

**Cultural Politics
and Political
Culture in
Postmodern Europe**

**Edited by
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In Search of Brussels Creolization, Insularity and Identity Dilemmas in Post- National Europe

I

Brussels. The city has such an oblique identity that most of us do not even know exactly where it is. Well, there was a stop called Brussels on the night train from Amsterdam to Paris (wasn't there?) on our youthful rail journeys southwards? Possibly, but it was not a city to visit: it was a city void of meaningful signs. No canals or windmills, no Eiffel tower or baguettes. It lacked a clear outline and was not even remembered long enough to be forgotten. Pass me the atlas.

This less than flattering reputation is not due to a mistake of Brussels' own making, but the responsibility of Belgium. For how should a city which is the capital of a country which would rather not be a country, behave itself in order to give that impression of grandeur and cultural significance which is expected of a card-carrying European capital city? It can be said about the author's hometown, Oslo, that it is

neither large nor important, and it is disliked by many Norwegians; but at least it has its Viking ships, its outdoor essentialist folklore museum depicting the nation as a Romantic fantasy, its locally world-famous ski jump and its forested nature reserve full of trees with deep Norwegian roots. It thereby provides a symbolic depiction of an imagined Norway.

Brussels, on the contrary, has no country, no imagined national community, to make visible and tangible. It has been said that there has only been one single Belgian in the world, namely the bilingual and diplomatically inclined King Baudouin I who died two years ago. This may well be true. For what or who is typically Belgian? Hercule Poirot? Simenon and Maigret? Jean-Claude van Damme? René Magritte? Are there other famous Belgians, and what do they signify? Don't ask me, I don't even remember the names of the prime ministers.

In Belgium, mind you, it is necessary to talk of prime ministers in the plural. They are no less than three in number; a Flemish one, a Walloon one, and a federal one (since 1993, Belgium has been a federal state). An apocryphal story circulates, telling the story about how all of them appeared simultaneously at the same reception in Tokyo, happily ignorant of the presence of the others. The resulting situation must surely, if it did occur, have convinced the Japanese hosts that the Europeans are indeed insane.

Belgium, and Brussels in particular, lies at the crossroads, or faultline if one prefers, between Latin and Germanic Europe, in a way analogous to the location of the Central European cities Prague, Bratislava, Vienna and Krakow mediating between Slav and Germanic Europe; Istanbul and Sarajevo between Christianity and Islam, and Ljubljana and Trieste — at the double interface between Latin, Slav and Germanic Europe. The urban agglomerations located just outside present-day Germany's western border — Maastricht, Brussels, Luxembourg, Strasbourg and so on — have their linguistic, religious

and ethnic duality, hybridity or complexity in common, as well as a tormented and complex past which could be construed as having lasted ever since Charlemagne founded the fragile and very loosely integrated "Holy Roman Empire," later "of the German Nation," of which Voltaire famously said that it was "neither holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire." According to legend, the ominous German-French division, later to gain military, cultural and political significance, emerged already then. Allegedly, Charlemagne's two grandsons, Louis and Lothar, who divided the empire between them, spoke different languages. Seen against this historical backdrop, it must be understood as a cunning pun from the distant past that the street harboring my hotel in Brussels, the optimistically-sounding Hôtel Eurovillage, carries the double name Boulevard Charlemagne and Karel de Grootelaan.

These towns on the faultline (or crossroads) have regularly been besieged, conquered, held hostage, sacked and taken as booty. At the time of the Reformation, a new, bitter boundary appeared to coincide approximately with the by then well established German-French boundary: between the Papists and the Protestants. Thus warlords and bored aristocrats found yet another pretext for their wars of conquest, large-scale theft, massacres, rape and destruction. As late as 1695, Brussel's proud Grand'Place, the undisputed city center since the 12th Century, was nearly completely destroyed during two days of intensive attack from one of Louis XIV's mercenary armies. It is no cause for surprise that there is hardly a place in Europe where the support for the European Union is less equivocal than in these very areas. In Strasbourg and Luxembourg, inhabitants are reminded every day of the cities' ambiguous location, since practically all written communication is in French whereas the spoken language is German dialect. In Brussels, the situation is sociologically more complex. The city is largely Francophone, but it is surrounded by a Dutch-speaking countryside (some Flemish claim that they speak "Flemish," but they remain unsuccessful in their attempts to prove that it is a different language from Dutch). Since the country is officially bilingual in French and

Dutch, public signs come with dual texts. In some places, ethnonationalists have crossed out information in the Other language, so that road signs to Antwerpen/Anvers or Mons/Bergen only inform drivers familiar with Dutch where to turn left.

Brussels is a city of pomp and grandeur. When most of the monumental buildings in Grand'Place had been destroyed, the citizens immediately began to reconstruct their central square, and in 1699, the square was reborn as a lavishly decorated center for a merchant city full of rich Jews, Frenchmen, Germans and Spaniards. Today, Grand'Place gives about the same impression as Belgian chocolate. It is rich, generous and well endowed with exquisite details, but the initial seduction quickly gives way to a tired feeling verging on nausea. The square is literally packed with Gothic spires, golden door knobs, glass paintings, embellished gables and marble columns.

A walk through Brussels reveals that Grand'Place is by no means unique. The city, successively the seat of the rich Brabants, the Spanish Netherlands and the late colonial power Belgium, is littered with war memorials and monumental buildings. There are pretentious equestrian statues, symmetrical parks with phallic monuments in strategic places, neo-Gothic castles and palaces. The problem facing the Belgians, if they exist, is naturally that this overwhelming symbolic greatness no longer refers to anything resembling real greatness. The city's monuments are signifiers yearning for something to signify. The Belgians have nothing to celebrate, and they are least of all interested in celebrating themselves.

When Belgium figures in world news, it is rarely because the Belgians have performed outstanding or shocking acts. The news the rest of us get from Belgium is usually EU news or NATO news. In 1985, shocking news from Belgium's main football arena made the world headlines. During a European football game at Heysel/Heizel Stadium

between Liverpool and Juventus, supporters lost their temper so seriously that more than a dozen Italians were killed. Heysel made its name as the very symbol of meaningless hooliganism. This is, perhaps, typically Belgian: When they finally acquire fame, foreigners are responsible for it.

Brussels, I should hasten to add, is also a lovely city, known as the home of many of Europe's finest restaurants, and it can boast strange and tasty beer, some of it seasoned with cherries or raspberries (better than it sounds), and a compact, pleasant city center, strongly touristified, but by virtue of its narrow cobbled alleys and venerable shops a piece of old urban Europe down to the smallest detail.

Moving a few blocks north-east, one meets another Brussels, which actually offers a tentative answer to the identity problem of the Belgians and the city: The Brussels of the European Union. In the area of the Rond-Pont Robert Schuman, named after the visionary French foreign minister who was effectively the man behind the French-German coal and steel union which would later develop into the European Community, the density of dark blue flags with golden stars is impressive. This part of town is above all characterized by EU flags, expensive suits and tasteful ties, small luncheon restaurants and an ambiance of goal-oriented, streamlined efficiency strikingly absent from the rest of the city. In this area one may find most of the offices of the EU Commission, the working place of the nearly twenty thousand bureaucrats who struggle to make all of Western Europe follow the same rules of play.

It is those overworked bureaucrats, most of them some kind of social democrats, who have been identified by EU resisters and detractors as their main enemy. When walking through the gray corridors of Brussels, meeting with one bureaucrat after another to learn about trade with the Third World, environmental policies, unemployment benefits and language policies — all the time being

offered tepid instant coffee while obediently respecting the smoking ban — it seems all but ludicrous to hate the institution. It may be boring, it may be gray and inefficient — but malevolent? In its stiff and awkward friendliness it lacks even a hint of the late-Habsburg Kafkaesque. The European Union, seen from its insides in Brussels, has more in common with Habermas' philosophy. It is an extremely thorough and slowly grinding machine, it can be deadly boring, but it is honest in its own way and important to those whom it concerns.

The project called "European integration" is naturally full of contradictions, and no sane European can be either a hundred per cent favorable or a hundred per cent hostile to it. It is egalitarian since it aims at giving the poor of Southern Europe the same life chances as the rich of Northern Europe; but it is egotistic insofar as it excludes the really poor countries of the world, from Morocco southwards. It is a free trade project aiming at the removal of tax barriers and obstacles to competition, but it is also a legislative system supposed to guarantee the viability of local traditions. It is an attempt at creating a shared European identity, but the parties negotiating over this are nation-states whose governments generally insist that Europe should be what de Gaulle spoke of as *L'Europe des patries*, and no federation. At the same time, it has become clear that one main result of the integrative efforts has been a strengthening of regional identification. Those regionalist movements are partly a direct counterreaction against clumsy bureaucratic attempts at uniformization, but they can also be interpreted as a direct result of integration at a supranational level. Minorities which were formerly forced to relate to a frequently hostile nation-state, may now address their grievances directly to Brussels, which is more sympathetic than most nation-states.

Regarding Brussels itself and its relation to the EU, it is easy to see that it is a good choice as "the capital of Europe," since the city has nothing to lose as a symbol of a national territory, and since its symbolic

infrastructure — parks, palaces, equestrian statues, monuments and war memorials — give the city an image as a credible focusing point for a political union containing several hundred million persons.

II

Some years ago, a group of chefs from different European countries held a crisis meeting in Brussels. The occasion for the meeting was the threat against national culinary traditions which the increasing European integration seemed to imply. The concerned chefs imagined a gastronomic situation in a not so distant future where everything could be mixed incongruously together, where formerly unambiguous and unchallenged boundaries between sauerkraut and coq-au-vin were erased, and where one might actually risk being served dishes such as steak and kidney pie marinated in garlic with tagliatelle and a Greek salad as side dishes. Indeed, the participants at the meeting had already seen clear indications of mindless creolization, culinary nihilism and dissolution of national cuisine. The greatest danger was seen as blandness: dreary compromises devoid of character, standardized food lacking originality. *Euro-cuisine*: could one imagine anything less palatable? (Excepting, of course, Euro-films.)

Are these alleged changes symptomatic of European development as European integration in its various forms moves forward? The answer is an emphatic yes and no. Allow me to begin by stating it like this:

At a seminar in London a few years ago, the social anthropologist and philosopher Ernest Gellner made this rather blunt, but in its way accurate statement: "People in different places still utter different sounds, but they tend to say the same things." Following the same line of thought, the historian of ideas Francis Fukuyama, then employed at

the US Foreign Office, argued that history has come to an end in the Hegelian sense: that there are no longer profound ideological contradictions in the world. According to Gellner and Fukuyama, we are approaching the end of a massive, global process of cultural homogenization. Modernity has won, they claim. We are becoming more and more similar all over the world. We acquire the same kinds of knowledge in the same kinds of schools from Nauru to Narsassuaq, consume goods obtained from the world market, and relate to labor markets with fundamentally common traits. The radical cultural differences which anthropology earlier in this Century saw it as its task to account for, are gone, suggest Gellner, Fukuyama and many others. And in Western Europe, this global process seems to accelerate thanks to the standardization resulting from common political and economic planning.

Simultaneously, nevertheless, a continuous process of internal differentiation or cultural fragmentation takes place within modern societies. It is this very tension between increasing cultural similarity on the one hand, and the upsurge of new cultural differences and identifications on the other, which characterizes the dynamics of new European identities.

Today's complicated and somewhat turbulent situation in Europe, on both sides of the old Iron Curtain (which could by now be renamed the ECU curtain), is characterized by *negotiations over identity*. In Eastern Europe, many citizens have clutched onto ethnic identities after the fall of the old regimes while in Western Europe, meticulously planned attempts at fashioning a supranational identity are presented. Like Eastern Europeans during and after Stalinism, many Western Europeans mobilize for counterreactions against attempts at the creation of supranational identifications. Like in Eastern Europe, such proposals are met with loud protests and appeals for "cultural uniqueness," "ancient history," principles of sovereignty and so on.

Like in Eastern Europe, however, many West Europeans have also discovered that the cognitive map offered by nationalism does not necessarily fit the territory. Therefore, "regionalist" and ethnic tendencies have begun to appear within the multi-national EU — often opposing the state, more rarely opposing Brussels. One example is the French farmers; another could be regionalist movements in both French and Spanish Catalonia; a third could be the Italian federalist party Lega Nord, which would not mind amputating what they see as the infected (if not gangrenous or downright putrid) foot and lower leg further south.

The two processes — the fall of the Eastern European regimes and the attempts at tighter integration in the EU — have together created an unusually open situation with regard to the subjective belonging of the individual. Is one a European, a Spaniard or a Basque, or is it possible to combine the three? Does one belong to the petty bourgeoisie, the Polish nation or the Jewish diaspora? Or is one, when all is said and done, a citizen of the world? There are no objective answers to this kind of question.

The oscillations between the erasure of boundaries and the development of new boundaries are wavelike movements. Everybody seems to search for the "natural" point of equilibrium between isolation and contact with others; one demands, simultaneously, the right to access to common benefits *and* the right to exclusiveness. In today's uncertain situation, the nation-state can no longer be taken for granted. The map can be re-drawn; the boundaries can be delineated anew. If the state should become less important within the EU, the actual boundaries of the Basques may — perhaps — be drawn around an undivided Basque country (but what of the Castilians and Frenchmen who live in the same area?) which may not have to declare itself a sovereign and limited state, and the commonalities in culture and lifestyle experienced by urban citizens of Denmark and in Germany may

find an expression without being perceived as treason by other, non-urban Danes and Germans. In this sense, the respective situations in Eastern and Western Europe have important aspects in common. The tragedy of Yugoslavia, "the country between East and West," may illustrate the parallels: the federal state torn to pieces by conflicts between the prosperous north and the impoverished south, between ethnic logic, supranational federalism and Jacobin Serbian centralism, between market liberalism and central planning, between city and countryside, and between parliamentarism and the one-party system. Comparable contradictions can be re-found throughout Europe, even if they have led to wide-ranging violence only in Yugoslavia. A difference between Eastern and Western Europe, which is important if we opt to view the EU as an identity building project, concerns the relationship to ethnic nationalism. Eastern European identity movements are generally ethnic in character. They appeal to *Blut und Boden*, verge towards anti-Semitism, denigrate foreigners, victimize minorities and favor the idea of ethnically based states. The Western European regionalist and ethnic movements are similar, but for one thing: They do not see the ethnically based state as a goal in itself. The EU gives promises — which may or may not be kept — of alternative modes of political organization. The existential question for a self-defined people is no longer perceived as identical with the question of whether or not one can gain control over one's own state. Perhaps, indeed, it might be possible to unite cultural nationalism with political cosmopolitanism within the union? If so, *chapeau* to Brussels. So far, the attempts at creating a shared European identity have been countered by strengthened local identities among quite large groups (and there are East Europeans who claim that the official symbolism associated with the "new European identity" — posters depicting playing children etc. — is reminiscent of Stalinist propaganda for the "Socialist man").

No matter which shape they eventually come in, new European identities will have to either reconcile themselves with or combat

nationalism and ethnicism. Still today, national belonging seems to be a basic foundation of subjective identification to many Western Europeans, even if it will in all likelihood play a lesser role in the future. Many see themselves *primarily* as Danes, Spaniards or Germans; only at the next level can they consider identifying themselves as Jutlanders, Andalucians or Bavarians. Kohl is more important as a symbolic figurehead to most Germans than Delors or that new guy, whatshisname, Santer.

Nationalism as an ideology was developed in Europe at the end of the Eighteenth Century; it was during this period that the nations were invented. A basic notion in this tradition, originating in Herder and other Europeans, is the idea that a "nation" (in the meaning of *Volk*) has a metaphysical, predestined, teleologically guaranteed destiny to self-determination. A people had not realized its essence before gaining self-consciousness of itself as a nation. The *Nation-an-sich* had a historical mission to become a *Nation-für-sich*. One aspect of this assumed historical destiny was gradually, in the course of the 19th Century, phrased as the wish for a *nation-state*, that is to say a political entity where the people (the cultural entity) and the state were congruent. During our century, the idea of the nation-state has spread at the speed of a bushfire. In the mid-nineties, virtually the whole world consists of imperfect nation-states; states whose leadership pretend that their inhabitants have a "common culture" (whatever that means). Most of the world's inhabitants are forced to live in a nation-state; we are forced to be *citizens*. This does not mean, however, that the nation-state will always remain — in Anthony Giddens' words — "the pre-eminent power container of our era." *Supranationality* is one keyword in this regard; another is *subnationality* (ethnicity, regionalism...), and a third keyword is *globalization*, which implies that cultural meaning and political power to a decreasing degree is tied in with a particular territory. A consequence of globalization is cultural *creolization* or hybridization — the wide-ranging blurring of boundaries and the bifurcation and fragmentation of "national cultures" into poorly

integrated bits and patches of shared meaning, which are sometimes unrelated to space (MTV watchers of the world, unite!), sometimes local in character, and which always make it conceptually impossible to think of "nations" as coherent cultural entities, as imagined communities "inherently sovereign and limited."

III

In this day and age, many support the view of sociologist Daniel Bell to the effect that the nation-state is too small for some tasks and too large for others. The League of Nations in the interwar period was a pioneering organization with regard to the first kind of tasks, and today supra- and international organizations mushroom and proliferate, making decisions on behalf of several nation-states or other supranational constellations. Regarding the tasks which the nation-state is too small to handle, the development has, however, moved in a different direction. All over the world, the nation-state has increased its level of activities and social importance since the Second World War. The state has increasingly taken over obligations from the family, the church and the local community. The ideology of governance embedded in the Maastricht treaty seeks to reverse this tendency through combining a strong centralization with a possibly equally strong decentralization. In this way, regions and supranational Europe may be strengthened at the expense of the middle level: the nation-state. If this truly happens, national belonging will probably in due course be weakened among the EU citizens, since they will have less to gain in terms of goods and services from the nation-state, and the latter will have less power to exert over its inhabitants.

On the other hand, there is little cause to doubt that a reconciliation between new European identities and nationalism may

also conceivably take place through the development of a new supraethnic European (or, more precisely, Western European) nation. So far, European nation-building has a pitiful record, and opinion polls (be they as unreliable as they may) suggest that many EU citizens feel less European in 1995 than they did when the Maastricht treaty was signed. This treaty aimed explicitly at molding an ever closer community out of the member peoples, and a widespread reaction (of the boomerang category) to this proposal was the insistence that *we* are going to keep our distinctiveness and our national identity, at any cost! During the campaign before the first Danish Maastricht referendum, the winning "No" side had, as one of its main slogans, "I want a country to be European in!"

What is needed for the citizens of Europe to feel European? First of all, a shared mythical past is sorely needed. History books such as Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's *Europe — A History of Its Peoples* (1990), published in about a dozen languages with a preface by the then leader of the Commission, Jacques Delors, may give an indication as to which myths are required. As Jacques Le Goff writes in the preface to a recent, multilingual monograph series titled "Fare L'Europa" ("Creating Europe"): "A Europe without history would be a miserable orphan. For today is a descendant of yesterday, and tomorrow is a fruit of the past."

Now this sounds wonderful and reasonable, but it needs to be recalled that there is no such thing as a politically innocent historiography. In both Le Goff's series and in Duroselle's book it is emphasized how important it is for the continent to obtain a common history where the shared European past is stressed at the expense of the national pasts (which have hitherto been focused on intensively by historians), where local and regional variation is granted importance, where the nation-state is depicted as an interlude and the "common European heritage" appears as a permanent dimension of shared Europeanness. Notwithstanding nationalist suspicion, this new European historiography is under way, and it naturally requires that

Europeans define their community in contrast to something different, namely the non-European (whatever that is). Thus the Mediterranean is made to appear as the border of the civilized world, and the non-European peoples of the world become *Others*: people to compete with in the global market, to fight wars with if necessary. The peace between Germans and French is finally made permanent through long-lasting institutional cooperation and supranationality; instead, non-Europeans and perhaps particularly Muslims appear as a possible common enemy. This is plain general sociology. Georg Simmel showed more than a century ago how the internal cohesion of a group is contingent on the external pressure (thereby inverting the slogan *divide et impera*), and it follows that what kind of group eventually coheres depends on where the pressure is perceived as originating. The more barbaric Muslims can be made to seem, the more alien the Japanese, the more hopeless the Africans, the more childish the Americans, the stronger will be the sense of being European.

At the same time, it is unlikely that a possible supraethnic European nation will be able to fill the entire void left by partly dethroned European nation-states. Large fields and segments of daily life in European localities will remain locally experienced and codified in the foreseeable future. There seems to be little point in homogenizing lifestyles so that Danes and Greeks lead their lives in identical ways, and besides, this kind of standardization would have been distinctly unpopular. Due to such considerations, the European union will have to appear as a confederation of sovereign states, but it will nevertheless potentially weaken national belonging, understood as belonging to a nation-state. The citizens of this Europe of a near future will be linked through mutual economic and political dependence, but they will continue to be separated by language and, to some extent, cultural practices. All of them will belong to a minority, to use a tired word from the dated vocabulary of nationalism. Thereby, the classic idea of the nation-state — the notion that cultural and political

boundaries should be coterminous — becomes impracticable. You have to feel under pretty heavy pressure to go to war against your colleagues in the European Parliament or your regular suppliers of cauliflower and percolators. The federalists in Brussels are currently struggling uphill, and the general impression from polls and public discourse, unreliable sources but the only ones available for this end, is that a majority of EU citizens are reasonably satisfied with the community as it is, but that they are not willing to relinquish the nation-state. Still, it is inevitable that the importance of the nation-state will be reduced — both at a practical, organizational level, and at the level of personal identity. It becomes a middle level between the local and regional on the one hand, and the supranational on the other. Whereas the nation-state throughout this century has demanded the undiminished loyalty of the entire citizen in virtually all his or her capacities, it is now being forced to share the arena with other actors; it remains an important agent, but it is no longer the only one. Of course, EU citizens become increasingly interested in European affairs and in “Europe” as a project when a growing number of decisions which affect them directly are made in Brussels. Since Denmark joined what was then the EEC in 1972, there has been a perceptible swing in Danish public debate towards European issues. The importance of the Nordic area, which Denmark traditionally identified itself as part of, has been similarly reduced. Until Sweden and Finland joined the EU very recently, there has scarcely been any interest in Nordic affairs in Denmark since the early 1970s, since neither “Norden” nor Scandinavia exist as anything but lofty ideas. The EU, on the contrary, is a tangible reality whose existence the Danes see, hear and feel every day.

Even if the European Union is not going to be an old-fashioned nation-state, but rather a loose (con-)federation where differences are respected, it will still make it possible to justify wars against non-European societies, if they can be seen as threats to European interests. The old ideal of Europe as a civilian power between the military superpowers is old hat anyway, for two important reasons: First, there is

now only one military superpower; secondly, the plans for a common European security policy have already proceeded relatively far, as an element in the development of a common foreign policy. (But who will volunteer to die for Europe?)

It is unlikely that the EU will ever appear as an empire. Comparisons which are being drawn between the EU and the Roman Empire, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and even Hitler's *Dritte Reich* are libelous, not the least because the European union of our day is a voluntary association where Slav and Baltic peoples are standing in line to join. This is not a trivial difference. At the same time, it is clear that the price to pay for shared identity within the union is firm outward boundaries. This dynamics can nearly be seen as a zero-sum game. The stronger the internal cohesion becomes within Europe, the firmer the boundaries outwards will be. In this kind of situation, it becomes an important intellectual duty not only to help to strengthen lower-level identity systems — nation, region, locality — but also to encourage the development of cross-cutting ties which transcend mere territory. For the new plethora of overlapping spatial communities promised in the deliberately vague statements of the Maastricht Treaty and in other EU propaganda is not tantamount to a transcendence of spatial communities. Still, Morocco, Mauritania and Mauritius are outside. A political attitude based on values not on parochialist sentiment cannot defend national, ethnic or otherwise spatially defined interests, but should as far as possible be just as emphatic about the poor of Bombay as with the poor of Birmingham. This kind of attitude, threatening to dispense with the arbitrary boundaries of maps and geographies, may be less unrealistic now than it has been for a long time.

Nationalism, as is well known, argues the congruence of cultural and political boundaries. If one tries to link such a doctrine to the complex, hesitant and resisting social reality "out there," one quickly

enters into fundamental problems. This is not just due to the well-known problem of minorities (both indigenous and immigrant); it is not chiefly due to the development of supranational agencies either. A main contributing cause for the present crisis of the nation is the fact that an increasing number of cultural phenomena cease to be territorially bounded.

States and federations are territorial. They have physical boundaries; on the map, they appear as thick red lines, and in the territory they may appear as border stations with armed guards in uniforms. On the other hand, much of the information (in a wide sense) contributing to the subjective creation of personal identity is not delineated in a similar way. The increasing deterritorialization of culture was, for example, of great benefit to some inhabitants of former Eastern Europe, who were able to listen in on the propaganda of *Radio Free Europe* — contrary to the wishes of their national leaders, who were only in control of territorially delineated resources.

In today's Europe it is for a variety of reasons inaccurate to speak of the continent as consisting of a certain number of "cultures." Europeans all over the continent (but particularly in Western Europe) are acquiring more and more in common; internal boundaries are being erased, and European culture is being creolized or hybridized as diverse influences mingle and mix in blatant disrespect of the spatial dimension. This is partly caused by the mutual influence which led to the chefs meeting in Brussels; it is also partly caused by general processes of globalization which, *inter alia*, entail that the inhabitants of Athens watch the same (North American) films, read about the same global events and listen to the same pop singers as the inhabitants of Arnhem, and finally, it is also caused by the standardization of national legislation and the development of common markets for commodities, labor and capital which is taking place at this very moment.

The debunking of the notion of “national cultures” caused by creolization, globalization, *and* regionalization, has a number of other aspects which have been granted less attention in the ongoing debate over European identities. Above all, it is still a rather neglected matter that internal cultural variation in a country can in many respects be more significant than the variation between countries, and this tendency, always present, is becoming difficult to neglect in the age of globalization and creolization. In important respects, it is relevant to speak of a common European urban way of life, which is markedly distinctive from rural ways of life. Additionally, increasing cultural differentiation in the *places* themselves is becoming ever more apparent. The appearance of various kinds of “subcultures,” specialization and transnational networks are some of the keywords in this regard. A Danish woman may, besides her Danishness, be a researcher in microbiology, a lesbian and a jazz lover; if so, she has something in common with other microbiologists, lesbians and jazz lovers worldwide — which she does not share with other Danes — no matter where they happen to live. This kind of interpersonal networks or nonlocalized cultural uniformities is mushrooming as a consequence of globalization, and it is an important dimension of cultural creolization: the process whereby cultural variation increasingly becomes disembedded from space and persons become cultural hybrids. The most important background variable for this process is the internationalization (or disembedding) of capital — which is of course not confined to Europe — that also contributes to weakening the position of the nation-state as a carrier of identification.

Some scholars regard this trend as the dominant one, and reckon that people in the future will be decreasingly place-bound. The multifarious webs of meaning that make up their identity can be found virtually anywhere, and as processes of cultural entropy speed up, it will apparently become easier to realize one’s dreams, or to satisfy one’s needs, wherever in the world one might happen to be. Subcultural

specialization will, following this line of thought, continue to develop, but the “subcultures” themselves are becoming less and less localized.

Although globalization implies a less obvious embeddedness of culture in places and a general deterritorialization in other respects, it does not automatically entail that people move around more: some dimensions of disembedding are truly placeless, such as satellite TV and the Internet, and actually reduce the need for short or long term traveling. As a matter of fact, this is happening anyway, partly because of the less and less localized character of the labor market, partly through tourism (allegedly the third largest trade in the world, following the exchange in drugs and arms), partly through migration from poor to rich countries, and partly because the transnationalization of capital creates a demand for labor at new sites.

The more encompassing non-localized networks of information and social linkages become — from Internet friendships to professional networks and transnational company loyalties — the less important the nation (and the region or the federation) becomes as a focus for individual identity. The EU as such has little to do with this kind of process. Norwegians are not excluded from the emergence of transnationality and placelessness just because the country has turned down an offer to join the EU twice in a little over twenty years. Since globalization may imply, to some, that it matters less where in the world one happens to be no matter what one is up to, it may seem as though the EU does not have a significant effect on the development of non-national cultural identities. What the EU has to offer at the level of symbolism and the creation of identity is so far not much more than empty rhetoric. The dark blue flags decorated with golden stars displayed on every corner in some parts of Brussels are still empty signs in search of something to signify. What EU citizens have in common is chiefly a shared legislation (in some areas) and a shared market for labor and commodities. Only when they obtain — and start believing in — their first European football team, and only when the first soldier has

died for Europe, will there be a basis for an emotionally embedded, shared collective identity in the EU. The production of cultural similarity and the processes of creolization which are today taking place across national boundaries, have little or nothing to do with the development of European integration. Siemens, Shakespeare and Schopenhauer are icons for a global culture, that is to say, a symbolic universe not spatially delimited. (And in any case, it would be silly to claim that the Irish have the same history as the Greeks.)

IV

So far, the argument has indicated that globalization, or transnational processes, are more important for changes in the personal identities of Europeans than European integration. There are several reasons why this argument may be simplistic.

First, European integration has already led to widespread changes in identification through engendering counterreactions, or complementary moves, in the shape of regionalism. Regionalism can, like ethnic movements, be nationalistic in its character, as in Slovenia and Georgia, but within the EU it is generally not. There, the main issue for EU regionalists amounts to taking the federalist slogan of subsidiarity and the decentralization of politics and identification in the literal sense, rather than being a wish to found new states with their own foreign ministers, own currency and own national football teams. Eurocrats in Brussels have for their part, as a reaction to the widespread dissatisfaction with the Maastricht Treaty, changed their ideological rhetoric perceptibly, now stressing "unity in diversity" rather than expressing unmitigated Jacobin values of centralization and homogenization, and in the Treaty itself, both dimensions, contradictory as they may seem, are emphasized.

Secondly, research on labor migration has indicated that it is not altogether irrelevant to people where they happen to live. Most people prefer not to move.

Thirdly, European processes of political and economic integration will engender cultural forms we cannot predict, but which will surely bring Europeans in different countries closer to each other.

Am I contradicting myself? Let us see.

To Herder, Vico and other pioneers in the development of modern national ideology, the task was exactly the opposite of today's challenge. In their age, the nation-state did not yet exist, and it was necessary to argue convincingly that the European peoples were indeed different and had a right to retain their cultural heritage. Early nationalism also had a strong democratic element since it included workers and peasants as components of the nation in its imagery. Herder's arguments for self-governance could today be aligned to the view that cultural minorities have a right not to be assimilated or "culturally annihilated" through majority dominance in the state. He did not presuppose the nation-state as a condition for the maintenance of cultural tradition. Herder's Germany was a linguistic and cultural field, not a political one. Following his essentially pre-nationalist logic, the formation of a nation-state would not be necessary for cultural survival. Regionalism in today's Europe, which is an increasingly important focus for identity from the Hebrides to Andalucia, could therefore be seen as an expression of a pre-nation state, "Herderian" way of thinking: a demand for cultural survival without insisting on setting up a state as guarantor.

In a word, there is no doubt that spatial belonging will remain important for the majority of Europe's inhabitants, even if the nation-state is being weakened. This belonging could be concrete (linked to a

visible place, such as Hilversum) or abstract (linked to an invisible place, such as Europe or Sweden), and the two are not mutually exclusive. As in so many other areas, there exists more *both-and* than *either-or* in the field (note the spatial metaphors) of identification.

When Denmark joined the EC in 1972, many Danes feared a massive invasion of poor Sicilians in search of work. The invasion never came about. Personally, I remember encountering a group of unemployed Englishmen in an Amsterdam pub a few years ago. They were profoundly unhappy about having left Merseyside, but despairing circumstances had forced them to. Most people, in other words, seem so strongly connected to their *Heimat* that only love or misery can persuade them to leave it, despite the existence of a shared labor market in Western Europe.

Regionalism does not seem to entail a qualitative change in personal identification, although its political and administrative significance is growing. The region is, like the nation and the supranational, abstract. But it is an abstraction many feel more at home in, in particular situations, than the nation. In those concentric circles of social identities, or perceived commonalities of experience, which serve as spatial anchors for individuals, we may speak of at least the following levels: Europe — the country — the region — the hometown or village. At each level, the individual will experience identity conflicts as well as a sense of loyalty. At the first indication of an invasion from outer space, Earth would constitute a comparable focus of identity. What is new in today's situation in Western Europe, is the insistence of "Europe" and the regions to form the symbolic focus of identification in spheres which were formerly associated with the country. Experiences and reminiscences formerly interpreted (by the subject) as national ones, can be reinterpreted as European or regional experiences. Suddenly I no longer have a French education but a European one; suddenly my childhood is no longer French either, but Occitan. The personal

experiences and reminiscences themselves remain essentially unchanged, but they are framed differently and connect me to new imagined communities.

Some readers may regard this kind of reasoning as lofty experiments of thought. This could be because they see the nation as somehow more natural and enduring than other imagined communities. If so, they are in for a rude awakening fairly soon.

Many members of cultural minorities are pleased with the current situation of uncertainty and negotiation concerning identification, since the Western European development towards a multiethnic political entity where everybody (even the feared Germans) belongs to a minority can liberate them from the stigmata of minority status. The goal, within this "neo-Herderian" mode of reasoning, would be for Catalonia and Wales to appear as autonomous regions on a par with Norfolk and La Mancha, partly at the expense of the weakened entities Great Britain and Spain. It is a promising period for adventurous political entrepreneurs.

Now there are nonetheless a fair number of Europeans who seem to be condemned to minority status for generations to come. Fifteen million EU inhabitants are immigrants, and they have a total of seven million children (who cannot logically be considered immigrants if they were born in the country where they live). They have no European region to relate to. Frequently they do not even have an apartment block they can consider their own. Does this mean that their cultural identity is condemned to disembeddedness; that they will never find a spatial focus for belonging? Hardly. Even after centuries of exile, many Jews saw Palestine as their "real" homeland. In similar ways, British Muslims look towards India or Pakistan as foci for identity, French *Mahgrébins* look towards Tunisia, Algeria or Morocco — as delimited places where they belong (even if they do not live there). Such a spatial orientation may actually be possible even if the mythical homeland were

void of persons of one's own kind, just as the mythical Israel has been virtually *judenfrei* for long periods.

Although globalization, creolization and transnational processes are not necessary conditions for the conservation of regional or otherwise spatial belongingness abroad, such processes facilitate it. It makes the movement from St. Vincent to Wolverhampton smoother than it would otherwise have been; it creates a shared unbounded space of recognizable, familiar reality.

Globalization is a process of a different order than the processes leading to European integration, since it does not create social commonalities: all it does is create cultural similarity and abstract potentials. In a certain sense, globalization functions as a social disintegrator in erasing boundaries, creating loose and situationally changing creolized identities, and so on. The difference between globalization and the expansion of politico-economic boundaries consists, *inter alia*, in the fact that cultural similarity can never be a sufficient basis for goal-oriented collective agency. Globalization cannot in itself liberate individuals from their places of birth, but it makes it possible for them to maintain local belonging although they may be physically located far away. This is partly because of the new, technologically induced possibilities for obtaining knowledge about events at home, partly because changes in the "home country" follow roughly the same global processes, and are therefore linked with, changes in the "host country," so that the cultural gulf separating, say, London's East End from Bombay no longer seems insurmountable. Globalization creates common denominators and builds bridges; it makes communication possible, fast and cheap where it was either impossible or, at least, slow and expensive. In this way, globalization may lubricate new emerging identities.

Regional and ethnic self-consciousness may be a reasonably efficient means for preventing some of the unwanted effects of globalization, perhaps not least the general cultural entropy feared by the chefs meeting in Brussels. All over Europe, inside and outside the European Union, and certainly not exclusively in France, there are cultural editors and bureaucrats who spend a fair share of their working day trying to protect the local language against entropy; that is, the threat of a possible future "Eurospeak," a frigid standard language based on common cognitive denominators and not on local experiences; operating within the narrowest cultural framework imaginable, namely the bureaucratic and business milieus in (metaphoric) Brussels and Strasbourg. The development of such a flattening and flattened language, which might well be expressed through "different noises" in different regions, to use Gellner's expression, is a real threat to variation and nuance in Europe (and elsewhere). Since transcultural processes aim at making communication possible across established boundaries, this communication risks becoming partly rudimentary and primitive as in a pidgin language; partly artificial like Esperanto; partly superficial, inhibited, un-lived and devoid of connotations. In his wonderful book about the European search for a perfect language, *La ricerca della lingua perfetta nella cultura europea*, Umberto Eco concludes like this:

A Europe of multilinguals is not a Europe consisting of persons who speak several languages fluently, but at best a Europe consisting of persons who can speak their own language when they meet each other and yet understand the language of the other; which they do not, however, speak particularly well; and who may understand, with a certain effort, the "genius" each of them expresses when he speaks the language of his own ancestors and his own tradition.

On this basis, Eco is skeptical of the idea of a shared European language, such as Esperanto or business English ("English as a foreign language"), since those languages are decontextualized and therefore poor in connotations. Dante's culturally bound Italian, he argues, was a far more perfect language than the cosmopolitan medieval Latin it

replaced. Instead, he recommends that we learn at least the rudiments of living, "natural" languages so that as many as possible may use their mother tongue. (To an irremediable Scandinavian like myself, it is necessary to add that this is an easy statement to make for an Italian, but how many Italians will, when all is said and done, take the effort to learn a Scandinavian dialect?)

North American television and modern pop music are good instances of a language based on general common denominators rather than shared experiences. The entrance ticket is cheap — a bare minimum of cultural competence is required to participate — and the expression is so simple that its dissemination may cover a potentially enormous area. This can be contrasted with an expression like Mahler's Sixth Symphony, which requires a certain familiarity with European classical music in order to be understood. Mass produced transcultural expressions may therefore, perhaps justly, be said to threaten the unique, complex and profound aspects of each local tradition. So far, however, it is not within the EU that these threats are produced with the greatest confidence and efficacy, but in the USA. When France, in the spring of 1994, passed a law disallowing the use of non-French words in public communication, neither Dutch, Germans, Spaniards nor Italians were perceived as the main enemy, but North American mass culture. Thus even within the EU standardizing and flattening North American mass culture appears to be the main challenge for the preservation of locality and difference.

Now, as is well known, Europe also has another Other than the USA. If the US is perceived as the poor-mannered natural child of Europe, then the Muslim world is perceived as the continent's unreliable cousin. It may seem paranoid and silly to regard the "Muslim world" as a threat to Europe. One would assume Europe to be a much more serious threat to Muslim countries. Europe is infinitely richer, better organized, militarily stronger and more closely connected with

both transnational capitalism and with the world's undisputed military power number one, than any Muslim country including Kuwait. Nonetheless, Islam is a rising crescent — at least at the symbolic level — towards the closing of the millennium. In Brussels, and in many other European cities, Islam is growing many times faster than any other religion. Perhaps it could be said, to twist a familiar phrase, that for each European who becomes an atheist, a new European Muslim appears. The "Muslim world" also appears, at least seen from a worried European vantage-point, as much more confident and boisterous than the ambivalent and slightly chaotic European continent.

The rise of politicized Islam in Europe's neighborhood may credibly be seen as a reaction to another fundamentalism, namely the gospel of free trade and individualism. Instead of a mutual *rapprochement* between Europe and Muslim countries, we risk an increasing polarization where the two parties mutually demonize each other to strengthen their respective internal cohesion.

To those who are at work fashioning an European identity for the 21st Century, fundamentalism in North Africa and the Middle East must truly be *gefundenes Fressen*. They have been granted a sufficiently grotesque, sufficiently scary and sufficiently harmless enemy image, which may prove very useful indeed in the contrastive demarcation of Europeanness.

Now there happens to exist some ten million Europeans who have little to gain from this mutual polarization. Ten million EU inhabitants are Muslims, but there is not a single *place* in the EU which is considered a Muslim place. Perhaps, indeed, there is something to the idea, proposed by Iver B. Neumann and others, that a contributing cause for Turkey's lack of success in its application for membership is Europe's reluctance to lose its main contrast, its defining Other, the Muslim barbarian? Including "the sick man of Europe" in the community would blur its external boundaries. The question of Turkey's

potential membership in the EU is therefore an important test case. To put it differently: What exactly is it that the equestrian statues, the war monuments and palaces of Brussels are expected to signify in the near future?

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This rambling journey through the construction site known as the European Union began in Brussels, and to Brussels I return. Near the Rond-Pont Robert Schuman lies Berlaymont, that monumental office block which was home to the Commission until a few years ago. The building has been transferred to the Belgian authorities, who have so far been unable to decide what to do with it. Its innards, reeking of asbestos, need very thorough renovation. In the meantime, the once proud center of "Europe" stands there, expressionless, an empty shell, a sad sight. As a remnant from the period when Berlaymont was the heart of the EC, the area is still littered with bookshops and souvenir shops selling pennants, cups, hats and T-shirts decorated with EU symbols, restaurants with Italian, Greek and French names, and various establishments with the prefix "Euro."

At Kitty O'Shea's pub, straight across from Berlaymont, the imported Irish staff do not speak a word of French if they can help it. They sell Irish stout and bitter, and the TV set in the corner is tuned to a snooker game on the BBC. Three languages are easily heard from where I stand on this Wednesday evening, and Dutch is not one of them. There is nevertheless a Belgian of Flemish origin standing next to me, sipping a pint of Irish stout, a rare sight indeed in this part of town, but he is employed by the Commission. I am still on a research mission, poking into levels and forms of identification in "the New Europe," and eventually succeed in engaging him in a conversation on the relationship between the two Dutch-speaking populations — the Dutch

and the Flemish. They speak the same language, eat the same food and frequently go through the same religious rituals, for there is a thriving Catholic community in the Netherlands. I ask him, briskly, whether the ongoing EU integration might not lead to an eventual disappearance of the identity boundary between the Dutch and the Flemish. "Not at all," he replies, indicating his position by talking of the Flemish in the third person. "The Flemish like nobody except themselves. If they have to learn a foreign language, they choose English. Most of them are determined not to learn French. And as far as Holland is concerned, well, there is no sign of any interest, not to mention sympathy."

Anybody willing to die for Europe? The cosmopolitan Flemish says no, describing himself as a peaceful man who "sort of enjoys life." Other EU citizens, even if they were more bloodthirsty than my companion, would scarcely embrace the idea with a great deal of enthusiasm either. For my own part, I say, I have no intention of firing a single shot at the hordes of emaciated Africans strenuously paddling across the Gibraltar some time in a not so distant future. But, I add, I am equally unwilling to die for Scandinavia, Norway or for that matter Oslo, my hometown. There are more important things to die for than places.

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