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## *The End of Westernism: Double Standards, Cynicism, and Fossilized Narratives*

Germany and Europe, perhaps unknowingly, act in this way, driven by this undercurrent. It is the epitome of a fearful West that refuses to explore outside the lines drawn by its own political truths, when, paradoxically, that is the only ethical way to continue to resemble what we are.



Berlin is a city full of memory, full of plaques commemorating our recent history, or at least some of its most tragic chapters. But European memory is more than just Germany. To the east, more than 2,000 km away, in Durrës, a small village in Albania, it takes the form of a Soviet-inspired statue perched on several concrete steps. He is an unidentified soldier, a partisan looking out over the Adriatic with his rifle pointed at Italy. It is the communist monument to Albania's resistance to the fascist invasion during World War II.

Statues and cold bronze plaques from two distant cities teach us about the history of our... continent although, being in plain sight, we hardly stop to look at them.



A photo from the U.N. headquarters in New York, Dec. 20, 2023. EDUARDO MUNOZ (REUTERS )

Memory is a complex matter. Writer and essayist Masha Gessen recently described how the politics of memory operates on the streets of Berlin, in a controversial piece published in *The New Yorker* comparing Gaza to a Nazi ghetto. The audacity has almost earned him the cancellation of the prize that the German foundation of political thought Heinrich Böll had awarded him: none other than the Hannah Arendt Prize. The image of the partisan statue appears in a text published in the magazine *El Grand Continent* by the thinker and writer Lea Ypi, author of one of the literary phenomena of the year, her novel *Libre*, which is precisely about memoirs.

Both are prominent names in 2023, and both point to a phenomenon that perhaps sums up what is happening in the West, where narratives about who we are today inspire new heresies. Gessen's article is an example of how departing from orthodoxy can have its costs. In this regard, [Samantha Rose Hill](#), one of the leading international experts on Hannah Arendt's work, has described in *The Guardian* the tragic paradox that the prize that bears her name would not be awarded to [Hannah Arendt](#) today. The reason? His political position on Israel and his views on Zionism, a heresy that would shake, today as in the past, the status quo of European opinion regarding Israel's war policy. Hill explained, for example, that treating the Holocaust as a historical exception has the strange effect of placing it outside of history, a phenomenon that allows the German government

to give unconditional support to Israel without taking responsibility for what that support means.

But let's take the example of the German narrative about the memory of the Holocaust to the whole of the West, and think about our narrative, the one that says that democratic values and the will to concord are what define us in the world, the reason that allows us to arrogate to ourselves a kind of natural international leadership over the universality of human rights. just as Germany gives lessons on how to interpret the Shoah. Today, one might ask whether our justifying narratives function as a reflexive shackle, making it difficult for us to understand the world in which we live. By turning our values into dogma, have we become less porous to reality?



We solidify our memory by putting it in stone or metal, or by categorically affirming it as a reason of state, as Green Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck has done, but that does not make us more permeable to the world. Is there no possible nuance to Israel's much-talked about right to defend itself? What solution paths does our unconditional support offer? Gessen has dared to mention the elephant in the room: at some point, the willful German effort to keep memory alive "began to seem static, glazed, as if it were an effort not only to remember history, but also to ensure that only this particular history will be remembered, and only in this way." Something that Arendt herself would have signed.

Germany is the paradigmatic example of a symptom that, in a way, we see reflected in the imbalance of Israel's war against Hamas and the European position in the face of this unbearable tragedy. The way in which we Western democracies dared to address the historical injustices that have happened with our acquiescence, such as colonialism or imperialism, looking our crimes in the face ("our worst selves," again in Gessen's words),

seems to have withered. It was we who decided that the impossibility of changing the past generated in the present the political responsibility of channelling it as memory, and we did so through a narrative that built a sense of community: Europe as a common home, as a space of rights and freedoms.

But by solidifying it in this way, our memory has become a mental shackle that prevents us from understanding the present. It is no coincidence that, at a time of political, budgetary and diplomatic crisis, and with the far right on the rise, Germany clings to its memory as a safeguard of its own national sense. Nor is it the case that, as we lose influence over the world, we in the West cling to the narrative about our values, something that gives us identity, but prevents us from seeing how, in the eyes of the outside, our position is contradictory, incoherent and self-serving.

From the self-styled Global South, that part of the planet that we still look at with distrust as otherness, we are told that while we pose as staunch defenders of international law in Ukraine, our almost numantine defense of the alliance with Israel shows our true face. It is the effect of the erratic, almost cantonal diplomacy that we are deploying from the West in the face of the war in Gaza and the West Bank. "Double standards," they say, and they are right, even if they do it with more cynicism than principle. Which countries in the Global South actually support Palestine? What democratic alternative do you propose for global governance?



While in Europe we are accelerating the most daring enlargement in our history and convincing ourselves of the need to speak the language of power, to really be a geopolitical bloc, Israel is clearly showing us the consequences of renouncing a genuinely Kantian policy. Because it is Kant and his perpetual peace that is the rickety narrative

through which we travel and from which we look at the world, even if we operate politically differently as it suits us. Too little Kant and too much Realpolitik.

The foundational philosophical principles that apparently hold our political order together have been transformed into mere fetishes, into objects of an onanistic politics that has lost its permeability for understanding the present. Do we really promote respect for human rights and compliance with international law? Instead of supporting, with means and diplomatic pressure, a solution for Israel and Palestine, we opted for *Conflict Management*, as if corporate language were more than empty shells. As if no lives were at stake. Instead of betting on multilateralism and international law, the West has chosen reasons of state, the law of the jungle and *apartheid*.

At the last European Council of the year, we witnessed first-hand the eloquent contradiction between what we claim to be and what we do. The protagonist? The cunning Viktor Orbán, who could not prevent the opening of talks for the entry of Ukraine and Moldova into the EU, but he could block a 50,000 million euro aid to Kiev by absenting himself during the vote on accession. The most formidable thing about the matter is that, in order to force him to choose between the EU or Putin, the European Commission resigned itself to releasing 10 billion of the 30,000 million euros allocated to Budapest and blocked for its violations of the rule of law. How many bribes and renunciations is the EU willing to make in order to become a geopolitical bloc?

How many times will geostrategic decisions be imposed on safeguarding democratic cleansing? All this, moreover, occurs at a time of brutalization of the international order, when the most necessary is the resolute defense of a multilateral framework represented by a UN adapted to the new actors and global balances. The alternative is the law of the strongest, and it is being imposed in many contexts.



GRANADA, 05/10/2023.- Pan-European rally in support of Artsakh Nagorno-Karabakh coinciding with the III summit of the European Political Community, this Thursday in Granada. EFE/Pepe Torres

The triangle of brutalization is completed by the great forgotten conflict within the Euro-Mediterranean perimeter, that of the province of Nagorno-Karabakh, in Azerbaijan, emptied in a few weeks of its Armenian majority through textbook ethnic cleansing. War crimes and crimes against humanity follow one another while we allow multilateralism, the premise of a global order based on rational and ethical rules, to wither. Because the West and the Global South can't find a way to understand each other, but while some speak of the questioning of the post-1945 architecture of peace as a clear symptom of our decline, of the de-Westernization of the planet, wouldn't it be more useful to see it as the discovery of our relative position in the world? Such a perspective would force us to listen and be open to criticism, to look our double standards in the face without renouncing to lead or defend a global order based on democratic principles.

Turning political narratives into a fetish also has another derivative: the desperate attempt to hold on to something, says Wendy Brown, is always reactionary, because it opens the way to melancholy. Trapped in the past, we find ourselves unable to imagine the future and build it together. But as long as we continue to behave like this, the far right and reaction will continue to grow inside and outside our armored borders. Our impeachment is gripped by anxiety about what we think we are losing: that's why our response is regressive. Germany and Europe, perhaps unknowingly, act in this way, driven by this undercurrent. It is the epitome of a fearful West that refuses to explore outside the lines drawn by its own political truths, when, paradoxically, that is the only ethical way to continue to resemble what we are.

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