

Introduction: Transcultural Communities in Europe

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Abstract:

This collection of papers was first presented at a research symposium at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro on March 28, 2008. The symposium was organized by the Department of German, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese Studies with the support of the Center for Critical Inquiry, the Program of International and Global Studies, and the Kohler Fund. Its goal was to understand common research interests among faculty from a variety of disciplinary and methodological approaches and to outline questions for future research ventures which would examine Europe from an interdisciplinary, transnational, and transcultural perspective.

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*****Note: Full text of article below**

INTRODUCTION: TRANSCULTURAL COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE

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THE HISTORY OF EUROPE

Since 1945, our understanding of Europe has undergone a dramatic shift. Since 1945, European history has been dominated by the history of the European Union (EU) which in turn has to be read against the backdrop of wars that plagued Europe throughout the centuries.

In 1950, the European Coal and Steel Community with its six founders, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, began to unite European countries. It was based on the assumption that economic collaboration would secure political stability and lasting peace. In 1957, the Treaty of Rome created the European Economic Community, the beginning of an ever tighter economic cooperation. However, the 1950s were also marked by the Cold War, culminating in the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. This wall symbolized the divisions running through Europe and the world, dividing the continent politically for almost three decades.

The 1960s can be characterized as a decade of increasing prosperity. In 1963, the EU signed its first big international agreement, an attempt to help former colonies in Africa. European aid for the developing world has always been linked to the respect for human rights. In its own right, this agreement can be interpreted as a first and cautious acknowledgement of the historical responsibility the EU assumes for

the colonial past of some of its member states. Just five years later, in 1968, the six founding states removed custom duties on goods imported from each other, allowing free cross-border trade for the first time. Trade among the six and between the EU and the rest of the world grew rapidly and foreshadowed processes that are currently subsumed under the buzzword globalization. 1968 also witnessed the height of global student protests and youth revolts in an attempt to change the social and cultural conditions of life and to further democratization. While Soviet tanks invaded Prague in August 1968 to crush the short-lived Prague Spring, rioting by students and workers in France in May 1968 shook the very foundations of the French state.

The first expansion of the EU occurred in January 1973. The founding six nations were joined by Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. This expansion in membership and thus in geographical reach continued in the 1980s. In 1981, Greece joined, followed by Spain and Portugal in 1986.

The seventies also witnessed the first official attempt of the democratization of the EU. In 1979, EU citizens directly elected members of the European Parliament for the first time. The push for democratic legitimacy of the EU culminated on October 29, 2004, when twenty-five EU countries signed a treaty establishing a European Constitution. It is designed to streamline democratic decision-making and management in an EU of twenty-five or more countries. It also creates the post of a European Foreign Minister. The treaty has to be ratified by all twenty-five countries before it can come into force. When citizens in both France and the Netherlands rejected the Constitution in referendums in 2005, EU leaders declared a “period of reflection,” which has been widely interpreted as a major setback for the further political integration of the European Union.

The collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War is symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Germany was united after more than forty years, and its eastern part joined the EU. The year 1995 brought a further EU enlargement with new members Austria, Finland, and Sweden. In 2004, eight countries of central and eastern Europe—the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia—joined the EU, finally ending the division of Europe decided sixty years earlier at Yalta. Cyprus and Malta also became members. In 2007, two more countries from Eastern Europe—Bulgaria, and Romania—joined the EU, bringing

the number of member states to twenty-seven countries. Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Turkey are also candidates for future membership.

The end of the Cold War did not only lead to a geographical expansion but also an increased focus on closer economic and political cooperation. In 1992, the Treaty on the European Union was signed in Maastricht. It is a major EU milestone, setting clear rules for the future single currency as well as for foreign and security policy and closer cooperation in justice and home affairs. In 1993, the so-called single market and its four freedoms were established: the free movement of goods, services, people, and money became reality. This open market was further enhanced by the Schengen agreement in 1995. Travelers can travel without any passport control at the frontiers between all countries that sign the agreement. Free trade and travel were further encouraged by the introduction of the euro in eleven countries (joined by Greece in 2001) for commercial and financial transactions only in 1999. Euro notes and coins arrived on January 1, 2002 in the following countries: Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, and Finland.

Lastly, in the new century, the EU is ready to take on military and security responsibility. In 2003, the EU took on peace-keeping operations in the Balkans, first in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and then in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In both cases, EU-led forces replaced NATO units.

Recounting the history of Europe after 1945, framed as the history of the European Union, highlights some of the issues that determine the debates surrounding Europe, most importantly its ever shifting geographic dimension, its historical determinacy as a conglomeration of nation states that, in close proximity, have to actively search for a way of peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution, its economic interdependence, and its linguistic and cultural diversity that, however, can also be understood as embodying a common European culture, in particular if set against the rest of the world.

THE CULTURE OF EUROPE—EUROPEAN CULTURE?

Whereas the historiography of Europe seems to emphasize and even privilege the economic, political, and legal aspects of the continuous and continuing European integration, it is our contention that

the cultural production that engages with Europe is equally important in shaping the real and imagined borders and structures of Europe. As the official web page of the EU emphasizes, culture takes on a very important role within the Union. In fact, Europe is officially proud of its cultural diversity and actively supports its linguistic diversity by advocating that all members should be able to speak at least three of the European languages.¹ Furthermore, it aims to promote transnational mobility and to stimulate intercultural dialogue.

As one of the leading voices in German-European Studies, P.M. Lützeler shows that most of Europe's prominent authors have commented on European cultural unity and connected their reflections with a plea for political unity as well.² During the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, when nationalist movements attempted to establish nationalistic identity, unity, and often supremacy over other European nations, it is to the credit of European writers, such as the Schlegel brothers, Madame de Stael, Heine, Nietzsche, Heinrich Mann, Tucholsky, Sartre, to name just a few, who were committed to imagine a Europe that operates within a framework of the ideals of fraternity, equality, and liberty in a space that emphasizes conflict resolution over violence.

As all of the papers show, a cultural perspective on Europe emphasizes its backdrop against a history marked by conflicts and wars. Given that background it is not surprising that authors and film makers explore the utopian potential in the European idea. It is our goal to contribute to a discourse on Europe that emphasizes the importance of the history of the continent in order to shape the future of Europe which includes rethinking its spatial reach and its place within a global network that marks the life of individuals as interdependent and thus necessitates cooperation over competition.

While this introduction began by recounting the history of Europe as manifested in the development of the European Union, I do not want to suggest that the emphasis on 1945 renders the longer historical perspective on Europe obsolete. Regardless whether one agrees with Tony Judt who emphasizes that Europe after 1945 is marked by wars for years to come or with Hartmut Kaelble who de-emphasizes the year 1945 as a radical rupture and "zero-hour" in favor of taking a long-ranging historical perspective on European developments, the papers collected here stress the importance of time and space for our current understanding of Europe and its future within an increasingly

tightly connected global society. The papers selected represent the full breadth of historical developments, ranging from the Napoleonic Wars to the most recent cultural engagement with the colonial past of France and the contemporary reshaping of German identity as one that is multicultural rather than based on blood lineage. The papers also challenge Europe from a spatial perspective. Macfie and Krive argue that Russian identity and Russian history have to be considered within a European cultural memory even though Russia is not a member of the EU.

Placing the discourse on Europe in a cultural context allows us to discuss ideas of European identity and of European diversity and thus to recognize pluralism, however difficult to achieve, as one of the cornerstones of the European project. As such, European culture can serve as the catalyst to think about the importance of communication, sustainability, justice, responsibility, and peace. While many describe the current situation of Europe as a fortress Europe that enables European integration on the expense of excluding countries considered to be outside its borders, the papers collected here emphasize that both history and the outside loom large over the European project. As such, it is high time to revisit all borders, be they determined by geography, national or ethnic identity, religion, language, or economic and legal structures.

CONSTRUCTING A EUROPEAN SPACE

Literary and cultural studies show an increasing interest in the influence that space has on the construction of cultural practices and interactions. In this context, space is understood not solely as a static pre-given entity, but as a dynamic sphere that enables cultural formation, that governs power structures, and that contributes to the construction of cultural memory. In our symposium, we are especially interested in how space generates communication between heterogeneous spheres and provides a field for transcultural exchange.

The notion of transculturalism allows us to reconsider familiar texts and to include texts that have been marginalized and overlooked previously. Since culture and its manifestations are rooted in time and space, the category of transculturalism enables us to investigate the transfer of ideas across national borders and the ways they are remembered (and forgotten).

We are interested in the history of the migration of people, texts,

and ideas within the nation space and beyond. With this symposium we are asking how the category of the “transcultural” allows us to analyze texts that are rooted in time and space yet at times transcend or subvert these categories. How do texts borrow from each other? How do people travel between seemingly distinct worlds and how do they settle in new contexts? How do ideas pass national borders? And what are the repercussions of these flows? How do these migrations transform the culture of the homeland and how are they received and integrated in the new context? How do they contribute to a specific European memory?

These papers aim to contribute to a more complete understanding of transculturalism. In particular, we are interested in how processes that currently are subsumed under the term “globalization” are rooted in and reflected by European history. What can we learn from comparative readings of past and current events in order to achieve the multiple and often conflicting goals of western society, democracy, peace, and equality?

The first two papers engage in a discussion of the influence of Stalinism on our contemporary understanding of Russia and its role in and for Europe. Kathleen Macfie discusses the life and work of D. S. Mirsky (1890-1939), a highly educated Russian from a family with an illustrious lineage who left Russia in 1921 just as the Civil War came to an end. Macfie understands him as a “specular border intellectual,” whose exile in London is accompanied by an enormous shift in ideology and self-understanding. While Mirsky originally supported the Eurasianist movement, he later came to support a nationalistic Soviet Russia and—a sign of Mirsky’s tragic misreading of Stalin and the realities of the Soviet Revolution—returned “home” only to perish in a Soviet gulag. In addition to reading his writings in the context of exile and as such as important negotiations between the ever shifting Russian society and the culture of his London exile, Macfie also emphasizes the importance of Mirsky’s writing as a contribution to the development of the emerging academic field of Russian Studies and as a commentary on transcultural European communities in the wake of the Soviet Revolution.

Sarah A. Krive examines the life and work of Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966) and her contested reception in post-socialist Russia. Akhmatova has been advanced by competing readerships as an anti-Soviet anachronism, a pro-Russian patriot, and a great artist and sur-

vivor of a brutal totalitarian regime. In an innovative close reading, Krive places life, work, and its often difficult publication history within the tradition of poetic monumentalization. Tracing the layered compositions and versions of one of Akhmatova's most challenging poem cycles, "Wreath for the Dead," Krive argues that it attempts and resists monumentalization on several levels at the same time. Thus, contemporary interest both among literary critics and readers in Akhmatova and her work ultimately leads to the ghosts of Stalinism and Russia's way of dealing with this past in the present. Akhmatova's reception after 1989 is embedded in a European landscape of remembering and forgetting, of pain and sorrow, of guilt and responsibility. This landscape is rooted in cultural representations and practices that challenge its participants to reconsider what it means to adhere to a national identity and to claim a European future.

Whereas the two papers on the effects of Stalinism focus on place and its changing significance within a geographically shifting and perpetually imagined Europe, the next two papers focus on ways of overcoming space and its limitations. James Martin discusses how the films of Turkish-German director Fatih Akin (b. 1973) challenge the geographical limits of nation states, visualize European border crossings, and introduce more fluid descriptions of national and personal identities that developed due to migration processes. Martin describes the transformation in Akin's works from stereotyped images of Turks living in Germany to more nuanced investigations of transnational identity.

Arndt Niebisch engages with the problem of overcoming space via telecommunications. He bases his argument on media theorist Marshall McLuhan who describes the synergetic effect of modern electric media by attesting that the world is condensed to a "global village." In a comparative reading of an essay by Heinrich von Kleist and Jules Verne's novel "The Journey Around the World in 80 Days" Niebisch discusses how Kleist and Verne envision personal and transcultural interactions in a global community that is connected through the telegraph. The unifying function of modern media as described by McLuhan is, after all, not merely a twentieth century fantasy turning more and more into the virtual reality of the internet; already the nineteenth century, with the invention of the electric telegraph, envisioned such a newly emerging global community.

Both Martin and Niebisch's papers reflect on the (im)possibility of "clear," unambiguous communication. Whereas Martin examines the discourse on Europe in visual culture, Niebisch proposes to consider the centrality of technological advancement for both the conduct of war and the establishment of (Western) civil society. Both papers emphasize the intrinsic link between the mode of communication and the message itself. Changes in the way we communicate affect our understanding of Europe as a geographic, political, social, and cultural entity and its global reach. Technology and travel expose the challenges faced by those who dare to participate in transnational and transcultural border crossings. At the same time, technology and travel enable those exchanges in the first place and preserve the pluralism of cultural expression.

The last paper addresses a topic that connects trends in European Studies with broader global concerns. Cybelle H. McFadden analyzes the undercurrents of social, cultural, and economic tension at the heart of Franco-Algerian relations today. Through close readings of two contemporary films, Dominique Cabrera's *L'Autre Côté de la Mer* (1997) and Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005), she shows that France's colonial past continues to have a profound impact on French society in the twenty-first century. The recent uprisings in the suburbs of Paris, often considered functioning as the modern equivalent of medieval ghettos, and the political and social concerns these events trigger are reflected in visual culture. However, as McFadden's analysis convincingly shows, there is no easy answer to solve the problems that arise in the aftermath of colonialism. The ghosts of the past demand the acknowledgement of historical guilt and the acceptance of responsibility even by generations that are seemingly far removed from the historical events. Furthermore, the discussion of the impact of the colonial legacy emphasizes that Europe extends beyond its geographical borders and that as long as there are borders they will be crossed by someone willing or forced to undertake the journey. While these transnational and transcultural crossings might trigger fear and resistance, they also present the unique opportunity to continue realizing the unfinished project of Europe and its promise of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

NOTES

¹ These aims were spelt out in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, which recognized formally for the first time the cultural dimension of European integration.

² Lützelner is author and editor of the following two studies: *Die Schriftsteller und Europa. Von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart* and *Europäische Identität und Multikultur. Fallstudien zur deutschsprachigen Literatur seit der Romantik*.

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