Anxiety, Dissonance and Imperial Amnesia of the European Union

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ABSTRACT

According to the master commemorative narrative of the EU, the European integration project represents a break with the violent European past characterised by fragmentation and nationalism, which culminated in World War Two and the crimes of Nazism and Stalinism. However, recent scholarship has criticised the omission of 19th and 20th-century European colonialism from the memory narratives advanced by the EU. In this article, I use the permanent exhibition in the House of European History (HEH) in Brussels to take this insight one step further and make two arguments. Firstly, I show that it is not only colonialism that is erased from official memory but, more broadly, empires and imperialism, although most European history over the past 2000 years was imperial. Secondly, I understand this "imperial amnesia" as an anxiety-controlling mechanism aimed at reducing the dissonance between the self-proclaimed image of a normative and civilian power on the one hand and imperial-like tendencies in its behaviour on the other.

Keywords: European Union, empire, memories, memory, history

Avrupa Birliği'nin Kaygı, Uyumsuzluk ve Emperyal Unutkanlığı

ÖZET

Avrupa Birliği'nin hakim hatıra anlatısına göre; Avrupa entegrasyon projesi, İkinci Dünya Savaşı, Nazizim ve Stalinizmin suçlarıyla doruğa çıkan parçalanma ve milliyetçilikle şekillenen şiddetli Avrupa geçmişini geride bırakmayı temsil etmektedir. Fakat güncel çalışmalar; XIX. ve XX. yüzyıldaki Avrupa sömürgeciliğinin, AB tarafından geliştirilen bellek anlatılarından çıkarılmasını eleştirmektedir. Bu makalede, Brüksel'deki Avrupa Tarihi Evi'ndeki daimi sergiyi bu gözlemi bir adım daha ileri götürmek ve iki argüman daha oluşturmak için kullanıyorum. İlk olarak, son 2000 yıldaki Avrupa tarihinin çoğu emperyal olmasına rağmen, resmi bellekten silinenin sadece sömürgecilik değil, daha geniş anlamda imparatorluklar ve emperyalizm olduğunu gösteriyorum. İkinci olarak ise, "emperyal unutkanlığı"nı, kendi kendini ilan eden normatif ve sivil bir güç imajıyla davranışlarındaki emperyal benzeri eğilimler arasındaki uyumsuzluğu azaltmayı amaçlayan kaygı kontrol mekanizması olarak tasavvur ediyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, imparatorluk, anılar, hafıza, tarih

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Introduction

In July 2007, Jose Manuel Barroso, the head of the European Commission (EC), compared "the EU as a creation to the organization of empires. We have the dimension of empire, but there is a great difference. Empires were usually made with force with a centre imposing diktat, a will on the others. Now what we have is the first non-imperial empire".[1] This statement immediately stirred controversy across Europe. To ease the dissonance and calm the tensions, Barroso's spokesman quickly made an assurance that "No one needs to have imperial nightmares tonight. President Barroso [...] referred to a quote by the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk to emphasise that the EU is anything but a superstate".[2] It is no wonder that the next time Barroso mentioned empires, it was to exactly the opposite effect. In a speech delivered to EU heads of delegations in September 2012, he made sure to point out that the EU is "not a nation and not an empire but a group of free willing nations that have decided that by pooling their sovereignty and acting together, they would be more effective in defending their interests and promoting their values".[3]

This article aims to show that this episode is not just a minor slip of the tongue but that it speaks volumes about the EU's memory politics and its anxiety about empires and imperialism. To that end, it builds on the recent literature according to which the EU erases links to colonialism from its memory script because this would undermine the myth of the EU as a peace project. This is a selective interpretation of history, "a foundational tale of pure origins, of an Immaculate Conception, which sets in place the main elements of a wishful and idealised European identity".[4] This idealised script excludes the fact that one of the key motivations for European integration both in the interwar period and in the immediate aftermath of World War Two was to Europeanise colonialism by merging French resource-rich colonies in Africa with German investments through the Eurafrica project.

Building on these insights, others have also shed light on the obfuscated links between colonialism and the European integration project. Patrick Pasture, for instance, shows that although the European integration project's initial aim was to sustain the European colonies, it shook off its colonial legacy following decolonization in the 1960s and by the early 1970s reinvented itself by embracing universal liberal values. From then on, "the colonial dimension of the ECs vanished from European memory…".[5] Aline Sierp attributed such politics of memory not only to the concerns over potential reparations but also to the amnesia which exists at the national level.[6] Also, she mentions the small steps towards greater recognition of the European involvement in colonialism and its links to the early phase of the European integration project. The European Parliament (EP) has been at the forefront of this inchoate atonement which has yet to affect the official memory politics of other EU institutions.[7]

1   Honor Mahony, "Barroso Says EU is an Empire", *EU observer*, 11 July 2007, https://euobserver.com/institutional/24458 (Accessed 11 January 2022).

2   Ibid.

3   Jose Manuel Barroso, Speech by President Barroso to European Union Heads of Delegation, Annual Conference of EU Heads of Delegation, EUSR and Chargés d'Affaires /Brussels, 4 September 2012, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-12-585_en.htm (Accessed 11 January 2022).

4   Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, p. 5.

5   Patrick Pasture, *Imagining European Unity Since 1000 AD*, London, Palgrave, 2015, p. 191.

6   For a more detailed analysis of colonial amnesia in European countries see: Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire: Decolonization, Society and Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 415-490.

7   Aline Sierp, "EU Memory Politics and Europe's Forgotten Colonial Past", *Interventions*, Vol. 22, No 6, 2020. p. 686-702.

This article builds on these insights and develops them further by making two additional arguments. Firstly, I show that the EU systematically forgets not only European colonialism but also the much longer and broader phenomenon of imperialism, which dominated European politics for 2000 years. This encompasses not only various imperial polities inside Europe (Roman, Holy-Roman, Habsburg, German, etc.) but also European colonial rule over non-European territories and populations. Secondly, I understand this imperial amnesia as an anxiety-driven defensive mechanism which aims to reduce a dissonance between the EU's anti-imperial ethos and its imperial-like behavior. To illustrate my arguments, I use evidence collected from the permanent exhibition of the House of European History (HEH). As a major project of EU institutions, and the only museum of its kind, HEH is a perfect site for interrogating the relationship between history, memory and identity of the EU. In addition to having visited the museum twice, first in December 2017 and then in July 2018, I also draw on the HEH's founding documents, other EU official documents and public statements of EU policy-makers.

In the next section, I outline my theoretical assumptions about the politics of memory, avoidance and anxiety. Then, I discuss the anti-imperial ethos of the EU, its quasi-imperial behaviour and anxiety generated by the dissonance between the two. Finally, I use evidence from the HEH to show that the EU's politics of memory is characterised not only by colonial but also by imperial amnesia.

Memories, Dissonance and Anxiety

Collective memories are inextricably linked to identity. Who we are hinges primarily on where we think we come from. However, what we decide to remember collectively is also radically interdependent with what we choose to forget collectively. Revealing these forgotten elements of history does not only illuminate the little-known past but can also shed light on the aspects of a polity's identity obscured by those memories which are foregrounded in the stories told about the self. However, not all memories matter equally. In contrast to historical memories that are usually no longer important for the group's life, collective memories are based on the mediated experience of the group and have a bearing on that group's identity.[8] Therefore, collective memory is a much more spontaneous narrative that evolves organically out of society and is closely tied to its self-understanding, which "the common people carry around in their heads".[9]

Collective memories are always plural, contested and in a constant state of flux. This is especially so in polities as complex and diverse as the EU. To fend off anxieties that could stem from the inability to tell a coherent story about "who we are and where we come from", all polities, including the EU, construct what Yael Zerubavel calls "master commemorative narratives". This is a "basic 'story line' that is culturally constructed and provides the group members with a general notion of their shared past".[10] Master commemorative narratives tell a story based on selecting and omitting key events, remembering and forgetting, which led to the group's emergence and evolution as a distinct entity. The story is usually periodised into major stages, in which dark ages are usually juxtaposed with earlier golden eras and ongoing revivals. Polities aim to maintain their master commemorative

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8 Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, New York, Harper & Row Colophon Books, 1980.

9 Carl Becker, "What Are Historical Facts?", Phil Snyder (ed.), *Detachment and the Writing of History: Essays and Letters of Carl L. Becker*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1958, p. 61

10 Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 6.

narratives because they satisfy their basic need for ontological security or "the persistence of feelings of personhood in a continuous self and body".[11] Actors that can sustain their biographical continuity have a stable sense of agency. In contrast, agents struggling to sustain their autobiographical narrative get engulfed by anxiety and lose the ability to act purposefully.

In the broadest possible sense, anxiety is a feeling of inner turmoil over the uncertainty of future events. For Søren Kierkegaard, one of the first thinkers to systematically reflect on it, anxiety is unfocused fear which stems from "our ability to choose even the most terrifying of the possibilities".[12] For other existentialists such as Martin Heidegger, anxiety stems from humans' awareness of mortality. This is why it is a fundamental mood, which serves as the ground for all other emotions.[13] Anxiety is often conflated with fear and other emotions such as guilt, shame, etc. While fear is related to concrete physical and external danger, anxiety is, to use the words of Giddens, "essentially fear which has lost its object through unconsciously formed emotive tensions that express 'internal dangers' rather than externalized threats".[14] On the other hand, shame is "anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography".[15]

The inability to synchronise different memory narratives, or memories with behaviour, produces cognitive dissonance, discomfort which arises from two or more conflicting ideas and beliefs.[16] To reduce the resulting anxiety, people can revert either to avoidance, or denial that the dissonance exists, by changing the dissonant convictions and memories or strengthening consonant memories.[17] In Giddens' view, "avoidance of dissonance forms part of the protective cocoon which helps maintain ontological security".[18] He uses the metaphor of the protective cocoon to depict an emotional barrier that helps "bracket out" threats to agents' integrity and enables them to "go on" in social life. Amir Lupovici defined avoidance as defensive measures aimed at reducing dissonance by self-restriction to information, creating ambiguities, or looking for consistent and supportive information. In Lupovici's words, avoidance "allows actors to separate the threatened self from the source of the threat and secure the boundaries of the self".[19] Thus, avoidance helps maintain the protective barrier that inoculates the self by blocking out disturbing feelings of vulnerability and fragmentation, allowing an agent to act purposefully.

The literature on anxiety, memory and ontological security has identified several distinct forms of anxiety-driven avoidance in memory politics. One of them is forgetting. Dmitry Chernobrov distinguishes forgetting by repression, when memories are pushed into the unconscious, from forgetting

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11 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991, p. 55. For an overview of how the concept has been used in International Relations see: Jennifer Mitzen and Kyle Larson, "Ontological Security and Foreign Policy", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2017.

12 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simply Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 119.

13 For an overview of the existentialist take on anxiety and its applications in IR see: Bahar Rumelili, "[Our] Age of Anxiety: Existentialism and the Current State of International Relations", *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 24, 2021, p. 1020-1036.

14 Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 44.

15 Ibid., p. 65.

16 Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails*, London, Pinter & Martin Publishers, 2008 [1956].

17 cf. Joel Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance: Fifty Years of a Classic Theory*, London, Sage Publications, 2007.

18 Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 188.

19 Amir Lupovici, "Ontological Dissonance, Clashing Identities, and Israel's Unilateral Steps Towards the Palestinians", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 38, No 4, 2012, p. 818.

by forgiving, or "helping the subject come to terms with its own troubling past …".[20] While the former threatens to resurface in the future as an unprocessed trauma, as in the case of the memory of inter-ethnic violence in Yugoslavia during World War Two activating five decades later, the latter is a healthier form that is expected to come about through mourning and reconciliation. When it takes place abruptly, following regime changes or revolutions, forgetting can also take the shape of memory erasure. One case in point is the Baltic states' decisions to remove or displace Soviet Era monuments, such as the iconic Bronze Soldier in Tallin.[21] Denial is another form of avoidance, where states actively refuse to acknowledge that something happened. A case in point is the denial of Turkey and Japan that they committed crimes at the outset of the 20th century and hence their refusal to apologise for them.[22] A similar mechanism is to silence unwanted memories so that the healthy ones, constitutive of collective storylines, can come front and centre. Silence can be an early response to traumatic events, as was the case with the Holocaust in Germany and Israel, but it can also grow into a more permanent feature of memory politics.[23]

In this paper, I posit that collective amnesia is a distinct, previously under-theorised, form of anxiety-driven avoidance mechanism in world politics. It is very similar to the above-mentioned phenomena but still could be analytically distinguished from them. In contrast to forgetting, which usually refers to particular events or details from a group's past, amnesia wipes out a very broad segment of that group's memories. While denial assumes an active process of selective exposure to information and reinterpretation of past events to serve a positive self-image of the polity, amnesia is about the whole-cloth repression of memories. Finally, in contrast to silencing which assumes that the memory might be vivid but unspoken or toned down and marginalised, amnesia involves total oblivion.

In the rest of the article, I elucidate how the imperial amnesia of the EU can be understood as a defense mechanism used to reduce anxiety stemming from the dissonance between the anti-imperial ethos of the EU and its quasi-imperial behaviour.

Dissonance Between Anti-Imperial Ethos and Imperial-Like Behaviour

From the very outset, the identity of an integrated Europe has been tightly connected to the anti-imperial ethos stemming from the foundational myth of the EU as a peace project. The Schumann declaration laid down a vision in which "The contribution which an organised and living Europe can bring to civilization is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations".[24] According to the EU's official website, "the EU is set up with the aim of ending the frequent and bloody wars between neighbours, which culminated in the Second World War."[25]

20 Dmitry Chernobrov, *Public Perception of International Crises: Identity, Ontological Security and Self-Affirmation*, Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, p. 127.

21 Maria Mälksoo, "Liminality and Contested Europeanness: Conflicting Memory Politics in the Baltic Space", Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin (eds), *Identity and Foreign Policy*, London, Routledge, p. 65-84.

22 Ayse Zarakol, "Ontological (In)security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan," *International Relations*, Vol. 24, No 1, 2010, p. 3-23.

23 Kathrin Bachleitner, *Collective Memory in International Relations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021.

24 Robert Schuman, "The Schuman Declaration", 9 May 1950, https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en (Accessed 11 January 2021).

25 European Union official website, "The History of the European Union" https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history_en#:~:text=A%20peaceful%20Europe%20–%20the%20beginnings,in%20the%20Second%20World%20War.&text=In%201957%2C%20the%20Treaty%20of,%2C%20or%20%27Common%20Market%27 (Accessed June 17 2021).

The idea that the EU is a novel and a *sui generis* actor in world politics, which somehow breaks with the tradition of power politics is reflected well in the "adjective power Europe" debate. It started in 1970s with François Duchêne who famously coined the term "civilian power Europe".[26] Its defining characteristic, according to Duchêne, is the reliance on civilian rather than military ends and means as well as on values of equality, justice and tolerance. As such, united Europe had a chance to usher in "a new stage in political civilization".[27] As the European project evolved, the labels invented to capture the essence of its distinctiveness in world politics have also evolved. The EU has been characterised as "normative",[28] "ethical",[29] "transformative",[30] "magnetic",[31] "liberal"[32] or even a "metrosexual" power.[33]

This attachment to universal values gained further momentum after the Cold War. The Lisbon Treaty reiterates the EU's attachment to universal values such as "democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law".[34] These were not only the values the EU cherished at home but also the ones it is set to export globally.

The above-described anti-imperial self-understanding of the EU as a civilian power stands in stark contrast with what Samir Puri calls "quasi-imperial habits and characteristics".[35] The very concept of "civilian power Europe" smacks of the old idea that European empires have a civilizing mission in the colonised world.[36] Some analysts stress the historical uniqueness of the EU's imperial character. Authors have thus labelled the EU a normative,[37] gradated, postmodern,[38] soft,[39] or non-imperial empire.[40] Others, however, hold that adding adjectives is not needed, as the EU possesses all the elements

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26 François Duchêne, "The European Community and the Uncertainties of Interdependence", Max Kohnstamm and Wolfgang Hager (eds.), *A Nation Writ Large? Foreign-Policy Problems Before the European Community,* London, Macmillan, 1973.

27 Duchêne, "The European Community and the Uncertainties of Interdependence", p. 20.

28 Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: a Contradiction in Terms?", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No 2, 2002, p. 235-258.

29 Lisbeth Aggestam, "Introduction: Ethical Power Europe?", *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No 1, 2008, p. 1-11.

30 Mark Leonard, *Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century*, London, Fourth Estate, 2005.

31 Richard Rosecrance, "The European Union: a New Type of International Actor?", Jan Zielonka (ed.), *Paradoxes of European Foreign Policy*, The Hague, Kluwer Law International, 1998, p. 15-25.

32 Wolfgang Wagner, "Liberal Power Europe", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 55, No 6, 2017, p. 1398-1414.

33 Parag Khanna, "The Metrosexual Superpower", *Foreign Policy*, July/August, 2004.

34 Ibid.

35 Samir Puri, *The Great Imperial Hangover: How Empires Have Shaped the World*, London, Atlantic Books, 2020, p. 248 (e-book). For the literature analysing the EU as a modern empire: Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: the Nature of the Enlarged European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007; Hartmut Behr and Yannis A. Stivachtis (eds), *Revisiting the European Union as Empire*, London, Routledge, 2015.

36 Gabi Schlag, "Into the 'Heart of Darkness'—EU's Civilising Mission in the DR Congo", *Journal of International Relations and Development,* Vol. 15, No 3, 2012, p. 321-344.

37 Raffaella A. Del Sarto, "Normative Empire Europe: The European Union, its Borderlands and the 'Arab Spring'", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 54, No 2, 2016, p. 215–232.

38 Thomas Diez, and Richard Whitman, "Analysing European Integration: Reflecting on the English School", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No 1, 2002, p. 43-67.

39 Bjorn Hettne and Fredrik Soderbaum, "Civilian Power or Soft Imperialism-The EU as a Global Actor and the Role of Interregionalism", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 10, No 4, 2005, p. 535-552.

40 Yannis A. Stivachtis, "The English School and the Concept of 'Empire': Theoretical and Practical/Political Implications", *Global Discourse*, Vol. 3, No 1, 2013, p. 129-135.

of empires of the old age. For Jan Zielonka, like other empires in history, the EU has a vast territory, frontiers that are constantly shifting and a centralised system of governance. In his words, the EU is "above all, a very bullish, intrusive and expanding actor. Like all empires, it tries to assert political and economic control over various peripheral actors through formal annexations or various forms of economic and political domination".[41]

The EU's Enlargement Policy is an excellent case in point clearly showing some of the quasi-imperial characteristics. To begin with, for the past half a century or so, the EU's borders have been continuously changing without a clear end in sight. Moreover, similar to the historic expansion of traditional empires, the EU's enlargement has been driven by geopolitical[42] and security concerns.[43] The EU has indeed been present in Central and Eastern Europe in the early 2000s in the Western Balkans today, as an "empire by invitation".[44] In other words, the overwhelming geopolitical expansion of the EU in these regions has come from the appeals of those on the receiving end rather than through coercion or conquest.[45] In many other ways, however, the expansion of the EU echoes the legacies of 19th-century imperial rule. As Hartmut Behr has convincingly demonstrated, its conditionality policy bears a strong similarity to the 19th century "standard of civilization" used by European nations to decide which non-European states were eligible to join the society of states. Both are defined by the self-perception of Europe as the authority who defines the standards and consists of steps needed to be taken to include non-European states and propagates a vision of the world with the EU at the center surrounded by concentric circles of more or less civilised and developed peripheries.[46]

Beyond the enlargement zone, lies the neighborhood zone, covering the post-Soviet space and the wider Mediterranean. In the official discourse, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) entailed the promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance, the rule of law and a market economy and the creation of a "ring of friends" with whom the EU will enjoy "close, peaceful and co-operative relations" and share everything but institutions.[47] Countries falling under the purview of ENP are offered financial assistance and access to EU markets if they commit to domestic political and economic reforms. The progress of each is separately monitored, and the process is governed through individual Association Agreements and Action Plans drafted by the EU for periods of three to five years. This resembles one of the key characteristics of imperial rule, which according to Nexon and Wright, "involves heterogeneous contracts that specify varied rights and privileges to different

41 Jan Zielonka, "The Uses and Misuses of the Imperial Paradigm in the Study of European Integration", Hartmut Behr and Yannis A. Stivachtis (eds), *Revisiting the European Union as Empire*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. 48.

42 Lars S. Skalnes, "Geopolitics and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union", Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier (eds), *The Politics of European Union Enlargement: Theoretical Approaches*, London, Routledge, 2005, p. 213–33.

43 Atsuko Higashino, "For the Sake of 'Peace and Security'? The Role of Security in the European Union Enlargement Eastwards", *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 39, No 4, 2004, p. 347-368.

44 cf. Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952", *Journal of Peace Reesearch,* Vol. 23, No 3, 1986, p. 263-277.

45 Dimitar Bechev, "From the Soviet Bloc to the New Middle Ages: East-Central Europe's Three Imperial Moments", Kalypso Nicolaïdis, Berny Sèbe and Gabrielle Maas (eds.), *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and Colonial Legacies*, London, IB Tauris, 2014, p. 259.

46 Ibid, p. 240.

47 European Community, "Communication from the Commission: Paving the way for a New Neighborhood Instrument" 1 July 2003, p. 4
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/wider/wider_en.pdf (Accessed 12 January 2022).

peripheries".[48] Despite the strong rhetorical attachment of the EU to "joint ownership" and partnerships, especially with the launch of the Eastern Partnership in 2009, the EU's actions have given a clear priority to the spread of its norms and protection of its interests.[49] As the obvious goal of this policy is to achieve influence and maintain stability through asymmetric partnerships, "many in the region would characterize this as a form of soft imperialism".[50]

Imperial impulses are also clearly present in the foreign, security and defense policies of the EU. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, the EU has for the past two decades maintained protectorates through a combination of membership conditionality and civilian and military interventions conducted under its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Here, however, the EU has acted in the Western Balkans as an "empire in denial" by disguising the true nature of its presence "in non-political, therapeutic or purely technical, administrative and bureaucratic forms".[51] Further afield, despite the liberal language in which CSDP missions are cloaked, they are often characterised by a thinly concealed imposition reminiscent of colonial times.[52]

The dissonance between self-understanding as a peace project and civilian power on the one hand and imperial-like features and behavior on the other generates anxiety within the EU. Domestically, the analogy with empires raises a "historical specter" that feeds Eurosceptic attitudes.[53] As a reaction to Barroso's previously discussed imperial analogy, the conservative public in the EU immediately used the statement to increase pressure on the government to call for a referendum on exit the EU.[54] Eurosceptics in other European countries also often use this rhetorical strategy from across the political spectrum to question the legitimacy of the EU. Abroad, and especially in Africa, imperial analogies clearly undermine the credibility of the EU as a development donor and a foreign policy actor who presents itself as a disinterested normative power that is there to assist the rules-based order and local peacebuilding. For all these reasons, it is understandable why it is ill-advised for the EU to use imperial analogies to articulate what it does in world politics. As a result, references to empires and imperialism are remarkably absent from EU policy discourse and its collective memories.

"Imperial Amnesia" in the EU

Most of European history was imperial.[55] From the Roman Empire, through the Byzantium and the Holy Roman Empire, to the contiguous or overseas empires built by European states in the modern era, empire was the dominant form of governance in the old continent. Many see the birth of the idea

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48 Daniel Nexon H., and Thomas Wright, "What's at Stake in the American Empire Debate", *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 101, No 2, 2007, p. 254.

49 Elena A. Korosteleva, "Change or Continuity: Is the Eastern Partnership an Adequate Tool for the European Neighbourhood?", *International Relations*, Vol. 25, No 2, 2011, p. 243-262.

50 Bjorn Hettne and Fredrik Soderbaum, "Civilian Power or Soft Imperialism-The EU as a Global Actor and the Role of Interregionalism", *European Foreign Affairs Review,* Vol. 10, No 4, 2005, p. 545.

51 David Chandler, *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State-Building*, London, Pluto, 2006, p. 11.

52 Filip Ejdus, "Local Ownership as International Governmentality: Evidence from the EU Mission in the Horn of Africa", *Contemporary Security Policy,* Vol. 39, No 1, 2018, p. 28-50.

53 Stella Ghervas, "Antidotes to Empire: From the Congress System to the European Union", John W. Boyer and Berthold Molden (eds.), *EUtROPEs: The Paradox of European Empire,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 49-81.

54 Bruno Waterfield, "Barroso Hails the European Empire", *Telegraph*, 11 July 2007, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1557143/Barroso-hails-the-European-empire.html (Accessed 11 January 2022).

55 Puri, *The Great Imperial Hangover*, p. 209.

of a united Europe in medieval Christendom and "herald Charlemagne as the forefather of Europe".[56] From the 15th century onwards, this ambition went global as various European colonial empires expanded worldwide, a process jumpstarted by Portugal and soon followed by Spain, England, the Netherlands, France and others. At the turn of the 20th century, most major European states had empires of their own, either through overseas colonies or through contiguous territorial expansion.

Empires of the old traditionally served as the inspiration for the prospect of continental integration. The early modern imaginations of a united Europe, such as the one drafted by the Abbé de Saint Pierre in 1717, were inspired by the Holy Roman Empire.[57] Imperial history inspired the European integration project well into the 20th century. In his 1924 magnum opus *Pan-Europa,* Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergy, often dubbed as the parent of the European idea and the founder of the European movement, directly connected the contemporary necessities for the unification of Europe in the aftermath of the Great War with earlier attempts in history from 800 onwards.[58] Like many other pan-Europeanists from the interwar period, Coudenhove-Kalergy called for the unification of Europe so that its colonial control over Africa could be sustained.[59] Only days following the Schuman Declaration, Coudenhove-Kalergy became the first laureate of the Charlemagne Prize, whose foundational document framed Charlemagne and his Carolingian Empire as a source of inspiration for the unification of Europe.[60]

Today, explicit references to imperial history and symbolism in EU symbolism have survived only in traces. The choice of Rome as a setting for the conclusion of its founding treaty, for example, clearly insinuates an imperial continuity from the Roman Empire to the contemporary European project.[61] In addition to proclaiming all of the continent to be under the hegemony of the Union, EU banknotes also establish a linear progression from the Roman Empire (e.g. Romanesque structures on €5 banknote) to contemporary times (e.g. modern buildings and bridges on €500 banknote).[62] This banal imperialism insinuates a *translatio imperii* in which the EU is a modern successor of the Roman Empire.

Notwithstanding the long imperial history and subtle contemporary hints, memories of both empire and imperialism are a blank spot in the EU's mnemonic narratives. As Puri points out: "The problem is that the EU has its own form of amnesia: it is fixated by the continent's immediate twentieth-century history, but largely ignores the broader patterns of imperial history that have shaped Europe."[63] The imperial amnesia in the EU is shaped by its anti-imperial ethos. The script of "the EU as a peace project" construes the entirety of European history as a struggle between the "forces of fragmentation", which dominated the old continent for centuries, and the "forces of integration", which have unified and pacified the continent since the World War Two with a potential to extend this civilizing process globally. In the rest of this section, I illustrate the imperial amnesia of the EU with evidence from the HEH.

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56 Pasture, *Imagining European Unity Since 1000 AD,* p. 14.

57 Ibid., p. 30.

58 Richard Coudenhove-Kalergy, *Paneuropa*, Wien, Paneuropa Verlag, 1926.

59 Richard Coudenhove-Kalergy, "Africa", *Paneuropa*, Vol. 5, No 2, 1929, p. 18.

60 Oriane Calligaro, "Legitimation Through Remembrance? The Changing Regimes of Historicity of European Integration", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 3, No 3, 2015, p. 330-343.

61 Ibid. p. 333.

62 Russel Foster, *Mapping European Empire: Tabulae Imperii Europaei,* London, Routledge, 2015.

63 Puri, *The Great Imperial Hangover*, p. 262.

Imperial Amnesia in the House of European History (HEH)

The first major EU initiative to institutionalise European history was made by the EP in 2007. Ten years later, this initiative resulted in the opening of the HEH in Brussels.[64] It aims to serve as a reservoir of collective memory and a basis for European identity and to contribute to the EU's global ambitions.[65] Just like the European integration project, the museum's creation was an elite project that excluded the wider public. It was conceptualised by a narrow group of experts in two stages.[66] The first stage was under the strong influence of the network of German Christian Democrats led by the President of the EP, Hans-Gert Pöttering, who all shared a teleological federalist view of European history depicted in the previous section.

Pöttering charged the Committee of Experts to draft a plan for the museum, which would strengthen the cultural basis of the European project and enhance its identity and legitimacy. Their vision of the museum was eventually laid out in the "Conceptual Basis for a House of European History" published in 2008.[67] The document reflected the master commemorative narrative of the EU revolving around World War Two as the turning point, but it also envisaged covering "the origins and development of Europe until the end of the 19th century".[68] This was meant to include also the imperial history of Europe, from the Roman Empire, through its medieval successor in the Holy Roman Empire to the overseas and contiguous empires of the modern era. It's important to note, though, that the Conceptual Basis depicted imperialism and colonialism "exclusively in a positive light".[69]

In the second, implementation stage, the concept was shaped by a wider group of academics with a more critical view of imposing a teleological narrative and a sense of collective identity in a top-down fashion. The concept also changed due to attempts to secure the support of socialist MEPs and those from the new Eastern European member states who challenged the singularity of the Shoah by portraying communism on a par with Nazism.[70] This led to the revised concept entitled "Building a House of European History" drafted by the Academic Project Team in 2013.[71] According to this revised concept drafted by the team of 24 experts from across the EU, which decisively shaped the final outlook of the permanent exhibition of HEH, the longer view approach was abandoned. Instead of it, in the opening section titled Shaping Europe, the document explains the concept of the museum based on a shared European past which is constitutive for collective self-understanding. Moreover, the document recognises that "memory is inextricably intertwined with oblivion: to bear something in remembrance means, ineluctably, to lose sight of something else…".[72] The long imperial history of

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64 Veronika Settele, "Including Exclusion in European Memory? Politics of Remembrance at the House of European History", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies,* Vol. 23, No 3, 2015, p. 406-407.

65 Ibid., p. 408.

66 Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* Vol. 55, No 3, 2017, p.14.

67 European Parliament, Committee of Experts House of European History, Conceptual Basis for a House of European History, Brussels: European Parliament, 2008. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf (Accessed 11 January 2022).

68 Ibid., p. 11.

69 Sierp, "EU Memory Politics and Europe's Forgotten Colonial Past", p. 694.

70 Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project", p. 14.

71 European Parliament, Building a House of European History, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/tenders/2013/20130820b/Annex_I-Building_a_House_of_European_History.pdf (Accessed 11 January 2022).

72 Ibid., p. 31.

Europe is hence obscured behind the mythical story of Europa and the bull, which "became emblematic for the continent".[73]

The revised concept then jumps to the 19th century, thus omitting ancient and medieval European empires. However, in contrast to the orientalist and one-sided depiction of modern overseas European empires from the Conceptual Basis made by the Committee of Experts, the revised concept of the Academic Project Team acknowledged, although in passing, that European colonialism was "permeated by racist and social Darwinist ideas".[74] This remark aside, the diversity of European imperial projects, the length, the scale and the brutality of European overseas colonialism, its connection to the roots of the European integration project, consequences for the colonised people, and its contemporary consequences and echoes were entirely omitted from the document. Instead, European integration is presented as the best antidote to prevent "western Europe from regressing to earlier chauvinistic, aggressive and imperialistic mechanisms."[75]

The HEH opened in May 2017 in Brussels. The permanent exhibition is divided into six chronological sections. Except for the first section, the rest of the permanent exhibition covers the period from the 19th century onwards, thus leaving entirely outside of the picture both the ancient and medieval empires that dominated European history until 1789. Closely following the 2013 revised concept, the first section is entitled "Shaping Europe" and features the "common heritage" of Europe. The exhibition starts with the depiction of the myth of Europa in which Zeus, disguised as a bull, abducts a Phoenician noblewoman - Europa - and takes her to Crete. The 2013 revised concept of the Academic Team suggests that the myth "refers to the fact that European culture has ancient roots outside Europe".[76] However, the Bull myth could also be interpreted in line with the dominant memory narrative in the EU and its anti-imperial ethos. According to Ian Manners, the "bull myth projects the rejection of nationalism and fascism from the past onto a present EU" and "provides a story of how the "old Europe" of empires and nationalism was transformed into a new Europe more ready for the demands of a global 21st century."[77] The opening section of the exhibition also lists legacies of European history, and colonialism and slave trade are indeed mentioned to be among them, but empires and imperialism are not. -

The second section, titled "Europe Ascendant" covers the rise of modernity and the ascent of European states as global powers. Here, of particular interest is a subsection "Europe as a global power 1789-1914", constructed in a glass-covered corridor representing two sides of the advent of European modernity. The section features the notions of progress, reason, science, and geographic exploration on the left side. On the opposite side, as part and parcel of the modernity that made "Europe as a global power" stand the symbols of colonialism and racist ideology underpinning it. Such a tone in the depiction of colonialism resulted from the revised 2013 concept shaped by academics.[78]

However, the centuries-long domination of Europeans over the rest of the world is still in the permanent exhibition narrowed down to a few decontextualised details while omitting crucial infor-

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73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., p. 33.

75 Ibid., p. 35.

76 Ibid., p. 31.

77 Ian Manners, "Global Europa: Mythology of the European Union in World Politics", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 48, No 1, 2010, p. 70.

78 Ibid., p. 411.

mation without giving the visitor any sense of the sheer scale of exploitation. The omission of King Leopold II's colonial exploitation of what today is the Democratic Republic of Congo is particularly striking given that the museum itself is located in the eponymous Leopold Park. Instead of revealing the scale of atrocities, by placing these fragments on colonialism within the section on European ascendancy, as Sierp points out, the HEH suggests that colonialism was a beneficial part of Europe's development.[79]Also, restricting the story of colonialism to this section gives the visitors, as they are moving one floor up, the false impression that this chapter of European history was closed.

The third section of the exhibition, called "Europe Eclipsed", covers the wars of the 20th century, including the Holocaust. Despite the crucial role of imperialism behind the outbreak of the World War One, this has been entirely omitted from the narrative. The only exception is a brief mention of the colonial troops fighting within the militaries of various colonial powers, for example, Algerians in the French army or Indians under British command. From World War One onward, the European empires and imperialism disappear from European history, at least according to the HEH.[80]

Especially interesting is the subsection of the museum devoted to the interwar period, contrasting the pan-European idea sharply both to the waning of imperialism and the waxing of authoritarianism. Thus, for instance, according to the HEH pocket guide, "[a]s a consequence of World War I, old empires broke up and new states were created. Pacifism and the idea of European integration grew in influence".[81] Moreover, the colonial roots of the European integration project are systematically forgotten. Coudenhove-Kalergy's books are featured along with the pan-European flag, journals and coins minted by the fledgling European movement. However, the colonial roots of the pan-European idea and the Eurafrica project pursued until the 1960s are omitted from the presentation entirely. The exhibition on the fourth floor then moves on to equate Nazi terror with the Soviet rule, thus reflecting the more recent mnemonic influence of the new Eastern European member states, most importantly Poland and the Baltic states.[82]

The fourth section, entitled "Europe Divided" in the concept paper, covers the Cold War period. However, this section does not present the colonial wars that the major European powers fought in the Third World in this period. Instead, the exhibition tells a story of superpowers using anti-colonialism strategically to replace European influence around the world (in Vietnam, for example). While this section covers the outset of the European integration process and the conclusion of the Treaties of Paris and Rome, it entirely omits that one of the motivations for the unification of Europe was to preserve the remaining colonies.[83] The exhibition thus clearly follows the master commemorative narrative presented in the previous section, according to which the forces of integration, without a history of their own, started reshaping the old continent in the aftermath of World War Two.

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79 Sierp, "EU Memory Politics and Europe's Forgotten Colonial Past", p. 695.

80 Elizabeth Buettner, "What–and who–is 'European' in the Postcolonial EU? Inclusions and Exclusions in the European Parliament's House of European History", *BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review*, Vol. 133, No 4, 2018, p. 140.

81 House of European History, *Pocket Guide*, 2018, https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/mission-vision p. 9, (Accessed 11 January 2022).

82 Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project", p. 528; Maria Mälksoo, "The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 15, No 4, 2009, p. 653-680.

83 Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, p. 5.

The fifth section, "Breaking Boundaries", tells the story of the last wave of democratization and subsequent expansion of the EU. The process started in Spain, Portugal and Greece in the 1980s, followed by the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and the subsequent entry of Central and Eastern European states into the EU. Geopolitical aspects of this process, including the enlargement of the EU's spheres of interest in the space previously occupied by the Soviet Union, is entirely side-lined. In contrast, the normative side of the process, including the spread of democracy and human rights, occupies central space. The final section, entitled "Looking Ahead", is located in the museum's atrium and expectedly contains no references to either imperialism or colonialism.

To sum up, in the HEH both the long history of European imperialism until 19th century as well as its last decades in the 20th century are entirely deleted from memory. The imperial nature of many European nation-states with contiguous empires in the Eastern part of the continent are also entirely overlooked. As Buettner has pointed out, the HEH is also mute on the Ottoman Empire despite it being part and parcel of European history and an empire whose legacy still matters. She attributes this to orientalism which rendered the "sick man of Europe…insufficiently European for the HEH".[84] While the museum does mention colonialism and the slave trade in passing, the link between the 20th century European colonialism and decolonization with the roots of the Eurafrica project and early European integration is also omitted. Such a selection of forgotten and remembered pasts in the HEH may be attributed to a variety of economic, political or bureaucratic reasons. However, I argue that psychologically, such a choice, reflecting the wider imperial amnesia of the EU, is a defensive mechanism aimed at fending off the anxiety which stems from the dissonance between the EU's anti-imperial self-perception and its imperial-like features. By avoiding references to empires and imperialism, the EU reduces the dissonance and can go on with its routinised memory and identity narratives revolving around the post war peace project and civilian power.[85] The EU simply does not have a frame of reference to discuss its imperial past.

Conclusion

Despite 2000 years of imperial history in Europe, the EU suffers from "imperial amnesia". Its memory narratives delete all traces of empires and imperialisms. This is best exemplified in the HEH established in 2017 to define shared European memories and foster identity building in the EU. Although the museum did take an important step forward by acknowledging that colonialism is part and parcel of shared European history, it obscures not only the 20th century entanglement of colonialism and the European integration project but also remains mute on the longer history of imperialism in Europe.

In this article, I have argued that this "imperial amnesia" is an anxiety controlling mechanism aimed at reducing the dissonance between the strong anti-imperial ethos of the EU and its imperial-like features. To be sure, the EU is essentially different from empires of the old age in that it renounced power politics and embraced rules-based order. Moreover, it conceives itself as the peace project at home and civilian power abroad devoted to spreading democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In many respects, however, the EU does resemble empires. Instead of fixed borders, it has frontiers which are constantly shifting. It governs the countries in its neighborhood indirectly and has the ambition to

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84 Buettner, "What–and who–is 'European' in the Postcolonial EU? Inclusions and Exclusions in the European Parliament's House of European History", p. 143.

85 Ibid., p. 141.

define what is normal in international politics for polities worldwide echoing the 19th century "standards of civilization" and "civilizing mission". Due to these contradictions, Samir Puri called the EU "democracy's heir to empire".[86] Yet, as I have shown thus far, the EU has denied this heritage in order to fend of anxiety generated by the dissonance between these seemingly contradictory narratives.

These findings might be relevant for at least two disparate bodies of research. Firstly, they contribute to the scholarship on the EU by foregrounding its previously overlooked "imperial amnesia". By closely investigating how and why the EU deletes its imperial antecedents from its official memory register, this article enriches long-standing debates about the role of the EU in the world and the nascent literature on its politics of memory, in particular a growing niche literature on the HEH. Secondly, the findings contribute with novel empirical material to IR studies on emotions, memories, and ontological security. Its main argument that collective amnesia can be driven by anxiety and dissonance can be further tested, applied to and developed in other cases in world politics.

These insights also raise several new questions. Firstly, the assumptions about anxiety-driven amnesia developed in this article are preliminary and based on discourse analysis and museum observation. They can certainly be further empirically probed through interviews, focus groups or experiments. Secondly, the article has zeroed in on the contemporary mnemonic narratives of the EU. It would be useful to juxtapose these to the memory narratives of the pioneers of the European integration project advanced before empires and imperialism went out of fashion if not out of history. Thirdly, this article has not raised how the EU should face its imperial heritage in a more salubrious manner. In other words, how can the EU accept that it is "democracy's heir to empire" without undermining its self-identity as a peace project and without providing discursive weapons to its enemies. Maybe an EU coming out of the imperial closet would be better equipped to restrain its deep-seated impulses in order to impose its will on others. Maybe this would help the EU to more aptly articulate the noble ethos behind the clumsy notion of the "non-imperial empire" and reinvent the meaning of empire for the 21st century: civilian, peaceful and democratic.

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86 Puri, *The Great Imperial Hangover*, p. 267.

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