Europe and the Emergence of Modernity.

The Entanglement of Two Reference Cultures

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Abstract

This article offers a theory of the notion 'reference culture' by taking as major examples modernity and Europe. Both constitute reference cultures and while different are closely related. A certain entanglement took place between the emergence of modernity and the formation of European culture whereby the latter came to be one of the main carriers of modernity. However, they need to be separated in that Europe, while being the first major expression of modernity, is not the only embodiment of modernity. Modernity can be termed a first-order reference culture and Europe a second-order one. While there have been many second-order reference cultures, the European one was an influential and powerful one, but it was also a temporary one. This article sets out the main features that define the specificity of Europe. Against accounts that emphasize a master narrative or an underlying cultural unity to Europe, it is argued that crucial to the making of Europe was the formation of modes of communication that enabled common practices to develop across a range of different cultures. In this way, it is argued, Europe consolidated as a consequence less of endogenous factors than exogenous ones. Important, too, was the mobile nature of European culture which facilitated translation into other cultures and which was also receptive to modernity. The twentieth century has witnessed the emergence of other varieties of modernity and the global decline of the European model.

Keywords: culture, Europe, European history, modernity, multiple modernities

Introduction

At the heart of the idea of Europe lies a certain paradox.[1] On the one side, Europe has been a cultural reference point for many parts of the world since the eighteenth century and, on the other side, it does not itself have any essential singularity that would make it a reference culture. The period in which Europe became such a reference culture was indeed short, no earlier than the late eighteenth century and by the early twentieth century it had ceased to be the beacon for the world. This was a time in which the rise of Europe roughly coincides with the emergence of modernity. It is therefore reasonable to suppose there was a relation between the idea of Europe and the emergence of modernity. However, that relation is by no means clear and it cannot be assumed that modernity sprung from within Europe or that there was no relation. Europe signifies specificity while modernity invokes universality. The claim of European universality cannot be seriously entertained and nor can the reduction of modernity to Europe. In this paper I would like to try to resolve the apparent paradox by asking three questions. What are the defining features of Europe that provide its singularity or distinctiveness? Which of these features, if any, constitute the matrix of a reference culture? What is modernity and of what does its relation to Europe consist?

The argument advanced in this article is that neither Eurocentric approaches that stress either the exemplarity or exceptionality of Europe nor postcolonial arguments offer adequate accounts of European history. It is possible to identify the singularity of Europe without recourse to purely internalist accounts of its history that ignore the relation to the non-European world; it is also possible to identify logics of development that cannot be entirely explained by reference to the elements typically highlighted by postcolonial theorizing. Indeed, the formative influences of the non-European world precede the age of imperialism and cannot be entirely accounted for by overseas colonization. Those than can be attributed to colonization constitute an important strand, but only one of many. But one of these looms large: namely the 'discovery' of what came to be known as America. This event opened up a new imaginary for Europe, which prepared the ground for modernity. It symbolized a world that was new and with this came limitless possibilities for the future, which ultimately were to reside outside Europe. This

was the paradox of Europe's discovery of the modern world, a discovery that, as has often been noted, was also a conquering of the world.

The Singularity of Europe

Accounts of the singularity of Europe are faced with two difficulties. The first is the problem of separating the history of Europe from the history of its constituent units, namely nations or empires out of which it consolidated. For most histories, the history of Europe is the history of its nations.[2] Whether there is a history of Europe as such has been generally either rejected or avoided in mainstream historiography. Indeed, most accounts of the idea of Europe stress discontinuities and divisions.[3] The notion of unity in diversity has been one response to this problem. The appeal of the notion can undoubtedly be attributed to its vagueness. Yet, it also encapsulates the divergent trends in the making of Europe.

The other problem is the external perspective on Europe in its relation with the wider world. This has become increasingly important in global and transnational history. Separating Europe from the non-European world is by no means clear-cut since much of European history happened in other parts of the world and that which we take to be Europe today includes areas that in earlier times were not considered to be European. European overseas colonialism from the sixteenth century to the late nineteenth century has been formative of many other histories and, we are increasingly accepting, formative of European history. Moreover, as is now well established, the geopolitical limits of Europe have shifted many times in history, such that it is not possible to say by recourse to geography of what it consists. So there is therefore something unsatisfactory in the conventional approach to the history of Europe in terms of a history of nations and the contradictory assumption of the relative coherence of Europe when it comes to the wider world. How is it that the only unity that can be found consists of a difference between Europe and the non-European world, when within Europe there are only differences? Despite these conceptual and methodological problems the idea of Europe can be defined in ways that overcome this contradiction.

Suspending for the moment the second problem of the external versus internal definition of Europe, I shall address firstly the problem of

singularity versus commonality, as the solution to this may help with the second problem. Is there anything specific to the European heritage that gives to it a defining characteristic that marks it off from the historical experience of other parts of the world? Max Weber famously posed this question and found that the answer lay in the prevalence of a particular mode of rationality – the so-called 'methodic manner of life' – that was, he believed, most developed in Europe. Although often criticized for misreading other civilizations and using Europe as an evaluative reference, it is evident from a reading of the 'Author's Introduction'[4] that he believed empirical inquiry leads to the conclusion that the main value spheres of life in Europe – economy, law, religion – were pervaded by a pronounced concern with rationality. While Weber's approach can be questioned on many accounts, and not least his assumption of civilizations as relatively intact, he did not claim that Europe is culturally superior. However, one problem remains, namely his over-emphasis on rationality and the association of this with Europe.

Rather than highlighting one over-arching characteristic of Europe, it can instead be hypothesized that there have been five features of European history and more generally characteristics of the European heritage that can be singled out. The challenge is to avoid over-pluralizing Europe, but also to avoid recourse to a metaphysical master narrative, as was once common. In rejecting such 'grand narratives', we still have the problem of finding an alternative narrative. Perhaps the sceptic will argue we do not need narratives. This may be true, but we need ways of making sense of the past. Such sense-making does not necessarily need to take the form of a master-narrative. Nor does it need to take the form of a search for an essential trait, such as rationality. Indeed, many of the features to be discussed below are not in themselves necessarily exclusively European. Instead, what is more significant is the combination that resulted. The fact that at various points in history these features combined to produce distinctive constellations or cultural models is, in the final analysis, what gave Europe shape and thus what might be said to be a part of its defining nature.

The first feature of European history that can be singled out is the fact that no single power ever gained supremacy for long. This has been a central feature of European history that had enduring formative consequences for the making of Europe. It is also why out of the plurality of very similar powers no European-wide nation or state emerged. The

European historical experience has been one in which a plurality of city states, small regional states, territorial empires, and later nation-states dominated with none ever gaining total supremacy and none enduring for long.[5] These states, despite their differences, had remarkable similarities, with inter-marriages between the royal households the norm and common practices of government and in warfare. Yet, no common state emerged from these lineages. The Roman Empire was the first major political order, but it can only with difficulty be equated with Europe, since it was more of a Mediterranean empire. It would be more accurate to say Europe emerged out of the collapse of the Roman Empire, beginning with its internal division into Greek eastern and western Latin parts. This early division formed the inner tension in later patterns of European history, which never led to a common European tradition. While this story can be told in terms of a history of divisions culminating in the Reformation and the wars of religion of the seventeenth century and the later wars of the twentieth century, it should also be seen in terms of a tension that gave to Europe a certain indeterminacy and the absence of path-dependency in its political structures. While wars between the various centres of power were of course common, so too was the balance of power system since 1648 and the unique relationship that was established earlier between church and state whereby an accommodation was achieved, such that the former never gained ascendancy over the state. It was an accommodation in which the state had the upper hand. The overall result of this was the absence of a centre of power. This does not mean that there were no centres, but that none of them was the dominant one. For this reason it is not possible to say where the centre of power lies. Perhaps today there is a new centre of power forming in Brussels and Frankfurt, but it is a recent development with uncertain prospects. Indeed, the history of European integration fits well into this picture of a plurality of orders of powers.

Secondly, closely related to the previous point, another important feature of the European tradition was a strong tradition of civil society. Since the early Middle Ages local powers won rights against the nobility setting limits to the centralization of power. Elites had to negotiate power with organized civil society groups, such as merchants, craftworkers, the intelligentsia, and later organized workers. This was most developed in the cities, in particular the autonomous cities. There the demands of organized guilds and non-state organizations checked the

growth of absolutism.[6] The outcome can be described, as what Jeno Szücs in a classic essay has referred to as a 'plurality of small freedoms'.[7] The structure of power institutionalized by Norman feudalism gave a foundation to legal and symbolic relations of mutual recognition whereby the ruler had to grant rights to those lower down in return for their obligations. The history of modern Europe was one in which civil society movements played a major role in shaping the direction of societal development. This is why in Europe many powerful political movements took off and had reverberations in other parts of the world, from republicanism and liberalism to conservatism, nationalism, socialism, anarchism, communism and fascism. The long-term consequence of civil society was that authority was constantly contested and that as a result of politicization it was difficult for any centre of power to endure. This point can be characterized as a constant tension between legality and legitimacy. The legality of any political order was always open to questioning from those who did not accept its legitimacy. This problem arises when new sources of authority emerge and challenge the legitimacy of the old order. The prevalence of civil society had the effect of constantly producing new claims to legitimacy. This undoubtedly had a democratizing effect in the long term, since it had the effect of setting limits to central state power, but it was not always necessarily so in that such contestation must also be seen as a consequence of group interests.

Thirdly, the relation between the present time and the past was from very early on in the history of Europe one of periodic rupture. Within Christianity disputes over the scriptures and ecclesiastical authority set the terms for a tradition of disputes that was not confined to religion. The rise of Christianity itself was responsible for the break with antiquity, for in severing direct links with the pagan cultures of Greece and Rome the Christian Church established itself as the new, or the modern. It severed any connection with territory, since it was deemed to be a universal church. In becoming the common religion of Europe, it established a tension with the profane world, which Max Weber claimed to provide Europe with the basic impetus towards rationalism. The movements that shaped the later history of Europe, from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance and Enlightenment, shared this tendency towards the severance of the present from the past. To be sure, the Reformation and the Renaissance saw the present as deriving its legitimacy from

the recovery of an older past that if retrieved would allow the present to break free from the recent past. But this spirit of rebirth or revival of a more ancient mind was nonetheless a rejection of the preceding age. The later and more utopian movements of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, in bringing a more future oriented dimension to the European mind, developed this spirit of asserting the priority of present time over the past. This does not mean that the only common culture was one of re-interpreting the past, though I argue it was the most important legacy and was almost certainly more pronounced in Europe than elsewhere, at least before the twentieth century when arguably modernizing currents elsewhere brought about major ruptures with the past (the October Revolution being the most striking example). Early medieval Christianity, despite its divisions and doctrinal disputes, laid the basis for common traditions throughout Europe in, for example, the tradition of Roman law, Latin, the names of the saints, diocesan organization, architecture, art and music etc.[8] The theoretical point, then, is that continuity was achieved to a large degree through rupture, which made possible the reconstruction of the past in new forms.

Fourthly, closely related to the previously discussed point of the internal logic of development within European culture that led to the formation of a self-questioning attitude, an additional dimension to the European tradition can also be identified. This can be termed the double pursuit of individual and collective liberty. It has been widely regarded that the idea of the individual was invented in Europe. Morris traces individualism to the twelfth century.[9] It was integral to Christianity, in the quest for individual salvation; it was the basis of European philosophy and ethics. While the notion of the individual as such cannot be exclusively attributed to Europe, since similar ideas can be found in ancient Indian civilizations for example, what is perhaps more characteristically European were the political implications that followed from the discovery of the individual. The emphasis on the individual, for instance, lent itself to the philosophy of liberalism and to the capitalist ethic. It was frequently in tension with the related pursuit of collective autonomy, which was another current in the European political tradition and which expressed itself in republicanism and in socialism. A feature of European political identity was precisely this tension between individual and collective autonomy.

Fifthly, the final aspect of the European heritage that can be high-lighted is the cultivation of a world orientation. The Europeans were not the only ones who developed an interest in other peoples, but it is arguably the case that curiosity about other cultures was taken further in Europe. There was extensive borrowing of the culture of others, as has been much documented in recent years by global historians. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the most salient aspects of European science and technology were derived from other civilizations.[10] European civi-lization was itself constituted through centuries of cross-fertilization from other cultures, especially those of the East and the Mediterranean. Central to all of this was of course European colonization. While not all of European ventures to the furthest corners of the world were colonial ones, many were and this was one of the main ways in which Europe related not only to the non-European world but also to itself. Lying at the very source of Europe's engagement with the world was the very notion of the world, which was considerably more developed in Europe than, for example, in China, where the world effectively was the world of the Middle Kingdom. For Europe, the world was not Europe; it was outside, as in the notion of the New World. Europeans sought to know this world and to master it both intellectually and politically. The map was not a European invention, but Europeans developed sophisticated cartographic techniques that made it possible to think of the world as a globe.[11] The European discovery of what became known as America was the single greatest event that shaped the formation of the European worldview.[12] Unlike the encounter with Asia, the encounter with America took the form of a 'discovery' that challenged the assumptions of a world ordered by Eurasian civilizations. It opened the way for the emergence of the wider category of the West, which ultimately reduced the place and significance of Europe.

The foregoing is obviously a limited characterization of some of the defining tenets of the European heritage. In highlighting these elements – most of which have been variously noted by others – I have tried to foreground the absence of a common model of unity such as a common language, a notion of peoplehood, religion, and state. This approach to the European heritage is also a corrective of 'essentialist' arguments that seek to attribute an undue emphasis on any of these characteristics as constituting the basic soul or spirit of Europe. It is in this respect that the approach developed here differs from the more

Eurocentric accounts. Rather than emphasize any of these characteristics as constituting a primary identity, the argument instead is that it was their combination that gave rise to a particular matrix – or set of cultural models – that was formative of modern Europe.

A pronounced trend in this matrix, which can also be termed civilizational, has been towards plurality, which was reinforced by every drive towards unity, but which always led to the production of new differences. However, the notion of plurality presupposes logically a relation to a larger matrix or framework that is pluralized. Of what does this consist if it does not imply homogenization or a process of convergence? Avoiding the poles of unity and diversity, without denying either, the point must be that similar logics of development unfolded at various points in Europe through systems of exchange whereby the above five characteristics evolved and combined in different ways, but with much the same effects. This means that in order for Europe to consolidate both as a consciousness and as a civilizational matrix, an interlinked system of communications must have existed. Europe was considerably more networked than other parts of the world due in part to its navigational rivers, trade routes, centres of learning from monasteries to universities, translations, map making, the early development of printing and the techniques for the manufacture of paper etc. The bourgeois culture of modernity, as Seigel has also shown, was based on networks that facilitated its diffusion.[13] It was this that made Europe possible rather than a preordained structure or a common culture.[14]

A preliminary conclusion is that what is common in the history of Europe is not a shared culture or common institutional framework, but the existence of modes of communication that facilitated similar logics of development, such as developments related to the five points discussed in the foregoing. In this way the paradox of unity and diversity can be understood in more sociological terms. There are three aspects to this. Firstly, the more communication, the more difference since conduits of communication do not produce integration into a common framework or imply that people will draw the same conclusions from similar information. In fact they are more likely to draw different conclusions. Like players in a game, each seeks to win but by playing according to common rules. Thus common rules lead to diverse outcomes. This is the sense in which the unity of Europe might be best conceived, a unity that came from the adoption of common practices across

a range of institutions in different geographical areas. This produced modes of integration that while differing in their design and cultural contexts were nonetheless remarkably similar. A pertinent example is the case of the adoption of the nation-state and the very idea of the nation, which is arguably a European invention and a characteristic of Europe and which paradoxically at the same time was the very political form that gave rise to conflict and warfare.

Secondly, the outcome, especially with regard to the above five elements, is not simply the passing on of a message unchanged, but a reinterpretation of previous systems of thought with which often went an attitude of self-transformation: in the terms of both Weber and of Foucault, 'transform thyself' was often the message. Against the Eurocentric assumption of a foundational origin – a spirit of a founding subject – that provides later eras with the basic blueprint, instead the only constants are simply diverse reference points that provide individuals with the tools to construct identities. In science, in ethics and in religion this was the developmental logic of European culture that became all the more proliferate due to the interlinked nature of Europe.

Thirdly, facilitated by networks of communication an imaginary Europe took shape relatively early (before a comparable development took place in other parts of the world). Europeans could thus imagine Europe as a continent and as a civilization. This was aided in no small way by the decline of Christendom and its substitution by the idea of Europe as a surrogate symbolic world. The capacity to imagine a larger world, the world of Europe, made it possible for Europeans to imagine the still larger entity of the world as a globe. This had potentially cosmopolitan dimensions in opening the European mind to other universes of meaning. In the era before colonization cosmopolitan currents were important expressions of this cognitive development. Indeed, it is arguably the case that they preceded both nation and empire. This is especially the case in Germany where cosmopolitanism preceded the formation of national consciousness, according to Meinecke's famous thesis in 1907.[15] However, there can be little doubt that these currents were later reversed by the stronger waters of nationalism and colonialism.

In sum, it was dense and durable networks of communication that created the conditions for the possibility of something that can be called Europe. These networks make possible ultimately the extension of Europe beyond itself and to the translocation of Europe to many

parts of the world. This points in the direction of a mobile conception of European culture, namely a kind of culture that is not tied to a foundational origin. What is offered here is a sociological thesis about the explanatory significance of networks of communication and an argument that this made possible the diffusion of modes of thought and practices that tended to increase contestation. The result was a plurality of cultural and political sites, but this was possible only because of the matrix of exchanges that consolidated.

Figure 1: Map showing the telegraph lines in operation, under contract, and contemplated, to complete the circuit of the globe by H.H. Lloyd & Co. Publisher, (1872) (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_showing_the_telegraph_lines_ in_operation,_under_contract,_and_contemplated,_to_complete_the_circuit_of_the_ globe_(8346430055).jpg, Norman B. Leventhal Map Centre).

The Making of a Reference Culture

Europe became a reference culture from the late eighteenth century, but this was above all a development of the nineteenth century. Before the mid-eighteenth century Europe was a marginal part of the world. The civilizations of Asia, especially in China and India, and the Ottoman Empire were the main centres of the world, which had its centre of gravity in the Indian Ocean. To sum up a now well-known story that has been

best told by Pomeranz, a 'great divergence' occurred by which Europe outpaced Asia. In revising the traditional account of the Rise of the West, Pomeranz and other global historians have demonstrated that this took place much later than previously thought.[16] This is a significant argument in that it challenges the traditional view of the uniqueness of Europe as something that can be attributed to its own achievements, an inner essence, and that its formation had little or nothing to do with the rest of the world. In short, the rise of the West cannot any longer be accounted for entirely in endogenous terms, for the relation to the non-European world was critical. This also accounts for the making of a reference culture, as I shall clarify below. However, the global contextualization of Europe in accounts such as those of Pomeranz, while correcting the old view of the rise of the West, does not tell us much about the European heritage, other than that it happened later than previously believed. Other studies in transnational history paint a picture of an interconnected world rather than one of largely separated or intact cultures.[17]

Much of the debate has focussed on Europe's relation to Asia. The encounter with the New World was also important and very different in that Europeans did not discover civilizations in the north comparable to those in Asia; in central and south America it was different, but there two of the three main civilizations were defeated (the Aztec and Incas) and the third (the Mayan) had already gone into decline by the time of the Spanish conquest. The Portuguese, who did not initially set out to conquer the new lands, had only nomadic tribes to deal with, the 'people without writing', as Lévi-Strauss was later to term them. The subsequent conquest of America by the western sea-based European powers – Spain, Portugal, England, France and the Netherlands – was very different from the conquest of parts of Asia in that it was complete, while much of Asia was unconquered or partially. In contrast to the conquest of Africa – which occurred much later and was only complete by the end of the nineteenth century – the conquest of the New World, while complete, was temporary. The republican temperament rose early and quickly severed direct political subservience to the Old World, which by the early nineteenth century had undertaken its own course.

There are a number of conclusions that can be reached from the history of European colonization and exploration in Asia and in the New World that help to explain the rise of Europe as a reference culture. With regard to the New World, the significant factor here lies in the formation

of new settler societies that initially at least were composed of Europeans who brought with them the cultural and social values and institutions of the home countries.[18] While these quickly changed to suit the circumstances of the new lands, an enduring cultural legacy was forged that tied the New World to the Old at the time that it severed its political ties. The divergence of the Old and the New Worlds is most evident in the rise of the republican idea. While it germinated in Europe, growing out of the old European culture and Roman political legacy, it developed in innovative ways in the New World, and above all in Latin America. Some of the most important developments in republican thinking took place there leading to the loss of Spanish dominion. The later development of republicanism in Brazil, and the confluence there of republicanism and positivism, led to a reversal in the relation of crown and colony.[19] Europe served as a reference culture for the development of new political ideas that took on a distinct form in the New World and which, when exported back to Europe, had a radicalizing effect. For instance, the influence of Latin American republicanism on Spain at the end of the nineteenth century or the influence of the American revolution in Europe and above all in France, and the influence of the Haitian revolution on post-Revolutionary France. Europe may have been a reference culture, but it was also transformed as a result of the interpretations that were made of its own ideas. This confluence of Europe with modernity should not lead to the conclusion that they were coeval, despite their co-emergence: the formation of modernity in Latin America, despite (or in spite of) the European impetus, was an endogenous development of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and cannot be entirely accounted for by the European variant of modernity.

In Asia it is a more complicated story since (European) settler societies generally did not develop and the imperial mission was different from that in the New World. Those parts that were colonized by Europeans were often only partially and European culture never entirely replaced native culture. This is true too of India, where the British Empire established a policy of rule through local elites. The most significant factor in explaining the appropriation of European ideas in Asia was internal change within the political system. In China within a short time, from circa 1912 to 1915 a major shift occurred in Chinese political thinking whereby it became impossible to continue to appeal to the idea of the 'mandate from heaven'. In place of the emperor

as the source of political power was the new idea of the republic.[20] Sun Yat Sen, who succeeded in bringing about this shift more than anyone else, thus introduced a European theme that had huge implications for subsequent Chinese history. This occurred at a time of openness to new ideas and when Chinese elites sought to find new solutions for state-craft. It was not of course a wholescale transplantation of a European idea, but a Chinese adaptation and it was accompanied by the rejection of other aspects of European culture, such as imperialism.

The appropriation of the republican idea in Turkey at much the same time by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk is another remarkable example of the power of the republican imagination in a civilization that had hitherto been very different from the European one. As the Ottoman Empire crumbled, the idea of the republic, imported from France, was used to bring about a huge shift in the locus of power from the Muslim Sultan to the secular republic. Western culture was adopted by the elite and republican government and was selectively introduced in societies that were otherwise unprepared for such ideas, leading inevitably to very different outcomes. As in the case of China and Brazil, it was not a wholescale importation, but a modified one, which in this case was combined with elements of socialism and fascism. In Europe the repub-lican tradition rarely articulated socialist ideas.

In Japan, earlier, at the time of the Meiji Reform in 1868 a similar moment of openness occurred when European ideas were for the first time introduced, following a long period of closure.[21] However, the use that was made of those ideas was determined by Japanese culture and only selective appropriation was effected, thus ensuring that the intro-duction of new ideas would not lead to major social and political trans-formation, as was the case in China, which embarked on a period of revolution, while in contrast to China, Japan generally opted for gradual reform.

Other examples to illustrate the proliferation of Europe as a refer-ence culture would include Christianity – though in its origin it was not European it effectively became a Europeanized religion – Marxism in its various incarnations, and liberalism. While many examples can be found of how European culture was forcibly and brutally imposed on other parts of the world, as the case of the imposition of Christianity fol-lowing conquest, force does not explain some of the most wholescale appropriations of European ideas, such as Marxism in late imperial

Russia and its subsequent adoption in China. What was it about Europe that led to it having such global influence? Why did not the reverse occur? Until now endogenous factors have been stressed rather than the power of European culture in order to account for the appropriation of European ideas. However, this does not fully account for the making of the European reference culture. The global spread of ideas of European origin can be explained by two additional factors.

The worldwide diffusion of European ideas can be partly accounted for by the fact that there was a certain co-emergence of European consciousness and of modernity. This resulted in Europe becoming equated with modernity. However, it must be clearly established that while Europe did become a reference culture for much of the rest of the world, it did not exhaust the nature of modernity. Here a key point is that Europe fairly early developed – certainly long before the so-called Rise of the West – the basic elements of a world culture, that is a cultural matrix that lent itself to cultural translation. This is because the key elements of European culture are themselves translations, having evolved out of earlier appropriations of ideas that were not themselves European. The fact itself that much of European culture was transmitted through translations, including Arabic translations is a striking illustration of the role of translation in not simply transmitting culture but in transforming it.[22] More than this, those aspects of European culture that were appropriated by the rest of the world were characterized precisely by a propensity for translation in that they lent themselves to diverse interpretations. It can of course be argued that all of culture is a translation and that all other world cultures are formed from the logic of translation. There is nothing specific to Europe about this. However, what may be regarded as a feature of the European heritage is that the logic of translation appears to have undermined the possibility of an enduring culture, producing instead less durable constellations and a culture of critique that undermined Europe from within.

It was paradoxically this tendency that made possible the formation of Europe itself: by dint of the proliferation of networks of communication, Europe consolidated through the diffusion of particular notions of, for instance, individual and collective liberty, ideas about the nature of rights and political obligation. What differed was how these ideas were interpreted and combined, but critical was that the defining elements lacked cultural particularity. Indeed, the most utopian of all

Europe's ideas, Marxism, found more resonance in other civilizations than in Europe, while the messianic elements within Christianity found an expression in North America where it became the legitimating basis of a new empire that appealed to the doctrine of American exceptionalism. The thesis advanced in this article then is that European culture was not particularly European and it was this that lent itself to what can be described as cultural translation. This had both a negative and a positive outcome for the societies that it encountered. It had negative consequences in that it led to many non-European societies misrecognizing their own modernity by simply imitating what they judged to be authentic modernity. There were undoubtedly positive outcomes of a cosmopolitan nature in achieving mutual dialogue with other cultures and in cultivating greater understanding between societies, as reflected for example in the writings and work of Alexander von Humboldt, the opposition to slavery and the cultivation of what Kant termed the ethic of hospitality. In other words, an enduring feature of the legacy of Europe was its transnational tendency. It frequently became entangled in other cultures and led to hybrid outcomes, but within Europe and beyond.

European culture then was a mobile culture.[23] Europeans were relatively mobile, but the culture they created was yet more mobile. A related contributory factor was that expansion, both demographically and militarily, in the new centres of economic power in the West, was forced outwards beyond Europe. Ottoman supremacy closed off the possibility of expansion in the near east. The result was an impetus towards overseas expansion and a preference for a balance of power within Europe, a balance that was as precarious as the balance that was sought between capital and labour.

Modernity and its Relation to Europe

The other factor that accounts for the global diffusion of European culture is the emergence of modernity. Modernity is not European, but a condition that can arise in any society or civilization. It has been much associated with Europe, but this view can be criticized for reducing modernity to its European expression. Habermas, for example, has characterized modernity in terms of a conflict between two kinds of rationality, the instrumental rationality of capitalism and communicative

rationality. In this account, the 'project of modernity' is about communicative reason resisting power and domination.[24] He rejects the postmodern thesis of modernity becoming obsolete as well as the pessimistic scenario of Weber and the Frankfurt School, for whom modernity has become an 'iron cage'. Instead, modernity, which begins with the internal pluralization of cultural value spheres, as Weber following Kant argued, continues to have relevance so long as communicative forms of rationality exist and have the capacity to challenge power. However this account is limited by a tendency to see modernity as a product of Europe and does not give sufficient recognition that modernity can take other forms. There is nothing specifically European about the features that Habermas attributes to modernity other than that they first emerged in Europe and took on a European-specific form.

In the past two decades or so there has been a huge literature on modernity as a plural phenomenon. Much of this derives from the path-breaking work of S.N. Eisenstadt, who developed the notion of 'multiple modernities' based on different civilizational trajectories.[25] The older assumptions of modernity as essentially a product of European or western civilization have been much criticized in wider-ranging scholarship that has emerged from, for instance, comparative historical sociology, transnational and global history, postcolonial theory, and cosmopolitanism. This is not the place for a review of these trends. However it can be remarked that while Eisenstadt gave the notion of modernity a wider and more global relevance, the tendency in recent years has been less centred on its civilizational characteristics in so far as these relate to the emergence of the major Eurasian civilizations of the Axial Age. Eisenstadt's own work also gave the European variant of modernity undue significance in shaping other varieties of modernity. The civilizational dimension cannot be entirely neglected in any kind of global comparison, as wide-ranging scholarship has recognized.[26] The multiple forms that modernity takes can be related to civilizational trajectories, but greater recognition is required of endogenous logics of development and the entanglement of these with exogenous ones. Yet, the problem of what modernity consists still remains. It is not enough to postulate multiple or entangled variants.

What is modernity? It is best defined as a condition of awareness that nothing is settled for once and for all and that therefore the future is not predetermined. It expresses the idea that the present is not determined

by the past, especially by the recent past. Most invocations of modernity announced a rupture of present time from the past, generally the recent past. The modern is the present time; it is the 'now' and 'the new'. The consciousness of the new is common to most cultural, philosophical and political expressions of modernity from the eighteenth century onwards. The modernist movement in literature, the arts and architecture strongly emphasized a spirit of newness and the break from tradition. The social and political ideas of what Koselleck referred to as the *Sattelzeit,* the period from 1750 to 1850, provide the main reference points for modernity, the *Neuzeit*.[27] This period, which saw the formation of key conceptual and structural changes, made possible the emergence of modern society as a new kind of society that sought to reach beyond itself, beyond what had previously been contained within the 'space of experience'. In the terms of Koselleck, the 'horizon of expectation' was considerably expanded beyond the 'space of experience', which was also broadened. The discovery of the notion of 'progress' in this period, which he attributes to Kant, marks the point at which new expectations become possible and are not limited by previous experience. For Koselleck experience and expectation are key registers of a shift in historical consciousness. Koselleck's theory of the emergence of modernity in terms of a particular kind of time consciousness has been very influential. It suggests a notion of modernity that is defined in categorical terms rather than reducing it to a particular period or epoch. The *Sattelzeit* can be seen as the period when modernity took shape in Europe but is not confined to this period. However, Koselleck's account conflates modernity with its European expression. As argued throughout this article, despite their co-emergence and entanglement, they need to be conceptually separated. One aspect of the notion of modernity that is striking is that it reflects a strong faith in the capacity of human agency to shape society in light of guiding ideas and in knowledge. This is not a specifically European idea.

Wagner, drawing on Castoriadis, has developed an approach to modernity that draws on the multiple modernities approach, while departing from it in a number of ways. Modernity, he argues, is marked by a continuous search for new answers to key challenges relating to social and political order.[28] In his account, the plurality of forms of modernity are responses to central 'problemátiques' that all modern societies seek to answer. Modernity is neither universal nor uniform

but an on-going process of interpretations in light of experiences made earlier. In this account, there are three over-arching interpretative questions: an epistemic one, a political one and an economic one, referring respectively to what kind of shared knowledge a society rests on, how to create rules for a common social life, and how to establish the rules to solve the basic material needs of society. What is finally common to all varieties of modernity is also what defines the specificity of their different 'societal self-understandings': all societies need to find answers to these 'problemátiques' in their own ways. The condition of modernity is thus radical contingency and uncertainty in that these 'problemátiques' are open to interpretations and thus different answers will be found in different societal contexts. Thus the formation of modernity throughout the world, in the north and in the south, will be very different. The implication of this view is that modernity is not a specifically European condition.

In drawing attention to key problems or questions modern societies have to address, and which define the condition of modernity, Wagner solves a problem that beset other approaches that addressed the plurality of modernity. In this way he avoids either universalizing European modernity or pluralizing it to a point that it becomes meaningless. However, there are two limitations to this analysis. The first is that it does not discuss the interaction of different formations of modernity, since they do not simply develop endogenously but develop in close interaction. It still needs to be explained how such 'problématiques' arise. Moreover, though the answers that are found vary greatly, the fact is that many answers are quite similar. In view of the worldwide dominance of Europe in the nineteenth century, it is difficult not to conclude that the European variant gained dominance for a time and influenced the shape that other forms assumed. This was in no small part due to the fact that it was the first major location of the emergence of modernity. Earlier expressions of modernity in other parts of the world were undoubtedly influenced in part or in whole by the European model, which in many cases was either the French or British variant. A second limitation is that it does not fully account for shifts in the moral and political horizons of societies. In other words, it does not offer a critical normative position of what is at stake in such models of modernity. This is generally a problem with the multiple modernities concept, which operates within an interpretative framework of analysis and is

not concerned with developmental logics. It cannot be denied that some models of modernity are more successful than others in solving societal problems, such as the key questions that Wagner identifies. To explore this further is beyond the scope of the present article. It can however be remarked that modernity is also about the raising of normative claims, such as the vision of a better world. An account of modernity that seeks to correct the Eurocentrism of the classical conceptions must not lose sight of this dimension that gives a more central place to knowledge and cognition.

As highlighted by Wagner, one of the most important expressions of modernity is the use of knowledge. This can be understood in two senses; knowledge in the sense of science and science-directed public policy; and knowledge in the sense of, what Strydom from the perspective of cognitive sociology refers to as, cognitive principles or modes of thought or reason that open up modern societies to new potentials.[29] Modernity is a condition in which new structures develop that allow ideas or principles to guide human action in finding answers to some of the key challenges facing all societies. While Wagner stresses three key questions or 'problématiques', I am emphasizing a framework of cognitive reference points that when realized in specific cultural models made possible developmental logics. For this reason modern societies are dynamic, prone to contestation and marked by constant transformation by human agency. The concrete forms of modernity vary hugely depending on the societal and cultural models in which they are realized. This characterization of modernity is in accord with the multiple modernities approach, as in the work of S.E. Eisenstadt and Johann Arnason, but does not reduce it to a specific civilizational path. Additionally it gives greater recognition of entanglements. It is also in line with Habermas's conception of modernity in terms of communicative challenges to power. Modernity is itself in terms of its primary orientation a singular order of reference, which can also be considered to be a cognitive order that provides the basic design or blueprint for modern societies. The reference points that guide modern societies are derived from this cognitive order. The most salient of these are ideas of freedom, equality, autonomy, justice, the individual and democracy. A feature of all of these ideas is that they are open-ended and not necessarily mutually compatible. The diversity of projects of modernity is a consequence of different interpretations of these ideas and different combinations.

What took place then in Europe from the eighteenth century onwards was the formation of specifically European cultural models that realized, what Strydom has termed, the meta-cognitive order of modernity. The relatively early development of modernity in Europe does not mean that the form that modernity took defined for once and for all modernity in Europe nor elsewhere. The solutions varied from the early modernity of England in the seventeenth century to the constitutional and democratic state by the end of the nineteenth century. These different models of modernity were not so divergent that there was no relation between them, for if this were the case it would not be possible to refer to Europe in a meaningful sense. As we have established, from early on in the history of Europe certain trends can be discerned that led to similar outcomes, which in this analysis can be attributed to networks of communication. The five significant characteristics that were identified in the foregoing – political fragmentation, a strong civil society tradition, periodic ruptures, individual and collective liberty, and the cultivation of a world orientation – can be seen as reflecting more general meta-cognitive principles that give modernity a particular cultural form. In this view, then, some of the salient features of Europe are not themselves universal or define the condition of modernity. So when modernity emerged it found in the structures of consciousness within Europe cultural models in which it could be anchored. In these instances, the condition of modernity is reflected in such ideas as the contestability of power, the questioning of the received wisdom of the past, the idea of freedom and cosmopolitanism. The realization of modernity in the cultural models that emerged in the early modern period did not confine modernity to those models: the framework of reference points that constituted the cognitive order of modernity could never be finally settled.

The relationship between Europe and modernity can be seen in terms of two reference cultures: a European reference culture and the wider and more abstract reference culture of modernity. The latter can be seen as a first-order reference culture and Europe as a second-order reference culture. There have been many second-order reference cultures, but the European one had two advantages over all others. It was first of all one of the first globally oriented cultures and, as argued, it was a mobile culture that offered those cultures it came into contact with a set of ideas that were easily translatable. Not all cultures have achieved this. Two examples illustrate this, namely the Arab invention of numerals and,

more circumscribed in scope, the Chinese invention of a non-phonetic script, which in this case made possible the expansion of Chinese civilization beyond the Han kingdom without presupposing a common spoken language. The European route was different in that it neither opted for a common language nor a common script, but a cultural predisposition towards self and societal transformation, which appeared to give a central space to the individual and to freedom. The fate of modernity was thus inevitably bound up with the idea of Europe. However, we should see that this confluence was temporary and never entirely a happy relation, since the modern spirit and European consciousness were often in conflict, as in the conflict between the 'ancients and the moderns' in the seventeenth century and the revolutions that marked the modern era. Indeed, the social struggles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the age of ideology, all testify to the tension between the spirit of modernity, as realized in the cultural models of the age, and the concrete reality of society.

Conclusion: Europe and Modernity in a Post-European Age

The period in which Europe was a reference culture was relatively brief. It ended in 1918 in the wake of the First World War, which led to widespread disillusionment by European intellectuals with the promises of Europe and more generally with modernity. There can be little doubt that 1918 was a watershed in European thought and in European politics. What followed in European thought was a turn to anti-modernism and scepticism about modernity. This was reflected in a mood of crisis and a critique of European civilization, as expressed in the turn brought about by Nietzsche and Heidegger and in the Spenglerian 'decline of the west' prognosis. Certain aspects of the thought of Sigmund Freud affirmed this transformation within European civilization. The early twentieth century saw the rise of other reference cultures, namely the United States and Russia. For much of the twentieth century, the so-called short twentieth century, Europe was subordinated to the wider category of the United States-led West, which was the dominant reference culture, until it too underwent a process of fragmentation. In this time modernity ceased to be defined by its European form; many other societal variants of modernity have taken shape in what can now be

termed a 'post-European' age in the sense of a world in which Europe is no longer at the centre and in which Europe itself is no longer exclusively defined in terms of the West, a construction that has become increasing problematic.

This does not mean that the European experiment with modernity was moribund or that the idea of Europe ceased to be of cultural or political significance. After 1945 the idea of Europe was rescued with the project of European integration. The movement that led to the European Union revived both the idea of Europe and a particular interpretation of modernity that was strongly linked with capitalism and democracy, an era of democratic capitalism. However, the notion of Europe as a reference culture lost its normative salience. The formative period of European integration subordinated Europe to the wider category of the United States-led West. The dominant reference cultures for much of the twentieth century were the United States and the Soviet Union (to which we can add fascism, which until its defeat was an alternative and very compelling model of modernity for elites and masses in Europe). In reviving the idea of Europe, the European project did not create a new reference culture. Although one should not neglect the normative salience of the EU for many other trans-national regions (in Asia, Africa, and Latin America), this is a relatively minor aspect of European integration. Indeed, the current crisis of the EU is due in no small part to the fact that while undermining the nation-state it has not overcome the nation-state. Nonetheless, it is clearly the case that the idea of Europe has become a cultural and political reference within the European area and has enjoyed considerable success, but it competes with many other normative orders.

If Europe is today a culture of reference, it is a much diminished one. Indeed, this may be the rationale for its continued relevance. However the fact remains that the wider world no longer looks to Europe for models on the governance of societies as it did in the nineteenth century.

Notes

1   This paper is a revised version of a keynote lecture for the Conference 'Reference Cultures and Imagined Empires in Western History: Global Perspectives, 1815–2000', University of Utrecht, 11th June 2014. I am grateful to the conference convenors and participants for their comments

on the talk and to the editors and referees for their comments on an earlier version.

2 For example, Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford, 1996).

3 Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (London, 1995); Anthony Pagden (ed.) *The Idea of Europe* (Cambridge, 2002).

4 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (London, 1978).

5 Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* (Oxford, 1990).

6 Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Empires in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997).

7 Jeno Szücs, 'Three Historical Regions of Europe' in J. Keane (ed.) *Civil Society and the State* (London, 1988) 306.

8 Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (London, 1993).

9 Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1250* (London, 1972). See also Larry Seidentopf, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London, 2014).

10 John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge, 2004).

11 Jerry Brotton, *A History of the World in Twelve Maps* (London, 2012).

12 I am grateful to Aurea Mota for clarifying this point and several other arguments developed in this paper.

13 Jerrold Seigel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life: Society, Politics and Culture in England, France and Germany since 1750* (Cambridge, 2012).

14 Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2014) chapter 14.

15 Friedrich Meinecke, *Cosmopolitanism and the National State* (Princeton, 1979).

16 Kenneth Pomerantz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the World Economy* (Princeton, 2002).

17 Emily Rosenberg (ed.), *A World Connecting, 1870–1945* (Cambridge, 2012); Emily Rosenberg, *Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World, 1870–1945* (Cambridge, MA., 2014); Dominic Sachsenmaier (ed.), *Global Perspectives on Global History* (Cambridge, 2011); Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (eds), *Global Intellectual History* (New York, 2013). This can be illustrated by the example of the way in which the telegraph pole made possible for the first time rapid global connections (see the Map of Telegraph Lines).

18 Louis Hartz, The *Foundation of New Societies* (New York, 1964).

19 Aurea Mota and Gerard Delanty, 'Eisenstadt, Brazil and the Multiple Modernities Framework: revisions and reconsiderations', *Journal of Classical Sociology* 15:2 (2015) 39–57.

20 I am grateful to Professor Wang Gungyu for this insight.

21 Gerard Delanty, 'Japan and Modernity' in Ulrich Beck, Natan Sznaider and Rainer Winter (eds), *Global America: The Cultural Consequences of Globalization* (Liverpool, 2003).

22 Remi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* (South Bend, Ind., 2002).

23 Stephen Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility* (Cambridge, 2010).

24 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

25 S.N. Eisenstadt, 'The Civilizational Dimension of Modernity', *International Sociology* 16:3 (2001) 320–40; S.N. Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities: A Collection of Essays by S.N. Eisenstadt* volumes 1 and 2 (Leiden, 2003).

26 Said A. Arjomand, *Social Theory and Regional Studies in the Global Age* (New York, 2014); Johann Arnason, *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions* (Leiden, 2003).

27 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, 2004).

28 Peter Wagner, *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation: A New Sociology of Modernity* (Cambridge, 2009); Peter Wagner, 'Modernity: From Convergence and Stability to Plurality and Transformation' in Gerard Delanty and Stephen P. Turner (eds), *Handbook of Contemporary Social and Political Theory* (London, 2009); Peter Wagner, 'From Interpretation to Civilization – and back: Analyzing the Trajectories of non-European Modernities', *European Journal of Social Theory* 14:1 (2011) 89–106; Peter Wagner, *Modernity: Understanding the Present* (Cambridge, 2012).

29 This approach draws on the work of Piet Strydom who has developed a cognitive sociology (see for example Piet Strydom, 'The Cognitive and MetaCognitive Dimensions of Contemporary Social and Political Theory' in Gerard Delanty and Stephen P. Turner (eds), *International Handbook of Contemporary Social and Political Theory* (London, 2011). See also the special issue 'Social Theory after the Cognitive Revolution: Types of Contemporary Cognitive Sociology' of the *European Journal of Social Theory* 10:3 (2007).

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