Does the EU Need a Navel? Implicit and Explicit Identification with the European Union

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Abstract

Analysts should expect neither too much from European Union identity and its causal role in driving the integration process, nor too little, by underestimating the stabilising force of *implicit* identification with the EU. Daily transactions in an EU institutional context embed an acceptance of the EU as a legitimate political authority and underpin passive consent to the continued functioning of the EU. The emergence of *explicit* EU identification is contingent upon the value (real and symbolic) attached to transactions, the extent to which valued goods are perceived to be under threat and whether competing political authorities are viewed as legitimate.

Does the EU Need a Navel? Implicit and Explicit Identification with the European Union[1]

1. Introduction:

There has been a recent rise in scholarly interest in the role played by identity in the European integration process.[2] The nature of EU identity and its relationship with European integration needs further unpacking and conceptual refinement. One source of insight into the relationship between identity and territorial integration and disintegration comes from the extensive literature on national identity and community formation.[3] The nature of identity

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[2] See, for example: Bruter (2003, 2005); Carey (2002); Diez Medrano and Guttierez (2001); Herrmann, Risse and Brewer (2004); Checkel and Katzenstein (eds) (2009); Citrin and Sides (2004); Gerard Delanty (1995); Fligstein (2008); Fossum (2003); Green (2007); Habermas (1992, 2006); Hooghe and Marks (2008); Laffan (1996); McLaren (2006); Risse (2003, 2004, 2005 and 2010); and Shore (2000).

[3] Scholars need not become preoccupied with the question of whether or not the EU is, or will ever be, a national state in order to utilise the insights and approaches developed by students of nationalism and national identity. Unification nationalism, involving the 'unification of a number of nominally sovereign states' (Breuilly, 1982: 65-89) (as occurred, for example, in Germany and Italy), for example, is particularly

and its role in relation to the support for and maintenance of political regimes has been the subject of longstanding scholarly debate. Gellner (1997:90), for example, in his blunt question 'Do nations have navels?' referred to the tension between 'primordialists', who saw national identity as a historically determined given and the 'modernists' who saw national identity as a creation in response to modern social requirements and conditions. Identity, from this latter perspective, was not a precondition for the emergence of political regimes (in this case national states) but was used to support the development and maintenance of such regimes. Gellner (1997, 101) concluded that: 'Some nations have navels, some achieve navels, some have navels thrust upon them. Those possessed of genuine ones are probably in the minority, but it matters little'. Drawing on this national identity and community formation literature, and building on previous contributions on 'Banal Europeanism'[4] (Cram, 2001, 2009a and 2009b), it is argued that:

(i) a conceptual distinction must be made between *identification as*, *identification with* and *support for* the European Union – the relationship between these categories needs to be problematised not assumed;

(ii) both *implicit* and *explicit* aspects of identity must be taken into account – in particular, the importance of implicit identification in creating a latent political community in the EU needs to be recognised;

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appropriate as a model for examining the European Union. Although these studies of states and nations refer to an earlier, predemocratic era, there is still much to learn from students of these phenomena.

[4] This article builds upon the concept of banal Europeanism originally published in a number of publications as part of the ESRC 'One Europe or Several' programme (Cram, 2001a and b) and subsequently developed in Cram 2009a and b. There is now a growing literature which recognises the importance of the hot or heroic v banal distinction in relation to the study of European Union identity and the emergence of a political community at EU level. See, for example: Cram, 2001a, 2001b, 2009a and 2009b; Trenz 2004; Priban 2009; Castiglione 2009; McNamara (2010).

(iii) the mobilisation of explicit or conscious identification with the EU, in the latent political community, becomes possible as the EU emerges as a positive 'meaningful presence' for the citizens of the EU and as the legitimacy of existing political authorities comes into question.

Even, however, if a surge in conscious identification with the EU takes place and the EU, in Gellner's (1997) terminology, discovers its 'navel', identity is contingent and contextual. A more meaningful measure of the relationship between EU identity and European integration, it is argued, is the extent to which implicit or unconscious identification with the EU exists and has become sufficiently embedded to underpin ongoing public consent to the functioning of the EU as a system.

2. Unpacking Identity and its Effects:

Defining identity and isolating its effects is notoriously difficult (see for example, Abdelal et al, 2009). To understand the role played by identity in the European integration process it is essential to distinguish between three key categories: (i) the self-allocated label or role (*identification as*) ie. I am European; (ii) the state of being (*identification with*) ie. I am more or less intensively attached to the EU and/or its outputs; and (iii) the political behaviour (*support for*) – I am a supporter of the EU, its policies and/or European integration. It is, moreover, important to move beyond the dominant focus on *identification as* Europeans and to problematise and explore the relationship between, *identification as* a European, *identification with* the European Union and *support for* (or opposition to) the European Union.

The act of self-categorisation (*identification as*) reveals who or what an individual sees herself as. However, it tells nothing about the meaning or intensity of that categorisation to the individual. As Citrin and Sears (2009:147) put it, 'one can call oneself an American

without feeling strongly patriotic or believing that nationality is fundamental to one's self-concept'.

Empirical research on EU identity has been driven largely by the available data. It has, therefore, focused predominantly on the extent to which individuals identify themselves *as* Europeans or on attitudinal research which identifies the extent to which individuals express *support for* the EU and the integration process. Further research has sought to identify the characteristics of those who identify themselves as Europeans (Fligstein, 2008) and how this might relate to future support for European integration. To this end survey data, such as that produced by Euro-barometer, have been a key source. This approach has been heavily criticised for failing to capture what identification as a European means to survey participants (Bruter, 2003) and for over-stating the relationship between *support for* European integration and *identification as* a European (Cram, 2009). The UK and Ireland provide good examples of the disjuncture between stated support for the EU and identification as Europeans. These two member states represent extreme ends of the *support for* scale of the EU. For example, the Euro-Barometer survey No 61[5] asks respondents if they (i) have a positive image of the EU, (ii) benefit from EU membership, or (iii) support EU membership. UK responses to these questions are consistently in the bottom two of the member states. Irish responses are consistently in the top three most positive. However, when asked whether they *identify as* more or less European, Irish and UK respondents are both below the EU average of European identifiers. Also both have high levels of respondents who identify themselves as 'nationality only'. There is no straightforward relationship between *support for* the EU and *identification as* a European or vice versa.

[5] Eurobarometer No 61, 2004 is most commonly used as it asked the question concerning the extent to which respondents view themselves as European.

The concept of *identification with* the EU should not be confused with *support* for the regime or its policies. The distinction between these categories is perhaps best illustrated by example. It is conceivable that a Euro-sceptic who, in Easton's (1965) terms, exhibits neither diffuse (toleration of the regime) nor specific (for particular EU policies) support for the EU, and does not identify herself as a European[6], may in fact identify with, or be attached to, the EU. The mechanisms through which this implicit identification emerges are explored in the following section. In Section Four, the conditions under with implicit identification with the EU becomes manifest are explored.

This example highlights the importance of measuring not only *identification as* or *support for* but *identification with* the EU. It also highlights the importance of understanding the process through which implicit or unconscious attachment to the EU may be transformed into explicit, conscious identification with the EU. Even if the attachment of the individual to the EU were to become explicit, and even if this individual were to begin to support the EU at either a diffuse or specific level, there is no certainty that she would also begin to label herself *as* a European in a survey.

3. The Nature and Embeddedness of EU Identity:

(i) EU Identity as Contingent and Contextual:

Renan (1990: 19) famously wrote in 1882 that the very existence of a nation is a 'daily plebiscite'. National identity, in this view, is less a romanticized notion of emotional attachment to a homeland or culture than a choice or act of will, even a calculated decision concerning the costs and benefits of affiliation. In similar vein, Deutsch *et al.* (1957: 85) argued that 'political habits of loyalty' could be shifted from any given political unit to any other, whether larger or smaller, 'if this seemed to offer a more promising framework within

[6] Although it is entirely possible that a Euro-sceptic might identify themselves *as* European but be anti-EU.

which this attractive way of life could be developed'. If identity is understood as contingent, the initial decision to support integration, to maintain the status quo or to push for devolved powers, is seen to be taken in response to a more or less rational calculation concerning the costs and benefits of integration or devolution rather than being driven by some elusive sense of Europeanness. Loyalty to or identification with various territorial or other objects of attachment are not fixed but contingent upon the ability of the various authorities to deliver valued goods.

This understanding of identity as contingent is consistent with contemporary manifestations of shifting loyalties in the component units of, for example, the United Kingdom - a long-standing union between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Margaret Thatcher's perceived attack on the welfare state in the UK, it has been argued for example, helped to foster support for Scottish nationalism: 'Defence of the welfare state had priority and nationalism is contingent, hence many Scots in the 1980s argued that the best way of defending this great British institution was by destroying Britain' (Mitchell, 1996: 54). To some extent, previously quiescent Scots, and even Scots who previously identified themselves as British, resurrected their Scottish identity in order to protect a valued good.

What constitutes a more attractive way of life or a valued good is not a given. Thus, the context in which calculations and declarations are made regarding the level(s) of authority with which European people(s) identify and what this means to them plays a key role. When studying the process of what might, following Laitin (1998), be called 'identity in formation', the various opportunities, constraints, internal and external challenges, or the context within which actors operate, must be understood.

(ii) Function and Sentiment as Mutually Reinforcing Aspects of EU Identity:

Following recent developments in European integration and the challenge these have presented to existing theoretical approaches, Hooghe and Marks (2008: 23) have observed that there is more to the construction of the EU than simply economic bargaining. They argue that a post-functionalist theory of European integration is required, integral to which is the role played by identity. The issue of the nature of identity, and the relationship between identity and functional interests, has long been debated in the literatures on nationalism and national identity. It is argued here that a false dichotomy between 'interest driven' and 'identity driven' behaviours must be avoided. With respect to the relationship between identity and interests six key insights emerge from the literature on national identity and community formation:

a. Identity has more functional or banal aspects than are suggested by many of the traditional measures, in terms of sliding scales of stated affiliations and declarations of how European or otherwise an individual feels. The affective dimension of identity refers to the 'we' feeling or sense of belonging and to the sentimental attachment of an individual to a political unit. Many have focussed on the affective dimension of identity, on the importance of shared histories, values and language, of ethnic symbolism (Smith, 1995) or the 'psychic income' (Kellas, 1991) associated with a shared identity. Others, however, have recognised the functional (Deutsch *et al*, 1957), even instrumental (Brass, 1979), elements implicit in the concept of identity. Thus, as Gellner (1964: 160) argues, 'Men do not in general become nationalists from sentiment or sentimentality, atavistic or not, well-based or myth-founded: they become nationalists through genuine, objective, practical necessity, however obscurely recognised'.

Scholars utilising Deutsch's insights in an attempt to understand or measure the development of a European Union identity have emphasised his arguments concerning the importance of communicative systems for the emergence of a shared (in this case, European

Union) cultural identity (for example, Fligstein (2008: 16-17)). However, in relation to the process of integration, Deutsch *et al* (1957: 5) stipulated only a very limited ability to communicate as a prerequisite. Indeed, drawing on extensive comparative research into the process of nation-building, Deutsch *et al* (1957: 90) specifically emphasised the importance not of *shared values* but of *complementary interests*: 'The basis of such cooperation was not necessarily similarity of values or outlook, but rather complementarity – that is an interlocking relationship of *mutual resources and needs'*.[7] This alignment was not reliant on shared language, character, memories or history or a shared sense of belonging (in this case a sense of Europeanness) but required simply 'the ability to communicate more effectively, and over a wider range of subjects, with members of one large group than with outsiders' (Deutsch, 1953[1966]: 97).

Others have argued further that even those nationalist affiliations traditionally associated with impassioned 'hot' ethnically based nationalism can be understood to have an underlying functional basis. For example, Hardin's (1995: 5) rational interpretation of support for national movements argues that 'self-interest can often successfully be matched with group interest'. For Hardin (1995: 70) the identification of individuals with ethnic groups is not primordial or extra-rational. Individuals, identify with ethnic groups because 'it is in their interest to do so'.

b. *The functions performed, or valued goods provided, need not be economic in nature*. Physical security was traditionally associated with the guarantees provided by a state to its community. Bloom, usiing identification theory, also stresses the importance of 'psychological security' (Bloom, 1990: 61) and the importance of a sense of belonging to a 'secure community' (Bloom, 1990: 152). The symbolic and political benefits for some of being seen to belong to an association of 'modern' states and the instrumental benefits of

7 Emphasis added.

affiliation with the EU for the achievement of goals to which identity is of secondary importance are well known.

c. *The functional basis of identification need not be recognised by affiliates.* The most readily available data on European Union identity, largely through Eurobarometer surveys, provides only a very limited starting point for the analysis of an EU identity. In particular, the problematic nature of the classic Eurobarometer question, 'How often do you think of yourself as a – European, European and [nationality], nationality and [European], nationality' (see for example, Standard Eurobarometer 61, 2004) has been highlighted. Not only does the question fail to distinguish between an EU and a European identity but as Haesly (2004: 99) argues, 'Making claims about how 'European' certain (groups of) individuals are requires capturing the myriad ways the type and level of European attachments interact'.[8] Indeed, according to Bruter (2003: 1154), 'when two individuals claim to 'feel European', they might mean totally different things in terms of both the intensity of the feeling they describe and the imagined political community they refer to'. However, even as data sources become more nuanced, individuals may not themselves always be aware of any rational basis which may underpin their affiliation: 'A group gains power from coordination of its members, powers that may enable it to take action against other groups. Hence, the group may genuinely be instrumentally good for its members, who may tend, without foundation, to think it is inherently, not merely contingently, good' (Hardin, 1995: 70).

[8] Although, for example, Green (2007) and Fligstein (2008) both highlight the growing number of individuals willing to identify themselves as 'nationality and European', it is important, as Green points out, to distinguish between a broader European cultural identity and what, for example, Bruter (2005) called a European political identity. Identification by an individual as 'European' might equally be made by a Swiss or Norwegian citizen. It thus remains difficult to discern the extent of any causal relationship between identification of an individual *as* a European and membership of the EU as a political unit.

d. That identity includes functional elements does not imply that sentiment is unimportant. The attachment, even the love, felt by an individual for their country or people, or the concept of national sentiment, is no less authentic for the recognition that identity incorporates a functional dimension. Indeed, it is the ability to marshal support for the pursuit of various interests under the mobilising banner of nationalist sentiment, and the power of symbolic *signifiers*, which has made the study of national identity, its formation and its functions, so important and so intriguing. As Gellner argued, while seen by some as offensive and as under-estimating the depth of individuals' sentimental attachment to their nation or community, an approach which recognises the intrinsic role of functional interests implicit in the concept of identity is 'derogatory only if you insist that your national, patriotic sentiment springs directly, unconditionally, from some innermost psychic springs untainted by the influence of the social environment' (Gellner, 1997: 11-12).

(iii) The Importance of Symbolic Signifiers:

The attachment of symbolic signifiers to functional benefits is central to understanding how identification with a political authority is generated. The interplay identified between interest and identity in the development and maintenance of political communities is consistent with, for example, Almond and Verba's (1963) analysis of the affective and evaluative dimensions of political engagement and their contribution to creation of the 'civic culture'. Central to the interplay between the affective and evaluative dimensions of identification with the political regime is the extent to which functional benefits, whether material or otherwise, become attached to meaningful symbols or *signifiers* of attachment to the relevant political unit such that these symbols resonate with the public and become capable of mobilising 'national', or in this case, 'EU' sentiment. Deutsch ([1953]1966: 170) also argued that communications and symbols were central to an understanding of the

emergence of a 'national consciousness'. Individuals are not limited by pre-existing norms but are able to normalise new practices and to integrate new behaviours with past traditions by re-imagining or re-branding existing symbols. In this way, a people 'can achieve *consciousness* by attaching secondary symbols – that is symbols about symbols – to certain items in its current intake of outside information, and to certain items recalled from memory (Deutsch, [1953]1966:170). Billig (1990:175), referring to the nation state, argued that there was a need for a taxonomy of 'flaggings'. From an EU perspective, the extent to which citizens are exposed to different types of EU flaggings in different domains and in different member states could be measured. This is very much in tune with Deutsch's suggested mapping of communication patterns and how they are experienced by individuals. Deutsch also stressed the importance of mapping the extent to which secondary symbols, carrying implicit messages about nationhood, had become attached to these daily events and patterns of communication:

> 'How wide is the range of interests and the volume of communications and experiences among the members of a people? To what share of these have national symbols become attached? How often are those national symbols then found in circulation? What persons, things and institutions are devoted to producing these secondary symbols, and *how important is that portion of the primary communications to which they have become attached*?' (Deutsch, [1953]1966:172-173).

Both *identification with* the EU and *identification as* a European might, over time, be accompanied by a sentimental attachment to the EU as symbolic *signifiers* become attached to valued functions, thus providing a shorthand connection between *valued goods* and *sentimental association* with the European Union as provider of those goods. A detailed mapping exercise is required to establish the extent to which EU symbols, from flags to more

mundane reminders, have become associated in the popular perception with valued public goods.

(iv) Implicit Identification with the European Union:

For many years a 'heroic' understanding of identity was pervasive in the study of European Union identity, characterised by Smith's (1995:139) provocative question, 'who will feel European in the depths of their being, and who will willingly sacrifice themselves for so abstract an ideal? In short, who will die for Europe?' To some extent this heroic understanding of European Union identity continues to inform the practical efforts of the EU institutions and elites. Attempts have been made to 'bring Europe closer to the people' by manufacturing a European Union identity, creating flags to wave, anthems to unite and by seeking to engender a grand constitutional settlement for the European Union.[9] Evaluations of top-down efforts to Europeanise identity have been unequivocal. Empirical studies have shown the socializing effects of European institutions to be uneven and weak, and for Checkel (2005:815) 'in no way can be construed as shaping a new, post-national identity'.

However, the production and reproduction of European Union identity is much more extensive and much more mundane than these grand efforts and their critiques suggest. For Gellner (1997: 94), '[C]ultures are sometimes invisible to their bearers, who look through them like the air they breathe...'. Also referring to the study of national identity, Billig (1995: 44) decried the fact that the term 'nationalism' is frequently reserved by scholars to refer to 'outbreaks of "hot" nationalist passion, which arise in times of social disruption and which

9 The Constitutional Treaty was rejected in 2005 following referenda in France and the Netherlands and subsequently abandoned and replaced by the Lisbon Reform Treaty (also rejected by Ireland in its referendum in 2008 and subsequently passed at the second attempt on 1 Oct 2009). The Lisbon Reform Treaty was ratified by the last member state, the Czech Republic, on November 3 2009.

are reflected in extreme social movements'. As he argued: 'All over the world, nations display their flags, day after day. Unlike the flags on the great days, these flags are largely unwaved, unsaluted, unnoticed' (Billig, 1995: 46). What is often neglected in the study of identity is the day to day, low-level, reinforcement of a shared consciousness, albeit passive, which is crucial to the maintenance of the regime. Coins, symbols, background flags, policy interventions and legal frameworks provide constant daily reinforcement, at an unconscious level, of EU membership.[10] Even if few are prepared to die for the EU, membership of the European Union has become increasingly entrenched as part of everyday life in the European Union.

Three closely related elements help to explain how the EU becomes normalised within the lives and imaginings of EU citizens: *re-imagination*, *collective forgetting* and *normalisation*:

a. *Re-imagination:* The statement that the EU is an 'imagined community' underestimates the degree of 'deep, horizontal comradeship' implied by Anderson (1991: 6) in his reference to community and overestimates the existence, in any community, of a single imagining of what that community is and what membership of the community means. There is no single imagining of the European Union and no single understanding of what it means for an individual to identify with the EU.[11] Moreover, identity itself is not immutable but

10 It is worth noting that, in a daily low-level manner, such symbols may also present a constant source of annoyance. Nevertheless, they serve as a daily reminder of an emerging status quo ante which might cost more to challenge than to tolerate. Following the theoretical arguments developed here, banal Europeanism would incorporate low-level or banal Euro-scepticism which, unless mobilised, would also not threaten the daily functioning of the EU system. Should the extent of the implicit attachment to the EU become *explicit* , however, the individual might use this as a resource to re-assess their support for the EU. I am grateful to participants at an earlier presentation at ARENA for helpful discussions in relation to this point.

11 Indeed, the ability of the EU to accommodate a diverse range of imaginings of what the EU is and might be

adaptable and susceptible to change. What it means to an individual to be Scottish, Greek or European today may not be the same tomorrow. Likewise, for any given individual at any given time, both the meaning and utility of identifying as Scottish, Greek or European may not be the same as that for any other individual at that particular time. Individuals have an extraordinary ability to re-order or revise or to *re-imagine* their various identities and the communities with which they identify should it be in their interest to do so. As Bloom (1990:50) puts it, 'As life circumstances change, individuals may make new and appropriate identifications. Individuals may also seek to protect and enhance identifications already made'. Thus, the relative costs and benefits or appropriateness of being Scottish, Greek, or European may also alter over time. Facilitating the *re-imagination* of the European Union and the twin adaptabilities, of both the meaning and the utility of identification with the European Union, is the inculcation of new norms in the daily lives of individuals such that previous practices and perceptions are, at least temporarily, blocked from the collective memory.

b. *Collective Forgetting:* Part of the *raison d'être* of the EU was to create lasting habits of peaceful co-operation between previously antagonistic and warring nations and to tie Germany irrevocably into a Union with its European neighbours. In many respects, the collective forgetting of these relatively recent past antagonisms has been highly successful. The normalisation of the membership of former Eastern bloc states within the EU framework is testament to the relative speed with which collective forgetting can take place. The insights offered by Ernest Renan in 1882, in relation to the nation state, thus remain relevant to the study of the European Union today. Renan (1990:11) emphasised the importance of the

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provides, at the very least, a safety valve which allows for a coexistence of diverse perspectives and the avoidance of entrenched conflict over the future of the EU and thus facilitates the process of integration. Even further, the diverse imaginings, rather than simply co-existing, may provide an important dynamic for the integration process (see Cram 2009b).

collective forgetting of inconvenient pasts for the maintenance of contemporary national identities. In similar vein, Billig (1995: 38) argued that 'the nation which celebrates its antiquity, forgets its historical recency'. While Deutsch (1953[1966], 117) discussed the process of social learning through which shifts in identification might be reinforced and earlier preferences revised: 'And as with all learning processes, they need not merely use this new information for the guidance of their behaviour in the light of the preferences, memories and goals which they have had thus far, but they may also use them to *learn*, that is, to modify this very inner structure of their preferences, goals and patterns of behaviour'. To some extent, collective forgetting, which serves mutual interests, takes place through the normalisation or domestication of previously unfamiliar practices. Thus, as patterns of behaviour shift, what at first appeared new gradually becomes unremarkable.

c. Normalisation: The learning of 'integrative habits' as a result of prior cooperation was viewed by Mitrany (1943), Deutsch (1953[1966]), 153, *et al* 1957) and Haas (1958) to be a vital aspect of regional integration. The learned habits of integration are central to the normalisation, at an unconscious level, of the EU in the lives of its citizens. These routines and habits by acting as daily reminders of belonging may, in Billig's (1995: 43) terms, 'serve to turn background space into homeland space'. *Normalisation* of the EU occurs as new rules and routines or integrative habits transform understandings of the place of the EU within the lives and imaginings of its citizens into a state of normality such that a *re-imagination* of the EU and of the meaning and utility of membership of the EU becomes possible and a *collective forgetting* that life was ever otherwise takes place.

For EU citizens identification is largely based on daily low-level engagement with the EU in unremarkable ways (carrying passports or driving licences, conforming with legislation, walking past EU flags) which nevertheless remind citizens of their involvement in the larger EU system whether for good or ill (Cram, 2001). Attempts to operationalise the

concept of banal Europeanism have found that, throughout the EU, there has been a rise in low-level 'banal' references to Europe or European actors, institutions and law in the media which are quite distinct from the more explicit debates engaged in by elites over whether particular European developments promote or undermine the national interest (Trenz, 2004, 2006). To this extent, reference to the EU increasingly becomes normalised – a description of 'home' events rather than foreign news. Even the very term member state could be viewed as an unwaved flag, an unremarkable but constant reminder of membership/belonging to the European Union. The implications of the embedding of banal Europeanism may be far reaching for European integration. In a low-level manner, at the unconscious level, the EU increasingly impinges directly 'upon the actual experience of the individual' - a factor which Bloom (1990: 59) identifies as a key aspect of the process of nation building.

4. From Implicit to Explicit Identification with the EU: The Emergence of the EU as a Meaningful Presence

(i) The EU as a Meaningful Presence

The willingness of its citizens to shift allegiances to the EU level is not essential to the continued functioning of the EU. However, such willingness may occur if the EU becomes a *positive* meaningful presence, perceived to offer a better way of life for its citizens, and particularly if this preferred way of life is perceived to be under threat. By the same token, if the EU was to emerge as a *negative* meaningful presence, the understanding of identity as contingent which has been presented here, would predict that any existing allegiance with the EU might equally be withdrawn. Central to this argument is an understanding of the mutually reinforcing nature of function and sentiment implicit in the concept of identity:

> [Nationalism] never grows *only* as a response to cultivation from above, because certain elites believe that people ought to see themselves as 'so-and-

so's' (rather than whatever they thought they were before). The growth occurs when real socio-economic forces erupt into people's lives and show them the concrete meaning of identifying as 'so-and-so's' – when they begin to see, or think they see, there is something in the ideology for their own life-prospects. (Nairn, 1977: 32)

To appreciate functional benefits, individuals must experience those benefits and for identification to occur they must relate those experiences and benefits to the level of authority concerned. For a mass of individuals to identify explicitly with a state, they must first 'actually experience the state' and that experience must be such as to 'evoke identification' (Bloom: 1990: 61). Central to this experience, Bloom argued, was the concept of psychological security. This required either that 'symbols of the state present an appropriate attitude in situations of perceived threat' or that 'symbols of the state behave beneficently towards the individual' (Ibid.: 61).

Deutsch *et al* (1957:85) referred to the 'double process of habit-breaking': the process through which citizens, exposed to the benefits available from a new level of government, start to break the habit of allegiance to the existing political unit. The extent of the emerging habit of attachment to the alternative political unit become is revealed when the new benefits come under threat. This challenges the value of the current allegiance. The EU has traditionally been an elite-driven process, with restricted areas of jurisdiction, in which a significant disconnection persists between the actions of the EU and the experiences of its citizens. Even in cases where EU actions have direct and significant effects on the lives and experiences of citizens, these have largely been filtered by national executives and other interested parties such that it has been difficult for individual citizens to make reasoned calculations as to their status as winners or losers in the EU context (McLaren 2006:189). However, explicit support for European integration and even an explicit European identity

may be mobilised if an appreciation of the extent of the already existing banal Europeanism emerges and if the costs associated with any challenge to this emergent *status quo* are perceived to be unacceptable. For some, revelation of the extent of their implicit attachment to the EU will not incline them to identify explicitly with the EU and not all individuals will value the same interventions in the same way. For others, the EU will become a negative meaningful presence. However, recognition of the extent to which implicit identification with the EU is emerging as the *status quo* nevertheless impacts upon calculations concerning the utility of opposing EU membership or seeking to withdraw from the Union and thus has important implications for the process of European integration.

There is now extensive evidence of how the EU impacts upon the daily lives of its citizens (see for example, Wiener 1998, Maas 2007). As the range of EU activities spreads into previously forbidden territory of, for example, welfare provision, it is conceivable that the EU might emerge as a positive *meaningful presence*: a body consciously perceived to be bringing valued benefits to citizens. In relation to, for example, EU wide access to health-care, it has been argued that 'Community law is a supranational source of individual rights, which through the empowerment of European patients augments enforceable and material meaning to the skeleton of European citizenship' (Martinsen 2005: 1052). At the same time as individuals are becoming aware of and actively pursue access to those benefits, national executives seek to maintain control over not only their budgets and planning priorities but over welfare, an area which has long been central to the relationship between state and society (Hervey and Trubek 2007:634). It is precisely this type of clash that that is most likely to result in the mobilisation of the latent political community in favour of European integration: as awareness emerges of the existing and potential benefits of EU membership and citizens, able to access their rights directly under EU law, face a threat by national providers to limit these emerging rights. If the ability of national executives to provide the

valued goods also comes into question, the conditions are in place for the development of a more explicit or conscious identification with the EU.

(ii) The Role of Identity Entrepreneurs:

The process through which the EU becomes a meaningful presence continues to be mediated, of course, by a wide range of *identity entrepreneurs*. Hooghe and Marks (2008) have argued that political parties at the domestic level play an important role in such political cueing and Laffan (2004) has argued that the EU institutions play a role as 'identity builders'. The role of the EU and its institutions in providing incentives for collaboration and in creating an 'appreciative system' which values these incentives should also be taken into account. The concept of an *appreciative system* helps to explain the interrelationship between calculations of cost and benefits and the values or appreciation placed on those benefits. In the 1960s, Vickers (1965: 67), argued that cognitive frameworks, often implicit or unconscious, shaped the extent to which one course of action rather than another might be perceived as more desirable or acceptable to an individual. He argued, moreover, that such cognitive elements developed over time and in the context of a process of collaboration and interaction with a variety of actors. The potential synergies between different conceptions of the EU have important implications for European integration. By encouraging the confluence of disparate, but complementary, interests and imaginings, *identity entrepreneurs* can have a profound effect on the emerging sense of community in the European Union.

The process of identification with the national state was not always, or even predominantly, spontaneous and nor was it inevitable – key actors and interests played a central role in fostering nationalist discourse. There is a powerful argument from scholars of nationalism that states generally precede nations (Keating, 1988), that national states frequently emerge from multiple centres (Breuilly, 1982), that nationalism does not simply

emerge but is actively created: 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist' (Gellner, 1964: 169) and that 'nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way around' (Hobsbawm: 1990, 10).

Nationalism is a potent mobilising force and has been a powerful tool for those who have wielded it. Deutsch (1953: 188) referred to the 'deliberate pioneers and leaders of national awakening' who saw the mobilisation of national identity and the creation of national symbols as serving their interests. Brass (1979:40) too argued that the study of ethnicity and nationality are best viewed as 'the study of politically induced cultural change' and emphasised the role of political elites in inducing that change. Schmitter (forthcoming), in his tribute to Puhle, stresses similarly the role of '*"ethnic/national entrepreneurs"* who must interpret, not just the structural, but also the conjunctural situation in order to identify potential threats and opportunities'.[12]

The first organizers according to Deutsch (1953: 188) follow the pioneers and promote the beginnings of the transmission and institutionalisation of national identity. Brass (1991) stressed the importance of political organisation and structures for the transmission of national identity. Over the centuries various means of transmission and entrenchment of national sentiment have been pursued including physical force, the media, universal institutions, high culture and persuasion. As well as military service and improved communication systems, Weber (1977), for example, cites the power of education in turning 'peasants into Frenchmen', while Anderson (1991: 201) reminds us: 'A vast pedagogical industry works ceaselessly to oblige young Americans to remember/forget the hostilities of 1861-65 as a great "civil" war between "brothers" rather than between – as they briefly were – two sovereign nation-states'.

12 Emphasis in original.

A range of institutions (executives, bureaucracies, parliaments, courts) and actors (corporate interests, trade unions, social movements) operating at a variety of levels (global, transnational, EU, national, sub-national) each seek to embed or to protect their conception of the European Union in the institutional structures and practices which constitute European integration and thus promote or preserve their own interests. As long as national governments continue to be seen as the legitimate providers of valued goods or are not perceived to be blocking valued goods provided by the EU, the preference of citizens currently identifying with their national state is likely to be for the *status quo* requiring no adjustment to their existing affiliations. When, however, EU provision of valued goods becomes visible and attractive to citizens, but particularly when provision of those valued goods is threatened by national executives, and the legitimacy of the role played by national executives comes into question, then the EU becomes a positive *meaningful presence* in the lives of the European peoples. Then conditions are ripe for the mobilisation of the latent political community of the EU in support of European integration, or even for a shift in allegiances, as individuals begin to re-imagine the role and function of the EU as well as the meaning and utility of their existing and potential identities.

Conclusion:

This article built on the perspective of *banal Europeanism* which views *identification with* the European Union as underpinned by a process which is banal, contingent and contextual. The case of the European Union highlighted important issues in relation to the distinction between *identification as* a European, *identification with* the European Union and *support for* the EU or for further European integration. The importance of *implicit* as well as *explicit* identification with the EU in securing consent to the continued functioning of the EU even in the absence of support for European integration was also highlighted. Implicit or

unconscious identification with, or attachment to, the EU, is essential to the continued functioning of the Union. This is manifested in an, often unconscious, normalisation of the EU as a legitimate political authority such that to challenge this norm is to challenge the status quo. Conscious or explicit identification with the EU may also emerge in the latent political community as the EU becomes a *meaningful presence* for its citizens. The following arguments were presented concerning the nature of the relationships between identification with the EU, identification as Europeans and support for the EU or further integration:

1. explicit *identification as* a European, and measures of *support for* the EU, are less reliable predictors of European integration than the extent to which a degree of *identification with* the EU, whether implicit or explicit, exists;

2. implicit *identification with* the EU, is more widespread than measures of either *support for* the EU or *identification as* Europeans would suggest;

3. implicit *identification with* the EU, may co-exist with a degree of Euro-scepticism;

4. as *identification with* the EU becomes more explicit this may increase *support for* the EU but not necessarily *identification as* Europeans;

5. explicit identification with the EU is most likely to emerge when (or if) the EU becomes a positive *meaningful presence* in the daily lives of its citizens and, in particular, when hitherto unrecognised benefits from the integration process come under threat;

6. the extent to which explicit identification with the EU results in support for the EU or European integration is contingent upon the actions, and perceived legitimacy, of any alternative providers of such valued goods (for example) at the national level.

In answer to the question 'do nations need navels?', Gellner (1997:36) concluded: 'My own view is that some nations possess genuine ancient navels, some have navels invented for them by their own nationalist propaganda, and some are altogether navel-less'.

This article asked ‘does the EU need a navel’? The conclusion is that the EU does not need a navel, though it may develop one or have one invented for it. Tempting though navel-gazing is, analysts must ask what function such a navel might serve and for whom rather than simply going looking for one.

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