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The narration of Europe in 'national' and 'post-national' terms: gauging the gap between normative discourses and people's views

PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1368431008097009>

PUBLISHER

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VERSION

SMUR (Submitted Manuscript Under Review)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Antonsich, Marco. 2019. "The Narration of Europe in 'national' and 'post-national' Terms: Gauging the Gap Between Normative Discourses and People's Views". figshare. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/16123>.

EUrope Between ‘National’ and ‘Post-national’ Views.

Abstract: Among scholars and intellectuals, Europe is often celebrated as a post-national space, i.e. a space built around cosmopolitan values rather than culturally and/or ethnically specific factors. This view is also often sketched in normative terms, being rarely based on what people actually think of this post-national Europe. The present article essays to fill this gap, by focusing on two post-national questions: is European identity constructed in the absence of an Other? Does Europe stand for the separation of the ‘cultural’ from the ‘political’? Relying on qualitative information collected in four regional case studies in Western Europe, this article maintains that the ‘post-national’ view finds expression also among people. Yet, it coexists with a ‘national’ view, which continues to shape how people see themselves and the world, Europe included. The paper argues that it is exactly in the interaction, at times contradictory, between these two views that the normative idea of Europe as a post-national space should be analyzed.

Key-words: European identity, *demos*, Habermas, post-national, cosmopolitan

Introduction:

During the last decade or so, scholars from different disciplines have normatively essayed to give a cultural rationale to EUrope, i.e. to the politico-institutional space which, due also to the recent enlargements, today absorbs, in the everyday language, the

geographically blurred notion of Europe. As noted by Str ath (2002), the concept of European identity, introduced in 1973 at the Copenhagen EC summit and further elaborated in the 1980s through the ad hoc Committee for a People's Europe (Shore, 2000), remains today a contested notion, particularly as far as its content and meaning are concerned (see also Ifversen, 2002). Along with the efforts of the European Commission to endow Europe with a symbolic paraphernalia (flag, anthem, passport, driving license, etc.), aimed at consolidating Europe's identity in the everyday life of people (Cram, 2001; Shore, 1996), scholars have also contributed to search for those values and principles which could give Europe a cultural identity with which EU citizens can identify themselves. In fact, the lack of a European *demos*, i.e. of a collective sense of European identity among European citizens, is often quoted as one of the major obstacles for any further process of European integration. This discourse seems to rely on a vicious circle. On the one hand, it is said, Europe cannot grow as it is not supported by a 'we' feeling among its citizens (Cederman, 2001). The lack of a European *demos*, the discourse continues, means the lack of a European democracy, as a political system not based on *demos* is just *cratos* (Shore, 1996: 489). On the other hand, according to those scholars who believe that a *demos* can be produced by the mere functioning of European institutions (Kohli, 2000) or by a process of active engagement in the public life (Calhoun, 2002), this sense of 'we' feeling cannot be generated as long as Europe does not move forward in the integration process. Usually, the former view is espoused by those authors who adopt a so-called 'national' perspective (Beck, 2003), i.e. a perspective which looks at Europe through the prism of the nation-state (cf. also Ifversen, 2002). From this perspective, Europe lacks all the features (common language,

history, traditions, etc.) which traditionally characterize the nation-state and which therefore prevent its transformation into a viable polity (Mann, 1998; Smith, 1992). Less concerned with the (lack of) common cultural and ethnic factors, the ‘post-national’ view stresses instead the civic and political values which alone can build a stable democracy (Balibar, 2004; Bauman, 2004; Beck and Grande, 2007; Habermas, 1998). In this latter case, the structural link between territory, sovereignty and identity, which, at least in theory, has traditionally characterized the nation-state, becomes loose or, according to some authors (Habermas, 2001), it disintegrates, as ‘cultural’ and ‘political’ emerge as two distinct spheres. In this view, a post-national EUrope is a territorially vague and governmentally multiple space, filled with universal, cosmopolitan values, beyond the particularism of the nation-state. Although highly suggestive, these post-national accounts of EUrope are predominantly normative in character. They do not reflect what EUrope *is*, but they envision what EUrope *should* or *must* be. This normative stance obviously opens up questions related to the extent to which these views are shared by people, i.e. the would-be EUropean *demos*. It is the purpose of this article to analyze the post-national thesis against narratives of EUrope expressed by EU citizens during focus groups and individual interviews which I personally administered, between May 2005 and January 2006, in four regional case studies (Lombardia, Italy; Pirkanmaa, Finland; North East of England, Great Britain; Languedoc-Roussillon, France).

The article is divided into two parts. In the first part, I introduce the post-national arguments, focusing in particular on the works of Habermas, who, more than others, has opened the way to a conceptualization of EUrope as a space beyond the isomorphism between territory and (cultural/ethnic) identity. The goal here is to present how, despite

their different arguments, all these authors look at EUrope from a ‘beyond-the nation-state’ angle - what I indeed call the ‘post-national’ perspective. In the second part, I analyze people’s views, collected in focus group discussions and individual interviews, as a way to assess whether the post-national arguments (‘views from above’) are also shared by people (‘views from below’). Due to space constraints, I limit my analysis to two questions which resonate with some of the major arguments of the post-national literature: is EUropean identity constructed in the absence of an Other? Does EUrope stand for the separation of the cultural from the political?

In order to avoid any misunderstandings, I should point out that the term ‘post-national’ here is not adopted as an analytical category, but as a descriptive lemma which aims to capture under one label all the different efforts of conceptualizing EUrope beyond the nation-state. Put it differently, my goal is not to critically discuss the analytical value of what I call the ‘post-national’ arguments per se, but to investigate the distance that exists between these normative arguments (‘views from above’) and people’s views (‘views from below’).

A Post-National EUrope: Views ‘from above’

In 1993, John Gerard Ruggie published an article on territoriality and international relations which has since exercised a great influence on the ways scholars have looked at EUrope (Rumelili, 2004: 27). Questioning the historical link between state and territoriality, Ruggie defined EUrope as “the first truly postmodern international political form” (Ruggie, 1993: 140). By this term, Ruggie meant that EUrope was moving beyond

modern politics, characterized by territorially defined and mutually exclusive forms of sovereignty, which, in turn, organize social space from a single fixed viewpoint. On the contrary, EUrope, for Ruggie, had to be conceived as the first multi-perspectival polity, organized around multiple centers of authority, which defy the notion of a fixed and exclusive territoriality. Following this reading, a conspicuous number of scholars, in different social disciplines, have investigated the ‘neo-medieval’ (Anderson, 1996), ‘post-Westphalian’ (Albert, 1998), and ‘de-bordered’ (Berezin and Schain, 2003; Zielonka, 2002) character of EUrope. These studies have narrated EUrope as an increasingly fragmented, rhizomatic space, which overcomes the Westphalian separation between domestic and international politics or, in social theory terms, the distinction between Self and Other. From this perspective, EUrope is not constructed against an Other (Kohli, 2000; Soysal, 2002), simply because the inclusion/exclusion nexus which has characterized the nation-state is not reproduced by and within the notion of EUropean identity (Neumann, 1998). This identity is ambiguous, fluid, and many-stranded (Neumann, 1998: 412), as Self and Other dissolves into the figure of the ‘hybrid’ (Amin, 2004). In this context, loyalty is shared rather than exclusive and identities, if not hybrid, are certainly multiple (Axford and Huggins, 1999), nested (Faist, 2001; Herb and Kaplan, 1999) or in a continuous flux (Stråth, 2002). Similarly, EUrope’s external boundaries, rather than as fixed lines of separation, are narrated as porous, blurred, soft, and fuzzy (Christiansen et al., 2000; Wæver, 1997; Zielonka, 2002).

Despite their different take, all these authors can be grouped under the label ‘post-national’, as they all agree on one point: the crisis of the nation-state or, better, the crisis of the congruence between the cultural and the political which the nation-state has

essayed to implement throughout its history (see Gellner, 1983: 1). Globalization, i.e. the increased intensity of financial, communication, commodities' and people's flows across the globe, has challenged the possibility for the state to remain in control of its national space (Sassen, 1996). To be sure, none of the post-national authors maintains the end of the nation-state. On the contrary, it is acknowledged that the nation-state still rouse powerful expressions of belonging, loyalty and attachment (Calhoun, 2002: 150; Delanty, 2003: 472) – as also confirmed, in the case of the EUropean countries, by the series of Eurobarometer surveys.¹ Yet, as Delanty has aptly pointed out:

we are living in an age which has made it impossible to return to one of the great dreams of the project of modernity, namely the creation of a unitary principle of integration capable of bringing together the domains of economy, polity, culture and society (Delanty, 2000 quoted in Rumford, 2003: 37).

In other words, in the age of globalization, the isomorphism between territory, sovereignty, and identity, which, at least in principle, has characterized the modern nation-state, is no longer (Appadurai, 1996; Paasi, 2003). This is why post-national authors who look at EUrope refuse to adopt the same conceptual categories used for making sense of the nation-state, as they cannot be taken as criteria for evaluating the process of EUropean integration (Delanty, 2003: 472). Such an approach, which goes under the name of 'methodological nationalism' (Beck, 2003) or 'territorial trap' (Agnew, 1994), would indeed fail to make sense of a space which, in the words of Beck and Grande (2007: 69), "should not (and could not) become both a nation and a state" (see also Weiler, 1999: 346-7).

In their search for a new conceptual ground where to locate EUrope, many post-national authors have espoused a cosmopolitan view. For Beck and Grande (2007), a cosmopolitan EUrope is the only ‘way out’ of the present institutional, economic, and political crisis. Their EUrope is one which does not confuse unity with uniformity, as it relies on the principle of tolerance. A similar position is shared also by Amin (2004), whose cosmopolitan idea of EUrope, inspired by the accounts of Julia Kristeva and Giorgio Agamben, relies on the empathy/engagement with the stranger in the forms of hospitality and mutuality. Emphasis on tolerance, inclusion, intellectual openness, dialogue, equality, and protection of human rights are characters which post-national authors see as specific of EUrope (Etzioni, 2007; Nicolaïdis and Howse, 2002; Soysal, 2002; Stråth, 2002). According to Nicolaïdis and Howse (2002), these values constitute a sort of EUropean ideal of political humanism or EUtopia, which overcomes the Schmittean notion of the political, defined as the opposition between *amicus* and *hostis*, on which the modern state has historically constructed itself. As a post-national space, EUrope adopts instead a different notion of the political, one which, by quoting Isin (2002), can be described as relational, since “being political means to constitute relationships between oneself and others either via affiliation and identification or agon and estrangement” (Isin, 2002: 17), never exclusion. The same values of political humanism have also been discursively deployed to herald the image of EUrope as a ‘transnational normative’ actor (Therborn, 2001 quoted in Soysal, 2002: 274). This image has been recently revived by the appeal of Habermas and Derrida (2003), who, contesting the war in Iraq, have promoted the image of a peaceful, cooperative, and civilizing

EUrope as a true Kantian counterbalance to the Hobbesian USA (Kagan, 2002 - see also Elden and Bialasiewicz, 2006).

This notion of post-national or cosmopolitan EUrope has been criticized under different aspects, as EUrope still largely functions as a modern inter-governmental institution (Caporaso, 1996; Risse-Kappen, 1996), its borders are quite sealed to strangers (as testified by the recent adoption of stricter immigration and asylum policies by some EU member states), its transnational normativity is often viewed by non-EUropeans in terms of an ethno-centric patronizing attitude (Alibhai-Brown, 1998; Lutz, 1997; Shore, 1996), and its capacity to act as a counter-hegemonic power against the USA still remains today rather uncertain (Balibar, 2003; Deighton, 2002; Keane, 2005). Yet, despite these limits, the notion of post-national EUrope is rather popular among intellectuals. More than any others, the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1998, 2001) has essayed to give a firm theoretical content to this notion, by extending his idea of constitutional patriotism to EUrope itself. As it is well-known, by this term Habermas advocates a form of deliberative democracy which is not legitimated by the existence of an *ethnos*, ‘a people’ in ethno-cultural terms, but by a *demos*, a collectivity shaped by the same political culture. Put it differently, for Habermas cultural homogeneity is not a necessary condition for democracy, as engagement into the public sphere is what produce the collective opinion- and will-formation which secure legitimacy of and support to political institutions. According to Habermas (1992), EUrope can and should embody this form of constitutional patriotism: a post-national society which relies on the rationality of citizens who engage in democratic practices and discourses rather than on cultural and ethnic homogeneity. Habermas’ theory has been largely criticized by both communitarians, who

have lamented that it downplays the role of culture in politics, and liberals, who disagree on the treatment of universal human rights as legal rather than moral norms (Pensky, 2001: xxix-xxxi). In relation to the present article, the former critique is certainly the most relevant one, as it is legitimate to doubt that a ‘thin’ (political) common identity would be enough to generate the necessary trust and solidarity among citizens (Cederman, 2001; Schnapper, 2002; Shore, 2004). As a way to bring the cultural back in, without, however, falling into the communitarian ‘error’ of treating the cultural as inherited and pre-political, Calhoun has proposed to broaden Habermas’ notion of constitution as a legal framework by talking of constitution as the creation of concrete social relationships, of bonds of mutual commitment forged in shared action (Calhoun, 2002). In a similar vein, Kohli (2000), drawing from the insights of economic sociology (Granovetter, 1985), has pointed out that collective identities should be seen not as an antecedent, but as a consequence of the development of institutions. This means that European identity should not be seen as a pre-condition for a European society (see also Zürn, 2000: 212). Other authors have pushed even further this reasoning, maintaining that a common identity (either cultural or political) is not at all necessary to support democratic institutions, as an utilitarian factor (Kaelberer, 2004) or, in liberal contractualist terms, a sense of justice and a sense of mutual respect among citizens (Føllesdal, 2000), would suffice to generate people’s trust in political institutions.

Whether critical or supportive of the post-national thesis, the majority of these authors rarely sustain their arguments with some evidence regarding people’s views. Post-national authors have affirmed that citizens *should* renounce to their egoistic interests and adopt cosmopolitan tolerance of the Other (Beck and Grande, 2007: 71 – see

also Etzioni, 2007: 39); political institutions *should* be based on the communicative use of human reason (Pensky, 2001: ix); the majority culture *has to* free itself from its historical identification with a general political culture (Habermas, 2001: 74); and citizens, again, *should* treat their own culture disinterestedly, with irony, as an object of inquiry (Turner, 2002). Yet, moving from a normative to an empirical terrain, is there any evidence that today the European citizen is really such a generous, rational, a-passionate, and ironic individual that the post-nationals long for?

Unfortunately, there are few empirical studies which have investigated whether the ways in which people make sense of Europe confirm the post-national thesis or not. Licata and his colleagues (2003), for instance, have shown that cultural homogeneity is not a necessary condition for European identification, thus implicitly supporting the post-national thesis. Similarly, Kritzing (2005) has found that a political system that is expected to be efficient can generate a sense of common identity, i.e. a common European identity is not a necessary antecedent to the development of European political institutions. The present article aims to contribute to this literature by bringing some qualitative evidence which can be used to answer two questions at the core of the post-national argument: is European identity constructed in the absence of an Other? Does Europe stand for the separation of the cultural from the political?

In order to avoid any misunderstandings, I should finally point out that the term 'post-national' here is not adopted as an analytical category, but as a descriptive lemma which aims to capture under one label all the different efforts of conceptualizing Europe beyond the nation-state. Put it differently, my goal is not to critically discuss the analytical value of what I call the 'post-national' arguments, but to investigate the

distance that exists between these normative arguments ('views from above') and people's views ('views from below').

A Post-National Europe? Views 'from below'

Methodology

Qualitative data used in this study come from a field work which I personally conducted between May 2005 and January 2006 in four regional case-studies: Lombardia (Italy), Pirkanmaa (Finland), North East of England (Great Britain), and Languedoc-Roussillon (France). The selection of these four case-studies was based on cross-tabulating the results of a cluster analysis (using the significant predictors from a binary logistic model on Eurobarometer survey data for European attachment) and data about regional GDP per capita (in Purchasing Power Parity values) for each region in 'Western Europe' (i.e. the fifteen EU member states before the last two enlargements).² The choice of clustering on the independent variables was done in order to avoid the bias of sampling on European attachment, i.e. the dependent variable (King et al., 1994). The four regions selected represent some of the different socio-economic (poor/rich), political (pro-European/Euro-skeptical), and geographical (North/South) features of Western Europe. In each region, I administered four focus groups, with 4-5 participants each, male and female, aged 18-26 years old, without foreign background. The composition of the groups used education as a 'control characteristic' (Bedford and Burgess, 2001; Knodel, 1993). As such, in each region two groups were formed by participants with a university degree (or in the process to obtain it), which were named 'students', and two groups with

participants without a university degree (and not willing to obtain it in the future), which were named 'workers'. I also conducted about 100 semi-structured individual interviews with 'local elites', here defined as any person with a political, institutional, or social role in the region. Overall, 185 respondents (108 males, 77 females) took part in this study. Information was collected on questions related to the sentiment of territorial attachment at four scales (local, regional, national and European), meanings of Europe and conditions of inclusion and exclusion of foreigners. The information was coded following an inductive approach, i.e. codes were not generated on the basis of an *a priori* theory, but on the observation of recurring patterns (Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Silverman, 2004; Weinberg, 2002). The following analysis focuses only on the information relevant to the two research questions mentioned above.

Europe and the Other

According to Neumann and Welsh (1991: 329), the figure of the Other, historically embodied by the Turks (Islam) and by the Slavic populations (East), has played a decisive role in the construction of Europe as a modern, civilized, and progressive space (see also Neumann, 1999 and Wolff, 1994). The question which needs to be asked is whether the identity of Europe is today still constructed in relation to/against an Other or, in postnational terms, the Other is no longer evoked to define Europe. From the voices of the respondents, there is enough evidence to

confirm the former hypothesis. Yet, the Other is today no longer represented by the barbarian and savage Turk or Russian, but by a social space which is neither less civilized nor less modern than Europe, namely 'America' (i.e. the USA). Although discourses which excluded Turkey as non-European were heard in the focus group discussions and individual interviews, it was mainly America to be mentioned by the respondents (independently from their socio-demographic and national characteristics) as the Other which indirectly defined what Europe is. These narratives of 'othering' can be organized into two major categories: economic and cultural. In economic terms, America and, to a lesser extent, Asia were mentioned as the Others against which a unified Europe was called into existence as the only way for the European nation-states to compete successfully on the global market. This view reproduces what Weiss (2002) has named 'globalization rhetoric' – a rhetoric which finds the rationale for the existence of Europe in the global economic competition, i.e. outside Europe itself. Yet, additional evidence from interviews and focus groups challenges the interpretation, advanced also by Soysal (2002: 274-5), that America and Asia are Europe's Other only in economic and not in cultural terms. In fact, while the economic dimension was certainly a major component of the way in which the USA and Asia were portrayed, the cultural dimension was also present to a significant degree. This cultural aspect was, on the one hand, tied to the economic dimension and, on the other hand, it touched on political ideas. Among the respondents, the elite interviewees in particular, across all the four regional case studies, depicted the USA as the abode of wild capitalism and extreme neo-liberalism against which the image of Europe as the home of a more 'human' economic model

was heralded. It is worth mentioning that this image of Europe as a social democracy, although mainly present among leftist interviewees, it characterized also political representatives from right-wing parties, even though, in this latter case, interviewees adopted a more protectionist tone, demanding that Europe had to protect the nation-state from global competition. Despite the European social model is today under criticism, being a notion both unevenly shared among European countries (Mayer and Palmowski, 2004: 582) and confused as for its meaning (Giddens, 2007: 1), overall the accounts of the respondents confirm that this notion continues to play a major role in the process of constructing the image of Europe as something different from the USA.

As mentioned above, this difference was also articulated, once again more by elite interviewees than focus group participants, in relation to the different conception of the political held by Europeans and Americans. While Europe was presented as a champion of human rights, diplomacy, and non-violence, thus echoing the post-national rhetoric of the authors discussed in the previous section, the United States were heavily criticized for their use of military force as a way to solve international disputes. Not surprisingly, in a couple of cases Europe was expressly invoked as “a counter-balance against America”, thus depicting the US in terms of an antagonist. In other words, Europe stands for what the United States is not. This means that the notion of post-national Europe is not constituted in the absence of a cultural Other, as the United States is narrated as what Europe does not want to be – the negative image of the Self. This is a point which, ironically, despite the invocation of going beyond identity narratives constructed on the dichotomy ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ (Neumann, 1998: 414), characterizes also the discourses of

some post-national authors (Habermas and Derrida, 2003 – see also Hutton, 2002; Str ath, 2002: 398).

The ‘othering’ rhetoric was activated by respondents not only in relation to the *identity of EUrope*, but also with regard to their sentiment of *EUropean identity*. This identity was said to be triggered when ‘abroad’, which once again was often described as America or, alternatively, Asia. As suggested by social psychology (Chryssochoou, 2003) and cultural studies (Hall, 1996), the process of identification is always activated by a specific context. According to Triandafyllidou and Wodak (2003: 210), identity is about meanings and meanings develop in context dependent use. It comes therefore with no surprise that respondents talked about their EUropean feelings in relation to a ‘foreign’ context. In the case of the United States, people’s mentality, extreme individualism, violence, and streets inhabited by homeless were mentioned as the elements which made America look as a space ‘Other’. In the case of Asia, it is interesting to observe that one respondent who visited Thailand as a tourist stressed the sentiment of being Westerner rather than EUropean. In this case, the ‘othering’ discourse assumed a racial connotation, as the context of feeling ‘white’ among ‘yellow’ people took over other forms of identification. This experience can also be interpreted in the sense that EUrope, as part of the West, contains an implicit racial connotation (whiteness) which at times can be activated also when the ‘yellow’ (or the black, etc.) is encountered in EUrope itself.

Cultural vs. Political

When we analyze the responses of focus group participants and elite interviewees in relation to meanings of Europe and their European attachment we find that there is not a consistent trend which can either support or reject the post-national hypothesis. Instead, people's comments open up multiple perspectives and to reduce them *ad unum* would be erroneous. From these comments, it is possible to find evidence for a narration of Europe both as a 'national' and a 'post-national' space. In this latter case, Europe was defined both as a space of common political values and as a space of governance supported not by a common culture, but by a utilitarian dimension.³ Let's analyze in detail.

A great number of respondents narrated Europe by using the same conceptual categories which they would have used if they had to define their nation-state: (lack of) common language, traditions, culture, etc. In this sense they implicitly rejected the normative stance of those post-national authors who maintain that Europe "should not (and could not) become both a nation and a state" (Beck and Grande 2007: 69). The 'national' view was rather evenly diffused among all the different socio-demographic categories and across all the four regional case-studies. Overall, as it is obvious to expect, respondents stressed more the absence rather than the presence of Europe's 'national' elements. More than anything else, the lack of a common language was said to be the major obstacle for the creation of a sentiment of European belonging. In this regard, it is interesting to quote the comment of one respondent, who aptly captured the difference between the communicative and the symbolic functions of language:

"Language – observed Fabrizio, Italian 'student', aged 24 – still remains something which differentiates, in terms of belonging, those who speak your language from

those who don't. Then, if a person is able to speak English and to communicate with others, it's ok. However, your language... I mean there is a greater belonging with those who speak your language."

From this perspective, the nation, as defined by those who speak the same language, will always exercise a higher emotional attachment than any form of European identity. It would be, however, imprudent to conclude that a post-national Europe exists only as a normative project in the minds of intellectual elites. In fact, respondents also talked of Europe in terms which closely resembled the post-national or cosmopolitan image discussed above. Even if not as frequent as the articulation of Europe as a potential nation-state, the definition of Europe as a post-national space surfaced rather often in the comments of both focus group participants and elite interviewees, particularly in those highly educated and those who shared a leftist political preference. These respondents indeed talked of Europe as a space which protects human rights, a space of democracy and tolerance, and a space at peace and which aims to implement peace.⁴ In this sense, Europe materializes, in Habermasian terms, as a space which is bound together by the sharing of the same political culture. Interesting enough, this post-national reasoning was even taken to the extreme by a Finnish focus group participant, who affirmed that Europe should be regarded as 'a unifying way of thinking' rather than an actual geographical region. From this perspective, Europe is not rendered in terms of a specific geographical and institutional space, but is perceived as a principle, a project or an idea which claims to be 'universal'. This outlook characterized quite many of the elite interviewees, who indeed stressed the normative role of Europe as a model and a

laboratory both for ‘another’ globalization, more social and less liberal, and a champion of humanitarianism and international peace around the world. This perspective clearly resonates with the EUtopia of post-national authors discussed above. In both cases, not surprisingly, the US, once again, was mentioned as the negative model against which EUrope stands.

The narration of EUrope in post-national terms emerged also in the way, rather common among all respondents, in which cultural diversity, rather than cultural homogeneity, was heralded as the constitutive principle of a EUropean identity. These accounts clearly echoed the post-national idea that unity should not be confused with uniformity (Beck and Grande, 2007: 73) - an idea which today seems to inform also the EU official policy, as manifested in its motto ‘united in diversity’. However, this praise for cultural diversity implicitly acknowledges the resilience of national attachment, which, as shown by Eurobarometer survey data, remains indeed the first form of territorial attachment among people in Western EUrope.⁵ Respondents rejected by far and large the scenario in which EUrope was to take over as one overarching identity, as this was perceived, according to a zero-sum logic driven by a ‘national’ perspective (i.e. a perspective which treats EUrope as a would-be nation-state), to endanger the richness of the existing national cultures. Yet, paradoxically, it is exactly because of the predominance of this ‘national’ outlook among people that it seems legitimate to affirm that if EUrope is to succeed, it will have necessarily to be a post-national EUrope, one which bases its existence on the sharing of a common political culture rather than on its transformation into a ‘national’ space. This is exactly because people hold dear their attachment to their nation.

This point opens the question, widely debated by the literature (Calhoun, 2002; Cederman, 2001; Kohli, 2000; Schnapper, 2002; Shore, 1996; Shore, 2004), about the capability of such a post-national construction to generate a ‘we’ feeling which many authors see as a necessary condition for the creation of solidarity, in whose absence, it is said, democracy cannot function correctly. From the comments of the respondents, two points seem to emerge. First, even though respondents were skeptical about the creation of a common European identity, fearing that this would erase their national identities, they also affirmed, rather contradictorily, that a European identity was necessary for Europe to exist as a political entity and if not present now it would come in the future, as a matter of the ongoing process of European integration. This view confirms the anti-essentialist idea about identity espoused by post-national authors. From this perspective, cultural identity does not exist in nature, as a primordial condition of societies, but it is the product of the functioning of institutions (Kohli, 2000) or the process of active engagement into the public sphere (Calhoun, 2002). The question which, however, needs to be asked is what kind of identity the respondents meant by affirming that the construction of Europe requires a European identity. With regard to this second point, the comments of the respondents do not allow for a clear answer, as both ‘national’ and ‘post-national’ observations were heard in the focus groups and in the interviews. On the one hand, in fact, respondents equated European identity to a form of national identity so that, for example, in the words of an Italian focus group participant, in the future European identity and national identities will be related among themselves as national identity and regional identities are today. On the other hand, however, some elite interviewees referred to a more post-national, cosmopolitan or civic notion of identity, as

in the comments of an Italian school headmaster, who stressed the need of finding ‘two or three great ethical themes’ (e.g. fighting against poverty in the world and rejecting war as a mean of solving disputes) in which people can identify themselves. This lack of ‘something’ which can mobilize people or, in the words of a couple of other interviewees, ‘make people dream’, rather than ‘oppress’ them with thousands of technicalities, was implicitly reproduced in many of the comments about the distance between ‘us’ (people) and ‘them’ (the politicians and bureaucrats in Brussels) – a distance which quite a few of the French respondents mentioned to justify their rejection of the referendum on the EUropean constitutional treaty.

Finally, a partial confirmation of the post-national dimension of EUrope can be detected in the utilitarian rationale used by a large number of respondents to explain their support for EUrope. More than the rendition in national or in post-national terms, respondents indeed referred to EUrope as a space which was able (or unable) to meet their needs and interests, articulated both in personal terms (e.g. freedom of travel, use of the same currency, opportunities of study in another EUropean country, etc.) and in social terms (e.g. helping the nation to compete successfully on the international market, structural funds, etc.). The relevance of the utilitarian factor in explaining EUropean support has also been highlighted by quantitative studies (Gabel, 1998). Here, however, the question is whether such a utilitarian view of EUrope can be read in post-national terms or not. Once again, there seems to be no clear answer to this question. On the one hand, in fact, the utilitarian view seems to maintain the separation of EUrope as a political, administrative, and economic space from EUrope as a cultural-identity space, reflecting, therefore, the separation between the political and the cultural put forward by

Habermas. Respondents who used the utilitarian rationale did not indeed acknowledge any sentiment of European identity. “[EUrope] is the spare wheel if the country goes wrong – remarked Aurélien (French ‘worker’, aged 18). [...] For development, it’s good; but I don’t think that EUrope touches on our cultures: we don’t feel EUropean.” “I see EUrope as a medium of social and political cohesion – affirmed Audrey, French ‘student’, aged 24. At the cultural level, as a medium of management of heritage. At an identity level... no.” It is precisely this absence of a common identity, even in political terms, which, on the other hand, casts a doubt about the post-national character of such a view and, more importantly, its viability as a rationale for further integration. Despite the argument of some post-national authors that a utility function can be associated with a sense of ‘weak collective identity’ (Zürn, 2000: 192), no significant evidence emerged from the comments of the respondents in order to support this hypothesis. Only a few respondents who shared the utilitarian view admitted that, despite their absence of a sentiment of cultural attachment to EUrope, they felt a sentiment of political belonging.

Conclusion

Is EUrope a post-national space when seen from the eyes of ordinary people and local elites? If this question has to be answered in relation to discourses of ‘othering’ heard in focus groups and individual interviews we should conclude that EUrope is not (yet?) a post-national space. In fact, both the identity of EUrope and a sentiment of European identity were triggered, among respondents, mainly in relation to or, at times, against ‘America’. The USA was rendered in terms of an Other not only in economic terms, as suggested by Soysal (2002: 274-5), but also in cultural terms, as its economic system and

its values were perceived as alien to the European culture. Yet, paradoxically, the kind of European Self which was generated out of this confrontation with the American Other was a post-national Self, one imbued with universal or cosmopolitan values. Many respondents indeed talked of Europe as a space at peace and which aims to bring peace to the world, a space rich in cultural diversity, where human rights are protected and democracy is at play, and a space which refuses the same neo-liberal logic which drives the USA. In this sense, the European Self was not cast in 'national' terms, as a given territory inhabited by a 'people' who share the same cultural traits, history, traditions, language, etc., but, in Habermasian terms, as a culturally diverse space which shares the same political principles and whose territorial configuration remains ultimately open. This explains why it seems legitimate to doubt that the USA can finally assume the image of a 'real' Other, one which is perceived as an immanent threat to the community and therefore activates discourses of inclusion and exclusion of its members, exactly because Europe was not constructed in terms of a (national) community. Europe was narrated as an idea, an ensemble of post-national values, more than a (national) territory where a 'people' lives, i.e. a space of communitarian bonds. Accordingly, the Other of such a space resembles an idea or a set of values rather than a specific 'people'. Nations, not Europe still define the sentiment of communitarian belonging and it is at this scale that social categorizations of 'other peoples' usually take place. In this sense, if the original question has to be answered in relation to the separation of the cultural from the political, it seems legitimate to affirm that a post-national Europe indeed exists among people - even though mostly among the highly educated and leftist ones. This does not mean, though, that the European citizen has already become the rational, a-passionate, and

ironic individual described by post-national authors, as EUrope still remains subordinate, in people's minds, to the sentiment and the logic of national belonging. It is also for this reason that if EUrope is to succeed as a political space, it will therefore have to be necessarily a post-national EUrope, one which bases its existence on the sharing of a common political culture rather than on its transformation into a 'national' space.

The separation of the cultural from the political emerged also in relation to the utilitarian discourse used by respondents to explain their relation to EUrope. Yet, in this case, no common identity, even in 'thin', political terms, accompanied such a view. This opens up the question whether utilitarianism can be enough to generate a sense of loyalty to EUrope. In conclusion, it seems reasonable to affirm that a post-national EUrope is not only a normative view shared by intellectual elite, as it characterizes also the discourses of ordinary people. Yet, this post-national view coexists along with a 'national' view, which still shapes how people see themselves and the world, EUrope included. It is exactly at the interaction, at times contradictory, between these two views that the future of EUrope as a post-national space lies.

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¹ Among the EU-15 countries, the European average for national pride rose from 80% in 1982 to 90% in 2005. If we take the average value measured across the EU-15 during the period 1991-2005, we note that national attachment (92%) is the primary form of territorial attachment, followed by regional and local (both at 89%), and finally European attachment (61%).

² Eurobarometer survey data are periodically collected by a consortium of survey firms on behalf of the European Commission. The data set used was Eurobarometer 60.1 (2003) in reference to the following question: "People may feel different degrees of attachment to their town or village, to their region, to their country, or to Europe. Please tell me how attached you feel to ...?". Given the socio-economic and political

differences between East Germany and West Germany and between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, these territories are treated as separate in the Eurobarometer series. Further information on the methodology adopted and the relative data sets used is available from the author upon request.

³ As pointed out by one of the reviewers, it can be argued that ‘culture as identity’ can be a narrow way of looking at the notion of culture, which instead can be best conceptualized as a medium of communication. I certainly agree on this point, since the literature has shown that identity is a form of communication, which gets activated always in a discursive context (Martin, 1995; Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998; Jenkins, 2004; Yuval-Davis et al., 2006). Yet, this way of looking at identity does not obliterate the fact that the ways in which the respondents talked of culture clearly reproduced the discourse ‘culture as identity’. For them, culture and identity were indeed closely linked and the absence of a European culture prompted some respondents to state their lack of a sentiment of European identity.

⁴ An analogous narration of Europe emerges also in Bruter (2004), whose research design and methodology are quite similar to the present study. Yet, strangely enough, Bruter labels these post-national values as ‘cultural’ and oppose them to other ‘civic’ meanings (e.g. borderlessness, circulation of citizens, etc.).

⁵ See note 1.