

# EUROPE BETWEEN AMBIVALENCE AND FUNDAMENTALISM

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## **I \* Maps**

One of the permanent fixtures in our classroom used to be a set of rolled up maps placed immediately above the blackboard. They were hierarchically arranged, so that the map of Norway, imposing and detailed, was at the front. Behind it hung a European map, and finally there was a map of the world where it was barely possible to glimpse the outlines of each country. Mirroring the nationalist vision of the world, the apparently innocent classroom maps, intended as teaching aids in history and geography, taught us at an early age that there are three countries in the world of approximately the same size: Norway, Europe and the World. Naturally, the former was to be considered the most important to us, who were lucky enough to live in Norway and whose first loyalty should be directed towards the nation of our birth.

Presumably, such maps still exist and continue to serve their simple ideological function. Maps embody the essence of nationalism. They establish the idea of the nation as a bounded territory surrounded by solid red lines, and lend credibility to the fiction of the unitary nation with its natural and unquestionable boundaries. They also highlight the imagined and abstract nature of the nation. It cannot be observed, it contains millions of persons whom each of us will never meet and yet, it has to exist as we can see it clearly delineated on the map. The ragged and elongated shape of Norway is

sufficiently familiar nationally to be used as a symbol in advertising. It provides a tangible definition of the otherwise impossibly complex word "us".

Mental maps similarly simplify real-world complexity. National history is being told as though the nation were a person imbued with intentions and experiences: *We* are a young nation, *we* suffered under the Danes and during The War; *we* won nine gold medals in the Winter Olympics and so on. Every narrative excludes by default. The stories mute a million of other stories which will never be told. National history reads as moral fables, as just-so stories about heroic defeats and victories. They have as their moral and political purpose to instil patriotism and loyalty in a population which would otherwise have been happily oblivious of their "natural" obligations towards their unknown compatriots and ancestors.

The grand idea of Europe envisioned by the founders of the European Economic Community, later the EU, entailed a wish to transcend parochialism and petty philistine nationalism, as witnessed in nationalist historiography and narrow-minded, territorial selfishness. As it evolved in the postwar decades, it definitely succeeded in replacing the European battlefield with a European marketplace within its own polity, which is in itself no mean achievement. Another question nonetheless concerns the effects of European integration on identification. In which ways does European integration affect personal identity? There can be no simple answer to this, but the question certainly needs being raised.

In its attempts to fashion a shared identity feeling among Europeans, the Commission has tried -- and luckily failed -- to replicate some of the errors committed by nationalists. In the Scandinavian anti-EU press, stories about cucumber curvature, condom sizes and bottle shapes have circulated for years, confirming ideas about the EU as yet another bureaucratic monster clumsily imposing common standards in an ill advised attempt to create a rational, centrally organised society. Some new European history books give a similar feeling of *déjà vu* to people accustomed to living in powerful nation-states, through their rendering of an absurd European history according to which

Ireland and Greece share the same history, while Greece and Turkey do not. It is scarcely necessary to be an expert in Mediterranean history to laugh cynically at such pathetic attempts at creating new feelings of nationhood. As a matter of fact, during the pre-Maastricht ideological buildup in the early 1990s, tactless East Europeans glancing at the colourful propaganda brochures produced by the Commission had the nerve to compare the imagery to that of Stalinism. The smiling adolescents from different nations, icons of a glorious postnational European future, seemed fabricated. Their smiles seemed to have been created with Adobe software. Paranoia? Perhaps, but no shared European identity will ever come about in this way.

Standardisation and old-fashioned nation building will not do. The reason for this is not sentimentality of the kind that has led many Germans to oppose the EMU because of their emotional attachment to the Deutsche Mark, or the fear that national soccer teams will disappear or -- for that matter -- parochial worries about language death and the erosion of so called ancient customs. The reason is not even mainly that most Europeans have been coaxed into belief in a national identity once and are not prepared to accept a repetition of that peculiar form of brainwashing. The main reasons are objective.

## **II \* Territories**

The competence of the nation-state is territorial. Its maps, censuses, border controls, legislative and political systems include, exclude, monitor and control persons attached to territories, and victimise those who cannot prove their territorial origin. People who have not yet discovered that power and meaning no longer follow territories, still earnestly discuss where the boundaries of Europe ought to be drawn (the Ural? the Russian border -- and if so, which one? the Bosphorus?). In trying to find a geographic criterion, they forget that if identity has anything to do with culture, it cannot follow territorial boundaries since cultural differences and similarities cut across borders, especially in our day and age, the age of the Internet and the jet plane.

The nation-state is a nineteenth-century phenomenon *par excellence*, wedded to then new technologies and forms of knowledge enabling regimes to command effective control over populations hitherto integrated into the state only in theory. Imagine the impact of the railway on national integration; or the national press; or the decennial population census -- this precious instrument of political monitoring. Peoples were being pounded and punched into similar shapes, to put it brutally. They became national populations. Peasants, to paraphrase a famous title, were turned into Frenchmen.

During the twentieth century, the nineteenth-century institution of the nation-state has blossomed, and it is only as we approach the millennium that it is running out of steam. It is, as is often remarked, threatened from both above and below -- from transnational organisations as well as identity movements at the subnational level -- but more importantly, it is threatened by processes which do not obey the territorial logic on which the nation-state depends.

The entire history of the twentieth century can be written as the history of acceleration, as Paul Virilio has indeed done. We have now reached the point where there are no delays. Everything is simultaneous in the age of satellite communication. During the 1994 Winter Olympics, I spent a couple of days at Lillehammer, where the games were held. Uninterested in winter sports and disgusted at the vulgar display of Norwegian nationalism, I had taken great pains in order not to possess tickets for anything. In the hotel room, aimlessly channelsurfing between BBC, 3Sat, Sweden 2 and Norway 1, I ended up watching part of an event which took place only three hundred meters away from the hotel. Opening the window, I could hear the cheering crowd. This is not in itself remarkable. What is relevant, is the fact that had I happened to be in Melbourne or Vancouver, I could have watched exactly the same event at exactly the same time. This is what is meant by the seemingly far-fetched idea of no delays: Information of all kinds travels at the speed of light. On the Net or on the cable network, it does not matter where you are physically. You engage with the world through time, not through space.

The accelerating information technologies also impinge on the economy. Notably, the most important economic agents are no longer nation-states but transnational corporations. Delinking from territorial encumbrances, they are in principle everywhere and nowhere at the same time. The money in my savings account is available from ATMs everywhere in the world. The best definition of cyberspace is that it is where the bank keeps your money.

And yet, as any sensible person would object in response to this kind of rhetoric; and yet! What about all the new social movements praising the virtues of the small, tangible community, the xenophobic gangs violently defending their local territories against nonwhites, the upsurge in regionalism all over Western Europe; look at the success of ethnic nationalisms in contemporary European party politics, and not least, look at the mushrooming ethno-kitsch industries, making handsome profits through carefully constructing romanticised, localised settings with an air of cultural authenticity!

Nobody can deny the force of localism in today's Europe -- or, for that matter, elsewhere in the world. But is it not merely a response to globalisation? For where would Swedish neo-Nazis be without the jet plane bringing thousands of refugees to European metropolises? Where would Norwegian nationalists be without the spectre of a post-national Europe? And where would the English heritage industry be without a widespread sense of uprootedness spurred by Microsoft and CNN? Localisation feeds on globalisation. The demand for security, small scale, predictability and coziness is a direct result of globalisation.

It is easy to see, reasoning along these lines, how European localisms respond to centralising policies. The more homogeneous Europe is envisioned in Brussels, the more virulent the counterreactions. The erasure of boundaries implied by globalisation does not eradicate a sense of local belonging. What it does contribute to is the dethroning of the nation-state. Having lost many of its monopolies, the European nation state survives increasingly, like our European monarchies, as a relic.

So here we are, virtually in the twenty-first century, busy redrawing our maps. Neither culture, the economy nor politics is inextricably tied to the nation-state -- or to any other territory. Identities remain local to a great extent, but not exclusively so; and the bottom line is not necessarily the nation. Globalisation and the information society have endowed us with permanently multiethnic societies, superfast turnover in all kinds of media attention, a rapidly changing economy requiring a flexible workforce, and a political situation where the left/right axes have changed beyond recognition and possibly beyond existence. New political contradictions and conflicts have emerged from the ruins of the old global order. Ethnic nationalism and politicised religion confront the gospel of individualism and liberalism. Boundaries and purity become scarce resources in a turbulent world where the order of the day is hybridisation, mixing, complexity. In a wide-open world where everything happens simultaneously and changes are not only unpredictable but consequential, the temptation to escape into a fundamentalist *Weltanschauung* is often irresistible, whether the enemy is seen as unfettered liberalism, secularism and sexual liberation, "Islam" or -- as in the case of the most uncompromising Norwegian Euro-sceptics -- the European Union. Fundamentalism takes many shapes, always feeding on ambivalence and complexity.

### **III \* The unmappable non-territory**

The European Union can play a crucial role at this historical junction. Of course, everything can go awry. The EU can degenerate into just another oligarchy of powerful states cooperating in a purely utilitarian way -- never moving the union beyond the marketplace -- or it can continue to commit the mistakes typical of nineteenth-century nationalism; creating artificial boundaries, strengthening internal cohesion through enemy images, glorifying national (or continental, as the case may be) histories at the expense of others; in brief, simplifying the world rather than acknowledging its immense complexity.

But let us suppose it does not. Let us suppose, just for a moment, that the politicians, intellectuals and bureaucratic architects who are pivotal in fashioning the new Europe, have redrawn their maps and are prepared to face the millennium. Like nationalists, they will have to draw on history while developing their vision; but they will have to use it differently.

A point of departure could be the French intellectual Edgar Morin's prophetic statement from 1987, made at a time when the fall of the Eastern Bloc still seemed a utopian prospect. Morin proposed that the future Europe be built on the ruins of the Colosseum and the Berlin Wall; powerful symbols of megalomania and of totalitarianism. The sentiment arising from these ruins can only be doubt; ambivalence; uncertainty. One is forced to admit that all grand European political projects of unification have been unsuccessful, and are remembered more for their spectacular follies and failures than for their positive achievements.

The keyword for future European politics and identity formation will have to be pluralism. It is true that all identities are created through contrasts and therefore are exclusive by default. This does not mean that common identities need to be parasitical on enemy images. They can instead be thought of as complementary, as gender identities usually are. Difference is a virtue, not a problem to be eradicated. Given not only the considerable cultural variation among native Europeans, but also the added diversity represented by immigrants, any other option than acknowledging the value of difference would be suicidal. There is much to be learnt from committed pluralist countries like India in this respect, but even in Europe, it is possible to find genuinely pluralist polities in the past, such as the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, not to forget the wonderfully incongruous Holy Roman Empire (which was, in Voltaire's famous words, neither holy, Roman nor an empire). Complex and seemingly contradictory identities (of the generic kind "Muslim, lesbian, Belgian computer engineer") will no longer be featured in glossy Sunday supplements in a society where such adaptations are perfectly normal. Pluralism must, of course, include the right to opt for conservative solutions.

Traditionalist culturalism is a threat only when it challenges liberal rights and democracy, as witnessed in the Rushdie affair.

Architects of a healthily integrated Europe must further acknowledge the network character of the contemporary world. As we all belong to a great number of groups, which are activated in different situations, structures of power and systems of meaning do not overlap in an orderly way. We all participate in systems at many different levels -- from the family via the nation and, perhaps, global interest-groups such as professional networks, to the world as a whole. There can be no absolute demand for loyalty to a particular territory. Multilayered identities and conflicting loyalties must be reconciled with the political structure, which must be loose and flexible enough to contain fundamentalist tendencies, whether of a religious, ethnic or other kind. Fundamentalism is an inevitable by-product of pluralism, but it can be channeled into relatively harmless directions.

A further consequence of the non-territorial character of the world -- and a most important one -- must be the insight that Europe is not a place, but an idea. Of course, according to particular interpretations of European histories, political totalitarianism, racism or imperialism could be seen as the quintessential European idea. Now, this would not be an entirely fair judgement, and besides, it would not be very helpful as a basis for a future sentiment of Europeaness. The name of my European idea is ambivalence. That is our single most valuable export to the rest of the world. In line with this, allow me to propose an alternative myth of origin for the European identity, a myth which can be invoked against fundamentalisms of all kinds, European and non-European alike.

The bare rudiments of the myth will have to do for now. Daedalus and Icarus, father and son, were imprisoned in the Minoan labyrinth, destined to be eaten by the monstrous Minotaur. They managed to escape in the nick of time, aided by artificial wings attached to their spines with beeswax. Be careful, Daedalus admonished his son, do not fly too near the sun lest the wax will melt! Intoxicated by his new powers, Icarus failed to heed his father's advice,



soaring upwards into the sky. The wax melted, and Icarus plunged to his death. This myth has bequeathed us the term hubris. It is a very European notion, a complex idea and a challenging one. For we cannot say for certain that we would rather have followed the prudent Daedalus' example than his son's. We remain doubtful, ambivalent, European. There is no easy way out.

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In connection with the book, one was asked to provide a recipe for a "favourite national dish", in order to give the book, an edited volume of essays by European intellectuals, a slightly more frivolous touch. Well. My favourite Norwegian dish? With the globalisation of culture in mind, I am tempted to suggest paella valenciana, but then again, on the other hand:

### **Pinnekjøtt (pronounced roughly pee-neh-kiutt)**

In Norwegian cuisine, necessity has been turned into a virtue, and leading chefs boast of its simplicity. Pinnekjøtt is a simple dish from Western Norway, reflecting the scarcities, the seasonal variations, the rudimentary technology and the poor infrastructure of traditional Norway.

The essential ingredient is smoked and salted mutton ribs. Smoking and salting were the main forms of preservation in the old days (smoked and salted fish are other regional delicacies). Because of the harsh winter, animals were always slaughtered in the autumn. To ensure the meat supply during the cold months, the meat was preserved.

The meat, cut into pieces of reasonable size, must normally be watered overnight, but ask the butcher anyway. It is then steamed for about an hour over a bed of birch twigs lying just above the boiling water. The meat must by no means be immersed in the boiling water! It can also be prepared in the stove, which is strictly speaking cheating, but which gives the meat a crispy crust and also enables one to use the meat juices in the gravy.

The meat is eaten with boiled potatoes (the boiled potato is considered a Norwegian staple, but was unknown less than two hundred years ago) and mashed swedes. Both potatoes and swedes should first be peeled and boiled for 20 minutes. The swedes are then mashed, mixed with enough milk to give the concoction a smooth, porridge-like consistency, and boiled again for a few minutes, while being stirred briskly, with salt and pepper added. The gravy should be dark brown, thick and nasty looking. As a chutney, one may consider to use a small amount of cranberry jam. No salad is required; this is a traditional dish served in the traditional way!

Recommended drinks are beer (dark lager type) and schnapps, preferably aquavit (Scandinavian potato liquor). The schnapps helps to dissolve the grease which tends to stick uncomfortably to the palate.

Pinnekjøtt (lit.: Twig meat) is a Christmas dish from Western Norway. In the east, pork ribs occupy the same place. In recent years, pork ribs have been threatened seriously by three forces of cultural diffusion: (i) Pinnekjøtt, arguably the tastier dish, has travelled across the central mountain plateau, invading many good East Norwegian homes; (ii) Turkey has become fashionable, due to the general, ongoing Americanisation of Norwegian culture; (iii) The public hysteria surrounding health issues has led many Norwegians to relinquish their traditional, greasy food -- including their fat, juicy pieces of Christmas pork. It is widely believed in Norway that mutton fat is less unhealthy than pork fat.