



When Culture becomes Politics

*European Identity
in Perspective*

THOMAS PEDERSEN

WHEN CULTURE BECOMES POLITICS

Dedicated to the memory of my mother

WHEN CULTURE
BECOMES POLITICS

European Identity in Perspective

By Thomas Pedersen

© The author and Aarhus University Press 2008

Front cover: Carlsbridge, Heidelberg, Germany

Photographer: Dietmar Okon/GettyImages

Back cover: Wassily Kandinsky, French, b. Russia; 1866-1944, Painting with Green Center, 1913, Oil on canvas, 43¼ x 47½ in. (108.9 x 118.4 cm), Arthur Jerome Eddy Memorial Collection, 1931.510, The Art Institute of Chicago.

Photograph: © The Art Institute of Chicago.

Cover design: Jørgen Sparre

Printed by Narayana Press, Denmark

ISBN: 978 87 7934 683 3

Aarhus University Press

Langelandsgade 177

DK-8200 Aarhus N

Denmark

www.unipress.dk

Gazelle Book Services Ltd.

White Cross Mills,

Hightown

Lancaster,

LA1 4XS

www.gazellebooks.co

The David Brown Book Company (DBBC)

P.O. Box 511

Oakville CT 06779

USA

www.oxbowbooks.com

LIST OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	7
1. INTRODUCTION	9
2. INTEGRISM: CULTURE IS CHOICE	29
3. DO EUROPEANS REGARD THEMSELVES AS EUROPEAN?	57
4. CULTURE, IDENTITY AND NATION	67
5. THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE	83
6. SOURCES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY	95
7. SOURCES OF TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY	105
8. A BRIEF, COMPARATIVE REFLECTION	117
9. EUROPE AS A CULTURAL COMMUNITY	123
10. WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT EUROPE	141
11. “OLD” EUROPE AND “NEW” EUROPE	165
12. ORIENTALIZATION? THE CHALLENGE FROM CHINA, JAPAN AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD	183
13. EUROPE’S INTERNATIONAL IDENTITY	199
14. PROTECTING EUROPE’S UNIQUENESS	217
15. THE LIMITS OF SYMBOLIC IDENTITY	227
16. VALUE IDENTITY: VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF DEMOCRACY	237

17. CITIZENSHIP AND CONSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY	251
18. PERFORMANCE IDENTITY: EUROPE AS A WORKING COMMUNITY?	263
19. COSMOPOLITANISM AND INTER-CIVILIZATIONAL DIALOGUE	273
20. CONCLUSIONS	287
BIBLIOGRAPHY	303

PREFACE

The first seeds of inspiration for this book were in a sense sown in 1980 on the Altiplano of Bolivia. I was spending some time in Latin America as a kind of existential journey. One day I reached for a book to read and picked up a slim, second-hand volume I had bought in a marketplace along the way to Bolivia. It was a book on personalism by Emmanuel Mounier. This book with its deep, philosophical interest and quite original conception of individuality spurred me on in later years pushing me in the direction of theoretical debates and inter-disciplinary research. My early academic career went in a different direction though, but I subsequently returned to the issues raised by Mounier. My interest in philosophy was recently reawakened in connection with my research on European identities and European culture. I was puzzled by the way culture tended to be defined – unquestioningly – in collectivistic and holistic terms. I had to ask myself the question: Is not culture increasingly a matter of personal – in part philosophical – choice and individual expression? If so, this also pointed towards a new personalized understanding of nationality.

The book was written in the most inspiring of settings: Most of it was written in Estonia, the crossroads between East and West and a window on the new Russia. It immediately raised the question of whether Russia belongs to Europe. Having embarked upon the analysis of European identity, I soon discovered that the problems looked different from the perspective of the new Europe than from Copenhagen or Bruxelles. To be able to live and work in the Baltics for an extended period has been a great opportunity for me, not only in personal but also in professional terms. Politically and economically Western, Estonia's culture represents one of the rare plants in the European garden. The Estonian language forms part of the Finnish-Ugrian language group, and apart from Finnish and Hungarian, it has no linguistic family in Europe. For a West European it is a very difficult language to learn. It is however also a very charming language, illustrating the richness of European diversity. And yet, even Estonian carries the luggage of the European cultural legacy: "Naturalism" is "naturalism" – in Estonian as well as in English.

Let me take this opportunity to thank my colleagues at Tartu University and Audentes International University in Tallinn, who provided me with

excellent working conditions and also helpful comments, and who showed admirable patience. I am also grateful for being granted leave from my position as an associate professor at the Department of Political Science at the University of Aarhus, Denmark. Although in the main – and in keeping with its tenets – this book is very much an individual product, testifying to the continuing existence of freedom of expression within our embattled universities, I have benefited from useful discussions with, among others, associate professor Per Mouritzen, University of Aarhus, Dr Maurice Fraser, the London School of Economics, and Dr James Hughes, also from the London School of Economics. I moreover received helpful written comments from referees. The responsibility for the content of the book and its conclusions remains, however, entirely my own. Let me also say a word of thanks to the various student assistants and secretaries, and not least to my publishers at Aarhus University Press, who along the way provided indispensable help, and whose professionalism and patience in the face of academic delay often impressed me. Finally, thanks to my two children, Ida and Simon Emil, who provided unflinching support and encouragement along the sometimes bumpy road towards publication of this work.

*Thomas Pedersen,
Tallinn,
September 2008*

1. INTRODUCTION

This book is essentially about the element of personal choice in cultural affiliation with Europe. Europeanness is not about institutions. It is essentially about ideas. This is in keeping with the approach adopted by contemporary, American analysts such as Robert Kagan and Jeremy Rifkin. It is interesting to note that both see the EU as representing a coherent societal model – a kind of creed – and one that is at variance with the American. The two books reflect the tendency for Americans to focus on the “big picture”, but also their ability to avoid getting lost in the quagmire of details. There may be a tendency for American analysts to describe Europe in overly ethnocentric terms seeing a common “European creed”, because they are used to thinking in terms of an American creed. But this does not change the fact that the approach of American scholars and commentators is often refreshing and a source of inspiration for European scholars mired in the insider-language of the EU.

Robert Kagan starts out with the claim that “it is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world”.¹ It is a dramatic statement, and one that invites further scrutiny. Rifkin is more interested in the relative competitiveness of different powers in terms of guiding ideas and concludesmy personal belief is that Europe is best positioned between the extreme individuation of America and the extreme collectivism of Asia”.²

Culture and identity used to be the preserve of a small elite, whose rituals, preaching and teaching the masses were simply expected to absorb. In the age of globalization this is no longer a fitting description. Increasingly, at least in the Western world, culture and identity are linked to democracy, to the point where fundamental questions about the concepts of political identity and culture have to be asked. This book explores the sources of national identity and the possible sources of a common European identity and examining the degree to which such a common identity exists in Europe

1 Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power, America and Europe in the new World Order*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 2003, p. 3. See also Jeremy Rifkin, *The European Dream*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2005.

2 Rifkin, op.cit. p. 365.

today, it tries to assess the support it enjoys. In this connection I undertake a comparison with other civilizations and with selected national polities. But my ambition is wider: I use the problem of a European identity as a launching pad for asking some more fundamental questions about the nature and sources of human identity, and about the nature of Political Man.³

I am of course not alone in taking an interest in problems relating to culture, identity and religion. In fact, at least within the field of International Relations one has in recent years witnessed a cultural-religious turn reflected in a growing body of research and theoretical debate. A good example is Scott M. Thomas's recent volume, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, in which the author shows how culture and religion influences international relations.⁴ The book itself, though, is mainly about the role of religion. Culture is mentioned time and again but is not analyzed as a separate issue. As I find this a major short-coming, my book can be read as an attempt to fill this gap.

European identity is one of the most complex phenomena within European studies and social science. It involves i.a. clarifying some difficult conceptual questions and finding solutions to fundamental problems of measurement. I would not go as far as embracing the view of Adrian Fawell that ... "the language of 'identities' is above all else the province of politicians and pundits: the folks who invoke identities precisely to build collective power, and to blur and mystify the underlying reasons why individuals engage in collective, social cooperation, interpersonal relations, or personal identification".⁵ But he has a point. The discourse about identity can be used as legitimating ideology and by all sorts of actors. These problems come on top of inherent difficulties involved in studying the EU, notably the need to draw upon several different disciplines.

European identity is, however, also one of the most topical and arguably most important issues, witness the huge debate on the subject. Surely, not all of this attention can be completely misplaced. The fact that a topic attracts attention does not necessarily mean that it is important, but when serious

3 The question about the effects of identity and culture is not addressed in this book. For a recent work on this important and complex problem see Jan-Erik Lane and Svante Ersson, *Culture and Politics. A comparative approach*. Ashgate 2005.

4 Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*. Palgrave: Macmillan, 2005.

5 Adrian Fawell, "Europe's identity problem". *West European Politics*. Vol. 28, no. 5. November 2005, p. 1113.

scholarship addresses an issue, this is certainly one reason to pay attention to it.

How important is it for Europeans to share a common identity? This is hotly disputed. Some argue that a close and well-functioning European collaboration is possible without a common identity, however defined. In fact, the same people tend to argue that European collaboration should not concern itself with such normative issues, but ought instead to concentrate on practical collaboration. Others – typically those analysts who regard the EU as a polity with federal features – argue that a common European identity is a prerequisite for a functioning European democracy. What cannot be disputed is the fact that the topic is being intensively discussed not least in the new member states, for whom the return to the European family of cultures has been a costly affair in terms of legislative adaptation etc. Nor can it be disputed that the study of political and social identity touches upon some fundamental and fascinating problems relating to the nature of Political Man, of society and indeed of Mankind.

Identity like culture belongs to the words that everybody uses, but very few understand. In Samuel Huntington's apt formulation ... "it is as indispensable as it is unclear".⁶ Having a common identity is not about being identical. A person with a strong identity is first of all a unique person. The same applies to nations and civilizations. Defining identity involves asking at least two sets of related questions, both of which exceedingly complex: First of all, to what extent identity relates to underlying sociological factors; and secondly, how identity relates to power. None of these questions can be examined in any great depth here, but by way of illustration one may, for instance, ask how a factor such as urbanization and more broadly globalization with its attendant stress relates to identity formation. It may be surmised that nations with a strong and stable common identity are nations with a high degree of stability on underlying sociological factors. But this goes against the widely held view that the formation of states was related to factors like major wars against "external others". The power-identity nexus is equally complex and it will be touched upon in several chapters. As a preliminary definition we may say that identity is about belonging, about distinctiveness and about demarcation. Which of the three aspects is the most important is difficult to establish, but all of these dimensions are surely important (see chapter 4).

6 Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the re-making of world order*. Touchstone Books. 1998, p. 21.

The process of central and eastern enlargement – as well as the specific problem of Turkish accession to the EU – has in recent years prompted a heated political debate about European identity and culture, inspiring scholars to examine the nature of European identity. Central and Eastern Europeans have historically displayed a keen interest in issues of identity and culture as a part of their own fight for the preservation of a threatened, national identity. Another stimulus for this interest has been the “nation-building” and more recently the “legitimacy-building” efforts of the European Commission. Finally, the Euro-American disagreement on the invasion of Iraq has prompted a debate about European identity in the sense of common (foreign policy) values within Europe.

Even though many will object to my use of the word “nation-building” in the EU-context, and identity-building is indeed a more precise term, not only are the kind of measures used by the European Commission in its attempts to strengthen its popular legitimacy and add an emotional dimension to the European endeavour well-known from the history of nation states, but some academic scholars have also explicitly addressed the problem of European identity in these terms. By way of illustration let me draw attention to a learned article by Jos de Beus, which carries the title “Quasi-national European identity and European democracy”.⁷ The article contains an attempt to define nationality in broad heuristic terms, which in all its legal clarity seems helpful to the following analysis as a way of demonstrating the relevance of parts of the literature on nation-building and nations.

A nation can be defined as an extensive set of non-relatives who think and feel that they have important things in common and that they differ so much from other large groups that they constitute a distinctive and self-contained society. Nationals share a certain way of life and attach meaning to it to the point where it turns into a self-enforcing culture.⁸

I do not regard the EU as anything approaching a fully-fledged nation-state, but I do think that some EU-actors are using strategies inspired by nation-building and to the extent that they do, scholars have to acquaint themselves with the nation-building literature.

7 Jos de Beus, “Quasi-national European identity and European democracy”. *Law and Philosophy*, Vol. 20. 2001.

8 Ibid. p. 292.

In recent decades, the EU has through a series of history-making changes in the treaties developed formal governance structures to the point where, today, the EU not only constitutes a political system but also a regional polity, which some scholars argue can be characterized as a special kind of decentralized federation. It is true that the EU is a very atypical state-structure in that regulation is much more developed than for example re-distribution, and that the EU lacks a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Yet, it is difficult to dispute the fact that EU decisions are considered “authoritative” within the EU area. Having said that, it must be added that states – and major states in particular – continue to play a particularly prominent role in the European policy process. Indeed, the informal politics are particularly important in Europe, creating a layer of strong coalition politics and informal leadership mechanisms beneath the formal structures.⁹ Intergovernmentalist scholars such as A. Moravcsik have a point when they argue that transnational preference formation is very weak in the EU.¹⁰

Obviously, the strengthening of the supranational decision-making structures draws attention to the question of legitimation, which is reflected in the considerable body of literature published in recent years on the problem of democracy within the EU. Now, the question is if, apart from legitimation, a supranational decision-making system also requires some kind of common culture or identity, in any case some kind of emotional glue?

The challenges posed by rapid polity-building at the supranational level are fundamental. It can be argued following Joseph Weiler that the precondition for acceptance of supranational majority voting on a large scale is the existence of a feeling of mutual belonging within the boundaries of the polity. Without such a feeling a legitimacy crisis may soon emerge. Some would say that such a crisis is already visible in the EU, witness the negative outcome of the referendums on the first version of the new EU treaty in several EU member states. De Beus points out that “European identity sparks attachment of some existential meaning to European politics as a shared practice as well as participation in the cooperative conflict of European integration for better or worse”. And further ... “the rise of European identity stimulates the rise of this constitutive willingness”, and, “the rise of European identity contributes to the rise of commitment to public reason beyond the sphere

9 See i.a. Thomas Pedersen, *Germany, France and the integration of Europe*. London: Pinter, 1998; and Keith Middlemas, *Orchestrating Europe: The Informal Politics of the European Union*. London: Fontana, 1995.

10 Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe*. Cornell University Press, 1998.

of the nation state”.¹¹ In other words, if a stronger European identity were to emerge, it could be expected to give European democracy a new resilience.

The Oxford scholar Larry Siedentop’s warning against a hasty federalization of the EU seems pertinent.¹² At least it needs to be examined to what extent the discrepancy between the developed “state-dimension” and the undeveloped “nation-dimension” within the EU constitutes a fundamental problem. To the extent that it does, the next question becomes: what does it take to make European decisions legitimate at a deeper level, and moreover: How does a common political identity come about? What are the sources of common identity? Finally, how far has the EU come on its way to a common identity, and what is the more precise nature of that specific identity compared to that of other polities?

Anthony Smith, a prominent theorist of nationality and nationalism, is quite pessimistic about the EU’s possibility of ever attaining something similar to a national identity

There is no European analogue to Bastille or Armistice Day
no European ceremony for the fallen in battle, no European
shrine of kings or saints. When it comes to the ritual and
ceremony of collective identification there is no European equiv-
alent of national or religious community ...¹³

Other authors are more sanguine about the prospects. Jürgen Habermas in a response to sceptics such as Smith and Siedentop argues that

Es fragt sich, ob dieser Wechsel des Politischen
Klimas nur einen gesunden Realismus..ausdrückt
Oder eher einen kontraproduktiven Kleinmut, wenn
nicht gar schlichten Defätismus¹⁴

Habermas’ optimism derives from his very different understanding of the sources of identity.

11 Ibid.

12 Larry Siedentop, *Democracy in Europe*. Columbia University Press, 2001.

13 Anthony Smith, “National identity and the idea of European unity”. *International affairs*; Vol. 68/1. 1992, p. 73.

14 J. Habermas, *A Constitution for Europe*. New Left Review. 2001.