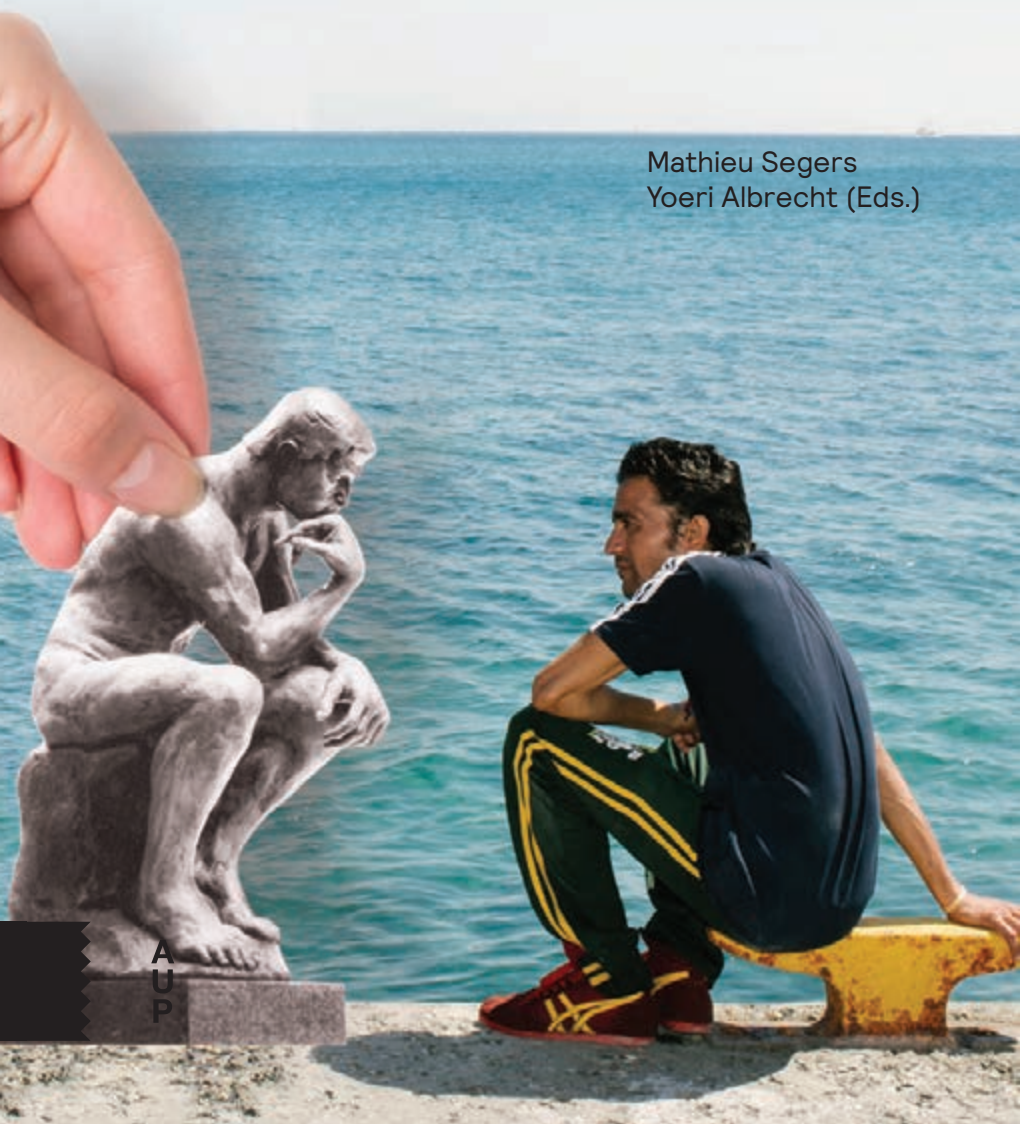# Re: Thinking Europe

Thoughts on Europe:
Past, Present and Future

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My EUtopia

Empathy in a Union of Others

Kalypso Nicolaïdis

There are stories one remembers till the end. Stanley Hoffmann, renowned Franco-American political scientist and a friend, died recently. He passed on many stories but one stands out in my memory that serves as a retrospective beacon, a story illuminating our future in spite of our present European predicament. In the story, Stanley is fifteen and hiding with his mother in Lamalou-les-Bains, a charming village at the foot of rolling hills in the south of France. The village is occupied by German soldiers, most of whom are barely older than him by the end of the war. In the story, Stanley and his mother, originally Austrian Jews and the only ones in the village to understand German, manage to listen to their occupants as they open letters from home, letters full of catastrophic news of bombardments and death. And so Stanley and his mother pass on the message to the villagers, that in truth the boys in Nazi uniforms are *malheureux comme des pierres* (as sad as stones), and the villagers in turn send instructions to their sons in the *maquis* of the surrounding hills not to shoot. When the village was liberated in 1945, he recalls, not one drop of blood was shed. It was not like this everywhere.

Can this testimony inspire new generations who witness their own wars and atrocities, to believe in the possibility of a more ethical world – *malgré tout*? Can we not together project ourselves back to the numerous pockets of deep humanity that were left even at the end of such an atrocious war (are they not all?!) and to these ineffable attitudes that made reconciliation possible after the war? And if we do, can we not share Stanley's gaze and suppose that the European Union was made possible, at least initially, from sparks like these? Ripples of empathy in the mist of Inferno.

Like other intellectuals who grew up in wartime, Stanley spent his life trying to understand a century which witnessed in its first half a collapse of all the restraints put on war in previous centuries, and in its second half a frantic search for new more drastic restraints. This search may have led *inter alia* to the birth of the UN and the EU, but alas war could only be kept at bay by some peoples in some places some of the time. As they edged closer to the Kantian ceiling and away from the Hobbesian floor, Europeans were lulled in the illusion that they had collectively transcended self-inflicted disaster.

Fast forward to 2016 and the doom besetting our European continent, a continent torn apart by a tsunami of crises, ranging from the Eurozone's multiple debt wounds to the tragic moral tale of refugees dying across borders, a project of union from which a greater number than ever want out, whose open-society values are mocked from within by leaders who prefer to look up to Putin than to Mandela, and all this against the backdrop of terror in our cities inflicted by our own children, kids from the suburbs who, in another universe, could have been the friends of their lifeless victims. Many now say that the question is no longer "more or less Europe" but "Europe still"? Will Europe be reborn like the phoenix or crash like Icarus for daring to fly too close to the sun?

There are countless ways of asking, or not asking, or even mocking these questions. Indeed there are countless European stories, ways of thinking through what Europe does for me and what I should do for Europe, ways of dreaming or rejecting Europe, endowing it with all sorts of goods and evils, all sorts of pasts, pedigrees and prejudices. No doubt the book in which I write these pages offers an equally attractive European narrative. Our task is not to find one best story but simply to amplify the echoes between European stories in the firm knowledge that it is their tapestry of contrasting textures and colours which will continue to constitute the European project for decades to come.[1]

For my part, I focus on one story – the story of the echoes of what happened in Lamalou-les-Bains 70 years ago, a moment

pregnant with the promise of reconciliation, for there and then, empathy had become contagious against all odds. I ask what to make of the fact that the rest of the world sees us as a "European civilization" without empathy, turning its back on its credo, forgetting the lessons it had so painfully learned.[2] And in doing so, I attempt to sketch a realist EUtopia, that of a Community of "others", peoples who while holding on to their differences somehow manage to recover and nurture that original spark and translate their simply human empathic instincts into a sustainable form of institutionalised togetherness.

I do so under three labels: Promise, Trial and Hope. The promise has lived in many minds over the centuries. One version of it can be called post-Holocaust humanism, and can be inspired *inter alia* as this book is by Isaiah Berlin's musings captured in his November 1959 speech to the Fondation Européenne de la Culture in Vienna, *European Unity and its Vissicitudes,* grounded in Europe's history, pathologies and aspirations.[3] And it can be found in a missing albeit implicit ingredient of his philosophy, namely the role of empathy, recognition and solidarity in the cooperative promise. We must however, reckon with the fact that neither in Europe nor elsewhere can we rely on the better angels of our nature to translate the empathic impulse into lasting peace nor can we rely on institutions to compensate for our empathic deficits. Today's European Union may be on trial precisely because it cannot sustain the institutions that were meant to foster it. Finally, then, our hope rests with the politics of empathy and the related praxis of recognition and solidarity. Perhaps paradoxically, one of the most solid grounds to entrench such a praxis will be found in all the forms of art and education which encourage flights of imagination and thus help us inhabit each other's worlds.

I.   Promise: Isaiah Berlin's Humanist Tradition

Like Stanley Hoffmann, Isaiah Berlin spent most of his life trying to understand the follies of his century and their historical roots

in order to extract fragments of wisdom from the still smothering fire of history. He made one of Kant's dicta his own – that "out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made" – in the firm belief that trying to fit humanity into any kind of straitjacket is bound to fail.[4] Never mind that this was not really what Kant meant, referring as he did not to human beings in general but to the fallibility of individuals who pretend to incarnate the sovereign.[5] Never mind that Kant did believe that the collective destiny of humanity, working through the deficiencies of its individual members and the progressive force of competition, reveals what he called "the hidden plan of nature to bring into existence an internally and externally perfected political constitution". Why else offer posterity a blueprint for Eternal Peace?

If Isaiah Berlin, in contrast, passionately rejected any perfectionist utopia, this does not mean that he gave up on the belief in an ideal, one that could still be possible in a post-Holocaust world.

In this spirit, if we may still dare today to speak of an EUtopia, it is precisely in this non- teleological sense, to refer to a posture-driving action, a belief in a Union as we would want others to see it and whose never fulfilled promise we would like to remain faithful to.[6] In such a EUtopia, it is the manner in which we trace our course which matters, guided by an ever receding horizon and our normative compass. It is because this EUtopia was born from *aporia* – impossible situations from which there seems no way out – that Europe is a political existentialism justified by the doing rather than the being, whose existence as a project must always take precedence over some essence of "Europeanness", where experience must trump ideology, and experiment bypass grand designs. There is an answer to *aporia.* In the words of the French philosopher Sarah Kofman, "to say that a *poros* is a way to be found across an expanse of liquid is to stress that a *poros* is never traced in advance, that it can always be obliterated, that it must always be traced anew, in unprecedented fashion".[7]

Can we read Isaiah Berlin's European narrative in this spirit? In particular his reading of European history as a dialectic between the craving for public order and for individual liberty, a history where resources lay vibrant to sustain the tilt towards the kind of liberty which we must still thrive for, crooked timber of humanity that we may be.[8] The search for these resources takes the historian of ideas back to our forefathers' simple enlightenment belief that "although there existed obvious differences between individuals, cultures and nations, the similarities between them were more extensive and important, above all the faculty called reason". Upon this foundation lay the possibility for social life through human attempts to communicate and "try to persuade each other of the truth of what they believe".

Henceforth, with the enlightenment, we were able to move beyond the fundamental assumption by which men lived for more than 2,000 years, "that all questions have their answers, and that there exists a perfect pattern of life, compounded of all the true answers to all the agonising questions". We came to understand that tragedy in this world is born from the incompatibility of equally justified human actions, and that heretics, dissidents and minorities of all hues did deserve at least to be seen as dying for their own truth, for there was no such thing as one truth. And this, while hierarchy and subjugation between peoples increasingly came to be exported from an intra-European scene to the global in the imperial frenzy of the 19th century. In this regard, Great Britain's schizophrenia may have been the most egregious.

Isaiah Berlin's dilemma however takes us back to the relationship between France and Germany as he agonises about the road taken when 200 years ago, the liberal enlightenment intuition underwent its romantic transmutation. We must try to take in what happened to this powerful story of rising individuation and tolerance, when by the early 19th century romantic humanism took over and with it the idea that the noblest task for a man has become "to fight for his own inner ideals which cannot be tested as true or false but simply as goals whose design do not pre-exist

anyone else's thought of them". Yes, here was the long shadow of the call for liberty, the assertion of Protestant renaissance against the old order dominated by the French and King Louis XIV whose arc of resistance stretched from the Holy Roman Emperor to Spain, Sweden, Saxony and Bavaria. Germany's counter-attack against the French, the praise of variety, the wild and the spirit may have elevated art and literature to an exalting pinnacle. But, alas, the tidal wave of feelings "rose above its banks and overflowed into the neighbouring provinces of politics and social life with literally devastating effects".

From this, Isaiah Berlin expresses a general warning against "great imaginative analogies from one sphere, where a particular principle is applicable and valid, to other provinces, where its effect may be exciting and transforming but where its consequences may be fallacious in theory and ruinous in practice". By inspiring leaders of men and nations, the chaotic rebellion of the romantic artist on the hill, the heroic free creator haranguing the universe, somehow can be connected to the sinister descent into totalitarianism and nationalism of the 20th century. As Heinrich Heine warned the French already in the 1830s, "one fine day their German neighbours, fired by a terrible combination of absolutist metaphysics, historical memories and resentments, fanaticism and savage strength and fury, would fall upon them, and would destroy the great monuments of Western civilisation".[9]

If Napoleon had been the first great romantic political demiurge making his creation the transformation of the world, the creation of states and the bending of wills, it is in Germany that totalitarian destruction would find its most inspired agents. In Isaiah Berlin's history, the romantic worship of art as inviolable and absolute led in the end to the extreme of nationalism and Fascism where all limits were trespassed, even the assumption from a prior age of inter-religious hatred that the other should be converted rather than liquidated.

Yet, it would be simplistic to see the last 150 years as solely the scene of conflict between the older universal ideal founded

on reason and the new romantic idea founded on self-assertion where the former finally and thankfully returned with the advent of our technocratic Union, a small island at the end of history in a Hobbesian world. If we believe in the irrevocable plurality of *European Stories*, Isaiah Berlin's story is not that straightforward. We must be relieved that "the conception of man inherited from the romantics remains in us to this day", that political pluralism can successfully tame the exaltation of singularities ushered in by the 19th-century romantic declaration that man is independent and free. It is this spirit of "indestructible regard for what a man himself believes to be true" that led countless human beings to give up their life in the resistance to Nazism, to rise in the name of ideals that might have been universal or local, collective or personal, but ultimately ideals that did not belong to some grand overarching truth but to each one's inner calling, romantic as that may sound. There cannot be a single path to history, *notwithstanding* Marx or Hegel "metaphysical intimidation". But there may be a different kind of a "cunning of history", a cunning which recovers the force of multiplicity, diversity, pluralism, tolerance, and creativity from the clutches of its nationalist perversions. Ultimately both ideals, the many and the one are but abstract poles between which we seek the flourishing of individual human beings.

With Isaiah Berlin, we may now hope to ground our *living together* in the idea that the essence of man is the power of choice and the history of mankind the play in which all men improvise their parts, searching for a *poros* in a vast expanse of liquid, knowing full well that every choice sacrifices a path not taken. And we can now finally live together with the complementary idea that the improvisation is not random, for the essence of humanhood is also what keeps the great majority from acting outside the bounds of decency for "we know of no court, no authority, which could, by means of some recognised process, allow men to bear false witness, or torture freely, or slaughter fellow men for pleasure".

How do we bring this story to bear on Europe's current predicament? We could repeat like others that in the EU today, the forces of selfish retrenchment and fragmentation, parochialism, and indeed nationalism, have again gained the upper hand over the forces of reason and unity of mankind. But we know that such a story is too black-and-white. And we should know in fact that living together in this overcrowded continent of ours requires more than an abstract yearning for unity that after all has inspired the most destructive of aspiring pan-European sovereigns, the all too crooked Napoleons, Bismarks, Stalins, and Hitlers.

Instead, we need to continue down the road sketched by Berlin, and see the promise of Europe's unity in diversity as predicated on the most universal of human traits, a trait at least as powerful as the will to power and the yearning for freedom, that is the trait of empathy or the ability and even the desire to imagine oneself, as separate as one may be, in the skin of another. If much of international political thought, including Isaiah Berlin's, is about drawing the line between the universal and the particular, empathy rather than competition stands at the interface. It explains how the common moral foundation of our conduct or "universal ethical laws" *a la* Berlin can coexist with realms "where we actively expect wide differences – customs, conventions, manners, taste, etiquette". Empathy connects the many without merging them into one.

Empathy of course is not *per se* a European story. But we can ask ourselves how this universal trait has been brought into play in the project of European integration and when and how it has failed us. And in the process, we can venture that the world of art and politics could still be linked in ways more profitable for humanity than the unfortunate echoes of German romanticism in the 20th century.

Empathy has of late become a buzzword in both public media and scientific discourse and is increasingly studied in social, political, and cultural contexts.[9] We have come to understand that it is because early humans developed the capacity to internalise

their mutual goals so well that they were able to coordinate complex activities leading to leaps in evolution unattainable by other species. Without this capacity scientists tell us, our brain volume would not have grown along with our capacity for cooperation. While in sympathy, pity or compassion we remain apart, in empathy we enter the world of others, not just our family or friends or community, but others who have no relation to us, aliens who are not like us but whose reality we recognise and act upon. And it is not enough to put oneself in the other's shoes, what is equally essential to complete the cycle of empathy is a "return to self", a self transformed by that projection and yet still capable of acting from its own standpoint, its own goals amended but not dissolved in the encounter with the other.

In the global village where the range of our mediated vicarious experiences has grown exponentially, we have not automatically become global citizens or digital nomads, but we have become neighbours of sorts. Which is why the likes of Sen, Nussbaum or Rifkin call for all of us to become "empathetic actors".[11]

To be sure, applying insights from our understanding of human development and face-to-face relations to organisations or entire complex systems like the EU is not a straightforward story.[12] We need to consider how empathy applies to groups, crowds or even more abstractly "publics". In doing so, the related concept of recognition can be considered not only as a form of empathy writ large, but the expression of empathy in action, since from empathy to recognition we move from inhabiting other individuals' personal experiences, to considering what is universal about them, from "taking in" a uniquely particular viewpoint to acknowledging each other's more abstract social identity, and we move from asymmetric to fundamentally reciprocal relations. Some would argue that what is at stake in recognition is not simply empowering, but literally constituting the other, while others would counter that this is attributing too much power to recognition as opposed to self-understanding.[13] Nevertheless, the part we each play in the larger worlds we

inhabit, as citizens for instance, can only exist in its recognition by others. Yet, recognition may even express the opposite of empathy, that is, the necessity that we establish a distance in order to live with our differences.

In a similar vein, empathy is closely linked yet not equal to solidarity which is also a *hybrid* concept, used to describe both an observable *empirical* behaviour amongst people, an affect, and the normative grounds on which there *ought* to be such behaviour.[14] In this distinction also lies a cogent *critique* of relying on empathy for social change for this overlooks the structural barriers to social change and the normative need to pursue justice irrespective of affect. But the kind of empathy we are concerned with here is not simply *affective* but also *cognitive*, a capacity for perspective taking grounded on reason as much as passion.[15] But of course, that empathy "cracks open the door of moral concern" does not mean that it suffice in the toolkit that motivates justice – we need and rights and laws wedge that door wide open which in turn requires a collective purpose.[16]

Analysing the effect of social boundaries, including national boundaries on dynamics of empathy, recognition and solidarity is a complex task, beyond the scope of this essay. But we can say in general that the purpose of institutions as fields of empathy and recognition is to make an affect and an idea real. Institutions can enter, reflect, magnify or deflect struggles for recognition which may use the human capacity for empathy but also take account of the limits of such capacity.

We can see the EU project as seeking to channel the empathetic instinct across borders through democratic political, legal and economic institutions. It may seem like a stretch to ground such complex institutional structures on empathy, which is after all an individual human affect. Yet, if there are so many of us on this small cramped space at the tip of the Asian continent we have no choice but to reinvent the code of empathy across borders. How then do we aggregate empathy in the European Union?

## II.	Trial: The Elusiveness of Empathic Transnationalism

European integration seems to have little to do to with empathy. It has been about fulfilling functional needs, accommodating differences in interests and power through political narratives often disguised as clashes over ideas. But let us entertain the notion that empathy has been both its secret weapon and its Achilles heel.

We can start with the observation that the European Union was built by bringing together nation states, which at their best can be thought of as clusters of "organised empathy", the training schools of empathy for neighbours-as-strangers. The bet: that the perversions of nationalism and racialism were indeed that – perversions, and that the version of the national consciousness which had also been the well of resistance during the war was still worth rescuing. The European Union was constructed as an anti-hegemonic not anti-national project. Three hundred years after Westphalia, while the idea of Union in Europe could prevail as an alternative to the closure of sovereignty, it was to remain complementary to the idea of European nations.

To the extent that these peoples do not merge into one single European people, this is a Union of others.[17] Others, not in the sense of perfect strangers, or the essentialist understanding of other ethnic nationals (although, alas, this remained and remains a widely shared perception of what other nationals are within Europe). Others rather as simply the recognition that different political communities forge their own "overlapping consensus" through their own political ways and languages, their own political bargaining mode, their own notions of what the role of the state should be etc. The challenge for the EU has been to build an overlapping consensus of existing overlapping consensus, rather than a single overarching political order. Such a focus on horizontality best helps us understand European institutions as they are, as well as the dangers faced by the EU when its leaders forget this foundational truth.

Arguably, the edifice that was being built could only work properly if the peoples of Europe were to adopt a posture of radical openness to each other's realities. This is what I call the idea (or ideal) of European demoicracy, the idea that the EU is best conceived as connecting separate but interdependent sovereign peoples, "a Union of peoples who govern together but not as one".

This necessity of radical intermingling is best expressed by the term Union as opposed to Unity (although I suspect this is also what Isaiah Berlin means when he contrasts Unity with Uniformity: "indeed we do not look on variety as being itself disruptive of our basic unity: it is uniformity that we consider to be the product of a lack of imagination, or of philistinism, an in extreme cases a form of slavery"). Whether we refer to it as unity or uniformity, the message remains the same, that is, that there is nothing grand or ideal or beautiful in the merger of the many into one, the Europe of "one size fits all". "The worst of all sins," says Berlin, "is to degrade or humiliate human beings for the sake of some Procrustean pattern into which they are to be forced against their wills, a pattern that has some objective authority irrespective of human aspirations."

This is not an easy proposition and one that alas the EU has only approximated very imperfectly over the years. To some extent, the kind of intense and continuous negotiating mode in which European elites have been engaged requires a certain degree of empathy, if only to better identify potential "trades" over issues that are relatively more crucial to the other side than to mine, and vice versa. Political negotiations in Europe cannot be grounded on such continuous compromise building bolstered by consensus, without a modicum of empathy between national negotiators as to the hierarchy of their preferences.

But with the increased sensitivity and visibility of the issues dealt at European level, this logic has run against that of democratic interdependence: decisions need to be vetted by the peoples of Europe and these vetting processes are not amenable to the same bargaining dynamics. If addressing issues of burden

sharing when the burdens are large (whether in financial or human form) requires the active involvement of Europe's respective "publics", we can no longer ignore the need to play out the dynamics of empathy, recognition and solidarity among the peoples of Europe and not only their leaders and lawmakers.

We could argue that the EU's legal order is both made possible by and conducive to a kind of legalised empathy across borders, predicated as it is on turning the laws of individual states into other-regarding laws, under the principle of mutual recognition. The boundaries of mutual recognition are drawn by relational calculations involving a complex mix of trust and expediency: if one side observes that the other side's laws are not good enough, it will not arrest someone and extradite her there. Although, EU institutions sometimes pretend otherwise, other-regarding law in the EU calls not for blind trust but binding trust – trust that must be merited including in the eyes of publics.

The refugee regime is *par excellence* a global institutionalisation of empathy. But what we have learned from the current so-called refugee crisis in Europe is that this regime rests on the capacity of European states to deal with the way in which each state is dealing with its own bit of the problem, its own bit of the responsibility owed to strangers fleeing death in their own country. And in doing so a kind of hierarchy of empathy is instituted, with empathy for the most vulnerable from without (refugees) vying for the kind of empathy dictated by the ties that bind neighbours within (European citizens). In making this nexus between internal and external "institutions of empathy" highly visible, the crisis has revealed the limits encountered by Europe's heroic attempt at institutionalising empathy. The spectacle of refugees hurdled behind Europe's fences does not seem to speak to those sitting around the EU decision table. In the great game of politics, individual impulses seem lost in translation, disregarded as a piece of inconvenient DNA. Do European leaders reflect popular sentiment? Following their lead, we turn a blind eye, shroud ourselves in indifference, don't want to know, hear or see. But against this cynical appraisal,

witness the splendid *elan* across Germany and witness crisis-stricken old pensioners in Greece sharing their loaf of bread with a refugee. And witness Germany's support for Greece's plight, now that its plight is about helping others rather than itself.

We are left with three observations that may be at the root of our current disillusionment and may point to what may be the way forward.

First, *Europe's legal and constitutional order is but the thin superstructure of institutionalised empathy.* The history of law has long demonstrated that law cannot be sustained if it is not in phase with social change. Of course, judges have allowed themselves sometimes to supersede politics. But that only happens when the social terrain is ripe. As for politicians, they have failed to realise that given the EU's involvement with increasingly sensitive policy domains, their intergovernmental bargains and implementing law need to be embedded in bargains between societies. An elite-driven EU may have been a necessary sin in the first few decades, but the EU must now operate under the full force of democratic anchoring. And while the cracks started to open with early debates about the Euro, Polish plumbers, and benefit tourism, they have become schisms with the management of the Euro- and Schengenland. Structural reform in Eurozone countries or refugee resettlement across Schengen cannot happen without the engagement of citizens. The EU must now become a genuine demoicracy, that is, a polity which involves relations between "peoples" rather than simply states or their official representatives, relations underpinned by the various ways in which the peoples accept and practice their interdependency, including the way they open their own house under the ultimate Kantian requirement of hospitality.

Second, transnationalism in Europe has moved from the grounds of sympathy to empathy, *from a focus on transnational basic transfers to a focus on the need to change one's own politics when it produces dramatic externalities.* In this context, it can be

counterproductive to speak of compulsion and coercion. In the EU, like in any modern marriage, nothing is irreversible. We are together by choice if we are a federal Union, not a federal state like the United States. One can be against both Grexit and Brexit and yet argue for a Europe where both are possible. Short of this nuclear option, as the issue has become increasingly sensitive, *integration through law* must be supplemented by each country's increased capacity to internalise through its parliament, fiscal councils or civil society organisations the consideration of the impact of its action on other countries, peoples, communities. And in turn, radical openness within the EU space can prepare its peoples for the ways in which they manage openness on their external frontiers.

Third, *altering one's own life, or at least one's political stance, on empathic grounds is strongly conditioned on perceptions of fairness*. Publics may be generous to each other, but not if it is taken for granted or if burdens are not shared at all.

III.   Hope: Cultivating Empathy through the Art of Translation

What are the requirements and tensions associated with the quest for a politics of empathy in the EU today? Can empathy be cultivated, and moulded to fit our collective ambitions? How can we better achieve what Ulrich Preuss calls the necessary cognitive and moral learning for democratic institutions – starting with the presumption that peoples, cultures, language groups do not have the right to be ignorant of each other?[18] This is a vast agenda for which I can only offer a few fragments here.

Poetic Empathy

The European Union may not have started with culture, as in the regret expressed by the apocryphal Monnet quote, but education and culture is probably where we must start if we are to explore

the sources and resources of empathic demoicracy. What better way to overcome mutual ignorance than to cultivate the flights of imagination made possible by reading poetry and novels from other countries and languages, the guided tours of the mind of others, the romantic thrill of hearing another mind in a foreign accent, stories of strangers whom we can inhabit for a while and might inhabit us for the rest of our lives. Much of the creative literary process after all relies on what the great English Romantic poet John Keats saw as the ability to negate oneself, which he called *negative capability,* explaining to his friend Woodhouse: "A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity, he is continually in for – and filling – some other body."[19] Or, as Hazlitt, Keat's mentor, remarked on Shakespeare "(he) throws his imagination out of himself". Schools are at their best when they tell our kids stories of the "sympathetic imagination" as it used to be called and inspire them on their own journey of translation between self and other.

In fact, isn't translation the generic name for universality?[20] Schools throughout Europe could do well to make compulsory the reading of several novels a year translated from another European language. An adolescent who reads Larsson's *Millennium*, Ferrante's *Brilliant Friend*, or Mulisch's *Discovery of Heaven* may be more in tune with Swedish, Italian or Dutch sensitivities than a political scientist who knows every twist of their political system. It may even be the case that English can only play its role as Europe's *lingua franca* if its generalised use is conditioned on universal access to Europe's singular voices (warranting for instance a radical increase in EU support for literary translation).[21] If they are to play their part, so-called "European schools" need to stop isolating language sections in their silos and start being about their intermingling. And Erasmus students may surely learn a lot about other countries in pubs and cafés but how about also asking them to write their own little novels, novellas or blogs as instantaneous translations between their home and host institutions?

Intrusive Empathy

Amidst pronouncements of retrenchment within the safe havens of our parochial identities, something else has happened in Europe in these crisis years which may give us hope. Never before have Europeans known so much about each other's politics, each other's hang-ups, flaws, and insecurities. To be sure, this increased mutual awareness has often been put to bad use, simply feeding prejudices and attacks. But it is nevertheless what is needed if we are to avert EU drift towards blind interventionism within national democratic dynamics. If we consider for instance that in a world of uncertainty, the EU is a vast insurance project and that making good on that promise requires a combination of rule obedience and solidarity, intrusive intervention might only be justified if filtered through empathic lenses. Consider for instance that a disproportionate share of the cost of adjustment from the Greek debt saga has fallen on the poor and created a whole new class of *nouveaux pauvres* in the country. It seems that many officials in European capitals among the creditors fail to be concerned about the distributive impact of their requirements, as if the country could be considered a black box in social terms. Would it not be preferable for them to worry about these differential impacts? And for their publics to lead the way? Calls for justice across borders must recognise the tension, the aporia between democratic autonomy, which requires less interventionism, and just intervention which means peaking inside the black box of other countries. And for European peoples to accept, or better wish, to open their democratic choices to each other in this way, we will need more transnational politics where cleavages emerge across countries and not only between them, among those for instance who across borders are most exposed to collective risks and less to opportunities. Uniting across borders is an old but fragile process which does not happen in a vacuum.

Theatres of Empathy

Youth activism can be the first school of empathy. In fact, it is often a live *theatre of empathy*. Take the "I am" movement: *Je suis Charlie*, or perhaps better: *Je suis Ahmet*. It has a long historical shadow: "We are all Palestinians" and all "children of the Holocaust" at the same time. Just as in the spring of 1968 we were all "German Jews" with Dany Cohn Bendit (including six-year old me!), and later all "Jan Palach" setting himself on fire in Prague's Wenceslas Square. But what did we mean then? And what do we mean now? For sure, that we commit, deeply and truly to the victims of violence and oppression everywhere. But are we asking any kind of political authority to do something about their oppression? Are we organising to intervene ourselves as civil society? Or do we prefer to stay on the side of contestation?

In our epoch, it seems that it is no longer enough to simply "unite" in "solidarity" with our brothers and sisters as in the good old days of international unions and parties. Today's moving force is to *be* the other, to feel her pain, inhabit her suffering. The web connects the "je suis" everywhere and them with that which they claim to be. But how many of those who "are" *Charlie* get the jokes in its pages and share the last laugh? And does it matter? What kind of conversation are they ready to engage in with those who shout back: *Je ne suis pas Charlie?*[22] Or what does it mean for activists to enact a "die-in" during the Gaza bombardment or for Ai Weiwei to re-enact the drowned infant Alan Kurdi on a Lesbos beach? While such acts may constitute a step beyond solidarity in the scale of other-regarding-ness, the theatre of empathy may become a regression when disconnected with a sense of responsibility for the ultimate outcome which this empathy implicitly calls for: do not confiscate my dignity, do not maim me, do not kill me. And should we not prefer calls for a solidarity which is not predicated on pretending to be equal but on acknowledging our inequality and privilege (as white, middle class, young, men, …). This is not about you.[23] Empathetic actors can turn rebels into victims and rob them of

their own voice with the good intention of lending theirs. Why do I need to imagine that it could be me in order to act, when the real problem is that people like me will never *know* what it means to be on the other side? Should my appeal for justice be grounded on affect, an affect presumably demanded from those who are supposed to deliver the goods, or should it be grounded in struggle and *rapport de force?* The theatre of empathy too often ignores question marks.

Mimetic Empathy

Helping the helpless may be the most basic universal value, but empathy for the plight of refugees seeking to cross European boundaries has exhibited many different hues. In Britain for instance, the vision of scores of Germans lifting "Welcome" placards in a football stadium did more to trigger empathy than countless pictures of refugees in life boats on our TV screens. Somehow, here as elsewhere empathy is not only contagious but has taken on mimetic qualities. Publics empathise all the more with refugees when their neighbours do, as if some sort of vindication was needed. Is this wisdom of the crowds? Statesmen are supposed to know that theirs is the burden of putting burdens on everyone else. Never was Angela Merkel more of a statesman than when she did. But it would be wrong to believe that what is urgently needed is democratically virtually impossible to do. In fact, polls show that a majority of European citizens are in favour of taking in significant numbers of refugees in their own countries, especially if other countries do the same. Empathy does not trump demands for fairness. But conversely, taking in refugees is preferred over the closing off of borders as long as there is to be a "fair" allocation of refugees – of course the meaning of fairness is hotly contested although per capita measures can be a pretty good start as argued by the European Commission. This demonstrates how misplaced can be our politicians' fear of "the blind fear of their electorate". Perhaps they might start believing in the empathetic intelligence of their citizens who do not in

their great majority subscribe to the pronouncements of Marine Le Pen or Jarosław Kaczyński against "bacterial immigration", threatening the import of "protozoa and parasites". The countless cities and towns around Europe organising refuge testify to that effect.

Virtual Empathy

Is life on social media and the continuous navigation among virtual worlds which defines the new generations changing the parameters of empathy in our transnational community? In a world of Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter our children learn to inhabit seamlessly many parallel lives at once, learn to recognise the many cues that facilitate empathy, juggle with the multiple lives of others, and enter them in a heartbeat. But they also tend to interact with like-minded groups to the detriment of those who might really require empathy rather than simple connection. We have only started to explore the huge potential of e-democracy and how these virtual networks might be expanded into shared political lives full of new modes of virtual exposure and radical transparency as well as ubiquitous resistance to injustice. Europe *must* be part of this adventure.

Conclusion

We should certainly fear the technocratisation, banalisation and marginalisation of empathy bred by the complexity of today's globalisation. If empathy is about staying oneself while entering the other's mind and dreams, it is ultimately a call to action. A call for action by Europeans in the world ought to be based in part on our capacity to understand the perceptions that others have of the EU, including their perception of the EU as a post-colonial power. But more fundamentally, a global empathetic actor must find ways of empowering actors for change elsewhere by co-inhabiting their worlds if and when they will let us.

In our own neck of the woods, we Europe must rediscover and cultivate empathy for those left behind – left behind by the dignified Greek old man who killed himself not to be a burden for his family, left behind by the lifeless corpses at the bottom of the Mediterranean, left behind by all those who died in greater numbers in Paris' Bataclan because they did not want to leave their mates behind.

We are also those left behind. So let us not forget these young German occupants in the village of Lamalou-Les-Bains whose despair echoing through the hills of the *maquis* protected them and ultimately won the European peace. It is in their name, and in the name of all those who fought in the past for a cause other than themselves, that we should continue to build, painstakingly, step by step, the institutions of empathy in a community of others.

Notes

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6. Kalypso Nicolaïdis and Robert Howse, 'This is my EUtopia: Narrative as Power', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Special Anniversary issue, (40)4 (2002), pp. 767-92.
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11.   Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

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18.   Claus Offfe and Ulrich Preuß, *Citizens in Europe: Essays on Democracy, Constitutionalism and European Integration* (ECPR Press, 2016).

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22.   Kalypso Nicolaïdis, 'Charlie Hebdo numero 1178: All is forgiven?', openDemocracy.net, 28 January 2015.

23.   Mathijs van de Sande, 'Don't confuse solidarity with empathy', *Doorbraak.eu* 23 February 2015.