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## The Canon of European History and the Conceptual Framework of National Historiographies

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*What the philosophers impose from above, the historians try to achieve from below; they too are haunted by the chimera of universal history, this phantom-like counterpart of flowing time.*

Siegfried Kracauer<sup>1</sup>

### **National historiographies in transnational perspectives**

National histories are something more than a specific way of seeing the past through the looking glasses of the nation-states. They are also more than an enterprise of accumulating knowledge about the past in state archives, national libraries, and museums. National histories also represent the way through which history, as a literary genre, was adopted and popularized. The term *history*, throughout the long period of its existence, was (and still is) mainly used to refer to the diverse linguistic and cultural ways of understanding social temporality, which have been different in time and space and depend on the “historicity” that each culture produces. In simple words, the way in which society sees itself determines its historical view, and, vice versa, historiography depends on how societies wish to resemble.

In Europe, up to the nineteenth century, the era when national histories appeared, the term history epitomized not only a method and a specific outlook but also principles and values related to the cognitive reordering of the past. National historiography was associated with historicism, which, according to Friedrich Meinecke, was an intellectual movement broader than the German historical school of the nineteenth century, as “the application to history of the new life principles conquered by the great German movement from Leibniz to Goethe’s death.”<sup>2</sup> Historicism, as an intellectual approach which placed history at the center of the cognition of the world, was not exclusively German. It became a philosophy, theory, and method reassuming approaches to knowledge and society that have marked modernity. Georg Iggers has placed this new way of thinking of history at the old but crucial intersection of regarding humanity in natural or cultural terms, writing that historicism was more than just a theory of history, because it involved a total philosophy of life. According to Nicolas Dirk, history

became “a sign of the modern.”<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, what we now recognize as history, first, spread across borders creating national cultures and, second, it was diffused through education in order to nationalize the masses. In both cases, this form of history substituted or obscured other forms of evoking and making sense of the past as chronicles, sagas, songs, myths, or short stories, ever since retained as folk genres or residuals from a pre-modern era.<sup>4</sup>

This sharp change was connected not only to nationalism, but also to colonialism and post-colonialism. Besides the emerging national elites, who adopted the new historical way of writing as a means of self-representation, inside and outside the nation, colonial powers used history to render the past of extra-European territories comprehensible to the metropolis, while, in the post-colonial era, the former objects of observation decided to master their own images of the past and to create their own historiography.<sup>5</sup> Although some elements of modern historical writing, such as the criticism of sources and the sequence of cause-effect relationships, were common to older Arab and Chinese historiography, in all these cases an epistemic rupture took place with the introduction of national historiography, which transformed all other histories into the prehistory of history. But this rupture did not happen only in history writing outside of Europe. The perception of history changed also in Europe. Before the spread of nationalism, history was written by amateurs for a limited audience belonging to the upper classes. With the consolidation of the nation-state, history was written by professionals for the large national audience as part of the nationalization project. Pre-national history was a product of elites for elite audiences; national history was still a product of elites but for mass audiences. Though nationalism and colonialism were the vehicles used to spread the modern way of doing history around the world, each case retains its specificities, and the encounter between the different ways of writing history had their consequences on the formation of historical consciousness.

One example of transplantation of history is the modern Greek case. Although there was a long tradition of historiography in the Greek language since the Athenian historians of the classical era, modern Greek historiography had to be re-invented in the nineteenth century and was the product of the establishment of an independent state. Post-independence Greek historiography was closer to contemporary German, French, or English historiography than to the ancient or medieval Greek tradition of historiography. But the formation of the modern Greek historical consciousness was not defined by the chronological terms of the Greek nation-state. It was extended to the remote past which was viewed through the modern nationalist perspective. For modern Greeks, the best-qualified authors for appropriating the classical past were not Herodotus, Thucydides, or Xenophon, but Constantine Paparrigopoulos, Spyridon Lambros, and modern archaeology.<sup>6</sup> Another example of national history breaking the tradition of writing the past is Russian historiography. Until the early nineteenth century, the past was known through chronicles and ecclesiastical histories before historicism, introduced by German-educated intellectuals, would lead to the publication of a multi-volume history of the Russian state by Nikolay Karamzin in 1818–1829.<sup>7</sup> Outside Europe, China was the most conspicuous example because of the long Chinese tradition

in writing history. The transition from Confucian to modern historiography was abrupt and part of the large movement that tried to transform the old Empire into a republic in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> China followed the example of Japan, which adopted the modern method of writing history from the Germans at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> To summarize briefly, the relationship between *history* and *nation* is one of the most productive fields for understanding both concepts. Although, the main emphasis was put on the internal aspects of the history–nation relationship, since 2005 this relationship has been seen in a broader, transnational context.<sup>10</sup> New nations required a common language to convey their individuality to the international audience. This common language was to be found in history.

For considering national historiography as a transnational wave that swept the world we should compare it with the spread of the novel during the same era and with the same spatial radiation. According to Moretti, since the end of the eighteenth century, in the novel, Western European high culture encountered local realities and provided the pattern in which the local experience as a raw material was melting. The idea of the plot and of the simultaneity of disperse actions belong to the pattern. The social characters belong to the local (or national) reality. The diffusion of the novel was ensured by the spread and the adoption of the pattern and its popularity through its encounter with the local (or national) social characters.<sup>11</sup> History, too, may be seen as a synthesis of form and content, but unlike the novel, in history writing the content (events and their meaning) is not a raw material indifferent to the form. History writing not only refers to the past; it also has a strong comparative component.

Writing history is part of a broader practice of comparative activities that intensified during the eighteenth century in Western Europe and has grown to embrace the rest of the world ever since. Comparative activities, including travel literature, correspondence, missionary work, diplomatic relationships, and geographical and ethnoanthropological research were forms of rendering familiar the European experience of the world to European home audiences. They were stimulated by the spread of commerce, capitalism, technology, emigration, and navigation, by intellectual movements such as the Enlightenment, and by political aspirations such as those embodied in nationalism. History belonged to these comparative activities, even before it was conscious of being comparative. From this point of view, historiography could be seen as a grammar of representation with a twofold function: Representing the past of a particular community to the outside world and, at the same time, the world to the local audiences. National historiography is an outstanding example of this two-sided representation. Imagining the nation was impossible without a series of comparative activities. Not only was the sameness of the national identity set upon making manifest the differences from other national, supranational (religious, imperial), or subnational (regional and local) identities, but the whole project of nation building was shaped on an interplay of imitation and competition. Nationalism, according to Benedict Anderson, is a “ground of comparisons.”<sup>12</sup> On this ground, even national historiography grew up as a comparative historiography, and that was true for the set of national

disciplines: philology, anthropology, law, political and social sciences, and folk studies. Even when addressing an internal audience, national histories were to give an account of the reputation and the place of the nation as part of an imagined world. As a consequence, they could not neglect other societies and had to adopt a comparative perspective towards them. They had to give an account of the nation's place in the imagined procession of progress and civilization. This inherent (but often unspoken) comparative dimension of the national histories has often been overlooked.

In the background of this comparison, on which modern historiography from its inception and until the last decades of the twentieth century was embedded, lies the idea of a single, linear developmental course of civilization in time, space, and values, with Western Europe (or simply "Europe" or the "West") at the top. This perception, implicit or explicit in historiography, philosophy of history, and social theory, identified the concept of "civilization" as synonymous with the concept of "European civilization." As a consequence, all other civilizations and historical itineraries were conceived in a range of negative terms as being debased, retrograde, or evolutionary deviations from this developmental path. Edward Said in *Orientalism* and Larry Wolff in *Inventing Eastern Europe* have analyzed how the idea of civilization, far from being used as a neutral term, provided the philosophical and historical framework for putting whole cultural-geographical regions in a state of subordination to the big power centers of Western Europe.<sup>13</sup> Modern historiography created not only a meta-narrative that imposed the European experience as the true path of historical development, but it also enshrined a specific way of ideology and methodology as the *only* way to write history. The idea of a path of historical development and the method of writing history are closely interconnected. Together, they both constitute a "canon" of modern historiography.

### **How to conceive the historical canon?**

Before analyzing how a canon in historical writing could be thought and how it was formed and changed, let us explain that although not explicit in the historical texts, the discourse of modern history could not be constructed without canon-created categories and concepts. European historians developing and deploying concepts such as culture and civilization, nation, civil society, citizenship, and public sphere were speaking a language with rules. Like grammar, a canon is not a text, but rules of construction of a text. The canon has been formed through its use, and this had two consequences. First, it has essentialized these concepts as universal elements of modernity and, since Europe has experienced and conceptualized modernity, it ensured that European history would be the yardstick against which the history of all other nations would be measured. Secondly, when scholars and writers outside Western Europe attempted to write the history of their nations and adopted the canon as the basis for doing so, they donned an intellectual straitjacket that compelled them to narrate their nation's story with a conceptual vocabulary drawn solely from the European experience. To do modern

scientific history, then, meant the adoption of a canon that invariably produced histories of non-European nations explaining why they were “different,” “peculiar,” or “inferior,” always in relation to Europe – even though the canon itself was based on a very schematic, oversimplified image of Europe. The canon is not the image of Europe, but it is the use of this image to construct other images, similar or different, but always in comparison to it.

What is the difference between the canon in religious or literary terms and the canon in terms of historiography? In the first case, religious or literary canon was constructed as an index of texts.<sup>14</sup> Historical canon is rather flexible as it does not depend on a defined body of texts. While the first is rather rigid, the latter is dialogic and negotiable and depends on the interplay between center and periphery. Negotiation does not mean that the normative role of the historical canon was less efficient. But the dialogue between the canon and the deviation from the canon was proliferous, and national historiographies are the result of this cross-border dialogue and negotiation.

The historical canon is rarely explicit. It is traceable through the responses to the taxonomies, evaluations, and conceptualizations which have been imposed on national historiographies. To give an example, in describing modern Greek history as having missed some important moments of European history such as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, or the opposite, as having succeeded in synchronizing itself with important moments of European history (early formation of the nation-state and adoption of parliamentarism), the result is the same: The writing of history according to a canon, which implied that certain big events were essential for the creation of a modern society in Europe. This canon may be missing literarily, but conceptually it is present in the national historiographies. The language of “what is missing,” of absence, lack, deficiency, and divergence, is the constructive element of most national historiographies. The invisible element is how they realize what is missing and how they measure distance and divergence. The shadow of European history is always looming over the shoulders of the writers of national histories.

The canon depends on the interaction, first, between the way Europeans construct their history towards other Europeans and, secondly, on the way that non-Europeans see themselves in response to the European gaze. Regarding the inter-European relationship, one of the most celebrated cases, though not unique, is the debate in German historiography on the *Sonderweg*, according to which Germany took a “special path” to modernity in comparison with the other major nations of Europe. The divergence of this path from an imaginary mainstream was “measured” by modernization theories, which functioned here as the basic historical framework.<sup>15</sup> As a consequence, the encounter with the canon produced a comparative framework as well as the scope of comparison. From this perspective, historical sociology and the theories of modernization, common to social history since the 1960s, served as transnational vehicles of comparative history.<sup>16</sup>

Another form of this interaction regards the relationship between European history and the history of former colonies. When European historians claimed that, for instance, Africa had no history before the arrival of the Europeans (“There is

only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not the subject for history”<sup>17</sup>), African intellectuals responded with the idea of the African “contribution” to civilization. Amílcar Cabral, an intellectual from Guinea-Bissau stated in 1969 that “colonialists usually say that it was they who brought us into history: Today we show that this is not so. They made us leave history, our history, to follow them, right at the back, to follow the progress of their history.”<sup>18</sup> Cabral’s evocation of a pre-modern local form of history was not a call to return to local oral mythical stories. It had to do with the efforts of African historians to demonstrate, using the discourse of modern historiography, that Africa was the birthplace of civilization. This antiphonic form of the canon was the master plan for the construction of several national histories. As a response to the European canon, a long tradition of writing about the African “contribution to civilization” was formed.<sup>19</sup>

The canon is prolific because it created the categories and concepts with which we comprehend the very sense of modern history, even at the expense of local experience. In using, for instance, the term “secularism” in relation to Turkey, we should bear in mind that it describes neither something similar to the Western European experience nor something different, but something modeled on this experience, something accommodating Turkish history to the Western canon of statesmanship, of “how a modern society should be,” as well as the description of this adaptation.<sup>20</sup> Secularism and religion, civilization and culture, nation and ethnicity, class, civil and political society, democracy, and other terms were used as vehicles for rendering meaningful past experiences for the modern subject and translating them into the modern historical language. This conceptual substratum determines the canonical discourse of European history and extends it beyond the chronological structure of historical events. As a consequence, while it is possible to write the history of the concepts on which the history of the major countries at the core of the canon rely, in the case of the societies lying outside of or on the borders of the canon, historians were expected to measure delays, deviations, deformations, or particularities. For instance, the history of the concept of freedom could be traced in English, French, and German history with references to Greek and Latin etymology. In regard to peripheral or non-European countries, what matters is how they have conceived, translated, and adapted the term, not how they have contributed to the making and the changing of its meaning. This difference gives an all-embracing structure to the historiography of European national histories, as well as an internal tension. One of the most elaborated examples of criticism on how concepts and categories transplanted from one historical reality to the other is the criticism of the colonial writing of Indian history.<sup>21</sup>

### **Making and remaking the canon**

The canon was not established at once, but it was made and remade several times. It is integral to the making of European historiography not only because it refers to the major landmarks of European history, but also because it invests them

with meanings and evaluations regarding European and extra-European societies, nations, civilizations, and religions. Until the common European projects of writing a European history during the last decades of the twentieth century, European history was written inside national historical cultures projecting the national views toward the European past. The making of European historiography depended also on the continuous juxtaposition between what was considered to be “European” and what was not, and it was a field of contestation between rival concepts of what is and what should look like a “common” and “shared” course of European history.<sup>22</sup>

When did the idea that “Europe” had a history begin to traverse common conversation, and when did European history begin to be canonized? Not before the emergence of Enlightenment’s historical narratives codified on the basis of major societal watersheds.<sup>23</sup> The identification of the history of Europe with the concept of the transformation of society and the civilizing process could be considered as the core element of the canon. Enlightened European history was not a history of events without a coherent meaning, and over the course of time European history acquired a plot, based on some evaluations such as freedom, progress, civility, the “balance of power and equilibrium,” and individuality. Historical landmarks were used for establishing a pool of values, which, in turn, were used as a canon of “Europeanness,” regardless of the as-yet undefined concept of Europe. Of course, the admiration for non-European peoples and civilizations was not absent from European literature before the nineteenth century, but it was used as an allegory to criticize European societies.<sup>24</sup> From this viewpoint, it was not geography that determined what was “European,” but rather the distinctiveness of European history and civilization.

National movements, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, were conceived as civilizing processes connected to the making of European history. The Declaration of Greek Independence in 1821 stated: “We desire to assimilate ourselves into the rest of the Christians of Europe.”<sup>25</sup> Christianity was used as a metonymy for Europe. What Europe meant for Greeks was explained in an obituary to Adamantios Korais (1748–1833), a leading intellectual who had lived in Amsterdam and Paris and who tried to educate Greeks in the Enlightenment worldview and values and to inspire in them a national consciousness.

I know that in the realm of religion you were not a reformer like Luther or Calvin; in the realm of philosophy you were not a renovator like Bacon or Descartes; in the realm of politics you were not a theorist like Montesquieu or Rousseau. Those men lived in different times and circumstances, hence they were different personalities. Instead, you have tried to introduce into our homeland all those good things which humanity strove with its blood to acquire during the past three centuries: I mean freedom of consciousness, independence of reason and freedom of public governance.<sup>26</sup>

The text is an outstanding illustration of how the canon of European history was formed and used, or how it was formed through its use. Europe was seen

as being synonymous with humanity, and history was considered a path to freedom, rationalism, and emancipation. Since this path had been attained by the European countries, the meaning of nationalism became equated with “catching up” with the mainstream of history. Through the transference of a sense of canon, nationalism was identified with “Europeanization” even for nations belonging to the European continent. This identification was not only true for the Greeks. Benedetto Croce perceived the Italian *Risorgimento* as a chapter in the European history of liberty, and the unification of Italy as the transformation of the Italian peninsula into a European land. Czech democrats considered their participation in the revolt of 1848 as a necessity to rally themselves around the European family. Finally, Bulgarians named the years of the formation of their national identity *Renaissance*, as a resonance of the European Renaissance.<sup>27</sup>

At a close reading of the obituary to Korais, there are two levels of time and space: The first is the European “there and then” and the second is the Greek “here and now.” Of the two, the first was central. As a consequence, the European past constitutes the future of the Greek present. The first level is made up of condensed history, while the second is an empty place and time. This idea of emptiness, central to the model of cultural imitation and transference, is the counterpart to the canon and not only for the Greek case; it was more or less common to the political and cultural agendas of the national movements in the European context of the nineteenth century. The disruption of the present as a consequence of thinking of the self in juxtaposition to the canon is clear in a text by the Polish intellectual Aleksander Świątochowski, who in 1883 urged his compatriots:

[T]o join in the stream of general civilization, to adapt ourselves to it, to subject our life to the same rhythms which govern the development of other nations. Otherwise, they will never recognize our rights and our needs, and will continue to regard us if we were some *ancient relic which can be comprehensible only with the help of an archeological dictionary*.<sup>28</sup>

This duality of the time, “living now” as “ancient relics,” was inflicted by the interplay between normativity and historicity contained in the canon. The canon not only imposed a comparative dimension into the thinking and writing of national history, but it also was compelled to play a normative role and to teach the nation how it should behave in the present and in the future.

During the nineteenth century, the history of Europe had not yet emerged as a clear construction of the history of the continent. It was rather a universal history that culminated in Europe, and the European canon of history emerged from the European mirror of world history. François Guizot, in his *Cours d'histoire moderne*, written between 1829 and 1832, presented the history of Europe as the history of the constitutive elements of civilization.<sup>29</sup> With France as the indisputable protagonist (“there is not a single great idea, not a single great principle of civilization, which, in order to become universally spread, has not first passed through



France<sup>30</sup>); his European history became the history of freedom and progress and the pattern on which the national histories of Europe were placed and modeled. Under the auspices of the history of civilization, historical agency was transferred from the use of nations as vehicles of providential will to their civilizing contribution. European historians like Leopold von Ranke and philosophers of history like Hegel developed the idea that universal history was the sequence of nations contributing to civilization. Jules Michelet, in his *Introduction à l'histoire universelle*, wrote that the whole of history was a struggle between man and nature, the spirit and the material, freedom and fatalism. Man, spirit, and freedom were thought of as belonging to Europe, and nature, the material, and fatalism as belonging to Asia. Christian faith and morality, Greek philosophy, art, Roman law, and statecraft made up the core of this tradition. History was “the grand human movement from India to Greece and to Rome, and from Rome to us [the French].”<sup>31</sup> This imaginary course of history was enriched during the following century by the invention of Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment as new turning points in European (and world) history.<sup>32</sup> The theory of evolution and Darwinism, social theory from Karl Marx to Max Weber, and theories of modernization in post-World War II Europe and the United States turned the idea of the Western trajectory of civilization into one of the primary ideas of modernity.<sup>33</sup>

This history was highly selective because what mattered were the glorious eras of the advancement of the human mind and civilization and not the obscure events of suffering and oppression. But the main effect of this history was the “othering” of regions, nations, and civilizations from this trajectory of civilization. The European periphery, other continents, and non-European countries and cultures were considered to be negative, stagnating in older development stages, stuck, or deviations from this victorious course of personified history. Nineteenth-century anthropology, Social Darwinism, and eugenics played a tremendous role in the embedding of this linear concept of history as a narrow path for the selected races. Karl Pearson wrote that “the path of human progress is strewn with the decaying bones of old nations, everywhere we can see the traces left behind by inferior races, the victims of those who have not found the narrow path to perfection.”<sup>34</sup> Even Karl Marx, though critical of British imperialism, concluded that colonization brought India into the evolutionary narrative of Western history.<sup>35</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, the diffused idea in Europe about the past was, according to G. W. Stocking:

European civilization was the end product of an historic progress from a savage state of nature, that the development of all human social groups (composed as they were of beings of a single species with a common human nature) necessarily followed a similar gradual progressive development, and that the stages of this development could be reconstructed in the absence of historical evidence by applying the “comparative method” to human groups coexisting in the present, had come to form by the end of the eighteenth century the basis of much Western European social thought.<sup>36</sup>

Although the past was split between the deep past of anthropologists and prehistorical archeologists and the short historical past of historians, the history of the world was predominately conceived as the history of Europe.<sup>37</sup>

After the end of World War I, this image of the European supremacy was apparently strengthened, but at a deeper level “relativized” by the writing of world histories (Wells, Spengler, Toynbee, Sorokin, Dawson, Mumford, and others), a very popular genre between historical narrative and philosophic history, which enjoyed a specific place in European historiography.<sup>38</sup> This wave of world histories emerged from a mixture of disappointment from a liberal course of history, which collapsed as a result of World War I, and the anxiety of the learned elites over the tide of mass upheavals that followed the revolution in Russia. It was a response to the concern that European civilization would perish. World histories used a civilization discourse which was extended to the great empires and civilizations of pre-modern times. In this perspective, the term *civilization* became neutral, having beginning and end, rise and fall, and not only degrees and hierarchies of a unique category of civilization used as a standard of the “more or less civilized.” According to W. H. McNeill, “by cycling through the recorded past, Spengler and Toynbee put European and non-European civilizations on the same plane.”<sup>39</sup> At the same time, interwar world histories that presented Western civilization as a coherent, compact civilization, arching from ancient Greece to modern times, codified the European canon and rendered it to a pattern of civilization.<sup>40</sup>

World War I resulted in the reshaping of Europe, through the dissolution of the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian Empires and the appearance of new small and medium states from the Baltic to the Mediterranean. The problem that emerged from the need of the new nations to craft their own identity and history imposed the question of who belonged to Europe, and what might be the structure of European cultural geography. The debate over the borders of Europe became a debate over the shape of European history, with explicit political resonances. Eastern European history since the eighteenth century had been a laboratory for concepts regarding belatedness, backwardness, distortions, deformations, and other nuances of an intra-European “Orientalism.” During this period, Eastern Europeans took the floor in order to define themselves, their national and regional identity, and their position vis-à-vis European history. Their main argument to defend their belongingness to European history was grounded on their religious and cultural adherence to the Catholic Church and the Roman legacy. Both were regarded as central elements of a canon of belonging to Europe. Placing Russia and the Balkans outside the canon, as the land of Orthodoxy, serfdom, and authoritarian rule, they were pushing those regions over the European border. In shifting their own line of exclusion from the canon further eastwards (in the eighteenth century this border lay east of Berlin and Vienna), they remade the canon. The concept of East-Central Europe was born out of this discourse, declaring the borders of the region as those of European civilization. Polish historian Oscar Halecki and his colleagues from Czechoslovakia and Hungary battled in international historical conferences to exclude Eastern Europe and to keep East-Central Europe

within European history. However, the fight for the canon comprised many minor confrontations:

Henri Pirenne made a historical distinction between Western and Central Europe, with clear political connotations after the First World War. For the Belgian historian, although Western Europe was transformed in a capitalist and liberal society, the persistence of servitude in Central Europe resulted in undemocratic and military mentalities and authoritarian regimes which led to the Great War.<sup>41</sup> The agrarian transformation and the path to capitalism subsequently became a central concern of historical debates and defined the way that national histories were used to describe their path to modernity. Capitalism, industrial transformation and liberal society became part of the canon; military and authoritarian regimes were excluded.<sup>42</sup>

The distinction between Western and Central Europe had its discontents. As the term *Mitteleuropa* was claimed by the Germans for assuring their hegemony over the regions included in the old boundaries of the German and Habsburg Empires, the intellectual elites of the small, new countries had defined themselves in terms of a "Europe of small states" (Tomáš Masaryk)<sup>43</sup> or "New Europe," in opposition to pan-Slavism in the East and pan-Germanism in the West.

Nicolae Iorga tried to present arguments justifying the incorporation of the Balkan states into the canon, coining the term "Byzance après Byzance," which meant that despite the Ottoman (i.e. Asian) domination of the Balkans, Hellenic culture, the Roman legacy, and Christian civilization had survived.<sup>44</sup> The Romanian historian's goal was to develop a new conception of universal history, removing the differences between Western, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe on the basis that the whole of Europe embodied the continuing influence of the idea of Imperial Rome.<sup>45</sup> The problems of the eastern boundaries of the canon would reappear during the Cold War and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

During the 1930s and part of the 1940s, Nazism and fascism evoked a new image and a new perspective of Europe based on racial ideas of civilization and in sharp distinction between Europe, on the one hand, and the United States and Russia, on the other. Opposing these ideologies and their politics of history, European historians reacted by inaugurating the writing about European civilization, European consciousness, and values.<sup>46</sup> European civilization was considered an intellectual and cultural refuge from the crisis of values which were created by the mass invasion into politics, in the form of fascism but also of communism, or the cultural "rebellion of the mass," according to José Ortega y Gasset.<sup>47</sup> European culture and consciousness were idealized by liberals and conservatives as a repository of values in opposition to the new barbarians. The writing of European histories was a reaction to this crisis, and according to Johan Huizinga, one of the pioneering historians of the period, it had to confront the "crisis of civilization," an idea diffused throughout the interwar period.<sup>48</sup> The older references to events such as the barbarian invasions, the French Revolution, and the rise of nation-states were still not considered to be of great value for the European consciousness because they

suggested the political and cultural fragmentation of the idealized community of European peoples. On the contrary, the emphasis was placed on references to the roots and values of the common Christian past, the classical legacies of the Greek and Roman antiquity, and the transformation of the European consciousness during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The historiography of European history before, during, and after World War II, glorifying certain cultural moments, whitewashing the past, and removing from the picture violence and authoritarianism as integral parts of European history, remade the canon of European history. It was part of a liberal intellectual resistance against totalitarianism and pointed out the making of a new, unified European consciousness.<sup>49</sup>

Big wars have always had a deep effect on historiography, and the need to accommodate pre-war perceptions of identity, war experiences, and the new post-war realities intensified historical debates. World War II opened a deep rift in the European self-image, and the prevailing idea was that European history had come to an end. The community which would undertake its legacy was composed of the Western European countries along with the republics of North America. This idea was affirmed during the Cold War, when the Atlantic community acquired many institutional forms such as the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The canon was recast along Western/Eastern lines and the Atlantic was declared an “inland sea of Western civilization.”<sup>50</sup> The turn from European to Western history was effectuated through the use of concepts which referred to large blocks of civilization. Western civilization was equated to Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian origins, and the liberal-constitutional evolution and free market were common to Europe and the United States.<sup>51</sup> This canon of Western civilization (which also encompassed Japan, an ally of the Western world after the war) became one of the big ideological postulates of the world order in the second part of the twentieth century. According to Sir George Clark in his introduction to the *New Cambridge Modern History*: “Civilization [...] from the fifteenth century, spread from its original Europeans homes, assimilating extraneous elements as it expanded, until it was more or less firmly planted in all parts of the world.”<sup>52</sup> The debasement of the canon from “Europe” to the “West” was also advocated by Eastern European intellectuals and historians who immigrated to the United States such as Halecki and Francis Dvornik.<sup>53</sup> For Halecki, the old periodization of European history (ancient, medieval, and modern ages) needed to be substituted by a new one, which could comprise, first, a “proto-Europe” from the Greco-Roman period to the spread of Islam around the Mediterranean basin, second, the 2000-year history of the making of Europe from the subjugation of the continent by the Romans until World War I, and, last, the Atlantic period from the American war of liberation to the unmaking of Europe through World War II and the Cold War. The exiled Polish historian believed that European civilization would survive as the Western civilization outside the confines of the old continent. The criterion of belonging to the canon was subsumed to the world “freedom.” He introduced two axes, a historical (vertical) and a geographical (horizontal). According to the historical axis, European history was a narrative of freedom and its enemies. According to the geographical axis, freedom was like a line thick in

the center and thinner towards the peripheries of Europe, which were dominated by extra-European powers (Spain by the Arabs, the Balkans by the Ottomans, and Eastern Europe by the Russians).<sup>54</sup> The politics of history during the Cold War were dominated by the affirmation of Western values and, above all, the right of freedom. Thus, the Western and Free World was identified. However, the main contribution to the canon during this period came outside historiography, from social sciences. Modernization theories were in vogue in the United States and in the English-speaking world during the 1950s and 1960s. Engulfing older views of history as evolution in progressive stages of growth, modernization theories were the product and, at the same time, producer of a historical canon in terms of ideal-type models of tradition and modernity. They had a strong impact on national histories in a period when modernization was the prevailing political and intellectual paradigm in national agendas.<sup>55</sup>

The recovery of the idea of Europe and the creation and promotion of a new European consciousness of peace and cooperation was the firm idea behind the Council of Europe. For this reason, a handful of distinguished historians and intellectuals were invited to Rome, in 1952, to discuss the writing of a new and unified history of Europe.<sup>56</sup> From the beginning, there were disagreements between the conveners and their guest historians. Politicians urged the promotion of a European history comprising liberal Europe, excluding the countries of the "Iron Curtain" and the Iberian Peninsula under dictatorial regimes. Historians, on the contrary, argued that "problematic" nations should be included in a European history but under different categories. They used three categories for Europe: The historical Europe, the problematic (Eastern and Southwestern) Europe, and the non-Europe, that is the Southeastern Europe which had not participated in the common European experience.<sup>57</sup> The organizers recommended a history of unifying moments, common institutions, and shared culture. Historians, in contrast, did not wish to exclude national perspectives and the conflicts between European nations. The organizers were personalities promoting the common European future and were bearers or heirs of the interwar utopian visions of Europe. They considered nationalism as the main enemy of their unification project. Their aim was the writing of a European history useful for the project of European unification. But unlike them, most of the participating historians had emerged from historical institutions in the service of nationalism, and they were unwilling to discard the national glasses of seeing the past, even the European past.<sup>58</sup>

The early experience of the Council of Europe demonstrated the future difficulties in the construction of a coherent institutional narrative of the European past. A possible solution was the appearance of the discourse on heritage and *patrimoine* during the 1970s. The concept of heritage with its materiality and, at the same time, symbolic power proved a more flexible solution in articulating a European past. The past was something that could be made on demand, could be enjoyed, and more importantly, could be financed. But what is heritage without a canon? Recurrent references to Christian, Roman, and Greek heritage (and the high rate of funding) proved that the canon had not changed, but now allowed room for

national legacies. The concept of heritage promotes the material and immaterial cultural achievements as the unified element of the European history, with the exception of martial and war monuments.<sup>59</sup>

A consequence of the cultural shift from history to heritage was that the canon was constructed by metonymies: Athens for the Classical past, Rome for the Roman Empire, Charlemagne for the Christian civility of the Middle Ages. These moments of the past were connected with special features of the present: Athens for democracy, Rome for the legal tradition of Europe, Charlemagne for a unified Europe that respected differences. The iconography of the euro banknotes is a good example of the articulation of the canon with the concept of heritage and identity at the turn of the twenty-first century. European history is recognized in the depiction of major, common moments from antiquity to the modern world, through different architectural styles. At the same time, these common images were combined with national symbols for the coins of each country. In this way, European and national audiences could share a common past with differentiated readings.<sup>60</sup>

The concept of heritage was enriched with another concept, elaborated in Pierre Nora's book *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984–1992). The "sites of memory" are material and non-material crystallizations of memory or memorializations of the past and include places such as monuments, archives, museums, commemorations, and widely recognized symbols. In contrast to heritage, the sites of memory are principally national. The only exception was the memory of World War II, regarding not the variety of local and national experiences, but the victory against Nazism (D-Day), the common opposition to the war, and the Holocaust. It is worth noting that during the 1952 discussions in Rome, references to genocide were suffocated because they were considered dangerous for the regeneration of national hate and as an obstacle to reconciliation.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, during the 1980s and 1990s the Holocaust became a symbol of European commemoration against intolerance, racism, and totalitarianism. Yet, the admission of the Holocaust to the European celebratory canon of history would have long-lasting consequences.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 put an end to the story of Atlantic Europe and renewed the old debates about the boundaries and the borders of Europe, the canon of its history and European identity. This debate had commenced in the previous decade among the dissident intellectual milieus of Eastern Europe. Opposing the Soviet rule of their countries, they turned to an idealized version of European history, stressing the "Europeanness" of Central Eastern Europe and contrasting this with the "non-Europeanness" of Eastern Europe. The "coming back to Europe" was considered to be a political alternative to the communist regimes. The Russian version of this debate was the unsuccessful idea of a "common European home" advanced during Perestroika. In both slogans there was a rivalry concerning the canon. According to the Polish-American historian Piotr Wandycz (1992),

Bohemia, Hungary and Poland did belong to the Western civilization. Christianity and all that it stood for, had come to them from Rome or, to put

it differently, the Western impact was the dominant and the lasting one. [The peoples of the East Central Europe] were shaped by and experienced all the great historical currents: Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, the French and Industrial revolutions. They differed drastically from the East (...) Their eastern frontiers marked the frontiers of Europe.<sup>62</sup>

Such an argument was the kind of response to the ongoing categorization of Eastern Europe outside the canon. Although Eastern European intellectuals made no reference to the pre- and post-war continuities in their countries, the return to Europe implied a canon purified from any negative aspects (dictatorships, anti-Semitism, ethnic cleansing) and comprising the values of freedom, open society, and citizenship, which were presented as immanent to all of the periods of European history. To Eastern European intellectuals, Europe appeared as the triumph of belief in truth, justice, freedom, human dignity, and democracy. For this European history, Russia and Eastern Europe were considered alien and, even more, the cause of all misfortune and backwardness in Eastern European countries. From the Eastern European experience it is clear that the construction of the canon depends heavily on the periphery. The canon was constructed where it was needed, but it has been constructed invoking “a figure of Europe from days gone by”<sup>63</sup> or as Benedict Anderson said, as an “inverted telescope.”<sup>64</sup> The duality of time is again present and reproduced, not as the archaism of the self-accused subject, but as the essence of past of the desired model. Europe and European history are invested with nostalgia whose tense is neither the past nor the future but the future past.<sup>65</sup>

The 1992 Maastricht Treaty decided to “bring the common cultural heritage to the fore.” As a consequence, a huge political enterprise emerged in the writing of new books and textbooks promoting European history in the spheres of education and public culture. It is important to state that European history still retained an internal hierarchy and a line of exclusion. The celebrated book by Jean-Baptiste Durosé, *Europe, Histoire de ses peuples* (1990), was confined to the history of the 12 states of the European Union (EU), plus those of Scandinavia, Switzerland, and Austria, but excluded Greece and Slavic Europe. According to Stuart Woolf, this undertaking was imbued with a European teleology and was organized around predefined concepts.<sup>66</sup> This policy of encouraging the writing of European history has made historians dependent on European financial programs without any problematization of and theoretical preparation for the writing of European history. A good illustration of this undigested use of the past is the volume published by the Greek government in which not only the concept of Europe but also the trend towards European unification is traceable to ancient Greece and Byzantine history!<sup>67</sup> The conference organized in Blois in 2000 during the French presidency of the EU was quite critical toward such attitudes and a different approach was emphasized: Instead of constructing a retrospective history of the EU, what was needed was to approach it as the result of concrete political initiatives during the post-war period. The introduction to the historical debate of the concept of contingency shifted the narration of European history from the concept of the canon

to the more flexible concepts of heritage, “*lieux de mémoire*,” and experiencing history.<sup>68</sup>

Various approaches brought the canon into crisis at the end of the past century. Social anthropology, exploring its own approaches to the non-European cultures, has deconstructed the conceptual frameworks presupposed by the European canon of history.<sup>69</sup> The rise of studies on Orientalism (inspired by the homonymous book by Edward Said), the criticism by subaltern studies of the European historians looking at Indian history, and finally the emergence of post-colonial studies have destabilized the writing of European history from the point of view of the canon. Contributing to the demolition of the canon was also the debate on the historical context of the Holocaust. Was it not an offspring of the European course of history and civilization? Mark Mazower's *Dark Continent* and Christian Meier's *From Athens to Auschwitz* are indicative titles of this reverse of the canon.<sup>70</sup>

In this making and remaking of the canon were two axes, one conservative and religious, stressing the Christian values as the core of European society and polity, and the other liberal, progressive, and rational, stressing the legacies of the Enlightenment, secularization, and the democratization of Europe. Most of the encounters with the canon were defined by one or the other conception of it. However, the reverse is also true. The definition of the canon along the lines of one or the other version was a consequence of the idealization of Europe through its imitation. Europe became a metaphor of its idealized and schematized history.

### **The Canon and “how to represent the nation”?**

If national historiographies were constructed not only as a nation's self-image but, at the same time, as a representation of the nation to the world, then interaction with the canon was one of the formative elements of national historiographies. By the same gesture, the canon was accepted, contested, or modified by national histories. As a consequence, the canon has produced derivative discourses and new concepts in the framing of national histories.

An example of this complex relationship is the formation of modern Greek historiography. Modern Greeks, constructing their history by identifying themselves as descendants of the ancient Greeks, could participate in the core of the European canon. But their medieval (Byzantine) and early modern history was totally alien to the European canon of history. The history of Byzantium, from Gibbon to Voltaire and Hegel, was regarded as a sequence of crimes, an epoch of religious fanaticism, devoid of any creativity in arts and literature, culturally sterile, and the twilight of the Roman Empire. The Ottoman period of the Greek history was also outside the canon. Both periods not only were excluded from the course of European history, but according to Pirenne, Bloch, and Febvre, European history had emerged and had consolidated in opposition to the Byzantines and the Ottomans. Furthermore, the estrangement of Eastern Europe and the Balkans from the European canon were related to the Orthodox Church and the Byzantine tradition, both claimed as parts of the Greek past.<sup>71</sup>



What was the response of Modern Greek historians? They reacted in three main ways: First, with the suppression of the undesired periods. Modern Greeks reclaimed the legacy of ancient Greece and dismissed their medieval and early modern pasts. Secondly, with the inclusion of the medieval period in the national narrative and with the insistence that it has contributed to the Western course of history. Finally, the third response was the sublimation of the excluded period with emphasis on its differentiation from Western cultural elements and, at times, the dismissal of the Western "canon." More than responses or reactions, these encounters with the canon were developed in strategies of producing meanings for the construction of the national identity, for its self-representation to the world, and for legitimating demands in foreign policy. In the early nineteenth century, the Greeks prioritized the first strategy which has remained the stronger component in the public representation of the past and in cultural policy. The name of the nation comes from antiquity and the principal symbol representing Greece to the world is the Acropolis. When a visualization of the long Greek mythistory was presented at the opening ceremony of the 2004 Olympics, the recognizable figures of the performance came from the part of Greek history belonging to the Western canon. The myth of Greece as the birthplace of Europe was even recruited for its accession to the European Economic Community. Yet what has given cohesion to the Greek historical narrative was the second strategy of incorporating the dismissed parts of the historical past into the history of the nation, presenting them as contributions to the main course of European history, as implied by the canon.

The main problem of writing national history outside Europe or on the European borders has to do with the exclusion or deviation from the canon, which is often conceived by national historiographies as stigma. Poland, according to the nineteenth-century Krakow school of history, was part of Europe because of its participation in the Latin and Christian culture, which distinguishes Europe from Asia, but it had deviated from the main course of European history since the eighteenth century because the ruling gentry proved unable to organize a centralized nation-state, which was a European feature. This thesis of "deviation" from the European canon was criticized some years later by the Warsaw school of history which, trying to shift the trauma from national self-recognition, declared that the fate of Poland was in part explicable by its role as the "shield of Europe" against the East, and not by the "suicidal perversions" of the Polish nation. In both cases, national history could not be viewed beyond its relation to the European canon.<sup>72</sup>

The Ottomans and their empire were considered not only alien to European history but the main enemy of European nations since the fifteenth century. When the Turks undertook the effort to organize a modern nation-state after World War I, they had to write their national history in conformity to the European canon. But, how to deal with their Ottoman past? Their ancestors were considered a nomad people whose invasion destroyed the civilization in the East, and their rule was stigmatized by the history not only of Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbs but also of the Arab nations. The initial reaction of the nationalist historians, under Kemal Atatürk, was to invent a remote period of prehistory and to present Turks as the

inventors of language and the predecessors of European civilization. This invention of a classical past was part of a more general strategy of adaptation to the Western canon of history, constructed around the trinity of a golden era, a dark interregnum, and a national revival. It was explained brilliantly by Atatürk, in 1927:

Gentlemen, it was necessary to abolish the fez, which sat on our heads as a sign of ignorance, of fanaticism, of hatred to progress and civilization, and to adopt in its place the hat, the customary head-dress of the whole civilized world, thus showing, among other things, that no difference existed in the manner of thought between the Turkish nation and the whole family of civilized mankind.<sup>73</sup>

This strategy of adaptation was undertaken by the Westernized and modernizing elites and the most outstanding example was the adoption of the Latin alphabet. At times, the strategy was to minimize the difference from the canon and to normalize the deviation. For instance, the rise of social history in Europe during the second part of the twentieth century, under French auspices, gave Balkan and Turkish historians the opportunity to present their history as a normal part of the European *longue durée*. Turkish historians participated in the post-war debate on feudalism by celebrating the Ottoman state as the protector of the independent peasantry of the Empire. Specific elements of the Turkish social tradition were emphasized (by Barkan in 1937) as offering a solution to the social problems of the peasantry and as a third way between capitalism and socialism!<sup>74</sup> This is a case of the sublimation of the initially excluded past.

The idea of not belonging to the canon creates a consciousness of absences and failures which could be described as a “negative consciousness”: Negative in the sense that the consciousness is not defined by what the subject is, but by what the subject is not, that is, the adoption of a perspective of self-exclusion. Post-colonial and subaltern historians have argued that Indian history was read in terms of lacking, failure, absence, incompleteness, and “inadequacy” in regards to Europe.<sup>75</sup> However, negative consciousness was also a feature of several European historiographies. During the period of the making of Russian national history, in the early nineteenth century, Yuri Samarin, criticizing Boris Chicherin’s approach to history, described it as the “negative tendency,” the “negative school,” or the “negative view of Russian life.” He wrote that “in other countries history has been written with an awareness of and sympathy for the national past of the historians’ country”. However, in Russia this was not the case. Historians of the “negative school” did not write about what was in “Russian life”, but “what was not in it.” Chicherin’s study of Muscovite institutions offered, Samarin noted, “a whole inventory of what had taken place in the history of Europe but not in that of old Russia.” Samarin accused Chicherin of describing Russia as having “no systematic legislation, no developed social estates, no adequate education in legal theory, and no widespread understanding of juridical principles.” Negative consciousness has also a strong presence in the history of the Balkan nations and the

term *Balkanization*, already having a pejorative meaning, has been used inside and outside the Balkans in a scornful and self-sarcastic style.<sup>76</sup> Negative consciousness would be considered as an internalized Orientalism constructed on the pattern of Western Orientalism. A good illustration is provided by the Serbian writer Jovan Dučić: “[t]here are only two Easts. One is Balkan and the other is Buddhist. The Balkan East: The cosmos has never yet seen such misery! Even today it lacks its own civilization, its own morality, its own nature . . . . The Balkans are even today a true Turkish desert.”<sup>77</sup> The stigmatization of the term *Balkan* has been internalized and its negative connotations have been used for the self-description of the area and its history.<sup>78</sup>

The resemblance to the West and the difference from Eastern Europe in terms of civil society was also a cornerstone of the historiography of *Mitteleuropa*.<sup>79</sup> Poland, despite its celebrated “Europeanness” was portrayed as

a country between the East and the West, where Europe starts to draw to an end, a border country where the East and the West soften into each other . . . None of the great movements of European culture has ever penetrated Poland, not the Renaissance, not the wars of religion, not the French revolution, not the industrial revolution.<sup>80</sup>

Negative consciousness was also an ingredient in the making of Spanish history. The Spanish historian Jaume Vicens Vives, in his book *Aproximación a la Historia de España* (1962), wrote that his objective was “to resolve the problem of the imperfection” of Spain in order to follow the path of “Western civilization towards capitalism, liberalism and rationalism, as well as the failure of Castile to make Spain a harmonious, satisfied and acquiescent community.”<sup>81</sup> Finally, even Italian history has been described by Antonio Gramsci as an “incomplete revolution” (*la rivoluzione mancata*). In this case, the canon was the French Revolution as an example of a deep transformation of the society towards the incomplete transformation of the Italian society and politics. The idea of the “incompleteness” was dominant in post-war Italian historiography, and not only.<sup>82</sup>

In negative consciousness, the significant past is not what had happened, but what did not happen. The negative image was used as “a whole inventory of what had taken place in the history of Europe,” according to Russian debates. As a consequence, neither the national history nor the history of Europe was just an account of the past. Both were a projection of measuring civilization, modernity, and the belonging to Europe. Negative consciousness was not only the response but also the product of the canon. Through this conceptualization, national histories describe, explicitly or implicitly, what is missing, the incompleteness of the national identity, and its own negative aspects. This conceptualization of the self in negative terms implies a dislocation of the point through which the subject observes the world, and involves the decentralization of its subjectivity. Freud wrote that “In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification.”<sup>83</sup> This displacement

concerns a discursive practice where subjects, political procedures, and institutions are constructed and located in a subordinate or subaltern position in relation to the center. Through this perspective, national histories cease to be solid and self-centric and acquire a role of relating and comparing things. In the Greek context, this dislocation was conceptualized as the “lost center.” According to this theory, which had an enormous impact on Greek literature and culture, modern Greek culture was fragmentary and without cohesion because it remained without an inner center.<sup>84</sup>

A further consequence of this negative consciousness is the internal division within non-canonized societies between a modern and a traditional sector. The interpretative framework of this division is influenced by social theories that characterize social change as the clash between the modernist elite and the inactive masses, renewal versus tradition. This framework was consumed, enriched, and expanded over time by a series of interrelated concepts: on the one hand, renewal, Europeanization, Westernization, rationalization, and modernization; on the other hand, traditionalism, inertia, conservatism, and anti-Westernism. This dichotomy, in various ways, penetrated the intellectual, political, and economic history from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.<sup>85</sup>

Tradition and modernity became founding concepts that re-ordered the historical facts and re-cast them in a binary logic. Further on, this dichotomy structured the social and historical disciplines, their methods, and their theories in various national historiographies. For instance, the resemblance to the West and the difference from Eastern Europe in terms of civil society is a cornerstone of the historiography of *Mitteleuropa*.<sup>86</sup> The invention of a Balkan Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and the Western origins of the national movements are central ideas in the historiography of Southeastern Europe.<sup>87</sup> Not only the alignment but also the exclusion from the canon was productive because it provided the framework for a comparison between the excluded and the canonized. Besides reordering the past, national historiographies responded to the canon by playing with the elements of differences and similarities in two ways: First, by seeing the difference in a traumatic way and by trying, at the same time, to indicate strongly the hidden or neglected similarities with the canon; second, by seeing the difference in a positive way and handling it as an alternative to the canon and thus turning it upside down.

### **Historiography between modernity and identity**

National histories, in order to serve the construction of identities imposed the need to celebrate differences, particularities, and exceptionality. As a consequence, the internal division between the “modernized” and the “traditional” has been reconstructed not only as an unequal relationship, meaning the superiority of the modern/Western/canonical towards the traditional/belated/non-canonical, but also as two domains of an equal relationship: The “inner” and the “outer.” The “inner” is identified with the spiritual, the “outer,” with the material. Language, religion, literature, aesthetics, family life, and identity were considered to belong

to the “inner” and the spiritual. Economy, technology, and statecraft were considered to belong to the “outer” and the material. In the “outer” domain, the issue was efficiency and compatibility. In the “inner” domain, historiographies were in search of authenticity, advocating a policy of preservation, while imitation was condemned as a parody. The celebration of the differences took several forms. In some cases, differences were seen as incompatible, but coexisting with the canon. In other cases, they were exalted to the detriment of the canon. The problem of compatibility between national particularities and the canon was a topic of negotiation in national historiographies, programs of education, literature, art, and historical culture. Historiography, although aligned with the modern/traditional dichotomy, imposed by the canon, was prone to define its task as the study of the particularity and the specific, defined as the essence of national identity.

If negative consciousness is a form of “self-othering,” the alternative appears as the othering of the canon and the celebration of differences, particularities, and exceptionality. Celebration of the differences took several forms. In some cases, they have been used to support exceptionality, being not incompatible but, rather, able to coexist with the canon. A strong tendency in Russian historiography was the “apologetic history,” which appeared as a reaction to the “Western” reading of Russian history. The basic idea was that Russian history could be read from the point of view of continuous dialogue between Russian history and “universal history.” For instance, in universal histories a prominent explanation for Russia’s seclusion from Europe was its occupation by the Tartars, an archetypal barbarous horde in the Western imagination. But, for Karamzin, the “Tatar yoke” saved Russia and its faith from invasion and partition by its Western enemies: “Moscow owes her greatness to the khans.”<sup>88</sup> Another central point of reversing the canon was the defense of absolutism and of the character of the Russian state. For Solov’ev it had conciliated the prince and the community, following an alternative path from the Western rise of individualism and the subsequent social disorder. For Samarin, “the Western world now expresses demands for an organic reconciliation of the principle of individuality with the principle of an objective norm obligatory for all—the demand for community (*obshchina*)”.<sup>89</sup>

The cornerstone of “othering” from the canon was not the state-centered history. The main arenas of celebration of the difference is cultural and literary history, as well as history-oriented literature. Opposing the *patriotismo del dolor*, a concept developed by Ortega y Gasset describing the Hispanic negative consciousness toward Europe in interwar years, Miguel de Unamuno proposed a confrontation with everything considered European, modern, and rationalist. Unamuno turned the scorn of Spain for bearing the stigma of “Africanismo” on its head, declaring that Spain should recognize its African roots in the great spiritual tradition of St Augustine. For the Spanish intellectual, historiography should evaluate the quixotic character of the Spanish people.<sup>90</sup> This was a call influenced by literature and addressed more to writers and essayists than to professional historians. Indeed, literature was the privileged field in the formation of an anti-Occidental hegemonic alternative. In Russia, the obsession with the past gave rise

to a mixed genre of history–literature–philosophical essays and the most influential versions of what history meant for the Russians. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is an outstanding example of how anti-canonness was connected with the search of an alternative narrative of the past and an alternative conception of history, unbound by the epistemology and historical realism of modern historical writing and historicism.<sup>91</sup>

Differences were strongly exalted to the detriment of the canon outside Europe and were used during the period of decolonization as an ideological coverage of anti-colonial movements. Such an example is the concept of “Negritude” developed by Leopold Sedar Sengor, a Senegalese intellectual, very influential to the African Francophone anti-colonialism:

Negritude [...] is a response to the modern humanism that European philosophers and scientists have been preparing [...] Africa has always and everywhere presented a concept of the world which is diametrically opposed to the traditional philosophy of Europe. The latter is essentially static, objective, dichotomic [...] The African, on the other hand, conceives the world, beyond the diversity of its forms, as a fundamentally mobile, yet unique reality that seeks synthesis.<sup>92</sup>

This rivalry to the canon was mild regards to approaches which considered history as the expression of the canon. A well-known and tremendously influential theory of the “othering” of the West was manifest in the book of the leading Iranian intellectual and one of the fathers of the Islamic Revolution, Jalal Al-e-Ahmad. The central idea of his book, *Westoxication* (1962), is to reverse the “othering” of the canon.<sup>93</sup> The accused or scorned “oriental” subject was transformed into a subject proud of his “orientality” and his differences from the West. This reverse to Orientalism was a new program of cultural politics. The Egyptian historian Tariq al-Bishri, defending it, wrote in the 1980s:

The Islamic approach to history [...] does not mean a new criterion for judging the objectivity of facts at hand. When we carry out historical research, and set up criteria to evaluate events, we should simply keep in mind the weight and influence of Islam, as a concept and as a culture, in shaping historical events.<sup>94</sup>

Intellectual approaches of this kind tend to criticize scientific historiography as an aspect of colonial rule rather than as a discipline that proclaims the universality of its method. Although important in culture and politics, these ideas divide historians in Muslim countries in two hostile camps.<sup>95</sup> Conventional history education, which insists on the universal prepositions of its approach to the past, regardless of the positioning of the subject, obstructs historians in turning the canon upside-down entirely. However, this obstruction reveals, at least, deeper strands between history as an intellectual method and the canon as the evaluation of the European course of history. Commenting on this inner link, critics of colonialism write that “globalization from Third World perspectives at its most radical presently entails

a repudiation not just of a Eurocentric mapping of modernity, but of history itself as a fundamental expression of Eurocentrism."<sup>96</sup>

Summarizing this argument, I would say that in European national historiography, the celebration of differences from the canon was restrained to an ethnocentrist perspective. National essentialism was a two-sided reaction to the canon because, at times, the nation represented a concretization of the European modernity and, at others, a repository of values to be preserved against the consequences of modernity.<sup>97</sup> In the nineteenth century, Joachim Lelewel, a Polish historian, romantic, and democrat, commenting on the negative identity that saw Poland as having deviated from European history, admitted that there was no unique road to progress but several national ways passing through the affirmation of the individuality of each nation.<sup>98</sup> Similar attitudes, which found expression as theories of multiple modernities (or varieties of modernity) in 2000, were closer to historicism and its emphasis on particularity without overthrowing the canon.<sup>99</sup> This was the most followed path by national historiographies, which hold on portraying national individuality, engaging in dialogue and negotiating with the canon, and bringing new "contributions to civilization."

## Conclusion

There is an ongoing production of theories of comparisons in history: Cross-national history, transnational history, *histoire croisée*, and entangled history.<sup>100</sup> My argument is that comparison is not an *à la carte* method, but rather, a given and even coercive framework that was historically formed and imposed from within the historical discipline from the nineteenth century onwards. What I am claiming is that, together with historical theory and method, and inside the description of the world past, a canon of world history was shaped as an implied code in writing history. It developed like an invisible worm in an apple and was swallowed with the apple. This implied code imposed a canon of how history evolved, and imprinted a hierarchy of nations, civilizations, and ways to modernity on the concept of history. Writing history means to internalize the canon, and to be ascribed in a mental geography prescribed by the canon. As a consequence, each nation, in writing its own history, was constrained to deal with the problem of its implied place in the mental global map. Writing history, whatever history it might be, involves a mediation or immediate encounter with this historical canon. That was true for world, European, and national histories, as well as for local history and social history. Through encountering the canon, a comparative framework was established, which produced and determined the scope, conceptual tools, meanings, and the purposes of comparison in national knowledge. This framework is traceable in history writing, but it has also transcended its borders and is visible in national historical culture.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the conceptual structure of writing national historiographies, as part of a dialogue between the canon and the strategies to overcome it. The canon of historiography and the way of handling the

canon have been used as a vehicle of values and norms, and as a way of constructing concepts and cultural attitudes in the making of national history and identity. Instead of adopting a rigid dualism between main and subaltern discourse, or between “Orientalism” and “Occidentalism,” we could see four main strategies, which are dependent on time and political agendas. The first was the suppression of certain aspects of the national history because they were excluded by the canon. The second was the indication and the promotion of the “neglected contributions” to the Western course of history. The third response was the sublimation of the excluded periods, with emphasis on their differentiation from the Western cultural elements, that is, the dismissal of the Western “canon.” All these strategies should be examined together because they are aspects of a dialogue that has produced the conceptual subtext of historiography. I have insisted on this dialogic form because it challenges the dichotomies between national narratives and supranational histories and focuses on the internal tensions in the transnational writing of history. Historiography is a form of representing the past in the terms of the prevailing contemporary cultural settings, but at the same time, it represents a search for the proper voice on how to address the world on your past, how to translate your experience, and how to negotiate your place in the world. Historiography, as a language of communication, has an implicit, immanent, strong comparative aspect.

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