

European Memory and Identity during the refugee crisis¹

Carolina Rebollo Díaz

Social Studies and Social Intervention Research Centre (ESEIS), University of Huelva, Spain

E-mail: carolina.rebollo@dstso.uhu.es

1. Introduction²

Identity and collective memory are central themes in the context of the European Union (EU) and its common project (Prutsch, 2015). The construction of the Europeanist narrative through the reworking of the past, based on values such as solidarity, inclusion, and cooperation between member states, has been a fundamental pillar in the formation of a shared European identity. However, the migration crisis that reached its peak in 2015 posed significant challenges to these foundations because of the responses that European institutions and governments put in place.

This refugee crisis has been one of the largest displacements of people in Europe in recent decades. Millions of people fled war and violence, mainly in Syria, in search of safety and protection in European countries (ACNUR, 2015). During this period, the media broadcast daily images of refugees trying to reach Europe, encountering closed borders, or losing their lives at perilous sea crossings. The shocking images of children dying on the shores went viral (Mielczarek, 2020) and became a symbol of the 'shipwreck of Europe' (de Lucas, 2015). The European values that made the continent a place of freedom and fraternity and represent part of the European identity seemed to be challenged by the lukewarm response of institutions to the management of the crisis. This was not simply a social, coexistence or migration management problem, but also a political one that fuelled the sentiment of extreme right-wing sectors, who felt legitimised to show an openly hostile and dehumanising attitude towards the migrant population. Despite significant advances in diversity, equality and human rights, there was concern that the threat of the rise of extremist populist parties would translate again into an intolerant, xenophobic and racist Europe.

This crisis also generated a wide range of reactions on social media, including Twitter, which became a key platform for public debate and discussion on the issue (Ferra & Nguyen, 2017; Kreis, 2017; Öztürk & Ayvaz, 2018). Discourses on Twitter reflected the diversity of opinions and attitudes towards the refugee crisis, ranging from messages of solidarity and support to expressions of fear, xenophobia and rejection (Rebollo Díaz, 2021). Recently, the war between Ukraine and Russia generated another movement of displaced people in Europe. The armed conflict in Ukraine has led thousands of people to seek refuge in neighbouring European countries. As in the previous scenario, Twitter has been a space to express opinions about the Ukrainian conflict (Chen & Ferrara, 2023; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2022).

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² This chapter is part of a broader research project based on the author's doctoral thesis "Tweeting about refugees: a comparison of discourses, imaginaries and social representations" defended at the University of Huelva in 2021. This research analysed more than 1.8 million tweets in six different languages about refugees in the period from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016.

In this chapter, we discuss collective memory and the construction of European identity and how these have been appealed to in discourses centred on solidarity and empathy towards refugees in the context of the migration crisis; we will reflect on the identity conflicts that are manifested as a result of a European political response to the migration crisis that does not seem to fit with the process of community building based on values such as equality, diversity or inclusion. Finally, we will reflect on the memory of this recent crisis in the new humanitarian situation resulting from the war between Ukraine and Russia. To do so, we will use as an example some of the most important public discourses and mobilisations that have emerged on Twitter, mainly from social activism. The study of discourses on Twitter offers a unique insight into how identity and collective memory are reviewed nowadays in the context of the refugee crises in Europe.

2. Building identity through collective memory

Narratives and memories of the past play a fundamental role in the construction of personal, group, ethnic and national identity. Collective memory provides an interpretative framework that shapes how individuals perceive themselves in relation to their community. Maurice Halbwachs, a pioneer in dealing specifically with collective memory, argued that memory is influenced by the social group to which one belongs. Individuals remember and reconstruct the past based on their social relations and the social and cultural structures in which they are immersed (Colacrai, 2010). That is, personal memories are always shaped by 'social frames', as people adapt what they remember to the social contexts in which they conduct and imagine their lives. Halbwachs linked collective memory to group unity and self-understanding (Toth, 2017).

Pierre Nora, another prominent French sociologist and historian, has also made significant contributions to the study of collective memory. According to Nora, memory refers to the way individuals and groups interpret and make sense of their past through shared memories and symbolic representations. In this sense, Nora (1989) introduced the concept of "lieux de mémoire" which are physical spaces, cultural practices, or symbols that embody and preserve a society's collective memory. These places and symbolic practices are essential for constructing cultural identity and transmitting shared history and values, as they link the identity narrative with an emotional component and provide a shared set of symbols, myths, rituals, and traditions (Vollmeyer, 2021). These elements contribute to forging a shared identity and establishing a sense of belonging to a wider community or group.

German theorists Jan and Aleida Assmann have also provided important insights into the study of collective memory from a cultural perspective. They have demonstrated the relationship between memory and culture and the link between cultural memory, collective identity construction and political legitimation (Erll et al., 2017). According to the Assmanns, cultural memory refers to the collective memory of a society or group, transmitted through cultural practices such as writing, literature, art, religion, and other cultural media. This memory is constructed through processes of communication and cultural reproduction, and plays a fundamental role in the formation of individual and collective identity (Vollmeyer, 2021). Identity is therefore closely linked to collective memory, as shared narratives and symbols of the past influence how individuals see themselves and how they relate to others. Collective memory provides an interpretative framework and a sense of historical continuity, creating a sense of belonging and connection to a wider group.

These approaches indicate that memory and identity are closely linked. Identity must be constructed and reconstructed through acts of memory, remembering who one has been, and connecting that past self with the present self. Therefore, we can understand memory in relation to identity as a process that enables perception and the possibility of constructing a cultural

identity in a movement from the present to the past (Netto & Oliveira, 2010). According to Pollack (2006), memory is a constituent element of the feeling of identity, both individual and collective, insofar as it is also a very important component of the feeling of continuity and coherence of a person or group in the reconstruction of itself. However, memory is not neutral but is influenced by power relations, asymmetries, and hierarchies in the evaluation of mnemonic content, giving preference to certain visions of the past or even suppressing others (Vollmeyer, 2021). The past is not given but is continuously constructed and reconstructed. Thus, different views on the past may exist within the same society, which may influence the construction of multiple identities.

The collective memory of people and communities preserves their history and cultural identity. By documenting and analysing the narratives, traditions, rituals, and myths passed down from generation to generation, the unique cultural aspects of a group can be preserved and valued. Thus, one way to delve deeper into memory and identity is to study conflicts, traumatic events, or historical highlights in the life of a community, and how the interpretation of the community's collective memory in relation to these events relates to elements of identity (i.e., Bastidas & Pérez, 2020; Huertas Diaz et al., 2023). From the perspective of nation-states, memory has legitimised their construction by underpinning contemporary nationalism and using myths of origin, shared language, folklore, common values, in a narrative imagined, assumed, promoted, and defended by the state (Villa Gómez & Barrera Machado, 2017) that grants identity to members of the nation. The case of supranational states is more problematic. The divergent national identities and historical experiences of different member states may make it difficult to form a unified collective memory. Member states may have distinct histories, cultures, and narratives that may not be easily reconciled in a single collective memory. This is the case in Europe, where challenges have arisen in forming collective memory and constructing a unified identity.

3. Memory of the past and the construction of European identity

Europe has been the scene of numerous historical events that have left a lasting imprint on the continent's collective memory. After the horrors of the World Wars and the Holocaust, a narrative began in Europe centred on the process of peacebuilding and reconciliation (Rosoux, 2017), as well as the defence of democratic rights (Rigney, 2012) enshrined in the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights. This narrative presented its challenges and difficulties. On the one hand, because the history between states has been full of wars, and victors and vanquished people could have opposing perceptions of the past. On the other hand, there is an impossibility of transposing one or more national memories on a European scale (Prutsch, 2015).

Later, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the expansion of the EU in 2004, the Holocaust narrative lost its centrality as Europe's master narrative. New narratives have focused on the Stalinist dictatorship as a new spotlight of memory (Prutsch, 2015), presenting Europe as the ideal of democracy, economic progress, and social modernity (Moreno Juste, 2013). Integrating new and old member states into a narrative about a common past presented complications again. However, this new European scenario strengthened European integration with the capacity for reconciliation and the ability to deal with divisive and problematic pasts to achieve a better future (Assman, 2006). Due to past experiences of war, totalitarianism, and also colonialism, Europe has built a series of values by revisiting the past that can be extrapolated transnationally and can become the foundation of European collective memory (Martínez Berzal, 2020). The content of this collective memory would be based on the idea of safeguarding peace and democracy, democratic values, and universal rights.

The construction of a European narrative has coincided with efforts to build or reinforce European identity (Fadeeva, 2022; Toth, 2017). This identity would provide legitimacy to the European political system, the European Union and the integration process, as well as build citizens' confidence and motivation and increase their participation in the political project (Martínez Berzal, 2020). However, the question of European identity is complex and has been debated in both sociopolitical and academic terms. It is not our intention in this space to delve into all these debates, but we do intend to take a closer look at some positions on how to understand European identity.

3.2 Different Approaches to the European Identity

One way of approaching European identity relates to elements that make up the continent's cultural heritage based on European civilisation, common roots, and shared historical achievements. Europe has a rich cultural and artistic heritage that has been passed down through the generations. This includes literature, music, painting, architecture, philosophy, and other artistic and cultural manifestations that influenced the formation of European identity. Europe also has a shared heritage that includes historical sites, monuments, traditions, folklore, and customs, which are integral to the continent's collective memory. Significant historical periods, such as the Industrial Revolution or the Enlightenment, have also had an important impact on European imagination. According to the most recent Eurobarometer, Europeans believe that history and culture are two of the most community-building elements among EU citizens (European Commission, 2023). However, many of these cultural elements are difficult to extrapolate across the continent. While cultural and artistic heritage may be an important element in the construction of European identity, it is necessary to consider other factors and recognise the diversity within the continent to fully understand this shared identity. As for common history, this can also be understood in terms of interactions, influences, and cultural contact between different European regions over the centuries. The exchange of ideas, migratory movements, trade, and cultural diffusion have generated a web of connections that has contributed to the formation of a constantly evolving European identity.

Another way of approaching European identity is in relation to those who are considered non-European, that is, the idea that individual or group identity is formed in contrast to or in relation to others. According to these positions, European identity could be linked to primary identity markers defined as European: whiteness, Christian origin, European culture as synonymous with civilisation, as opposed to other markers that would correspond to a non-European 'other': non-white, non-Christian, barbarian, etc. (Ammaturo, 2019; Pettersson, 2019; Rebollo Díaz, 2021). A primordialist view of identity as unique and innate, transmitted from generation to generation (Wang, 2018) and based on ethnocultural and/or religious traits. This is undoubtedly the most dangerous stance that Europe can face in the construction of its identity as the perception of this difference leads to the exclusion, discrimination, or marginalisation of those who are considered the "others". This is one of the identarian visions invoked by xenophobic positions when discussing migrant populations. A very clear example is the case of Muslim migrants, where it is common to find in the most discriminatory positions their representation as the opposite of Western civilisation, clearly linking civilisation per se with the West or, more specifically, Europe versus the Middle East. This nationalism is often conceived as pan-European in the sense that all European nations share the same "problem with foreign intruders" (Määttä et al., 2021).

By contrast, assimilating the enormous diversity that characterises today's European societies through inclusion and equity is another way of approaching European identity. Undoubtedly, one

of the most prominent features of today's European societies is the enormous diversity and richness of their cultures and multiculturalism. Precisely because of this, the defining feature of European identity is its diversity. Bearing in mind that one of the greatest difficulties in talking about European identity is that Europe is not homogeneous, identity must emerge from a political-legal system rather than from ethno-racial issues (de Lucas, 2006). An identity more oriented towards civic aspects associates it with European citizenship, democracy, rights, and constitutional norms, rather than with nationhood and cultural traditions (Leith et al., 2019). A sense of belonging through the rule of law, based on democracy, human rights, and social responsibility. Multicultural societies, such as those in Europe, need to be equipped with a shared identity based on the principles of inclusion and equity to avoid any risk of rejection, oppression, or xenophobia. Knowledge of human rights, social responsibilities, the common axiological framework, and an understanding of how the rule of law, based on democracy, are elements that every European citizen should know, and together with other elements of a symbolic nature (anthems, flags, laws, buildings, etc.), can facilitate and support a sense of belonging (García Blanco & Diestro Fernández, 2013). The fact that Europeans share a legal status that emanates from the Member States' own nationality can help them feel more identified (Martínez Berzal, 2020), as it is a complementary and not a substitute citizenship.

The European Union has worked to preserve and promote this latter conception of a European identity based on common values. Since the Union's founding texts, the idea of safeguarding peace and democracy has always been present. According to the Declaration on European Identity (European Union, 1973), Europe's identity was to be based on a common heritage and the principles of representative democracy, the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights (Aker, 2019). The EU has also developed policies and programmes aimed at promoting European citizenship; mobility between member countries; cooperation in areas such as the economy, the environment, and security; and the promotion of an inclusive and diverse European identity. The same preamble of the Nice Charter speaks of diversity as a positive, valuable fact: "The peoples of Europe [...] have chosen to share a peaceful future based on common values [...] The Union contributes to the preservation and promotion of these common values while respecting the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe as well as the national identities of the Member States [...]". Equal treatment and non-discrimination have also been present in the European Union and have been fundamental in the process of European integration. This is demonstrated by the large number of regulations that have been approved by different bodies of the European Union from the founding treaties to the present day (Grande, 2017). To a large extent, this work on democratic and human rights comes from the European past. Today, its investment in human rights is more precise because it has violated them in the past. In this context, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 for contributing to peace, reconciliation, democracy, and human rights in Europe.

It should be noted that the sense of identity in the European population has several nuances. National identification remains more prevalent and emotionally charged than European identification (Díez Medrano, 2019). A longitudinal analysis of the Eurobarometer from 2012 to 2019 concludes with the growth of a hybrid form of identity composed first of national identity and second of European identity (Bešlić, 2019). This may support the possibility of having a European identity alongside one's national identity: one might feel an attachment to both one's nation and Europe, just as regional identities coexist with national identities in much of Europe (Dalton, 2021). On the other hand, in terms of the content of that identity, Europeans believe that common values are one of the elements that create the most community among EU citizens

(European Commission, 2023). Similarly, the more satisfied individuals are with democracy in their countries and the more positive they are about the idea of freedom of movement to work and live, the more they recognise themselves as Europeans and their nationalities. Another interesting aspect is the value that best represents the EU. According to Eurobarometer 2021 and 2022-2023, these are peace, democracy, and human rights (European Commission, 2022, 2023).

4. Questioning European identity during the refugee crisis

Around 2013, the global situation of people seeking refuge worsened markedly and reached unprecedented numbers. The civil war in Syria and civil strife and violence in other countries marked the beginning of a large-scale refugee crisis that intensified in the following years, particularly from 2015 onwards. In response, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) declared that Europe was facing "one of the largest waves of refugees in decades" and stressed that it was "a refugee crisis, not just a migration phenomenon" (ACNUR, 2015). In the European Union, different voices failed to agree on a unified position, mainly because of the significant differences and complex relations between the 'old' and 'new' member states (Havlová & Tamchynová, 2016). The situation of border closures in Balkan countries highlighted the difficulty of achieving a common and coordinated approach. In Eastern Europe, each country adopted its own approach, considering its national interests.

The lack of coordination and largely individualistic response to the migration crisis have been severely criticized. Media and social media amplified daily shocking images of refugees trying to reach Europe only to be met with closed borders or perish on perilous sea journeys. Photographs of children dying on the shores went viral (Mielczarek, 2020) and became symbols of the 'failure of Europe' (de Lucas, 2015). European values that were once considered fundamental to European identity now seemed to be called into question by institutions' lukewarm response to crisis management. This was not simply a social, coexistence or migration management problem, but also a political problem, as it fuelled the sentiment of sectors of the far right that felt legitimised to display an open and explicitly hostile and dehumanising attitude towards the migrant population. After having achieved important advances in terms of diversity, equality and human rights, it was worrying that the threat of the rise of extremist populist parties would translate into a return to Europe's intolerant, xenophobic and racist past.

In this context, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), activists, and other actors mobilised and expressed their discontent through social media, where support and awareness-raising campaigns, fundraising, denunciation actions, etc. were carried out, many of them appealing directly or indirectly to what European identity meant. Twitter has been a key platform for these conversations and mobilisations, as it has been in other crises, such as the recent COVID-19 crisis (Ceccagno & Thunø, 2023; Eslen-Ziya & Pehlivanli, 2022). The quick and easy distribution of information and the live coverage of events by users are the main reasons for the platform's dominant role in public communication processes, especially regarding crises and breaking situations on a potentially transnational and global scale.

Four key themes related to European identity and memory were addressed on Twitter during the migration crisis: 1) questioning of values and legal obligations; 2) the idea of Fortress Europe; 3) feelings of shame and alienation from European identity; and 4) mentions of the past in relation to Europe's present and future.

4.1 Questioning of values and legal obligations

Some authors argue that with the arrival of refugees, Europe became an inhospitable place that violated the rights of migrants and asylum seekers (de Lucas, 2015; Espuche & Imbert, 2016), renouncing its universal principles and establishing political barriers to asylum (Alpes et al., 2017). On Twitter, it was common to refer to the migration crisis as a humanitarian one, stemming from the European Union's 'anti-human rights' policies, which left refugees unprotected in the face of a lack of shelter, border closures, and violence.

These messages, both online and offline, materialised in the European March for Refugee Rights on February 27, 2016, driven by social media at the height of the migration crisis. This march aimed to demand safe routes for refugees trying to enter Europe, as well as to raise awareness of the drama they were carrying, as opposed to the xenophobic attitudes that had emerged in some European countries. Using hashtags such as #27FPasajeSeguro or #SafePassage, thousands of groups, organisations and citizens joined in and interacted with other users, spreading the word about mobilisations, and expressing their discontent with the management of the humanitarian crisis, as well as expressing their desire for a more dignified and fairer treatment of refugees. On Twitter, 'Safe Passage' became closely associated with refugee and human rights. It was presented as an alternative to death, risks, illegality and mafias, a humanitarian and just policy that could end the dangerous paths taken by refugees due to border closures.

Establishing safe transit routes also meant curbing the agreement signed by the EU with Turkey. This agreement substituted for the creation of safe routes at the expense of undermining refugees' asylum rights. This was called "inhumane" and "illegal". The first adjective focuses on solidarity. The signing of the agreement turned Europe into a community lacking solidarity, abandoning refugees without offering them refuge, and exchanging them with Turkey as if they were commodities. "Refugees are not merchandise" was a slogan widely used in numerous tweets to denounce the economic background of the agreement. The idea of protecting the principles of dignity and humanity by saying "no" to the deal was also spread. In terms of legal arguments, the denunciation of the violation of human rights and the illegality of deportations were prominent. These mobilisations resulted in a lack of confidence in the human rights path that had been built up in the EU and that had been part of the socio-politically constructed identity over the last century. Thus, the EU ceased to be in part a positive referent and became a symbol of a systemic crisis affecting the process of European construction (Limón López & Fernández de Mosteyrin, 2016).

These are some representative examples of this topic on Twitter³:

- *Today we demand #SafePassage at the European March for the Rights of #Refugees. A #Europe without #HumanRights what is it? <https://t.co/RGaBDtOAZW>*
- *Are we European Union to turn our backs on refugees? Do we unite to burden #HR? NOT IN MY NAME. #STOPAgreement*
- *And we leave the fate of these refugees in the hands of an unsafe and untrustworthy country. and we give in and pay them. where are you.... Europe? #UEmata*

Source: Refugee Dataset (Rebollo Díaz, 2021)

4.2 Fortress Europe

'Fortress Europe' is a concept used to describe the EU's restrictive and securitised migration policy. It refers to the idea that the EU has taken measures to strengthen its borders and control

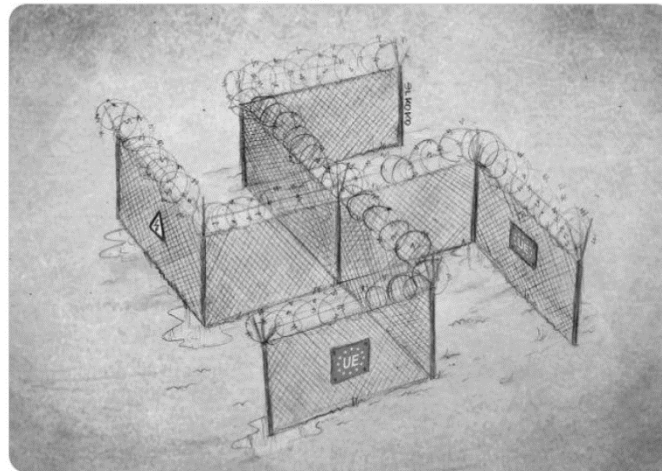
³ All tweets have been translated into English from their original language.

migration, often focusing on security and the protection of its own interests rather than prioritising the protection of the rights of migrants and refugees. This term implies that the EU has established stricter physical and legal barriers to limit the access of migrants and refugees to their territory. These measures include building fences and walls, strengthening border controls, outsourcing migration management to neighbouring countries, and implementing stricter return and deportation policies (Treviño Rangel, 2016). 'Fortress Europe' can also imply a critique of the EU's alleged lack of solidarity and humanity in migration management, arguing that security and control interests are prioritised over the rights and protection of people seeking refuge or a better life in Europe (Espuche & Imbert, 2016; Limón López & Fernández de Mosteyrin, 2016).

On Twitter, it was found a denomination of Europe as unsupportive, complicit in the deaths, indifferent to the drama, and cowardly in the framework of Fortress Europe. #Europefortaleza, #fortresseurope, #festungeuropa or #EuropeForteresse accompany messages in all languages that reproach it for its passivity in taking decisions on the safe passage of refugees. #FortressEurope is an example of how the fight against irregular immigration has been favoured over the reception policy. In this sense, there is a certain incoherence between what was explained in the EU in humanitarian and human rights terms, and what was managed in practice through the police and border control apparatus (Kuus, 2011). While on the one hand, the process of EU integration and the values upheld by the EU are referred to, on the other, controls are reinforced.

Figure 1. Tweet about Fortress Europe

No queremos la #EuropaFortaleza de las vallas y concertinas, queremos la #EuropaDeLosPueblos de las solidaridad!



1:39 p. m. · 30 abr. 2016

Source: Twitter.

4.3 Feelings of shame and identity distancing from Europe

Tragic deaths and disappearances, especially of refugee children, sparked highly emotional responses that added to the demands for the protection of minors. The *Plataforma de la Infancia*, in Spain, called for the implementation of a European protection plan for unaccompanied or separated children (Ayuda en Acción, 2016). The international press also played an important role in focusing on the tragedy of children (Dimitrova et al., 2018; Fotopoulos & Kaimaklioti, 2016).

On Twitter, refugee rights activist movements launched campaigns to denounce this situation. In Spain, it is interesting to note the active role played by the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid

[Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado] (CEAR) and its campaigns *UErfanos* and *UEmata*. The former denounced the daily deaths of children whose asylum rights were being "repudiated". This campaign was joined by thousands of users who conveyed in their messages not only indignation but also a great sense of shame at what the EU was doing. The second campaign, equally highly emotional, claimed that the EU was killing refugees because of its deal with Turkey. Europe was called an "executioner", even committing "genocide". Feelings of shame and a rejection of identity also arose when it was claimed that the EU "does not represent us".

At the heart of this conflict is the contradiction between the identity construction based on rights and values that the EU has built and that many Europeans had embraced, and the lukewarm response of European institutions. The deaths of minors took place in Europe or under what should be its protection, a Europe that is not only a political community but also part of the identity of those who denounce the violation of human rights of refugees. These deaths on "their" territory make them guilty and complicit and cause them shame. On many occasions, these denunciations have been accompanied by hashtags such as #notinmyname or #chebergogna [what a same], signalling feelings of shame for belonging to a political community that has "lost its humanity" and even a distancing from identity as Europeans (#notinmyname).

Some examples are the following:

- *Every time we see refugees sleeping on European soil in the cold mud **we feel the same shame.** #You too would run away #StopDeal.*
- ***I am ashamed of this EU.** Less than 20 #refugees received in Spain. Let them starve and freeze to death #Uemata.*
- *They come. We kick them out. And meanwhile already more than 200 children dead. **This is not my Europe.** #refugees*
- *Refugees from Syria including children who risk their lives to get here deserve to be helped not discriminated against #notinmyname*
- *#PasajeSeguro In this country of islands we are all refugees. **No regrets or remorse for not feeling European.***
- *How can we call them refugees if we don't give them refuge? **Shame on Europe** #StopAgreement #NotInMyName <https://t.co/ODapybhtvi>*

Source: Refugee Dataset (Rebollo, 2021)

4.4 European past and future history

Finally, it has been denounced on Twitter that the EU was breaking an international protection system created after the Second World War, basically to prevent the recurrence of homelessness situations, such as those that occurred during the armed conflict and the years that followed. Mention is also made of the West's responsibility in this situation by discussing past debts or responsibility for the wars and clashes that triggered the migration crisis. Arguments such as "they need us" or it is "our responsibility" have been mixed with appeals to sign manifestos or donate.

Sometimes guilt is exposed through moral, even karmic, judgements that in the future, we may be punished for the events of the present. "History will remember" is a very emotional argument that has been repeated in tweets about the refugee crisis, in which the author alludes to the morality of the audience for events that are referred to as "illegal", "inhumane", "the end of humanity", "the dead European dream" or even in a more divine or spiritual sense "our soul for sale".

Figure 2. Tweet about the European past



Source: Twitter.

The drama has also been presented through testimonies of refugees collected by social organisations or through comparisons between this crisis and that experienced by European refugees in the context of the Second World War, bringing the memory of the past to the present.

These are some examples:

- *#EU kills by forgetting its own history and that of millions of European #refugees around the world.*
- *RT @camposcar: 78 years ago Catalan refugee families and children rescued in the Mediterranean by the US ship HMS Dehli. **Our turn***
- *In one week, dozens died. Aylan was to be the last. **History will not forget him.***
- *"We will be judged on this & what will we answer? BBC News - Government avoids defeat over lone child refugees call.*
- *@therealbanksy reinforces her fight for #refugees <https://t.co/TFvVTRL88A> I will always say it, #refugeeswelcome, **Don't repeat the past.***

Source: Refugee Dataset (Rebollo, 2021)

5. Ukrainian Refugee Reception in Europe

The 2015 migration situation in many countries reached a critical point. Human Rights Watch referred to the verbal and physical abuse of refugees by Macedonian police, especially at the Gazi Baba detention centre on the Macedonian-Greek border, with arbitrary arrests and other forms of harassment (Human Rights Watch, 2015). At the Roszke refugee camp in Hungary, the police threw food with gloves and masks separated by fences. This was not the only shameful situation. As if it were a prison, refugees had to be accompanied by a law enforcement officer to the bathroom, were verbally abused, and were confined in spaces divided by barbed wires that served as cages (Rodríguez, 2015). Faced with the EU's refugee relocation and distribution policy, states led by Hungary and the so-called Visegrad Group questioned the EU's unified policy and its national refugee quotas (Bojadžijev, 2018) and refused to accept any refugees.

The scenario with the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in different European countries has changed radically. Disagreements between Eastern and Western Europe no longer exist. The borders

between Ukraine and its EU neighbours (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania) have been opened to allow Ukrainian refugees to flee the war. European citizens are now massively in favour of welcoming Ukrainian refugees (European Commission, 2023). In no European country has there been protests against such reception, not even by xenophobic parties. Ukrainians who have left their country have found the doors of EU border states open. Moreover, they have met with multiple citizen initiatives, both in these border states and in the rest of the EU, aimed at picking up refugees at the borders, transferring them, and welcoming them (González Enríquez, 2022).

Several factors explain why those fleeing Ukraine are treated differently from those seeking refuge in Europe. One of the main reasons is the solidarity and identification that Europe feels with the Ukrainian cause in its fight against the Russian invasion. Europe is once again facing a distressing situation in the 21st century, only comparable to the events of the Second World War, due to Vladimir Putin's determination to invade Ukraine (García Ortiz, 2022). Thus, the EU's unified stance towards Russia has provided a stage for European political leaders to publicly call for the reaffirmation of democracy and European values that have been part of the identity built around Europe in the face of an 'autocratic' external enemy (Jourová, 2023; La Información, 2022).

However, it has also been pointed out that racism and Islamophobia may be at the root of this disparity, especially when focusing on Eastern European countries. These are the most reluctant countries in the European Union to receive refugees from Asia and Africa and are particularly opposed to Muslim immigration (Pickel & Öztürk, 2018). Unlike Western European countries, which have a greater tradition of welcoming people who speak different languages, practice different religions, or have more marked phenotypic differences, Eastern Europe has maintained greater cultural homogeneity over time. The evident disparity in the treatment of the Ukrainian population compared with those from other regions of the world has generated understandable concerns that have also been expressed on social media. Many of these resentments denounce racism in the face of sympathy for refugees who are 'white', 'blonde', 'Christian' or even "civilised". In this sense, Europe faces the danger of adopting primordialist positions in which identity is defined in ethno-religious terms, which may lead to the differential treatment of those who do not fit this pattern.

Here there are some examples:

- *To make it clear, the BBC and the European media remind us: there are wars on top of wars, and one in Ukraine is worse than one in Iraq. Moreover, **the lives of "blonde, blue-eyed" people are worth more, and those refugees deserve asylum, not Africans. Racism 2022***
- *Seeing Spanish right-wing and extreme right-wing leaders giving absolute support to refugees from Ukraine and Russia as well as schooling to minors (what less) surprises me, very much. I didn't know that for them there are **first and second-class refugees**. It smacks of racism.*
- *Ukraine "is not Iraq or Afghanistan", it is "relatively civilised and almost European", CBS journalist. "They are not refugees from Syria (...) **they are Christians, they are white**", NBC journalist explaining why Poland opens its borders. What many think, unfiltered.*
- *Once they totally refused to receive refugees from their wars in Libya, Iraq or Afghanistan "**they are Arabs**" they said in panic; today the just and civilised European Union has announced it is ready to receive all necessary refugees from Ukraine.*

6. Conclusions

The close relationship between memory and identity is reflected in how narratives of memory influence identity construction. However, challenges arise in the formation of unified collective memory in supranational states such as Europe. In the aftermath of historical events such as the Holocaust and world wars, Europe has worked to build a process of reconciliation and peace, establish legal frameworks around democratic and human rights, and have sought to create a common memory and a European identity based on these values. The task is not easy because there are different understandings of Europe as well as different histories and national identities that may contradict each other.

In addition, the migration crisis has challenged this human rights-based construction. On the one hand, European citizens expressed in social media a deep sense of frustration and indignation in the response of European institutions to the reception and distribution of refugees, reflecting in their messages anti-European positions from social activism and a lack of confidence in the progress of human rights that have been built up. Thus, the European Union found itself severely questioned and at the risk of no longer being considered a positive reference. On the other hand, the "Fortress Europe", which was more concerned with political and economic protection than with the promotion of peace and human rights, was denounced. Feelings of shame and of not being represented by one's own supranational community ultimately affect the legitimacy of building a common European project.

As Díez Medrano (2019) argues, perceptions of European identity depend on the prevailing economic climate, reducing identification with Europe in times of economic crisis and increasing it in normal economic circumstances. The refugee crisis has been another example of how, in times of crisis, European identity can falter. In this case, it was not only an economic challenge but also a political and social one. This lack of consistency makes us think of European identity as a political and economic construct imposed by the institutions of the European Union, which does not necessarily reflect a shared cultural or social identity among member states.

Recently, during the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, the EU showed a completely different response than it did during the 2015 migration crisis. This has generated comments on social media that show a certain discomfort in understanding that Europe's solidarity response towards Ukrainians is due to the perception that they are physically and culturally like an imaginary white and Christian Europe. Certainly, such views raise serious questions about what kind of identity is being constructed and transmitted. European identity should not be based on a specific ethnicity or primordialist approach but rather on a process of choice that requires consensus around a set of values. The Holocaust, as a negative point of reference, generated a narrative that identifies Europe as a defender of democratic values. Europe is, therefore, at a moment where it must demonstrate that the authoritarian, anti-democratic, and xenophobic regimes of the past that have shaped what has been constructed as Europe's identity are behind it and that the fights are for peace and democracy.

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