

JCMS Annual Review Lecture: Imagining Europe: The Cultural Foundations of EU Governance

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Introduction

On 18 March 2015, more than ten thousand people from all corners of Europe crowded Frankfurt's Römerberg Square, chanting and waving handmade banners. Although the demonstration was peaceful, earlier in the day multiple police cars had been set on fire, and fights had broken out between activists and police. The occasion? The official inauguration of the long delayed, hideously expensive new European Central Bank building. Representatives of the Spanish political party Podemos and Greece's Syriza joined the anti-austerity protests, calling for an end, as one sign put it, to 'ECB Monetary Fascism'. Protesters were quoted as not just protesting against the European Central Bank (ECB) and the European Union's (EU) specific policies, however, but also asserting the need for just and fair treatment for their larger European community. One 30-year-old protester said: 'We can't always make cuts at poor people's expense and call them lazy Greeks, but we need to stand by in solidarity with them'.¹

For those of us who have studied the European Union for decades, the visibility of the protests, the violence, the protester's explicit talk of European solidarity and the intense scrutiny of the actors being pilloried signals a startling change in the politics of the EU.² In the past, EU governance unfolded largely insulated from mass politics, marked by elite discussion rather than popular protests. Today, a profound transformation is at work. The opening of EU politics to public scrutiny and awareness is necessary for the EU to be a mature and legitimate political entity, but the supporting social foundation for EU governance will also need to change for this transformation to hold.

Scholars have long probed into how material and functional elements matter for the evolution of the EU, be they formal institutions, national preferences or economic forces. But we have spent much less time examining the cultural underpinnings of the EU's governance. A literature on identity and socialization has moved forward our understanding of individual conceptions of political identity. But we need to look to how broader cultural dynamics have shaped the EU's basic construction as legitimate political authority in order to fully understand the challenges the EU faces today.

¹ *Wall Street Journal*, 18 March 2015.

² I use the terms EU and Europe interchangeably, although the former is clearly a subset of the latter.

Specifically, I argue for attention to how everyday life helps construct the particular shared identities and broader cultural vocabulary for politics in the EU.³ Today, life in Europe is repeatedly shaped by or imprinted with the EU, in symbols and practices sometimes obvious and at other times very much under the radar. Pick up an object such as a hair dryer or a cuddly plush toy and it will invariably have a small tag printed with a ‘€’ logo (standing for *Communauté Européenne*), indicating the product meets EU safety standards. A family in the Netherlands with an ageing parent may now share their home with a healthcare worker from Romania, thanks to the European single market for labour that joins them together. German firms have recalculated their business plans in response to sanctions set by the EU in 2014 against Russia after Putin’s interventions in Ukraine. In the Basque country, travellers now pass freely from France to Spain without showing any documents, a lone sign (depicting both Spanish and EU symbols) the only thing marking the move from one country to another. In these and many other ways, the EU is changing the basic foundations of day-to-day life for ‘European citizens’, and in the process subtly reframing as European those things, such as borders or safety standards or labour laws, that used to be solely understood as national political prerogatives. The consequences of EU symbols and practices even extend outside the boundaries of Europe, as the EU’s foreign policies and its diplomats construct the EU as a sovereign actor among states, signing international treaties and sending ambassadors to foreign capitals.

EU programmes are important in themselves for quite down-to-earth reasons, as they create winners and losers and redistribute wealth and power. But they also engage latent social processes that create a backdrop for politics that profoundly shapes the path of governance. EU policies, both intentionally and unintentionally, have generated a vast array of symbols and practices that provide a vocabulary and toolkit for the accrual of power to the EU. As EU governance permeates through European life, a subtle, incremental building of layers of everyday symbols and practices – what I call its cultural infrastructure – has transformed peoples’ lived experience. But, I argue, the particular ways in which this cultural backdrop has been fashioned imposes important limits on the EU’s evolution as a legitimate authority. Just like nation-states, the EU has effectively used the tried and true political technologies of labelling, mapping and narrating to create social categories and classifications and make the European people governable (Scott, 1998). But the legitimation that is accrued through the EU’s symbolic and practical activity is an unusual and relatively thin one, making it difficult to bring people together in collective responses to the stress and strife of crises such as the eurozone catastrophe.

Unlike the heavy-handed work done by nationalism to support the concentration of state power, the EU’s cultural infrastructure is rooted in a specific type of banal authority, which navigates national loyalties while portraying the EU as complementary to, not in competition with, local identities. From the abstracted and generic iconography of the euro, to the labelling of the EU’s foreign policy chief as the dizzyingly obscure ‘High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,’ to the balancing done by the European passport’s simultaneous joining of national and EU symbols, to the timid public architecture of Brussels and the cities of Frankfurt, Luxembourg, Strasbourg all serving as decentralized EU capitals, the symbols and practices generated by EU policies are often deracinated, purged of their associations with the powers of the

³ This contribution draws on and develops the arguments made in McNamara (2015a).

nation-state. Instead of conveying a concentration of power and identity, the EU's symbols and practices are standardized into a seemingly unobjectionable blandness, metaphorically nested in Member States, even as a considerable amount of power and capacity is accruing to the EU. While effective in the short run, it may prove a fragile foundation going forward.

The construction of this cultural infrastructure is not only of historical or academic interest. Faced with the potential end to the 'permissive consensus' that previously underpinned the EU (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), the inherent limitations of the EU's particularly banal and tempered cultural infrastructure are now being sharply felt. Scholarship on comparative political development makes clear that dissent and struggle are nothing new for emergent political authorities (Fukuyama, 2011; Tilly, 1975). The protests at the new ECB building should therefore not surprise us. But the cultural infrastructure of governance of the EU, because of its particular banality and need to navigate robust national identities, may be poorly suited to support these struggles. Policy-makers, politicians, citizens and scholars need to come to grips with these new demands for a more politicized EU if they are to navigate forward to a legitimate and effectively functioning European Union.

This article proceeds as follows. I first situate the EU as a new emergent political form that has as one of its key challenges to establish itself as a taken-for-granted political authority, or to put it another way, as an unremarkable social fact. I then provide a brief empirical survey of the ways in which the EU is constructed through subtle, everyday cultural processes, noting the inherent fragility in that construction. Deracinated and banal, and gingerly navigating the nation-states, the cultural composition of the EU's legitimacy may not yet be enough to support the contestation that naturally comes with the deepening of political integration. In conclusion, I offer some thoughts on how to address these challenges by transitioning to a less deracinated and more emotive set of symbols and practices that allow for a more direct contestation over EU policies.

I. The Puzzle of the EU as an Emergent Political Authority

The EU is a new emergent political form, just as the Holy Roman Empire or the Hanseatic League or the modern nation-state all were at one point in time, and the EU likewise has its own trajectory of political development (Ruggie, 1993; Caporaso, 1996; Marks, 1997; Marks, 2012). Rather than seeing the EU only as an assemblage of laws and institutions designed to manage cross-border regulations over quotidian things like cheese or hair dryers, we should step back and consider the EU in terms of historical trends in governance, as a case of comparative political development (McNamara, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Börzel and Hosli, 2003; Börner and Eigmüller, 2015). When we see the EU in this way, as a new polity with claims on its 'citizens' and vice versa, it shines attention on the question of how its legitimate political authority is created (Copsey, 2015).

The indicators of this political authority range far and wide in the deep and intrusive ways that the EU increasingly and profoundly shapes public and private life throughout Europe. As a system of supranational governance has been built at the European level, the EU's membership has extended from the original six signatories of the 1957 Treaty of Rome to today's 28 Member States. EU institutions, administrative bodies, legislators, judges and policy-makers have come to do more and more of the work of governing over Europe as a whole. With the Single Market that has brought down barriers to trade and standardized rules for everything from electrical outlets to roaming tariffs on mobile

phones to financial reporting to public procurement rules (Egan, 2001; Egan, 2015; Kelemen, 2014), the single currency project (Matthijs and Blyth, 2015), and the extensive reach of European Court of Justice and its supremacy over national law (Stone Sweet, 2004, 2010; Schmidt and Kelemen, 2013), the EU has accrued much power and policy capacity in the economic realm. Non-economic areas such as social policy, citizenship, environmental policy, health policy, culture and entertainment, economic development and education have also been subject to collective European governance (Caporaso and Tarrow, 2009; Anderson, 2015; Shaw, 2008; Delreux, 2011, McNamara, 2015a). Importantly, however, although its policies indirectly redistribute wealth and opportunity, the EU does not have a formal system of direct taxing and spending, or debt creation at the European level, as is routine for all nation-states no matter how decentralized (McNamara, 2015c).

On the world stage, contrary to the conventional wisdom that the EU lacks foreign policy power, the EU signs treaties alongside sovereign states, negotiates in high-level talks such as those with the US and Iran over nuclear issues, litigates against nations such as China in the World Trade Organization, and has co-ordinated robust collective sanctions on Russia (Menon, 2014, 2015; Smith, 2011). In the military sphere, the EU has deployed troops, police forces and crisis management personnel to more than a dozen conflicts, and has taken over the responsibility for providing security in Bosnia-Herzegovina from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Mérand, 2008; Norheim-Martinsen, 2013). However, the EU does not have its own European army under a hierarchical command, but rather networks the Member State militaries together for its limited joint EU actions.

Scholars, policy-makers and public figures have long wrestled with how to think about the question of the EU's legitimacy (Copsey, 2015, p. 73). Some have argued that a lack of direct democratic representation erodes the EU's legitimacy, while others argue that the EU should be seen as a case of entirely appropriate delegation from elected officials to EU bodies (Moravcsik, 2002), or that legitimacy varies depending on the fit between national government structures and the EU (Schmidt, 2006). Others have focused on the question of whether a European *demos* is possible, or in fact already emerging, and how to build in more space for democratic contestation (Mair, 2013; Schmidt and Kelemen, 2013).

I approach the question of the EU's legitimacy in a different way, by focusing on how political authority is socially constructed. Political authority can be conceptualized as the process of creating social control and compliance (Hurd, 1999). Legitimacy is present when a culturally accepted principle or value shores up the right of that political authority to rule. Legitimacy, in this telling, is a subtle form of power that rests in a political authority's ability to create consent for its governance while also appearing to transcend that particular political actor. 'Legitimacy', as Martha Finnemore has written, 'is by its nature a social and relational phenomenon' (Finnemore, 2009, p. 61). It cannot be assumed unilaterally, but must be conferred by others, and is dependent on the particular broader social setting to determine its content. The terms by which political legitimacy is established vary with historical context, as norms of dynastic rule legitimated European rulers for centuries but, beginning in the late eighteenth century, democratic sovereignty became the metric for legitimation (Bukovansky, 2002). A key part of the social foundation for legitimacy of any political entity lies in what I call the cultural infrastructure for governance, as I explain below.

II. Comparative Political Development and the EU

A Cultural Infrastructure For Governance

Scholars of comparative political development have pointed out that war has historically been an important crucible for the emergence of new political entities, as the need for security has overcome resistance to the concentration of power (Tilly, 1975, 1990). Economic logics also have long provided an incentive for scaled-up governance and new political institutions to support market development and trade (Spruyt, 1994). But in addition to these widely recognized security and economic drivers for political integration, underlying social processes must be marshalled for a new emergent political form to take hold and stabilize. Culture, as everyday symbols and practices, helps to constitute and naturalize what people view as the appropriate locus of political authority. Culture also helps to construct what Benedict Anderson termed an ‘imagined community’ to support that new authority (Anderson, 1993).⁴ Yet the study of culture has largely taken a back seat to other logics in scholarship on the EU. To be sure, some scholars have integrated aspects of social logics into their accounts to parse the dynamics behind the EU’s history (Stone Sweet *et al.*, 2001), while a newer literature on the EU has emphasized a social constructivist approach to symbolic representation, framing and ideas (McNamara, 1998; Christiansen *et al.*, 2001; Parsons, 2003; Checkel, 2007). But these approaches have tended to shy away from directly confronting the concept of culture, offering explanations that more narrowly focus on ideas and socialization rather than the larger social structures that surround actors and infuse meaning into their daily lives.⁵ Thus they overlook the latent, taken-for-granted ways in which symbols and practices enable some type of politics, while constraining others. A more recent scholarly shift to an empirical focus on the work done through symbols and practices provides a new method of assessing the ways in which the social construction of the EU is occurring.

Culture has often been viewed by modern political scientists as a quagmire of intractable phenomena, or dismissed as a mask for other, more important, dynamics. On the other hand, some who have advocated for the role of culture have actually set back its study by approaching culture as unchanging, static and primordial. Samuel Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis is one prominent example of this mistaken view of culture (Huntington, 1993). For Huntington, culture can be boiled down to an immutable religious affiliation. We are born into our culture, and die with our cultural identities intact. Much of the early work on political culture likewise understood nationalist identities of Kurds or Germans as part of the essential DNA of a citizen. But recent work in comparative politics and sociology has moved away from this view, arguing instead that culture and identities are continually constructed, dynamic and inherently contested (Thomas *et al.*, 1987; Sewell, 1995).

⁴ Anderson defined imagined communities as cultural ‘artefacts’ that create a sense of ‘deep, horizontal comradeship,’ resting on a shared image of a limited, sovereign community even as its members will never meet or even know of each other (Anderson, 1993, pp. 6–7). They are invented, not given; ‘distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined’ (Anderson, 1993, p. 6).

⁵ There are a few innovative studies that have argued for an explicit cultural approach, but these early studies tended to focus mostly on the malign effects and cynical calculations of actors promoting a ‘European culture’ as a way to mask the negative distributional impacts of European integration (Delanty, 1995; Shore, 2000). Recent work is closer to the approach I am arguing for here, emphasizing that culture is not under the control of any one actor but rather is the product of social interactions (Cram, 2001, 2009; Manners, 2011; Della Salla, 2010).

This newer literature on culture emphasizes its dynamic nature and offers a way of empirically demonstrating its causal impacts. Here, culture is defined as delineating a process of meaning making, shared among some particular group of people (Scott, 1985, 1998; Wedeen, 1999, 2002, 2008). We can think about meaning making as ‘a social process through which people reproduce together the conditions of intelligibility that enable them to make sense of their worlds’ (Wedeen, 2002, p. 717). Clifford Geertz’s famous quote is helpful here: ‘Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). Throughout our day, whether it be in families, schools, terrorist cells, law offices or army units, we rely on a series of quotidian practices and symbols to stabilize our interactions. They are so prevalent that they become completely commonplace and taken for granted, unremarkable except perhaps when we move into a different setting and we are jolted into seeing all of the previously invisible rules and roles from our new perspective as an outsider. By seeing culture as practices of meaning making, we are able to probe into the ways in which actors are making their worlds intelligible and manageable (Wedeen, 2002, p. 720). This approach also opens up the potential to study more precisely the conflicts, cleavages and power involved in the construction of cultures, and how symbols can be used as resources in those conflicts (Swidler, 1986).

If cultures are not primordial and static but rather are the dynamic structures within which we interpret and make meaning of our worlds, then each of us also carries a unique cultural identity that is infused with the variety of all of these different experiences and commitments. We are not of one culture, but of many. This is very important, because if multiple identities can co-exist, it opens up the possibility that the creation of a European identity may not automatically be in a zero-sum battle between national and EU identities. Instead, those identities might be nested, parallel, hierarchical, conflicting, mutually exclusive or synergistic, to name but a few relationships. And they will be activated in different contexts, and with the prompting of different cultural symbols and practices.

Constructing an EU Polity Through Symbols and Practices

The historical experience of nation-states tells us that creating new political affinities is always an uphill battle. The construction of a new political community has always required a significant shift in citizens’ vision of the appropriate polity: its scale, its membership, and its meaning. In many instances this shift occurs with coercion; in other instances it is more voluntary. But in all cases, it involves the creation of a perceived and experienced bond that can glue individuals together in a shared culture and shared identity. Motivated political elites have strategically attempted to create such shared identities, although never without pushback and reversals. They have been helped by the unintentional work done by the shifts in daily life brought about by the material impacts of various state-building policies.

Ambitious empirical work across a variety of historical cases has emphatically made this point (Weber, 1976). To note but one example, an astonishing study of the development of Scottish national sentiments based on the notion of the Highland traditions has likewise traced many of the purportedly ‘ancient’ Hibernian traditions (Scottish clans with distinct tartans made into kilts and so on) to a combination of creative hucksters in the early nineteenth century and romantic leanings on the part of various members of

Scottish society (Trevor-Roper, 1983). The creation of new national monuments and rituals, such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, provided a sense of 'nationness' without specificity as to the particulars of who is, or is not, part of the community (Anderson, 1993, pp. 9–10). The development of the technology of the national census allowed the categorization and classification of this new group of citizens in a universal form while giving the state tools to extend its bureaucratic power (Loveman, 2005; Starr, 1987). Expressions of community, such as the museum and the map, were elevated to the national level and arts, artifacts and boundaries all become part of the larger project of the nation-state (Anderson, 1993). While the nation-state centralized and exerted control across a host of policy arenas, it also was an impressive 'symbolic accomplishment' (Bourdieu, 1984). These political and social technologies gave people a sense of community beyond their local villages and towns, forever changing the scale of politics.

The challenge for real-world actors, be they Eurocrats or national elites, attempting to establish the EU as a social fact is to make it seem unremarkable and natural, even as it may be actually quite novel and revolutionary. Bourdieu has called this the ability to 'construct the given' – that is, to make natural and unremarkable certain categories and actions that reinforce and legitimize political agency (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 170). For the EU, of course, the project is doubly hard as there are no analogs to the EU as a political form, and EU officials must be careful about not overtly mimicking the nation-state to avoid awkward confrontation over the EU's ultimate goals. Yet when successful, the EU is naturalized as an actor such that we don't even think about this process of actor creation, nor do we question the construction of an imagined community of European citizens, who must locate themselves inside this pervasive mental framework even absent a true European 'nation' or template for the EU's unique polity. Note that these processes of symbolic representation do not by themselves create unity, or loyalty, or emotional attachment. Instead, symbolic representation creates a unit, a vessel for discourse, reference and discussion. Agents may actively push back on the deployment of symbols—rejecting, resisting, subverting or creating counter-symbols. The blue and yellow EU flag may be viewed with approval when flying above a new economic development project in Croatia, but it might be trampled on by students in Greece protesting against economic austerity policies.

Culture as shared meaning is not only created through symbols, as discussed above, but also through practice. Practice—our day-to-day experiences and actions as humans—is what solidifies and makes real those constructions, or contradicts and inverts them (Wedeen, 2002; Pouliot, 2008). Europe can be represented as a borderless entity on the back of a euro note, but when a Dutch citizen at the Charles de Gaulle airport outside Paris joins with Italians and Poles in a line for 'EU Nationals' when entering France from the US it becomes part of that person's lived experience of what 'Europe' means, and eventually a taken-for-granted reality (McNamara, 2015a). In this view, instead of only considering what we think *about* (symbolic representation), we should also understand what we think *from* (Pouliot, 2008). Thinking 'from' a sense of European political identity is a much more powerful and ingrained dynamic than thinking 'about' political community and identity. In this view, crossing from France into Spain with no passport or experience of it as a border becomes a deeply engrained pattern of behaviour that changes the backdrop of discussion about European governance. Even if such practice does not make that governance unproblematic or uncontested, it changes the basic felt assumptions under which the discussion occurs.

III. The EU's Localized and Banal Authority

If I am right that the EU's legitimacy lies in part in the social processes that provide cultural or everyday naturalization of the shift in power toward Europe, then how has the EU accomplished this sleight of hand? Below I outline some of the symbols and practices that I argue build an implicit imagined European community, albeit one very different from what underpins the nation-state. A series of deliberate and surprisingly successful policy actions on the part of European officials have naturalized the EU, even as some attempts to create a sense of a unique European identity have been less successful. In addition, some EU policies targeted toward more material results have had important but unintentional cultural side effects, generating habits and representations that normalize the EU as a new emergent political form.

Navigating the Nation-State: Localizing Europe

The central difference between the EU's legitimation and the historic strategies of the nation-state is that the EU's cultural infrastructure must carefully navigate pre-existing loyalties and robust identities even as it creates a political community at the European level. The early nation-state symbolically asserted itself as supreme over long-standing political actors who sought to share its powers (Weber, 1976; Loveman, 2005). In contrast, the EU's efforts at labelling, mapping and narrating to naturalize Europe have sought instead to subtly recontextualize national symbols and practices so that they appear in a different light, taking on modified meanings that create space for a common – if not single – European identity. EU programmes and policies do not strip out national identities and associations, but rather reorient the EU's symbols and practices so that they are not necessarily viewed in opposition to long-standing national identities. For example, a EU programme officially anoints one or more European cities per year as the 'European Capital of Culture'. In so doing, the historical richness of a city such as Antwerp is projected outward into Europe as part of a shared cultural heritage, not one tied exclusively to Belgium (McNamara, 2015b). The goal is to resituate Member State affinities within a broader frame of Europe, allowing for both the universal (EU) and the local (Belgian), not replacing but complementing long-held identities. In this way, elements that are part of the daily national culture – that is, the symbols and practices that make meaning within the local political community – are reclassified from purely national, to national but simultaneously embedded within 'Europe'.

Multiple modes of symbolic representation and practice in the EU follow this logic. The primary language adopted by the EU for its legal actions uses the term 'EU directives' rather than calling the rules 'laws', a conscious decision to avoid direct conflict with sovereign nation-state but instead nesting the EU rules within the national rather than competing with it. While English is the overwhelmingly dominant language in practice across EU administrative offices, all of the 23 EU languages are celebrated as putatively equal in the official communications of the EU. While the euro's paper currency is standardized and uses only carefully abstracted, generic European images, each participating Member State issues its own euro coins with standard European imagery on one side and national symbols, such as the Brandenburg Gate or the Irish harp, on the other (McNamara, 2013). The national governments all use a standard EU passport design,

although the passports themselves are not actually issued by the EU. They use a common color (burgundy), with the EU name appearing in the national language (e.g. *Europese Unie*) at the top of the passport, but also with the national symbol and name, such as the Dutch royal coat of arms and *Koninkrijk Der Nederlanden*. So, we have both a deft co-optation and standardization of a core national symbol, the passport, while leaving control over passport issuance to the national authorities and setting the EU symbols side by side with the national ones.

A second way in which the EU has localized while categorizing its states together within the EU frame is by explicitly promoting 'universal', purportedly ahistorical, values that are widely shared among liberal democracies in the modern age. Making the EU centrally concerned with issues such as human rights, democracy and economic efficiency, in this view, therefore does not demarcate the EU as distinct or grounded in any particular national political culture (Soysal, 2002). Liberalism, with its emphasis on individual rights and its deep roots in western enlightenment thinking, is instead refashioned as universalism in this strategy. The motto of the EU, 'united in diversity', reflects this approach as it (paradoxically) stresses both commonality and a unified identity as well as diversity and pluralism. Some scholars have therefore argued that the EU should be understood not as a form of national identity but in terms of civic identity, in a departure from more traditional forms of ethnic or cultural identity (Sassatelli, 2002). The result is what some have termed a post-nationalist EU (Eriksen and Fossum, 2000). However, it is evident that the EU also appropriates quite traditional symbols and political technologies (passports, citizenship, paper money) and conventional expressions of state or national authority (Manners, 2011). The question is whether ideas such as 'united in diversity' can be made intrinsically meaningful despite their banality, or whether it is enough for the EU to function as an empty frame within which many multiple cultures flourish without eroding the whole.

These brief observations get to the point that Europe's cultural construction does not have the EU *replacing* pre-existing political authorities, as occurred with the historical rise of the nation-state. Tellingly, when the EU appropriates national symbols more directly, as with the failed effort at a European Constitution in 2005, it runs into trouble (Sternberg, 2013). EU policy-makers must instead find other ways to fit within the existing cultural context of the modern era of the nation-state, appropriating and reinventing national symbols, juxtaposing rather than confronting them. The EU and traditional national symbols co-exist, but policy-makers have attempted to frame them so as not to be in direct competition with each other, their effect additive and positive sum, not zero-sum. This creates a European space that does not depend on a unified, collective emotion or 'predisposed identity' nor one neatly bounded cultural community, but rather an 'assemblage of principles and their enactment,' such as democracy, progress, human rights and gender equality (Soysal, 2002, p. 281). The nation co-exists with the EU in this space, but it is resituated, reinterpreted, reimagined and no longer the sole legitimate authority.

Deracinating Europe

The EU's cultural infrastructure is notable for a second strategy, one that marks it as quite distinct from previous emergent political entities. That is the strategy of what I call deracination. The EU has been successful, in part, in legitimating itself because of the way in

which it has portrayed a deracinated version of governance while pursuing the political technologies of labelling, mapping and narrating. It is no accident that the British press focuses on things like rules from Brussels on the size and shape of bananas, while sober central bankers rule over the euro and faceless lawyers in Luxembourg shape community law. For decades, the people of Europe dozed over the thought of the labyrinthine governance structure that is the EU, rather than contesting it. Indeed, blandness and integration by stealth is a long-standing EU tradition. The European Court of Justice succeeded in shifting legal power to the EU level in part because of the ability of law to serve as a 'mask' for politics, reducing revolutions in sovereignty to dry legalese, impenetrable and seemingly innocuous (Burley and Mattli, 1993). The euro was framed by policy-makers as simply a technocratic solution to dampen exchange rate variability within the single market, rather than the historic transfer of sovereignty it was (Jabko, 2006). This banality has its pluses and its minuses, as we shall see, but it is clearly part of how the EU has constructed itself as a political authority and social fact of remarkable tenacity. It has enabled the creation of a type of imagined community of Europeans who have taken on ways of thinking and acting within a new European governance scheme that, at the very least, creates a permissive consensus for the historic consolidation of power in Brussels in the decades following the 1958 Treaty of Rome. This 'banality by design' helps the EU to navigate the pre-existing and robust national communities by making the transfer of power seem like an unremarkable act of technocratic delegation.

Unsurprisingly, given this deracinated set of symbols and practices, the number of people who self-identify as European in interviews and polls is relatively low (Díez Medrano, 2003; Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009; Fligstein, 2008; Favell, 2008). People do not have the nationalist fervour or pride in themselves as citizens of the EU that they have as, for example, Swedes or Greeks. Yet, if my reading of the symbols and practices of EU governance is correct, displacing national identities is not what we should expect from the EU, as the labels, mental maps and narratives embodied in the EU's cultural infrastructure stresses complementarity of identities, not a single European identity. In daily life, EU citizens are inundated with subtle cues that privilege layering and blended identities, including the creation of a taken-for-granted Europeaness to match national and regional identities. So, instead of looking for the fervour of national identity as we traditionally think of it, we might look instead for evidence of what has been called 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995), translated into this new, non-state governance form – what I call 'banal authority.'

A key insight of this approach is that nationalism does not only arise in crisis and conflict, but that nations are reproduced on a daily basis, through banal and mundane ways, and it is those habits of mind and practice that underpin national identity (Billig, 1995). Those activities and representations that seem the most clichéd (flags and anthems, for example) matter, for they reproduce national identity in ways that prime populations for supporting their states in more emotional or difficult times, such as war. Established nations continually 'flag' or remind their populations of nationhood in a myriad of seemingly innocuous ways: 'this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building' (Billig, 1995, p. 8). However, occasionally the symbolism becomes a subject of contestation, as when the former Czech president Václav Klaus

refused to fly the EU flag over the castle in Prague; his replacement, the more pro-EU Miloš Zeman, made the return of the blue and yellow flag one of his first official acts as president. The EU Member State embassies in Washington, DC fly the EU flag next to their national flags, an act unremarked upon even as it signals something remarkable about the sharing of political authority.

This concept of banal nationalism well captures the deracinated, ‘under-the-radar’ taken-for-granted rhetoric and practices that create Europe as a legitimate actor but reverberates back on individual identity in ways not captured in the polls (Cram, 2001, 2006). For example, the uncontroversial acceptance of a public EU entity, the Eurostat Agency, commissioning Eurobarometer polls that ask people whether they ‘feel European’ can be argued to have created a chain of representations and practices that creates and reinforces the concept of the EU as a legitimate actor and European as a legitimate category of identity. The work of seemingly mundane, technical bureaucrats and telephone polling agents does not excite the mind in the way that a national day of independence with fireworks and fervent anthem-singing might, but it may have important effects in creating the foundation for EU governance, by legitimating a range of statistical and information-gathering activities. Ironically, from this perspective, Eurobarometer is constructing European identity even as it is reporting its nonexistence. So, it is not the degree of felt or activated ‘Europeanness’ – although that is important in other contexts – that matters for this argument, but rather the normalization of the EU as a legitimate governor. We are clearly not in a situation where the EU has replaced national identity but the EU’s cultural impact is real in the very particular type of ‘banal’ imagined community. Participation in this community involves both active dynamics (‘imagine this!’) and passive participation (unthinking repetition and habits of practice that reproduce Europeanness). Viewed this way, we might see the puzzle as not that there is so little European identity but rather that there is so much implicit, taken-for-granted Europeanness at work. It is both a strength and a weakness of the EU that it forges its imagined community with a particularly banal sense of nationalism – a rather bloodless, often highly technocratic, and usually quite quotidian sense of political authority – rather than impassioned, blood-racing heroism.

Conclusion: The Limits of the EU’s Cultural Infrastructure for Governance?

What does Europe’s particular type of banal authority mean for the future of the EU and its policies going forward from the eurozone crisis and beyond? Will it provide enough of a social foundation for dealing with the challenges ahead – be they economic malaise, insufficient democratic representation, xenophobia or societal exclusion? The legitimation that arises from the symbols and practices of the EU’s imagined community has been constructed to support the rather stealthy consolidation of European political development, but is not necessarily well equipped to deal with the open political contestation inevitable in the EU as it evolves as an ever more significant source of governance. Deracinated and localized understandings of Europe, and citizens’ places within it, are a weak foundation for the type of solidarity and sacrifices demanded in the face of Europe’s economic, social and geopolitical challenges.

Those groups that are suffering disproportionately from the eurozone crisis are confronting the meaning of the EU in new ways. Its ‘under-the-radar’, taken-for-granted status has been swept aside by a new politicization of Europe – what the EU means, who

it is for, and how it should be governed. The effects of the sovereign debt crisis that started with Greece in late 2009 continue to plague much of Southern Europe, while Northern EU states, most notably Germany, have seen their economic prospects only get rosier. The differing prescriptions for what to do to solve the crisis – with Germany in the person of chancellor Angela Merkel successfully demanding austerity and the cutting of public budgets and services – have made what was a sore point into a painful fault line across the EU states and their publics.

A key political challenge for the EU lies in the fact that the euro crisis has had such uneven effects across Europe's political community, with seemingly intractable youth unemployment soaring in the Mediterranean states while robust economic opportunities open up for new generations of Germans and other northern Europeans (Matthijs, 2014). Does the EU have the overall social solidarity and sense of political community to support the pooling and transfer of resources from the haves to the have-nots that the crisis seems to require (Copsey, 2015; McNamara, 2015c)?

The public debate has suggested there is little sense of collective belonging, even in circumstances where the richer states arguably gain the most from the continuation of the eurozone and the EU's larger economic integration. But despite this, the EU states together have pledged in the neighborhood of €1 trillion to keep the eurozone afloat and the Member States financially stable. European summits too numerous to count have been held, and a new layer of institutions, most prominently the European stability mechanism for back-up funding in times of crisis along with a European banking union, are being built at the EU level, further moving political authority up to the centre of the EU polity (Matthijs and Blyth, 2015; Howarth and Quaglia, 2014).⁶ These moves have been grudgingly acquiesced to by the European public, if not embraced or even fully understood. I argue that they could not have been possible without the decades of slow accumulation of everyday symbols and practices that created a permissive consensus for such political developments. Indeed, the most effective and active actor in the eurozone crisis has been the ECB (European central bank), a relatively opaque and political independent body that has more in common with the EU legacy of deracinated, technocratic governance than with any new emergent sense of impassioned European political identity and solidarity. Yet as austerity policies continue to be the price paid by the laggard states for their debt issues, the close identification of those policies with 'Europe' is an association that is piercing the banal authority the EU has been built on and creating new challenges for legitimation, as evidenced by the Blockupy Frankfurt protests.

A second major area of challenge for the EU, however, goes far beyond any particular economic crisis. How can the EU improve overall democratic representation and citizens' participation in European-level politics, and what role do the symbols and practices of Europe play in creating a democratic culture to support it? My argument suggests that one way forward is to enhance democracy in the EU through less banality and more political contestation – but contestation of a healthy and inclusive kind. Because of the veneer of banality that the EU's symbols and practices create, the salience of EU issues for everyday citizens is low, and it is difficult for the 'mobilization of bias' to occur and drive debate and effective democratic participation (Schattschneider, 1960). Although it seems counter-intuitive, I argue that the EU needs more overt contestation and direct discussion

⁶ See also Gren *et al.*'s contribution to this volume.

of its policies and debate over its leaders, a point made by other scholars from several different perspectives (Hix, 2008; Schmidt, 2006, 2009; Mair, 2013). The EU has profoundly shifted governance to the European level, even in those areas that formally were considered core state powers (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2014). Conflict and contestation are the growing pains of any new polity, but they need to be directed into effective, legitimate and appropriate channels of representation and partisanship (Follesdal and Hix, 2006). What my account highlights is that the EU's cultural toolkit (Swindler, 1986) for this sort of contestation has been intentionally very limited.

There are some indications that we are moving in the direction of more open contestation, albeit with some important caveats. The 2014 European Parliament elections were much more publicly contested than any before in EU history, with wide coverage in national newspapers and various trans-European interest groups—from students to environmental activists to high-priced consultants—setting up websites and generating information relevant to their EU-wide constituencies.⁷ Some small steps were made toward a true electoral contest for the European Commission president to replace Barroso as the second president since the Lisbon Treaty. A heavily promoted television debate, social networking and advertisements on various media all increased awareness of the European-level elections in ways not seen in previous years. But it was not to be the end of the EU's traditions of banality or deracination by any means. The voting result for the European Commission president was not legally binding, but only to be taken under advisement.⁸ The ultimate choice of Jean-Claude Juncker, a Luxembourg prime minister and confirmed technocrat, to head the European Commission did not move the EU very far beyond its business as usual, even in a time of extraordinary tension over the euro crisis and the EU's future.

In the national settings, the shift in power to the EU has become more openly debated than ever before, as national electorates begin to move beyond their permissive consensus to something that is much messier but, in the long run, will produce a more robust version of democracy for Europe. Even David Cameron's promise to hold a referendum on British membership in the EU and the fervent denunciations of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) may, in the long run, prove an opening for a more transparent and pluralistic discussion of the pros and cons of EU governance. Radical anti-EU parties, such as the Danish People's Party, Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement in Italy or the Golden Dawn in Greece, may not be exemplars of deliberative democracy, but the concerns they embody need a place in debates about the EU.

The argument I am making suggests that any institutional fixes to improve EU democracy will need to work hand-in-hand with changes in the cultural infrastructure for European governance. The meaning currently infused into the symbols and practices of life in Europe, as both directly and indirectly shaped by EU policies, is one that does not easily support overt democratic contestation over accrual of power to the EU. A shift will have to occur at every level of cultural experience in order to make this happen. In settled times, as Swindler points out, culture can directly influence political action by providing a tool kit or repertoire of social resources to construct strategies of action (Swindler, 1986). The symbols and practices of banal authority have done so remarkably well in the EU, creating a foundation for an extraordinary expansion of governance since World War II. Now, the unsettled

⁷ On the 2014 European Parliament elections, see Hobolt's contribution to this volume.

⁸ See Dinan's contribution to this volume.

times ahead will provide different opportunities for culture to shape outcomes. New cultural repertoires will need to arise to shape the meaning attached to the EU and increase the role of citizens and active political participation. Most importantly, the cultural strategies of deracination that support the EU need to be replaced with a more honest and open assessment of partisanship, and the winners and losers from various policies. Localization, or the careful symbolic balancing of local and state-level attachments and powers, will continue to be necessary. Thinking about the EU as a 'polity-in-the-making' (Copsey, 2015), or a 'coming together federalism' (Kelemen, 2014; Stepan, 1999) as a voluntary grouping of previously independent states, offers a template for the foundation of political culture that can live with the tension in levels of political authority implied by the EU.

My emphasis on the need for increased politicization and a more impassioned, less technocratic sense of European identity might make some readers very nervous. After all, nationalism was the cause of much injustice and bloodshed over the past century. Should we be worried about a new, more strident version of political identity being constructed at the European level? Efforts to create a European identity could support policies of social exclusion, military aggression and xenophobia. In the same way that Ernst Gellner (1983) viewed nationalism as a malign force historically, so writers such as Delanty (1995) and Shore (2000) see the EU's policies and dynamics as deeply pernicious. Delanty sees the 'European idea' as a 'totalising re-appropriation of forces that lie deep in European history' (Delanty, 1995, p. viii). He writes about the 'myth of Europe as a unifying and universalising project', linking it to the 'enforced and violent homogenisation' that occurred historically (Delanty, 1995, p. vii).

Although these are real and important concerns, my reading of the reality of the EU does not support these fears. The EU has some powerful symbolic and practical tools at its disposal; however, the process of authority construction is incomplete, lumpy and highly attenuated, varying across different EU national settings and social and economic groups, and can often be contradictory in its effects. There have been clear examples of xenophobic Europe, with anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic activities on the rise, but evidence also of an alternative type of political space, more peacefully overlapping and co-existing with national identity (Soysal, 2002). The idea of Europe as post-national, liberal enlightenment project is an underlying narrative, captured in the flashmobs playing the EU's informal anthem 'Ode to Joy' in Ukraine.⁹ The EU is not a perfect liberal democracy and never will be. But the accomplishments of the EU over the postwar era indicate that it has been, on balance, a force for the common good that need not necessarily repeat the excesses of nationalism. The EU is an innovative political entity whose future is unknown, but the ways in which everyday symbols and practices have legitimated its political authority so far provide some clues as to where it has been, and where it might go.

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⁹ *Express Tribune*, 31 March 2014.

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