On the circulation of swastikas

De la circulation des croix gammées

Overal hakenkruizen

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Let us take advantage of the fact that a four-monthly editorial is by definition, no longer current news in order to express a few retrospective considerations. Less than a year ago, the Nazi swastika resurfaced in Putin’s media to denounce what they called Ukrainians’ Fascist downward spiral. An easily recognized phraseology. This “wooden language”, as formerly was said, aimed to disqualify the separatist opponents having brought about the deposition of Viktor Ianoukovitch, and also to legitimize the potential war-waging positions of the new tsar, Viktor Ianoukovitch, and also to legitimize the potential war-waging positions of the new tsar.

Up to now, we agree, don’t we? HOWEVER, TO MERELY SEE IN THE USE OF THE WRETCHED SYMBOLIC SIMBO LE FROM THE PROPAGANDA, as European news easily claimed, is this not making Ukraine wear the overly comfortable clothes of the – excuse the term – victim? Ah! I can already hear it said that I am exaggerating, that I must not treat lightly the violent repression which the opponents at the Maidan square have been struck with.

Of course, this has never been my intention. Yet, on the other hand, as Perec used to say, facts do not stop with what was said. They also have every necessary quality to become a sort of badge or a label. Today with pedagogy being one of the key words relating to memory, it would be interesting to question the notion of a “victims badge” or a label. Today with pedagogy being one of the key words relating to memory, it would be interesting to question the notion of a “victims badge” or a label.

Indeed, when I saw the swastika being waved on television news, I immediately said to myself that this cross is everywhere. We see it continually, alone or with Hitler’s portrait. Also, it is not merely the question of the place of the Holocaust within our culture that must be debated, but also of the Nazism within this very culture. What is most worrisome, is the naturalization of this symbol. Immediately recognizable, simple, it already had every necessary quality to become a sort of badge or label. Today with pedagogy being one of the key words relating to memory, it would be interesting to decipher this paradoxical iconolatry with students.

What do you think of this idea? In reality, both. The particular example serves as a way to show the general issue, to illustrate and to remember it. It is difficult to circulate on this terrain where those who are recognized as attackers – and who openly hold this role – point to… truths nevertheless. It is on this point that I wish to more precisely express my opinion. We easily notice a tendency to gather everything within a same victim discourse, all formations and all groups as soon as they are the target of political violence. In this respect, the main concern of transmission would not so much seem to be (or no longer) information itself – omnipresent, today, up to a point of saturation –, as much as learning to grasp the complexity of the reality which information refers to, which at times is referred to from a distance all the while misleadingly making us believe that it deals with reality “in live”. Of course, complexity is also a word that can be used to avoid saying anything. However, in the name of this complexity, we must also learn to suspend such moral judgements which focus on the image of the victim and to better discern what is being shown. It is thus important to remember the permanence of Ukrainian ultranationalist ideas that still honour their pro-Nazi heroes guilty of anti-Semitic crimes, such as Yaroslav Stetsko and Stepan Bandera, to name only two. What is more, the latter was celebrated in 2010 with his statue being raised, nonetheless! In other words, it is not because Ukraine has claimed to be against Vladimir Putin’s authoritative regime, that Ukrainian’s main political tendencies are all unanimously close to democracy as it is conceived (imagined) within the European Community. Furthermore, forbidding the Russian language at the end of February 2014, forming straight away Oleksandr Turchynov’s temporary power, hardly gave any guarantees of democracy. To say it somewhat briefly: the enemies of our enemies are not necessarily our friends.

THE EXPRESSION SEEMS TRITE, IT IS TRUE. The problem – for it is important to maintain a contradictory debate –, is that the downward spirals of Ukrainian extremists are not a reason to disqualify the entire society and not to believe in its potential and its desire to reach a democracy. Ukraine’s sad history should be remembered. The history of a country that was for centuries caught between, broken up and invaded by their neighbours (Poland, Austria, Germany, tsarist Russia, Soviet Union). Remember the two great famines, the repression and the communist systematic participation in the Shoah. This is referred to from a distance all the while misleadingly making us believe that it deals with reality “in live”. Of course, complexity is also a word that can be used to avoid saying anything. However, in the name of this complexity, we must also learn to suspend such moral judgements which focus on the image of the victim and to better discern what is being shown. It is thus important to remember the permanence of Ukrainian ultranationalist ideas that still honour their pro-Nazi heroes guilty of anti-Semitic crimes, such as Yaroslav Stetsko and Stepan Bandera, to name only two. What is more, the latter was celebrated in 2010 with