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Integrating the Past, Engaging the Present: Leveraging History and Memory in the Task of Building a Just and Inclusive Europe

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My impression has been that this four-year series of conferences at Caux, focusing on Europe, was inaugurated in the face of Ukraine's crisis last year, but that it was also instituted as a way to honor the fact that these four years comprise the 100th anniversary of the Great War. Many – maybe most - of us are the descendants of people who were involved in that war, as well as other wars, and we would like to find some way to demonstrate that the memory of that war urges us on in the task of creating an enduring peace for succeeding generations.

In this regard, I would like to recognize the fact that my grandfather's name, Peter George Smith – appears on the memorial in St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh, as well as on the war memorial in his village of Kippen, as one of the Church of Scotland clergy who died in the context of that war. After his death at the age of 42, his wife and six children had to move from the manse of their village – the clergyman's home – and find a new life in the city, living on a widow's pension of 37 pounds a month. Four of the children including my father were sent away for their schooling to a charity institution for the children of the widows of professional people. No child in that school had a father. Current scholarship tells us that 26.4% of Scottish soldiers who went to fight in World War I perished. This ratio is only equaled by Serbia and Turkey. Then in 1940 my

grandfather's youngest son, my uncle, was killed in France in the early days of World War II, and his name was added to the same war memorial. The facts of my father's story are ones that we often referenced in our family, but there was a way in which our telling of the story never fully assuaged or altered our awareness of my father's deep insecurities and the difficulty he had in giving emotion a trusted place in our family life. At the same time, these facts help explain my father's desire to use his life for building a different kind of future. Through my father, that call to address the wounds of our time has come down to me. I say this of course in order to tell you something about myself and my connection to Europe, but also to say something about the long reach of history.

The first part of this talk will address some of our ideas, understandings and assumptions about history itself. And after that I will discuss project development and offer some practical ideas. Then I look forward to interaction with all of you. I hope our discussion will help pull together themes that have emerged over the past days.

The coming together of personal identity, group identity, culture, narrative, political ideology, post-modernism, constructivism, history and memory is one of the most conceptually challenging of matters. In every context this combination plays out differently. It has many moving parts and, these days, is changing even more rapidly thanks to the dramatic increase of communication. Caux provides a forum where we probe the connection between the personal and the social so it is natural that we would want to focus on these issues of history and memory at Caux. Engaging personal and group memory intelligently is one of the most obvious ways Caux can be a source of trustbuilding in coming years.

Ideas that inform this discussion

When my father embarked on studies at Glasgow University in 1933, history was displacing the classics as the university major of choice. He became a student of history and so he remained all his life. In line with a prevalent view of history in the nineteenth century, he equated the march of history with the expression of God's engagement with humankind: History was a tale of God's purposes in the world that would lead to a better future.

The decline of Christianity's hold on Western Europe and North America was already underway in the late 19th century, but the tragedy of World War I, compounded by the Depression, World War II and the Holocaust questioned for many this assumption that God was present in the march of history and would inevitably guide us towards the realization of the best kind of social order.

Today, the notion of the march of history per se as the realization of God's plan is upheld largely by religious fundamentalists. I believe the reason most of *us* feel some inner chords resound when we consider matters of history these days is because the depersonalization of our globalizing world causes us to search for more awareness of who we are by referencing the past.

But the weight of history and memory supersede matters of identity. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel speaks for all those who have been touched by mass atrocity when he speaks of memory as a moral requirement. Witness turns out to be more than just saying what happened – it is a testament to the human condition and the incomprehensibility of some of the events that have shaped us.

Even at a more everyday level, most of us know that denial of the past can have serious repercussions, skewing our judgment and leading us to imagine we need to protect apparent “truths” that don’t deserve to be protected. And so we recognize that willingness to face the truth leads to more authentic living. We believe that by addressing our own wounds of the past and those of others we will find peace with ourselves, that we will see justice prevail over wrongdoing, and that we will discover a spirit of greater love and faith with which to reach out to other people and to the dilemmas around us. We recognize that we draw strength from the past, from our parents and ancestors and from other inspiring personalities. In all these ways we feel a link between the march of history and our spiritual core.

Among the myriad ways history informs our outlook and experience, I would like to highlight a few more.

First, groups. Groups of people develop their sense of belonging, indeed, it could be said, their very essence, by virtue of reference to a common history. This common history gives those in the group common reference points and a sense of continuity. Often the foundation story, or the story of the birth of the group, is repeatedly recited, and this in itself gives strength to the group.

We would be wrong to think of group memory as simply personal memory multiplied by the number of people in the group. Agents articulate particular moments of the past that gain public attention, and the collective memory is shaped accordingly.

The politicization of group identity brought nationalism to birth as an ideology in nineteenth century Europe. Nationalism relies on the fact that groups bond around a common history. But the goal of nationalism is to create political constituencies and

centralized states. In this sense it is a manipulation of the group bond – it is a sleight of hand on the part of leaders, building on some elements of actual history but leaving out others in order to guarantee political support. Nationalism assumes additional power by suggesting that nations have a national soul, a kind of group psyche embodied in their culture, language or religion. It is an extremely appealing idea. It can have poisonous repercussions when it rationalizes a power system that sidelines minority groups.

Countering both the thesis of history as the realization of God’s plan and history as the expression of the national soul, Marx articulated an idea of history as an inevitable process that would propel the workers of the world to rule the world. Despite the collapse of communism, this idea lives on by providing a vocabulary and insights with which to challenge the tenacious hold of privilege.

In summary we could lay out these three ideas this way

1. History = a story of the increasing fulfillment of God’s plan
2. History = a container for the story of “our” group that gives us a sense of belonging and identity
3. History = a force that empowers the disempowered

These are not the only meta interpretations of history, but I spent a bit of time outlining them in order to demonstrate the clear connection between ideas about history and ideas about power. Each of these three implies a particular idea of who has the power in the society. Each of them has been partially discredited but they live on in certain respects.

So, let’s switch over now and think for a few minutes about how the past resides

within us personally. Freud, Jung and their followers have shown us that the past can be lodged in unconscious places in the human mind, causing us to behave in apparently irrational ways for reasons we don't understand. In this sense, we all contain within ourselves deeper truths about the past that influence our thoughts and behavior that we have difficulty admitting even to ourselves.

In recent years, with increased understanding of the workings of the brain, we are learning more about trauma, and I promise you insights about trauma are going to have more and more impact on our understanding of conflict and societal healing. It is already happening. Trauma derives its name not because of the objective extremity of an event, but because of the particular effect that an event has on a person. In experiences of violence or extreme helplessness, central brain function is taken over by areas of the brain that respond emotionally or instinctively. Our brains become locked into a threat mode, and we remain in a state of hyper-arousal or numbness. We respond to subsequent events through intuition and get caught up in repetitive actions that trump our ability to think rationally.

While people generally assume that talking about a trauma is cathartic and helpful, we now know that this is not quite so. Talking too soon, or under some kind of duress, can be re-traumatizing. Interventions that address the body directly are more effective to soothe people in the aftermath of trauma. It is only later that revisiting the story behind the trauma is healthy. Talking about the trauma requires safety and emotional support. Those who have been through trauma make room in their minds for the truth little by little, gradually discovering ways to name things and integrate them into their sense of the past.

A word about narratives. Narratives are stories we live by. They offer meaning, enabling us to make value judgments in the day to day and to pass values on to the next generation. The past gets coopted to create narratives. Leaders will promote a narrative that serves their interests and perpetuates their power. Enlightened leadership attempts to expand the narrative through highlighting less acknowledged aspects of collective memory. Finding the integrated narrative is therefore another way of talking about leaving the painful past behind.

All of what I have just said may seem quite abstract, but one essential takeaway is the following: If we seek to alter the power discourse and thus create conditions for genuine trust, we must develop expanded or overlapping narratives. I will say this again: the task of trustbuilders is a task of creating expanded and overlapping narratives.

How do we make all this practical?

When I think of the nodes of political and social tension in Europe right now that in some way reference the past, I think first of minority groups – national minorities, Roma, immigrants, the descendants of immigrants, Muslims (who of course fit in the previous categories also, but whose situation deserves special attention because of their religious self definition and the global emergence of radical Islam) and indigenous peoples. I think of contested societies where competing nationalisms challenge the viability of states, resulting in a politicization of the smallest corners of everyone's world. Ukraine. Bosnia. Cyprus. Moldova. Northern Ireland. Belgium. I think of the post-communist countries who continue to deal with the aftermath of seven decades of command economies and authoritarian government, who are working to forge new

narratives of inclusion and integrity. I think of Europe's relations with the developing world, some countries of which are former colonies of Europe. I think of Russia right now – of the concern and disappointment many to the west of Russia feel that the hope for constructive future relations might be receding. I think of the war in Ukraine. I think of the impact of mass atrocity – of Srebrenica, Armenia, of the 1930s famine in Ukraine, and of the ongoing legacy of the Holocaust, which according to some, is the single most powerful unifying symbol in Europe today demonstrating the common commitment to the respect of all individuals and groups.

We already know of projects that have come to birth in Caux that encourage groups to “walk through the history of the other,” to create opportunities for story telling as a means to greater self confidence and an expanded consciousness, to create a forum for national apology and repentance. These methodologies will continue. At the same time, we should always be looking for ways to expand the toolbox.

Project development arises when people have a long term engagement with specific social issues. Projects do not have to contain a total solution. They are entry points for trust building. As such they are the sine qua non of social change. Beyond their intrinsic value they open up unexpected opportunities to gain credibility and raise public awareness. Often the process of creating bridgebuilding projects becomes the forum where the deepest trustbuilding occurs.

I decided to select a few cases of potential project development to talk about here. My choices are not comprehensive.

1. *Europe's immigrant communities*

How are the various countries of Europe going to handle the pressure of newcomers in the coming decades? What kinds of overlapping narratives could be developed and broadcast that would assist this process?

a) What about a storytelling project entitled “Stories of exile; stories of home.”

This would be a frame for community story telling that allows acknowledgement of a range of people’s notions of home, and at the same time offers acknowledgement of painful experiences of deracination and non-acceptance. The stories could be broadcast once a week on a ten minute radio segment. They could be publicized on websites, twitterfeeds, or books, or they could be a form of graffiti. This is a fairly non-confrontational way to broaden awareness and humanize stories of the other. At the same time, the process of bringing such a project to birth would involve development of trust and friendship among people with very different backgrounds and outlooks.

b) My second idea would be a project called “Creating Resilient Communities.”

In this project, groups of immigrants and non-immigrants from a specific place come together to envisage what they would like the future narrative of their particular community to be. This would involve a carefully thought-through facilitated conversation. It would doubtless begin with story telling and gaining an understanding of the way history has caused all involved to think about the immigrant-host experience. Then those involved could engage with a series of questions about the new narrative people want to create. How will the respective histories get woven into the new narrative? What needs to

happen with regard to our relationships to create that narrative? What changes are needed in the system? How will we bring those changes about?

- c) Thirdly, The City Walk. Taking a leaf out of the Hope in the Cities walk through the history of Richmond, Virginia, and walks that we know about in Cape Town, Paris and Amsterdam, a walk through the history of a city is a way to familiarize all who live there with groups whom they do not know, and the situation of those groups. This could be marketed through tourism bureaus and schools, but its infrastructure would require careful teambuilding. The power of place speaks to us. So, in the twenty-first century narrative for Europe, new ways of depicting place and home must be redefined.

In these cases, participation in the project itself will involve expansion of people's understanding of the other. Preliminary discussion and planning will require dialogue and listening. The larger aim is to expand the narrative through different ways of framing our answer to the question Who are we?

2. Romani people

Roma are the largest European ethnic minority, numbering around 12 million. A large proportion live in eastern European countries where they experienced severe marginalization under communism, which was a continuation of more long term marginalization. Their hopes that things would improve were raised when communism collapsed. In 2013 the New York Times reported that Roma students in the Czech Republic are still routinely placed in either segregated schools or schools for children with learning disabilities, despite criticism from rights groups and a 2007 ruling by the

European Court of Human Rights that called the situation discriminatory. The Czech Republic continues to work to improve this, but it this is just one example of ongoing struggles against longstanding prejudice. We all know that categories the Nazis used to designate Roma as lesser people, such as work-shy, unfit, dishonest and inferior continue to be used today in mainstream discourse.

Those who want to dismiss the claim that Roma are an ethnic minority accuse them of having no history. Because Roma were widely spread and did not have a written tradition, their group history has not been easy to access. Today Roma historians and sociologists are retrieving and recording this history. One tragic piece of Roma history is the numbers who died in the Holocaust. In some Roma villages in the Czech Republic as many as 90% of Roma perished.

So, one way we can assist the process of bringing this minority into the mainstream is to give recognition to elements of their history. Efforts to gain acknowledgement of the Holocaust as it affected Roma are a belated but nonetheless healing endeavor.

This must be balanced by broadening the public's willingness to address current Roma discrimination.

The Roma could be spokespeople for a call to personal healing from the painful residue of Europe's discriminatory past. An obvious way we can all contribute to a narrative shift is to make sure that Roma have a place at the table in any European undertaking, allowing them to have a voice in all European concerns just as the rest of Europe shoulder's Roma concerns.

3. *Racism and colonialist past*

Very quickly we will find that a serious encounter with the minority experience in Europe cannot move far without a willingness to probe assumptions about race.

“Racism,” the word, denotes a set of ideas about the innate superiority of some groups over others that rationalize domination and dehumanization. One does not need to have a white skin to be an oppressor, nor does one need to have a dark skin to be oppressed, but the metaphor of light and dark has enhanced our either/or assumptions about power relations in ways that deserve much more attention than they tend to receive from privileged groups.

While the marginalized suffer from the effects of racist behaviors, those who indulge in racism suffer also, becoming hardened to the plight of others, dissociated from their own emotions, less able to capture deeper nuances of the human experience, caught up in the continuous wheel of making money and advancing their own interests. An increasing groundswell of scholars is demonstrating connections between the emergence of capitalism and a broad global acceptance of racist assumptions.

Research into who the colonizers were and why they colonized has unearthed the fact that a high proportion of those who colonized Algeria in the nineteenth century - from Spain and Italy as well as France – were rural people who had lost their ability to farm because of the abolition of communal agriculture. Agrarian lands were being bought up by the wealthy. This and other parallel political and economic changes contributed to the creation of a victimized swath of the population who went to the colonies as a compensation for the ills they had suffered back home, then started treating the people they found there exactly the way they had been treated themselves. The same

is true for Scotland vis a vis the US. The Scottish “clearances” - enclosure of land for sheep farming - put the peasantry off their land, forcing them to emigrate first to Ireland and then on to the Appalachian region of the US. President Andrew Jackson came from this background, and was the president who drove the Cherokee nation off their land. In other words, racism has arisen in part through a form of transgenerational trauma and the well known human tendency to treat others the way we have been treated ourselves.

Bringing these matters into the public discourse, through books, articles, museums, art, literature and film will, I hope and believe, increase in coming decades.

4. Mass atrocity and totalitarianism

Since the end of World War II we have had greater success in creating tribunals to judge individuals who have incited war, and now we have the permanently established International Criminal Court. This seems a significant step forward in addressing impunity, but it does not come without complications. The limitations of legal measures to address the past have encouraged the growing recognition that restorative justice processes are gravely needed. This has brought to birth the field of transitional justice – a package of mechanisms that help a society move on after a cataclysm. Truth commissions, archiving and record keeping, rewriting textbooks, helping teachers recognize new ways to teach geography and history, encouraging the emergence of professional historians and journalists who show integrity in their use of sources and strive to express the truth without favor to political or economic interests.

Much could be said about all of these endeavors. And people here right now are engaged in some of them. We can discuss them further.

This year our eyes have been on the Armenians and Turks as they commemorate the events that occurred a hundred years ago. In April and May I attended several seminars in Washington where Turks, Armenians and others discussed these events and, of course, went into the much touted issue of Turkey's official non acceptance of the word genocide.

Turkish acceptance would be a balm to Armenians. But a parallel matter for all concerned is how to address the collective trauma that limits people's creativity and capacity to live full lives.

In the past ten days the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica debacle was observed. Discussions of blame, advance planning, and the role of peacekeepers have been had and will probably continue. When I ask myself what can possibly assuage this loss, I feel humbled at what this town has to carry.

I know it would be a kind of miracle, but I still like to imagine the possibility that Christian Armenians, in spite of the pain they suffered at the hands of Muslim Turks could reach out to the Muslims of Srebrenica and engage together in a quest for a response to atrocity. Perhaps that is already beginning at Caux....

5. Ukraine

I have never been in Ukraine or Russia and don't want to pretend that I have special insights for such a painful situation. In Ukraine the need to shore up the national identity means that elements of history receive considerable focus these days. I am told that the push for commemoration of the 1930s famine as a way to assert Ukrainian identity has introduced hot debates over whether the target people of the famine were a

social class or an ethnic group. The former would fit the Soviet/Russian narrative, the latter the emerging Ukrainian narrative. Likewise the elevation of Stepan Bandera as a hero who strove for a modern, united Ukrainian state gets attacked by the pro-Russian lobby on the grounds that Bandera was a Nazi sympathizer.

This type of debate is characteristic of a deeply divided, contested society. Along with a very painful personal past, Ukrainians and Russians see the region's history being extremely politicized. Those of us who have studied Bosnia, Cyprus and Northern Ireland have seen a similar dynamic. History is everywhere, but the attempt to corral history gets mired in endless political discussions. Then the contestation gets manipulated by a powerful neighbor. The Ukrainian situation is a reminder of events in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, where histories were in the mix, but where the situation was exacerbated and enflamed by ethnonational entrepreneurs who had larger geo-political motives.

In these deeply divided societies, focusing on and discussing the respective narratives of the groups in question can be counter productive, because doing so solidifies boundaries. Somehow personal stories must take people outside of hyper-political talk. We are here to explore how you do that.

In the public domain, it may be more important right now to focus on other topics of common importance for those who want to work together for a future Ukraine. Finding common endeavors – for example addressing corruption, developing stronger interagency cooperation within government, promoting public-private partnerships – would be a more useful strategy. In other words, I think it is reasonable to suggest that

having exhaustive discussions about the past isn't always the best approach to trustbuilding.

But no matter what bridgebuilding tasks you are involved in, you will never fail to find that acknowledging the pain of the other, and the contribution of your own group to that pain, is a sine qua non for genuine dialogue.

On the longer term, it will be helpful for Ukraine to find ways to complexify the telling of history, so that it is not as amenable to use by the media and by chauvinist groups. The fullest accounts of the famine and the Nazi invasion will require a societal airing. Absorbing that past will take generations. Young historians must be challenged to engage in a form of history writing that stands back from nationalist programs. Projects where historians of different backgrounds collaborate to develop a casting of particular events might be a useful strategy.

Conclusion

I will ask in conclusion, What is the narrative for the Europe of the 21st century that all of us would like to promote? Daily news reports underline that Europe is in a perilous time. The problems are large. The temptations for fear are great. The likelihood that we will turn to old habits of blaming the other are considerable. Caux may not have the answers for Europe's complex problems right now, but it could help set a standard for how to live in uncertain times. In the 20th century, the business on the table in Europe was clearly the question of how a conglomeration of nation-states could function constructively in a small place. That quest is by no means complete, but in the

upheavals of the 21st century we here could undertake to promote in every way possible the kind of inclusive mindset on which trust is built.

I was, not long ago, telling a South African friend about Caux. After I described the well known founding story of Caux and other stories from this place, my South African friend said, “So, it is a place of pilgrimage.”

Yes, that is true. Caux is a place of pilgrimage. Caux is a place to acknowledge the sacred as well as to find solidarity with others in our understanding of the task of living. But in addition, I believe Caux is a place where actual methodologies could be developed and tested, and where delegates can come back year after year to compare experiences in using them. Those going out from Caux should be agents in constructing the new 21st century narrative for Europe in intentional ways. This is another form of pilgrimage. As we consider Caux’s own narrative for the twenty first century, I hope it will be tied to developing practices that specifically support a more inclusive Europe.

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