

New Perspectives on Europe from 1914 to 1945

Alice-Catherine Carls

University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, TN, USA

Stephen D. Carls

Union University, Jackson, TN, USA

Abstract: *Europe from War to War, 1914–1945* started as an attempt to document topics left blank in most textbooks dealing with twentieth century Europe. It ended up being a thoroughly researched, comprehensive study of the first half of the century. Its original structure features parallel chapters within each chronological section (1914–1919, 1929–1939, 1939–1945). Each section contains two chapters that deal with international and domestic matters. Chapters are organized topically. In the chapters focusing on international affairs, military and diplomatic issues are considered in their complementarity, and the technological and global dimensions of each conflict are highlighted. In chapters dealing with domestic matters, economic, political, demographic, and social developments are dealt with a systematic fashion. As a result of the consistent coverage of topics, the continuum of history reverberates throughout the book.

Europe from War to War, 1914–1945 highlights topics that are seldom handled in comprehensive studies of the time period, such as: the contributions of the colonies to European powers in both world wars; interwar projects for European unification; the role of Scandinavian, Iberian, and Balkan countries; the role of religion; transnational feminism; the demographics of minorities, emigration and refugees; the impact of both world wars on initiatives such as relief efforts, international labor regulation, and public health.

Modernization, a key theme throughout the chapters dealing with domestic developments, is examined through five criteria: political change (democracy, human rights, political participation and liberal measures), demographic change (refugees, resettlements, migrations, and growth), economic progress (industrial modernization, agricultural reforms and labor legislation), social policies (welfare, professional mobility, public health, and women's advancement), and urban development (urban planning, transportation). A separate chapter deals with cultural developments from 1914 to 1945; it provides an integrating perspective on the period's momentous changes.

Key words: Aristide Briand, modernization, total war, League of Nations, European integration, Władysław Sikorski, Józef Wittlin, Albert Thomas, religion, emigration, emancipation of women, paradigm shift

Nowe perspektywy badań Europy w latach 1914–1945

Streszczenie: Tragiczne wydarzenia z lat 1914–1945 zostały przypięczone dwoma wojnami. Uznaje się je za część procesu, który rozpoczął się podczas Rewolucji Francuskiej i był przejawem dążenia do kontrolowania świata w imię postępu. Owa tendencja uwidaczniała się na trzech płaszczyznach i obejmowała kontrolę umysłów poprzez rewolucję naukową i oświecenie, kontrolę natury poprzez eksploatację zasobów naturalnych i rewolucję przemysłową oraz kontrolę nad światem poprzez kolonizację. Konflikty wywołane tymi dążeniami zakończyły się manichejską konfrontacją dobra i zła, która doprowadziła do najszlachetniejszego i najokrutniejszego ludzkiego zachowania, zamkniętego w lustrzanych odbiciach. Europa została po prostu uwieczniona między zniszczeniem a odrodzeniem. Połączone razem – moc zabijania i moc uzdrawiania – stanowiły o tożsamości ówczesnej Europy. Niemożliwe jest pisanie o Europie XX wieku bez zwracania uwagi na terażniejszość. Podwójna tragedia wojny i ludobójstwa, której doświadczyła Europa w latach 1914–1945, spowodowała jej upadek, cofnięcie się „do zera” w rozwoju cywilizacyjnym. Był to wiek przemiany w historii Europy, która odegrała kluczową rolę w kształtowaniu dzisiejszej Europy. Dotknęła ona Europę tak głęboko, że dzisiejsza dynamika cywilizacyjna wciąż jest postrzegana przez tamten pryzmat i słownictwo tego okresu. Nadal jest miarą, której używamy do określenia i zmierzenia spektrum politycznego oddziaływania z „lewego” na „prawy”. Towarzyszy temu poczucie winy, że zniszczenie krajów i łamanie praw człowieka nie zostało jeszcze w pełni odpokutowane. Nasza próba wyjścia poza przeszłość ujawnia tylko szerokość i głębokość traumy, którą przeżyły trzy poprzednie pokolenia. Ocenie niezliczonych poważnych lub zupełnie drobnych incydentów towarzyszą emocje, które wciąż znajdują się w zbiorowej pamięci. Dopiero gdy minie okres rozliczenia, tylko wtedy, gdy pamięć uwolni się z emocji, możliwa będzie pełna historyczna synteza.

Badania prowadzone przez współczesnych historyków nie służą temu, by ożywić przeszłość, ale by złagodzić emocje, jakie nią, i by pielęgnować zdrową, uzdrawiającą rekonstrukcję przeszłości. Cel ten można osiągnąć tylko wtedy, gdy cała historia zostanie opowiedziana z godnością i uczciwością. Taki szacunek jest niezbędny w naszym wieku, gdzie pragnienie sensacji jest często wykorzystywane ze szkodą dla historycznej obiektywności. Ponadto, obecnie wiele problemów polaryzacyjnych zagraża sprawiedliwości społecznej i demokracji. Populizm, terroryzm instytucjonalny, łamanie praw człowieka i zagraniczna interwencja w „niespokojnych” krajach rzeczywiście mają głębokie korzenie. Czytanie terażniejszości w świetle przeszłości należy wykonywać ostrożnie, z uznaniem dla równowagi między ciągłością a zmianą.

Słowa kluczowe: Aristide Briand, modernizacja, wojna totalna, Liga Narodów, integracja europejska, Władysław Sikorski, Józef Wittlin, Albert Thomas, religia, emigracja, emancypacja kobiet, zmiana paradygmatu

The troubling events of the years from 1914 to 1945 were part of a culture that did not originate or end with two world wars, yet contributed to their outbreak. These events were part of a process that began during the French Revolution and became a drive to control the world in the name of progress. It was a triple thrust that involved control of minds through the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, control of nature through the exploitation of natural resources and the Industrial Revolution, and control of the world through colonization. The conflicts generated by this

threefold drive ended in a Manichean confrontation between good and evil that brought about the noblest and the vilest human behavior locked in mirror images of each other. Europe was, simply put, caught between destruction and rebirth. Linked together, the power to kill and the power to heal framed the central question of Europe's identity.

It is impossible to write twentieth century every time appears Europe without keeping an eye on the present. The double tragedy of war and genocide loomed over European life between 1914 and 1945, and took it from its apex to ground zero. It was an age of metamorphosis within European history that played a crucial role in shaping the Europe of today. It affected Europe so deeply that today's civilizational dynamics are still being viewed through the prism and vocabulary of this period. It remains the yardstick we use to name and measure the political spectrum from "left" to "right." The lingering guilt that the destruction of countries and the abuses of human rights caused has yet to be fully exorcised. Our attempt to get beyond the past only reveals the breadth and depth of the trauma that three previous generations endured. Countless minor or major incidences test raw emotions that still inhabit collective memory. Only after the period of reckoning is past, only when memory is emptied of grief, will a full historical synthesis be possible. For the historian today, the problem is not to bring the past to life, but to mitigate the emotions it carries and to nurture a healthy, healing reconstruction of the past that can only be achieved when the whole story is told with dignity and fairness. Such respect is essential in our age, where sensationalism is often used to the detriment of historical objectivity. In addition, several polarizing issues today threaten social justice and democracy. Populism, institutional terror, the suspension of human rights, and normative foreign intervention in "troubled" countries indeed have deep roots. Reading the present in the light of the past must be done carefully, with an appreciation for the balance between continuity and change.

The initial goal of *Europe from War to War, 1914–1945* was to remedy shortcomings in the existing literature. Unsurprisingly, the first half of twentieth century Europe generates the same kind of fascination among readers and scholars as the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution of 1917. Likewise, the appeal of the epic struggle between Hitler's Third Reich and Stalin's Soviet Union remains undiminished, because it offers a convenient framework for a coherent narrative of the tragedy of the 1930s until the end of World War II. The years 1914–1945 have generated countless studies that differ in their approach, their choice of beginning and end dates, and their geographical focus. The narratives have evolved, from Ernst Nolte's concept of a "European civil war" to Ian Kershaw's *To Hell and Back* and Tony Judt's philosophical examination of European identity and destiny. Most books, however, present a pre-framed image of Europe. While many have overcome a longstanding focus on Western Europe, there

is still a tendency to minimize coverage of peripheral areas such as the Balkans, the Baltic states, and Scandinavia. The spotlight also tends to be on high politics mixed with human interest stories gleaned from a host of memoirs, biographies, and community histories. The human, demographic, economic, and social developments remain hard to assess. The difficulty resides in reconciling quantitative and narrative approaches that do not lend themselves to satisfactory linear narratives.

The idea for the book began in Alice-Catherine's classroom. Shifting from textbook to textbook in her 20th century Europe courses and recognizing their oft unsurpassed contributions, showed her the difficulty of forming a full picture of the period. In order to document the existing blanks in the literature of the first half of the twentieth century, she researched several areas and wrote lectures on them. But a new narrative structure was still missing. Once she found it, she decided to take her efforts from the classroom to the publishers, and Stephen soon joined her in this endeavor.

The most important feature of *Europe from War to War, 1914–1945* is its emphasis on multiple continuums. This paradigm shift questions the way we remember and what we remember, and broadens the traditional narrative to tell the whole story as much as possible. To do so requires consistent coverage of domestic and international affairs instead of skipping from one major crisis, event, or personality, to the next. It also demands a thorough examination of the social and cultural history of this period, in addition to political, economic, military, and diplomatic perspectives. War can easily be inserted into such a continuum. Rather than examining it through the dichotomy of war/peace, we looked at interwar conflicts as a series of war-related aftershocks, the result of the unfinished business of peace. In 1919, the same regions that had preoccupied European diplomacy before 1914 remained problematic, from Poland's eastern frontiers, to British and French aims in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Corfu Incident of 1923 that led to fears of another world war. Allied military control in several defeated countries contributed to assure the peace. The end of the Allied occupation of Germany in 1930, the collapse of Aristide Briand's European project and the failure of the disarmament talks emboldened the revisionist powers of Italy and Germany in the 1930s. Mussolini, for example, moved aggressively ahead with his *de facto* annexation of Albania, conducted victorious war in Abyssinia, and intervened in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Fascists.

An equally important feature of the book's "continuum" approach is the parallelism between its chapters. Each set of years (1914–1923, 1919–1929, 1930–1939, 1939–1945) contains two chapters; one dealing with international developments, and the other with domestic issues. Thematically organized within a chronological framework, each chapter takes a fully comparative approach to the era, allowing the reader to follow the evolution of key trends and ideas. Within each chapter, the structure remains

parallel. In international politics, the importance of diplomacy next to the battlefield is documented. In domestic politics, the chapters handle political, economic, and social issues. When leaving a chapter, the reader knows that he/she can pick up that theme again in the next chronological section of the book. Doing things this way necessitated a difficult restructuration and redefinition of each of these fields, but it also ensured that each topic serves as context for the next, and that there is an open-ended character to each part of the book that is conducive once more to new paradigms.

Special consideration is given to the analysis of the issue of modernization, which was essential to these turbulent thirty-one years. We propose to measure modernization through five criteria: political change (democracy, human rights, political participation and liberal measures), demographic change (refugees, resettlements, migrations, and growth), economic progress (industrial modernization, agricultural reforms, labor legislation), social policies (welfare, professional mobility, public health, and women's advancement), and urban development (urban planning, transportation). A first conclusion is that there were marked differences between modernization in war and in peace. Both world wars hastened the discovery of new technologies that were used for fighting total war. While chemical and armaments manufacturing underwent great modernization, advances in women's rights, labor rights, human rights, and democratization, slowed or halted. Modernization resumed on all fronts between 1919 and 1939 and constitutes a key topic of the chapters dedicated to interwar domestic politics. Using the five criteria allowed us to measure how modernization affected the lives of average citizens and how each criterium influenced the development of the others. But the wars' destruction also set back modernization in peacetime, as can be seen in the introduction to the fourth chapter titled "Modernity's Promises":

By the time the guns fell silent in 1918, European countries involved in World War I had suffered tremendous destruction. From the French front to the western Russian lands, cities and villages had been bombed, fields ruined by the battlefields, the environment compromised by ammunition and other contaminants. Millions were homeless, especially in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, and many of them had nowhere to go. Millions of children were orphaned. The human losses were staggering as well; a whole generation of men was missing; civilian deaths from military action and crimes against humanity totaled over 2.2 million, and another 4.6 to 5.3 died of malnutrition and disease (excluding the influenza epidemic). Between 22 and 23.6 million returning soldiers were wounded physically or psychologically. Demobilized soldiers and refugees returned to countries whose borders had changed and whose economies had endured several grueling years. The war had changed much, from the fabric of everyday life to the organization of civil society and community life. The physical devastation was widespread, so reconstruction was imperative in a number of countries. European nations' financial situations looked bleak. An immense task of reorganization lay ahead of the men and women who survived the war. In this dire situation, the neutral countries, especially the Scandinavian states, offered a picture of stability and hope. While exempt from the toils of reconstruction, they nonetheless went through the same issues that belligerent countries experienced: industrial and agricultural modernization, increased social mobility, the emancipation of women, the building of new urban environments fit for

modern life, and the expansion of public welfare. These tasks required more government intervention than had been the case, and generated lively debates about the role of the state in the economy. These problems not only challenged politicians, but also the systems they operated under: liberalism was under attack; democracy lacked the mechanisms and processes that were required to solve questions quickly, and thus found itself challenged by authoritarianism. Reconstruction meant experimentation to a large degree. (p. 117)

In an effort to expand the traditional narrative to everyday existence within Europe and the impact of two world wars on the peoples' lives, the topics of demographics and demographic change are central to the book. How people lived and where they lived are factors of seminal importance to Europe's cultural identity. While statistics about wartime losses abound, historians' attention has been slower in studying interwar refugees, emigration, and labor patterns, which represent a largely untapped field of study. There were many faces of labor in war and peace: military labor, conscripted or forced labor, labor rights, labor markets, industrial workers' and peasants' labor conditions, and the internationalization of labor, to name just a few. An examination of them not only offers a fuller understanding of daily existence in war and peace, but reveals similar patterns in both world wars, showing that in many ways World War I was a dress rehearsal for World War II. A systematic analysis of emigration, including prewar emigration, wartime refugees, postwar resettlements, prewar emigration, wartime refugees, and end-of-war and postwar resettlements, reveals pressure points on communities' national identities and cultures. The response to these unprecedented demographic strains was the birth of humanitarianism during World War I through the efforts of American engineer Herbert Hoover. The continuum approach shows that war, labor, and emigration were closely related, and that humanitarian responses grew from one world war to the next.

Advertised by the publisher as "global in scope, accessibly written and illustrated throughout with photographs and maps," it is deemed "the perfect introductory textbook for all students of early twentieth-century European history." Indeed, one of its goals is to introduce the reader to understudied topics. Among the new elements seldom seen in broadly-based texts is the League of Nations which played a crucial role not just as a peacemaker, but as the nurturer of progress. Tasked with immense responsibilities, such as monitoring international labor markets, birthing the creation of a European-wide electric grid, or drawing the border between Albania and Greece, the League had many successes, but was ultimately undermined by the absence of key countries from its membership, structural weaknesses, and unrealistic expectations imposed upon it by its members. The book also highlights Scandinavian countries' role in promoting peace and disarmament and their pioneering of social progress. Poland's rebirth in 1918, its economic stabilization and modernization, its treatment of minorities, its political veer to the right in the 1930s, and its martyrdom

in World War II are prominently featured. Vienna, the “city with a social conscience,” became a leading example of the interwar attempts to cope with urban difficulties. The role of Europe’s colonies in both world wars is another point of discussion, as they proved to be invaluable participants, even to the point of Brazzaville in French Equatorial Africa serving as the capital of General Charles de Gaulle’s Free French government. The efforts to achieve European integration are usually underrepresented in existing textbooks. Given the wide range of thoughts and projects that have their roots in late nineteenth century political ideals, this is surprising. Indeed, European integration rose from the concept of a customs union, but it evolved greatly during the interwar years. Poised between a functionalist and federalist model, European leaders and thinkers in our study did much to prepare the ground work. The introduction of industrial cartels and Briand’s United States of Europe in the 1920s, as well as General Władysław Sikorski’s European federation project during World War II, demonstrate that post-1945 European unification plans had important antecedents.

Among other new elements that receive significant treatment in our book are the economic mobilization of belligerent states in both world wars, transnational feminism, the role of religion and the development of domestic and international public health, and notably in the area of epidemics such as typhus, cholera, and tuberculosis. The book also incorporates new names into the mainstream of politics, technocracy, and culture, such as Albert Thomas, Józef Wittlin, Louis Loucheur, and Arthur Salter, to name a few. Often, when we deal with well-known material, it is the angle that is new. For example, the interaction among European countries is examined at every echelon of high and low politics, and in a comparative framework that includes European colonies, American influences, and transatlantic relations in times of war and peace. The advance of women relates not only to their achievements, but the debate surrounding their role in society, and the responses to their progress. The impact of politics on cultural developments is also examined in depth. These new elements will hopefully engage the younger generations to pursue further investigations on their own. A full online companion website to the book will stimulate students’ questions and encourage research on understudied topics. Yet *Europe from War to War, 1914–1945* is by no means a finished product. It is very important to us to stimulate research on understudied topics by students and historians alike. As for us, we will continue to highlight discrete elements of life in Europe during the first half of the century, making new findings available through the publisher’s companion website.

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