

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository:<https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/113120/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Murray-Miller, Gavin 2018. Civilization, modernity and Europe: The making and unmaking of a conceptual unity. *History* 103 (356) , pp. 418-433. 10.1111/1468-229X.12614

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12614>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



Civilization, Modernity and Europe: The Making and Unmaking of a Conceptual Unity

Gavin Murray-Miller
(Cardiff University)

Published in: *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*, 103:356. July 2018. Pp., 418-433.

There is no shortage of opinions when it comes to ‘the idea of Europe.’ Since the 1950s, questions regarding the commonalities and shared historical experiences that have constituted a European community have remained central to the process of European integration and the formation of the European Union. Scholars largely supportive of European integration have accented the role played in this process by common social, political and economic institutions. Those favoring a *longue durée* assessment frequently emphasize a collective European heritage rooted in Classical, Christian and humanist values.¹ These and other considerations have routinely informed perspectives on the very nature and intentions of the EU, whether viewed as a supranational structure that respects national sovereignty, a cosmopolitanism bureaucracy

¹ See: Manuela Ceretta and Barbara Curli, eds., *Discourses and Counter-Discourses on Europe: From the Enlightenment to the EU* (London, 2017); Patrick Pasture, *Imagining European Unity Since 1000 AD* (New York, 2015); Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans?: Transnational Identities and Public Spheres* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*, ed., Anthony Pagden (Cambridge, 2002).

advancing a transnational modernizing agenda or even an empire in its own right.² In one way or another, these various considerations have shaped the ways in which we narrate Europe and understand both its past and present.

Yet outside these continentalist narratives we can also reflect on how Europe's engagement with the wider world came to shape competing idioms of European selfhood. To do so requires assessing the complex relationship between mutually reinforcing paradigms that have conditioned the narratives and plot structures underpinning discourses of a nominally 'European' civilization. Europe and civilization have perennially shared a discursive boundary. The intertwining of these concepts has been so extensive that, historically, one has typically served as a metonym for the other. As an Enlightenment creation, the concept of civilization itself expressed a reflexive understanding of Europe's own development and path to modernity. From the eighteenth century onward, Europe, properly understood, has been intimately bound up with processes of modernization and social progress, and this trinity of Civilization, Modernity and Europe has produced a particular image of the self and world at large that has embodied a definitive European quality and worldview.³

Examining the explicit and implicit meanings within 'European civilization' entails exploring the terrain of modernity itself. It equally entails re-evaluating the myths and origin stories that have long remained central to the story of Western development. Critical

² Anthony Smith, "National Identity and the Idea of Europe," *International Affairs*, 68:1 (January 1992): 55-76; Philipp Ther, "Caught in Between: Border Regions in Modern Europe," *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russia and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed., Omar Bartov and Eric Weitz (Bloomington, 2013), 485-502; Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford, 2006).

³ The literature on this subject is quite vast. However, see: Luisa Passerini, "From the Ironies of Identity to the Identity of Ironies," *The Idea of Europe*, 195-96; Stuart Woolf, "The Construction of a European World-View in the Revolutionary-Napoleonic Years," *Past and Present*, 137 (November 1992): 72-101; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005), 116-26; Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans., Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1978), 49-50, 223-57; Timothy Mitchell, "Introduction," *Questions of Modernity*, ed., Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis, 2000), xi.

engagements with imperial and global histories in recent years have furnished a range of novel analytical and theoretical frameworks that allow for a rethinking of Europe and its place within the world. Situating Europe within these trajectories not only takes account of the interactions and intersections that shaped Europe's past; they also provide insight into present anxieties surrounding issues of European identity and globalization. Needless to say, how Europeans respond to and negotiate these present challenges will have implications for the immediate future. Whether confronted with an inward-looking Europe or a Europe 'open to the world' will depend upon the narratives and histories that underwrite prospective European imaginaries.

Europe and the Metanarrative of Civilization

'Europe' was by no means an alien concept to pre-Enlightenment thinkers. The people of the continent were referred to as *Europenses* as early as the eighth century in medieval chronicles. The term was later employed by Charlemagne to describe the various populations of his Carolingian Empire while Renaissance scholars had few qualms with identifying the swath of territory extending from Iberia to the Ottoman frontier as 'Europe.'⁴ Yet writers of the eighteenth century evoked a specific idea when imagining Europe. The term connoted a shared classical inheritance, a set of common civil values and a commitment to 'the progress of commerce' which, as the Scottish philosopher William Roberts noted, had a considerable influence on 'polishing the manners of the European nations.'⁵ According to Immanuel Kant, the 'civilized states of our continent' were ultimately those 'commercial states' which engaged in peaceful and

⁴ David Levering Lewis, *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe, 570-1215* (New York, 2008), 172; John Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance* (New York, 1994), 1-50.

⁵ Quoted in Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (London, 2013), 57.

productive enterprises.⁶ The French scholar Louis de Jaucourt summed up this mentality in his entry for ‘Europe’ in the *Encyclopédie* compiled during the middle of the eighteenth century. ‘It matters little that Europe is the smallest of the four parts of the world in terms of terrain,’ he claimed, ‘because it is the largest of all with respect to its commerce, its navigation, its fertility, by the enlightenment and industry of its peoples, by the knowledge of Art, Science, [and] Trades.’⁷ As Robert Wolker has argued, the generations of the long eighteenth century effectively ‘invented’ the idea of a collective culture and heritage spanning the continent, providing an idea of Europe as both a geographic entity and a ‘civilization.’⁸

If this particular understanding of Europe was a relatively new concept for elites so too was the idiom of civilization. Despite its classical and historical import, ‘civilization’ first appeared in the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie* only in 1798 and became a common trope among writers to describe a state of existence befitting the supposed refinement, cultivation and sociability of continental elites.⁹ As an analytical category, moreover, ‘civilization’ corresponded to the universal outlooks inherent in Enlightenment thought. The French economist and statesman Anne Robert Jacques Turgot expressed a widely held Enlightenment belief when arguing that the human race was ‘one vast whole’ but that ‘the present state of the world, marked as it is by infinite variations in inequality spreads out before us at one and the same time all the gradations of barbarism to refinement.’¹⁰ For Adam Ferguson, ‘varieties’ were ‘but steps in the history of mankind’ and were indicative of ‘the fleeting and transient situation’ through which all

⁶ Anthony Pagden, “Introduction,” *The Idea of Europe*, 16.

⁷ Louis Chevalier de Jaucourt, “L’Europe,” *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 36 vols. (Paris, 1751-1780), 6:211-12.

⁸ Robert Wolker, *Rousseau, The Age of the Enlightenment and Their Legacies* (Princeton, 2012), 35-44.

⁹ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 38-40; Lucien Febvre, “Civilization: Evolution of a Word and a Group of Ideas,” in Peter Burke, ed., *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Febvre* (New York, 1973), 224-34.

¹⁰ Quoted in Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago, 2009), 70.

societies passed.¹¹ Enlightenment universalism mapped the world in comparative and evolutionary terms, positing a civilizing process at work in world history. Social and cultural distinctions corresponded to a hierarchy in which lesser and more advanced civilizations could be compared and contrasted. As the natural scientist Philippe Buchez explained in 1833: ‘The differences between the human races living today are only the expression of differences in the states of civilization currently dispersed across the surface of the globe.’¹²

Although the attributes of civilization were not theoretically restricted to European societies, by the nineteenth century it was unconditionally believed that Europe was leading the way in this civilizing process. In 1851, the economist Michel Chevalier traveled across the English Channel to visit the Great Exhibition staged in London. Spectators entering the magnificent Crystal Palace temporarily erected in Hyde Park were greeted with an array of cultural and industrial displays consisting of steel-making demonstrations, newly-fashioned industrial machines and agricultural samples brought back from the British colonies. These exhibitions, much like those that would be staged in France nearly two decades later, offered a panorama of the burgeoning global economy and intellectual dynamism symbolizing the achievements of Western society. Comparing the marvels of European industry with the exhibits on colonial and foreign cultures, Chevalier saw an ‘extreme inequality’ between Occidental and Oriental civilizations. ‘Between the two,’ he claimed, ‘it would seem there is an abyss.’ Scientific advancement and industrial production had given the West an ‘immense superiority’ over the rest of the world, with Europe now constituting ‘the depository of the future.’¹³

¹¹ Quoted in Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 55.

¹² Philippe Buchez, *Introduction à la science de l'histoire ou science du développement de l'humanité* (Paris, 1833), 139.

¹³ Michel Chevalier, *Exposition Universelle de Londres en 1851* (Paris, 1851), 6-7, 14, 22.

Chevalier's compatriot François Guizot was no less hesitant to celebrate what he deemed 'the essence of modern civilization.'¹⁴ Yet for Guizot, Europe's material achievements were secondary to the 'firmness of political thought' and liberty that characterized European societies. 'All of Europe and notably France,' he maintained, 'has marched along . . . the same path of liberation and general progress. These paths have guided the people who have firmly engaged in a high degree of strength, prosperity and grandeur that we call and that we have a right to call modern civilization.'¹⁵ In valorizing the 'path of liberation and general progress' that Europe had followed, Guizot's vision of civilization was clearly a product of a post-revolutionary Europe. The years of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars saw 'civilization' acquire a new social and political meaning as the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity announced by revolutionaries became the justification for territorial expansion under the banner of modern civilization. Radicals preached the liberation of man from the tyranny of custom while Napoleonic administrators implemented revolutionary reforms among the 'savage' and 'barbaric' continental populations in the name of European civilization.¹⁶ Enlightenment perspectives on commerce and moral progress became the basis for a veritable 'civilizing mission' rooted in core ideas of material advancement and social emancipation. Already by the 1790s, the Marquis de Condorcet foresaw Europe with its global trading networks and imperial domains serving as an agent of civilization in the world. 'What have been no better than the counting-houses of brigands will become colonies of citizens propagating throughout Africa and

¹⁴ Ibid., 184.

¹⁵ François Guizot, *Histoire parlementaire de France* (Paris, 1863), 1:cxi.

¹⁶ Quoted in Stuart Woolf, "French Civilization and Ethnicity in the Napoleonic Empire," *Past and Present*, 124 (August 1989): 114.

Asia the principles and the practice of liberty, knowledge and reason that they have brought from Europe.¹⁷

By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Enlightenment notions of European civilization had crystallized into a comprehensive vision of Europe not only as a continental community but as a world-historical phenomenon. The years of revolutionary turmoil born from 1789 provided the final thrust in this development. ‘After having shattered, ruptured and demolished everything it had been, is [the continent] not completely occupied with finding itself, remaking itself and recreating itself?’ asked the French political writer Émile Barrault in 1835. Violently torn asunder from its Christian and monarchial heritage, the people of the continent were now encouraged to reimagine themselves as part of a civilization that, in Barrault’s estimation, designated ‘something immense, incomplete, prolific, confusing, [and] new . . . something that embraces everything and yet still has no clearly defined form; a chaos pregnant with creation yet inchoate.’¹⁸ The Revolution marked a dramatic rupture with the past, one that Barrault conceptualized as a violent act of self-repudiation and renewal. ‘Europe’ gave embodiment to this process, encompassing the destructive and progressive impulses that would condition the very idea of modernity.

‘There exists in Europe a concord of needs and wishes, a common thought, a universal soul, that drives nations toward the same goal,’ the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini affirmed in 1831. ‘There exists a European tendency.’¹⁹ For political ideologues like Mazzini, this ‘tendency’ signified the promise of liberty, the union of people and, above all, peace. For

¹⁷ Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, trans., June Barraclough (New York, 1955), 177.

¹⁸ Émile Barrault, *Occident et Orient: Études politiques, morales, religieuse* (Paris, 1835), 253.

¹⁹ Quoted in Maurizio Isabella, “Mazzini’s Internationalism in Context: From Cosmopolitan Patriotism of the Italian Carbonari to Mazzini’s Europe of the Nations,” *Giuseppe Mazzini and The Globalisation of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, eds., C. A. Bayly and Eugenio F. Biagini (Oxford, 2008), 42.

technocratic thinkers like Barrault on the other hand, Europe pointed the way to an unprecedented industrial and commercial world order. These moral and progressive affinities constituted the basis of a European idea that future generations would repeatedly invoke and identify with over the coming years. By 1867, the philosopher Émile Littré could speak of Europe as an ‘innate tendency.’ The people of the continent, he insisted, now ‘truly feel like citizens of that vast and glorious community we call Europe.’²⁰

The story of modern European development as narrated by post-revolutionary thinkers amounted to an exercise in dialectics. Only in separating itself completely from its past could Europe create itself anew under the guise of ‘modern civilization.’ It is, in part, Hegel who became the prophet of this new vision of civilization. In his estimation, history was essentially rational and driven by the violent processes through which human ideas actualized themselves and attained higher fulfillment.²¹ If the *philosophes* spoke of refinement and elevated morals when they invoked civilization, the next generation embellished these concepts with new notions of historical discontinuity, radical transformation and freedom that would remain central to the construction of a European narrative and identity.

While customary historical narratives continue to identify the Enlightenment and French Revolution with the origins of modernity, they no longer adhere to a ‘diffusionist myth’ informed by notions of European universalism and exceptionalism (paradoxical concepts in themselves).²² The eighteenth century did, however, serve to construct new fields of difference organized along axes of modern and pre-modern, Occident and Orient, ‘civilization’ and

²⁰ Émile Littré, “Politique,” *La Philosophie positive* (Paris, 1867), 1:127.

²¹ See: Robert Stern, *The Routledge Guidebook of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (London, 2013); Robert C. Salmon, *In The Spirit of Hegel* (Oxford, 1983); J. L. Talmon, *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase* (London, 1960), 202-04.

²² Sebastian Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique,” *American Historical Review*, 117:4 (October 2012): 999-1027; Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus*, 129:1 (2000): 1-29; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Muddle of Modernity,” *American Historical Review*, 116:3 (June 2011): 663-75.

‘savagery’ that would come to figure prominently in a variety of European projects and ideologies over the next two centuries. World history, as Hegel pointedly remarked, traveled from East to West, for Europe was ‘the absolute end of History.’²³ For Hegel, this superior status had come through the torturous struggles of dialectical change and opposing forces that had propelled European civilization into the modern era. Almost from its inception, this vision was channeled into an aggressive project of colonial expansion and overseas transformation that would give Europe a profound sense of its own world-historical significance. The radicalization of the Enlightenment not only inspired faith in the idea that the world could be remade in Europe’s image. It rendered it a moral imperative. This process too was ‘a European tendency’ (to employ Mazzini’s phrase).

However, for all this talk of turning points, civilizational advancement and Europe’s leap into the modern era, it is difficult to deny that thinkers of the nineteenth century were adhering to a familiar script. Some five centuries before men like Barrault and Hegel speculated on Europe’s new-found place in world history, the Italian poet and scholar Francesco Petrarca had similarly turned a critical eye to the past while dreaming of the future. Like his future European compatriots, Petrarch condemned the barbarism and stagnation of a past entombed in ‘gothic’ slumber. ‘Our posterity, perchance, when the shadows have lifted, may enjoy once more the radiance the ancients knew,’ he wrote. This dictum would constitute a clarion call for a new generation of intellectuals and scholars in the coming decades.²⁴ Petrarch’s injunction to liberate Europe from an oppressive medieval ‘darkness’ (*tenebrea*) translated into a cultural program of *renaissance*—reconnecting the continent with the grandeur of a classical civilization and inheritance. Yet this civilizational ‘rebirth’ equally announced a historical rupture. In casting off

²³ G. F. W. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York, 1956), 103.

²⁴ Thomas G. Bergin and Alice S. Wilson, *Petrarch’s “Africa”* (New Haven, 1977), 239.

the slough of a ‘middling’ age (*medium aevum*), Europe was imagined as the embodiment and repository of a definitively modern time and civilization vastly different from and even superior to other societies.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, it was during the Renaissance that Europe as a geographic and culturally entity began to assume form, tracing the contours of what Edmund Burke would later call the ‘great vicinage of Europe,’ an imaginary that would be refined and elaborated upon over the coming centuries.²⁶

It is here that we can glean the outline of a European narrative that is at once effacing and self-affirming. Despite their distinct narrative structures—Petrarch’s conforming to historical cycles of decadence and regeneration while Hegel’s being linear and agonial—the stories they tell are the same.²⁷ It is a story of Europe remaking itself through self-repudiation, of defining itself in opposition to itself and, in the process, affirming its links with civilization. Europe’s civilization and claims to modernity have always been one and the same, for it has been the idea of rupture in the present that has conditioned the discourse of civilization.²⁸ The struggle between religion and secularism that encourages tolerance and freedom of conscience; the overthrow of medieval feudalism that paves the way for the rational state; divisive ethnic and tribal antagonisms reconciled within the civic unity of the nation-state: these comprise the critical elements of a European master narrative. This ‘explanation by emplotment’ has persistently furnished a coherent perception of European civilization and made it possible to imagine Europe as the axis of world history and the embodiment of a universal modernizing

²⁵ John Degenais and Margaret R. Greer, “Decolonizing the Middle Ages,” *Journal of Medieval and Modern Studies*, 30:3 (Fall 2000): 431-38.

²⁶ Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in The Renaissance*, 3-50.

²⁷ For general works on ideas of decadent and progressive time, see: Pierre Chaunu, *Histoire et décadence* (Paris, 1981); Jacques Le Goff, *Histoire et mémoire* (Paris, 1988), 43-44; Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980); Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, 2004).

²⁸ F. R. Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford, 2005), 367; Hichem Djait, *Europe and Islam*, trans., Peter Heinegg (Berkeley, 1985), 108-09.

process. In short, these elements have shaped the metanarrative of Europe in the modern period.²⁹

Europe and the Diffusionist Myth

If modern civilization has constituted a leitmotif of European history, it has been a history persistently measured against those outside of Europe's own civilizational unity. Only through a self-proclaimed world-historical mission could this imaginary be sustained and made real, setting the stage for the era of European imperial expansionism which would validate a self-proclaimed modern civilization by pressing it upon others deemed 'primitive' and beyond the pale of modernity. Various studies have scrutinized the discursive boundaries of 'civilization' and 'savagery' that mapped a putatively modern European identity, often noting the fluidity and ideological variations that these representations assumed. Whether construed through epistemological frameworks of Orientalism, 'Euro-Orientalism' or 'Balkanism,' the inclination to differentiate between a nominal 'European' civilization and those cultures and societies on the periphery in need of 'civilizing' has persistently shaped reflexive conceptions of the European self.³⁰

The 'civilizing mission,' as it was understood by contemporaries, was a crucial element of European myth-making. It instantiated the very idea of a 'European civilization' and portrayed it as the precursor to overseas colonial expansion. A measure of continuity was established between the consolidation of a European community on the continent and the diffusion of its

²⁹ For metanarrative and history, see: Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973), 7-11.

³⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 2003); Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994); Ezequiel Adamovsky, "Euro-Orientalism and the Making of the Concept of Eastern Europe in France, 1810-1880," *The Journal of Modern History*, 77 (September 2005): 591-628; Maria Todorova, *Imagining The Balkans* (New York, 1997).

values and material attributes across other parts of the globe. This account not only shaped predominant ideas of cultural difference and differentiation held by European thinkers; it equally situated Europe squarely at the center of a modern inheritance that was properly understood to be ‘European’ or ‘Western’ in nature. The ‘civilizing mission’ has, therefore, stood at the center of a Eurocentric vision of social development and history, a vision which continues to influence contemporary perspectives. Colonialism solidified the conceptual boundaries and narratives of a European modernity at the very moment Europe itself acquired a global character and reach. This paradox requires greater attention. East and West, Asia and Europe ‘were always walls in the mind at least as much as lines on the earth,’ as the historian Tony Judt once claimed.³¹ As such, these toponyms could be expansive or restrictive. As a geographical expression, Europe possessed a form that was roughly identifiable. Yet as a concept, its contours could be limitless, especially as European began to settle in other parts of the world.

The dissemination myth has relied upon a vision of colonial modernization in which European states attempted to replicate the forms of continental modernity abroad. French journalists were not reticent in expressing aspirations of implanting European civilization in ‘the heart of barbarism’ as they strengthened their hold on North Africa.³² The Spanish politician and economist Joaquín Costa foresaw a civilizing mission for his own country in Morocco in a similar fashion. Speaking in 1884, he called upon his compatriots to bring civilization to North Africa and ‘reproduce down there the character of our homeland.’³³ Despite the Eurocentric mentality and discourses that drove colonial expansion, the transformations wrought by colonialism frequently blurred the lines between European and non-European spaces. In the early

³¹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York, 2005), 752.

³² Augustin Marquand, “Alger et ses environs,” *Akhbar*, 14 February 1869.

³³ Quoted in Xosé-Manoel Núñez, “Nation-Building and Regional Integration: The Case of the Spanish Empire, 1700-1914,” *Nationalizing Empires*, eds., Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (Budapest, 2015), 236.

1870s, the Scottish missionary Norman Macleod arrived in Bombay on the Western coast of mainland Indian to find a ‘Europeanized city’ bustling with commerce and trade.³⁴ Poets like Richard Kipling amusingly noted that sections of Calcutta resembled the British metropole while the journalist William Howard Russell described the buildings he found in Galle, Sri Lanka as ‘a slice of old Europe . . . thrust in among the cocoanut tress, palms, [and] coral reefs.’³⁵ In the 1860s, the traveling businessman Charles Thierry-Mieg was perplexed by the hotels, shops and wide boulevards he found in Algerian cities, insisting: ‘Today, Algiers is an entirely European city.’³⁶

Pretensions of ‘Europeanizing’ peripheral spaces fueled overseas building projects. Yet colonial regimes were not simply engaged in transplanting and copying European forms on distant shores, despite the pronouncements of imperial ideologues and statesmen to this effect. Replicating Europe on foreign continents marked conscious efforts to instantiate a specific idea and image of Europe, a ‘simulacra’ that was always more symbolic than authentic.³⁷ Claims of civilizing and modernizing non-European territories furnished the ideological fiction and rationale that sustained imperial domination and European identities. As such, Europe, civilization and modernity became intermingled concepts with one commonly invoking the other. In projecting images of themselves as ‘modern’ societies, states and rulers employed a symbolism and vocabulary broadly understood to be European, and in doing so validated their status as nominally modern, civilized nations. This was especially important for states with only marginal European credentials or regions considered altogether ‘Oriental’ and foreign.³⁸ In these

³⁴ Normand Macleod, *Peeps at The Far East: A Familiar Account of a Visit to India* (London, 1871), 25.

³⁵ William Howard Russell, *My Diary In India In The Year 1858-69*, 2 vols. (London, 1860), 1:80-81.

³⁶ Charles Thierry-Mieg, *Six semaines en Afrique* (Paris, 1861), 46.

³⁷ See: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, 1994).

³⁸ Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World’s Fairs* (Berkeley, 1992), 157-58.

instances, Europeanization occurred by design as much as by tendency, demonstrating the malleability and competitive impulses that motivated nineteenth-century urbanizations initiatives on a global scale.

Case in point was Russian Turkestan. Straddling the boundaries between Europe and Asia, the Russian empire perennially tested the limits of European inclusion and exclusion.³⁹ Its efforts in colonial Tashkent after 1867 sought to efface such differences and situate Russia within the conceptual geography of modern European society. Colonial ideologues hailed Russia's 'civilizing' initiative in the Central Asian steppe and validated their European credential through conspicuous acts of colonial modernization. Within the span of twenty years, the Russian colonial administration and its team of civil engineers managed to outfit the city with boulevards and poplar-lined streets modeled on St. Petersburg's Nevskii Prospect. These Russian elements were complemented by a Parisian-inspired network of streets, parks shaded by apricot trees and a public zoo. The city acquired the look of 'a small European capital,' as one observer noted, and the effect was clearly intentional.⁴⁰ Tashkent was lauded as an oasis of European civilization in the middle of Central Asia, an impression that the Russian administration assiduously cultivated as it carried out its work.⁴¹ If Russia's European and civilized pedigree may have been questionable among French and British observers, its robust efforts to civilize the steppe and impart a 'European' character to the region amounted to an exercise in radical self-fashioning. 'In Europe we were Tatars,' wrote Fyodor Dostoyevsky in 1881, 'but in Asia we were also Europeans.'⁴² Colonialism provided an important theater in which Russian identity

³⁹ Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Euro-Orientalism: Liberal Ideology and the Image of Russia in France* (c.1740-1880) (Oxford, 2006); Thomas McLean, *The Other East and Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Imagining Poland and the Russian Empire* (New York, 2012); Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis, 1999), 65-112.

⁴⁰ Henri Morse, *A Travers l'Asie centrale* (Paris, 1885), 82.

⁴¹ Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923* (Bloomington, 2007), 35-46.

⁴² Quoted in Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, 2003), 37.

could be manufactured and projected to the rest of the world. The official newspaper *Turkestanskiia Viedomosti* spelled out these intentions clearly in its inaugural issue, noting, ‘Turkestan can be as important for us as India is for Britain and Algeria for France.’⁴³

The comparison was apt.⁴⁴ Colonial cities like Algiers, Bombay and Tashkent provided stages upon which the drama of European modernity and progress was played out and represented to audiences at home and abroad. They were testaments to European power, but equally symbols that were consciously constructed and molded to communicate notions of European civilization and selfhood. If Europeans prided themselves on disseminating a superior civilization abroad, the irony was that the attributes and forms of modern European civilization became a reality through their articulation and representation overseas. The colonies offered a place for the realization of European imaginaries on a grand scale through acts of self-fashioning.

Taking account of this process not only serves to dissolve the spatial geographies that map ‘European civilization.’ They also fragment the chronologies that underwrite it. Colonial modernization paralleled nineteenth-century urbanizing and industrializing processes on the continent. The construction of railways and palatial neo-gothic buildings in Bombay was coterminous with similar feats back home as new building projects and the laying of the London Underground proceeded alongside the growth of urban slums in neighborhoods like Whapping and the East End. The Gallicization of North African cities with their ‘Parisian imitations’ occurred simultaneously with the remodeling of Paris under Georges Huassmann, the *Prachtbauen* of the Ringstrasse in Vienna and Baron Frigyes Podmaniczky’s urban planning

⁴³ Quoted in Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent*, 44.

⁴⁴ See: Alexander Morrison, “Russian Rule in Turkestan and the Example of British India, c. 1860-1917,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 84:4 (October 2006): 666-707.

designs in Budapest.⁴⁵ Non-European cities acquired a definitively ‘European’ character at the very moment when the modern European city was being imagined, planned and built on the continent. In this context, what has typically been considered a process of ‘diffusion’ assumes the nature of a common global experience.⁴⁶

And it was not simply colonial European powers that engaged in this type of artful self-fashioning either. As nominally European attributes became benchmarks of civility and progress, non-Western powers also learned to speak the language of ‘civilization’ and ‘enlightenment’ espoused by imperial rivals. Forward-looking emirs or sultans under pressure from foreign powers were attracted to the financial and military benefits that reforms might offer. For more than a century, the Ottoman leadership walked a fine line between modernization and tradition, contending with the needs of state reform while catering to religious conservatives and wary elites within the military.⁴⁷ Although this balancing act did not always proceed smoothly, the expanding influence of European power in Ottoman economic affairs and the strains of imperial decline made it a necessity. ‘Constantinople looks a lot like London and nothing like the Orient,’ the French critic Théophile Gautier wrote back to a friend, unamused, following a trip to the city in the 1850s.⁴⁸ Egypt was no different. Alexandria’s cosmopolitan atmosphere, European buildings and modern train stations evoked nothing of the city’s classical heritage, while Cairo had little of the ‘authentic’ Orient to offer the tourist. Docking in the city on his way to India, William Howard Russell took a critical view of Cairo, a city ‘most distressingly European’ in its

⁴⁵ See: Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1980), 24-110; David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton, 1972); Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers Under French Rule* (Berkeley, 1997); Tristram Hunt, *Cities of Empire: The British Colonies and the Creation of the Urban World* (New York, 2014).

⁴⁶ C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World* (Oxford, 2004), 170-98.

⁴⁷ Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and The Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford, 2002), 53.

⁴⁸ Letter to Louis de Cormenin 5 July 1852, in Théophile Gautier, *Constantinople et autres textes sur la Turquie* (Paris, 1990), 24.

appearance and character.⁴⁹ This impression was precisely what the ambitious Khedive Ismā'īl Pāshā had envisioned in the early 1860s, and he was not modest when it came to touting his accomplishments. ‘My country is no longer in Africa,’ he proclaimed resolutely in 1878. ‘We are now part of Europe.’⁵⁰

‘Now is the time to see the Orient because it’s disappearing, it’s getting civilized,’ Gustave Flaubert advised his mother in a letter written during a trip through Egypt and the Levant in the late 1840s.⁵¹ Of course what he meant by this comment was that the East resembled Europe to a greater extent than he had previously imagined. Laments to a disappearing Orient were expressed as travelers moved through parts of Africa, the Middle East and Japan. These elegies to the exoticism and charm of a fabled Orient were in part the product of an aggressive European colonialism and in part a reaction to a globalized modernizing process taking place across the nineteenth century. If Europeans left home to find only the simulacra of Paris or London, their experiences testified to modernity’s pervasive influences just as much as to Europe’s increasing global reach and prestige.

Narrating Postcolonial Europe

To recognize that the idiom and external qualities of ‘European civilization’ paralleled extra-continental developments is to reformulate and re-conceptualize the European metanarrative. It locates Europe within a broader global continuum, challenging ideas of ‘civilization’ as an internally generated concept or a process of self-realization. It equally highlights the need to rethink models of ‘diffusion’ and the ways in which modernizing agendas were transmitted and

⁴⁹ Russell, *My Diary In India*, 1:31.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Robert T. Harrison, *Gladstone’s Imperialism in Egypt: Techniques and Domination* (Westport, CT, 1995), 53.

⁵¹ Quoted in Frederick Brown, *Flaubert: A Biography* (New York, 2006), 265.

communicated. At base, it questions the ontologies that have grounded understandings of a consistent European society and community across time. Imperialism, understood as both a framework for global power relationships and a channel for identity formation, was never divorced from the European imaginary. If imperial expansion helped crystallize the ‘idea of Europe,’ it also exercised a profound influence on European culture and self-perceptions. It is precisely this subject which post-colonial theory has sought to interrogate, and with it question the very core of European selfhood and the civilizing mission.⁵²

‘Wear the costume of the country you visit, but keep your own clothes for the journey home,’ Diderot once advised.⁵³ This injunction could have served as an epigram for the process of decolonization that was set in motion during the mid-twentieth. Faced with crippled economies and formidable national resistance movements in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Europeans pulled up stakes and retreated back to the continent, either relinquishing formal control over imperial domains or abandoning them altogether. Indeed, it appeared European states endeavored to don a more familiar garb. They abandoned the ornamentation of empire and returned to imagined ancestral homelands, committing themselves to ‘European integration’ and continentalist projects. Yet in the wake of empire, it was difficult to ignore that ‘home’ had changed. Centuries of migration, economic integration and cultural exchange had left their mark on imperial nations, revealing that metropoles had never been divorced from the currents and counter-flows of the empires they had founded.⁵⁴ Outremer

⁵² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000); Couze Venn, *The Postcolonial Challenge: Towards Alternative Worlds* (London, 2006).

⁵³ Denis Diderot, “The Supplément au Voyage du Bougainville,” *Political Writings*, ed., John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler (Cambridge, 1992), 74.

⁵⁴ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in a Bourgeois World*, eds., Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley, 1997), 1-37; Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham, 2006).

Europe, with its racial diversity and heterogeneity, had become Europe proper, a realization that elicited new anxieties over the loss of identity in the coming years.

It is in this context that we might reflect on what, at present, has been called Europe's 'crisis of identity,' a phrase encompassing a broad range of debates concerning questions of core values, history, immigration and the impact of globalization.⁵⁵ These debates have been most evident at the level of European nation-states. In 1985, the conservative British MP Enoch Powell did not hide his anxieties on what the growing presence of Africans and Asians in the country posed for the future. Britain, he warned, would not be 'recognizable as the same nation it has been, or perhaps as a nation at all' if immigration trends continued unabated.⁵⁶ The verdict has been equally severe among French politicians and conservatives alarmed by an influx of North African immigrants arriving in the country since the postwar period. As one senator remarked during a controversial debate over immigration legislation in 1993, 'the majority [of French citizens] do not want a puzzle of cultures, faith and traditions which [will] slowly disfiguring our national identity.'⁵⁷ The supposed homogeneity that formed the basis of the national idea has always been a fiction or 'imagined community,' as Benedict Anderson has phrased it. Yet this fiction has made the diversity previously relegated to the colonies a more conspicuous and, some might argue, unwelcome presence in continental national life.⁵⁸ Current

⁵⁵ Dirk Hoerder, "Transcultural States, Nations and Peoples," *The Historical Practice of Diversity: Transcultural Interactions From the Early Modern Mediterranean to the Postcolonial World*, ed., Dirk Hoerder (New York, 2003), 26-29; Nezar Alsayyad, "Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: On the Discourses of Identity and Culture," *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: Politics, Culture and Civilization in the Age of Globalization*, eds., Nezar Alsayyad and Manuel Castelles (Lanham, 2002), 9-30; Anthony Giddens, *Run-Away World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives* (London, 2003); Crawford Young, ed., *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-State at Bay?* (Madison, 1993); Sharon MacDonald, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today* (London, 2013).

⁵⁶ Quoted in Clare E. Alexander, *The Art of Being Black: The Creation of Black British Youth Identities* (Oxford, 1996), 5.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Soraya Tlatti, "French Nationalism and the Issue of North African Immigration," *Franco-Arab Encounters*, eds., L. Carl Brown and Matthew S. Gordon (Lebanon, 1996), 393.

⁵⁸ Fafid Gafaiti, "Nationalism, Colonialism, and Ethnic Discourse in the Construction of French Identity," *French Civilization and its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race*, eds., Tyler Stovall and Georges van den Abbeele (Lanham, 2003), 189-210.

concerns over both national and European identity are a reminder that former colonial powers cannot keep their own clothes for the journey home, not simply because the legacies of empire run deep (although they do), but because imperialism was part of a globalizing process that has yet to run its course.

The ‘Europeanization’ of continental communities has required a fair amount of forgetting and even ‘amnesia,’ as various critics have noted.⁵⁹ National narratives have traditionally treated the imperial experience as a historical tangent, and in doing so marginalized the disparate colonies and multi-ethnic settler communities that once thought of themselves as European despite their distance from an imagined homeland. Empire augmented the boundaries and peripheries of Europe in an age characterized by rampant expansion and global migrations. Colonists in Algiers enjoyed Parisian-style cafés and boulevards reminiscent of Haussmann’s Paris just as British residents in Bombay caught trains at the Victoria terminus modeled on London’s St. Pancras. These were details in a global European history that was extra-continental but no less European. They provide a view of processes that wove together lives and established connections across great distances, recreating an image of the imperial nation that many subjects and citizens once accepted as a reality. We have only just begun to recover these global narratives. Prior to what scholars have labeled an ‘imperial turn’ in the discipline of history, these details were pegged as histories that occurred ‘over there.’ In reconstituting them, we have begun to de-territorialize European memory and, through this, grasp the complex and diverse relations that made up an exceedingly globalized European story.

For more than two centuries, imperialism provided a means of transmitting ideas of European civilization and values, and in many cases served to strengthen them. Yet in their

⁵⁹ Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l’oubli: la mémoire de la guerre de l’Algérie* (Paris, 2005); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algeria War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, 2006); Gert Oostindie, *Postcolonial Netherlands: Sixty-Five Years of Forgetting, Commemorating, Silencing* (Amsterdam, 2011).

transmission they often acquired a universality that made them definitively ‘European.’ Articulating imagined social and cultural commonalities through the idiom of ‘civilization’ became the basis for imagining a cosmopolitan continental society just as much as imagining diverse imperial societies spanning the globe. European exceptionalism was always dependent upon its claim to universality. ‘Europe has always been open to the entire world,’ claimed the Swiss writer and European federalist Denis de Rougemont in 1949. ‘By right or wrong, by idealism or by ignorance, by virtue of its faith or by its imperialist views, it has always perceived its civilization as an ensemble of universal values.’⁶⁰ For thinkers of the nineteenth century, this ‘openness’ to the entire world possessed a more evident imperial character, but it was no less evident in Enlightenment outlooks that lauded the progressive ‘commerce’ and moral ‘refinement’ found on the continent or championed these qualities as models for others to emulate.

Today, however, as the attributes of European modernity secure themselves firmly beyond the continent, Europe finds its historic claim to a universal modernizing project compromised. The proliferation of nation-states across former colonial empires, the industrialization of world economies and the establishment of global capitalist markets have relegated Europe to a participant in a larger vision of modernity shared with non-Western societies. Modernity, once seen as a particularly European or Occidental phenomenon, has, in the twenty-first century, acquired its own culture and attributes that can no longer be considered purely Western or European in character.⁶¹ The advent of a postcolonial and globalized modernity entails the end of the European civilizing mission and with it the end of a particular

⁶⁰ Denis de Rougemont, *Oeuvres complètes*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1994), 1:85.

⁶¹ Carol Gluck, “The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now,” *The American Historical Review*, 116:2 (June 2011): 677-79; Djaït, *Europe and Islam*, 166-67.

idea of European selfhood and history. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Europe has lost its monopoly on its universal world-historical status.

We can speculate on whether Europe will exhibit its familiar tendency for radical redefinition and self-recreation. Or we can question whether we need to posit a new European master narrative altogether, resituating its revolutionary and modern heritage as such. The alternative, as some have recently suggested, is to ‘provincialize’ Europe and integrate it into a larger global narrative based upon the recognition of ‘multiple modernities’ and a pluralist history.⁶² These questions arrive at a time when European integration and growing demands for multiculturalism have compelled Europeans to reflect critically on questions of identity, nationality and their place in the wider world. Perhaps more to the point, their prevalence suggests that such questions will continue to provide grounds for the affirmation, contestation and reconceptualization of new European imaginaries and narratives in the years ahead.

⁶² Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus*, 129:1 (2000): 1-29; Huri İslamoğlu and Peter C. Perdue, “Introduction,” in *Shared Histories of Modernity: China, India and The Ottoman Empire*, ed., Huri İslamoğlu and Peter C. Perdue (New Delhi, 2009), 1-20.