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Diversity in Unity:

An Introduction to Historiography at the European University Institute

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Since its foundation in 1972, the Department of History and Civilization (HEC) of the European University Institute (EUI) has proven to be a highly innovative and interesting project in the long tale of professional history. Seated in the same spot that Boccaccio wrote his *Decameron*, the HEC is heir to the legacy passed down from the Renaissance of pan-European intellectual co-operation and intermingling. It is a department that, in other words, is deeply committed to the idea of diversity in unity. What does this idea mean in practice?

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Its most obvious manifestation is in the student body itself. Researchers are selected from all over Europe (and, in more than a few cases, beyond) to complete their doctoral training at the EUI together, attending the same seminars and using the same facilities. The result is a productive dialogue where different traditions and languages meet on equal ground to exchange practices, share cultures and debate concepts. This, in combination with a multi-national faculty, means that no one national tradition is able to dominate at the HEC, a fact that renders it almost unique among doctoral institutions. True, many universities have students and staff from every corner of the globe but it is nearly always the case that the host country will often impose the historical tradition to which both groups are expected to conform. In the EUI, however, the traditions sit side-by-side, engaging and transforming each other.

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This is but one side of the coin, however. Student diversity is not simply limited to where they are from but what they are doing. From medieval Catalonia to modern Africa, from gender studies to intellectual history: research topics at the HEC span across time, space and methodologies. Again, the result is interaction. Such a vast range of subjects with so many proponents fights against introspection within a single field of research. The HEC researchers are constantly forced to ask themselves about the place of their work within the wider historical discipline. It is for this reason also that comparative historical studies have found a congenial home at the EUI.

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This brings us neatly on to the second element of our title: unity. Diversity, by its very nature, is fractious, prone to dissension and disagreements. A wider structure is needed to keep these urges in check and this is what the HEC's doctoral programme provides through its seminars and research agenda. The seminars are the main tools through which students of diverse interests and backgrounds are invited to share their thoughts within the framework of a single thematic that relates to the department's agenda. This agenda focuses on several broad topics: the history of European integration; comparative, transnational and global history; the history of empire; intellectual history in its many manifestations; gender history; cultural history, history of science; religious history; and economic history.

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The structure of the EUI also provides for a degree of interdisciplinary co-operation. HEC researchers form only one quarter of the student body: also present are economists, political and social scientists and lawyers. This means that the students of the EUI are consistently exchanging ideas about their chosen branch of academia and engaging in joint projects, often with the active support of the institution itself.

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It is with the aim of presenting the idea of diversity in unity that we have gathered papers and interviews for this edition of *Zeitenblicke*: there are five of each. Together they represent the diversity of interests, skills and methodologies typical at the EUI while also demonstrating the way in which those individual concerns interact with the larger departmental agenda. The interviews also offer a view of another facet of HEC life, that of the faculty, all of whom are well respected in their various fields. The opinions they offer are illuminating not just in terms of the EUI but also for their perspectives on historiographical trends and problems.

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Intellectual history is one of the cornerstones of the HEC departmental agenda: each year, several seminars are offered by professors on the particular problems of this historical sub discipline and the department is also home to an active and productive intellectual history working group. Thus the field is well represented in this collection. Kaarlo Havu's (FI) paper is an interesting example of what young intellectual historians at the HEC are producing. Using his research on Erasmus and the idea of sovereignty, Havu reflects on trends both present with the historiography of his field and the twist and turns in philosophy itself as rhetoric is constantly re-evaluated and incorporated into different systems of thought. The result is an insightful deliberation on how one should think about rhetoric: not as an abstract philosophical concept but rather as an idea very much grounded in a concrete historical context. The essay of Brian Kjær Olesen (DK) is equally grounded in intellectual history: however, he chooses to use his expertise in this particular subfield to deliver some criticisms of the theoretical aspects of comparative and transnational history. Olesen (DK) engages with what he perceives as theoretical problems both in the field of comparative and transnational history. In his contributions, he therefore proposes a dialogue with recent developments in the field of intellectual history, and tests his assumptions in a fascinating case study that explores the links between Montesquieu and the eighteenth-century Danish monarchist Ludvig Holberg. Finally, Olesen and Havu, along with Jonas Gerlings (DK), Daniel Knegt (NL), Thomas Wittendorf (DK) and Matti La Mela (FI) have interviewed Professor Martin van Gelderen, an eminent

historian of political theory who is himself an alumnus of the EUI and currently Dean of Studies for the HEC.

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With a focus on global history both in the early modern and modern periods, it is no wonder that many of the professors and researchers at the EUI are dealing with the histories of empires. The department has recognised the importance of this field by creating the Vasco da Gama Chair on European Colonial and Post-Colonial Systems and, more recently, a Vasco da Gama fellowship. We too have chosen to highlight this aspect of the department by conducting two of our four interviews with practitioners in the field of imperial history. Moritz von Brescius (DE) has spoken to Professor Antonella Romano and Professor Jorge Flores with an eye to discussing their particular specialties, the history of science and empire and the cultural history of such polities. Von Brescius has also teamed up with Tilmann Kulke (DE) to interview Professor Sebastian Conrad, formerly of the EUI and now holder of the chair in global history at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Professor Conrad's most recent publications have focused on German nationalism and how it was shaped by globalization processes in Imperial Germany, but he has also worked on German colonial history and the 'Enlightenment' from a global perspective, making him one of the most influential proponents of global history in the German-speaking world. The interview deals with the history, analytical innovations, and problems of writing 'global history'. More specifically, Conrad compares this perspective with other competing approaches beyond the national framework (like transnational history), and critically analyses the potential of global history to overcome the established dichotomy between the 'west and the rest'. Here, he addresses pitfalls and problems of the still unsettled 'great divergence' debate. Finally, Sebastian Conrad points to those fields that, in his opinion, will attract much attention in the future – such as the discussion of 'early modernities' in other world regions.

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As the history wing of an international academic institution, the HEC also puts no little emphasis on international history, particularly on European integration in the decades following the Second World War. This is facilitated by the fact that the archive of the European Union is located next to the EUI. Another major theme pursued at the History Faculty, one which also shaped the integration process, is the Cold War. This global geopolitical freeze provides the backdrop for Frank Gerits' (BE) essay on French cultural agencies in newly independent African states. His principal concern is to use an empirical case study to point out methodological limitations in the international history subfield. In doing so, he puts forward the idea that much could be learnt through introducing a comparative perspective in order to relativize the use of cultural power in sub-Saharan Africa and thus help us reach a more complex and diverse definition of the concept. Gerits has also produced an interview with Professor Federico Romero, currently Professor of History of Post-War European Cooperation and Integration at the EUI. Together, they examine recent developments in the field of international history and suggest directions into which it might proceed.

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As is the case with other universities, the EUI has a special place for the study of the rich field of social history. The contributions representing this aspect of the historical profession accurately reflect the diversity encapsulated within it. Carolina Obradors

(ES) has provided us with a discussion of the construction of citizenship in late medieval Barcelona: her study reflects the growing importance of the cultural dimension in social history, arguing that citizenship was as much a cultural category as it was a social, political or legal one. Jan Schulz (DE) has written about a thoroughly different era and subject, providing us with some ideas about the comparative study of the revolutionary terrorist groups Action Directe (AD) in France and Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) in West Germany from the late 1970s until the end of the 1980s. The paper compares the degree to which both groups made use of social discourse and also analyses links between the groups: thus, for Schulz, historical comparison does not stop at simply comparing and contrasting two isolated blocks but also studying the interconnections and influences that the two units of analysis shared. As we can see, both of these articles, whilst working within the genre of social history, have attempted to make use of insights furnished by other fields of study that enjoy a position on the HEC's research agenda (cultural and comparative history).

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To conclude, we can already see that the essays and interviews collected here show a huge degree of diversity. They span time and space. The authors are from many different nations, each with their own academic style. However, the EUI and its history department unite them all. All of the researchers have tried to incorporate insights coming from outside of their particular specialisation and in doing so reflect the way in which the research agenda of the HEC structures productive miscegenation. This is truly diversity in unity.

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