European Union Politics

SESSION 11: **EUROPEAN IDENTITY**

The EU today

▶ Stuck between a **technocratic organization** and a (democratic) **polity**

- they have different logics of legitimation

[output legitimation   X   values + societal norms]

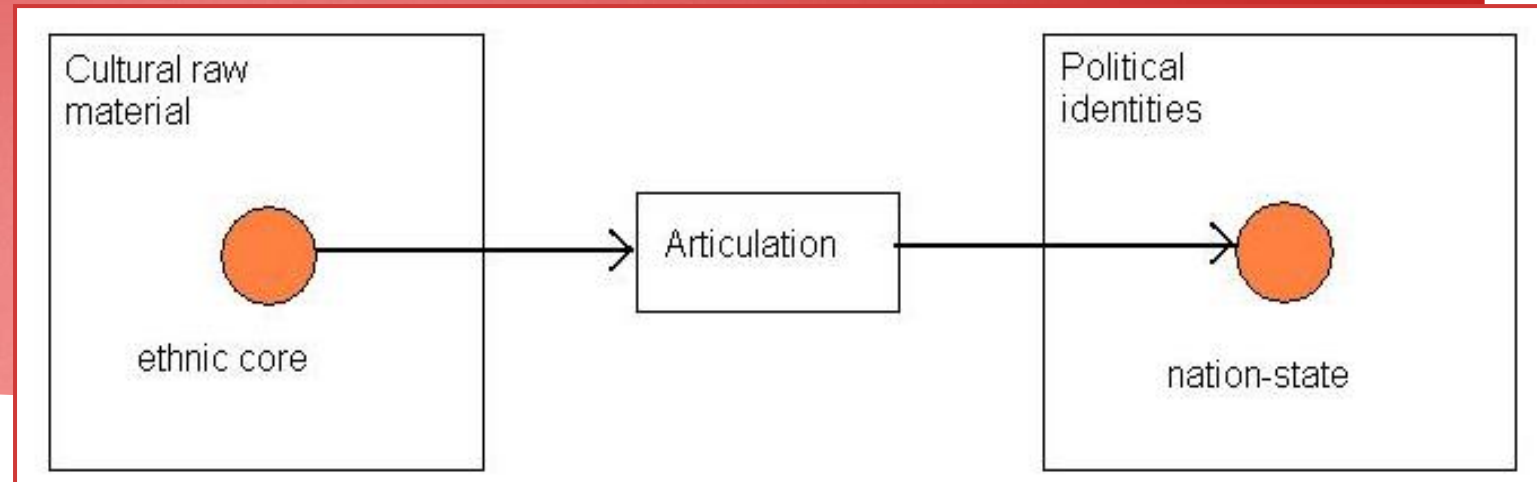| LEGITIMACY	Procedure	Culture
Basis	Institutional balance	Values and norms
Process	Bargaining	Belonging
Actors	Stake-holders (MS, interest groups, citizens)	Demos/People with identity
Polity	Post-national union	A state-like entity

- Does the EU have a demos/people?
- Is there a European identity?
- **Are there any people who feel they have a European identity?**

Collective identities

▶ Why did people fight in the WWII?

▶ Why do people **defend** their nations?

▶ What makes people 'sacrifice/die for their country'?

▶ What are the **narratives** of national origins?

▶ Is there a difference between a **nation** and a **state**?

▶ **Would anyone die for the EU? Or for Europe?**

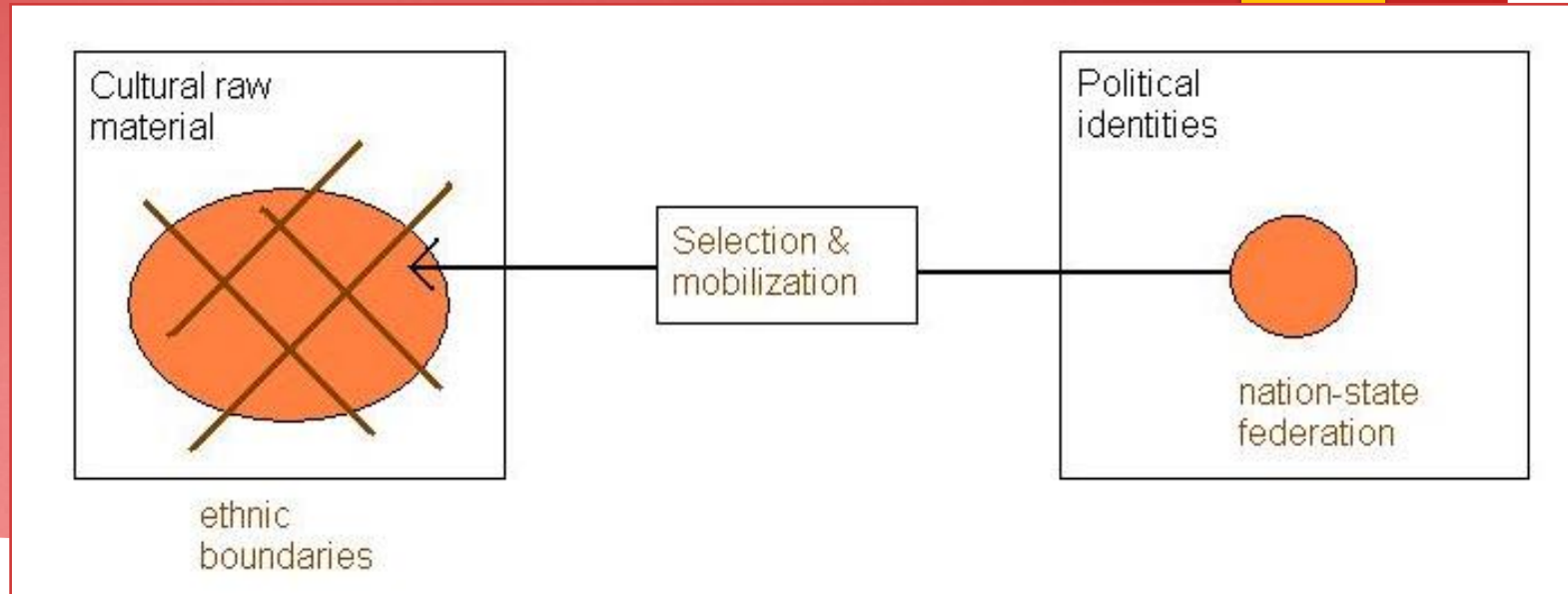▶ Are the EU and Europe the same? Or is there a difference?

ESSENTIALISM & Constructivism

- Identity formation is driven by cultural background variables

- Each **ethnic core** produces a **political identity** in a more or less direct fashion

- Agency is restricted to **articulation** of a given cultural heritage

- Thus, 'primitive units' such as ethnic cores are presumed to exist, and the task of the nationalist entrepreneur is to 'rediscover' and transform them into a politically operational identity (A.D. Smith)
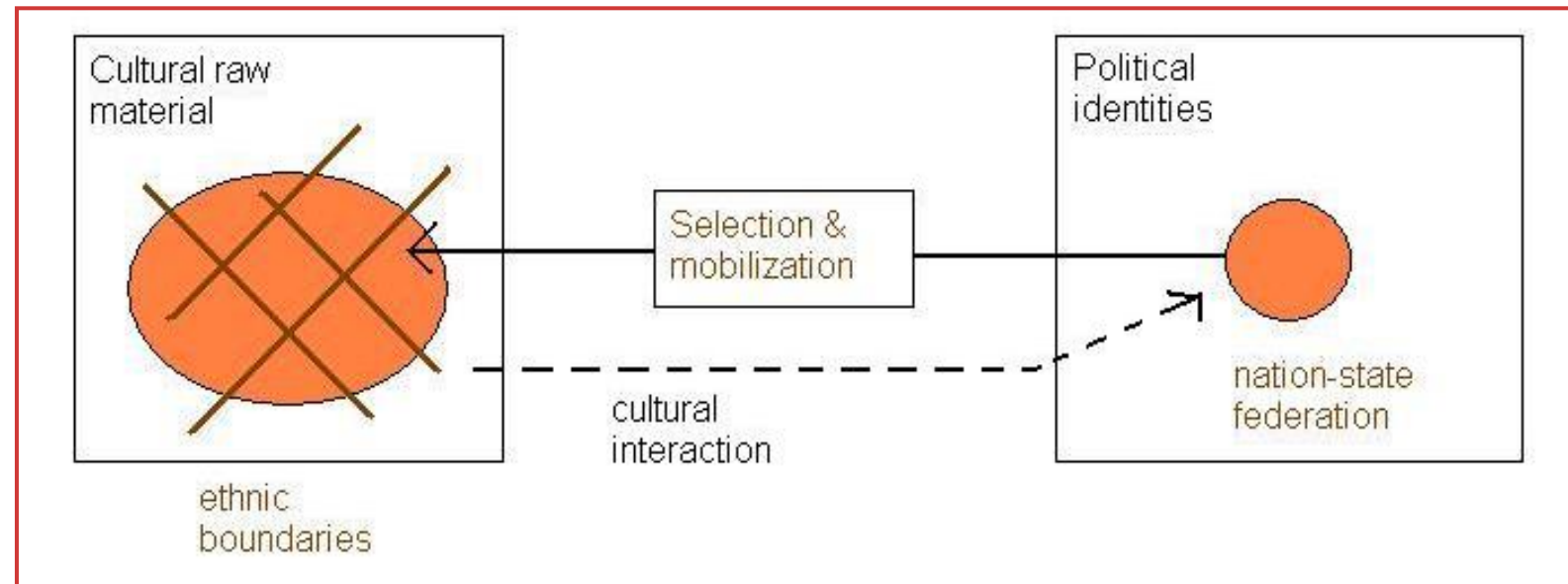
Essentialism & **CONSTRUCTIVISM**

- Places more emphasis on **political process**

- Identity formation entails **manipulation and interpretation** of cultural **symbols**

- 'Since cultural systems are inherently multidimensional, **history does not deliver ready-made packages such as ethnic cores**. Instead, it is **up to the political activist to select** the ethnic cleavages to be mobilized or suppressed' (Cederman 2001: 142)

- Instrumental constructivism lets the **causal arrow run from right to left ←**

- Instead of assuming culture to be the starting point, constructivists **begin with political identity** formation, emphasizing the autonomy of political factors and treating culture as a mere side-effect of the process
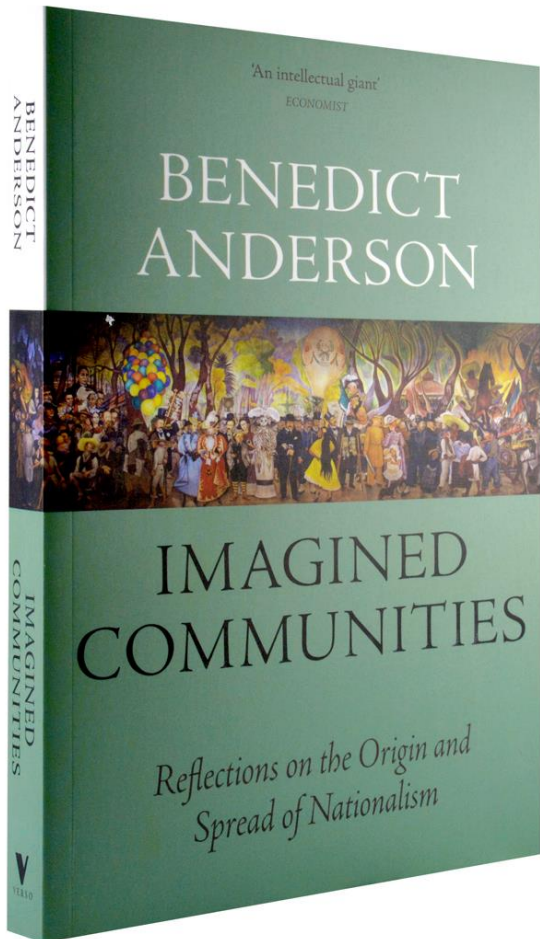
Essentialism & **CONSTRUCTIVISM**

- Other constructivist approaches adopt a softer outlook, based on **reciprocal interaction** between culture and identity formation ⟷

Benedict Anderson's **Imagined Communities**

A nation…

▶ 'it is an **imagined political community** – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'

▶ "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991: 6)

▶ If a nation constitutes an imagined political community

▶ **Could Europe constitute an imagined political community as well?**

Collective identities

▶ "The nation is imagined as **limited** because even the largest of them has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind."

▶ "The nation is imagined as **sovereign** because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm."

▶ "Finally, it is imagined as a **community**, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this **fraternity** that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings."

(Anderson 1991: 7)

Liberty Leading the People

1830 Eugène Delacroix

Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima

(February 25th 1945) by Joe Rosenthal / AP

Does the EU have any such moments?

The European Union

AUSTERITY ELECTING A NEW GREEK PEOPLE

▶ Does the EU command any such **sentiment**?

▶ Is the European Union such an imagined community? **Could it become one?**

▶ Is there such an '**ethnic core**' which we can tap into to provide legitimacy for the EU administration?

▶ Is there any **construction** which would catch the imagination of all of us and thus **validate** the European integration project?

▶ How to construct such an IMAGINED COMMUNITY in Europe?

National and European identity

▶ We have multi-level identities... **Do these levels cancel each other out?**

▶ What is the relationship between **national identity** and **European identity**?

*"Here we have the reason why the European Commission's attempts during the 1970s to build a 'European identity' on the basis of a European **flag**, a European **hymn** etc. were so unsuccessful, and in fact probably counterproductive.*

This way of building identity had long since been cornered by nation states. *Building a European identity by means of the same symbols in competition with national ones invited competition, with nation states being the home team."*

(Iver Neumann 2006: 9)

Identity and crises

▶ European identity is **mobilized in times of crisis:**

- 1970s – oil shocks/crisis of US leadership

- 1990s – end of the Cold War, period of expectation

- 2000s – 9/11, Iraq!

- 2010s – Eurozone crisis… calls for solidarity

- 2015/16 – Migration crisis …external other

- 2022 – Russian full war against Ukraine

▶ Can the EU **remain** a political project **without a demos**/people with a European identity?

▶ Can we have a **political** identity without a **cultural** one?

▶ Can it derive its legitimacy from processes only?

▶ In a **heterogeneous society** can we find identity vis-à-vis an <u>external other</u>?

Sources

▶ Anderson, Benedict (1983[1991]): *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso

▶ Cederman, Lars-Erik (ed.) (2001): *Constructing Europe's Identity. The External Dimension*. Colorado, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers

▶ Neumann, Iver B. (2006): 'European Identity and Its Changing Others', a NUPI Papers no. 710 - 2006, *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*. Available at: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/27901/710.pdf