

Culture as Opposed to What? Cultural Belonging in the Context of National and European Identity

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Abstract

The past twenty-five years have seen an explosion of interest in nationalism and nationality in the social sciences – the past ten also in cultural studies. These two disciplinary areas define their objects of study differently, but both have recently started to converge in the pervasive use of the term ‘national identity’, which in turn relies on the term ‘cultural identity’. Although theoretical complications entailed by the use of ‘identity’ as a concept have been noted, the theorization of identity as culture has occurred almost by default, with the term ‘culture’ merely designating what needs to be explained, and the inherent circularity of ‘cultural identity’ as a category remaining unaddressed. The two approaches differ in their understanding of the crucial categories of ‘culture’ and ‘politics’ in their accounts of nation and national identity. Cultural studies accounts focus on politics in terms of cultural politics, and thus fail to take on board important aspects of the social science accounts which they take as standard reference points. Both approaches ultimately rely upon ‘culture’ as an all-inclusive category of social subjectivity, which remains undertheorized in both approaches, albeit in significantly contrasting ways. The place of culture in recent work on European identity functions differently, and provides a useful counterpoint to these difficulties.

Key words

■ cultural belonging ■ cultural identity ■ culture as solidarity ■ European identity ■ national identity

Introduction

The complexities of unravelling the force and import of the use of the term ‘culture’ in a given theoretical context are well known. It operates as at once what is taken for granted, the tacit dimension of everyday practices and behaviour, and

what has been thought about most, what is most conscious and developed (Eliot, 1948: 120). Moreover, it is frequently the interrelation and overlap between these senses that is most significant, as the founder of cultural studies, Raymond Williams, stressed (1976: 91). In the context of national identity, the problem only becomes worse, since the relationship of culture to politics is crucial to the theory of nationalism and nation – indeed, the nation-state has been defined as the coincidence of the two dimensions within a particular social formation, its cultural and political boundaries being co-extensive. Culture has become the focus for differentiation within this area. In this discourse, ‘cultural difference’ becomes ‘cultural identity’ and functions as the basis of recognition: from the outside as basis for entitlement, and to demarcate a particular object of study, and from the inside, as the basis for solidarity and ‘belonging’.

Recent approaches to the idea of ‘nation’ emerging from the field of cultural studies have tended to replace ‘politics’ with cultural politics alone. Two attempts have been made recently to argue against this as a generalized distortion occurring in cultural studies, one by Terry Eagleton (2000), the other by Francis Mulhern (2000). Mulhern views this tendency as a ‘fixed impulse to displace politics as a form of social authority’ in order to replace it with ‘the cultural’ (2000: 181–2). This particular battle is between what Mulhern terms the upholders of ‘Kulturkritik’, in which high culture has a normative value, as ‘the principle of a good society’ (2000: xvi), to be reasserted against the inadequacy of the political, and the attempt by cultural studies practitioners to re-include the popular as part of a more generalized understanding of signifying forms and practices. In the context of nationality, nation and nationalism, however, the particular problems caused by this tendency are of a more specific kind. On the one hand, an insufficient regard for politics outside of cultural politics in the ‘culturalist’ camp, and on the other, the all-prevalence of both ‘national’ and ‘cultural identities’ as terms within social science theories of nation, without due allowance for the awkward theoretical baggage they entail. To elucidate this further I review two recent attempts to disentangle ‘identity’ itself, both what it entails, and how it emerged as such an all-pervasive usage, and then turn to the implications of the use of the term ‘culture’ in this context.

The Problematic of Identity

In an important contribution to this problematic in terms of national identity, Perry Anderson (1991) suggests that the force of ‘identity’ in Braudel’s multi-volume *The Identity of France* is a double one: ‘what subsists and what singles out’ and that for Braudel these are in fact one and the same (1991: 3). The lastingness which is to be the marker of distinctiveness analysed in this volume is that of certain durable structures of demography and of production. Anderson queries aspects of Braudel’s account of both these areas, but more significantly for present purposes, he suggests that Braudel’s search was misdirected. Since these structures are no longer in place, and have not been so for some time as a result of the

structural homogenizing of modern capitalist societies (1991: 5), the possible ground for differentiation of such societies is *culture*. This is the area which was to have been addressed in the penultimate of the projected final two volumes of the series which Braudel did not live to write. These were to have covered politics, culture and society, and external relations respectively, though the latter's non-appearance is not considered in Anderson's account.

Anderson draws out what he sees as a discursive shift, a 'change of register in the discourse of national difference' (1991: 7), from the use of 'national character' to that of 'national identity'. In his view, this has taken place as recently as the previous decade, and the terms are often used interchangeably. Both of these suggestions are somewhat implausible. As he himself notes (1991: 6), the term 'national character', far from being used interchangeably, has fallen into 'intellectual disgrace', though he suggests that it is still everywhere assumed and relied upon in conversational usage. However, leaving this to one side, the mere fact that he sees the two notions as functionally related, the one taking over where the other left off, is striking. 'National identity' as a concept seems now to find a much more automatic train of discursive connections in relation to families of conceptual usage including 'cultural identity' and 'collective identities'. 'National character' stands apart from this as of historical interest but in a fundamentally different vein, long since vanished from respectable theories of nation and of nationalism. In order to establish their difference – where a demonstration of a direct relationship might seem more to be expected – Anderson lists sets of contrasting connotations:

The concept of character is in principle comprehensive . . . it is self-sufficient, needing no external reference for its definition; and it is mutable, allowing for partial or general modification. By contrast the notion of identity has a more selective charge, conjuring up what is inward and essential; relational, implying some element of alterity for its definition; and perpetual, indicating what is continuously the same. (1991: 7)

Appealing again to conversational usage, he notices that a 'crisis' of identity is spoken of, and a 'change' in character, but not the reverse – except in the context of disguise. Having derived these contrasting connotations from what he sees as general conceptions pertaining to individuals, he then extrapolates out to groups, 'What obtains for individuals, holds good for peoples. If national character was thought to be a settled disposition, national identity is a self-conscious projection.' Anderson claims that identity won out over character because of its greater possibilities of moral reassurance at a time of social upheaval (post-World War II), and because of its suggestion of 'a more intimate, idealised bond than the gross links of daily custom'. Its only problem was that, in both the individual and the collective case, it was more 'brittle . . . the very rigidity of its social projection . . . makes it prey to a kind of structural anxiety' (1991: 7). Aspects of this account are clearly somewhat contradictory, not least the dating of the conceptual transition, if such it is, the description of contrasting 'general conceptions' of the two notions juxtaposed with the suggestion that they are widely treated as interchangeable, and the view that one 'declined' as an idea to which any credence was attached, even as its continuing usage is appealed to.

This contradictory aspect indicates not just uncertainties in the account, but the tangled nature of the terrain. The various problems raised by his brief but suggestive account of what gave 'rise to the discourse of national identity' are too numerous to be dealt with here. For the moment, what I am interested in is the unquestioned move from individual to collective identity, and the fact that, despite Anderson's remark that the ground of Braudel's misdirected search for French identity should have been culture, and that his own concern is stated as the theoretical shifts in the 'discourse of national difference' occurring in the 1980s, he does not notice the marked pervasiveness in that discourse of the term 'cultural identity' as a direct corollary of the shift to 'national identity', nor the ways in which identity habitually figures in that context – as fluid, multiple and altogether problematic. Anderson's article is unusual in its confident listing of the attributes of identity, and, as I have remarked, is at least unafraid to link national character and identity in genealogical relation, and to make an explicit claim for culture as the ground for the latter. More often, as other commentators have pointed out, 'national identity', 'cultural identity' and 'national culture' all feature as residual categories without explicit conceptualization, their conceptual force and overlap remaining unexplained, and their assumptions about how cultural borders might be constituted and reproduced left unexamined (Schlesinger, 1987: 233).

A very different attempt at 'identifying identity' was made eight years earlier by an American historian (Gleason, 1983). Gleason also noticed the term's all-prevalence, but in the significantly different, albeit related, context of immigration and ethnicity. Rather than elucidating a 'general conception' of the term, he strikes a cautionary note about its elusiveness, pointing out that simply qualifying it as 'ethnic identity' or 'American identity' only serves to make matters worse. As indicated in the title of his article, Gleason offers what he terms a 'semantic history' of identity, tracing the usage back to its emergence as a widely employed social science term in the 1950s, a lineage deriving from the work of the émigré psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson. Erikson, who coined the phrase 'identity crisis', used the term to express the interaction of the individual with the social in terms of ascriptive social roles and the internalization of cultural norms, influenced both by Freud's theory of childhood identifications, and by the beginning of social psychological role-theory. The stress was, however, entirely on interaction – not on collective or group identities. However, Erikson did have strong links with anthropologists such as Margaret Mead who had pioneered the school of so-called 'culture-and-personality' studies in the 1930s. This approach was taken up just after the Second World War by UNESCO in the form of the 'Tensions Project', a collaborative investigation into national character as the route to reducing tensions inimical to international understanding. National character was here accorded full scientific status. Most interestingly, studies of American character proved extremely popular – in a society of mass immigration – becoming, Gleason argues, the rationale for the newly separate discipline of American Studies (Gleason, 1983: 925). These studies of 'the American character' dealt with the relationship of individual to society, very much as Erikson did,

but also how the individual was 'shaped' by the culture in which he participated, thus marking a transitional phase between national character in the earlier sense of 'native genius' to something much closer to 'national identity'. But, Gleason argues, whereas in the 1950s the idea of group identity seemed at best old-fashioned, in the 1960s and 1970s it gained currency in the context of Vietnam and 'the race crisis'. These cultural historical markers are given by Gleason in order to account for the term's inflationary use, already dismissed as mere cliché by the early 1970s. The cultural-historical terrain is rather too vast to quarrel with here, let alone the methodology of Gleason's picaresque narrative of lexical vicissitudes. However, what is of interest for the purposes of this article is what Gleason deems to be the single deciding factor in the term's 'success'. He states:

... *identity* promised to elucidate a new kind of conceptual linkage between the two elements of the problem [of the relationship of the individual to society], since it was used in reference to, and dealt with the relationship of, the individual personality and the ensemble of social and cultural features that gave different groups their distinctive character. (1983: 926)

The distinctiveness of the particular society, rather than simply 'the social' as specified by socio-economic typologies is linked back to identity formation by Gleason, effectively placing the individual in relation to a particular *national* society and/or culture. But the loss of 'identification' to the more widespread currency of 'identity' runs the risk of restricting it to 'self-image or self-definition' (Rée, 1998: 86), complicating its usage further by suggesting something more straightforward and all-encompassing, and, though not necessarily less active as a process, easier to construe as if it were a transparent social categorization, rather than an extremely complex and unclear composite of mass and individual ones over time.

The Pairing of National Identity and Cultural Identity

Both terms, as has been noted, are widely, though not always rigorously, used in the 'discourse of national difference', and some of the problems – including that of collective identity extrapolated out from a version of individual identity – have been pointed out by Étienne Balibar (1997: 94). This discourse in terms of its academic manifestations, as opposed to instances of popular usage, has been subject to a marked bifurcation in the past twenty years, immediately noticeable in the designation of its object – the area has been split into theories dealing avowedly with nationalism and those dealing with national identity and nation, the 'political' and the 'culturalist' approaches. At one level this methodological polarization might appear to reflect an entirely uncontroversial division of labour: one strand deals with the operations of political power and legitimation in terms of nationalist movements and nation-building, while the other focuses on the processes of cultural construction and social relations entailed by national identity, and the question of 'the cultural basis of national authority: how . . . we

construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life, and from what sources [do] they derive their legitimacy' (Jackson and Penrose, 1993: 11). However, what I am concerned with here is not simply that such a split might in fact prove unhelpfully artificial, but that both sides end up relying on undertheorized categories such as 'cultural identity' as a direct result of the polarization. Neither 'cultural identity' nor 'national identity' signify an exclusively culturalist approach. Rather, they have been absorbed into the mainstream of both. To understand the development of both these terms, we need to understand the use of both 'nation' in culturalist theories, and 'culture' in theories of nationalism.

The Use of *Nation* in Culturalist Theories

A classic instance can be found in Homi Bhabha's Introduction to the collection, *Nation and Narration* (1990: 1–2). Here, 'nation' is glossed as 'a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social *life* rather than the discipline of social polity'. Bhabha makes this point in relation to a well-known passage from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), in which Anderson proposes that nationalism should be aligned with 'large cultural systems that preceded it' rather than with 'self-consciously held political ideologies', (Anderson, 1983: 19). Bhabha, in his own contribution to the volume, positions himself against the 'historical certainty and settled nature' of the term nationalism (1990: 292). His object is rather 'the western nation [viewed] as an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the *locality* of culture'. The nation is to be denaturalized as a term, its apparent natural existence and historical necessity relativized as one form among others, a historically specific variant of the wider problematic of culture as lived experience in relation to place. The contentious aspects of Benedict Anderson's own claim of the relevance of nationalism to earlier systems of kinship and religion will not be dealt with here. What is of crucial interest to understanding 'cultural identity' in relation to 'national identity' is what is at stake in the unassailed centrality of culture as all-embracing category.

Cultural studies exponents of this approach tend to rely, as Bhabha does, on noticing the importance accorded to culture in what Anthony Smith has termed the 'modernist' theory of nationalism (Smith, 1998). The role which it plays in relation to other factors, and the way in which it is used are not, however, always sufficiently allowed for. Smith provides a list of the ways in which 'culture' features in theories of nationalism. Though most often used in the anthropological sense of 'way of life' and the realm of the everyday, it also features in a number of other important ways. These include, notably: the role of both intellectuals and intelligentsias in the spread of nationalism (Hroch, 1985); 'high' culture in the sense of the role of ideology and of ideas, and of artistic expression (Hutchinson, 1994), in the spread of nationalism and the formation of nations; and, in terms of both the origins and the continued existence of nations, as the symbolic, that is to say, the myths and memories of what Smith designates the

'ethno-symbolic', or what features on the 'culturalist' side as the rather more inclusive category of 'cultural memory'. However, despite this complex and varied usage, culturalists have drawn more sustenance from two particular instances of claims for the centrality of culture to nations and nationality. If Benedict Anderson provides one crucial reference here, the other is the work of Ernest Gellner (1964, 1983). When Gellner states that 'modern man is loyal to a culture not a monarch, land or faith', the equation of cultural and national identity might seem to be entailed by this relation. But Gellner's use of 'culture' within his theory of nation-formation is extremely specific. Though he uses the distinction between 'high' culture and culture in the anthropological sense (wild/savage and garden/cultivated in his formulation, 1983: 50), he is using the former as marker of a certain stage of complexity within his functionalist theory rather than as the repository of intellectual and artistic achievement and activity mined for purposes of national/cultural identity-formation. 'Culture' is here homogenization and standardization of culture: the creation of mass education systems producing mass literacy within an official language, and thereby enabling the level of communication required by modern, industrialized societies. It is in this sense that Gellner means that identities derive from culture in this context – i.e. as opposed to an individual's place within a given, relatively fixed hierarchical structure. 'Nations' are indeed, in Gellner's view as in Bhabha's formulation given above, one form of living, a particular sociological arrangement responding to the needs of modernization – the 'western' in Bhabha's version. But they are *not* one form of 'living out culture': rather, culture just is what enables industrial society to function properly, and identification with culture is with this 'high' culture, imposed from above by the state. In his view, it is this which has 'made it seem . . . that nationality may be definable in terms of shared culture' (Gellner, 1983: 54–5). The boundaries of a standardized culture are the same as the political boundaries of a state because the state imposes the former, and this congruence is the distinctive marker of nations.

However, despite the programmatic clarity of Gellner's formulations, his espousal of the term 'high culture' has led to confusion for those operating with a different methodological intent. In his book-length attempt to map the complexities of the term mentioned above, Terry Eagleton states: 'we owe our modern notion of culture in large part to nationalism and colonialism' (2000: 26). Already, this is over- emotive, as if culture is *necessarily* tainted by its association with the nation-state. He goes on to rehearse Gellner's thesis in brief, but Eagleton's version lacks due recognition of the sociological nature of Gellner's usage of 'high' culture, immediately shifting it to a more 'cultural' one. Eagleton parses Gellner's theory as follows:

As the pre-modern nation gives way to the modern nation-state, the structure of traditional roles can no longer hold society together, and it is culture, in the sense of a common language, inheritance, educational system, shared values and the like, which steps in as the principle of social unity. (2000: 26)

In fact, Gellner's theory of culture in relation to nation steers clear of any

particular cultural or ideological 'contents' such as what Eagleton terms the inculcation of 'shared values and the like'. According to Gellner's account, the unificatory role of culture is entirely functional and self-perpetuating, and Eagleton is mistaken to include this element. Eagleton then adds that it is in this way that culture 'becomes a force to be reckoned with politically', a formulation which does little justice to Gellner's thesis of the congruence of culture and politics as determining the modern nation, and one which illustrates clearly the danger of cultural studies exaggerating the role of culture as politics, the tendency which Eagleton is himself aiming to locate and condemn.

Eagleton sees this tendency to conflate culture and politics as the direct result of the construal of culture 'as solidarity' and as identity (2000: 43), which takes off from the demarcation of culture in the 'anthropological' sense of culture as way of life, but includes a normative sense. This is the conjuncture which represents the other main problem in cultural studies approaches to nation and nationality. Clearly this sense of culture, the one to the fore in cultural identity, links back to Herder's holistic sense of culture, and, even if it does not place an overt valuation on collective particularity, its principles of definition correspond to this sense of group distinctiveness experienced through, and identifiable by, culture. However, the cultural studies use of the anthropological definition of culture is of course not for the purposes of celebrating or emphasizing cultural diversity understood in terms of the seamless identification of the 'fundamental units of humanity', each with its own discrete, organic culture. The point of what Stuart Hall termed 'the cultural turn', propounded and effected in his own work, was to stress how culture constitutes the relations and institutions of everyday life, and in effect to provide a new totality – 'the social totality becomes the cultural totality, political economy becomes cultural economy' (Kraniauskas, 1998: 16). Hence the question, culture as opposed to what? The distinction between culture and politics is collapsed completely; what is excluded is the sense of the nation-state in its organization of the relation between state and society. Culture and cultural politics are enlarged, and the emphasis on this kind of politics falls away, leading to a sense of national identity as just the experience of the cultural within certain chance boundaries. Additionally, the focus of 'cultural difference' leads directly back to the problems of the borders of culture, and the circular delimitation of groups in terms of culture in order then to signal their cultural distinctiveness. Culture is 'doubled' in this kind of approach, as both a 'distinctive organisation of social life and its own representation' (Bennett, 1998: 23). But the former aspect is not sufficiently allowed for, as in Bhabha's formulation above, of nation as the 'representation of social life *rather than* the discipline of social polity' [my emphasis]. Equally, solidarity is reduced to the particularism of cultural difference alone. There is an ever-present danger, notwithstanding intentions, not to allow for opposition, change, and critique as cultural possibilities and to equate shared culture with cultural homogeneity.

In terms of this methodological polarization, on the other side of the equation, within the social theory and Anglophone philosophical approaches to nation, this problem appears far more commonly under the label of 'multiculturalism' than

of 'nationalism' (Margalit, 1997) and the threat which multiculturalism is perceived to pose to monocultural liberal theories of the polity. It is in this context, that of minorities and of the politics of identity – ethnicity and immigration in Gleason's account, irredentism and secession in that of the cultural geographer, Jan Penrose (1995: 391) – that what Étienne Balibar has termed the 'ambivalent proximity of the discourse of cultural and national identity' (1995: 177) becomes unavoidable. As he comments, this is most noticeable in the discourse of officialdom, as for example that of UNESCO. Where in the 1950s project referred to already, UNESCO sought to defray international 'tensions' by enhancing the understanding of distinct national characters, it now seeks to resolve problems through culture, where culture is the basis for claims to entitlement in terms of group rights both within a particular dominant culture and in the context of immigration. The problem in both contexts, that of minority group identity and that of national identity, is the same, however, to the extent that 'cultural identity' is taken as the key marker in terms of group delimitation and identification of individuals with the group. The view that culture can be naturalized, with each cultural unit as a distinct species, is rejected. But essentialism is merely moved up a level – from culture to the process of group formation and identification itself. 'Culture' is thus no longer essentialized, but rather seen as an essential construction, and used to demarcate this process of group formation, which is seen as necessary, always and everywhere. However fluid and shifting identities based on culture may be, the process of group identity formation is not, and thus we end up with a psychologized remainder, upon which both political and cultural analysts rely.

The Use of *Culture* in Theories of Nationalism

An example of this in an avowedly 'political' analysis of nationalism and nationality can be found in the work of the historian John Breuilly (1993). Breuilly sees nationalism as a pseudo-solution to the problem of the split between state and society in the modern era. His approach to culture could not, at one level, be more strikingly different to that of the culturalists. Instead of reasserting the centrality of culture to nationalism, he excludes it from his study altogether. For Breuilly, the pseudo-solution of nationalism was to attempt to bridge the gap between politics and civil society by offering a mirage-like vision 'of the community defined simultaneously as the cultural and the political "nation" of theoretically equal citizens'. Culture here becomes the 'private character of the ruled society'. Nationalism as a form of cultural identity is excluded on methodological grounds, as not 'amenable to explanation'. Breuilly states:

People do yearn for communal membership, do have a strong sense of us and them, of territories as homelands, of belonging to culturally defined and bounded worlds which give their lives meaning. Ultimately, much of this is beyond rational analysis and, I believe, the explanatory powers of the historian. (1993: 401)

As Anthony Smith points out in commenting on this passage, splitting off political movements from 'sentiments' and banishing the latter, out of impatience with the time-wasting claims by cultural primordialists for a unique culture nation, and as if 'cultural identity' is necessarily implicated in this kind of argument, results in what he terms 'the unacceptable primordialism of an irrational need to belong' (1998: 87). Even though Breuille's thesis regarding nationalism deals with it as historically specific, the pseudo-solution to a specifically modern problem, the need for belonging is seen as timeless and non-specific. This is, in effect, no different to Jan Penrose's reliance on the essential nature of group formation, even though one account places culture completely centrally while the other seeks to exclude it from analysis. The need for 'cultural belonging' presented in this way ultimately takes us no further than the reductive psychological explanations of the appeal of nationalism of an earlier era: the idea that nationalism and nation are 'distortions of reality allowing men to cope with situations they might otherwise find unbearable' (Smith, 1998: 89), an ideological manoeuvre relying on intensified emotion and identification in periods of crisis; or, focusing on it in terms of the everyday, as another version of the 'gregarious herd' constituted by 'sentiment and instinct'.¹ Ultimately, underlying the most sophisticated analyses of the discursive construction of multiple and changing identities resides the untheorized idea of group/cultural belonging.

Margaret Canovan (1996: 13, 116, 130ff.) has argued that political theory in general has relied on a tacit assumption of what she terms 'nationhood', in presuming the existence of a political community which is in fact a national community specifically, though never identified as such. Effectively, both what Canovan is pointing to, and what the accounts mentioned above share, is the equation of 'the cultural' with 'the affective', how individuals identify with larger units to form a community, deemed to be moral, political and/or cultural, entailing a degree of mutual recognition over time rather than particular lasting patterns of culture or social structure, and a degree of ascription – members are not free to choose individually, or at least, even if they 'opt in' in a variety of ways and to differing degrees, what they participate in is not of their own, individual fashioning (1996: 55). This is, rather, a realm of *social* subjectivity. If the culturalist approach omits the 'political' as such, the political approach leaves the 'cultural' as the 'affective', an area which can be subtracted without loss from the causal and historical analysis of the nation as political system.

The Place of Culture in Approaches to European Identity

We have come a long way from the use of culture as what remains after the homogenization of political and economic structures, the single differentiating factor, in terms of superficial variants of advanced capitalist societies – the role proposed for it by Anderson. In terms of culture as ground for identity, I will turn finally to the European case and the possibility of supranational identity,

which has thrown up very different approaches to the problem of the relation of 'politics' to 'culture', and the import of these terms.

Much of the nervousness over the risk of seeming to essentialize culture stems from the widely known distinction, first coined by Friedrich Meinecke in 1907, between culture-nations and state-nations, cultural/ethnic nationalism and civic/political nationalism. The first half of the opposition is, as has been seen already, widely acknowledged in terms of an obligatory reference to Herder and to German Romanticism in culturalist discussions of nation, the second, less so. The use of this contrast originates in the famous putative contrast between French universalist legitimation of nation and the German in terms of cultural particularity, dating back to Renan's polemical usage.² Generally, it is invoked in order to valorize the civic version. Without being able to draw out the many complications and ramifications of this distinction, I pause only to note that it scarcely figures in culturalist accounts of national/cultural identity, just as the problematic of the nation as a particular configuration of state and democracy does not. The distinction has reoccurred, however, in the context of European identity, in what is in effect a valorization of an ideal of the civic, universalist side of the equation in the attempt to bypass what I have termed 'the affective'. Both Étienne Tassin and Gerard Delanty have appealed to Habermas's coinage of a 'post-national constitutional' patriotism and/or identity.³ According to Tassin, even if it is clear – or at least arguable – what the idea of Europe has denoted in the past, the idea of European political union has entailed a sharp break between the new European community and Europe as a historical and cultural entity (Tassin, 1992: 171). Tassin is content to see the European 'political community' as the framework enabling the confrontation of culturally divergent national identities (Tassin, 1994: 111). Michael Mosher (1993) has welcomed this putative new version of supranational identity and new idea of Europe as one which avoids the problems of national identity and nationalism's identification of politics with culture, appealing rather to a 'partial divorce between culture and public function, and to a politics that [has] slipped out of culture'. The 'political' identity of Europe on this view, is defined by its 'democratic principle' (Tassin, 1992: 171), that is to say by a shared political ideal. In his *Inventing Europe* (1995b), Gerard Delanty draws out what he sees as the historical equation of European identity with an abstract notion of high culture.⁴ His invocation of an ideal of citizenship sets itself up against this, which he sees as both essentialist and nostalgic; Europe as the 'high culture of its past, the unity of its traditions'. The civic, ethical ideal is opposed to this kind of appeal to a 'spiritual substratum' whose roots in cultural pessimism he traces (1995a: 31). Here, then, the 'cultural' in the sense of solidarity and identity which I have been discussing, is relegated for fear of its associations with racism and claims to cultural distinctiveness of a particular group as grounds for superiority and exclusion. Instead, Delanty tackles high culture as the supposed historical bond of Europeanness, and argues for its replacement by a political approach at the level of the abstract and the ideal. He admits that this notion of 'post-national citizenship' appears merely formal, and as such, risks vacuity. He advocates participation – active

citizens, anti-racism – as the key element in the creation of the ‘substantive dimension’. Linda Colley (1999) proposed a similar model of multiply layered allegiances, including the European, based on a more formal notion of citizenship, at a recent Downing Street lecture. Both are seeking to avoid the problem of the definition of citizenship in cultural terms which they see as leading immediately to racism and to xenophobia.

Other commentators have found the prospect of politics alone, at this abstract level of political ideals, as putative ground for forging a new European identity, unconvincing. Attempting to replace an ideal of high culture with an abstract political ideal cannot, it is argued, prove viable as the basis for shaping a new common identity. This would be to conflate *legitimacy* with identity (Anderson, 1991: 8). Anthony Smith (1997: 337) has considered the possibilities of deliberately conjuring up and developing ‘sentiments of affinity’, and in order to respond to a perceived need for ‘a European mystique’ (Seton-Watson, 1989: 39). This would involve invoking elements of shared European culture analogously to the creation of nationalist historiographies, as earlier Pan-Europeanists once proposed the use of Carolingian imperial myths to act as ‘mythomoteur’ of a political mythology. He rejects the possibility of identity formation being amenable to such shallow forms of social engineering.⁵ Philip Schlesinger (1994: 320) comments that ‘without a place for culture it does not add up to a convincing recipe for collective identity’. Both reject the idea of political ideals as a realistic unifying force: culture is seen as essential to a sense of common belonging, again as the only possible source of compelling ‘tales of solidarity within bounded communities’ (Schlesinger, 1994: 318), but one whose operations require sedimenting over generations. This, even though the only acknowledged historical bond of ‘the idea of Europe’ as transnational culture is that of high culture – the one which Delanty sees as discredited and essentialist.

Conclusion

These pronouncements on the future of Europe and the possibility of an overarching European identity which seek to counterbalance perceived negative aspects of the pattern of national identities remain simply projections for the moment, exhortatory at best, and ultimately uncertain of the possibilities of the relationship between the national and the European. What is interesting to this account is how culture, understood in a particular way, is argued both for and against as ground for identity, on the model of national/cultural identity. This usage stems from the work of cultural studies, but is less totalizing; the term does not function without opposition. The demarcations of ‘the cultural’ as opposed to ‘the social’ or the ‘political/economic’ are of course ‘theory-bound’, indicating the differences and different concerns of different disciplines (Rorty, 1994: 155). However, as I have argued here, this does not reflect an unproblematic division of labour, in which different though related objects of study fall within different spheres. The object of study, ‘nation’, is differently constituted by the different approaches,

and theoretical problems and confusion can only ensue. As Williams (1976: 76) argues, the term 'community', like culture in the sense of 'cultural identity' and 'national identity' explored here, functions doubly as both form of organization and subjective sense of relation to and involvement with this larger unit, and is never given an opposing or distinguishing term. If culture is then also the constitutive system of signifying practices, the specific forms of those practices, and the reflection upon them, there would seem to be nothing left to be in opposition to it. In terms of national identity where all these senses of culture are needed, this leads to an unhelpful conflation of politics with cultural politics only, and a misunderstanding of the importance of the distinctive relationship of the two to the history and theory of the nation-state. Equally, and again like the term 'community', a collective entity is being posited, and a kind of 'belonging' is subsumed under the term. The all-encompassing usage of the term only serves to naturalize this as 'essential', or 'fundamental yet unanalysable'. To understand this process further, how it functions and whether it is in fact essential, it would seem necessary to reduce the reach and inclusiveness of the term, in order to retain the delicate balance of the complex interrelations of the processes and forms habitually included within it at present.

Notes

- 1 Bertrand Russell (1917) cited in Rée (1998: 82). On the active construction of belonging constituted by everyday practices at a tacit level, in which 'the flag remains unwaved', and nationality is a taken-for-granted part of an ongoing discursive reality, see Billig (1995).
- 2 Cf. Llobera (1996: 203). Todorov (1989: 238) glosses the former simply as 'attachment to one's culture' and cites Artaud's endorsement of this and castigation of 'civic nationalism' as the chauvinistic, warlike form, an unusual reversal of the more common alignment of the civic and the rational, the cultural and the primordial. Cf. also Brubaker (1992).
- 3 Habermas (1992), Tassin (1992: 171; 1994), Delanty (1995b: 163). An example of this kind of 'Euro-idealism' on the basis of a culturalist postmodern approach can be found in Jenks (1993: 148).
- 4 Cf. also Delanty (1995a) and J. Nederveen Pieterse (1991).
- 5 Perhaps more plausibly, Furio Cerutti suggests that the necessary emotional basis of such a 'cosmopolitan' identity could be supplied by the risks and fears attendant upon more global threats (Cerutti, 1992: 157).

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