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## Thoughts on the book

### Globalizing Hypocrisy For a humanist approach to the ethics of memory<sup>1</sup>

I started work on the book with a somewhat narrower theme, *the asymmetry of memory in Europe*. aspired to show that an ethics of European memory is possible, and that this involves reconciling competing memories of the Holocaust and the Gulag. The desideratum of a *memory of the Continent* was already supported by a will literature devoted to asymmetry, legitimized by the ideal of forging a European identity

As natural as these assumptions seemed to me, they proved to be oversimplifying on closer investigation. An example: in *Vajda v. Hungary*, the judges of the ECHR argued convincingly that you cannot treat the Nazi swastika and the communist (and not only) red coat of arms the same in the public sphere. There are limits to symmetry. On the other hand, an ethics of memory has to provide an answer to the phenomenon described by Alain Besançon as *the amnesia of communist crimes vs. the hypermnnesia of Nazi crimes*. Judging the past cannot be honorable if one gives up the aspiration of universal *fair play*. The notion of symmetry (and asymmetry), which initially seemed a simple methodological criterion, proved highly problematic.

It became relatively quickly clear that a memory of the Continent cannot be circumscribed to this geographical space. States such as Israel and the USA decisively influence the internal ethno-national and ideological debate on one *front line of the memory front*. The European border of memory runs mainly through the Baltic States, Poland and Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Germany. Romania was also a good case study. The intensity of the partisanship displayed by the actors of memory shows that the idea of a common European memory is almost a chimera.

The research hypotheses, which had also taken up ideas with academic circulation, proved unexpectedly vulnerable. Among other things, they were met with astonishing neglect by memory entrepreneurs. Examples again: in a globalizing campaign, statesmen, institutions, civic organizations, scholars accused a 2018 "Polish Holocaust law" of provisions that simply did not exist in it; civic activists and academics wrote an impressive number of disparaging articles denouncing a theory of *double genocide* prevalent, they claimed, in the Baltic States - even though the "theories" of the alleged perpetrators did not fall into such a category

It turned out that excesses, distortions, misses, especially premeditations, are a consistent part of the problematics of memory ethics. It is for this reason that the volume has devoted

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attention to deconstructing the phenomenon I have called *the hunting of the incorrect*, a form of hypocrisy incompatible with the desideratum of correctness. This is what we started with.

The phenomenon of 'hunting the incorrect' has highlighted the function of memory entrepreneurs in interpreting the facts of history. We called their views and conceptions of memory aimed at imposing univocal, albeit partisan, *militant theorizing at the* national and supranational levels. They propose simple explanations for complex situations, standardize ideas and stigmatize perspectives that deviate from the "model". We have criticized the combination of research and activism in the politics of memory when it boils down to the expression of ideological or ethnic loyalties. Although I recognized the positive role of activism, I was left at the end of the demonstration with the fear that my plea might come across as a challenge to the value of civism in protecting collective memories.

The study of militant theories has highlighted the original failure reflected in today's dominant assumptions about the ethics of memory: the "cherry-picking" of the original draft of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. A proof of the failure: since the adoption of the Convention until today, the number of cases of politicicide has been four times higher than the number of genocidal actions. The analysis has highlighted a paradox of the international human rights system: the memory of genocide has become more important than its prevention, in the context of the transformation of memory into a "cultural obsession of monumental proportions across the globe" (Andreas Huyssen).

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A concern of the authors is the perishability of what they write. I thought it only natural that a book I had planned for publication in 2023 would inventory the major cases for the subject that year. I stopped at two series of events indispensable to bringing the battle for memory up to date: the actions in the United States with Black Lives Matter as the main actor, and the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022. Month after month new elements emerge on these topics. But the principles that have emerged from the analysis of these phenomena (such as symbolic imprescriptibility in relation to the principles of civilized nations, the war in Ukraine as a failure of the ethics of memory) are perennial.

The book is constructed in the form of a dialogue of facts with their conceptualization. Among the series of "facts to study" that I considered important are: the misuse of the politics of memory by international organizations and national actors (with details on Russia, Germany, Israel, Poland, the Baltic States and Romania); the distorted position of historians towards communism and Nazism from a moral perspective; the imposition of canonical interpretations on genocide, politicicide and debates on the ethics of memory

I think it is important (following Yves Terson) to argue for a *universal ethical code of memory* based on *the ethical code of human rights*. Its scope remains limited. Some limitations of the ethical code stem from the very nature of the international human rights system. Other limits to a universal memory reflect the demands of group memories. But an ethical argument about memory can be hoped to persuade an ever-widening and therefore increasingly ethnically and ideologically heterogeneous community. This aspiration does not imply a "universal memory", an excessive project, but a progress in the dialog of memories.

Another stake of the book was to establish categories. I analyzed the synergy of sensibilities, the frustrations of memory, the harassment of collective memories, and finally a theory of methodological comparativism. In dialog with these, I searched for the specificity of an *ethics of memory with a humanistic approach* in opposition to its ethnic and ideological approach. I considered "acute", for a humanism of memory, *the deconstruction of* strategies of dehumanization, of the right to victim status, of the distinction between human revenge and revenge in the name of justice, of the legal re-evaluation of ideologically motivated trials, of ethical verdicts in classic cases of moral lustration, of the dissonance of memory ethics incompatible with intelligence, of the corruption of memory. I appreciate moral aporias as a category-test for ethical judgment. An ethics of memory guided by humanism recognizes the multiple anthropological, psychological and cultural conditioning of human beings.

The book explicitly listed its aspirations: justice, universality, fair *play*. I think the volume *Globalizing Hypocrisy* upheld them to the end. Other foundations had to do with method, and rigor in the first place. I placed the analysis on the terrain of law, a heuristic and methodological resource designed to combat the negligence of academic or journalistic practices too easily labeled as the ethics of memory. As the research has deepened and widened, it has come to give primacy to the requirements of precaution, discernment and proportionality. To my surprise, research conceived as a plea for accuracy and de-subjectivization has become a *hermeneutics of memory*.