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Roberto M. Dainotto (2007) *Europe (In Theory)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 272 pp., US\$22.95, ISBN 0-8223-3927-7, paperback

Roberto Dainotto's contribution to a growing spate of interventions on what exactly are the origins, social beliefs and historical grounding of the European Union is to be welcomed for its incisiveness and originality, part of which resides in his re-viewing history 'from the bottom', as it were. This is no mere revisionism of the dominant and mostly optimistic and self-serving historiography of the idea of Europe, but rather a rereading of basically the same sources in order to point out at least three factors, each of which deserving of lengthy critical discussion. First, that Europe has existed really only as a *theoretical projection* – hence the title – by a number of influential thinkers who sought

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each and every time to foreground a specific interest or hegemonic plan (be it driven by superiority of class, nation, or region).

Second, that in order to achieve this end, Europe has been interpreted as going through phases in which its boundaries, conceptions of the non-Europeans and primacy of its self-established 'universal' values (such as liberty, property, civilization) have manifested a peculiar spatiotemporal dynamics, such that there exists no consensus among the most valid recent attempts at pinpointing with any certitude where Europe, or the idea of Europe put back in circulation since the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, begins or ends.

Third, that in the midst of all this, not only have 'real people' been left out of consideration for what they might actually have had to say about what they felt was a European *oecumene* – unless, of course, following the late nineteenth century Orientalists, they were considered tenable 'documents' – but that the much demonized eastern 'other' has been relocated *inside* Europe, since the Renaissance. One nefarious consequence of this ideological rewriting was that the entire underbelly of modern Europe, namely countries like Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain – or 'Pigs' (p. 2) – have become the systematic butt of prejudices and less than noble characterizations for not living up to the Nordic – i.e. non-Mediterranean – sense of civilization, nationalism, order, capitalist ethic and 'true' core European values.

From among these latter countries, Dainotto focuses on the case of Sicily as a region, which, according to hegemonic accounts, had been freed from the Muslims by the Normans in order to slowly bring it back into the fold of Christianity and Europe, but then, alas! it never made it as a fully accredited European region. Dainotto explains this in part by focusing on the rise of the Gallocentric view of Europe, of which Montesquieu is chosen and studied as the preeminent exemplar (pp. 52–86), and who lays the foundation (on climatological grounds!) for institutionalized conceptions of the primitive, lascivious, unproductive east *and* the south, a view which nineteenth century positivistic science (Niceforo, Lombroso) would gladly confirm. Beyond that, with Montesquieu we come close to the identification France = Europe = history itself! A counter-argument – but which in the overall scheme of the book turns out to be merely complimentary – is then presented by exploring the influential figure of Madame de Staël, who effected a shift toward a German-based origin of Europe and which we know gave rise to intellectual wars during the nineteenth century as to which of the two sovereign states should be given credit for establishing the earliest principles of what could be identified as Europe. Bhabha and Said have dedicated revealing pages to the post-colonial reconstruction of the debates.

In the midst of all this wrangling, the south was theorized out of relevance. The fate of Sicily at this juncture turns out to be particularly complex: owing on the one hand to the internalization of the despised uncouth oriental, and the concurrent disgracing of the Mediterraneans; and owing, on the other, to the fact that Sicily's centuries old autonomist and libertarian drive has had to concede, in the post-Congress of Vienna decades, to an alliance with the Piedmontese unification of the Italian peninsula. Sicilians, their culture and history, found themselves characterized as the backward oriental *within* the new Europe. This reminds us of some arguments that circulated at the end of the last century according to which Italy, or part of its south, was nearly to be considered a 'Third World' region. It certainly refueled the older opposition industrious-north vs lazy-south, which existed as an undercurrent within Italy from even before Unification.

Dainotto does an excellent job of synthesizing a remarkable number of first-rate works in European studies in order to lay the foundation for his claim that 'the Europe-versus-Orient paradigm may be overlooking a supplementary and *modern* genesis of Europe' (p. 53; my emphasis). Inspired in part by the work of Benedict Anderson, Walter Mignolo, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and others, but developing them in original ways, he makes a case for an unwritten history of exclusions and silences concerning the centrality of the role of Sicily in upstaging all these self-referential ideas – or, in his text, and perhaps more appropriately, *theories* – of Europe. It is clearly demonstrated (ch. 5) that Sicily was the concrete link between east and west. More than that, Sicily has provided materials and witnessed social situations that point toward an alternative conception of core European values. To argue his position, Dainotto relies on Juan Andrés and Michele Amari, the two experts on the Middle East and Islam who laid the foundation for what today is known as the 'Arabist' paradigm of comparative literature and Southern Orientalism (pp. 124–36). Unfortunately, caught in the throes of the several nationalisms erupting everywhere, both were swallowed up in the *negative* or instrumental Orientalism of the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Dainotto is writing against the grain of 90 per cent of established academic historiography on Italian and European history. Although he begins with the necessary references to the canonical books by Federico Chabod and Denys Hay, he goes beyond them in highlighting the limitations of a conception of the unitary development of the idea of Europe. In the first chapter, 'The Discovery of Europe' (pp. 11–51), he reiterates that all agree that Herodotus first established a cultural/critical distance between Greeks and Persians and laid the foundation for an 'us' vs 'them' paradigm. He then references the most valid reconstructions, from John Hale (Europe arises between 1450 and 1620), to Robert Bartlett (eleventh and twelfth centuries), to Norman Davies (during the 'barbarian' invasions, 330–800 AD), to Enrique Dussel (1492) to Bernard Lewis (732 AD) to M. E. Yapp (1714!), in order not so much to contest them or offer a new date for its beginnings, but to show that they are in the main working under the overall theoretical assumption that a European identity comes into being first in locating its *Other*, namely the Orient, and more specifically in subsequent centuries in the amorphous geopolitical differentiation between a Christian west and an Islamic (middle-) east. It is only in the Early Modern period, when historiography comes into its own, that to these reconstructions we begin to add the further distinction between a north and a south of Europe, and the south and the east are slowly made to overlap.

There is another way of reframing the origins of Europe. At the end of his narrative, against such authorities as Rosario Romeo and Denis Mack Smith, the author shows that not only was Sicily *not* brought into the European fold by the Normans, but it actually fared better under the Arabs: 'the annals of history had completely lost the memory of these five centuries of Muslim presence in Europe, five centuries that – as Andrés had already suggested to us and Amari will never tire to repeat – were in fact *fundamental* for the creation and establishment of European civilization itself' (p. 200). Among these factors, what stands out, in my view, is the polyethnicity and multiculturalism of the Arab-Sicilian world. On the same wavelength, and perhaps more cogently, if historians themselves were not operating under the Modernist prejudice that 'revolutions' are technically only those that occur after Westphal, they would see that the *Vespri* was actually the first true revolution, that is to say, 'born from the people' (p. 202), to cite Amari, or 'from below', though quickly

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betrayed by European monarchs, the same who had presumably 'liberated' Sicily from the infidels.

Written in a lively style, *Europe (In Theory)* is fresh, innovative, and brings the most advanced post-colonial and historiographic positions into Italian studies and conversely suggests that an understanding of Italy's complex past could enrich American cultural studies, Mediterranean area studies and the thorny issue of the relation of Islamic culture to Christian Europe.

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