

# A Cape of Asia

ESSAYS ON EUROPEAN HISTORY

*H.L. Wesseling*



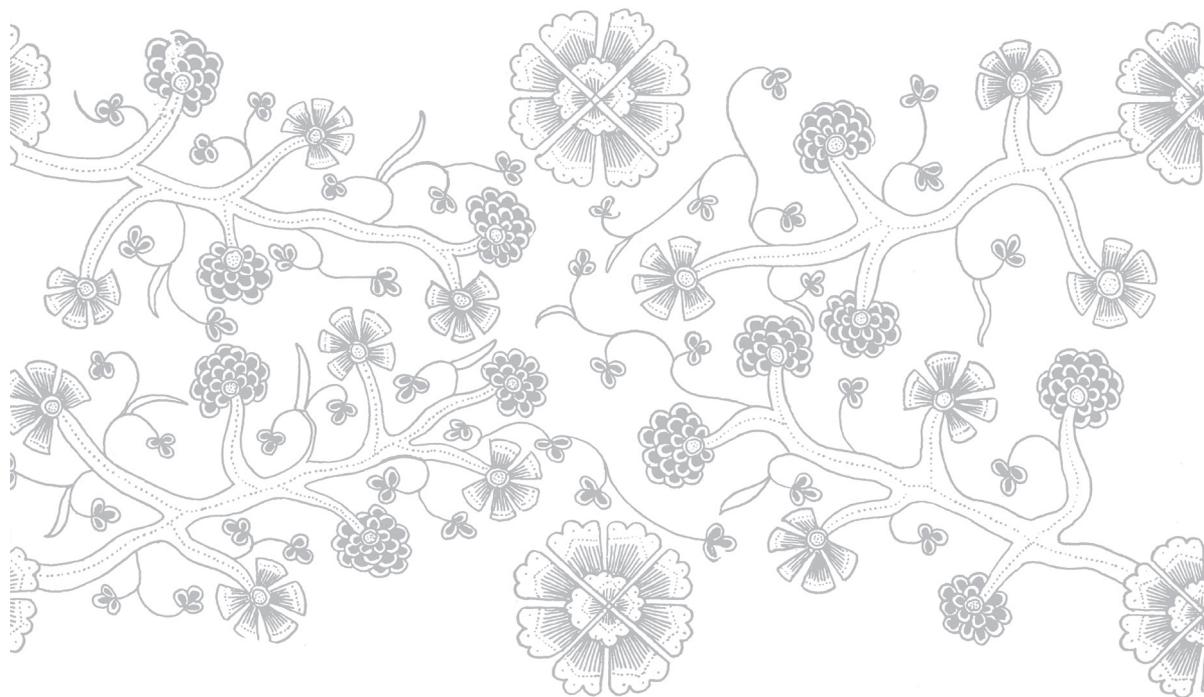
A CAPE OF ASIA



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*Henk Wesseling*



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*Europe is a small cape of Asia*

PAUL VALÉRY

*For Arnold Burgen*

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## Preface and Introduction

This is a book of essays about European history. The title and the motto are taken from a text by the French philosopher and writer Paul Valéry. These few words date from 1919 and can be seen as the shortest summary of the new mood that came over Europe in the interbellum years. Until 1914 nobody had seen Europe as a Cape of Asia. Rather, Asia was seen as a backyard of Europe, a region to be conquered, ruled and exploited by Europeans as they brought the light of modern, i.e. Western, civilization to these backward areas. The same was true, and to an even greater extent, for Africa, which had almost entirely been submitted to European rule during the last decades of the 19th century. While Asia was considered a stagnated and backward part of the world, European thinkers also realized that once, long ago, the first great civilizations had flourished there. Such ideas did not exist about Africa. In the eyes of the Europeans, the dark continent had never played a role in world history. Indeed, it did not have a history at all, at least not before Europeans arrived there. The most famous formulation of this opinion was given by the German philosopher Hegel who wrote: 'Africa [...] is no historical part of the World [...]' (see: 'Eurocentrism').

This Eurocentric world view was the result of the dominant position Europe had acquired over a great number of years. And that dominant position was seen as proof of the superiority of European civilization. There are many formulations to be found of this European feeling of supremacy but probably none more pertinent and powerful than the words that John Henry Newman wrote about this in his *The Idea of a University*. According to Newman, Western civilization 'has a claim to be considered as the representative Society and Civilization of the human race, as its perfect result and limit, in fact'. In 'European Ideas about Education, Science and Art', I discuss these ideas at length.

Newman formulated these ideas extremely forcefully, but they were held then by virtually the entire Western intellectual world. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a Eurocentric view of world history, one in which non-European nations only entered the stage when they were confronted with and subjected to the Europeans (see: 'Eurocentrism'). After all,

history in its modern, scientific form was a European invention anyway. The essay ‘History: Science or Art?’ describes the way modern, scientific history was developed in 19th-century Europe.

When Newman gave his lectures on *The Idea of a University*, European supremacy was nearing its zenith. This was the result of a centuries-long process. It began in the 1490s with the voyages of Columbus and Vasco da Gama and ended in 1945. The first essay of this book, the one on ‘Globalization’, offers an overview of this process and the historical interpretations of it. My argument here is that what we today call globalization extends back a long way in history. It is the result of two long-term processes, the expansion of Europe and the Industrial Revolution.

The expansion of Europe is a subject that I have studied for well over three decades. The first book I published on the subject, *Expansion and Reaction*, dates from 1978. In this book I defined the expansion of Europe as ‘the history of the encounters between diverse systems of civilization, their influence on one another and the gradual growth toward a global, universal system of civilization’. Today I have some doubts about this. I am not a believer in Huntington’s theory of the ‘clash of civilizations’, which I consider too simplistic, but I also have some doubts about Fukuyama’s ‘End of history’ because I see the potential for new ideological controversies, for example about ecology and sustainability, in other words about the question of how to deal with Planet Earth. However this may be, the point is that according to this definition, European expansion includes more than colonization and imperialism alone. It also includes informal forms of empire, economic interconnections and cultural exchange. One could argue that the most important form of European expansion was the creation of the New World, a new Europe overseas that, even after it acquired political independence, was very strongly connected to the old Europe. The languages spoken in the New World are English and French, Spanish and Portuguese, the religion is Christianity and the civilization European.

The expansion of Europe became ever more powerful after the Industrial Revolution. This revolution was rooted in science and technology and resulted in the division of the world into rich nations and poor nations. That division still persists today. The contributions on ‘The Expansion of Europe and the Development of Science and Technology’ and ‘Rich and Poor: Early and Later’ are about these developments. European expansion culminated in the colonization and imperialism of the 19th and 20th centuries. Among historians of European expansion, there exists a certain division of labor between those specialized in this period

of colonization and imperialism and the others, whose main interest is in the earlier years. I belong to the first group. My publications in this field include *The European Empires, 1815–1919*, a textbook, and *Imperialism and Colonialism*, a book of essays. The articles ‘Imperialism’ and ‘Changing Views on Empire and Imperialism’ offer an overview of the debate on the subject of imperialism and some new insights into it, respectively. Whereas initially imperialism was considered as having originated in response to economic problems in Europe (the need for foreign markets for European capital and commodities and for raw materials for Europe’s industry), from the 1950s political motives received more attention.

European imperialism was, of course, often connected with warfare. Generally speaking, the colonial powers were successful in these conflicts. The idea of moral and technical superiority that resulted from this series of nearly always successful battles had some influence on the way Europeans fought the Great War (see: ‘Imperialism and the Roots of the Great War’).

The most spectacular, though not the most important feature of European imperialism was the partition of Africa. In little more than twenty years, that entire continent was divided up among European powers and submitted to European rule. In 1991 I published a book on this subject that was later translated into English and several other languages. The essay ‘Some Reflections on the History of the Partition of Africa’ offers some afterthoughts on the matter.

The First World War did not bring an end to European colonial rule. On the contrary: in 1919 Europe ruled over a larger part of the world than it had ever done before. When the remains of the Ottoman Empire in the Near East were divided between France and Britain, the domain of European rule reached its greatest extent. The self-confidence of the colonial powers was still intact. As a matter of fact, it was only then that the French became conscious of the fact that they had become a world power, and enjoyed it. On the other hand, there were also indications that the global power relations were changing. Europe had once been ‘the world’s banker’ but had now become a debtor, to the United States. The American President Woodrow Wilson preached the gospel of self-determination. The Russian Revolution of 1917 resulted in the founding of the Soviet Union which, via the Komintern, became a center of anti-imperialist agitation. Japan emerged as a new power with great ambitions. In parts of Asia, nationalist movements were growing in numbers and influence.

The feeling that things were changing was formulated by philoso-

phers, writers and historians rather than by businessmen and politicians, for whom it was still business as usual. The first indication of this changing mood was the book *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (The Decline of the West) by the German writer and philosopher Oswald Spengler. This thoroughly pessimistic book, published in 1918, was based on a cyclical view of world history. According to this vision, civilizations are born, flourish and decline. This cycle had been the fate of the ancient civilizations of Asia, and now it was Europe's turn to enter the path of decadence. Another version of this cyclical theory was the 'heliocentric' concept of world history. According to this interpretation, civilization follows the course of the sun, from east to west. From Asia, where it had originated, civilization had come to Europe and from there eventually it had to cross the Atlantic to America. The article on 'The American Century' that Henry Luce published in *Life* in 1941 is a late echo of this vision (see: 'The American Century in Europe').

Only a year after Spengler's *Untergang* had come out, Paul Valéry published his *Crise de l'esprit* (The Crisis of the Spirit) in which he wrote: 'We, civilizations, know now that we are mortal.' This is a rather strange, and some might say a typically French, way of putting things, but what he really intended to say was that we Europeans knew by then that our civilization would not last forever. Many other European authors wrote in the same vein. One of the most famous was the great Dutch scholar Johan Huizinga, who published his *In de schaduwen van morgen* (In the Shadows of Tomorrow) in 1935. This book became an overnight best-seller in the Netherlands as well as, later, elsewhere. The book was translated into many languages and made him a world-famous writer. The article 'Johan Huizinga and the Spirit of the Nineteen Thirties' places this book in the context of Huizinga's work and the spirit of the time. The concepts of decline and decadence that were so characteristic of the 1930s were not entirely new of course. In France, after being defeated in the war of 1870, the sense of decadence was rather strong, and during the *fin de siècle* it became a general European phenomenon. The essay 'Two *fin de siècles*' deals with this subject.

The crisis that Spengler, Valéry, Huizinga and others described was a crisis of civilization. But the interbellum years saw other crises as well. First, there was the crisis of democracy. It started with the communist dictatorship resulting from the Russian Revolution of 1917. The fascist dictatorship of Mussolini followed in 1922. In 1928 Salazar became dictator in Portugal, and in 1933 Hitler came to power in Germany. The rise of Hitler's national-socialist movement had much to do with another

crisis, the economic crisis, also known as the Great Depression, that followed the Wall Street Crash of 1929. And finally there was the diplomatic crisis, or *The Twenty Years Crisis*, to quote the title of E.H. Carr's classic book on the subject. This crisis, spawned by the failure of the peacemaking process of 1919, ended with the beginning of the Second World War in the wake of the German invasion of Poland in 1939.

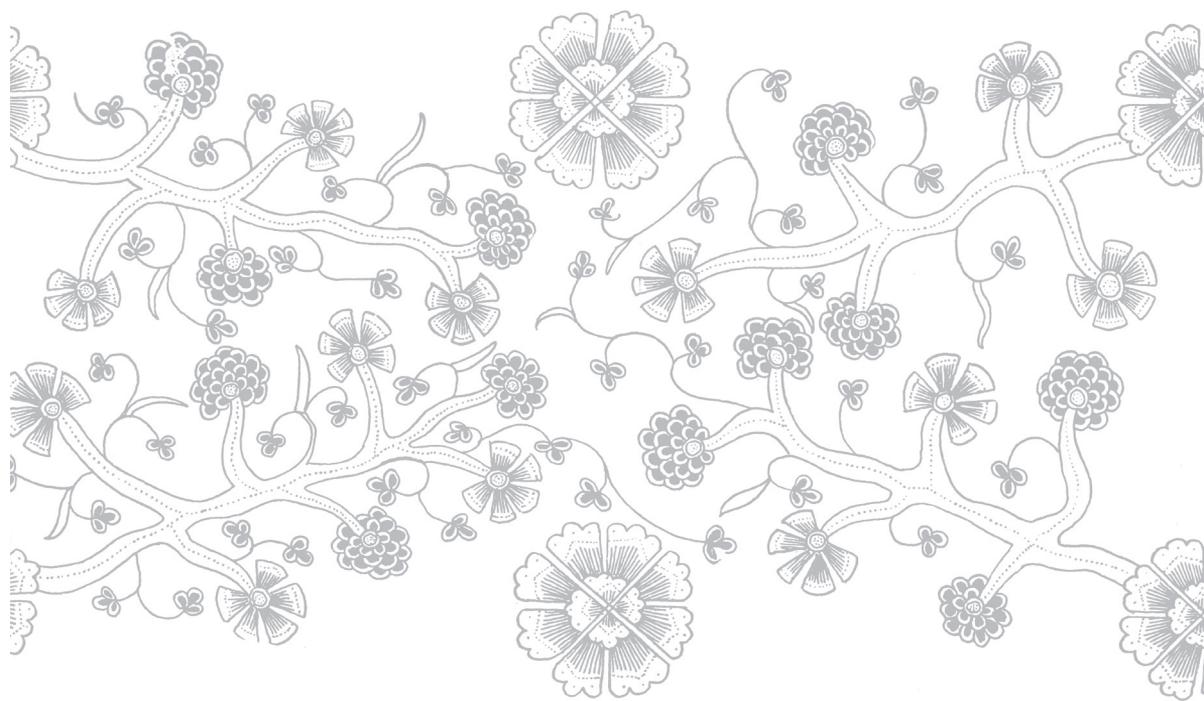
The result of the Second World War was the rise of two new superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, and the end of Europe's world hegemony. The Cold War between the two superpowers originated from problems in Europe (the Polish question and the division of Germany), and Europe was involved in it, but in actual fact NATO was run by the Americans, and Eastern Europe was nothing but a satellite of Moscow. At the same time the process of decolonization, which started in 1947 in British India and was all but over in 1960, brought an end to the European empires. Somewhat paradoxically, this decline of Europe's influence was the beginning of a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity. The Marshall Plan laid the foundations for Europe's economic recovery and European cooperation. What British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan said about Britain in 1957 was true for the whole of Western Europe: 'You never had it so good.' Under the pressure of the Cold War, and only a few years after the end of World War II, France had to accept German rearmament. The European Coal and Steel Community was the beginning of a process of cooperation and integration that resulted in the European Union of today. The essays 'What is Europe?', 'Realism and Utopianism' and 'France, Germany and Europe' deal with these developments.

The Netherlands also flourished after the loss of empire. That was quite a surprise. The Dutch had fought many a war to conquer it (see: 'A Peaceful Nation') and they considered their empire, and particularly the Netherlands East Indies, as the basis of the Dutch economy and of the well-being of their people. Since the 1930s, 'The Indies gone, prosperity done' had been a well-known ditty. The Dutch feared that the loss of empire would lead to economic misery and poverty. But it did not. Rather, the opposite was the case. A quick and full economic reorientation followed the loss of the empire, the consequences of which were soon forgotten. The only lasting result of colonial times is the presence of a number of former colonial subjects (see: 'Migration and Decolonization: the Case of the Netherlands').

When looking back at the two centuries discussed in this book, one can distinguish three periods. The first was the 'long 19th century' which lasted until 1914. The 19th century was the century of Europe. Until then, Europe had never been more than what it geographically was and still is: A Cape of Asia. Even the 18th century did not know a superior Western Europe against a stagnated and backwards Asia. Then everything changed. Due to the Industrial Revolution, the productivity of the European economies increased dramatically. By 1800, the productivity of a British textile worker was about 100 times higher than that of one in India. Other sectors of the economy followed. The steam engine, steam ships, railways, etc. changed Europe and later the world. By the end of the 19th century, Europe dominated virtually the entire world, either by informal influence or formal political control. But this supremacy was not to last. The century of Europe came to an end with the First World War, which led to a diminishing influence of Europe and a growing impact of the United States on the world economy. The interbellum years were a period in which notions of decline and decadence were becoming fashionable among European intellectuals, and the end of European civilization was seriously considered. The Second World War was even more of a disaster for Europe and its population, but somewhat surprisingly, this did not lead to a revival of the mood of gloom and doom of the 1930s but rather to an economic renaissance and a new feeling of self-confidence. This period is now coming to an end. The world order is changing again. The bonds of friendship between Europe and the United States are loosening, and the European Union is uncertain about what course to follow. The question is not if Asia will retake the place in the world economy that it had occupied until the 19th century, but when. And whether in the long run autocratic China or democratic India will be the leader in this vast movement of 'reorientation'. The title of André Gündler Frank's book on this subject, *ReOrient*, is very well chosen indeed.

The essays collected in this volume deal with many of these topics. They are written from a historical perspective. And they are what the word 'essay' suggests: personal reflections on vast subjects written for an intellectual and interested but not necessarily specialized readership. They were nearly all written in the last decade of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century. Thus, as the historian knows all too well, they reflect the spirit of their time.

# Europe and the Wider World





## Globalization: A Historical Perspective

‘Globalization’ is neither a very elegant word nor a very clear concept but seldom in the history of mankind has a new term been accepted so quickly, and on such a global scale. Until the 1990s the word was virtually unknown, now it is on everybody’s lips. About 700 scholarly publications appear every year which have the word in its title.<sup>1</sup>

Because the word is so new, one might believe that the phenomenon it refers to is also a new one, but that is not the case. Globalization did not begin with the emergence of China and India as the new economic powerhouses of the world, nor with the IT revolution, or the emergence of the multinationals. It did not even begin with the process of Americanization of the world after World War II or the age of European imperialism in the late 19th century. Globalization began in 1492 when three tiny ships left a small port in southern Spain and set sail for the Ocean. Their commander was intent on finding a sea route to the Indies. What he actually did was ‘discover’ — as we still say — the Americas. This was probably the single most important event in modern history. It led to the creation of what is now called ‘the Western world’, that is the continuation of European civilization across the Atlantic, not on the small scale of the European subcontinent, but on that of an immense continent.

Five years later another flotilla set sail from the Iberian peninsula. In 1497 Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and arrived in Asia. Nobody would say that Vasco da Gama ‘discovered’ Asia as it had of course been known to Europeans from ancient times. From a European point of view the voyage of Vasco da Gama was less important than that of Columbus. It made no ‘discovery’ and it did not lead to the creation of a New World. There would not be a new Europe overseas in Asia. But that voyage was important all the same both in European and in Asian history because it opened up the period of Western dominance over Asia or, as the famous Indian historian K.M. Panikkar has put it, the ‘Vasco da Gama epoch’ of Asian history.<sup>2</sup>

These events took place more than five hundred years ago and there have been many changes since then. In many respects the world is now very different from what it was then. But the most striking difference is

no doubt that concerning the ‘wealth and poverty of nations’ to quote the title of David Landes’s well-known book (see below ‘Rich and Poor: Early and Later’, p. 23).<sup>3</sup> This is the result of the two most important developments of modern history: globalization, which began with the expansion of Europe, and industrialization, which originated in the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century.

#### GLOBALIZATION: A VERY BRIEF HISTORY

##### *The Expansion of Europe*

For all practical purposes European expansion began in the 1490s with the voyages of Columbus and Vasco da Gama. This meant that, in the words of Fernand Braudel, Europe faced an ‘extremely grave choice’: either to play the American card and develop this immense continent — that was the difficult and long-term option — or to play the Asian card and exploit the riches of Asia, which was the easier, short-term option.<sup>4</sup> Europe decided to practice both forms of expansion but it did this with some division of labor. The Spaniards devoted themselves to America and created an immense empire. The Portuguese, who were weaker in resources, especially demographically speaking — the whole country then counted less than a million inhabitants — took the other option, not the creation of a new world overseas like a New Spain or New England, but the exploitation of existing trade and wealth. Theirs was an empire of trade, forts and factories, more oriented towards Asia than towards the Americas.

The Iberian hour was brief, however. The great world historical event of the ‘long sixteenth century’ (1450–1650) was the transfer of Europe’s centre of gravity from the South, the Mediterranean world, to the eastern shores of the Atlantic. For a short while the Dutch Republic took over the banner of world hegemony. It fought the Spaniards in Europe and chased the Portuguese out of most of Asia. The Dutch East India Company became the great potentate in Asia. But Holland was essentially as vulnerable as Portugal, as became increasingly clear when it was challenged by the British. Towards the end of the seventeenth century Britain assumed the mantle of world hegemony, a position it maintained until the end of the nineteenth century, when its position was challenged by other nations which began claiming parts of the overseas world.

Though the partition of Africa was the most spectacular episode in this imperialist race, Asia was the more important one. The British con-

solidated their Indian Empire, making it the most important of their colonies. The French built up their empire in Indochina. The Dutch began their expansion from Java into the outer islands of the great Indonesian archipelago. Unexpected newcomers like the United States in the Philippines and Japan in Korea and Taiwan also entered the imperialist scene in Asia, as did Germany, Italy and Belgium in Africa. Every country great or small, new or old, wanted to play a role in the partition of the world. This was the new element introduced by imperialism.

However, the era of European expansion was not to last for long. After the First World War President Wilson's concept of self-determination, Comrade Lenin's message of anti-imperialism and the driving forces of nationalism in Asia and Africa were indicating that the days of Empire would soon be over. Thirty years later Europe had all but withdrawn from Asia. Within the space of two decades the European empires had dissolved, much faster than they had been created.

### *The Industrial Revolution*

The second great world historical development in modern history was the so-called Industrial Revolution that began in Britain at the beginning of the eighteenth century. There is — as yet — no theory that offers a satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon. The most widely accepted theory however is one that could be labeled as a convergence theory, that is to say an explanation comprising various independent variables which came together more or less by accident and that cannot be reduced to one *prima causa*. Historians have mentioned in this respect such features as demographic growth, literacy, the scientific and agricultural revolutions, capital formation and low interest rates.

England was the first country to undergo an Industrial Revolution but it was not the only one. Western Europe followed suit and in countries like Belgium and Germany industrialization in the 1870s was so spectacular that some historians have spoken of a 'Second Industrial Revolution'. The same goes for Japan after the Meiji-restoration of 1868 and the United States after the Civil War of 1861–1865, both countries which went through the same experience. France and Holland, important colonial powers, not to mention Spain and Portugal, had this experience much later and to a much lesser degree.

It was the Industrial Revolution that made all the difference for the world economy. It divided the world into developed and underdeveloped countries, into rich and poor. Until the eighteenth century there was not much of an economic difference between the various parts of the world.

There was no rich and privileged North as against a poor South. China and Latin America probably had the highest level of wealth and development. North America was a developing country and Australia was not yet even a penal colony. There were differences but they were marginal because all societies were living under the ceiling of pre-industrial productivity.

Then Prometheus was unbound and the world would never again be as it had been before. In the nineteenth century Britain not only took over the leading role in European expansion — a traditional periodic shift, as leadership had previously moved from Venice to Antwerp and then to Amsterdam — but it also began to influence and dominate foreign economies. This was something new. Thus the Industrial Revolution brought about a qualitative difference. From its beginnings as traditional colonialism, comparable to that of the Romans, Arabs, Ottomans, Chinese et cetera, European colonialism moved on and took on a new character, to become a colonialism *sui generis*. Globalization, in the form of the integration of world markets, had been taking place from about 1500 on a very limited scale. After the Industrial Revolution, say from about 1800, global competition for internationally tradeable commodities was seen for the first time, and since then it has only increased as it is still doing today.

#### GLOBALIZATION: A BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

##### *The Modern World System*

The Industrial Revolution takes an important place in the historiography of the development of what Immanuel Wallerstein has called ‘the modern world system’.<sup>5</sup> Wallerstein however argues that the origins of the world economy of today go back much further, viz. to the end of the fifteenth century. There he finds the beginnings of a world system that developed fully in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and had already matured before the onset of the Industrial Revolution. The ‘systemic turning point’ he locates in the resolution of the crisis of feudalism which occurred approximately between 1450 and 1550. By the period 1550–1650 all the basic mechanisms of the capitalist world system were in place. According to this the Industrial Revolution of about 1760 to 1830 is no longer considered as a major turning point in the history of the capitalist world economy.

The world system, according to Wallerstein, is characterized by an international economic order and an international division of labor.

It consists of a core, a semi-periphery and a periphery, the location of which changes over time (regions can ascend to the core or descend to the periphery). Modern history is in fact the history of the continuing integration into this world system of ever more parts of the world.

Wallerstein's work was well received by social scientists but rather more critically by historians who in particular criticized the great weight given to international trade in the model. Some argued that pre-industrial economies were not able to produce such a significant surplus as to make an important international trade possible. Even in trading nations par excellence, such as Great Britain and the Dutch Republic, trading for export represented a very small percentage of the GNP (and export to the periphery only a small percentage of total foreign trade). Generally speaking, the effects of European expansion on overseas regions were not very important. In Asia the impact of overseas trade was only regional. Both in India (textile) and Indonesia (cash crops) only some regions were affected by the European demand for goods. As far as Africa is concerned, the trade in products was very limited. Much more important was the Atlantic slave trade. In the Americas and the Caribbean the impact of European expansion was most dramatic, not so much because of trade but because of the demographic decline of the original population.

An interesting point of Wallerstein's theory is his questioning of the very concept of an Industrial Revolution and thus of the distinction between pre-industrial and industrial colonialism. This distinction has been a central argument in the classical theory of imperialism, a theory that has dominated the historiography of late-nineteenth and twentieth century European expansion and globalization (see below 'Imperialism', p. 35).

#### THE END OF HISTORY (THOUGH NOT OF HISTORIOGRAPHY)

European colonialism and global domination reached its zenith between the two world wars when most of Asia and virtually all of Africa were ruled by European nations. After the end of the second war the world changed dramatically. The European era was over. Decolonization brought about an end to the European colonial empires. The United States became the world's superpower. 'The American Century', to quote the title of an article by the editor/publisher Henry Luce, began. Luce published his famous article in one of his journals, *Life*, on 17 February 1941. He argued that America had to play a major role in the war that

was going on and which he considered a war for freedom and democracy. America now was a world power and it had to act accordingly, that is to say, it had to become a global player (see below, 'The American Century in Europe', p. 104).

Henry Luce's prediction that the coming age would fulfill history and tensions and wars would become obsolete, was faintly echoed by Francis Fukuyama when in 1989 he coined the expression 'The End of History'.<sup>6</sup> In his famous article with that catching but rather misleading title Fukuyama did not argue that after the end of the Cold War nothing of historical importance would happen anymore. He used the term in a Hegelian way to indicate that the struggle of competing ideologies had come to an end because a consensus had been reached that the world order should be based on capitalist production and democratic political systems.

Maybe this explains how, at the same moment that Fukuyama put forward his thesis of the end of history, the word globalization started its great advance which has led to the stardom it has today. Politicians and businessmen use it as an argument for reforms, revisions and reductions. Economists and social scientists have also discovered the subject and so did historians as is made clear by the fact that in 2007 a new journal was launched with the title of *Journal of Global History*.<sup>7</sup> A lot of work on this subject has to be done by historians because the world did not turn global overnight. Globalization is the result of a process that has been going on for at least five centuries. Therefore it is a historical subject *par excellence*.

## Rich and Poor: Early and Later

Historians are a funny lot. They have strange ways of explaining things. They don't give proofs but only examples. They will argue that phenomenon A was the result of phenomenon B. But they will not predict that whenever B will produce itself again, A will follow. Thus they — or should I say, we — give strange answers but not, like economists as Keynes famously said, to questions that nobody asks. On the contrary, we deal with important questions that interest many people, questions such as the Causes of the French Revolution or the Origins of the First World War. Some historians go even further and ask even more general questions, like why and how wars begin or what the social origins of dictatorship and democracy are. There are many of such great historical questions and it is difficult to tell which is the most important one. Many people however will agree that one of the most important questions of today is: Why are some nations so rich and some so poor?

Formerly the answer to this question was considered to be easy. That, generally speaking, Europe — or 'the West' — was rich and others were not, was due to the help of God and/or the special virtues of the white man. For others with a more rationalist approach to history, salvation had not come from the Almighty but from liberalism and capitalism. Even Karl Marx, no friend of capitalism, argued that capitalism liberated great productive forces and was a necessary stage in the inevitable and desirable transition from feudalism to socialism. Therefore he also welcomed the introduction of capitalism in Asia, by way of colonialism, because that would awake Asia from its secular slumber and liberate it from the constraints of the 'Asian mode of production'. Friedrich Engels wrote on January 22, 1848 in *The Morning Star*: 'the [French, W.] conquest of Algeria is an important and fortunate fact for the progress of civilization'.<sup>8</sup> Some truly orthodox Marxists like the Beijing professor Zhang Zhi-Lian still hold this position. According to him the causes of China's stagnation (before 1949!) are to be found in Chinese society itself. He wrote 'The roots of China's stagnation lay more in the economic structure and mental make-up characteristic of precapitalist modes of life than in imperialist encroachments.' And he concluded: 'It was basically

the refusal to adapt to new conditions and the stubbornness with which they clung to the old that incapacitated our forebears to resist effectively the aggressions of colonialism and imperialism and to absorb the 'truly progressive' (my quotation marks, W.) elements of modern capitalism in order to make a genuine industrial take off.<sup>9</sup>

Western neo-Marxists however generally hold rather different views. Their arguments are related to the so-called dependencia or development of underdevelopment school. This theory which became very popular in the 1960's had its origins in the observation of the permanency of Latin America's problems: poverty, inequality, slums, external debts, dominance by foreign capital, etcetera. In one word: dependency. The theory of dependency argues that this situation is not the result of undevelopment but of underdevelopment. The 'Third World' is seen as the periphery of a world economic system in which the centre, that is to say the North, is accumulating the profits and keeping the periphery in a situation of permanent dependency. Thus, underdevelopment is not a situation but a process. The Third World is not undeveloped, but it is being underdeveloped by the West. The dependencia theory was first put forward by the Argentinean economist Raoul Prebisch in 1947 and then further developed by scholars like Furtado, Samir Amin, Galtung and others to become a universal theory applicable not only to Latin America but to the entire Third World. André Gunder Frank formulated it in a catchy phrase: 'the development of underdevelopment'.

The 'dependencianists' form an important school of thought that has certainly put its finger on a number of problems that are very relevant to our analysis of the relationship between development and underdevelopment. It should be said, however, that in so far as they consider the incorporation of the overseas world in the world economy as the one and only cause of underdevelopment, their theory is untenable. When we compare for example on the one hand, countries like Egypt, India and Nigeria, which were strongly influenced by colonialism, and, on the other hand, countries that have never been colonies and where Western influence has been minimal, like Afghanistan, Nepal and Ethiopia, which are then the more underdeveloped ones? The answer is not difficult.

Frank has been one of the most influential thinkers on the problem of the relations between the 'North' and the 'South'. These terms came in use in the 1960's to replace the more traditional opposition of 'East and West'. In those days of the Cold War the words 'East' and 'West' were used as terms for the two blocs that stood against each other, and they were

thus not available in their traditional sense to indicate Europe and Asia. In a way they were similar because the East was considered to be stagnated — or underdeveloped — while the West was dynamic, or developed. But one knew that this had not always been the case. The old words ‘Ex Oriente lux’ refer to this. The title of Frank’s latest book, *ReOrient* includes a reference to this observation.

Frank takes issue with some theories about the secular superiority and predominance of the West over the East, and in many respects he is right. Some five hundred years ago the differences in wealth and development not only between Europe and Asia but between all parts of the world were marginal. It is difficult to find reliable data for that period. But this does not really matter. *Prima facie* evidence demonstrates that between economies that were all based on traditional agricultural production with very limited division of labor, little production for the market and only small scale artisanal production of non-food commodities, the differences must have been very small indeed. The ratio being something in the order of 1 to 2 or even 1 to 1.5. To paraphrase a well-known ditty from the 14th century:

‘When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then the wealthy man?’

Now, however, the differences between rich and poor countries are enormous. The explanation of this development is by no means straightforward, but it is clear that this has more to do with the industrial revolution than with colonial exploitation and the incorporation of peripheral countries into the western world economy. There is probably no more striking illustration of the relative importance of intercontinental trade in the early days of European expansion than these simple data: around 1600 the combined merchant fleets of the European states only had a total tonnage of one or two — around 1800 of seven or eight — of today’s supertankers. Intercontinental shipping was spectacular but not important. What changed the situation completely was the coming of the steamship and the industrial revolution. But for more than three centuries, between 1500 to 1800, the interaction between various parts of the world had been marginal. Later on this changed.

Does this mean that colonialism at least then became an important factor for the wealth of the West? The answer to that question is not easy to give. Britain was the first country to have an Industrial Revolution and Britain indeed was a colonial power. But other countries like Belgium

and Germany followed suit. These countries however, did not possess colonies at that time. The same goes for Japan after the Meiji-restoration of 1868 and the United States after the Civil War of 1861–1865, to mention two other countries which went through the same experience. In France and Holland, important colonial powers, not to mention Spain and Portugal, industrialization came much later and developed to a much lesser degree. One might well wonder whether its colonial possessions were not more of an impediment to a country like Holland than an asset for modernization and industrialization.

If, then, the theory that industrialization was the result of colonialism is unjustified, the related theory that the West, after its industrialization, became dependent on the colonial world as a producer of raw materials and a market for industrial commodities is also untenable. The Swiss economist Paul Bairoch has demonstrated that as far as raw materials are concerned, the developed world has been practically self-sufficient until far into the twentieth century. In 1914, after a century of intense colonization, Europe provided 97 to 99 per cent of the minerals it needed and about 90 per cent of the raw material for its textile industry. As far as energy is concerned, Bairoch's figures are even more striking. During the first half of the twentieth century Europe exported more energy to the Third World than it imported from it. In the nineteenth century the surplus on the energy balance was very big indeed. England played a major role in this. Coal amounted to about 14 per cent (in value) of British exports. To put it briefly, until the Second World War Europe itself provided about three quarters of the raw materials it needed for its industry.

Another myth concerns the role of the overseas world as a market for European commodities. Again, Bairoch's calculations are interesting. In the nineteenth century — until 1914 — the developed world exported 17 per cent of its export production to the overseas territories. In other words, 83 per cent of the export trade took place among the developed countries themselves. Moreover, the production for export was only a small part of the total production, roughly 8 to 9 per cent. The vast majority of production was for domestic consumption. To summarize: 8 to 9 per cent of the production was exported and of this 17 per cent went to 'Third World' countries. If we restrict ourselves to industrial products the percentage is somewhat higher, 5 to 8 per cent, and this percentage was to grow during the twentieth century. One should however take into account that for some countries, like Britain, and for some sectors, like textiles, the export trade was really quite important. But taken as a

whole, Bairoch concludes convincingly the overseas world was not of prime importance.<sup>10</sup>

Neither Landes, nor Frank, nor Bairoch give definite answers to the question why some nations are rich and others poor, but they demonstrate that at least some historians not only ask important questions but also come up with intelligent, albeit different, answers.

## The Expansion of Europe and the Development of Science and Technology

The history of the modern world has been dominated by two major events: the industrial revolution and the expansion of Europe. The expansion of Europe was a much encompassing process in which colonialism was only one aspect. It included the peopling of new continents, the creation of the modern world economy and the diffusion of European culture and values among other civilizations. The industrial revolution, which originally began in Europe, spread all over the globe changing the way of life of all the world's inhabitants. These processes were of course interrelated. On the one hand the expansion of Europe played a certain role in the coming into existence of the industrial revolution in Europe. On the other hand the industrialization of Europe dramatically changed Europe's power and thus made it possible for her to conquer, administer and exploit vast portions of Asia and Africa. Expansion and industrialization went hand in hand. Science and technology played a major role in both processes. As we all know, the industrial revolution in its modern form was based on the systematic application of science and technology to industrial processes. The expansion of Europe was based on technological innovations. In its wake, modern technology was introduced in various parts of the world. New branches of applied and pure science were developed: for example, tropical medicine, tropical agriculture, orientalism, anthropology and so on.

Let us first have a look at the original industrial revolution, the one in Britain in the 18th century. There is no doubt that this industrial revolution was based on a revolution in technology. To what extent was this technological revolution for its part connected with the so-called scientific revolution that had taken place in 16th and 17th century Europe? This is a matter for debate. It has been argued that before the 19th century, the influence of science on technology was non-existent. This is perhaps an exaggeration but it is true to say that science and technology are not necessarily interconnected. There has always existed technology – and important technology for that matter – which was not based

on science but on practical experience. It is also true that modern Western science, as it was developed during the scientific revolution, did not find its origins in technical needs or problems. The problems scientists were interested in were largely those of pure science. But on the other hand, it is also true that the great originality of the development of Western science and technology in modern history was the strong interconnection between the two.

This was the result of a long process of preparation. As one of the founding fathers of the history of technology, Lewis Mumford, wrote in 1934 in his *Technics and Civilization*: 'Men had become mechanical before they perfected complicated machines to express their new bent and interest'. This was the result of a change of mind. 'Before the new industrial processes could take hold on a great scale, a reorientation of wishes, habits, ideas, goals was necessary.' This took place in Europe during the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern period when traditional religion lost its impact on the European mind. Or, as Mumford remarked: 'Mechanics became the new religion, and it gave to the world a new Messiah: the machine.'<sup>11</sup>

After about 1750 in Europe, science and technology became nearly as inseparable as Siamese twins. The results of this were overwhelming. In 1800 the productivity of an English textile worker was about 100 times higher than that of one in India. That this was possible, was the result of industry, science and technology.

#### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

We can fairly say that science and technology were the decisive factors in the historical process that led to the formation of the modern world and that they are still of decisive importance today. All the same, we maintain an uncomfortable relationship with them. On the one hand, we realize only too well that we owe practically all our prosperity and most of our well-being to science and technology, that the future of mankind depends upon this. On the other hand, we also know that this knowledge carries problems. Knowledge in itself is not a boon, it has to be used in a sensible way. We might even go further and state that, to many people, knowledge and science are something dangerous, even diabolical. Science evokes forces it is not always able to control. The scholar is not only seen as a benefactor, but also as a menace. This is one of the Western views on science. It is one of the *leitmotifs* in the well-known Faust saga, the notion that all human knowledge is inspired by the devil. There

is another vision as well, the one not of men producing useful knowledge but pure science, not Dr Faust but Archimedes of Syracuse who, when he was stabbed by a Roman soldier, merely asked him not to ruin his circles. Both types of scholars exist, however in practice the distinction cannot always be maintained, because even pure science may lead to practical results.

We also see this when we look at the role of sciences in European expansion. From the very beginning colonialism faced a dilemma: to develop or not to develop, to interfere or not to interfere, to impose Western values as a universal truth or to respect indigenous values. This is an old debate that is still going on. The British in India in the 18th century already wondered: What are we doing here? How should we act? What right do we have to meddle with this society, to interfere with this culture? We are all familiar with the outcome of the debate. Colonialism followed its own inner dynamics. Economy, science and technology collaborated in the exploitation of the overseas territories. Knowledge about the East was absorbed and systematized in Western science. Western science and technology were exported to the overseas world.

This process of exchange has been going on now for some five centuries and in an ever more increasing way. How this process actually took place and whether there is a general pattern in this to be discovered we still do not know. We are only at the beginning of the study of this important field of research. The first scholar to suggest that such a general pattern can be distinguished was George Basalla who, in 1967, in a famous article in *Science*, presented a diffusionist model of the spread of Western science in non-Western areas. Basalla distinguished three phases. During Phase I, the non-European world acted only as an object of study for European science, it was followed by Phase II, the one of colonial science. In Phase III the transition took place to a situation in which non-Western countries developed an independent scientific tradition.<sup>12</sup>

This model has been criticized as being too simplistic and one sided, which undoubtedly it is. But what is true is that in the first stages of European expansion there was not much diffusion of European science and technology. Nor was European technology necessarily superior to Asian technology. On the contrary, the quality of Indian shipbuilding, for example, had been greatly appreciated by the British, and the same was the case with textiles. And even when Asian technology struck European observers as backward and unproductive — as for example was the case with minting — this was not necessarily true within the context of the Asian economy of those days with its own specific emphases.

Generally speaking, one can maintain that, in the first stage of European expansion, the non-Western world functioned primarily as an object for Western scientific curiosity. Originally, of course, the need for knowledge included the weather and climate, the geography and topography of the Eastern world, as well as astronomical observation, indispensable knowledge for shipping and exploration. Next, scientific concern turned towards the flora and fauna of the tropical world, another understandable field of interest. After all, in the beginning nearly everything revolved around spices!

But in addition there was an interest in Eastern culture and society, both in the material sense of products and artefacts, and in the immaterial sense of languages, customs and traditions. This interest also existed right from the beginning, but it has considerably increased since the 18th century. There were three successive movements to provide it with strong impulses: the Enlightenment in the 18th century, the geographical movement in the 19th century, and finally full colonialism in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

The Enlightenment gave the first impetus to the formation of numerous learned societies in Europe as well as in Asia. The Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences was founded in Indonesia in 1778, just a few years before the well-known Asiatic Society of Bengal, founded in 1784 by the famous orientalist Sir William Jones. In the 19th century, travels and particularly exploratory journals became the great passion of Europeans. This also explains the rise of geography and ethnology. In the years between 1820 and 1830 geographical societies were founded in most European countries. Ethnology became popular in the late 19th century, the age of Darwinism. No wonder that ethnology — or anthropology as we call it today — also adopted the evolutionary perspective of Darwinism and divided mankind into higher and lower races or — in a milder variety — into peoples at different levels of development. This taxonomy later invited severe criticism.

The greatest impulse for the diffusion of science and technology however was engendered by the colonial system itself. An increasing degree of involvement necessitated knowledge of all kinds of areas. It dawned on people that, as one colonial administrator observed, every form of government should be based on sound knowledge. If one were to respect the indigenous society, one would have to get to know it first. On the other hand, this also held true if one were to develop this society. This led to the dilemma that is known as the 'Oriental-Occidental Controversy'. The classical example of this almost universal debate we find in India

at the beginning of the 19th century.<sup>13</sup> The issue at stake was whether the colonial power should promote the spread of Western education and science or rather stimulate indigenous civilization and traditions. In the Indian case both positions were defended by the British but also by the Indians. Thus, it was not purely a matter of colonialists versus colonized. Some British orientalists had a very high esteem of Indian civilization and scientific knowledge, some Indians on the other hand were crying for instruction in Western knowledge and languages. But there were also Indians who took the opposite view and there were British who found oriental sciences absurd and worthless. The famous British administrator Lord Macaulay observed that ‘a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.’<sup>14</sup> Macaulay had his way and in 1835 the controversy was solved once and for all: the Government of India was to promote European languages, literature and science among the population of India.

As we all know this was to become the general pattern. In the 19th century Western science and technology became so overwhelmingly superior that nobody questioned the need to export them to the overseas world. The complaint now was not that the colonial power did too much in this respect but rather that it did too little and therefore was to blame for the tardy development of the non-Western world.

#### CONCLUSION

This then brings us to our conclusion. We have seen that over the last five centuries an enormous transformation has taken place. The world was first interconnected by European expansion, than united by modern and industrial colonialism. After 1945 that particular system fell apart, but it was continued in the form of the capitalist world system that we know today. Economically speaking, our planet has become one world, although with different and competing blocs. On the other hand political and cultural divisions continue to exist and are, if anything, becoming deeper. It is interesting to observe how complicated the present situation from the Western perspective has become. On the one hand there is Japan, which is seen as an economic opponent but not as an ideological one. On the other hand there is the Arabic world, which is considered at least by some not as an economic but as a cultural danger. It is also interesting to note that there is a definite globalization and westernization to be seen at the level of material civilization and popular culture (Coca Cola, jeans, hamburgers, pop music, soap opera’s), but also a revival of

traditional values as is illustrated by the rise of fundamentalism and various forms of linguistic and cultural nationalism. These phenomena, as well as the recently discovered problems of the ‘acculturation’ of immigrants from the Islamic world, have led to an extensive debate in the West — in America and also in Europe — on the question of cultural universalism as against cultural relativism. Are Western values and ideas about human rights, democracy, rights of women, et cetera, universal or has every civilization the right to cultivate its own values that cannot be examined against some universal moral code?

This question, although recently rediscovered is really an old one. In one form or another it has been with us since the beginning of European expansion some five centuries ago. It became acute with the emergence of modern colonialism in the 19th century. When looking at it from this long-term perspective it is interesting to note that both schools of thought, universalism and relativism, have always existed. The dominant school however was the universalist one. In the early phases of European expansion, from the 16th to the 18th centuries, Christianity was the most important ideology. In the 19th century, as a result of the Enlightenment and the democratic revolutions of the 18th century, the dominant ideology was liberalism, that is to say the belief in liberty, democracy and material progress. In the 20th century socialism became very important. Whatever the differences between these ideologies, what they all had in common was their claim of being universally valid.

On the other hand, there has also always existed a certain counterpoint to the value-imperialism of the West. In the old days there was the admiration for the ancient civilizations and the wisdom of the East. This was summarized in the well-known phrase: *Ex Oriente lux* (Light came from the East). In the 18th century, the *philosophes* criticized European societies by holding them up to the mirror of Eastern examples. Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* is perhaps the most famous example of this. Voltaire wrote that China was the best empire the world had ever seen; but Voltaire, of course, knew very little about China. At the same time, Rousseau and others developed the myth of the *bon sauvage*. In the 19th century, under the influence of romanticism and historicism, the argument was developed that every civilization was an entity of its own, with its own set of values that cannot be judged from outside. So Europe has always known both universalism and cultural relativism.

The debate seems to be as lively as ever. At the end of the Cold War and with the disappearance of the Soviet Empire, and indeed of the Soviet Union itself, for a moment the world seemed to have become a very

simple place. After the death of fascism and communism only one ideology survived, that of liberal democracy. As we all know Francis Fukuyama called this: *The End of History*. If one looks more closely at the world, however, things are not simple and the triumph of the West, be it political or ideological, is not altogether so self-evident.

# Imperialism

## INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF A DEFINITION

‘Imperialism is not a word for scholars’, Sir Keith Hancock remarked a long time ago, and he was right.<sup>15</sup> Scholars have to make clear what they mean when they use certain concepts or terms, and therefore have to give definitions. This, however, is impossible with the word imperialism. The problem is not that there are no definitions of imperialism, rather the contrary. There are about as many definitions of imperialism as there are authors who have written on the subject. They vary from those which refer to one specific form of imperialism, mostly Europe’s 19th century colonial expansion, to others which give a very general meaning to the word, like the one in *Webster’s Dictionary*: ‘any extension of power or authority or an advocacy of such extension’. Clearly, such a definition can cover almost any situation. Not surprisingly therefore the word has often simply been used as an invective in order to criticize the policy of another country.

So defined imperialism is useless as a scholarly concept. In serious studies however the word has always had a more limited meaning. The problem is exactly how limited its meaning should be. Sometimes the word is used in a universal historical way in order to characterize the politics of a dominant power. Thus some historians have spoken of Roman or even Assyrian imperialism. But this is highly exceptional. In historical studies imperialism generally refers to the policy of European countries, and primarily of Britain, during the 19th and 20th centuries, aiming at the expansion of their power and influence over other continents. It is in this context that the term imperialism originated and began to be used as a political and historical concept. Historically speaking, the word imperialism is therefore obviously closely associated with colonialism. But while colonialism was only used to refer to one specific form of alien rule, viz. the colonial one, imperialism acquired a wider meaning and included various other forms of influence over alien nations and states, such as the financial influence of France and Germany in the Russian and Ottoman Empires or such things as British ‘gunboat policy’ and American ‘dollar diplomacy’.

After the end of the colonial empires the word 'colonialism' could only be used to refer to a phenomenon from the past and thus fell out of use. 'Imperialism' however continued to be used, and from then on also indicated those forms of domination that were formally different from but factually comparable to those formerly practiced by the colonial powers. For a while the word 'neocolonialism' was also used for this purpose, but somehow that term was less successful. By the end of the Second World War America had become the new superpower. Accordingly, imperialism was now mainly applied to describe the foreign policy of the United States vis à vis other countries, in particular in Latin America, Asia and Africa. There was also an attempt to make the concept applicable to the policy of the Soviet Union with regard to the Central and Eastern European countries that came under its influence after 1945, but this was not very successful. The reason for this is that, historically speaking, imperialism has connotations with capitalism, and not with communism, and with overseas possessions and not with adjacent countries. Although there clearly was a Soviet Empire, it was not considered to be an example of imperialism but of traditional power politics. Only in its very general meaning as another word for all forms of power policies or simply as an invective, was it also used to describe communist countries like the Soviet Union and China. After the end of the Cold War this use of the word imperialism lost much of its earlier attraction.

In this article imperialism is used in the sense of its initial meaning, that is to say as a term to indicate the extension of formal or informal, mostly European, rule over Asian and African countries in the late 19th and early 20th century as well as, more generally, for some other forms of western predominance during and after the colonial period.

#### IMPERIALISM: THE HISTORY OF A CONCEPT

Like 'colonialism', which was probably first used in the title of a book of a French socialist critic of the phenomenon, Paul Louis' *Le Colonialisme* from 1905, 'imperialism' was originally a French word. It was from the 1830s onwards that the terms 'impérialiste' and 'impérialisme' came into use in France. They referred to the empire of Napoleon and to the imperial pretensions of his nephew Louis Napoleon, later known as Napoleon III. The colonial connotation came only after the word had begun to be used in Britain in the 1860s. Then, of course, the empire it referred to was no longer the continental one of France but the overseas empire of Great Britain.

Although the word imperialism was already used in Britain in the 1860's, the historical concept appeared only in 1902 with the publication of J.A. Hobson's *Imperialism. A Study*. Hobson, a radical but not a socialist, was deeply impressed by the South African War (1899–1902). In 1900 he published a book on this subject, *The War in South Africa. Its Causes and Effects*, in which he argued that power in South Africa had fallen into the hands of a small group of financiers 'chiefly German in origin and Jewish in race'.<sup>16</sup> In his famous book *Imperialism. A Study* he elaborated this vision into a general theory of imperialism, and used the term imperialism to indicate the 'expansion of Great Britain and of the chief continental Powers'.<sup>17</sup> The word expansion referred to the fact that over the last thirty years a number of European nations, Great Britain being first and foremost, had 'annexed or otherwise asserted political sway over vast portions of Africa and Asia, and over numerous islands in the Pacific and elsewhere'.<sup>18</sup> For Hobson the meaning of the word imperialism was very clear: it was the establishment of political control. He also was explicit about the forces behind it. Various people such as an 'ambitious statesman, a frontier soldier and an overzealous missionary' might play some role in it, 'but the final determination rests with the financial power'.<sup>19</sup> Thus Hobson offered us a definition (imperialism is the expansion of political power of European countries over the non-European world), a periodization (imperialism took place over the last thirty years, thus between 1870 and 1900) and an explanation: it was the result of the workings of the financial powers. In order to explain their behavior, Hobson argued that, as a consequence of the capitalist system, the British economy suffered from underconsumption. As a result of this, surplus capital could no longer be profitably invested in England itself. Therefore, the capitalists were 'seeking foreign markets and foreign investments to take off the goods and capital they cannot sell or use at home'.<sup>20</sup>

As Hobson's theory implied a criticism of capitalism, it had a certain attraction to Marxist thinkers. As a result of this, a new Marxist theory of imperialism was born. While originally Marx and Engels had considered colonialism as an 'objective' progressive force, now Marxist theorists like Karl Hilferding and Rosa Luxemburg scorned late 19th century imperialism as a form of exploitation and suppression. The Marxist theory of imperialism became very influential when it was appropriated by a man who was not only a theorist but also a practical politician, Lenin. In 1916 he published his famous brochure *Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

Lenin's ideas were mostly based on the work of the previous mentioned Marxist authors who in turn had been inspired by Hobson's theory. It was therefore understandable that a direct link was seen between Hobson's and Lenin's theories, so much so that it became fashionable to speak of the 'Hobson-Lenin thesis'. There are however two important differences between Hobson and Lenin. Firstly, for Hobson the flight of capital from the metropolis to the overseas world was a consequence of the development of capitalism, but not a necessary consequence. The origin of the problem was underconsumption. Therefore, theoretically, it should also be possible to solve the problem by increasing the purchasing power of the working classes. Indeed Hobson remarked: 'If the consuming public in this country [Great Britain, W.] raised its standard of consumption to keep pace with every rise of productive powers, there could be no excess of goods or capital clamorous to use Imperialism in order to find markets (...)'.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly and more importantly, Hobson and Lenin tried to explain two different things. Hobson, who wrote his book during the South African War, wanted to explain the division of the world and more specifically of Africa, in the late 19th century. Lenin, who wrote in 1916, tried to explain the redivision of the world of which the First World War was the most spectacular outcome. In Lenin's brochure the word Africa hardly appears at all. The period he referred to was also different from the one dealt with by Hobson: not 1870–1900 but thereafter. He explicitly wrote about this: 'I have tried to show in my pamphlet that it (imperialism, W.) was born in 1898–1900, not earlier'.<sup>22</sup> Thus Lenin parted ways with Kautsky and Luxemburg for whom imperialism was little more than another word for colonialism.<sup>23</sup> For Lenin it was something else: not the highest stage of colonialism but of capitalism.

Although the capitalist theory of imperialism was not generally accepted and alternative interpretations were launched and had some influence, some form of economic interpretation became the standard explanation of imperialism during the 1920s and 1930s. Imperialism was considered as having originated from economic problems in Europe that were characteristic for the late 19th century, in particular the need to guarantee the flow of raw materials to the industrialized countries and the protection of overseas markets for the sale of their industrial products. This consensus broke down after the Second World War under the influence of decolonization and the rise of the American empire. The new world political situation also had an impact on the theory of imperialism. In a famous article, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', two

Cambridge historians, Jack Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, developed the concept of 'informal empire'.<sup>24</sup> They argued that the real zenith of the British Empire was not to be found in the late 19th century but rather in the mid-Victorian period of informal British economic hegemony. For Britain, the entire 19th century was one of expansion. It was an imperial century. Britain's imperial expansion manifested itself in various forms: emigration, trade, overseas investments, the establishment of naval bases etc. The extension of political authority over foreign people was only one form of imperialism, and not even the most important one. The Mid-Victorian empire was comparable to the informal American empire that came into being after 1945. It worked with informal means because that was the best way of doing things. The maxim of British policy makers was: informal empire if possible, formal only if necessary. Due to foreign competition and rivalry the late Victorians however were forced to formalize their Empire and they did so, willy-nilly.

While Gallagher and Robinson discovered imperialism before empire, other theorists also discovered imperialism after empire. This resulted not so much from a reflection on the rise of the American empire but from a reassessment of decolonization. While after the First World War the European powers had increased their territorial possessions, for example by the division of parts of the Ottoman empire, and stabilized their colonial rule, the situation was very different after the Second World War. In Asia the process of decolonization started immediately after the war and later on it was also followed on in Africa. Thus in the 1960's most of the former colonies had become politically independent. But political independence did not automatically bring an end to the social problems nor to the economic dependency of the ex-colonies. Some of the new states became even more dependent on the western-dominated world system than they had been before. For many observers it was clear that the end of empire was not at the same time the end of imperialism. Some theorists worked this out in the theory of dependency. According to the dependencianistas, imperialism was not only the extension of political control. It also included the dependency of less developed parts of the world on the industrial powers. Empire was only one form of imperialism, one stage in the history of western dominance.

However, why one form of imperialism was replaced by another remained a question, an answer to which was also given by Gallagher and Robinson in 1961 in their famous book on the partition of Africa: *Africa and the Victorians*.<sup>25</sup> Here they argued that changes in the periphery, that is in the overseas world, rather than in the mother countries,

were responsible for the changes in the ways and means of imperialist control. Although *Africa and the Victorians* also primarily dealt with British policy, the theories developed here had a wider meaning. While the theory of the imperialism of free trade was typically a theory about British imperialism, the peripheral theory was applicable to the imperialist activities of other nations as well. In many cases changes in the non-western world were decisive in determining imperialist action. Egypt's financial problems for example led to increasing foreign interference, and this, in turn, to a 'nationalistic', or rather proto-nationalistic, reaction which plunged Egypt into an internal political crisis which again led to foreign intervention and occupation. The discovery of minerals in South Africa, to give another example, led to a complete change in the balance of power in that part of the continent.

Ronald Robinson later elaborated this interpretation into a more general theory based on the observation of the important role of the African and Asian partners of the imperialist rulers. In this so called 'collaborationist theory', imperialism is conceived of as a system of collaboration between European and non-European forces before, during and after colonial rule. The changing forms of imperialism are considered as changing forms of collaboration that resulted from changes in the bargaining positions of the various parties.<sup>26</sup>

The Gallagher and Robinson theories were followed by a great number of studies on the economic significance of the British Empire and the role of economic factors in British imperialism. The important place of Britain in the debate on imperialism is understandable because Britain was the imperial power par excellence. But for that very reason Britain was not the most typical imperial power. Rather it was atypical and therefore the discussions in other European countries on imperialism have followed different lines and focused on different questions. Chronologically speaking however the European revisionist theories were developed in the same years as the British: the debate started in the 1960s and continued well into the 1980s.

#### NATIONAL ARTICULATIONS

In France, Henri Brunschwig's *Mythes et réalités de l'impérialisme colonial français, 1871–1914*, which appeared in 1960, set the tone for the debate on French imperialism. According to Brunschwig, the causes of French imperialism were not to be found in economic demands but in the development of French nationalism after the defeat in the Franco-Prussian

war of 1870. The protectionist factor was a myth, political factors were decisive. Given the specific intellectual climate that existed in France after the Second World War, and in which Marxism played such an important role, it was to be expected that Brunschwig's book would lead to great controversy, as it did. But the Marxists could hardly deny the fact that the French colonial empire had been of little economic importance in France. In order to rescue the Marxist theory of imperialism they therefore argued that French imperialism was not to be found in the French colonies but elsewhere, in the Russian and Ottoman empires. They argued that French colonialism was not imperialist and French imperialism not colonial. In 1984 an important study by Jacques Marseille, based on an extensive data bank on French colonial trade, threw new light on the question of economic interest. His conclusion was that in the beginning the colonies were useful to French industry from an economic point of view but subsequently became a burden.<sup>27</sup>

In Germany there also was a strong connection between imperialism and nationalism but it is not altogether clear to what extent imperialism was a result of nationalism. This is because the decision to found a German colonial empire was very much the decision of one man, chancellor Bismarck. Therefore in Germany the discussion on imperialism has always been concentrated on Bismarck and his motives. There were two main interpretations, a foreign political one (imperialism as a move in Germany's international relations) and one in terms of domestic policy, like electoral success, financial pressure groups etc. The discussion was reopened when in 1969 H.-U. Wehler added new elements to this debate. Although he stressed the economic background of imperialism he agreed that, as in the case of France, the German colonial empire had not been very profitable. In his view, the link between economics and empire must be sought on a different level. He emphasized the social problems of the Reich (its lack of legitimation because of its creation *von oben*, by force) and considered Bismarck's bid for colonies as a shrewd political move intended both as part of a general, more or less anti-cyclical, economic policy, and of a social policy seeking to unite the Germans around issues of foreign policy and thus to overcome internal tensions. Thus Wehler's emphasis was more on the domestic than on the diplomatic motives of German imperialism under Bismarck.<sup>28</sup> Here, the debate on German imperialism touches upon a wider discussion, the one on the problem of continuity and discontinuity in German foreign policy, the so-called German *Sonderweg* and the place of national-socialism in German history.

Italian imperialism was also studied from a special perspective. It was

not very successful during the classical period of imperialism but it continued during the interwar years, under the influence of fascism. The French historian Jean-Louis Miège has emphasized not only the demographic factor in Italian imperialism, but also its political and ideological dimensions — the nationalistic reaction to the loss of population as a consequence of emigration — comparing it in this respect to Spanish imperialism.<sup>29</sup> The interpretation of Portuguese imperialism was long dominated by Hammond's theory of an 'uneconomic', that is to say a primarily nationalistic, form of 'imperialism'. Gervase Clarence-Smith later challenged this view by making a strong case for an economic interpretation of Portuguese imperialism. He argued that economic motives went hand in hand with other ones such as missionary zeal, nationalism and others.<sup>30</sup>

The case of Belgium is very special because in the 19th century, Belgium was an anticolonialist country, but in spite of this it was eventually to acquire one of the biggest European colonies in Africa, the Belgian Congo (later on Zaire, now again Congo). That this happened was due to the extraordinary zeal, tenacity, ruse and ruthlessness of one man, King Leopold II. Jean Stengers has analyzed the singular nature of the king's imperialism which was one of old fashioned economic exploitation and in this respect inspired by the example of the Netherlands.<sup>31</sup>

In the Netherlands the historical discussion on imperialism began rather late. The most important contribution to the debate came from a book by Maarten Kuitenbrouwer.<sup>32</sup> In this he argued that the Dutch case was roughly analogous to others, and that the Netherlands followed more or less the general pattern. It has also been noted however that Dutch imperialism was defensive rather than offensive, reluctant rather than enthusiastic. In this respect it was comparable to Britain. In both cases there was more continuity than discontinuity, and what discontinuity there was, derived from a change in circumstances, not in policy.

The historical debate on imperialism was mainly about the traditional colonial powers of western Europe but observations have also been made about other countries. Russian imperialism poses interesting questions and offers paradoxical aspects because on the one hand, Russia was an object of western European financial imperialism but on the other hand it was also acting itself as an expansionist power by extending its empire to the East and eventually to the shores of the Pacific. The case of Japan is particularly interesting, because it is the only Asian nation which became an imperial power. Like other Asian countries it was first confronted with western influence but it reacted in a very different way

to this challenge. After having been forced to 'open' the country in 1853 it very rapidly accepted Western notions and techniques, so much so that already in the 1890s it started its expansion into China. Japanese imperialism was continued in the 1930's and of course during the Second World War. Some analysts have also considered Japan's economic expansion after 1945 as a form of informal imperialism.<sup>33</sup>

The concept of American imperialism is a very complicated one. Of course America has been considered as the main imperialist power since 1945, but how this was related to its earlier expansion is unclear. While some authors consider the Russian expansion to the East as a form of imperialism, the American conquest of the West has hardly ever been interpreted in this way. Traditionally one has observed that American imperialism has come about only by the turn of the century, with the Spanish-American war of 1898 and the American take-over of Cuba and the Philippines from Spain.

#### EXPLANATION: MOTIVES AND MEANS

The rich literature on imperialism that has been published from the 1960s onwards, has led to a revision of the traditional views on the origins and meaning of late 19th century imperialism. Transformations in Europe but also in the overseas world have received attention as factors that can explain the new imperialist attitude. The main distinction is between European interpretations on the one hand, which underline economic, political, strategic and ideological motives, and peripheral interpretations which give special attention to activities and developments in the overseas world and in particular to the 'frontiers' of European influence. The new research has also given attention to such topics as the ecological aspects of imperialism, cultural imperialism, the impact of imperialism on the sciences et cetera.

Much of the debate on imperialism concerned the motives of the imperialists. In order to understand the origins of imperialism however, attention has also to be given to another aspect, not the motives but the means. The development of imperialism cannot be understood by looking only at transformations in Europe and the overseas world and the incentives for imperialist actions that were created by these. What also was necessary for such action was the disposal of the necessary means. It had always been virtually impossible for Europeans to survive in the environmental conditions of tropical Africa. New developments in the medical sciences, like the prophylactic use of quinine (as from the 1840's),

made it possible for Europeans not only to live, but also to work and even to fight under such conditions. The development of new means of transportation (steamships, railways), the opening of new sea routes (like the one via the Suez Canal), the revolution in the means of communication (the telegraph and later on the telephone and wireless communication) made the extension of imperial rule possible. Finally but perhaps most importantly the development of new weapons and in particular of the machine gun gave the Europeans an enormous advantage in their battles with non-European nations. Colonial wars became successful almost by definition and the European colonial armies became 'ever victorious' armies. Entire continents could be conquered at very small cost for the conquerors.

Thus the great technological superiority of the Europeans came into existence during the latter part of the 19th century due to the so-called Second Industrial Revolution which took place in Western Europe and created rivals for British trade. These technological transformations not only offered the means for imperial expansion but also led to new demands in the European societies which had their effects on foreign and colonial policy. Social and economic questions assumed increasing importance. State welfare provisions expanded. The import of tropical products at affordable prices was considered as a matter of public concern. This called for sustained economic exploitation which presupposed the existence of peace and order, in other words, effective authority.

The balance of power in Europe also changed dramatically in the 1870s. In the early 19th century, from Napoleon to Bismarck, Europe had found itself in an exceptional political situation. Germany and Italy did not yet exist. Britain had eliminated France as a maritime and colonial rival. Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands, the old colonial powers, had had their day. Hence, Britain enjoyed *de facto* world supremacy, much as the United States was to do after the Second World War. All these factors were swept away in the 1870s. After its defeat in 1870 France sought compensation for its loss as a continental power by strengthening its overseas role. Germany and Italy, newcomers both, claimed a place under the sun.

Internal political factors also played a part. European governments were faced with a new phenomenon: they had to take the wishes of their electorate into account. Economic growth and social harmony became declared objectives of government policy. The Paris Commune of 1871 accentuated the danger of social revolution and hence the importance of social issues. The state was asked to do more things for more people.

Conversely, technical progress, economic growth and growing political involvement by the citizens of Europe created the conditions for a strong state. The military might of the European powers reached unprecedented heights. At the same time in the overseas world transformations took place which often proceeded from previous contacts with Europe or European settlers, and which changed the existing internal balance of power. Thus in many respects a new situation came into being after 1870, in Europe as well as in the overseas world, and therefore, after all forms of revisionism, it is still justified to speak of the period of 1870–1914 as an age of imperialism, as Hobson did when he introduced the concept about a century ago.

## Changing Views on Empire and Imperialism

Words can be confusing and titles can be misleading, particularly if titles consist of one simple word. Two titles suffice to illustrate this phenomenon. In 2000, a book appeared with the title *Empire* and in 2002 another book appeared with exactly the same title. In the first *Empire*, Michael Hardt, an American literary theorist, and Antonio Negri, an Italian political philosopher, argued that although classical imperialism is over, Empire is alive and well, albeit in a new form. For them 'Empire' means the following: 'Our basic hypothesis is that sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule. This new global form of sovereignty is what we call Empire.'<sup>34</sup> This is a rather special definition of Empire because what one usually has in mind when using that word is something very different. It is the Empire that the other book, written by the British historian Niall Ferguson, is about.<sup>35</sup> This book describes, as the subtitle indicates, *The Rise and Demise of the British World Order*. But it is also about something more, as is apparent from the rest of the subtitle: *and the Lessons for Global Power*. These lessons are intended for the rulers of the Empire of today, the Americans. While the first *Empire* is the Bible for anti-globalists, Ferguson's book can be considered as the New Testament of the advocates of America's imperial ambitions.

The two books clearly indicate that the word 'Empire' means different things for different people, and has very different moral connotations. For Hardt and Negri, Empire is bad; for Ferguson, it is good. This is even truer of words such as imperialism and colonialism, which refer to different phenomena that have been interpreted and appreciated in very different ways. From the very beginning the word imperialism has had unpleasant connotations. Hobson, who published his *Imperialism: A Study*, in 1902, was very critical of European and, in particular, British imperialism. So were the other authors who used the term to describe the exploitation of the overseas world by Western — in the first instance European powers. The same is true for the word 'colonialism' coined somewhat later by the French socialist Paul Louis, in 1905.

Authors such as Hobson and Louis however were in a minority. While

there have always been critics of certain abuses of colonial rule and European expansion, generally speaking the colonial systems were seen as beneficial for the colonized peoples. Lord Lugard, the famous British colonial administrator, was so strongly convinced of the benefits of British colonial rule that he even felt obliged to warn his readers that they should not believe that British penetration into Africa was taking place only to bring civilization, peace, and good government there. 'However greatly such objects may weigh with a large and powerful section of the nation,' he wrote in 1893, 'I do not believe that in these days our national policy is based on motives of philanthropy only'. And he continued: 'it is well, then, to realize that it is for our advantage — and not alone at the dictates of duty — that we have undertaken responsibilities in [...] Africa'.<sup>36</sup> Please note the phrases 'not only' and 'not alone'. Who would believe today that colonialism had philanthropy as its sole motive?

The moral justification of colonial rule was strengthened by the introduction of modern colonialism, which aimed at economically developing the tropical colonies rather than simply taking away their products. This new policy was introduced in the last quarter of the 19th century. The French called it the 'mise en valeur' of the colonies. In the Netherlands Indies it was known as the 'ethical policy'. The Dutch politician Abraham Kuyper — founder of the oldest political party in the Netherlands — wrote in 1878 in the party's manifesto that the policy of exploitation should make way for 'policies of ethical obligation'. What Kuyper had in mind was a kind of guardianship, whereby the Dutch guardian would bring up the Indonesian people, uplift them morally, and later — 'God willing' — give them a more independent position. The Dutch liberal journalist P. Brooshooft used the same metaphor when he spoke of the Indonesians as a 'childish people' needful of protection. An Indonesian critic asked whether the Netherlands would also teach its children to stand on their own two feet! While earlier forms of European colonialism (the Atlantic slave trade, the Dutch cultivation system in Indonesia, the atrocities in Leopold II's Congo Free State) had given rise to criticisms and moral outcries of concerned Europeans, the new colonialism was defended with ethical arguments, thus giving the colonizer a good conscience.

This tendency became even stronger after the First World War. The Europeans were, and remained, convinced of the rightness of what they were doing. In the 1930s, the famous French historian Gabriel Hanotaux — who in the 1890s had been minister for the Colonies and, later, for Foreign Affairs — edited a large five-volume history of the French

colonies in which, among other things he wrote: 'By occupying Algiers France fulfilled the mission that Providence and history had entrusted to her. And this was another of those beautiful French adventures: the attraction of the unknown, the pleasures of taking risks, of sacrifices, of showing individual courage, disinterested devotion, the elan of a generous and educative creation. What a generous conquest: not one merchant involved!'<sup>37</sup>

Not surprisingly, this attitude changed with decolonization. In Asia, decolonization came earlier than in Africa and, already in the 1950s, a critical reassessment of colonialism was taking place. As far as Africa was concerned, the good conscience of the colonizer was still alive and well around 1960. When in that year the Belgian Congo became independent, the Belgian King Baudouin, said at the ceremonial transfer of power: 'The independence of the Congo constitutes the end of an enterprise conceived by the genius of King Leopold II. He undertook it with tenacious courage, and it was subsequently continued with perseverance by Belgium [...]. During the past 80 years Belgium has sent the best of its sons to your land [...]. When Leopold II undertook this great work — today finding its crowning achievement — he did not present himself as a conqueror before you, but as a civilizer. The Congo has been endowed with railways, roads, sea lanes, and airways, which, in bringing your peoples into contact with one another, have stimulated unity and have opened your country to the wider dimension of the world. A medical service requiring years to perfect, has been patiently organized, delivering you from manifold dangerous diseases [...]. We are happy therefore, to have given the Congo — in face of the greatest difficulties — those elements indispensable for the structure of a country that has started on the march along the path of development.'<sup>38</sup>

Here, of course, the former colonial master was speaking. But not so long before, a Congolese politician had written similar things: 'With a most sincere and humanitarian idealism, Belgium came to our aid, and with the support of vigorous native troops she eventually chased away the enemy [the slavers, W.]; she checked the spread of disease [sleeping sickness, W.], instructed us, banned those of our customs that to some extent were inhuman, made us free, happy, vigorous, civilized [...]. All really human and rational men must express their gratitude and bow with respect before this grandiose task, realized in this country at the expense of incalculable material and human sacrifice.'<sup>39</sup>

This Congolese author was nobody less than Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the independent Republic Congo. In that new role

and on the same occasion as King Baudouin, Lumumba expressed himself however rather differently. He said: 'So far as our lot was concerned during the 80 years of the colonialist regime, our wounds are still too fresh and painful to be forgotten [...]. We were quite aware that the law of the state was never the same for a black as for a white, cruel and inhuman to the one, accommodating to the other [...]. We knew that in the towns there were magnificent houses for the whites and ramshackle straw huts for the blacks; that a black was admitted neither into cinemas, restaurants, nor shops, labeled with a sign inscribed 'Europeans only'; that a black traveled at the bottom of the ship or at the feet of the white in his luxury cabin [...]. All that, my brothers [...] we have deeply suffered. But all this — all that I have described above — all of it, has now ended.'<sup>40</sup>

After decolonization this vision became the new orthodoxy: colonialism was wrong. Thus the appreciation changed but the interpretation remained the same: colonialism had had a strong impact on the non-Western world, a bad influence according to the new school, a good one according to the old one. Later on, a new interpretation also became apparent. It was now argued that Western influence had not been so influential after all. The few centuries of Western dominance in Asia had not had much impact on these old and well-established civilizations. In addition, as far as Africa was concerned, European colonial rule had been a matter of only a few decades, not even a full century. While thus the impact of colonial rule was minimized, at the same time other theorists argued that decolonization had not brought an end to Western dominance. This had been continued in a new form and the dependence of the former colonies on the West had become even stronger. First, this interpretation was called neocolonialism or dependency. In the present-day it is known as globalization.

Here, as is always the case with history writing, the impact of the present on the interpretation of the past is clearly visible. Under colonialism, colonial rule was mostly seen as benevolent and good for the colonized. After decolonization, colonial rule was blamed for the backwardness of what was then called 'the third world'. In recent years opinions have changed again. The Arabic world is now often seen as a world of fundamentalism, terrorism and backwardness, Africa as a world of despotism, civil war and starvation. Former colonial rule, it is heard, cannot be held responsible, or at least not alone responsible, for this sorry state of affairs. The British Empire, Niall Ferguson argues in his book on Empire, is nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary, it has been beneficial for the world.

There is of course no question that the age of the British Empire has been over for a long time. If today there is an empire at all, it is the American Empire. As far as rhetoric is concerned there seems to be a remarkable continuity between the two. When the British commander General F. S. Maude occupied Baghdad in 1917 he said to the people of Mesopotamia, as it then was: ‘Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators [...]. It is [not] the wish of [our] government to impose upon you alien institutions. [It is our wish] that you should prosper even as in the past, when your lands were fertile, when your ancestors gave to the world literature, science and art, and when Baghdad city was one of the wonders of the world. It is [our] hope [...] that once again the people of Baghdad shall flourish’.<sup>41</sup>

As Niall Ferguson has observed, President George W. Bush, addressed the people of Iraq, as it now is, in a very similar way in a television speech of 4 April 2003, where he said: ‘The government of Iraq, and the future of your country, will soon belong to you [...]. We will end a brutal regime [...] so that Iraqis can live in security. We will respect your great religious traditions, whose principles of equality and compassion are essential to Iraq’s future. We will help you build a peaceful and representative government that protects the rights of all citizens [...]. You are a good and gifted people — the heirs of a great civilization that contributes to all humanity’.<sup>42</sup>

One commentator called this ‘Democratic Imperialism’, a somewhat contradictory concept. But the history of the word ‘imperialism’ shows so many variations that a new one can easily find its place.

## Some Reflections on the History of the Partition of Africa, 1880–1914

Some twenty years ago I published a rather voluminous work in Dutch under the title: *Divide and Rule. The Partition of Africa, 1880–1914*. The English translation of it came out some years later, in America. The Romans had an expression saying that books have their destiny — or in the original Latin: *Habent sua fata libelli* — and indeed, there is a rather curious story about this book to be told. When it came out, it was the first comprehensive book on the subject that had been published since nearly a century. The last and indeed the only other book on the partition as a whole was the one by Scott Keltie: *History of the Partition of Africa*. That book came out in 1903 when the partition was not even yet finished. Surely, it is one of the ironies of history that there were nearly ninety years of silence and then, just six months after my book came out, another and an even bigger book on the partition was published, Thomas Pakenham's *The Scramble for Africa*. It is not for me to comment on the differences between the two books. Others have done that and no doubt will continue to do so. Let me just say that there are many differences, not only as far as the composition is concerned but also in analysis and interpretation.

In this contribution I shall deal with the same subject, this time not in 500 but in some 20 pages. This means of course that I can only give some of my views on the subject. What I will offer you are a few afterthoughts: conclusions and reflections on the history of the partition of Africa and on the problems that arise when writing that history. In order to do that, I shall first briefly introduce the subject. Then I shall discuss some of the main topics of the debate on the partition. Finally I shall sketch some of the problems of writing the history of the partition and the way I have tried to deal with them.

To all practical purposes the history of the partition of Africa began in 1881 with the French occupation of Tunisia. To be sure some historians have argued that the revival of French expansionism after the defeat of 1870 took place somewhat earlier, with the introduction of a new forward policy in the Western Sudan. But this should not bother us here. Whatever happened in West Africa somewhat earlier, the foundation of a French protectorate over Tunisia in 1881 was the first clear official demonstration of a new French policy in matters overseas, and it was recognized as such. A few days after the event, Léon Gambetta, the parliamentary leader of the French Liberal Party, wrote to Jules Ferry, the Liberal Prime Minister who was responsible for the occupation, saying that 'France has regained the status of a great power'.<sup>43</sup> The Gambetta Note which a year later was presented to the Egyptian government by the short lived ministry of Gambetta himself was another indication of the same mood. But the government of Gambetta fell before anything had been done and the new French government procrastinated. Thus Britain had to go it alone. The British bombed Alexandria, landed an expeditionary force, built up an army, defeated Arabi Pasha and became the new masters of Egypt. Although the French had only to blame themselves for this blatant demonstration of instability and impotence, they did not blame themselves but the British and for more than twenty years Anglo-French rivalry formed the background of the partition of Africa. This rivalry, which reached its climax with the Fashoda Crisis of 1898, came to an end only with the Entente Cordiale of 1904. But by that time the partition was all but over.

The Anglo-French antagonism and the French frustration over what they considered as the 'Loss of Egypt' were to influence developments in other parts of Africa as well, as soon was to be demonstrated. In the late 1870s a French naval officer of Italian extraction by the name of Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza had been pioneering in the Upper Congo area and, all on his own initiative, closing treaties with local chiefs. In these treaties the chiefs transferred their sovereignty to France. In 1882 Brazza returned to Paris, orchestrated a promotion, press and public relations campaign for his new occupations and managed to convince the French Parliament and the French Government of the necessity to have them ratified.

The ratification of the Brazza treaties triggered off other imperialist operations in the Congo area. King Leopold II of Belgium sent the

famous traveller Henry Morton Stanley to the region. His mission was to have the Congolese signing similar treaties with King Leopold and his Congo Association as Brazza had had them signing with him. The Portuguese who, as nearly everywhere in Africa, also had the oldest rights in the Congo Basin got nervous and found support from their traditional ally, Britain. This cooperation resulted in the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of February 1884. The signing of this treaty however led to such tumultuous reactions in Britain and Europe that it never was ratified. Under French and German pressure the British accepted to have these matters discussed at an international conference: the famous Berlin Conference of 1884–1885.

This conference has been the source of many myths and misunderstandings. It is often considered as the meeting where the partition of Africa was masterminded. This is not true as we can see by simply reading the Proceedings and in particular the General Act of the Conference. In this Act the decisions of the participating powers, that is to say nearly all European states as well as the United States and the Ottoman Empire, were laid down. As we can see by reading these documents the conference only dealt with three issues. The main issue was the decision to create an enormous free trading zone, including practically the whole of Central Africa. Then a number of humanitarian principles were accepted or confirmed: the abolition of the slave trade, the prohibition of the import of liquor, gunpowder etc. Finally there was the famous question of the formalities that were to be respected by states wanting to make new occupations in Africa. Here the conference ruled that in such cases the Powers that wanted to do so should notify the others of their claims and create sufficient authority on the ground to effectively control their new possessions. But all this was only applicable to new possessions and only to the coasts of Africa.<sup>44</sup> When at the conference it was suggested that these procedures should also apply to the interior the delegates protested. ‘That would amount to a partition of Africa’, said the French ambassador and that was not the task of the Conference. Her only responsibility was to formulate certain rules for new occupations on the coasts of Africa. The other delegates agreed with this and so the partition went off the agenda. This discussion however remains important because it is probably here that we find the origins of some of the myths concerning the Berlin Conference.

The first myth is a well-known one: the Berlin Conference partitioned Africa; it drew the boundaries of the various European possessions. Or, as Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana put it: ‘The original

carve-up of Africa [was] arranged at the Berlin Conference of 1884.<sup>45</sup> This is a theory still to be found today, even with serious authors like Basil Davidson. But it is not true. The Conference drew only one boundary, that of the free trading zone. But that was not a political, but only a commercial boundary.

The second theory is the so-called 'hinterland theory'. This, again, is a theory that one still finds in many textbooks, for example in the well known and otherwise excellent textbook by Robert Palmer, *A History of the Modern World*. Palmer writes, that 'a European power with holdings on the coasts had prior rights in the back country'.<sup>46</sup> Nothing of this is to be found in the Berlin Act, but again it is a very persistent myth. The Belgian historian Jean Stengers had tried to trace back the origin of this theory. He found the first mention of it in a French textbook of 1918. But there are even older ones. According to my own research the original source of it might be a popular German textbook from 1908, Dietrich Schäfer's *Weltgeschichte der Neuzeit*. This exercise in historiography, interesting though it is, should not occupy us here.

The next theory is that the Berlin Conference laid down the 'groundrules' for the scramble or formulated a 'code of conduct' for the partition. It is true that the Berlin Act laid down a few general principles: two articles out of the twenty-eight of the General Act are devoted to this, the ones I mentioned about notification and effective occupation. These articles however were not directives for partition, but diplomatic precautions to avoid international problems.

Another very popular theory is that the Berlin Conference 'fired the starting gun for the partition'. These kinds of metaphors are of course rather flexible, but if this was the start, it was a very false start indeed because most of the runners were already well under way. If the Conference tried to do anything in this respect, it was to call back the competitors. It was 'a holding operation'. But it was a holding operation that failed.

Thus there are many factual errors to be found in the historiography of the Berlin Conference. There is however another side to all this as well. When the Conference was convened, politicians and public opinion expected that something important was going to happen. The partition was supposed to be on the agenda. A Dutch newspaper made a comparison between Bismarck and the Pope who in the 15th century divided the world and gave away entire continents. In the same way, the journal continued, 'Bismarck is carving up a continent and in a fair manner gives away empires and states'. This was literally speaking not true.

But what was true, was that the partition was taking place in high speed and under supervision of the European heads of state and government. The misunderstanding was that people thought that the partition took place at Berlin. But there was very little partitioning going on in Berlin. As far as that was concerned, the only thing that happened was that during the conference — but not at the conference, because this was a matter of bilateral diplomacy in the lobbies and not of multilateral diplomacy — a few agreements between European states and the Congo Free State were signed. In actual practice however the partition took place on the shores of Africa and soon was to take place in the interior as well. The results of this were submitted for diplomatic bargaining between the European governments. This became a major preoccupation of European diplomacy in the decade after the Berlin Conference and resulted in what we now know as the ‘Scramble for Africa’.

Between 1885 and 1895 virtually the whole continent of Africa was partitioned and distributed between the European powers. West Africa was essentially a matter of Franco-British and East Africa of British-German agreements. By 1895 this part of the partition was virtually over. Then the partition as well as the century ended with two great and well-known crises: the Franco-British clash over the Upper Nile in 1898, resulting in the spectacular French retreat from Fashoda, and the South African War, ending with the Pyrrhic victory of the British in 1902. The partition of Morocco was only an afterplay, indeed rather more the prologue of the First World War than the epilogue of the Scramble for Africa.

#### THE DEBATE

This of course is a very brief story of what actually happened, but it might be enough of an introduction for a discussion of some topics of the historical debate on the partition and European imperialism in Africa. The first issue of this debate is of course the one about the causes and the chronology of the scramble. This debate essentially comes down to two questions: 1) Why did the scramble take place at the time that it took place? 2) And why did it take place in the way it took place? But there is a preliminary question to this as well, because not all historians agree on the question when the scramble actually did take place. Here the discussion is about the beginning and not so much about the end. That the scramble was over by about 1912 is no matter for discussion. But its beginning is a much more complicated issue. Historians have taken different positions on this. Many years and events have been suggested:

f. ex. 1884, because of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty; or the ratification of the Brazza-Makoko treaties in November 1882; or the British occupation of Egypt earlier that year; or the French occupation of Tunisia in 1881; or the forward policy introduced in French West Africa in 1879. The importance of this debate does of course not lie in the exact date itself but in the fact that every date implies a certain theory about the causes of and the responsibility for the scramble.

If I shall not discuss these problems at great length that is not because I would believe they are not important. On the contrary, I very strongly believe that they are important. But what I would also like to suggest is that one should not overestimate the importance of them. It is perhaps possible to find out what was the very first beginning of the scramble but that does not mean that when we have found that, we also have found its original cause, its *prima causa* as they say in natural philosophy. In mechanics one can indicate the first shock — and all that follows is predictable and can be traced back to it. But history is not like mechanics. Even if we find the original initiative, that says very little about what followed.

Imperialist acquisitions were not the result of one decision, but of a chain of decisions, a chain with at least three links: the local activities and possibilities, the actions and reactions of the government and the attitudes of public opinion, press and parliament. Between these three factors there was a permanent interaction and feedback. One element was useless without the others and, as with all chains, the chain was only as strong as its weakest link.

This is to say that the partitioning process could begin, but also be stopped, at every level. The British explorer Cameron annexed the Congo for the British government in 1874. The only reaction of the Foreign Office was that it was ‘an interesting proposal but of no practical use for our generation’.<sup>47</sup> That was the end of it. Maybe a few years later the French government would have liked to treat Brazza’s annexation of the Congo for France in the same way, but by that time public opinion and parliament in France would not have accepted such an attitude. Thus neither the local nor the metropolitan factor alone was decisive — their interaction was.

Many imperialist operations originated in local initiatives, in local crises, subimperialisms, protonationalisms and what have you. But this does not mean that these initiatives automatically developed into imperialist annexations. They could be stopped by politicians and indeed they were stopped many times. Lord Derby, the British Foreign Secretary,

scorned the ambitions of the Australians who wanted to have about the whole Pacific: 'I asked them whether they did not want another planet all to themselves and they seemed to think it would be a desirable arrangement if only feasible. The magnitude of their ideas is appalling to the English mind'.<sup>48</sup> These subimperialists did not get what they wanted but were stopped by the metropolitan government. On the other hand such governments could do very little when there were no local activities or when there was too much opposition in Parliament.

What I intend to say is that we should be careful with concepts such as 'scramble' and 'partition'. They are not things that existed in reality, but constructions of the mind, historical concepts, interpretations. That is perfectly all right. Historians cannot do without a certain 'realism', in the philosophical sense of the term. But one should realize that precisely because these are constructions of the mind and not processes in reality, there are no laws of causation that link one event to another. Therefore the search for a *prima causa* of the partition is useless.

What, however, we probably could agree upon is a certain chronological scheme or framework. We can then distinguish a first or initial phase from 1879 to 1885; a second stage — the heyday of partition — from 1885 to 1895; and an epilogue from 1895 to 1902 or even 1912 if one prefers to include Morocco. In this sense 1885 was the point of no return. But such a scheme of course is also only an analytical tool, an instrument to better understand a complex reality.

If such a scheme cannot explain why the scramble happened when it happened, it can help us in analyzing the conditions that had to be fulfilled in order to make the partition possible, which is not to say necessary. For example the medical possibilities to survive in Africa had to be created and there had to be the military and technical superiority of Europe to make the price to be paid for the partition an acceptable one. These conditions were not fulfilled in the early 19th century. But there was another condition too, a political one. The two characteristics of the partition period — as compared to earlier and later years — were 1) that there was something for everybody; and 2) that everybody wanted something from Africa. This enables us to determine the time-limits of the partition. The first characteristic disappeared about 1914 — when Africa was partitioned. The second one came only into being after 1870. Before that year the political conditions for such a situation were not fulfilled. Germany and Italy did not yet exist as unified states and France had no motive to get seriously involved in these matters. Thus there was nobody to challenge Britain's informal empire and thus there was no partition.

All this however does not mean that after that the partition had to happen. The things I mentioned were necessary but not sufficient conditions. Politics is the realm of freedom and not of necessity, as the German philosopher Hegel said. Thus, for the rest of the story we have to look at the motives for expansion. That there were many different reasons (political, strategic, economic and others) for various European nations to go into Africa, is obvious. There is such a vast literature on the various motives of European imperialism and it is such a well-known subject that I am not going to discuss it here. Rather than doing that, I shall now move to the other question I mentioned, the one not of chronology but of typology.

The partition was one form of imperialism among others. Thus the question is: why did imperialism in Africa take on this form rather than another? Let us then first see what was typical about imperialism in Africa. In my opinion the most interesting thing about the partition was not that it began, but that it never stopped. Once the partition had begun, one partitioned and partitioned and partitioned until there was nothing left to partition. Why did this happen? The best way to answer this question is perhaps by asking another question: what could have stopped it? There are two possible answers to this: 1) a massive resistance by Africans; or 2) a major international crisis. Both would have raised the price of the partition to an unacceptable level. None of these happened. Why not? Why was Africa partitioned while China was not? Why did the First World War break out because of a Balkans problem and not about Africa?

History is about what happened and not about what did not happen. That is why there are hundreds of books on the partition of Africa and thousands of studies on the causes of the First World War. And that is also why there are practically no studies on the question why China was not partitioned nor on the question why the scramble for Africa did not lead to war between the European powers. These questions are of course in a way unanswerable. Still, such comparisons can help us to understand what happened. The partition of China was very much in the minds of men in the end of the 19th century. It was supposed to be imminent. Politicians spoke of the 'Africanization of China'. But it did not take place. To some extent of course the reason for this was domestic. China was a highly centralized polity, an empire. In Africa there was nothing like that. There only was political fragmentation. But there is another side to it as well: the international situation was different. Russia was on the march in East Asia and approached China over land. As early as the 1890s Japan became an imperial power in her own right. The United

States took an interest in China and preached the Gospel of the Open Door. Nothing of this happened in Africa. Here the Europeans were as it were on their own, among themselves. Here they could re-enact their traditional European policies, in a new and different context.

Thus the partition of Africa was — to paraphrase a famous remark by A.J.P. Taylor — in the ‘best tradition’ of European politics: it was about territorialization, about borders and boundaries. We often speak of the ‘artificial boundaries’ of Africa, but were they more artificial than the European ones? In a way the partition was nothing but the entire European history since the Middle Ages all over again, but then in a very accelerated way: 400 years of history repeated within 30 years time! There was however one big difference: in European history one started with annexations and wars and ended with peace treaties and boundaries and maps. In Africa they started with maps and treaties, and war came later, if it came at all. And if war came, it was not among Europeans but between Europeans and Africans. This explains one of the most curious phenomena of the partition: its peacefulness. Most of the partition took place between 1885 and 1895. That was, as we know, about the most peaceful decade in modern history. In the great statistical study on war by Singer and Small we see for example that in that period there was only one great war (between China and Japan) and one smaller war (between the Congo State and the Arabic slave traders). This is to say that during the partition itself there were practically neither European nor colonial wars.<sup>49</sup>

There are two possible explanations for this strange phenomenon. In the first place there is the danger of a conceptual fallacy: maybe the application of violence as used in Africa did not fit with the criteria of traditional war, was therefore not classified as such and thus not counted. This might be the case but probably only to a very small extent. Another factor is more important. That is that during the heyday of the partition, in Africa itself very little happened. Thus, what these maps showing the partition illustrate is not reality but fiction. They illustrate the agreements on boundaries as made in European chanceries and offices, not the occupation itself. That came later and cannot be dated so easily.

This order of things was very different from European history. It was not so much European history repeated, but European history put upside down. In European history there is first annexation, war, negotiations, peace etc. and finally there are maps that represent the results of this. In Africa one began with maps, but in the beginning these maps represented nothing but themselves. Normally a map is a representation of reality

in some coded form. Not so ‘The Map of Africa by Treaty’. Here there was no reality to be represented. Here, to use that well known expression from the 1960s, the medium was indeed the message.

This explains much of the peacefulness of the 1885–1895 decade: not much happened except on paper. It also explains why the Europeans could so easily avoid getting involved in major conflicts. Territorial questions were settled in advance. Moreover, these were arrangements about regions one did not know and certainly one did not care very much about. All this lightheartedness is perfectly illustrated in a speech by Lord Salisbury, in the House of Lords in 1890, where he said: ‘I will not dwell upon the respective advantages of places which are utterly unknown not only to your Lordships, but to the rest of the white human race’.<sup>50</sup> To quote another famous expression of Salisbury, most of Africa was ‘very light soil’ indeed! The rivalry between Russia and Britain on the North West Frontier was known as ‘the Great Game’. But as compared to Africa, that was not a game but business. In Africa — apart from the Mediterranean — European rivalry never became more than a game.

#### WRITING THE HISTORY OF THE PARTITION

Let me now finally say a few words about the problems of writing the history of the partition of Africa, or at least about my own problems and the way I have tried to solve them. What I have done in my book is to try and analyze the decisions concerning the partition of Africa and the considerations that led to these decisions. In doing so I continued the work done by the many historians who over the last thirty years or so have tried to analyze aspects of the decision making process that led to the partition. I am not sure that we have done this in a satisfactory way, but for the sake of argument, let us for a moment assume that we have done so. Even then immediately a new question comes up: when we have found the answers to these questions, that is to say reconstructed the motives of the statesmen, do we then also know the causes of the partition? Let me, in order not to be too abstract, illustrate this by giving another example of the same sort of question. When we have reconstructed the decisions and patterns of thinking of the German Kaiser and the Russian Czar, of the French President Poincaré and the German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg in 1914, do we then know the causes of the First World War? Obviously the answer is: No. At least that is what most historians believe and that is why they look for ‘deeper causes’ and *forces profondes*.

Jack Gallagher and Ronald Robinson when writing the conclusion of their famous book on Africa and the Victorians, faced the same problem. Their answer to this question was that ‘the subjective views of the British partitioners (...) were one of the many objective causes of the partition itself.’<sup>51</sup> I am full of admiration for this book but I must admit that I do not find this approach very satisfactory and personally I would prefer to put it a little differently. I would say that, when moving from motives and decisions to causes and consequences, we enter into a different field of analysis altogether. The French would call it a different historical *discours*. With most historical problems our discussion is exclusively in terms of causes and consequences. We discuss the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire, the causes of the expansion of Europe, of the rise of the middle class, of the industrial revolution, etc. In analyzing political problems however we often begin with a different type of historical analysis, one in terms of motives and men. In political history we see men trying to change the destiny of the world and we want to understand what they did and why. But this reconstruction of the past as *expérience vécue*, as it was consciously lived by contemporaries, is only one part of the historical explanation. Historians should not only look at the past as it was seen by contemporaries, but also as we see it now, knowing what they did not know and using concepts that they had not heard of.

This type of historical analysis is an anachronistic analysis. We know that by 1885 Britain’s power was already in decline. In 1885 some people in Britain feared and elsewhere hoped that it was, but they did not know. We know that the beginning of the expansion of Europe coincided with a secular trend of economic growth (Braudel’s ‘long 16th century’ or Simiand’s ‘Phase A’). This is a thing neither Columbus nor Vasco da Gama knew — nor would they probably have cared about it. Thus these concepts are anachronistic. Nevertheless these are perfectly acceptable and indeed accepted historical categories.

What I intend to say is that so far we have been discussing one side of the story: men making history. But there is another side to it as well: history making men. In the 18th century Britain became the leader of the world economy. In the 19th century she was for a while the master of the world. Britain got this position — to use the phrase of Dale Carnegie’s well-known success guides — ‘without really trying’. It lost it soon and then tried very hard to get it back. But in vain. The same is true for the Dutch Republic a century earlier. Jean Baptiste Colbert, to give another example, tried very hard to industrialize France, but he failed. A century later the manufactures came into being spontaneously. History is the

result of what people try to do and what time permits, of personal and impersonal forces. The historian's task is to make sense of the past and in doing so he will use both forms of historical explanation, the personal and the impersonal one, the motives-and-men as well as the causes-and-consequences-approach.

When we now look at the partition of Africa, not from the personal but from the impersonal forces perspective, we find not just one but even two different stories, depending on whether the vantage point is primarily political or economic. We also get two different chronologies. Politically speaking the partition was a period of transformation. It was the prelude to colonial rule. Full colonialism came to Africa only about 1914, because only by that time Africa was almost entirely under colonial rule. But the colonial period was a very short one — particularly in the time perspective of a continent where once the cradle of humanity stood. It lasted only half a century. By the 1960s it was virtually over. Short as it may have been, it was a very painful period in African history. The loss of sovereignty and dignity, the subordination to the rule of 'alien races', as our 19th century colleagues used to say, made a sad page in the book of African history. In this respect decolonization was a major change.

Economically speaking however this period does not seem to be such an important phase in European colonialism. As seen from the post-colonial perspective, the colonial period of African history was only a rather unimportant stage in a much longer process. This process brought about the incorporation of Africa into the world economy and the spread of industrial civilization over the continent. From this point of view the partition was not a major episode. The major events came later. The transfer from commercial to economic exploitation took place in the 1920s and these years were more of a watershed than the 1880s. On the other hand, decolonization did not bring an end to this process. As seen from the African perspective dependency and interconnection were continued and, according to some, they became even stronger. From a European perspective, imperialism and colonialism in Africa had always been of a rather marginal importance. Therefore, for Europe also, the decolonization of Africa was by no means a major shock.

Only now and thus rather belatedly I have come to the subject of the Africentric as against the Eurocentric approach to African history and imperialism. This means that the history of the partition of Africa, as I have discussed it here and as I have written about it in my book, is essentially a Eurocentric way of doing this history. I have studied the history of the partition from the point of view of European actions and actors. Is

that acceptable? Should not the history of Africa and thus also the history of the partition of Africa, be written from an African perspective? In other words should one not primarily give weight to the African actors and their decisions? This is a very complicated as well as a very important problem, but one with which I can only deal rather shortly here. Let me therefore simply present my conclusion about it. I think that a history of the partition written from the African perspective would be very interesting, but I also believe that there is room for a history written from the European perspective. I would even go a little bit further and suggest that this last one is perhaps more interesting than the other.

The reason for this is very simple and I can illustrate it by quoting the words that Andrew Roberts wrote in his 'Introduction' to Volume 7 of the *Cambridge History of Africa*, the volume that deals with the period 1905–1940: 'Between these dates', Roberts wrote, 'the history of Africa was more obviously being made by Europeans than by Africans'.<sup>52</sup> In my opinion this is also, and maybe even more so, true for the preceding period, thus the period of the partition.

This is not to deny that Africans played an important role in the partition. They did and they did so in various ways: as brokers and middlemen, as guides and interpreters, and even as soldiers in the European armies, thus in a way as collaborators. But of course there was not only collaboration but also resistance. Famous names such as those of Samori in West Africa, Cethswayo in South Africa, Abushiri in East Africa, the Mahdi in the Sudan or the Negus Menelik of Ethiopia eloquently witness of that. With the exception of Menelik however ultimately the Europeans always had their way. Africa was partitioned according to the agreements European politicians and diplomats made in European chanceries.

Therefore, for the historian, the most important actors in this process were not the Africans but the Europeans. That is to say, if we want a history that tries not just to describe but also to understand what happened. Here a comparison with another historical event of great importance, the history of the persecution of the Jews and of the holocaust, may be illuminating. If one writes the history of that tragedy one should of course give ample attention to what happened to the Jews. But if one wants to understand the holocaust, one should not primarily study the conduct of the Jews but the plans and the actions of the Nazis. This is not to say that the scramble for Africa was something similar to the holocaust but only that in both cases the historian first of all will be interested in the decision makers and not so much in the victims. But what is true for the partition is of course not necessarily true for other episodes of Afri-

can history. On the contrary. Apart from this very short period, during most of their history Africans have been masters of their own destiny, as indeed they are today.

What all this amounts to, I am afraid, is really not more than a truism, viz. that we can look at African history from various perspectives and that in my book and in this article I have presented only one of them.

## Imperialism and the Roots of the Great War

In history textbooks, the period from 1871 to 1914 is known as ‘the age of imperialism.’ In this period, the European powers extended their control over the rest of the world to an extent never seen before. In 1870, Dutch control over the Netherlands Indies was effectively limited to Java and a few outposts on the other islands. French rule in Indochina was virtually negligible while the British were only just beginning to re-establish control of India after the Mutiny of 1857. By 1914, the Europeans ruled over nearly the whole of South and Southeast Asia. Similarly, in 1870 Africa was still largely *terra incognita* for the Europeans. Settlements were limited to South Africa and Algeria although there were a few scattered possessions on the coast of West Africa (as well as the Portuguese territories in Mozambique). However, by 1914, European rule had spread to the entire continent, with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia. At the same time, European influence also grew in the Ottoman Empire, Persia and China.

It seems extraordinary that a period during which the European powers so obviously conquered the world is also generally considered to have been a period of relative tranquillity, sometimes called ‘the age of armed peace.’ This can be explained by the fact that most historical texts have been written by Europeans, and that Europe in fact experienced a period of prolonged peace between 1871 and 1914.

Still, in the imperial hinterlands, wars were constantly being waged — to colonize new areas, and to crush episodic rebellions. The best-known examples of such imperialist conflicts are the Boxer Rebellion in China, the German wars against the Herero people in Southwest Africa, the South African war, and Kitchener’s conquest of the Egyptian Sudan. There were also many other conflicts that received a lot of coverage in the newspapers of the day, but most have long been forgotten. These include the prolonged struggle of the French against the African resistance leader Samori in West Africa, the Maji-Maji wars in East Africa, the French conquest of Madagascar and the Dutch wars against Aceh and Lombok in Indonesia, etc. Moreover, some forms of colonial violence were described as ‘punitive expeditions’ or ‘police actions’. In most

cases, annexation preceded war, because resistance came only later. In these instances, the military operations were not considered to be acts of 'war', but rather campaigns against rebels.

As a result, it is not easy to quantify the military activities that took place during this period. Nevertheless, we do have some statistics at our disposal. In their book *The Wages of War, 1816–1965*<sup>53</sup> the political scientists J.D. Singer and T.M. Small surveyed all the disputes that took place during that period. They classified disputes on the basis of certain criteria, the most important being the number of casualties. They found that ten larger disputes during the period 1871–1914 qualified as a colonial 'wars'. Among these were four British wars (against the Zulu's, against the Mahdists, the Second British-Afghan War of 1878–1880 and the Boer War in South Africa, 1899–1902), two French wars (in Madagascar and Indochina), one Dutch war (in Aceh, North Sumatra), two wars in the Philippines and one Italian war in Ethiopia in 1895–1896. They also specify seven smaller wars. Thus, of all the many military operations only seventeen could be classed as fully-fledged wars

In his book on Britain's *Colonial Small Wars, 1837–1901*<sup>54</sup>, Donald Featherstone describes twenty-two important wars during the period 1871–1900, as well as an apparently infinite number of incidents and skirmishes along the Northwest Frontier of India. The period after 1900, which saw the 'pacification' of Kenya, Nigeria, and the Gold Coast as well as several operations in the Southern Sudan and the Red Sea area, was not much better. A book on the Netherlands Indies Army during the period from 1871 to 1914, provides a colorful list of 'troubles', 'irregularities', 'expeditions', 'disturbances', 'actions', and 'uprisings' in which this army was involved. In all it lists thirty-two operations for the period 1871–1914, even if the thirty years of war in Aceh are considered as one single military operation.<sup>55</sup> There has been no comparable review of French warfare, but there is a French publication by Gabriel Hanotaux and A. Martineau entitled *Histoire des colonies* (1930), in which about 40 colonial operations and campaigns are described.

Overall, it can be concluded that during this period three major colonial powers were involved in at least one hundred colonial military operations.

#### COLONIAL WARS

Several case studies on specific regions offer a more detailed insight into what actually took place. Helga Kjekshus's study of German warfare in

Tanganyika is especially illuminating in this respect.<sup>56</sup> The most important war in Tanganyika was the German campaign waged to suppress the Maji-Maji Rebellion. The rebellion was named after the magic water (maji-maji) that the Africans believed changed bullets into water. This war raged from 1905 to 1907 and because traditional military methods were not effective in dealing with guerrilla warfare, scorched earth tactics were applied on a large scale. By targeting the civilian population in the agricultural regions, particularly during the sowing season, the Germans broke armed resistance by means of starvation. In the fourteen years running up to this major war there had already been 84 military operations classed as 'battles' according to German law. This law, passed 27 June 1871, stipulated that German soldiers involved in an official battle were entitled to a government pension. In Tanganyika, a 'quiet year' thus meant about six battles, that is one every two months, as well as many other violent acts such as burning huts or stealing livestock.

In his article on 'The Politics of Conquest', John Lonsdale paints a similar picture of British activities in western Kenya between 1894 and 1914.<sup>57</sup> In this twenty-year period, there were nearly fifty incidents in Kenya that were so serious that the British thought it necessary to resort to (or at least consider the use of) force. In eleven cases, the British refrained from action because they lacked the necessary military equipment; on two occasions the expedition ended in defeat or retreat; in thirteen cases a display of military power alone was sufficient and on twenty occasions, a punitive military expedition battle ensued. This means that on average during this period the British military engaged in one official battle per year. These data clearly indicate that the conquest and pacification of Africa by Britain and Germany was a continuing process. Not a single year passed without their being a war, in fact not one month passed without there being some kind of violent incident or act of repression.

Some historians have tried to calculate the total loss of human life ensuing from violent encounters between Europeans and the colonized peoples. Up to now, no research has been performed specifically on the period between 1870 and 1914. However, according to the well-known economic historian Paul Bairoch, a reasonable estimate is that between 1750 and 1913 the lives of 300,000 European and 100,000 non-European soldiers were lost in the process of conquering 34 million square kilometres of African and Asian territory and subjecting 534 million people to European rule. The number of lives lost by their opponents is estimated to have been somewhere between 800,000 and 1,000,000.

However, the total number of deaths resulting from the wars and subsequent forced migrations and famines was probably more like a staggering 25,000,000.<sup>58</sup>

Overall, the European armies did not suffer great losses in battle during their campaigns. Eighty to ninety percent of deaths were related to disease and exhaustion rather than to actual combat. The British colonial war theorist Colonel C.E. Callwell rightly called the colonial wars ‘campaigns against nature’<sup>59</sup> and the British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain quipped: ‘The mosquitoes saved the West Africans, not the eloquence of the intellectuals.’<sup>60</sup> Asian and Africans were more likely to die in battle than of disease and exhaustion. However, it is difficult to assess the loss of life accurately because only the Europeans kept records. They recorded the deaths of their own troops but rarely of their opponents, and if they did, only the deaths of warriors and not women or children. As the German poet, Bertold Brecht said, ‘Die im Dunklen sieht man nicht.’

Nevertheless, there are some figures available, for example, on the Maji-Maji Wars. The official German report, which was presented to the Reichstag in 1907, states that 75,000 Africans died. Other estimates, however, suggest that 120,000 to 145,000 died; some even estimated 250,000 to 300,000, which is a huge number for such a relatively small region within Tanganyika. More than ninety percent of some tribes perished. A variation on Tacitus’ famous quote is applicable here: ‘They left a void and called it peace.’

The figures for the British-Zulu War of 1879 are equally staggering. Half of the 50,000 Zulu warriors who fought in this war were either killed (8,000) or wounded (16,000). On the British side, 1,430 white men died and 1,000 ‘Natal Kaffirs’ were killed in a war that had lasted only six months.

It was not only Britain and Germany that conducted wars on such a scale. The Aceh War waged by the Dutch in Indonesia was no less devastating in terms of intensity and casualties. Here also the European casualties were recorded in more detail than those of the opposition forces, in this case the Acehnese. During the entire conflict, 2,000 soldiers of the Netherlands Indies Army were killed in action and another 10,000 died from disease. On the Indonesian side, it is estimated that 60,000 to 70,000 Acehnese were killed and 25,000 died from disease and exhaustion in labor camps. In total, therefore, approximately 100,000 men perished and another 500,000 people were wounded in the Aceh War. As mentioned previously, the Netherlands Indies Army was also involved in

another thirty-one military operations at the time, although these were of far less importance.

The huge discrepancy between European and non-European lives lost in battle can be attributed to the superiority of the European firearms. This is apparent from Hilaire Belloc's famous lines:

Whatever happens, we have got  
The Maxim gun and they have not.

The effectiveness of these weapons was a cause for great pride among European officers, politicians and reporters. A well-known example of how successful these weapons were was the Battle of Omdurman, near Khartoum, in the British campaign against the followers of the Sudanese religious leader known as the Mahdi. As the sun rose on 2 September 1898, battle commenced. At the end of the morning, the British commander, General Horatio Kitchener, put away his binoculars and remarked that 'the enemy had been given a good dusting.' This was an understatement. By 11.30 a.m. nearly 11,000 Mahdists had been killed and another 16,000 wounded. In contrast, the Anglo-Egyptian army counted 48 dead and 382 wounded. Winston Churchill, who took part in the campaign as a journalist and as a soldier, called the battle 'the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians.'<sup>61</sup> The Mahdi's tomb was opened, his nails were taken as souvenirs and the rest of his body was burned. The Mahdi's successor, the Khalifa, escaped and was not seen again until a year later, when he was killed in battle on the 24th of November 1899.

#### PACIFICATION

The most successful way for the colonized peoples to fight the Europeans was to refuse to engage in battle. In regular battle, the superiority of the European firearms was overwhelming. The annihilation of the Mahdi's army illustrates this. A much more successful tactic was guerrilla warfare in which local skills, such as knowledge of the terrain, popular support, being accustomed to the local climate and conditions, gave the indigenous peoples an advantage. Where this was the case, as in Madagascar, Indochina and Morocco, the 'pacification process' took much longer and required far more effort from the Europeans.

The process was called pacification because the aim of these military operations was to create a permanent state of peace by gaining absolute

control. In this respect, these conflicts differed from classical European warfare. The main characteristic of colonial wars was that they were not just instigated to defeat an enemy but were also intended to annex the opponents' territory and to subject the population. The first element that these colonial wars have in common is thus their war aims.

As Clausewitz's famous formula has it 'war is the continuation of politics by other means.' In other words, political aims determine wars. In the 'ordinary' wars in European history, the aims were usually limited. The peace agreements often included ceding territory but usually this would only be about a particular region. In contrast, colonial wars were absolute. The colonial conquerors came to stay. Their aim was the permanent and total subjection of the population — in other words, 'pacification'.

The nature of the aims driving the colonial wars had consequences for the outcome. Normally, a war is said to have been won when the opponent is beaten and accepts the victor's terms. But when is a colonial war won? When is an opponent defeated? How can victory be defined? There were usually no peace conditions and often it was not even known who the opponent actually was. Colonel Callwell drew attention to this problem in his book about what he called *Small Wars*. He claimed that in contrast to 'civilized' wars, in *Small Wars* there were no clear targets, such as a ruler, the seat of government, a capital city or any other large group of people. Callwell exaggerated somewhat, but in many cases the enemy was indeed difficult to identify.

The Europeans not only had to defeat the opposition but also had to make sure that they were, subsequently, accepted as the rulers by the local population. The French generals, Joseph Gallieni and Hubert Lyautey developed a general theory of colonial warfare in which they addressed this issue. They made a distinction between 'slow action', which was aimed at gradually purging the resistance in a particular region while establishing permanent occupation, and 'quick action', which referred to military action against the enemy. Gallieni's and Lyautey's strategy has been summarized as, 'Fight if necessary, but fight as little as possible'. Their own two most famous maxims were, 'To destroy only to reconstruct' and, 'With pacification a great wave of civilization spreads out like an oil slick.'

Unfortunately, the theory was often not born out in practice. The famous British colonial commander, General Sir Garnet Wolseley maintained that in a war against an 'uncivilized nation' (that is, a population without a capital city), your first objective should be the capture of what-

ever they prize most. For Callwell too this was the crux of the matter: 'If the enemy cannot be touched in his patriotism or his honor, he can be touched through his pocket.' This meant that the invaders often resorted to stealing cattle and burning villages, 'and the war assumes an aspect which may shock the humanitarian.'<sup>62</sup>

Sometimes the goal of pacification and civilization turned into an operation of elimination and extermination. The most notorious example of this is the so-called *Vernichtungsbefehl* ('extermination order') issued by General Lothar von Trotha in the German war against the Herero's in Southwest Africa in 1904. In this notorious proclamation, he declared: 'Within the German borders, every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, shall be shot down. No woman or child shall be admitted: I shall send them back to their people or have them shot. These are my words to the Herero people.' It was signed: 'The great general of the all-powerful emperor, Von Trotha.'<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, when the war in Aceh was going badly for the Dutch, a commentator remarked: 'Our policy should no longer be aimed at their assimilation but at their elimination'. In his so-called 'Hun Speech' of 27 July 1900, The German Kaiser said as much to German soldiers participating in the international force being sent to China to quell the Boxer Rebellion: 'No pardon will be given, and prisoners will not be made. Anyone who falls into your hands falls to your sword! Just as the Huns (...) created for themselves a thousand years ago a name which men still respect, you should give the name of German such cause to be remembered in China for a thousand years that no Chinaman (...) will dare to look a German in the face.'<sup>64</sup>

All these statements illustrate the political climate prevailing in Europe, which had become harsher under the influence of social Darwinism. Even such a respectable and wise statesman as the British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury expressed such views: "Eat and be eaten' is the great law of political as of animated nature. The nations of the earth are divided into the sheep and the wolves (...).'<sup>65</sup> Similar views appear in many writings from the decade before the First World War. It was widely assumed that one must prepare oneself for a war that was inevitable in the never-ending struggle for the survival of the fittest among the nations.

During the years of the 'armed peace,' the armies of the great powers apart from Russia did not engage in major warfare in Europe. This meant that the only way to see action and obtain fighting experience was to join the colonial army. Moreover, as the colonial officer also had to be a good administrator there were more skills to learn than fighting alone. Gallieni and Lyautey strongly emphasized this particular aspect of a colonial officer's work. The collection of letters that Lyautey wrote between 1894 and 1899, *Lettres du Tonkin et de Madagascar*, have become a classic example of French colonial literature (Lyautey later became a member of the Académie Française). In these letters, as well as in other publications, he gives a lyrical description of the life of the colonial officer. He describes with obvious pride the results of the 'creative feats' of the colonial leaders: land reclamation, paddy fields, sleepy valleys transformed into hives of activity. How great his satisfaction was may be gathered from his exclamation, 'What nobler task for a man of action!'

There is at first glance little that is heroic or soldierly in this interest in markets and paddy fields, in these 'laborious, thankless and lowly jobs which are the daily and only productive task of the colonial officer,' as Lyautey put it, and in preparing, realizing, and bringing to fruition such peaceful achievements. One may even ask if this work did not divert attention from the soldier's real task of defending his native soil, and have a demilitarizing effect? Lyautey anticipated these questions and answered no. To him, the essential features of the military vocation were its vitalizing and active aspects. These two aspects were present in ample measure. Therefore it was nonsense to suggest that officers serving in the colonies were demilitarized when such manly qualities as initiative, responsibility, and militancy were constantly needed. On the contrary, 'it is the grandeur which colonial warfare alone, understood in that sense, bestows upon life.'

The texts of Gallieni and Lyautey were published in distinguished journals and read by the intellectual elite. French newspaper readers however were more interested in the more spectacular aspects of colonial warfare. Never before had the printed press reached an audience as large as it did in those years. In 1910, the Parisian daily newspaper *Le Petit Journal* sold 835,000 copies a day and the *Petit Parisien* even more at 1,400,000 copies. These popular newspapers featured colorful, full-page illustrations of the heroic feats of the French colonial armies. For example, the struggle with the river pirates in Indochina, the execution of the

rulers of Madagascar, the battle against the female soldiers of the King of Dahomey and the entrance of General Dodds into their capital, the conquest of Morocco, etc. Novelists also wrote about the colonial world and military glory. Rudyard Kipling is of course the best-known English apologist and prophet of Western expansion and the British Empire. A less well-known but very successful and famous writer in his day, was the French author Ernest Psichari, grandson of the great scholar and writer Ernest Renan, who was a colonial soldier. In his novels, he idolized the colonial army whose deeds in the tropical forests of Central Africa and the immeasurable plains of the North African desert seemed to embody the great French traditions that were absent in urban France. In his work, he merges heroism, exoticism and nationalism to produce a lyrical hymn praising the colonial soldiers who do not indulge in the materialistic and decadent urban life-style of France but live an austere life of devotion and self-sacrifice in the colonies overseas.

Colonial warfare also influenced military thinking. Although there was peace in Europe during these years, there was an international arms race. The costs were so high that the Russian Tsar convened an international conference in The Hague, in 1899, to see whether the ongoing increase of armaments could be stopped or at least reduced. The conference took place and some decisions were taken: for example, a Permanent Court of Arbitration, was set up. However, the arms race continued. Another conference followed in 1907 — but still the arms race went on. At the same time, disarmament fell into disfavor. The Russian Foreign Minister Isvolsky called disarmament ‘a craze of Jews, socialists and hysterical women.’<sup>66</sup> Military experts studied the wars that were being waged, especially the Boer War in South Africa (1899–1902) and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05. According to the experts, these wars confirmed the theory that willpower and moral fibre were the most vital qualities in war and that, therefore, an offensive attitude was all important.

The colonial wars supported this theory. Callwell’s book on small wars argues for offensive warfare that is directed toward breaking the morale of the opponent. This effect should be achieved by means of a combination of strength and bluff. The commanding officers must continually seek and hold the initiative. They must fight — not manoeuvre: ‘the enemy must not only be beaten. He must be beaten thoroughly.’ Ultimately, a colonial war is a psychological battle that must respond to the nature of the colored peoples: ‘This is the way to deal with Asiatics — to go for them and to cow them by sheer force of will.’

This view, widespread in Europe at the time, gave the strong the moral right to subject the weak, who were by definition inferior. Colonial wars were not only exciting — they were justified. More important, colonial wars were nearly always successful and the colonial armies were therefore almost always triumphant. Of course, there were some exceptions such as the British defeat at Isandlwana and the Italian humiliation at Adowa, but these incidents were rare. As a rule the colonial armies came, saw, and conquered.

There are striking similarities between the ideas expressed by the colonial war theorists and the ideas of the great military theorists of the pre-World War I period. Lyautey's colonial warfare theory that 'passive defence can only lead to being overrun' differs little from Ferdinand Foch's claim that 'passive defence cannot avert defeat.' Similarly, Colonel Callwell's statement that, 'moral effect ranks almost before material gain,' is echoed by Colonel Grandmaison's remark that 'moral factors are not the most important; they are the only ones that matter in war.'

There was also another important and tangible link between the colonial wars and the Great War. Colonel Grandmaison had been Gallieni's adjutant in Tonkin. The British generals Allenby and Wilson had studied under the English theorist of guerrilla warfare Miller Maguire. Some of the best-known generals from the colonial wars, such as Kitchener, Gallieni, and Lyautey, later became Ministers of War during the First World War. Joffre had been with Gallieni in Madagascar before he became the first colonial officer to be appointed head of the French General Staff. Within the first months of the war, he nominated many 'colonial' officers to high positions: Mangin, Franchet d'Esperey and others. In his view, these were the best-equipped men for the job as they had practical experience of warfare.

Soon the ideas about moral factors and the offensive spirit were put to the test. The First World War was characterized by large-scale offensives accompanied by massive slaughter. This strategy was directly related to the colonial belief that willpower and morale were the decisive factors in war. As Foch said, 'Victoire égale volonté'. This belief that victory is achieved by breaking the will of the enemy is based on a number of assumptions both psychological and philosophical. However, these beliefs were supported by expert analyses of imperial conflicts and colonial wars.

At the same time, colonial military novels presented a romantic view of the military life. Colonial wars took place in a world of exoticism and heroism. War was difficult and harsh but the rewards were rich. These

writings painted an image of war that made it possible, fifty years after the Battle of Solferino, again to believe in the glory of war. In this way, the 'small wars' in the colonies paved the way for the Great War.

The colonial armies were accustomed to continually mounting attacks regardless of the chance of success, in order to sustain an image of European superiority. It is not difficult to see the connection between this approach and the predominant mentality of the generals of the 1914–1918 war, who valued willpower, moral fibre, and bold attack. However, the First World War infantrymen soon discovered that machine guns and barbed wire were not as easily subdued as the poorly armed Asians or Africans.

As V.G. Kiernan ruefully wrote in *The Lords of Human Kind*: 'Their generals in the rear, many of them with minds still farther away in the Asian or African campaigning grounds of their youth, could not be got to see the point.'<sup>67</sup>

## Migration and Decolonization: the Case of The Netherlands

The expansion of Europe meant many things to many people. It included the expansion of the European economy into a world economy. It brought with it the expansion and interaction of ideas, values, habits and life styles. It led to the expansion of European state power over vast portions of Asia and Africa. And it included many other things as well. But the expansion of Europe was first and foremost the expansion of people.

During the course of the great world historical process that began in the 1490s with the voyages of Columbus and Vasco da Gama and ended in the 1960s with the end of empire, millions of people travelled or were transported to various parts of the world. Millions of Europeans moved to the New World, sometimes as indentured labor, later on and more often as emigrants. Six million Africans were shipped as slave labor across the Atlantic to the Caribbean and parts of the Americas. Europeans founded settler colonies in North and South Africa. Chinese people spread all over South-East Asia as well as over some regions of Africa and America. In the wake of decolonization millions of people from the former tropical colonies, both whites and non-whites, found their way to Europe.

These are all well-known facts but when one goes a little deeper into them, one is confronted with many questions and problems that, surprisingly, have hardly been studied — questions, for example concerning the exact numbers in these movements. At first sight this simply seems to be a matter of archival research, but it is not all that easy. The figures are often very difficult to trace back, and many questions of methodology and terminology arise. Also important and difficult to answer are questions concerning the motivations for departure — such as push and pull factors — and the adaptation to the new circumstances. Indeed there are many other questions as well. Thus, when in 1986 the European Science Foundation (ESF) founded a Network for the History of European Expansion and whose goal was to study European expansion from a long-term perspective and in a comparative way, one of the first issues to be

studied was the subject of migration and expansion. Research groups were set up, conferences were organized and all these activities resulted in a number of publications.

The first of these was a general book of essays under the title *European Expansion and Migration* edited by Pieter Emmer and Magnus Mörner.<sup>68</sup> The book dealt with the entire classical period of European expansion, that is to say from the fifteenth to the twentieth century and with all types of emigration, including also some forms that were not related to colonialism. Thus the Scandinavian, German and Italian emigration, basically an emigration to America, also received attention. Although the early period was also dealt with, the emphasis of this volume was on the nineteenth century.

The book had some interesting conclusions. One of the editors, Pieter Emmer, pointed out that the European participation in intercontinental migration was very high and amounted to 80 percent of the total.<sup>69</sup> Even today the emigration of Europeans is higher than that from the other continents. Another of Emmer's conclusions was that Europe had benefited from it in many ways: The emigrants lived longer and better than their fellow Europeans who stayed behind, while they were also relieving the population pressure that resulted from the strong demographic growth in Europe.

As the emigration of the Ancien Régime was somewhat neglected in that volume it was decided that a special volume should be devoted to this subject alone. This resulted in an important book of essays, edited by Nicholas Canny under the title *Europeans on the Move. Studies on European Migration, 1500–1800*.<sup>70</sup>

While much was known about European migration in the period before the end of Empire, it became increasingly clear that we knew relatively little of the so-called return migration to Europe, which took place after decolonization. It is of course well-known that there was such a movement. Colonial civil servants, military men and other Europeans connected to the colonial system returned to the motherland, as also did colonists, like the Portuguese from Angola and Mozambique and even more famously or infamously the French *pieds noirs*. There were also the many colored people holding European passports and living in the West Indies and elsewhere, who came to Europe.

The problem here is not only that little research has been done, but also that statistics are often lacking because there was little interest in these matters when they were taking place, that is to say during the period of decolonization. There are also problems of definitions, due,

among other things, to the fact that an initial migration to Europe was sometimes followed by a later return migration to the colonies and then, finally, again by a definitive migration to the metropolis. There are also phenomena like the return of Greek emigrants that would easily escape attention because Greece never was a colonial power. The research group that was set up presented its results in 1994 in a book published in French, *L'Europe retrouvée. Les migrations de la décolonisation*, edited by Jean-Louis Miège and Colette Dubois.<sup>71</sup>

#### MIGRATION AND DECOLONIZATION: FACTS AND FIGURES

The book offers some fundamental research and as far as I know it is the first to give exact numbers and figures on the migration movements that resulted from or were connected with decolonization, not only for the colonial powers but also for other nations like Greece. The chapter on the Netherlands was written by Herman Obdeijn. I would first like to present some of his quantitative data before discussing the social, political and psychological results of decolonization and return migration for the Netherlands.

As I have already said about figures in general, one is surprised to see how difficult — even in our contemporary age of statistics and computers — it is to come up with reliable answers to such simple questions as: How many people came to Holland as a result of decolonization? When? From where? Et cetera. The basic facts, however, are simple. The Netherlands possessed two colonies: the East and the West Indies. The East Indies, which is now known as Indonesia, was of course by far the most important of these possessions. The total population of Indonesia before the Second World War amounted to some 60 million people. There were three official categories of population: the Europeans, the so-called “Foreign Orientals” (such as the Chinese and the Indians) and the indigenous. The group of Europeans that amounted to about 300,000 people included also the Japanese, a small number of Chinese and some Indonesians, as well as Germans and British (see figure 1).

Figure 1 Population of the Netherlands Indies According to the 1930 Census

'Europeans'	240,417
of whom:	2,400 British
	6,900 Germans
	7,200 Japanese
	8,948 'Assimilated' Indonesians
	300 'Assimilated' Chinese
	241,669 Dutch and others
'Foreign Orientals'	1,339,000
of whom:	1,233,000 Chinese
	106,000 Indian, Arabic and others
'Indigenous'	59,138,000
Total	60,717,417

Source: *Census of the Netherlands Indies, 1930*

The majority of these, however, were Dutch. But there was 'Dutch' and 'Dutch', and the majority (170,000) of the 'Dutch' in Indonesia were in reality those of mixed blood. They were known as Indo-Europeans. The majority of them returned to the Netherlands after decolonization, although return is perhaps not exactly the right term because the great majority of them (75 percent) had been born in the East and most of them had never previously seen the Netherlands. Altogether some 280,000 of these people came to the Netherlands, mostly between 1945 and 1963. As I have already said, the statistical evidence is by no means impeccable, but I do not want to go into the technical details of these calculations and would rather prefer to simply accept the figures given by Obdeijn which, on the whole, are the most reliable figures we have (see figure 2).

#### THE MOLUCCAN QUESTION

One particular group of immigrants from Indonesia were not Europeans but belonged to the indigenous population. They are known as the Moluccans. Their coming to the Netherlands can only be explained by their historical role in the Netherlands Indies and by the policy followed by the Dutch government with relation to Indonesia's independence.

Figure 2 Immigrations into the Netherlands from the Former Dutch Colonies

	Netherlands Indies	Moluccan Isles	Surinam	Dutch Antilles
1945-1949	45,000			
1950-1951	68,000	12,500		
1952-1957	72,000			
1958-1963	70,000			
1964-1969	15,000			
before 1966			13,000	
1966-1970			9,000	
1969-1980	10,000			
before 1972				10,000
1971-1974			48,000	3,000
1975			40,000	1,700
1976-1980			37,000	12,000
1981-1985			9,000	9,000
1986-1990			22,000	21,000
Total	280,000	12,500	178,000	56,700

Source: Herman Obdeijn, 'Vers les bords de la Mer du Nord. Les retours aux Pays-Bas induits par la décolonisation' in Miège/Dubois eds., *L'Europe retrouvée*, pp. 49-74.

By the Linggadjati Agreement of 15 November 1946, the Netherlands recognized the Republic of Indonesia as the government which exercised *de facto* power over Java and Sumatra. But Indonesia consisted of many other regions as well, and in various parts of the huge archipelago Dutch power had already been re-established at an early stage. Wishing to maintain its influence in Indonesia in so far as possible, the Netherlands' government found it necessary to restrict the power of the Republic and by means of the so-called 'federal solution': Indonesia would become a federation, in which the Republic of Indonesia (consisting of Java and Sumatra) would be no more than one state among others. Numerous states were to be created (eventually there were sixteen) and the whole federation together would form the United States of Indonesia, which in turn would be linked to the Netherlands by the Dutch Indonesian

Union. At the time of independence, sovereignty was handed over to these 'United States of Indonesia'.

Predictably, the nationalist movement of the Republic considered the Dutch federal policy simply as a strategy of 'divide and rule'. They were therefore not particularly inclined to respect the federal structure and, immediately after the transfer of sovereignty, a strong drive towards unification developed, which found a general echo among the people of Indonesia. The Moluccans, however, who lived in the Federal State of East Indonesia showed a decided resistance to the loss of their independent rule to the government of the Republic. When it became obvious that the Federal State of East Indonesia was to be eliminated, the Moluccans set up the Republic of the South Moluccans on the island of Ambon on 25 April 1950. Many fierce battles were fought until eventually the area was occupied during 1950–1951 by the central Indonesian government.

The resistance of the Moluccans arose from their historical ties with the Dutch government. They had long provided many of the soldiers for the Netherlands Indies Army. At the time of the Moluccan uprising this army had practically been disbanded, but there were still 4,000 Moluccan soldiers awaiting discharge. Understandably they did not want to submit to the Indonesian government fearing that they would be considered traitors, and a Dutch judge ruled that they could not legally be forced into this position. The Moluccans wished to move to New Guinea (at that time still a Dutch possession, and now known as Irian Barat) or Ceram, one of the Moluccan islands which continued to fight the central government. But neither alternative was acceptable to the Indonesian, nor therefore to the Dutch government. The only remaining choice for these people was to depart for the Netherlands, a decision taken in February 1950.

I shall return to the subject of the integration, or rather the lack of it, of the Moluccans into Dutch society, later, as I would first like to finish the statistical overview and give the figures for the West Indies. The Dutch West Indies included two parts, Surinam, or Dutch Guyana, on the South American continent, and the Dutch Antilles, in the Caribbean. In every respect their importance was very small as compared to the East Indies and particularly in so far as population is concerned. The total population of Surinam in 1971 was approximately 385,000 people and of the Netherlands Antilles approximately 250,000. There was massive immigration into the Netherlands from Surinam in the 1970s. It was hoped that this would come to a halt with the coming of Surinamese independence in 1975. But this was not to happen. The Surinamese emi-

gration continued and was reduced only after 1980 by some new restrictive measures by the Dutch. The Antilles have continued to be part of the kingdom of the Netherlands, and a continuing emigration is taking place from there into the Netherlands although this is largely only for temporary reasons, like study and temporary employment.

An element which had less to do with decolonization than with general economic and demographic developments after 1945, was the opposite phenomenon, that of an important emigration from the Netherlands, particularly in the 1950s. About 150,000 people left the country. They did not go to the overseas possessions and former colonies but went mostly to America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In 1960, with the beginning of the economic boom in Europe, this movement came to a rather abrupt standstill.

In conclusion we can say that from the present-day Dutch population of some 15 million people, approximately 407,000 immigrated from the former colonies while another 405,000 are descendants of these. The geographical breakdown of this group is to be seen in figure 3.

*Figure 3 Dutch Citizens Having a Link with one of the Former Dutch Colonies*

	Dutch East Indies	Moluccan Archipelago	Surinam	Dutch Antilles
Country of birth	250,000	40,000	87,000	28,000
Country of birth of at least one parent	175,000	10,000	163,000	59,000
Total	425,000	50,000	250,000	87,000

Source: Obdeijn, 'Vers les bords de la Mer du Nord', p. 71.

Let us now have a look at the way these immigrants were received in the Netherlands and discover what happened to them.

#### RETURN AND RE-ADAPTATION

I shall begin with one group that I have not yet mentioned because, strictly speaking, they were not immigrants although they also returned from the Indies. This is the group of some 100,000 conscripts who had served in the Indies during the process of decolonization. Little is known about their adaptation at home. No doubt their overseas expe-

riences have affected these men, generally very young, who had seen guerrilla warfare, had been in contact with an alien society, and borne isolation and enforced idleness. Occasionally, stories of incidents and excesses came to light, but there was never any question of a public discussion of — let alone an inquiry into — the conduct of the soldiers in the Indies. Nor was any general concern shown as to their reception and re-adaptation at home. Perhaps the most marked result of their service in the East Indies is the popularization of Indonesian dishes in the Netherlands. There had, of course, always been returned expatriates, but they were too few and too localized to influence Dutch eating habits. The influx of some 100,000 people from the Indies brought with it a passion for Indonesian food and Indonesian restaurants. Nasi (fried rice), bami (noodles) and loempiah's (egg-rolls) have become an integral part of Dutch culture. Once or twice a week many Dutch housewives prepare an Indonesian meal (or what she believes to be such a meal) and there are now over 2000 Chinese-Indonesian restaurants to be found throughout the country.

A second, even larger, body of repatriates were the Indonesian Dutch of which I already have given some general figures. They came in waves, the first of which occurred between 1945 and 1948. Members of the first group, in many cases, came to the Netherlands for rest and rehabilitation, but did not intend to remain there. The second wave, which developed in 1949–1951 as a result of the transfer of sovereignty, consisted mainly of civil servants and military personnel. Neither they nor the group arriving between 1952 and 1955 proposed to return to the East. The latter, somewhat lower in social status than the earlier repatriates, were often Eurasians or Europeans who had never been in the Netherlands; these people had waited to see which way the wind would blow. A fourth and last wave came in 1957/58 as a result of the Indonesian nationalization of Dutch businesses. Included in this group were the *spijtoptanten*, those who had at first opted for the Indonesian nationality, but subsequently felt that they were not treated as full citizens, and so came to Holland, having *spijt van*, that is to say regretting their initial option.

Little is known about how these people fared. Economically, hardships were few: Jobs were easy to find in these years of increasing prosperity. Socially, however, the repatriates encountered many problems, such as the loss of status and the difficulties of adaptation to a different and often simpler way of life, apart from adapting to our cold climate. The greatest difficulties were probably experienced by the 'stayers'-Dutchmen born and raised in the Indies — to whom the Netherlands

was an unknown foreign country. They included many Eurasians who had problems in finding social acceptance as they also had had within the framework of the colonial society. In contrast, the higher-ranking, academically-trained colonial civil servants had few problems. These mostly took up satisfactory second careers in the Netherlands' civil service, administration, judiciary and universities. Their numbers, however, were very small.

The fate of the third group, the Moluccans, was very different. It was presumed that the Moluccans would only remain in the Netherlands temporarily, as is obvious from the fact that the 4,000 families, 12,500 people in all, were housed in camps. This group, therefore, stayed together in the camps, was cared for by the government, was not permitted to work and remained completely isolated from Dutch society, awaiting a return to Indonesia and dreaming of an independent republic. In the 1950s, this situation began to change. Increasing prosperity made it possible for the Moluccans to take part in the work process, a return to the East Indies became less realistic as the relationship with Indonesia deteriorated. Instead of the camps, residential areas in various Dutch towns were made available for housing. This group of Moluccans, about 90 percent of whom are Christians and belong to the Evangelical Moluccan Church, now numbered 32,000. They enjoyed the benefits of a flourishing economy and an emerging welfare state. Nevertheless, the nucleus of the problem remained. The Dutch government considered the Moluccan question to be a social problem, a matter for the Minister of Social Welfare. The Moluccans considered it as a political problem, the responsibility of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In 1975, impatient with the attention of social workers only, they turned to more up-to-date methods of terrorism. On three occasions, in 1975, 1977 and 1978, they occupied a school, a train, an embassy, a consulate and a county house, killing several people in the process. The Dutch government developed unexpectedly successful tactics — persuasion, exhaustion and military power — to end these actions. Dumbfounded, the Dutch watched their television screens, as jets dived over one of their trains and tanks attacked one of their schools. The indiscriminate killing of Dutch citizens did indeed draw attention to the cause of the Moluccans but hardly gained public sympathy for it. The result of these activities is that the Moluccan question is now considered more seriously, but not that their political aims have been accepted by the Dutch government.

The first Moluccan terrorist action occurred in 1975, the same year in which immigration from Surinam reached its zenith, in anticipation

of the colony's independence which was to be granted in November 1975. Thereafter the Surinam people could indeed enjoy the vast sums in development aid which the Netherlands were to pay as an alimony in this divorce, but they could no longer expect the extremely favorable social benefits available to Dutch citizens. The lure of these fabulous payments was great. In 1973, 11,000 Surinamese came to the Netherlands, in 1974 almost 18,000 came and in 1975, when independence was breathing down their necks, nearly 40,000 bought oneway tickets to Amsterdam Airport. At least, the Dutch felt not without some relief, there could never come more than 385,000 immigrants, since that was the total population of Surinam. By 1975, a total of 115,000 Surinamese had settled in the Netherlands. Not only was this a very large group for such a densely-populated country — it just about compensated for the total emigration of the 1950s — but it also involved a group of easily recognizable colored people. The Dutch realized in 1975 that they had in their midst not only a dissatisfied Moluccan population — 32,000 strong — but also over 100,000 potentially dissatisfied and poorly-adapted Surinamese. The 280,000 repatriated Indonesian-Dutch had been smoothly assimilated into Dutch society. But now it suddenly became clear that the inheritance of the colonial past also included some 150,000 colored inhabitants. This belated discovery that the Netherlands had become a multi-racial, or as we now say a multicultural, society caused the country its first true imperial hangover.

It is apparent that decolonization had several unfavorable effects in the Netherlands' collective psychology.<sup>72</sup> Various sectors of commerce recovered only partially or not at all from the shock; the trauma of the loss of Empire had a negative influence on Dutch politics; failure to settle the Moluccan question has saddled the country with a dangerous inheritance. On the whole, however, the shock was absorbed without too much trouble. The feared economic disintegration never occurred; on the contrary, prosperity increased as never before. Adaptation to the new state of international affairs proceeded fairly smoothly. The assimilation of 280,000 Indonesian Dutch was barely noticed. When in 1969 the economic historian Henri Baudet published an article about 'The Netherlands after the Loss of Empire', he could justifiably argue that, for the Dutch, colonization appeared to be a turned page, the past, a closed book.<sup>73</sup>

Ten years later, however, the picture looked somewhat different. In the course of the 1970s, there were several crude reminders of the imperial past, not only the activities of the Moluccans and the arrival

of the Surinamese but, even earlier, heated discussions on the behavior of Dutch troops in Indonesia. Until then the history of the Dutch war in the Indies had received virtually no attention at all: no institute, no television series, no scholarly articles, official or unofficial. In contrast to the stream of literature about the Second World War, there existed only a few unread novels and some forgotten memoirs. Colonial history was also out of favor: At the universities, it attracted very few students. In short there existed no historical view of colonization and decolonization; no-one needed it; it was the past, but it had not become history. It had simply been pushed aside, obliterated, wiped out. Of course many war veterans knew that many atrocious things had happened, but only a few of them had actually fouled their hands with these acts. The rest knew what had happened, but they kept quiet and accepted no criticism from outsiders. There was in fact almost no criticism.

In 1969, public opinion was shocked by the so-called Hueting affair. The Hueting affair developed from a television programme on 17 January 1969 in which a veteran of the colonial war, the psychologist J.E. Hueting, revealed details of excesses by Dutch troops in Indonesia. This really was a bomb-shell, and reactions ranged from angry denials by former soldiers to demands that the guilty should stand trial. The government did what it had to do: It ordered an investigation. The report, which appeared very quickly, was vague and said little, restricting itself to recording a few incidents. These affairs like other ones illustrate the *crises de conscience* which appeared so frequently in the Netherlands in the 1970s — but not only in the Netherlands. The entire western world was to learn this need for adaptation, purification and catharsis, with Vietnam and Watergate as the symbols of moral issues in foreign and domestic politics.

These developments also affected the historical profession. In the Netherlands, the interest for the colonial past was to develop slowly, but since the 1970s, the interest among students for this subject has definitely been growing. At least some fifty overseas history specialist in work at Dutch universities and research institutes. There also is a constant stream of Ph.D. students and post-docs. The number of publications is vast and many historians reach a wider audience with books that are accessible to the general public.

This is not to say that the colonial past has now been digested. On the contrary, on various occasions, for example with the case of a former defector of the Netherlands Army in the Indies who wanted to come to the Netherlands, or with the official state visit of the Queen to Indonesia in 1995, the sentiments immediately became very heated again, and for a

time public opinion was concerned by some aspect or other of the colonial past and the decolonization period. The same is true for the history of the Second World War and the German occupation. We see similar developments in France à propos of the Algerian War of decolonization and the process of Maurice Papon. And in America concerning the Vietnam War. The past needs much time to become history.



# European Identities





## What is Europe?

Words like *Europe* and *European* are used daily by millions of people in a completely routine-like way, rather more unconsciously than consciously, thus suggesting that everybody knows what they mean, that we all know what is European and what is not, where Europe begins and where it ends. But this is not the case at all. On the contrary, the concepts are unclear and ill-defined. Indeed they might well be indefinable. This is indeed a curious situation, but it was not a problem before 1989 when the world was simple and Europe was conveniently divided into a free, democratic and prosperous Western Europe and a subjugated, totalitarian and stagnating Eastern part of it. Now, however, things are no longer so simple and the question of what Europe actually is has become a problem and will increasingly become a problem in the future.

Therefore we should now ask ourselves the question of whether the old and rather vague notions about Europe and the Europeans, notions with which we have lived for the past half century or so, are still valid. The basic assumptions of the last fifty years were that Europe in fact meant Western Europe, including only the western half of Germany, and that this 'little Europe' would, as it were, automatically become ever more united so that eventually we would all become Europeans rather than Germans, Italians et cetera. These two basic assumptions are now in question. Europe will not be the federal Europe dreamt of in the philosophy of some European idealists. Whatever the future of the European Union might be, it will be very different from the idea of a United States of Europe. What is also clear is that, however small or big it becomes, it will certainly be — and indeed already is — considerably more extensive than the original Europe of the Six, the Nine or the Twelve. The question of 'What is Europe?' is therefore of great importance. When we use the word Europe, are we then referring to a geographical, a social, an economic or a cultural entity? What are its borders? Is our civilization a European civilization or rather a Western one, incorporating also America into its fold?

Obviously Europe is primarily a geographical expression denoting one of the five continents. But here there is an important difference with

continents like America, Africa, and Australia, that are surrounded by oceans and seas: between Europe and Asia there is no clear geographical boundary. The Germans have an expression: 'Asia begins at Vienna' (*Asien fängt an in Wien*). The famous Dutch historian Huizinga went even further when he declared that Asia begins east of the line that can be drawn from Groningen to Maastricht (Groningen is known for its natural gas and Maastricht for its treaty). Surely we cross a border there, if only from the world of blankets and sheets to the world of sumptuous eiderdowns, but whether this is the border between Europe and Asia is open to debate. Anyway, eiderdowns have now become fashionable in Western Europe as well.

It was General de Gaulle who coined the expression 'Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals'. But what he had in mind when using this phrase remains a mystery. Certainly the Urals have never functioned as a border between Europe and Asia. Nor for that matter has the Aegean Sea. The Greeks have lived on both sides of that sea from times immemorial, as the Turks later came to do. For centuries the Asian peoples have invaded Europe, as we remember from our schooldays, when we learnt about Attila and the Huns. And we must not forget the Russians who subsequently colonized all over Asia, ending up in Vladivostok on the Pacific.

So, what we understand by the word Europe is not a geographical unity. Nor is it a political or economic one. In fact Europe has never been a unity — neither politically nor economically. On the contrary, Europe has always been, if anything, a continent of political divisions and economic rivalry between nation-states. Thus the words 'Europe' and 'European' can only refer to something cultural. Here, however, we enter into a very difficult field where the possibilities for myths and mystifications are legion. Let us therefore try to agree on some basic facts.

What we typically understand when we talk of European civilization is essentially the civilization of Western and Central Europe. And the common denominator for these parts of Europe is that they were once part of the Latin Christian Church and shared the experience of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment — that is the Scientific Revolution and Rationalism. They thus developed a new type of society and civilization, one that we might call modern civilization. This new order of things was strongly influenced and revolutionized by the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th century. But its foundations were laid down much earlier, in the 16th century in fact, by what an American economic historian with the very Dutch name of Jan de Vries has ingeniously called 'the industrious revolution'. This brought about a new social pattern

which systematically aimed at maintaining and improving the standard of living and the quality of life of the community.

If this analysis is indeed correct, it has two consequences. First, that European civilization is not limited to Europe only, because it was exported to the new worlds of America and Australia. Secondly, that not the whole of Europe is European in this sense of the term. It is not clear where exactly the dividing line lies, but roughly speaking it would run from Kaliningrad to Sofia. East of that line we enter a different world, a world that has not shared in the above mentioned experiences.

Clearly, then, it is not only as a consequence of World War II and the Cold War that the western part of Europe has entered into a process of creating an economic and political union. There is a more fundamental basis for this in the historical background as described above. It is also for that very reason that the entry of countries like Poland, Hungary and Czechia into the European Union was a logical development. The 'Europe 1992' schedule has been overthrown by the dynamics of the political revolution of 1989–1990. To give priority to the deepening of the European Community rather than to the enlargement of it — to put the options in Euro-jargon — would be like giving priority to embellishing the rich suburbs rather than extinguishing the fires that are burning in the old and poor neighborhoods. It would not only be unfair but also unwise to do so if only because we have anyway to rethink our traditional ideas about the future of the European Union and the growth of a European identity.

Many historians are actively involved in discussing these issues. Some historians like Tony Judt have argued that the idea of admitting the countries of Central Europe is a 'grand illusion', because it will dramatically change the future of the European Union and is based on a false interpretation of European history. Others go in a very different direction. They consider not only Central but also Eastern Europe as an integral part of a future European Union. Others would like this Europe also to include Turkey. They accept that the conditions in that country would have to change considerably and that there are great economic difficulties connected to its entry into the European Union. But they also argue that essentially Turkey is part of Europe and thus belongs to the European Union. The argument that there exists an unbridgeable gap between the Islamic culture of Turkey and the classical and Christian one of Europe, as the leaders of the Christian-Democratic parties have often argued, is considered as unrealistic. Both civilizations, they say, stem from the same tree.

Following this line of argument one could also plead for the entry of North Africa and the Middle East into the European Union, and indeed some intellectuals have done so. That also is an answer to the question: 'What is Europe?', but it is certainly not the answer the founding fathers of Europe had in mind when they asked themselves the same question. And it is probably also not what the political leaders of France and Germany have in mind now. A Europe that would extend itself to Vladivostok and Pakistan in the East and to the Sahel and Sudan in the South is hardly European at all. So, it seems about time to ask ourselves the question what Europe really is or should be. The issue is too important to leave it to politicians only.

## Realism and Utopianism

Some twenty years ago, in 1988, the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher delivered her famous Bruges Speech. In this, among other things, she said the following: ‘To try to suppress nationhood and concentrate power at the centre of a European conglomerate would be highly damaging and would jeopardise the objectives we seek to achieve. Europe will be stronger precisely because it has France as France, Spain as Spain, Britain as Britain, each with its own customs, traditions and identity. It would be folly to try to fit them into some sort of identikit European personality. Some of the Founding Fathers of the Community thought that the United States of America might be its model, but the whole history of America is quite different from Europe. People went there to get away from the intolerance and constraints of life in Europe. They sought liberty and opportunity and their strong sense of purpose has, over two centuries, helped to create a new unity and pride in being American, just as our pride lies in being British or Belgian or Dutch or German.’<sup>74</sup>

When saying this she was, of course, simply echoing what General de Gaulle had said nearly thirty years earlier at an equally famous press conference:

‘I do not believe that Europe can be a living reality if it does not encompass France with her French, Germany with her Germans, Italy with her Italians and so on. Dante, Goethe, Chateaubriand do belong to the whole of Europe for the very reason that they were pre-eminently Italian, German and French. They would not have meant so much for Europe if they had been *apatrides* and had thought and written in some sort of ‘integrated’ Esperanto or Volapük.’<sup>75</sup>

De Gaulle later repeated the same message in a television interview with Michel Droit in which he said:

‘Of course we can jump on our chairs and dance and shout “Europe! Europe! Europe!”, but that does not mean anything and

it does not bring us anywhere. Therefore I say once more: We have to take things as they are. How are they? There is a nation France. This cannot be denied. It exists. There is a nation Germany. This cannot be denied. It exists. There is a nation Italy, a nation Belgium, a nation Holland and, somewhat further away, a nation England and a nation Spain. Nations they are. They have their history, they have their language, they have their way of life.<sup>76</sup>

Both statesmen were right. The creation of the Common Market, the European Community and even the European Union has not brought about the end of the nation-state. We cannot really imagine a Europe in which there would no longer be a Germany, a France or a Holland. The idea of a process in Europe following the same pattern as that which led to the creation of the United States is clearly an illusion. As the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt wrote some years ago in an article in *Die Zeit*: 'It is about time to finally recognize that Charles de Gaulle was right with his concept of a *Europe des patries*'. Now, De Gaulle never used the term *l'Europe des patries*. He actually said *l'Europe des Etats*, which is indeed more correct, although such nuances are not very important in this context. What all three politicians intended to say is that the original federalist approach to Europe was an illusion. And in this they are undoubtedly right.

Thus, at first sight, it looks as if the federalists are the utopianists and the nationalists are the realists. Although this is true, it is not the entire truth. Nations and states are indeed entities. They exist. But they have not always existed. They are not the products of nature but of history. Nations are 'imagined communities', to use the elegant phrase formulated by Benedict Anderson, that is to say: creations of the mind.<sup>77</sup>

It is interesting to note that General de Gaulle and Mrs Thatcher spoke of the British, the French et cetera, each with their own language, history and way of life, thus suggesting that these are uniform and homogenous groups. But they could also have spoken of Britain with her Scots, Welshmen, Englishmen and Irishmen or of France with her Bretons, Alsacians, Basques and others. These groups also have their own language, history and way of life. This, however, does not prevent them from forming together the British or the French nation and living together in one state, the United Kingdom and France respectively.

This combination of state and nation is what we call the nation-state and this nation-state is a typical European product which, for better or

for worse, has been exported all over the world. In some cases, in the early states, like for example Britain, France and Spain, the state preceded the nation. In other states, those of the late comers, like Germany and Italy, the idea of a German and Italian nationhood preceded the process of forming a German and Italian state. In the first case historians speak of state-nations, in the second one of culture-nations. But, in whatever order things took place, in both cases a great deal of this feeling of nationhood was artificially put into the citizens' heads in the 19th century in order to make them better and more obedient citizens. In both cases also the outcome was the same: one form of social organization, the national one, overshadowed all other forms. This process culminated in the two World Wars of the twentieth century. State formation, nationalism, interstate rivalry and war are part and parcel of European history.

Thus the realists are right when they emphasize the fundamental difference in history and development between Europe and the United States of America. But they are wrong when they suggest that nations are products of nature and therefore are bound to be with us forever. As the famous French writer Ernest Renan said more than a century ago: a nation is a product of the will.<sup>78</sup> What makes a nation a nation, is the will to be a nation. This will was very strong in the 19th century, partly because of ideology but partly also because of the interest the citizens had in a strong state which provided them not only with security but also increasingly with social and economic advantages.

The nationalist ideology has lost much of its appeal after the two World Wars, and the interest of the citizen in having a strong state has also diminished. The function of the state changed fundamentally after 1945, and two processes have been taking place in Europe since that time: decentralization and supranational integration. If these trends continue, the nation-states will also continue to lose many of their functions and there will be room for not just one, but for many social identities. To mention just one example, one could then be at the same time Alsatian, Frenchman and European.

Thus, unity does not necessarily imply uniformity, nor should it do so, because it is precisely the variations of national articulations and expressions that create the vitality of European civilization. This was already stated by the famous Dutch historian Johan Huizinga a long time ago. In an address to American students in 1924, Huizinga said the following:

‘I do not know whether Americans can fully realize the necessity there is for Europe of preserving its division into many nations,

and the fervent desire of all and any of these to maintain their specific national existence. I do not mean this politically so much as culturally [...] It would be quite natural for you to say: why should not the European nations, after so many centuries of bitter strife, in the long run be merged into one vast unit? [...] Still, political harmony and concord is not the one thing the world stands in need of. However indispensable to civilization peace and order may be, real civilization is not contained in them. They may even be a danger to it, should they be promoted by equalizing and levelling. What we envy you is your unity, not your uniformity. We Europeans feel too keenly that no nation, however prosperous or great, is fit to bear the burden of civilization alone. Each in his turn is called upon in this wonderful world, to speak his word, and find a solution which just his particular spirit enabled him to express. Civilization is safeguarded by diversity. Even the smallest facets in the many-sided whole may sometimes catch the light and reflect it'.<sup>79</sup>

These words of Huizinga's sound rather romantic. But their basic assumption is shared by most of us, viz. that Europe's historical greatness and present vitality arise from the fact that there are so many nations, each with its own cultural tradition. But at the same time we also know that, with all their differences they are all truly European and form some sort of community, although not necessarily a Union. Thus the borderline between realists and utopianists is not really as clear cut as some would have us believe.

## France, Germany, and Europe

In 1999 a book appeared in Paris with the rather alarming title *De la prochaine guerre avec l'Allemagne* ('On the future war with Germany'). It had not been written by some sensationalist science-fiction writer but by none other than Philippe Delmas, a former aid to Roland Dumas, who was twice minister of Foreign Affairs under the Mitterrand administration.

For historians who are familiar with the history of France between 1870 and 1914, the title of this book must have rung a bell, because in that period many books with similar titles appeared in France, for example, *La prochaine guerre* by General H. Bonnal (1906), *La guerre de demain* (1889) by Danrit, a pseudonym and acronym of the later famous Colonel Driant, who under his own name also published *Vers un nouveau Sedan* (1906), F. Delaisi's *La guerre qui vient* (1911), A. Grouard's *La guerre éventuelle* (1913), M. Legendre's *La guerre prochaine et la mission de la France* (1913), Ch. Malo's *La prochaine guerre* (1912) and General Palet's *Les probabilités d'une guerre franco-allemande* (1913), while similar works also appeared in Germany like *Deutschland und der nächste Krieg* by General F. von Bernhardt (1912) and *Jena oder Sedan* (1903) by F.A. Beyerlein. All these books reflected, of course, the strong and ever increasing tensions that existed between France and Germany after the defeat of France in the war of 1870 and the foundation of the German Empire in 1871 and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, that resulted from this. With these developments of 1870–1871 a new question was born in Europe: the so-called German question (or in French 'la question allemande'). This question came down to one simple problem: The German Reich was too big and too powerful a state to be integrated into the existing European state system. Two more Franco-German wars which eventually developed into two World Wars were the result of this 'question'.

After 1945 the conditions changed completely. Germany was devastated, partitioned and under the control of four alien powers. The same went for her capital, Berlin. France on the other hand was one of these four powers. France's position however was also complicated. It was a member of the Great Four but only by permission of the Great Three; it

was defeated in 1940 but pushed forward as a fellow-victor in 1945. Soon it was getting involved in a desperate struggle to hold on to its colonial empire in Indochina which ended in a humiliating defeat and retreat and was followed by the even worse nightmare of the war in Algeria. Never ending financial, social and economic problems (inflation, strikes) as well as permanent political crisis (the average life of a French cabinet at that time was only five months) were characteristic of the France of the Fourth Republic.

All these problems notwithstanding, it was France that took the leadership of Europe. That is perfectly understandable because France was the only nation that *could* take it. For obvious reasons, neither Germany nor Italy could do this. Britain could have done it, but did not want to. Thus France took the initiative towards European unity, because it was the only nation in a position to do so and because it had reasons of its own for doing it: it was in France's own interest. To be sure, it would be unfair to deny all idealism in this move. Robert Schuman was no less sincere in his desire to remove the matters of conflict than Briand had been thirty years earlier. But there was another side to it as well. The European concept in France was based not only on hope, but also on fear. European integration was not only a reconciliation, but also an exorcism of Germany.

The first defence treaty that was concluded in Europe after 1945, the Treaty of Dunkirk, was aimed against Germany, not Russia. The European Community of Coal, Iron, and Steel was created in order to get a grip on Germany's heavy industry. Under strong American pressure, and in order to escape the even greater danger of the creation of a new German army, France developed the plan for a European Defence Community. The final rejection of that plan by the French parliament in 1954 illustrated France's fear of Germany. It did not help, because in that same year Germany was rearmed and became a member of NATO. After the defeat of the European Defence Community project, another course was selected for European cooperation, that of economic integration which was inaugurated by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The idea was that economic integration eventually would also lead to the political integration of Europe. This however was not the thinking of General de Gaulle.

The Fifth Republic, that was founded by General de Gaulle in 1958, produced an unmistakable increase in internal stability, in economic growth and in the continuity of foreign policy, and thus laid the basis for an increasing French influence in the 1960s. The unravelling of the drama of decolonization and the thaw in the Cold War opened up new

opportunities for French diplomacy. Thus the 1960s witnessed a strong impact of France on European politics. The foreign policy of General de Gaulle was the most stunning example of this. His diplomacy was aimed at nothing less than a fundamental revision not only of the European but of the entire world order.

The first thing de Gaulle did, on 17 September 1958, thus still as prime minister of the Fourth Republic and even before he had been elected president of the Fifth Republic, was to present a memorandum to the United States and the United Kingdom with the proposal to reform NATO in such a way that it would be led by a directorship of the US, the UK and France. This suggestion was not accepted by 'the Anglo-Saxons'. America had very different ideas as became clear when, somewhat later, the newly elected American president, John F. Kennedy presented his 'grand design' for a new American leadership over the Western alliance. De Gaulle's reaction was to make a bid for French autonomy and French leadership over Europe. He rejected Kennedy's offer of a Multilateral Nuclear Force (MLF) and further developed France's own 'force de frappe'. At the same press conference where this was announced, he also vetoed Britain's admission to the European Economic Community. For him Britain was simply a man of straw of America. De Gaulle wanted to reform the process of European unification by introducing the Fouchet Plan for a European Political Union, which would be based on cooperation — not integration! — of European states. This was rejected by the other partners in the EEC. In order to take revenge de Gaulle then, in 1963, signed with chancellor Adenauer the French-German Friendship Treaty which is generally known as the Treaty of the Elysée.

The successors of de Gaulle faced different problems. The events of May 1968 had demonstrated France's economic weakness, just at a time when the growing financial and economic power of Germany had become apparent. At the same time, through the gradual erosion of the past and the succession of generations, German diplomacy regained its freedom. The moral catharsis of Germany, brought about by the Willy Brandt administration, has been a strong catalyst in what was an anyway inevitable process. A new generation born after the War and thus unconnected with the Nazi era, was to take over the German leadership.

In retrospect the above mentioned aspects of chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* are unmistakable but at the time they were noticed only by a few observers, typically to be found in France. De Gaulle's confidant Christian Fouchet for example labelled the 'Ostpolitik' a 'genuine Bismarckian policy'. And, as Henry Kissinger told us, president Pompi-

dou (as well as he himself) was worried whether this policy might not be the first step to an uncertain and possibly dangerous future for Germany and Europe. Pompidou, in the classic traditions of French diplomacy, tried to outbid Germany in good relations with Russia, while at the same time re-enacting the Entente Cordiale by opening the Common Market to Britain as a counter weight against Germany. Giscard's diplomacy was basically the same, only more so, because in the meantime Germany's influence had grown. Thus, when chancellor Helmut Schmidt was known to be planning a visit to Brezhnev, Giscard flew to Warsaw to see the Russian leader first.

Pompidou, a former banker, and Giscard, a brilliant economist, understood more of economics than General de Gaulle had done. Under them the main aim of France's European policy was, in some way or another, to control Germany's economic power. This implied an austere economic policy which, apart from the first two years of euphoria after the election of president Mitterrand, was also to be continued under the Left. The 'franc fort' became the symbol of this economic policy. The policy of the 'franc fort' implied however that France had to follow the German D-Mark and thus became dependent on the policy of the German Bundesbank. To get a grip on that policy became the main aim of French European policy. President Mitterrand and chancellor Kohl developed a new 'special relationship', somewhat similar to the one that had existed between de Gaulle and Adenauer. They were both seriously concerned about the future of Europe and also saw parallel interests for their two countries. Germany wanted political and defence cooperation with France, France wanted economic and monetary cooperation with Germany. The Economic and Monetary Union and the European Political Union were the results of this.

In the meantime however a completely unexpected and astonishing series of events had taken place: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the unification of Germany, the dissolution of the Soviet Empire and the end of the Cold War. Thus the Maastricht Treaty became effective in a completely different European and world order than the one for which it had been planned. French leaders who were confronted with German unification were of course very worried by it. But they quickly realized they had to accept the situation and put their hope on the saying that this time the German leaders did not want to create a German Europe but a European Germany.

As a consequence of all this, after 1989 the center of gravity of Europe has moved to the East and accordingly the capital of Germany has also

moved in that direction, from Bonn to Berlin. The enlargement of the European Union that followed has undoubtedly increased the political weight of Germany. Thus, in a way, 'the German question' has come back. But it has now taken on a very different form and we should be grateful for that. Books like the one by Delmas however, as well as many other publications, indicate that at least for France it will be a while before it will have become accustomed to this new situation.

## The American Century in Europe

In 1999, the Whitney Museum of American Art was showing a very successful exhibition called *The American Century*. Indeed, there were two exhibitions, *The American Century, Part I* about the first half of the 20th century and *Part II* dealing with the following fifty years. The presentation was divided up into decades, each of them having its own motto. The one for the 1950s was: 'America takes command'. This may sound rather martial but the motto is indeed very appropriate as one could argue that as from then on the American leadership also included cultural leadership.

The name of the exhibition, 'The American Century', was of course derived from the title of the famous article that Henry Luce, the editor/publisher of journals like *Life* and *Time*, published in *Life* on 17 February 1941. Luce wanted the Americans to play a major role in the war for freedom and democracy that was in progress at that time and the building of the better world that would have to come after that. In his article Luce insisted that 'our vision of America as a world power includes a passionate devotion to great American ideals'.<sup>80</sup> The idea of America as a world power and, indeed, as *the* world power of the future, is, of course, much older than the concept of the 20th century as the American century. Already in 1902 the British liberal journalist and advocate of world peace through arbitration W.T. Stead published a book with the title *The Americanization of the World, or the Trend of the Twentieth Century*. According to Stead the heyday of the British Empire was over and the United States was the Empire of the future. The enormous success of America was due to three things: education, production and democracy. Britain's choice was between subjugation or cooperation. Stead even proposed the merger of the two countries. In the following decade, this idea that America was Britain's successor and that the two countries should and could form a union because of their intimate familiarity, became popular among British writers.

Much earlier and long before the role of America as a world leader had actually become apparent, Alexis de Tocqueville had already prophesized that America would become a future master of the world, one of

the two superpowers, the other one being Russia. For Tocqueville America and Russia were also two opposite models of society. A few years before Tocqueville, the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel had said in his famous lectures on *The Philosophy of History*, given in Jena in 1830–1831: ‘America [...] is the country of the future.’ But he also remarked that ‘its world-historical importance has yet to be revealed in the ages which lie ahead.’<sup>81</sup> In the best of European traditions Hegel went on to declare that both physically and spiritually America was still impotent and that the Americans were like unwise children, far removed from higher thoughts and aims.

Hegel’s ideas were part of a tradition according to which civilization follows the course of the sun. From Asia, where it was born, it had come to Europe, where it had come to full blossom. For Hegel, Europe was the final destination of the journey of civilization. America might be a country with a future but it had offered nothing to the world yet and thus there was no place for it in his *Philosophy of History*. Others argued that civilization would follow the path of the sun even further, across the Atlantic to America and that there the Empire of the future was to be found. The most famous formulation of this is to be found in the last quatrain of a poem by the philosopher — and bishop — George Berkeley, after whom a well-known university in California has been named. The poem was written in 1726 but published only in 1752. The last lines read as follows:

Westward the Course of Empire takes its Way;  
The four first Acts already past,  
A fifth shall close the Drama with the Day;  
Time’s noblest Offspring is the last.

America would be the last chapter in the great book of empires and civilizations, because westward from America there was only the Pacific and behind that lies the East, where long ago, it had all begun.

Economically and politically speaking, the American Empire began at the end of the 19th century. In 1898, with the Spanish-American war, America officially became an imperial power by taking over the remains of the Spanish Empire (Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines). The us position of world power was confirmed by the First World War and the Peace of Paris. After the Great War the European powers had become debtors instead of creditors. Now, not Europe but America was ‘the world’s banker’. This new economic world order became clearly visible with the crash of Wall Street in 1929 which led the world into the great

depression of the 1930's. From that time on, everybody knew that when America was ill the rest of the world would suffer too.

After 1945 the US became the world's Number One superpower. The American economy alone produced more goods and services than all the rest of the world together. The dollar took over from sterling as the world's reserve currency. The American fleet ruled the waves as once H.M.'s Navy had done and the president of the United States was the only statesman to dispose of the atomic bomb. As a matter of fact, America used that weapon twice, in August 1945. As Tocqueville had predicted, Russia was the other superpower, but although a great military power, economically speaking, the Soviet Union was very vulnerable as became clear with the revolutions of 1989–1990. After that America remained as the world's only superpower. Henry Luce's prediction that the coming age would fulfill history and tensions and wars would become obsolete was faintly echoed by Francis Fukuyama when he coined the expression 'The End of History'.

While already after 1914–1918 nobody in Europe could remain blind to America's economic and political power, its cultural impact was very limited. Luce argued that American culture had laid the foundations for the American century. All over the world people listened to jazz music and watched Hollywood films. This may be true, but for Europe's intellectual elite the United States remained a primitive country that had nothing to offer to the enlightened mind. The Americans were seen as naïve, uncivilized human beings, whose only interest was in making money. All over Europe and even in the former mother country, England, writers and essayists were uttering similar sounds. C.S. Lewis for example remarked: 'The so-called Renaissance produced three disasters: the invention of gunpowder, the invention of printing and the discovery of America.'<sup>82</sup> And Harold Nicolson told a journalist who was leaving for America that 'there is one thing you will miss in America — that is the adult mind.'<sup>83</sup>

The war did not bring about an end to these forms of cultural contempt. Graham Greene for example said that he would rather spend his old age in the Gulag Archipel than in California.<sup>84</sup> France soon took over the leadership of post-war anti-Americanism, of which Coca Cola and later McDonalds became the symbols. When Coca Cola in 1949 opened its first factory in France, there was a strong protest against the 'Coca-colonization' of France. The catholic daily *Témoignage Chrétien* summarized its rejection of both the Soviet Union and the US in the slogan: 'We want neither Coca Cola nor vodka. Good wine is enough.'<sup>85</sup>

The American intellectual elite was irritated by this refusal and tried to improve America's image in the world of high culture by subsidizing journals and scholarly institutions. The history of this campaign is described by the historian Volker Berghahn in an article on 'European Elitism, American Money and Popular Culture'. This article is one out of a collection of 13 contributions that are brought together in a recent book about *The American Century in Europe*. The book has three sections which deal with diplomatic, cultural and social responses to the American challenge respectively. The majority of the authors are Americans and among the Europeans, Italian authors take pride of place. This is easily explained by the fact that the book is the outcome of a joint project of the universities of Cornell and Turin. This is not to say that the book is unbalanced. There are two contributions that specifically deal with Britain and Germany. What one misses however is a chapter on what might well be the most interesting case, France.

The book appeared too early to deal with the European reactions to the American intervention in Iraq, but Walter LaFeber's warning seems to be very much to the point. 'If [...] the United States, defying the warnings of Europeans and others, attacked states suspected of harboring terrorists and/or developing weapons of mass destruction (Iraq would be the prime target), European and Islamic governments could well turn against the American action, unless the United States won quickly, conclusively, and established a well-regarded and effective government to replace the overthrown regime — a large order.'<sup>86</sup> So far the effect of the war has not so much been a separation of Europe from America as an internal division of Europe. This is a new division that does not coincide with the former East-West division. Maybe the American Century in Central and Eastern Europe has yet to begin.

## Eurocentrism

Africa is a European invention. When the Romans finally defeated Carthago, they turned the place into a province and called it Africa. Originally referring only to a small part of Tunisia and Algeria, it later became the name of the entire continent. The same happened to Asia, another province of the Roman Empire, in what is now called the Near East. The names of the two other continents demonstrate even more obviously their European origins: America was named after an Italian traveller — and not even Columbus! — and the term Australia comes from the fact that European voyagers who had some vague idea about the existence of this continent but knew nothing about it, called it ‘The Unknown Southland’, *Terra australis incognita*.

Thus these names, consciously or rather unconsciously as is the case with terms like the Near East, Non-Western Studies, Overseas History et cetera, are all witness to the Eurocentric bias in our world view. The same is true for history. History as we know it in its modern scientific form, is a European invention. It was developed in the West in the nineteenth century and it dealt almost exclusively with Western and indeed European history.

The historical interpretation which resulted from this was extremely Eurocentric. *Weltgeschichte* in fact came down to European history, for in the framework of general history non-European peoples played no role. In the nineteenth century the European approach to Asian history was increasingly dominated by feelings of European superiority and a conviction of Asian backwardness. Their supposed backwardness was a fairly recent phenomenon, since European historians and philosophers had traditionally shown a great respect for the ancient civilizations of Asia. Asia was considered as the continent where the cradle of civilization had once stood. But true as it may be that the light of civilization had originally come from the East, according to European thinkers since then there had been no development and thus no history. To quote Hegel: Asian history is ‘for the most part, really unhistorical, for it is only the repetition of the same majestic ruin’. And: ‘China and India lie, as it were, still outside the World’s History’.<sup>87</sup>

Hegel had of course a great influence on Karl Marx and Marx also concluded that Asia has no history in the Western sense of the word. In an article of 1853 on 'The Future Results of British Rule in India' he stated: 'Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive invaders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society'. And nearly ten years later on China: 'The Oriental empires always show an unchanging social infrastructure coupled with unceasing change in the persons and tribes who manage to ascribe to themselves the political superstructure'.<sup>88</sup>

The opinions on Africa were even more categorical. Here there were no ideas about 'the cradle of civilization' or 'the light that once came from the East'. Africa was seen as an ahistorical continent and the African people as a people without civilization and thus without history. The most famous formulation of this judgment is to be found in the Jena Lectures given by Hegel in 1830–1831 and published as the *Philosophy of History*. Here he wrote: 'At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit (...). What we properly understand by Africa is the Unhistorical Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, which had to be presented here only as being on the threshold of the World's history'.<sup>89</sup>

Again, the writings of Karl Marx reflect the same line of thought. There is no doubt however that such opinions were by no means a monopoly of Marxist historians. Indeed they never had been. Adam Smith for example wrote in *The Wealth of Nations*: 'Africa (...) as well as several of the countries comprehended under the general name of the East Indies, are inhabited by barbarous nations'. To be true, he also remarked: 'But those nations were by no means so weak and defenceless as the miserable and helpless Americans (...)'.<sup>90</sup> These Americans of course were not the European colonists but the 'Indians'. This line of thought was continued until very recently. A late echo of it can be found in the work of a Hungarian Marxist historian of Africa, Endre Sik, who wrote in 1966: 'Prior to their encounter with Europeans the majority of African peoples still lived a primitive, barbaric life, many of them even on the lowest level of barbarism. (...) Therefore it is unrealistic to speak of their 'history' — in the scientific sense of the word — before the appearance of the European invaders.<sup>91</sup> Again, this was by no means an exclusively Marxist way of thinking. Just one year before Sik's book appeared, the Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford — and by no means a Marxist — H.R. Tre-

vor-Roper, compared the histories of Britain and Africa, describing the latter as being little more than 'the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant quarters of the globe'.<sup>92</sup>

How things have changed since the 1960s! No sensible person would argue any more that African history does not exist, not even in Oxford. The development of African history has been spectacular. Perhaps it has been the most vivid, dynamic and innovative field of history since the emergence of the new social and economic history in the 1920s and 1930s. One could argue that the *Journal of African History* has been the most innovative journal since the founding of the French journal of the *Annales* in 1929. Indeed the two developments are to a certain extent comparable. Social historians, such as those of the *Annales* and others, began to ask questions that had not been asked before and of which no mention has been made in traditional sources. New sources had to be discovered and new techniques developed to re-examine old sources in a new light. The same situation existed with African history. Sources are scarce, and the very scarcity of sources has given an enormous stimulus to the development of new techniques and methods. The past had to be investigated with other means. Anthropology has also played a major role in developing African history.

The great leap forward took pace at an astonishing speed. In the mid-1950s not one of the major post-graduate institutions in the United States (Harvard, Princeton, Chicago, Berkeley, Columbia) offered courses in African history. By the late 1970s there were already 600 professional historians of Africa in the United States.<sup>93</sup> Next to the Americans a major role was played by British historians. The *Journal of African History* — the first issue of which appeared in 1960 — was, as Terence Ranger has said, 'the combined manifesto, charter, programme and shop-window for the field'.<sup>94</sup> Oliver and Fage's *Short History of Africa* sold several hundred thousand copies and is probably the single most influential book on African history. Soon however the Africans took over the leading role themselves. The *UNESCO History of Africa* is essentially an achievement of African historians.

The development of an autonomous (= non-Eurocentric) approach to Asian history had taken place earlier. The official British history writing about India was strongly Anglocentric. As Nehru once remarked about the British: 'Real history for them begins with the advent of the Englishman to India; all that went before it is in some mystic kind of way a preparation for this divine consummation.'<sup>95</sup> Already in the middle of the nineteenth century however, as a reaction to the rather condescend-

ing approach of the colonial historians, Indian historians developed their own historiography, and in the late nineteenth century the rise of the nationalist movement gave a strong impetus to this so that by the 1920s and 1930s there existed a considerable group of professional historians. When independence came in 1947, Indian professional historiography was already in a strong position.

In Indonesia on the contrary, there were practically no professional Indonesian historians before independence. Here, however, the question of Eurocentrism had already been approached in the 1930s by a Dutch colonial civil servant, J.C. van Leur, in his dissertation about early Asian trade which was published in 1934. He reacted against the exclusively colonial approach, which constituted a distorted perspective and ignored vast areas of historical reality. Most historians, he wrote, see the Asiatic world through the eyes of the Dutch ruler: 'from the deck of the ship, the ramparts of the fortress, the high gallery of the trading house'.<sup>96</sup> He successfully tried to remedy this view. Even more fundamentally, he also questioned the periodization of history and the place in it allotted to Asia. His ideas were rediscovered in the 1950s and have been very influential in the rethinking of Asian history in the early modern period.

In retrospect much of the debate about the possibilities and impossibilities of, and the similarities and dissimilarities between western and non-western history, looks rather futile. Today everybody accepts that Africans and Asians have their own history, and that it is as rich and interesting as that of Europe. The question, however, is whether we can stop here and simply consider world history as the sum of a great number of autonomous regional, national or even continental histories. Most historians would agree that we should try to do more and study how, in one way or another, these various civilizations have become interconnected, how the world situation of today has come into being. Therefore the real challenge is now to offer a non-Eurocentric form of world history. This is a difficult task but a necessary one because, as the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga already wrote in the 1930s: 'our civilization is the first to have for its past, the past of the world, our history is the first to be world history'.<sup>97</sup>

## A Peace Loving Nation

We Dutch people like to think of ourselves as a peace-loving nation. We do not like the clash of arms, parades and uniforms, even though the memory of admirals Tromp and De Ruyter is still strong enough to make our hearts beat faster whenever the Navy is allowed to purchase a few farm-fresh and very expensive super-frigates. We have a great time watching the British journalists on Newsnight who, leaning over a sand-box with generals and admirals ret'd., analyze the military operations in Iraq. But the French military pomp and glory of *Quatorze Juillet* does not appeal to us, and the French *force de frappe* is greeted as a joke. And Germans in uniform are not our cup of tea.

So we have an aversion to the turmoil of war and like to sing our praises as a peace-loving nation. Militarism is foreign to our nature. Soldiers are not held in high regard here, although the officers and especially the generals are paid well. Almost everybody saw conscription as a very unpleasant obligation. The slogan 'Mourir pour la patrie' does not sound appealing to us. Warlike behavior is not appreciated. Which is quite exceptional. Even the Belgians have considered courage and militancy as historical qualities of the Belgian people for centuries. They refer to none other than Julius Caesar, who wrote that of all the peoples of Gaul the Belgians were the most courageous ('horum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae'). Not only eighteenth century Belgian authors liked to refer to Caesar, the Belgian king Albert also quoted these words in his proclamation to the army on August 5th, 1914, one day after the German invasion. Those Belgians mentioned by Caesar also happen to include the Dutch, but I don't think anyone ever felt the need to remind us of that fact.

There is a real tradition here. The Dutch mentality has been more pacifistic than militaristic for a long time, and our foreign policy has been focused on maintaining neutrality and encouraging an international legal system, in which the law, rather than force will prevail on earth. Cornelis van Vollenhoven, the great legal scholar from Leiden, was of the opinion that our country should serve as an example for the dangerous outside world. He spoke of a Lafayette-role, and even a Joan of Arc-role, both pretty militant figures by the way. The Peace Confer-

ences of 1899 and 1907, which resulted in the establishment of the International Court of Arbitration, were held in The Hague, the seat of government of the neutral Netherlands. In his well-known *Projet pour rendre la paix perpétuelle en Europe* of 1713 the French Abbé de St. Pierre had already proposed to establish a permanent Court of Arbitration in our country, not in The Hague, but in Utrecht, a city he knew because of the peace conference that was held there that year. Still, love of peace is not the only order of the day in Holland. In the final quarter of the nineteenth century we waged one of the biggest colonial wars in history, the Atjeh war, in which half a million people died. And that wasn't the only one. We had already had the Java War, the Lombok Expedition, and many others. All of this led to much excitement and a roll of drums. Well-known and popular songs from those days contained catchy slogans such as:

'With powder and lead  
we shoot the Balinese dead'

and

'On a rope, on a rope,  
Toekoe Oemar and his wife'

In 1894 L.W.C. van den Berg wrote in *De Gids* that the people of Atjeh should be eradicated: 'no longer at their assimilation, but at their elimination must our policy be aimed'. And we also sympathized deeply with the struggle of the Boers in Transvaal. The Dutch poetess Catharina van Rees wrote the national anthem of the republic of Transvaal which says, among other things:

'Do you know that nation so heroic  
and yet oppressed for so long?  
It has sacrificed property and blood  
For freedom and justice.'

This heroism actually also rubbed off on us, for after all, the Boers were our 'cousins'. After World War II, we waged a big war of decolonization that lasted several years and led to the deaths of thousands of people on both sides. We fought most of our wars, however, in Europe. Everyone remembers World War II, when we fought against Germany and Japan.

And of course we all know the episode of the Belgian revolt, during which we conducted among other expeditions, the Ten Days Campaign, and admiral Van Speyck who destroyed himself with his ship after uttering the immortal words: 'I'd sooner blow her up'.

However, the largest number of wars stem from the days when the Netherlands was a powerful nation, and the years before that when our people fought for independence. First there was the Eighty Years' War with Spain. Then we became an independent nation, and our goal was to remain independent and gather wealth. We conducted many wars with these objectives in mind, including four with the English that lasted a total of fourteen years. Still, that was nothing compared to the wars with France. In all we were at war with France for twenty-eight years, or even thirty-three if you count the War of the Austrian Succession. And then there is the French declaration of war in 1793, followed by the French invasion in 1795, and eighteen years of French occupation and annexation. After that there was the French intervention during our war with the Belgians in 1830. Has there ever been a time when we were not at war with France?

There were many more adversaries. For example the Portuguese, whom we fought in Asia, Africa and America, and generally not without success. In 1645 we supported the Swedes and fought the Danes and ten years later we did the exact opposite. In both cases the objective was the same: to keep the Øresund, which was of vital importance to our Baltic trade, open. In 1672, the Year of Disaster, we were simultaneously at war with France, England and two German sovereigns, the bishops of Munster and Cologne. We were at war with more than half of the fifteen countries that until recently made up the European Union, including all the big ones (France, Germany and England) but also Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Denmark and Belgium. Furthermore, we should not forget that Austria was part of Germany during World War II and Italy was its ally. So we were at war with those countries, too. As for Finland and Ireland: in the past they used to resort under Sweden and England respectively and therefore do not figure in these calculations. Of the fifteen countries that until recently made up the European Union, there are only two we have not been at war with. The first is Luxemburg, but this country was united with ours in a personal union for a long time. The other country is Greece. At least, I don't remember any war with Greece. But that is the only exception.

None of this applies anymore now. We may spend a lot of money on our armed forces, but we were very happy when conscription was abol-

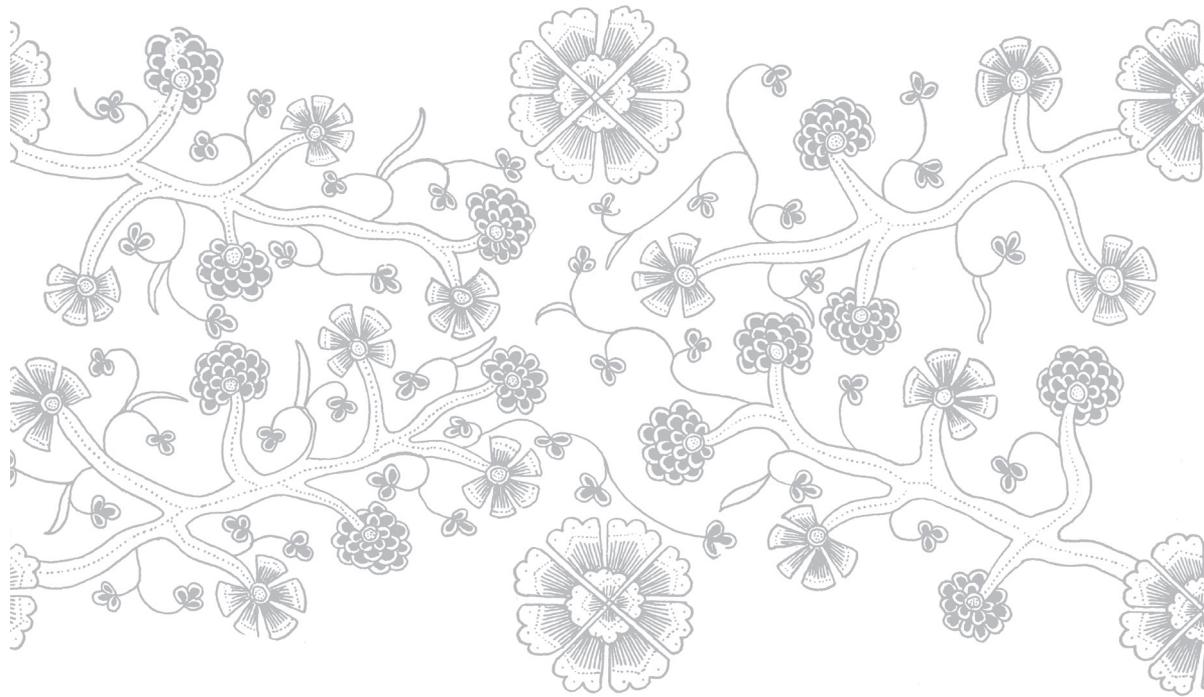
ished. A regular army was going to defend our honor from now on. Professionals, that's what we wanted. It seemed like a good solution, because professionals make their own decision to fight and if necessary be killed. But it became clear very quickly that this was not exactly what we had had in mind either. If actual shots are going to be fired, the members of our Lower House will trample each other in order to be the first to demand that our boys be called back. Being killed in action is *pour les autres*, especially the Americans.

The aversion to being shot is a rapidly and strongly spreading phenomenon that governments are increasingly obliged to take into consideration. In bygone days governments were willing to sacrifice large numbers of human lives to achieve the desired goals. Tradition has it that Frederick the Great shouted at his soldiers: 'Hunde, wollt ihr ewig leben?' [Dogs, do you want to live forever?] The millions of soldiers who died in World War I are the most horrifying example of this willingness. And the soldiers on their part were willing to make the sacrifice, for in spite of the occasional strike and mutiny, their silent acceptance of — in our eyes senseless — suffering and death, is what strikes us most. The willingness to fight and be killed has diminished considerably, not only in the Netherlands, but all over the Western world, and governments, even those of totalitarian states such as the Soviet Union during the Afghan war, have to take this into account. Saddam Hussein thought the Americans would not dare fight a war in the Gulf. He was mistaken. Twice. But that does not alter the fact that, since the Vietnam war, the arrival of an airplane filled with body bags has been every American president's nightmare.

The question of where this change in the mentality of leaders and troops came from has been subject to much speculation. Some have named the decrease in family size as a factor. I don't see that. Families weren't that large in the past, plus I don't believe that the parents of a large family would carelessly send their sons off to die thinking: 'on a fruit-filled tree, one or two plums are not missed'. The question, especially with regard to World War I with its endless and senseless slaughter, should be why this willingness existed before. As yet, nobody has come up with a satisfying answer. Perhaps it has to do with class relations and the acceptance of authority back then. These have since changed considerably. The emancipation of the individual has progressed and it is no longer matter-of-course to accept and obey orders. And so the world is starting to resemble the Netherlands more and more. What a pleasant thought!



# European Civilization





## European Ideas about Education, Science and Art

In September 2010 pope Benedict XVI payed an official visit to the United Kingdom. Apart from some protests about the sexual misbehavior of catholic clerics, the popal visit received little attention. On 19 September, the fourth and last day of his visit, the pope celebrated the beatification of John Henry Newman. That event got even less attention. In fact one wonders whether the British people had any notion at all not only about what beatification actually is but also who ever this Newman might have been. Still he is not only of interest to the Roman Catholic Church as one of her most famous converts but also as the author of one of the most influential books about education, viz. *The Idea of a University*. As not everybody may be familiar with the life and work of this Oxford don who was later to become a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church, I will first say a few words about the author of this remarkable book.

John Henry Newman was born in London in 1801. His father, a banker, was of Dutch extraction while his mother came from a Huguenot family. Newman entered Oxford as a student when he was only 15 years old and stayed for a considerable time. In 1822 he became a fellow and in 1826 was appointed tutor at Oriel College. In 1828 he became vicar of St. Mary's Church. With John Keble and others he founded the so-called Oxford Movement, which opposed liberalism in religion. He became disenchanted with the Church of England, resigned his post as vicar, became a Roman Catholic and left Oxford to go to Rome. In 1847 he was ordained a priest. Seven years later he was asked to become Rector of the newly established Catholic University in Dublin. It was there that he gave the lectures that were to form the basis for his extremely influential book: *The Idea of a University*.

Newman's book is a most curious work, as is apparent from its rather long and complicated title, which reads as follows: *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated*, I. *In Nine Discourses delivered to the Catholics of Dublin*; II. *In Occasional Lectures and Essays Addressed to the Members of the Catholic University*.<sup>98</sup> It is by no means a coherent book. Indeed it is not really a book at all. It consists of a compilation of nine lectures given at the Catholic University of Dublin and a selection of other lec-

tures and papers given on various occasions. It has often been criticized as being 'radically flawed by inconsistency and self-contradiction'.<sup>99</sup> This is true in so far as it is not always easy to follow his line of argument. Moreover, the assumption that theology is a science, and indeed the most important of all, may not be easy for the modern reader to accept. All the same, the main argument is clear and powerfully presented: a university is primarily 'a place of teaching universal knowledge'. Its aim is 'the diffusion and extension of knowledge'. Its purpose is 'to produce more intelligent [...] members of society' by fostering 'cultivation of mind', and 'formation [...] of the intellect'.<sup>100</sup> Newman presents a high ideal of what a university should be: 'the high protecting power of all knowledge and science, of fact and principle, of inquiry and discovery, of experiment and speculation'.<sup>101</sup> He also elaborates his ideal of liberal education: which is the 'real cultivation of mind'.<sup>102</sup> As a result, 'A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom [...]'.<sup>103</sup>

There is of course much more to be said about this monumental work, and I shall return to it later on. However, one thing is clear. By discussing the 'idea' of a university, Newman was able to address some general issues concerning science and education. I hope to do the same and so present some general reflections and observations on education, science and art.

#### EDUCATION

The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives various meanings for the word 'Education', including puzzling definitions such as, for example, 'the rearing of silkworms'. But the two most familiar ones are 'the process of 'bringing up' (young persons)' and 'the systematic instruction, schooling or training given to the young in preparation for the work of life' [...]. These two elements are present at every stage of education but not always in the same proportions. Primary education, to begin with that, is a matter of basic instruction. The main aim is to teach the child certain elementary skills, of which the most important are reading, writing and arithmetic as well as obtaining some basic knowledge about the world, that is to say some geography and history. The general education of children is, of course, principally a duty for the parents. Just as one has to feed and protect a child one has the duty to impart knowledge and skills as well as instill moral values. Nowadays, however, in virtually all societies, the state also assumes responsibility for the provision of schooling for

all its subjects, regardless of the financial or social background of the parents. Indeed, whether they like it or not, parents are obliged by the state to send their children to school and they are punished if they fail to comply.

Secondary education did not become of interest to the state until much later. The usefulness and purpose of primary education was obvious, but this was not so apparent for secondary education. Indeed, some denied that secondary education had any purpose at all.<sup>104</sup> The famous English historian Sir Lewis Namier once remarked: 'Elementary education keeps children off the streets; university education provides a place for people like me. As for secondary education, I can think of no reason for it at all'. I cannot agree with Sir Lewis, because I believe that secondary education is the most important of all the types of schooling. While elementary education is necessary to be able to operate in society, and university education is indispensable for the training of scientists and qualified professionals, the 'liberal education' Newman spoke of is essentially acquired at secondary schools. This is certainly true for the rather elite form of secondary education (exemplified by the grammar schools and gymnasia) that was the norm in Europe until the 1960s.

When in 1878, Mark Twain travelled to Germany, and visited Heidelberg among other places, he wrote that the German student 'has spent nine years in the gymnasium, under a system which allowed him no freedom, but vigorously compelled him to work like a slave. Consequently, he has left the gymnasium with an education which is so extensive and complete, that the most a university can do for it is to perfect some of its profounder specialities.'<sup>105</sup> The German gymnasium was the model for the Dutch gymnasium.

The backbone of this type of secondary education was the study of the humanities, that is to say of Greek and Latin, but also of modern languages, history, mathematics as well as, in most cases, religion. This type of education was based on an ideological consensus that was characterized by two elements: firstly, the idea that there is a continuous thread linking modern civilization with the past and, secondly, that European civilization is virtually synonymous with civilization in general. According to this way of thinking, there is a direct line running back through time, from the present to the Renaissance and from the Renaissance to Rome and Greece, and so on going right back to the ancient civilizations of Egypt and the Near East. Civilization originated in the Mediterranean world; not just European or Western civilization but civilization *tout court*.

The most pertinent, most passionate and, possibly, also the most arrogant formulation of this belief — for a belief is what it was — is to be found in Newman's *Idea of a University*, from which I will quote the following lines: 'I am not denying of course the civilization of the Chinese, for instance, though it be not our civilization; but it is a huge, stationary, unattractive, morose civilization. Nor do I deny a civilization to the Hindoos, nor to the ancient Mexicans, nor to the Saracens, nor (in a certain sense) to the Turks; but each of these races has its own civilization, as separate from one another as from ours (...)'. That was the great difference with Western civilization, which, according to Newman, 'has a claim to be considered as the representative Society and Civilization of the human race, as its perfect result and limit, in fact'. Newman concluded: 'I call then this commonwealth pre-eminently and emphatically Human Society, and its intellect the Human Mind, and its decisions the sense of mankind, and its disciplined and cultivated state Civilization in the abstract, and the territory on which it lies the *orbis terrarum*, or the World'.<sup>106</sup>

Newman formulated these ideas extremely forcefully but they were then held by virtually the whole Western intellectual world. Later on however, the situation Newman described changed dramatically and this produced, what is known as, the *Crisis in the Humanities*. In a book of the same title published in 1964, the prominent English historian J.H. Plumb wrote: 'A hundred, fifty, even twenty years ago, a tradition of culture, based on the Classics, on Scripture, on History and Literature, bound the governing classes together and projected the image of a gentleman. [...] These subjects — History, Classics, Literature, and Divinity — were, with Mathematics, the core of the educational system (...). Alas, the rising tide of scientific and industrial societies, combined with the battering of two World Wars, has shattered the confidence of humanists in their capacity to lead or to instruct'.<sup>107</sup>

Thus, the two foundations of traditional humanistic education have been shaken. Firstly, the sense of an unbroken line connecting us with the past has disappeared. If history is popular at all today, this is not, as it used to be, to study books that highlight how we relate to our 'forefathers' but rather to read how very different, how strange the people in the past were. The success of books such as *Montaillou* by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie or Simon Schama's *The Embarrassment of Riches* illustrates just this. The past has become a collection of curiosities and the historian has turned into an anthropologist.

Secondly, the belief in the superiority of Western civilization has

diminished, if not vanished entirely (although it has probably disappeared more from public discourse than from private convictions). The reason for this is not so much the rise or the increased appreciation of other civilizations. Few of us envy life under the Taliban, the Iranian Ayatollahs or in hectic, overcrowded Japan. This change in attitude is more related to the steady decline of European influence worldwide.

If this analysis is correct it leads us to two questions. Firstly, is this development to be regretted? Secondly, can something be done to remedy it? My answer to both questions is: 'Yes'. As to the first question, the reason for regret is not so much ideological as practical. In order to be brief, I will borrow E.D. Hirsch's succinct words on the subject. Hirsch has argued that 'an absolute requirement of high literacy in a nation is that its citizens must share a broad range of diverse background knowledge' and he concluded 'that broad humanistic studies at *every stage* of education and particularly in early education are highly utilitarian as well as intrinsically valuable'.<sup>108</sup> I agree wholeheartedly with this view.

As to the second question: 'What can be done to remedy the problem?' the answer is not so simple. A return to the old situation is not an option. Modern concepts of civilization will have to be more ecumenical and more multicultural than they used to be. What is necessary, then, is the development of a new ideological consensus about what is worth knowing and, subsequently, to teach that to students either at secondary school, as was the European tradition, or at college, as is the tradition in America.<sup>109</sup>

This brings me to the third level of education, the one I know best from personal experience and that is university education. Although there are many important differences between the various national traditions in university education, it is fair to say that the most fundamental distinction is seen when comparing the European and the American university. There can be no doubt that the American model has been the most successful. It combines higher education for the many with having the best research universities in the world. It has been so successful that it is now imitated virtually all over the world. The reason why the European system failed is that it did not adjust to the two main developments in modern society: social emancipation and the economic need for an ever better-educated population. These two developments have created the need for mass university education.

As I have argued for a long time, and at various occasions, I see the transformation of the European university as a structural change, that should be welcomed not regretted.<sup>110</sup> It is necessary to accept the con-

sequences that this will bring a greater diversification of the academic landscape. Inevitably with the increase in the number of degrees and the merging of university and vocational higher education institutes, the degree itself will become less important than the place where it was awarded. The distinction between research and teaching universities, widely accepted in America, will inevitably come to Europe too.

#### SCIENCE

This brings me to the second topic of my lecture, science. Nowadays, it seems quite natural that universities are places where teaching and research go hand in hand. This, however, is a fairly recent phenomenon. The history of the universities reveals that in the beginning the universities were first and foremost institutions for professional training. Willem Otterspeer's magisterial history of the University of Leiden, demonstrates that this venerable place of learning was not a centre for research but for education.<sup>111</sup> When, in the eighteenth century, science became increasingly important this was more a matter for learned societies and academies than for the universities. The idea that the university could play a role in this and that teaching and research should go together only emerged later, in the nineteenth century. The man who first introduced this idea of the university was the German scholar, statesman and diplomat Wilhelm von Humboldt.

In Humboldt's view, the university was a place where scholars and students could dedicate themselves to research. University lecturers should not merely be passive 'scholars' but must take an active part in research. However, according to Charles Mc Clelland, Humboldt's idea of *Wissenschaft* was radically different from, later, positivist, concepts. Humboldt's view was that '*Wissenschaft* and further discoveries emanating from it were the instrument, not the goal, of the scholar. The full development of the personality and of a supple, wide-ranging habit of clear, original thinking was the goal'. In other words, *Wissenschaft* should contribute to *Bildung*.<sup>112</sup> In this respect, there was not that much difference between Humboldt's and Newman's ideas of 'liberal education'. The main difference was that in England university research was not encouraged until about the 1860s. Almost half a century after Humboldt's reforms were introduced in Prussia, Newman was still arguing that the object of a university 'is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement' of it. And he concluded: 'If its object was scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a university should

have students [...].<sup>113</sup> One of Newman's younger contemporaries, Benjamin Jowett, the famous Master of Balliol when that College still was 'the nursery of statesmen', exclaimed: 'Research! A mere excuse for idleness; it has never achieved, and will never achieve any results of the slightest value!'<sup>114</sup> And even a century later another Oxford don spoke with great contempt about 'that state of resentful coma dignified by the name of Rezearch'.<sup>115</sup> The way he spelled 'rezearch' and pronounced it with a strong German-American twang, indicates the contempt for American education that was still so powerful in the 1950s.

Such protests were, of course, all in vain. Research was here to stay. Today, the university justifies its own existence not only, and not even primarily, as a place of higher education but first and foremost as a centre of scientific research. The academic pecking order is clear evidence of this: the highest accolade does not go to the best teacher but to the most successful researcher. For the researcher, there are Nobel Prizes and similar awards; for the teacher there is a bunch of flowers, a bottle of cheap wine and the dubious accolade of 'Teacher of the Year'.

The strategy to promote the university as the best place for the advancement of science has been very successful. This is hardly surprising as in every walk of life, we all benefit, in some way, from achievements in science and technology. Science has become the backbone of society, the prerequisite for progress and economic growth. There is an unbroken chain connecting knowledge to science to research to technology to industry to production to economic growth and finally to wealth and wellbeing. Today, this forms the main justification for research. However, this utilitarian reasoning is not the only, and may not even be the most important, justification for the acquisition of knowledge. The strongest, and oldest, argument in favor of the pursuit of knowledge is that it is an intrinsic good. Even in Ancient times, Cicero declared that we are all of us drawn to the pursuit of Knowledge and the search after truth.<sup>116</sup> Cicero was most probably inspired in this by the famous words from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: 'All men naturally desire knowledge.'<sup>117</sup> Aristotle also wrote: 'Clearly then it is for no extrinsic advantage that we seek this Knowledge [...] since it alone exists for itself.'<sup>118</sup> This tradition was still very much alive in the nineteenth century. Newman, for example, not only quoted Cicero but also argued himself that, 'Knowledge is, not merely a means to something beyond it, or the preliminary of certain arts into which it naturally resolves, but an end sufficient to rest in and to pursue for its own sake'.<sup>119</sup>

Newman was a pious and religious man but other thinkers also had

similar ideas. His contemporary, the French scholar Ernest Renan was a student who lost his faith, left the seminary, became an agnostic and caused a scandal by writing the *Life of Jesus* in which he wrote ‘My religion is the progress of reason, that is to say of science’.<sup>120</sup> Elsewhere, in his famous book *L’Avenir de la Science*, he said: ‘there is in this world something that is more valuable than material pleasures, or wealth, or even health, and that is the dedication to science’.<sup>121</sup>

By the time Renan declared his faith in the religion of science and Newman pleaded for knowledge for its own sake, the other argument in favor of science, the utilitarian one, had also built up a respectable tradition. Even if the utilitarian tradition cannot boast a link to Aristotle or Cicero, it was represented by a wellknown philosopher from the sixteenth century, Francis Bacon. Macaulay wrote a wonderful essay on Bacon, in which he has an imaginary follower of Bacon summarize what ‘the new philosophy’, i.e. science, has done for mankind: ‘It has lengthened life; it has mitigated pain; it has extinguished diseases; it has increased the fertility of the soil; (...) it has spanned great rivers and estuaries with bridges of form unknown to our fathers; (...) it has lighted up the night with the splendor of the day; it has extended the range of the human vision; it has multiplied the power of the human muscles; it has accelerated motion; it has annihilated distance (...)’.<sup>122</sup> And so Macaulay went on for another two pages.

Currently, this is the main argument for the promotion of science. Since the Second World War, the practical application of science has underlined the importance of advancing pure science. However, defending the interests of pure science while, at the same time, securing funds from the state has turned out to be a delicate balancing act and a rather humiliating task at that. As that remarkable observer of human nature Sir Humphrey Appleby, one of the main characters from the series *Yes Minister*, remarked on an occasion when his boss visited Oxford: ‘No one really understands the true nature of fawning servility until he has seen an academic who has glimpsed the prospect of money’.<sup>123</sup> A few years in academia suffice to learn how true this observation is. Nevertheless, there are also some remarkable examples of intellectual honesty. In 1969, when particle physics was at its zenith — it had given the American politicians first the atomic and then the hydrogen bomb — Robert Wilson, director of a famous particle-physics lab, was asked by Congress what his laboratory could contribute to America’s defense. There was, of course, an enormous amount of money at stake, but Wilson replied: ‘This new knowledge has all to do with honor and country, but it has nothing to

do directly with defending our country, except to help make it worth defending'.<sup>124</sup>

Because the state has become the main financier of science it is able to influence what kind of research will be promoted and what will fall by the way-side. This is called 'research policy'. By putting pressure on research councils, the government can, either directly or indirectly, influence research priorities in the natural and the life-sciences and, also increasingly, in the humanities and social sciences.

While this is generally considered acceptable for the sciences, and nowadays also for the humanities, it has, hitherto, not been considered acceptable for the arts. This is quite remarkable as the state now not only takes care of education and science, but has also become the principal financier of the arts, at least in Europe. In the late nineteenth century, when scientists realized that in order to gain public support they could not defend science for the sake of science alone, the art world did exactly the opposite. It proclaimed its new ideal of art for the sake of art alone ('l'art pour l'art'). This idea has been so successfully disseminated that if an occasional progressive politician tries to support socialist art, or promote cultural activities for young people or for immigrants, this is generally considered to demonstrate a lack of taste. Where does this difference in attitude come from? What does this tell us about the difference between science and art?

#### ART

Although in actual practice artists and scholars usually move in separate spheres, it would be difficult to deny that, even if their worlds are different, there is a sense in which they are identical. They both spring from the human mind. The creativity of the artist can easily be equated to the inspiration of the scientist. Artists today mostly work alone, although this was different in the days of Rembrandt and Rubens. Scientists usually work in groups. But in science as in art it is the drive of the individual that matters. The concept of genius is equally applicable to music as it is to mathematics. The name of Einstein is a symbol of scientific genius as much as the name Van Gogh is of artistic genius.

When in 1998, the Royal Netherlands Academy celebrated its one hundred ninetieth birthday, it chose *Science and Art* as its theme. Part of the jubilee symposium consisted of a series of dialogs between an artist and scholar.<sup>125</sup> As a historian I had an easy task as speaker because history is clearly a hybrid discipline: it is a mixture of science and art. But

more generally I think it is fair to say that science and art are usually defined more by their differences than by their similarities. The most striking difference is that science is characterized by the notion of progress, while art is not.<sup>126</sup>

Research is a cumulative process: knowledge is advanced by building on the achievements of the past. Copernicus and Newton are still famous but their theories are outdated. A mediocre high school physics teacher of today possesses far more knowledge about the laws of nature than Newton did. In the world of art, this is very different. At least, one rarely hears people say how fortunate we are today to have Karel Appel, Stockhausen and Le Clézio so that we do not have to suffer anymore the primitive attempts of Rembrandt, Mozart and Shakespeare. But, different as they are, there is in my mind no doubt that science and art are also very similar in so far as they are the two most sublime expressions of the human mind. There is also no doubt that, as Cicero said, as soon as human beings have satisfied their most basic needs, they start to search for knowledge. And, as prehistoric cave paintings demonstrate, humans will then also look for beauty. The search for truth, through knowledge, is not unlike the search for beauty, through art. As Carl Kaysen, former director of the Institute for Advanced Study of Princeton, once said, ‘the ultimate standards in the intellectual world are aesthetic’<sup>127</sup> and one of his successors, Philip Griffiths, a mathematician, remarked: ‘Fundamental thinking has much in common with art, with play, with dreams; it is fragile and unformed’.<sup>128</sup>

In the paper I presented at the Academy symposium I quoted, in this context, two famous lines from John Keats’ ‘Ode on a Grecian urn’:

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty — that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

I was criticized on this point by one of my colleagues who said that if, indeed, this is all one needs to know, we might as well close down all the universities right now!

He obviously interpreted Keats a little too literally, which shows how dangerous it is to rely on poetry in order to illustrate an argument. Nevertheless, I am willing to take that risk once again and quote another poem, with a similar tenor, this time by Emily Dickinson:

‘I died for Beauty — but was scarce  
Adjusted in the Tomb

When one who died for Truth, was lain  
In an adjoining room —  
He questioned softly, ‘Why I failed’?  
‘For Beauty,’ I replied —  
‘And I — for Truth — Themselves are One —  
We Brethren, are,’ He said.’

It is time to come to a conclusion. What I have tried to argue can be summarized in four simple statements: 1) It is important, indeed imperative, to come to some agreement about the role of humanist studies in secondary and tertiary education. 2) The European universities are going through a stage of structural change, which will result in a new academic landscape with greater diversity than before. 3) It is wrong, particularly for the humanities, but also for the sciences to defend and illustrate the importance of science and scholarship in utilitarian terms only. 4) Although there are fundamental differences, science and art also have a great deal in common. And finally of course we will have to reconsider Newman’s idea that Western civilization is the only true “civilization of the human race, (...) its perfect result and limit”. Such a reconsideration will have important consequences for the way we look at other civilizations today.

## History: Science or Art?

Is history a science or an art? There are several ways of looking at this well known and frequently debated question. One way would be to look at the categorization of disciplines as made by the *Academia Europaea*. This organization has given a great deal of thought to the matter, resulting in the rather practical solution of essentially distinguishing four broad categories: Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and Life Sciences. It is noticeable that, apart from the Humanities, all other scholars use the term 'science' to describe their work. But not all of them will be considered as scientists proper because in the English language, the word *science* or *sciences* in its simple form, thus without any adjective, refers exclusively to the natural sciences.

To a certain extent the same is true in France. Of course, the concept of the *sciences humaines* or the *sciences de l'homme* is well established — although they are not altogether too clearly distinguished from the *sciences sociales* — but here again '*les sciences*' in its simple form is the term used for the natural sciences. Thus, the *Institut de France* includes five academies but only one of them simply calls itself *Académie des Sciences*, and that, of course, is the one for the natural sciences.

In German — and Dutch — the situation is different. The term *Wissenschaft* does not exclusively refer to the natural sciences. There is no *Wissenschaft* as such. There is *Naturwissenschaft* and there is *Geisteswissenschaft* or *Kulturwissenschaft*. They are different, but both are *Wissenschaft*. This may be because the term *Wissenschaft* comes from *Wissen* (knowledge) and although the humanities may not be scientific, obviously it cannot be denied that they are based on knowledge.

The German notion of the *Kultur-* or *Geisteswissenschaft* has much to do with the development of history as a scientific discipline in the course of the 19th century. This was a new development, because originally, in its traditional or classical form, history was considered as a form of literature. After all, apart from, somewhat surprisingly, astronomy, it is the only discipline to have its own muse: *Kleio*. Classical historians were and still are considered as part of classical literature: Herodotus, Livy, Tacitus and even Caesar are — or should we say were? — read at school, just as were

Euripides, Virgil and Horace. This also was the case with historians like Machiavelli, Schiller and Voltaire, who were at the same time famous writers. This tradition continued well into the 19th century: Macaulay, Carlyle, Michelet were all typically literary historians.

Then there came a reaction to this situation with the plea for the introduction of scientific methods in history. The first stage in this process of 'scientification' brought the introduction of the so-called philological and text-critical method. The principal task of the historian was supposed to be the truthful reconstruction and interpretation of historical texts and documents. The aim of his work was *verstehen*: to understand the past. The word *verstehen* already indicates that this was a typically German movement, which indeed it was. But the German example was followed all over Europe. We owe a great deal to the German historical school of the 19th century. We owe it some important notions that are still part and parcel of historical thinking: the notion of development over time, that is the diachronic concept of history, as well as the synchronic concept of history, i.e. the notion that every period has its own character and that there is a unity that connects all the phenomena during a certain period. Furthermore, we owe to it the notion that goes with this, namely that every period should be judged according to the standards of its own time or, in the famous words of the German historian Ranke, that every period is *unmittelbar zu Gott*. All this can be summarized as what the Germans call *Historismus* (Historicism).

Historicism strongly underlined the uniqueness of historical events. This led to the great debate at the end of the 19th century that was in particular animated by the German neo-Kantian philosophers Rickert and Windelband, who claimed that there were, in fact, two models of science, the model of the natural sciences which they labelled 'nomothetic' because it is interested in regularities and thus in laws, and another totally different concept of science, which they labelled 'idiographic', because it is not interested in laws but in the particular and the unique. Its aim is to give an accurate description rather than to discover laws and rules.

This was the first strategy used by historians in order to have their discipline accepted as a science: to promote their activities as a science *sui generis*, in its own right. It was not wholly unsuccessful but ultimately it was vulnerable because it was in contradiction with the very powerful notion of the unity of science. After all it is not easy to accept that there exist two practices that are very different but have the same name of science. But it was not only 'idiographic' theory that was criticized, for historical practice was also attacked. The criticism was that this approach

to history was too narrow, too much focused on great men and political events. History should also study the anonymous people who had always represented the vast majority of the population. Thus social history came about and methods were developed to study the unknown people of the past, first in Europe, the peasants and the laboring classes, later on also in the rest of the world, the so-called 'people without history'. This led to the second strategy of historians in trying to become accepted as a science, the one of the conversion to the social sciences.

This school of thinking with which the name of the French *Annales* group is intimately connected, was dominant during the greatest part of the 20th century. It had a strong impact on history not only in France but also elsewhere. It played an important role in the renewal of historical studies, by introducing new themes, new approaches, new methods and new techniques. It continues to be important but in recent years a new school has become fashionable which may be labelled the narrative school. Essential for their way of thinking is the claim that history not only is not a social science but that it is not a science at all and that the purpose of doing history lies in something else, viz. in the enjoyment of 'the pleasures of the past'. The background of this development is manifold. It concerns postmodernism and the so called 'linguistic turn', but also of course it is connected with the general decline in appreciation of the social sciences. To be a social scientist may have seemed attractive in the 1960s, but it did not sound so very sexy in the 1980s!

Who is right? The narrativists or the scientists? To the non-philosophical mind it is clear that the answer lies somewhere in the middle. If history is a science it is a rather special sort of science, but if it is to be considered as a form of literature, it is also a very special form of literature. History is different from the sciences in so far as it is very difficult to speak of scientific progress. Science in its proper sense is characterized by the accumulation of knowledge, and thus by progress. Very few school-teachers of today will have the mind of Newton or Darwin but most of them have a better insight into nature than these geniuses had. This is not the case in history. History is not based on the accumulation of knowledge. We know now more about the French Revolution than Michelet did. We can also agree that some interpretations of the Revolution have proved to be untenable, that they have been 'falsified', to put it in Popperian terms. But we cannot say that we now know the truth about the French Revolution while our ancestors did not. In this respect history is more like the arts where the idea of progress is also either absent or ambiguous. Who for example would say that, now that we can enjoy

Appel, Albee and Andriessen, we can happily get rid of the works of Rembrandt, Shakespeare and Mozart? In this respect history may also be somewhat similar to philosophy, insofar as that discipline too is hardly considered as a story of continuous progress, from the clumsy reasonings of Plato and Aristotle to the high levels of sophistication of Heidegger's 'Nichtendes Nichts' and Sartre's 'être en soi'.

On the other hand history is not simply literature either. This can also be pretty easily demonstrated. A novelist may write: 'It was a rainy day in Carlovica, the splendid capital of Ruritania, when Queen Diana woke up on the morning of November 11, 1945. The Queen felt miserable, she hated rain and was always depressed by it'. It is prose that may not lead straightaway to the Noble or the Booker Prize, but, apart from aesthetic concerns, no objection can be made to it. A historian however could only write this if he had evidence for all his statements: Was it indeed raining that day? Was the Queen depressed? Was this because of the weather? How does he know that? This he will have to explain by giving references and mentioning his sources. In other words, like the novelist he writes a story, but in his case he needs sources to justify his story.

Historians have often been worried by the ambiguous character of their trade. But they should not be. Whatever their discipline may be, it is appreciated both by the public at large and by their peers from other disciplines. In a way, their work is more respected than that of their colleagues in the social sciences. They can write for large audiences, while at the same time and for the same work also be praised by their fellow historians. Historians may receive the Nobel Prize for Literature but they have also received it for Economics. In short, they live in the best of two worlds and they had better enjoy it. For more than anybody else they ought to know that things may change.

## Two *Fin de Siècles*

Was the end of the 20th century comparable with the end of the 19th century, the so-called *fin de siècle*? To what extent were the cultural characterizations of that decade — for *fin de siècle* is first and foremost a cultural concept — applicable to those days? The answer to this question is not easy to give because there are similarities as well as dissimilarities. The central preoccupation of the *fin de siècle* was the feeling of decadence, the idea that European civilization was past its prime and on to the end. Living in the 1990s it was only logical that we were reminded of the 1890s and asked ourselves whether our period resembled those years, whether the cultural characterizations of that decade were also relevant to our time.

In order to be able to answer this question we should consider the similarities and dissimilarities between the two periods. When doing so, a serious complication arises. We know about the end of the 19th century, and we can even know it in two ways. We can look at it through the eyes of contemporaries, who devised the term *fin de siècle*; but also, more closely, through the magnifying glass of present day historians with their hindsight. In other words, we may reconstruct that which the contemporaries saw as typical of their time as well as that which we now consider as characteristic. These need not necessarily coincide. However, we cannot do the same thing for our own time. We do not know what the historic judgement of our time will be. Moreover, we hardly know our contemporaries' judgement of the 1990s. Rather unwisely then, I shall try and discuss our own time anyway, but considerably more briefly than the previous *fin de siècle*.

Before doing so, something has to be said about the notion *fin de siècle* itself. What exactly does *fin de siècle* mean? Literally nothing more than: the end of the century. But, as everyone knows, the term refers to the end of one specific century, that of the 19th century. Yet, since the beginning of the Christian era 18 other ends of centuries preceded that one, and one even included the end of a millennium. For that is what we were doing in the 1990s: we were not just witnessing the end of a century, we were living to see the end of a millennium. So we were in the same posi-

tion as people were in the decade preceding the year 1000. According to the romantic historians of the 19th century, people had a vivid sense of a finality of time around the year 1000. That year would bring not only the end of a century and a millennium, but the end of the world, because the thousand years' realm from the book of *Revelations* would perish then, a thousand years after Christ's birth. Modern historians are no longer quite so sure about this subject, therefore I will leave it at that. It does not matter to us so much for, when our thoughts go back to the *fin de siècle* we do not think of the 1990s, but of the 1890s. There is only one real *fin de siècle*, and that is the end of the 19th century.

How come there is only one *fin de siècle*? Well, it is not because historians decided afterwards that these were such exceptional years. Contemporaries did so and that was a pretension which they recognized themselves. John Grand-Carteret wrote in his book *XIXe siècle* that he and his contemporaries had pompously named *fin de siècle* that period which, in the eighteenth century, had simply been called 'la fin du siècle'.<sup>129</sup> That was in 1893 and ever since that moment the term *fin de siècle* crops up regularly. The term itself, however, is somewhat older and was probably used for the first time in the comedy of the same name by Jovenot and Micard in 1880.

In the meantime, we need to establish which years exactly comprise the *fin de siècle*. Of course, in the first instance one thinks of the decade 1890–1900, but often the notion is used in a wider sense. Some people define the *fin de siècle* as beginning in 1880 or 1877 and others again consider it as continuing until 1905 or 1914. But let us stick to the literal *fin de siècle*, that is to say the 1890s. *Fin de siècle* is, however, not only (and not even primarily) a chronological notion. It is primarily used as a cultural-historical concept, created by the contemporaries themselves to express that aspect which they considered to be the most characteristic of their time, namely that it was a final time, a waning, or to use another metaphor, the *Dämmerung*, a twilight of civilization. To them, *fin de siècle* was also and especially a certain attitude, a pose. Anything strange and mysterious was called *fin de siècle*. Holbrook Jackson illustrates this in his *Eighteen-nineties*: a wedding party in a gas-works, followed by a honeymoon in a balloon, that is *fin de siècle*. A police-officer who, after the execution of a murderer he has caught, uses a piece of his skin to manufacture a cigar-case, that is *fin de siècle*.<sup>130</sup> Eugen Weber tells in his book *France. Fin de siècle* of a man taken to court because he lives on his wife's income obtained from prostitution, who alleges as his defence: 'But I am just a *fin de siècle* husband'.<sup>131</sup>

So there are many notions connected with the *fin de siècle*: that of ‘unity of contrasts’, as Grand-Carteret wrote,<sup>132</sup> and of ambivalence or *Halbheit*, to give it a Viennese ring, of perversity, complexity, eccentricity, nihilism, abnormality, egotism, refinement, artificiality and, paradoxically enough, also of renovation and modernity. But one notion dominates all others, namely that of decadence. Now, decadence itself is also a complicated notion with many connotations, from completion to decay, and with different backgrounds — I will come back to that later — but let us confine ourselves for the time being to this observation of decadence.

So we may agree on the fact that the *fin de siècle* is a cultural-historical notion rather than a chronological one, that it may be dated around 1900 and that it was dominated by a sense of down-grade and decline. The question arising then is whether the *fin de siècle* was a common European phenomenon. I mean this in a national sense and not in a social sense — naturally it was a phenomenon confined to the elite; neither farmers in their hovels nor workers in their factories will have cared much about the decline of civilization or the way in which the clock ticked away the hours of the century: they had other, real problems. What I mean is this: was the *fin de siècle* exclusively a French phenomenon, or was it to be found in all European countries? The answer is simple: the latter is the case, but in each country there were rather great differences.

The Spaniards had a real *fin de siècle*. To them, in 1898, with the war lost against the United States and the loss of Cuba and the Philippines, the remnants of the Spanish supremacy were brought to an end. This caused a considerable political and psychological shock. The ‘generation of 1898’, as they were called in literature, that is to say the generation born in the 1870s, was marked by it. This Spanish experience however, was an exceptional one and did not have much to do with the *fin de siècle* as a European cultural phenomenon.

One might call a figure such as the Bavarian King Ludwig II a typical *fin de siècle* person, but the Wilhelminian Germany is certainly not to be associated with *fin de siècle*, rather with bragging and a belief in progress. In Italy the *Risorgimento* was followed by a period of scepticism and uncertainty, but that stretched beyond the barriers of the *fin de siècle* and culminated in the post-war years and the rise of Mussolini. In the Netherlands, an author like Couperus is associated with the *fin de siècle*, but he was obviously a solitary individual. Dutch literature had finished with the *fin de siècle* during the movement of the ‘Writers of the Eighties’ with its extreme individualism and aestheticism. The 1890s on the other hand were characterized by a search for harmony and balance.

The Americans also knew their *fin de siècle*, but that had a totally different tone. Do not they speak of the 'gay nineties', when 'gay' then simply meant merry?

In England however, we see a real *fin de siècle*. It has been beautifully evoked by Holbrook Jackson in the previously mentioned *The Eighteen-nineties*. We all know its most famous representatives: Aubrey Beardsley in the arts, and in literature Oscar Wilde, Max Beerbohm and a whole series of minor *littérateurs*. However, this English *fin de siècle* very strongly resembles a phenomenon imported from France; which is how the English saw it themselves, as we will see.

There is only one other country which is associated with the *fin de siècle* to the same degree as France, or rather one city: Vienna. Recently, the Vienna of the *fin de siècle* has become a source of great public interest, this is the Vienna of Freud, Klimt, Hofmannsthal, Schnitzler and so many other great ones, but also of Lueger, Schönerer and Herzl; in other words, of anti-semitism, populism and zionism. Books like Wittgenstein's *Vienna*,<sup>133</sup> Carl Schorske's *Fin de siècle Vienna*<sup>134</sup> and especially the great exhibition in Paris *Vienne, L'apocalypse joyeuse*<sup>135</sup> focused on the charm and importance of Vienna during this period in a spectacular way, even to such a degree that we are tempted to consider Vienna as much as Paris as the centre of the European *fin de siècle*. Yet this parallel does not hold good completely. There are various differences between Vienna and Paris. One of them is, in my opinion, essential. In Vienna we actually see a society and civilization that perished, that disappeared. After 1914–1918 the Hapsburg Empire ceased to exist and Vienna never figured again as a cultural centre. Berlin, also capital of a defeated — but not vanished — country, took over Vienna's cultural role. Vienna became the symbol of *Die Welt von gestern* (The World of Yesterday), to quote the title of Stefan Zweig's famous book.

France is another matter. The French *fin de siècle* was followed by the *belle époque*. In the French spiritual, political and moral climate after 1890 sentiments of decadence and downfall changed to sentiments of vitalism, elan, patriotism, virility, energy, expansion, self-confidence, chauvinism, nationalism, etc. France became herself again, as the title of a well-known book by Dimnet summarized it.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, France appeared in 1914–18 to be anything but a society in disintegration. The country stood the greatest test of her history during the First World War before becoming once more the centre of world politics at the Peace Conference of Paris in 1918–1919, but that was for the last time, as we know now. However, as a cultural centre, it is still blooming, with her most

important rival no longer being Vienna or Berlin, but New York. That is the reason why the French *fin de siècle*, historically speaking, is a different story from the Austrian one. The Austrian one is a prelude, an introduction to the downfall in 1914–1918. The French *fin de siècle* is an interlude, to be followed by an era of regeneration.

For this reason it is hard to speak about the *fin de siècle* as a general European phenomenon. Countries differ too much. On the other hand it is also true that the feeling of decadence, so characteristic of the *fin de siècle*, is a common European phenomenon which can be found in all countries. During this period, Russian literature had its trend of the Decadents and downfall-philosophers, such as Vladimir Solovjev, who predicted in his *Story of the Antichrist* of 1899 an Asiatic sovereignty over Europe and the rise of the realm of the antichrist. The Italians knew Gabriele d'Annunzio as their most monumental figure of the decadent movement, the 'Victor Hugo of decadence', as Mario Praz names him in the *Romantic Agony*.<sup>137</sup> In Germany, we meet Julius Langbehn — at that time incredibly successful but now completely forgotten — who, in 1890 in his remarkable bestseller *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Rembrandt as an Educator), scourged the decay of German spiritual life — to him Rembrandt, just like Shakespeare, was a Low German.<sup>138</sup> And there was Gustav Meyrink who chose Amsterdam as a symbol of European decay and who accordingly gave the city its just deserts in his novel *Das grüne Gesicht* (The Green Face): it was destroyed by a hurricane.<sup>139</sup>

However, much better-known is another German, Max Nordau, who in his *Entartung* (Degeneration) of 1893 pointed out France as the country *par excellence* of moral and psychological decay, a country perishing by alcohol, tobacco, opium and hashish, by impurities and mental defects.<sup>140</sup> Nordau's work made a deep impression — in France as well — and when an English translation was published in 1895, it became a bestseller in that country. It was the year of the trial of Oscar Wilde, one of the leaders of the aesthetic movement, and in every respect a symbol of decadence. Nordau's book suited the English very well, for they did not love their decadents much. This work confirmed for them their conviction that their decadent movement was imported from the continent and, in particular, from that perverse country of bird-, snail- and frog-eaters, France, for which no room existed in England, and which should therefore be opposed. This feeling was formulated inimitably by John Davidson in his novel *Earl Lavender* by a lady proclaiming in a heavy Cockney-accent: 'It's fang-de-seeaycle that does it, my dear, and education and reading French'.<sup>141</sup> French import, that's what it was.

These views of the Germans and English, on the French decadence, agree surprisingly well with what the French themselves thought of it. They too were quite preoccupied with the French decay. At this point however, we encounter the problem mentioned above, the problem of what exactly decadence means. The French feeling of decadence was widespread and deeply felt, but it had different connotations from those of depravity, homosexuality and amorality.

Above all it was a realization of political and social decadence. It did not arise from the *fin de siècle's* underlying metaphor of growth, maturity and old age, of the temporariness and transitoriness of life. A specifically political experience was at its root, namely that of the defeat by Germany in 1870, and a specifically social experience, that of demographic stagnation. In the eyes of the French, France was pre-eminently a country of decadence, but in view of its specific character this could not possibly be an article of export. It was a typically French, and not a general European phenomenon. Better still, the French decadence was only the reverse of the German and English (or Anglo-Saxon) superiority, subjects on which a great number of books were published in these same 1890s.

Typical of the real *fin de siècle* feeling of decadence is the famous dialogue from Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: 'Fin de siècle, murmured Lord Henry. Fin du Globe, answered his hostess. I wish it were *fin du globe*, said Dorian sigh. Life is a great disappointment.'<sup>142</sup>

Here is the dandyish 'épater le bourgeois' — feeling of decadence in full flower. 'Sordid' and 'morbid', realistic à la Zola and romantic à la Verlaine, these were, according to Holbrook Jackson the characteristics of the English decadent literature.<sup>143</sup> Of course, we do hear these noises in France as well, but this is not the issue with the French philosophers of decadence in the first instance. In France the issue was not 'la fin du globe', nor 'la fin du monde' but the end of a particular world, 'la fin du monde latin'. That notion was very strong during these years, but it can also be found before the *fin de siècle*. 'We are witnessing the end of the world', Flaubert wrote in 1870 and: 'our race is finished'.<sup>144</sup> Taine and Renan proclaimed the same in famous writings like *Les Origines de la France contemporaine* (The Origins of Contemporary France)<sup>145</sup> and *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France* (The Intellectual and Moral Reform of France),<sup>146</sup> but they also showed the way to recovery: science and patriotism. That was where the future layed. These two should put an end to decadence. In short, the Prussian model should be imitated.

That is indeed what happened. In the 1870s and 1880s barriers were put up in order to put an end to decay. The army and schools were

the instruments by which the Republicans wanted to create unity and propagate knowledge. When barriers broke down in the 1890s under the influence of the rising irrationalism and anti-patriotism, the idea of decadence returned.<sup>147</sup> This idea was taken over by authors and aesthetes in other countries from their French colleagues and was made into a general concept. However, while doing so its content was changed. The typically French idea of decadence with its specific political and social backgrounds changed to a general feeling of downfall, which was coupled with the idea of a century coming to an end, and obtained a much vaguer, more romantic *Weltschmerz*- and *maladie-du-siècle*-like content. The mental decay in certain texts assumed almost physical dimensions. This has been formulated in an unforgettable way in the chanson on *Le jeune homme triste*, which Maurice Donnay sang in the *Chat-Noir*:

‘Il était laid et maigrelet,  
Ayant sucé le maigre lait  
D’une nourrice pessimiste’.<sup>148</sup>

Thus, we are confronted by a paradoxical conclusion. France, as we saw, is the country *par excellence* of the *fin de siècle*. Decadence, we also saw, is pre-eminently the characteristic of the *fin de siècle*. But the French idea of decadence, we finally noticed, is in fact not real *fin de siècle*, but a thing from years gone by and of different purport and background.

#### A TURNING POINT IN HISTORY?

Up to now we have discussed the vision of contemporaries. The question we have to consider now is whether that vision was correct. Is it true that the 1890s were a period of decadence? Was the *fin de siècle* a ‘fin du globe’, a ‘fin du monde’ or at least a ‘fin du monde latin’? Coming straight to the point, I believe the answer is no, but a qualified no, for here again France seems to occupy a special position.

The decade between 1890 and 1900 in French history certainly was a period of crisis. This culminated in 1898 in the dual drama of the Dreyfus-affair, and the Fashoda-incident, that great French humiliation in international politics. Rehabilitation, however, was soon to follow. After the Dreyfus-affair a powerful united front was effected in order to defend the Republic. In international politics the reconciliation with England followed in 1904, whereafter the position of France on the international scene improved considerably. The years after that (the decade before the

First World War) were not a time of decay but, on the contrary, of revival and restoration. The infrastructural weaknesses however, remained. France remained a country with a stagnant and aging population, an old-fashioned economy and a strong introversion. This would only change during the next *fin de siècle*, that of the twentieth century. The political and social crisis, however, which was the main issue to the contemporaries, was over. France was herself again. With some good reason, the 1890s in French history can be seen as a period of decay and crisis, but only if one realizes that this was temporary.

This kind of epoch and its characterization has only a very limited significance. Let us remember that this period was also the time of socialism, anarchism, feminism and imperialism and so on. There was also optimism. As K.W. Swart reported in *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-century France* many pubs during these years were named *Café du Progrès*.<sup>149</sup> Periods of time cannot be typified univocally, but we cannot do without such generalizations and there is little harm in them, so long as we realize their relativity and limit ourselves to one single country. For Europe as a whole, such generalizations are much more questionable. In a world of national states it is obvious that what applied to one country does not necessarily apply to another. On the contrary, that which was flourishing-time in one often meant decline in another. The Dutch Golden Age did not coincide with the Spanish one, but came closely after it. The decline of the one was the condition for the blooming of the other. The periods of flourishing in European cultural history are generally not only coupled to a period of time, but also to one country: Italy during the Renaissance, England under Elisabeth, Holland during the Golden Age, France during the Enlightenment, Germany under the Republic of Weimar, etc. Although, of course, these concepts are disputable, they have been accepted rather generally. For Europe as a whole however, this poses problems and therefore we should be grateful to the historians who have tried to establish the meaning of these years in a general European perspective.

Various authors have ventured to do this, but I confine myself to only two here, who have formulated very explicit theses on the subject. The Dutch historian Jan Romein described this period in his *The Watershed of Two Eras. Europe in 1900*, as a transition period. To him 1900 was a turning point in European history. Fundamental changes occurred in many fields: art, psychology, philosophy, etc.<sup>150</sup> The Englishman Geoffrey Barraclough defended, in his well-known *Introduction to Contemporary History*, an even stronger opinion: the 1890s, according to him, formed

a transition to a new phase in history. As the end of the fifteenth century was the watershed between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, likewise the end of the nineteenth century was the transition to a new historic period, the 'Contemporary Era'. The latter has a character of its own, different from the modern period. With Barraclough it is not, as with Romein, a new way of thinking he is interested in, but infrastructural changes like the Industrial Revolution, which overcame nature, and modern imperialism, which conquered and united the world.<sup>151</sup>

Naturally, such theses are open to criticism, but there is some sense in pointing out, as Romein did, that during these years the fundamentals of a number of presuppositions concerning European thinking, such as the belief in reason, science and progress, came up for discussion, and to assume with Barraclough that together with the changes in Asia and America, the first signs appeared of a fundamentally new world order, in which there would no longer be a self-evident dominance of the European economy, politics and culture. If one would like to call that *fin de siècle* or 'End of the European era' or whatever, then I do not object, but it was not a period of decadence.

The fact that we are inclined, to a certain degree, to see it that way, is of course caused by the First World War. The First World War definitely put an end to the belief in progress and European supremacy over the world. It is conceivable that we see the *fin de siècle* now for the greater part *sub specie* of this war. But, however radical the events, Europe's role and the role of European culture had not yet come to an end. That brings us to the last part of my argument, the twentieth century *fin de siècle*. Here we have to answer the same questions as we did before: were there then voices which produced similar noises as could be heard in the 1890s? Is there a reason for this?

#### THE 1990S

Clearly it is not easy to say anything about the last *fin de siècle*. The 1990s have only just finished and who can comprehend their spirit? Yet one thing seems clear to me. If *fin de siècle* is always connected with decadence — and, as we have seen, in a cultural-historical sense it is — then there seems to be no question of a *fin de siècle* feeling at this time. We all strongly realize since that *annus mirabilis*, 1989, that the world is in full motion and that we are experiencing an era of great changes, but what we see, fills us predominantly with optimism. The end of a malevolent system, decline of an incompetent bureaucracy, recaptured freedom in

Eastern and Central Europe, successful collective actions against a dictator, none of these are matters which would make us feel dejected.

Undoubtedly, a hangover will follow the intoxication and we will see that economic and social stress will come to a crisis after the dictatorships have been dissolved and that nationalistic sentiments will take their course. Already they take a heavy toll. Undoubtedly, the joy over the triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy will be silenced when the ecological catastrophe, which is inevitably the result of a worldwide expansion of the western life-style, will become visible to its full extent. We will then come to our senses and realize that it is unwise to lay the future of the world exclusively into the hands of the ladies and gentlemen of the options exchange. At that time the question as to how society should be arranged will be asked anew and new differences of opinion and new ideologies will present themselves. Even though we are most certainly experiencing times of great historical importance and probably the end of an era, I do not foresee a definitive end of ideologies or even an *End of history*.

Undoubtedly also, it is too easy to speak of the triumph of western culture and western values but the idea of an end of western civilization is remarkably absent in any case. How remarkable this is becomes evident when we consider, from this point of view, the period between the two *fin de siècle*'s. When doing so we witness a curious development. Summarized, the story amounts to the following. The first *fin de siècle*, i.e. 1890–1900, was characterized by feelings of decadence, the following decade was darkened by the threat of the great war. The first post-war decade, i.e. the 1920s, was dominated by horror and remorse over what the Europeans had done to themselves, the second post-war decade, the 1930s, by the crisis and the rise of the dictatorships. Ortega y Gasset, Huizinga, Spengler and others prophesied the end of our civilization. The Second World War did indeed seem to bring the end. As a consequence of the terrors of this war, the demolition of the European positions of authority in Asia and Africa set in. The *Era of Europe*, as Romein said was over.<sup>152</sup> Toynbee continued Spengler's work in the 1950s: the life cycle of western civilization had been completed. Romein announced the *Age of Asia*.<sup>153</sup> The 1960s finally manifested great doubts on western values and standards. Our culture seemed to have had its time. Our values were rotten. At least that was what some people thought.

The facts were different. Europe recovered in a miraculous way after 1945. Its economic and political role is not over by far. European, or rather western civilization even shows an amazing vitality. It has been criti-

cized strongly, and many have declared it to be dead and buried, but this seems to be somewhat premature. Western civilization, like God and the novel, has been declared dead over and over again. Yet they all appear to be very much alive.

If I am a good judge of the spirit of the age, there is even a renewed appreciation of western culture to be discerned and a stronger self-confidence. Is there a reason for this? Personally, I think so, but that has nothing to do with science or historic insight. It is indeed a matter of faith. To put it differently, it is anybody's guess. The only thing we can learn from historic insight is that nothing is so hard to see through as the spirit of one's own time. So let us stop trying, and come to our conclusion.

#### CONCLUSION

That conclusion can be simple. The question at issue was whether our time resembles the former *fin de siècle*. The answer is a clear no, in any case, and not just in a subjective sense. The feelings of decadence, so characteristic for the *fin de siècle*, do not, at the moment, play a dominating role in our cultural consciousness. We have neither the feeling that our civilization has reached a unique degree of flourishing, never to be surpassed by anything, nor do we have that other feeling that it is past its prime and on to the end. Western civilization is neither ripe nor rotten. It resembles the western life-style. People tend not only to become older, but to remain fit and full of vitality up to their old age. It is a rather disturbing, but familiar sight, at least in America, to see people, of 80 years of age, who are not only still alive, but also cheerfully occupied chopping wood, riding horseback, swimming and running in city parks. It is strange, but one gets used to it. The same applies to western civilization. She has grown older and become a bit damaged. Traces of a few face-lifts are visible on her face, but she is still active and full of vitality. It is tempting to elaborate on this metaphor, but it is not wise to do so, for one might end up thinking not of western civilization but of Ronald and Nancy Reagan!

To the question of whether art and science are affected by the *fin de siècle*, as they were once before, we can give a simple answer. The answer is no. Science continues and has been continuing, for centuries already, and whether it is the year 1900 or 2000, is of no consequence to its practitioners. Artists do not care which decade it is. For more than a century they have declared a new trend every decade: impressionism, expressionism, fauvism, dadaism, surrealism, constructivism, non-figuratism, min-

imalism, maximalism, neo-realism, post-modernism, deconstructivism, etc. Undoubtedly they will go on like this. The *fin de siècle* has presented itself here already. However, in literature and essayism — in short, in those organs which determine the cultural climate — we do not for the time being find the idea of a *fin de siècle*. Worries concern the economy and politics, the recession and the revival of nationalism, but not the decay of European or western civilization. Many things may change as yet, but for the time being the differences in mentality between the end of the twentieth century and the previous one seem to surpass the number of their similarities.

## Johan Huizinga and the Spirit of the Nineteen Thirties

The historian Johan Huizinga lived from 1872 to 1945 and whilst he came from a line of Baptist ministers, his father, by contrast, was a professor at the medical faculty of the university of Groningen. As rector of the university, member of the municipal council and president-curator of the municipal 'gymnasium', he belonged to the local elite of Groningen, albeit not to the top. The style of living in the Huizinga household was sober and even slightly blinkered. Johan attended the municipal gymnasium and after his graduation, in 1891, he read Dutch at the university of Groningen. In his student days he became fascinated by art and literature, but nonetheless did not neglect his studies. He took his bachelor's exams and gained a *cum laude* iudicium in 1893, after which he specialized in linguistics. He graduated on June 5, 1895. After a year of further study in Leipzig, he returned to Groningen and on May 28, 1897, he obtained his doctorate with a thesis on *De Vidûshaka in het Indisch tooneel* (The 'Vidûshaka' in Indian theatre), under the tutelage of the sanskritist J.S. Speyer. He still was a young man who had not yet reached the age of twenty-five.

Huizinga could thus with some justification be regarded as a linguist and with some imagination as a sanskritist, but certainly not as a historian. As for the study of history, he had limited himself to attending P.J. Blok's lectures on Dutch history in Groningen. Blok was also instrumental in Huizinga obtaining his first job in 1897: that of history teacher at a secondary school in Haarlem. His bachelor's degree in Dutch qualified him to teach history at this level. In 1902, the young history teacher married a girl from a very distinguished family, Lady Mary Vincentia Schorer, the daughter of the mayor of Middelburg.

Huizinga remained a secondary school teacher, although this was not completely to his liking. He wanted something to do besides teaching, and in 1903 he became an unsalaried lecturer in History and Literature of British India at the University of Amsterdam. In 1905, at the age of thirty-three, Huizinga was appointed professor of General and Dutch History in Groningen. A little less than ten years after his appointment

in Groningen, Huizinga was appointed professor of General History in Leiden. This was towards the end of 1914, shortly after the death of his wife. He quickly gained renown in the academic arena. His book *Herfst-tij der Middeleeuwen* (The Waning of the Middle Ages) appeared in 1919. This book made his name as a historian. In 1924, the book was published in English and German, gaining him international repute. These events were quickly followed by invitations from abroad and guest lectures. Huizinga's most successful book, *In de schaduwen van morgen* (In the shadows of tomorrow), appeared in 1935. This book was translated into eight languages very soon after its publication, and was reprinted many times. From being an internationally famous cultural historian, Huizinga now became a world famous cultural critic. Huizinga's last major work, *Homo ludens*, published in 1938, provided the third element of his current reputation, that of cultural philosopher.

At first glance, the story of Huizinga's life seems to paint a picture of a predestined and effortless road to the top. And this is indeed the way the story is often told. Those who take a closer look at this life, however, will find that there was another side to it, and that with hindsight, Huizinga's career was not the straightforward success story it appears to be.

#### HUIZINGA'S PRIVATE LIFE

Huizinga talked only rarely about his private life. The odd paragraph in the autobiographical essay *Mijn weg tot de historie* (My road to history) provides a glimpse into his private life.<sup>154</sup> Huizinga's Correspondence, published a few years ago, greatly adds to our knowledge of the subject.<sup>155</sup> His dearly beloved wife died at a very young age in 1914 and left him with five very young children. He remained a widower for almost a quarter of a century, not remarrying until 1937, when he married Auguste Schölvink, who was thirty-seven years his junior. They had one child.

Huizinga's father was a complicated character and a tormented spirit. He had originally wanted to study theology, but gave up this idea because he lost his faith. He lived a wild life in his student days. He contracted syphilis, and at the end needed morphine to make his suffering bearable. Another son, Herman, became convinced that he also suffered from syphilis and, at seventeen, committed suicide because of this, just a few months before the death of their father. Obviously, these events will have made a significant impression on the dreamy and sensitive boy that Johan Huizinga was.

As has been said, Huizinga's first marriage was an extremely happy

one, but it lasted only a very short time. In those days it was not unusual for men to become widowers at an early age, but it was rather unusual to remain one for so long, especially in a case such as Huizinga's. At the time of his first wife's death his children were eleven, nine, eight, six and two years old respectively. From 1914 until 1937, over twenty-three years, he lived alone with his growing children and the many members of domestic staff common in his circles in those days. His grief was not limited to the death of his first wife. His oldest son Dirk, who had always suffered from poor health, died at the age of fifteen, in 1920. Huizinga's relationship with his children was rather complicated, to put it mildly. The distance at which he kept them was unusual even for his time.

The years of his widowhood almost completely coincided with the years of his professorship at Leiden University and his growing international reputation. Did the tragedies of his private life influence his work and his academic productivity? Surprisingly, the answer to this question appears to be: not at all. He wrote two of his most important works in the first five years after his first wife's death: *Mensch en menigte in Amerika* [Men and masses in America] and *The Waning of the Middle Ages*; these being published in 1918 and 1919 respectively. Moreover, *Erasmus* followed in 1924, *Tien studies* [Ten studies] in 1926, the second book on America and the biography of Jan Veth in 1927, and *Cultuurhistorische verkenningen* [Cultural-historical explorations] in 1929. Apart from *Homo ludens*, all his major works appeared in the years between 1918 and 1930 (*In the Shadows of Tomorrow* is a different story). In the course of that period his children left the house one by one. His youngest child, who was two at the time of his first wife's death, turned seventeen in 1930.

That twelve-year period between 1918 and 1930 proved to be the most creative period in his life. This is also true in a purely quantitative sense as can be seen from his *Verzamelde werken* [Collected works]. In total these comprise 4,296 pages. Of these, 1,702 pages were written in the twelve-year period mentioned above. The twelve years prior to that period, 1905–1917, resulted in 871 pages, and the twelve years after, 1930–1942, rendered 1,068 pages. One could say that Huizinga was a late starter. His first well-known book appeared when he was forty-six. After that his productivity, quantitatively speaking, always remained at a high level no matter what events occurred in his life. Qualitatively speaking the standard of his work declined somewhat. He had reached the qualitative peak of his creativity in the first ten years of his widowhood.

Whereas Huizinga's private and family life was certainly not carefree, as we have seen, his career took a smooth and successful course. Howev-

er, we must also adjust our view somewhat with regard to his career. We now know Huizinga as the world-famous historian whose work is read all over the world. This has not always been the case. One of his most famous books, *Homo ludens*, was translated rather long after its original publication and became famous even later. *Erasmus*, on the other hand, was written at the request of an American publisher, and therefore first appeared in English. This was in 1924. It was not very successful; in 1931, the publisher had over half of the two thousand copies originally printed destroyed because of a lack of interest.

More remains to be said about Huizinga's most famous work *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, which was published in Dutch in 1919. The English and German translations appeared five years later in 1924, which can be regarded as a long time for such a famous book. Much more remarkable is the fact that the French edition did not appear until 1932. And thereby also hangs a tale.

#### HUIZINGA AND THE FRENCH

Huizinga's friend, W.J.M. van Eysinga, professor of International Law at Leiden University, met the French diplomat and historian Gabriel Hanotaux at the Assembly of the League of Nations. This curious and mercurial man had become Minister for Foreign Affairs at a very early age, but as such had not been very successful and subsequently returned to his former profession, that of historian. He edited a large number of major and successful series, was a member of the Académie Française, and may therefore be regarded as an influential person. Van Eysinga tried with success to interest Hanotaux in the idea of a translation of Huizinga's work. Hanotaux subsequently approached the publisher Champion. This intervention would turn out to be the start of a long and sometimes slightly humiliating *via dolorosa* for Huizinga.

The Correspondence paints a clear picture of this. It shows how Hanotaux, from the very beginning to the end, time and again, imposes increasingly peculiar requirements on his Dutch colleague. 'You have to translate it into French yourself', is his first demand. Huizinga does it. 'You have to make it two hundred pages shorter', is his second. And Huizinga does it. Not only that, but he even writes to Hanotaux: 'The book is no doubt the better for it'.<sup>156</sup> And so on and so forth. The book has to be shorter still, the French is not good enough, the publisher has no money and Hanotaux has no time. Finally Champion asks Huizinga to make sure that a potential French translation will also be sold in the Netherlands.

When Huizinga points out that this is impossible, Champion demands that Huizinga pay half the printing costs. This is more than even Huizinga can take. 'To buy the honour of seeing my work published in French' is below his dignity.<sup>157</sup> The translation was never published, and in 1927, after six years of agony, Hanotaux finally returns the manuscript.

Five years later a French edition is published after all, but in a different translation and by a different publisher. Huizinga again approaches Hanotaux asking him to write a foreword to this edition. The latter complies, but writes in an accompanying note that he really had not had enough time to do it because he was due to leave for Morocco. He apologizes for it being a chaotic text and suggests that it may need to be improved when the proofs come in. Or perhaps it may not. It is left to Huizinga to decide what to do with the text. The book did indeed appear with the foreword as written by Hanotaux: a curious, rhetorical and chaotic text that can only have put off its potential readers. The book was not a success, and in 1936 the disappointed publisher Payot writes that he had only sold twenty-nine copies of *The Waning of the Middle Ages* in the previous year, and therefore wants to offer the book at half price. In order to stimulate sales, he will put a paper band around the book with the text: 'This book teaches us that in times of great trouble, we should not despair of human nature. Gabriel Hanotaux de l'Académie Française.'<sup>158</sup> This way, Huizinga — or rather his publisher — may have profited from Hanotaux's fame and rhetoric, at least to some extent.

It is a strange history, and yet a poignant one. Just imagine Huizinga the widower, writing in his study and translating *The Waning of the Middle Ages* into his schoolboy French, and taking his 'homework' to be discussed sentence by sentence with the austere Walloon minister Cler who rewrites every sentence, strikes out every metaphor. Then imagine that the author has to cut his work to half the size of the original, and one cannot but be surprised about the peculiar route that this work, now so famous, has had to travel.

After the French edition of *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, French interest in Huizinga still remained rather meagre. The strange thing about this is that the *Annales*-school arose in France in 1929, named after the journal *Annales d'Histoire Économique et Sociale*, which came to be the most influential school of history after the war. The founding fathers, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, preferred to work on the same periods that Huizinga was specialized in — the late Middle Ages and the early-modern period — and were also very interested in the type of history in which Huizinga pioneered: the history of mentality. In an article about

history and psychology, Febvre praised *The Waning of the Middle Ages* and called it 'fort suggestif'.<sup>159</sup> This article later came to be famous because, as was often the case with Febvre, it was in the nature of a scholarly programme. The article's argument ends in a series of suggestions for new historical themes: a history of love, death, piety, cruelty, joy and fear. This list is reminiscent of Huizinga's list of wishes, which includes a history of vanity, pride, the seven cardinal sins, the garden, the market, the horse, the inn, etc.<sup>160</sup>

The interests of Huizinga and of the historians of the *Annales* display remarkable similarities. However, there was hardly any contact between them, and certainly no cooperation ever evolved. In the index of names to Huizinga's Collected works the names of Bloch and Febvre take a modest place. Febvre is mentioned three times in passing and his name does not appear at all in Huizinga's overview of *De geschiedschrijving in het hedendaagsche Frankrijk* (Historiography in present-day France), which appeared in 1931. Marc Bloch only appears as the author of reviews in the *Revue Historique*. The name of the journal *Annales* is not mentioned anywhere and the only thing Huizinga ever wrote about the work of both founding fathers of the *Annales* was a rather critical review of Marc Bloch's *Les Rois thaumaturges*.

Thus Huizinga's interest in the *Annales* was limited and by the same token little interest was shown in his work by them. For instance, the French translation of *The Waning of the Middle Ages* has never been reviewed in the *Annales*. Marc Bloch did review the German edition of the book in the *Bulletin de la Faculté des Lettres de Strasbourg*. It appears from the Correspondence that Febvre asked Huizinga for an article for the *Annales* twice within a brief period at the end of 1933. Apparently the first letter received a hesitant reply from Huizinga. Febvre did not give up immediately but wrote in his next letter that the whole of *The Waning of the Middle Ages* would have been appropriate for publication in the *Annales*: 'Tous les chapitres de votre Déclin du Moyen-Age auraient pu y paraître les uns après les autres' ('All chapters of your Waning of the Middle Ages could have appeared here one after the other'). Huizinga next submitted two topics for publication, which were apparently not to Febvre's liking. Huizinga then told him he did not have anything else to submit and had in the meantime become occupied with other subjects.<sup>161</sup>

Nothing came of Huizinga's cooperation with the *Annales*. This is because the editors did not contact him until after *The Waning of the Middle Ages* had been published in French. By then Huizinga had largely shifted his attention from cultural history to cultural criticism. The fact

that an entire group of historians had devoted themselves to an area that he once had explored all by himself seems to have escaped his attention completely. The journal *Annales* appeared for the first time in 1929. *The Waning of the Middle Ages* was published in 1919. The French edition appeared in 1932, as we have seen. One wonders how things would have turned out had Champion published the book in 1922 or 1923.

#### FROM CULTURAL HISTORIAN TO CULTURAL CRITIC

As has been mentioned, Huizinga's productivity abated somewhat after his fifty-fifth year, yet it still remained considerable. The nature of his work changed however. In the thirties, from having been a cultural historian he became first and foremost a cultural critic, rather than a scholar he now was an intellectual. The extent to which that transition was either the result of a conscious choice or of circumstances is difficult to ascertain. In his major work about modern Dutch historiography the Belgian historian Jo Tollebeek wrote that circumstances after 1933 'forced [...] Huizinga to a fundamental cultural criticism'.<sup>162</sup> That is putting it a bit strongly. It was most probably a combination of factors that brought Huizinga to undertake his activities as a cultural critic. The situation in the world was of course important, but his personal development also played a role.

It seems that by the end of the 1920s, his main creative wave had run its course and his doubts about the importance of purely scholarly work grew. These doubts had always been present in him. Huizinga had always been more of a generalist than a specialist. He preferred to write for a cultural journal such as *De Gids* rather than for a specialist historical journal such as the *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*. Nevertheless, he had been extremely successful as a historian. He was undoubtedly held in high regard as a scholar in the Netherlands, as well as becoming a member and eventually the president of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. And as a historian he was also known and acknowledged abroad. Would it not have been appealing to follow up on these academic successes by playing a role outside of the academic and university world, and to make known to a wider public the opinions and insights in modern civilization he had developed? In other words, was not the time right to take up a more important position in the intellectual and cultural life of his times? It seems not too implausible that such ideas and emotions must have gone through his mind. Maybe his domestic circumstances also played a role. The first phase of life after his first wife's death, which

had been colored by his family and work, ended around 1930. Whatever brought Huizinga to his new activities, it is certain that he played his new role of cultural critic with great enthusiasm, and that he felt comfortable in this role. It added a new element to his fulfilling existence. It is to this part of his work and particularly to *In the Shadows of Tomorrow*, his main work in this area, that we must now turn.

In October 1933, Huizinga gave a lecture on 'The future of the European spirit' to the Committee of Arts and Literature of the League of Nations.<sup>163</sup> This presentation, which was followed by a discussion with prominent European intellectuals such as Julien Benda, Aldous Huxley, Paul Valéry and others, can be regarded as Huizinga's first step on the road of contemporary cultural criticism. In fact, the two main themes of *In the Shadows of Tomorrow* can already be found in the last paragraph of this lecture. In the first sentence of this paragraph we find a warning: 'Europe today finds itself exposed to more than one force threatening to send it back to barbarism.'<sup>164</sup> And the last sentence contains a recommendation: 'It is, after all, only the moral practice of communities and individuals that can cure our poor world, so rich and yet so infirm.'<sup>165</sup> The entire work, *Shadows*, published later is no more than an elaboration of these two themes.

In 1934, he further elaborates on this in an open letter to Julien Benda.<sup>166</sup> Nationalism, superstition in technology, the need for asceticism, familiar themes, are all discussed here. In that same year *Nederland's geestesmerk* (The cultural identity of Holland) appears, which is a true ode to the Netherlands and a prayer of thanks for the divine blessing that rests on the history of this country. The book includes a paragraph on the 'Crisis of culture',<sup>167</sup> in which Huizinga announced that he would further elaborate later, in a larger work, on what he had only briefly touched upon here. Here too, we find themes such as technocracy and over-organization, heroism and 'puerilism', the weakening of the morale and the decline of morals, the 'error of universal suffrage', political irrationalism, and such like. Then he was invited to deliver a speech at a dinner at 'De Grote Club' in Amsterdam in 1934 on the topic: 'Is our civilization in danger?'<sup>168</sup> And finally on February 8, 1935, Huizinga gave a speech in Brussels about the 'Crisis of civilization'. This speech was to become the reason for him to write his most successful work: *In the Shadows of Tomorrow*.

This book is no doubt Huizinga's main cultural critical work. The title provides an indication of its content. It is about the future of culture, the prospects for which are not good. The subtitle *Een diagnose van het gees-*

*telijk lijden van onzen tijd* (A diagnosis of the mental suffering of our time) makes this even clearer. The book is about suffering, and the author obviously sees himself as a doctor who wants to diagnose the disease.

This is the main theme of the book, which is elaborated in twenty-one brief, sometimes very brief, chapters. In each of these chapters is described one of the ailments of contemporary civilization. This is preceded by some general paragraphs in which the cultural crisis is determined, compared with the past and placed in the framework of an analysis of the cultural concept itself. Some themes may now be familiar: the weakening of judgement (illustrated by cinema and advertising), the decline of the critical mind (apparent from the theories on race and Freud's ideas), the abuse of science (expressed in birth control and bacteriological warfare — a surprising combination at first glance), the betrayal of the knowledge ideal (by placing the will higher than knowledge), the cult of life (which results in an overestimation of earthly happiness and a lack of interest in the hereafter), the decline of moral standards both in the international community (as expressed in the theory of the amoral state), and in private life (impurity, glorification of vice, the romanticized view of crime), the cult of heroism (called the 'superficial vogue of Nietzsche's philosophy')<sup>169</sup>, 'puerilism' (meaning the glorification of records, sports, games and of youth), lack of style and other wrongs in modern art.

Finally, Huizinga discusses the chances of recovery. Social, political and economic reform will not suffice. They will solve some problems but if the same spirit remains in control, civilization will not be restored: 'A new spirit is needed', 'an internal cleansing', 'the mental *habitus* of people needs to be changed'.<sup>170</sup> This is the way he puts it in the last chapter entitled "Catharsis". To achieve that catharsis, a new asceticism is needed, a 'surrender (...) to what may be considered the highest', not to the state or people or class or individual happiness, but to 'He who said: "I am the way, the truth and the life"<sup>171</sup>

This is the way it should be, but will it really turn out this way? Huizinga does not express his opinion on this. After all, the book was only presented as a 'diagnosis', and one should not look for a prognosis or a therapy. Nevertheless, there is something of a prognosis to be found in the text (the patient is sick, but not yet doomed) together with a remedy (asceticism and reconsideration are prescribed).

The main idea of *Shadows* then is that civilization is in decline and that this can be reversed only by a spiritual, internal regeneration through the recovery of an absolute moral embedded in metaphysics. This idea

can also be found in many other writings, both long and short, such as 'Humanisme ou humanités?', 'Geistige Zusammenarbeit der Völker', 'Conditions for a recovery of civilization', which Huizinga published in the years that followed.<sup>172</sup> They also constitute the core of his second large work about the cultural crisis of his time, *Geschonden wereld* (Damaged world), which was written under difficult circumstances during the war, and which was published in 1945, shortly after that war and shortly after the end of his own life.<sup>173</sup>

I can be brief about this last work, not because it is without significance, but because insofar as it adds new elements to Huizinga's earlier work, particularly in the shape of fairly extensive semantic and historical views of the concepts of civilization and culture, it is of little relevance with regard to our topic. While, insofar as it does relate to our topic, the book offers the same diagnosis (the crisis is a cultural crisis), the same prognosis (the future is uncertain, but we have to keep hoping) and the same therapy (remedy has to come from an ethical reconsideration and individual catharsis) as *Shadows*.

In *Shadows*, Huizinga also paid attention to international political morals. This topic was very important to him and was also to take up a considerable place in his Damaged world. Huizinga resisted the view of the amoral state, as did Hugo Grotius and his friend and colleague from Leiden the lawyer Cornelis van Vollenhoven before him, and made a plea for an international moral standard. He opposed especially the philosophy of the German lawyer Carl Schmitt, who had argued that the issue between states was not about right or wrong, but about friend or foe. With this he touched on one of the most important German historical traditions, that of the 'Primat der Aussenpolitik'. His remarks in this context about the work of Gerhard Ritter led to a correspondence with 'this exceptional and calmly thinking historian' which somewhat tempered the debate.<sup>174</sup> The German government was less composed in its reaction as becomes clear from the fact that after *Shadows*, Huizinga's name started to appear on the official German *Listen des schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums* (Lists of damaging and undesirable books).<sup>175</sup>

*In the Shadows of Tomorrow* was a successful book, and it made Huizinga world-famous. A great deal has been written about it, then and later, and many have studied the source and meaning of the views voiced in it. Were they merely an expression of the emotions of an old and downcast man, or was there more to it? Dutch critics such as the essayist Jacques de Kadt, the historian Jan Romein, a former student of Huizinga, and others regarded it as a cry for help coming from a member of the petty

bourgeoisie and emphasized the class-relatedness of his ideas. Others still, the German national-socialists for instance, regarded his ideas as typically Dutch. This is all true, but first and foremost it is a book that is characteristic of the period in which it originated. Therefore we should not only focus our attention on the spirit of Huizinga himself, but also on that of his time, the nineteen thirties.

#### HUIZINGA AND THE SPIRIT OF THE NINETEEN THIRTIES

Huizinga's book about the mental suffering of his time was one of many. There was a great deal of true suffering in the thirties, particularly in the forms of poverty and unemployment. It was a period of general angst. The fact that so many books about crisis and decline appeared in that particular period was not surprising. The First World War had ended a period of optimism and long-term international stability. The Russian Revolution of 1917 had resulted in the first modern dictatorship. Mussolini established the first fascist dictatorship in the twenties, followed in the thirties by the economic crisis and the rise of Hitler. It would have been astonishing had historians and intellectuals refrained from studying these phenomena and had priests and ministers refrained from asking people to pray and keep hope.

A large number of important works on this theme of crisis appeared, with the best known being Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*.<sup>176</sup> Albert Schweitzer published the first part of his *Kulturphilosophie* in 1923, which started with the simple yet catching observation: 'We live under the sign of the decline of civilization'.<sup>177</sup> As early as 1919, Paul Valéry published his *La Crise de l'esprit* in which he wrote: 'Nous autres, civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles' (We, civilizations, now know that we are mortal).<sup>178</sup> In his book about the 'new Middle Ages', the Russian emigrant Berdjajev gave his view on the difference between Western elements of European culture — meaning focused on the earthly and finite — and Eastern elements — focused on the revelation and the infinite. He felt the future lay in the Eastern element, because it held the remedy against the mechanistic and atheistic spirit of the West.<sup>179</sup> The German count and philosopher Keyserling published *Das Spektrum Europas* in 1928. In it he stressed the diversity within the European cultural spectrum as well as the unity of Europe. That unity was to be found in the European spirit. The task of Europe was to preserve 'the holy fire of the spirit'.<sup>180</sup> Keyserling founded his 'Schule der Weisheit' (School of wisdom) in Darmstadt for this very purpose.

The thirties showed a true explosion of crisis studies. Arnold Toynbee published the first three parts of his major Spenglerian *Study of history* in 1934.<sup>181</sup> The American sociologist of Russian descent, Pitirim Sorokin, concluded in 1937, according to him “on the basis of a vast body of evidence”, that Western society was in an extraordinary crisis.<sup>182</sup> Toynbee and Sorokin however were not to become famous until after the Second World War.

The authors in the area of cultural criticism who did become known in the thirties were others, the most famous probably being Ortega y Gasset and Julien Benda, but there were more. Ernst Jünger gave his view on modern man in *Der Arbeiter*, published in 1932.<sup>183</sup> In the same year, Henri Bergson published *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* and Jacques Maritain published *Humanisme intégral* in 1936.<sup>184</sup> Henri Mas-sis, a definite right-wing ideologist, wrote his *Défense de l'Occident*,<sup>185</sup> in which he compared the West with the East and defended the West.

Poets and novelists such as Yeats and Eliot also expressed complaints about the decline of civilization and views on what caused it, as well as about the opportunities for restoration by way of introducing authoritarian and/or aristocratic systems. The thirties can rightly be called the golden age of intellectual commitment. Some of these authors committed themselves to the communist ideology and the Soviet Union, others to fascism or national socialism. However, there were others still who could not find satisfaction in these movements and who sought new solutions. That is why a restless search for new ways and methods became apparent in these years, this having been characterized by the phrase ‘L’esprit des années trente’.<sup>186</sup>

For some, the crisis of the thirties was primarily a socio-economic crisis, a crisis of capitalism. They looked for new forms of socio-economic structuring and organization. Others felt it constituted a crisis of democracy. They looked for new forms of leadership and political organization. Still others — with one view not excluding another, of course — focused mainly on the international crisis, the crisis of the European system of states, which was a result of nationalism gone haywire. They looked for new forms of international organization, such as the League of Nations and the Pan-Europe movement.

However, there was also a group of people who regarded the crisis a cultural crisis in essence. And Huizinga belonged to this group. He had little interest in socio-economic aspects. Politics was another area in which he was not particularly interested, although he did have ideas about it. He felt democracy was only acceptable with ‘the addition of an

element of aristocracy',<sup>187</sup> and regarded the system of proportional representation 'the silliest mistake (...) a doctrinal theory of state has ever made'.<sup>188</sup> He paid a great deal of attention to the dangers of nationalism and international rivalry. He deemed an international moral and supra-state organization necessary. All these themes are dealt with in his work, yet to him the main issue was the crisis of culture.

Huizinga's cultural criticism belongs to the aristocratic school. With it — and in the nature of his analyses — his views sometimes came close to those of some fascist and reactionary cultural critics. His witticisms about the irrational character of the democracy, his concern about 'the extinction of the supply of indigenous people' in Western Europe<sup>189</sup>, his complaint about 'the depraved half-civilised' human being who does not know the wholesome restrictions of respect for tradition<sup>190</sup>, his aversion to modern art and compulsory education, his concerns about mechanization, urbanization, the decay of the landscape, the ugliness of the suburbs, and so many other things, remind us of reactionary authors such as Yeats, Eliot, Bernanos, Massis and others. It would not be difficult to compile an anthology of statements and judgements expressed by Huizinga that can also be found in the writings of the many reactionary and fascist authors who were active during the period between the two wars. On the other hand, it would also not be difficult to compile a similar anthology of statements made by Huizinga in which the social and political opinions of these authors are contested. The latter is less surprising than the former, but it is more important, because, given the influence of their era on all these authors, their mutual differences are the issue here. There are a number of differences, and they are significant.

In the first place, Huizinga often implicitly compares the present with a past, idealized or not, and this has to be so because otherwise one would not be able to discern either changes or decline. However, he does not want to return to that past, at least he realizes that this is impossible. Huizinga is too much of a historian to believe in such a return. Civilization has developed, and will develop further. We should not go back, he argues, but must move forward. We have to get through this crisis, even if we do not know where this will lead us. We have to keep creating culture, he says. This shows that Huizinga was not a reactionary. The second difference with at least some of the reactionary thinkers of that time stems from Huizinga's faith. He shows his Christianity in his work and he places his faith in the restoration of Christian values. The third difference is that Huizinga has never wanted to commit himself, politically or in any other way. In this respect he resembles Julien Benda, who pointed

out in his *La trahison des clercs* that commitment was the main sin of the modern intellectual. He also kept a certain distance with regard to the 'Committee of vigilance of anti-national socialist intellectuals', even though he certainly sympathized with their ideas.

The fourth and final difference stems from the true sobriety and bourgeois mentality that marked his character and his world. There was a clear aristocratic element in his aversion to modern culture. In his concern about the phenomena of his time and the rise of the half-civilized human being, Huizinga was no doubt honest. However, he had too much common sense to believe in 'the new man' of the fascists and the communists, and he was too much of an Erasmian not to detest fanaticism and radicalism, too much of a historian not to be convinced of the relativity of things, and too much of a Christian not to be aware of the limited capacity of man to take control of his own fate. And, as a native of Groningen, he after all was a very down-to-earth type of man. One should not expect too much zeal for the creation of the new man from someone who used to call it a day at ten o'clock every night, saying: "I don't know about you, but I am going to bed".<sup>191</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

We live in a world that is radically different from that of Huizinga, and we know it. The period between 1914 and 1945 was indeed, as was experienced and described by many, a time of crisis or at least transition. The position of Europe in the world, which in the previous century had been so dominant that it sometimes seemed as if the rest of the world did not matter, was changing. The colonial era drew to an end. America informally took over leadership of the world after 1914–1918, and did so formally after 1940–1945. Correspondingly, there was a change in society that is often rightly called the 'Americanization' of society.

The crisis caused by these social and global changes is now over and done with. The masses have not adjusted to fit the elite, but rather the elite have adopted the taste of the masses. That is why a typical thirties theme such as that of elite-versus-masses is no longer topical: the distinction no longer exists. It has often been said in reaction to the success of books such as Huizinga's *Shadows* and Ortega's *Rebellion of the Masses* that penitential sermons always have been popular. But that too is no longer the case. The prevailing mood is no longer one of pessimism, but one of optimism.

The remarkable thing is that already immediately after 1945 this

development was clearly to be seen. One would expect that the Second World War and the holocaust, the atom bomb and the Cold War would only have reinforced the mood of crisis. But they did not, at least not with regard to the future of European civilization. In the second half of the forties quite a number of books appeared on 'the-crisis-of-Europe-and-its-civilization', but in them, besides the many concerns expressed, a certain optimism could be detected: democracy had won, western civilization had proved it was alive, once again our culture had a future. And in later years these feelings became even stronger. Today, we are satisfied with our wealth, generally speaking, with our society and even with our culture. As in the years before 1900, we have experienced a *fin de siècle*, but this time without many feelings of crisis. We know, either from what we read, or more likely, from what we see of other continents on television, that things can be different, and we are not envious: neither of the disciplined way of life in wealthy Japan nor of the poverty of Africa or equally of the veiled and alcohol-free life under the ayatollah regime. We may be living in a world that is 'possessed', to quote the famous opening words of *In the Shadows of Tomorrow*, but we are certainly not doing too badly.

# Notes

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