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Respect My Right to Dominate: Recognition Politics and Foundationalist Representation

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Abstract

In this article, we present how the recognition framework of
political and historic representation has enabled reactionary
political forces, which increasingly recognize its inner
contradictions and turn them against the basic principle of
universal dignity, with the clear aim of corroding the whole
recognition political edifice from the inside out. Taking the field of
the symbolic construction of European identity as our main focus,
we will reconstruct how the takeover of recognition politics has
destabilized political and historic representation in Europe and
ended up undermining European integration rather than enhancing
it. Following one of the most important theorists of political and
historic representation, Frank Ankersmit, we introduce the
conceptual distinction between antifoundationalist vs. founda-
tionalist representation in order to account for the series of decisive
institutional changes that since the 1970s have contributed to the
intersection of two separate fields into 'memory politics' and led to
the rise of a new and inherently non-democratic foundationalism,
of which recognition politics is one of the main symptoms.

Keywords: politics of recognition, political representation, historic representation, European
enlargement, symbolic violence.

1. Introduction

In this article, we address a parallel process of decay that we see taking place in the fields of political and historic representation that is related to the takeover of recognition political discourses in both fields. The first process is the degradation of political antagonism to symbolic struggles of mutual delegitimation. Unlike in the social democratic past of the twentieth century, when political actors fought for particular goals inside an institutional system that they all accepted as legitimate, today's competitors play a game of mutual delegitimation: under the flags of liberalism and illiberalism or populism they struggle to settle what should be the only legitimate order for the whole political community (Orsina, 2017: 8). Parallel to this is the decay of historic memory to a symbolic 'victimhood competition' (Chaumont, 1997; Novick, 1999), which makes historic memory the prey of increasingly mythological and moralizing narratives that reduce historical complexity to black-and-white lessons and incite a symbolic struggle of mutual degradation, impeding genuine historical understanding (Todorov, 1995; 2000).

These two processes have been closely interrelated in past decades, as political representation has become 'historicized,' historical representation 'politicized,' and institutional boundaries between the two spheres of social action began to be dismantled (Nora, 2011; Habermas, 1988). The intertwined processes of delegitimation and victimhood competition manifest the takeover of recognition or identity politics in the representation of the conflicts of the present and the past. In the recognition paradigm, all actors use the same codes of self-legitimation and delegitimation: they legitimate themselves as bearers of a universal moral language and delegitimate their opponents for their reluctance to accept this universal moral code, and even worse, for pressing an alternative vision of universalism that serves only to veil their particularistic interests.

In this article, we present how the recognition political framework of political and historic representation has enabled reactionary political forces, which increasingly recognize its inner contradictions and turn them against the basic principle of universal dignity, with the clear aim of corroding the whole recognition political edifice from the inside out. Following Frank Ankersmit, we introduce the conceptual distinction between antifoundationalist vs. founda-tionalist representation in order to account for the series of decisive institutional changes that since the 1970s have transformed the fields of political and historic representation in parallel, and through the intersection of these fields triggered the rise of 'memory politics,' which we see as a main symptom of today's non-democratic, foundationalist representational régime.

We argue that no natural alliance exists between liberalism and the discourse of recognition, the rise of which is related only indirectly to ideology, as its direct roots lie in a new institutional régime of political representation that emerged in the seventies and eighties and took the place of the former class- (and social cleavage-) based representation régime of post-WWII social democracy. These institutional transformations have allowed the rise of the seemingly universalist but in fact foundationalist and perspectivist discourses that have taken

over the fields of political and historical representation. The foundationalist logic of the post-class representational régime urges actors to justify their action with universalistic moral declarations, which means evading the democratic procedures of will formation, bargaining, and accountability. In the current régime of post-class representation (see Mair, 2002; Ankersmit, 2002), mainstream liberal and progressive radical forms of recognition politics are equally urged to give in to the antidemocratic temptation of arbitrarily declaring their particularistic moral rules as universally valid – and illiberals and extremists are more than happy to join them on this path and fight their struggle against universal dignity on the very recognition political platform that announces it.

We will reconstruct how the takeover of recognition politics has destabilized political and historic representation in Europe and ended up in undermining European integration rather than enhancing it. The tacit memory political agreement between 'integrators' and the 'yet to be integrated' less resembles the genuine reconstruction of a commonly shared European historical identity narrative than a mutually beneficial power deal, in which new members have recognized the old members' hegemony in relation to narrating European identity in a liberal universalist memory political framework, and, by contrast, old members have recognized the special claims of post-communist countries to be respected as victims of the evils of Communism. Symbolic declarations cannot substitute for open negotiations undertaken on explicit terms: the function of such 'foundational' acts is not to establish new ground for the future, but to naturalize established power relations.

2. The symbolic violence inherent in recognition politics

There is a tension around recognition politics that is commonly observed: its protagonists have claimed to act in the name of universal and inclusive principles such as equal dignity and mutual respect. Still, in whichever form these principles have been put into political practice, they have stirred bitter controversy and rebuttal from actors who have felt that the seemingly emancipatory process in fact undermines their own equal recognition, and marginalizes and oppresses them. These ambiguous dynamics urge the parties in the debate to mutually deploy the same liberal principle of equal recognition against each other as was eloquently analyzed by Charles Taylor (1992). Taylor distinguished two modalities of recognition politics, one that stands on the ground of common-sense liberalism and seeks the 'equalization of rights and entitlements' in the name of universal dignity, and one that he called the politics of difference, which – he claimed – 'grows organically out of the politics of universal dignity' (Taylor, 1992: 39), and asks for differential treatment for disadvantaged groups and positive discrimination in the name of the same universal nondiscrimination principle. 'These two modes of politics,' Taylor argues, 'both based on the notion of equal respect, come into conflict': identity groups who do not belong to the rule-setting (individual rights-centered) paradigm of mainstream liberalism regularly complain that the equal treatment being offered under the auspices of liberal universalism

does not in itself guarantee to end their systemic oppression (cf. Samuel, 2013). Controversies, however, have rarely endangered the underlying principle of equal dignity. At the dawn of a liberal global era, even a communitarian like Taylor laid more stress on balance than on conflict: in the end, the debate between liberal mainstreams and their identitarian challengers maintains a common liberal force field, since the parties in the debate differ mostly in terms of the glasses they use to read the same universal Enlightenment principle of equal dignity that each of them seeks to implement.

Today, three decades later, the above-described delicate balance has been upset: the recognition discourse is increasingly deployed against the principle of equal dignity. The politics of recognition has lost so much of its liberal pedigree that it is called by Fukuyama (2020), a core liberal author, the greatest danger to liberal democracy. Recognition politics is increasingly used as a Trojan horse of social oppression in the hands of extreme-right bullies, fascists, and supremacists, who wallow in the joys of using its rhetoric to rip apart its Enlightenment foundations. As early as in the 1990s, research documented how white supremacists sought to highjack the liberal discourse of cultural pluralism with two 'rhetorical strategies: equivalence and reversal. These strategies portray whites as victims of discrimination and as equivalent to racial and ethnic minorities' (Berbrier, 1998: 436). Reversal, of course, is not a problem in itself: the inner tensions of recognition politics have always made certain forms of 'victimhood competition' inevitable. For example, the critique that affirmative action is discriminatory has always implied giving voice to its majoritarian victims; still, this latter voice had to stand on the universalist ground of equal dignity. Today, however, the reversal strategy is increasingly turned against the liberal grounds that Taylor assumed to be commonly shared. A politics of recognition flourishes even after the vanishing of the liberal consensus, and actively contributes to its demolition.

In this article, we are interested in exploring why the inner 'code' of liberal recognition politics makes this discourse so vulnerable to extreme-right reappropriation. There is, of course, the old dilemma that the liberal system is vulnerable because it defends its enemies that seek to destroy it – or, in Taylor's reformulation, 'the principle of equal citizenship has come to be universally accepted. Every position, no matter how reactionary, is now defended under the colors of this principle' (1992: 38). This explanation, however, does not dig deep enough to fully reveal the inner contradictions of recognition politics that we will seek to unravel in more depth. Liberal universalist recognition politics, as we will argue, is not vulnerable simply because it is too tolerant, but, because it entails symbolic violence, it asserts its protagonist's natural right to dominate and uses this aggression against its opponents (Perugini and Gordon, 2015). This aggression, however, can be turned back against it, not only by more radically equalizing identitarians, but also the most reactionary enemies of universal dignity.

Let us illuminate how this works in practice using a speech by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, delivered in the European Parliament the day before the general vote on the so-called Sargentini Report in 2018 October. The Report

provided an overview of the miserable state of rule of law, constitutionalism, and human rights in Hungary, and proposed, for the first time in EU history, to initiate Article 7 (1) of the Treaty on European Union (which defines the procedure that Member States shall follow to sanction a member who breaches fundamental EU values).

Orbán's strategy aims to normalize 'illiberal democracy' as part of the liberal universe. This strategy uses the political weaponry of recognition to create the semblance that it accepts the basic constitutional rulebook of EU polity. Recognition political language allows Orbán to take a legitimate position and delegitimize his adversaries.

> You will denounce the Hungary which has contributed to the history of our great continent of Europe with its work and – when needed – with its blood. You will denounce the Hungary which rose and took up arms against the world's largest army, against the Soviets, which made the highest sacrifice for freedom and democracy (…) I stand here now and defend my homeland, because to Hungarians freedom, democracy, independence and Europe are matters of honour. This is why I say that the report before you is an affront to the honour of Hungary and the Hungarian people. Hungary's decisions are made by the voters in parliamentary elections. What you are claiming is no less than saying that the Hungarian people are not sufficiently capable of being trusted to judge what is in their own interests. You think that you know the needs of the Hungarian people better than the Hungarian people themselves. Therefore I must say to you that this report does not show respect for the Hungarian people. (…) You are assuming a grave responsibility when – for the first time in the history of the European Union – you seek to exclude a people from decision-making in Europe. You would strip Hungary of its right to represent its own interests within the European family that it is a member of. (…) If we truly want unity in diversity, then our differences cannot be cause for the stigmatisation of any country, or for excluding it from the opportunity of engaging in joint decision-making. We would never sink so low as to silence those with whom we disagree. (Orbán, 2018)

By denouncing the Sargentini Report in the name of the victimized Hungarian nation as illegitimate and violating the Treaty, Orbán's speech makes any criticism or corrective intervention based on the very same treaty illegitimate. This, beyond doubt, exercises symbolic violence not only on Orbán's adversaries (specified only as 'you'), but also on the political community itself within which the whole debate emerged. It qualifies a subfield of European politics as undebatable (in this case: Hungarian domestic policy). Orbán uses the seemingly universal tropes of liberal recognition politics to re-declare the old populist principle of sovereignty *vox populi, vox dei*, which was once inherent in early liberal theory (Kis, 2013) and politics, and which today can be rephrased with ease in the language of inverted

recognition politics as a call to respect the speaker's divine (popular) authorization to dominate.

If the illiberal Orbán today constructs himself and his nation as a collective victim-hero, and threatens to upset the table, this is not an outside attack against European principles, but a position that harmonizes with the tacitly accepted framework of the construction of European identity. Orbán exploits the potential of symbolic violence that has been encoded from the beginning in the tacit memory political agreement between European 'integrators' and the 'yet to be integrated', in which the two parties have mutually recognized each other's dominion, and on these grounds declared the unity of the European family and the legitimacy of its institutional order.

3. The tacit political agreement of European integration, and its prerequisites: silencing and entrapment

Since the end of the Cold War, the symbolic construction of the European community has been based on a double reduction of political debate, as this was reduced not only to the construction of a shared historical memory, but also to the question of a choice between two exclusive memory constructions represented as 'constitutive historical legacies' of Europe. In other words, the political debate about the boundaries of the political community that evidently arose with the accession of the EU has been degraded into mimetic victimhood rivalry, which reached its symbolic endpoint with the 2009 EP resolution on 'European conscience and totalitarianism.' The road to the common, pan-European elaboration of the tacit political agreement during the 'long nineties' led from the clash of exclusive universalistic moral worldviews to a reluctant consensus based on the live-and-let-live principle. Before discussing the main features of this process, we first need to look at the historical context in which it took place.

The origins of the political space of EU accession date back to the 1970s, when the emerging, decontextualized global Holocaust consciousness that created a new means of moral universalization (Alexander, 2012; Levy-Sznaider, 2006) overcame the until-then dominant anti-fascist moral universalism. As a result of Cold War tensions regarding the moral significance of WWII, especially the communist campaigns that targeted West Germany (Lemke, 1993; Weinke, 2002), the Western World began presenting the problem of Fascism and genocide as a memory issue which should be dealt with by moral gestures, not criminal law (Zombory, 2020). Following the 1970s, it was commonly shared memory – the 'cult of heritage' (Calligaro, 2015) – that was supposed to create the conditions for collective identity, no longer a consensus of common political, military, etc. interests. In the 'end-of-history' atmosphere of the long 1990s, the discourse of integration, with its narcissism of small differences (Freud, 2002[1929]) between 'constituent historical experiences,' took on an ideological-mythical role and became increasingly detached from historical reality. Suffice to mention that in contemporary European memory culture, WWII appears as a mythic struggle

between liberal democracy and totalitarianism fought by an alliance of victims of a Western Holocaust and Eastern communism.

By the final decades of the Cold War, neoliberal human rights discourses (Whyte, 2009) had linked up with the developing construction of the cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust, with the latter serving as the moral basis of the former. As the historically unique case of absolute victimization, the memory of the Holocaust has been universalized as the general framework for establishing mutual respect and reconciliation. The humanitarian reason (Fassin, 2012) for cosmopolitan liberalism promised the possibility of restituting human dignity; in reality, awarding publicly acknowledged victim status to any human being on Earth who had been struck by injustice. In the Western political imaginary, there were no longer two ideologies in conflict, but an individualized 'pure' human suffering opposed to any possibility of political or social transformation. When the Iron Curtain fell and the enlargement of the EU became a hot political issue, the discourse of integration was already completely devoid of the possibility of negotiating between conflicting interests. In other words, the discursive framework of integration efficiently silenced the articulation of parties' political interests.

The debate on 'Europeanness' began in such political conditions, leading to the common social construction of the mimetic reversal of recognition norms. In the midst of profound geopolitical restructuring, post-Cold-War Western Europe embraced the preexisting cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust, and made it the central element of EU integration policy. The EU presidency statement of 31 October 2005 affirmed that '[t]he significance of the Holocaust is universal. But it commands a place of special significance in European remembrance. It is in Europe that the Holocaust took place' (EU, 2005). The 'special significance' of the Holocaust in European memory derives from the fact that the Holocaust – 'the negative core event of the 20th century' (Diner, 2003: 43) – took place on the continent. After the 'cult of heritage,' the third wave of Europeanization (Karlsson, 2010) was based on 'a common European canon of remembrance' 'against the backdrop of the memory of the Holocaust as the constituting, in effect the inaugural event of a commonly shared European memory' (Diner, 2003: 42). It is now the historical lesson of the memory of the Holocaust that is supposed to create solidarity and a sense of belonging for European citizens. The 'founding myth' of Europe rewritten, the core values of 'Europeanness' are promoted through commemorating the Jewish genocide as a unique historical experience in Europe with a universal relevance. The moral order articulated by the commemoration of the Holocaust has become the standard of civilization imposed by Europe's international policy: both in terms of the so-called integration process, and in the vocation of maintaining humankind's universal rights in the world. From the 'Western universal' position, EU enlargement appeared as a process of integration through which the continental civilization could be reunited according to its supposedly universal values. It followed that the norms of European historical consciousness, coming to terms with the past, and the cultivation of Holocaust memory, were imposed as soft membership criteria on associated

countries; as proof of democratic commitment, even of being civilized; that is, being 'European.'

Because of the unequal positions created by the accession process, this universalized moral order could not be debated by the addressees. Democratically elected national representatives were interpellated as members of civilized nations to be, with decades of communist totalitarian domination behind them. The EU conditionality of the universal recognition paradigm meant that the prerequisite of participating in the debate was the adoption of its normative system. Since European political space, especially EU institutions, were closed before the actors of the post-state socialist countries striving to 'return to Europe,' they took up positions in the moral order imposed on them as the universal code of civilization.

Post-communist state efforts to 'come to terms with' their 'totalitarian pasts' were made manifest in various forms of institutionalization, which provided space for and gave credence to political claims. These institutions, be they historical commissions, institutes of remembrance, or memorial museums of communism, served as laboratories in which an Eastern European identity could be elaborated in a legitimate way. Besides adopting European norms of recognition, expressed by Europeanized cosmopolitan Holocaust memory, actors of the 'Eastern specific' presented the memory of communism as their additional 'historical experience.' This Eastern European *differentia specifica*, constructed according to the representational canon of Europeanized cosmopolitan Holocaust memory, was expressed as greater suffering resulting from the 'double occupation' related to WWII. Its specificity in relation to universalist Holocaust memory is not historical but geographical. The nation, characteristically earlier represented as the heroic protagonist in the narrative of historical struggles between the mythic forces of West and East, is now being constructed as an East European community of victims, repressed by both totalitarian regimes but mainly by communism. The legitimate political subject position for the associated countries was the outcome of mimetic victimization. Far from being a local initiative stemming from a specific historical experience, the memory of communism is the result of the localization of norms of historical consciousness imposed during the EU enlargement process.

The symbolic violence inherent in the implicit imposition of a universal moral order was thus challenged by applying the norms of the very same moral order. Since the post-Cold War eastern position of EU enlargement was constructed according to the moral-political rules of the game defined by the integrators, the articulation of historical experiences of state socialism were silenced in the debate. The principles of historical authenticity were defined by the Holocaust-centered norms of European historical consciousness. As a result, the question of communism was not a political one, but a memory issue identically constructed to that of the Holocaust, and could only be raised as the moral need to restore the human dignity of its victims. As a consequence, communism was presented as an essentially and exclusively criminal and terroristic totalitarianism associated with the possible greatest potential of victimization. The only possible way to reverse the symbolic violence was to challenge the universality of the imposed moral order; that is, the uniqueness of the Holocaust. The whole

conceptual and argumentative repertoire of revisionism, also present in the Orbán speech cited above, the reference to the West's double standards, the idea of double victimhood, the calculation of 100 million victims of communism, etc., are all examples of the mechanism of the reversal of symbolic violence elaborated in the nineties.

From the civilizatory European position, actors posed not only as representatives of the victims of the Holocaust but also as defenders of its unique status, stepping up against contemporary perpetrators who would relativize its significance. The West defined the recognition of canonical Holocaust memory as *the* proof of democratic commitment and *the* prerequisite of cultural-political integration. From this perspective, the Eastern cause of criminalizing communism appeared as a systemic threat to the democratic values of the West. By contrast, actors assuming the Eastern European position stood against the 'Western double standard' of recognizing only the suffering of Holocaust victims, while denying the same from the victims of communism whom they self-proclaimed to represent. They revolted against the European system biased by a Westernism disguised as universal.

Since anti-integration voices were silenced on both sides, the game of mutual delegitimation was strictly limited so as not to threaten the game itself. The politics of recognizing communism as a victimizing system destabilized but did not change the conditions of legitimacy: it was acknowledged as a constituent historical legacy of European identity without denying the primary significance of the Holocaust. This tacit political agreement of 'live and let live' was codified in the 2009 EP resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism. With this document, the EU legitimizes the binary political space with its acknowledgement that 'the dominant historical experience of Western Europe was Nazism, and (...) Central and Eastern European countries have experienced both Communism and Nazism,' and speaks of the 'double legacy of dictatorship borne by these countries' (EP, 2009). Though the memory of Communism is recognized as European, the resolution also declares that 'the uniqueness of the Holocaust must nevertheless be acknowledged.' The drive behind the resolution is clearly to unite Europe, which necessitates 'form[ing] a common view of its history,' yet it respects internal differences such as an east-west divide of historical legacies of past suffering. Second, the political repositioning led to the escalation of victimization. The 'common view of history' called for in the resolution has been restricted to the 'tragic past' conceived of as human rights violations. In this view of the past, potential moral judgement can only differentiate between criminalized totalitarian regimes of whatever ideology on the one hand, and the conglomerate of suffering innocent individuals on the other. Although the heroes of the Resistance are mentioned in the resolution, the only memory community this policy permits to construct is the collectivity of victims, the boundaries of which are demarcated by pure human suffering. As the document clearly puts it, 'from the perspective of the victims it is immaterial which regime deprived them of their liberty or tortured or murdered them for whatever reason.'

The tacit memory political agreement attempted to square the circle, as it allowed for the geographical division of an allegedly universal historic memory. This nonaggression pact, in our view, reflects less a genuine process of working through in which parties could genuinely contrast and reconcile their historic experience of conflict and injustice than the mutual interest in silencing these contrasts.

From the integrator viewpoint, the tacit agreement would read as follows: if you let me declare the primacy of the Holocaust and define the victim-perpetrator narrative and the universal equal dignity of all victims as the ultimate moral code (which means you will refuse to return to the dark and barbaric tradition of relativizing the Holocaust, elevating national memory above that of other nations, and questioning equal dignity on racial or national grounds) – then I will invite you to narrate your history in the same universal language. I will give you respect as a victim of Evil, a freedom fighter against Evil, and a historic family member who now 'returns' to its natural community. I will not delegitimize your specific self-representation as a victim of Communism (I don't consider this a relativization of the Holocaust). The same deal, read from the Eastern perspective, goes like this: if we follow the rules of the universal moral order of recognition and don't challenge the uniqueness of the Holocaust, we will be adopted as legitimate political subjects into the European family, not only as collective victims who deserve sympathy, but also as collective heroes who have proved their democratic commitment as they risked their lives against the region's universal Evil. If we respect your (the West's) right to regulate common European historic memory in the framework of the mutual recognition of victimhood and of anti-totalitarian virtue, we expect you to respect our right to position ourselves as double victims of the Communist and the Nazi evil at the same time, and as genuinely democratic nations.

The above tacit agreement may be read along the line of Schimmelfennig's analysis (2001) about the broader EU integration process: here, too, declared cohesion has been enforced in acts of 'silencing' that appeared to be mutually beneficial, but resulted in a common 'entrapment' of accomplices rather than a genuine integration of willing partners. In the discourses about a new Europe, as Traverso ironically stated, 'the West has had a makeover, almost a new virginity. If Nazism and Communism are the bitter enemies of the West, the latter ceases to be their cradle so it can become their victim, with liberalism assuming the role of its redeemer' (Traverso, 2005: 90–91). There is no need to say that the East was just as happy as the West to declare its historic virginity. The tacit memory political pact, in other words, allowed both sides to silence the messy constellation of historical, political, and economic controversies that would threaten the declared narrative of common European identity. The universalist recognition political framework empowered all parties to enact this 'silencing' and thus to commit the symbolic violence they needed to declare their genuine Europeanness.

With their tacit agreement, the integrators and the integrated entrapped themselves in complicit wedlock, as they mutually authorized each other to speak from the position of innocence in every conflictual situation and associate their

opponents with oppressive evil forces. The tacit agreement opened space for aggressive forms of symbolic representation: at the moment, a representative speaks directly from the position of a represented victim whose suffering is unique and experience is unchallengeable, they become protected from any challenge, since potential opponents are automatically catapulted to the side of Evil.

In Eastern Europe, during the decades of liberal hegemony between 1989 and 2008, the above-described mechanism allowed for the silencing of controversy on the grounds of liberal common sense: critics of intense privatization, multinationals, international capital or NATO membership could almost automatically be debunked as anti-European, uncivilized, sympathizers of devilish régimes (nationalist or Communist). By contrast, today when the liberal hegemony is crumbling in each of its constitutive fields, illiberals are taking the lead and exploiting the delegitimating potential and symbolic violence that is inherent in recognition political discourse.

4. Radicalizing reappropriation

On the whole, the anti-totalitarian memory political pact that buttressed the symbolic unification of Europe – by silencing the tensions of the past and the present and declaring an antitotalitarian consensus – has greatly shaped the language in which tensions related to the Union can be discussed and debated. This representational language urges debating parties to use the codes of victim and perpetrator to describe themselves as the victimized, bullied, genuinely democratic representatives of a legitimate European system. The same code allows actors to debunk their opponents as illegitimate, anti-European usurpers with tyrannical inspirations. Debates about Europe have decayed to a mutual delegitimation game, in which all parties can dress their economic and power interests in the clothes of declared victimhood: respect given but not received, displays of genuine democratic legitimacy, and the rejection of tyranny.

This is the result of the reluctant antitotalitarian consensus which, in the short term, seemed to be a win-win platform: Western integrators felt they could enforce their universalist memory discourse, and Easterners also felt they could make hay out of equal recognition as victims of Communism. However, the resulting consensus about a Union made of antitotalitarian victims entrapped all parts into a highly unstable delegitimation game in which the very foundations of the European system are being questioned all the time. This common entrapment turned out once again to be damaging to the once-hegemonic liberal center, the enemies of which have learned to speak the liberal discourse of recognition as their native language – reciting the centuries-old liberal trope of popular self-government, and legitimating with the principle of equal recognition their natural right to autocratic domination in the name of their peoples.

The illiberal reappropriation of recognition political norms is clearly radicalized when the narrative of the country as a collective victim of totalitarianism is expanded to all contemporary political debates, with the logical conclusion that all opponents of the victim-nation must stand on the side of

universal evil. Today, the Hungarian far-right uses the liberal recognition political ground to debunk the liberals of Brussels as a totalitarian evil (either Nazi-like, or Stalinist).

Ironically, the Hungarian extreme right has reappropriated liberal language and learned how to use it to play the Nazi card – this precious symbolic weapon that has traditionally been used by liberals. In a recent interview, the Speaker of the Hungarian parliament compared the contemporary EU to the collapsing Third Reich, and Brussels leadership to the Führerbunker.

> The globalist staff sitting in the Brussels bunker no more believes in victory. They have realized their plan has collapsed, they are losing their positions, they go on the defensive, and yet, or just because of it, they are losing all their good sense and continue the war at any cost, even at the price of destroying the union. They are waiting for the ultimate weapon, the *Wunderwaffe,* which is at this moment Article Seven, that they hope will bring them the ultimate victory. (Szentesi Zöldi, 2020)

This absurd parallel is not solely acting-out, but part of a concerted operation in which government aides and actors play the Nazi card against their opponents. In the weeks during which the above interview was published, the spring of 2020, a government-sponsored online journal falsely called out Donald Tusk concerning his 'Nazi grandfather' (explanation: as President of the European People's Party, Tusk is for expelling Fidesz). Although this is certainly not the first time that the Nazi blame game has been reappropriated by extremists – think of Rush Limbaugh coining the term 'feminazi' in the early 1990s – what is certainly new is that, in our case, illiberal reappropriation is being performed on the seemingly universalist grounds of recognition politics.

Rogers Brubaker has recently explored the convergence of Western European extreme-right parties within a shared civilizational platform against the threat of a totalitarian Islam. Envisioning Europe as a secularized Christian civilization that is based on the value of tolerance and equal dignity, many extreme-right parties perform 'an ostensibly liberal defense of gender equality, gay rights, and freedom of speech' (Brubaker, 2017: 3). Brubaker draws a line between Western and Eastern Europe with good reason: in their biopolitical stance, Western extremists are a suffragette movement, in comparison to the Eastern 'extreme center.' However, on the terrain of memory political and European identity struggles, the Eastern right does not trail behind at all in performing 'illiberal invocations of liberalism' (ibid.). On the contrary: this is a genuine invention of legitimate, Europeanized, universal language with which to perform one's national freedom fight against the totalitarian European Empire.

The tacit memory political pact that established the mutual recognition of victimhood, the memory of Holocaust and Communism, and an anti-totalitarian consensus as the identity political foundations of European unification has created a dysfunctional and highly vulnerable setting. In the European house, liberal and autocratic régimes 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. The anti-totalitarian consensus and universal respect have never been more than camouflage – and today, illiberal political entrepreneurs are unleashing one part of the silenced controversies in order to universalize their own interests under the liberal auspices of the mutual recognition of free European nations. This symbolic battle explains why the vision of a shared European civilizational heritage is gaining such a firm hold over all the actors, liberal and illiberal, at the very moment when a severely dysfunctional Union is closer to the brink of disintegration than ever in its history.

5. The power of foundationalist representation

Recognition political discourse is neither liberal, nor identitarian, nor autocratic: we interpret it as a 'foundationalist' – and thus, as a potentially anti-democratic and 'speculative' (Csigó, 2016) – form of representation. Twentieth-century representative democracy was based on a democratic corporatist model of political representation in which the essence of political struggle lay in the competition of organized mass-scale social coalitions for the scarce resources of society (Touraine, 1997). These social coalitions were formed around the 'well-founded fiction' of the social class (Bourdieu, 1987) – emergent aesthetic proposals which balanced out the aspirations of members and representatives, proposals that no singular actor had the privilege to declare directly – as they existed mostly in the form of a silent 'inner voice' (Ankersmit, 2002: 133–163) that all interested parts could hear spontaneously emerge from the cacophony of negotiations and conflicts that constitute the mass-scale representation process. This 'inner voice' of democracy, however, has been lost in the transition of the past decades to a new, ('popular,' 'populist' [Mair, 2002], 'plebiscitary' [Ankersmit, 2002]) representational régime. In this régime, political struggles are fought for other stakes and with other means: here, elite actors ('cartel parties' [Katz and Mair, 1995], political personalities, lobbies, corporations, and NGOs) compete via popular campaigns and lobby for the power of unilaterally declaring, in the form of state regulation, a compulsory universal moral and legal order that all actors are expected to respect and comply with. The new régime has been built on the 'foundationalist' assumption that it is possible to represent the fundamental interests of a 'disorganized' society directly, right at the point of state regulation.

While the new representational régime did indeed emerge in parallel with the contraction of mass representative organizations – the old 'corps intermediaires' of social democracy –, on another plane it developed in continuity with the social democratic model of governance. The social democratic Welfare State, as Claus Offe has shown (Offe and Keane, 1985; Offe, 2006; for a review see Lash, 2006), was not simply a corporatist power broker between the best organized central groups in society. The welfare state acted equally as a universal regulator of social life and stepped up in defense of the disorganized peripheries of society. The representatives of the disorganized groups were inevitably elite civil society players whose prime resource did not lie in mass organizations and organized

masses, but in their direct access to the regulatory powers of the protective state from which they hoped for legal and fiscal defense against social oppression and marginalization. The representatives of 'disorganized interest groups' were able to enter politics in the direct vicinity of the state as elite actors themselves, struggling for access to the state's power of legally codifying what they promoted as the universal, morally just order of the whole community. If on the plane of party politics the old mass party model certainly did surrender to 'cartel parties' and political personalities and their technocratic rule, 'disorganized interest groups' and their elite civil representatives survived in the form of social movements and NGOs and struggled to 'manag[e] democracy' (Skocpol, 2003) through codifying the recognition of marginality into law.

It is certainly not a coincidence that in the historic period when the anti-foundationalist system of mass representative democracy surrendered to a new 'populist' or 'plebiscitary' régime, the system of representing historical experiences equally underwent thorough institutional transformation. The institutional walls between political and historical representation have been torn down and, in the new, historicized public space, new actors have appeared on stage (Habermas, 1988; Nora, 2011). In this memory political scene, the focusing of attention on Holocaust victims was structurally homologous to the above-described process, in which the focus of political representation shifted from the mass organized central groups of society to the 'disorganized interest groups' of the periphery and the elite civil representatives campaigning for them.

After WWII, the main political actors of historical memory formed a coalition of those who could claim to be part, in some way or another, of the historic victory over Fascism: resistance fighters, leftists, political prisoners, racial persecutees, intellectuals, everymen who resisted in their private lives. These actors spoke from the position of the central, self-organized makers of history who, after the horrors of the past, chose to serve further as remembering witnesses, adversaries of Fascism, adding their own particular perspective to the common anti-Fascist cause, gathering in national and international associations, witnessing in tribunals, journals, and schools, and forming 'social coalitions.' Even though the Cold War had disrupted the fragile anti-Fascist consensus of the war years by the end of the 1940s (Lagrou, 1999), until the 1970s the representation of historical experiences was institutionally embedded and particular on all sides. This representational regime functioned in an institutional framework in which historical experiences were referred to in relation to particular problems by various institutional players of justice, politics, history, or education.

The systemic change of the institutional field of historical representation, which is often described as a transition from history to memory, can be best analyzed as a shift from witness to victim. In the context of justice, for example, one can observe how the representation of historical experience had been institutionally disembedded by the fourth quarter of the twentieth century. In the post-war period, the witness, testifying typically in the courtroom, represented historical truth from a particular perspective defined by the given case. Arguably, the Eichmann trial constituted a turning point in this regard due to its politics of

witness recruitment based not on the connection to the past deeds of the accused, but to the dramatic demonstration of the Holocaust as a whole (Yablonka, 2004). The new regime of authenticity has been based on the suffering body of the suffering individual victim whose 'biolegitimacy' (Fassin and D'Halluin, 2005) is apparently universally shared.

The shift from the witness to the victim marks a definitive thread in the paradigmatic change of the political representation of history. In the new model, attention is focused on the institutionally disembedded 'testimony' of the victim about a 'lived through' bodily experience. A victim's experience of past injustice is no longer seen as a particular, perspectivist narrative of a witness that is connected to a particular 'case,' and narrated in particular institutional settings for particular reasons (judicial, educational, literary, associational) but the direct demonstration of a universal truth. The peripheral, traumatized, passive, disempowered victim is given voice by an initiated elite representative who asserts in their name a just moral order and a legitimate systemic order for the present-day remembering community (Zombory, 2019).

The traumatic and victimized modality of historic experience in the recognition political framework serves to short-circuit what Ankersmit calls the 'radical brokenness of political reality.' If liberal-universalist (and radical progressivist) versions of recognition politics are in trouble today, this is arguably because they are interlocked with illiberal reactionaries in a common anti-democratic trap in which all actors seek to unilaterally declare the just moral order and evade democratic debate with the properly selected historic narratives that inevitably drift apart from historical reality through universalization. Directly defining the moral foundations of the political community and the legitimate systemic order that follows from these foundations – this is the prime temptation of antidemocratic political representation, liberal or antiliberal, in today's age of recognition. This antidemocratic temptation has been fully served by seemingly universalistic narratives about the historic experience of totalitarianism which have established fake ground for 'universal mutual respect,' but in fact served to veil power games – and illiberals and autocrats have gradually learnt how to win these power games right on the liberal 'homeground' of universal recognition.

6. Conclusion

The illiberal reappropriation of the liberal universalist memory political discourse radicalizes a dynamic that has been present in all recognition political struggles, whereby the individualistic, formal, rights-focused streams of mainstream liberalism have clashed with forces seeking to empower oppressed communities beyond the formal equalization of rights. We have shown how illiberals can exploit this dynamic, turn it against the core liberal principles of equal rights and dignity, and use it to justify the autocracy's natural right to dominate.

The illiberal reappropriation covered in this study unveils the vulnerability of a typical recognition political strategy that seeks to preemptively win political wars by laying down the universal foundations on the ground of which all further

political controversies should be articulated. This strategy, no doubt, entails symbolic violence and declares one's right to domination. In our case, the proponents of this strategy – the Western liberal integrators and many of their Eastern integrationist partners who also sought to preemptively 'civilize' their countries (and forget about the possible colonizing instincts of the West) – may have drawn all parties into engaging with universalist liberal declarations, which may have temporarily silenced controversies. However, today we see these returning in an even more threatening and less controllable (because they are seemingly liberal, legitimate, sellable, convincing) forms.

The more its tropes are used by liberals, progressives, and illiberals alike, the more apparent it becomes that recognition politics is not an ideological formation but a symptom of a broader structural transformation in the institutional system of representation that shapes the articulation of all thinkable ideological positions. The case therefore is not simply that, as Taylor proposed 25 years ago, a 'politics of difference' would 'grow organically out of the politics of universal dignity,' since these two, together with the repressive-illiberal forms of recognition politics that reject universal dignity, have all grown out of a new representational régime that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Recognition politics is part of this broader constellation and its dysfunctions can only be understood in the context of the broader structural ills of representation in contemporary democracy.

We have argued in this paper that no natural alliance exists between liberalism and the discourse of recognition, the rise of which is related only indirectly to ideology, as its direct roots lie in a new institutional régime of political representation that emerged in the seventies and eighties and took the place of the former class- (and social cleavage-) based representation régime of post-WWII social democracy. These institutional transformations have allowed the rise of seemingly universalist, but in fact foundationalist and perspectivist, discourses that took over the fields of political and historical representation. The foundationalist logic of the post-class representational régime urges actors to justify their actions with universalistic moral declarations, which means evading the democratic procedures of will formation, bargaining, and accountability. In the current régime of post-class representation, mainstream liberal and progressive radical forms of recognition politics are equally urged to give in to the antidemocratic temptation of arbitrarily declaring their particularistic moral rules as universally valid – and illiberals and extremists are more than happy to join them on this path and fight their struggle against universal dignity on the very recognition political platform that announces it.

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