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DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL MEMORY IN EUROPEAN CONTEMPORARY SPACE: (NEO)NATIONALISM, TRANSNATIONALISM, AND AGONISM

Alina Iorga, Professor PhD,
"Dunărea de Jos" University of Galaţi,
Alina.Iorga@ugal.ro

Abstract

At the end of the Cold War, the geopolitical struggle for the shaping of reunified Europe, the rise of populism, and the reemergence of neo-nationalism on both sides of the old Iron Curtain created the premises for a competition between the new master narratives associated to the two dominant paradigms of the politics of the past: the cosmopolitan / transnational and the antagonistic / national(istic) one. Against the background of the persistent crises following the transition processes in Eastern Europe, the Great Recession, the new geopolitical challenges, and the subsequent waves of neo-nationalism, the "memory games" intensified on both national and European institutional arenas. These games had a significant impact, detectable especially at the level of the institutionalized memory formats (the political and the cultural memory focused on the "founding traumas", including the revisionist national historical politics), which encompassed the deepening of the ideological, political, and cultural cleavages within and beyond the nation states. In the same time, the mnemonic and cultural struggles over the conflicting "painful pasts" allowed the preservation of the old fault line which has divided "Europe's Europes" during the Cold War. Against this mnemonic background, the new paradigm of the "agonistic memory" seems to offer a "decent" and "realistic" third way for dealing with the contested pasts, by means of a multiperspectivist approach which also allows the overcoming of the impasses revealed by the two other competitive memory models.

Keywords: memory games, neo-nationalism, antagonistic memory, cosmopolitan memory, agonistic memory

Introduction. "A moment of danger"

After 1989, in "Europe's Europes" (Trimçev et al., 2020) – implicated in the processes of reshaping collective identities, by means, among others things, of the narratives of national traumas which were also instrumentalized, unfortunately, in the extremist areas of the political scenes –, it was inevitable for the transnational projects aimed at the construction of a consensual memory of the continent, based on the liberal politics of reconciliation, to collide with the antagonistic nationalist projects. In fact, attempts at reconciliation were, from the outset, defied by various actors, some of them using the universalist liberal paradigm as "a resource for creating division and heterogeneity", while efforts to integrate national cultural legacies within "the historical heritage of Europe" had as consequence the "renationaliz[ation] of memory": "… the space of Europe (the EU and beyond) is run through with a multitude of stagings of conflictual memories, memories around which multiform actors it's up to." (Mink, 2008: 479-480) On this ground, the apparent cosmopolitan consensus that led, through the depoliticization of public sphere, to the concealment of the left/ right antagonism facilitated, at the same time, in the East, as in the West, the transfer of political and symbolic capital from universalist liberalism to the hybrid space where populism intersects with "the new faces of fascism" (Traverso, 2019). Given that, in recent years, a new "digital fascism" has gained momentum, the specificity of which consists in the self-manipulation of the subjects by means of the resources provided by *social media*, in the absence of a hierarchical organization directed, through propaganda techniques, by actors of the extreme right (Fielitz and Marcks, 2019: 8), the danger of these transfers has increased significantly. Leaving aside this "post-organizational" dynamic of the "digital hate cultures" (Ibidem: 20), we should note that the populists of the radical and extremist right draw their elements of legitimation from *mainstream* ideologies, especially from the sphere of conservative values associated with "cultural pessimism", values, which, appropriated on neo-nationalist ground,

facilitate the establishment of a "pathological normalcy" (Mudde, 2016: 11) in the thus hybridized political field. The instrumentalization of narratives anchored in the "painful pasts" (Keightley and Pickering, 2012), doubled by the "general moralization of political conflict", with origins in the "politics of regret" (Olick, 2007: 128, 134) initiated in the 70s, have now become, against the backdrop of the evoked depoliticization, factors that are conducive to many ideological contaminations responsible for the erosion of liberal democracies.

Ultraconservatives, illiberals and extremists from the East, for example, end up intersecting on the ground of narratives that integrate, alongside the cultural and political memory of painful pasts, the religious area of the canonical cultural memory. On the other hand, by appropriating symbolic practices and universalist liberal rhetoric, the same actors try to legitimize themselves by mobilizing a "national cosmopolitanism", "politically dubious […] [and] celebrating a given nation's humanitarian accomplishments without paying much attention to its ethical blunders" (Kansteiner and Berger, 2021: 208). As for the West, there the legitimizing discourses of the extreme right illustrate the effort to redefine the nation and the European identity in religious-civilizational terms (Brubaker, 2017: 1191-1226) by instrumentalizing narratives where "identitarian Christianism" meets, paradoxically, the "defence of secularism and liberal values" (De Cesari, Bosilkov și Piacentini, 2020: 27). In this highly polarized and confused landscape, the anti-totalitarian consensus institutionalized in 2009, after long debates, within the European Parliament becomes, in the cultural and political practices of the "mnemonic warriors" (Kubik and Bernhard, 2014: 17), the object of severe distortions that affect the strength of both national democracies and the European project: "In the European house, liberal and autocratic regimes and forces clash and cooperate with each other in a state of common 'entrapment,' desperately trying to enforce their own vision of Europeanness and shared fundamental values." (Csigó and Zombory, 2020: 19-20) In a study published shortly after the adoption of the resolution on *European conscience and totalitarianism* (2009), Konrad Jarausch warn about the challenges linked to attempts to "reconcile plurality with unity" by "harmonising disparate recollections into one generalised memory culture" (2010: 317), against the background of European crises. A few years later, the pan-European rise of neo-nationalist populism, against the

backdrop of an entangled dynamic of the "memory games" (Mink and Neumayer, 2013), would make even more evident the problematic nature of this harmonization.

Memory games, (neo)national(ism), transnational(ism) and agonism

In the current context of the spread of "counterfactual histories and divisive interpretations of the past", whose political instrumentalizations constitute "one of populism's most powerful resources" (Erll, 2020: 294), the investigation of collective memory becomes more significant than ever. In this article we will especially consider its institutionalized forms, the political and cultural memory (Assmann, 2010: 42-44), with an emphasis on the memory games, and on their relationships with both the "asymmetries" and normative "conditionality" specific to the post–Cold War geopolitical framework (Mink and Neumayer, 2013: 6, 12). The latter is defined by the "prefab model" that had functioned for almost half a century in the West. As Mary Elise Sarotte observed, the 1989–1990 competition of great powers focused on the lands where the Cold War originated and where the "the endgame" was announced. It is "the final round in a competition that was long-running, multi-layered, and profoundly significant," where the key players have advanced four "architectural" prototypes – "the Soviet *restoration* model", "Kohl's *revivalist* model", the "*heroic model* of multinationalism" (supported by Mikhail Gorbachev), and the winning one, "the *prefab* model", already successfully tested in the West: "As in many architecture competitions, the winning model was not the most visionary. Given all the constraints involved, it was the most practical in the time frame available." (Sarotte, 2014 [2009]: 28-32) The vulnerabilities pointed out by Sarotte persist after the end of the Cold War, being reflected, among other things, by the incongruities, detectable since the first years of the transitions, between the Western vision of a unified Europe and that of the East recently freed from the political-economic hegemony of an actor that continued to be perceived as "the Slavic other" (Ibidem: 30). The memory games carried out in the national and European institutional arenas after the collapse of the former Soviet empire, while constructing a geopolitical architecture in which the integration of Russia had proved to be extremely problematic from the very beginning,

incorporate these asymmetries, beyond the appropriation of certain elements of the cosmopolitan consensual rhetoric mobilized in the configuration of new master narratives. The analyses on the topic enable the understanding of some controversial moments in the history of constructing the "new Europe", as well as the complicated roles that the various implicated actors assumed after *annus mirabilis* 1989. We shall start by observing that, at the end of the first decade in the westernization process, a few years before the most significant phase of the Union's enlargement, when the Baltic States, the Visegrád Group and Slovenia will be integrated, Central-Eastern Europe did not look like a bloc at all, as noted by Sorin Antohi, "despite decades of Soviet-style homogenization" On the contrary, the region seemed to keep its "historic structural differences" shaped especially by the "explosive ethnic, religious, social, and political interwar legacy […] complicated by mutant identities and boundaries produced by the practice of state socialism and proletarian internationalism [...]" (Antohi, 2000: 61). From the perspective of the dynamics of memory, things started to get complicated, on both sides of the former Iron Curtain, with the commitment of the "new Europe" on the path of Euro-Atlantic integration:

> Central and Eastern European countries' exit from Soviet-type regimes changed the European memory 'referential', in the sense that two occasionally concomitant context resources worked to intensify memory issues and historicizing strategies. First, the principle of conditionality embedded in the EU's enlargement policy was used as a resource for producing a hegemonic historical narrative. […] Moreover, the clash between the EU on the one hand, with its normative reconciliation principle and temptation to force memory to 'unite' around the uniqueness of the Holocaust as an integral part of the '*acquis communautaire*', and the new member states that emerged from the collapse of the Eastern bloc on the other, with their determination to get the experience of Soviet totalitarianism incorporated into the foundations of European historical legitimacy, constitutes a geopolitical asymmetry that in turn facilitates the pursuit of memory games through demands for memory 'readjustments' and reparations. (Mink and Neumayer, 2013: 12)

These asymmetries of the European (geo)politics of memory have generated, particularly after the first wave of integration, not only repeated debates, but

also a notable number of studies (Milošević and Perchoc, 2021) dedicated to the conflicting histories of the continent. Most of them maps a Europe that, beyond the consensual project, seemed to preserve, almost two decades after the fall of Berlin Wall, a fault line between the former communist bloc and the West, the latter being both idealized and contested in the East in point of the ideological and cultural differences (Judt, 2005; Leggewie, 2009; Mälksoo, 2010; Karlsson, 2010; Assmann, 2013; Kiss, 2014; Kovács, 2018; cf. Antohi, 2000; Sierp, 2017; De Cesari, Bosilkov and Piacentini, 2020; Trimçev et al., 2020 etc.). Regardless of the authors' spaces of belonging, the analysis grids and the eventual ideological positions, the research published in the second half of the 2000s highlighted the persistence of cultural divides between the mnemonic regions of Europe (Lewis et al., 2022), deepened by the historical experiences following the Cold War. Research, for example, on the narratives mobilized by the memory entrepreneurs (Mink, 2008; Sierp, 2017; Neumayer, 2019 etc.) reveals since as early as 1992 (the year of the first debate regarding Eastern communisms host by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) the persistent "clashes", intensified in "moments of danger" (Levi and Rothberg, 2018), between the "old" and the "new" Europeans aspiring for recognition, whose fixation on their own traumatic memory, doubled by the blame of the West for the alleged "debt" contracted through the Yalta agreement, constantly fuelled a certain "semi-orientalism" of western discourses (Mälksoo, 2010: 73; cf. Pakier and Wawrzyniak, 2015). The old "epistemological-cultural fault line" (Antohi, 2000: 62) was also maintained in the institutional arenas of the European Union, where the attempts to mobilize some "top-down" strategic instruments aimed at strengthening, through cultural integration, the community project have led, not infrequently, to what some researchers call "the clash of cultures": "The prospects of a European memory policy are undermined not only by national approaches but also by institutional rivalry." (Pakier and Stråth, 2010: 12) An example in this sense is provided by the project "A New Narrative for Europe", initiated by the European Parliament and implemented by the European Commission in the period 2013-2014, whose agenda represented, in Wolfram Kaiser's terms, "a reaction to the economic and financial crisis" in 2008. The project stressed – similarly to the Commission's previous initiatives, aimed at counteracting,

through the "transnational convergence" of Europe's cultural memories, a series of far-reaching problems (the socio-economic crisis of 1973, for example, at the origin of the European cultural policies of the period, or those from the end of the 90s) – the persistence of significant "dissonances" (Kaiser, 2015: 3, 10, 11). The analysis of the mnemonic dynamics circumscribed to the respective geopolitical contexts highlights heterogeneous configurations (Perchoc, 2019: 678) reflected, on the one hand, in the competing narratives elaborated within the institutional arenas (national and transnational) and, on the other hand, at the level of social imaginaries (Braga, 2016) inscribed, themselves, in a composite landscape, where the special status of diasporas can be observed. Without insisting on the matter, we should point out the deep heterogeneity of the mnemonic contexts specific to "accidental diasporas", linked with the (re)emergence of "post-multinational nationalism". The phenomenon has its roots in the "great reconfigurations of political space along national lines", as a result of the disintegration, first, of the three empires (Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman), at the end of the First World War and, later, with the end of the Cold War, of the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia (Brubaker, 2009: 461, 465). The former USSR represents the paradigmatic case, offering "on a huge scale" the "example of a new political contract" intended to prepare the formation of "the monolithic Soviet "nation"" through the manipulation of "ethnicities and nationalisms (by changing borders, inventing languages and ethnicities, granting "autonomous" status to various populations, regions, and republics)" (Antohi, 2000: 70).

However, leaving aside this example, we must note that, regardless of the manner of referring to the official memory regimes (Bernhard and Kubik, 2014; cf. Perchoc, 2019), which evolves over time, as well as the positionalities of the mnemonic actors, the representations of the "communities of memory" (Margalit, 2004: 69, 101) (national or transnational/ diasporic) are, to a large extent, dependent on the different historical experiences of the West and of the East. Confronted, at different times, with the "interpretation wars" (Mälksoo, 2010: 103) in regards to memory and presenting some similarities in terms of the temporary denial, in contexts of crisis, of historical continuity in relation to the troubled or traumatic pasts (Karge, 2010; Lim, 2010; Koleva, 2022; cf. Kiss, 2014 etc.), the two Europes have never reached full convergence in

memorial policies (Kovács, 2018). The observation is also valid in the case of the memory of communism and in that of the narratives related to the Second World War: "…there has been a fundamental temporal mismatch between phases of 'freezing' and 'unfreezing' of war memories in Western and Eastern Europe" (Mälksoo, 2010: 87). Thus, while the Easterners experienced a "freeze" extending over more than forty years, under the hegemony of the Soviet policies of "organized forgetting" (Wydra, 2007: 25), the one visible in the Western space in the first post-war years and, in some cases, until the memorial turning point of the 7th and 8th decades was, "largely self-imposed": "Indeed, it was a conscious choice of forgetting certain traumatic parts of one's past in order to provide a safe interregnum in which the building of a new identity could begin […]." (Mälksoo, 2010: 87) Comprising multiple divided mnemonic regions, beyond the varied cultural-historical legacies, the different perspectives on the Cold War (Lowe and Joel, 2022), Central and Eastern Europe remains, by contrast, the space of multiple and conflicting pasts mobilized in the memory wars:

> For eastern Europeans the past is not just another country but a positive archipelago of vulnerable historical territories, to be preserved from attacks and distortions perpetrated by the occupants of a neighbouring island of memory, a dilemma made the more cruel because the enemy is almost always within: most of these dates refer to a moment at which one part of the community (defined by class, religion or nationality) took advantage of the misfortunes of another to help itself to land, property or power. (Judt, 2004: 172; cf. Koleva, 2022)

In such a landscape, it was to be expected that the strategies mobilized in the process of cultural and political Europeanization would induce (or accentuate) polarizations at the level of different formats of collective memories. Beyond the East / West cultural fractures, the memorial conflicts transferred to the supra- and transnational arenas, but especially in the European Parliament, obviously had an important national political sublayer (Troebst, 2010: 56-63; cf. Sierp, 2017). These polarizations become problematic especially during major co-determined crises, when, becoming radicalized, they generate serious disorders of social cohesion, such as anomies or schisms (Outhwaite and Ray, 2005: 44-45, 56). In Central-Eastern Europe, especially in recent years, "the impact of

the crises has seemingly fuelled populism within the mainstream and the fringe, currently challenging the conventional model of consensus politics" (Gherghina and Fagan, 2021: 4). The situation is no different in the West, separated for almost half a century from this "significant other", a liminal "Europe, but not quite Europe", where the "condemnable excesses" of the continent's history could be projected (Mälksoo, 2010: 68). In fact, both Western Europe and the United States have been dealing with the rise of "conspiratorial populism" for many years, which registers there the same migration from the margins to the core of political scenes, leading to the emergence of "*Post-Truth* politics" (Bergmann, 2018: 8, 109). The phenomenon is not new. In Europe, today threatened by anomie (Țăranu and Pîrvulescu, 2022: 55), such crises have been interconnected, as in the whole world involved in globalization processes, with the mobilizations of the populist extreme right. The movements in question are related to the re-emergence of neo-nationalism, whose first wave, linked to the global oil crisis of 1973, triggers the process of political Europeanization (Karlsson, 2010: 38-39; cf. Kotkin, 2001: 10-11). A second one, manifesting after the implosion of the Eastern bloc in 1989 / 1991, marks the period of transition, triggering the acceleration of the processes of cultural Europeanization (Karlsson, 2010: 38), as well as the politicization and securitization of international migration (De Haas, Castles and Miller, 2020: 10-11). In the context of globalization and regionalization of migration, the third wave appears, fuelled by the crises following the Great Recession of 2008. Finally, the fourth, preceded by the events of 2015, considered "Europe's *annus horribilis*" (of the crisis from Greece, of the terrorist attacks in Paris and, above all, of the so-called refugee crisis) (Mudde, 2018: 257), is coupled with the turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the tragedy in Ukraine. In all these "moments of danger", neo-nationalist imaginaries were reactivated, often in tandem with conspiracy theories, both at the level of political discourses assumed especially by "fringe" actors (radical populists or right-wing extremists), as well as, through the mediation of the former, in the sphere of the collective imaginary (Mudde, 2016).

Beyond this dynamics of political imaginaries, there is a cultural crisis, in fact, a "crisis of all models", which Ivan Krastev links, in a study published shortly after the "*annus horribilis*", with the absence of new ideas, "the dramatic decline of

trust in public institutions" and a climate of "instability and anger", unsupported, however, by any "major political mobilization": "There is no new collective utopia that has captured the public's imagination. Instead of bringing new life to the political left or the political right, the crisis challenged the very notion of the left-right structured democratic politics. Europe and world have gone populist." (Krastev, 2016: 52, 53) This is the era in which the "crisis of the meritocratic elites" sharpens, against the backdrop of the "return to national historical narratives". Legitimized by personal achievements and not by "belonging", these elites would have lost what Krastev calls, following Ivaylo Ditchev, the "emotional citizenship", that is "the tendency to share the passions of their community". Hence, they fuelled "public hatred" capitalized by the actors of the "new populism in Europe and America": "The populists do not offer a real alternative, nor are they egalitarian. Their attraction lies in their promise to renationalise the elites, to re-establish the constraints that were removed." (Krastev, 2016: 56, 57, 58)

At this point, we should draw attention, on the one hand, to the differences between the populist neo-nationalism manifesting (under various labels) in the last three decades and the "the classic civic liberal nationalism of the 19th century", which animated the construction of nation-states. In the first case we deal, as Don Kalb observed, with "ethnic (or ethno-religious) nationalisms, pervaded by national nostalgias of imagined golden times", abruptly ended, sometimes in humiliating circumstances, eras to be restored, in a projected future, in the populist narratives, "by the sheer force of majority national will and excellence". These visions are often fed by "a (self)victimization" which is partly based on "historically objective" realities and partly "imaginary", doubled by the culpabilisation of "alliances between imperial actors, EU bureaucrats, transnational capital, culturally liberal and cosmopolitan state-elites betraying the nation, and immigrants or minorities […]". To the listed categories is added, in the populist Eastern European narratives, in that of the Trump regime, but also in the Dutch and Italian narratives, the stigmatization of "the deeper enemy" represented by "cultural Marxism", "sexo-Marxism" and "antifascist anarcho-communism" (Kalb, 2021: 320). Once the distinction between the two paradigms (liberal and populist) is made, we cannot lose sight of the significant differences among civic liberal nationalism's modes of configuration. In its (post)

modern versions, the latter remains tributary both to the national(ist) traditions linked to the contexts of the emergence of nation-states, and to subsequent historical experiences. There are a number of factors that have decisively left their mark on the evolution of political cultures, on the articulation of democratic systems, as well as on the ways of understanding democracy in the European space. Nonetheless, in the case of Eastern Europe, involved after 1989/ 1991 in the "westernization" process, the late establishment of most of national states – previously sited under the hegemony of multinational empires (Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman) and dominated by a "cultural and ethnic nationalism", lacking the political dimension illustrated, for example, by the German mixed model –, took place in the absence of the factors that favoured, in the West, the advance of liberal democracies (a bourgeois revolution and consistent civic liberalism) (Minkenberg, 2017: 398). If in the West of Europe the stability of the nation-states was due, to a large extent, to solid political and cultural architectures anchored in "revolutionary events, the consequences of wars, or the founding events of constitutions", in the East, the state-formation history is linked to various "contested memories" that permanently made political constructions vulnerable: "The non-congruity of national consciousness with the territorial frame of the state in eastern Europe was a major driving force of nationalism in its irredentist form of claiming lost territory and in its aggressive form of discriminating against ethnic minorities." (Wydra, 2007: 226) Hence, the difficulty encountered by these societies in "establishing, and reproducing political identities" (Antohi, 2000: 69), accentuated against the background of social actors' distrust in the discourses circulated in the public sphere and in state institutions. The construction of trust as a collective emotion – notes the anthropologist Christian Giordano in an analysis of standardized democratization in the post-socialist East – was made difficult by historical legacies. Throughout the centuries, the actors of these societies "were treated at best as subjects and not as citizens", while the historical experiences of the region were marked by successive social and cultural traumas associated to "foreign imperial domination [...], ethnocracies, civil and military dictatorships, and fascist or communist totalitarianisms" (2011: 287).

According to Tony Judt, the Second World War and the subsequent forced reorganization put an end to previous clashes among European nation-states, stirred by nationalist perceptions of "the perceived inadequacy of their geographical area and the presence of unwanted minorities within their territory", but at the same time they "contributed to a radical undermining of the fragile legitimacy of the newer states – between Soviet internationalism and the promise of Europe their raison d'être seemed elusive." (1999: 169) Determinant in the reactivation of neo-nationalism during the first post-communist decade (marked by multiple crises) in the agendas of populist-extremist actors – fascist-authoritarian, racist-ethnocentric or religious-fundamentalist (Minkenberg, 2017: 398; cf. Gherghina, Mişcoiu and Soare, 2017) –, the Central- and Eastern-European experiences outlined above also played a crucial role in shaping both national memory politics and regional legitimation strategies. Going beyond the transitional contexts, they continue to fuel the resistance of (neo)nationalist actors to transnational mnemonic regimes, supporting, at the same time, the preservation of apparently insurmountable conflicts. The resistance is also visible, in the sphere of social memory, in Western and Northern Europe, increasingly receptive, after the Great Recession, to the revival of national(ist) traditions. Beyond the appeals for the preservation of cosmopolitan architecture, seriously damaged by its own versions of right-wing populism, the "old Europe" – confronted, especially after the so-called refugee crisis, with "cultural racism" and "ethnic regionalism", as reactions to immigration and to "corrosive multiculturalism" (De Cesari, Bosilkov şi Piacentini, 2020: 12, 34, 36; cf. Mudde, 2017: 609-620) –, could not avoid the dilemmas generated by the re-emergence of nationalisms. In fact, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, accompanied for a short time by the utopian hope in the "end of history", to the current crises affecting social solidarity and threatening the European project, (still) divided Europe seems to have oscillated between nostalgia for national pasts defined by "cultural differences" (the core of nationalist narratives) and the hope that animates, in competing, often antagonistic, progressive narratives, the dream of solidarity in diversity. The antagonism manifests itself, with different degrees of radicalization, in contexts marked by the hegemony of neo-nationalist populism, including the illiberal and the authoritarian one, in which nostalgia, integrated into political and cultural

mnemonic strategies, has a restorative dominant. In such cases, the "hope for a progressive and enlightened future" hardly coexists, in a "fragile equilibrium", with the "strong nostalgic attachment" to a past perceived as a time of lost glory: "If nostalgia often strives to restore the polity in question as it once was, the latter is its polar opposite – it is associated with progressive ideals and optimistic, forward-looking visions." (Hellström, Norocel and Jørgensen, 2020: 4)

These types of "historical emotion" (Boym, 2001: 10), have different manifestations since the 90s (see Iorga, 2023), with the collapse of the socialist bloc (marked, after the revolutions of 1989, by the disintegration of the Soviet empire, with the separation of Ukraine and the Baltic States, by the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the tragic ethno-political conflicts that followed), the reunification of Germany and the commitment of the East on the path of democratization, simultaneously with entering the race for Euro-Atlantic integration. Ever since then, Europe's political and cultural-historical memories have been the object of instrumentalizations at both national and transnational level, and with variable impact on collective perceptions, conditioned by both the dynamics of antagonisms in political fields and the seismic shifts in the geopolitical sphere. Prefaced by the *boom* of the 80s, which institutionalized the traumatic memory of the Holocaust in the West, the memory games gain momentum in the East after the disintegration of the socialist bloc, transgressing the borders of the national states whose collapse seemed sealed in the first transitional decade and moving into the European institutional arenas. It is the space of the battles that the East, inclined to preserve "a past-centered conceptualization of Europe", while the "old Europeans" tend to privilege a "future-oriented project", one set on overcoming the impasses related to dealing with the painful pasts (Mälksoo, 2010: 71), initiates with the purpose of transnationalizing their own counter-hegemonic paradigm (the traumatic memory of communism, essentialized in the Stalinist version). Noting that the "orientation to the past, rather than to the future", sometimes seen as part of an "Eastern European syndrome", does not indicate a "pathology" of the region, but presents significant convergences, despite the time gaps, with the memory dynamics within the West during the Cold War (Ibidem: 83, 88-89; cf. Wydra, 2007: 238-239, 239-240), we draw attention to the fact that the demands of the East appear against the background of a "manifest asymmetry

in European memory". In the words of Aleida Assmann, if the victims of the Holocaust had already received public recognition, "the victims of Stalinism, who were deported, tortured, exploited as forced laborers and murdered en masse, have not yet been accorded a rightful place in Europe's historical memory and moral consciousness." The "continuing dissonance" created by the conflicts between the two traumatic memories, which remains an obstacle in the process of cultural Europeanization, was maintained by both sides of the former Iron Curtain. From the Westerners standpoints, the same Assmann comments, the reluctance of the Easterners towards integrating the memory of the Holocaust into national policies is alarming: "The exclusive focus on one's own nation as victim of communist terror is seen as a strategy to ward off responsibility for collaboration and to block empathy for Jewish victims." On the other hand, for Easterners, the difficulty, visible in the other half of the continent, "to anchor the crimes of Stalinism in a European memory that is saturated with museums, monuments and commemoration events relating to the Holocaust" is equally unsettling (Assmann, 2013: 31, 32; cf. Judt, 2005).

The paradigm shift, involving the integration of Holocaust memory into what was intended to be "a broader anti-totalitarian view of modern European history" (Büttner and Delius, 2015: 391), occurs in the period after the Great Recession, in the context of the third neo-nationalist wave, due especially to the efforts made by some of the recently integrated Eastern countries. In the "vanguard" (Mälksoo, 2010: 90) are Poland and the Baltic states, the only European states occupied by the USSR as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Baltics experiencing between 1940 and 1945 the double trauma of the confrontation with Stalinism and Nazism, before being integrated into the Soviet empire, a status that they will keep until 1991. Both in the case of Poland and in that of the former Soviet republics, the capitalization of memorial veins with high symbolic resonance on both national and European level, starting with the protest movements of the 80s, favoured by *glasnost* and *perestroika*, represented an essential component of the strategies mobilized for the purpose of recognition. The instrumentalization of the memory of *Solidarity*, as well as that of the protests organized, starting from 1987, by

national(ist)-civic groups in the Baltic States[1], is, however, also relevant from the perspective of the convergence of the transnational paradigm with the national one, detectable, in certain cases, in the process of the Europeanization of memory. Thus, the history of dissent, democratic opposition and civic activism during the communist period, condensed in the *Solidarność* symbols, allowed the Polish MEPs to project in a universalist framework the demands for the recognition of their own country's role in the democratization of the East and the reunification of Europe (Góra and Mach, 2017: 73). In this case, we are dealing with a positive illustration of the mobilization of national history on the ground offered by the cosmopolitan paradigm. Obviously, this is a specific segment of the Polish cultural-historical memory, well integrated in the social memory (not always in the official mnemonic regime) and, at the same time, easy to harmonize with the universalistic values promoted through transnational policies. A relevant precedent, from the same viewpoint, seems to be the management, in the context of the "return to Europe", of the contested pasts, also illustrated by Poland, this time in the field of international relations, through the program implemented by the elites from the *Solidarity* milieu. As Timothy Snyder remarks, Poland resumed dialogue with Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine when the USSR still existed, gradually gaining credibility through policies aimed at maintaining existing borders, beyond historical claims, guaranteeing cultural rights for minorities and their treatment, above all, as citizens of their countries of residence, the correlation of historical debates with European and international standards, as well as the cautious use, in an "instrumental" manner, of national history in foreign policy (2004: 56). The above examples provide strong arguments in favour of the transnationalization of memory and explain the resilience of the cosmopolitan paradigm, despite the challenges posed by the rise of neo-nationalism.

The cosmopolitan model naturally offers the advantage of a multiperspectivism

[1] Synchronous with the protests caused, in the West, by the commemoration of August 23, 1939 (the date of signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) within the so-called "Black Ribbon Day" initiated by Canadian refugees from the countries occupied by the Soviet Union, the commemorative demonstrations culminated in 1989, when "approximately two million people formed a 675.5 km long human chain spanning all three Baltic States" (Sierp, 2017: 446, 447; cf. Perchoc, 2013)

that is missing, most of the time, from the antagonistic narratives. In Aleida Assmann's terms, "the interpretive framework of the transnational turn also carries a promising potential for memory studies as it stimulates new perspectives on the larger political and cultural contexts in which memories are selected, constructed, and contested." (Assmann, 2017: 67) As Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney have observed, "the transnational optics" is likely to change the perception of memorial processes and forms, which are no longer linked to a series of "points or regions" that can be mapped horizontally, but are inscribed in "a dynamic operating at multiple, interlocking scales and involving conduits, intersections, circuits, and articulations". At the same time, the two authors note, "the transnational dynamics of memory production" remains deeply connected to that of national memories. Hence, sometimes "the globalization of memory practices has paradoxically helped reinforce the nation as the social framework par excellence for identity and solidarity, suggesting that the latest phase of globalization and transnational capitalism has not led to the disappearance of the national, but rather its transformation and reconfiguration […]" (2014: 6). Although comforting, the optimism of these integrative perspectives suggests, according to the opinions expressed by researchers from different disciplinary areas (political science, *Diaspora & Migration Studies*, etc.), a certain conceptual desynchronization in relation to the great global socio-economic and political transformations that have occurred since the 2000s (Mudde, 2017). Given that "the transcultural frames of memory that shape our understanding of the past are […] contested, contingent, and both politically and ethically ambiguous" (Bond, Craps and Vermeulen, 2017: 6), it is obvious that, once instrumentalized on (geo) political ground, the cosmopolitan paradigm cannot evade the abusive transfers of symbolic capital mediated by antagonistic narratives, as in the case, already mentioned, of "national cosmopolitanism" or, worse, in that of transnational memory of fascism, grasped as "a site of contestation among political imaginaries" (Levi and Rothberg, 2018: 365). In fact, whether it is limited to national scenes, or it involves transnational mobilizations, the competition of various political and socio-economic projects is what defines the framework of the increasingly heated disputes around memory transformed, especially in its traumatic versions, in a legitimizing moral tool. On this ground, seemingly incompatible memory

paradigms collide, triggering multiple challenges such as those that Francis Fukuyama warned, in his plea for the retrieval, in the field of liberalism, of the nation as a "social construction", which is claimed today, from positions that criticize the liberal ones, by both conservatives and illiberals: "Liberalism, with its universalist pretensions, may sit uneasily alongside seemingly parochial nationalism, but the two can be reconciled. The goals of liberalism are entirely compatible with a world divided into nation-states." (2022)

Regardless of the political-ideological affiliation of the actors involved, the high stakes of the political games remain anchored in the moralizing dimension of the memory narratives. In this aspect, the mnemonic landscapes from the former Eastern bloc offer enough examples of moralizing history, memory and political conflict (Müller, 2004: 19; Olick, 2007: 139), whose transnational implications are related to contemporary geopolitical dynamics. Without insisting, in the absence of adequate space, we must note on the subject that, in the 2000s, mnemonic strategies reflect an increasingly obvious political instrumentalization of history, influenced by the (re)nationalization, everywhere in "Europe's Europes", of the cultures of memory (Mink, 2008: 479-480; Pakier and Stråth, 2010: 12). From this period, the gap between the "objective" historiographical interpretation and the "post-factual" revisionist politics of history regarding the Second World War and the socialist era begins to grow (Luthar, 2017a: 10). The phenomenon, states Heike Karge, was already noticeable in the 90s, when in most of the countries of the former communist bloc there was an "uncritical reversal" of the previous memorial regimes, leading to the "'dislocation' of collective memories", while in the elaboration of the new policies, the previous ideological criteria were replaced by antagonistic ones, in the absence of a pluralistic approach (2010: 137, 138). The author draws attention, from this perspective, to "the continuity of interpretative patterns inherited from the post-war period, in which historical memory was instrumentalised to support a positive national self-image" (Ibidem: 137). Obviously, the narratives in question, converging with the neo-nationalist trend generalized in Europe, can also be explained from the standpoint of the above-mentioned geopolitical conditionalities and asymmetries. The second aspect is essential for understanding the behaviour of the former Soviet satellites towards the Russian Federation, not only in the context evoked by Karge, but

throughout the more than three decades that have passed since the disintegration of the USSR until the invasion of Ukraine. The construction of antagonistic official regimes aiming to counterbalance the post-Soviet master narrative based on both the remythologization of Stalin and the imperial past (tsarist and Soviet), which sustained the "'populist official' nostalgia" (Platt, 2020: 232), seems to us, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine, explicable. However, the continuity of some mnemonic practices that reflect, through radical rhetoric, unidirectional and overly moralizing vision and the absence of contextualizations, the "uncritical reversal" of the official historical narratives of communist era remains problematic. Reducing the epoch's meanings to a "legacy of repression" involves an oversimplification, and a nuanced approach is required: "Next to a red book of the communist utopia and a black book of communist crimes, there is the need for a grey book of the history of central European countries under communism." (Wydra, 2007: 220) The comment seems important especially in respect to the implications of the social memory's "dislocation". In the case of this sort of approach to national histories and cultures, characterized by the superficial treatment of the adequacy of mnemonic policies to the perceptions and expectations of various memorial communities, the geopolitical context marked by the permanent challenges coming from the ex-Soviet space is perhaps less relevant. However, national(ist) historical legacies and the way they are integrated into the revisionist practices mobilized at the intersection of the intellectual and academic field with the dominant political field maintain their relevance, against the backdrop of the memorialization and moralizing of history, on the one hand, and of the moralization of political antagonisms, on the other hand. From this standpoint, the revision of history after the collapse of Eastern Communisms has been transformed, in some cases, in the context of the nationalist turn that occurred both in the political fields and in that of historiographical research, in what Oto Luthar called, with regard to Slovenian practices, "a revisionist historiography [...] immune to the effect of new evidence" (2017b: 192). Appropriated by populist actors, the narratives built on the basis of such historiographical practices facilitated the reconfiguration of political antagonism as "a struggle between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identification" (Mouffe, 2013: 6-7), in other words, a struggle between good and evil, which, moreover, has

become a dominant feature of contemporary "post-politics". In Luthar's terms, instead of supporting the "necessary debate on the relationship between morality and politics" (2017a: 10), moralizing discourses have expanded their scope to a level that affects the political experiences of post-socialist countries: "What we are faced with is an attempt to confuse historical knowledge with political programming." (Luthat, 2017b: 192). The consequences are obvious in the case of the Polish politics of history mobilized as "a tool in political battles" (Behr, 2015: 29) during the PiS electoral campaign in 2005, implemented, nevertheless, in a geopolitical context completely different from that of the 90s, marked by increasing tensions between the "new Europe" and the former hegemon of the Eastern bloc. In an analysis centred on the institutional actors involved in the second wave of post-communist "purges" (Ash, 2004), Georges Mink also insists on these moralizing excesses: "They reject any nuanced view of the person in question: a traitor is a traitor, a hero a hero. This attitude, meant to come across as cool-headed and objective, is nonetheless founded on moral conviction, not fact." (Mink, 2013: 155, 163-164) Reflecting on the transitional justice implemented in the '90s, Timothy Garton Ash had drawn attention, before the revisions of the following decade, to the need to overcome moralizing prejudices regarding the "implicated subjects" (Rothberg, 2019). On the one hand, Ash observes, in analysing the archives of ex-communist states, it is imperative that the text be placed "in the historical context." On the other hand, the process of interpretation requires "both intellectual distance and the essential imaginative sympathy with all the men and women involved, even the oppressors", which does not affect the process of seeking the truth: "But with these old familiar disciplines, there is a truth that can be found. Not a single, absolute Truth with a capital T, but still a real and important one." (Ash, 2004: 282)

The process described above cannot be fully understood in the absence of a connection with geopolitical dynamics, crucial in all the great battles around memory. And the international context in which the said mnemonic practices are included was, without a doubt, one that gave rise to anxiety, if we were to evoke only two of the relevant events: the commemoration, in (the same year) 2005, in Moscow, of "The Great Fatherland War" (in the aftermath of the first wave of enlargement), as a reissue of the Stalinist ritual dramatizations of 2000

(immediately after the Visegrád Group countries' integration into NATO), and the war in Georgia in 2008 (slightly after the second phase of enlargement), followed, in 2014, by the annexation of Crimea. The events take place against the backdrop of constant memorial conflicts, whose importance for the Russian Federation is attested, among other things, by the establishment in May 2009, as a result of a presidential decree, of "the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Combat the Falsifications of History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests". Having as main objective the consolidation of "the perception of the politics of history as a matter of national security", also illustrated by the publication of "manuals dedicated to the 'falsifications' of the history of Russia in other countries", the initiative is followed in 2020 by the establishment of a new department, whose dual purpose is "the investigation of previously unknown war crimes" from the period of World War II and the 'prevention of distortion of historical facts'" (Kasianov, 2022: 79, 81-82). The measures were taken in the context of "the memory war between Russia and its neighbours", the one in 2009 being a "a response to the work of institutes of national memory that had been created first in Poland and then in Ukraine." (Kalinin, 2013: 261-262) It is a "climactic moment of the memory wars" fought in the 2007-2009 period, one of "the resurgence of Russian cultural and ethnic irredentism", when nationalism "became an important element of the external strategy" assumed by the leadership of the Federation: "[T]he memory wars of 2007–2009 always included an appeal concerning the violation of the rights of Russians in the "near abroad." Protests inside countries with "incorrect" historical politics (Ukraine, Baltic countries) were planned with the local Russian-speaking population in mind." (Kasianov, 2022: 80) During the same period, on the other side of the barricade, Russia's provocations provided a solid argument justifying late lustrations, especially in the case of Poland and the Baltic States: "…letting former agents of the regime go unpunished would endanger the newly acquired sovereignty of the country, since those agents might continue to work for a foreign power, in this case Russia. The countries most sensitive to this argument were the Baltic states and Poland." (Mink, 2008: 485)

These practices highlight, beyond the problematic character of moralizing (trans)national historical policies, a series of vulnerabilities of both mnemonic

paradigms. Subjecting both the antagonistic and cosmopolitan model to a critical examination, recent research suggests the reorientation, in the construction of mnemonic strategies and politics, but also in the analysis and interpretation of collective memories dynamics, towards a "third way", in order to enable both nuanced approaches and the integration of multiple conflicting perspectives. Circumscribed to a "third wave" within the field of *Memory Studies* and indebted to previous concepts of "traveling memory" (Erll, 2011), "multidirectional memory" (Rothberg, 2009), "memory unbound" (Bond, Craps and Vermeulen, 2009) etc., these researches emphasize the dynamic character of all processes of remembrance, as well as the importance of both reception and "(re)mediation" (Olick, 2007; Erll and Rigney, 2009; Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll, 2017 etc.) in (re)shaping the shared memory's various forms. Announcing an important paradigm shift, these recent studies highlight, at the same time, the relevance of the "implicated subject" (Rothberg, 2019) in relation to the ethical-moral approach of the victims *vs* perpetrators antagonism, still dominant in the research on the traumatic memories of Europe, but deeply problematic in the case of investigating specific configurations within the Central and Eastern European "archipelago". The latter is the area of "disputed memory", the territory where the painful "double experience" (Nazi and Stalinist) triggered a profound polarization within the mnemonic communities: "The double heritage of Nazism and Bolshevik communism in many parts of the region remains difficult to balance without indulging in the exorcising of one through the other." (Wydra, 2007: 227; cf. Sindbæk Andersen and Törnquist-Plewa, 2016: 2) No less difficult is the unidirectional approach of the various ways of remembering the experiences of "real socialism", as well as, in general, of the perspectives on the Cold War, beyond the multiple overlaps, intersections and interactions among the different "regions of memory".

In such memorial contexts it is all the more obvious the need to overcome the normative-moralizing approaches mostly specific to the antagonistic vision, through a multiperspectivism already favoured, in a "consensual" version, by the cosmopolitan model. It is the main advantage of the "agonistic memory" paradigm (Cento Bull and Hansen, 2016; Cento Bull, Hansen and Colom-González, 2021; Kansteiner and Berger, 2021), whose promoters base their efforts

on a fertile concept of contemporary political theory: agonism. For Chantal Mouffe, the author of an "agonistic model of [liberal] democracy" understood as an alternative to those provided by neoliberalism and neo-nationalism, the challenges of the contemporary multidimensional world require a reconsideration of the previous models (the aggregative and the deliberative), whose rationalist-individualist framework would exclude two essential elements in the functioning of the political field: "the centrality of collective identities and the crucial role played by affects in their constitution". Recognizing antagonism as constitutive of the *political* and, therefore, *politics*, the Belgian theorist shows that, for pluralist liberal democracies, the essential problem is not about reaching a "consensus […] without exclusion", which would require the construction of a "we" in the absence of a corresponding opponent ("they"). The crucial issue, for Mouffe, is the establishment of this "we / they distinction, which is constitutive of politics, in a way compatible with the recognition of pluralism", without the "eradication" of conflict, given that "the specificity of pluralist democracy is precisely the recognition and the legitimation of conflict". The main current demand in liberal democratic politics is a change of perspective on "the others" who should no longer be perceived as "enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not to be questioned". In other words, the "we / they" antagonism should be reshaped in such a way that the conflict no longer takes the form of a "struggle between enemies", but of an "agonism" – a "struggle between adversaries" (Mouffe, 2013: 2-3, 6-7).

Following the consequences of Mouffe's reflections in the field of *Memory Studies*, not without expressing reservations about the fragility, revealed by this model of agonism, of the boundaries between "democratic [and] non-democratic modes of engagement" and between "adversaries [and] enemies" (Kansteiner and Berger, 2021: 223-224), supporters of agonistic memory show interest in its ability to "repoliticize the public sphere" and to deconstruct, at the same time, the new nationalist-xenophobic narratives and practices (Berger and Kansteiner, 2021: 5). The agonistic approach is all the more necessary since the proliferation of the latter not only affects the strength of the cosmopolitan paradigm – necessary for democratic balance, but vulnerable, from the perspective of the "agonists", in

its universalist dimension, which may create room, as shown by the "national cosmopolitanism", for deliberately avoiding the historical, political and social contextualization (Cento Bull, Hansen and Colom-González, 2021: 13-14) –, but they also undermine the foundations of the European architecture designed, from its very beginning, for maintaining the peace on the continent. Noting that all three paradigms represent "ideal types", being subject to contextual conditionings, and that they cannot be generalized in the analysis of the complex dynamics of social memory, the agonists also show that, unlike the antagonistic and cosmopolitan models – which suggest "competing trajectories of collective progress", opposing "national superiority" to "utopias of reconciliation and transnational cooperation" –, agonism remains "sceptical of progressive teleologies". Sharing Mouffe's perspective on the legitimacy of political conflict in pluralistic democratic systems and, accordingly, integrating significant ideological elements from both competing paradigms, the supporters of agonism plead for an equilibrium of contraries, aimed at overcoming the blockages that affect, through the polarization of mnemonic communities, social solidarity within and beyond the borders of nation-states: "…in the historical conflict between antagonistic national(istic) memory and cosmopolitan transnational memory, agonistic memory claims the messy middle ground in the name of realism and decency and seeks to overcome the paralysing impasse between nationalism and cosmopolitanism." (Berger and Kansteiner, 2021: 2-3)

In the researches of the last decade, it has become common place to plead for the adjustment of transnational mnemonic policies, so as to facilitate an integration as harmonious as possible of the national and regional narratives related to heterogeneous landscapes where, quite often, inertial trends become manifest. In this sense, cultural integration should be correlated, beyond the supranational efforts aimed at building and disseminating "a European canon", with "societal initiatives that are broader than the interests of a political elite." (Karlsson, 2010: 40). The new agonistic paradigm offers clarifications and important conceptual tools in the analysis of these policies and their socio-cultural and identity impact, all the more relevant in the context of the current crises, likely to accentuate the "schism" noted, for more than two decades, in the memories of Europe. Leaving aside the transnational framework, such schisms raise equally serious

problems in the national areas where, associated with social traumas, they lead to "disengagement, estrangement, and alienation" – "the solvents of the ethical community" –, which undermine the process of remembering past emotions and, implicitly, the feeling of solidarity in the present (Margalit, 2004: 11, 144).

Instead of conclusions

A significant consequence of the "paralysing impasse" that occurred throughout the competition between the cosmopolitan and the antagonistic model, materialized in the focus of the memory games on painful pasts, is the hegemony of the traumatic paradigm in the field of memory studies. This privileges a vision of memory focused on "loss, victimization and grievance", to which is associated a "collective state of depression" with roots in the changes responsible for "the collapse of the grand narratives that, since the onset of modernity, sustained utopian thinking and trust in the future" (Rigney, 2018: 369, 377). In these circumstances – and recognizing "the interconnectedness between disputed memory, mediation of emotions and politics" (Sindbæk Andersen and Törnquist-Plewa, 2016: 3) –, it is essential to mobilize social energies in the sense of capitalizing on the transformative potential of collective affects whose resort is, to a great extent, the mnemonic imagination. As a "critical discipline", Ann Rigney commented a few years ago, *Memory Studies* faces "the challenge of exploring how the past and present can interact in producing scenarios for the future without falling back into grand narratives", but also avoiding the fixation on traumatic pasts. Nevertheless, encouraging "a 'positive turn' in memory studies" may look like inappropriate if we refer to "historical injustice", since it is well-known that the "positivist" standpoint has "a dubious track record", illustrated, among other things, by the "socialist realist happy-end monumental histories" and a "the triumphalist mode of remembrance": "So at first sight it seems like we are caught […] between, on one hand, the danger of seeing memory only as traumatic and hence the legacy of the past as only negative; on the other hand, the danger of 'falling back' into narratives of progress or into an escapist optimism or a paralysing nostalgia." (Rigney, 2018: 369, 370)

Obviously, the "paralysing nostalgia" evoked by Ann Rigney cannot be identified with the version that Svetlana Boym called "reflective", analysing it in contrast to the "restorative" nostalgic perspective and practices. As a "pervasive feature of modern cultural dynamics," reflective nostalgia stimulated by the mnemonic imagination involves a "different interaction between past, present, and future," mirroring "a collective desire to reconnect with what has apparently been lost or reassess what has apparently been gained" (Keightley and Pickering, 2012: 113-115). There are, therefore, nostalgic practices that "keep certain alternatives open within the public domain", animating "counter-narratives" whose emancipatory potential may be directed against "social orthodoxies" and "political pieties" (Ibidem: 116). By contrast, the nostalgia that Ann Rigney refers to is understood in the melancholic dimension linked to traumatic experiences, which can indeed lead to apathy or collective "depression". As a social phenomenon, paralysing nostalgia can be an adverse effect of remembering painful pasts, especially when the ethical communities involved face significant crises or massive suffering. In such contexts, symbolic policies focused on these pasts and mobilized in the name of the ethics of memory can find their opposite, in the case of the misinterpretations of the political memory at the level of the collective imaginary, in phenomena that endanger social cohesion, such as schism or anomie. The danger increases significantly when the narratives that support such policies are annexed, distorted, and instrumentalized in the legitimizing strategies of extremist actors (which are often mnemonic warriors) and becomes almost impossible to manage on the ground of the media affected by the rise of digital fascism. Under these conditions, we must acknowledge, leaving aside the (geo)political conditionings and asymmetries, that the cosmopolitan paradigm continues to ensure a cultural-identity framework indispensable for preserving the democratic equilibrium in the European regions. Given the complexity of multi-layered challenges in contemporary world, the politics of history can no longer neglect (agonistic) multiperspectivism, appropriate both for the "entangled" dynamics of social memory and for the requirements of the ethics of memory. From this viewpoint, we should not forget that the process of shared remembrance does not calling us for "repeat past sufferings, but to respond ethically to it": "This involves not the fixing of meaning, but meaning revisited in the relational

dynamic between the temporal tenses. It is a matter of remaining faithful to the particularity of people's experience while being able to imagine their pain anew in the continually changing conditions of the present." (Keightley and Pickering, 2012: 193)

In an essay published (first) in 1994, Tony Judt proposed a not quite optimistic analysis of certain political and cultural upheavals visible after the end of the Cold War, such as the "end of the European Enlightenment" and the emergence of a "counter-Enlightenment", whose main symptom seemed to be "the crisis of the European intellectuals". In the case of the young liberal democracies of the "new Europe", these seismic shifts added to the political vacuum, the anxiety caused by the tragedies in the former Yugoslavia and the economic shocks of the transitions, felt primarily by the (former) proletariat. It is the era in which the conflicts around the traumatic memories of the "century of extremes" intensify and in which the acute problem of authority (re)appears. "Who in Europe today, Judt wondered, [still] has the authority (moral, intellectual, political) to teach, much less enforce, codes of collective behavior? Who, in short, has power, and to what ends and with what limits?" For the Anglo-American historian of post-war Europe, the absence of a clear answer to this question was a warning of the future "turmoil": "...in a variety of ways Europe is about to enter an era of turmoil, a time of troubles. This is nothing new for the old continent, of course, but for most people alive today it will come as a novel and unpleasant experience." (Judt, 1999 [1994]: 171, 174) In 1994, the troubled future had already begun. And, with it, an(other) age of nostalgias. Today, the unrest has worsened, and restorative nostalgia, paralysing and lacking in reflective dimension, seems more current than it did nearly three decades ago.

Thirty-four years after the configuration, in the core of divided Europe, of the winning architectural model in the geopolitical competition initiated at the end of the Cold War, the world is still searching for equilibrium. As in 1989-1990, the endgame seems destined to take place in Central-Eastern Europe, encompassing, in the cartography drafted in the early 1950s by Oskar Halecki, the most prominent historian of interwar Poland, "the lands between Germany and Russia" (Troebst, 2010: 57). It is the traditional area of "disputed memory", where the memory games have been intensifying soon after the reconfiguration of European architecture designed, also in the middle of the last century, as a

guarantor of peace on the continent. The world of "present pasts", where there is still time to project the "future of nostalgia". And, perhaps, a new "concert of Europe".

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