FROM NATION-BUILDING TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF EUROPE: THE LESSONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE FRENCH EXAMPLE

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One of the problems associated with attempts to promote a popular sense of *European* identity is that there are no obvious historical models to serve as a guide. The most inviting analogy is with the process of nation-building in Europe itself in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but this raises a number of problems. Given what one author has called 'the novelty of our historical circumstances' [Gray, 1996], the drawing of parallels between such different periods is clearly a hazardous undertaking. Furthermore, the very success of the national idea has itself raised obstacles to the development of supra-national identities.

At another level, however, the objections are less persuasive. It is often assumed that the processes of nation-building have little in common with those involved in the construction of Europe; that Europe is not, and can never become, that 'community of culture' which nations are deemed to embody. However, this view offers a one-sided perspective on the mechanisms of nation-formation, and raises issues that lie at the very heart of the debate on nationalism and the national question.

If we believe that nations are shaped primarily by some pre-existing sense of collective identity - a common language and history, shared belief-systems and 'psychological make-up', all contained within well-defined territorial boundaries[1], then the prospects for emulating these conditions at European level will indeed appear slim. If, on the other hand, we give what I would regard as proper recognition to the *politics* of nation-building, and acknowledge that nations are socially and ideologically *constructed*, then there are grounds for greater optimism about the European project. This is not to deny that the cultural raw material of nationhood (what Hobsbawm has called 'popular proto-nationalism') [Hobsbawm, 1990, pp.46-79] may sometimes have played a significant role in nation-state formation, though far less than *nationalists* themselves routinely pretend. However, to borrow the terms used by Jolyon Howorth elsewhere in this volume, *'doing'* has often been the most powerful agency for the development of a sense of *'being'*, and this metaphor seems particularly appropriate in this context.

The first point is that there were may different paths to nationhood, and that the 'raw material' mentioned above was rarely present in the 'necessary' or 'desirable' combination. Examples abound where nation-states were constructed despite considerable linguistic or religious diversity, where historical traditions were 'invented' rather than 'discovered',[Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983] and where national boundaries had little rationale beyond the *realpolitik* of conquest or diplomacy.

To say this is to recognise that nations are political *artefacts*, and that as often as not they are the *creations* of states rather than the *creators* of states.[2] Even in those cases where a sense of nationhood had to be promoted as a *precondition* of the struggle for statehood, this was always within the firmly *political* context of opposition to existing state structures.

If nation-states first emerged in the context of the decay of the pre-national dynastic structures of *Ancien Regime* Europe (a process itself associated with the broader phenomenon of 'modernity'), it may be argued that today we are witnessing a period of equally significant social and cultural change. Whether or not the over-arching concept of 'post-modernity' is appropriate or helpful in this respect, terms like post-industrialism and post-colonialism (not to mention post-materialism and post-socialism) are suggestive of a number of related transitional phenomena. Against this wider background, the nation-state is experiencing the full effects of economic globalisation, and the attendant problems of reduced autonomy arguably presage a generalised crisis of political legitimacy. In this context it is relevant to ask the question whether, just as in the last century pre-national state structures crumbled in the face of nationalism, so in the late 20th century the nation-state model is itself being superseded.

In the contemporary context of economic and cultural globalisation, it is easy to regard all nations and nationalisms as essentially parochial and exclusive, and the recent resurgence of ethnic nationalism in the post-communist successor states has reinforced this image. It is important, therefore, to remind ourselves that in the 19th and early 20th centuries the nation-building process frequently involved a dramatic widening of the cultural, political and spatial horizons of ordinary people, expanding social consciousness beyond the ties of kinship, trade and locality (*Gemeinschaft*) to invoke an 'imagined community' [Anderson, 1983] based on the more abstract notion of *Gesellschaft*. To borrow Tom Nairn's image of nationalism as the 'Modern

Janus', [Nairn, 1977] if one face of the phenomenon looks back to the past, revealing the features of ethnic particularism and fear of the "other", the reverse face looks to the future in a more generous and optimistic spirit of universalism - nations as constituent parts of an emerging world community.

Of course, this simple polarity fails to convey the full complexity of the national question. Nationalism may be mobilised by established states, or by movements that challenge existing state structures. It has, at different times, been harnessed to ideologies of every shade across the political spectrum, to projects of social emancipation and to those of social integration, to the cause of imperialist expansion and to that of liberation, to authoritarian populism and to liberal democracy. Nationhood has been defined by the determinist principles of descendance *(droit du sang)* and by the voluntarist principles of residence *(droit du sol)*, has been inspired by both *ethnic* and *civic* solidarities, has been achieved by state-led assimilation or by a more tolerant incorporation of subsidiary identities in civil society. The sheer diversity of this experience warns against attempts to generalise about the processes of nation-formation or the ideological characterisitics of nationalism(s), and indeed case studies of individual countries would reveal an infinitely more nuanced picture than can be conveyed by the set of contrasts outlined above.

The case of France

In examining the case of nation-formation in France, some necessary distinctions suggest themselves. In an age where virtually every state in the world claims to be a *nation-state*, and where "nation-speak" permeates political discourse everywhere, we are faced with a terminological and conceptual morass. *Nation, nationality, nationhood, nationalism (and patriotism), nationalist (and nationalistic), national identity, national consciousness, national sentiment* - such terms are used with little precision in everyday parlance, and specialist scholarship has scarcely helped to clarify matters. Problems of definition are endemic to the ideological and methodological debate on the national question, and there is no more consensus on terminology than there is on the explanation and interpretation of the phenomenon. The precise terms used below are therefore less significant than the underlying intent, which is to distinguish conceptually between different features of the nation-building process.

National Consciousness

I will use the term *'national consciousness'* to denote the process whereby the 'nation' becomes a significant collective reference-point in the lives of ordinary people. Clearly, variables of geography and ethnicity will affect the feasibility of this process, but in more general terms it will be facilitated by socio-economic transformations - industrialisation and urbanisation, improved communications, expanding labour and commodity markets, rising levels of literacy etc. This will hasten the gradual transcendence of local and regional identities which become subsumed in the wider national 'whole'. However, the key framework for such developments is the emergence of the nation-state and of the notion of 'citizenship', whereby the masses acquire a sense of 'having a stake' in the national community. As the focus of decision-making, conflict-mediation and interest representation, the nation-state will endeavour to 'integrate' diverse social categories (whether defined by class, gender or ethnicity) and to promote allegiance to the 'nation'.

The role of the state in this process was particularly prominent in the case of France. The absolutist monarchy of the 17th and 18th centuries may indeed be seen as a necessary compensation for the country's linguistic, cultural and geographical diversity, and for the perceived fragility of its long land frontiers. The intense political divisions created by the Revolution provided a further pretext for the preservation of this centralised state apparatus, and successive regimes mistrusted regional identities, not only as potentially disintegrative but also as a possible power base for political opposition. Under the Third Republic, the attempt to create a homogenous national culture was intensified through the agencies of mass schooling and mass conscription, through the deployment of national symbols and the 'invention' of national traditions, and through the identification of an external enemy in the shape of the newly-unified Germany

National consciousness under absolutism had largely been limited to social elites, and to the regions that were least remote from the capital. The Revolution, by invoking the concept of citizenship and politically mobilising millions of ordinary peasants and town-dwellers, therefore marked a decisive stage in the construction of nationhood. [Jenkins, 1990] This was an ideologically precocious development given the economic backwardness of large areas of the country, and the degree of mass politicisation it accomplished should not be exaggerated.

However, there is no doubt that the 'slow re-run' of the Revolution (1815-70) progressivly widened the political community and raised levels of popular political consciousness. The social compromise of the Third Republic, based on the property-owning middle-classes and peasantry, was consolidated by rural modernisation, representative democracy and the state-led inculcation of national values, turning "peasants into Frenchmen" in Eugen Weber's famous phrase. [Weber, 1976]

The emergence and extension of national consciousness in France may thus be seen as a gradual process of social and political 'integration'. However alienated many industrial workers felt under the *bourgeois* Third Republic before 1914, the nation-state was an unavoidable reference-point for political and trade-union activity, though arguably it was not until the 'new deal' of the Liberation reforms (1944-6) that the industrial working-class acquired a more concrete sense of 'membership' of the nation. The formal recognition of women as full members of the political community came only with the granting of the suffrage in 1945, and in terms of the wider notion of equal citizenship the process of integration is far from complete. The same might equally be said of those immigrants who, despite acquiring citizen rights under the relatively liberal nationality code of 1945, nonetheless continue to experience discrimination in civil society.

National consciousness may thus be defined as a politically neutral sense of membership of the national community, based primarily on the recognition that the nation-state is the main institutional framework for the satisfaction of individual and collective aspirations. At a more affective level this may be combined with a sense of 'belonging', an attachment to a familiar spatial environment or 'way of life', and it is at this level that terms like *'national sentiment'* or indeed *'patriotism'* come into play. However, a distinctive feature of the French experience is the significant role of the centralised state in inculcating this sense of nationhood, and the integrationist (some would say 'assimilationist') logic that has consistently underpinned this project, irrespective of the ideological colour of successive regimes.

This has had two negative effects. The first is that, in as far as French nationhood has been shaped more by the state than by spontaneous forces in 'civil society', the present decline in the capacity of that state to fulfil national aspirations risks has caused something of an 'identity crisis'. The second is that the integrationist attempt to create a homogeneous national culture is

no longer feasible in the context of an increasingly multi-ethnic and pluralist society. These are themes to which we shall return.

Nationalism and National Identity

These last observations raise a different dimension of the 'national question'. What exactly is French 'national identity', what is the homogeneous national culture that successive regimes have allegedly sought to construct? Here we are in the force field of *nationalism* proper, where attempts are made to appropriate the past in the name of political and social values deemed to be characteristically 'French'. And the essential point to be made is that 'national identity' in France has never been subject to any comfortable consensus, it has been a highly contested area. In 200 years punctuated by war, invasion and revolution, issues of national sovereignty and state legitimacy have repeatedly emerged to colour the discourse and imagery of political conflict. Diverse movements and ideologies have, in such circumstances, presented themselves as the authentic expression of national values, as the true 'patriots', as the legitimate defenders of the 'national interest'. [Jenkins, 1990]

In this short essay it will not be possible to explore the full ideological and political diversity of French nationalism(s), which was already apparent in the very different (though related) phenomena of revolutionary *Jacobin* republicanism and Bonapartism. These two traditions made equal use of the 'dangerous' concept of the popular nation in their opposition to the social and political elites of the restored monarchy (1815-48) and to the European settlement imposed by the 1815 Congress of Vienna. Nationalism in this period was thus mobilised in opposition to the established regime, setting the 'nation' (the *pays reel* of the 'people') against the 'state' (the unrepresentative *pays legal* seen as subservient to international interests). During the 1848 Revolution, and even more so during the Paris Commune of 1871, the convergence of the themes of social and political emancipation with those of national self-determination (and in the latter case national liberation) gave nationalism a decidedly left-wing coloration.

By the turn of the century, however, popular anti-state nationalism had undergone a complex ideological transformation in the context of opposition to the liberal *bourgeois* Third Republic, and eventually became identified with an extreme Right that many have seen as 'proto-fascist' in character.[3] Though some have seen this process as a metamorphosis of the previous left-wing

Jacobin tradition, in the context of the times it represented something new - an inter-class coalition of the discontented and marginalised extending from conservative catholic to *petit-bourgeois* and plebeian milieux, attracting monarchists together with populists of diverse political persuasions, and initially even some socialists who saw the Boulangist movement of the 1880s as a vehicle for undermining *bourgeois* democracy. This new nationalism was *externally* aggressive and chauvinist in its call for revenge against Germany, while *internally* it sought to re-define nationality on deterministic and exclusivist ethnic lines. Racism, especially in the form of anti-semitism, was a key theme, but ethnicity was conceived as much in cultural as in strictly biological terms, allowing a whole range of *outsiders* to be identified as hostile to core national values - protestants and free-masons, liberal intellectuals and 'corrupt' bourgeois politicians, international socialists. So-called 'integral' nationalism promoted (a particular vision of) the 'nation' as an over-riding and unconditional loyalty, as an instrument of collective unity, therefore invoking an authoritarian state which would transcend the divisiveness of both representative democracy and social class struggle.

'Nation' has thus been deployed by movements of both Left and Right as a mobilising theme for popular opposition to the prevailing regime. Arguably these forms of 'anti-state nationalism' have never truly 'captured' the state and translated their value-systems fully into practice, even in the exceptional conditions created by the defeat of 1940 and the period of Nazi occupation. While the collaborationist Vichy regime gave considerable scope to the ideologues of right-wing integral nationalism, it was also shaped by more traditional conservative forces and indeed by external pressures. Similarly, although the Resistance movement revived the left-wing discourse of national liberation and social emancipation last heard at the time of the Paris Commune, its reform programme was compromised by the political divisions and the economic and international realities of the post-war era.

It was through the agency of the *state*, therefore, that efforts were made to construct a more consensual form of national identity which would transcend these polarities of left and right. In this respect it is important to recognise that, though the Third Republic adopted the once revolutionary iconography of *Marseillaise*, tricolour and Bastille day as symbols of nationhood, it did so on the ruins of the Paris Commune and in a spirit of reconciliation which claimed that the Revolution was now complete. Furthermore, while conservative enemies of the regime

denounced the secular education system as a vehicle of republican indoctrination, in reality Lavisse's history textbooks emphasised the continuity of *La France eternelle*, invoking the achievements of Charlemagne and Richelieu and treating the Revolution as an episode in the unfolding tale of French *grandeur* and *rayonnement.* [Citron, 1987]

Thus, in seeking to build consensus the Republic was inevitably open to other more conservative influences, expecially those generated by traditionalist catholic *milieux* which were barely reconciled to the advent of democracy and the age of mass politics, resented the regime's anti-clericalism, shared the anti-semitism of the extreme-Right nationalists, and saw the Army and the Church rather than the Republic as the true incarnation of national values and national continuity. The representatives of such attitudes were entrenched in the administrative and political institutions of the Republican state, and while they resigned themselves to republican *forms*, they had little sympathy for republican *ideals*. Their ambivalence was amply illustrated by Vichy, and indeed by the collapse of the Fourth Republic when the Army again emerged as a potential counter-pole for the definition of national interests in opposition to the civilian authorities.

These tensions and contradictions within the Republican state itself also allowed a certain dilution of the republican concept of nationhood, and this reflected the inherent dangers of the 'assimilationist' logic of *'La Republique une et indivisible'*. The ideal may have been the promotion of equal citizenship in an open and tolerant civic order, but at the same time the insistence on a homogeneous national culture as a necessary basis for that order raises the possibility that some categories may be judged 'non-assimilable' or 'unwilling' to assimilate, and therefore designated as outsiders or 'internal aliens'. [Silverman, 1992] As we have seen, this exclusion may be on political or religious as much as on 'ethnic' grounds, but in the contemporary context it has a particular resonance in the case of immigrants and their descendants. The central point, however, is that the boundaries between the 'civic' and the 'ethnic' models of nationhood are permeable, and that symbiosis between the two has been a persistent feature in the *practice*, if not in the official *discourse*, of the Republic.

These ambiguities were particularly evident in the widespread reluctance to come to terms with decolonisation, most strikingly in the case of Algeria. Whatever the diversity of political motives

from left to right, there was a lowest common denominator in the concept of France's 'civilising mission', the belief that Algerian independence was an illogical choice when set against the prospect of participation in a superior metropolitan culture. Whether this mission was conceived in secular or religious terms, as geared to emancipation or domination, to eventual 'equality' or subservience, it betrayed a fundamental condescension towards colonial peoples which was at least a 'sub-text' even in left-wing articulations of national identity.

National sentiments in an age of national decline

The opposition of two rival models of French national identity as represented by Vichy's *Revolution nationale* and the anti-fascist Resistance and Liberation movement has never since been duplicated in such stark terms. After 1945 the ideological divide between competing nationalisms (Gaullist, Communist, Poujadist) became increasingly blurred as France struggled to come to terms with lost status in the world of the superpower blocs. In the 1960s Gaullism indeed appeared to have achieved a new nationalist synthesis which reconciled old antagonisms behind presidentialism, economic modernisation, and the slogan of an 'independent' foreign and defence policy.

Ironically the state-led modernisation of the 1960s decisively opened the French economy to the international forces which would progressively reduce the autonomy of national government in the sphere of economic and other related policy fields. The failure of the Socialists' interventionist programme in 1981-2 ('Keynesianism in one country') was taken as confirmation that in the age of 'market globalism' governments no longer had sufficient leverage over the domestic economy to implement a nationalist industrial regeneration strategy. The end of the cold war and the demise of the bloc system has similarly undermined the bases of France's discourse of national independence in foreign and defence policy [Chafer and Jenkins, 1996]. The current 'crisis of political representation' in France reflects widespread disillusionment with the incapacity of governments to 'deliver the goods', itself a symptom of the crisis of the nation-state as the primary agency of decision-making in an increasingly supranational world.

In this context, it is not surprising that nationalism has lost its credibility as a political ideology and programme, and has been largely jettisoned by mainstream French political parties. However, other factors have also contributed to this process. Politicised versions of national

identity were based on other collective solidarities, value-systems and institutions which have since been eroded by social and cultural change: on the Left working-class communities, trade unionism, social egalitarianism, the *ecole republicaine*; on the Right religious belief, Church and Army.[Mendras and Cole, 1991]. The advent of a more individualistic, socially and culturally pluralistic, multi-ethnic society has weakened the appeal of the historic myths which bound *nation* and *state* together.

This growing *separation* was already visible culturally in the events of May 1968, which may be seen as a revolt of *civil society* against prevailing state structures. It was significant that the main political targets of the movement were Gaullism and Communism, which in their different ways incarnated the bureaucratic, centralising, homogenising logic of French national identity-formation. It is significant too that the social movements of the 1970s, for which May 1968 acted as a catalyst, reflected a challenge to the assimilationist model of French nationhood - regionalism, feminism, anti-racism, Third Worldism.

The rise of the Front national may be seen as a symptom of the difficulties of transition and adaptation to a post-industrial, post-colonial, post-national society. Le Pen's movement feeds on the insecurities engendered by this process, appealing to those who feel most threatened by market globalism, and exploiting in a racist direction the ideological space opened up by the mainstream parties' abandonment of nationalist discourse. Significantly, the FN's nationalism is not geared to the development of a coherent and credible political programme, but to the populist exploitation of identity crisis at both local community and national level [Jenkins and Copsey, 1996, pp.116-121]. It feeds on fear for the future and nostalgia for the past, and may be seen as a form of resistance to what Hobsbawm has called the 'supranational restructuring of the globe'. [Hobsbawm, 1990, p.182].

Before turning finally to the relationship between France's self-image as a nation, and the idea of 'Europe', let us summarise the implications of the preceding observations.

1.   *National consciousness* in France is well-established, but the central reference-point in the historical process of nation-formation, namely the *nation-state*, no longer provides a convincing focus for political aspirations. There is an increasing separation between the

long-cultivated sense of 'belonging' to a national community, and the logic of self-government on which that community was originally based.[4]

2.   As a result, *nationalism* as a political programme has lost credibility and *national identity* has become less tangible. While Gaullism appeared to have attenuated the sharp ideological polarisations of the past, and to have laid the foundations for a more comfortable and less conflictual sense of nationhood, those who subsequently hailed a new era of 'consensus' and 'la fin de l'exception francaise' now appear too complacent in their predictions.[Mendras & Cole, 1991: Furet, 1978]

3.   What exactly *are* the 'national sentiments' of ordinary French people, assiduously cultivated over 200 years by rival regimes and movements, but now deprived of any realistic and coherent political expression? At this point, it is worth reminding ourselves that public opinion at large is rarely as sensitive to ideological nuances as the politicised *milieux* of *'minorites agissantes'*. It was only at critical moments - when national territory was threatened, or when the legitimacy of the state was seriously called into question - that rival conceptions of national identity achieved a wider popular currency. And indeed, when such circumstances encouraged national consensus (e.g. the *Union sacree* of 1914) the imagery was depoliticised. Socialists and conservatives may have rationalised the need for war in very different terms, but this had limited popular resonance because these different motives led to the same conclusion. On the other hand, in the period before and during the second world war rival nationalisms became sharply polarised, invoking not only different histories and value-systems, but different forms of state, different external enemies, different policies. In this context, the stark political choices involved inevitably impinged more heavily on popular consciousness.

4.   However, in periods of greater stability it is safe to assume that, for the majority who were not politically active or engaged, *national sentiments* were more amorphous - an attachment to a familiar spatial environment, to its traditions and way of life, mediated perhaps through regional, religious or class loyalties, but only vaguely 'political' (that sense of having a stake in the national community which Hobsbawm has called 'state patriotism'). [Hobsbawm, 1990, p.80-100] In the case of France, however, there is

perhaps another more widely-shared sentiment, equally difficult to *demarcate* politically but 'political' nonetheless, namely that sense of France's exemplary universal mission and its past status as a 'great power' (both continental and colonial). Part of the success of Gaullism was that it found ways of nurturing that illusion even in the changed world system of the super-powers, and it is that illusion which is increasingly exposed in the era of accelerating globalisation.

France and Europe

In the post-war period the construction of Europe as a transnational institutional entity has become a crucial reference-point for defining French political movements as more or less 'nationalist'. Under the Fourth Republic in the 1950s, the debate over the proposed creation of a European Defence Community appeared to polarise opinion between the nationalist 'extremes' (Communists, left Socialists and Gaullists) on the one hand, and on the other a centre ground stretching from moderate Socialists to conservative 'free-marketeers' whose pro-Europeanism has been identified as implicitly 'non-nationalist'.

This is a simplistic dichotomy for several reasons. First of all, in the context of the emerging post-war structures of the Cold War and bloc politics, it would be facile simply to *equate* Communist and Gaullist 'nationalisms', each of which had its own distinctive ideological rationale, both domestic and international. Admittedly the themes of their opposition to the European enterprise sometimes overlapped, and reinforced one another at the level of public opinion - the resistance legacy, fear of a renascent Germany, a shared though far from identical anti-Americanism. But the differences in their social constituencies and domestic political aspirations, and above all their different *locations* in the Cold War divide, can hardly be presented as minor nuances, as marginal differences of emphasis in the rhetoric of national sovereignty and independence.

Similarly, it would be misleading to separate the pro-European project from this wider international context. While (most) Socialists, Christian Democrats and the *droite moderee* shared a fundamental anti-communism, they did not have an identical vision of the kind of

Europe they wished to create, or of how this emerging entity should position itself in world affairs. At one level there were (and arguably still are) tensions between a Europe shaped largely by economic liberalism and one based on the model of social democracy. At another level, not all pro-Europeans saw the future community as part of the bloc architecture of the 'free world' and the Western Alliance. At least in the early 1950s there remained a significant Left-neutralist element which aspired to a non-aligned Europe as a third force in the world system, equidistant between American capitalism and Soviet Communism, a kind of socialist prefiguration of the Gaullist discourse of the 1960s [Cornick, 1996].

This mention of De Gaulle brings us to a further point of contention. Orthodox historiography implies a 'break' between the foreign policy of the Fourth Republic (ineffective, compliant, undermined by internal divisions) and that of the Fifth (decisive, independent, and based on an emerging Gaullist consensus). As Jolyon Howorth has suggested in a recent essay, [Howorth, 1996] this perspective underestimates the degree of continuity in the French state's quest for international influence and status in the post-war era, and the persistent importance of 'Europe' in these calculations . For successive French governments, the formal transfers of sovereignty involved in the creation of transnational structures were compensated by the prospect of increased leverage on world affairs if France could shape the emerging community in line with its own institutional and ideological preferences.

De Gaulle's endorsement of the Treaty of Rome when he came to power in 1958, his subsequent advocacy of an *Europe des patries*, his vision of an enlarged European space independent of the power blocs, confirmed his own particular (and in the event highly seductive) conception of how French and European interests might coincide. But by the same token, those who advocated different institutional models and international roles for Europe were not necessarily any less preoccupied with the furtherance of *French interests*, they simply perceived these through a different ideological prism. In other words, the contrast between *nationalist* and *non-nationalist* responses to the project of European integration is not the most helpful analytical framework.

The notion that something called 'Europe' exists, and that France should have a leading role in determining its shape and direction, is widely shared across the political spectrum. The obsessive use of the barometer of 'nationalism' tends to obscure the fact that different kinds of 'Europe' are

on the agenda - one defined by the liberal market economy or by more social-democratic principles, a community integrated 'vertically' through national governments or more 'horizontally' through transnational institutions, a community open to the world or an economic and cultural 'fortress'. In other words, Europe remains a 'potentiality', and needs to become a genuine political 'space' in which these different conceptions can freely compete rather than being dressed up and disguised as the rival 'interests' of *nations* (i.e. states).

Europe as a political 'space'

To return to our central theme, the French model of nation-building is instructive for the creation of Europe precisely because it embraced rival conceptions of national identity. *National consciousness* did not imply consensus, a single hegemonic image of essential 'Frenchness'. Rather it reflected growing recognition of the nation-state as a framework within which different visions of the 'nation' could be articulated. In this respect, 'doing' helped to create a sense of 'being', and to the extent that the European Union achieves popular recognition as a significant decision-making agency, it too could become a framework for the development of a growing *European* consciousness. But this 'consciousness' should not be equated with 'identity', which in the European context would necessarily be highly pluralistic both regionally and ideologically.

However, for this process to take full effect the institutions of the EU need greater political legitimacy. A sense of being directly affected by, and implicated in, the decision-making process is a necessary precondition for the emergence of a genuine popular European consciousness, and this can only be achieved if institutions are transparent, accountable and representative. The construction of European 'citizenship' is therefore of central importance, and this raises crucial questions about the patterns of integration in the European Community.

The present model is essentially one of *vertical* integration though member nation-states. The key source of collective decisions is inter-governmental, and the approval of the legislative and administrative outcomes is entrusted to national parliaments. This process has negative implications for the development of European consciousness for a number of reasons:

1.   Decisions are taken at an elite level at several removes from the arena of public scrutiny

and debate. Their implementation emanates from what is often perceived as an unaccountable bureaucracy, and national parliaments absorb the details into their routine business. As a result, the affairs of the European Union have only limited 'visibility', and thus even the basic pre-requisite of democratic accountability is unfulfilled.

2. Since the representative principle is deemed to be assured by the democratic legitimacy of national governments and parliaments, the affairs of the European Union are forced into a framework which emphasises the plurality (and rivalry) of *national* interests. This imagery inevitably promotes popular perceptions of 'Europe' as an *external* agency constraining the freedom of manoeuvre of national governments, and identified with the hegemonic aspirations of other nation-states.

3. What is 'lost' in this imagery is the recognition that in these vertical structures 'nations' are represented by 'states', and that these states reflect the ascendancy of particular sets of vested interests within their respective communities. In reality, within each nation-state there is a diversity of views about the future shape and role of 'Europe', but this diversity is stifled by an institutional straitjacket which reifies the member states (rather the European 'citizenry' itself) as the legitimate democratic 'actors' in the European Union.

In other words, the spread of popular European 'consciousness' requires the promotion of *horizontal* integration, permitting the cultivation of collective aspirations which transcend the purely *national* divisions favoured by the present institutional arrangements. It would be naive to pretend, of course, that two hundred years of nation-building have left no mark; that linguistic and cultural differences, historical animosities, uneven economic development, dissimilar political and social structures, count for nothing. But it is equally the case that economic globalism, mass migration and mass communication have narrowed such differences, that the efficacy of national decision-making is increasingly called into question, and that the political issues that mobilise public opinion increasingly transcend national boundaries, invoking transnational solidarities and inviting transnational solutions.[5] In short, it is only when (if) the European Union reflects the *ideological* diversity of its political community (rather than just its vertical *national* components) that it will become the kind of political 'space' which will promote

a sense of 'citizenship'.

Europe: 'state' and 'civil society'

There is another respect, however, in which the French nation-building process may serve more as a 'caution' than as an example for the European community. Whatever their ideological differences, the movements that competed for control of the French state were always tempted to use the centralised apparatus to create a homogenised national culture, ironing out linguistic differences, discouraging local and regional identities, and seeking to assimilate immigrant communities. If this state-led integrationist model now appears to have foundered on the realities of an increasingly pluralistic and multi-ethnic France, then all the more reason for rejecting it in the wider context of Europe where cultural differences are even more complex and even less amenable to 'top-down' strategies of this sort. *Doing* will not create a sense of *being* if it is foisted on reluctant peoples from above by institutions that enjoy little democratic legitimacy.

This is not to say that institutional change is irrelevant. Indeed, there is an urgent need to remedy the so-called 'democratic deficit' in Europe, by widening the opportunities for citizen participation and representation, and making the executive agencies of the EU more accountable to transnational representative bodies. However, it will (persuasively) be argued that institutions like the European Parliament lack the democratic credibility to be entrusted with greater power, and lack the power to achieve greater credibility. Such arguments are usually underpinned by the increasingly unconvincing rhetoric of *national* sovereignty, but they are also deployed by 'free-market' pro-Europeans who see no reason to encumber the process of economic integration with democratic controls.

That said, there is a 'chicken and egg' problem about the creation of a more democratic Europe. The democratisation of transnational institutions has to be accompanied by the development of a representative infrastructure in 'civil society'. Political parties, interest and pressure groups, social movements and non-governmental organisations of every kind have to learn to cooperate across frontiers and to develop a distinctly European agenda. The incentive to do so is, of course, reduced by the relative weakness of organisations like the European Parliament, but in turn the case for strengthening the latter's role is undermined by the absence of a developed European 'civil society'. The only way of resolving this problem is by making the democratic reform of

EU institutions a central campaigning theme around which 'civil society' activists could begin to coalesce.

Further progress with EU integration through the present vertical inter-governmental processes would tend to reinforce fears of an elite-led project leading to a super-state, one which would govern 'subjects' rather than 'citizens', and which would be enslaved to the principles of market globalism. Indeed, these fears have already found sufficient political expression to jeopardise the whole enterprise. European consciousness cannot be forged from above by unrepresentative and unaccountable institutions. It will emerge only though the effective practice of citizenship within a democratised institutional framework, and the pressure for such reforms can only come from below though the agency of 'civil society'.

Conclusion

The construction of a democratic European 'space' through horizontal integration would also help to resolve the tensions between different levels of allegiance - regional, ethnic, national, European. The cultural diversity of Europe should be perceived as a rich resource rather than as an obstacle to be 'ironed out' by bureaucratic homogenisation. European consciousness will need to co-exist with a plurality of other social identities. However, 'difference' does not lead remorselessly to antagonism and conflict, unless cultivated in that direction by political actors. But that is precisely the effect of the current 'vertical' integration through member states, which constantly emphasises the alleged *contradiction* between 'national' and 'European' interests.

'Horizontal' integration would on the other hand emphasise aspirations that are *shared* across the frontiers, and would facilitate collective action on policy issues that clearly require European mediation. This would be quite compatible with recognition that other areas of policy are more appropriately dealt with by nation-states, regions or municipalities. Indeed, the notion of 'subsidiarity' implies a functional distribution of policy-making competences, and the emergence of a multi-layered civic community from local to European level. The British Government's deliberate distortion of the term to justify a centralised and unitary 'nation-state' reveals all the dangers of the 'vertical' model of integration.

As Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out, each individual has a multiplicity of 'identities'.

[Hobsbawm, 1990, p.123.] These are not exclusive of one another, not interchangeable 'like shoes'. They co-exist, even though circumstances may make one form of identity more salient at a given time. There is always the possibility that these identities will enter into conflict with one another, but this does not indicate that they are *fundamentally* antagonistic and irreconcilable. Genuinely *painful* choices are normally imposed by problematic historical situations, and indeed by the willingness of politicians to exploit and magnify the particular 'identity' which suits their purposes. Attempts to forge a European consciousness will therefore need to acknowledge and respect cultural pluralism. Failure to do this is grist to the mill of those who feed politically on Europe's ethnic and national divisions, or who envisage a 'Fortress Europe' closed to the outside world.

In this respect, it is the inclusive 'civic', rather than exclusive 'ethnic', model of nation-building which should serve as an example. Social identities are secured and stabilised by political empowerment, and this applies as much to the *creation* of a sense of being 'European' as it does to the *protection* of older national, regional or local loyalties. Indeed, the current wave of 'Euroscepticism' reflects popular frustration at the inability of national governments to 'deliver' what has traditionally been expected of them. It has been easy to lay this 'loss of sovereignty' at the door of Europe, and to present the integration process as a *vehicle* of market globalism rather than as an attempt to regain a degree of sovereignty at a higher level.

These 'conflicts of identity' can only be resolved within decentralised structures of democratic accountability, through the various territorial levels from European Union to locality. But these structures must be based on a realistic assessment of the policy constraints at each level and on a clear demarcation of policy-making functions. Only on this basis will it become possible to narrow the gap between expectations and outcomes, to restore credibility to political processes, and to build a European citizenry based on 'multiple' but mutually compatible identities.

Notes

1.   Stalin's famous definition runs 'A nation is an historically evovled, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture'. J. Stalin, <u>Der Marxismus und die nationale Frage</u>, Vienna, 1913, pp.10-11.

2.	Thus, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein writes 'in almost every case statehood preceded nationhood, and not the other way round, despite a widespread myth to the contrary' I.Wallerstein, 'The construction of peoplehood' in E.Balibar and I.Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, Verso, 1991, p.81.

3.	See for example Z. Sternhell, La droite revolutionnaire 1885-1914: Les origines francaises du fascisme (Seuil, 1978) and A.D.Smith, Nationalism in the Twentieth Century, Martin Robertson, 1979 p.67.

4.	In the words of Stanley Hoffmann, 'Thus today, for domestic and external reasons, the French state no longer defines or crystallises French nationalism, and nationalism in French society no longer serves as a forceful inspiration for the state'. S.Hoffmann, Essais sur la France: declin ou renouveau?, Seuil, 1974, p.483.

5.	David Goldblatt and David Held wrote recently that 'we live in a world of overlapping communities of fate in which transboundary problems require common, democratic, transboundary solutions. At the level of the EU this requires the active promotion of policies to overcome the democratic deficit and the deployment of transnational referenda on major Europe-wide questions'. ('Bring back democracy', New Statesman, 10 January, 1997, pp.24-6.

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