First of all, I begin with a brief observation on method. These lines start from an admission that is not universally shared among historians: that the past is always thought of from a time and a place, *hic et nunc*, so to speak. This perspectivist idea links knowledge to the situated point of view of the subject and has a long and prestigious tradition in European and American historiography, from Johann Chladenius to Reinhart Koselleck, from Gustav Droysen to Benedetto Croce.\(^{1}\)

Of course, to this set of perspectives must be added another, not theoretical but empirical, which is even more imperative in these times of global and/or transnational history: the unequal knowledge that all historians have of historiographies other than their own, since historiographies are still generally organised on a national basis. Even if we speak of global or transnational historiographies (and what is published in English, at least for Latin America, is not considered to be the most interesting), mastering other historiographies would require unusual erudition in order to work with primary sources, or to propose something more than general interpretative schemes. In this sense, the case of Latin American historiography is no different from that of European historiography, even if it does not require an extensive multilingual mastery.
Taking these obstacles into account, the present text does not aspire to propose a Latin American perspective, and even less a global one, but only an Argentine one, based on authors who are almost all Argentine. In order to investigate these images of Europe, it seems necessary to distinguish among different groups and spheres.

The perspective of “ordinary” people

One is that of “ordinary” people: what image did they have? In general terms, the question is impossible to answer, but if we look at the working and middle classes of European immigrant origin from the end of the 19th century onwards, things are much clearer. At least the children of migrants from Southern (the vast majority), and Eastern Europe had a rather negative image of their parents’ places of origin as poor and backward. This is clearly indicated by their externalisation of their Argentine identity and also by other cultural indicators. Immigrants abandoned their parents’ language, whether it was the official one or, like more often happened, the dialect spoken in the family, which generated greater shame the more they became integrated into Argentine society. The more social and educational advancement took place, the more Europe was left behind, destined to be a bygone past in the face of the dominance of the myth of Argentina’s present and future greatness. No one sang the Argentine anthem louder than the children of the immigrants, asserted the soon-to-be president of Argentina’s National Education Council in 1899.²

One hundred years later the situation was reversed. The American myth was now the European myth, the future was European. Many Argentine descendants of emigrants, whether grandchildren, great-grandchildren, or fourth generation, aspired to emigrate to Europe, seen as the place of possibilities and well-being. Emigration, which was mistakenly called return emigration, when it was in fact a new emigration, reached high numbers that correlated with each of Argentina’s successive economic and political crises. An easy way to measure one dimension of this new myth is to look at applications for a European citizenship. For example, there are today around 700,000 Argentines of Italian origin who have obtained an Italian passport valid in the EU, who have not yet emigrated and may never do so. In addition to other European nationalities, especially Spanish, and those who have already emigrated, a total number is difficult to pinpoint.³

A further note: the application for a European passport does not indicate that emigration will be to the country of origin of one’s ancestors. The case of migrants with
Italian passports who settled in Spain and their difficulties in gaining recognition as EU citizens in the 2000s is well known. Europe, then, was seen as a land of promise for many migrants, regardless of much more precision about national cultures: a way of repeating the old saying, \textit{ubi bene, ibi patria}.

It is true that these Argentines, who do not belong to the poorest classes, had and have some summary idea of Europe. It is likely not the one they received in the family environment, which in any case would be the memory of a place, of a region, of a specific nation, but the one that came from the Argentine educational system.

History teaching in Argentina in the past

If we go back fifty years or even a little over a hundred years, the history taught in Argentina at all levels of education had two axes: the American-Argentine and the European, also known as Western. The latter went beyond the mere history of Europe. It traced its origins to the ancient Near East and extended to the contemporary world, including the rest of the world as part of European expansion. Of course, variations occurred in line with political changes, but they gathered around an enduring axis of debate among Argentine elites: secularism and Catholicism. For example, the first Peronist government (1946-1955) substantially increased the hours of study of Argentine history, decreasing the Mediterranean-European axis. By introducing compulsory religious education in schools, however, the study of the Old and New Testaments reinforced the axis of Catholicism.

When it came to studying what was called ancient and medieval history and modern and contemporary history, there were many options. In general, they were textbooks written by Argentine high school teachers, who summarised European textbooks. In the best cases, schools used more ambitious works translated into Spanish from German, such as Oncken’s \textit{Historia Universal}, or those edited by Walter Goetz or later by Maurice Crouzet. There was also a French option: French textbooks, written for French schools, and translated into Spanish, such as the so-called “little” Lavisse for primary schools. Above all, and for a very long time, the books of Albert Malet completed by Jules Isaac, the very well-known Malet-Isaac series.

I studied in high school in the early sixties with Malet-Isaac textbooks, which had been used since the beginning of the 20th century. The first editions in Spanish of the series available in the Argentine National Library date back to 1909. It may well be said that...
things have changed in the new millennium, and that extra-European history has become much more common, but even so, Europe and particularly the Mediterranean and Western European region continue to dominate secondary history education in Argentina.

Things were similar in university teaching, except for literature courses, where there were “national” subjects: for example, Spanish, French, English, Italian or German literature. In the rest of the humanities, philosophy, geography and, of course, history, studies were at the continental level. In the case of the teaching of history, with few variations, students in the past and today go from the history of the Ancient Near East to contemporary history. In this treatment, Europe was and is seen as a unit. While the predominant scenario was also the Western European scenario, there are glimpses of the Slavic world at specific moments when they became visible to Western eyes or came into contact with Western powers. Something similar happens with the United States in cases where it was thought of as part of the Euro-Atlantic world and not the American one.

At the same time, what lay beyond the Atlantic was studied in the processes of colonisation, then decolonisation, but in both cases European operations were the conceptual focus. Of course, some exception could always be pointed out, which escaped the unitary continental framework. The history of Spain, the “mother country”, used to be treated separately. Especially in the post-World War II curricula, the history of Spain was taught first as a compulsory subject and then as an optional subject, surviving in almost all Argentine universities, although with a declining tendency. Of course, this interest in Spain, reborn in the twentieth century, was linked to the Middle Ages: particularly, from the end of the Spanish Civil War, when Franco’s regime, searched in it the “essence” of Hispanidad. When it made incursions into modernity it did so also under the premises of Hispanic-Catholic nationalism.

Similarly, there was in Argentina some form of “universal” history, understood in the form of a “history of culture” which could be another way of speaking of the “West”, or under other rather marginal influences, Toynbee or Spengler, for example, of a plurality of civilisations. In the canonical, Eurocentric version, everything had a first legitimising argument: Latin America was a projection of Europe outside Europe for Latin Americans themselves. The term “Far West” was also used in Europe to designate the same process.

Thus, to study the history of Europe was to study the projection of Christian Europe, in Catholic readings; the projection of modes of production, feudal or capitalist, in Marxist
debates; or the projection of philosophies, aesthetic theories, or political forms, which were also a European derivation, in cosmopolitan or liberal readings. Thus, Europe was the root of all things. Even the foundations of nativist or nationalist thinking as an alternative to Europeanism sought their foundations in European thinkers, sometimes used in unusual ways: Herder, Hegel, Marx, Maurras, Gramsci, Heidegger, and others.

New perspectives in present Argentine historiography

Are the themes and sources of Argentine historiography different today? Formally, one might say yes, in the sense that other histories have appeared, for example, of “Asia and Africa”. Although it has now become incorrect to defend what was previously believed to be correct. “European civilisation”, for example, has become a problematic phrase for some, but not for all. There are still traditional views: Eadem Utraque Europa is the name of a curious academic journal published today in Argentina. True, too, some steps have been taken in search of “connections” between different histories.

Has the history of Europe or the West, if we think of it endogenously, changed so much? Of course, in the 1980s there was more economic and social history and less political history, and since the 2000s more cultural history and less social history. There are changes of register, yes. Whether there are changes of conceptual instruments is open to debate. Is not Europe as seen from Argentina still Europe, and is not the succession of hegemonic nations still the same? Let us think of the 20th century: imperialism, “world” wars, fascism, communism, decolonisation are all ruled by Europe. Of course, a final chapter on European unity could well be included, even if, seen from the outside, such unity is perceived as tenuous. In the local media, the first cut of history, beyond some economic dimensions, nation states seem to continue to set in motion a game of alliances, conflicts, and borders, which continue to exist. Even the “extra-community” experience helps us to perceive them more clearly. Moreover, if today many younger Argentine historians have been trained abroad, which has raised the technical level of European history studies, this has at best (Anglo-Saxon campuses aside) created strong links with specific European historiographical traditions, but always at a national or sub-national level.
The problem of Europe in Argentine intellectual culture

When we shift our focus from popular and even academic approaches to Argentine intellectual culture, the problem of Europe arises again. Certainly, thinking about Europe is not just a problem for historians, nor only for history professors. It is also something that is and has been present in Argentine intellectual discourse in many ways. In 1985, Jorge Luis Borges, who was both a writer and a professor of History of English Literature at the University of Buenos Aires, wrote something that he had expressed often on previous occasions, that Argentines were Europeans exiled in America. He said in 1985: ‘I believe that we are the reflection of Europe, the prolongation of Europe, and that we can be a mirror, possibly a magnificent one, of Europe, since Europe generally forgets that it is Europe’. He added: ‘On the other hand, we here, in this distant and forgotten Argentinean land, are in a position to perceive the fundamental unity of Europe, which is more difficult to perceive there, because, it is well understood, each country in Europe, not forgetting Spain, has its own tradition, and it is natural that this tradition should be delimited. As for us, we have our own traditions... and Europe is the whole of Europe, Europe is one’. Of course, Borges’ comment was abusive. Many in Europe, academics, or essayists, had thought of Europe as a unity, and especially when they were immersed in deep crises. Benedetto Croce and Johann Huizinga in the 1930s, in the face of totalitarian advances, Denis de Rougemont or Luis Diez del Corral, in the second post-war period, in the face of the idea of threat and loss of centrality.

Borges’ idea was not exclusive to his intellectual milieu. To take another example, the socialist essayist and academic historian José Luís Romero, a specialist in medieval European history who defined himself as a “historian of Western civilisation”, argued that he had a right to the whole of European history because it was his property, which meant that he was intellectually entitled to it.

The problem could, however, be seen in another way. For example, in Buenos Aires in 1936, parallel to the most famous meeting of the P.E.N. Club, the VII Conversation (Entretien) of Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations was held on the theme of relations between the cultures of Europe and Latin America. Three Spanish-American participants – Pedro Henríquez Ureña, from the Dominican Republic, Alfonso Reyes from Mexico (both living in Buenos Aires at the time) and Francisco Romero from Argentina – gave talks that had points in common and this led them to continue...
discussions among themselves to better define what we can call the “differential fact”: i.e., admitting that a difference between Europe and the Americas existed, they wondered where the American particularity lay with respect to European culture. The answers are not important here. The question is important, and the question always places Europe, or rather the relationship with Europe, at the centre.

If we want to go back further and consider famous Argentine essayist, literary historian, publisher, and renowned publicist Ricardo Rojas, we could recall that in successive books since the time of the first Argentina centennial he proposed different formulas to achieve a new worldview of Argentine culture that would allow us to leave the European corset and achieve a new European and Indo-American synthesis. He unsuccessfully entitled and defined this concept *Eurindia*. This formula, as well as others that preceded or followed it, which sought a synthesis between the European and American worlds, aroused resistance in public opinion in the large cities of the Argentine coast and in the educational system.

Of course, the panorama has changed progressively in Argentina over the last forty years. On the one hand, there is the affirmation of the American economic, social, and even cultural model, which is seen as superior to the European one and, therefore, more worthy of imitation. On the other hand, and inversely, there is the affirmation of Argentina as a plurality of cultures, the mestizo culture and even more of the pre-Hispanic cultures that have survived, while recalling that Argentina is vast and varied. To give just two examples: both the politically devalued figure of Christopher Columbus, and the date of October 12th (commemorating Columbus’ arrival in the Americas in 1492), are no longer celebrated, as they had been since 1917, as Día de la Raza (day of the race), referring to the “Hispanic race” or “European race”, but today are celebrated as a “day of respect and cultural diversity”. Thus, in an Argentina with contrasting representations of Europe, the dream of many who want to emigrate stands side by side with the ideas of others who want to distance themselves from, relativise, or perceive more clearly the negative aspects of European culture. Some still see European culture as “civilisation” in the classical sense, and others see it as a high or refined form of “barbarism”.

These questions, like others, can neither be summarised in a unitary image, nor resolved empirically. They are based on *a priori* assumptions that may be ideological or idiosyncratic: do the cognising subjects believe in the existence of national characteristics, or do they believe in a universal characteristic common to all? Does cosmopolitanism or nationalism impregnate their gaze or hegemonize their readings? The reader of this text will find in it both an interpretation and a testimony.


5. Wilhelm Oncken, *Historia Universal* (22), Barcelona 1918; Walter Goetz (ed.), *Historia universal* (10), Madrid 1946-51; Maurice Crouzet (ed.), *Historia general de las civilizaciones* (7), Barcelona 1958.


7. I.e Albert Malet / Jules Isaac, *La edad media*, Buenos Aires 1909. See also another Spanish version that was published in Paris 1914 and among other examples was the favourite in elite schools.

8. This exceptionality of the literary studies was also reported by Ana Clarisa Agüero for the case of the National University of Córdoba, Argentina and by José Rilla for the University of the Republic, Uruguay.

9. Professor Benito Bisso Schmidt informs me that also at his university, the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil), there is still an *Historia Ibérica*, an optional subject, which suggests a certain persistence of the history of the original colonial powers.


11. Jorge Luis Borges, Porqué me siento Europeo, in: *Textos recobrados* (1956-1986), Buenos Aires 2003. That this idea is a widespread and enduring heritage is shown by two recent quotes from different, albeit less sophisticated, personalities: the last two Argentine presidents who are of opposite political persuasions. Mauricio Macri in 2018 and Alberto Fernández in 2021 expressed in different phrases the same idea: ‘In South America we are all descendants of Europeans’, said Macri, and ‘We Argentines come from ships and those were ships that came from Europe’, said Fernández.


