

Bottici, Chiara; Challand, Benoît: *Imagining Europe. Myth, Memory, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014. ISBN: 978-1-10764-164-8; 220 S.

**Rezensioniert von:** Jan Philipp Wilhelm, Leipzig

Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand's book is a peculiar hybrid between monograph and essay collection. As the authors themselves acknowledge, the volume is based on several articles on the formative processes of European identity that they have published on different occasions since 2005. Bottici and Challand make every effort to combine those articles and give their book a coherent structure. With a jointly written introduction and conclusion, they provide readers with a sound contextualization of their arguments, two large thematic blocks called „Memory and Identity“ and „Myth and Identity,“ which provide the overarching frame for the individual chapters. Through constant cross-referencing, readers are able to follow the authors' reasoning more easily. Despite these efforts, however, the particularity of some of the individual chapters remains quite recognizable – both in methodological and thematic regards – while elsewhere in the book arguments from different chapters overlap to a point where several passages in the book appear to be repetitions.

A thorough reading of the book is nonetheless worthwhile as the authors excel at providing valuable insights into recent debates on European legitimacy and identity as well as at presenting some interesting original research. The book greatly profits from the different academic backgrounds of its authors – Challand is a political and social scientist, and Bottici is a philosopher – in that it combines contemporary qualitative social research with the necessary philosophical depth, especially with regard to their rigorous separation of memory and myth in their analysis.

As mentioned above, this separation provides the binary structure of „Imagining Europe“. Starting with the premise that „Europe has not always been there“ (p. 1), the authors set out in the quest to examine the ways how the political project of Europe, as it emerged in the aftermath of the First World War, has been imagined over time. In both parts of the vol-

ume, the common thread concerns questions of identity in the European context: Does a European identity exist? If so, what does it entail and what are its sources?

The first part of the book approaches these questions by discussing memory as a possible source of European identity. Chapter 1 begins with a more general and theoretical introduction, in which Chiara Bottici primarily discusses whether Europe as a hybrid political entity even requires an identity. She thus dives into the scholarship on the nature of legitimacy in the European Union (EU) context, from output-oriented, functionalist arguments to Habermas' concept of „constitutional patriotism,“ concluding that identity – political and/or cultural – is a necessary condition for any kind of legitimacy. The remainder of the chapter consists of an overview concerning the debates and ideas on the form and possibility of a European identity, some of which the authors return to in a more in-depth analysis throughout the book.

In Chapter 2, Bottici then puts the concept of collective remembrance to the test by examining how the narrative of Europe, born out of the traumatic experience of the Second World War, is endorsed in contemporary history textbooks in Italy, France and Germany. Even though she asserts that this narrative is „a powerful symbolic reservoir for a European identity,“ at least for Western Europe, she acknowledges that it is also a source of fundamental disagreement in the larger European context since the EU enlargements of 2004 and 2007 – a problem discussed more closely in Chapter 3.

This next chapter, the work of Benoît Challand, examines the enduring legacies of the Cold War and the divisions in collective remembrance in Western, Central and Eastern Europe. In what is mostly a discussion of existing scholarship, Challand argues that since „social memories have been profoundly affected by the different political systems reigning during the Cold War period“ (p. 75) and because the experience of a traumatic past is much more recent in the new member states, differences in remembrance of these pasts are not only inevitable but should be regarded as legitimate. Thus, he goes on, any attempt to superimpose West European historical per-

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spectives on Central and East European countries – for example the primacy of the Holocaust – will only reinforce social and cognitive divisions between East and West. Challand concludes that if a European identity is to be constructed on collective remembrance, then Central and East European countries must be given the autonomy to collectively remember on their own terms and to make their experiences and voices heard within the European Union.

In the second part of the book, the authors explore what they call the „myths of Europe“ and their role in the construction of a European identity. Chapter 4, written by Chiara Bottici, begins with a theoretical introduction on what constitutes a myth and how it can be distinguished from other forms of political symbolism and mere historical narratives. Bottici stresses the processual nature of myths: symbols and narratives only become myths when they are actively elaborated („worked on“) by a given group that is fulfilling a need for significance. A myth is then defined as a call for action rather than as an explanatory theory; it „does not claim to describe the world; it aims to create its own world“ (p. 93). Bottici identifies and discusses four main narratives of Europe that in certain contexts and times have also worked as myths: the foundational narrative of Europe as the vehicle of peace and prosperity; the „Classical Europe“ narrative – Europe born out of Greek and Roman antiquity; the „Christian Europe“ narrative – Europe as the continent of Christianity; and the narrative of Europe as the birthplace of Western Enlightenment and modernity. She wraps up the chapter by examining how these narratives have been visually conveyed and mythologized through icons in European history textbooks, namely through the Greek heroine Europa, Europe as the feeding mother, the „Europe train,“ and Europe as the promised „land of milk and honey.“

The last two chapters, both written by Benoît Challand, focus on the external dimensions of European identity. In Chapter 5, Challand seeks to identify what he calls „sequences of Europe“ – chains of arguments about the historical narratives of Europe as a political project – and examines their role

in the gradual emergence of a European subjectivity by analysing how European integration was represented over time in French, German, and Italian history textbooks. He argues that these sequences tended to provide significance for a European identity, especially when the external „Others“ of Europe came into play: East European communism and (to a degree) the United States during the Cold War, and more recently Islam. The discussion of the latter is the subject of Chapter 6.

Here, Challand explores the perceived importance of religion with regard to the narrative of „Christian Europe“ as it was represented in academic literature, international print media, and official European Economic Community (EEC) and EU treaties since the 1950s. Finding that „Christian Europe“ as a political myth did not play a role before 2004, he goes on to look more closely at both the changing role of Turkey in an EU perspective from a „defender of ‘Western Civilization’“ (p. 160) to a symbol for „another civilization“ (p. 163) and the simultaneous shift from the communist hammer and sickle to the Muslim star and crescent as the dominant external „Others“ of Europe. It is perhaps in describing how contemporary imaginations of Europe are increasingly dominated by notions of culture and religion that „Imagining Europe“ makes its most valuable contribution to current debates on European identity. However, as Challand notes at the end of the chapter, the mere fact that religion has recently gained greater importance does not mean that religious arguments about Europe primarily serve divisive and possibly dangerous processes of „Othering.“ Affirming that religion could very well also function as a mediating factor between different social groups, he thus calls for a „thorough reflection on secularism“ in order to adopt an approach to European identity that „acknowledges the rich diversity that characterizes its past, present, and future“ (p. 165).

The hybrid character of the book as a piece of academic literature might well have been the authors' intention because it enables them to convey to readers an accessible tour de force through recent debates on European identity, enriched with original research. However, it also results in the lack of a singu-

lar concluding argument. It is thus perhaps no surprise that Bottici and Challand conclude with what seem to be the lowest common denominators of their findings: They state that even though „Europe has not always been there [...] we have nevertheless been imagining it for quite some time“ (p. 167), and assert the need to reconsider the question of European democracy. Both conclusions can hardly be regarded as innovative, but nonetheless they serve as important reminders and guidelines for future academic endeavours in the field.

Despite its shortcomings, „Imagining Europe“ is a valuable and thought-provoking contribution to the debates surrounding European integration and identity, which, in light of the successful „Brexit“ referendum in the United Kingdom and growing Euroscepticism in many other member countries, will quite likely gain in scope and importance over the coming years.

Jan Philipp Wilhelm über Bottici, Chiara; Challand, Benoît: *Imagining Europe. Myth, Memory, and Identity*. Cambridge 2014, in: H-Soz-Kult 04.11.2016.