

HOW EUROPE FORGOT ITSELF

A new book reveals how Europe has forgotten who it is, writes **Matthew Lesh**.



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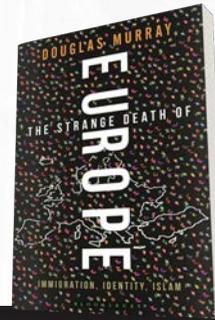
The world is coming into Europe at precisely the moment that Europe has lost sight of what it is,' Douglas Murray writes. 'And while the movement from other cultures into a strong and assertive culture might have worked, the movement of millions into a guilty, jaded and dying culture cannot.'

British commentator Douglas Murray's *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity and Islam* combines his writing talent with a clear argument supported by extensive research from recent

European travels. Murray's core message is that Europe has lost its mojo, its sense of self, its purpose and identity, while at the same time it is welcoming people from other cultures on a mass scale, but ultimately failing to integrate them.

Murray is sympathetic to the moral challenge faced by European leaders raised by the 2015 refugee crisis. It is natural to feel empathy for hundreds of thousands of desperate people knocking on your door. As German Chancellor Angela Merkel discovered, it is difficult to say 'no'. However, Murray believes Europe accepted mass-movement from a position of weakness, not strength.

Europe, beginning after World War I and particularly following World War II, lost faith in

**The Strange Death of Europe:
Immigration, Identity, Islam**By Douglas Murray
Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017, pp 352

religion, progress, and itself. After witnessing the worst of humanity, Europe has dismissed ideologies, the lessons of the Enlightenment, and reason as a guide for action. These grand notions seemed too





similar to the bad ideas that had wreaked havoc on mankind.

‘If being “European” is not about race – as we hope it is not – then it is even more imperative that it is about ‘values’. This is what makes the question “What are European values” so important,’ Murray says. The problem is that Europe, by dismissing Western foundations and concentrating on vague concepts such as ‘respect’, ‘tolerance’ and ‘diversity’, is a hollow shell.

Europe’s founding ideas and principles, Roman and Greek antiquity, the legacy of Christianity, and the Enlightenment, are being ignored at the West’s peril. In practice, the celebration of diversity has meant celebrating every culture other than the culture that established diversity in the first place.

In order to become multicultural, Europe has

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downplayed itself and ignored the reasons why people want to move there. Relativism has meant pulling Europe below other cultures.

Murray, despite being an atheist himself, is particularly concerned about the collapse of Christianity. Europe’s structure of rights, laws and institutions could not exist without the Christian base from which they developed. The secular focus on ‘human rights’ derives from moral equality in God’s eyes, a concept developed by Christian

thinkers in the Middle Ages. As atheist theologian Don Cupitt put it, ‘the modern Western secular world is *itself* a Christian creation.’

Murray contrasts European self-doubt and guilt with the lack of self-criticism of other cultures. Uniquely, the West blames itself today for past misdeeds and the world’s problems. But one of the best features of the West, self-criticism, is undermining. ‘Only modern Europeans are happy to be self-loathing in an international marketplace of sadists,’ Murray notes.

It is important to acknowledge both the good and bad in history. ‘A country that believes it has never done any wrong is a country that could do wrong at any time,’ Murray discerns. He continues:

But a country that believes it has only done wrong, or done such a terrible, unalleviated



■ German Chancellor Angela Merkel. | AAP image

amount of wrong in the past, is likely to become a country that is inclined to doubt its ability to do good in the future.

There are lessons in this for Australia. In some senses, Australia is better placed than Europe. We have a history of integrating different cultures, and do not face hundreds of thousands of people on the doorstep. Australia welcomes high-skilled immigrants beneficial to the economy, and vetted refugees. In the face of boat arrivals, and hundreds dying at sea, Australia cut off the people smugglers' market. It seems that Europe is now following the Australian model, returning those who arrive by boat to Turkey.

Nevertheless, Australia's ideological challenge is just as deep as Europe's. Australia is weighing itself down with historic guilt. As the IPA's *Foundations of Western*

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Civilization Program has diagnosed, schools are failing to teach young people about the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the industrial and scientific revolutions, and the development of liberal democracy.

Murray, discussing the historic 'strain of Europe', highlights the Australian case. 'Whereas for contemporary Europeans colonialism is just one of our middle-rankings midway sins, for Australians colonialism has become the nation's founding, original sin', Murray states. School children are taught, no matter Australia's achievements, the nation can never recover from its founding premise: genocide and theft. Australia is in 'a state of perpetual remorse', apologising for the actions of white European historic figures, to which the vast majority of contemporary Australians have no relation.

Murray observes that Australia's self-criticism is damaging the country's international reputation, which has changed 'from a generally sunny and optimistic place to one that has become palpably darker, not to mention mawkish about its past.' Australia's apologising for the past and historic hyperbola sends a mistaken signal to international observers and school children that Australia has a uniquely bad history.

This risks undermining Australia's successful immigrant society. As Murray discusses, successful integration requires a uniting vision of society which people feel they want to belong

and protect. Bassam Tibi, a Syrian immigrant to Germany in 1962, described this as a *leitkultur* or 'core culture'. Within the confines of this core culture people should be free to live their lives how they please, however they must accept its premises to be a member of that society.

Australia should be proud to be a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-race society. Each new arrival, both as an individual and the group they are part, have bought something to Australia's culture. However, underlying Australia's success is a core culture, a national identity informed by the country's Western heritage which includes respect for the rule of law, democracy, and the individual.

People have come to Australia from across the globe because they want to live in a society built on these foundations. A mixture of self-doubt and dismissal of these foundations, however, threatens the ability to integrate future arrivals and Australia's future.

In order to impart the culture of a free society onto new arrivals and the next generation, Australia must be comfortable with itself and its history. This means, in practice, acknowledging both the darker elements of the past *and* the country's extraordinary success and progress. The recent controversy surrounding historic statues, however, indicates that many have a one-dimensional negative view of Australian culture and history.

The Strange Death of Europe is a warning bell for Australia. Perhaps hyperbolically, Murray believes Europe, having failed to integrate new arrivals and lost its core values, will no longer be recognisably European in the not too distant future. If Australia holds the same sense of self-undermining guilt, will we face the same fate? 