

Reference Review

ENCYCLOPAEDIC EUROPE

Bernard A. Cook, ed. *Europe Since 1945: An Encyclopaedia* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 2001), 1464 pp., two volumes. ISBN 0815313365.

The aspiration to systematize knowledge in the form of the encyclopaedia corresponds to the very notion of European modernity. The famous *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, edited by d'Alembert and Diderot, and published in instalments from 1751 onwards, emerges as the very symbol of the Enlightenment and of an understanding of Europe as the receptacle of rationality, rights and political modernity. What set the encyclopaedic form apart from others was its aspiration to *continuity* between differing fields of knowledge. By displaying the common ground between, say, astronomy and grammar, the *Encyclopédie* sought to unveil the common principles connecting all thought for all people. In the classical age of monarchy, the political implications of such a notion were clearly immense. *Europe Since 1945* thus occupies a place in a noble tradition based on a belief that an 'encyclopaedic' assembly of knowledge can amount to something more than the sum of the facts it contains. This is the measure against which this book constantly struggles; in the end, it does not completely succeed.

Europe Since 1945 contains a vast collection of material, comprising nearly 1,500 pages, made up of over 1,000 articles written by 286 scholars from 30 countries. The majority of the articles are relatively short in length and deal with individual persons of interest in a political perspective. In addition to articles dedicated to each European nation, including those of Eastern Europe and the individual nations of former Yugoslavia, together with partial coverage of the

former Soviet Union, there is a relatively small number of articles on groupings, organizations, movements and concepts. In addition, the encyclopaedia contains a subject guide and a brief chronology of major political events of the period 1945–2000.

The strength of these volumes is without a doubt the more comprehensive survey essays. In particular, the country-specific articles are the most competently written and the most useful, doubtless because it is here we see the broader programme of *Europe Since 1945* take shape. The long article on Yugoslavia, for example, integrates the more diverse elements of both the collective dimensions of Yugoslav self-consciousness and the national particularities and the tensions they produce. Thus, when the historical axis between Tito and the Soviet Union is developed as the backdrop for the building of political, social and cultural institutions, the individuals and events take clear and meaningful shape. This type of comprehensive treatment stands in stark contrast to the countless minor articles on individuals – be they politicians, military men, artists or cultural actors – whose significance is never adequately contextualized. The longer entries give a broad picture with many components and provide a far more plausible and understandable role of individual players, institutions and movements in the longer narratives of 20th-century national and European development. Thus, informative and interesting articles about Germany, Romania and Italy, to name a few more examples, are far superior to spotty, incomplete or even confusing articles about Kohl, Ceausescu and Craxi.

The strength described above, however, must be measured against a serious weakness of *Europe Since 1945*. Despite the value of individual articles on individual countries, the meaningfulness of the chronological cross section (despite the clear geopolitical value of the Yalta summit in 1945 and

the millennium shift to 2000) never becomes clear in the development of the volumes. Something like 'Europe' never emerges as a more useful, more understandable or more tangible category after having studied the work. The volumes are replete with examples of people and events with their centres of gravity before 1945, with no explicit association with what makes Europe what it is after that year.

Moreover, the principles of organization and categorization do not contribute to making these volumes more meaningful. The Western European Union is devoted an article of the same weight as 'tourism'; Jacques Derrida receives as many lines as Jacques Delors; the Polish émigré publishing house Institute Literacki is granted an article, while the East Berlin underground art scene receives none; and 'Socialist International' receives the same coverage as 'soccer hooliganism'. To be sure, there exists a system of categorization and conceptual valorization justifying these choices and others; the problem is that this system remains utterly undisclosed to the reader.

Nor does the *selection* of material appear to be conceptualized or problematized at all. Under 'Literature', we find Brendan Behan, but not André Malraux; Christa Wolf, but not Thomas Mann; and Dermot Bolger, but not Bertolt Brecht. Under 'Philosophy', we find Roland Barthes, but not John Rawls; and Etienne Gilson, but not Norberto Bobbio. The list of glaring absences is many times longer than the selection itself. The subject index lists one sole 'International Dispute' – the 'Cod War' (in and around the Icelandic fishing grounds) – and only four 'International Crises'. European 'Intellectuals' number only nine; 'Military Alliances' only three; 'Minorities' only eighteen; 'Paramilitary Groups' only six; and 'Wars' only eight. The Vietnam

War is not even listed, though the Korean War is. The index contains a heading 'Crime', containing six listings, while 'Sport' has three. We could go on.

The greatest symbol of the book's problem with conceptualization is the fact that 'Europe' itself is not devoted an article. Though various other institutions more or less central to the process of European construction are included, the questions of what Europe is, what heritage it contains, and what meaning it has in the 20th century all remained unaddressed.

The copy-editing of the volumes wavers between poor and dreadful, aptly symbolized by the very first sentence: 'The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 seemed a logical conclusion to a historical epoch launch by World War II (1914–18), but more specifically to the Europe that was produced by the changes of World War II (1939–45)' (p. vii). The book is littered with typos, factual errors, spelling errors and mistranslations, giving the reader the sense that it was assembled in haste. The digitalized maps used throughout and the sporadic photographs are of oddly poor quality compared to the production values in the rest of these otherwise very attractive volumes.

Like the cultural, political, religious and geographical entity it attempts to encompass, *Europe Since 1945* is a work in search of an identity. One is left with the impression that the editor and his collaborators did not have an unambiguous idea of what they wished to accomplish. Without any clear principles, either explicit or implicit, the reader is lost in the struggle.

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