

.....

Redefining Europe – Islam, Secularism and Diversity: “The Search for Europe’s future: Nations, religions, and politics”

Oliver Schmidtke and Jason R. Young

Introduction

Few ideas have endured as long and have proven to be as powerful as that of the nation and the ideology of nationalism save perhaps for religion. The complex and intricately interwoven web of ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural and territorial markers that make up nationalisms and ideas of the nation are statements about distinction that identify ‘self’ in opposition to ‘other’. In attempting to disentangle the connection between religion and the nation, one is immediately struck by the frequency of which conceptions of the ‘nation’ as possessing a divine origin or a social destiny, such as American Manifest Destiny or the French colonial *Mission Civilisatrice* arise. The psycho-physical connections between the idea of the nation as elect, the nation as victim, and the nation as a territorial bound entity lies closely at the heart of nationalism, providing the basis for pogroms against enemies within and wars against threats external. The dark side of nationalism – its aggressive attitude toward the external other and its uncompromising homogenizing claim toward internal minorities – has been the historic price for providing the socio-political space for modern politics.

As a political ideology, one of nationalisms central features is its keen interest in defining and perpetuating the political community as well as its incumbent restrictions of rights to and within territory that come about with defining the ‘outsider’. The cultural, linguistic and social organization of the political state has preoccupied much of European intellectual and political history. The binding role of religion as the basis for the political state was increasingly displaced by an imagined common history, culture and language in the shape of the *Nation*. Nationalism as ideology is however wrought with pitfalls;

discursive and xenophobic tendencies to see other nations and minorities as physical and biological threats to the life of the nation were quickly developed into enmities by nationalist elites and political projects that aimed at reconstituting or maintaining the nation's political territory in terms of homogeneity. In many senses the past 60 years of European economic and political integration has been a response to the belligerent legacy of nationalism, and 'Europe' as a governance space has come to be a symbolic representation of diversity, accommodation and civic nationalism. Yet, despite these movements, a familiar spectre has returned to haunt Europe: the ideal of ethnic and religious homogeneity as the basis for political community.

Europe has seemingly now entered in a period of intense self-reflection as nationalism ("Nation as State"), religion and territory reemerge as subjects of political discourse. National borders as exclusive demarcations for political communities can no longer simply be taken for granted and essentializing ethnic identities have largely been discredited. This has sparked a debate on legitimate and politically desirable forms of defining the borders and nature of political community in Europe. At the height of this introspection is a debate centering on the attractiveness of further increasing the political integration of European nation-states into something potentially resembling a federal Europe. This debate is wrought by internal tensions around institutional, political and cultural change. The rejection of the Constitution Treaty by the French and Dutch electorates, enlargement fatigue, and the reality of Turkey's candidacy for accession have polarized an already frayed sense of a shared European cultural identity. The debate over inserting a reference to Europe as possessing a specific Christian tradition in the Draft Constitution marked an effort to draw upon a specific religious heritage as a common

thread to re-launch European integration; it also signified the renewed salience of religion as cultural and political markers. Europe's uneasy peace with religion, specifically those practicing Islam, has gradually grown more tenuous as Europe's Muslim population have continued to grow both demographically as well as a political voice. The 2005 riots in the periphery of Paris provided a dramatic account of how insufficiently certain immigrants are integrated in European societies and how the religious divide corresponds strongly with forms of social exclusion. The so-called 'Cartoon Crisis' that recently rocked Europe is but the most recent embodiment of a perceived fundamental clash between cultures. The 'Cartoon Crisis' suggests how deeply linked integration, assimilation, and culture are with Europe's self-identity. Religious and cultural minorities, Turkey's potential accession to the European Union and the very public debate over the presence and visibility of Islam in the public sphere all push Europe's identity crisis to the forefront of both public debate as well as academic investigation, especially in light of the present geo-political climate.

This issue of the Review of Russian and European Affairs brings together young scholars to explore the interaction between minorities, majorities, Islam and religion in a broader sense of Europe. The contributors to this volume engage with these two fundamental and interconnected themes: first constructing Europe and second defining Europe. In his article on "Christianity and tolerance" Daniel Augenstein gets to the core of this debate by reminding us that despite multicultural narratives, the nation-state continues to be constituted by the *idea* of homogeneity even though the reality reflects something entirely different. Through an engagement with John Locke's writing on toleration, Augenstein suggest that rather than attempting to create a 'Christian culture'

for Europe, Europe should instead embrace co-existence and tolerance for alternative world-views as the way forward beyond cultural essentialism. Augenstein suggests that a European identity based on inclusiveness and respect for difference rather than on an unrealistic pursuit of homogeneity is essential if Europe as a polity is to step beyond the politics of cultural difference.

Ian Morrison's essay, likewise, comes at an important juncture as recent scholarship has begun to critically re-examine the secularization thesis (for example, Norris and Inglehart, 2007). Morrison steps outside the debate over the accuracy of the secularization thesis and conflict over the place of religion in the public sphere by focusing on the social goals of secularization: the attainment of universal rights and freedoms through limiting the influence of the Church (religion) over the social and political affairs of society. Morrison notes that the public sphere is *the* key site for the commemoration of the civic nation and the presence of overt religious symbols in the public sphere – such as the *Hijab* and *Burqa*– contest the legacy of secularism. Morrison argues the secularization thesis has gone beyond limiting the influence of religious institutions in social and political agenda setting, and instead has become a sacred doctrine itself, which manifests in the construction of the public sphere and the ideal citizen. The debate over assimilation versus multiculturalism therefore has emerged as the *issue politic*. This construction of the political subject and the public sphere is directly connected to the idea of the State and the Nation as political life; it is here that Dagmar Soennecken draws our attention to the courts and refugee NGO's increasing importance in the migration regime and thus the constitution of the National.

Soennecken's article explores the judicialization of the immigration regime in

Germany, revealing that contrary to the North American experience – and other European civil law domains such as the Netherlands–, while German NGOs have become increasingly judicialized, they have not directly entered the courts as interveners and petitioners as North American groups have. Instead, Soennecken’s study of the strategies of German refugee NGO’s directs our attention to the roles of policy actors, refugee organizations, social discourse and institutional design in expanding the space for court challenges and mediation of the refugee regime. Soennecken’s study suggests that further research into the institutional structure of civil society, the State, and the operation of the Courts beyond the literature dominated by North American case studies will add new depth to the study of European immigration regimes and political integration.

The perception of an immigration problem identified by Soennecken further casts light upon conceptions of ‘Europe’ as a spatial and cultural narrative. It is this point that Jason Young and Naozad Hodiwala take up in their respective essays. Young looks at Europe’s seemingly new found identity crisis by suggesting that ‘Europe’ is constructed by a series of ‘othering’ processes. Young argues that Muslims and Islam in Europe, beyond representing alternative cultural and social organizations, have been constructed by narratives of ethical, linguistic, and cultural difference to comprise Europe’s antithesis; dual bindings of Islam as a religious and a cultural boundary and Turkey as a geographic boundary serve to define the limits of Europe and provide fuel for developing a core and a periphery of Europe.

The debate over, including a reference to Christianity in the Constitution Treaty illustrates a Europe that is still grappling with the pressures of integrating the former socialist states of East and Central Europe into the core of Europe. For Western European

states with sizable Muslim populations – namely France, Germany, and the Netherlands – religious and cultural traditions have come to the forefront of the public debate over the national space as the resident Muslim population continues to grow both in numerical size as well as in political assertiveness. The immigration question is constructed as a threat to social homogeneity and cultural traditions, traditions already under strain by European integration and particularly by the eastward enlargement. The discourse of Europe and European-ness is constructed in terms of cultural binaries, of which Muslims and Turkey represent the ‘other’ against which to measure Europe’s similarities.

Like Young, Naozad Hodiwala picks up on the securitization of the immigration regime by conservative and populist politicians and public intellectuals. Hodiwala perhaps accurately sums up the sentiments of the far right, of which Jean-Marie le Pen is the most symbolic in his characterization of the threat posed by Islam. Striking to the core of their arguments, Hodiwala, as Young, suggests that the renewed strength of the anti-immigrant lobby comes as a result of a sense the ‘meaning’ of the nation has or is being changed by Islamic migrants. Hodiwala is highly critical of western European media and politicians fear mongering, cultural misrepresentation and hyperbolic characterizations of Muslims as dangers to social security, as sources of unemployment, and as terrorists bent on destroying European national, cultural and religious traditions. Hodiwala focuses on the securitization of migration and culture and the role of elites in perpetuating a ‘clash of cultures’.

The debate over Turkey’s potential accession has roused academics, politicians and media alike into discourses spanning everything from a ‘clash of civilizations’ to fundamental questions about the Nation as the State and essentialist discourses of ethnic

nationalism. The major contributions the papers in this volume make are to engage with these two concepts and to explore Europe as a set of cultural, economic and religious discourses (Pagden, 2002). Europe's identity crisis seemingly hinges on this question. Europe's self-identity is now confronted by fundamental questions about Europe as a political and social set of meta-narratives. Changing demographics, the eastward expansion, and the potential accession of Turkey raises important questions about the social, and political design of a future Europe: Will Europe be troubled by a clash of civilizations and exclusionary forms of nationalisms or will Europe represent a new, cosmopolitan or post-national form of political and social polity?

Works Cited

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: reflections of the origins and spread of Nationalism* Rev. Ed (London: Verso, 1993)

Norris, Pippa and Englehart. *Sacred and secular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

Anthony Pagden, Ed. *The idea of Europe: From antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)