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Panel Europe and Discourse: Challenging the mainstream in EU studies

Paper **The mythical EUropean:
elucidating the EU's powerful integration instrument
of discursive identity construction**

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Abstract

Drawing on Thomas Kuhn's (1970) seminal analysis, this paper illustrates that European integration theory fulfils the characteristics of a scientific paradigm and is no less arbitrary than it is hegemonic. While not a criticism in itself as scientific paradigms open up opportunities for study of some aspects of reality, simultaneous closure of others occurs. Because mainstream European integration theories are unified by ontological and epistemological assumptions, certain methodological approaches (such as those resulting from a social and discursive constructionist understanding) and foci of study (e.g. the contradictions and power relations that European integration gives rise to) remain underexplored. The value of identifying mainstream European integration theory as a paradigm is to enable researchers to overcome said limitations. Adopting a focus on discourse as a means as well as identity formation as a form of integration, Eder's (2007) attempt to transcend transactionalism's (Deutsch 1953) omission to focus on content and functions rather than density of transactions is laudable. However, exclusive focus on historical narratives and rationality-driven legal equality means it falls short of providing a useful theoretical framework in its own right, reproducing several paradigmatic assumptions. Flood's (2002) account of political myth goes beyond such limitation. Usefully supplemented by a structural rather than normative understanding of ideology (Freedon 1996) and extended beyond historico-ideological content, this approach allows for the study of the identity-endowing and integrating function of implicitly or explicitly ideologically marked narratives that establish what it means to be European. Such narratives can be found, amongst other forms of political and institutional communication, in publicity brochures of the European Commission, which form the empirical basis of this paper.

Introduction

On 26 January 2011 a research seminar was held at King's College London under the title 'A contribution to the critique of integration theory'. The speaker was Magnus Ryner from Oxford Brookes University, an expert in International Political Economy, and his critique mainly involved exposing said established set of theories as a paradigm. A paradigm, according to Kuhn in his seminal book 'The structure of scientific revolutions' (1970), consists of the basic assumptions that researchers in a particular field hold in common. They permeate their theoretical commitments, determine their epistemology and what methodology is deemed to be appropriate in the field. By this, they constitute the scientific community that adheres to them. As Kuhn (ibid.) identifies, they are necessary to postulate and test cause-effect relationships, which is the main object of science. On the other hand, however, while enabling research and insights in some areas, due to their underlying assumptions they foreclose such opportunities in others. This is necessary to make them meaningful, but is also necessarily limiting. As such, paradigms are no less arbitrary, i.e. selective yet normalised, than they are sometimes, e.g. in the case of mainstream European integration theories, hegemonic. This can be identified when studying the patterns of the 'language game' (Wittgenstein) of this paradigm to identify its underlying assumptions. An exercise in this has been carried out in preparation for this paper and its results are presented in it. This is inspired partly by the above-mentioned presentation. Partly, however, the seed for this paper was already planted before it took place. For, a focus on so-called¹ European identity, Wittgenstein's concept of 'language games' and an interest in discursive construction more generally, had made it clear to the author, that mainstream integration theories were both limited in their insights and conformed to rules of their own that caused these limitations.

The aim of this paper is twofold: firstly, to outline how mainstream integration theories form a paradigm and, secondly, to show how a different paradigmatic approach – namely one that overcomes its limitations by subscribing to a discursive constructionist ontology and resulting epistemology and methodology – can complement it usefully to provide new insights into the process of European integration. In order to outline in how far mainstream European integration theories belong to the same, in many respects limiting as well as enabling, paradigm, it is necessary

¹ Note that this expression as well as the spelling 'EUropean' further on in the text aim to indicate the process of the 'colonisation of Europe' (Boedeltje and van Houtum 2008) commonly found in EU political myths that conflates the notion of Europe with that of the EU, despite the fact that they are quite different and separate, and proclaims an image of Europe that is really a projection of that of the EU.

to outline their basic tenets. This will be done in the first section of this paper – relying on the forbearance of the expert reader for, depending on their inclination, either the mere inclusion or the comparative superficiality of this section. They are due to its necessity but as a backdrop for the main points to be discussed later on. These are: the features identifying these theories as belonging to a hegemonic paradigm within the study of so-called European integration, an outline of promising theorisation springing from within this tradition that may point the way to overcoming limiting paradigmatic assumptions, theories thus far external to the study of so-called European integration that do just that, and examples of material that can be studied following a new paradigm and establishing thus far marginalised theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of so-called European integration.

European integration theories

Theoretical engagement with so-called European integration has long been dominated by the ongoing debate between neo-functionalism (Haas 1958) and intergovernmentalism (Hoffmann 1966; Moravcsik 1993). Despite the advent of other approaches, for instance concerned with forms and levels of governance (Marks et al. 1996) and policy networks (Petersen 2009), these two take pre-eminence. This is probably due to the fact that they provide more of a theoretical framework than most others; their ability to offer both grand explanations of events and facilitate empirical hypothesis-testing. They also both lend themselves to instrumentalisation for implicit support of one or the other normative idea of what the outcome of so-called European integration should be; continuously intergovernmental or increasingly supranational structures and processes. Based on classical International Relations conceptual commitments, intergovernmentalism describes the EU and its predecessors as mere conglomerations of states or organisations set up by intergovernmental treaties, and emphasises the role and continuing relevance of the nation state in their structure, processes and relations. It explains that nation states – classically understood as self-interested, solitary actors in the international system – only cooperate when it is in their (and their populations') interest. When this is the case, cooperation can take place, even on a large scale. However, in essence, their self-interest will not allow cooperation to take on its own dynamics of solidarity or habit, and will be discontinued if no advantages for the state can be gained or if perceived disadvantages outweigh them. In contrast, neo-functionalism, aims to account for incremental processes of integration that express just such dynamics, claiming that they will culminate in the telos of a supranational European state or state-like structure. According to Jo

(2007), it has its foundations in practical plans to facilitate regional cooperation (such as David Mitrany's functionalism and Jean Monnet's vision of his project of European integration), yet turns these into a theoretical framework for the study of integration. It claims that by a process of 'spill-over' integration in one policy area will lead to integration in others. The areas most often envisioned to be affected in this way are, as e.g. Shore (2000) explains, the following: starting from the economic, the first spill-over will affect the political, the second lead to integration in the cultural realm. There seems to be some confirmation of this theory in the fact that spill-over appears to have taken place from the economic to the political realm, e.g. in the formation, first, of the single market, and then, of Union citizenship. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that this is a theory and that validity in one area does not guarantee validity in another and that, therefore, spill-over into the cultural realm should not be taken for granted as it is by many EU officials and scholars. The danger is that a theory that appeals to so-called common sense is applied to an area in which processes are at work that are far too complex to be made sense of easily. What is commonly overlooked is the fact that the first – what may be called 'functional' – spill-over effect required mainly political-legal action by a small elite group while the second – or 'social' spill-over – would require a large-scale, spontaneous or socially engineered, shift in individuals' attitudes and behaviour. And while claims have been made under its banner about the socialisation of elites, it fails to account for how such a large-scale shift in individuals' attitudes and behaviours may come about. The theoretical framework around political myth outlined below will illustrate one way in which it can be argued attempts at this are already being made, but more of that later.

The paradigmatic nature of mainstream European integration theories

The problem of lacking an explanation of or approximation to processes of such social spill-over poses the first indication that European integration theories can be made sense of as belonging to a paradigm. Adopting a problem- rather than theory- or method-driven approach to the study of European integration, one cannot fail but notice that the mainstream theories drawn on exhibit significant oversights. This is to say, the problems that European integration poses, take shapes or display features that are, at least in part, incommensurable with the theories that claim to account for the phenomenon. It is a general feature of paradigms that while they open up opportunities, indeed form the prerequisite, of postulating theories and testing hypotheses, in some areas, they foreclose opportunities of knowledge generation in others due to their ontological and epistemological assumptions. That is to say, that through providing definitions, methods, units of

analysis, etc. their outlook or approach may enable study in one direction, but is always necessarily limited – for only through the exclusion of some aspects is meaning given to others – and therefore forecloses study in other directions. For instance, the assumption of the correctness of neofunctionalism’s theory of spill-over prevailing in some quarters, led many – both European Union officials and scholars – to believe in the inevitability of the above-mentioned social spill-over, namely in the emergence of a shared identity of Europeans in the cultural realm, and to overlook the fact that the assumption of automaticity obscured a lack of understanding of the nature and features of, and actors in, this process. Rather unsurprisingly, the failure of this process to manifest in practice has resulted in great incomprehension and lamentation. As a result, ‘European identity’ now figures largely in the political and, subsequently, in academic debate, both in terms of attempted affirmation versus negation of its existence and in attempts to identify or devise theoretical and practical approaches to fostering it (e.g. by means of political rights and symbolic representation). And both the mainstream integration theories have found it easy enough to include this issue within their overall approach. However, they fall short of making sense of it, as they cling to their paradigmatic assumptions and characteristics; neo-functionalism simply assumes that identification will grow as a spill-over, i.e. evolve, from economic and political integration, while intergovernmentalism tends to emphasise the alleged impossibility of supranational identification or the conflict of loyalty that the primacy of national identity is seen to cause in any form of supranational identification. However, as neither of these theories engage in any detail with the question of how identities, cultural ones as well as quasi-national supranational ones, are formed, it can be seriously doubted that they will provide any useful insights into the question of the existence, emergence or even possibility of a European identity.

And while such limitations are necessarily a characteristic of any paradigm – which is why it can only be of benefit to a discipline or field of study to allow and welcome the co-existence of multiple paradigms – it is worthwhile noting that the very dominant, established, mainstream position of these theories is another indicator of their paradigmatic nature. As a successful paradigm, the mainstream integration theories combine foundational works (as indicated above), they manage to account for or resonate with a number of (albeit, as pointed out above, not all) important points within the field, and they display an identifiable pattern of underlying ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that pose as ‘rules’ of its ‘language game’ (Wittgenstein 2001). These rules define what can be studied, how it can be understood and what methods can be used to elicit its nature. For instance, in the context of studies of the EU, the focus of study usually implies states or state-like structures and nominalised national or supranational institutions and decision

making processes. These are portrayed in a post-Enlightenment quasi-individualistic and rationalistic light and made sense of through evolutionary theoretical commitments (through the conceptual complex of history, teleology and inevitability), all of which favour generalisation rather than particularistic study and exclude aspects of power that do not fit these assumptions (e.g. by viewing politics as an administrative rather than ideological activity). While the form that this paradigm takes is normalised, it is nevertheless arbitrarily selective and – surprisingly – despite interdisciplinary influences, e.g. from anthropology and sociology, often not self-reflective. This forms another characteristic displayed by many paradigms; that the self-understanding of their proponents is one of correctness or impossibility of alternative approaches.

Foundations of an alternative paradigm within

It is interesting to note in this context that self-reflexivity could easily have been achieved in the field of European integration studies, for alternative approaches indeed existed among early theoretical endeavours to make sense of European integration. The school of transactionalism (Deutsch 1953) – overshadowed by the long-established and vehement debate of the two previously mentioned theories and thus marginalised as an integration theory – offered the tools for a study of the process in non-rationalistic, particularistic and non-normative terms from its early days. Furthermore, it has all along been directly concerned with issues closely associated with the contemporary buzzword of politics, including the European Union's, namely identity. It focuses on the conditions necessary for political integration to occur and identifies relevant aspects not only in shared political and administrative institutions, but also in shared communication and extended mutual transactions of individuals. In all these, it emphasises mutual responsiveness as the key to the establishment of a sense of community or 'we-feeling' among the populations of the integrating region. And while initial studies following this school of thought were overly concerned with the quantitative dimension, e.g. measuring the density of transaction processes, it emphasised from the start that such an integration project depended on more qualitative aspects such as complex and long-term processes of social learning, often over generations, in which shared symbols, identities, habits of cooperation, memories, values and norms would lead a group of individuals to consider themselves a people. For this reason, it has received increasing attention in recent years.

Eder (2007) builds on this tradition and emphasises the transactionalist nature of communication. In a move akin to Hobsbawm's (1983) theory of the invention of tradition, he describes shared stories

as formative of a 'communication space'. Amongst these, he identifies two types in particular: those referring to the experience of fairness perceived in the rules of membership of the EU being based in a legal contract and therefore the same for all members², and those referring to historical events that are perceived to be shared (in the widest sense of commonly attributing significance, of whatever kind, to them). Following Weber (1956), Eder refers especially to such stories as refer to common existential experiences, such as struggles for life and death. However, in his exclusive focus on historical at the expense of other identity-endowing narratives, he reproduces the evolutionary understanding including assumptions of teleology and inevitability, which is characteristic of the paradigm identified. Simultaneously, the emphasis on legal equality (or perceptions thereof) suggests that he also subscribes to the paradigmatic rationalistic and quasi-individualistic ideas of self-interest identified above. Moreover, while Eder first refers to the possibility of individual identification, in large parts of his article, it seems that he is referring not to individuals but to states as actors. In all these respects, he passes up an opportunity to fundamentally challenge and substantially complement the existing paradigm, despite the fact that his move to a focus on communication as a social and identity-endowing practice holds the key to a new paradigm in the study of European integration, namely that of discursive construction.

Studying discourse: overcoming the mainstream paradigm of European integration theories

While social constructionist approaches³ have found their way into EU studies in parallel to their gradual acceptance in the field of International Relations in general, discursive approaches are still scarce (e.g. Cramer 2010) and have certainly not penetrated the mainstream of integration theories. Yet, understanding processes of social construction, and, as a subcategory of it, discursive

² Here he overlooks, however, that the contractual nature of these rules does not overcome the arbitrariness of criteria of eligibility for membership.

³ Here it may be of advantage to draw readers' attention to the often ill-understood, related yet distinct, nature of social constructionism and social constructivism. Social constructionism can be seen to refer to an ontological outlook, a sociological conception of 'reality', 'world' (Kuhn 1970) or 'imaginary' (e.g. Calhoun 2002) that social interaction affords meaning or gives rise to. In contrast, social constructivism can be understood as epistemological in nature and referring to individuals' psychological, cognitive processes in constructing concepts and understandings that enable them to make sense of and, in turn (making the link to constructionism), act in the 'world'. Clearly, these two processes are closely linked in practice in a relationship of mutual contingency and continuous debate, reaffirmation, adaptation and change. However, in International Relations, the link is often not made clear enough, for there is a tendency to favour social constructivism as a theoretical standpoint rather than drawing on it for an analysis that brings together constructionist ontology and empirical, hermeneutical study.

construction, not only provides insights that complement those offered by mainstream theories of European integration; it provides insights that are logically prior to those that conventional approaches can elicit as well as powerfully political. The argument goes as follows: constructionist approaches, in contrast to traditional positivist ones, hold that reality is not a given 'out there' but that its meaning arises from human beings' interactions.⁴ One, and the most important, such interaction is discourse. Discourse includes, but goes beyond mere written texts and utterances or conversations; it refers also to the durable, yet malleable, structures of what is considered comprehensible form and to established contents of meaning. For instance, the EU is constructed by means of its constitutive discourses. And so is so-called European identity. The argument in favour of analysis of its discursive construction then is that instead of taking for granted the nature of the EU and studying it with descriptive methods (such as empirical observations of what it consists of, what it does and how it has developed and attempted predictions of how it will develop), it makes it possible to ask questions about how the EU has come or comes to mean what it is widely understood to mean. Such 'how-possible questions' (Doty 1993) regarding the emergence of established 'meanings-in-use' (Weldes 1998) surrounding the EU are logically prior to those posed (and sometimes answered) by the mainstream paradigm in the sense that the formation of meanings precedes any of the aspects that theories that take meanings for granted can ever study.

One area of these – as has already been mentioned above – are questions of the emergence of so-called European identity. Rather than assuming the form (national or quasi-national, singular rather than multiple) and content (usually ethno-cultural and linguistic) that identities take and attempting to identify or foster these in so-called European identity, this approach allows researchers to study the discursive processes that give rise to and establish as 'fact' those forms and contents. It also enables study of the meaning of 'European', as the term itself is an 'empty signifier' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) that acts as an umbrella term that ties together a variety of concepts and, by doing so in a particular way, offers them a collective morphology that only in its entirety signifies the meaning of the term. In order to study such meanings, it is necessary to study the discursive contents and patterns that give rise to it. But not all paradigms are suited to this study, because they follow the

⁴ Attention is drawn here to a useful distinction regarding social construction. It is outlined in an early attempt by Diez (2001) to outline the uses of the social constructionist approach to studies of the EU: Constructive realism assumes that, even though constructed, there is a world or reality 'out there'. In contrast to classical positivist approaches, however, it cannot be directly observed and made sense of, but can only be known or made knowable by means of the meaning systems of language (i.e. discursive social interaction). Constructive idealism, in contrast, assumes that it is the fact that there are actors engaged in the linguistic construction of reality that brings it into being. The concept of 'social imaginary' used, for instance, by Calhoun (2002) to discuss the EU, provides a useful way of approximating this understanding.

rules or pattern of their own language game. The paradigm represented by the mainstream integration theories features several assumptions and foci of study; a teleology that obscures contradictions and the operation of power within the integration process, the assumptions that politics can be made sense of in rationalistic terms of administration and self-interest rather than fear, desire and power, and in terms of individualism rather than collectivity, as well as the assumption that the term Europe is synonymous with EU, etc. Intentional or not, these assumption lead to a necessarily theory- or method-driven approach, such as 'European identity is X, is it possible to achieve X and how so?' Discourse analysis, in contrast, allows for an approach that starts with the problem 'what is European identity?' by posing the question 'how is it possible (by what means and power structures) that so-called European identity as come refer to its current meaning?' These are new questions indeed, and they could certainly be posed about a variety of objects of study relevant to European integration. Thus, a focus on discursive construction belongs to a different paradigm that can usefully complement the mainstream one.

As mentioned above, 'how possible' questions do not only elicit the actual means of the social (and discursive) construction of reality. They can also be used as a starting point to identify and explore the power structures that facilitate this process. While power is certainly an object of study in the realm of international relations in general and sometimes also in that of European integration, it is understood differently in social and discursive constructionist accounts; they aim to identify structures and practical examples of the exercise of the power not to influence decisions or coerce people or states into specific behaviours but to determine meanings. These include establishing the 'common sense', obscuring contradictions, allowing or disallowing discursive participation based on identity of the speaker or content of speech, processes of nominalisation and predication, and the like. They can be identified by means of deconstruction, i.e. juxtaposition with possible alternative discourses, which does away with the assumption of inevitability. As indicated earlier in this paper, the mainstream European integration theories provide little space for alternative discourses; they are hegemonic and, as such, their contents as well as their dominance are normalised. They also lend themselves to instrumentalisation in support of a very limited number of normative positions including the legitimisation of institutions such as the Commission. Approaches differing from these are often perceived as Eurosceptical or even anti-European.⁵ And while it is true that the potential to raise questions of relations and the practice of power forms the basis of a critique in the Marxist sense, it is mistaken to assume that such critique originates from scepticism or anti-Europeanism

⁵ The author of this paper has heard both herself and other researchers, e.g. those approaching study of the EU from social anthropology such as Shore (e.g. 2000), described as the former, when neither deserve such a label.

rather than a desire to identify room for the improvement of a project that is viewed in an overall positive light. It is for this reason, namely the need to round out well-disposed accounts of European integration by allowing for critical reflexivity, that this new paradigm and the method of discourse analysis are valuable.

Allowing a new (complementary) paradigm to take shape in the study of European integration

Such reflexivity as well as the added insights offered by the method of discourse analysis are particularly valuable, as Checkel (1999: 546) identified, in the area – thus far under-explored in the context of studies of the EU – of ‘social learning and normative diffusion’, through which the formation of identity (including so-called European identity) takes place and which takes the form of discourse. This is where a connection can be made to Eder’s (2007) work outlined above. However, as has been stated before, while preparing the ground, he fails to break with the mainstream paradigm; this is illustrated by his choice of discourses (historical narratives and perceptions about legal equality) to focus on. However, social learning and normative diffusion take place by means of many other discourses as well. All of these can be grouped together under the category political myth, which will be explained in more detail below. Before doing so, however, it is important to note that, located at the intersection of political science, anthropology and sociology, its use is not only conceptually enriching and empirically illuminating, but also methodologically sound in this context. It is in line with the understanding that European integration is not just an intergovernmental project of international relations, but also a political and cultural phenomenon (which despite disagreement as to the extent cannot be denied outright). On a more abstract level, this means that it overcomes the compartmentalisation of disciplines so necessary in view of the fact that the world out there, albeit constructed, does not conform to disciplinary boundaries. By overcoming these artificially drawn boundaries that at the same time as allowing some, limit other, aspects of our understanding, it is possible to arrive at a problem-driven approach, where theory and method are deduced from the problem rather than one where theory or method determine which problem can be studied.

With regard to processes of social learning and normative diffusion involved in the construction of so-called European identity, this means that it becomes possible to study aspects of identity in general and quasi-national identity in particular that were formerly taken for granted due to methodological and theoretical commitments. Features conventionally mobilised in the definition of such forms of identity are linguistic similarity, essentialised (sometimes even assumedly primordial)

ethnic background, community of fate, ideological (religious, political, etc.) unity, and so forth. However, while studies of national identity have long identified these as socially discursively constructed or 'imagined' (Anderson 1983), in the context of European Union studies, essentialist understandings still prevail. This is why the lack of linguistic similarity and shared ethnic background are considered problematic. Furthermore, due to the dominance of the paradigm outlined above, the constructedness of the history and telos of its community of fate as well as its (implicit as well as explicit) ideological make-up have been overlooked in the context of the European Union. Yet, the new approach suggested here allows insights into them both, for they are constructed in narratives or, more precisely, political myths.

The defining features of political myths, according to Flood (2002), are, firstly, that they are narratives that carry ideological beliefs; secondly, that they present themselves as and are held to be true and, often, sacred or sacrosanct and, thus, insulated from critique; thirdly, they may appear in regional or diachronic variations and synchronic analogies. All these characteristics are accepted here, including the premise of the first one on a structural understanding of ideology. The one adopted here is that described by Freedon (1996) of ideologies as 'patterns of thought-behaviour' or clusters of concepts that give meaning to the world in empirical and normative terms and, thus, enable individual and, more importantly, collective action. Here, the individualism and quasi-individualism of the mainstream paradigm of European integration theory is overcome. This is helpful, for identification of the kind that is discussed cannot be understood in terms of the individual alone. However, a fourth defining characteristic proposed by Flood (2002), namely that myths display, in their narrative, a sequence of connected past, present or future events, is considered as unnecessarily limiting in its insistence in a temporal or historical reference point. It is, therefore, replaced by the understanding that a constant reference point is needed around which a narrative is constructed. Apart from, say, antagonistic relations with an 'other' or 'out-group', or normative ideals, this can – and often, though not always, does – take the shape of a historical event. In this guise, myths are similar to so-called historical memories of the past, which is the reason that the latter have received so much attention in the context of studies of national or quasi-national identities (Hobsbawm 1983, Eder 2007). A further similarity lies in the fact that the original source of the story is often unidentifiable and not considered of particular importance to assessments of its relevance and importance. But in common parlance myth is often understood as referring to a story untrue even if it is more or less widely believed. Such an understanding of necessary inaccuracy as a defining feature, however, is considered mistaken here, for it has no bearing on the identity-endowing function of a mythical narrative discourse.

In their combination, these criteria carry a variety of important points. It has already been stated that they enable collective action, but it is worthwhile to look at this in detail. By relating ideological content by means of narratives, myths provide inspiration and justification that can form the basis of any kind of human action; they can express a will to act or condone inaction and quietism. As such, MacNeill (1986: 23) claims

[m]yth lies at the basis of human society. That is because myths are general statements about the world and its parts, and in particular about nations and other human in-groups, that are believed to be true and then acted on whenever circumstances suggest or require common response. This is mankind's substitute for instinct. It is the unique and characteristic human way of acting together. A people without a full quiver of relevant agreed-upon statements, accepted in advance through education or less formalized acculturation, soon finds itself in deep trouble, for, in the absence of believable myths, coherent public action becomes very difficult to improvise or sustain.

While not specifically concerned with political myth, this assessment already suggests the political function of mythical narratives in general. More politically oriented analyses have identified myth as the 'ideologically marked' (Flood 2002) or 'value-impregnated beliefs and notions that men [sic]... live by and live for' (MacIver 1947: 4). They 'turn valuations into propositions about the nature of things' (ibid: 39) and without the direction they provide no political action could be taken. As the above analogy to instinct suggests, in their narrative form, myths work beyond and, thus, defy rational argument as the dominant form of political expression (Sorel 1999, Bottici 2007). Here, it becomes clear how an approach that proposes study of this particular type of discourse can overcome the paradigmatic limitation to rationalism that mainstream integration theories and studies of the European Union display. However, the study of political myth does not imply an analytically unhelpful endorsement of (alleged) irrationality. Rather, it intends to draw attention to role of the affective dimension in communication, identification and politics in general. Particularly in combination with Mouffe's (1998) argument that de-ideologising and de-politicising politics, which often involves the dismissal of its affective dimension, leads to – literally – disaffection and apathy, this is an important observation to keep in mind, especially in the apparently legitimacy crisis-ridden European Union. In this respect too, allowing an alternative paradigm to complement the mainstream one, can only be of advantage to the field of European Union studies, as identifying room for improvement and mechanisms to achieve it may offer solutions to problems that the Union is currently facing. Some may argue that this is not the point of academic work, but in view of the fact that a lot of academic engagement with the European Union is actively engaged in or lends itself to legitimising it, this cannot be considered a problematic proposition.

Empirical examples of the utility of a new paradigm

It is important to note here, that initial steps in this direction have been taken. Some writers have touched on political myth-making of the European Union yet broadly remained in thrall to historiography (Stråth 2005), while others have identified interesting aspects of the EU's language game (e.g. that it, too, like the field that is dedicated to its study, relies overly on rationalism (Hansen and Williams 1999)). Again others (Jo 2007) have identified the significance of political myths in times of political crisis, but overlook its equal significance (though invisibility due to success) at times when there is no political crisis. And in early 2010, the *Journal of Common Market Studies* published a special issue (Vol. 48, No. 1) on the topic of European political myths. However, the articles did not all engage in depth with definitional questions, paradigmatic assumptions, theoretical commitments, methodological consideration or critical analysis of the EU narratives they discussed. While a number of innovative ideas are presented by some (for example, one of the articles (Lenschow and Sprungk 2010) dispensed with the evolutionary/ historical notion of myth), several contented themselves with recounting the EU's policy discourses. Some also reproduced theoretical and methodological commitments, e.g. methodological nationalism and quasi-individualism (e.g. Jones 2010, Smismans 2010) or a sole focus on so-called historical memory (e.g. Hansen-Magnusson and Wiener 2010), that limited their insights. Most importantly, all of them overlooked the relevance of the concept to issues of identity (and legitimacy) as well as the ideological nature of myth that is at the basis of its identity-endowing function.

This means that more thorough as well as critical study of the EU's political myths is required, for such ideologically marked, affective and identity-endowing narratives can be found in a variety of EU policy discourses as well as sources such as the treaties, declarations, policy papers, inter- and intra-institutional communications, and – especially – in publicity material. The latter, due to being addressed directly to so-called European citizens and, thus, most relevant to the propagation of European integration through processes of the identity construction of the mythical European, form the focus of study of the larger project of which this paper represents a part. Amongst them, the focus is on those produced and published by the Commission; it being the most proactive amongst the EU institutions in the field of political marketing. The discourses considered most relevant to the process of constructing the mythical European can be divided into an internal or self-reflexive and an external or reverse mirror image category. In the former, there are discourses about citizenship,

European aspirations, and enlargement, while the latter consists of those of migration and foreign policy (touching on both aid and development, and security and defence).⁶

The former category contains discourses that establish relations of inclusion – either outright through defining citizens or by means of a transition from exclusion to inclusion in the context of enlargement. These often contain discourses about the commonality of rights, practices, and aspirations and ideological commitments such as a concern for the environment, the importance of conventional education, health, technological innovation and economic status, all of which are portrayed as an (often implicit rather than explicit) illustration of the superiority, preferability and alleged utility of European approaches and practices. One important myth of the European Union is that of its objective to provide ‘peace and prosperity’. While the former is grounded in the historical myth of its emergence after World War II, the latter betrays the Union’s ideological outlook particularly well. This can be illustrated best by means of deconstruction; for instance, the hippie movement of the 1970s would have paired the concepts love and peace rather than peace and prosperity. This simple example effectively exposes the arbitrariness of the latter set as well as its capitalist/consumerist focus. This focus also takes shape in the commodified nature of several Union citizenship rights (e.g. the right to freedom of movement is inextricably tied up with labour and labour-related activities) and the omnipresent portrayal of citizens engaging in activities of consumption. It is also mirrored, on the level of presentation, in the quasi-corporatist design of the EU’s marketing brochures (including its branding strategies). These send out mixed (even contradictory) messages in some areas. For instance, regarding the tension between the solidarity or sense of a ‘European family’/ ‘reunification of Europe’ it propagates in words and the individualism it portrays in images. The overall aim, however, is to make so-called Europeans feel good about themselves and, by means of branding the characteristics that inspire aspiration as European, to facilitate identification with the European Union. Practices such as appealing to the moral high ground (implicitly establishing European superiority) and euphemism (omitting images of hardship or manual work in favour of those of leisure and happiness, e.g. by symbolising the Common Agricultural Policy by means of a photograph of a cow) operate to this effect. Further ideologies supported in the public relations material in the form of mythical narratives of what it means to be European are the following: environmentalism by means of constructing the ‘responsible’

⁶ However, due to considerations of space, the present paper will only include reference to examples from some of these discourses and publications. A list of the ones drawn on can be found in the bibliography. Individual sources of exemplary materials on which arguments are based can be provided but have been excluded here in order to facilitate ease of reading.

EUropean; progressivism, technologism, healthism and educationalism by constructing EUrope as a place of innovation, advancement and a knowledge-based economy; individualism by portraying practices and discourses of personal advancement and self-interest around economic, e.g., opportunities and rights; corporatism, managerialism and pragmatism in its narrative representation of the activity of politics as administration or dispensing of service and in the format and design of its publications (esp. the use of stock photography that resembles conventional advertising material to an extent so as to make it almost meaningless); and universalism.

Universalism is an interesting ideological tenet propagated by the EU for it refers to its (cultural) imperialist assumption that its own values should be universal and should be spread. In a condescending approach that is reminiscent of colonial discourses, it presents its other as a reverse mirror image of itself. Thus, the second category of discourses mentioned above is one of exclusion and the impossibility of inclusion due to contradiction or incommensurability of values, practices, and standards. The 'other' is portrayed either as a helpless victim trapped in circumstances less fortunate than Europeans' or a potential threat. As such, contradictory ideological messages about solidarity beyond the European realm, humanitarianism, superiority of European understandings and practices, and securitism are communicated to citizens. The arbitrariness of rules of in- and exclusion is obscured by the crude racial and ethno-cultural markers familiar from national settings. Furthermore, in another move to establish the Union's significance in the world and, sometimes, create celebrity status for its institutions and selected officials, the 'other' is used as a backdrop or contrast against which to display European superiority and exceptionalism. In line with these points, de-individualisation takes two forms: in the case of EUropeans the method of the incomplete proposition preserves the sense of integrity or focuses on symbols of agency (such as hands) to enable identification; in the case of 'others', however, the framing of images is reminiscent of conventional methods of anonymisation of crime victims or perpetrators.

Beyond the specific contents of the European Union's publications, it can be said that with the exception of few instances of acknowledgement of the possibility of counter discourses for the purpose of audience appeasement, EU myths present a one-sided, sanitised image of life in the Union. This leads to several problems. Firstly, it has the effect of (over)simplification to a degree that could be seen as infantilising the audience (i.e. citizens), which may lead to disenchantment. Secondly, one cannot help but wonder if such communication is capable of offering reference points for identification beyond the conventional, aspirational yet perpetually unattainable and ultimately vacuous and dissatisfying type offered by corporate advertising. Furthermore, this sanitised image

leaves unexplained what aspect exactly of the utopian prospect offered makes it European, and thus is makes the project of identity construction vulnerable to the criticism of lazily reflecting back to citizens what is assumed they identify with anyway instead of offering political leadership and material fit for substantive identification. However, this may be a result of successful EUropean myth-dissemination or a self-fulfilling prophecy to this end. And while it would be interesting to discuss the question of the success of EU myth-making and –dissemination, it forms too large a project for the current context. The latter is content with having outlined its efforts and the structures and function of the myths presented.

Conclusion

The first part of this paper concentrated on the paradigmatic nature, the underlying theoretical and methodological assumptions, of mainstream integration theories. The second illustrated how, by means of a new, critical and constructionist, paradigm and discourse analytical method, the limitations of the former can be overcome to the benefit of EU studies by widening its scope and deepening its insights. These, it has been claimed, can be useful beyond the theoretical level for the continued improvement of the European project. After setting out a definition of the identity-endowing discursive form of political myth, the final part of this paper attempted to illustrate that such a change in direction in and substantive addition to the study of the EU is warranted, especially where questions of so-called European identity are concerned, by referring to examples of the EU's political myth. While this exercise has shown that some critical thought is not out of place in the study of the European Union, it has to be clear that such critique serves the purpose of improvement rather than a project of nihilism.

The same applies to the conventional paradigm common in studies of and theorising about the EU and European integration. As such, this paper has also presented a critique of academic practices alongside that of the EU's practices. About a decade ago, Christiansen, Jørgensen and Wiener found fault with studies of the European Union in that '[t]here is a certain paradox in that what is often referred to as *la construction européenne* has not received any systematic attention from constructivist scholars' (Christiansen et al. 2001: 1). It is interesting that these authors seem to assume that blame lies with academics, when this phenomenon and the overwhelming dominance of the paradigm described here can also be argued to be the result of structured interests within the European Union itself by making reference to tendencies in the allocation of research funding (which

in this field is to a substantial part provided by the EU). Attempting to identify the culprit in this way, however, is beside the point. What is of importance is to identify the problem and attempt to remedy it by overcoming the limiting aspects of the currently prevailing paradigm by complementing it with the insights of a new one. It is argued here that a social constructionist one with a focus on ideologically marked, affective discursive processes of political myth-making and -dissemination can be of use to such ends in the study of so-called European identity.

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