

FIRE AND BLOOD

The European Civil War 1914–1945

Enzo Traverso

Translated by David Fernbach



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To my mother, who was twenty at the time of Liberation

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Paris, October 2006

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Introduction

Certain images of the twentieth century are inscribed in our memory as visual references, icons of the past that sum up its meaning and retain its taste. Everyone knows Andy Warhol's Coca-Cola bottles, the figure of astronaut Neil Armstrong stepping onto the Moon, and the artificial happiness of Marilyn Monroe's smiles. When we think of the decades stretching from the First World War to the Second, however, everything darkens. We see the trenches, the rail tracks leading into the camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau under the snow of the Polish winter, the mushroom cloud of Hiroshima. The age of extremes has produced its imaginary of horror, with a whole world of suffering behind it, but also social experiences, shared cultures, ideas and struggles that the present book aims to explore by way of the concept of a 'European civil war'. This term has been used by several commentators and interpreters, from the interwar years on, even if the only writer to have developed it systematically – and in a highly debatable manner – is Ernst Nolte. If I adopt it here, it is to try and grasp the meaning of an age of wars and revolutions in which the symbiosis between culture, politics and violence has deeply fashioned the mentalities, ideas, representations and practices of its actors. Methodologically, this work draws on various disciplines – political theory, social history and cultural history – borrowing from them both interrogations and analytical