INTRODUCTION

The European culture wars

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Across Europe, the emergence of constitutional and democratic nation-states was accompanied by intense conflict between Catholics and anticlerical forces over the place of religion in a modern polity. There had always been intermittent institutional friction between church and state in central and western Europe, but the conflicts that came to a head in the second half of the nineteenth century were of a different kind. They involved processes of mass mobilisation and societal polarisation. They embraced virtually every sphere of social life: schools, universities, the press, marriage and gender relations, burial rites, associational culture, the control of public space, folk memory and the symbols of nationhood. In short, these conflicts were 'culture wars', in which the values and collective practices of modern life were at stake.

In Prussia, the largest member state of the German Empire, Otto von Bismarck's government launched a salvo of laws intended to neutralise Catholicism as a political force, triggering a 'struggle of cultures' (*Kulturkampf*) that shaped the contours of German politics and public life for more than a generation. In Italy, the annexation of the Papal States and the city of Rome, and the 'imprisonment' of the pope within the walls of the Vatican produced a stand-off between the church and the secular Kingdom of Italy, with far-reaching consequences for Italian political culture. In France, the elite of the Third Republic and the forces of clericalism waged bitter rhetorical battles, to the point where it seemed that secular and Catholic France had become two separate realities. In Belgium, a long period of growing friction between liberals and Catholic political interests culminated in the 'school war' of 1879–84, during which liberal and Catholic crowds clashed in the streets of Brussels, again with lasting repercussions for Belgian society and political culture. In the Netherlands, heated conflict over Catholic processions, which were legally forbidden, together with the pressurising impact of the *Kulturkampf* underway in neighbouring Germany, accelerated the articulation of Dutch society into discrete

socio-cultural milieux. In Switzerland, confessional and secular–Catholic tensions at local and cantonal level became intertwined with the most important issues in national politics. Political life in nineteenth-century Spain was marked by an extreme antipathy between Catholic and liberal-progressive interests that engendered a climate of mutual intolerance whose effects would be felt far into the twentieth century. In Austria and Hungary, Catholics and liberals clashed over civil marriage, schooling and Protestant burials in the aftermath of the new political settlement established by the Compromise of 1867. In England, concern over the growing confidence and strength of Roman Catholicism in Europe and Ireland goes a long way towards explaining the sharpness of the conflicts between Anglicans and nonconformists over issues of church, state and schooling, which were in any case Protestant variants of the Catholic–secular clashes occurring elsewhere in Europe.

At the national level, the chief protagonists in these struggles were liberal-dominated state institutions and anticlerical politicians and journalists, as well as the Vatican, the Catholic hierarchy, Catholic parties, and the Catholic press. However, they were also a socially deep phenomenon whose effects were felt not only in legislatures and parliamentary committees, but also in towns and villages. They involved not only political parties, ministerial factions, and senior clergymen, but also urban free-thinking clubs, local liberal committees, parish priests and lay parish councils, Catholic activists and the masses of the faithful. In some parts of Europe, the culture wars were intensified by confessional tensions between Catholics and Protestants; in other states, anticlericalism and secularism were powerful social forces in their own right.[1]

Historians have generally treated these conflicts in a purely national context. In part, this reflects the dominant concern of the European historiography of this era with the process of nation-state formation. It is

[1] For a stimulating interpretation of the nineteenth century as a 'second confessional age', see Olaf Blaschke, 'Das 19. Jahrhundert: Ein Zweites Konfessionelles Zeitalter?', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000), 38–75. From Blaschke's perspective, the German *Kulturkampf* appears as an episode in an epochal process of 'confessionalisation'. This is an illuminating perspective for countries of mixed confession such as Holland, Germany or Switzerland, where secular–clerical conflicts were overlayered by historical tensions between the confessions. It is less helpful in explaining secular–Catholic conflict in predominantly mono-confessional states such as Spain, France, Belgium, Austria and Italy, where the faultlines of conflict were primarily between Catholic ultramontanes and Catholic (or secular) liberals. Even in nations of mixed denomination, the confessionalisation paradigm captures one of the important motors of conflict, but does not take account of secularism and anticlericalism as autonomous social and political forces with their own deep historical roots. It is worth noting that Rudolf Virchow, who coined the term 'Kulturkampf' for general usage, was in fact an unbeliever and thus a Protestant only in a nominal sense.

also an inevitable consequence of the culture of national specialisations that still prevails in academic history. Germany's *Kulturkampf* figured as a specifically German eruption of forces unleashed by the Reformation, Napoleon's reordering of the German states, and the belated unification of the German Empire. Swiss historiography focused on the interaction between confessional and secular–clerical tensions on the one hand, and the evolution of Switzerland's peculiar federal system on the other. Italian historians emphasised the unique complex of problems thrown up by the Roman question. The conflict between the 'two Frances' was seen as part of that nation's distinctive revolutionary legacy, while it has often been assumed that Britain was insulated from the heat of continental confessional struggle by the supposedly temperate, consensual and pragmatic quality of its political culture. The literature on nineteenth-century confessional or secular–clerical conflict has also tended until recently to focus more or less exclusively on high politics. The emphasis has been on parliamentary debates, legislation, partisan conflict and the skirmishing of journalists.

These are, of course, perfectly valid perspectives on a phenomenon that was intimately tied up with questions of national identity and marked by sometimes spectacular public interventions by governments. Yet it has recently become increasingly clear that the Europe of the mid- and later nineteenth century should in some respects be seen as a common politico-cultural space. The mobilisation of European Catholics around a papalist agenda was a transnational phenomenon, as were the profound changes that transformed Catholic devotional cultures across the continent. The same can be said for that robustly secular political and literary culture that was common to so many liberal administrations in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this sense, it appears justified to speak of *European* culture wars; a pan-European phenomenon of this scope demands an all-European and comparative perspective, not least in order more precisely to ascertain the relative weight of the particular factors that determined the outbreak, course and consequences of the culture wars in the European states.

At the same time, recent historical research, while remaining alert to the national and high-political dimension of the conflicts, has begun to focus on regions and localities. The rediscovery of cultural history has stimulated interest in the symbolic representations that fed the culture wars: national and local commemorations and festivities, liberal or republican monuments, the deployment of resonant phrases and key words, the evolution, on both sides of the conflict, of a language of visual caricature, the demonstrative staging of religious festivities such as pilgrimages and processions.

The aim of this volume is to draw upon these recent research trends in order to facilitate a comparative analysis of the Catholic–secular culture wars as a European phenomenon. Two introductory essays by the editors discuss the two transnational antagonists: the revitalised Catholic church of the nineteenth century and the liberal and anticlerical networks of mid- to late nineteenth-century Europe. In the country-by-country studies that follow, an effort has been made to maintain sufficient consistency of approach to allow comparative and overarching themes to emerge. We have tried, as it were, when writing Italy (or Germany, or the Netherlands) to think Europe. The specificity of national experiences has of course necessitated variations in emphasis, but all contributions combine a general introduction to the origins and course of the culture wars in each national setting with analysis of a particular case study focusing either on an individual locality or on an individual issue in the conflict. Where the case study concerns local conflicts, the aim has been to link an understanding of how the issues were played out in specific political cultures with the virtues of a 'micro-history' that can offer, in Carlo Ginzburg's words, 'a graphic image of the networks of social relations into which the individual is inserted'.[2] Where the focus is on a specific policy issue, the aim has been to illuminate the conditions and mechanisms by which particular institutions (schools, for example) could become invested with a symbolic importance capable of mobilising powerful collective allegiances.

The country chapters that follow yield a number of general insights. They show, firstly, how interconnected the various culture wars were in the eyes of contemporary observers. The spectacle of the *Kulturkampf* in Bismarck's Germany exercised a powerful influence on political and cultural elites in the other European states, though frequently as a warning of what was to be avoided rather than as a model for emulation. Developments in Rome had an even more powerful effect, both on Catholics, who responded with indignation and vows of allegiance to the privations imposed upon the pope by the nascent Kingdom of Italy, and upon liberals and other anticlericals, who responded with outrage and paranoia to the increasingly robust doctrinal and political assertions emanating from Rome. As these chapters also show, the transnational resonance of such issues was heightened by the thickening of communicative networks – anticlerical and Catholic – that spanned the continent. The Catholic press nourished a sense of solidarity among Belgian, Austrian and Italian Catholics with

[2] C. Ginzburg and C. Poni, 'The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historical Marketplace', in E. Muir and G. Ruggiere (eds.), *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore, 1991), 6.

their beleaguered co-religionists in other countries, while the translation and reprinting of anticlerical books and articles created a European pantheon of secular celebrities and a stock of shared images and arguments. How these cross-border affinities interacted with commitments closer at hand depended, as the chapters show, upon the conditions obtaining in each case.

As all the single-country studies demonstrate, the course and ferocity of the culture wars both influenced and were determined by broader processes of political and social change. Of these, perhaps the most important was the expansion of political participation that occurred within the European states during the middle and later decades of the nineteenth century. In many of the countries studied in this book, the most intense phase of culture war followed a moment of historically significant constitutional innovation – the Compromise of 1867 in Austria and Hungary, for example, franchise reform in Belgium and Britain, the formation of new partly democratic national polities in Italy and Germany, or the establishment of the Third Republic in France. In an environment where franchises were opening up and parliaments were acquiring more power, institutions that had been locked into relatively fixed systems of representation – marriage and burial, schooling, dress, public space, even the sacral quality of royalty or of the state – were now up for grabs. One of the most disturbing and exhilarating aspects of democracies – especially emergent ones – is their competitive character. This is essential to understanding not only the intensity of the culture wars, but also the crucial role played in them by the print media and by those pseudo-plebiscitary mass performances – demonstrations, marches, processions – by which each side sought to show the other how successful it had been in gaining the allegiance of 'the people'.

The importance of newspaper journalism in fanning the flames of culture war is a theme that runs through many of the chapters. After all, as Margaret Lavinia Anderson has pointed out, the culture wars of nineteenth-century Europe were not literally wars.[3] Although there were certainly episodes of physical violence against people and property, these wars were primarily fought through the cultural media: the spoken and printed word, the image, the symbol. The 'mediated' quality of these conflicts is evident in many of the studies below. One of the most striking features of this era is the sometimes gaping discrepancy between the virtual reality of culture war rhetoric, in which we appear to be contemplating a struggle to the knife

[3] Margaret L. Anderson, 'Afterword: Living Apart and Together in Germany', in Helmut W. Smith, *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany, 1800–1914* (Oxford, 2001), 319–32; here 326.

between two diametrically opposed socio-cultural universes, and the lived reality of European societies, in which the shock of confrontation was muted at every level by a range of compromises and pragmatic fudges, even at the height of the 'hot culture wars' that raged across Europe from the 1860s to the 1880s. In the intermittent phases of rhetorical escalation that characterise this era, a key role fell to those 'snipers' on both sides of the divide whose intransigent appeals to prejudice and fear raised emotional temperatures in both camps.

In the dynamic and troubled environment of Europe's fledgling democracies, the era of liberal dominance proved short-lived. In the battle for mass support, the liberals were often outperformed by the Catholics, who proved much more skilful in mobilising those elements of the population – particularly in rural areas – whose presence in politics had previously scarcely been felt, and who feared they would gain little from the economic prescriptions and elitist politics of liberalism. But as a number of chapters in this volume make clear, the liberals were also under threat from secular political forces closer to home. As Europe's societies industrialised, the popular pressure behind left-progressive, and later socialist, programmes grew dramatically. In one sense, it could be said that the socialist parties, with their forthrightly secular outlook, merely inherited the culture warrior's mantle thrown aside by the declining liberal parties. On the other hand, most socialists had bigger fish to fry than the priests, and the presence of increasingly successful mass parties on the left tended to drive liberals and Catholics into an uneasy truce in the name of property and the 'social order'. In this sense, the rise of socialism cooled the heat of the culture wars by diverting some of its energies into other confrontations.

Yet this does not imply that the polarities of culture war left no lasting trace on Europe's political cultures. On the contrary, as many of these essays show, they structured politics in ways that outlasted the period of most intense conflict. In some states, this was reflected in a realignment of partisan allegiances or in subtle but lasting changes in their character. In others, the culture wars left an enduring imprint on popular voting behaviour. Their impact on political cultures more generally appears to have been ambivalent. It has been argued, on the one hand, that they contributed in many states to processes of democratisation by encouraging vast reserves of previously inactive subjects to mobilise in support of specific objectives, using the tools provided by newly devised regimes of mass suffrage. But it has also been suggested that they contributed in some states to a climate of intolerance and a tendency to shroud political claims in a rhetoric of intransigent absolutes.

Of all the goods for which Catholics and anticlericals contended during the culture wars era, the most encompassing was the nation itself and the collective identity that attached to it. As the essays in this volume show, anticlericals across Europe aligned themselves with the cause of the nation, which was imagined as an autonomous collectivity of unbound (male) consciences. They denounced their opponents as the stooges of a 'foreign' power structure bent on undermining the integrity and distinctiveness of the nation-states. The passionate commitment to a specific concept of the nation was one of the central escalatory mechanisms of the culture war era, for it could always be argued (by liberals) that what was at stake in the burial of a Protestant corpse in a Catholic graveyard, or the unveiling of a memorial to a condemned Renaissance 'heretic', or the closing of a local girls' school run by nuns, was not simply the right of an individual to a dignified interment, or control over public representation, or the entitlement of children to an education free of potentially divisive religious content, but the very soul of the nation itself, its independence, its cultural, political and economic modernity. Indeed, the equation of secularism with modernity, which passed via the Protestant National Liberal political theorist Max Weber into the fabric of the 'modernisation theory' that has underwritten so much of the most authoritative writing on European history since the 1960s, may well be the most enduring legacy of the European culture wars.

Constraints of space and the need to maintain a degree of thematic coherence have meant that we have had to limit the scope of this volume in various ways. We have chosen to focus above all on those areas where Catholic minorities or majorities found themselves in contention with liberal or secularising forces. It has thus not been possible to incorporate the Scandinavian countries or Russia, although analogous debates over the place of religion in public life took place in both. Readers may be surprised to find that we have not included chapters on Ireland and Poland. There are two reasons for this. The first is that neither was a sovereign state during the period covered in this book. The struggle between legislatures, executives and constituencies that was a defining feature of the culture wars thus took place within the framework of other states – Prussia-Germany and Austria in Poland's case (conditions in Russian Poland being such as to prevent the triangulation of the conflict in this sense), and Britain in the case of Ireland. More important, however, is the fact that the conditions of 'foreign' dominion obtaining in these two nations on the opposite peripheries of Catholic Europe militated against the unfolding of a culture war in the sense explored in this volume. Neither in Poland nor in Ireland was the Catholic identity of the nation plausibly contested by a powerful secular

or heterodox competitor (despite the presence of Protestant Irish patriots in the emergent Irish nationalist movement). In both cases, the divisive questions posed by the culture wars in other states were overshadowed by the quest for national autonomy or independence.

The title of this book will inevitably evoke parallels with the 'culture wars' fought out within Anglo-American academia during the 1990s over such bones of contention as multi-culturalism, the literary canon and 'political correctness'. Some of the specific policy questions on which these debates have turned – the conflict between the suburb and the inner city in huge conurbations, for example, or the explosive relationship between race and education in underprivileged urban ghettos[4] – would be quite alien to the protagonists who feature in this book. Yet there are also some striking connections. James Davidson Hunter, the writer generally credited with coining the term 'culture wars' in the 1980s, has himself declared that it was devised in order to evoke the 'similarities and dissimilarities between our own time and that of the German *Kulturkampf*'.[5] 'Culture wars' is of course a mistranslation of *Kulturkampf*, but for our purposes this is precisely its virtue: it captures the essence of the German without replicating it and thus lends itself to a far more encompassing application than the term *Kulturkampf* would bear.

There are also many thematic parallels. The meaning of marriage, for example, is at stake for those who have resisted calls for the legal recognition of non-marital relationships in the 1990s, just as it was for the exponents and opponents of civil marriage in the 1870s. The recent controversy over the inclusion of Darwinian or creationist material in school textbooks would have struck a chord with those nineteenth-century Europeans who demanded confessional schools, or fought to drive the religious orders out of primary and secondary education. Now as then, the meanings of 'culture' have been contested; the dyad culture/civilisation, manifested in the putative opposition between 'multi-culturalism' and 'western civilisation' would have been perfectly intelligible to those nineteenth-century observers who saw themselves as participants in a struggle for national 'cultures' against the European 'civilisation' of Catholicism.[6] In the 1990s, as in the 1880s,

[4] On these, see Joseph A. Rodriguez, *City Against Suburb. The Culture Wars in an American Metropolis* (Westport, Conn., 1999), esp. 3–14; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional. Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston, 1997), esp. 4–12.

[5] James Davidson Hunter, *Culture Wars. The Struggle to Define America. Making Sense of the Battles over Family, Art, Education, Law and Politics* (New York, 1991), xii.

[6] On the culture–civilisation dyad, see Joan de Jean, *Ancients against Moderns. Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (Chicago, 1997), x; on the contestation of the meaning of culture more generally, see Gregory Melleuish, *The Packaging of Australia. Politics and Culture Wars* (Sydney, 1998), 9.

the conflict was framed, somewhat misleadingly, as a stand-off between the forces of tradition and those of transformation. There was a tendency then as now to slip into martial metaphors: 'cultural combatants', 'canon fodder' (*sic*), 'ghetto wars' and 'textbook battles' in the 1990s; 'Jesuit infiltration', 'fortress', 'bastions', 'campaign' and 'black battalions' in the 1880s.[7] In both eras, the assumption that the integrity of national cultures was at stake ensured that ostensibly quite circumscribed issues could become contentious symbols of a greater struggle. It has been observed, moreover, of the 1990s that 'differences are often intensified and aggravated by their presentation in public', thanks to a 'media technology' that 'gives public discussion a life and logic of its own'.[8] Precisely the same can be said for the last decades of the nineteenth century. These contemporary resonances are welcome inasmuch as they sharpen our awareness of the public passions that are stirred 'on those rare occasions when society goes to war over culture'.[9]

If the issues contested in late nineteenth-century Europe remain alive – albeit in different forms – at the outset of the twenty-first century, the same applies *a fortiori* to those South Asian and Middle-Eastern societies in which secular elites have come under pressure from growing religious movements. That there are parallels between the conflicts analysed in this book and developments in nineteenth-century Latin America and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century non-Christian world is beyond doubt. Within the orbit of Islam and Hinduism, modernising intellectuals like Sayyid Ahmad Khan or Mohammad Abduh, who pioneered the critical historical study of religion or expounded the primacy of reason, posed a challenge to traditional religious elites. At the same time, efforts were underway within Islam to impose greater uniformity in religious schools through curricular reform, while improved communications facilitated the emergence of the great mosque at Cairo, al-Azhar, as an internationally authoritative teaching institution. Even within the much less centralised culture of Hinduism, nineteenth-century religious authorities strove, not without success, to bring local devotional practices into closer conformity with temple-based religion. 'Almost everywhere', Christopher Bayly has written, 'the world religions sharpened and clarified their identities', expanding to 'absorb and discipline . . . variegated systems of belief, ritual and practice'.[10]

[7] On this tendency, see Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams. Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York, 1995), 1, 13; Michael Keefer, *Lunar Perspectives. Field Notes from the Culture Wars* ([Canada], 1996), vii.
[8] Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 34. [9] De Jean, *Ancients Against Moderns*, ix.
[10] Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World. Global Interactions 1780–1914* (Oxford, 2003). I am grateful to Professor Bayly for making a draft version of this text available to me.

The consequence for many societies has been an ongoing conflict over the role of religion in politics, law and public space, even after the establishment of emphatically secular political orders, as in Turkey (1923) or India (1947). An exploration of these linkages lies beyond the scope of this book. But their existence alone reminds us that the religious conflicts still troubling so many of the world's societies are less exotic to modern 'western' political culture than we are often encouraged to believe.[11]

[11] The most egregious influence in this respect has been that of Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996).