European guilt: The rhetoric of apology

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We can dream of a cosmopolitan Europe. But to realize the dream, writes Obrad Savic, we must have the conviction to share the same history, the same past and the same future with "others", outside of Europe. An argument for transforming the people of Europe into a European world people.

This essay is an exploration into the concept of a new Europe, or more precisely, the concept of a post-national Europe: Europe in the age of apology. I shall try to formulate a genealogy of the European apology yet not in terms of its limits or of its ends but rather in terms of its origins.

The current European victimology identifies something like a painful legacy that emerges from a repressed and silent past, a past full of crime and injustice. Therefore, the “culture of apology” cannot be explained from within, by way of the Eurocentric slogan, “Europe is the Bible and the Greeks" (Emmanuel Levinas). Quite the opposite: a proper genealogical reconstruction of the concept of apology must be articulated outside of European universalism: “I shall seek to show the universalism of the powerful has been a partial and distorted universalism, one that I am calling ‘European universalism.’ [...] The struggle between European universalism and universal universalism is the central ideological struggle of the contemporary world.” [1]

If we want to discover the deepest roots and the fundamental trajectory of a pacified Europe, we must accept the general approach according to which Europe today is an unfinished project under political construction. It is also a philosophical project under conceptual deconstruction. This means that the construction of the new European institution must be framed by the deconstruction of its discursive formations. If the new Europe manifests itself as a cultural and political movement in deconstruction then our discursive analysis must take a new direction beyond Enlightenment modernity and its triumphant narrative and great heroic stories. As Derrida prudently suggested, the European legacy derives from sources “Greek, Christian and beyond”. This promising formula, “and beyond”, creates a reasonable distance from a Eurocentric and unified genealogy, which is always already fictitious. At the same time, it opens a perspective for many other cultural sources and traditions that pluralize European origins – Judaic and
Islamic sources at the very least. Above all, these different sources direct us toward a self-critical appropriation of the conflicted history of Europe, a history organized around its colonial and racist past.

One might claim that reason in its reflexive and critical dimensions was an exclusively European product. At the very least, Europe’s innovative rationality appeared out of the spirit of hope that everything could be different. Yet, from the beginning, the logic of the modern “spirit of negation”, the dialectics of negativity, turns against itself, transformed into the positive logic of affirmation. Modernity was born from the spirit of self-critical affirmation of European politics as universalized world politics. For example, the traditional idea of political responsibility as self-responsibility has been accepted as a response to, or more precisely, as a form of resistance against the neutralization of Europe’s self-critical affirmation. From the beginning, the normative elaboration of a self-critical Europe was a most effective way of conquering the world’s past as pure European property. This is the reason why the negative power of Europe, Europe as self-instituted critique, has been gradually transformed into an exclusive affirmation of the Eurocentric paradigm. Such a confirmation of Eurocentrism has slowly degenerated into the main principle of European self-glorification as cosmopolitization. The apologetic discourse of the European Union bureaucracy is the new, the latest, document of the collapse of the universal validity of the European self-critical mind, of its value of absolute openness to other beginnings, to new beginnings that are no longer beginnings of the same.

Many contemporary histories of post-war Europe, and of the EU too, are written to provide evidence of permanent political evolution towards greater democracy and freedom. As Anthony Giddens stresses, “The EU is the most original and successful experiment in political institution-building since the Second World War.” [2] But such apologetic discourse on the contemporary “Europeanization” of Europe, the brilliant adaptation of nations to the dynamic of EU integration, forgets that the political history of Europe is one of discontinuities and regressions as well as advances and progress. As Mark Mazover pointedly argued, modern Europe has invented and reinvented itself, often through “convulsive transformation.” [3] In this sense, we can say that the new Europe must be theorized from the perspective of Europeanization as a cosmopolitan response to globalization: “European integration is, at the same time, a reaction to the process of globalization and its most advanced expression.” [4]

In other words, the cosmopolitization of the new Europe implies an entirely new form of European self-understanding, a new kind of self-reflection based on a cosmopolitan “culture of the Other”. The new genealogy of victims demands Europe “to break with itself”, to turn against itself and its horrific past. We might even say that the ongoing decline of western credibility is a direct consequence of Europe’s failing deliberations with itself: its international reputation is definitely lost because of its inadequate confrontation with itself, with its own conflicted past full of crime and injustice. In fact, what we are given to understand as distinctively or specifically “European” origins belongs to various traditions, cultures and civilizations that are strictly inseparable from a common conflicted past. “Consequently what should be resisted is a view of the European heritage as one that is somehow prior to modernity. Instead, what is needed is a new narrative of European modernity that is attuned to the positive features of modern Europe and sensitive to the catastrophes of its recent history.” [5]

The recent expansion of a culture of apology and the unpredictable emergence of pacified
“sorry states” can be seen as a new framework for a more honest accountability among peoples and nations. The conceptualization and institutionalization of collective responsibility can be recognized as a new and improved moment of trustful reconciliation among individual and collective bodies. But such appeals for state apology or demands for collective responsibility can also function as an institutional facade for individual irresponsibility. [6] Every imbalance between collective responsibility and individual guilt can reinforce our growing mistrust in any singular act of apology. How, for instance, could President Bill Clinton apologize for the Rwandan genocide without accepting any personal blame for his own calculated decision not to intervene? What does it mean for Pope John Paul II to apologize formally, in the name of the Catholic Church, more than one hundred times? Can his ritual performing apologies sound serious and reasonable? We can often see that something is not right with the enormous inflation of the discourse of apology, its dissemination all around us. Sometimes these apologies seem laughably insincere, disingenuous, deceptive, manipulative, confused or simply wrong. This explosive scene of public acts of contrition provoked The Simpsons show to offer a series of jokes and parodies with competitions for the “Apologies of the Week” [7]. Eleazar Barkan presented empirical research results under the working title – “Taking wrongs seriously”: He found that a growing number of public apologies and open regrets have become linguistic vehicles for the pragmatic promotion of dialogue, tolerance and cooperation between groups confronting one another over past injustices. [8] A recent article in the journal Security Dialogue is dedicated to “Rituals of apology in the global arena”. Here are the very instructive concluding remarks:

In this article, we have identified and analyzed the communicative characteristics of rituals of apology typical for the “age of apology”: (1) asymmetrical purification rituals, in which the offender issues an apology in order to purify the dismal past of its group members, but does not necessarily need the forgiveness of a specific offended party in order to achieve its goals; (2) asymmetrical humiliation rituals, in which the offended party forces the wrongdoer to participate in a degradation ceremony as a condition for “settling the score”, not as a promise to settle their relations; and (3) symmetrical settlement rituals in which each side strives to achieve appeasement and restore balance to wounded relationships. [9]

The politics of regret

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.
(Milan Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, 1978)

In the last decade there has been a dramatic increase in self-critical awareness with regard to past injustice and massive atrocities all around the world. “No peace without justice” became a new motto of the post-conflict history of reconciliation. As Nelson Mandela declared, “True reconciliation does not consist in merely forgetting the past.” This means that dealing with the past cannot be successfully realized without a new, justified memory, without a unified transnational remembering of the tragic past. Let me begin here with a very small digression regarding the unusual claim that “shameful truths are not national property”. We cannot accept the irrevocable truth that conflicted
national memories still have a great capacity to destroy the normative foundations of any possible unified European memory. What is needed today is the urgent Europeanization of national memories, the categorical formation of a European Memory, so that Europeans can assume their share of the endless, universal responsibility over the brutal past. Only within a unified European memory can we discover that the Holocaust belongs to a common “European dark legacy” and not exclusively to German guilt. If the shameful truths of horrifying pasts are not only national property, then we might recognize that, in a certain way, Europe today, Europe here and now, comes as much from Auschwitz as from the Greek, Roman, and Christian traditions. This means that the self-critical rejection of national memory constitutes a precondition and may result in an opening for mutually deliberative engagements over the painful past. [10]

This is not an argument for Europeanization, much less for the homogenization of national memories. It is rather an appeal for the Europeanization of moral and political reflection in dealing with profoundly different pasts. We are facing the broad national task to begin to learn how to share our dark past and how to participate in the formation of a new European memory. Our responsibility toward the hidden past can be fundamental for a different political legitimacy and a better understanding among the nations. Since World War II, apologies for Human Rights violations have grown increasingly and are especially addressed toward state responsibility. This demand for recognition of individual and collective responsibility was especially focused on massive barbarism, politically motivated crimes such as genocide, mass murder, ethnic cleansing and systematic torture committed by and among European national states. “This view is bolstered by many scholars of transitional justice who argue that within states, truth-telling and legal prosecutions for human rights abuses promote democratic consolidation and post conflict stability.” [11]

In fact, during the 1990s we could see a broad eruption – and not just in Europe – of what has been called a “politics of regret”. National leaders increasingly began to assume collective responsibility for past misdeeds and engage in public “acts of atonement”. “What I call the politics of regret is not that regret is an entirely new emotion, though I do argue that the dominance of a particular form of temporality underlies regret’s prevalence in contemporary discourses. What is new is both its ubiquity and elevation to a general principle. Regret is the emblem of our times.” [12]

The politics of regret is still uncertain with regard to an ethics of responsibility, and many questions are still open for further debate. The main dilemma is whether all forms of the politics of regret – with their moralistic overtones – are matters of convictions or whether there can indeed be a responsible politics of regret as a self-responsible act of official, state apology.

Despite the massive effect of the culture of apology, there is no proportionate correspondence between a horrific past and a political readiness to improve our culture of transnational justice. Instead of this desirable correspondence between reality, collective perception and acting in concert, we are confronted with a paradox. The increased awareness of the “misery of the world” (Pierre Bourdieu) is not matched by a normative consensus, on the basis of which political intervention could actually protect human beings.

Whether we talk about political mass murder in East Timor, war in the former
Yugoslavia, the cutting of the rain forest in Brazil, the spread of AIDS in Africa, drug traffic, global pollution, trade with human organs, bio-piracy and, last but not at least, global terrorism – each problem on this endless list, the severity of which all conflicting factions could agree upon, nevertheless appears as unsolvable, because the citizens of the world disagree on the normative criteria that should guide their actions. These countetndencies of complexity and normative dissent feed nowadays the interest in the project of a universalistic morality. [13]

Historically speaking, the culture of apology begins after World War II, mainly with the German political willingness to accept official, state responsibility for the crimes committed by the Nazi state. As Jennifer Lind demonstrates in her book Sorry States (2002), counterproductive denials of past atrocities stimulate distrust and inhibit international reconciliation among the post-conflict states. As we shall see, a politics of apology is an inherently intersubjective act only on the condition that the victim decide when a formal gesture is really apologetic. Many famous cases of acts of state apology (such as “Clinton confessing to guilt for slavery and racism on the occasion of a visit to Africa – “We are sorry for that”; the Australian government confessing to the guilt of having mistreated and murdered aborigines; the Dutch government asking for pardon for exploiting its former colonies; French president Chirac and the Norwegian government assuming the guilt of their countries’ collaboration with the Nazis; a climax was no doubt reached with the Pope’s apologies for the crimes of the Roman Catholic Church over the course of its long history) show that the consolidation of a democratic future depends on the state’s capacity to create a new legitimacy by way of remembrance and recognition.

Of course, we must be very careful when considering the limits of any single act of apology, either among groups, peoples, or states. Generally speaking, reconciliation among peoples or nations requires that countries stop perceiving one another as a threat, as enemies. Sometimes a rigid demand for absolute apology can be counterproductive and without relevant consequences. Despite the fact that the Federal Republic of Germany has come to terms with its past violence to a historically unprecedented degree, with the most profound self-critical reflection the world has ever seen, it never officially apologized for Nazi crimes or acknowledged collective guilt. [14]

The culture of contrition

We must fight for what the word Europe means today. This includes our Enlightenment heritage, and also an awareness and regretful acceptance of the totalitarian, genocidal and colonialist crimes of the past. (Jacques Derrida, L’Europe de l’espoir, 2004)

The long and explosive history of Eurocentric affirmation of great European politics concluded with the end of the Second World War. As we know, the self-promotion of European world politics was a consequence of the imperial interests of antagonistic nations who were “dreaming of the project of world colonial power”. In fact, from the modern period onward, the self-destructive “moments” of the European spirit as world spirit can be reconstructed. We cannot forget the irrefutable fact that “From Columbus to
Hitler, the word ‘world’ bears an exclusively European, philosophical-political meaning. The concept of world was nothing but a natural horizon of European external ambitions and expectations. [15] The permanent philosophical self-glorification of Europe as a unique cultural and “spiritual place” has been the dominant historical narrative. In some sense, “speculative reason” was the philosophical instrument for the theoretical justification of European’s expansion and occupation.

Within the old nomos of the Earth, civilization was synonymous with European civilization. In this sense, Europe was still the center of the Earth. With the appearance of the New World, Europe became the Old World. [...] In 1492, when a new world actually emerged, the structure of all traditional concepts of the centre and age of the Earth had to change. These new, unknown, non-European spaces arose not as spaces of a new enemy, but as free spaces, as an area open to European occupation and expansion. [16]

Despite the great hostility between sovereign European states, there emerged, as Husserl argued, a unified spirit of European humanity: “No matter how hostile they may be toward one another, the European nations nevertheless have a particular inner kinship of spirit which runs through them all, transcending national differences. There is something like a sibling relationship, which gives all of us in this sphere the consciousness of homeland.” [17] Let us conclude carefully, and schematically: the Eurocentric tradition has been open for self-critical correction, but only within the European paradigm. In fact, modern philosophy opened a great process of deconstruction of the Eurocentric self-interpretation of Europe. As we well know, there is one specific line of philosophical readings of Europe, (this line can be followed from Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, through Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas, to Jan Patocka and Rodolphe Gasché), insisting on the self-critical affirmation of a new, cosmopolitan Europe. For these thinkers, Europe’s self-critical distance from itself and its own history are intimately tied to the idea of a peaceful Europe. We must accept responsibility for the best and for the worst in the European tradition, without naive pretensions to reappropriate only the luminous achievements of western modernity.

Modernity is no longer the exclusive possessions of the West. Today it constitutes something like an arena in which different civilizations, with their culturally specific adaptations of a common social infrastructure, encounter each other.” [18]

If the achievements of modernity belong to everybody today, any civilization and culture, then grand narratives of heroic national pasts can no longer provide the valid ground for a positive reaffirmation of a new, cosmopolitan Europe. The political construction of a cosmopolitan Europe is a work in progress, an unending normative task that can be achieved only on a transnational level. This means, finally, that European political responsibility must act against and beyond any Eurocentrism. What is already a fairly abstract form of civil solidarity, still largely confined to members of nation-states, must be extended to the citizens of other nations as well. The image of a peaceful, cooperative and cosmopolitan Europe emerged from the painful lessons of a horrific past. Therefore, any future controversies on European cosmopolitics must be grounded in the
universalized ethics of a *culture of contrition*.

For the past half century, the process of a *cosmopolitanization* of Europe has become crucial for a pacified world politics. We might say that the concept of a new Europe implies the interconnected expansion of four fundamental factors: the construction of a post-national Europe; a post-secular and post-heroic Europe, and an apologetic Europe (*sorry states*). As we can see, each factor is involved in the long process of redefinition of a new, cosmopolitan Europe, which has become the new political zone on which the cosmopolitan option can be globally verified. The new, post-conflict Europe may represent the turning point, the border zone, where trans-national democracy can be restrained, or inspired, by a new political enthusiasm. The promotion of the idea of a new cosmopolitan Europe, a *Europe to come*, demands the further development of the democratic legacy of European nation-states *beyond* their borders. This legacy does not merely include the formal borders of civil and human rights, but various levels of transnational loyalty, culture, education, cooperation, and international solidarity and cosmopolitan justice. In fact, the emergence of a culture of apology is a precise document that our new language of universalism is deeply rooted in an ethic of transnational justice. The fact that the culture of apology seeks to protect human beings as individuals, as victims, rather then as citizens of particular state, shows that the new world politics is grounded in the universality of ethical obligations. As we well know, “A fundamental challenge for our time is the construction of a jurisprudential theory able to reconcile the universality of human rights with the partiality of positive law.” [19]

We must acknowledge the existing contradiction between the universalism of an ethics of excuse and the particularity of national law, a contradiction that can never be fully transcendent, but only progressively ameliorated in time. I don’t want to follow the line of argumentation according to which democratic norms and the claims of justice may contradict each other. This tension between national democracy and international justice can be resolved only if cosmopolitan justice can be fully instantiated and embodied in national legislative systems. As we know, Kant’s cosmopolitan legacy functioned as a normative foundation for the peaceful international relationship of the European republican states.

The conceptual innovation of Kant’s doctrine of cosmopolitanism is that Kant recognized three interrelated but distinct levels of *right* in the juridical sense of the term. First is domestic law, the sphere of posited relations of right, which Kant claims should be in accordance with a republican constitution; second is the sphere of rightful relations among nations (*Voelkerrecht*), resulting from treaty obligations among states; third is cosmopolitan rights, which concerns relations among civil persons to each other as well as to organized political entities in a global civil society. [20]

All these rights, especially the right to hospitality of the world citizens, create a political and legal environment based on reciprocal moral obligation, or mutual humanity. Without the *cosmopolitan right* of world citizens created by the western theological, philosophical and legal tradition, we could not understand the eruptive emergence of the European *culture of contrition*. Sorry states appeared precisely at the moment of the institutionalization and juridification of cosmopolitan justice. New normative trends in
human rights in Europe, and especially, the clear demand for unconditional punishment of genocide and crimes against, created the political and legal preconditions for the entire institutionalization of sorry states and for the culture of apology.

If a culture of apology creates an ethical frame for a new, post-national Europe, we need to redirect our thinking on Europe, and refuse the conventional idea that the starting point for thinking the new Europe is the old Europe!

The more societies are confronted with transformations that threaten their very national foundation, the more fearfully people cling to what is familiar and the more likely they are to misunderstand the new European realities. Even changes for the better then provoke anxious resistance. [21]

There is no doubt that the normative concept of Europe comes from a Europe which still does not exist, a Europe yet to come in a completely new, changed and cosmopolitan form. “Today the European Union is similarly misunderstood, for the simple reason that it is still perceived within the out-dated political and scientific framework of the nation, whereas the realities which are producing Europeanization represent the classical historical counter-example to the political and social ontology of the nation-state.” [22] Unity should no longer be confused with sameness or identity: precisely the inverse holds, namely, that Europe’s strength is seen to reside in the fact that it acknowledges its own differences. Cosmopolitan integration is based on a paradigmatic shift toward the promising principle that diversity is not Europe’s problem but its condition and solution.

Despite numerous obstacles and conflictual episodes from the past, European political construction has overcome decisive phases and successfully followed the envisaged direction. A growing number of states have been integrated through the free exchange of people, goods, services and capital: this process has led to today’s common market and single currency. But this significant achievement, concentrated on the creation of a monetary and economic union, is no longer sufficient. Economic expectations by themselves can hardly mobilize political enthusiasm for the long-term project of a political community – or a community that deserves this name. Today, we need a new, broader political perspective, if we do not want cosmopolitan Europe to remain reduced to a common market overwhelmed by globalization. Faced with distinct crises of accelerated modernization, many societies are turning back to claustrophobic national identities. Europe is an unfinished political project precisely because it is fractured from within, fractured by the conviction that the European Union was established as a service for the harmonization and self-intensification of national interests! The debate over the consolidation of “European political construction” is still interrupted by regressive myths entangled in issues of sovereignty and nationality. If the European Union wishes to renew its fundamental political vision – the promise of Europe as a cosmopolitan promise – it needs to work on its political space as a permanent site for a “democracy under construction”. [23] Otherwise, the European Union will inevitably face numerous obstacles which cannot be overcome successfully, and which constitute its permanent denial and refutation.

The project of cosmopolitan Europe has been especially paralyzed from within by the incorrect self-understanding of its own conflicted past. A productive understanding of the
conflicted European past is blocked by national narratives of history and memory. Therefore, the first step must be a fundamental correction of the European paradigm, one prepared to transcend the contradictions between “national sovereignty” (always already fictitious) and “Eurocentric hegemony”, deprived of its groundwork in cosmopolitan citizenship. The initial effects of the European process of integration are being jeopardized by uncompromising competition and internal discord between Europe and its member states. Europe’s new political vision should therefore promote a different self-understanding of the European community, not to be reduced to a federation of sovereign nation-states. It must be a project of establishing a European community of citizens that needs not less, but more of a common Europe.

The cosmopolitan constellation cannot be reduced to the political promotion of the “Europe of the Other”, to a fashionable discourse of otherness dominating European cultural and political space. It is a question of understanding the new political construction called “post-national Europe”. One might state that we are the witnesses of a unique transformation of Europe, that is, of what we still call Europe. What is occurring today with European political construction seems to be without historical precedent. For the first time, Europe has ventured to cease being a captive of its own shameful and long dissembled past. In the spirit of the new culture of apology, contemporary Europe has engaged in emancipating narration of acts of injustice committed by and among European nation-states and against the other, newly colonized, states. Everywhere one hears the voices of remorseful self-confession with regard to Eurocentric horror, the consequence of imperial hegemony, colonial arrogance, and expansive nationalisms and totalitarianisms. Europe has finally given up its own Eurocentric heritage by taking a critical self-reflexive distance towards its repressed and long-denied past. Europe is heading in the right direction, towards freeing itself finally from its “antagonistic identities”, and thus expanding the possibilities of a proper theoretical discourse and counter-discourse. A newly pluralized Europe has abandoned the politics of identity and rationally rejected the forces, which, in the name of ethnic, national, class, cultural and religious identity have been involved in reckless violence, crimes, xenophobia, racisms and ethnic cleansings. It is therefore not surprising that “post-national Europe” is especially sensitive to the appearance of any nationalistic or religious fanaticism, anti-Semitism or cultural racism.

The greatness of the new and unique transformation of Europe resides in the fact that this transformation comes from within, from the pluralized sprit of Europe. In other words, the new Europe is united by differences from below. Cosmopolitanism from below is actually a political idiom by which the new Europe infallibly calls itself: the interest of (cosmopolitan) integration into European community is based on political and legal standpoint in which differences do not represent an obstacle but the very condition for solving newly occurring problems!

This emergence of a new, cosmopolitan Europe, a Europe to come (à venir), is permanently connected to a spirit of hope and promise. It should be remembered again what Europe promised under its name: Europe promised (“the promise of Europe”) to open itself towards what is not, what has never been and what will never be only Europe itself. This task certainly prompts some responsibility to think, speak and act in accord with this paradoxical promise. To think for, and sometimes against, any form of Eurocentrism. If Europe awakes, it will realize that its new, unknown, enigmatic,
cosmopolitan face comes from within, and simultaneously, from without Europe, even against the spirit of old, national, Westphalian Europe!

**European guilt**

Everyone is guilty with respect to everyone else, for everything, and I more than anyone. (Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *A Writer’s Diary*, 1881)

The emergence of a culture of excuses, of sorry states, is testimony that post-conflict Europe is trying to emancipate itself from itself, and at the some time, to liberate the Europeans from themselves. As Derrida proposes, “European responsibility toward its own heritage is always a responsibility to the other.” Let us see, briefly, how Europe gradually became something entirely new - a “new land of mourning” that is no longer responsible primarily to the memory of itself. The unconditional responsibility of Europe requires the invention of a new and just memory of the European past, the past of Europe which has its origin outside itself!

Since there is no thinking without memory, without inherited concepts, the name Europe, used to designate a new figure of universality, not only draws on the resources provided by its European heritage but also remains faithful to Europe’s own memory, rather than forsaking it.” [24]

There are many faults in European history, says Jean-Marc Ferry, that need to be pardoned: “We have to remember, in a critical way, the violence and humiliation we have inflicted on whole peoples on every continent in order to impose our own vision of humanity and civilization.” Therefore, the tempo and intensity of post-conflict reintegration depend on our capacity to share equal responsibility for Europe’s common future as well as for Europe’s common past. The most urgent task of the European Union, beyond any Eurocentrism, is to put Europe into question, or more precisely, to open the question of European common past and collective memory. As Habermas and Derrida noted, “Self-critical controversies about this past remind us of the moral basis of politics. [...] With the growing distance of imperial domination and history of colonialism, the European powers also get the chance for reflexive distance from themselves”. [25] The national past can no longer provide arguments for a positive reaffirmation of a European future. Rather, it becomes a contrastive foil for misunderstanding the past and the present. “Public memory of the national past is now assigned the task of breaking the mythic repetition-compulsion of history burdened with guilt and injustice.” [26] Undoubtedly, Europe cannot exist only as a community of national memories that separate us instead of uniting us. As we know, the exclusivity of national memory (“ethnic expropriation of collective remembering”) is not universalizable and therefore is irrelevant for the creation of post-national public spheres in Europe. Despite predictions of the “death of the past”, and the “end of history”, Eurocentric conflicting pasts refuse to go away. Furthermore, the transmission of rival national histories and memory cannot contribute to breaking with the tyranny of the past. The permanent commemoration and the proliferation of national pasts in the European Union has not established freedom, but rather enforced the terror of collective, national memory.
In this sense, we must articulate the idea of *cosmopolitan Europe as a future-oriented project*, that, in many ways, seeks to put the tormented European past behind it. The acceleration of a rapidly integrating European Union has shown that for “old” Europeans, Europe is the future, whereas for “new” Europeans (“eastern Europeans”) it is still the past. If we want to further accelerate the *cosmopolitan integration of Europe*, we have to go beyond the economic and financial realms, toward a political, legal, and normative reintegration of the European Union. We can dream of a cosmopolitan Europe to come only if we accept the unique orientation, and more, the common conviction, that we must share the *same* history, the *same* past and the *same* future with “others”, outside of Europe. Democratic solidarity among us, and especially, international solidarity with others, can exist only for a people of Europe already transformed into a European world people.

“In terms of civil rights, the new thing about the European Union is not just that it is not a state, but that it is already a *mega-national political community*, which has the task of realizing for a second time the old Enlightenment contractualism idea (Rousseau, Kant) of the French Revolution – of bringing together *strangers* under laws of right [...] but this time *beyond the borders* of the nation-state.” [27]

Finally, how we can create a *European historical consciousness* such as is necessary for the recollection of the conflicted national past, a past that can be shared outside of an exclusive national frame? The legacy of *ethnic fundamentalism*, still functionally equivalent to racism, should not be allowed to be a long-term obstacle to establishing an *inclusive* historical narrative of a European past. According to this new historical narrative, civic belonging is in principle accessible to everyone, regardless of ethnic or cultural origin:

> What distinguishes “civic” nation from “ethnic” nation is not the absence of any cultural component to national identity, but rather the fact that *anyone can integrate* into the common culture, regardless of race or colour. [28]

Today it is becoming clearer that the culture of apology demands the further Europeanization of collective memory, because “European enlargement can succeed culturally and existentially only when our memories have been shared and brought together as one.” [29] The emergence of *sorry memory* brings the hope that a critical self-understanding of European remembrance could be fostered by a mutual opening and by a shared, deliberative engagement over the horrific past. A self-critical unification of European memory requires at least one of two possible paths. The first would be the activation of all European countries to “work through the past” as individual nations – in the name of shared universal principles of emancipated memory politics. This memory practice already appeared – not just in Europe – as the “politics of regret”. National leaders increasingly began to assume collective responsibility for an unjust, cruel past: such a culture of apology based on truthful contrition for past atrocities can constitute a new and effective form of political legitimacy all around the world. The second possible process would be a genuinely shared Europeanized memory, with similar content and not only the same mourning practices. Transnational memory includes a sanctioned metanarrative of “collective pasts”: since the emergence of the culture of apology, the shameful truths of the past are no longer exclusive national property. They belong to all European nations as a whole. We can even add that the shared memory of the Holocaust unintentionally produced the structural ground for a birth of the new, cosmopolitan
We suggested that shared memories of the Holocaust, the term used to describe the destruction of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and a formative event of the twentieth century provide the foundations for a new cosmopolitan memory. It is a memory that harbours the possibility of transcending ethnic and national boundaries. [...] While “national memory” is determined by identity that is produced within clearly defined borders, “cosmopolitan memory” is characterized by shifting boundaries and a process of de-territorialization. The memory of the Holocaust helped the articulation of a new rights culture.“ [30]

Following this argument, Holocaust memory and the new rights culture have been mutually constitutive. The de-territorialization of Holocaust discourse from a unique symbol of Nazi evil to the representative case for supranational moral universalism clearly demonstrated that, since the 1990s, the Holocaust has been reconfigured as a decontextualized event. It is the universal nature of evil associated with the Holocaust that fuels its metaphorical power in such ways as to allow universal appropriation. Does this mean that the Holocaust belongs to all who want to define themselves as victims? In fact, Holocaust memories have become cosmopolitan in scope (the role of the Jew as the paradigmatic Other) because they enable diverse oppressed ethnic groups to recognize themselves in the condition of the Jewish victims. In the historical course of cosmopolitan Europe, the Holocaust has been universalized in a paradoxical way: the bitter irony of today’s cosmopolitanized Holocaust memory lay in the fact that the Jews were persecuted and murdered (annihilation of European Jews) precisely because of their cosmopolitanism. The history of Holocaust reception in Europe is the history of a quasi-mythological perception which lost its status as taboo and was transformed into a prohibition. This metamorphosis corresponds to a shift from the Holocaust as sacred to a profane field of signifiers.

As an unprecedented crime against humanity, the Holocaust became the unavoidable part of a European compulsive identity, especially in the form of a radical refusal to accept guilt or in the form, just as radical but in the opposite direction, of uncompromised protection of the Jews as victims. The legal protection of the Holocaust as a unique historical event was formalized by criminalizing the denial of the Holocaust. The United Nations General Assembly, moreover, established Holocaust Day on the official calendar of the UN (International Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January 2005). As we know, in January 2009 the European Parliament proclaimed 11 July to be a day of commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide throughout the EU. These legal acts can show that (criminal) legislation concerning the memory of shamed European past increased the normative power of EU. The expansion and accumulation of so-called “memory laws” aroused the opposition of many professional organizations: the World History Association, for example, published a famous “Appel de Blois” [31] arguing “that it is not the business of any political or state authority to define historical truth and to restrict the liberty of the historian’s research by penal sanctions. Historical debates are under attack by the European memory police.” It was very strange that leading world historians among whom were Eric Hobsbawm, Jacques Le Goff, Heinrich August Winkler and Pierre Nora, signed the open letter against the EU Parliament, and the EU Commission, trying to abolish an institutionalized protected memory of the victims of
Many scholars do insist that the increase in legislation concerning the painful memory of Europe’s tragic past represents a specific form of European self-punishment. The whole world hates Europe, and we deserve to be sacrificed because of our past crimes! The dramatic expression of European responsibility has profoundly affected our deep mistrust (“the pathology of debt”) in European history: self-stigmatization produces new historical arguments in favour of a European “tyranny of guilt”. The self-hatred and self-accusation of contemporary Europeans was interpreted as a “transparent sign that we are prisoners of a white guilt”! [32] Can we suspend Europe’s culture of apology by arguing that European peoples spend too much time apologizing for past crimes rather than weighing for their own future? In other words, the true transgression of old Europe is not only what it did in the turbulent past, but what it is not doing today. Europe’s “politics of shame” is not proof of western masochism, but the confirmation that we are ready to learn from our painful past. As a European idea, democracy is something that has never existed in a satisfactory way, and therefore, remains to come. Since the time of Enlightenment, Europe has undertaken a perpetual self-critique, and in this perfectible legacy is a chance for a new beginning, for another, different, self-corrective European future.

Footnotes


17. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 1936


23. Etienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*, 2004.


25. Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, "15 February, or, what binds Europeans together", in Daniel Levi (ed.), *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe*, Verso, 2005, 12


29. Eric Langenbacher, Bill Niven and Ruth Wittlinger (ed.), *Dynamics of Memory and Identity in Contemporary Europe*, Berghahn, 2013


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