

Writing European History – the Danish Way

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I want to further our understanding of how European history has been written and used by offering a survey of Danish ways of writing European history throughout the course of the 20th century. I will do so by focusing on the question as to whether one or more significant changes can be identified in the ways in which Danish scholars have written European history during the last century. It is a specific corpus of texts that I will be analyzing in the following pages, using a bird's eye perspective. And having completed my survey, I want to say something about what I think is one of the main challenges to be met by any contemporary writing of European history if it is to exert an influence upon the formation of historical consciousness in present day Europe.

Not a study of textbooks

This is not a survey of textbooks designed for use within the Danish educational system, and there is a good reason why such texts are not at issue here. Until the 1960s, there was no such thing as a textbook on European history within the Danish educational system. However, the entire framework for the production of educational textbooks has undergone some significant changes during the latter part of the 20th century. Since these changes are relevant to the following analysis, I will start off by describing them.

Between 1900 and the early 1960s three kinds of history books were in use within the educational system in Denmark: 1) textbooks on

Danish history, 2) textbooks on Nordic or Scandinavian history and 3) textbooks on world history. But textbooks on European history did not exist. It is not difficult to come up with a plausible explanation for this pattern. Two sets of issues would appear to have been of primary importance. First, during the first part of the 20th century, Danes tried to hold on to 19th century traditions, in which the Nordic community of memory was considered the second most important community, the first and most important being of course the national Danish community of memory. Second, a national identity for the majority of Danes during the 19th and early 20th centuries was an issue, which called for a clear demarcation between Danes on the one hand, and Germans on the other. Such a need was not likely to be met in a Danish setting by recognizing Europe as an identity marker of significance.

In the 1960s, a new kind of textbook was introduced into higher secondary education – the Danish *Gymnasium* – in conjunction with a decision to establish a new academic subject. This subject became known as *History of European Ideas*, and it was given the task of treating the interconnections between the various subjects being taught in the Danish *Gymnasium*. In other words, its task was to highlight intellectual threads of connection that could be established between such subjects as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, as well as classics, history and language, literature and the study of art. In order to launch this new course, a series of new textbooks on the history of European ideas was published in the mid-1960s. In these textbooks one finds attempts to sketch what was seen as the common cultural heritage of Europe. The introduction of this new subject, however, was not only a pedagogical initiative designed to counteract disciplinary fragmentation within the educational system. It took place at a time when Danish academics were beginning to think along the line that Denmark would become a part of the European Common Market. This change in outlook is also evident in a new approach to the understanding of European history as outlined from the 1960s on in *Gymnasium* textbooks on world history.

However, it was not until the mid-1980s that the first textbooks specifically devoted to European history were published in Denmark. The earliest textbooks were for use in the *Gymnasium* setting, and later on textbooks on Europe appeared which were designed for the primary and lower secondary levels of the educational system. From the 1990s on, it became very evident indeed that Europe constituted one of the decisive mental frameworks being employed in Denmark within the field of teaching. But it should be noted that this is a framework that easily generates serious conflict, since the Danish adult population is very split indeed in its assessment of Denmark's future place in the European Union. This fact may help to explain why the common European textbook, *The History of the Europeans* [Europæernes historie], which was widely published in a series on European countries in 1993, has not had any notable success in the Danish context. It has probably been perceived by Danish *Gymnasium* teachers as representing an approach that is too political and too controversial in the present situation. Yet, the fact that Europe has begun to set the agenda, also in the field of history teaching, is evident from the publication of such textbooks as *The Way of Europe* [Europas vej] (1994) and *The World of the Europeans in the 20th Century* [Europæernes Verden i det 20. Århundrede] (1999).

The texts in question

The corpus of texts which I will be treating in some detail are all works written by Danish academics for the purpose of being read and used by the general public in Denmark. Some of these works were written in co-operation with other Nordic scholars and thus have the character of a joint Nordic venture. This may be taken as further evidence that the Nordic countries have had a special status as a community of memory in the Danish setting. In such cases there would of course also have been a Norwegian and Swedish edition of the work

in question. In other cases works were written solely for the Danish book market. Yet, in each instance these texts can be considered as a history of Europe in the stricter sense of the term.

In the following analysis I will be surveying the writing of European history during a period that can be described as constituting four generations of texts (see the appended Table, listing these texts)¹. In regard to the first three generations it should be noted that a selection is not at issue, all texts of the type in question being included. In the case of the fourth generation of texts – i.e. those from the late 1980s and 1990s – only a selection of those that have been published have been included.

There is yet another corpus of texts that might have been included in the present survey, namely those histories of the world – *Weltgeschichte* or *Universalgeschichte* – which were published in the late 19th century and the earlier part of the 20th century. They might have been included for the reason that histories of the world published during that period were committed to a decidedly Euro-centric approach to global history. One might even go so far as to say that many of these works were actually histories of Europe masquerading as world or global history. The fact that the dividing line between a history of the world and a history of Europe was far from clear during the early decades of the 20th century is illustrated by the point made by Hartvig Frisch in 1928 in a postscript to his own new history of Europe, when he remarked that his work appeared to be rather similar to the existing histories of the world. But, as it should soon become apparent, there is at least one good reason for treating histories of Europe as a distinct genre of history writing in the Danish context.

The first specific history of Europe to be published in a Danish setting appeared in 1899.² It was written by the young historian and social-democrat, Gustav Bang (1871–1915),³ and his new two-volume history was entitled *A Cultural History of Europe Told as Stories for the People*. In 1928, another social-democrat published a new history of Europe. It was again a two-volume history, written by the classical

scholar Hartvig Frisch (1893–1950),⁴ and entitled *A Cultural History of Europe*. In the early 1960s, two histories of Europe appeared on the book market in Denmark at the same time. The first of these was an enlarged and updated version of Frisch's history of 1928, the task of bringing the text up to date and adding some chapters on the intervening period having been given to the philosopher, Svend Erik Stybe (b.1919), another academic who had close connections with the Social-Democratic Party. The second was the fruit of a joint Nordic venture. This six-volume history of Europe, entitled *Our Cultural Heritage*, was published between 1961 and 1970. It was edited by the Danish classical scholar, Per Krarup (1906–77), and one of the main Danish contributors was the literary historian, Peter P. Rohde (1902–78), who had earlier been a member of the Danish Communist Party. The task of rounding off this new history of Europe was given to Rohde, and he did so by writing a lengthy essay about *Man in Contemporary Society* [Mennesket i nutidens samfund] (1970) in which he discussed the prospects of ongoing attempts to create a new Europe.

At no point during the 20th century has Danish society been without a fairly up-to-date history of Europe, and as a matter of fact the publication of these histories has followed a fairly regular pattern. The first history was published around the turn of the century, the next one followed some thirty years later in 1928, and the third batch began to crop up on the shelves of bookshops again some thirty years later, namely in 1961. Thus, no one should have been taken by surprise when the fourth batch, and so far the last, began to make its appearance in the late 1980s. However, we may well be surprised by the sheer number of histories of Europe which have been published since 1988. One can easily identify at least eight such histories, specifically written for the use of the general public (see the appended list).

The first of the fourth batch, which appeared in 1988, was given the title *Discovering Europe. The History of an Idea* and was edited by Hans Boll-Johansen (b.1936) and Michael Harbsmeier (b.1951). It was the fruit of interdisciplinary work which had been done at a re-

search center at Copenhagen University. The largest of these new histories was published in six volumes, 1991–92. It was entitled *The European House* and was edited by Søren Mørch (b.1933), again one of the Danish historians to have strong affiliations with the Social-Democratic Party.⁵ Two additional new books on Europe were published in close conjunction with the first Danish referendum concerning the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. One of them was *Europe: Nation – Union – after Minsk and Maastricht*, edited by the economist Christen Sørensen (b.1945), the other being *The Faces of Europe. Nation States and Political Cultures in a New, Old World*, written by the historian Uffe Østergård (b.1945). Some of these new books were concerned with issues regarding divisions within Europe related to competing political cultures. This was the case for instance with *All of Europe. Projects – Contrasts* that the political scientist Ole Wæver (b.1960) published in 1989.

Having presented the corpus of texts which is used in this analysis, I shall now go on to answer the following two questions: 1) on what points is it possible to detect some notable lines of continuity in the Danish writing of European history? and 2) on what points have there been some interesting changes or shifts in the focus of that writing?

Writing European history: a Left wing project

When one looks back on the history of history writing during the 20th century, it soon becomes apparent that for a rather long while the writing of European history in a Danish setting had the character of being a Social-Democratic or Leftist project, and this is a tradition which was in fact upheld right up to the 1990s. It is also worth noting that when Left wing academics decided to write books about European history, they focused their attention specifically on the cultural history of Europe. The titles of Gustav Bang's and Hartvig Frisch's books, from 1899 and 1928 respectively, make this focus evident.

Such a clear-cut pattern makes it pertinent to ask: why did Danish academics on the Left opt for writing a cultural history of Europe when they wanted to address the general public? To write European cultural history during parts of the 20th century was one way of indicating opposition to the historical establishment of one's day. First, focusing attention on the history of Europe, rather than that of the nation state, was a way of making the point that one was interested in furthering an internationalist approach to history. Authors adopting this approach thereby distanced themselves from the nationalist framework that prevailed among the historians of the establishment. Second, focusing attention on the history of culture, rather than that of the state, was a way of making the point that one was attempting to write a history in which historical processes were viewed from below, that is to say, a history of the common people and of everyday life. Thus, in his book from 1928, Hartvig Frisch argued that cultural history should be defined as the study of how human habits had changed over time. As a result cultural history became a rather neat way of marking one's distance to and difference from the kind of history from above, which was the norm among the nationalist historians of the establishment.

It is perhaps also worth noting in this context, that when the first specifically Social-Democratic history of Denmark was published in 1968, it again took the form of being a cultural history of Denmark. This work was entitled *A Cultural History of Denmark* [Danmarks kulturhistorie], and its author Ib Koch-Olsen (1914–95) explicitly made the point that so far as the earlier periods of this history of Denmark were concerned they should not be seen as Danish history, but rather as constituting an integral part of a general history of Europe.

This approach to European history was maintained right up to the 1990s. Thus, the six-volume study entitled *The European House* (1991–92) can also be seen as an attempt to uphold this tradition on more points than one. It includes a clear emphasis upon questions concerning cultural history. Yet, it is also important to note that as of the late 1980s it became quite apparent indeed that some Danish

scholars were seeking to develop new approaches to the writing of European history. A notable example is Uffe Østergård's deliberate attempt to develop a more comparative approach to the study of European history. He continued the trend in both of his books, *Faces of Europe* (1992) and *Europe* (1998). Another new development worth noting concerns the fact that a number of social scientists began to involve themselves in the writing of European history, and as a result the writing of European history could no longer be conceived as the sole prerogative of archaeologists, classical scholars and historians.

The understanding of Europe

The next question to be raised concerns the ways in which Europe has been defined and understood in Danish histories of Europe. The first story to be told in this regard is indeed a rather simple one. If one looks at the first and second generation, to wit the histories of Europe written by Gustav Bang and Hartvig Frisch, it becomes very clear in retrospect that they were not at all concerned with the question of how Europe should be defined, either in geographical or socio-historical terms. Both of these authors happily assumed that Europe was an entity which constituted a taken-for-granted reality, one with which both the writer and reader of these histories were wholly familiar. While neither Bang nor Frisch devoted any attention to the question of the socio-cultural borders of Europe, they were on the other hand very concerned indeed with questions about the origins and development of the Indo-European race. Thus, it appears that during the first third of the 20th century Danish academics conceived Europe in racial rather than in geographical or socio-historical terms.

On one point these conceptions remained unchanged in the 1960s. Europe was still treated as a familiar entity which could be assumed to be a reality taken for granted. On another point, however, a rather significant change had occurred. In the new history from the 1960s –

Our Cultural Heritage (1961–70) – no attempt was made to define the Indo-European race, Europe now being defined wholly in cultural terms. What Europeans have in common, it was asserted, was their common cultural roots in the Greco-Roman and Judaic-Christian traditions. In other words, Europe in the 1960s was being defined by a common cultural heritage which stretched all the way back to Antiquity.

Moving on to the late 1980s and the 1990s, it soon becomes apparent that a major shift had occurred in the way in which Danish academics had begun to conceive Europe. No one found it appropriate any longer to treat Europe as a given entity, having the character of a reality that was taken for granted. On the contrary, most writers took their starting point in noting the many problems to be addressed in reaching a definition of Europe or a definition of a common European heritage.

It is indeed strikingly symptomatic of the new way of thinking about Europe that the first of the texts belonging to what I have called the fourth generation actually bears the title: *The Discovery of Europe* (1988). This title would have made little or no sense to Danes 50 or 100 years earlier, but by the late 1980s such a title could well be conceived as being very appropriate indeed. People living in Europe were now in the midst of a process of having to re-discover, and thus re-appropriate, what Europe is, had been and might become. The new manner of thinking about Europe, which was to characterize the texts from the late 1980s and 1990s, is typified by the points made in the very first paragraph of *The Discovery of Europe*: that the question of how to define Europe is indeed a contested issue, and that it therefore also constitutes one of the sites of struggle and conflict in contemporary society. Its corollary was that the writing of European history now entailed involving oneself in a field of political conflict.

If one uses the histories of Europe from the 1980's and 1990s as one's primary evidence and standard, then it is very clear that Danish academics had shifted the focus of their interest to the analysis and exposition of the somewhat precarious character of Europe. These

books convey the message again and again that Europe must be seen as a very complex entity in geographical as well as in cultural terms. It is also worth noting that in some of these histories of Europe one finds a comparative treatment of North America, Australia and New Zealand, as is the case for instance in Uffe Østergård's *The Faces of Europe* (1992). The reason offered for pursuing this approach is that these societies can be seen in some respects as recent extensions of a European civilization, and that they thus represent some of the points of convergence between European and global history.

It should also be noted that some Danish scholars no longer wanted to stress the line of cultural continuity from Antiquity to present day Europe, and on this point distanced themselves from a conception which had prevailed until at least the 1960s. However, no general agreement has emerged as to the historical epoch in which the cultural and political origins of contemporary Europe were to be found. In the first volume of *The European House* (1991), Søren Mørch portrayed present day Europe as the heir to the scientific and secular thinking associated with the Enlightenment and modernity, thus placing the decisive break in the 17th and 18th centuries. In *Europe. Identity and Identity Politics* (1998), Uffe Østergård stressed the importance of the break between the world of classical Antiquity and medieval Europe, therefore tracing the origins of present day Europe back to medieval – i.e. feudal – Europe.

The place of Europe in world history

When one explores how Danish academics have thought about the place of Europe in world history, it soon becomes apparent that a rather interesting line of continuity can be traced that runs throughout the 20th century. A notion, which virtually all academics who have written European history appear to share, is that Europe has a culture that in one way or another is both unique and superior. European

civilization, it is openly asserted or tacitly assumed, has been much more dynamic and creative than all other known civilizations. This conception of the uniqueness of Europe has been maintained from the end of the 19th century and right up to the very end of the 20th century. But it should be noted that some significant changes took place during that period regarding the ways in which Danish academics have sought to ground their notion of European superiority.

A *Cultural History of Europe* (1899) was based upon and structured by the idea that the Indo-European race was superior to all other known races and, it was argued by Gustav Bang that European culture had therefore also been superior to all other cultures. The author decided to underscore this point by including illustrations to demonstrate racial differences between, for instance, an Indo-European and a Negro. However, Bang did admit that at some specific points in time Chinese civilization has equaled the European, but he also made it clear that at the end of the 19th century this was no longer the case.

The idea of European superiority was also manifest in the history of European culture published by Hartvig Frisch in 1928, but in this instance the racial line of argument was presented in a somewhat modified form. Frisch did not argue in terms of a single Indo-European race as his predecessor had done, but operated with a conception of three kinds of Europeans: a Nordic, an Alpine and a Mediterranean type. There was also another crucial point on which Frisch thought somewhat differently. In 1928, the view was no longer presented with calm certainty that Europe in the long run would be able to uphold the superiority it had hitherto maintained. The events which had given rise to these serious doubts were on the one hand horrifying European experiences during World War I and on the other the mounting power of the USA and the Soviet Union.

By the 1960s it had become apparent to everyone that Europe was no longer the center of world affairs, whether in terms of economic, political or military power. Two super-powers were now setting the agenda of world politics, the USA and the Soviet Union, and each of

these powers had established its own sphere of influence within a divided Europe. Yet, it is interesting that this new state of affairs does not seem to have had the effect of undermining the notion of European superiority. Rather, the conception was now based on a different line of argument than that presented by Bang and Frisch. Thus, one finds no traces in *Our Cultural Heritage* (1961–70) of any of the arguments based upon racial superiority that had characterized the first part of the 20th century. This line of argument had lost all legitimacy following the awareness of the atrocities perpetrated by Nazis against Jews and other non-Aryan peoples during World War II. In its stead, the argument in favor of European superiority was made on the basis of cultural continuity. Only in Europe, the argument ran, could there be found a culture whose roots extended back to classical Antiquity, and that was in fact the reason why European culture would turn out to be both more dynamic and more flexible than the cultures of the United States of America or the Soviet Union.

The conception of the uniqueness and superiority of Europe has continued to crop up in those histories of Europe that have been published since the late 1980s. But on closer inspection it again becomes apparent that a very significant shift has occurred in the arguments put forward to ground this conception. The most clear-cut example of this more recent line of thought is found in the six-volume study *The European House* (1991–2) whose first and introductory volume is called *The Civilization* [Civilisationen]. It was written by Søren Mørch and the use of the definite article in the title of the volume was quite deliberate, being another way of conveying to the reader the meaning of the notorious saying by Atatürk: "... there is no other civilisation than the European one, civilisation in fact means European civilisation." Yet, it should be noted that Mørch did not want to base the idea of European superiority on the conception of cultural continuity as it had been presented in the 1960s. What had made European culture into something special was the development of scientific and secularized ways of thinking which had begun to evolve during the 17th and 18th centuries, and consequently Mørch had no interest in

trying to trace the origins of European culture back to the Middle Ages or even further back to Antiquity.

It can thus be said that one of the striking patterns which become apparent from a survey of 20th century histories of Europe is the presentation of Europe as culturally superior to all other cultures in the world. Throughout the past century, Danish academics have been committed to this notion of the cultural uniqueness and superiority of Europe, but the ways in which they have sought to argue their case have changed more than once. Insofar as the existing histories of Europe are taken as primary evidence, Danish scholars do not appear to have become distinctly less Euro-centric in their manner of thinking as the 20th century wore on. Yet it should also be emphasized that it is by no means the same Euro-centric outlook that has been reproduced year in and year out during the course of that century.

The purpose of writing European history

The writing of European history constitutes a very clear-cut illustration of what is nowadays described as the attempt to develop people's historical consciousness (*Geschichtsbewusstsein*). One of the manifest and recurrent patterns in these histories concerns the fact that, throughout the 20th century, Danish academics have sought to write European history in very committed and 'interventionist' ways. They have sought to interpret the past in order to shed light on the present and thereby participate in the shaping of the future, and the writing of European history can thereby be seen as a series of deliberate attempts to intervene in and to influence contemporary politics.

It is clear that some major shifts also occurred in the understanding of what it was that constituted the most urgent challenges of the day. It was by means of a somewhat simple notion of progress that Gustav Bang had sought to link the past, present and future in his *Cultural History of Europe* (1899), and the main message which his book con-

veyed to its readers again and again was that it was Europeans who were to be seen as the main carriers and chief promoters of an ongoing civilizing process. Therefore, as he saw it, the main challenge at hand was an internal European one. The author wondered how the people of Europe would be able to handle the mounting conflict between the different social classes of European society with particular regard to conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie. At the same time, Bang appeared to be rather confident that the people of Europe would in fact be able to handle this challenge.

Hartvig Frisch's *Cultural History of Europe* (1928) completely lacked that self-confident and optimistic outlook which Bang's presentation had exuded thirty years earlier. As he saw it, European culture had begun to disintegrate in the aftermath of the horrific experiences of World War I. The most urgent challenge at hand as he saw it was to identify the lessons which the people of Europe would be able and willing to draw from their experiences of World War I. There can be no doubt that Frisch viewed his own history writing as a political and cultural intervention. It was explicitly conceived as an attempt to oppose and counteract those social and national divisions that were threatening contemporary European culture with ruin. It is also clear that Frisch in 1928 was very taken with the question of what effects the emergence of a wholly new kind of culture in the Soviet Union would have on Europe.

It was Peter P. Rodhe, in conjunction with the study of *Our Cultural Heritage* (1961–70), who was given the task of outlining the challenges to and the prospects of Europe on the threshold of the 1970s. He approached this task in a way that had neither the self-confidence and optimism which had characterized Bang's approach 70 years earlier nor the apprehension which had characterized Frisch's more pessimistic approach 40 years earlier. European culture, Rodhe asserted, was in the midst of a major process of transformation that tended to leave many people feeling rather uncertain and disoriented about the current state of affairs. But at the same time, he decided to sketch a political-cultural scenario in which Europe would be able to pool its

many and diverse resources and establish what he called 'a middle empire' – a political and cultural realm which could match both the USA and the Soviet Union in terms of strength and creativity.

The most decisive change regarding the issue of why European history is written occurred in the 1980s. Until the 1970s, Europe had been mainly conceived in a Danish setting as constituting a common cultural heritage – a heritage possessed by people who lived in Europe regardless of whether they wanted to have it or not. From the late 1980s on, an increasing number of scholars began to look upon Europe as a political and cultural project – one that people might influence and shape by means of their decisions and priorities.

An interesting example of this shift is to be found in the material used to promote the sale of *The European House* in 1991. Some of the key phrases in this promotional material run as follows: "Open yourself up to your European roots," "Get to know your European roots as a Dane in the new Europe" and, most telling of all, "A Danish work for Danish Europeans." One may note the introduction of a very interesting terminological innovation in this material, the phrase "Danish Europeans." Such a term would have made little or no sense during the earlier decades of the 20th century, insofar as the operative assumption then was that all Danes by definition were Europeans. But suddenly one finds a new assumption at work to the effect that it makes good sense to divide Danes into two groups: Danish Europeans and other Danes – the latter perhaps being Danish non-Europeans. From the late 1980s on being a Danish European came to mean that one belonged to a category of Danes who wanted to be active participants in a new political and cultural project, in contrast to those others, the Danish non-Europeans, who did not want Denmark to be a part of the European Union. One of the features, which distinguish the Danish histories of Europe which appeared during the 1990s from earlier histories, is precisely this new sense of being an active part of an ongoing political and cultural project. Thus, in instances of this latter kind, the writing of European history cannot be conceived merely in terms of making a contribution to that stock of stories by

which Europeans may structure the living of their lives. It has also become a task that requires finding new ways of writing history.

Different ways of writing European history

It is not possible on the basis of the available research to say anything very definite about the effects of Danish histories of Europe on various kinds of readers during the course of the 20th century. But the fact that such histories were written and sold with fair regularity throughout the period in question makes it plausible to assume that they must have been meeting some important needs among the Danish reading public. Writing European history probably functioned during the first two thirds of the 20th century as a way of keeping a specific community of memory alive. It may also have functioned as a way of maintaining and reproducing the idea that the peoples of Europe had a common cultural heritage. Yet, in the case of Denmark, such a community of memory was for many, if not most people, of much less significance than either the national Danish or the Nordic communities of memory. It is only against such a background that it is possible to offer a plausible explanation of the fact that the writing of European history in a Danish setting had been a genre with special appeal to Social-Democrats and other academics on the Left.

While it is not possible to document to any extent the effects of the writing of European history on readers in a Danish context, it is possible to show that a notable change has occurred in recent years as to the ways in which a history of Europe is actually written – a change that regards the re-definition within the text itself of the relationship between 1) the writer, 2) the reader, and 3) the story being told.

As regards those histories of Europe which were published between 1899 and 1970, the writer of the text in all cases appeared in the role of the teacher, as an educator. The writer saw himself – and during this entire period the author was invariably a man – as a person who has

taken it upon himself to tell his readers what they ought to know and how they ought to feel about their own cultural roots. Thus, these writers of history saw themselves as persons who had both the required insight and the wisdom to be able to state authoritatively what the lessons were to be drawn and learned from dwelling upon the Europe of the past and the present. In this setting the appropriate frame of mind to be adopted by the reader would seem to have been that of a student – trying to appropriate and remember the pre-scribed lessons. To be a good reader (student) meant that one was willing to not only appropriate, but also to stand by that cultural heritage which one found spelt out in the pages of the available histories of Europe. Such a mode of history writing may be considered as constituting an appropriate form of communication in parts of the educational system. But it can hardly be conceived as such if its objective is to contribute to the deliberations of fellow adult citizens as to how the past can be used in the process of understanding the present and thereby seeking to shape the future.

In recent years there has been a growing awareness among scholars that history writing and identity politics are frequently interrelated sets of activities.⁶ This insight has made it pertinent to raise and try to answer the question: what kinds of identity politics can be considered compatible with living and functioning in a democratic society? Thus, the insight into how history writing and identity politics are interconnected activities has also made it pertinent to try to find new ways of writing history. Such ways would entail re-definitions of the relationship between the reader, the writer and the stories being told. The touchstone in this case must be that such modes of history writing are able to convey to the readers that the writers are respecting the democratic rights of their fellow citizens.

In some of the recent histories of Europe – i.e. those from the 1990s – one can find the first attempts at developing a more exploratory and interactive mode of history writing. In these instances the writer no longer appears solely in the role of a teacher or educator who is trying to spell out the lessons to be learned by attentive and willing students.

Rather, the writer is also trying to initiate a dialogue with readers about the issues and challenges at hand. Thus, the reader of these texts has to be treated more as a partner in a dialogue or as a participant in an ongoing discussion – i.e. as a person who also has a say and who has some views worth listening to when it comes to having a discussion about questions concerning how Europe or European identity is to be defined in present day society. When it comes to the task of writing new European history, one of the main challenges, as I see it, will be inventing and developing modes of history writing which, on the one hand, are able to deal seriously with the many intricate issues of European identity politics, but which, on the other hand, are also able to do so without infringing on the democratic rights of the readers of those stories.

Notes

- 1 In the diagram listing the main corpus of texts I use the original Danish titles with an English translation appended in brackets, but in the rest of the text I will only be referring to the English translation of the titles. The reason for this has been a wish to give a better flow to the reading. In all other instances I will be using an English translation of the title and the first time place the original Danish title in brackets.
- 2 There have been some earlier attempts at writing European history, the first of these being *An Introduction to the History of the most notable European States* [= *Introduction til de fornemste europæiske Rigers Historie*], 1711 by the Danish-Norwegian historian Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754).
- 3 Gustav Bang belonged to the Left wing of the Social-Democratic Party, and his wife Nina Bang (1866–1928) was also an historian and became in 1924 the first female secretary of state in the world.
- 4 Hørvig Frisch also belonged to the Left wing of the Social-Democratic Party, and he became in 1935 the leader of the parliamentary groups of the Social-Democrats and the minister of education in 1947.
- 5 The wife of Søren Mørch is Ritt Bjerregaard (b.1941) who was the Social-

Democratic minister for several terms and was also for a four-year term a member of the European Commission.

- 6 I have treated this set of problems in more detail in "History and the politics of identity. Reflections on a contested and intricate issue."
In: *Historiedidaktik i Norden* 7, Trondheim 2000.

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1st generation

Gustav Bang: *Evropas Kulturhistorie i Fortællinger for Folket*, vol. 1–2 [A Cultural History of Europe Told as Stories for the People], 1899.

2nd generation

Hartvig Frisch: *Evropas Kulturhistorie*, vol. 1–2 [A Cultural History of Europe], 1928.

3rd generation

Hartvig Frisch: *Evropas kulturhistorie*, vol. 1–4 [A Cultural History of Europe], 2nd. revised and enlarged edition (Revised by Svend Erik Stybe), 1961–62.

Per Krarup (1906–77), ed.: *Vor kulturarv*, vol. 1–6 [Our Cultural Heritage], 1961–70.

- Vol. 1 *Kulturgrundlaget* [The Cultural Foundation], 1961.
- Vol. 2 *Europæisk kultur spirer* [European Culture Shoots Forth], 1963.
- Vol. 3 *Europæisk kultur spaltes og spredes* [European Culture Divided and Disseminated], 1965.
- Vol. 4 *Det nye Europa skabes* [The Creation of a New Europe], 1966.
- Vol. 5 *Nutidskulturen* [Present Day Culture], 1970.
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European History: Challenge for a Common Future

**edited by Attila Pók, Jörn Rüsen
and Jutta Scherrer**

Results of the project
"European Historical Consciousness."
A Cooperation between the
Körper-Stiftung, Hamburg, and
The Institute for Advanced Study
in the Humanities (KWI), Essen,
under the direction of Jörn Rüsen



[2002]