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## The Various Forms of Transcending the Horizon of National History Writing

*Matthias Middell and Lluís Roura*

The starting point for the project “Writing the Nation: National Historiographies and the Making of the Nation-States in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe,” sponsored by the European Science Foundation (ESF) between 2005 and 2009, was the observation that the European study of history (and the international study) currently is experiencing a multifaceted process of transformation.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, many historiographies in Europe remain organized according to national criteria into associations and societies, systems of higher education, museum networks, and journals,<sup>2</sup> but they are supplemented by regional patterns and increasingly overarched by transnationality and internationality. Within this framework, an intensified dialogue between the historiographies has developed. As a consequence of this dialogue, increased importance has been assigned to the question of similarities and differences in historiographies that developed over the course of the last 150 years. Whether a homogenous European historical science has emerged, or at least plausible approaches for such a science already exist is subject to varying opinions.<sup>3</sup> While some look for specific European features and refer to the fact that history had perhaps a larger impact on European affairs than on and in any other world region, others insist on global connections and mutual influences transcending the limits of single continents.<sup>4</sup> However a growing interest in the collective history of historians (male and female alike) is undeniable.<sup>5</sup>

With the financial support of the ESF and the *national* science organizations of more than 25 nations across the continent, a group of European historians divided into four teams have dedicated themselves to the question of how the relationship of national history writing to potential alternative approaches developed over the course of the last two centuries.

For this project, a division of labor seemed appropriate, in order to facilitate an efficient exploration of conceptions of history as they were taught and researched. One team focused on the institutionalization of historiography and thus the “iron cage,” in which work increasingly took place. Three teams dealt with concepts and narratives, whereupon their efforts were directed at the broadest possible coverage of the diversity of national representations and the existing alternatives.<sup>6</sup>

In the meanwhile the existing *Atlas of European Historiography* also made clear what the accompanying studies elucidated in detail: The study of history numbers among the older subjects taught in European universities. Neither sought history – like its younger sister sociology – its place in the canon of subjects only at beginning of the twentieth century, nor received it – like political science, which had significant overlaps in content with history departments – full citizenship in the *universitas litterarum* only after World War II. Yet, its long presence in many European universities did not change the fact that historiography had to adapt to a profound nationalizing process that played out in European societies in the second half of the nineteenth century. This process massively encompassed the universities.<sup>7</sup> This is not surprising if you keep in mind that the (imagined) history community along with the linguistic community constituted an important dimension in the legitimation of the nation<sup>8</sup> and contributed indispensable material (or testimony to its alleged authenticity) for the “invention of the nation.”<sup>9</sup>

However the aforementioned atlas also demonstrates that the majority of historians were not willing to serve the nation alone. They became involved in historical associations at the regional level and dedicated themselves to the history of those provinces in which their universities were located. They also traveled to the vestiges of Antiquity in order to establish the origin of European history. Nor should we forget that although historians referenced the emerging nation, a significant portion of European territory before 1918 belonged to empires, thus historians frequently lived in empires, not nation-states and were therefore writing on empire.<sup>10</sup> Neither was this perspective necessarily marginal, as some of the articles in this volume will show, nor would it be appropriate to portray it as backwards. After all the relationship between nation and empire cannot be envisioned as a teleological progression from pre-modern to modern state form, rather it has to be conceived as a complex balance.<sup>11</sup> This again implies that the various forms of territoriality in nineteenth-century Europe were also expressed in historiography. Indeed one finds at a closer look that Eastern European historians who worked at the intersection of Russian, German, and Habsburg regimes challenged the national framework, as their colleagues in Spain were disturbed by and wrestled with the peculiar overlapping processes of nationalization together with a large imperial past that disrupted any clarity of territorial relations.<sup>12</sup> Even British and French historians debated the dual character of their nations and identified the imperial and colonial dimensions as part of their own history – a history that they realized was not necessarily only national.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the growing international entanglement fostered an interest in the history of those neighboring nations with whom they coexisted in strife or alternatively in alliance.

If we keep in mind all these tendencies that transcended national frontiers, about which this book will speak in more depth, then a limitation to the representational power of maps is apparent. This limitation was also noted by the authors of the *Atlas of European Historiography*. While it is relatively simple – at least in the framework of more traditional cartographic convention<sup>14</sup> – to project the organizational form of various historiographies on the territories of nation-states, it is

not so simple to discern transnational activities from maps. To take the example of the Comité International des Sciences Historiques (International Committee of Historical Sciences, CISH): The Comité, like most international organizations that arose at the beginning of the twentieth century, was based on collaboration and competition between national committees. However, gradually the Comité gave more weight to thematically oriented (and later internationally composed) commissions in which the citizenship of their members was a secondary importance. It would, by the way, be highly illuminating to reconstruct the composition of these commissions (and their change) to retrieve transnational research connections. To a large extent they manifested themselves in exchanges of letters and by means of occasional visits in the tradition of the *république des lettres* from Erasmus to D’Alembert,<sup>15</sup> which are difficult to display in maps. The same holds true for the congresses the CISH held, and still holds every five years, at which delegations of the national committees mingled.

Precisely because the study of history, both in its institutional form and in its practice, was not solely the fruit of the nationalization processes of the late nineteenth century, but also can be traced back to earlier paradigms (and given at that time professional reflection about the past was particularly keen on references to earlier histories of the discipline), historians could easily mobilize these older heritages. For those historians who were uncomfortable with the national use of history, they could contemplate the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment. Moreover, they were able to trace the disassociation of intellectuals from service to the state back to ancient motives and to the intellectual leaders of the Renaissance.<sup>16</sup>

Leopold von Ranke, who in the neo-historical turn of the 1890s immediately gained cult status as founder of a scientific historiography, propagated not only a source-based history of politics (and demonstrated how useful it could be to maintain excellent relations to the rulers), but he also went down in the annals of the discipline as the author of an (incomplete) world history.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, von Ranke was invoked not only by conservative political historians but also by those who believed a renewal of universal history to be the most pressing desideratum. This phenomenon was perceptible, for example, in the struggle for the takeover of the prestigious journal *Historische Zeitschrift* in the mid-1890s, when the dual legacy of Ranke was wielded by both the national-political arguing Neo-Rankeans and cultural historians in the discipline.<sup>18</sup>

For the interpretation of these debates, it is not helpful to rely on a simplistic schema, in which the national-political reactionaries within the discipline of history are contrasted with those men of progress who supported transnationalism and a universal perspective. This fallacy is perhaps most dramatically illustrated by the example of the sociologist Hans Freyer. In his contribution to *Weltgeschichte* (“World History”) published by Ullstein in 1929, Freyer opened with a clear avowal of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. However, only a few years later in a brochure on the desired “revolution from the right,” he expressed his affinity for the Nazi regime.<sup>19</sup> His subsequent world history, which he developed temporally parallel to the course of World War II, illustrates that enthusiasm for and disillusionment

with the expansionist project of an aggressive nation-state can be expressed in the mode of world history.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast, the (pre-)history of the French *Annales* offers abundant indications for an entangled history of historiography. The young Marc Bloch traveled to Germany, where he attempted to determine through the activities of Karl Lamprecht (among other things), how the new social and cultural history was consistent with the nationalism of imperial Germany.<sup>21</sup> When the war tore a deep rift between Western European and German historiography, it was the mentorship of the Belgian Henri Pirenne that provided the momentum for the ambitious project of Bloch and Febvre, who were now both teaching in Strasbourg.<sup>22</sup> Pirenne, among others, had directed the 1922 International Congress held in Brussels. Finally, we learn from the extensive correspondence with a pleiad of colleagues maintained by both Bloch and Febvre (now collected in several edited volumes), how they kept in view the international historical sciences and also promoted their own approach.<sup>23</sup>

The history of the *Annales* School<sup>24</sup> is an excellent example not only of international action, but also of the international networking within the historical sciences of the twentieth century. It was no coincidence that the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* under the leadership of Fernand Braudel became a mecca for many historians, especially those from Latin America<sup>25</sup> nor that on the other side of the Atlantic at Binghamton University in New York a Braudel-Center arose, whose aim was to combine the approach of the French historical school with world-system analysis.<sup>26</sup>

These few references may suffice to make comprehensible that on the one hand, the history of historiography, which organized its subject matter according to nations,<sup>27</sup> claimed to reproduce a very important component of the organization of the discipline. Without doubt, the working reality of most historians during our period of investigation was and is shaped by affiliation to an institution that owes its establishment and continued existence to state financing.<sup>28</sup> In addition, communication continued for a long time primarily within this national framework, as evidenced by the relatively low representation of foreign authors in the relevant professional journals.<sup>29</sup> However, the historical profession has also a transnational past. While it was for a long time relatively plausible to fade it out, doing so has become less convincing in the last decade. Current history writing is increasingly done in contexts that transcend political borders. New institutions have been established in which doctoral candidates from various nations are educated together. New research approaches to transnational and global history require knowledge and use of archives in different nations. Together with the new possibilities of digitalization and electronic communication, this interest has led to a new relation of historians to the national character of archives. Increasingly transnational groups, who were concerned with the history of more than one nation, formed for the use of archives. We need only recall the archival holdings on the great wars of the twentieth century or those on the history of communist movements.<sup>30</sup> At the same time internationality became an increasingly important catchword in the universities. Insistence on the national quality of historiography

was displaced by the idea of global competition. Immigration also contributed its part in shattering identification with national and imperial history. Concurrently the institutions that examined the intervention of European powers in the history of only seemingly distant continents were changing. Moreover, new insights facilitate the integration of the history of colonialism into contemporary instruction and the public debate. These trends provoke the question whether there is a prehistory that is a longer tradition of the transnationalization of historical culture and historical science – at least if the main intellectual tool of historians, namely to question discourses of and claims for newness, is applied to the development of history writing.

This volume centers on this question and seeks to substantiate that history writing reflected the globality of its time as much as it followed the nationalization of the societies in which it was produced. While postulations of the newness of transnational and worldwide entanglement were first questioned by studies on economic and social processes, in the meanwhile they have also frequently been called into question in regard to intellectual developments.

Analogous efforts also emerged for the history of historiography, essentially by expanding the subject matter of investigation and by integrating the quarrel with post-colonialism and orientalism into the methodological debate. So, on the one hand, the extremely meritorious *Oxford History of Historiography*, which was prepared parallel to the ESF project, made tremendous efforts to cover for the first time the entire globe and to find authors to portray with sophistication the discrete historiographies of Asia, Africa, and South America, so that these historiographies were placed on a par with the previous traditional offerings of “Western” historiography.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, Georg Iggers together with Edward Wang and Surpriya Mukherjee have updated and globalized the preexisting panorama of the most important historical scientific approaches.<sup>32</sup> Both undertakings point to the necessity of transcending previous horizons. While it may be contentious whether the concept of history actually is one of the weapons developed by the West for intellectual domination or whether it is possible to break free from the preexisting frame of thought, the history of historiography first approaches the problem from a different direction. It notes the various forms and effects of historical self-assurance and in doing so endeavors to delineate professionalized forms from other forms. As the studies by Stuart Woolf and Iggers illustrate, historiography is a globally encountered phenomenon, even though the institutional fixtures on the one hand and the relationships to political discourses, school instruction, and other forms of public practice on the other hand may vary according to region.

There is another argument why focusing solely on national history obstructs as much as it reveals. Traditionally histories of historiographies concentrated on concepts and the repeated flare-ups of methodological disputes and thus highlighted individual authors underestimating the institutional anchorage. Since the 1980s this limitation has become doubtful and thus the attention has turned to institutions, practices, and communication forms. But because the organizational settings have largely been national, following them bears the danger of neglecting

international and transnational entanglements (as well as the connections to other disciplines).

Our own project seeks to counter this bias, in a modest way. We concentrate on Europe despite the fact that we treat the rest of the world as the subject matter of European historians. To counter this shorting we have tried to include a comparative perspective on the historiographies of other continents wherever it was possible. The limitation remains, deriving from the origins of the whole project, the need for a feasible scope, and its European sponsorship. Still we are aware of and would like to state explicitly that what we do for the European historiography should be done for other regions as well and turned into global analyses.

This leads to a methodological remark. Our project is nourished by the insight that every comparison must be able to homogenize its objects of comparison to a certain extent, in order to be able to work out the similarities and differences to other objects of analysis. Our concern was thus not to contrast European historiographies as a more or less homogenized whole with those of other continents. Instead, we started from the observation that there was a glaring deficiency in the differentiated descriptions of the European historiographical landscape. Therefore we believe this project, which is limited to Europe, is an important complementary project for a more broadly conceived global investigation. The two should cross-pollinate one another.

The task of a collective European panorama finds variable conditions in certain places. For France, Italy, and Germany a very extensive literature on the development of their respective historiographies already exists and this literature has garnered attention beyond these nations' respective borders.<sup>33</sup> Moreover in recent years British historians have abandoned their reservations regarding the study of historiographical traditions.<sup>34</sup> However the detailed and penetrative works for other nations oftentimes go unnoticed internationally.

This uneven reception has led to disequilibrium in the European history of historiography in favor of a few historiographies, and this imbalance could result in a twofold methodological trap. On the one hand, the impression could be cemented that some historiographies became professionalized and institutionalized earlier; generated more important methodological innovations, and therefore rightly have been the focus of attention.<sup>35</sup> A closely related danger exists, namely dispensing with detailed investigation of the diversity of developments in the European space and contenting oneself with extrapolating relationships from the already better researched parts of Europe. Particularly vulnerable in this regard is Eastern Europe, whose archives during the Cold War were difficult or even impossible for Western researchers to access and whose historiographical traditions within the dominant Marxist–Leninist paradigm were articulated, remembered, and researched in a specific way.<sup>36</sup> After 1989/1990 this skewed picture experienced much revision.<sup>37</sup> The idiosyncratic interweaving of older historiographical traditions (which prior to 1989 had often been characterized as “bourgeois”), along with the appearance of a Marxist historiography which could develop in an orthodox and party-oriented direction or could be accompanied by an interest in social history and international comparison (and in some cases both

developmental patterns can be seen in the scholarship of the same person), shaped Eastern European historiography. Thus its complexity is not adequately reflected, if we dismiss the influence of Marxism and Stalinism as an episode without impact.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, it is important to remember that the role of Marxism certainly is not limited to Eastern European scholarship. Therefore, it seems to preclude us from speaking of Marxism in the singular, since the differing variants of Marxism did not simply disagree, their disagreements led to frequent political controversies. Moreover the differing variants influence the present-day debate about Marxian thought as perhaps a continuing inspirational force and respectively the sustainability of any kind of Neo-Marxism.<sup>39</sup>

The debate on the influence of Marxism has implications not only for the differentiated perception of European historiographies in the late nineteenth century and the “short” twentieth century, to the extent that the individual national fields have been shaped by the debate with Marxism in very different ways.<sup>40</sup> The role of Marxism clearly was connected with the effort to establish an alternative way of writing history, which started from class affiliation and conversely deemphasized affiliation to the nation. Let us remember that the worker’s movement after the experience of the Revolution of 1848/1849 first sought to create transnational federations. The First International existed prior to the founding of socialist–democratic parties at the national level and was an effort to create an organization encompassing potentially all nations. The success of this effort is an entirely different matter.

A look at Marxist historiographies in Eastern Europe reveals these historians dealt primarily or exclusively with the histories of their respective nations. The political history of socialist nations was rooted in national history.<sup>41</sup> The distinction between tradition (as the positively connoted historical line, which was drawn according to class) and heritage (as openness to the totality of the history of a nation) indicates how the politics of history became increasingly nationalized and how an effort was made to sell this process as a socialist one. In the special case of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), this process was particularly challenging, because of the parallel existence of another German state – the Federal Republic of Germany drawing on the same national heritage.<sup>42</sup> The effort to create concepts corresponding to the “socialist GDR nation”<sup>43</sup> found limited acceptance both internationally and within the GDR’s own population. This failure to invent a separate nation within the nation, however should not be misinterpreted as the product of a diminishing nationalization in Marxist historiography.<sup>44</sup> Already by the 1920s Marxist historiography had its roots in the still very young Soviet Union. Under Stalin’s leadership and as a consequence of Lenin’s turn to the possibility of construction of a socialist regime exclusively in one nation, historians there had already encountered this dilemma. The interests of the worldwide communist movement were not identical with those of the Soviet Union. Thus, it is not surprising that the Soviet Union and the nations within its sphere of influence experienced a systematic division (and occasionally competition) in their systems of higher education between national history and general/world history. Sometimes even a separate department for the history of the communist movement