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## Rethinking the Question of Otherness and Democracy in European Philosophy

### Abstract

In this paper the author questions how European philosophy from the Greeks to Modernity and postmodernity encountered the problem of Otherness as the problem of the stranger. Moreover, otherness and alterity were for the most part understood as opposed and threatening to the European "selfhood". In the second part of the article the author addresses the theory of Costas Douzinas, both its originality and shortcomings as a response to the issue of rethinking new cosmopolitanism. In conclusion, democracy, pluralism and identity are analysed in the light of ongoing debates surrounding the dilemma and accomplishments of the multicultural approach. The author argues that alternative cosmopolitanism includes not only critical but normative theory as well.

Key words: Otherness, stranger, democracy, Europe, philosophy, pluralism, identity.

### European Thinking Between Cryptoschmittianism and Emanuel Levinas

The motive of "the stranger in Europe", the Other of and in Europe, appears as the live image of ambivalence of both European philosophy in its history, and of political and social practices of exclusion and inclusion of otherness. Although it is commonplace to remember ancient democracy of the polis, what is sometimes forgotten is that for the Greeks the "strangers" were barbarians (and this extended as far as to the difference between *polites* vs. *idiotes*). The stranger, precisely as "the other", was excluded from the polis and to a great extent from the community itself, which meant that strangers were perceived as inferior to Athenian citizens, and as such incapable of ruling. Moreover, strangers as foreigners were conceived as born to serve native Athenians, existentially and politically marking the limits of ancient democracy and its "democratic polis", along with women and slaves who also constituted the category of "otherness" in the form of political and social exclusion. The concept of „otherness“, therefore, in terms of history and philosophy, emerged in the (created) distance between the "self" and "the other", as this very distance, and as difference between "ipseity" and "alterity".

In a way, this Greek attitude exemplified the birth of the “master-slave” relation as the proper “description” of the western philosophical understanding of otherness - the motif of “the stranger in Europe” became the leading trace in Modernity. In the Hegelian “master-slave” dialectic, “the stranger in Europe” is revealed throughout Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* (2007). For example, Hegel’s writing on the Slavs (and the same goes for Africans and more or less for all “non-Europeans”), as of „strangers“ here reaches the point of describing them even as non-historical, as „people without history“ (unlike those from Western Europe), and this attitude further continues in Marx’s and even more Engels’ writings. The moment that Hegel saw Europe as “a spiritual synthesis of Christianity and Germanic culture” (Delanty 1995) is something that had an impact and contributed to an understanding of the concept of “Europeanness” that as such excludes many cultures, nations and people.

This is why the motif of “the stranger in Europe” reveals the idea of otherness as both constitutive and exclusive in the sense in which it is totally different from “the other” that (European) “selfhood” and “identity” is maintained and preserved. Certainly, to a great degree, this relation of non-relation, establishing of difference as the key category for comprehending otherness, the cryptoschmittian attitude of the decisive positioning of “us” vs. “them” and “friend” vs. “enemy” - brought what is often termed as “Eurocentrism” and “Eurocentric discourse”.

Drawing on this line of continuity of “Eurocentrism” in greatest European philosophical thinking, some 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers, and particularly Emmanuel Levinas (and later Jacques Derrida), articulated a “revolution” within it - and precisely in relation to understanding of “the Other” (Levinas 1980). On the examples of Husserl, Hegel and Heidegger, Levinas argues that what these philosophers did not take into account is “the otherness of the Other”, let alone that they were not able to face “otherness as otherness”. For Levinas, the “Other” is a stranger as well, but that is exactly the reason why at the ontological level “the Other” cannot be ever equalized with and in “the Same”. What European philosophies, Levinas argues, of Husserl, Hegel and Heidegger, each in his own way, articulated, is the reduction of “the Other” to “the Same”, of alterity to ipseity, and in last consequence to *solus ipse* as the outcome of such thinking.

In the theory of Michel Foucault, in his later works such as *The Birth of Biopolitics*, as part of articulating biopolitics, Foucault writes that it includes “the idea that the foreigners have infiltrated” (Foucault 2004), and in that sense, he also refers to wars. While tracing in genealogical and critical way how Western societies of control were transformed into societies of regulation, Foucault discloses how biopolitics manifests itself as governing over entire populations. One of the most eminent contemporary philosophers Alain Badiou has recently argued that even the European Constitution, in its latest version, contains “anti-barbaric references” and precisely in relation to migration processes as something that Europe needs to protect itself from, a moment whose potentiality we are witnessing today, and not yet to the fullest.

The example of Levinas's (and then Foucault's and Badiou's) thinking shows a different paradigm of European thinking. Moreover, this is to say that European philosophy discloses two tendencies and in that way inner ambivalences and ambiguities within itself: (1) the split between the "self" and "the other" as between "us" and "them", a cryphtosmittian attitude that in its best points to intellectual, political and moral (and other kinds of) superiority of "the Europeans", i.e. to inferiority of "strangers". This split, implicitly or explicitly, can unfortunately be seen throughout the Western philosophy tradition and it always assumes an "absolutistic position", and in worst case, it ends with the "friend-enemy" distinction. (2) The second tendency reveals European thinking as, broadly speaking, "democratic thinking", as thinking of multiplicity and alterity, of otherness and pluralism. In a sense, this means shedding light on hegemonistic tendencies on the one hand - and this also goes back to the philosophical tradition of Modernity of thinking knowledge as power - and on tendencies that pursue recognition of otherness qua otherness. In order for this event of recognition to take place, what must be reached upon is specific ontological and political position of the stranger - that the "otherness" of the stranger remains irreducible and incomprehensible precisely in the sense in which "the Other" cannot be or become the subject of knowledge or rather incorporated into a previously existing partial paradigm of certain knowledge. Levinasian and Derridian "hospitality" here becomes an example of relation of the "self" towards "the Other" in which the other is not violently and abruptly identified with "the Same" and where the foreigner remains, in a sense, "forever foreign". This is, therefore, the other potentiality of European thinking, and as such is simultaneously constitutive for the idea of Europe as founded on multiplicity, and perhaps democracy as well.

### **Costas Douzinas and Some Thoughts on Contemporary Thinking of Otherness**

In recent contemporary debates on otherness, through a creative and yet philosophically strict analysis of Hegelian dialectic of recognition, accompanied by Freudian and Lacanian "psychoanalytic intervention", Costas Douzinas relocates the recognition of the "otherness of the other" towards the context of "the desire for the other". Moreover, Douzinas (2007: 102-117) intensifies his conclusions through a famous cry that belongs to Arthur Rimbaud - "Je est un autre!" What is at stake in this call is a specific ontology, politics and ethics of radical thinking of (radical) otherness that reaches as far as to say that my own existence is at stake in and through otherness? Rethinking the alternative to overwhelming apathy and consensus of "Western societies", both their theory and politics, as the alternative to formal recognition of the hybrid condition of majority of theories and practices, Douzinas builds a radical theory of otherness.

What occurs within postmodern metaphysics of Western societies, Costas Douzinas argues, is a major change on the existential level conceptualized in terms

such as “following one’s happiness” and especially “self-realization” which “enable every wish of any individual or group to be transformed into a political request and eventually to legal right (Ibidem: 137).” Why is this so significant? Such approach is at the same time a critique of postmodernism, pragmatism and formalism, aiming to disclose different forms of self-proclaimed “cosmopolitanism” and shedding light on its relation with the Western “empire” which often represents the negation of otherness. It reveals the ipseity hidden behind the scenes of the presence of articulation, practices of “human rights” and absence of otherness. It wakes up from the ipseity hidden beneath the calls for either usefulness, legality or non-identity being the ultimate criteria for the existence of otherness in this world. In this sense Douzinas writes that “the cosmopolite right always begins as a critique of local injustice and often ends as ideology of empire” (Douzinas 2007). Moreover, this moment, for example, reveals that the issue of human rights is great for manipulation and instrumentalization, up to the point that it appears “as an ideological flag under which cultural wars and international political battles are pursued (Ibidem: 201).”

This brings us to the question of rethinking the following thought: “What is at stake in contemporary discourses on otherness? How does it relate to the sense of justice or, rather, is there a connection between Western discourses and politics of human rights and contemporary wars led in their name? How has Otherness been both used and abused, instrumentalized and misunderstood?” In a sense, it could indeed be argued that this condition is a continuation of previous modern “colonial” framework (in the new “imperial” setting), and that contemporary thinking and political practices in their own way either disregard the otherness of the Other or, more radically, attempt again to reduce it to the order of the Same.

Douzinas’s response rests in the alternative in which, in a philosophically poetic mode, “my being - always accompanied by the other - is in movement, for it creates itself in infinite number of specific worlds of other double beings (Douzinas 2007)”. Douzinas’s faith in this “ontology of cosmopolitanism that is arriving” is a faith and call for a different cosmopolitanism, one that “does not generate itself into imperial globalism” but rather remains faithful to the irreducibility of otherness. What is, however, less plausible in Douzinas is how one reaches such an ontological, political and ethical state of the world in naming this new cosmopolitanism as close to “antique cosmopolitanism” as he indeed writes? And moreover, what would it mean if such a cosmopolitanism was to become “a nomos on earth”? Leaving aside this non-plausibility of antic cosmopolitanism as a role model for a new cosmopolitanism of the new age, on the other hand, there is perhaps something more than a mere coincidence in the fact that Costas Douzinas deliberately calls his model “an arriving cosmopolitanism” in reference to Derrida’s “arriving democracy” (*democratie l’avenire*). For a marking trace of such Derridian democracy is that it never arrives. As a specific messianic expectation, such democracy - i.e. cosmopolitanism - exists in another form of temporality. By interpreting Jacques Derrida’s idea (and without refuting its utopian character) as the power of imagination itself, Douzinas remains

in a more imagined and dreamed than the real polis of desired otherness and cosmopolitanism and without reference to its irreplaceable proper “content”.

### Democracy, Pluralism and Identity

Does this mean to say that “another cosmopolitanism”, a different existential cosmopolitanism that would embrace otherness does not seem plausible and likely to arrive? Or, rather, is it not the case that such a conclusion would, as it were, in advance exclude what we have termed as the other potentiality of European (and non-European) thought? If such a potentiality, however, is to be articulated and understood in its fragility, it seems that it would, on the one hand, have to go beyond both formalism and pragmatism, and postmodernism and multiculturalism. Such an idea reveals the interrelatedness between the concepts of democracy, identity and otherness. Multiplicity and democracy exist where otherness exists, or otherwise we risk Otherness drowning in Sameness, and this in last implication leads to totalism and/or, worse, totalitarianism. On the other hand, the extraordinary challenge lies in recognizing that this does not mean to tear up the concept of identity. On the contrary, what such articulation requires is recognizing the co-originality between identity and openness, and between identity and otherness. The fact that “the Other is here when I am here”, and vice versa, is what is infinitely lost in the theories of hybrid identities. What is even worse, what can imminently be lost with it, are democracy and multiplicity, since both rely and come forth in and through the encounter between the “I” and “the Other”.

In other words, the triple relation between otherness, democracy and identity can be summed up by saying that identity is not identity of identity and difference (Hegelian motif) but rather the opposite, namely, constructed and historically shaped on non-identity of the conceptual pair “identity” and “difference”. Or - in terms of one of the oldest philosophical and political relations between “one” and “many” - it means that “many” carries the structural and historic primacy and, moreover, that it represents a concept tied with the idea of democracy. But, on the other hand, and importantly enough (in difference to postmodernism, for example), this does not mean that the category of identity should be abandoned, as something xenophobic per se, and that “non-identity” is the only proper name, since, on the contrary, such an approach rather leads to dissolution resulting in hybrid forms, where both the “I” and the “Other” escape to disappearance, or, more radically, to “non-existence”.

In contrast to this image, the suggested framework of the relation between identity and non-identity underlines the ethics that comes forth with it as well. Difference, many, multiplicity and otherness, or rather, the Other proper, represent the ethical request as implicit in their existential demand. This is to say - in response to the question of how this new theorization would look like in “metaphysical”, “political” and “ethical” way - that it has a lot to do with how “normalization” of politics would look like if democratic forms of identity/otherness were transformed and lived up

to in their multiplicity of particular existence. The example of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's recent claim that multiethnicity and multiculturalism in Germany have utterly failed (followed by polls that show, in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, that around one third of citizens consider their country to be "overrun by foreigners"), brings into light the ambivalences that surround otherness and recognition of the Other. Whose fault, therefore, is it in this story? Nobody's particular and yet everyone is "guilty", as in many other examples of the problem of the Other and otherness in contemporary events. On the one hand, a radicalized otherness (as it is the case with September 11, but no less with not so extreme examples, say, otherness manifested in either individual or collective total refusal or denial of language and culture of the state whose citizens they are), can take on multiple forms that essentially represent its very own denial. On the other hand, it is not rarely the case that otherness is not recognized as such - qua otherness - in its difference and own identity, for what was asked for was its assimilation into something, no one is sure exactly what, except that it has to do a lot with ghost-like "civil society". As Slavoj Žižek put it, "liberal multiculturalism masks an old barbarism with a human face". Moreover, this is to say, as Žižek continues, that the so-called tolerant liberal multiculturalism is an experience of the Other deprived of its Otherness (the "decaffeinated Other"). Žižek likewise radically concludes that in this attitude there is no decisive difference in respect to the seemingly opposed attitude of the "immigrant threat", which is to say, that it contains the same cryptoschmittian concept of "us" and "them", only in a concealed way - and that, in last implication, it was the global system that had generated all kinds of fundamentalism.

No doubt, therefore, that the story about otherness, especially in politics, is deeply related to the philosophy of power, political power, and sometimes violence. Selective recognition, double standards, lack of recognition of some "Others", aside from creating a new cryptoschmittian discord between "us" and "them", testifies about the inability of its recognition as universal principle of humanity - something that, on the contrary, true democratic identity does do. For if every otherness is, with no exception, recognized as the Other and in its uniqueness, together with the principle that the Other at the same time must recognize my identity, then what comes forth is democratic multiplicity. Moreover, what could be stated is that the very future of European identity lies in resolving this dilemma of searching for an approach toward otherness that does not represent say, a "negative coexistence" (the multicultural approach saying we happily live "side by side" and politely disregard the Other), but rather build itself on the normative that regards multiplicity as its own value, as a value in itself, precisely as democracy. What Europe has most recently witnessed, the failure of the liberal multicultural vision - and that is to say the failure of the idea that all we need is a neutral legal framework guaranteeing the coexistence of multiplicities - refers to the moment that without its normative content democracy arises, at best, as empty and blind, and in worst case, it leads to more than ignorance of the Other. Both political and ethical implications of this go very far.

What this, however, at the same time means that democracy, in Ranciere's terms, has a lot to do with equality (Ranciere 2007). It means that no stranger can be regarded or treated either as a "superior" or "inferior" other (who should be "enlightened" or that can be "used" for different political purposes), and that Western philosophy and knowledge cannot be identified with knowledge per se, but that it should rather, building on the idea that public use of reason is common to all and that knowledge is a common substance, open itself to a plurality of knowledge, coming from originary multiplicity of existences. This means that the concept of otherness (in terms of its recognition as otherness) testifies about the irreducible character of multiplicity, alterity, democracy and equality - and precisely as such has a lot to do with egalitarianism in a certain sense, social changes and sociality en generale. Rimbaud's "Je est un autre!", inscribed in every serious leftist contemporary thinking, simultaneously reveals the way in which alternative cosmopolitanism can be thought of along the lines of this responsibility of and for democracy as difference and equality, marking a space where the normative comes hand in hand with a critical approach and theory - and both are opposed to any type of exceptionalism.

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