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# Focus: Complexities of 'Europe'

## Introduction

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During the last four decades, especially since the Declaration of European Identity by the European Community, the question(s) about Europe's cultural and political identity have gained a revived impetus. Until the early 1990s, a line of argumentation that has been coined as the 'orthodox story' was predominant in the relevant analyses. This approach assumes that European integration/unification is connected to the construction of supranational institutions, which gradually superseded nation-states. This process, represented as the best guarantee of prosperity, is portrayed as an irreversible trend, despite shorter or longer periods of 'stagnation'. This body of scholarship has usually adopted a bifurcated conceptualisation of 'Europe', which links a purported common heritage to the future of a 'united Europe'. Stuart Woolf argues convincingly that in doing so, the exponents of the 'orthodox' approach seem to replicate the 'original sin' of nationalist histories: 'namely, that the identity of the nation – in this instance of Europe as a commonality of peoples – can be traced historically, through the centuries, as an ideal continuity, even if the peoples were not always aware of this'.[1] The most systematic and well-known version of this 'orthodox' interpretation was provided by the historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, which has been translated into several European languages.[2]

Such optimism, initially unchallenged, was augmented by the move from the EEC to the EU, the introduction of a common currency and the lifting of national borders. These factors provided a promising path away from the image of Europe as 'a dark continent', a phrase coined by historian Mark Mazower in his analysis of twentieth-century European

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history.[3] However, a number of new challenges, and the intensification of regional and global socioeconomic and political changes, brought the – previously dominant – celebratory trends in political science and macroeconomic approaches to Europe, face to face with pressing problems, which their conceptual tools were not sufficient to tackle. Dislocations like the war in Yugoslavia and the revival of ethnic violence, followed by the emergence of conflicts where differences between cultures and religions played a central role, as well as the recent economic crisis, forced intellectuals to rethink and reconsider what had been mistakenly thought of, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, as an 'end of history'. In the mid-1990s, the sociologist Gerard Delanty noted in his seminal book published in 1995 *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality*, that 'little thought [was] actually given to the meaning of the term Europe and its relationship to the problems in contemporary political identity'.[4] By contrast, the last decade saw a significant proliferation of intellectual work on critical approaches in relation to 'Europe' from an array of disciplinary gazes in terms of publications, workshops, conferences, debates and research projects; these attempted to incorporate the socio-cultural, historical and political complexities into their perspectives in order to respond descriptively and critically to the new challenges.

Through this rich intellectual production, new or re-emerging tensions inherent in the historically and politically loaded term 'Europe' have been put under scrutiny. One such tension echoes the problematic remnants of the 'orthodox story' and the very trajectory of 'European integration/unification', raising questions of whether the latter would unfold in a linear fashion, or could cease to advance due to the activity of Eurosceptic politicians. The historians Mark Gilbert and Timothy Garton Ash have voiced loud criticism of the linear approach, which shares the pitfalls of the Whig interpretation of history once lambasted by Herbert Butterfield.[5–7] In fact, Gilbert puts forth the compelling argument that Eurosceptics, such as Charles de Gaulle and Margaret Thatcher, have played an important role in shaping the EU *as it is today*. For instance, the European Council, which has been responsible for the general political direction of the EEC and the EU, has been a quintessential Gaullist concept, coterminous with the vision of *Europe des patries*: far from constituting a supranational institution, it consists of the heads of state or government of the member states. In addition, doubts have grown over whether the process of European integration and unification can be understood merely as a positive process, leading unproblematically to 'prosperity', 'freedom' and 'democracy'.[8]

Moreover, similar debates focused on tensions around the relation between the past and the present of 'Europe'. Such tensions have been taken up by scholars who have employed various approaches: for instance, the reconsideration of Europe's imperialist past and its present multifaceted function in the world from the perspective of a postcolonial critique,[9] the genealogical approaches focusing on the shifts and the modification of what 'Europe' has meant politically and culturally,[10] or critical reflections upon how European societies imagine and construct themselves through material culture and the appeal to a shared heritage. The series of seminars and workshops held at the Department of History and Civilisation of the European University Institute co-organised by the historian Bo Stråth and others have been especially illuminating.[11] Moreover, recent interdisciplinary publications in the humanities, such as the book edited by the historian and political scientist Anthony Pagden and

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entitled *The Idea of Europe. From Antiquity to the European Union*, have also made a signal contribution in the direction of illustrating the historical and situated constitution of 'Europeanness'.[12]

Other intellectual exchanges have focused on the relation between the regional, the national and the supra-national identities. While, on the one hand, the exploration of the multiplicity of attachments in a merging Europe has become the creative focus for the study of culture,[13] the identity issue has also been approached through the prism of a shift from the nation state to supranational institutions such as the EU as the locus of identity. There has been a creative debate between those who envisage a European identity as investing in the positivity of 'being-together' combined with a self-reflective, post-western critique of Europe as seen in Gerard Delanty's work,[14–16] and other debates that find a European identity as an hyper- or umbrella identity and thus compatible with national attachments.[17] A number of historians, such as Timothy Garton Ash and Alan Milward, have followed the latter direction. For instance, as Garton Ash argues in his book *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent*, 'German enthusiasm for European integration' '[was] nourished by the desire and need to secure wider European and American support for the vital German national interest of improving relations with the communist East, and, eventually, for the reunification of Germany'.[18,19] However, moving in another direction, Wolfram Kaiser has recently proposed that the understanding of 'European unification' should not be approached as indelibly linked with the actions of nation-states. By contrast, he stressed the importance of transnational networks – Christian Democratic Parties in particular – in shaping this process and diffusing their ideological linkages into the EEC structures.[20]

'Europe' as a primary locus of production of self-other relations both at their material and discursive/symbolical aspect has been another politically and theoretically significant tension which informs contemporary debates. Addressing these tensions, current literature on the making of Europe has been focusing on borders, external and internal, real and symbolic. The urgent questions over their flexibility/rigidity or expansibility/boundedness have become particularly salient in light of the rhetoric surrounding 'fortress Europe' and Turkey's candidacy for the EU. Controversies about who has access to legal or substantial citizenship, within a Europe of proliferating diversity, or the viability of what was seen in the 1990s as a 'New Europe' defined by its a multi-cultural space, have especially informed this debate on internal frontiers.[21] As the work of researchers at the Nijmegen Centre for Border Research[22] has demonstrated, borders can at the same time operate internally and externally, symbolically and pragmatically; as a result, they can delimit aspirations for a different kind of Europe, especially the historically specific articulation of Europe as synonymous with the EU. According to this critique, the 'abduction' of Europe, and the creation of new institutional logics to regulate economic standards and levels of security, has given birth to a set of border policies that produce regimes of extreme exclusion.[23,24] This tension, which has resonance with the debates between a 'Europe of the people' and the 'Europe of elites', has also been critically examined in contemporary anthropology of elites in the work of Cris Shore, who explores both the top-down procedures of identity construction[25] as well as the performance of a specific realm of 'Europeanness' at the level of administrative cadres.[26] Similar tensions have informed a set of heated debates about the construction of

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centres and peripheries within Europe, but also of Europe in its relation with the world. In particular, the production of 'margins' and the political challenges against such distinctions voiced by major political philosophers such as Etienne Balibar[27,28] and Jacques Derrida,[29,30] have been seminal. The identification of Europe through a Christian predominate affiliation has been one of the critical points raised by Etienne Balibar warning against the creation of Europe's apartheid that comes to constitute not 'a new (great) power' but a 'new type of power' (Ref. 28, p. 255). For Balibar, 'no European "identity" can be *opposed* to others in the world because there exist no absolute *border lines* between the historical and cultural territory of Europe and the surrounding spaces. There exist no absolute border lines *because Europe as such is a "border line"* […]' (Ref. 28, p. 219 emphasis in the original).

On the other hand, the significance of the self-other question in the making up of 'Europe' has been pointed out by several critical scholars through a focus on issues of identification, where affective and psychological foundations of practices are foregrounded. For instance, the political scientist Yiannis Stavrakakis has stressed the predicaments and impossibilities of identification procedures lacking engagement with affective elements of belonging, and exposed the weakness of a top-down identity project.[31] Similarly, the historian Luisa Passerini has probed the interrelation of ideas of 'European unity' in the Interwar period with discourses on love, emphasising the emotional charge carried by European identities.[32]

## Reflecting on complexities

In an attempt to locate points of convergence between all these intensified intellectual debates stimulated by the multiple cross-cutting tensions with reference to 'Europe', the graduate research group 'European Identities and Encounters' ran a two-year multidisciplinary seminar under the auspices of the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Science and the Humanities (CRASSH)[33] in Cambridge, UK. The seminar led to an international graduate conference entitled 'Complexities of Europe: Between Knowledge, Power, Citizenship and Identity', which was held on Friday, 20 November to Saturday, 21 November 2009.[34]

The aim of the conference was to explore the implications of the circulation of the name 'Europe' in contemporary sociopolitical contexts, beyond the political narratives of accession and integration. Standing critical to approaches to 'Europe' that often suggest a teleological narrative, portraying the establishment of the European Union as the consummation of every cultural and political project of 'Europeanness', this conference aimed at disclosing multiplicity, stimulating questions and highlighting the paradoxes of discourses circulating around 'Europe'. This involved highlighting the construction of a 'European' imagination through history and re-interpretations of cultural heritage, disclosing alternative visions and projects for a 'different' Europe, exploring the political challenges of memory between the national and the European, questioning the policies of borders and immigration and explaining the different effects of the diffusion of European politics between European centres and peripheries. It also aimed at the consideration of wider space and geographies. Thus, the conference provided a rich intellectual ground in order to think and problematise 'Europe'.

The second purpose of the conference was to promote an interdisciplinary dialogue. This has been one of the main aims of the 'European Identities and Encounters' graduate

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research group, from its very first meetings in 2008, which took place under the hospitable umbrella of CRASSH. The impulse for this conference was the outcome of a highly creative year of seminars, lectures and reading sessions organised by the group, where interdisciplinarity was actively promoted. In these terms we believe that it has been more than fortunate that the project has benefited from the participation of young, advanced and distinguished scholars from the entire range of the social sciences and humanities, including political science, history, social/cultural anthropology, archaeology, media studies, management, art history, linguistics, discourse theory, literature, sociology and geography. Keynote lectures addressed by Professor Gerard Delanty and Dr Henk van Houtum, set high standards of intellectual exchange within such an interdisciplinary scope. Similarly, the papers delivered and the closing remarks sessions proved to be a vibrant stimulus for comments and discussions.

The four articles in this special thematic issue within *European Review*, which stem from papers delivered in the aforementioned conference, focus on a set of different themes on the intersection of politics, borders and identities, which nonetheless share an oscillation of perspective between symbolic or imagined positions of 'inside' and 'outside', 'cores' and 'peripheries'. In contrast to mainstream analysis, where specific value judgements or a specific set of – usually economic – criteria are applied, our approach towards an analysis of Europe mainly 'through its margins' has been stimulated by Etienne Balibar's call to see Europe through its outskirts. For Balibar, a shaking of borders has already been taking place where the centre of Europe has become its outskirts. By this is meant that politically significant history is now written in the loci of shifting or expanding borders, however fortified or trespassed, and at the peripheries where 'Europeanness' is at the same time claimed and denounced.[28] The four articles reflect in different ways such considerations and answer to concerns about the use of culture, the diffusion of power and the appropriation of memories in contested political terrains.

The article by Anita McKinna focuses on the ways in which the making of political discourses at the centre of EU decision-making produces effects. The latter are transmitted, on the one hand, in unpredictable and contingent ways towards their target, but, on the other hand, they also diffuse towards a wider geographical map, creating regimes of power that exceed the political borders of the EU. By focusing on the direct and indirect impact of EU institutions on the peace stabilisation project in Kosovo, McKinna approaches 'Europe' under an analytical perspective that animates the latter as an exporter of normative discourses on human rights, gender and peace resolution through the funding of NGOs, establishment of offices, organisation of projects, and exporting of know-how. Her article argues convincingly that, although policy makers in Kosovo modelled themselves on 'European' standards, especially multi-ethnicity, the measures that they have implemented have actually led to further ethnic segregation.

Despina Syrri, in her article, also embraces a move from the core of 'Europe' to the periphery. Syrri explores the use of sites of traumatic heritage and the conflict between local memory and a Europeanised sphere of cultural consumption at Belgrade's Staro Sajmište area in Serbia. She analyses in depth the effect of EU funding in the definitions of national and local cultural heritage, and highlights the political element in representations of 'Europe' in contemporary art exhibits and forms of urban architecture.

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In particular, she demonstrates that Staro Sajmište has been increasingly appearing as a Holocaust site in public history in Serbia within the context of European integration, rather than as a 'fascist terror site', as it had been represented previously, and especially, by Tito's regime.

Based on an ethnographic case study, Dimitris Gintidis presents the cultural, political and economic changes as negotiated and materialising at Evros, a borderline area in the north-eastern part of Greece. Gintidis explores in detail the connection of EU policies with two significant changes in the local public sphere: the dissemination of cross-border programs during the last two decades, such as the INTERREG ones, as well as the transformation of local cultural associations into cultural entrepreneurs. The article does not adopt an 'orthodox' viewpoint and is not grounded on the perception that nation-states are gradually superseded by supra-national institutions; rather, Gintidis stresses the importance of the role of the Greek State in the interpretation and dissemination of EU-sponsored programs.

Finally, it has been widely acknowledged that identity formation is often powerfully constructed, constituted and expressed *through* material artefacts. Objects are tangible carriers of meaning and powerful means by which disputed social arenas (e.g. borders) are negotiated, delineated and reconstituted. Numerous studies of the 'social life of things'[35] have raised interesting questions of the connection between objects and identity construction in Europe. However, Lina Zigelyte's article in this volume complicates things even further. The author adopts the notion of theatricality to insightfully expand on the question of how fiction and reality merge '[…] as one's national identity is exposed to international ridicule, as one's overarching transnational identity is articulated as mere entropy, as politicians tightrope counteracting these claims, as these negotiations are broadcast in news flows and as one engages with the many layers triggered by Černý's installation'. Entropa, an art installation placed at the 'heart' of EU bureaucracy, erected in the headquarters of the European Union Council in Brussels in 2009, is taken in this article as a point of scrutiny to unmask the self-fulfilling prophecy of 'Europe' failing its 'Europeanness', unable to gather its fragments and live up to the myths created and preserved within national borders as well as across international aspirations.

In brief, all four articles aim at complementing or challenging a number of powerful stories that describe the making of European identities. They illuminate diverse conceptualisations of 'Europe' as a political and/or cultural project in various contexts, either 'at the heart' or in the 'margins' of the EU. They demonstrate that European integration is not simply or necessarily a 'path to prosperity'; EU-sponsored policies are argued to reproduce regimes of power, hierarchies and exclusions. In addition, all articles stress the importance of local and national actors in selectively receiving and implementing models promoted by the EU as well as complementing its supranational institutions. In contrast to what is argued in the 'orthodox' approach, European integration has not at all led to the diminution of their importance.

For this thematic focus, Eirini Avramopoulou, Leonidas Karakatsanis, Katherine Leckie, Nikolaos Papadogiannis and Thomas Stammers (the names are in alphabetical order) have proposed the theme and lined up suitable authors. They also provided feedback to them, prior to submitting the articles for peer review, which was overseen by the editor of *European Review*, Professor Theo D'haen.

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**Tom Stammers** is currently a Junior Research Fellow at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge and Affiliated Lecturer in the Cambridge History Faculty. In January 2010 he completed a PhD on collecting and curiosity following the French Revolution. His new project involves the history of material culture in the nineteenth century, looking at the proliferation of urban spaces related to the exchange, the revaluation and the disposal of objects (such as auction houses, flea-markets and rubbish dumps).

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