes time for light to reach us. Sunlight takes eight minutes to reach us; light from the nearest star takes four years, and from the closest galaxy the light left two million years ago, when man first appeared on our planet. We hope that Hubble will allow us to go back in time—to two to three billion years after the Big Bang—so that we can actually witness the birth of galaxies, which remains one of the great mysteries of contemporary astrophysics.

■ *Has the conquest of space changed the way we perceive the universe?*
—Undoubtedly. Because conquering space has also meant conquering the electromagnetic spectrum. Generally it is believed that astronomy is limited to what the eye can see. But there is a whole range of light waves that escape human eyesight, such as infrared waves, microwaves (as in ovens) and radio waves. So we have developed radio telescopes that do not pick up waves transmitted by radio and television stations, but those produced by sources in the cosmos. There are also ultraviolet light, X-rays and gamma rays which contain a lot of energy and which are blocked by the earth's atmosphere—fortunately, because they are harmful to us. And so we have put in orbit satellite telescopes specializing in these diverse types of radiation so that they can restore for us the cosmic landscape in all its richness and variety.

■ *How do you analyse all this information?*
—After the telescope has picked up light signals they are recorded by an electronic detector. They are then digitalized, translated into digits like the notes of music on a compact disc. These digits are stored on magnetic tapes, and using powerful computers the astronomer can process these digitalized images, which can be viewed on a screen, converted to colour, contrasted and varied at will, depending on what he is looking for.

Astronomers today no longer spend their nights guiding telescopes in darkness, looking through the eyepiece, fighting cold and struggling to stay awake. In a well-lit, warm and comfortable room, astronomers now command telescopes by computer. They simply indicate the position of the star or galaxy they want to study and it appears on the screen. Soon communication satellites will enable astronomers to make their observations without going to the observatory. They will not waste their time waiting for the sky to clear, and they will be able to work in the quiet of their own offices.

■ *The Hubble space telescope was named after a great American astronomer whose work provided the basis for the Big Bang theory. What exactly is the Big Bang?*
—This theory gives the universe a historical dimension, that is, a past, present and future. It is based on a fundamental discovery made by Edwin Hubble, who realized in 1929 that galaxies were fleeing the Milky Way, and the further away they were, the greater was the speed with which they were fleeing. The universe, therefore, is expanding. If we reverse the course of events, we get back to the point at which everything started, some fifteen billion years ago, when energy was extremely high and there was an enormous explosion: the Big Bang. The universe is not immutable, as Newton believed. It has a beginning and it is not eternal. The Big Bang created time and expanding space. Since then, other observations—such as the discovery of the cosmic background radiation which is left-over heat from the primordial explosion—have come to support this theory. It is also confirmed by what we have learned about the chemical composition of stars and galaxies.

■ *Matter was formed from the incredible energy freed by the Big Bang.*
—Yes, a tiny fraction of a second after the primordial explosion, at exactly 10^{-43} second afterwards. What had happened before? No one knows. Here we are up against a wall that we cannot penetrate with our present knowledge and physics is out of its depth. So at 10^{-43} second after the Big Bang the universe is no bigger than the head of a pin. It is extremely dense, and hotter than all the hells of Dante. There is a quantum vacuum. It is not a vacuum of calmness and tranquillity, devoid of substance and activity—as we might imagine it—but a vacuum bubbling with all the energy that had been released by the Big Bang, filled with phantom particles and antiparticles. This energy makes the universe expand with lightning speed: it is dilating at a staggering rate during an infinitesimal amount

of time. Simultaneously, it is cooling off and becoming diluted, making the ascent towards complexity possible. Energy gives birth to matter. At 10^{-6} second, when the volume of the universe is about the same as that of the solar system, the most elementary particles, quarks, combine to produce protons and neutrons. At the third minute, when hydrogen and helium nuclei appear, 98 per cent of the universe's mass has been constituted. The universe continues to expand, bathing in a soup of radiation and matter. But it is a non-homogeneous soup in which there are irregularities. Some areas are denser than others and one or two billion years later they will give rise to galaxies and stars. This fabulous ascension towards diversity will persist to our day.

■ *Where does life begin?*
—In the heart of the stars. It is the stars that made the elements necessary for life—oxygen, carbon, nitrogen, even heavy elements such as iron. The story they have to tell is of the utmost importance to us because it leads to our own. We are only stardust. We are made up of chemical elements that were created in stellar crucibles and expelled into space by supernovae.

One has to realize that stars are born, live and die just like human beings but on a considerably bigger time-scale. They are born in gigantic stellar nurseries, of collapsing hydrogen and helium clouds compressed into gaseous balls by gravity. In their core, which is heated to tens of millions of degrees, thermonuclear reactions take place producing intense radiation that diffuses towards the surface. An equilibrium is established between the outward push of radiation and the inward gravitational pull.

During millions, billions of years, the star consumes its hydrogen. When there is none left, it starts to use up its helium reserve. The combustion of helium produces an enormous blast of energy. The star distends on a colossal scale, and turns red. In this cosmic oven the alchemy that creates the bricks of life goes on relentlessly. After several million years, more than twenty new elements have been created in the heart of the red giant.

After the combustion of helium, it is the turn of carbon, then oxygen, to burn. Afterwards, more complex elements such as neon, magnesium, aluminium and sulphur appear. The same sequence of events repeats itself: each time a combustible element has been exhausted, a new one starts to burn, creating heavier and heavier elements. When iron appears, the star has come to the end of its life.

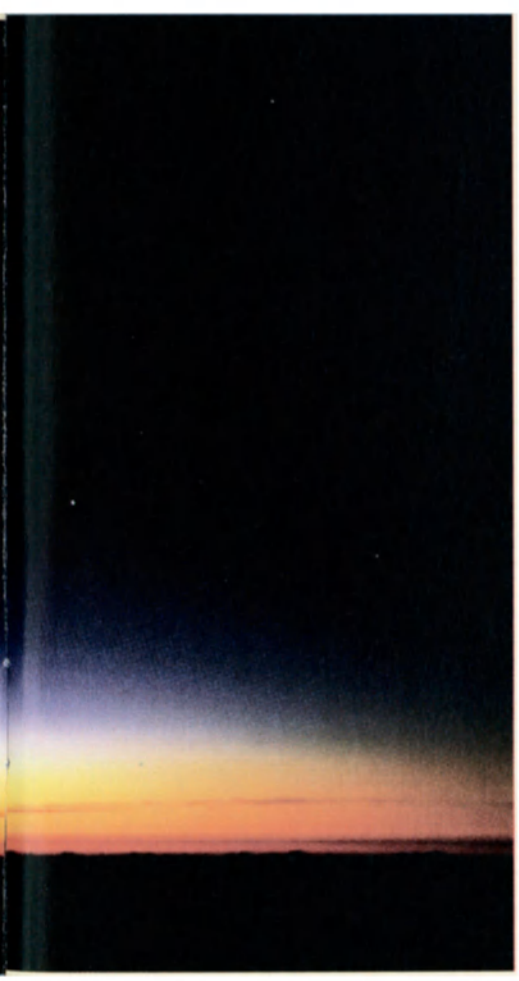
■ *Why does this alchemy stop with iron?*
—Because burning iron takes energy and the star, which is running out of fuel, can no longer provide energy. It stops radiating and fades. Gravity takes over and compresses the star until it collapses and dies. Low-mass stars transform themselves into white dwarfs. They then become invisible and join the countless stellar corpses that litter the galaxies. That will be the fate of our sun in nine billion years. A high-mass star (ten to thirty times the mass of the sun), on the other hand, dies a violent death. Compressed by gravity, such a star reaches an extraordinary density and when its heart contracts, a shockwave is produced that leads to a lightning explosion, shining with the intensity of a billion suns. That is called a supernova.

A supernova utilizes its enormous energy to produce elements heavier than iron, such as gold and silver, which later on are used to make jewellery for pretty women! The explosion projects all these

elements into interstellar space at a speed of thousands of kilometres per second. These are the seeds for future planets that may bear life. The atoms of which we are made today were created in a high-mass star that exploded more than four and a half billion years ago, before the birth of our sun.

■ *Do you believe that life can exist elsewhere, on other planets, in other galaxies?*
—It's probable. After all, the universe which we observe is made up of a hundred billion galaxies like the Milky Way, and each one has a hundred billion stars, of which billions resemble our sun. Each one of those stars is accompanied by a group of planets. Somewhere there has to be a planet that is neither too hot nor too cold for life to develop. Scientists believe that other intelligent forms of life can exist in our galaxy, or elsewhere in the universe, but how and where do we find them? It's like looking for a needle in a haystack. We do not know in which direction we should point our telescopes nor on which frequency they should be set to pick up possible signals. For the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' voyage, NASA launched a programme to listen to a thousand stars like our sun on two frequencies and also to randomly scan the sky on millions of frequencies.

Sunset and starry sky photographed from a 2,400-metre-high observatory in the Canary Islands.



■ *What is the "anthropic principle" that appears in modern cosmology?*
—The term comes from the Greek word *anthropos* meaning man and, in a larger sense, intelligence, consciousness. According to the anthropic principle, the universe is fine-tuned to an extraordinary precision for consciousness to appear. One must realize that our universe is determined by four basic forces and about fifteen numbers which are called physical constants. The basic forces are gravity, which keeps the planets circling the sun and our feet on the ground; electromagnetic force, which makes it possible for molecules to combine and form strands of DNA; the strong (nuclear) force, which binds protons and neutrons together to form atomic nuclei; and the weak (nuclear) force, which is responsible for radioactivity. As for the numbers, they include the speed of light, the mass of a proton, the charge of an electron or the gravitational constant. The value of these numbers has been determined with great precision: light travels at 300,000 km per second. Why 300,000 km/s and not 3 m/s? We have no idea why. We were given these numbers and we have to live with them.

Astrophysicists cannot reproduce the conditions of the Big Bang in their laboratories because these conditions were so extreme. They would need a particle accelerator the size of several light years which is impossible. However, with their computers and their equations, they can have fun building models of the universe—which I call toy universes—to which they attribute different physical constants. What is extraordinary is that all these toy universes are infertile. If the physical constants were varied ever so slightly then we would no longer be around to talk about it. If, for example, the intensity of gravitational force were increased, then the universe would become more compact and the stars would be ten million times less massive than our moon. They would consume their fuel too quickly and the complexity necessary for the creation of life could not develop. On the other hand, if you decreased only a little the force of gravity, then interstellar clouds could no longer collapse and create stars. Without stars there are neither heavy elements nor life. Take, for example, the electrical charges of a proton and an electron. The proton is approximately two thousand times more massive than the electron, and yet their electrical charges are rigorously equal, but opposite. If they would differ only by a billionth of a billionth, the stars, the sun and the earth would explode.

You can vary any other physical constant, the result is always the same: toy universes are empty and sterile. One can conclude from this that these constants were fine-tuned to an astonishing precision so that life could emerge and consciousness appear. If you want to picture this precision, imagine the accuracy that would be required for an archer to be able to hit a 1 square centimetre target 15 billion light years away.

■ *Talk of fine-tuning makes one think of a hand that regulates. Should we think in terms of some kind of regulatory mechanism or should we see life as the result of a long succession of random happenings?*
—If one opts for chance, then one is forced to invoke the theory of parallel universes which quantum mechanics does allow for.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 50 ►

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of a conception of history that had prevailed in Europe for two centuries. How should the link between past, present and future be defined from now on?

AN END AND A BEGINNING

by François Hartog

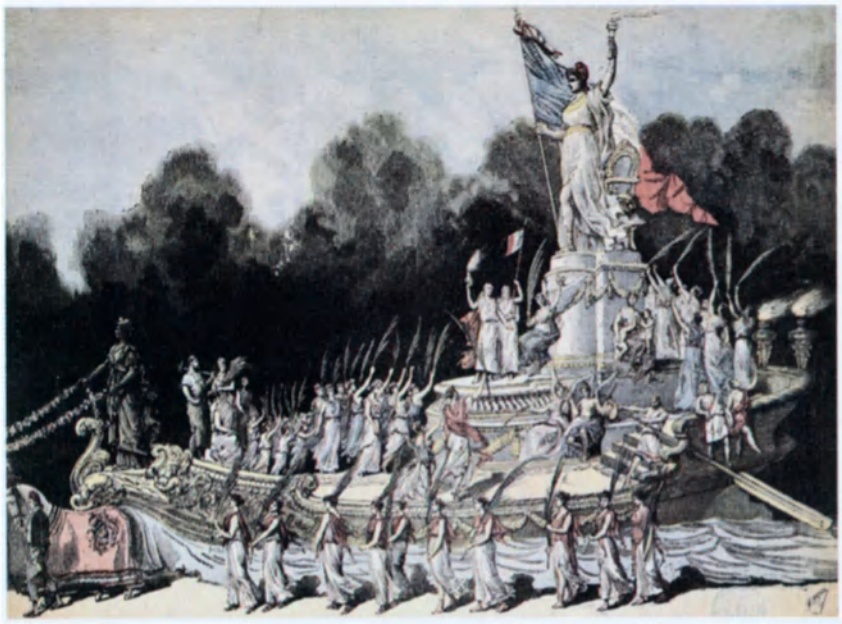
A few months before the fall of the Berlin wall an American historian named Francis Fukuyama published an essay entitled "The End of History?", which attracted widespread media attention.[1] Communism was collapsing, and only democracy now remained as the "final form of all human government". History, in the sense of "a simple, coherent evolutionary process", had come to an end.

In the long story of the world the end of history has been proclaimed—cheerfully, anxiously or resignedly—more than once. To my mind, however, the keynote of 1989 was something different—unpredictability: the unpredictability of what happened in that year, the growing unpredictability of the future it heralded, the unpredictability, even, of the past that it brought to an end. The recent past was primarily affected, but the remoter past has also become opaque and in a sense unpredictable. This is where the historian comes in.

History clearly needs rewriting in the former Eastern bloc countries (the very expression used to designate these countries smacks of uncertainty, as though they can only be described in terms of something they have ceased to be and it is not yet possible to say what they are). It is equally clear that this will be a difficult task and will involve more than just making corrections, replacing inaccuracy with accuracy. There is also a risk that new distortions will take the place of old ones (the new ones perhaps mere revivals of older historical myths). The articles in this issue of the *UNESCO Courier*, with their varied approaches, give some idea of the extent of the task and of what is at stake.

It would be quite wrong to regard this essential rewriting as the business of the "East" and no one else. The changes in the East are affecting the West and will continue to do so. We are all in the same boat. We always have been. Despite the antagonism between the two camps, some of their basic presuppositions were the same. Both shared a similar relationship with time and a

A joyful crowd on the Berlin Wall, 11 November 1989.



"The triumphal car of the Republic". This illustration commemorating the establishment of the Republic in France appeared in a daily newspaper, *Le Petit Journal*, in 1912.

similar idea of history, based on the idea of continuous progress. Scientific socialism, its face turned towards the radiant future, for long even looked like the cutting edge of modernity. In spite of very real political differences, we were both beneficiaries of what I would call the same great regime of historicity. That regime, which began to exist around 1789, finally broke down before our eyes in 1989. This is why the rewriting of history is, for a fundamental reason, also the business of the West. Should we talk of rewriting, or of writing? What history should we write today? What past, for what present?

A complete change of perspective

"When the past no longer sheds light on the future, the mind walks in darkness." This sentence written by the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville conveniently describes what may be called the ancien régime of historicity and the moment of its overthrow. Before, when the relation of the past to the future was governed by reference to the past, the "mind" knew where it was going. For the purpose of writing history, that was the heyday of the idea of history as a teacher and guide for living, first set forth by Cicero and later handed down and referred to until the present time. History offered a collection of examples for the instruction of readers and primarily of rulers. The general idea was that history was made for those who were supposed to make it. By extension it came to be thought of as "the common school of the human race".

During the period of the French Revolution things became blurred, the landmarks of the past faded, time suddenly seemed to speed up, and the future became totally uncertain: the mind walked in darkness. It was also a time when people referred intensively to the past. All kinds of analogies were put forward, as people clung to the comforting idea of historical parallels in an effort to understand and express the strangeness of what was happening. The French revolutionaries, for example, went back to classical Antiquity to try to describe their unprecedented actions.

In fact, however, a new regime of historicity came into effect between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. Henceforth the past was no longer expected to shed light on the future; the future was expected to shed light on the past. The future would make sense of the past; it would be the starting-point for the writing of history. Tocqueville is a witness to this reversal. In order to understand France's past he travelled towards or even into the future, sailing to America to portray the "new" i.e. democratic, society there. As a result he was able to see the Revolution not so much as a break but as a continuation, an extension, in many ways a completion of the work of the absolute monarchy. This gradual shifting of the relationships with time went hand in hand with the growth of a modern notion of history.

History as articulated in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century was history in the singular, history as an end in itself, a process. It defined itself as "knowledge of itself". The philosophy of history superseded and took over from the theology of history. What had once been studied in history lessons no longer had any point. How could history be "exemplary" when the past no longer shed light on the future? Or else the only lesson of history is History with a capital "H", with its judgments and its dustbins. In the logic of progress the exemplary gives way to the event, which is always unique. What is past is past.

To quote the French writer Julien Gracq, "history has become essentially an ultimatum issued by the Future to the present". I would merely add that the ultimatum also extended to the past and fell on historians, who during the nineteenth century organized and regarded their discipline as the science of the past. The predominant medium of this ultimatum was national history—the nation having of course been the outstanding phenomenon of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Any history worth the name was bound to reconsider the past in terms of the nation, searching for its origins, celebrating its past and future glories, and all too often surrendering to its mystique. This was also the time when scientific history and patriotic history went hand in hand, and when in France three entities—three persons, almost—France, the Nation and the Republic, came together in the writings of Ernest Lavisse to form a secular Trinity, the foundation of a history as memory of the nation.

This regime of historicity was challenged

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both before and especially after the 1914-1918 war. The German thinker Walter Benjamin started to look for a different relationship with history, i.e. a different historical temporality. The idea of "remembrance", meaning reliving the past, was central to this relationship. Historical time only really comes into existence when there is "a dazzling conjunction between the past and the present". At the same time history freed itself from the "tyranny" of the national, political history was criticized as superficial, and in the 1920s economic and social history developed in response to this crisis of history. There was a search for a different time-scale, inspired by economists' models and organized not in simple linear terms according to a succession of events but incorporating ideas of cycles and conjunctures, and sensitive to the recurrences, the enduring features and the long-term processes of history—in a word, ending up with different layers of temporality, with Fernand Braudel's concept of *la longue durée*—long-term structures and trends.

But these criticisms and challenges, important though they were, were not enough to make us change our regime of historicity—especially when it was fortified by the revolutionary vistas opened up by the October Revolution, followed by postwar reconstruction, the practical victories of socialism after 1945 and the East-West competition that followed them.

Signs of crisis began to appear in the West in the 1960s. As regards relationships with time, there was first the widespread acceptance of the idea that there was no future. Then the idea that the present is all that matters, each day consuming (and therefore producing) more and more novelties and historical events to feed the media system it has created. It is thirsty for prediction. But, more surprisingly, it has also turned out to be obsessed with conservation (the success of the "heritage" theme). It would also like to be able to watch itself happening, with, already, the eye of history.

The most typical manifestation of this dream of controlling or abolishing time is the concern to save more and more time—to the point of almost making it disappear, forgetting about it or escaping from it. But this present, which is somewhat unreal because it wants to be the whole of reality, is also a time when people are seeking identity and roots. Memory and commemoration became the catchwords of the 1980s, and were eventually, though not at first, taken up by historians, as they began skating over the surface of memory.

All in all, it gradually appeared that the future no longer shed light on the present, and hence not on the past. History has ceased to be the future's ultimatum to the present. At the same time, the future has regained its unpredictability (the opposite of an end of history) and the past its opacity.

It is the historian's task to revisit the past, to find other ways through it, to ask it other questions, to acquire new points of view, and to express a different relationship with time—in short to try and define the features of the regime of historicity that we have now entered.

It is not a matter of putting across a backward-looking view of the past, nor of setting up the past as a judge of the present under the impression that the days when history taught lessons have returned; but rather of reading the marks left by a forgotten, repressed, aborted past against the background of the present—not so much commemoration as remembrance. "We must reopen the past," wrote the philosopher Paul Ricœur in 1985, "and revive its unfulfilled, inhibited, nay its murdered potentialities." That is what Michelet, who saw historians as a bridge between the living and the dead, meant when he called on "the silences of history" to speak. ■

1 "The End of History?" was published in summer 1989 and later appeared in expanded form in a book, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, Free Press and Toronto, Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1992).

Protest posters in the eastern part of Berlin against a decision by the authorities to remove the statue of Lenin (1991). The large panel bears the ironical message: "Here the Berlin Senate decontaminates German-German history in the framework of a cleansing operation against those who think differently. Sponsor: Clean and Remove All. Contractor: Black-out and Co."

RUSSIA

After ceasing to toe the Marxist line, some Russian historians are still searching for a fresh approach to their country's past

Wanted: a new language

by Nikolai Kopossov

HISTORY is a language unto itself that allows historians to speak simultaneously about the past and about themselves. It is not enough to say, like the great historians of old, that history is written on the basis of sources: no less important is the fact that it is written by historians.

The rewriting of history therefore does not, in my view, mean "simply" the reappraisal, however radical, of historical events. It means changing the language of history, which in turn calls for a historian of a different cultural and anthropological type, and for a rethinking of the relationship between history and society.

Thus defined, the rewriting of history has not yet been undertaken in Russia. We go on speaking the same historical language as before. The only difference is that we now speak it much less often and more reluctantly, the main reason, in my opinion, being that historians have not changed as much as society.

A blurred picture of the past

Perestroika brought about radical changes in the Soviet public's awareness of history. The major offensive against communist ideology took place on the battlefield of history, but it was not waged by historians. It is no wonder that politicians took such an interest in history, since history, more than anything else, was the source from which the Soviet regime drew its legitimacy. In the period that proved decisive for the overthrow of communist ideology, the years

Left, *World youth is for peace!* A painting to the greater glory of Stalin (1951).
Above, Music Peace Festival in Moscow (1989).

between 1987 and 1989, discussion centred mainly on an assessment of the role of Stalin. The democratic press scored a decisive success when it managed to link the name of Stalin, in the popular mind, with the gulag, the Soviet regime and socialism.

It did not, however, succeed in completely overcoming the traditional idealization of Stalin's rule. Apart from the fact that there were still a number of convinced Stalinists, large segments of the population had lost their moral bearings as regards their attitude towards the country's past. While some rejected the Soviet historical experience out of hand, others did not know what to think about it. For many Soviets, the idealized image of Lenin continued to counterbalance the image of Stalin and to lend moral credibility to the Soviet regime.

By 1990, however, everything "Soviet" had been discredited to such an extent that Lenin's image too was gradually tarnished. In June 1991, a majority of Leningraders voted for a return to the city's former name of St. Petersburg. However, the image of Lenin had not yet become such a powerfully negative symbol as that of Stalin by the time that history, quite simply, ceased to interest people.

The political events of 1991-1993 removed history definitively from the forefront of public concerns. The Soviet regime's loss of legitimacy became complete, and the democratic ideology that came out on top looked elsewhere for legitimacy, primarily to an idealized image of Western civilization, the market economy and parliamentary democracy. But if that image had a "historical dimension", it was that of a history alien to Russia.

On the other hand, the communists and nationalists who joined forces to form the opposition could not agree on an assessment of the Soviet period because of the deeply held anti-communist views of some of the nationalists. The opposition's own forays into history have in the main been limited to the extolling of Russia's military exploits.

The reawakening, in connection with the nationalist movement, of interest in the Orthodox church and its history and in the history of Russian religious thought is of relatively minor importance, owing in part, perhaps, to the fact that the Russian church adopts an extremely cautious stance and plays only a modest role in social life. There are no grounds for believing that a plan for the rebuilding of society attractive to

"Comrade Lenin sweeps away the scum of the Earth". A Soviet poster of 1920.

the majority of the population can be worked out on the basis of an "Orthodox renaissance".

There is thus no political movement in Russia today that has succeeded in creating an image of the country's past that would inspire Russians with confidence in the future. We are witnessing a crisis of historical awareness in the population at large. How are professional historians reacting to this situation?

Historians defend their turf

From the very beginning of *perestroika*, the political passivity of most historians stood in marked contrast to the exceptional intensity of the debates about history. It was left to journalists, writers, sociologists and economists to set the agenda in the rethinking of the past. If historians expressed themselves at all in public, it was usually to sound a warning against jumping to conclusions. The main thrust of their contributions to the debates was to deliver a lesson in professionalism to journalists who had dared to encroach on their territory. The situation, however, became more and more ambiguous: anything that people acknowledged as being "the truth about history" they learned from sources other than those whose vocation it was to act as guardians of that truth. The insistent calls for historians to "tell the truth at last" threw them into confusion. Most of them were in no mood for any radical changes in their field.

It is true that there was a movement for reform among historians, calling for democratization of their discipline, the abolition of ideological surveillance, the lifting of the political ban on research into the "blank spaces" of history, wider access to the archives, international contacts and so forth. These demands were reasonable as far as they went, but they related only to the most obvious defects in the manner in which the writing of history was organized under the Soviet regime, and scarcely touched upon its internal problems.

Many of the reformers' demands were met: learned societies were given greater independence and the most conservative of their senior officials replaced, while the editorial boards of the historical journals were revamped. The principal journal, *Voprosy istorii* ("Questions of History"), became one of the most widely read publications of the democratic press. Curiously, it soon began to give pride of place to publishing eyewitness accounts, especially the previously banned memoirs of disgraced public figures—not, it will be agreed, a sign that much original research was being done. The direction taken by the country's leading historical journal faithfully reflects the state of Russian historiography as a whole, which, apart from a certain political reorientation, continues to discuss the same problems as before from the same viewpoints as before, and observes the same professional standards as before.

Although much of what had hitherto seemed unshakeable has been challenged or even rejected, historians are making no attempt to cast such radical doubts upon the basic concepts and standards of their own profession, and the task of changing it from within is an issue that has not been raised. Only a few expressions of dissatisfaction with the prevailing intellectual and professional standards are heard today. Generally speaking, the old "history establishment" has not given ground. Worse still, while the earlier rise in public interest in history did not bring about any substantial change within the profession, the decline in that interest has helped to reactivate its conservative forces. Hence, since about 1992 historians specializing in the Soviet period, who had until shortly before then been obliged to admit that their discipline was in deep crisis, have been regaining their self-confidence and denying that there is any need to reconsider their approach, although they have not yet influenced public perceptions.

History is thus, after being slightly smartened up, refusing further, more far-reaching changes. Why is this so?

Sticking to an ideological compromise

The process of renewal in social science presupposes that new social experience and a new individual self-awareness will be expressed in terms of scientific theory. It is precisely this "renewal mechanism" that has functioned badly in Russian historiography.

As a result of the long domination exercised over it by Marxism, history became incapable of expressing anything other than a rather limited range of social experience, the experience of statehood, nationhood and social conflicts. The social experience that became more and more important for individual self-awareness in the post-war world and especially during the 1960s—the experience of the individual playing an active role in culture—was almost impossible to express in the language of Marxist history. Even after ceasing to toe the Marxist line, history, as normally written in Russia, remains heavily dependent on the nation-state concept.

Of course, not all Russian historians are affected by this dependence. In the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, the increase in research into cultural history, which practically fell outside the Marxist historian's field of vision, gave expression to the experience of the individual as playing

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The cover of the Soviet magazine *Ogonyek* (1949) shows Stalin as a star beaming down on Moscow.

an active role in culture. It was, to my mind, precisely because of the tremendous psychological energy they put into the study of medieval culture that eminent historians such as A. Gurevich, Y. Bessmertny and L. Batkin were able to produce such excellent work. It is noteworthy that the historians of this group are today advocating change from within the profession.

They are, however, exceptions. The majority of Soviet historians hew too closely in their thinking to the ideological compromise offered to the intelligentsia by the Brezhnev regime. At the price of an outward show of loyalty to Marxism and on condition that their personalities and their individual social experience should on no account emerge from their research, historians were allowed to write studies that were to a large extent devoid of ideological content. Most Soviet historians invested all their emotional energy in this compromise, which was a relatively harmless but perfectly respectable form of opposition to the regime.

Many people were, of course, aware of the falsity of this situation, and this made them all the more indignant about the medieval history specialists who allowed themselves—to use the language typical of the times—to "express a personal opinion" and "speak on their own behalf". This conflict, which had been simmering for a long while, came out into the open in the *perestroika* period, when it became all too evident that "professional ideology" had made Russian historiography incapable of dynamic development at a time when the circumstances were exceptionally propitious for the emergence of new approaches to history. ■

ROMANIA

When the collective memory has been warped by Stalinism and national-communism, re-establishing a critical outlook is an uphill job

Past imperfect

by Zoe Petre

In the countries of eastern Europe, control of the collective memory has been an essential feature of dictatorship. From the time of the Communist Manifesto of 1848, history was the arena in which the very legitimacy of the dictatorship of the proletariat was decided. As George Orwell wrote in his famous novel, *1984*, "Who controls the past controls the future."

To begin with, this take-over of history had a dual purpose. First, it was designed to impose an official interpretation of the past as a forecast of the present and a supposedly glorious future. Second, it was a deliberate attempt to blot out all consciousness of national history and all positive memories of the past. The Romanians, who had shown a reprehensible loyalty to their nation by claiming their historic provinces and their national identity, had to be taught that this loyalty and this identity were "bourgeois prejudices" generated by a false view of history. Impoverished by Stalinist dogma and subjected to an obsessive search for the "class struggle"—the historian's only legitimate criterion—this new version of history, which denied the past any specificity, was designed only to justify the present.

Hundreds of teachers, hastily trained during the 1950s, continued to use the rudimentary stereotypes of this Stalinism which they had parrotted in their youth. Later, however, another branch was grafted onto this stock, namely the

Left, Nicolae Ceausescu addresses the National Assembly in 1977 during a ceremony to mark the centenary of Romania's independence.
Below, televised images of the trial of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu in 1989.

national communism of Nicolae Ceausescu and his entourage.

National history was muzzled for ten years. Then, playing the card of restoring the past, giving the impression that the "people" had managed to preserve the sense of national identity that had been distorted by professional historians, and exploiting the frustration of people traumatized by the crushing of their memories, this second manipulation finally destroyed the critical approach to history. First national history was annihilated by the universalist claims of Stalinist doctrine. Then universal history was annihilated by being reduced to a mere backcloth for an inflated vision of national glory. Increasingly pompous language, together with a growing refusal to think about method or exercise critical judgment, eventually brought in a falsely pious rhetoric of commemoration whose deleterious consequences are far from forgotten today.

Admittedly this exercise was never entirely successful. In the interstices of the system some people continued with dignity and humility to practise the profession of historian with dignity and humility, and a brilliant array of teachers, trained between the wars in Europe's great history departments, went on teaching until the 1970s. These historians handed down to their pupils an ethic, a model and a historian's conscience that helped them survive both intellectually and morally. During the short and deceptive interlude of 1965-1971—when the regime made a pretence of openness to the outside world in order to consolidate its position—this generation of pupils managed to make contacts and set up a network of intellectual communication that mitigated their isolation and allowed them to maintain a certain professional dignity.

Exploring continents, rethinking concepts

These remnants of historical awareness became essential after 1989, when a revival of the human sciences began to get under way. The enormity of the task still to be accomplished by historians is obvious. It involves rethinking concepts and bringing to light the forgotten continents of history, with drastically reduced human and material potential. A brief list of the objectives of this work shows that it will be an uphill job. In my opinion, such a list consists of two main parts: one of gaps to be filled, and one of ideas to be challenged. And of course the two parts overlap.

The most important gaps are due to the prohibitions of the period just ended. Both documents and interpretation were subject to censorship. The state archives only kept part of the documents pre-dating the Second World War. Those regarded as "sensitive" (documents relating to the Royal Family, the political parties and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) were placed in reserved archives, mainly those of the communist party's Institute of History. These archives have only become accessible since 1990.

For the documents of the past fifty years

(those of the communist party, the political police, and the army), it is still necessary to apply jointly to the army and the secret service. The recent opening of the state, communist party, Komintern and KGB archives in Russia has added a mass of documents essential for the study of the history of the communist regime in Romania. Moreover, one of the most urgent tasks is to quickly establish a stock of "non-traditional" documents—oral history and audio and visual archives—of the last fifty years. This is indispensable for sophisticated modern research into the mentality of totalitarianism.

The history of the origins, establishment and development of the communist regime, with all its ramifications, is the area which most urgently needs to be studied. In a critical examination of the past fifty years, far more is at stake than mere scholarly interest: it amounts to a test of a society's capacity to make a clean break with its past. Some major topics that must now be studied include: the history of the anti-communist resistance and the repression; the history of the institutions of communism, and of the divergent, indeed marginal and underground economies and societies, that the system controlled or masked; and also the leading figures of the system and the dynamics of its political, military, and intellectual elites.

This field, so far more closed to critical investigation than any other, needs to be reopened. At the same time, research should be carried out into the great taboos of official communist historiography: the institutions of the modern Romanian state (the monarchy, the army, the parliamentary system and the political parties in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the real history of the communist party, which was subject to a particularly distorting cult); the history of Transylvania, the key to the disputes between Romania and Hungary—a front-line subject for historians; universal history, systematically marginalized by the institutional system and also by lack of information and contact with the international academic community; and lastly the basic techniques of historical research—epigraphy, palaeography, and literary criticism, genealogy, diplomatic and heraldry. These tools of rigorous investigation were neglected as well as feared by the kind of rough-and-ready history that prevailed for so long.

As regards concepts, the situation is even more difficult. On the one hand, resistance to the ideologization of history was often reflected in a kind of conceptual paralysis, a rejection of any historical discussion, and a positivism that was never really questioned. Moreover, no historian managed to escape completely from the division of the historical field laid down by the regime, even by keeping the official line at arm's length. Once at least half the resources of historical research were devoted to the study of social or national movements, the accumulated results of this work were bound to end up by endorsing a viewpoint in which social conflicts (or the nation) constitute the main driving force.

The sleep of reason

The two-pronged offensive against the critical awareness of history—Stalinist indoctrination and then the official history of national communism—thus resulted in the establishment of a historical mythology. If even professional historians sometimes find it hard to remember that this mythology exists and to free themselves from it, what can be expected of people at large? The myth of a people's origins, of founding fathers or saviours, of a people both chosen and crucified by history, this edifying "nineteenth-century" perspective focusing on a people's identity, is the most difficult obstacle to surmount. This approach is the basis for a false appreciation of the present, which is all the more difficult to correct because it has become sacrosanct. There is still widespread confusion about whether history is an essentially critical exercise or an act of commemoration, a pious discourse about the past.

Keeping the invasion of stereotypes at bay is not easy, particularly in a society which has known not only the traumas of forty-five years of totalitarian rule but also the violence of a bloody and spectacular change of regime. This violent break was seen as a threat to the identity not only of the privileged groups of the old

The Romanian royal family photographed between the wars.

Demonstrators give the V for victory sign after the fall of Ceausescu.

regime, who were directly accused, but also of the "little people", who had resigned themselves to coming to terms with totalitarianism and whose precarious inner comfort was now disturbed. These men and women, hitherto crushed by fear, refuse to give up the amnesia that for so long helped them to survive and in many cases cling to the myths of national identity in order to regain their shaky dignity. Not the least of them are the professional historians who repress their critical spirit.

If, in the field of history, "collective knowledge" today corresponds to neither of the two official versions, the mongrel view that has emerged from them has no more affinities with a critical consciousness of history than they do. A separate study would be needed to cover this curious blend of incredulity and myth, of distrust and stereotypes, in which emotions (especially hatred) overcome rational thought. It produces a kind of rant, a tissue of empty and inconsistent verbiage that robs of its meaning not only the fabric of the myths of official history, but also history as a rational judgment, supported by evidence, of the past.

Such a climate cannot foster calm historical discussion. But this discussion must take place. If critical learning and a truthful collective memory are not re-established, the sleep of reason may continue. The real historians of the East, Romanian historians among them, must recover the memory of their own history. It is they, with their experience, both individual and collective, who are best equipped to recall the real memory of communist totalitarianism as a global phenomenon of twentieth-century history. The destructive nature of the century now drawing to a close, which stems not from some chance feature but from the inhuman, deeply perverse essence of both fascism and communism, has only just begun to be considered. It is our duty to think more deeply about it. The lion's share of this task will no doubt fall on the historians of eastern Europe. It is for them to collect the documentary evidence, and to carefully dismantle the institutional, social, and ideological machinery in order to put the tools essential for the search for truth within reach of their colleagues the world over.

The great illusions of the past about the heuristic or educational capacities of writing history have collapsed. Critical study of the past remains the only defence, fragile though it be, against a hideous return of human error. ■

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GEORGIA

The dangers of an idea of history that fuels ethnic conflicts

The historian's responsibility

by Georges Charachidzé

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IT is a well-known fact that the Soviet Union's intellectual bureaucrats, from the 1930s onwards, imposed upon the country a theory of history that they had put together from scratch. Strangely enough—and here we come to the heart of the matter—this theory was taken on board and, as it were, absorbed by everybody, from social scientists and intellectuals to schoolchildren and the man in the street. It entered the public domain, merging with people's own ideas about their national past. The theory is easily summarized, since it boils down to a few crude assertions: the history of any human group, seen as something smooth and uniform, describes a flawless trajectory from its palaeolithic origins through to the predictable, inevitable stages of modern evolution. It progresses under its own impetus along the clearly signposted path leading to the ideal society of tomorrow, if not indeed today. All this is familar, all too familiar.

An unexpected convergence

What is less well known are the ways in which this theory was adjusted to fit in with the ways in which the history of the various peoples of the U.S.S.R. was written. In Georgia, and doubtless elsewhere, there was no problem in making the adjustment: officialdom's view of human evolution fitted in nicely with the "national" conceptions of history. Thus, an early view of the past, that of the chroniclers and their royal masters of the eleventh to eighteenth centuries, pictured humanity, worldwide to begin with and then Georgian, as marching straight towards its first goal, the introduction of Christianity in the fourth century. It then brought on stage the unbroken line of Georgian sovereigns, whose epic story likewise tended towards a single end: the defence of the faith, the frontiers and the rights of the kingdom, which would lead to the complete fulfilment of its Christian grandeur and legitimacy.

There was nothing in this that was contradictory to Soviet official dogma: these stages indeed corresponded to those that any well ordered community should pass through before achieving its final goal and entering the promised society. School textbooks and other official publications were quite clear about this, vying with one another to stress the positive nature of the country's conversion to Christianity, and it is obvious that neither *perestroika* nor independence has made any difference in this respect.

Let us take another example. Nineteenth-century history, that of the philologists and the romantics but also that of their followers in more recent times, according to whom Georgia

was engaged in a constant struggle to preserve its identity, also fits in easily with the official Soviet version. The main thing was to see the course of Georgian history as leading up to the country's entry into the Russian, and later Soviet, empire. On the way, the saga of the Georgian people merges spontaneously into the march of universal history as its destiny blends in with that of the U.S.S.R.

It was not that the Soviet authorities "decreed" and imposed on the Georgians the view the latter should take of their own history. They simply encouraged the development of this view, changing its emphasis slightly and "adding to" it (especially the end of the story, the country's incorporation into Russia and then into the U.S.S.R.)—in other words they endorsed it.

They likewise endorsed the resumption and continuation of the task begun by the kings and queens of Georgia, that of compiling the complete annals of the kingdom. It was, again, the Soviet state that, through its specialized academic institutions, authorized and supported the scientific enterprise of publishing historic manuscripts and documents, especially religious texts. Finally, the three conceptions of Georgia's past—that of the former monarchs, that of traditional historians, and that of doctrinaire Soviet historians—worked their way together into the collective consciousness, becoming part and parcel of Georgian lore and combining to form the new, commonly accepted version of history.

This, then, is how things stand after independence (1991). Georgians all know, and never tire of repeating, that they must now cast off the old ideological straitjackets and at last give history, regained at the same time as national sovereignty, free rein. The question is, how to go about it and, above all, what to do?

There are, first of all, two obvious tasks to which many people have already committed themselves: that of expunging or correcting the falsifications practised for seventy years by Soviet officialdom and its local representatives, and that of filling in the "gaps" in history, its "forgotten" or forbidden periods. For several years now, newspapers, magazines and books have been making a good job of bringing to light the history of independent Georgia from 1918 to 1921 and of the national uprising of 1924, reconsidering the "Russo-Georgian rapprochement" of 1783 to 1801, and revealing the extent, the depth and the true nature of terror and repression, with their camps and massacres. All this is happening spontaneously, so to speak; the competence of those involved is almost as great as their enthusiasm, and it will not take long to put paid to Soviet manipulations of the past.

But what about history as such, in particular that blend of different views of history that people carry around in their heads? These ideas are so familiar that it is hard to reject them lock stock and barrel. They do not lend themselves easily to analysis or even to being sorted out. The counterfeit versions of the past put about by Soviet officialdom are difficult to separate from the other conceptions of history since they overlap with them, enfold them and are continuations of them.

Remembering 'forgotten' times

Since independence, two changes have occurred but have not affected the basic doctrine. Firstly, all references to Soviet-style "socialism" have been removed. History is thus again seen as performing a perfect trajectory, from its beginnings to the goal towards which the Georgian people is heading of its own free will: that of the nation, free and entire, at last coming into its own. The scenario is thus the same as that of the nineteenth-century historians. Secondly, in this case marking a break with those historians but harking back to the ideas held dear by the kings and their chroniclers, the Christian faith is regarded as the driving

Opposite page, *The new man* (1921), a watercolour by Nikolai Kogut (1891-1959). Below, a mid-19th-century lithograph depicting a Georgian prince.

force in history. In other words, the saga of the Georgian people is still working itself out in accordance with the very model that was until lately favoured by the Soviet authorities, the only difference being that it now culminates in the fulfilment of the Christian faith.

This is why recent historical publications, whatever their level, their scope or their readership, add nothing new to the existing edifice. They either carry on from where traditional history left off, supposedly purging it of all "Marxist" impurities, or they re-issue religious texts that have already been studied and published for a long time, simply giving them a wider circulation. *All* the major historical research projects are oriented towards the past of the Orthodox church or religious archaeology, or towards republishing, on a grand scale, the writings of the fathers of the Georgian church—which have in any case long been in print. There is no escaping the obvious fact that Christian teleology is purely and simply taking the place of the teleology of "scientific socialism".

As to the idea of history as destiny, unfolding uninterruptedly from ancient times, close to the very beginnings, through to the ultimate, quasi-eschatological goal, there is no question of modifying or even touching it. That idea, however implausible, remains firmly in place, for it makes it possible to set up, as a defence against the demands, legitimate or otherwise, of the ethnic minorities, the Abkhazians and Ossetians in particular, the perfectly preserved monolith of Georgia's long history.

As long as the ethnic conflicts continue and as long as they are being fought on the battlefield of what is mistakenly supposed to be history, the rewriting of history, necessary and salutary though it be, will remain a dead letter. It is not enough to rid the theory and practice of history of the superficial traces left by Soviet ideology, which are more a matter of vocabulary than of substance. Such measures will continue to be insufficient as long as the conception underlying the whole historical edifice remains intact. While the Georgians' almost pathological blindness to their own history persists, it will be quite impossible to extirpate its real Soviet roots.

In fact, the persistence of this blindness in regard to the past and the return to a retrograde conception of history fuel and reinforce the cultural and political component of the present ethnic conflicts. In Georgia, more than elsewhere, history and historians bear responsibility for the present and the future—which in Georgia's case is a great pity. ■

In May 1989, a young woman brandishes a sacred image in Tbilisi during a massive demonstration to celebrate the anniversary of the Georgian Republic of 1918.

POLAND

Myths that die hard

by Henryk Samsonowicz

Historians should eschew the role of prophecy and myth-making

Above, a ceremony held in the church of St. Stanislas in Warsaw in 1983 to mark the third anniversary of the Gdansk agreements which led to the creation of the "Solidarity" trade union.

In eastern Europe, historical materialism had a dual role: first to demonstrate that all changes must inevitably lead to world communism, and secondly to justify the political activities of the moment and, in particular, the reasons for whatever policy was pursued by Moscow at any given time.

In Poland, this doctrine was supposed to "explain" both the territories annexed from Germany after the Second World War and the territories lost to the U.S.S.R. in the east. It also led to certain manipulations (comical, to say the least) of Poland's past. For example, Casimir III the Great, who ruled in the fourteenth century, was downgraded in the official textbooks, where he was designated by the figure "III" because he had annexed part of Ukraine to Poland and abandoned Pomerania to the Teutonic Knights. After 1956, Casimir was partially rehabilitated but suspicion of him remained strong. Depending on whether or not they justified the gradual progress of mankind towards communism, historical figures, processes and actions were decreed to be either "progressive", meaning good, or "retrograde", meaning bad.

However, as the institutional crisis gathered momentum, attempts to impose such crude views of the more distant past were gradually abandoned. The situation in regard to recent history was quite different, however. For example, it was forbidden to write about the massacre of Polish prisoners of war by the Russians at Katyn, the bloody repression of the Stalin era, the civil war in Poland after 1945, the war against the Ukrainians or the anti-Semitism that was rife during the events of 1968. Similarly, it was extremely difficult to publish

In October 1956, during the rising in Budapest (Hungary), demonstrators climb on a Soviet tank in front of parliament.

anything at all about controversial popular figures such as Marshal Józef Pilsudski in Poland, Jozef Tiso in Slovakia or Imre Nagy in Hungary.

Black legend, white legend

This state of affairs confirmed the physical law that action and reaction are equal and opposite. Fighting to preserve its identity, civil society was to create a mythology of history: there would be a "white legend" as well as a "black legend". In Poland Marshal Pilsudski (1867-1935) never enjoyed such popularity in his lifetime as he did under the regime of martial law proclaimed after 1981. There were three reasons for this. First, he had achieved victory in the war against Russia in 1920. Secondly, he was the symbolic figure of the political generation that had succeeded in restoring the state after the First World War. Thirdly, he was perceived as a politician who stood for the sovereignty and independence of Poland. The opinion that society formed of him was of course based on what was known at the time about the history of the inter-war years, but it also reflected a genuine collective need and the country's profound desire to see its dignity asserted.

This reaction to the official version encouraged a search for truth in the old textbooks that had been used before the days of the communist regime. The nineteenth-century historians were particularly highly thought of by readers. The Lithuanians, the Poles, the Czechs and the Slovaks did not acquire their own state until after the First World War, while the Bulgarians, the Romanians and the Hungarians only achieved independence in the nineteenth century after a long period of subjection. In every case in which a national community did not have its own state, history played an essential compensatory role. Real or imagined, made up of facts but also of myths, history reflected a search for identity and was often positioned in relation to a utopian golden age. That is why historical literature written at a time of subjection to "comfort men's hearts" became popular again during the period of Soviet domination.

Witnesses for the prosecution

However, this "idealizing" current also endeavoured to absorb what were known as the "blank spots", the parts of the past that had been deleted from official history. The human hecatomb sacrificed to the October Revolution, the war of independence between Poland and Russia, the mass deportations and massacres perpetrated against the Poles in the days of Stalin, the total indifference the Soviet authorities had shown towards the desperate Warsaw insurrection—those were just some of the subjects raised by the opposition and followed with interest by the whole of society at a time when they were passed over in silence or distorted by the authorities.

In any case, those who had taken part in the events of the recent past were still alive. Their role had been diminished or falsified, but their testimony was too important to be completely ignored. These people provided knowledge of the "blank spots" through their activities and through their writings, which were circulated by the only independent institution in Poland, the Catholic church. The number of these actors and witnesses of the history of the immediate past grew rapidly as the crises of the communist system proliferated—Berlin in 1953, Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968. In Poland, social discontent erupted on several occasions. There was street fighting in 1956 between the army and workers in Poznan, student uprisings against censorship and police methods used by the authorities in 1968; bloody repression of the workers' demonstrations at Gdansk in 1970; more workers' demonstrations at Radom and Warsaw in 1976.

Each of these crises led to changes, sometimes substantial, in the government (this was both a warning to the rulers and a source of hope to the ruled), and also swelled the ranks of active opposition militants belonging to successive generations of Poles. The light these militants threw on events was naturally quite different from the official interpretation.

The great *Solidarnosc* (Solidarity) movement in 1980 was the most striking illustration of this

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31 ➔

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GREENWATCH

THE UNESCO COURIER — MAY 1994

INVENTING THE URBAN FUTURE

BY FRANCE BEQUETTE

EARLY this century, the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) stated that "In big cities the individual has a form and degree of freedom that does not exist elsewhere". Will this still be true in six years' time, when it is expected that half of humanity will be living in cities? Will cities still be "hot-houses of civilization" or are they going to destroy their inhabitants with high pollution and low quality of life? "In 1900, there were sixteen cities worldwide with a population of one million or more," writes François Lapoix, a specialist in urban ecology. "In 1950 there were seventy-one and today there are 220, thirty of which have a population of more than five million." The third millennium will be the age of the gigantic, sprawling megacity. John Celecia, a specialist in

INVENTING THE URBAN FUTURE

UNESCO's Division of Ecological Sciences, feels that it is important to distinguish between the cities of the industrialized world, whose inhabitants are in a position to be concerned about quality of life, and Third World cities where sheer survival is at stake. Nevertheless, all cities face the same kind of problems and issues: population influx, the use of space, transportation and public utilities such as water, electricity and waste disposal.

When these problems are not solved the health of city dwellers is threatened. "Gases and dust are the two leading causes of bad air quality in cities, and their detrimental effects combine and cumulate," says Claude Allègre, professor of earth sciences and department head at the Institut de Physique du Globe in Paris. "Such gases as nitric oxide (NO) and nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), sulphur dioxide (SO_2), carbon monoxide (CO), ozone (O_3), tetraethyl lead, methane and a variety of other organic compounds of lesser importance have reached abnormally high levels in cities." These gases, which are extremely toxic, can cause serious illness and irreparable damage in young children. Unlike gaseous pollutants, dust generated by burning coal, industry and vehicles is not usually the subject of environmental measures.

Why are New York, San Francisco and Rome healthier places to live in than Mexico City, Los Angeles or Athens? A city's weather is determined by its topography (e.g. whether it is located in a basin or in mountains), its average temperature, and wind conditions. Mexico City, like Grenoble in France, was built in a basin. Rising hot air is blocked by a layer of cooler air above that traps heat and pollution. In Los Angeles, sizzling hot air from the nearby desert lies motionless over the city. Athens, which is partially enclosed by mountains, has no ventilation that could disperse the deadly *nephos*, or "smog". In New York, San Francisco and Rome wind disperses pollutants.

At the heart of the problem is the automobile. In Mexico City, two million cars spew thousands of tons of carbon monoxide into the air every day. There are approximately 500 million cars in the world today, 80 per cent of which are privately owned. In the last twenty years the total number of vehicles has doubled, seriously damaging the air quality in cities. "We're driving dinosaurs.... Our cars are made for the past, not the future. We have to radically rethink a number of phenomena that our civilization has produced, and car traffic tops the list," says Frederic Vester, a German biologist who has founded an institute for the study of biology and the environment in Munich. The twenty car manufacturers who dominate the world's automobile market now have to take the environment into account. Among the solutions to the problem are the catalytic converter, lead-free gasoline, "diester" fuel (made with vegetable oil) for diesel engines, compressed natural gas, cars that run on solar energy and, above all, electric cars. But though the electric car offers an appealing solution, it has drawbacks—high cost and low performance. About 100 kilos of lead batteries (the best kind available) are needed to produce as much energy as one litre of gasoline, and after only 80 kilometres the batteries have to be recharged.

THE PROBLEMS OF WATER AND WASTE

Water is another big problem. In Mexico City, drinking water is increasingly difficult to obtain. Wells 1,500 metres deep have been dug, and pipelines bring in water from up to 100 kilometres away. The poorest inhabitants of Phnom Penh in Cambodia and Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire have to buy water from street vendors, who are in many cases unauthorized. Unclean water can carry cholera, typhoid, enteritis, poliomyelitis, hepatitis and a host of parasites. Another consequence of

AN IMPORTANT DATE FOR URBAN ECOLOGY

"Cities and Sustainable Development" is the overall theme of "Global Forum '94" which is being held in Manchester (United Kingdom) from 24 June to 3 July 1994. Representatives from 50 of the world's cities, 65 per cent of which are located in developing countries, have been invited. Delegations from all continents and the major geographical regions will share experiences regarding the urban environment, health, transportation, communication, employment, markets, and finance. The conclusions will be passed on to the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Conference on Habitat II that will be held in Istanbul in 1996. For further information, please contact the Town Hall, Manchester. Tel. (44-61) 236 08 68; Fax. 234 37 43

lack of water is lack of sewers. In Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), an inadequate sewage system has led to serious river pollution.

The big cities of the South are often hit by violent tropical rainstorms which wash away uncollected waste, and their most vulnerable inhabitants are people living in shantytowns built on low-lying ground that is subject to flooding. They use sheet metal, palm leaves and cardboard to build ramshackle shelters on patches of waste land where wells are often near latrines. Figures published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) are eloquent. In 1992, 80 per cent of the population of Addis Ababa were living in shantytowns or as squatters, 70 per cent in Casablanca (Morocco) and almost as many in Calcutta (India), 60 per cent in Bogota (Colombia), 39 per cent in Manila (Philippines) and 20 per cent in Bangkok (Thailand).

The problem of waste, which is closely linked to that of water, is growing worse. "The metropolis is a gigantic stomach," writes Michel Giraud. "It consumes a lot and spews out enormous amounts of waste." Cairo produces 4,500 tons of refuse every day, and only two-thirds of Mexico City's garbage is actually collected." Huge garbage dumps in Dakar and Manila have become polluted settlements for masses of outcasts.

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

According to the Centre for our Common Future based in Geneva (Switzerland), "Informal settlements and urban slums should be upgraded to erase the deficit in urban shelter. All urban areas need such services as clean water, sanitation and waste collection, and higher-income neighbourhoods should pay the full cost of providing such services."[1] Several organizations of the United Nations system are also addressing urban problems. UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme, for example, studies urban ecology and the ecology of populations. Its primary objective is to study how social conditions (the organization and structure of a society, its industries, its transportation, and its buildings) affect the natural environment and the quality of human life. Creative thinking, sharp analyses, and a judicious comparison of solutions are all necessary in the effort to rethink the future of the city.

In 1879 Jules Verne wrote, "Why don't we use our imagination to the full and draw the plans for a model city built on rigorous scientific data? We would invite all the peoples of the world to visit this city where life is good." The question is still as valid as ever. ■

SUGGESTED READING:

☛ *Shaping Cities: the Environmental and Human Dimensions*, by Marcia D. Lowe (Worldwatch Paper 105). Worldwatch Institute, Washington, D.C. (1991).

☛ *The Urban Environment. A Sourcebook for the 1990s*, compiled and published by the Centre for Urban Ecology, Birmingham (UK).

FRANCE BEQUETTE is a Franco-American journalist specializing in environmental questions. Since 1985 she has been associated with the WANAD-UNESCO training programme for African news-agency journalists.

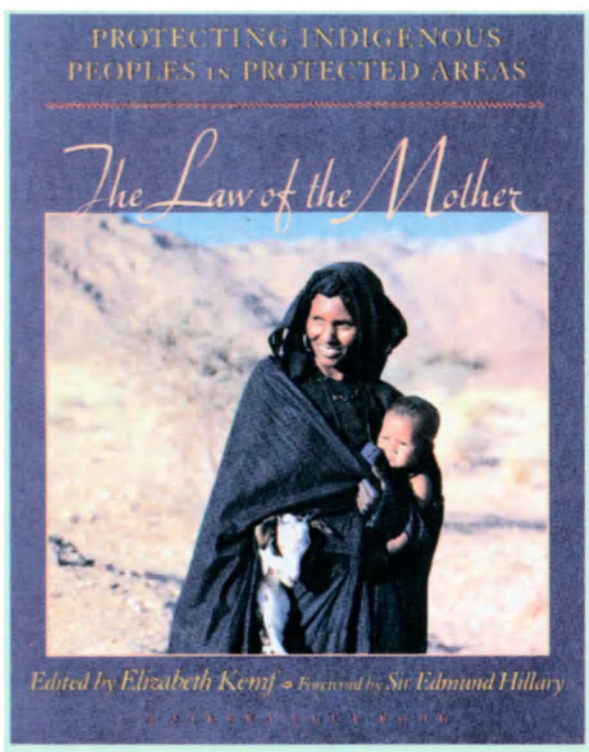
1. *The Earth Summit's Agenda for Change. A plain language version of Agenda 21 and the other Rio Agreements*, published by the Centre for Our Common Future, 52 rue des Pâquis, 1201, Geneva, Switzerland.

THE ENVIRONMENT IN FIJI

To learn about the environment in Fiji, the place to go to is the South Pacific Action Committee for Human Ecology and the Environment (SPACHEE), a non-governmental organization that was founded in 1982. Its office and Environment Resource Centre are at the University of the South Pacific in Suva (Fiji) where students, teachers, community groups and government staff can consult a comprehensive collection of environmental resource materials. SPACHEE also publishes a quarterly newsletter that focuses on fragile island ecosystems and organizes campaigns to raise public awareness on such matters as coastal waste dumping, sea turtles, and logging. For further information, please write to: University of the South Pacific, P.O. Box, Suva, Fiji. Tel. (679) 21 24 65; Fax. (679) 30 25 48. ■

LISTENING TO INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

A remarkable new book entitled *The Law of the Mother* enables readers to share the lives of dozens of communities that are trying to preserve their traditions, sometimes in spite of restrictions imposed by well-meaning defenders of nature. Numerous questions are raised. Should a group, for example, accept a ban on hunting in its territory because it has become a national park? The book also presents examples of how populations spontaneously protect their environment. When a child is born to the Karen people, who live in the highlands of Burma and Thailand, the father goes deep into the forest and places the placenta and umbilical cord in the branch of a tree, which symbolizes life and longevity. How could he ever allow the life tree of a member of his family to be felled and sold? This beautifully illustrated book, a collaborative effort between the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and The World Conservation Union (IUCN), with support from the Commission of the European Communities, is published (in English only) by the Sierra Club. It can be ordered from IUCN, Publications Service, rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland. Tel:. (41 22) 999 00 01; Fax: (41 22) 999 00 02. ■



INDIAN POLLUTERS FACE THE LAW

One of our readers, Dr. Bharat Desai, assistant professor in environmental law at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, wrote to us recently to say that the law has become very tough on polluters in India. He cites two cases, a gas leakage from a New Delhi fertilizer plant, and one of the world's worst industrial catastrophes (more than 3,000 dead and 100,000 wounded), which occurred when the highly toxic gas methylisocyanate escaped from the Union Carbide pesticide plant at Bhopal in December 1984. In both instances the Supreme Court of India ordered the companies to pay hefty sums as compensation to the victims. In the former case, the Court ruled that a company dealing with hazardous substances that cause injury has "strict and absolute liability". For further information, please write to: Dr. Bharat Desai, Jawaharlal Nehru University, School of International Studies, New Delhi 110067, India. ■

SEEDS FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY

From 1961 to 1970, during the Viet Nam War, American planes—in the hope of flushing out the enemy—dropped some 72,000 tons of defoliants on two million hectares of forest in the south of the peninsula. The trees have not grown back because the Americans also sowed seeds that have transformed the former woodlands into grassy savannah. Attempts to reconstitute the forest cover using Australian acacias have yielded promising results, but because of lack of funds it has been impossible to reintroduce indigenous species such as the dipterocarp, whose wood is valuable. In the heart of Ho Chi Minh City, France has created a 20-hectare botanical garden where Vietnamese foresters collect 20 to 30 tons of dipterocarp seeds annually. The Franco-Vietnamese scientific co-operation programme, which was set up last year, will be able to reconstitute the forest if it succeeds in obtaining funds. ■

IN GRANADA, SCHOOL AND WATER MIX

In Granada, children who are learning about water don't just sit in school. They go and see where it comes from, how it is collected and treated, and how it is distributed to users. When they get back to school, they work from a handbook that suggests a series of practical experiments, such as a solar distiller. The handbook, which is illustrated with photos and diagrams, is a model of its kind and can easily be adapted to other contexts (in Spanish only). Address: Aula de Educación ambiental, Carmen de los Mártires, Granada, Spain. Tel. 22 20 96. ■

A FOREST OF DWARFS AND GIANTS

The forest of Dja, in the south of Cameroon, is on UNESCO's World Heritage List and also forms part of its network of biosphere reserves. It is a tropical forest with huge trees whose canopy is so dense that only mushrooms and moss can grow beneath them. As many as 1,000 different kinds of insect can live in a single tree and the watercourses contain 120 species of fish. Strangely enough, this world of giants is the home of small animal varieties such as rare dwarf hippopotami, elephants and chimpanzees. The variety of birds is so great that they have not yet all been indexed. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and UNESCO, with the help of Germany, have raised $2 million to study the forest of Dja and improve its protection. ■

A LOVELY LITTLE FOREST

Even though it is no bigger than 80 hectares, the Fray Jorge forest in northern Chile is a wonderful curiosity of nature whose existence is now threatened. One of our readers, Daniel Yanez, has sent us an affectionate description of what has been described as a "relict hydrophilous [water-loving] forest" located in an arid zone, which exists because of the fog that forms almost daily on the Pacific coast. The fog is absorbed by the trees' leaves, leading to rainfall amounting to some 1,500 mm per year as opposed to 90 mm in neighbouring areas. The forest is the remnant of a much larger forest that was overexploited by logging for firewood and timber. The Ministry of Agriculture, which manages the 10,000-hectare Fray Jorge National Park, has listed in it more than 400 plant species—mainly subtropical flora and cacti—that are characteristic of southern Chile. According to our reader, the forest is losing about three hectares per year and may soon disappear. If nothing is done to capture the fog artificially, which is technically feasible, then it will not be possible to reforest the area. For further information, please write to: Daniel Yanez, rue aux Vaches, Mestreville, 27950 Saint-Pierre-d'Autils, France. ■

A CLEAN ISLAND

SITUATED in the north Atlantic on the edge of the Arctic circle, some 800 km west of Scotland, Iceland is an island of ice and fire. Over half of its population of 260,000 live in or near Reykjavik, the capital. During the summer months, however, the numbers of foreign tourists are so high that they represent almost 60 per cent of the entire local population. With a landscape that is unique in Europe, Iceland has many fascinating features. Its rocky coastline is broken by deep blue fjords where countless birds find refuge. There are beaches with black sand, volcanoes, geysers, and pools of bubbling lava. Vegetation is minimal, consisting primarily of dwarf birches, willows, moss and lichen. Beneath the midnight sun it is possible to eat delicious Icelandic bananas (grown in greenhouses, of course)!

Iceland, which lies across a great crack in the Earth's crust known as the mid-Atlantic ridge, is constituted almost entirely of volcanic rock, lava and sediment. It is rich in hydroelectric and geothermal power, both of which are renewable and less polluting than fossil fuels. However, this does not mean that the air in Iceland is entirely pure. While it is true that Icelandic air contains less than half the

The Lanmanalaugar valley, 100 kilometres east of Reykjavik.

A mass of blue lupins beside a river of hot water near the village of Stong.

average amount of sulphur dioxide found in most Member States of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), it does have a higher rate of nitrogen oxides, emitted essentially by the fishing fleet. At present, sulphur dioxide emissions from underground steam for energy are higher than those from human activities that burn fossil fuel. Underground water sources are plentiful and of good quality, but increased building and the rapid development of tourism and aquaculture, as well as more exports of bottled water, will make it necessary to watch over this resource carefully. Domestic waste water is discharged, for the most part untreated, into the ocean, where powerful currents disperse it in the open sea. Only Reykjavik has a modern treating facility for solid industrial and domestic waste. Small quantities of toxic waste are legally exported.

GLUTTONOUS WHALES

The quality of the soil, however, is at risk. When Irish monks first visited Iceland in the eighth century they probably discovered an island of forests. Today, only two forests remain, covering a mere one per cent of the territory. In 1990, 8,000 volunteers planted 3.4 million trees. Nevertheless, three-quarters of the country is affected by erosion. Because of the harsh climate, vegetation regenerates only very slowly, and it has been further deteriorated by agriculture, animal herds, tourists, cross-country vehicles and snowbikes.

So far, the island's animals are not threatened. The arctic fox or isatis (*Alopex lagopus*) is proliferating. The bird population is both large and varied. Iceland still hunts whales, which it considers a traditional source of food and a threat to its shellfish supply. The cetaceans are accused of depleting this resource more rapidly than the country's fishermen. But there is a growing awareness that the whale population must be managed wisely, like the fish reserves for which a quota for each species is imposed.

If the government wants Iceland to keep its image as a clean island, then it must use imagination in implementing its ambitious environmental policy, especially in the face of financial difficulties caused by a slowdown in economic growth. ■

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

phenomenon. Almost all the participants in previous movements were involved in it and made no secret of their commitment. Several million people were now in active opposition. The proclamation of a "state of war" by the government led to a definitive break between "official history" and "true history", as the majority of the population called it.

Demythification

When the communist system collapsed in 1989, the vision of the past that it had imposed collapsed with it. The history created by living people and the versions which had "comforted men's hearts" in previous years now came to the fore again. Genuine scientific historiography also experienced a fresh dynamic.

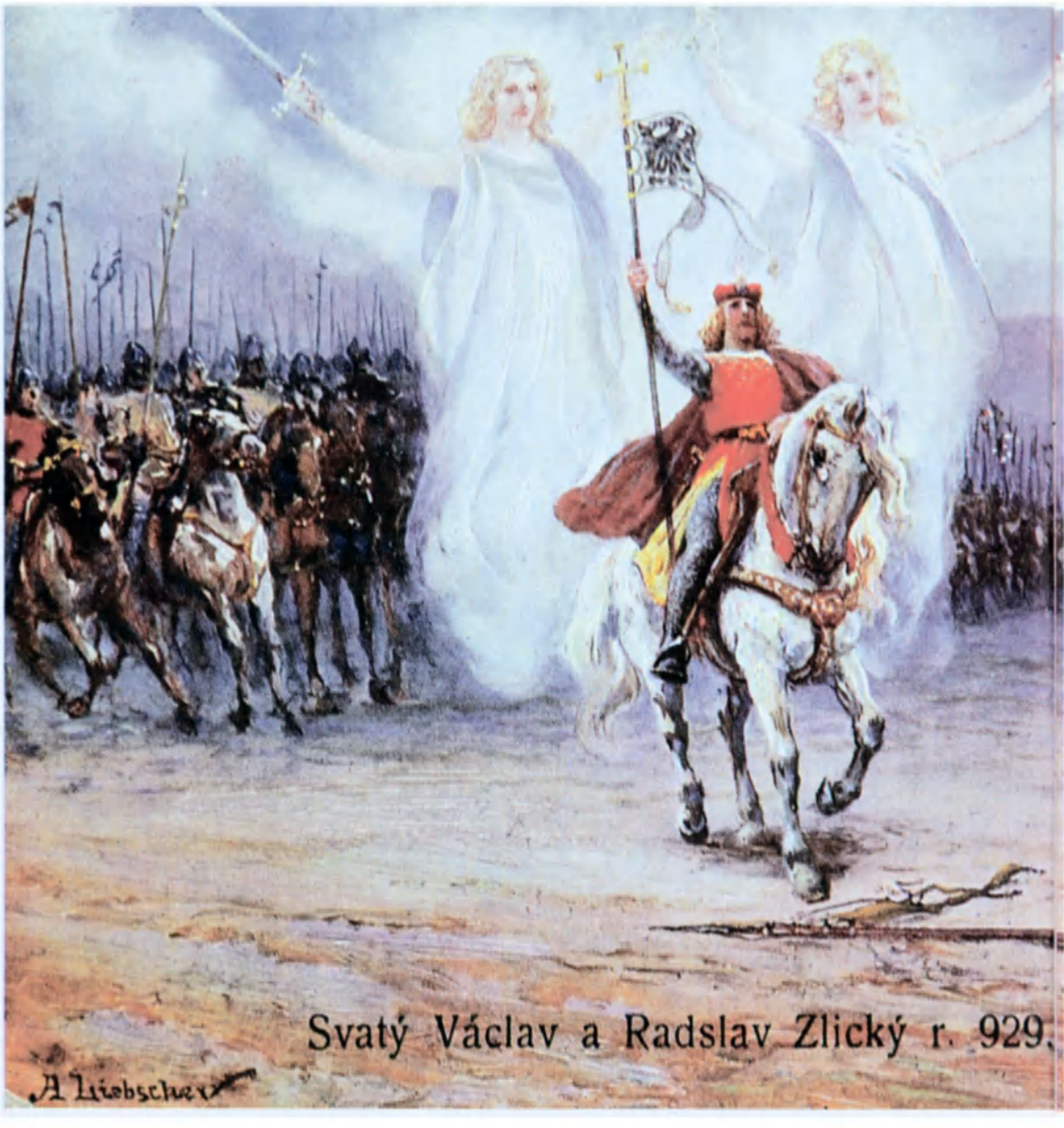
There were several reasons for this. The first is based on the national and international prestige enjoyed by Polish historical science. Since the nineteenth century, Polish society has held its historians in high esteem. Also, the researchers into ancient and recent history included men who were known for their opposition activities, so that all the more trust was placed in them. People were more willing to accept from them theories which were still not popular. In addition, the participation of Polish historians in international research and their co-operation with universities in many countries increased their credibility when they wrote the history of their nation.

Polish researchers have long drawn on the cultural anthropology of scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Georges Dumézil. They had taken part in programmes to apply the principles of Fernand Braudel's universal history and exploited the theories of American, German and English researchers.

The second reason is equally, if not more, important. Institutional change had led to the abolition of anti-democratic constraints. Once freedom of expression was regained, censorship abolished and "ideologization" of the past ended, the conditions for genuine scientific work once again existed. Moreover, Polish society had acquired its own state, laws and institutions. There was no longer any need to resort to an idealized image of the past to glorify national identity.

Hence the rewriting of history in Poland, as elsewhere in eastern Europe, is defined by three main features. First, the rejection of a single point of view—in other words, of an official version of history. Secondly, the possibility of writing about the past without neglecting any of its aspects, a feature that implies the authorization of public debate in a spirit of complete critical freedom, not so much about the existence of the facts as about their interpretation. Thirdly, the abandonment of the idea of history as a substitute for public institutions and as a way of providing the nation with a sense of identity. Historiography must abandon the role of prophecy and myth-making and devote its energies instead to the analysis of historical processes. Society and historical science will both be all the richer. ■

In April 1943 German troops discovered in the Katyn forest (Russia) mass graves of thousands of Polish officers executed by the Soviet security authorities. Below, identifying the dead.



Lost illusions

by Eva Schmidt-Hartmann

EVA SCHMIDT-HARTMANN is a Czech sociologist and historian who teaches at the Carolinum Collegium in Munich (Germany). She is the author of many studies on the modern history of central Europe, historiography and political thought.

As in every other former communist country, public interest in the past in post-communist Czechoslovakia began with curiosity about everything that had been previously forbidden. The history of churches and religion, old noble houses and individual politicians were the most popular topics in the media and in books. Clubs that were heirs to a rich tradition were founded and the historic heritage of Prague and other cities became tourist attractions that brought in ready cash. The liberated state derived its new legitimacy from its brief but glorious past.

As the many different faces of the past were dusted off and rediscovered, long-forgotten and repressed memories of unpleasant and conflictual situations and developments resurfaced. For example, the controversies between the Czechs and the Slovaks dating from the era of the first democratic Czechoslovak Republic between 1918 and 1938 took on a new lease of life. The exploitation by the tourist industry of everything to do with Franz Kafka raised questions about the fate of the German and Jewish peoples in the Bohemian regions who had made up nearly one-third of the total population before the Second World War. The passionate debate that ensued prompted recollections of many facets of past suffering and raised the question of how different sections of the population had behaved in those days and what assistance they had given to the victims of harsh persecution. The myth of specifically Czech democratic traditions began to be undermined.

St. Wenceslas (Václav I) is shown on this postcard reproduction of a painting by Adolf Liebscher. Regarded as the patron saint and defender of the Czech nation, he ruled Bohemia from 921 to 929.

The debate focused particularly on one question—not least because of its significance throughout Europe today: whether, and if so how, different nationalities can live together in a democratic state. On this subject, the history of Czechoslovakia offers a particularly rich fund of experience.

Modern Czech historical consciousness was formed during the nineteenth century in an age when Czech society acquired nationhood as an integral part of the Habsburg monarchy. As a defence against the lordship of the German-speaking Austrians which was experienced as a repression of nationality, Czech historians emphasized the cultural and historical originality of their nation. At the same time, Czech society did all it could to promote the democratization of multinational Austria. The idea of Czech nationhood, differing from others because of its democratic character, was born at that time and undoubtedly encouraged the adoption of parliamentary democracy by the Czechoslovak state created in 1918.

But the Czechs were not alone in Czechoslovakia. Even if they dominated the new state, the latter also contained Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians and other small ethnic groups. They perceived the newly founded state as the fulfilment of their struggle for emancipation from a Habsburg monarchy dominated by German speakers, and regarded the new republic as "their" state. They were deaf to similar endeavours by other nationalities to achieve self-determination. By clever manipulation, democratically elected majorities managed to ensure that a parliamentary system functioned, but they made no compromises with the members of other nationalities and did not allow them any share of power.

When the communist dictatorship fell in 1989 and democracy was restored, the Czech and Slovak memories of their common past proved very different. While the Czechs spoke of democracy, many Slovaks stressed the way in which their nationhood had been jeopardized. Three years later, the two nations went their separate ways and formed two independent states. The public debate on the past that emerged in post-communist Czechoslovakia did much to ensure that national conflicts became unbridgeable. Once again, it transpired that democracy provided no miracle recipe for conflicts between nationalities.

The age of suspicion

Czech society also gradually discovered that its democratic traditions had not prevented it from committing massive crimes against another nationality. Today, people are asking to what extent the expropriation of three million Germans after the end of the Second World War, their forced exodus from the country and the confiscation of the property they left behind them contributed to the establishment of the dictatorship of the communist party in 1948. The popular belief in the collective guilt of the Germans at the end of the Second World War, the neglect of individual liberties, blind belief in progress and uncritical faith in individual political leaders are often the subject of public debate by historians today.

Communist rule itself is starting to be viewed by historians in the longer term context of Czech history rather than as the rule of violence imposed by outside forces—the Soviet Union and its henchmen—without the co-responsibility of the Czech people. Today, few if any proponents remain of the idea of a Czech society shaped by its own supposedly democratic tradition on the one hand, and evil imported from outside on the other. On the contrary, people are now asking how it was that large segments of the Czech population could be convinced by communist ideology, why there were so few avowed opponents of the regime, and how certain elements of national self-awareness were exploited by the communists in an attempt to win over public opinion.

Top, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, the first President of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1935), arrives on Prague's Wenceslas Square in 1918.
Above, a demonstration in Wenceslas Square in Prague in November 1989 during the velvet revolution that led to the election of the dissident writer Václav Havel as President of the Republic.

Here, the lively debate over traditional images of history is a source of valuable information. Today, a traditional dislike of elites, a populist vision of politics and a taste for authoritarian rule are coming to be seen as typical features of the political culture of both bourgeois and communist Czechoslovakia. It is gradually becoming apparent that the communists reinterpreted traditional myths of Czech history but were able, first and foremost, to make ideological capital out of prejudices deeply rooted in the popular mind.

However, it is hard to come to terms with such a rapid change in the historical self-awareness of a society. New knowledge is often discussed in simplified form, and where a cautious and difficult critical assessment would be useful, radical prejudices tend to crop up instead. Often a glorified image is replaced by its opposite—denigration. Discussion turns into heated polemic based on slogans in which complex historical relationships are personalized and viewed in crudely simplified terms. Only a few years ago, historians were still often called upon to make statements of decisive importance in their capacity as guardians of truth; today many complain of the public's loss of confidence in statements based on historical studies.

The way in which history has been written in the past four decades is therefore a matter of controversy among a general public that takes an interest in history. Were all the historians who obtained permission to publish their works under the communist regime minions of the rulers or were they able to present the results of serious research? Can any confidence be placed in a historian who served the communist regime? What is the relevance of the moral and political integrity of a historian to the quality of his or her works? How does a presentation of history that has been purged of communist jargon to incorporate a new vocabulary and a few additions differ from sound modern historiography?

The uncertainty principle

In the schools and universities, complaints are being voiced about the lack of new teaching materials; historical journals are facing financial problems, and the Czech Republic, which now has only ten million inhabitants, is not a big enough market for books written primarily for specialists to be profitable. These practical problems contribute to an uncertain perception of the past by a broad sector of the public.

In reality, however, this climate of uncertainty corresponds in many respects to the changed consciousness of modern societies, which is a widespread phenomenon. In the West, the process of disintegration of the historical images handed down from the nineteenth century, which remained popular everywhere until the 1950s, has been slower but certainly not dissimilar to current developments in Czech society. Who in Europe today would claim that the English have an ideal recipe for a satisfactory political system, that the French are the only creators of culture and that the Germans are incapable of democratization? The fact that the post-communist reinterpretation of history shows the Czech past to have been many-faceted and the Czechs themselves as neither better nor worse "democrats" than others should therefore not come as a surprise.

The modern approach to history has revealed that many historical concepts once regarded as "scientifically proved" are myths, although such realizations are only gradually finding their way into the school textbooks. The disappearance, practically overnight, of traditional historical myths comes as a hard blow to many. People today must learn to live with the new uncertainty instead of using it to paint frightening scenarios of crisis. For the democratic future of Czech society, the demythification of its democratic traditions has brought valuable new insights into the complex relationships that spelled the end of democracy in the inter-war years. ■

BULGARIA

A sociologist discovers how history can be retouched by those who took part in it

When memory plays tricks

by Liliana Deyanova

A propaganda poster showing Todor Zhivkov, secretary general of the Bulgarian communist party from 1954 to 1989, and a text vaunting the country's economic strength.

"Our past is becoming more and more unpredictable." Bulgarians today are increasingly familiar with this paradox. Not for the first time, they are asking themselves such questions as these: Did the communists come to power on 9 September 1944 as the result of a "popular uprising" against a monarchist-fascist dictatorship, without direct intervention by the Red Army, or as the result of a coup d'état by a gang of traitors and terrorists supported by Russian guns? Was Bulgaria ever fascist? Who saved the Jews from deportation to Nazi concentration camps? The communist party or King Boris III?

In one of its first directives, the new government set up in 1944 enjoined teachers "not to expound the positive actions of monarchs in history lessons, but to stress the tyrannical quality of their rule and the struggle of the oppressed people". The triumphant workers and peasants were to be glorified. Thus was history rewritten. It is no surprise to find Spartacus described as a "proletarian"; the most grotesque illustrations of communist iconography came close to depicting him brandishing a hammer and sickle.

Today's history books, on the other hand, avoid talking about "the positive aspects of the proletariat", and filter or exclude previously sacrosanct expressions such as "anti-fascist popular uprising" and "the glorious October Revolution". Perhaps this is what the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard has described as "a rewriting of history that is contrary to the totalitarian version"?

A sociological enquiry

In Bulgaria a far-reaching research programme has been launched on "the rewriting of history". It is sociological rather than historical, and is less concerned with discovering the truth about past events than with understanding how they are interpreted in the various "rewritten" versions. The content of history books and history lessons, exhibits in historical museums, and biographies are all being studied as part of this programme.

By examining the ways in which individual biographies are being rewritten it is possible to see the two-way relationship between biography and history. We can discover how people see their own lives and try to "legitimize" them by making sure that they conform to newly-accepted standards, and also how new interpretations of certain historic events are being inserted in these "revised" biographies. Two different processes are involved: giving meaning to one's own life, and using one's life story to make sense of the past. It is possible to identify various strata in the collective memory by seeing how certain events are given emphasis, important facts are omitted, minute details are magnified, and what Freud called "screen-memory" comes into being.

In this context it may be hard to say exactly "what happened on 9 September 1944". Perhaps we ought instead to see what the various interpretations of 9 September are, or even find out about the different 9 Septembers stored in the different layers of the memory. What story do those who once called themselves "active combatants in the struggle against fascism and capitalism" now tell? What story do their victims tell?

To carry out this analysis we are using a variety of sociological techniques and a number of sources. By collecting the life stories of people as they are described in the eulogies pronounced at their funerals and in later conversations with those who knew them we have tried to find out how biographies are orientated nowadays, by people on both sides of the fence.

We shall not dwell on the way in which people make crude manipulations (intentional or otherwise) of their own past. What interests us is the way in which episodes in a biography are unconsciously reorganized at the time of death. In every biography we have noted a transference of guilt, a refusal to be associated with evil. Evil is rejected: it is done by enemies, or at a pinch by black sheep on one's own side. What is interesting in the biographies we have assembled are the compromises, the guilt-feelings, the justifications and rationalizations. Matters of this kind are not mentioned at funerals, but they can be taken into account precisely because of the way in which they are passed over in silence.

We examine and compare the various strata of a biography to see how it is constructed, what is concealed, retouched or given emphasis, how sensitive matters are evaded (e.g. the case of someone from a middle-class background who joined the Communist Party), and what apparently serves as mitigating circumstances (e.g. euphemisms whereby a crime is called a "youthful mistake", or a compromise is described as "the wisdom of experience"). In other words, we try to find out how biographies are "normalized".

Biographical revelations

We have distinguished four categories of biography. In each of them, the subject always remains an outsider, a figure who is somehow divorced from events.

First, what is striking about the biographies of communist leaders is the extraordinary innocence they affect with regard to everything that happened. Thus Anton Yugov, an ex-prime minister, is said to have fought "for a humanist society that did not come about, but that was not his fault.... He was not to see his dreams come true. Others are guilty." Elsewhere, however, Yugov is described as "a titan of the Revolution"; he was "one of the protagonists of history, and will always belong to it".

The "titan" thus makes history—but is not responsible for what happens. This is a peculiar logic, but one that is aware of its own illogicality and seeks to justify Yugov's failings by adding: "errors did not spare him, either". This is a typical example of exteriorization. The errors are the subject of the sentence; they come from an outside source. There are wicked men like Todor Zhivkov, who "seized power". Yugov, moreover, "had his own opinion about things, and that did not please the sinister Zhivkov, General Secretary of the Party". In this kind of biography we see how the ideal of the revolutionary, "the humanist society", is made into the norm.

The same method appears again in the biographies of humbler figures: "He had no feeling of guilt towards anyone," reads one typical sentence. By shifting emphasis one can try to make the subject of the biography appear innocent. A militant's life is always portrayed as a sacrifice—"Total commitment of self to build a new life, making a gift of oneself." And even if "ne'er-do-wells, careerists and profiteers" or "people placed by chance on the stage of history" deceived them, "real revolutionaries always resented the contradiction between the ideal (the norm) and reality, which they regarded with a critical eye". These revolutionaries were always indignant about mistakes; they wrote

In September 1944, the Soviet army occupied Bulgaria. A coalition government declared war on Germany. Below, in the little town of Lovec, the population salutes the Red Army and shouts anti-fascist slogans.

A pro-reform demonstration in Sofia in 1989.

letters to protest and complain: that is one of the distinctive features of this category of biography. Another way of acquitting revolutionaries is to emphasize their "disinterestedness" and their "refusal of privileges" with phrases like "he left no worldly goods" or "he donated his inventions to his professional association".

What was the point of these sacrifices? How did these disinterested, self-sacrificing people manage to build such a society? Our findings reveal a denial of responsibility. To work for the construction of socialism, at whatever level, was to be a cog in a piece of machinery. Deeper levels of personality and identity (where problems of morality and guilt are, in the last analysis, decided) were unaffected.

The biographies of those who were persecuted after 9 September 1944 and have since been rehabilitated belong to a third category. A striking feature of their tragic stories is a feeling of inevitability, of an all-pervading, irrational, insuperable destiny. The thread running through their stories and the value judgments on which they are based, is the dichotomy between "communist barbarians" on one side and "us superior beings" on the other. Life is divided into two parts: "Before the Revolution he was happy", after it "his life was trapped" or "life stopped". "He was a talented man, but his life came to a standstill: the communists shattered his creative genius," says a woman intellectual from "a family with the gene of culture".

Here too the break is always seen as coming from outside. Had it not occurred, the "gene of culture" would not have been stunted—it is as though life was lived in a pure ideal environment that only the impure reality of socialism could taint. Communism is seen as the main cause of a ruined life. The person was a failure because he or she did not live a "normal life" and a "normal life" is impossible without "a normal society". People whose life-stories fit into this category see themselves as possessing a particular gene, which is the other side of "the hereditary taint" which the communists long accused them of possessing—an excuse which for long allowed them to hound the "old guard", the "bourgeois". For the victims of repression, everybody except those on their own side was mediocre, pretentious and ignoble.

The fourth category consists of people who managed to "overcome the resistance of socialist circles", people whose "gene of culture was able to develop". Admittedly, they lived amidst "the poisonous vapours of hatred and hostility", but they "sowed the seeds of good". Though they came up against "a scowling present", they remained "part of our tradition", giving meaning to the emptiness and absurdity of life.

In this category too we find the same tragic dichotomy: a life torn between "a scowling present" and "tradition", between "yesterday" and "now", between the "old guard" and the "new people"—two groups permanently divided. ■

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UNESCO'S HISTORICAL WORKS

HISTORIANS often change their methods and the problems they study without in any way lessening their commitment to the search for historical truth. As the French historian Marc Bloch once wrote, "each age reconstructs the past in terms of its own preoccupations."

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, many countries have been attempting to rewrite their histories. Among them are Russia and other countries of eastern Europe, as well as the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus and central Asia, such as Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tajikistan, where there is an evident desire to look into the past to help rebuild a national cultural identity.

At a time when ideologies and theoretical models are being widely questioned, new ways of looking at the past can also be observed in the West. To take one example, the French Revolution of 1789 is no longer seen exclusively in terms of the onward march of liberty and progress. Analysis of the Revolution now finds room for an objective view of certain episodes, such as the Terror and the revolt of the *chouans*, during which liberties and cultural identities were stifled.

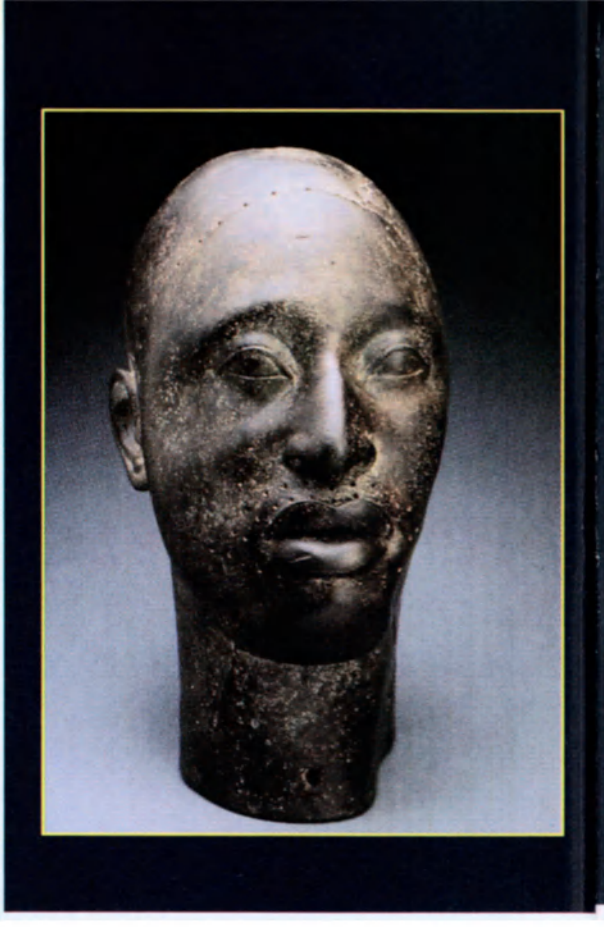
Long before these changes took place, UNESCO had been engaged on a number of major historical projects, including the history of the scientific and cultural development of humanity, and general histories of Africa, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. These projects have made use of new scientific procedures in historical analysis, different visions of history and appropriate methodologies (such as the use of African oral traditions) to establish and interpret the facts via a wide range of viewpoints.

Rewriting history means, first and foremost, taking into account new discoveries and advances in knowledge; it also means accepting other explanatory hypotheses, rehabilitating ignored or marginalized civilizations and cultures, and accepting a history that has many dimensions and moves in many directions, while always remaining true to human experience. This new approach, this change of emphasis and focus, make the UNESCO histories as topical as ever.

However, UNESCO's mission is also to contribute to the reconstruction, for the future, of a history which is an instrument of mutual understanding as well as a corpus of knowledge. On the basis of books already written or yet to be written, new historical syntheses (regional or inter-regional) will go further than the deciphering of civilizations using traditional methods, and reveal complicities, convergences, and trends that are universally shared. Rewriting history will thus involve far-reaching changes in approach and emphasis.

CHRISTOPHE WONDJI ■
Head of UNESCO's Section of General and Regional Histories

In the following article, Professor Jean Devisse, one of the architects of UNESCO's *General History of Africa*, sets an agenda for the rising generation of historians of Africa.



AFRICA

The true history of Africa is only now beginning to be written

Above left, brass head of the *Oni*, a religious chief, from Ile-Ife (Nigeria). It was produced by the lost wax method. The tiny holes in the surface were used for attaching ornaments.
Above centre, terra-cotta anthropomorphic statuette from Bankouni, near Bamako (Mali). Date unknown.
Above right, bronze head of an *Oni*. It belongs to the art of Ife (Nigeria) and was produced by the lost wax method in the mid-13th century.

An authentic picture

by Jean Devisse

At a very early stage, Western historians surrendered to the stubborn refusal of African history to fit into their conceptual frameworks. They left it to sociologists to study, in piecemeal fashion, the cultures of individual "ethnic groups" or "tribes". The sum of their efforts was to draw attention to a number of curious features and to suggest that they existed throughout the continent and its deliberately obliterated past. The institutions of the priest king and chieftainship, both obviously phenomena quite unlike anything that had existed anywhere else in the world, were all that was needed to define the continent's past.

African peoples too have felt tempted to assert unique features that distinguish them from others. Three striking examples have been analysed in recent years, from among the hundreds already recorded or presently being studied. The Nubians,[1] who once considered themselves "eminently Christian" were from the fifteenth century onwards eager to claim Arab origins and genealogies. The Hausa,[2] in common with many other peoples from Africa and the Indian Ocean, also lay claim to an Arab origin. The Tuareg[3] claim a relationship with the Ottoman Empire.

One must therefore constantly be on guard against the oversimplification which says that the true history of Africa, which was deformed or denied by "negationist" European studies of the nineteenth century, is that which the peoples themselves and their story-tellers repeat orally today. To rediscover and rewrite African history means going backwards in time. The writing of African history today runs as much risk of being retarded by a prickly regard for African specificity as it did in the past by colonialist negativity.

A symposium[4] held in Nice in 1986 on the initiative of Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, then Director-General of UNESCO, demonstrated that the writing of history in the late twentieth century must be based on the use of two important disciplines.

The first of these is chronology. Without a solid framework, history soon becomes nothing more than a vague anthropological discourse. History is more than a mere sequence of events, but without precise reference to a fixed timescale, interpretations become hazardously impressionistic.

The second discipline is the comparative method, which should be more widely used. Too many detailed studies are hidden away in monographs. As anyone knows who has contributed to the reconstruction of African history during the millennia prior to 1700, comparisons can be highly illuminating. They reveal convergences, nuances and differences, always provided that the results are related to a construction of world history composed of more than the mere juxtaposition of national or continental histories.

Comparative study presupposes the rapid

Ambassadors to the king of the Congo are shown in this illustration from the Dutch physician and geographer Olfer Dapper's "Description of Africa" (1686).
Below right, cross-section of a slave ship. The slaves are packed below deck. (Illustration from a mid-19th-century French treatise on naval engineering).

publication—which receives little encouragement from present economic systems—of the burgeoning crop of excellent work produced each year, particularly by African researchers.

Breaking new ground

Spectacular progress is currently being made in two areas. Firstly, growing numbers of studies are being carried out on the effects of the exploitation of human resources in Africa, particularly black Africa, which has occurred not only in the last few centuries, but over several millennia. The influence of this exploitation on the lives of groups of human beings—and on the economies, strategies of response and protection developed by African societies, the slow evolution of which is currently being perceived with increasing clarity—has become a major focus of interest.

These studies are enabling us to make a serious attempt to explore the question of the "arrested development" of a continent which, according to all the evidence, was "developing"—in the global sense, including the cultural dimension which is now integrated into the concept of development—in the fourteenth century, at the very time when Europe was experiencing a terrible period of crisis.

Secondly, work is commencing outside Africa in an area which was long considered unfruitful and even dangerous, namely the study of the African communities that were forcibly integrated into the life of Asia and the Americas. The spectacular change of attitude which has taken place in this field in the United States and Jamaica, for example, is now being echoed in the countries of Central and South America and the Caribbean, in lands which have long been reticent about such matters. The repercussions of the rewriting of African history on "racial integration"—a watchword in many states of the Americas—may prove beneficial, provided they do not lead to racial hatred and irreparable ruptures.

It has now become possible to examine other, much older forms of "human migration" from Africa to Asia and Europe, the existence of which has been shown by a recently published atlas.[5] The stages by which the planet has been populated from Africa—America and Australia were populated much more recently—can now be traced as part of a more detailed analysis of the evolution of the environment over thousands of years.

The same rigour must also be applied to the critical treatment of sources. No one now seriously contests the use of oral sources by historians. However, we still need to refine our methods of collecting, editing and critically examining oral data, just as historians in the North did two centuries ago with regard to written sources. Work has only just begun in this field, but extraordinary progress has already been made.

Africa's early metalworkers

Another endangered legacy consists of the irreplaceable evidence that can be produced by meticulous archaeological research. In recent decades, many spectacular discoveries have been made in

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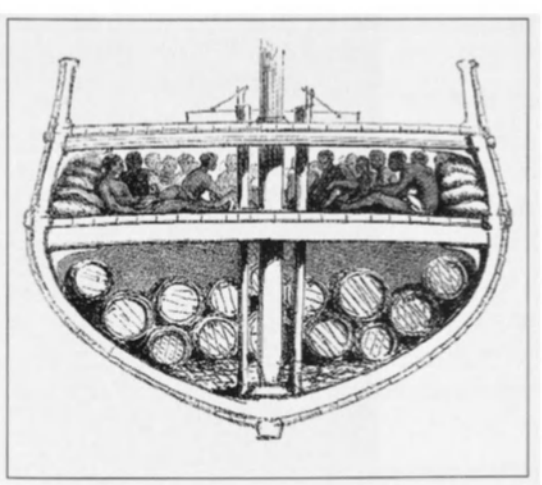
this domain. The discovery of many aspects of the past—traces of animal and plant substances, remains of meals, shrines, villages, towns, evidence of climatic change, ceramic objects—has considerably enriched our knowledge.

One revealing example is provided by studies on copper and iron. Until recently, it was taken for granted that south of the Tropic of Cancer Africa had not produced copper nor refined methods of making copper alloys. Today, the map of Africa is dotted with sites where metal was smelted during the past 3,000 years, and others where objects made of fine alloys have been found, many of them produced using the "lost wax" technique. At one time there was a debate among those who believed that iron could only have entered Africa from the north-east: either from the Caucasus or Egypt. Now, however, archaeological evidence from seven or eight countries of the intertropical zone, particularly around the equator, proves that the forging of iron was practised there as early as 1000 B.C. The era of quasi-theological debate has fortunately given way to meticulous work in the laboratory.

Lastly, there is a need for greater co-operation between disciplines. History must be allied more closely with other domains: the environmental sciences, geology, geography, human and animal palaeontology, dietetics, linguistics, medicine, and palaeobotany, to name but a few. Nor should one forget the essential role of scientific laboratories, which are now deeply involved in research on African history.

The "rewriting" of the history of Africa will require a major international effort, sustained over several generations. First and foremost it calls for the mobilization of African governments and researchers. For my part, I only regret that sufficient time no longer remains for me to witness this development. ■

1. See L. Kropacek, ch. 16 of *General History of Africa*, vol. IV, UNESCO-Heinemann International-University of California Press, 1984.
2. W.K.R. Hallam, "The Bayajida Legend in Hausa folklore", *Journal of African History*, 1966, pp. 47-60.
3. M. Hamani Djibo, *Le sultanat touareg de l'Aya*. Etudes nigériennes no. 55, 1989.
4. See *Etre historien aujourd'hui* (edited by R. Rémond). UNESCO-Crès, 1988. 350 pages.
5. *Grand Atlas de l'archéologie*. Encyclopædia Universalis publishers, Paris. P. 309, map by Jean Chavaillon.



UNESCO AND THE PREVENTION OF NATURAL DISASTERS

THE YOKOHAMA CONFERENCE

THIS ARTICLE IS ONE OF A SERIES IN WHICH THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNESCO SETS OUT HIS THINKING ON MATTERS OF CURRENT CONCERN

In the past two decades, natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, floods, landslides, volcanic eruptions, forest fires, grasshopper and locust infestations, drought and desertification have killed an estimated three million people, adversely affected at least 800 million lives and resulted in enormous economic damage, which in 1990 alone reached $47 billion. Developing countries suffer the greatest social and economic damage because of their limited resources for disaster warning and prevention. Today, the risk of natural disasters is increasing as a result of population growth, urbanization, alteration of the natural environment, substandard dwellings and public building and inadequate infrastructure maintenance.

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR; 1990-2000), was launched by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 22 December 1989 to reduce through concerted international action, especially in developing countries, the loss of life, property damage and economic and social disruption caused by natural disasters.

A World Conference on the Reduction of Natural Disasters is being held this year from 23-27 May in Yokohama (Japan). The conference has been convened to review the accomplishments of the Decade to date, chart a programme of action for the future, facilitate the exchange of information on the implementation of programmes and policies, and increase awareness of the importance of disaster reduction policies.

There are many more ways of disaster prevention and mitigation than is commonly thought. They need to be made better known to the communities concerned, the authorities, educators and development planners.

UNESCO, which is a member of the United Nations steering committee for IDNDR, has for many years been engaged in the assessment and mitigation of risks arising from natural hazards. It is committed to promoting policies of prevention, with a strong accent on enhancing preparedness and public awareness.

At the Yokohama conference, UNESCO and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) are organizing a technical committee on warning systems. UNESCO is also organizing a series of Poster Sessions which will provide a forum for scientific and technical presentations in the form of display materials on such themes as warning systems, education, health, earth science, engineering and architecture, legislation, regulation and land use.

UNESCO has published two booklets for the general public: *Standing Up to Natural Disasters* and *Disaster Reduction* as well as a children's cartoon book, *Tsunami Warning*. These can be ordered from UNESCO, Publications and Documentation Unit of the Science Sector, 1 rue Miollis, 75732 Paris CEDEX 15 (France). To order, ring (33-1) 45 68 41 20; Fax. (33-1) 43 06 11 22.

For more information, please write to: IDNDR Secretariat, Office of the United Nations in Geneva, Palais des Nations, CH-1211, Geneva 10 (Switzerland). Tel. (41-22) 798 6894; Fax. (41-22) 733-8695. ■

UNESCO IN ACTION

An active pact

We are living in an age of paradox, an age which is baroque in its immoderation, and in which the hopes born at the end of the Cold War—hopes for a more peaceful world enjoying greater prosperity, justice, solidarity and freedom—encounter the despair of the poor, whose impoverishment grows steadily worse, and the excluded, whose rejection is ever more complete.

At this watershed it is vital that we rethink the development of our societies from top to bottom. Only in so doing can we lend substance to our hopes. Having learned from experience, we will not forget that the sole protagonist and beneficiary of development is humankind.

In this connection, agreement has been reached on three essential issues: social integration, the fight against poverty, and productive employment. Rather than seeing social development as merely the development of "social services", UNESCO views it as a global process whose ultimate aim links up with that of human development. The interdependent nature of the phenomena and trends involved in this process and the increasing internationalization of the economy demonstrate clearly that our present problems are intertwined and that human societies therefore need an active form of solidarity which could take the form of an "international social pact".

An imperative—and I prefer to speak of an ethical imperative—for this type of solidarity is sharing: sharing of means, of knowledge, of work, of leisure. This type of solidarity also involves shared choices and I will mention here only those which in my view are most important.

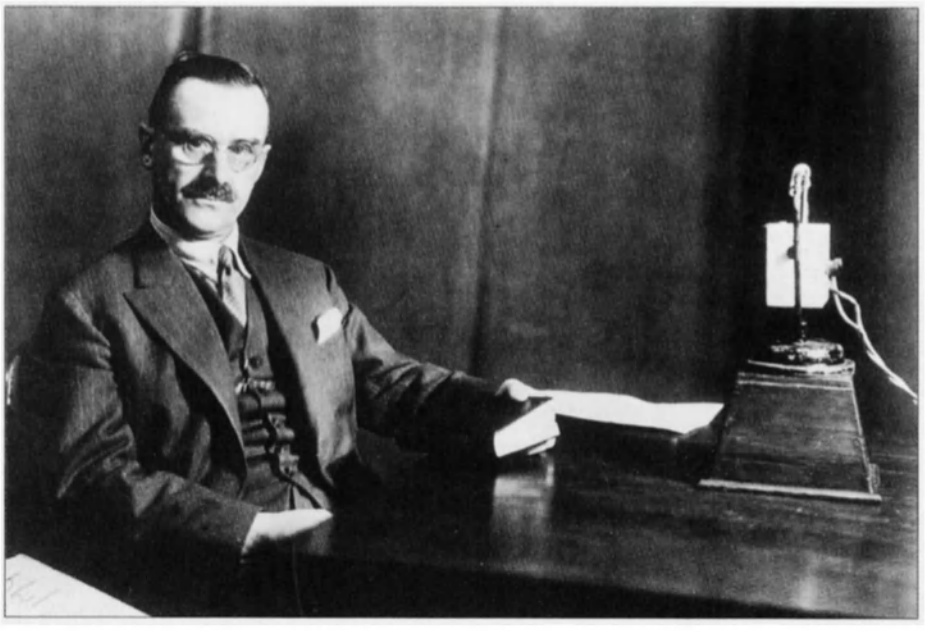
Social development—in the broader sense to which I refer—involves first of all a *global* struggle against all forms of exclusion—starting with poverty—through the development of human resources and productive employment. It means that developed countries, having realized the nature of their own difficulties and the links between those difficulties and the constraints experienced by other groups of countries, must proceed forthwith to make the necessary changes in their ways of thinking and their behaviour with regard to social integration, growth, consumption and employment.

It also means that the strategies adopted by decision-makers must take account of those whose insecure conditions contribute to international instability—I am thinking of emigrants, refugees, displaced persons and members of minority groups.

It also involves a shared determination, a joint effort of all parties, at both the national and the international level. At the national level, it is essential to harmonize, with imagination and daring, policies for employment, education, health, science, technology, regional planning, population and social integration. It is also essential that the private sector, the trade unions, the non-governmental organizations, indeed all parts of society co-operate with the authorities to ensure that these policies are successful. The role of women (so indispensable for social development), training and the acquisition of new skills (for jobs connected with the environment, for example)—such questions need to be treated in the context of society as a whole. Real social development necessitates the *active* and *democratic* participation of all members of society.

At the international level, changes in the economic situation and the extent of economic co-operation will clearly play a considerable part in forming the social pact, on condition that they are reflected in a reorientation of commercial exchanges and financial mechanisms. Within the United Nations system, the required change of direction is already being made, but it is essential to improve the coherence of the activities being carried out to acknowledge the human and social dimension of development. Allowances for this dimenson must involve scrupulously planned demilitarization, so that the new priorities gradually open up areas of genuine decision making and empowerment for civil society.

This will not be easy. But it would be illusory to think that social development can be achieved through the worn-out, myopic approach of economic development pursued up to now. ■



Thomas Mann giving a radio talk in 1928. The following year he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Thomas Mann
The collectivist betrayal

In 1935 Thomas Mann (1875-1955) took part in a meeting in Nice (France) organized by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation on the theme of "the education of modern man", and delivered a lecture the first instalment of which is published below. (The second and third instalments will appear in forthcoming issues.) Mann, who had left Hitler's Germany two years before, here expresses his belief in "European civilization" and defends the culture threatened by the rise of Nazi ideology. Readers may find some of the ideas he puts forward are still surprisingly topical.

DEEP down, Goethe never lost his kind heart or his good nature; and in his old age he confesses to us that he loved youth dearly, and that when young he liked himself much more than he liked himself as an old man.

But these words occur among others which do not hide his impatience with and lack of faith in the younger generation. "When you see," he wrote in 1812, "not only how people, especially the young, devote themselves to their pleasures and passions, but also how the age's serious forms of madness change and distort all that is highest and best in them, so that everything that should make them happy becomes their loss, to say nothing of the unspeakable pressure from outside, then it is not surprising that people obstinately persist in committing crimes against themselves and others."

We know all about that: the distortion of all that is highest and best in young people, the unspeakable outside pressure, and also the crimes. "The incredible presumption," wrote Goethe on another occasion, "to which young people give rein will manifest itself in a few years' time in the greatest lunacy,"—words that might have been uttered today, a really topical prophecy. He also wrote: "Young people no longer listen. It is true that listening requires a special kind of culture." Culture! A word that attracts the sneers of a whole generation. These sneers are directed against the favourite word of the liberal middle class, as if culture were really only another word for middle-class liberalism, as if it did not denote the opposite of brutishness and human destitution: the opposite also of idleness, of that miserable sloppiness that is still sloppiness even when it adopts a martial gait, in a word, as if culture, as form, as desire for freedom and truth, living by conscience and ceaseless efforts, were not the discipline of morality itself!

AN ESCAPIST GENERATION

So who bothers nowadays? The children of the modern world claim that life is harder for them than it ever was for us, because they share its risks, its distress and its total uncertainty, whereas we grew up in the economic security of the bourgeois century. But they exaggerate the importance of material things: and in any case, must not we children of the past in our old age now get used to a change in the circumstances that have taken us from bourgeois satiety to heroic penury? The important thing is that young people have no idea about "culture" in the lofty, profound sense, or about inner struggles, individual responsibility or personal effort; they take their ease in collective life instead.

Collective life is comfortable compared with individual life—deliciously comfort-

able. What the collectivist generation desires, and allows itself, is a perpetual holiday to escape from itself. What it wants and loves is ecstasy: and if we look at this term, expressive of noble, holy ideas and essential for the exaltation and religious uplifting of life, we see at once that the collectivism that is fashionable today is but one example of the popular distortion that great and venerable European concepts undergo when they are distributed and handed over for consumption by the masses.

"To make but one with all of life," cried Hölderlin in *Hyperion*. "At these words virtue doffs its warlike armour, the spirit of man lays down the sceptre; death disappears from the midst of life, and everlastingness and eternal youth inspire and beautify the world." The Dionysiac event that these words portend is cheapened in the collectivist ecstasy, the purely selfish hedonistic pleasure, informed by no real meaning, that young people get from marching in serried ranks to the rhythm of songs that are a mixture of folk-songs that have fallen into the gutter and newspaper articles.

AN IMPOVERISHED CIVILIZATION

These young people like to melt into the mass untrammelled by any personal responsibility, and don't really mind which way they are going. When asked what satisfaction they get out of it all, they are in no hurry to draw definite conclusions or make projections. The collective intoxication that brings freedom from the self and its burdens is its own reward. Related ideas such as "the state", "socialism" and "national grandeur" are more or less excuses—subsidiary and, frankly, superfluous ideas. What matters is to achieve ecstasy, to break free from the self and the need to think, i.e. essentially to free oneself of all morality and all reason—and also, of course, of fear, of the anxiety that leads people to crowd together in dense masses, keeping each other warm and singing loudly. This aspect of the matter is far and away the most likely to arouse our sympathy and commiseration.

This sense of wellbeing that people feel when they escape from themselves and shake off all personal responsibility goes back to the war. When we speak of modern man, today's man, we are of course thinking of the post-war European, the man who fought in the war or was born into the world created by the war. We tend to regard the present state of the world, economically, intellectually and morally, as the result of the war. But perhaps that is going too far. There is no denying the enormous material and moral havoc the war caused, but it did not create our world. It merely brought to light, accentuated and exaggerated what was already there. The incredible impoverishment of civilization and the moral decadence we cannot avoid observing by comparison with the nineteenth century are not the result of the war, although the war doubtless made a big contribution to them. The movement had already started beforehand. It is an old phenomenon, caused primarily by the rise to power of mass man, as José Ortega y Gasset has so brilliantly shown in his book, *La Rebelión de las masas* (1929; *The Revolt of the Masses*, 1932).

It is a tragedy that all the confusion of our times is due to the generosity and boundless benevolence of the nineteenth century, that immensely productive age whose scientific and social blessings enabled the population of Europe to increase threefold; it is a tragedy that this crisis, which bids fair to send us back into barbarism, grew out of its shortsighted magnanimity. Ortega splendidly describes how the new masses irrupted into a civilization which they proceeded to use as though it were a natural phenomenon, ignorant and utterly disrespectful of the complex mechanisms that were essential to its existence.

As an example of the masses' attitude to the conditions that gave them birth, it is worth recalling that they trampled liberal democracy underfoot—or, more precisely, that they used liberal democracy to destroy liberal democracy. It is very possible that they will bring about the decline of technology too, despite all the childish love their primitive souls have for it, because they do not know that technology is merely the practical application of free and disinterested research pursued for love of knowledge, and because they despise idealism and everything related to it—and hence freedom and truth.

INTELLECTUAL DECLINE

"Primitivism" is the right word to use. "The average modern man," says Ortega, "has a much healthier, more vigorous, but also much simpler mind than his predecessor of the last century." Thus if a play such as Ibsen's *Wild Duck* is played to a modern audience (assuming that the term, with its overtones of elitism, is the right one to apply to the modern masses), it will turn out to have become completely incomprehensible thirty-five years later. The audience takes it as a farce, and laughs in the wrong places. In the nineteenth century there was a society capable of understanding the European irony, the double meanings, the idealist bitterness and the moral refinement of a work of this kind. This faculty has been lost; and the proven possibility of the "disappearance", the lowering of the intellectual level almost overnight to a primitive state in which people are not merely insensitive to the finer points but feel a fierce hatred for them—this whole phenomenon, which would have been thought impossible in the nineteenth century, because then people believed in continuity, is all the more frightening because it opens up wider vistas. It shows that victories can in the end be lost and fall into oblivion, and that civilization itself is by no means certain to escape this fate. ■

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Text selected and presented by Edgardo Canton

UNESCO IN ACTION
HERITAGE

QUEBEC
a city beyond compare

by André Charbonneau,
Yvon Desloges and Marc Lafrance

The cradle of French civilization in America and a fortified city of outstanding interest, historic Quebec is one of UNESCO's world heritage sites

WHEN he built his first lodging, which served as a warehouse, home and fort on the northern bank of the St. Lawrence in 1608—on the site of what is today Place Royale—Samuel de Champlain harboured great ambitions for Quebec—that it should become the main port of the new colony, its political and religious centre, its major stronghold. The future proved him right. In the span of one and a half centuries, Quebec became the capital of an immense French empire in America—a giant with feet of clay—extending from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Rocky Mountains.

Located on a steep hill with two plateaux—one high, the other low—Quebec acquired its characteristic features very early on. In the upper town were the fortress, the governor's palace, religious and administrative buildings and numerous dwellings. The lower town was the commercial district whose port was until the mid-nineteenth century the farthest point up the St. Lawrence that ocean-going vessels could sail. From Quebec furs were exported in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as was lumber in the nineteenth, by which time the city had become the third largest port in North America and the principal point of entry for immigrants to Canada.

Moreover, the city and its educational institutions served as the administrative and intellectual centre of the new colony of New France, and was the apostolic seat of a large diocese that extended over a vast area of North America, from the Atlantic to Louisiana. From it explorers and missionaries set sail in search of new lands and new souls. It was the destination of French settlers who found there reminders of the land from which they had come. The cathedral, built in the middle of the eighteenth century, and the seventeenth-century parts of the Ursulines Convent and the Seminary, are all that remains of the complex of religious buildings—the archbishopric and other institutions—that once stood in the upper town.

In spite of important political, economic and social changes, Quebec has succeeded in preserving its cultural heritage, which is based on its institutions and architecture, but also on its geography. While large architectural structures have undergone major changes, the layout of the city remains fundamentally the same, spreading out like a spider's web, with a chequerboard pattern added in the middle of the eighteenth century by the engineer Chaussegros de Léry. The typical Quebec house had a distinctive architectural style adapted from a French model. Most of them were destroyed during the bombardment of 1759 and were rebuilt after the English conquest by craftsmen using traditional skills. Large chimneys, fire-break walls and high roofs are characteristic features.

View of Quebec. (19th-century French engraving).

THE FORTIFIED CITY

The upper town offered many tactical advantages to a city that was strategically important as a centre of communication with the mother country and as the port of

The Château Frontenac looks out over the St. Lawrence. It is named for Louis de Buade, count of Palluau and Frontenac, who was governor of New France in the late 17th century.

entry for supplies from France. Indeed, Quebec's defensive system reflected the advances of European fortification techniques from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Several elements of the system have survived to evoke the rich military past of a city that has experienced no less than five sieges.

Champlain's first wooden house calls to mind a medieval castle equipped with platforms for cannon. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, and during the first half of the eighteenth, the colony was caught in the throes of rivalry between European nations. Quebec became a prize in the conflict between troops and military techniques of the old continent. A succession of defensive walls were built whose geometry and contours reflect the influence of the great French military engineer Vauban. Several military structures from this period have survived, notably the walls around the old city, which were built by Chaussegros de Léry after 1745. Quebec was besieged twice during the Seven Years War (1756 to 1763), which was caused by rivalry between France and England in North America.

After the Treaty of Paris (1763), as a result of which New France became an English colony, Quehec continued to be of great strategic importance, although its situation was transformed by the American War of Independence against the British. American troops attempted to seize the city in 1775. British contributions to the defence system can still be seen. The construction of a citadel on the top of a strategic site is a classic response hy an army of occupation in a newly-conquered land, and the British were no exception to the rule. After many projects had been put forward and some building work was done between 1778 and 1782, the Citadel, which still dominates Cape Diamond, was finally built between 1820 and 1830 to plans by Colonel Elias Durnford.

Old houses in the lower town evoke the atmosphere of Normandy or Brittany, where their first occupants originated.

Rebuilt in neogothic style in the 19th century, the St. Louis gate was one of the fortified passages through the city wall.

The surviving elements of the defence system are one of the dominant features of Quebec's urban landscape. They are widely regarded as a key cultural resource that gives Quebec its distinctive character among North American cities.

THE END OF AN ERA

Quebec's era as a military fortress ended towards the middle of the nineteenth century. The departure of the British garrison in 1871 provided an opportunity to abandon the fort and destroy the old military gates. It marked the start of changes whereby the fortress became a historical monument and of struggles between the forces of progress and the supporters of conservation.

It was a bitter struggle, waged during a time of steady decline in Quebec. The large sea port, the shipbuilding industry and the lumber trade collapsed and the city lost ground when Ottawa became national capital after the creation of the Canadian Confederation. Yet in spite of these difficulties, major building projects such as the Parliament buildings (1886), City Hall (1895) and the Château Frontenac (1894) enhanced the city's image and gave it a new skyline.

The preservation movement launched by the government of General Dufferin in 1874 to protect the old walled enclosures determined the present shape of Quebec. The construction of the famous Dufferin terrace that overlooks the cliff, and the opening of new entry points into the city transformed Quebec from a fortress city into a national historic site.

The preservation movement grew stronger during the twentieth century. The fortifications were classified as a monument of national historical interest in 1957. Around the same time, the government of Quebec undertook the restoration of a number of houses and buildings situated on Place Royale in the lower town—the former commercial and residential heart of Quebec. In December 1985, following a recommendation by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the historic district of Quebec was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List. ■

ANDRÉ CHARBONNEAU, YVON DESLOGES AND MARC LAFRANCE
are Quebec historians working with Parks Canada-Quebec Region. They have been active for over twenty years in the protection and presentation of Canadian historic sites. They are co-authors of *Quebec, the Fortified City: from the 17th to the 19th century* (Quebec, 1982).

Rue Notre-Dame, in the lower town, is one of the oldest thoroughfares in North America.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE UNIVERSALITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Are human rights universal? Would that they were. We perceive this universality as self-evident, like other values we hold dear. The important point, however, is not whether those rights are universal from the philosophical or metaphysical point of view but whether everyone feels them to be universal.

It is doubtful whether they do. We take our stand on the principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948; but at that time the United Nations had less than sixty members, and the forty-eight votes cast in favour of adoption were all, or nearly all, "Western" votes, whilst decolonization had scarcely begun and we had only just started to speak about the Third World.

The United Nations now has nearly 200 members. The countries that have joined have thus "subscribed" to the Declaration—but how? By a solemn undertaking, by a statement that is binding on them, at least morally? It seems not.

These countries are under an obligation, but what sort of an obligation? Moral only, since the United Nations has no real means of coercing those who should fail to respect their undertakings. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau said long ago, "Without the sword conventions are mere words", and everything depends on governments' good faith.

How is it possible to talk about the universality of human rights when the Islamic countries, for example, some years ago proclaimed, quite officially, an "Islamic Declaration of Human Rights"? If we are to consider that declaration valid, then why not a Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or any other declaration?

Muslims are not alone in disputing the universality of human rights. Africans too have set themselves apart by publishing an "African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights" that, although it does not define the concept of "peoples" very clearly, shows that they think "the people" should take precedence over the individual.

Furthermore, in the socialist system, the concept of "natural law" that we so cherish is totally denied, the law being no more than the expression of a relationship between the state and the citizen and any supranational surveillance thus being totally negated. Other countries, for that matter, adopt the same negative attitude in the name of their sacrosanct national sovereignty.

Let us not, lastly, forget that the countries of the Third World are claiming a new right, the right to development. The most important thing for us, say the leaders of those countries, is the fight against hunger and poverty, with "Western-style" human rights tagging along behind. In point of fact, respect for human rights has never got in the way of development, and those leaders are sometimes mainly concerned to perpetuate the regimes they have set up. We must, in any case, take account of this situation.

So let us not delude ourselves. *Our* human rights reflect *our* society, and they are by no means accepted world-wide. Whether we like it or not, we have to face the fact.

It remains for us to draw the conclusions and ask ourselves what we ought to do to ensure that they are indeed felt to be universal throughout the world. There is obviously no question of trying to impose them—that would be to deny the very values for which we stand—so we must learn to use the power of persuasion. Relations between peoples are much more highly developed than they used to be; let us learn to make use of them. Our industrial civilization has managed to impose its technology all over the world; it would be hard to believe that it could not just as successfully "export" its noble ideas.

Meanwhile, we still need to learn to "accept others", to try to understand them and not turn them away, in other words to practise the seemingly forgotten cardinal virtue of tolerance.

BOB ZEEGERS
FORMER UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME EXPERT
CALLIAN (FRANCE)

A LIVING LANGUAGE OF SIBERIA

Vladimir Belikov, whose article "Language death in Siberia" appeared in your February 1994 issue, *Worlds within Words*, is right to be pessimistic about the survival of the languages of the peoples of Siberia. I would, however, like to give your readers a rather more encouraging piece of information.

In August 1993, during a short stay at Atchan, a village of the Nanai people on the banks of the Amur river in eastern Siberia, I discovered that the Nanai language is extremely well protected because of a well-adapted educational system. At the village school, which since 1983 has been known as a "national school", all the lessons are taught in Nanai, including those on applied art. Certain traditional activities such as embroidery are still practised.

For young Nanais, the difficulties come later. When they have to go to the city to continue their education at secondary and higher level, they face difficulties in adapting and integrating which are due both to their material circumstances and culture differences. These small peoples (no value-judgment intended) have to blend into the Russian cultural and linguistic mass if they are to have any chance of integration. This encourages them to lose their own identity.

Vladimir Belikov is to be thanked for his work.

BRIGITTE JULIA-RIPOLL
PERPIGNAN (FRANCE)

THE MISSING DESERT

As a lover of the desert, I was extremely interested to read your January 1994 issue devoted to this theme.

I was very surprised, however, not to find a single mention of the world's purest (if not biggest) desert—the desert of Arabia. It haunted the European imagination and a substantial article deserves to be written about it.

Ma'rib, the capital of the Sabaeans, was built in the middle of this desert, its waters confined by a great earth dam which, as the Qur'an says, enabled two gardens to blossom "on the right hand and on the left hand". The trade in incense that plied through the desert brought prosperity to the cities of Petra and Palmyra. Here the Roman legions sustained a crushing defeat in 24 B.C. In the desert of Oman are the famous *aflaj*, underground drainage tunnels that make farming possible.

The desert of Arabia has also been intensively explored by such illustrious figures as Lady Anne Blunt, Louis Arnaud, H. St. J. Philby, Wilfred Thesiger, Amin Rihani and many others. It is also the home of the culture and civilization of the Bedouin. In Mouny Berrah's article, even the film *Lawrence of Arabia* is not mentioned. What a pity!

JOSEPH CHELHOD
ANTONY (FRANCE)

NOT ENOUGH WOMEN

Your magazine is very interesting but you do not have enough women contributors. Take the issue entitled *A time to love. . .* (April 1993). On such a subject there was every right to expect an equitable division between the sexes. And yet eight out of your ten contributors were men!

Publishing an issue about women from time to time is not enough. There should be parity between men and women in every issue. Are not women one of UNESCO's priorities? More effort please!

FLORENCE MONTREYNAUD
PARIS (FRANCE)

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► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

In these parallel universes, all combinations of constants and physical laws would be possible. Most would be infertile but, by chance, our universe has found the winning combination and we are the big prize. In this hypothesis, we are the result of a lucky throw of dice.

Also, with quantum mechanics, a first cause is not necessary. In the microscopic world of elementary particles, causal relationships do not even exist. At any moment, phantom particles can arise suddenly and unexpectedly from an energy-filled void. It is impossible to predict where and when they will appear. Some physicists think that what is true for one elementary particle is also true for the entire universe at its beginning. At 10^{-43} second after the Big Bang, the universe—measuring 10^{-33} centimetre—was 10 million billion billion times smaller than an atom. It is quantum uncertainty that made it possible for time, space, and then the universe to arise spontaneously from the void.

Science cannot decide between this notion of chance on one hand and necessity on the other which the anthropic principle expresses. As for me—in this instance I speak more as a man of faith than of science—I opt for the second hypothesis: to assume that there is an infinite number of parallel universes inaccessible to observation and hence to experimental verification goes against the simplicity and economy of natural laws. On the contrary, what I find striking when I study the universe is its unity, its intimate harmony; this allows us, in our little corner of the earth, to work out physical laws that can explain phenomena occurring billions of light years away and discover properties of celestial bodies so far away that their light had left before the atoms of our bodies had even been made.

This same unity can be found in physics itself, where one discovers links between phenomena that, a priori, have nothing in common. In the nineteenth century, James Maxwell unified electricity and magnetism. In the twentieth, Albert Einstein taught us that time and space were one and the same thing. At the moment, physicists are trying to prove that the four basic forces of nature are in fact only one single force.

From the harmony of the universe we get a deep sense of beauty: not only because it contains objects of incredible splendour, but also because it is simple. Such varied phenomena as the expansion of the universe, the movement of the planets or the form of a snowflake can all be explained by the action of the four basic forces and by that alone. Theories that describe the universe have to be as simple, as beautiful as that. I am convinced that beauty and truth go together, and that an aesthetic sense can nourish intuition and guide research. The greatest physicists, such as Einstein or Dirac, had an acute sense of the beauty of their theories.

If the extremely precise workings of the universe are not due to a series of chance occurrences, then one has to assume that there was a Creative Principle which regulated it at the very beginning. As Voltaire said: "The universe confounds me, and I cannot believe that this clock exists and has no clock-maker."

■ *Will the research carried out by astrophysicists today—using an extraordinary wealth of resources—ultimately lead to a metaphysical quest?*

—It certainly responds to a very ancient yearning—that of the first human beings who turned their gaze upwards to the sky. My colleagues and I are the descendants of those men, with greater resources and more sophisticated instruments. But it is still the same quest that leads us to ask questions about our origins and the roots of life. By making it possible for us to situate ourselves in the long history of cosmic evolution, astronomy helps us to transcend the weightiness of our bodies and the brevity of our lives. ■

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