War and conflict in contemporary European history, 1914–2004

John Horne

The first half of the twentieth century was the most violent period in modern European history. War, revolution, civil war and the deliberate displacement or destruction of entire ethnic and cultural communities characterized much of the continent from 1914 to the early 1950s. Thereafter, conflict was frozen in less lethal and more institutionalized forms until the final decade of the century, when the end of the Cold War was followed by the extraordinarily peaceful integration of Europe – a process that continues today. The exception has been the violent implosion of Yugoslavia.

This theme presents particular challenges both for a European reading of the recent history of the continent and also for the notion of "contemporary" history. Wars and conflicts were by definition the result of difference and division and they were not, in the main, self-referentially European. Nor did they affect all parts of Europe in the same way, let alone at exactly the same time. What (if anything) makes them "European" in historical retrospect thus needs to be explored and demonstrated.

Wars and revolutions also provide the major points of discontinuity in recent European history. The sense of the "contemporary" stems in large part from the perceived links between these moments of rupture and the present – as shown by the common use of the terms "pre-war" and "post-war", "post-Communist", and so on. If the notions of historical temporality and "modern time" were invented in the Enlightenment, the idea of the contemporary as something deriving from the power of recent history to shape current lives is due in no small measure to the ruptures of the twentieth century.[1] Because the French experienced this sense of the contemporary earliest, with the French Revolution, and thus measured "contemporary history" from 1789, the term "temps présent" was coined in France to capture the specificity of the period since the Second World War.[2] Yet whether it is called "contemporary history", "Zeitgeschichte", or "histoire du temps présent", this recent past has parti-

[1] Reinhart Koselleck, The Eighteenth Century as the Beginning of Modernity, in: idem, *The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing, History, Spacing Concepts*, Stanford 2002, pp. 154-169; Hans Rothfels, Zeitgeschichte als Aufgabe, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1953), pp. 1-8; David Thomson, The Writing of Contemporary History, in: *The New History. Trends in Historical Research and Writing since World War II*, New York 1967, pp. 24-33, here pp. 31-32.

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cularly fluid temporal boundaries because it is redefined more rapidly and substantially by the evolving present than is the case with more remote periods.

Both "Europe" and the "contemporary", therefore, constitute unstable platforms for studying war and violence over the last 90 years. Yet this may be an advantage. Potentially, continental frameworks of analysis enable us to go beyond interpretations rooted in the nation-state or in the very divisions that produced the conflicts. Likewise, the idea of the "contemporary" suggests that variable time-frames may help pin down the changing continuities and discontinuities of the recent past. In other words, the very instability of both terms, "Europe" and the "contemporary", makes them positive vantage-points – provided that they are part of the question and not taken for granted.

1. Division and unity in European history

In thinking about how to explore war and conflict since 1914, it may help to draw a contrast with an influential tradition of historical writing about Europe since the Enlightenment. This tradition has been essentially binary. It has taken diversity to be a central feature of Europe, expressed by multiple states and by conflicts. But it has found unity in common cultural values, social arrangements and political principles, summarized by the notion of a European "civilization". This was Voltaire's "Great Republic, divided into several states [...] but all corresponding with one another", or Gibbon's view that Europe was characterized by a "general resemblance of religion, language and manners [...] productive of the most beneficial consequences to the liberty of mankind."[3]

The "civilization" in question was usually thought of in the singular, as providing both beliefs and an identity that distinguished Europe and Europeans from other continents and peoples. In the triumphalist phases of nineteenth and twentieth century Europe, it was all too easily confounded with "civilization" as such and provided an ideology for different Europeans to justify their dominance over much of the rest of the world or other parts of Europe. It might be thought that with Europe's descent into war and genocide, this tradition would have been abandoned. In fact it has proved remarkably resilient. For embattled liberal historians such as H.A.L. Fisher or Henri Pirenne, it

[2] François Bédarida, Temps présent et présence de l'histoire, in: idem, *Histoire, critique et responsabilité*, Brussels 2003, pp. 47-59, here p. 58; Rainer Hudemann, Histoire du Temps présent in Frankreich. Zwischen nationalen Problemstellungen und internationaler Öffnung, in: Alexander Nützenadel/Wolfgang Schieder (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte als Problem. Nationale Traditionen und Perspektiven der Forschung in Europa*, Göttingen 2004, pp. 175-200.

[3] Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, Paris 1751, ch. 2; Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London 1776–1788, ch. 3.

defined what had to be saved from fascism and communism. As Fisher put it in 1936: "The kind of civilization which we specifically designate as European reposes not upon a foundation of race, but on an inheritance of thought and achievement and religious aspirations."[4] Recast as "western civilization" after 1945 to include North America, it provided a powerful historical paradigm in the Cold War, while as the "European idea" it also informed the emerging process of European integration.[5]

The binary model of conflict and civilization is deeply unsatisfactory. Of course, there is no denying that certain cultural and political currents have marked the history of the continent as a whole. But one cannot argue without being reductive or essentialist that they produced a single "civilization" – as we have been reminded by the recent, acrimonious debate over the preamble to the proposed new constitution for the European Union. More importantly, the cultural or political currents often identified (Christianity, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, science, democracy, etc.) contributed to war and revolution, often decisively. Hence they should not be seen as a counterweight to diversity and conflict but rather placed among the causes of the latter. Above all, by monopolizing the transnational, the notion of "civilization" consigned the explanation of war and conflict to European diversity, reinforcing a tendency to write political and military history in terms of nations and the state system. Yet the critique highlights the question. Can a continental level of explanation problematize what was subsumed in the notion of European culture or "civilization"? Can it "Europeanize" our understanding of war and conflict? Or should the explanations remain with the nation-state (whose heyday was during this very period), making international relations and comparative national history the best approach? The answers to these questions lie mainly (but not exclusively) in the realm of cultural and political history. Confining myself to these fields, let me offer some suggestions as to what a transnational view of war and conflict in recent European history might have to offer.

2. War, revolution, and civil war: a European story?

The shift in chronological perspective produced by the events of 1989 resulted in a new thesis about Europe's "short" twentieth century which has gained

[4] H.A.L. Fisher, *A History of Europe*, London 1936, p. 6.

[5] Carlton J. Hayes, *History of Western Civilization*, New York 1949; Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Europe: a History of its Peoples*, London 1990 (commissioned by the EEC). For a critical reflection, cf. Luisa Passerini, From the Ironies of Identity to the Identities of Irony, in: Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe from Antiquity to the European Union*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 191-208.

wide acceptance.[6] Yet the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War did not so much redefine as re-open the question of the historical roots of the contemporary period – a good example of the elasticity of the latter. The bicentenary of the French Revolution in the same year was a symbolically important coincidence. Not only did it prove divisive in France (where the decline of a Republican political culture made the revolutionary legacy unexpectedly ambiguous) but it invited reflection on the links between the conflicts of twentieth century Europe and the upheaval of the late eighteenth century – and still does so.

At the risk of gross simplification, let me suggest that the latter was a profound moment because the ancient and widespread concept of sovereignty was reinvested in the abstract notion of the "people". This legitimized politics from below (through the concept of citizenship) and placed the principle of power (as well as its practice) in open-ended contention. It was also a profoundly European moment not only because it reverberated across the continent via the French Revolution but also because it was deeply contested. The reverberation was amplified in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (through ideas of liberalism and democracy). But sovereignty and self-determination were transferred to new concepts derived from culture (the nation), economics (social class) and later from biology (race).The revolutions of 1848 show the operation of a truly continental dynamic in propagating these emergent, and divergent, political languages.[7]

There was, of course, a long road from 1848 to the First World War. It was marked among other things by a process of partial dechristianization that helped translate transcendant and utopian impulses into secular politics.[8] It was also marked by a self-conscious preoccupation with "modernization" which provoked anxiety and conflict and helped polarize the languages of politics (citizenship, nation, class, race) into ever more conflictual patterns.[9] None of these developments played out the same way in different parts of Europe, but few zones of the continent were unaffected by them. They constitute a pre-history without which the wars and ideological conflicts of the period since 1914 are unintelligible, and it is one that cannot be written in national terms alone.

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[6] Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, London 1994; Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century*, London 1999.

[7] Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions 1848–1851*, Cambridge 1994.

[8] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century*, Cambridge 1975, pp. 229-266.

[9] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Nationalismus. Geschichte, Formen, Folgen*, Munich 2001, here pp. 36-40; John Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought 1840–1918*, New Haven 2000; Zeev Sternhell/Mario Sznaider/Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology. From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, Princeton 1994.

3. Total war

Nonetheless, it was the era of violence pivoted on the two world wars that translated these developments into military and political conflicts on a European scale. Because states (and mainly nation-states) were the agents of this process (conducting war, making peace), its history has largely been written in national terms or from an international relations perspective. There are obvious reasons for this. The explosive potential of popular sovereignty and the conflicting ideologies in which it resulted only assumed concrete shape in the development of individual states and the crises they experienced. National politics, and their geo-political interaction, thus provide coherent if well-rehearsed explanations for the revolutions and wars that transformed the continent. No-one would deny the importance of this level of analysis. However, some themes have emerged which address the European dimension of conflict differently, linking it with the pre-history that I have just mentioned. These themes have been particularly evident in the cultural history of the First World War which has marked the revival of interest in that field in the last decade.[10] They have also emerged from the first attempts at serious comparative work on the two world wars.[11]

The first of these themes is the scale and nature of the violence that characterized the two world wars in Europe. One way of approaching this is to consider the two conflicts as Europe's second Thirty Years' War – that is, as a continuous struggle which assumed ideological, diplomatic and military forms in different combinations and resulted in two episodes of generalized war.[12] However, this explanation does not identify the particular dynamics of

[10] For the First World War, see the annual yearbook of the Historial de la Grande Guerre, Péronne, *14–18 Aujourd'hui – Heute – Today* 1-7 (1998–2004), and Rainer Rother (ed.), *Der Weltkrieg 1914–1918. Ereignis und Erinnerung*, Wolfratshausen 2004 (catalogue of Deutsches Historisches Museum exhibition).

[11] Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau/Annette Becker/Christian Ingrao/Henri Rousso (eds.), *La Violence de guerre. Approches comparées des deux conflits mondiaux*, Brussels 2002; Bruno Thoß/Hans-Erich Volkmann (eds.), *Erster Weltkrieg – Zweiter Weltkrieg: Ein Vergleich*, Paderborn 2002. On the question of "total war" as an historical process, see the series of conferences organized by the German Historical Institute, Washington, and published by Cambridge University Press, especially Roger Chickering/Stig Förster (eds.), *Great War, Total War. Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918*, Cambridge 2000; idem (eds.), *The Shadows of Total War. Europe, East Asia and the United States, 1919–1939*, Cambridge 2003; idem/Bernd Greiner (eds.), *A World at Total War. Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937–1945*, Cambridge, forthcoming (2005). On the Great War as the seminal catastrophe of twentieth century German history, cf. Wolfgang Mommsen, *Die Urkatastrophe Deutschlands. Der Erste Weltkrieg 1914–1918*, Stuttgart 2002.

[12] Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime. Europe to the Great War*, London 1981; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Vol. 4: Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914–1949*, Munich 2003, e.g. p. 985.

violence that characterized the military conflicts at a continental level. These expressed a new intensity of warfare rather than just a causal link between the two world wars, and it was this intensity of warfare that helped transform ideologies and politics in the longer term.[13]

Foremost among these dynamics of war was the de-humanization of the imagined enemy. In extreme cases, not even his submission and conversion but his physical displacement or elimination became the goal. The outbreak of war in 1914 crystallized pre-existing tensions into antagonistic "war cultures" which already presented the conflict as a total war for the survival of nations that were seen to stand for different ideological and cultural values.[14] Externally, it was assumed that the enemy consisted not just of the state or the armed forces but the entire population. The logic (derived from the French Revolution) which assumed that citizens were also soldiers and that the state disposed of the entire economy in time of war, meant (when applied reciprocally to the enemy) that his whole society became a legitimate target.[15] Economic warfare targeted civilian living standards while strategic air power (which had been clearly imagined by the end of the First World War) ultimately targeted the civilians' existence. In the German case, it did so from the start of the Second World War while with the Allies, it escalated from economic to civilian targets, notably with the night bombing of German cities by the British.[16]

Internally, cultural and political mobilization for war generated powerful sentiments of community – seen by some as a new form of that *Gemeinschaft* whose apparent loss was mourned as a casualty of modernity. But the reverse side of this was a drive against the "enemy within", the deviant or treacherous "other" who had to be controlled if not extirpated from the national community (virtually all the nations involved in the First World War had their own "stab in the back" legend during the conflict). Cultural and political mobilization for war, in other words, was inclusive and exclusive, segregating both the nation and the outside world into antagonistic categories.[17] With a militarized population, it also supplied the means to turn such imaginings into political programmes and even realizations. It is not surprizing, therefore, if

[13] Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau/Annette Becker, *14–18, retrouver la guerre*, Paris 2000.

[14] Michael Jeismann, *Das Vaterland der Feinde. Studien zum nationalen Feindbegriff und Selbstverständnis in Deutschland und Frankreich 1792–1918*, Stuttgart 1992; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau/Annette Becker, Violence et consentement: la ‚culture de guerre' du premier conflit mondial, in: Jean-Pierre Rioux/Jean-François Sirinelli (eds.), *Pour une histoire culturelle*, Paris 1997, pp. 251-271.

[15] Daniel Moran/Arthur Waldron (eds.), *The People in Arms. Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution*, Cambridge 2003.

[16] Max Hastings, *Bomber Command*, London 1979; Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945*, Berlin 2002.

[17] John Horne, Introduction, in: idem (ed.), *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 1-18.

both wars in Europe produced episodes of radical repression against elements of the home population. The mass deportations of suspect nationalities by Stalin at the onset of the Second World War had been anticipated by the wave of forced deportations of frontier populations by the Russian army during the great retreat from Galicia in 1915.[18] In the case of Ottoman Turkey, war triggered the genocide of between 800,000 and 1.2 million Armenians.

This picture of extreme violence against a dehumanized enemy requires many qualifications which I cannot go into here. Its scope and intensity increased exponentially between the two wars. Also, it affected different zones of the continent differently. In the First World War, one is most struck in the west by the readiness of soldiers on both sides to face mass death in an unprecedented industrial conflict precisely because of the sense of total investment to which I have referred. The weight of violence tilted massively to the east in the Second World War, where soldiers and above all civilians were killed in millions owing not just to industrial destruction (the *Wehrmacht* reverted to technically more primitive forms of warfare during the Russian campaign) but above all to the propensity to see the enemy in extreme ideological and (in the German case) racially sub-human terms. Nazi Germany categorized the enemy in the west differently (Jews and Communists apart), so that warfare there was far more restrained.[19] The different treatment of prisoners of war in the two spheres marks the difference.

Dissolving the distinction between combatant and non-combatant, construing the conflict in ideologically absolute terms, and reducing or eliminating the assumption of shared humanity are thus as important in defining the violence of the two world wars in Europe as the vastly expanded means of destruction. This may explain why, for all the differences in scale, smaller wars which were similarly marked by extreme ideological or ethnic conflict (the Spanish Civil War, the wars in the former Yugoslavia from 1992 to 1995) had episodes that recalled events in both world wars (with bestialized imagery of the enemy, direct targeting of civilians, and the killing of prisoners).[20]

[18] Cathérine Gousseff, Les Déplacements forcés des populations aux frontières russes occidentales, 1914–1950, in: Audoin-Rouzeau/Becker/Ingrao/Rousso, *La Violence de guerre* (fn. 11), pp. 175-191.

[19] Pieter Lagrou, Les Guerres, les morts et le deuil: bilan chiffré de la seconde guerre mondiale, in: Audoin-Rouzeau/Becker/Ingrao/Rousso, *La Violence de guerre* (fn. 11), pp. 313-327.

[20] Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence. Civil War and Cultural Repression in Franco's Spain, 1936–1945*, Cambridge 1998; Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe*, Cambridge, Mass. 2001, pp. 139-184.

4. Totalitarian ideologies

A second dynamic of conflict in Europe from 1914 to the early 1950s was bound up as much with revolution as war, though it involved both. One might describe it as the emergence of ideologies whose internal dialectic required them to eliminate their own projected antagonists by violent conflict. Obviously, I am referring here to communism and fascism (if we agree, in the latter case, to give one name to what some would see as very different radical nationalist movements). No more than in the case of war is the aim to displace the classic explanations in terms of social appeal, economic dislocation and political crisis, most of which use a national framework of explanation, or of the comparisons that have been attempted between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany and between both and Stalinist Russia.[21] Rather it is to see whether a transnational level of explanation has anything to offer.

I observed that in the course of the nineteenth century, as cultural, economic and biological paradigms gained intellectual currency, they were invested with the political agency and authority that had originally been associated with popular sovereignty. By 1914, cultural nationalism, social class and racial biology had all generated influential creeds and movements, often in a variety of permutations. However, in a reversal of the late eighteenth century crisis, war now generated revolution rather than the opposite. Indeed, in some respects war was the revolution.[22]

The First World War not only precipitated the Bolshevik Revolution but stamped its outcome with a radical model of mobilization – war communism, terror, and the dual struggle against White and interventionist armies outside, and the counter revolutionary enemy within. The latter led to the destruction of the Cossacks, anticipating the "De-kulakisation" of the 1930s. As many historians have noted, the instruments used by Stalin to conduct his second revolution from above, as well as the vision of permanent mobilization that drove it, owed a great deal to the origins of the revolution in the Great War.[23] Likewise, the cultural nationalism that lay at the heart of Fascism was crystallised by the war and given political purchase by defeat or perceived national humilation. Thus Mussolini constructed a fascist persona as soldier

[21] Richard Bessel (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts*, Cambridge 1996; Ian Kershaw/Moshe Lewin, *Stalinism and Nazism. Dictatorships in Comparison*, Cambridge 1997; Henry Rousso (ed.), *Stalinisme et nazisme. Histoire et mémoire comparée*, Brussels 1999.

[22] For an early and still insightful statement of this inversion, see Elie Halévy, The World Crisis of 1914–1918: An Interpretation [1930], in: idem, *The Era of Tyrannies. Essays on Socialism and War*, London 1967, pp. 160-190.

[23] Peter Holquist, *Making War. Forging Revolution. Russia's Continuum of Crisis 1914–1921*, Cambridge, Mass. 2002; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, Oxford 1999, pp. 8-11.

and wartime journalist which he used to found the movement in March 1919.[24]

The mobilization of extreme nationalism behind the German military government in 1917/18 (e.g. the *Vaterlandspartei*), though it failed to reverse the disintegration of the war effort, generated a catastrophic vision of war, in which the only possible outcomes were total victory or total defeat, and which included plans for a last-ditch *Volkskrieg* against Allied invasion. Along with paramilitary violence, the "stab in the back" legend, and the ideal of the front community, this relationship between war and politics was inherited by the National Socialists, who of course added a biological and social darwinian racism.[25]

War thus shaped communism and fascism and provided each with a metaphoric language for politics. More fundamentally, however, each of these ideologies assumed a dynamic model of society, premissed on a transcendant future, which could only be reached by violent mobilization against the oppositional forces that the model itself proposed. The party and the charismatic leader were the self-appointed political agents who prosecuted the conflict, and the centrality of conflict to the belief-system gave them the authority to use extreme violence in doing so. Naturally, the terms of the model were very different. The most obvious contrast was between the social science terminology of Soviet marxism and the biological racism of National Socialism. The class conflict built into the former, though ultimately international, was most readily deployed in massive internal social engineering, of the kind carried out by Stalin in the 1930s and imposed on eastern Europe after 1945–1948. The darwinian struggle for racial supremacy which the Nazis imagined, once the balance had been tipped against the forces of conservatism within Germany, was innately expansionist.[26]

What the two creeds shared, however, was a transcendant vision that promised to overcome the decadence of the existing order and establish an earthly utopia. Although each used extreme violence (this was less true of Fascist Italy), each also demonstrated a real capacity to generate faith among activists and intellectuals as well as broader support (as shown by work on public opinion in Nazi Germany or on the consolidation of Soviet Communism through the Great Patriotic War).[27] Of course, it is not hard to make the

[24] Paul O'Brien, *Mussolini in the First World War. The Journalist, the Soldier, the Fascist*, Oxford, forthcoming (2005); Heinz Hagenlücke, *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei: Die nationale Rechte am Ende des Kaiserreiches*, Düsseldorf 1997.

[25] Michael Geyer, Insurrectionary Warfare: The German debate about a 'Levée en masse' in October 1918, in: *Journal of Modern History* 73 (2001), pp. 459-527.

[26] These crucial distinctions were of course at the heart of the *Historikerstreit* in Germany in the mid-1980s. On the crucial differences between Nazi and Soviet policies, see Omer Bartov, Historians on the Eastern Front: Andreas Hillgruber and Germany's Tragedy, in: idem, *Murder in our Midst. The Holocaust, Industrial Killing and Representation*, Oxford 1996, pp. 71-88.

case that with the clash between Nazi Germany and the USSR, the ideological conflict that I am talking about was a pivotal event of contemporary European history – perhaps the pivotal event. But the influence of these ideologies was broader, affecting much of the continent in varying proportions and intensity. And because communism and fascism in their different ways subordinated the individual to collective categories, some of which were to be eliminated, they dismantled the idea of a shared humanity in a process which, I have suggested, lay at the heart of the violence of the Second World War. How Europe (and not just a few countries) entered this ideological universe – and emerged from it – seems to me central to its twentieth century history. It is a theme that results with particular poignancy from the history of intellectuals who voluntarily adhered to fascism and communism as forms of faith, and sometimes sought to disengage from those same ideologies.[28]

5. Territory, peoples and states

A third theme addressing war and conflict transnationally is that of the three-way tension between territory, peoples and states. As cultural nationalism fed a heightened sense of linguistic and ethnic identity in the later nineteenth century and promoted the desirability of a culturally homogeneous nation as the basis for the state, the issue of borders, irredentism and ethnic minorities became ever more acute. This, too, is a classic subject of national and diplomatic histories, from the break up of the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires to Wilsonian diplomacy and the successor states between the wars. But the so-called "ethnic cleansing" in which all sides engaged in the wars of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (especially Serbs and Croats and Bosnian Serbs in Bosnia) reopened issues for many Europeans which had long been consigned to the past. Was this "Balkan" exceptionalism or part of a broader European pattern?[29]

Without denying the particularities of the Yugoslav case, the violence of these episodes (and their interaction with diplomatic "solutions") was a reminder of the brutal processes by which ethnicity had been made to fit nation earlier in the century, usually also on the occasion of war and post-war settlements. The Armenian genocide of 1915/16 was the result of the attempt by the Young Turks (faced with war and invasion) to construct an ethnically coherent basis for a modernized Ottoman Empire in Asia. The Greco-Turkish war of 1919–1922 ended in the mass expulsion of one and half million Greeks

[27] Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, Oxford 1987; Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War. The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, Princeton 2001, pp. 239-297.
[28] Tzvetan Todorov, *Mémoire du mal. Tentation du bien. Enquête sur le siècle*, Paris 2000.
[29] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford 1997; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred* (fn. 20).

from Anatolia and the reciprocal transfer of a smaller number of Turks from Greek Macedonia, the entire resettlement being endorsed by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.[30]

Yet the new states of central and eastern Europe founded after the Great War were ethnically and linguistic diverse and not necessarily intrinsically unstable. The period 1938 to 1945, however, was accompanied by the greatest redistribution of populations of the entire century, principally in the east. This was achieved by a combination of redrafting frontiers to incorporate populations or territory and moving populations to accommodate new frontiers. Examples of the former are the German annexation of the Sudetenland and the Soviet annexation of eastern Poland, with Poland being displaced several hundred kilometres to the west. Examples of the latter include the expulsion of Sudeten Germans from post-war Czechoslovakia and the separating out of Poles and Ukrainians in the western Ukraine. The process was also one aspect of the chaos of Europe at the end of the war, with millions of former prisoners of war and displaced persons scattered across the continent.[31]

However, this dynamic of ethnic "rationalization" was also super-charged by two larger imperial projects. The first was that of the Nazis to racially reorder eastern Europe – a project which the army in a more benign form had already begun during the military occupation of the area during the First World War.[32] The second was that of Soviet Russia to reacquire the multi-ethnic borderlands of the Tsarist Empire. In both cases, the extreme violence unleashed by war furnished the means, while the ideological struggle which I have already discussed radicalized the process. Economic exploitation, forcible deportation (to Germany or further east), and mass murder were the Nazi solutions. Massacres (though on a lesser scale), deportation within the Soviet Union, and military repression of local nationalism were the tools of the Soviet Union. Anti-Soviet partisan warfare in the Baltic region and the Ukraine continued until the early 1950s.[33]

The upshot after 1945 was a simplified "fit" of ethnic and national identity with nation-states compared to the inter-war period. Ironically, the one area that largely escaped the process was Yugoslavia. The balance of the pre-war kingdom was preserved in Tito's federal state, despite wartime massacres (notably of Serbs and Croatian Jews by the Croatian regime) and the inter-

[30] Vahakn Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide. Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, Providence 1995; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred* (fn. 20), pp. 52-56.

[31] Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted. European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1985; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred* (fn. 20), pp. 108-138.

[32] Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1589–1969*, New Haven 2003; Jan Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: the Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*, Princeton 2002.

[33] Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I*, Cambridge 2000.

necine feuding of the wartime Resistance movements. No doubt the need to preserve national independence from the threat of Soviet domination after 1948 was a major factor. Hence, if there was no historical inevitability there was a kind of logic to the explosion of ethnic violence and reordering of boundaries that occurred once Communism fell and the external menace was removed. And it works against the argument of Balkan exceptionalism, since Yugoslavia was replicating what had occurred elsewhere in central Europe in the context of more generalized violence fifty years before.[34]

In discussing these three dynamics of violence – total war, radically exclusive ideologies, and the connection between states, territory and peoples – I am conscious that I have not addressed what must stand as the most radical (and one-sided) conflict of all in Europe since 1914 – the Nazi genocide of the Jews. Nor do I have the space to address it here in any substance. But the question of whether, and in what sense, there is a European (as opposed to a German) explanation of the Holocaust seems to me to be a fundamental test of whether transnational explanations have a place in accounting for war and conflict in twentieth century Europe. It is not just that the three dynamics that I have discussed all contributed to the genocide, though they clearly did. For it was the product of implacable ideological enmity on the part of the Nazi elites, largely carried out in a space created by the ethnic project of racial re-settlement, and conducted in the atmosphere and with the tools of a "total" war effort. Nor is it even the fact that in ways that are still being pieced together subordinate groups in the Nazi order collaborated in the genocide for their own purposes. It is rather that if there is anything to the idea of a European dimension to the wars and conflict of the last 90 years, the dynamics that helped produce the Holocaust had deeper roots and broader parallels, which may make it in some degree part of a common history.

6. Democracies, colonialism and decolonization

If democracies were by definition opposed to the radical authoritarianism of both the extreme left and the extreme right, they had their own versions of total war and were by no means immune to the coercion and violence involved in making peoples fit territories. Mobilizing against a 'total' enemy tested beliefs in tolerance, the rule of law and individual liberties. State censorship and a mass self-censorship rendered liberal states such as Britain and France more repressive in wartime, as did the internment of enemy nationals. Hostility to the 'enemy within' resulted in a marked tendency to xenophobia and witch-hunts against political minorities (e.g. supposed 'defeatists'), of

[34] Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia. The Third Balkan War*, London 1992.

which the most striking example is perhaps the anti-German campaign of 1917/18 in the USA, echoed by the internment of Japanese-Americans in the Second World War. Nonetheless, democratic norms restrained the most lethal manifestations of hostility to the enemy and limited the transfer of wartime practice to peacetime ideology.

In like manner, the presumption by liberal democrats that citizenship overrode ethnic identity as the basis of nationality was eroded by the dynamic of war and violence, as a brief comparison of the two post-war eras indicates. The Wilsonian vision that informed the peace settlement in central and eastern Europe after the First World War explicitly acknowledged the place of ethnic minorities in the nation states which succeeded the multi-national empires. By contrast, it was democratic governments in exile that planned the rationalization of the post-war Czechoslovak and Polish states to exclude the bulk of the German minority, and when the process occurred (before the consolidation of Communist control), it met with little opposition from the 'western' democracies.[35]

Nor were democracies exempt from the escalation of battlefield violence and the direct targeting of enemy civilians. Indeed, there was a concatenation of moral and legal issues relating to the latter that particularly concerned what one might call the liberal maritime states, whose isolation from the continent had traditionally led them to rely on naval power rather than mass conscript armies. Both Britain and the USA grappled with the legal and ethical questions posed by a maritime blockade which allowed the enemy's war economy and civilian population to be directly targeted (and to which the German riposte in both world wars was unrestricted submarine warfare). It is no accident that the same two powers developed strategic air power between the wars as an additional and ultimately more effective means of paralyzing the enemy war effort at source. Although during the Second World War, the British could legitimately claim that they were responding to German targeting of civilians by aerial bombing, they (like the Americans) developed a capacity for saturation bombing that the Germans did not possess. This raised the ethical issues (which did not go undiscussed during the war) of using unprecedented violence against enemy civilians. The use of the atomic bomb in Japan was the ultimate expression of this mode of warfare and of the scientific capacities of the western democracies' war effort.[36]

Ultimately, the way in which military violence and ideological mobilization affected democratic powers is illustrated by the distinctive form of authority that they developed in wartime. If war was fundamental to the emergence of

[35] Margaret Macmillan, *Peacemakers. The Paris Conference of 1919 and its Attempt to End War*, London 2001, pp. 496-497; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred* (fn. 20), pp. 136-137.

[36] Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare. The Modern History of the International Law of Armed Conflicts*, London 1980, pp. 244-262; Hastings, *Bomber Command* (fn. 16).

new sources of authority which in different ways benefited both fascism and communism, the same was true of liberal democracies. The latter required a unifying but profoundly civilian embodiment of authority who could simultaneously mobilize energies for war, curb the power of the military, limit authoritarianism and strike a moral and political compact on the purpose of the war and the ultimate restoration of peacetime democratic norms, or even the advancement of the latter as a reward for wartime sacrifice. Lloyd George and Clemenceau came to power after crises of wartime government to fulfill precisely this role in Britain and France, and Woodrow Wilson performed a similar function for Allied as well as American public opinion. Arguably, all three men pioneered the figure of the charismatic democratic war leader which Churchill, Roosevelt and (in his own way) de Gaulle, perfected in the Second World War.

As references to the USA suggest, the dynamic of war and conflict in the twentieth century, although proceeding from a European epicentre, both underlined the fluidity of Europe's boundaries and exceeded European space. In illustration of the former point, the ethnic violence and state repression attendant on the break-up of Ottoman Turkey and the conflict with Greece straddled the Balkans and Anatolia. Also, if the belated Soviet declaration of war on Japan in 1945 meant that the Soviet conflict during the Second World War was a European one, it gave substance to that enlargement of Europe from the Don to the Urals first declared by a Swedish officer in the service of the Russian crown in 1730.[37] The Urals formed the natural barrier behind which the Soviet war effort sheltered, and de Gaulle, in seeking to avoid a bi-polar post-war world, was using more than a figure of speech when he referred to a new Europe stretching from the 'Atlantic to the Urals'.

Even more fundamentally, however, the very processes of war, ideological radicalization and nation-state formation that originated in Europe destroyed European hegemony in the world (as shown by the decisive intervention of the USA on the continent from 1944) while spreading to new portions of the globe. Decolonization and the conflicts which, in parts of Africa and Asia, have succeeded empire, can be seen in this light. Colonization (at least outside the predominantly European settler colonies) involved both coercion and complex transfers of ideas and aspirations, so that the colonial powers after 1945 – nearly all of them democracies – confronted movements of 'resistance' and 'liberation' whose language, goals and military expressions were deeply influenced by Europe. The Algerian Front de Libération National (FLN), for example, deployed a kind of *levée en masse* and rhetoric of national liberation which recalled French self-images of resistance to Nazi Germany. At the same time, the Cold War (whose origin and core remained in Europe) polarized

[37] Norman Davies, *Europe. A History*, Oxford 1996, p. 8.

much of the globe and disseminated ideological radicalization (some of it Soviet-derived communism) to emerging states. This process was exacerbated by the colonial powers, some of which used torture, repression and extreme military violence in their colonies in the name of democracy – as the Algerian and Vietnamese conflicts both showed.[38]

There is no question of dismissing the complexity and specificity of developments in other parts of the world in such an explanation, or of summarily comparing the wars and violence that have occurred there with those in Europe.[39] But the undoubted connections between what began in Europe and what occurred elsewhere show that contemporary European history must be related to the history of other parts of the world.

7. Conclusions

I began with a question; what might a "Europeanization" of the history of war and conflict over the last 90 years offer us? My conclusion is a genuinely provisional one. It might be objected that I have merely supplied a dysfunctional version of the "European civilization" thesis. But I do not think so, because I have placed the emphasis on multiple dynamics, not on a meta-narrative that seeks to impart an artificial cohesion to European history. More to the point, is it really possible to by-pass the national framework and the history of inter-state relations? Clearly not. Much of what I have discussed only assumed historical form in nation-states and their interaction through war, diplomacy and other ways.

Nonetheless, the kinds of processes with which I have been concerned were all larger than any one state and had an observable interplay at wider levels. There were both commonalities and reciprocal differences in how wars were fought, how ideologies emerged and how states tried to organize their territory and populations. Doubtless with more reflection, we might identify different zones of Europe as privilege fields for certain phenomena (for example, the way in which the processes I have discussed converged on central-eastern Europe during the Second World War). There are also different temporalities, as the processes we are talking about unfolded with varying chronologies. This means that the same phenomenon may have developed with differing time-scales in different parts of the continent – which is another reason why the temporal boundaries of contemporary history are so fluid. The ethnic violence of the former Yugoslovia in the 1990s is a case in point, as is the way Spain in

[38] Raphaelle Branche, *La torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie, 1954–1962*, Paris 2001; Daniel Moran, *Wars of National Liberation*, London 2001, pp. 15-27.

[39] Cf. the controversy generated by Stéphane Courtois (ed.), *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, London 1999, esp. introduction by Courtois.

the 1930s anticipated elements of the larger conflict that began as soon as its own Civil War was over. There were, in other words, dynamics of conflict and violence that worked beyond as well as through the state system which only a continental analysis can grasp fully.

It might still be objected that such dynamics were ultimately not distinctively European but were the violent face of modernity, increasingly manifest in different forms across the globe. This is only partly true, however, since their origin was distinctively European even if they were subsequently generalized. It becomes an argument for relating European to world history (rather than seeing the former as some ultimate horizon) and thus relativizing aspects of European development. It may be no accident that the construction of a specifically European identity occurred in direct response to some of the most violent aspects of European history during a period when the latter ceased to be distinctively European. But perhaps I should end, as I began, by leaving that as a question.

Prof. Dr. John Horne, The University of Dublin, Trinity College, Department of Modern History, Dublin 2, Ireland, E-Mail: jhorne@tcd.ie