or at least portions of it. Some of the contributions are excessively convoluted and over-complicated; others, weak. Nor did I get a real sense of where the book was going. There will certainly be something here for most people interested in the cultures of Asia, and in cultural change. But few, I imagine, will be enticed to read the book from cover to cover.

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***Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*; Mark Mazower; Allen Lane, Harmondsworth, xvi + 495 pages, hardbound, ISBN 0-713-99159-3, £20.**

Thomas Masaryk described Europe as "a laboratory atop a vast graveyard". He was speaking just after the first of two European civil wars which, by 1950, had accounted for most of the 60 million Europeans killed in wars or through state-sponsored violence.

Mazower's 20th century Europe is a story of conflict between the rival ideologies of liberal-democracy, communism, and fascism. His panoramic sweep, mastery of detail, and access to neglected sources, particularly on Eastern Europe, make him an accomplished chronicler not just of political history but of economic and social changes, and the rise of new ideas and behaviour patterns. The albeit declining role of religion is almost completely ignored but this oversight is excusable in a beautifully written book that is likely to be a much-quoted source on Europe 1900–90 for years to come; only in his appraisal of contemporary events does the author's judgment falter.

Mazower argues that democracy had shallow roots in European political traditions and shows just how many Europeans were ready to renounce it by the 1930s, when democracy was seen by many as freedom to starve and the main political debates were within the right. Early chapters on democracy's rise and fall, the unresolved national question following the collapse of four dynastic empires, and the crisis of capitalism pave the way for stimulating accounts of the nature and impact of communism and Nazism. National socialism was a "revelation of the destructive potential in European civilization—turning imperialism on its head and treating Europeans as Africans". He believes that Nazism fits into the mainstream of European history far more comfortably than communism. The self-righteousness and lack of moral scruple of Serb nationalists in treating fellow South Slavs as sub-humans during the 1992–95 Bosnian war illustrates the alarming ease with which Nazi methods could be taken up. In the Nazi heyday, the construction of a racial-nationalist welfare system

may have just been pushing to extreme tendencies visible in European thought (and practised in Switzerland and Sweden where sterilisation and other coercive measures in social policy occurred till recently).

In economic terms communism was "as one Polish economist put it, not a good idea badly implanted but a bad idea which was implanted surprisingly well". It provided a pioneering and durable solution to the Hapsburg dilemma of managing politically-conscious nationalities: a federal system which was a combination of an Austro-Marxist state and a centralized communist party. Thus, "communism turned out to be the last, and perhaps the highest, stage of capitalism".

Mazower describes the results of the new awareness in the 1940s that, to survive, democracy needed to embrace social objectives as well as individual political rights. The new welfare states acted to expand opportunities and choices for the individual citizen rather than safeguard the health of the collective, be it family or nation. He shows how the decline of the militarised state and the retreat from empire weakened collective identity, with the growing movement for European integration failing to offer a satisfactory substitute. The 1960s, it is argued, marked a real break with traditional social values and institutions and, for many, proved to be "the onset of modernity".

Europeans west of Prague grew accustomed to democracy not because of any intrinsic qualities but because "it involves less commitment or intrusion into their lives than any of the alternatives". Citizenship is increasingly seen in terms of costs and benefits rather than political rights or duties. In an age when high rates of support for democracy co-exist with high rates of political apathy, no new ideas have sought to redefine or supplant it.

Thatcherism is shrewdly described as an old materialist impulse of the right not the left: "the final gasp of that long and multifarious search for a political ideology to explain and therefore to rule society". But the claim that it is a failure is rash and contradicted by evidence elsewhere in the book. The crippling of organized labour in Britain and the rejection of Keynesian policies across Europe, especially by ruling leftists, suggests not. Left-sounding parties are in power in big states in the 1980s, which to Mazower is a sign that the political left is not in decline. But the stars of the 1980s, Craxi, Gonzalez and Papandreou were in turn a crook, an economic neo-liberal, and an ultra-nationalist long before they were progressive economic distributors. The impotence of the left is shown by unemployment rates of 11% in the European Union by 1993, 17% of people in poverty, and 3 million homeless. The flight from Keynesianism has enabled the radical right to expropriate the politics of citizenship and identity in some countries by fashioning a popular anti-foreigner message. Mazower offers plenty of evidence that Europe is not an American melting-pot, but a closer look at Britain, Portugal, and Spain might have revealed that multi-culturalism still has plenty of life in it.

A consistent theme of the book is the failure of European-led multilateral efforts to refashion the political economy and borders of Europe after the collapse of empires in the east in 1918 and 1989. The unwillingness to support the post-imperial states of the east economically or with pan-European security structures after both dates is striking. Allied failure to bomb the Nazi death camps before 1945 or lift the 3-

year-long siege of Sarajevo may even suggest a disdain for the east among western elites. In the five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the former satellite states received less than one-half of the investment Singapore gets in a normal year. An effort to rebuild the official institutions of states badly scarred by totalitarianism so that they could cope with the challenges of post-communism, could have rekindled the European idea. Instead it was Thatcherite policies that were encouraged, enabling the ruthless, nearly always former communists, to create a new oligarchy practising 'jungle capitalism' and often fuelling ethnic conflict to cover their tracks as they asset-stripped the economy.

Mazower believes that the nation-state should be credited for the peaceful character of the post-1950 era as well as blamed for the preceding carnage. The desperate state of Russia, he feels, does not make a revival of empire likely. With much of the communist bloc moving from the economic second to the third world, this is a surprisingly sanguine view. Mazower echoes the Belgian diplomat who saw the fate of the EU to be "an economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm". He sees a Europe of overlapping sovereignties and its great variety of cultures and traditions as still "fundamental to understanding the continent today". Conflicts in the Balkans and the Aegean "can scarcely threaten continental peace". These are surprisingly mellow words to end a book in which the author brilliantly shows the tragedy that complacency in the older democracies, unsatisfied nationalism and economic want generated before 1945.

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