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# On Agonistic Memory

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## Abstract

Building on Mouffe's critique of cosmopolitanism this paper argues that a cosmopolitan mode of remembering, far from having superseded the antagonistic mode associated with 'first modernity' in the European context, has proved unable to prevent the rise of, and is being increasingly challenged by, new antagonistic collective memories constructed by populist neo-nationalist movements. The paper outlines the main defining characteristics of a third 'agonistic' mode of remembering, which is both reflexive and dialogic, yet also relies upon politicized representations of past conflicts, acknowledging civic and political passions as well as individual and collective agency.

**Keywords:** agonism, antagonism, cosmopolitanism, modes of remembering, collective memory

## Introduction

The importance of memory in contemporary processes of collective identification has been theorized by a growing number of scholars from different disciplines in the last two decades. Particular attention has been paid to the different *modes* in which we remember the past and in this context an influential body of work has distinguished between an antagonistic and a cosmopolitan mode of remembering.<sup>1</sup> The former relies on heritage as monumentalism and on a canonical version of history, as well as a Manichean division of the historical characters into good and evil. It also relies on celebratory, glorifying or nostalgic narrative styles. The ethical/cosmopolitan mode of remembering, by contrast, emphasizes the human suffering of past atrocities and human rights

violations and represents ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in abstract terms. Its main narrative styles are characterized by reflexivity, regret and mourning.

In this paper we build upon Mouffe’s (2005) critique of cosmopolitanism by arguing that a cosmopolitan mode of remembering, far from having superseded the antagonistic mode associated with ‘first modernity’ in the European context, has proved unable to prevent the rise of, and is being increasingly challenged by, new antagonistic collective memories constructed by populist neo-nationalist movements. During the last few decades and especially after the recent economic crisis, in fact, political antagonism in the shape of populist neo-nationalist movements inimical to the European project and above all to a borderless society and the inclusion of migrants has been on the rise throughout the EU. The 2014 European elections marked the high point in the success and diffusion of this type of antagonistic politics.

While Levy and Sznajder (2002) argued that cosmopolitanization and Europeanization had successfully influenced national narratives and Rigney (2012a) wrote of transnational solidarity being promoted by the circulation of local and national memories across Europe thanks to literary and artistic works, recent trends suggest that antagonistic neo-nationalism has itself been able to promote novel forms of memory work and construct a Europe-wide narrative, albeit one bent upon destroying the European project. Thus the extreme right’s nationalistic discourse, expressed in an antagonistic mode, is also transnationally mediatized. In this context, we propose a third mode of remembering, which we define as ‘agonistic’, as a possible way forward in order to overcome the current lack of interaction between the other two modes, which in itself is also an indicator of the growing and worrying divergence between an ‘exterritorial elite’ and the ‘settled majority’.

### **Cosmopolitan memory and its critics**

Cosmopolitanism as a philosophical position was originally adopted by the Ancient Greeks and is as old as European civilization itself, but cosmopolitanism as a political and ideological position within the discussion of contemporary globalized society is closely tied to the proliferation of

theories of globalization after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. According to James (2014: x), contemporary cosmopolitanism can, in this sense, be defined as: ‘a global politics that, firstly, projects a sociality of common political engagement among all human beings across the globe, and, secondly, suggests that this sociality should be either ethically or organizationally privileged over other forms of sociality’.

The cosmopolitan memory discourse emerged as a result of two different but narrowly intertwined phenomena. On the one hand, it grew out of the transnational Holocaust memory that probably began with the famous TV series *Holocaust* in 1978 and increased steadily in scope and importance through the 1980s (Levy and Sznajder, 2002: 96). On the other hand, it fed upon the growing consciousness of coming to terms with the violent past of the authoritarian regimes of the 20th century, a tendency that surfaced during the 1990s as a result of a general human rights discourse. Huyssen (2011: 607) interprets this specific human rights movement that developed after 1989 as a last utopian vision after the collapse of all the utopias of the 20th century such as Fascism, Communism, modernization and decolonization, and argues that the hope for the future establishment of a human rights regime on a global scale invigorates local memory discourses and makes them conflate and hybridize within a transnational memory discourse. And it is probably this double influence of Holocaust memory and human rights criticism of former abuses that has given the cosmopolitan memory discourse what Novick (2000: 8) has labelled the ‘attitude towards victimhood’. Thus narratives of the past take as their point of departure the experience of the suffering of the victim and his or her descendants, while the image of the ‘hero’ in the traditional sense disappears from the stories.

One could say that the antagonistic and cosmopolitan modes of remembering have been associated with different historical phases. The antagonistic mode is linked to the dominance of the territorial nation-state, whereas the cosmopolitan mode pertains to the contemporary period, marked by a weakening of established national forms of identification and the emergence of transnational and translocal forms of belonging which challenge fixed boundaries.<sup>2</sup> Territory implies political

control exercised in exclusionary terms, as well as military and economic power: territory and state power have long been synonymous. The nation-state also revolved around the construction of an imagined community sharing a common culture and common values and surrounded by a symbolic boundary which excluded all those outside or adhering to a 'nomadic' style of life. As Bauman (2000: 13) wrote, during the period characterized by 'solid modernity', 'citizenship went hand in hand with settlement', whereas in the current phase of 'liquid modernity' 'we are witnessing the revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality and settlement [...] the settled majority is ruled by the nomadic and exterritorial elite'. Or, as Beck argued, 'first modernity' was characterized by the dominance of the nation-state defined by territorial boundaries, whereas 'second modernity' witnesses its undermining (Beck, 1992; Beck, Bonss and Lau, 2003). People are less and less restricted by a sense of place, so much so that according to Meyrowitz (1986) there is 'no sense of place' in an increasingly interconnected world. Amin (2002) argued that in the age of globalization space should be conceived in terms of relational processes and networks beyond any geographical scale. Within this perspective, places still matter, but no longer as bounded sites of geographical proximity. Hence sovereignty is no longer an indivisible, exclusive and perpetual form of public power fully contained within an individual state (Held, 1995: 107-113).

As well as historical processes, state nationalism and cosmopolitanism are also conceived as ethico-political projects. From this perspective, 'the cosmopolitan ethos states that the new role of nation-states is borderless inclusion and humanitarian control' (Ossewaarde, 2007). Hence nation-states are not completely superseded but their political role has radically changed. Similarly, it has been argued, a cosmopolitan memory has not come to supersede particularistic national memory cultures; rather, in the European context a cosmopolitan mode of remembering has impacted upon national narratives by engendering certain 'repertoires of memory work – affirmative but ambivalent perceptions of Europeanness, sceptical narratives about the nation emphasizing injustice and perpetratorship, and an increased recognition of the Other. While there is no unified (or unifying) European memory [...] there are shared cosmopolitan memory practices'

(Levy, Heinlein and Breuer, 2011: 141). Furthermore, while collective memories are no longer the prerogative of nation-states, as the latter now have to contend with other scales of identification, the supranational and the subnational, these other scales have also been influenced by a cosmopolitan mode of remembering (Levy and Sznajder, 2007: 161).

Viewed as an ethico-political project, cosmopolitanism has given rise to concerns and misgivings. The main proponents of a cosmopolitan memory, Levy and Sznajder, have themselves acknowledged the risk that cosmopolitanism may be conceived and perceived as a deeply Eurocentric project, as a new form of universalism which has its roots in the Enlightenment (2007). As they stated, ‘Despite its declaration to recognize otherness, core European cosmopolitanism is falling back into established patterns of “othering”’ (2007: 174). This is particularly the case in relation to Eastern European countries, where the ‘resurgence of national narratives is one relationship onto which core Europeans project this new universalism’ (p. 174). Levy and Sznajder therefore prefer to conceptualize cosmopolitanization as a process as opposed to promoting cosmopolitanism as a project.

Others, like Mouffe (2005, 2012) or Cazdyn and Szeman (2013), have advanced a much more fundamental critique of cosmopolitanism, accusing it of ignoring the political substance of social conflict. Cazdyn and Szeman view cosmopolitanism as closely linked to globalization but consider the latter an ideological project as opposed to a process. Far from signalling the end of nation-states, it constituted ‘a particularly effective figure/concept in extending US hegemony in the wake of the Cold War’ (2013: 28). According to Mouffe (2005), the cosmopolitan discourse, in arguing for solutions built upon transnational institutions and universal rights, ignores real and legitimate differences of social and political interests and leaves vital political questions unanswered for populist nationalists, racists, and fundamentalists to seize upon. For Mouffe the very relational character of cultural identity – i.e. the necessity of subjects and communities positioning themselves in relation to the ‘Other’ – implies the potential for antagonistic confrontation, where political opponents are viewed as enemies to be destroyed. The threat of an

antagonistic social development can be kept in check if the antagonistic relation is transformed into what Mouffe calls 'agonism' (Mouffe, 2005 and 2012). Agonism refers to the relationship between political adversaries who share the same symbolic space and respect the democratic rules established as conditions for the struggle for hegemony. Furthermore, agonism refers to the need to recognize emotions and passions as an integral part of political confrontation, while also giving them 'a democratic outlet' (2005: 30), thus neutralizing the risk that they may be appropriated by intolerant and undemocratic movements.

### **The rise of an antagonistic mode of remembering**

The proponents of a cosmopolitan memory tend to downplay the significance of neo-nationalism, arguing that it is no longer linked to territory, and seriously underestimate the emergence of movements bent on (re)constructing territorial forms of identification. More importantly, scholars seemingly overlook the important and novel role played by memory work in accounting for the increasing popularity of these movements. In fact, the antagonistic mode of remembering should not be viewed as a remnant of a historical phase dominated by the nation-state but as an integral part of 'second' or 'liquid' modernity. The search for community, for clear boundaries separating 'us' from 'them' as an antidote to insecurity constitutes a prominent feature of present-day society (Bauman, 2001). As Bauman wrote (2000: 214), 'Signs of malaise are abundant and salient yet [...] they seek in vain a legitimate expression in the world of politics. Short of articulate expression, they need to be read, obliquely, from the outburst of xenophobic and racist frenzy'.

Across Europe, populist nationalist and/or radical right movements have developed counter-memories in a strongly antagonistic mode, re-imagined territory in exclusionary terms, and constructed rigid symbolic boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. In direct opposition to current processes of critical reflection on past conflicts and injustices, these movements promote memories which essentialize, as opposed to problematizing, a collective sense of sameness and we-ness, with accompanying sentiments of they-ness. The community of reference and the memory work they

engage with tend to vary. Micro-nationalist movements, such as the Flemish and Basque, have turned traditional foundational narratives of war against their nation-states (Beyen, 2011; Muro, 2009). Various forms of political regionalism reject European citizenship (Painter, 2008) and are reminiscent of New Right ideology's emphasis on 'nativist' and exclusionary bonding memories (Spektorowski 2003: 61). Right-wing populist-nationalist movements, like the French Front National or the Austrian Freedom Party, have rearticulated the memory of nation-states in open antagonism to cosmopolitanism.

Taken together, these movements cannot be viewed simply as repeating the trajectory of modern nationalism. According to Pinxten (2006: 138), micro-nationalist parties are characterized by the refusal of modernity. Others view them as post-modern, since they construct 'authentic' ethno-territorial identities *ex-novo*, while presenting them as primordial. Thus Agnew and Brusa (1999: 123) defined the Lega Nord as 'maybe the first authentic post-modernist territorial political movement in its self-conscious manipulation of territorial imagery'. Even seemingly traditional nationalist movements have reworked the past in novel ways. Gullestad (2006: 70), in relation to the Norwegian Progress Party, identified a process of *neo-ethnification* of national identity at play, 'when old ideas are rearticulated and gain new importance as social imaginaries in new situations'. Art (2010: 6-7) argued that 'right-wing populists have decried the "politically correct" histories disseminated by elites out of touch with the values and historical memories of ordinary people'.

If it is the case that pro-European heritage professionals, intellectuals and movements tend to prioritize a depoliticized cosmopolitan mode of remembering (Kansteiner, 2002: 189), whereas Eurosceptic neo-nationalist movements prioritize a politicized antagonistic mode, and that the cosmopolitan mode seems unable not only to stem the growing success of the antagonistic mode of remembering but also to address the experiences of many people who feel the pressure of socio-economic change, we have to conclude that we are in serious need of rethinking the ways in which we remember the past.



## **Victims and perpetrators: re-instating the historical context**

While we accept that an emphasis on perpetrators vs. victims runs the risk of perpetuating a contraposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’, we should not neglect the socio-political context in which human beings came to commit evil acts and the human agency that promoted this shift. As pointed out by Labanyi (2008), an exclusive focus on victimhood tends to construct history as something done to people, negating individual agency. Indeed Levy and Sznajder (2002: 103) argued explicitly that the exemplary narrative in the cosmopolitan mode of remembering is that of the ‘non-acting victim’. In his extensive discussion of past and present constructions of heroes and victims by collective memory, Giesen (2004: 67) argued forcefully that nowadays ‘the victims themselves have no voices and no faces. They are dead, muted in their misery, numbed in their trauma’. He added that, ‘by their very definition, victims are seen as powerless and unable to fight for their own rights [...] Because of their damaged subjectivity, their muteness and anonymity, they need mediating third parties who articulate their suffering and advocate their claims – they need civic or professional representation’ (69). Hence agency is transferred to ‘professional specialists’, acting as ‘mediators between the victims and the public sphere’ (69). According to Giesen, the current construction of victimhood fits the ‘impersonal and anonymous order of modern society we live in’ much better than the figure of the hero, so much so that those who were seen as heroes nowadays tend to appear in the guise of perpetrators. It is important to note that Giesen’s reference to the type of society associated with the turn to victimhood chimes with Mouffe’s (2005: 34) critique of current democratic practices for reducing politics to ‘a set of supposedly technical moves and neutral procedures’. Also, Giesen’s view that agency has been transferred to professional specialists brings to mind Kansteiner’s critique of cosmopolitan memory for being restricted to European bureaucrats and professionals.

Giesen himself points out the risks associated with the current construction of victimhood, namely a paternalistic attitude in line with the empowerment of experts and professionals and the erasure of any ambiguity and ambivalence surrounding the concepts of victims and perpetrators,

whereby ‘the boundary between just and unjust, good and evil, good citizens and perpetrators, is fragile and shifting’ (63). It is interesting, however, that, when addressing the issue of how victims are remembered, Giesen acknowledges that they can be remembered either impersonally or ‘as subjects with a place, a face and a voice within a community’ (56). We would add that they can also be remembered as subjects with a collective, as well as an individual, political voice and agency. Indeed, it is often this political agency as well as the historical context and power struggles that turned many into victims and many others into perpetrators, bystanders, spies or indeed ambivalent figures. If we are to avoid the risk that the demythologizing of those who used to be heroes turns into their demonization, leaving open the possibility that they are re-appropriated as heroes by antagonistic and anti-democratic political movements, we need to promote a kind of collective memory that re-instates the social and political agency of those who became victims on the one hand, and re-humanizes the heroes-now-turned-perpetrators on the other.

We do not in fact subscribe to the view that evil is ‘inhuman’ and that criminals are ‘monsters’. Both the cosmopolitan and the antagonistic modes of remembering rely on moral categories of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. Whereas in the antagonistic mode these categories apply to particularistic tales of ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’, the cosmopolitan mode prioritizes a de-historicized and abstract opposition between good and evil. As Levy and Sznajder (2002: 102) put it: ‘It is precisely the abstract nature of ‘good and evil’ that symbolizes the Holocaust, which contributes to the extra-territorial quality of cosmopolitan memory’. In many cases this abstract approach takes the form of equalizing totalitarian ideologies with ‘evil’. By contrast, we agree with Todorov (2009: 454-5) that all human beings ‘have an equal potential for good and evil’ and that, while it is important to empathize with the suffering of the victims, there is a need ‘to attract attention to the mechanisms of the production of evil’ (455). In a recent article (2012: 539–40), Rothberg also makes a strong case against the use of the Holocaust as a ‘code for “good and evil”’, arguing that ‘a discourse based on clear-cut visions of victims and perpetrators or of innocence and guilt evacuates the political sphere of complexity and reduces it to a morality tale’.

Focusing exclusively on the victims can also preclude the possibility of remembering and understanding the historical context. Both the antagonistic and the cosmopolitan modes of remembering tend to simplify past historical events, hampering a critical understanding of their complexity. The antagonistic mode opts to turn historical events into foundational myths of the community of belonging and is therefore prone to misrepresent or manipulate the past, promoting forgetting as much as (selective) remembering. The cosmopolitan mode de-contextualizes the past in order to transcend historical particularism and promote a new kind of universalism. However as Olick (2007: 148) argued, learning from the past ‘means listening to both victims and perpetrators, and not to judge absolute truth or even to sympathize with either but to learn from their experiences and perspectives’.

Learning from the past also means changing the present in order to ensure that the conditions and processes which may lead to mass crimes are not repeated in the present. As Rigney (2012b: 253) argued, ‘At times, the reconciliation scenario itself may help obfuscate the fact that past injustices have persisted into the present and that a radical change in the present, and not just symbolic gestures towards the past, may be required’. Adopting a similar perspective, the issue of human rights also needs to be conceived not just as pertaining to the institutional and juridical spheres, but as requiring socio-political agency and bottom-up mobilization in the present. As Balibar argued, human rights are ‘insurrectional rights’, whereby ‘individuals and groups do not *receive them* from an external sovereign power or from a transcendent revelation, but rather *confer this right upon themselves, or grant themselves rights reciprocally*’ (2007; 2013). Furthermore, according to Fine (2010), the risk of de-humanizing both victims and perpetrators, which we associated with the cosmopolitan memory, is already present in international humanitarian and human rights law.

The turn to cosmopolitan memory is linked to trauma theory, with its emphasis on the unknowability and unspeakability of traumatic events and on the partial recovery of memory through victims’ testimonies to a witness (Felman and Laub, 1992; Caruth, 1995 and 1996). Trauma

theory has also deeply informed Holocaust studies. In particular, Felman and Laub (1992) argued that survivors of the Holocaust were unable to recount what they had gone through, because they had lost the capacity to bear witness to themselves, and it was only many years later that they were able partially to recover their memory through a process of witnessing. Similarly, van Alphen (1999) coined the expression ‘semiotic incapacity’ in relation to Holocaust victims’ inability to represent past traumatic events. Trauma theory has been critiqued for a variety of reasons and from different perspectives. From our own perspective, we would like to highlight the treatment of victims and perpetrators in trauma theory, which in our view is particularly problematic and which is comparable to the main shortcoming of cosmopolitan memory. The theory constructs all victims of violence as suffering from trauma and therefore as unable to retell their past and to act as agents. As Kansteiner (2004: 214) put it: “those exposed to violence are summarily turned into victims’. However, even in the case of the Holocaust, it has been shown that other factors besides trauma may also have prevented many victims from speaking out, including a lack of suitable interlocutors and the inability to reach the public sphere (Waxman, 2006; Wieviorka, 2006). This is even more often the case when mass atrocities are carried out in the context of civil wars, as many victims find themselves in a post-conflict environment characterized by hostile social and political reception of their stories and a general will to forget about the past. As Labanyi (2009, p. 28) stated with reference to Spain, ‘An absence of narration does not necessarily mean the existence of a traumatic block, though it may well indicate the existence of some kind of coercion or the lack of adequate conditions for the memory’s reception by others’. Once again, therefore, this points to the need to incorporate the socio-political context in our representations and understanding of victims, both in relation to the period when they were victimized and in relation to the post-conflict period, when they struggled to regain agency.

## **Reflexivity and dialogue**

Memory should be reflexive in ways which not only expose its socially constructed nature and/or include the suffering of the ‘Others’, but also through a dialogic approach which relies on a multiplicity of perspectives (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984). This type of dialogue is open-ended and does not aim at any specific conclusion, and in this sense it differs from that envisaged by Habermas (1984: 17), for whom communication should be ‘oriented to achieving, sustaining and reviewing consensus’. Let us consider these two approaches more in detail.

Habermas’s concept of ethical dialogue is rooted in the conviction that ideological differences and opposed material interests can be set aside in the public sphere in pursuit of consensus (Gardiner 2004: 29). This implies that his concept of dialogue takes place in an inclusive public sphere governed by transparent, universalist principles and is based ‘on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech’ (Habermas, 1984: 10). Argumentation involves both a process ‘oriented to reaching understanding’ and a procedure ‘subject to special rules’; furthermore, ‘it has as its aim to produce cogent arguments that are convincing in virtue of their intrinsic properties and with which validity claims can be redeemed or rejected’ (Habermas, 1984: 25). A person behaving rationally is defined by Habermas as ‘a person who is both willing and able to free himself from illusions, and indeed on illusions that are based not on errors (about facts) but on self-deceptions (about one’s own subjective experiences)’. Conversely, ‘anyone who systematically deceives himself about himself behaves irrationally’ (Habermas, 1984: 21). According to Gardiner (2004: 33), Habermas’s notion of the communicating subject rests on an idealist outlook that seeks ‘to engulf the alterity of things in the unity of thought’. The subject is not in any way decontextualized from society, but immersed in a lifeworld that functions as a pre-reflective background of assumptions that are taken for granted.

For Bakhtin, on the other hand, the subject is of a fundamentally dialogic nature, based on a relation between the I-for-myself, the not-in-me (the other) and the-other-in-me, i.e. the subject’s appropriation of the other’s vision from outside (Holquist, 1990). As Bakhtin expresses it in his

characteristic style: ‘I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance)’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 287). Bakhtin’s subject is situated in a concrete context of time and space, characterized by the co-existence of opposed and contradictory social forces and ideological dispositions, and this is why language use and dialogue in Bakhtin’s sense is dispossessed of the teleological perspective of reaching consensus, but is of a rather agonistic nature (Gardiner, 2004: 39). In Bakhtin’s perspective, living speech reflects social material and social interests and is imbued with myriads of collateral meanings of earlier discourses and anticipated answers.

Scholars like Gardiner and Roberts (2012), who have both compared Habermas’s and Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogue, seem to agree on at least two essential questions. Firstly, that where Habermas’s concept of lifeworld is an idealistic construction, which, in Roberts’ words (2012: 406), ‘lacks a theory of contradiction’, the everyday dialogue or ‘background language’ in Bakhtin’s thinking is imbued with social and cultural differences and contradictions. And secondly, where Habermas’s concept of ethical dialogue is restricted to the ‘ideal speech situation’ among equal citizens, hence divorced from concrete social settings and teleologically directed towards rational consensus, there is no such aim of reaching an ultimate truth in Bakhtin’s thinking. Quite to the contrary, according to Bakhtin, a unified truth can only be expressed through a plurality of perspectives.

The cosmopolitan mode is dialogic and multi-perspectivist in so far as it incorporates the perspectives of the ‘Other’ as a victim and conceives dialogue as a means to achieve reconciliation, but it is unable to incorporate the perspective of the opposed ‘Other’, the perpetrator as a subject in his own right. As stated by Crownshaw, there has been a turn towards the figure of the perpetrator in recent historical fiction (Crownshaw, 2011), to which we want to add the genres of documentary and historiography. But if we take the above into consideration, it turns out to be of utmost importance how the perspective of the perpetrator is introduced. Analyzing the media representations of the Eichmann trial, Torgovnick discusses two different modes which she terms

‘Eichmann is in all of us’ and ‘anyone could be Eichmann’. Whereas the former approach universalizes the potential for perpetration and bypasses the social circumstances in which perpetration becomes possible, telling us that we all have some evil inside, the latter gives priority to the historical contingencies of perpetration, forcing us to reflect upon our own way of responding to certain social circumstances (Torgovnick, 2005: 68). In this way the two modes of remembrance lead the audience to two different kinds of reflection and self-reflection. Let us give two examples.

Eichinger and Hirschbiegel’s *Downfall* (Der Untergang, 2004), a film about the last days of Adolf Hitler’s life, delivers a convincing portrait of the dictator, not as a monster, but as a human being with feelings and empathy. Although public debate disputed the appropriateness of this humanizing depiction, it is our conviction that the average reception of the movie will follow Torgovnick’s ‘Eichmann is in all of us’ mode. By showing the human side of the monster, the film makes the spectator reflect about his or her capacity to act in an evil way, but when the perpetrator exceeds certain unimaginable ethical limits, in this case when Hitler decides that the German people must be destroyed because they had proved unable to realize his vision of the Thousand-Year-Reich, the spectator feels assured that he or she would never be able to do that.

Our second example is Joshua Oppenheimer’s documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012) about the 1965–66 killings of more than half a million Indonesian people. Oppenheimer invited one of the main perpetrators, a gangster called Anwar Congo, to help him make a movie about the past. The latter was happy to accept, because, as he himself states at the beginning of the documentary, ‘the younger generations must learn how we created this country’. The documentary is about the making of this film, and whereas at first Anwar Congo is proud to show Oppenheimer how he invented new methods for executing his victims effectively and cleanly with a wire, at the end of the film he returns to the site of the executions, where he is filled with remorse, feels sick and vomits. The turning point is in the middle of the documentary, where Congo plays the part of a victim who is being tortured and is about to be strangled, and feels the claustrophobic despair of the victim. On a later occasion, when Congo is watching this footage together with Oppenheimer, he wonders if his

victims felt the same way as he did. Oppenheimer answers that they actually felt worse, because they knew that they were going to be killed, and Congo recognizes for the first time that he acted as a perpetrator and starts to cry. In our view this way of portraying the perpetrator follows Torgovnick's 'anyone could be Eichmann' mode in the sense that the spectator is forced to reflect upon the cultural and social conditions that made Anwar Congo act, feel and think the way he did. The perpetrator seldom recognizes him/herself as such at the moment of violent action, and it is through this kind of multi-perspectivist approach which establishes a real dialogue between the victim's and the perpetrator's subjective positions that the spectator is compelled to reflect upon the social and political circumstances that create the conditions for crime and mass atrocities.

### **Emotions and passions**

We are of the view that a focus on emotions and passions should not preclude understanding or risk undermining democracy. The antagonistic mode privileges emotions in order to cement a strong sense of belonging to a particularistic community, focusing on the suffering inflicted by the 'evil' enemies upon this same community. Empathizing with this suffering leads to passionate feelings among all those who identify with the community and who feel ready to fight against those identified as 'evil'. In the cosmopolitan mode, the focus is on the suffering inflicted upon humanity, hence upon 'us all' as human beings; empathizing with this suffering leads to feelings of compassion for and to a dialogue with the 'Other'. While the antagonistic mode incorporates passions but turns them against the 'Other', cosmopolitan memory shuns passions in favour of compassion. From the perspective of the latter, passions and emotions (with the exception of compassion) are seen as an obstacle to dialogue.

Habermas also argues that emotions and passions prevent dialogue, since the person engaged in a dialogue must be fully rational. Habermas gives an example of the type of utterances that should not be allowed in rational argumentation: 'I must confess that I am upset by the poor condition my colleague has been in since leaving the hospital' (1984: 41). Such 'expressive



sentences' cannot be validated through arguments, as 'they serve to manifest subjective experiences' (41). We therefore concur with those scholars who have argued that the human being conceived by Habermas as engaging in dialogue is both disembodied and unfeeling (Benhabib, 1992; Gardiner, 2004; Heller, 1982; Roberts, 2012), hence lacking 'the sensuous experiences of hope and despair, of venture and humiliation' (Heller, 1982: 21, quoted in Gardiner, 2004: 34).

Rather than replacing passion with compassion, we are of the view, following Mouffe (2005: 24, 30), that 'passion', as 'one of the various affective forces which are at the origin of collective forms of identification', is necessary in order to reinvigorate the political. Passions and emotions can be relied upon to sustain a collective sense of solidarity without demonizing the adversary and can also be theorized as sustaining democracy. Following Mouffe, Mihai (2014: 34) contends that 'blindness to the affective dimension of politics and its role in maintaining collective identifications prevents liberal and deliberative democrats from ascertaining the limited role that reason plays in moving people to participate politically'. Emotions, however, should not be viewed as inimical to reason and democratic agonism. On the contrary, as Mihai (2014: 46) argued, emotions should be seen 'as presupposing evaluations about the political world and as malleable to transformation through agonistic encounters'. As she stated:

Until we understand that emotion presupposes - alongside physiological reactions – thought, until we understand that it can be socialized to serve democratic agendas, until we affirm its malleability and responsiveness to agonistic persuasion and exhortations, we will not be able to account for the productive force that it can play politically' (2014: 43).

Hence there is a need for 'preparing emotions for agonism' and for democratic institutions to 'provide arenas for agonistic encounters' (2014: 40).

As well as sustaining democracy, emotional involvement can enhance our understanding of the role of passions in politics and history and promote dialogue. Recent psychological research has

demonstrated that emotions following a traumatic event can even enhance logical argumentation. Thus a study carried out after the London terrorist attacks of July 2007 established that people who were directly affected by the events and presented strong emotional reactions ‘were better able to rely on logic and inhibit the influence of stereotypes related to terrorism than participants who were not as closely involved in the events’ (Blanchette and Caparos, 2013: 406; Blanchette, Richards, Melnyk and Lavda, 2007). The authors speak of ‘the beneficial impact of trauma on logicity’ (2013: 407) and explain this on the basis that greater emotional involvement leads to greater motivation in understanding and participating in logical argumentation.

Benedetta Tobagi, the daughter of an Italian victim of terrorism, in a recent memoir of her father, also viewed emotions as facilitating both dialogue and understanding:

If you move only on the emotional aspect you don’t have the instrument to open a space for dialogue and rethinking, or sometimes even thinking seriously for the first time - in the sense that Hannah Arendt speaks about thinking - and so as far as I am concerned my choice was to build up a book that was really tailored to keep together these two aspects in a way that *emotion is functional to intellectual understanding* [...] but I was also aware as a would-be historian that I was so deeply affected by the story that I was telling that it was the most honest thing I could do for my reader; to expose also the feelings and the traumas and the wounds that the book grew out from.<sup>3</sup> [Emphasis added]

Tobagi’s own work (2009, 2013) demonstrated how emotions were for her the key for remembering the past in ways which enhanced understanding of the political context and the passions of 1970s Italy, including the perspectives of the perpetrators.

### **Defining agonistic memory**

So what would characterize an ‘agonistic’ mode of remembering<sup>4</sup> and how would it avoid the shortcomings identified above? In our view it would present the following features: 1) avoid pitting ‘good’ against ‘evil’ through acknowledging the human capacity for evil in specific historical circumstances and in the context of socio-political struggles; 2) remember the past by relying on the testimonies of both perpetrators and victims, as well as witnesses, bystanders, spies and traitors. The perspectives of the former perpetrators can provide crucial elements for understanding when, how and why people turn into perpetrators; 3) recognize the important role played by emotions and promote empathy with the victims as a first step towards remembering the past in ways that facilitate and promote critical understanding and also acknowledge civic and political passions; 4) reconstruct the historical context, socio-political struggles and individual/collective narratives which led to mass crimes being committed.

The main repertoires of the three modes of remembering are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

**The defining characteristics of modes of remembering**

	<b>Antagonistic Mode</b>	<b>Cosmopolitan Mode</b>	<b>Agonistic Mode</b>
<b>Nature of Conflict</b>	Good vs. evil Good and evil as moral categories Us= good Them= evil	Good vs. evil Good and evil as abstract categories Democracy/HR =good Totalitarianism = evil	Nature of conflict and violence depend on social circumstances, context and agency
<b>Perpetrator/victim Perspectives</b>	Perpetrator perspective presented as victim Us= victims Them= perpetrators	Emphasis on victims’ perspective on all sides	Learning from the memories/perspectives of victims, perpetrators and third party witnesses
<b>Historical Context</b>	Manipulated, historical events turned into myths	Transcended, universalized	Remembering historical context and socio-political struggles
<b>Reflexivity And Dialogue</b>	Self-consciously unreflexive, monologic	Reflexive, dialogic Exposing the constructed nature of memory Consensually dialogic (Habermas)	Reflexive, dialogic, multi-perspectivist Exposing the constructed nature of memory Open-endedly dialogic (Bakhtin)

<b>Empathy and Emotions</b>	Empathy with <i>our</i> past sufferings, passion of belonging, demonizing the evil Other(s)	Compassion for human suffering	Passions oriented towards collective solidarity, preparing emotions for democratic institutions
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Figure 1 obviously outlines ideal prototypes and we fully acknowledge that these traits might mingle and interact in real discourse. Our aim is not to find ‘pure’ forms of one or the other mode of remembrance, but to understand the background and effect of each of the exposed characteristics. On the other hand, it is a working hypothesis that as a default certain types of memory agents are inclined towards the use of certain modes of remembering: while populist and/or neo-nationalist politicians rely predominantly upon an antagonistic mode, mainstream national/EU politicians and memory professionals tend to adopt the cosmopolitan mode. But again, we are speaking about ideal prototypes and default expectations here, not of concrete discourse, not least because mainstream politicians are often tempted to adopt the antagonistic mode, in an attempt to stem the rising tide of populist parties and movements. Creative artists use all three modes, but are as a default expected to be the ones most inclined to apply reflexive and self-reflexive modes.

As previously argued, in contemporary Europe the antagonistic and the reflexive modes of belonging are both very much in evidence, but the former is in the ascendancy. The proponents of a cosmopolitan mode of remembering rely to a large extent on exposing the artificial and constructed nature of memory and identity as the principal means to counteract antagonistic memories. However, as we have seen, essentializing representations of the past based on ‘us’ and ‘them’ can both be socially constructed in a self-conscious manner *and* promote intolerance. Exposing the artificial nature of memory, therefore, should go hand in hand with promoting a mode of remembering, which is both reflexive and dialogic, but does not shy away from addressing politicized representations of past conflicts.

## Conclusion

By depoliticizing the historical context and privileging compassion over socio-political passions, cosmopolitan memory leaves the field open for a novel type of memory work that is able to manipulate passions and emotions in order to construct a collective sense of ‘sameness’ and target real or presumed ‘enemies’. While Rigney (2012a: 620) considers the transnational mediation of memory discourses as the way in which creative writing and film-making can promote solidarity among people who have not been former enemies, our argument is that the new type of nationalistic discourse is itself transnationally mediatized and has proved able to construct unreflexive antagonistic memories in a self-conscious manner. Thus exposing the artificial nature of collective identities and promoting transnational memory practices – two important traits of cosmopolitan memory - constitute necessary but insufficient elements to stem the rise of the antagonistic mode of remembering.

What is needed is a mode of remembering that, as Rigney herself (2012a) stressed, acknowledges both the impact of the legacy of bloody historical conflicts upon the European project (611), and the importance of ‘dialogic memory to the working through of intra-European conflicts’ (620). We are therefore concerned with the specific nature of the memory discourses in circulation and advocate promoting a mode of remembering that we have termed ‘agonistic’. In our view, the cosmopolitan and the agonistic modes of remembering are not necessarily in contraposition and in some cases are even complementary. We recognize the importance of transnational influence on local memory discourse, and welcome the creation of collective feelings of solidarity. However, an agonistic mode of remembering, in addition to exposing the socially constructed nature of collective memory and including the suffering of the ‘Others’, would rely on a multiplicity of perspectives in order to bring to light the socio-political struggles of the past and reconstruct the historical context in ways which restore the importance of civic and political passions and address issues of individual and collective agency.

## Notes

1. On the antagonistic mode of remembering see especially Erll (2009, 2011). See also Leerssen (2001). Related to this mode is the concept of ‘chosen trauma’: see Volkan (2001). On the cosmopolitan mode see especially Alexander (2002, 2009); Levy and Sznajder (2002, 2007); Levy, Heinlein and Breuer (2011); Nowicka and Rovisco (2009).
2. Levy and Sznajder explicitly linked the cosmopolitan mode of remembering to the process of globalization and to Beck’s concept of ‘Second Modernity’.
3. Benedetta Tobagi’s father, Walter, was killed by a terrorist group on 28 May 1980. In 2009 she published an acclaimed memoir of her father and in 2013 she wrote a book remembering the victims of a 1974 bombing attack. The quotation is from an interview she granted to Anna Cento Bull as part of the latter’s work on the legacy and memory of Italian terrorism (Cento Bull and Cooke 2013).
4. The need for a type of memory that is able to sustain an ‘agonistic democracy’ was put forward by Bell (2008). However, Bell did not discuss what traits might characterize this new type of memory.

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