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References and Uses of Postnationalism in French and British Debates on Europe

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Introduction

European integration introduces a competition between diverse sources of identification, which are not necessarily incompatible (Cinnirella, 1997; Duchesne and Frogner, 1995, 2002; Bruter, 2004). In this field of research, postnationalism can be considered as a useful framework in studying the interactions between national references and the prospects of a European identity. First, how can this theoretical proposal be defined? Postnationalism suggests building an identity that could emerge beyond specific traditions determined by a particular national history. It is closely linked to the notion of 'constitutional patriotism'. The main upholder of this theory, the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, is deeply influenced by the German historical context (Outhwaite, 1994; Pensky, 1995; Dews, 1999). In order to prevent the resurgence of any ethnic identification, especially after the reunification of his country, he proposes to launch a kind of political identity centred on values of democracy and fundamental human rights (Habermas, 1992, 1996).

Postnational theory is a way to avoid a systematic reference to an identity based on cultural elements. It helps to conceive the emergence of a European identity beside the sole national dimension. Democracy could then develop not only on the strict basis of national historical backgrounds. However, this theoretical assumption raises the question of the consistency of this postnational identity compared to the thickness of national ones. This paper precisely aims at giving a comparative analysis of French and British understandings of postnationalism, especially among intellectual elite.

A brief overview of the literature devoted to the postnational question in both countries makes it possible to evaluate the attention allowed to this topic. Is there a French or a British conception of postnationalism? Is postnationalism a pro-European attitude leading to marginalize the national stage and to consider the EU level as the forthcoming horizon of identification and democratic practices? Or is there, in political or intellectual discussions about postnationalism, the imprint of distinct conceptions of the nation that are then introduced to query the frame of the future EU?

Allusions to postnationalism in French and British academic literature

From a quantitative point of view, works in the British academic literature dedicated to this conceptual framework are more numerous than French ones. In both cases, it is a relatively marginal topic in public discussions and it is mostly interesting for academics. But is there always in their analyses a clear link between national and European considerations?

The most important part of the French literature on the subject is made of translations of Habermas' works (Habermas, 1990, 1998, 2000), completed by interpretations of philosophers or of political theory experts (Dufour, 2001; Ferry, 1990, 1992, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2002; Ferry and De Proost, 2003; Ferry and Libois, 2003; Ferry and Thibaud, 1992; Lacroix, 2000, 2002, 2004; Rochlitz, 2002). The European question is generally treated incidentally by British academics who essentially focus on strictly theoretical aspects. However, some British authors are more directly interested in European stakes (Bellamy and Castiglione, 1996, 1997, 1998; Laborde, 2001, 2002; Miller, 1995, 2000).

Analysing how the issue is discussed then invites to consider the various uses made of postnationalism and to explore the potential intentions inspiring the authors who mention it. The reflection is twofold. The first dimension concerns the links between national identities, the European prospects and postnationalism, that can be established in French and British literature. Postnational theory is then used in the intellectual debate to grasp the possible evolutions of EU. Academics have indeed mobilized it to conceive new forms of citizenship, to explore hypothesis such as cosmopolitanism or the emergence of a European demos expressing itself at a potential supranational level of democracy.

Questioning postnationalism: a way to replace the concept of nation at the core of the debate

A literal interpretation of the 'postnational' word could let think that those who mobilize it, in academic discussions or in the rare political speeches, seek to circumvent the national level to immediately consider a postnational space of European dimensions. But is this postnational hypothesis a deliberately chosen way to bypass the examination of the relationship between national identities and attitudes towards European integration?

In the French case, those who tackle the postnational question also have in mind to recall how the nation is for them an impassable horizon of democracy. This is the sense of the arguments developed by French 'national-republicans' (Lacroix, 2000). Since the debate about the Maastricht Treaty, they foster a reflection centred on the concepts of sovereignty and nation. They thus want to reassert the integrative virtues of the nation perceived as the privileged place where a feeling of community between citizens can be elaborated through long history.

According to the 'national-republican' thinking, civic participation has to be grounded on a specific historical, cultural and emotional heritage. Postnational theory also seems to be too abstract to sustain a concrete sense of belonging. One can find an enlightening exemplification of this stance in the reactions of Jean-Pierre Chevènement, former leader of the Mouvement des Citoyens, to the proposals of Joschka Fischer, the then German Foreign Minister, concerning the future of the European project (Fischer, 2000). Creating a European federation would represent a 'historical nonsense' and a 'postnational escape' (Chevènement, 2000). Most of all, constitutional patriotism would be inspired by what Paul Thibaud has named a 'spirit of penitence' (Ferry and Thibaud, 1992: 52) related to the particular German historical context and the painful identity in this country. Habermas' theoretical framework, based on an intellectual adhesion to abstract principles such as human rights, fundamental liberties, would then be unfit to replace the emotional mobilization generated by national traditions (Schnapper, 1994: 79).

The case of French 'national-republicans' demonstrates that authors or politicians taking part to the debate don't necessarily aim at bypassing national considerations. On the contrary, while contesting the postnational logic, they contribute to focus the discussion on the elements that constitute, according

to them, the main basis of a national polity. Such representations of the nation can also be found in parts of British academic thoughts. Some authors give their own definition of the nation and it is then possible to deduct from these assumptions what a European identity could be in comparison to national backgrounds.

Reading British sociologist Gerard Delanty for example, Europe is no political or cultural community and no real society because it will never rest on the effective homogeneity allowed by the nation-state (Delanty, 1998). By contrast, a nation is 'historically firmly embedded', so that all the attempts launched until now in order to build some kind of supranational political entity have simply 'failed to attract the passions and loyalties commanded by nations' (Smith, 1998: 195). According to this typology, a nation has to be based on a human population living on a historical territory, sharing memories, myths of its origins, and a mass culture. This definition uses the language of history and mythology so that 'a European identity has looked pale and shifting beside the entrenched cultures and heritages that make up its rich mosaic' (Smith, 1995: 131). Europe has no real identity, it rests on a culture without memory, with no own history: 'a 'European identity' has seemed vacuous and nondescript, a rather lifeless summation of all the peoples and cultures on the continent, adding little to what already exists' (Smith, 1995: 131). Nations are, at least for the moment, the only possible vectors of an affective mobilization of their respective populations.

Again, the main argument deducted from this acceptance of the nation is that a postnational identity could only be weak, as it wouldn't be supported by the emotional background present at the national level. It would also be illusory to operate a distinction between civic and ethnic representations of the nation. The former needs the latter to get its full expression. These kinds of considerations can be found in the British debate with the 'civic nationalists' who don't want to dissociate the civic components of the nation from communitarian affiliations. In this way, British identity is indirectly present in the discussions about Europe. A basis of cultural homogeneity, a common language, a sense of belonging to a same community, with close links between generations, and what David Miller qualifies as 'a sufficient degree of trust' (Miller, 1998: 48), are the necessary conditions ensuring the fostering of a deliberative democracy.

According to this view, principles of freedom, tolerance, respect of law, are certainly essential. But they are unfit to catch the emotive engagement carried by national identities and finally to define a political community (Miller, 1995: 25, 175). This argumentation explains that national identities are 'thicker' than what 'constitutional patriotism' suggests. The prospects of a civic nationhood is then considered by some authors as a demonstration of 'self-congratulation and wishful thinking' ignoring 'the contingent inheritance of distinctive experience and cultural memories that is an inseparable part of every national political identity' (Yack, 1996: 196-199). Given the strong influence of national references in the process of identification, how could the abstract principles upon which constitutional patriotism is grounded sustain a significant popular mobilization?

As Anthony Smith put it, if postnational approaches are rich in suggestion to understand contemporary problems of ethnicity and nationalism, they present a 'lack of historical depth to so many of the analyses under this broad heading, in a field that demands such depth' (Smith, 1998: 218). Europe would have to create a new identity, a kind of mythology. As Hugh Seton-Watson wrote it in 1985 for example, the appearance and the consolidation of a deep popular support to EU integration require 'something more exciting than the price of butter', that's to say 'a need for a European mystique' (Seton-Watson, 1985). It would be, according to Philip Schlesinger, a 'cultural battlefield' reflecting the cleavages between deeply rooted national identity, so that an overarching collective identity can only be perceived as the outcome of a long-standing socio-political practice (Schlesinger, 1992).

It then appears that the debate on postnational theory, whether it happens in French or British intellectual spheres, is also an opportunity to reassert the fundamental components of a national identity. Thus, it's a way to express a normative stance on what Europe could, or could not, be according to the

diverse interpretations of this theoretical framework. But there is another part of this theory that can be taken into account to conceive forthcoming developments of European integration. Postnationalism can indeed be used to think about EU not only in terms of identity, but also as a community of project, with a common goal that could mobilize European citizens.

Postnationalism as a framework to think of European democracy and legitimacy

When applied to the case of EU, postnationalism can be considered through the issues of cosmopolitanism, supranational democracy, European legitimacy and accountability (Beetham, 1994; Beetham and Lord, 1998). Most of the analyses produced in this field of research are written in English. They offer comments on the basis of a hypothetical European identity, on what a democratic debate beyond national borders on the EU political project could be.

Postnational theory suggests that nation-states are no more the sole spaces of reference for democratic practices. This kind of reflection directly interests the present debate on the political and constitutional structures of Europe, as a way to refurbish the classical frameworks of political theory. As Bellamy and Castiglione wrote, 'we need something like a Copernican revolution in our traditional political concepts if we are to comprehend the true nature of the European Union' (Bellamy, Castiglione, 1997: 255-256).

The question of European political legitimacy can be studied from a cosmopolitan – of postnational orientation – point of view. In his book *The Postnational Constellation*, Habermas considers EU integration as a central theme and pleads for a deepening of the political dimension of this process (Habermas, 2001a; 2003: 42-114). While evolving towards a federal system preserving social justice, human rights and peace (i.e. ideals of constitutional patriotism), Europe could be a privileged space to implement a cosmopolitanism of kantian inspiration. This point is also developed by French-speaking authors (Ferry, 2000, 2001; Cheneval, 2003). But, at least for the moment, cosmopolitan democracy has mainly been theorized in English (Archibugi and Held, 1995; Held, 1995; Archibugi, Held and Köhler, 1998; Archibugi, 2003). Among many others, one can cite the works of David Held who proposes to impulse a cosmopolitan democracy in order to consolidate fundamental rights, with political implications in the short- and long-terms (Held, 1995: 278).

Cosmopolitan theorists consider that a feeling of belonging to the planet is expressing itself through the mobilization of an increasing number of non-governmental organizations and global movements, pointed out by Habermas as constitutive of an emergent international public sphere (Köhler, 1998; Cochran, 2002). This political configuration could be the starting point of what many academics, most of them European ones – particularly UK scholars –, have named a 'cosmopolitan citizenship', in line with the emergence of a global civil society (Hutchings and Dannreuther, 1999; Brown, 2000; Carter, 2001; Dower and Williams, 2002). Cosmopolitans consider the case of a world society governed according to the principles of human rights and justice.

Against the cosmopolitan perspective, it is often reasserted that this new form of democracy would be incomplete because of the lack of a global demos (Archibugi, 2003: 257-272). This argument joins the previous developments on the main features of a democratic system. As Richard Bellamy and Dario Castiglione have demonstrated it in the European case, the universalist and individualist rights-based dimension of the cosmopolitan thesis has been questioned by those who consider that it finally misses the prerequisite of mutual trust and belonging to a specific community (Bellamy, Castiglione, 1998).

For some thinkers, the European debate precisely questions the hypothesis of a dissociation between democracy and the ties of reciprocity, of specific identifications generated in the space of a nation. According to Bryan S. Turner, 'the future of citizenship must therefore be extracted from its location in the nation-state' (Turner, 1993: 15). Citizenship could develop in a way that would allow to cope with the complex phenomenon of globalization and the case of supranational integration such as

EU. This is the main reason why postnationalism can be seen as the means to reset the classical definitions and theories about citizenship in relation to the nation-state.

Yasemin Soysal has put up a postnational model of citizenship in Europe assuming that since 1945 a corpus of norms based on the promotion of human rights through the mobilization of international organizations and transnational social movements has been consolidated (Soysal, 1994, 1996). This normative feature generates an increasing disentanglement between the recognition of a shared identity and rights associated to all citizenship. Because of the internationalisation of migrations, and with the multiplicity of global discourse focusing on the protection of fundamental rights as well as on principles of justice and equity, the traditional figure of the nation-state is no more the unique and legitimate source attributing individual rights.

All these changes have contributed to set the basis of a citizenship oriented towards a transnational and a postnational dimension. For Soysal, individual rights are now legitimated by ideologies 'grounded in a transnational community, through international codes, conventions, and laws on human rights, independent of their citizenship in a nation-state' (Soysal, 1994: 142). It reflects a 'universal personhood' that is a core element of the postnational model and that makes the difference with the national system.

'Postnational citizenship confers upon every person the right and duty of participation in the authority structures and public life of a polity, regardless of their historical or cultural ties to that community' (Soysal, 1994: 3). For some analysts, this hypothesis is also illustrated and confirmed by EU citizenship: it establishes a legal status for individuals who can be citizens of a country without necessarily being its nationals (Preuss, 1998; Shaw, 1997). This stance has to be relativized as nationality of a member state is still a precondition to become a European citizen, proving that this new form of citizenship is not associated to a special European identity, a historical and cultural background shared by all Europeans. However, some parts of the academic literature see in EU citizenship a way to discuss the cosmopolitan theme, with new rights attributed to individuals across borders with no systematic belonging to a cultural community.

These reflections on cosmopolitanism derived from those in terms of postnationalism, lead us to investigate the prospect of a European civic identity, i.e. an identification to EU as a political project. Such a problematic is directly related to the constantly underlying discussion on the basis of a political community. Does it have to be founded on an ethnos or can a demos emerge without a prepolitical support? This cut across the classical dichotomy between philosophers who consider that citizenship can't be achieved *ex nihilo*, outside a pre-existing social canvas (Miller, 2000: 96), and others, among them postnationalism upholders, who conceive a demos enhanced without the background of an ethnos.

It's the question actually raised by the EU constitutionalization process. The supporters of the EU constitution consider its elaboration as an opportunity to give a real significance to the postnational theoretical framework. According to Jean-Marc Ferry, a European constitution would impulse a sort of constitutional patriotism (Ferry, 2000: 87-137). European citizens could then recognize themselves in a political space essentially defined in civic terms and not only after ethno-cultural references. At the beginning of the constitutionalization procedure in 2001, Habermas thought it could bring more legitimacy to EU integration thanks to a new approach of democratic practices: a common political culture could appear through argumentation and deliberations on European values and objectives (Habermas, 2001b).

But there is a nodal point in this debate: the location of the European constituent will (Shaw, 1999). At the national level, this power is clearly determined. But where is the 'European people' entitled to adopt a constitutional document, if it is supposed to follow the same procedures as in national schemes? The same debate occurs relatively to the topics of citizenship, of democratic participation, either in a cosmopolitan world or at a postnational level in Europe. Once again, civic-nationalist and national-republican stances are familiar in this discussion. According to David Miller, the prospect of

implementing transnational forms of citizenship fails to take into account the necessary preconditions to enhance a genuine citizenship: 'either [these] aims are simply utopian, or else what they aspire to is not properly described as citizenship' (Miller, 1999: 60). The cosmopolitan form of citizenship would undercut the basis of a real citizenship that can only be experienced at the national level. The universal principles inspiring constitutional patriotism could only be completed in reference to a concrete national context. It would then be impossible to disentangle the republican ideals, the effective exercise of democracy from the belonging to a national community.

In the present situation, efforts to define EU *telos*, i.e. the common goal of this process, have not yet allowed to cast the main grounds of a European *demos*. For the moment, one has to conclude that there is no 'European people' but a coexistence of several national *demos* (Weiler, 1995). Nonetheless, the postnational framework gives the opportunity to investigate the civic dimension of European identity and to produce an alternative analysis of identities in Europe. Postnationalism should not be confused with supranationalism. Its aim is not to build a European super-state that would dissolve nations and identities in a superstructure. On the contrary, the main argument of the postnational theory is to overcome the 'nationalist principle' (Ferry, 1992: 40) so that political unity and cultural diversity could be compatible in a same space, as in Europe.

Conclusion

Contrary to nationalists, postnationalists don't consider the nation as the ultimate horizon of democracy. This conceptual framework can be used to open analyses to new ways of thinking various subjects such as identities, democracy and legitimacy in Europe, without keeping the debate constrained by familiar schemes. And it is precisely because it concerns central questions of the political theory and because it shakes up the linkage between culture and politics, democratic investment and recognition in a given community, that postnationalism is finally contested.

The postnational hypothesis is rarely relayed by political leaders in their discourses on the European theme. They avoid evoking a postnational horizon that, by its sole mention with the 'post' prefix, could indicate that they would have not so much control over the 'national' power. Moreover, recent developments around EU integration, especially about its constitutional treaty, show that Europe's present orientation doesn't go along the path of a postnational community.

To sum it up, this theoretical framework is referred to either by some rare politicians or, more frequently, by the intellectual elite. British academics are more likely to produce analysis on the subject than French ones, whose production seems to be reduced to main specialists of the habermasian philosophy. In both countries, there are supporters and opponents of this theory. The cleavage lines don't part pro- or anti-Europeans but they mostly refer to diverse conceptions of key concepts such as nation, identities and democracy in the European debate.

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