

Narrating Europe: (Re)Thinking Europe and its Many Pasts*

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In an essay that was part of a string of works aimed at unravelling the meaning of 'Europe', J.G.A. Pocock emphasised the indeterminacy of its identity as a constituent element of any discourse about Europe. Its resistance and resilience against all attempts to fix its boundaries and to define its past would be the main component of Europe's (self)representations. Viewed from such an angle, European identity might be, at best, the recognition of a plurality of different cultural values and social and political practices that cannot be subsumed under a unifying and unified narrative. If anything, Pocock suggested, it is the history of such an indeterminacy, so often overlooked or ignored, that ought to be told.¹ Similar doubts are shared by many others. As Richard Evans has recalled, A.J.P. Taylor once went as far as to assert that 'European history is whatever the historian wants it to be'. It was, as he saw it, but a chaotic collection of ideas and events taking place in or tightly connected to 'the area we call Europe'. However, he also had to admit that he was not sure what such an area was and that, therefore, he was 'pretty well in a haze about the rest!'² According to Evans, Taylor might have been right – though he then added, importantly, that what historians wanted constantly changed.³ But Evans's remark hints at the crux of the matter. In fact, it questions the interests of historians, their duties, and the relationship they entertain with 'their' pasts. Importantly, the urge to overcome the historical boundaries of national pasts, so tightly connect to the desire to find a common European past, has emerged time and again when nationalism has shown its darkest side or when the political limits of the nation-state have become manifest. At such historical junctures, in times of crisis, many scholars have turned to Europe. As has been noted, the fact that between the 1920s and the 1950s attempts to find a single, common European history multiplied is telling.⁴ Henri Pirenne's *Histoire de l'Europe*, written during the First World War

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¹ J.G.A. Pocock, 'Some Europes in their Histories', in Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 55–71, and especially 69. Also see, id., 'Deconstructing Europe', *History of European Ideas*, 18 (1994), 329–346 and 'Vous autres Européens – or Inventing Europe', *Acta Philosophica*, 14 (1993), 141–158, as well as René Girault, 'Das Europa der Historiker', in Rainer Hudemann et al. (eds.), *Europa im Blick der Historiker* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), 55–90 and Wolfgang Schmale, 'The Meaning of "Europe" in Historiography', id., *Gender and Eurocentrism: A Conceptual Approach to European History*, transl. by Bernard Heise (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2016), 29–59. The literature on the topic is particularly vast. Useful introductions are provided by Heinz Duchhardt (ed.), *Europäische Geschichte als historiographisches Problem* (Mainz: Zabern, 1997); id. (ed.), *Europa-Historiker. Ein biographisches Handbuch*, 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006–7); and Marcello Verga, *Storie d'Europa: Secoli XVIII–XXI* (Rome, Carocci, 2004). For an interesting insight on the relationship between national and European histories, see Antonis Liakos, 'The Canon of European History and the Conceptual Framework of National Historiographies', in Matthias Middell and Lluís Roura (eds.), *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2015), 315–342.

² Richard J. Evans, 'What is European History? Reflections of a Cosmopolitan Islander', *European History Quarterly*, 40 (2010), 593–605 (593). The reference is to A.J.P. Taylor, 'What is European History?', *History Today*, 36 (1986), 46.

³ Evans, 'What is European History?', 603.

⁴ See, on this, Stuart Woolf, 'Europe and its Historians', *Contemporary European History*, 12 (2003), 323–337 (325–330).

in a German prison camp and then published in 1936, Louis Halphen's *L'essor de l'Europe* (1932), seeking a common medievalist Europe against the Muslim danger, and Benedetto Croce's *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimono* (1932), celebrating European history as a relentless march towards freedom, are all important examples. To these, one need only add the works of Guido De Ruggiero, Christopher Dawson, H.L.A. Fisher, John Bowle, Heinz Gollwitzer, Oskar Halecki, Denis Hay, or Carlo Curcio.⁵ Even Lucien Febvre and Federico Chabod's lessons on the history of the idea of Europe and on the history of European civilization in Nazi-occupied Paris and Milan, later to become iconic books on the subject, are revealing of a deeply felt urge to find a new way of thinking the past and overcoming the narrow boundaries of the nation.⁶ As Dawson wrote in 1932: 'We must rewrite our history from the European point of view and take as much trouble to understand the unity of our common civilization as we have given hitherto to studying our national individuality'.⁷ On his part, in 1944 Croce spoke of the need to 'de-nationalize history' so that historians might 'help to cure this dejected and intoxicated world'.⁸ As recent historians have pointed out, although in a very different political and social setting, globalization has posed the need to overcome the sin of 'methodological nationalism' in the study of the past, inspiring various transnational or global turns.⁹ At the same time, the growing political and economic integration of Europe and the search for its legitimacy have renewed the urge to have a better understanding of its past. Some scholars have gone as far as to claim that just as nineteenth-century historians helped shape the ideological arsenal for building the nation, so they should now 'contribute towards supporting the European integration process by providing accompanying arguments'.¹⁰ Others have adopted a more nuanced stand, insisting on the need for 'building coherence and determining relations between stories made by Europeans, with which Europeans can identify and on the basis of which Europeans can be distinguished from non-Europeans'.¹¹ The complex relationship between political motivation and the scholarly responsibility of the historian emerges here in all clarity.

Any scepticism towards the very notion of a European history or narratives is, of course, justified. That the history of Europe is as much about violence and divisions – including religious wars, national clashes, and ideological conflicts – as it is about shared cultural, social, and economic accomplishments is undeniable. For some, the former even overshadow the latter. It is a point that might easily be grasped when considering the most divisive of human activities, so central to so much scholarship, that is, war. Writing shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, the great French philosopher Georges Sorel noted that Europe, a space inhabited by a number of different peoples with conflicting interests, desires, and ways of life, had always been the place of 'warlike cataclysms' and that the 'people of Europe can be united

⁵ Guido De Ruggiero, *Storia del liberalismo europeo* (Bari, Laterza, 1925); Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity* (London, Sheed and Ward, 1932); H.A.L. Fisher, *A History of Europe* (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1935); John Bowle, *The Unity of European History: A Political and Cultural Survey* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1948); Heinz Gollwitzer, *Europabild und Europagedanke. Beiträge zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, C.H. Beck, 1951); Oskar Halecki, *Europa. Grenzen und Gliederung seiner Geschichte* (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1957); Denis Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1957); Carlo Curcio, *Europa, storia di un'idea* (Florence, Vallecchi, 1958).

⁶ Woolf, 'Europe and its Historians', 325–326.

⁷ Dawson, *The Making of Europe*, p. xxiv.

⁸ Benedetto Croce, 'Snazionalizzare la storia', id., *La mia filosofia* (Milan, Adelphi, 1993), 316–318.

⁹ For an overview: Stefan Berger, 'National Historiographies in Transnational Perspective: Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Storia della Storiografia*, 50 (2006), 3–26.

¹⁰ Jürgen Elvert, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Nationalhistorie für Europa', *Zeitschrift für Weltgeschichte*, 5 (2004), 43–60 (59).

¹¹ Hannes Siegrist and Rolf Petri, 'Geschichten Europas. Probleme, Methoden und Perspektiven', *Comparativ*, 14 (2004), 7–14 (9).

only by a single idea: to wage war to one another'.¹² There is certainly some truth in this. Recently, scholars have even argued that the one common element that might weave together so many national histories into a single fabric is precisely war. Already experienced by scholars, artists, scientists, traders, and wealthy or aristocratic travellers, Europe became something very real for thousands and even millions of the lower and middle classes only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, fighting on the battlefields scattered throughout the Old Continent.¹³ In the process, invading armies carried with them ideas, values, and ways of life that helped to create shared forms of a European existence. However, if war has been such a constant presence in the history unfolding on the continent, turning it into an immense land of death and destruction, the incessant efforts of countless politicians, diplomats, and intellectuals to limit its destructiveness is also an undeniable fact. It was such efforts that eventually led to the birth of the *Jus ad bellum* and, ultimately, laid down the foundations of modern international law. From such a viewpoint, one might even find another definition of what European history might be. According to Michael Geyer, in fact, if war 'structured a common "European space", the containment of "savage" violence and the art of peacemaking "constituted" Europe in thought and practice'.¹⁴ It is an argument partly reminiscent of the ideas set forth by Carl Schmitt in his famous *Der Nomos der Erde* (1950). In the view of the German political and legal theorist, the emergence of the *Jus Publicum Europaeum* in the early modern period shaped a space in which violence among states was contained and limited through the recognition of the *justus hostis* – the legitimate enemy. He saw this as a crucial distancing from previous images of the enemy, usually inspired by religion, as the embodiment of all evil. However, this also produced at once a space, outside of Europe, with no laws or rules; a space waiting to be conquered and exploited by the peoples of Europe; a space where the most atrocious violence against the unfaithful, the uncivilized, the barbarian was deemed legitimate.¹⁵ The history of Europe might then be seen as a process leading to the containment of an ever-expanding destructive capacity within the Old Continent – in truth, between 1648 and 1914 a rather successful attempt – and to the violent domination by its peoples of the rest of the globe. So, when considering its history through the prism of conflict, Europe might be seen a space unified by perpetual war as well as a space where incessant efforts are made to limit its destructive violence. In effect, the narratives built on these two contrasting views are both as interesting as plausible. But they are only two among innumerable other possible and equally plausible – perhaps even compelling – narratives. In fact, one might decide to read Europe's history through the lenses of the idea of freedom, making the contention that Europe has been the space where political and then economic and social rights have gradually extended to most of its citizens – in spite of the many setbacks. But it might also be argued, with equal strength, that Europe, Mark Mazower's *Dark Continent*, has been the place where freedom has turned into its opposite. Instead, were one to consider the progress of reason, Europe would then become the space of a constant struggle against superstition, myth and, for some, religion. But it could also turn into the place of an increasing distancing between substantive and instrumental reason leading to the Holocaust – *From Athens to Auschwitz*, to use the title of Christian Meier's book.¹⁶ Clearly, there are countless possible European narratives, and historians have here a greater discretion over their object of enquiry than when studying the

¹² Georges Sorel, 'Sur l'Europe d'avant 1914', in Jean Variot (ed.), *Propos de Georges Sorel* (Paris, Gallimard, 1935), 16–19.

¹³ Ute Frevert, 'Europeanizing German History', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 36 (2005), 9–24 (12–15).

¹⁴ Michael Geyer, 'The Subject(s) of Europe', in Konrad Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger (eds.), *Conflicted Memories: Europeanizing Contemporary Histories* (Oxford, Berghahn, 2011), 254–280 (267).

¹⁵ Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde* (Cologne, Greven Verlag, 1950), 111–86.

nation. Inevitably, Taylor's comments about the malleability of European history come back to mind.

It is a point worth noting that many of the attempts made by the advocates of a European narrative are somehow based on the assumption that the model that ought to be followed is that of the nation. Just as nineteenth-century historians used their skills to help foster – more or less deliberately – a feeling of nationhood, it is believed, so should today's scholars encourage a shared feeling of Europeanness. Leaving aside the many issues that a post-modernist approach to the past would raise as well as the clear political implications, it can easily be argued that such an assumption is misleading for at least two reasons. First, national narratives are always sacred – or, rather, sacralised – stories. As Alberto Mario Banti has argued, references to sacrifice and martyrdom are always central to, or even the backbone of, any national discourse.¹⁷ The feeling of indebtedness towards those who have given their lives for their community is what actually creates a bond between the dead and the recipients of the narrative, thus shaping an imagined community – or, actually, a real communion – between them. Of course, the case of European narratives is very different – sacred nation / profane Europe might be a quite an apt way of putting it – and such difference might explain, in part, the difficulty of recipients identifying with any European narrative and, importantly for us, shows the need to write Europe's history in a much different way. The second, equally important reason is related to the difficulty of finding a European collective will. It is a point related to that of sovereignty and its meaning in the shaping of historical narratives. In fact, in classical political thought, a nation's will is expressed through the decision of its sovereign and, still in the seventeenth century, it would have been enough to dissect the king's will to grasp the nation's history. This way of interpreting the past contributed – and still contributes – to a misleading reification of the nation, making of it a coherent, collective actor with a clearly discernible will whose actions and deeds one might follow throughout the centuries. Because of the decision of its sovereign, in fact, divisions and the many wills of individuals and groups that actually make up a nation are conveniently – from the historian's point of view – relegated to a secondary plane. Class, regional, gender, or generational differences are ignored in the face of a clear political decision with clear political consequences. In this respect, since Europe lacks a will of its own – or, rather, lacks the medium through which this might be imagined – it is impossible to see it as an actor whose deeds and volitions can be traced throughout the centuries. And this makes it impossible to write European history following the model of the nation. Of course, the fact that in the history of political thought nation and sovereignty have almost always been conceived of as inseparable notions, further problematises the whole issue.

In spite of the political, social, and religious differences separating the peoples of Europe from one another, it is commonly assumed – almost intuitively – that there is a series of shared cultural practices that have real effects and consequences on their lives. The idea that, notwithstanding its political fragmentation, there was such a thing as a European community, something essentially different from *Christianitas* even if somehow rooted in it, dates back to the fifteenth century. Machiavelli and Botero and then Bayle, Leibniz, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Robertson, Gibbon, Novalis, to name but a few, all spoke of the values, manners, and customs shared by the different peoples of Europe and which defined a unique civilisation. It was for

¹⁷ See Alberto Mario Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita* (Turin, Einaudi, 2000); Alberto Mario Banti, 'Conclusions: Performative Effects and "Deep Images" in National Discourse', in Laurence Cole (ed.), *Different Paths to the Nation: Regional and National Identities in Central Europe and Italy, 1830–1870* (London, Palgrave, 2007), 220–229. On sacrifice in building social integration, see the classic study by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice* (1898) (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2016). Also see Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, 'Blood and Sacrifice: Politics versus Culture in the Construction of Nationalism', in Kevin Brehony and Joseph and Naz Rassool (eds.), *Nationalism Old and New* (Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1999), 87–124.

this common way of life, noted Edmund Burke in 1796, that ‘no citizen of Europe could be altogether an exile in any part of it’.¹⁸ The great French historian François Guizot, in his 1828 *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe*, was adamant: ‘I say European civilization, because there is evidently so striking a uniformity in the civilization of the different states of Europe, as fully to warrant this appellation’.¹⁹ While Guizot’s words might be perplexing – as if they were meant to convince the reader rather than state an obvious fact – his view had become a truism for many observers by the beginning of the twentieth century. Not even the Great War could disprove it – and, for some, it actually confirmed its existence. In 1915, for instance, the French novelist Jules Romains took on the curious view that the conflict tearing Europe apart was but ‘an armed conflict within a homogeneous civilisation’. He was convinced that the causes of its virulence lay in the fact that fighting one another were peoples that held much in common. A war ‘between two peoples truly *strangers* to one another is colder, more impersonal, and its violence maintains the form of the political endeavour’, he observed.²⁰ However, while the existence of a common European civilization was widely accepted in the interwar years, Valéry, Husserl, Patočka, T.S. Eliot, and several others were still facing the conundrum of what were those shared values and practices that defined European civilisation and, equally important, where their origins ought to be sought.

One way in which some historians sought the unity of European civilisation was by stressing the diversity of its national cultures. In fact, according to Guizot the most remarkable difference between Europe and other civilisations was ‘the unity of character’ that reigned in the latter. Each one of the non-European worlds, he wrote, ‘appears as though it had emanated from a single fact, from a single idea’ that entirely shaped its existence and institutions.²¹ Whenever new forces or principles emerged, this usually led to a new single idea or class dominating the whole of society. Coexistence of and struggle between conflicting principles ‘was no more than a passing, an accidental circumstance’.²² The condition of modern Europe was completely different, its history striking Guizot as ‘diversified, confused, and stormy’.²³ Different principles of social and political organization were engaged in a continual struggle that never led to one definitively overpowering the others. In his opinion, this variety of forces had been the precondition for a boundless progress that had endured fifteen centuries and which had grown increasingly faster because a ‘greater freedom attends upon all its movements’. The history of Europe was then the outcome of the struggle between the various factions and classes making up its nations, a struggle that ‘instead of rendering society stationary, has been a principal cause of its progress’.²⁴ Guizot was adamant that this sort of ‘*stabilized conflict*’ a unification of Europe leading to political and cultural uniformity, inevitably stifling freedom, was simply impossible.²⁵ In effect, Guizot’s liberal vision of European history, structured around a ‘difference in unity’ – a highly ambiguous and often misused idea – had illustrious predecessors. Already in the fifteenth century Machiavelli argued that the continuous and relentless struggle among its classes, republics, and states was the true source of European freedom, a condition that contrasted starkly with the immobility and despotism of the great

¹⁸ Edmund Burke, ‘First Letter on a Regicide Peace’ (1796), id., *The Writings and Speeches* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991), ix. 249.

¹⁹ François Guizot, *General History of Civilisation in Europe* (Oxford, Talboys, 1838), 1–2.

²⁰ Jules Romains, ‘Pour que l’Europe soi’, id., *Problèmes Européens* (Paris, Flammarion, 1933), 19. For more on images and ideas of Europe in the war period, see Matthew D’Auria and Jan Vermeiren (eds.), *Visions and Ideas of Europe during the First World War* (Abingdon : Routledge, 2018 [forthcoming]).

²¹ Guizot, *General History of Civilisation in Europe*, 31–32.

²² Guizot, *General History of Civilisation in Europe*, 33.

²³ Guizot, *General History of Civilisation in Europe*, 35.

²⁴ Guizot, *General History of Civilisation in Europe*, 220–221.

²⁵ On Guizot’s reading of European history, see Jean Goldzink, *La solitude de Montesquieu: Le chef-d’œuvre introuvable du libéralisme* (Paris, Fayard, 2011), 365. Italics in the text.

empires of the east. Montesquieu, in part, repeated the same ideas in the eighteenth century. Of course, such views and the related notion of Oriental despotism as the counterpart to European freedom are debatable at best. But what is interesting, within this liberal discourse, is the importance of the idea of progress in defining European identity on the one hand and, on the other, the role of Europe in world history. In fact, if Europe was seen simply as one civilisation among many, it also embodied the idea of civilisation as such.²⁶ If civilisations were gradually proceeding towards a single, 'common destiny', Europe was at the forefront and stood as the model for all other ones.²⁷ Seen from such a perspective, differences and boundaries could be established and explained by the different stages attained by civilisations on a path that was common to all. This meant, on the one hand, the existence of an underlying unity of all civilisations and, on the other, the possibility of some form of judgement over the degree of development attained. It meant, in other terms, that civilisation was at once a historical fact and the benchmark for an appraisal that was, inevitably, also moral and which, of course, was entirely determined by the achievements of the European man.

This narrative, bringing together – or, actually, conflating – European and world history, was rooted in eighteenth-century philosophy and historical thought. The complex set of intellectual and cultural practices through which Europeans defined themselves against an imagined other are inseparable not only from a specific version of history but also from the shaping of a specific regime of historicity.²⁸ In fact, a crucial aspect of how Europeans defined themselves in the early modern and modern periods relates to the ways in which they imagined the relationship between past, present, and future as such. Arguably, from the late seventeenth century onwards, discourses about Europe increasingly developed in connection with evolving notions of progress and were often couched in opposition to an alleged immobility of Europe's Other. From Campanella to Fontenelle, Condorcet, Hegel, Marx, and Husserl, Europe was the paradigmatic locus of modernity.²⁹ This was partly a product of the great age of discoveries, when the people of Europe came in touch with new cultures and civilizations. In particular, the image of the savage – whether real or imagined or distorted – so captivating for so many scholars, had a crucial impact on the development of European thought.³⁰ In a state of nature, outside or at the beginning of historical time, the savage became central to the moral and political philosophy of the time as well as its historical thought. Partly because of the image of the savage on the one hand, and partly because of the assumed immobility of the 'east' on the other, Europe came increasingly to be seen as the place of an acceleration of time, a place of an increasing separation of natural and historical time – and, of course, of a growing power

²⁶ On the complex history of the notion of civilisation and its many, shifting meanings, see: Philippe Bénéton, *Histoire de mots: Culture et civilisation* (Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1975). Also see Jean Starobinski, 'Le mot civilisation', id., *Le remède dans le mal: critique et légitimation de l'artifice à l'âge des Lumières* (Paris, Gallimard, 1989), 11–59; and Chryssanthi Avlami and Olivier Remaud, 'Civilisations. Retour sur les mots et les idées', *Revue de synthèse*, 129 (2008), 1–8.

²⁷ Guizot, *General History of Civilisation in Europe*, 5.

²⁸ The reference is of course to François Hartog's classic *Régimes d'historicité: présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris, Seuil, 2003).

²⁹ On this, Gerard Delanty, *Formations of European Modernity: A Historical and Political Sociology of Europe* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

³⁰ The scholarly literature is vast. Among the most important works are: Sergio Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi: 1580–1780* (Bari, Laterza, 1972); Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982); Frank Lestringant, *Le cannibale: Grandeur et décadence* (Paris, Perrin, 1994); P.-N. Denieul, *Le sauvage et le civilisé au siècle des Lumières* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2007). Also see Federico Chabod, 'La civiltà europea di fronte ai Nuovi Mondi', id., *Idea d'Europa e civiltà moderna: Sette saggi inediti* (Rome, Carocci, 2010), 95–112.

over nature and the world.³¹ The underlying othering practice was accompanied by a unification – and Europeanization – of world history, one centred around the idea that to evangelize first, then to civilise and, finally, to modernize the rest of the world was the mission of Europe's states and their peoples.

Perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that such a Eurocentric vision of world history, first emerging in connection with the global political and economic expansion of the peoples of Europe, somehow survived and took on a new shape in times of crisis. In the aftermath of the First World War, a new shared feeling of Europeanness started to emerge, partly as a reaction to the military and ideological threat posed by the Soviet Union and the cultural and economic menace represented by the United States. As Count Hermann Keyserling noted in 1928: 'Europe emerges because non-Europeans are gaining more and more power. In this regard, what is common to all Europeans becomes more important than what divides us'.³² Almost inevitably, the 'dwarfing of Europe' – to use Arnold Toynbee's famous expression – prompted many scholars to seek a common European past.³³ Moreover, by the 1920s and 1930s many also came to believe that the history of the world could no longer be equated with the history of Europe. In fact, this had been an assumption shared by many scholars at least since the publication of the abbé Raynal's monumental *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770), and surely one that animated much historical writing in the nineteenth century.³⁴ Important steps in redefining the relationship between world history and European history included H.G. Wells's *The Outline of History* (1918), Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918–1923), and Toynbee's *A Study of History* (1934–1954), in which were told the stories of the struggles between, and the rise and fall of, different civilizations over a unified globe. However, even in such works Europe still played a central role. There were two important reasons for this. The first was that because of Europe's global domination during the two previous centuries, the world had attained a level of political, economic and cultural unification hitherto unknown. The second reason, according to some scholars, was that having civilized the world, Europe's mission had come to an end and while this made its decline inevitable, it also meant that the values and ideas shaped by European history were now shared across the globe. It was against this background that the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset interpreted the rise of the USA and the USSR as the surge of two forces stemming from Europe. In his opinion, American hyper-capitalism and shallow consumerism as well as Soviet illiberal, barbarous Bolshevism were simply aberrations of values and ideas that had originally been European. However, severed from their origin, they had 'lost their meaning' and were now heralded by civilizations threatening everything that Europe stood for. Many others held similar views, including the French writer Paul Valéry. In his famous 'La crise de l'esprit', written in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, he claimed that 'everything has come to Europe and everything has come from Europe. At least, almost everything'.³⁵ According to the English historian H.A.L. Fisher, the peoples of Europe should 'recall before it is too late that they are trustees for the civilization of the world. [...] The common heritage of European civilization is the most splendid possession of man.'³⁶ In 1909, the Anglo-French writer and historian, Hilaire

³¹ On the acceleration of historical time as an important trait of European history, see Reinhart Koselleck, 'Vergangene Zukunft der frühen Neuzeit', id., *Vergangene Zukunft: zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1979), 17–37.

³² Hermann Alexander Keyserling, *Das Spektrum Europas* (Heidelberg, Niels Kampmann, 1928), 442.

³³ For the expression: Arnold Toynbee, 'The Dwarfing of Europe', id., *Civilization on Trial* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1948), 97–125.

³⁴ See Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), 17–19.

³⁵ José Ortega y Gasset, *La rebelión de las masas* (1930) (Madrid, Revista de Occidente, 1979), 153–156; Paul Valéry, 'La crise de l'Esprit' (1919), id., *Œuvres* (Paris, Gallimard, 1957), i. 995.

³⁶ Fisher, *A History of Europe*, iii. 409.

Belloc, had gone even further, stating that Europe ‘carries the fate of the whole world, lives by a life which is in contrast to that of every other region, because that life, though intense, is inexhaustible. There is present, therefore, in her united history, a dual function of maintenance and of change such as can be discovered neither in any one of her component parts nor in civilisations exterior to her own’. As he saw it, throughout its history, Europe had constantly sought a moral unity with the rest of the world.³⁷ Indeed, many historians and scholars writing in the 1920s and 1930s would have thought of Europe simply as *one* among many civilizations; and yet, because of its unique past, they also believed that it alone enshrined truly *universal* values.

It was in line with such ideas that many intellectuals maintained that all non-European civilizations lacked a past of their own. The ancient history of Eastern civilizations was certainly glorious but, having failed to create their own path to modernity, these had succumbed, politically or culturally, to the Europeans. As for the west, this was essentially an extension of Europe. In 1930, pondering over the history of Europe and the history of the world, Ortega y Gasset concluded that neither ‘New York nor Moscow’ could lead the world since they both lacked a real past.³⁸ But some authors took the argument one step further, claiming that a crucial element that defined European civilisation was its willingness to scrutinize and dissect the past in an objective manner – another characteristic that allegedly set Europe apart from other civilizations. The philosopher Karl Jaspers linked the ‘historical feeling’ of the peoples of Europe to their unique idea of freedom: ‘For freedom to be, it is necessary that we plunge ourselves into history [...]. The tireless realization of what is real and of what is possible, the intensification of historical consciousness, constitutes, with history itself, a fundamental trait of our European mind’.³⁹ Benedetto Croce went even further. In 1930, he claimed that the rise of Italian Fascism was the clear manifestation that the relationship between historical thought and politics had lost all significance. He contended that the nation, a historical construction, had been vested with the aura of a natural fact. The nation was now obsolete; from an agent of liberation it had turned into a force of conservation, portraying itself as the eternal and natural subject of history. This was a consequence and a cause of the stifling of the feeling of historicity (*sentimento storico*) that made it impossible to understand the past in a critical and detached way. According to Croce, making the nation the beginning and end of history meant rejecting the possibility of alternative political and social formations. It was the end of all struggle and debate – which, like other liberal thinkers, he saw as the hallmark of Europe. Consistently, he saw such critical attitude towards the past as inherently European; as an element that radically separated Europe from its Other. Crucially, the Neapolitan philosopher believed that only through this incessant and critical rereading of the past could the proper understanding of universal morality emerge. And since the ‘sense of historicity coincides with the European feeling’, then Croce interpreted the rise of Fascism, the cult of a nation not withheld from the scrutiny of the historian, and the rejection of all political alternatives – i.e. the acceptance of immobility and the end of freedom – as the rise of what he called Anti-Europe.⁴⁰ Croce’s views are interesting in many ways. Importantly, they draw attention to the moral lessons of the past and how these might relate to certain political projects. It is a point particularly relevant when considering the relationship between Europe and its nations. In effect, Croce did not deny the historical importance of the nation – quite the opposite. As a historical construction, the product of the will of men manifesting itself over the centuries, it had been an instrument of liberation, a way of overcoming the empty and abstract cosmopolitanism of eighteenth-century thinkers – or so he argued. But Croce was also adamant

³⁷ Hilaire Belloc, *Marie Antoinette* (New York, Doubleday, Page and Co., 1909), 3.

³⁸ Ortega y Gasset, *La rebelión de las masas*, 153–154.

³⁹ Karl Jaspers, in Julien Benda et al., *L’Esprit Européen* (Neuchâtel, Les Éditions de la Baconnière, 1946), 303.

⁴⁰ Benedetto Croce, ‘Antistoricismo’, id., *La mia filosofia*, 91.

that, by the 1920s, the nation had become obsolete and that the deleterious consequences of its resilience were evident. In many respects, such arguments are still relevant today and, crucially for us, might indicate a possible way of considering Europe's history/ies.

Historical narratives provide meaning and significance to (selected) past events and developments. They influence social reality and collective memory, and thus play a major role in identity formation. Beyond their unifying function, especially in times of crisis, they can also enhance (or indeed undermine) the acceptability to certain ideas, personalities, and organisations. They are shaped by historians and intellectuals, but are also affected by other groups and individuals, including state officials and institutions, not least to further a particular political agenda.⁴¹ Narratives and interpretations of European history have taken on a particular political relevance in the context of European integration, often legitimizing the deepening and widening of the European Union and its predecessors since the 1950s against the diversity and resilience of national interests.⁴² European political developments, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are commonly described as a dark age of nationalist hatred and violence, culminating in two world wars and the Holocaust. As the European Council put it in the Laeken Declaration of December 2001, 'for centuries, peoples and states have taken up arms and waged war to win control of the European continent'. The declaration, which launched a fundamental restructuring of the European Union, leading to the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, consequently portrayed the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951/1952 as a revolutionary act, a true turning point in the history of the Continent 'to banish once and for all the demons of the past'.⁴³ This is, of course, not a new narrative. In an attempt to foster a common identity amongst the member states of the European Economic Community, the European Council in 1985 not only adopted the European flag but also designated 9 May as 'Europe Day'. It thus officially affirmed the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950 – in which the French foreign minister had proposed a supranational economic organisation to eliminate 'the age-old opposition of France and Germany' – as the founding act of the European integration process.⁴⁴ The Preamble of the Treaty Establishing A Constitution for Europe, signed in Rome in October 2004 but later replaced by the Lisbon Treaty, similarly referred to the 'bitter experiences' and 'former divisions' that needed to be overcome by mutual respect and cooperation 'to forge a common destiny' and 'to continue along the path of civilisation, progress and prosperity, for the good of all its inhabitants'.⁴⁵ In this light, European integration appears as the only viable alternative to European self-destruction and decline, as a historic necessity and moral obligation to learn from the mistakes of the past.⁴⁶

⁴¹ With a focus on the relationship between historical writing and the evolution of nationalism, and for further references, see Paul Lawrence, 'Nationalism and Historical Writing', in John Breuilly (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), 713–729.

⁴² On the following, see in particular Fabrice Larat, 'Vergegenwärtigung von Geschichte und Interpretation der Vergangenheit: Zur Legitimation der europäischen Integration', in Matthias Schöning and Stefan Seidendorf (eds.), *Reichweiten der Verständigung. Intellektuellendiskurse zwischen Nation und Europa* (Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006), 240–262. For the wider context, see Johan Fornäs, *Signifying Europe* (Bristol, Intellect, 2012); Oriane Calligaro, *Negotiating Europe: EU Promotion of Europeanness since the 1950s* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, *Imagining Europe: Myth, Memory, and Identity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴³ 'Laeken Declaration on the Future of the European Union (December 2001)', in Jean-Claude Piris, *The Constitution for Europe: A Legal Analysis* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 198–206 (198).

⁴⁴ 'The Schuman Declaration – 9 May 1950', at: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en (last accessed 6 May 2018).

⁴⁵ 'Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe', *Official Journal of the European Union*, 2004/C 310/1, 3.

⁴⁶ On the importance of painful memories for European identity, see Christian Joerges, Matthias Mahlmann, Ulrich K. Preuß (eds.) *"Schmerzliche Erfahrungen" der Vergangenheit und der Prozess der Konstitutionalisierung Europas* (Wiesbaden, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008); Claus Leggewie, *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung. Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* (Munich, C.H. Beck, 2011).

The fact that this development was only a partial one, limited to certain areas of Western Europe, was brought to the fore in connection with the end of the Cold War and the transformation processes in Central and Eastern Europe. The possibility (and necessity) of Eastern enlargement was quickly raised by European officials and politicians. Following its summit in Dublin in June 1990, the European Council ‘expressed its deep satisfaction’ at the reforms in the former Soviet bloc and its hope ‘of overcoming the divisions of Europe and restoring the unity of the continent whose peoples share a common heritage and culture’.⁴⁷ The aforementioned Laeken Declaration of 2001 welcomed the accession of ten new member states enthusiastically, arguing even that the European Union was thereby ‘finally closing one of the darkest chapters in European history: the Second World War and the ensuing artificial division of Europe’. ‘The unification of Europe is near’, it stated, making a case for further, fundamental reforms: ‘At long last, Europe is on its way of becoming one big family, without bloodshed, a real transformation clearly calling for a different approach from fifty years ago, when six countries first took the lead.’⁴⁸ Such interpretations and statements not only imply a natural unity of Europe and primordial membership of its community, but they also propose a Whiggish notion of continuous progress towards ever more integration, peace, and prosperity on the Continent, implicitly associating Eurosceptic voices with regressive views and a potential return to those dark moments of nationalism and war. Marginalising conflicts and differences of opinion, such as the French rejection of UK membership in the 1960s, and very much keeping an inward-looking stance (ignoring, for instance, the turmoil and suffering created by decolonisation), the history of the EU is presented as an uninterrupted story of success: ‘We must never forget that: From war, we have created peace. From hatred, we have created respect. From division, we have created union. From dictatorship and oppression, we have created vibrant and sturdy democracies. From poverty, we have created prosperity.’⁴⁹

The narrative of peace and reconciliation, of integration and institutionalisation, clearly differentiating the European project from previous moments of strife and violence, has always been complemented by a more positive look into Europe’s past, the search for commonalities and predecessors to establish a sense of tradition and moral obligation towards previous generations.⁵⁰ Politicians typically refer to Europe’s Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritage, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment – tendencies and developments that did of course not reach all corners of the Continent and exclude as much as they include. This also applies to the famous Charlemagne Prize, which goes back to a local initiative of the city of Aachen (1949) in honour of the ‘great founder of western culture’ and was meant to celebrate ‘commendable individuals who have encouraged political, economic and intellectual ideas on western unity’.⁵¹ A new, more inclusive declaration was passed in 1990 and the prize has since

⁴⁷ Presidency Conclusions, European Council, Dublin, 25 and 26 April 1990, at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/dublin/du1_en.pdf (last accessed 6 May 2018).

⁴⁸ ‘Laeken Declaration on the Future of the European Union’, 198–199. Also see the Athens Declaration of 16 April 2003, at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20884/informal-european-council-athens-declaration-16-april-2003.pdf> (last accessed 6 May 2018).

⁴⁹ Irish Presidency of the EU, Declaration for a Day of Welcome of 1 May 2004, quoted in Fabrice Larat, ‘Presenting the Past: Political Narratives on European History and the Justification of EU Integration’, *German Law Journal*, 6/2 (2005), 273–290 (285).

⁵⁰ A typical recent example is the establishment of the European Day of the Righteous (6 March) by the European Parliament in 2012, commemorating all ‘those who challenged crimes against humanity and totalitarianism with individual responsibility’. See ‘Declaration of the European Parliament of 10 May 2012 on support for the establishment of a European Day of Remembrance for the Righteous’, at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2012-0205+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (last accessed 6 May 2018).

⁵¹ Public Declaration, Aachen, Christmas 1949, at: <http://www.karlspreis.de/en/the-charlemagne-prize/origin/public-declaration> (last accessed 6 May 2018). The first awardee was Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi.

been awarded to five East-Central European personalities (starting with Gyula Horn in 1990), but the website still celebrates Charlemagne as the ‘father of Europe’ and thus links the Franconian king directly to the European integration process since 1949.⁵² Such efforts certainly underline the intricacies of any attempt to forge a common European historical consciousness, which is why official EU statements speak in more general terms of our ‘common heritage and culture’ (Dublin Declaration) or ‘the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law’.⁵³ However, such rhetoric not only neglects the fact that Europe was equally the birthplace of nationalism, racism, and imperialism, it also makes it difficult to delineate a uniquely European set of values that would differentiate the community from the rest of the western (and increasingly wider) world.

In early 2014, the European Union launched the so-called ‘New Narrative for Europe’ project with the declared aim ‘to contribute to bringing Europe closer to its citizens and reviving a “European” spirit via the arts and sciences’. It was a forward-looking rather than retrospective initiative, hoping to restore ‘the waning confidence in Europe’ given the new realities and challenges facing the Continent.⁵⁴ In its first stage, it was aimed at artists, intellectuals, and scientists, while the second phase (starting in February 2016) was less elite-driven and involved youth organisations. In his introduction to ‘The Mind and Body of Europe’, a collection of essays including texts by György Konrád, Jürgen Habermas, and Michelangelo Pistoletto, the then President of the European Commission expressed his hope that the project would strengthen the European public space of debate and sense of togetherness. Once again, he presented the master narrative of peace and reconciliation: ‘That is the founding narrative of the European Union: to make war impossible among us by coming together through economic integration.’ ‘The ideas of peace, democracy and respect for human dignity’, he continued, ‘remain as compelling as ever for European integration, the most visionary political project in recent history. No other political construction to date has proven to be a better way of organising life so as to lessen the barbarity in this world, and overcome war, dictatorship and extreme nationalism.’⁵⁵ The original declaration of various prominent cultural figures provided a slightly more balanced interpretation of Europe’s past, highlighting the various achievements but also emphasising that ‘Europe should never forget that its prosperity in modern times is often tied to colonial conquest and was, therefore, attained at the cost of those from other continents.’⁵⁶ This attempt to get away from a single unifying master narrative and to pay attention to both the accomplishments and tragedies of history, to draw lessons from the past without dismissing alternative narratives and options, and to acknowledge that ‘European history is something other than “national” history’, and that ‘it is also something other than the addition of “national histories”, seems to be reflected in the New House of

⁵² <http://www.karlspreis.de/en/> (last accessed 6 May 2018). See also Fabrice Larat, ‘L’Europe et ses grands hommes: entre commémoration et distinction. L’exemple du prix Charlemagne de la ville d’Aix-la-Chapelle’, in Andrée Bachoud et al. (eds.), *Les intellectuels et l’Europe de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris, Publications Universitaires Denis-Diderot, 2000), 263–278 and id., ‘L’Europe à la recherche d’une figure tutélaire. L’instrumentalisation de la symbolique carolingienne comme tentative de fondation d’un projet politique’, *Politique européenne* 18 (2006), 49–67.

⁵³ ‘Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007’, *Official Journal of the European Union*, 2007/C 306/1, 10.

⁵⁴ ‘New Narrative for Europe’, at: https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/new-narrative_en (last accessed 6 May 2018). For a recent discussion, see Wolfram Kaiser, ‘One Narrative or Several? Politics, Cultural Elites, and Citizens in Constructing a “New Narrative for Europe”’, *National Identities*, 19 (2017), 215–230.

⁵⁵ José Manuel Durão Barroso, ‘Interweaving Narratives’, in Emiliano Battista and Nicola Setari (eds.), *The Mind and Body of Europe* (Brussels, European Union, 2014), 20–27 (22–23).

⁵⁶ ‘Declaration: The Mind and Body of Europe’, *ibid.*, 120–129 (127).

European History that was opened in Brussels in May 2017 on the initiative of the European Parliament.⁵⁷ However, the museum has not gone uncontested. It has been described as promoting ‘an ideologically biased, chaotic narrative line with many shortcomings or even falsifications’, marginalising, for instance, the roots of European heritage and unity before the French Revolution, including Christianity, or failing to pay sufficient attention to the perspectives and experiences of medium-sized and smaller countries.⁵⁸

Recent scholars of European history similarly refrain from presenting an overarching narrative or theme. This is partly a consequence of the linguistic turn and postmodern paradigm according to which ‘there is no longer the possibility of a grand narrative that gives history coherence and meaning’.⁵⁹ But in contrast to the historiography of the early and mid-twentieth century by the likes of Hay, de Rougemont, and Lippens, who often identified with and aimed to contribute to European economic and political integration, they have also come to appreciate the fluid geographical, cultural, and political boundaries of the notion of Europe as well as the complexity and diversity of European historical experiences.⁶⁰ In his magisterial book on the history of the twentieth century, Mark Mazower, for instance, described Europe as a ‘dark continent’ and argued that the ‘Europe’ of the European Union ‘may be a promise or a delusion, but it is not a reality.’ ‘Taking the divisions and uncertainties of this continent seriously’, he maintained further, ‘implies abandoning metaphysics, renouncing the search for some mysterious and essential “Europe”, and exploring instead the constant contest to define what it should mean.’⁶¹ Tony Judt, on the other hand, in a book that was shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize, openly embraced the achievements of European unity and emphasised the moral and political lessons of the past: ‘Europe’s barbarous recent history, the dark “other” against which post-war Europe was laboriously constructed, is already beyond recall for young Europeans. Within a generation the memorials and museums will be gathering dust – visited, like the battlefields of the Western front today, only by aficionados and relatives.’ If Europe’s past was ‘to continue to furnish Europe’s present with admonitory meaning and moral purpose’, he concluded by echoing Croce, it would have ‘to be taught afresh with each passing generation’: “European Union” may be a response to history, but it can never be a substitute.’⁶²

⁵⁷ Wolfgang Schmale, ‘House of European History, Brussels’ (11 March 2018), in id., *Europe Blog ‘Mein Europa’*, at: <https://wolfgangshmale.eu/house-of-european-history-brussels> (last accessed 6 May 2018).

⁵⁸ Platform of European Memory and Conscience, ‘The House of European History: Report on the Permanent Exhibition (30 October 2017)’, at: <https://www.memoryandconscience.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Report-on-the-HEH-by-the-Platform-of-European-Memory-and-Conscience-30.10.2017.pdf> (last accessed 6 May 2018). Also see Arnold Huijgen, ‘The House of European History erases religion’ (14 June 2017), at: <https://acton.org/publications/transatlantic/2017/06/14/house-european-history-erases-religion> (last accessed 6 May 2018).

⁵⁹ Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 141.

⁶⁰ Brunello Vigezzi, ‘Histoire et historiens de l’Europe au XX^e siècle’, in Robert Frank (ed.), *Les identités européennes au XX^e siècle. Diversités, convergences et solidarités* (Paris, Publ. de la Sorbonne, 2004), 164–184. Richard Vinen, for instance, entitled his book on Europe’s twentieth century ‘A History in Fragments’, holding that ‘there is no single European history but multiple histories that overlap and intertwine with each other’. See Richard Vinen, *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London, Abacus, 2000), 7. See also Florian Greiner’s essay in this special issue.

⁶¹ Mark Mazower, *The Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London, Allen Lane, 1998), xiv–xv.

⁶² Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, Penguin, 2005), 830–831. For a much discussed example of Judt’s Europhilism, see his ‘The Good Society: Europe vs. America’ (2005), in id., *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 393–409. For a discussion of Mazower and Judt as well as the wider historiographical context, see also Schmale’s important article ‘The Meaning of “Europe” in Historiography’, 49–55.