

Nationalism in the 21st Century: a European and United States Comparison

Alberto Martinelli – University of Milan.

The gist of my argument is that today nationalism in Europe is a threat to further political integration, while in the US it is an opportunity to cope with growing political and ideological polarization. The difference is partly due to the different stage of political development of the two unions (the United States are a consolidated union, while the EU is a union in the making) and to the different role played by national identities in the history of Europe and America. But differences stem also from the ways in which global processes change the nature of nations and nationalism. Global interdependence and cultural diversity, on the one hand, are eroding the independence of nations and making nationalism an obsolete ideology and, on the other, are transforming and giving new salience to them. The financial and economic crisis has become a crisis of governance as well, which makes it difficult to meet the serious challenges facing the Western world today. In the United States, this crisis of governance is taking the form of an intractable polarization; nationalism can be a resource for overcoming it and making government more effective. In the European Union, it is taking form of a stubborn renationalization, and the nationalism of member countries obstructs the road toward a more developed supranational union, which in turn is necessary for it to thrive in a globalized world. In order to argue my thesis, I will first critically assess major interpretations of nationalism in social theory, and second, discuss the role of contemporary nationalism on the two sides of the Atlantic.

Nationalism and nations have been a key topic in the history of political thought, but only a peripheral concern for political and sociological research until the last decades of the 20th century. This is no surprise; sociology and political science have developed as disciplines of the modern world, and the nation state has been the basic unit of analysis and frame of reference of most research. Besides, the fact that the world is divided into nations, and every person is born into a nationality, was seen as a feature of ordinary common sense and made nationalism a fact taken for granted. In recent decades, on the one hand, economic and cultural globalization has been eroding national sovereignty, while, on the other, with the end of bipolarism in world politics, old national and ethnic conflicts have re-emerged and new ones have appeared. Nationalism has become a key controversial research topic in social sciences. And there is a new awareness that nations and nationalism still matter.

1. How to define nationalism?

Smith (1991) remarks that the term ‘nationalism’ has been used in five different ways: the whole process of forming and maintaining nations; a consciousness of belonging to the nation; a language and symbolism of the nation; an ideology (including a cultural doctrine) of nations; and a social and political movement to achieve the goals of the nations and realize the national will. Since the first way can be better referred to ‘nation-building’, and the second and third are components of the latter two, the most appropriate meanings are the fourth and the fifth: nationalism can be defined, *lato sensu*, as the ideology of a specific political entity, the nation-state, and as a social and political movement aimed at conquering and exercising state power that is justified by a nationalist doctrine. According to this doctrine, nations with an explicit and peculiar character do exist, nation-related values and interests have priority over all others, and

nations must be independent and politically sovereign (Breuilly, 1982). There is also a *stricto sensu* definition of nationalism, that applies to those collective movements which subordinate any political value to the national one, pretend to be the only legitimate interpreter of the national principle and the only effective defender of the national interest, and consider social conflicts and democratic party competition as divisive phenomena that must be substituted by national solidarity (like Maurras' *Action française*, Hugenberg's *Pangermanik League*, Corradini's *Associazione nazionalista italiana* in the early 20th century, and various radical right parties and xenophobic movements nowadays). In my paper I will intend nationalism in the broader sense: not just as a political doctrine and a political activity, but also as "a more basic way of talking, thinking and acting" (Calhoun, 2007:11).

In this broader definition, the concepts of nationalism, nation and nation-state are strictly related, since nation-states are the context where nationalism develops and, in turn, the nationalist discourse helps to make nations. For Haas (1997:23) "a nation is a socially mobilized body of individuals who believe themselves united by some set of characteristics that differentiate them (in their own minds) from outsiders and who strive to create or maintain their own state". Their collective consciousness is based on a sentiment of difference or even uniqueness that is fostered by shared core symbols. Their wish is self-determination. "Nationalism is a belief held by a group of people that they ought to constitute a nation or that they are already one. It is a doctrine of social solidarity based on the characteristics and symbols of nationhood. A nation-state is a political entity whose inhabitants consider themselves a single nation and wish to remain one".

The nation-state is the institutional embodiment of political authority in modern society, an impersonal and sovereign political entity with supreme jurisdiction over a clearly delimited territory and population which claims monopoly over coercive power, and enjoys legitimacy as a result of its citizens' support. It is a particular institution resulting from the encounter between a sovereign, autonomous, centralized political organization, on the one hand, and a community (real and imagined at the same time) based on common citizens' rights and/or founded on ties of blood, language, shared tradition and collective memory, on the other. The nation-state - characterized by the unity of a people, a territory and a distinctive culture - slowly took shape in opposition to the multi-ethnic empires and/or the supra-national church; it developed historically through the growth of a civil bureaucracy, an army and a diplomacy, and through the formation of a nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991), resulting from the action of nationalist elites in the modernization process (Gellner, 1983) and capable of evoking primordial ethno-symbolic roots (Smith, 1991). On the one hand, nationalism is generated by the nation-state, since the bureaucratic centralized power of the latter allows the attainment of the political project of the fusion of state and nation, i.e. of the unification of territory, language, culture and tradition, and breaks the many regional/local and social/cultural autonomies of pre-modern societies. On the other hand, nationalism legitimizes the formation of an independent state based on people's sovereignty and coordinates and mobilizes action to achieve this goal. Gellner's paradoxical argument (1983:55) that "it is nationalism which engenders nations" -since nations can be defined only in terms of the age of nationalism, rather than, as you might expect, the other way around- contains some truth; but it is more appropriate to consider nation-building and nationalism as complementary processes.

From the vast literature on nationalism (thoroughly analyzed in recent works like those of Smith 1998, Hutchinson and Smith 2000, Motyl 2001, Day and Thompson 2004, Puri 2004, Lawrence 2005, Ichijo and Uzelac 2005, Delanty and Kumar 2006, Ozkirimli 2010), I select some key aspects that define my own perspective and

constitute the necessary background for the comparative analysis of American and European nationalism at the beginning of the 21st century. These key aspects--or critical areas of agreement (Cerulo, 2001)--are accepted by most (though not all) scholars and shape the modernist perspective, still the more influential approach to the study of nationalism. This perspective, adequately updated, is also my own. First, nationalism is historically specific, closely related to the modern nation-state and modern politics and to the formation of mass industrial society; it provides an answer to the specific modern problem of how to create solidarity in an atomistic society. Second, nationalism is the ideology--or discourse--of the nation; it fosters distinctive collective movements and policies, promoting the autonomy, unity, and sovereignty of those gathered in a single territory and united by a single political culture and a set of shared political goals. Third, nationalism evokes a strong collective sentiment: all citizens come to experience a shared collective identity and to embrace a common national purpose. Let's discuss more at length these key aspects of the modernist perspective.

Nationalism is linked to modernization, i.e. to a set of interconnected economic, political and socio-cultural transformations that characterize the modern world (industrialization, bureaucratization, democratization, mass communication). The role of nationalism varies in the different roads to modernity (Greenfeld, 1992), but there are common processes and recurrent features as well (Martinelli, 2005). Modern industrial societies require free movement of labour, capital and goods throughout the national community, universal schooling and a standardized national language, and intensified social and geographical mobility. They tend to destroy both exclusiveness of elite high cultures and the parochialism of local cultures (Gellner, 1983). Nationalism is a successful example of those 'invented traditions' occurring at times of rapid social change; it is developed in order to secure cohesion in the face of fragmentation and disintegration caused by rapid industrialization (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). It responds to the emergence of mass politics, when the insertion of hitherto excluded social groups into politics created unprecedented problems for the ruling elites, who found it increasingly difficult to maintain the loyalty, obedience and cooperation of their subjects. And it grows through the development of primary education, the invention of public ceremonies, and the mass production of public monuments, thus becoming a new secular religion.

Nationalism is a response to the central sociological question: what are the bases of solidarity in a modern society of individuals? Performing the three key functions of coordination, mobilization and legitimacy, nationalism played a key role in both major forms of response to the crucial question of how modern societies could establish an effective state-society connection and reconcile the public interests of citizens and the private interests of selfish individuals (Breuilly, 1996). The first response is 'political' and rests on the idea of citizenship; the nation is simply the body of citizens who participate in democratic and liberal institutions. The second answer is 'cultural' and stresses the collective character of society; it is initially upheld by political elites confronted with the problem of securing the support of the masses and capable of providing a common national identity of members of different social groups.

The national principle and the democratic principle are historically linked, but their relation is ambivalent and controversial. Modern nations are formed when large masses of people start to make political demands on the basis of a sense of cultural distinctiveness. National movements, i.e. collective movements embracing the nationalist ideology, aim at making people conscious of their equal rights as members of a single political entity and at fostering the political independence of their own country as the prerequisite for the establishment of a peaceful community of nations. The *Declaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* states: "the principle of

sovereignty essentially lies in the nation; no political body, no individual can exercise any authority that does not stem directly from it". The word *Fraternité*—which substituted the previous formula *Unité indivisible de la republique ou la mort* as the third immortal principle of the French revolution—is the most complex of the three (Martinelli et al. 2009); it tries to transfer at the state level the sentiments of belonging that people feel for their natural communities, and for this reason it needs—and tries to impose—a common language and a unique culture; but here it finds its limit, or even its impossibility. Popper (1963), for instance, affirms that the absolute absurdity of the principle of self-determination should be evident to anybody, since it implies that every state is a national state, limited by natural borders and the natural place of an ethnic group, the nation, with the consequence that it should be the ethnic group to determine and protect the natural borders of the state.

And yet, in spite of these critics, nationalism matters and makes people think that the nation really exists. Democratic ideology was insufficient to guarantee the unity of the state against the divisive forces of class antagonisms and conflicts among nations. It required the ideology of nationalism as a key means of political integration. Nationalism may be an absurd doctrine, but, as Breuille remarks (1982:343) “as far as is successful, it proves to be true” and effective. National interests, values and identities are indeed stronger than all others, as the defeat of Socialist and Christian internationalists at the outbreak of the First World War made clear.

There are basically two sources of European nationalism. The first source is the French revolution, from Rousseau’s political philosophy to the *Declaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*, to the radical nationalism of the Jacobins; it is synthesised in Renan’s famous expression: *l’existence d’une nation est un plebiscite quotidien* (1887). A nation is “a large scale solidarity” that presupposes a common heroic past, great leaders, true glory, and also implies ‘collective forgetting’ of previous divisive identities, but it is summarized in the present by consent, by the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life and willingness to live together as members of the same community. Renan’s view leaves unsolved the question of how this specific type of community differs from others. The second main source of European nationalism is German romanticism (Herder and Fichte) that stresses the cultural and linguistic meaning of the nation and is also related to some extent to *Blut und Boden*. Kohn (1948) introduced the widely known distinction between the political concept of the nation (Rousseau and the French revolution) and the cultural notion of the nation (Herder and German Romanticism). These historical sources of nationalism gave rise to a polarized view of nationalism and national identities: civic and ethnic, political and cultural, liberal-associational or organic-integral, Western rationalist-liberal/democratic and Eastern mythical-reactionary. The different national histories of French republicanism and German totalitarianism are responsible for this dichotomy between ‘good democratic patriotism’ and ‘bad undemocratic nationalism’, which has been persuasively criticised by scholars like Yuval Davis and Huntington. The latter defines these pairings ‘a false dichotomy’ since “the ethnic category is a catch-all for all forms of nationalism or national identity that are not clearly contractual, civic and liberal. In particular, it combines two very different conceptions of national identity: the ethnic-genealogical (or ancestral), on the one hand, and the cultural, on the other.” (2004:30). While ascriptive elements like ethnicity and ancestry are relatively permanent, cultural ones (i.e. language, religious beliefs, social and political values, assumptions as to what is right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, and the objective institutions and behavioural patterns that reflect these subjective elements) are much more open to change. Besides, the relative importance of the elements of national identity varies with the historical experience of the people. In a similar vein, Yuval Davis (1997)

differentiates between three key dimensions of nationalist projects: the 'genealogical' dimension that is constructed around the specific origin of the people (Volknation), the 'cultural' dimension in which the symbolic heritage provided by language, religion and other customs and traditions is constructed as the essence of the nation (Kulturnation), and the 'civic' dimension which focuses on citizenship, state sovereignty and territoriality as determining the boundaries of the nation (Staatnation).

The analytical distinction of these three dimensions is important; it can be used to analyze how different mixes of the three components can foster different political arrangements. Whenever the three components are not well balanced problems arise: if the national identity is too heavily based on the civic dimension, the associated collective sentiment can be weaker than other sub-national identities (ethnic, religious, local, regional) to the point of breaking the nation apart; if, on the contrary, the national identity is too heavily based on ethnic-genealogical and cultural aspects, it can become the ideology of a non-democratic state and foster xenophobic attitudes.

A shared collective identity and a common sense of national purpose are not necessarily democratic. The assertion that the fight for national independence is intrinsically democratic and the prerequisite for the establishment of a peaceful community of nations has been falsified by several historical cases. In spite of the historical linkage between national identity and democracy, nation-states can be totalitarian as well, as Nazi Germany or the Stalinist USSR; in both countries the nationalization of the masses was a key component of totalitarian consensus formation (Mosse, 1973). In many new nations, doctrines of self-determination turned into doctrines of aggressive nationalism that denied for others the same claims to independence. The independence of nations--even if achieved through a principle of self-determination--did not imply the end of the unequal distribution of power in world politics and, on the contrary, contributed to violent conflicts. Two great 19th century Italian thinkers, one well known and the other almost unknown in the Anglo-Saxon world, saw national independence as a prerequisite for peaceful coexistence. Mazzini's belief (1847) that the organization of Europe and the world in nation-states was the way to achieve solidarity among all human beings and brotherhood among all peoples was proved wrong by the 20th century wars. And Cattaneo's vision (1860) of the formation of a federal Italian republic as a basic step toward a federal Europe did not prevail in the process of Italian nation-building (Risorgimento) and it is still unaccomplished in today's European Union.

The ambivalent nature of nationalism can be better understood by focusing on the basic claims of nationalist ideology. Ozkirimli (2010) identifies three sets of interrelated claims in the nationalist discourse: a) identity claims: the world is divided into 'us' and 'them', friends and foes, positing a homogeneous and fixed identity on either side and stressing the characteristics that differentiate 'us' from 'them'; b) temporal claims: the nationalist discourse is obsessed with the propagation of the 'authentic' version of historical past and with establishing meaningful links to the past (also promoting social amnesia of problematic aspects, not congruent with the official narration; and c) spatial claims: nationalists presume an inextricable link between the nation and the physical and built environment of a territory that is often seen as formative of the national character and bearing the indelible marks of the nation's presence. As a result of the previous claims, at the core of the nationalist discourse lies the priority claim, i.e. the affirmation that the values of the nation must have absolute priority, that loyalty to the nation overrides all other forms of loyalty, individual and collective (family, class, ethnicity, religion, etc.), and that the nation is the ultimate source of sovereignty. These ideological claims respond to the individuals' need of overcoming the feelings of insecurity and perceived endangerment that results from

uprootedness and the dissolution of old securities and old faiths (Hroch 1985, Giesen 1991).

But why is the nationalist ideology so powerful in convincing people that loyalty to the nation is supreme? If one focuses only on the ethnic-ancestral component, fails to explain why this type of loyalty overrides others. Thus, the cultural and/or the political components of national identities must be taken into the picture. Anderson's well known answer (1991) is that the nation is an imagined political community, since although no single member personally knows all other members of the nation, yet in their minds they all live in community; it is a sovereign, limited and particular community, imagined as creating a deep, horizontal comradeship. Anderson even speaks of the need to overcome the fear of an individual death by identifying with an immortal nation. A second type of response is more political and stresses the linkage with the nation-state: nationalism is first on the scale of group values because it reflects a situation in which the most important actions of human beings are linked to the maximum locus of political power, that of the state (Albertini, 1964). A third response is socio-political: nationalist ideology, or discourse, has a powerful appeal because by affirming that it can abolish the distinctions between culture and politics, society and state, and private and public; it can mobilize the elites and the masses through the appeal to a shared historical destiny. In this respect, nationalism has an instrumental nature (Brass, 1991): ethnic and national identities are convenient tools in the hands of competing elites for generating mass support in their struggle for power, wealth and prestige. The existence of objective cultural markers of ethnic differences, elite competition for the leadership and the control of resources, and the communication of the selected symbols of identity to a mobilised population (through growth in literacy rates, media of mass communication, standardization of local languages) are the necessary conditions for successful ethnic identity formation and its transformation into nationalism; but the success of a national movement in its bid to control state power differs from time to time and from place to place, since it also depends on its political organization, the nature of government response and the general political context.

The dominant modernist approach has been criticised by the ethno-symbolist approach, which emphasizes the role of myths, symbols, memories, values and traditions in the formation, persistence and change of ethnicity and nationalism, and argues that, although nationalist ideology and movement are modern, nations exist all through history. Armstrong (1998) develops a century-long study of the formation of ethnic identities and focuses on the shifting significance of boundaries and on the long-term influence of 'myth-symbol complexes' on the emergence of modern national identities. Tullio-Altan (1995) identifies five basic components of nationhood: *ethnos*, *logos*, *topos*, *ethos*, and *epos*. Smith (1986, 2001) develops a complex and articulated theory of nation-formation based on the interplay between ethnic, nationalism and the modern state, where the ethnic is the core concept, defined in terms of six attributes (a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of a common culture, an association with a specific homeland, and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population). The nation is defined accordingly as "a named and self-defined community whose members cultivate common myths, memories, symbols and values, possess and disseminate a distinctive public culture, reside in and identify with a historic homeland, and create and disseminate common laws and shared customs" (2005:98). Smith argues that identities and legacies of earlier ethnic communities form the foundations of contemporary nations, reconstruct the main trajectories of different types of ethnic communities (the lateral/aristocratic ethnicities and the vertical/demotic ethnicities) in the process of nation-building through dynamic processes of ethnic self-renewal. The

‘ethnic imperialism’ of this view (Goio,1993) is tempered by the distinction of two types of nationalism--territorial and ethnic--that give rise to different types of pre-independence and post-independence movements. Certain events, like war and conquest, exile and enslavement, the influx of immigrants and religious conversion, generate profound changes in the cultural contents of ethnic identities; but even the most radical changes cannot destroy the sense of continuity and common ethnicity, partly due to external forces that help crystallize ethnic identities and ensure their persistence over long periods, such as state-making, military mobilization and organized religion.

This view of nations as solid and long living social realities, changing but enduring, is shared by Hutchinson (2005), who argues that conflict is endemic to all nations, and that all nations contain plural ethnic repertoires that give birth to competing cultural and political projects in the modern period. Hence nation formation is an unfinished and evolving process, and “the preservation of persisting differences and rival cultural repertoire is one of the important reasons for the adaptability of the nation throughout two centuries of tumultuous change” (2005:5). However, the recognition of cultural pluralism and conflict can also be interpreted in a different way, as scholars like Ozkirimli and Yuval-Davis do: individual and collective actors have multiple and conflictual identities over which there can be no final consensus and which make the persistence of contemporary nations much more problematic.

The ethno-symbolic critique of modernism does not prevent an integration of the two approaches. More radical is the critique of the modernist approach waged by non-Western post-colonial leaders. Nationalism was a successful export of European modernity; it emerged in the late 18th century and exploded in the next one, first in Europe and then in the Americas; in the 20th century it spread to Asian and African post-colonial nations, where it took new, autonomous forms, in the context of multiple modernities (Martinelli, 2005). The modern idea of popular sovereignty that was expressed in the identity of a people with a nation state in its turn legitimized the rise of anti-colonial movements, although this does not imply that the nationalist experiences in Asia and Africa are moulded on the modular forms of the national society propagated by the modern West (Chattergie, 1993). The view that links nationalism to Western modernity is even more radically rejected by those Asian and African nationalist leaders and intellectuals who maintain that nationality is an inherent attribute of the human condition and praise the ancient (and even eternal) character of their nation, the memories of a superior golden age and the awakening of the nation after a period of decadence (Kedourie, 1971).

The view of these leaders is close to the major alternative to the modernist approach, the so-called perennialist/primordialist approach (Hastings 1997, Grosby 2001), which provides a quite different answer to the question ‘when is the nation?’ by arguing that nations can be found in all historical epochs and are timeless, and that nationalism existed as a powerful reality in some places long before the 19th century. According to the socio-biological version of this approach (van den Berghe, 2001), nations are politically conscious ethnies, and ethnic groups have always existed, coalesce and break up, appear and disappear in history. The classic sociological and anthropological studies that have inspired this approach (Shils, Geertz) are more sophisticated. The objects of primordial attachments like blood, language, religion and particular social practices are not given, but assumed to be given by individuals. As Shils writes in his famous essay *Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties*, family attachment can only be described as primordial because it is not just a function of interaction, but “because a certain ineffable significance is attributed to the tie of blood”(1957:142). And Geertz argues that “by a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the ‘givens’ of

social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices....One is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbour, one's fellow believer, ipso facto; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the tie itself" (1993:259-60).

This perspective maintains that characteristics generally associated with nationalism exist in different ways and to different degree all through history, but it does not explain how nationalism differs from other types of primordial bonds, nor why it becomes the dominant type in given historical epochs. It is then more appropriate to argue that modern nationalism can use primordial ties as elements of its emotional appeal. Several convincing critiques have been developed of this approach; I will just mention three. Horowitz (2002) remarks that a lot is left unexplained in primordialist formulations, first of all why some affiliations become primordial while others lose out, and why ethnic boundaries include some subgroups and exclude others. Balibar (1990) criticizes the double illusion of nationalist narratives, i.e. believing that the generations which succeeded one another over centuries on an approximately stable territory, under an approximately univocal designation, have handed down to each other and invariant substance, and that the process of national formation was the only one possible and represented a destiny. But the most sweeping critique is that of Hobsbawm, who considers primordialism dangerous for both historians and sociologists, because "it confuses socio-cultural analysis by failing to distinguish between the essentially state-aspiring nineteenth-to-twentieth-century 'nation' from ensembles of communities politically dispersed by their structure, such as the ancient Ellenes...it confuses socio-political analysis by failing to distinguish, as nineteenth-century politicians did so clearly, between achieved national reality (with or without recognized group history) and indeterminate national potential" (2005:81-82).

Although the three approaches (modernist, ethnosymbolic, and primordialist) are actually blurred in the writings of several scholars, and there is some truth in all three, the modernist type is the most convincing and can be usefully modified by the other two: we can conclude that nationalism is a modern phenomenon, closely related to the formation of modern nation-states and to the other major economic and cultural transformations of modernity, but that it makes use of materials that antedate the modern era, i.e. primordial ties, and that the relationship between ethnicity, culture and politics is a key analytical focus in the study of nationalism.

At the beginning of the 21st century the legacy of nationalism is a mixed and contested one. The affirmation of the national principle can be seen as a fundamental step in modern history, insofar as it allows individuals to experience a shared collective identity and to embrace a common national purpose and contributes to make peoples key actors of world politics. But the nation-state can also be (it was and still is) an instrument of authoritarian rule and violent international relations. Nations and nationalism are historically linked to war. As Howard (1979:102) writes, "no nation could be born without war...no self-conscious community could establish itself as a new and independent actor on the world scene without an armed conflict or the threat of one." Given the different timing and sequence of the path toward and through modernity and the unequal distribution of power in world politics, aggressive nationalism--with its the appeal to national interests and identities--can lead to protectionism and trade wars, regional conflicts and hegemonic confrontation. Although the picture of nationalism drawn by scholars like Hertz (1945), Carr (1945), Kedourie (1960), and Minogue (1967), who, shocked by the tremendous experience of

the Second World War, saw nationalism as a dangerous legacy of the past, one that was invented by irresponsible intellectuals and spread by equally irresponsible demagogues, is too negative, one has to admit that nationalism continues to be a source of prejudice, tensions and conflicts.

At the beginning of the 21st century both nationalism and the nation-state are facing new challenges in their relations to the new global order and the fragmentation of ethnic, religious, class and gender identities. Nation states are subject to the two-fold pressure applied by the growing global interconnectedness of social relations from above and by the reaffirmation of regional and local identities and the emergence of new claims of autonomy from below. The process of globalization and the reaction to it have brought some scholars to argue for the demise or the withering away of the nation-state, and given the close ties of nationalism to it, of nationalist ideologies as well. It was, however, a too hasty *de profundis*. In the post-bipolar world of the 21st century, the nation-state is still the institutional embodiment of legitimate political authority, the key actor in international relations, and the taken for granted context of everyday life in most societies. No surprise, then, that its related ideology, nationalism, is alive and well; it is a powerful discourse that claims to produce collective identity, mobilize people for collective projects and evaluate peoples' deeds. As Calhoun observes (2007:1), "even when we are deeply critical of the nationalism we see, we should recognize the continued importance of national solidarities". But nationalism can play different role in different political contexts, as I will argue in comparing the two unions, the American and the European.

II. *A supranational union with multiple identities challenged by the nationalism of member states.*

The birth of the European communities at the end of the Second World War stems from the desire to put an end to the 'civil wars' of modern European history and to avoid the disastrous impact of aggressive nationalism.

The European Union is a specific and novel political construction, both institutionally and culturally. The building of a united Europe cannot reproduce the European model of nation-state building, since it lacks fundamental characteristics like a strong centralized power and a standardized culture articulated through a common language, and it seeks to preserve cultural diversities and different identities. For the first time in European history the state is relying not on military structures for the integration of such a huge and economically potent body, but rather on a legal and economic community, and does not aim to deprive its members of their cultural specificities. The memory of the tragedies stemming from competing nationalisms runs against the political construction of the European Union as a supranational state. The EU is a multinational entity with a core of shared values (democratic institutions, basic human rights, free competition, preservation of different cultures and languages, peaceful coexistence in international relations) that are at the foundations of common institutions. It is a supra-national union where decisions are taken by a tripartite structure (the Council of heads of government that represents the governments of the member states, the European Parliament that represents the peoples of the member countries, and the Commission); but the persisting strength of national identities makes the federal solution not yet mature. The project of the United States of Europe is upheld by enlightened minorities, but the very word *federal* is absent in the Lisbon Treaty (which has replaced the aborted constitutional treaty, saving the substance of its institutional reforms). European member states are now at a mid-point: the increased competition on a global scale and the exit strategies from the financial crisis and

economic recession push toward an acceleration of the process of political integration, while nationalist egoisms and prejudices slow it down.

There are two basic contradictions in the present politics of the European Union, and nationalism plays a key role in both. The first is the formation of a supranational union that uses nations as basic building blocs, but pretends to get rid of the related nationalisms. The second is the contradiction between the transfer of increasingly growing portions of national sovereignty from the nation-state level to the supranational level (first the open European space for the free movement of people, goods, services and capital, then a shared currency, now a single fiscal policy) and the still insufficient transfer of commitment and loyalty from the citizens of the member nations to the evolving supranational community and institutions.

The two contradictions are clearly linked together. Policy decisions at the EU level unevenly distribute costs and benefits not only among different social groups but also among different countries, and foster a renationalization of conflict that needs to be held in check by a strong communitarian sentiment and commitment to a shared project. Such sentiment and commitment are the more needed given the nature of European democracy. Most decision-making in the European Union is still top-down, although efforts have been made to move toward a multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance. National interests of the member states are predominant, also because of the 'democratic deficit' of the European Union. The members of the European Council of heads of government--which is the body that holds the ultimate decision-making power in the tripartite structure of governance--are not chosen by a European-wide constituency of all citizens but derive their legitimacy from the respective national constituencies, and therefore tend to put national interests above the common European interests. Attitudes of the peoples of the member states do not differ from those of their leaders. Bonds of affinity and shared values are still much stronger at that national level, also as a consequence of the decline of the *grand narratives*. Idiosyncratic national ideologies and stereotyped pictures of other member countries die hard. European citizens do not identify enough with European institutions and often oppose communitarian policies on the basis of national interests and identities. The Europe of nations is also the Europe of nationalism of the member countries. Nationalism blocks advancement on the way toward a stronger political community, which in its turn could provide legitimacy for a more encompassing supranational governance.

Let's discuss in more detail the contradiction between the basic role of nation states in European building and the negative impact of the related nationalism. According to the intentions of its intellectual authors, European integration would extend beyond the nation states of the member countries and finally replace them, although it necessarily had to be created under the control of nation states. The resistance of nation-states to any attempt to move into a federal direction has always been strong, but this opposition has not prevented the 'functional shift' of increasing amounts of sovereignty to the supranational level. Most of the member states' leaders have been further persuaded to acceptance of the European project by globalization. After the slowing down of European integration in the 1970s, the process once again accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s, because it became clear that a supranational union is the best way to enable nation-states to adapt to the new challenges of globalization and play a role in global competition without losing too many of their national prerogatives. No single EU member country, however economically powerful or politically ambitious, can seriously contemplate acting as a global player, whereas the European Union has the potential to do so. Ironically, the European integration that intended to supersede the nation state, may in fact guarantee its survival in a more complex world (Badie, 1995).

But this situation also implies that the nationalism of the various member countries is still alive and even growing in times of economic recession and financial troubles.

The European Union does not substitute for the nation states of member countries, since these have been simultaneously strengthened and weakened by European integration. To a certain extent, the European Union can be seen as an instance of 'consensual democracy' (Lijphart, 1999), insofar as the different socio-cultural components of the European society are recomposed at the political level by democratic elites open to cooperation and agreement. But nationalism at the country level often makes cooperation and agreement difficult. The role of member nation-states in European decision-making has been tempered by multi-level governance, i.e. a system of governance that relies on action taken at a whole series of levels (local, regional, national, supranational) by a variety of state and non-state actors who exist in an integrated hierarchy of decision making (Rumford, 2002). Multi-level governance rather than government, and regulation rather than rule, are more appropriate connotations of the European institutions and policies (Majone 1996, Stone and Sandholz 1998). But insofar as nations remain the building blocks of the supranational union (and have perpetuated themselves through the union), nationalism at the state level continues to be a major obstacle, especially when it is used instrumentally by political elites to increase their electoral support.

The second contradiction lies in the fact that there are limits to the extent to which a supranational government can advance the development of transnational economic, administrative, and legal integration with little community building. European integration has advanced significantly within these limits through several socio-political mechanisms. First of all, there are the spontaneous and incremental processes resulting from the internal logic of integration (the spill-over effect). Functional spill-over occurs when states decide to integrate certain economic sectors, forcing them to incorporate further sectors because of economic interdependence. Political spill-over is the result of a new political reality arising from the shift of political decision-making from the national to the supranational level; as decisions are now taken at the supranational level, powerful interest groups shift their lobbying to that level in order to influence the decision-making process, and they pressure their national governments into shifting ever more political functions to the supranational level. Second, European integration has advanced mostly as 'negative integration', through removing barriers to free circulation within the common market. Consensus has often been easily reached because the abolition of obstacles against the free circulation of people, capital, goods and services has been a positive sum game. Third, innovative governance has been introduced, like the Open Method of Coordination, which is based on participation and transparency as general principles and on guidelines and timetables, indicators and benchmarking, regional and national targets and measures, periodic monitoring, evaluation, peer review and feedback as key steps. Finally, the EU has contented itself with member states respecting basic standards on the basis of minimum compliance, and it also tolerated frequent violations of its rules and policies.

However, economic globalization and the birth of the euro have changed the situation. Competition in the global market requires more positive integration, with greater coordination and further regulation, with the risk of arousing strong reactions by national governments and by key actors of the civil society. And a single monetary policy increases the interdependence of the national economies of the Eurozone, but the European Central Bank does not yet have the same powers that other central banks have, first of all that of issuing Eurobonds. A single monetary policy requires a single fiscal and public expenditure policy, with strict controls of European institutions on national governments that are resented by their citizens. Conflicts of interests increase

among the member countries of the Eurozone, between the more successful economies and those plagued by high state debt and unemployment, between the citizens of the former countries who do not want to repay the debts of others, and the citizens of the latter who protest against the sacrifices imposed by EU authorities and the loss of national sovereignty. In the post-reunification decade West Germans accepted with little protest their leaders' decision to grant about 700 billion euro to East Germans, because they were considered fellow Germans. But the same German citizens (who are also European citizens) are unwilling to give much smaller amounts to Greece and other member countries affected by the sovereign debt, and as long as national politics is more important than European politics, political leaders will subordinate their decisions at the supranational level to the electoral competition at home. Functional spill-over and the political mechanisms of the past are no longer enough. A greater normative consensus and a stronger commitment to a shared project are needed.

Moreover, the question of nationalism in contemporary Europe is not limited to the member nations, but it involves also the growing immigrant population. The problem involves a different dimension of nationalism, not the political/cultural, but rather the cultural/ethnic; it is not a question of national sovereignty but of cultural cleavages. A single European immigration policy is needed, but it does not yet exist. The different member states' policies can be located on a continuum between the pole of assimilation (every individual enjoys the same rights and duties of citizenship, disregarding ethnic, religious, gender, and other differences) and that of multiculturalism (every member of a community has the right to keep its own distinctive values and practices). Heterogeneous policies at the state level contribute to foster nationalist prejudices and xenophobic closures.

There are two possible—and not mutually exclusive—ways to cope with these contradictions. The first is to separate state and nation, i.e., to develop the culture and the institutions of a multinational state, while preserving the national identities of member countries; the second is to foster those elements of traditional nationhood that are compatible with the multicultural supranational model through appropriate institutional mechanisms (European-wide education, media, public space, voting and political parties).

Particularly interesting for the first strategy are the ideas developed a century ago by the Austro-Marxist Bauer (1907). With the aim of preventing the disintegration of the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire, he stressed the need to separate the nation and the state, arguing that national-cultural autonomy does not necessarily require the creation of independent nation-states. He proposed that every citizen declare her/his nationality upon reaching voting age; members of each national community would thus form a single public body, entitled to sovereign decision-making authority in all national-cultural, identity-sensitive policies, while the federal state would take care of all other affairs. By establishing that a citizen is a member of a national community, whatever his/her residential location within the empire, *ethnos* is separated from *topos* or *Boden*, preventing dangerous conflicts about boundaries. In addition, *ethnos* could coexist with *demos* even in situations where national identities were too strong to allow for a successful federal solution, since a federal union, while implying a vertical separation of power between the federal center and the component parts, requires a profound sentiment of belonging to the union. On the other hand, Bauer's proposal underestimates the conflicts arising from the competing claims of the various national communities on many national-cultural, identity-sensitive issues—for instance, how to regulate family law, how to define the relations between state and the different religions, how to organize education, and to what extent to preserve multilingualism? These are familiar problems in multi-cultural societies; in fact the strengths and

weaknesses of Bauer's proposal are similar to those of multiculturalism. They involve the complex relationships between individuals, communities and the liberal/democratic state. Both European and American laws prohibit discrimination while contemplating various forms of affirmative action, with all the ensuing problems.

The serious difficulties confronting the first solution prod us to consider more seriously the second solution: the fostering of a European common identity, not as an exclusive identity, but as part of a multiple identity in which it coexists with other identities (Martinelli, 2007).

The foundations of a sentiment of European belonging--alongside several other national, cultural, ethnic, local identities--can be traced in the European common historical heritage and developed as part of the European project of achieving unity through diversity. A European common identity can be defined, first, as a set of common cultural roots (Greek and Roman antiquity, Christian religion) and, at a deeper level, as a core of specific cultural attitudes, which are organized around the dialectic relationship between rationality and individualism/subjectivity. These cultural roots are distinctive European traits since ancient times, but they crystallized into a specific cultural and institutional setting with the advent of modernity, fostering bold institutional innovations through a process of historical learning: science and technology, market-led industrial capitalism, individual rights, representative democracy, and nation-state citizenship (Martinelli, 2007). However, a European common identity has to build on not only a common memory, but must be constructed on the future as well; it is the realization of an open-ended project rather than the expression of the passive conservation of past values; and is to be actively fostered through institutional building. The European project is still a modern project; in fact, it is an expression of radical modernity, given modernity's particular conception of time that defines the modern age as an epoch oriented toward the future, conceived as being novel and better than the present and the past, and given the fact that the modern project is still far from being accomplished (Habermas, 1985).

This common cultural heritage contributes to European political integration, but it cannot (and does not need to) produce a distinctive, coherent identity that legitimizes the specificity of Europe as a single political entity in the way that national cultures legitimized the formation of European nation-states, because the political building of the European Union cannot follow the path of national building and cannot be grounded on the opposition of "us versus them". The lessons of history--religious fundamentalism and bigotry, ideological dogmatism, nationalistic aggressiveness-- teach us that this negative and arrogant way to define an identity (an identity in opposition to someone else), and its use to build a political entity, are no longer advisable in the world today. The European project can be defined as the achievement of unity through diversity, denying the old belief that what is different is potentially hostile and renouncing the construction of a specific identity based on the opposition of 'us versus them'. As Eliot argued, European culture must be differentiated and plural, united in its diversity (1948). Unity should induce the redefinition of identities, both those of the European peoples and those of immigrants from other parts of the world, rather than impose their abolition. And citizens should share multiple identities--the city, the regional, the national, and the supranational. However, the recognition of multiple cultural identities within a single state can be a destabilizing factor for national unity, since it alters the delicate balance between *ethnos* and *demos*.

For this reason, although European political unification should be built around the notions of unity stemming from diversity and of multiple citizenship, in the process we should also foster those elements of traditional nationhood that are compatible with the multicultural supranational model. In the light of the previous appraisal of the debate on

nationalism, it is the cultural component (and only some elements of it), not the ethnic-genealogical, that should be fostered in order to integrate the political-civic component (European citizenship). Of the five basic components of nationhood (Tullio Altan, 1995) we cannot rely on *ethnos* (that is, on ancestral ethnic origins), since it fosters closure, exclusion and discrimination, and runs against the core values of the EU. We cannot rely too much on a key aspect of *logos* (language) either, since multilingualism is considered a basic requisite for the respect of different cultural identities. But we can build on other aspects of *logos* (typical ways of thinking and acting) and in this respect European citizens are becoming more and more similar. *Topos*, the symbolic transfiguration of the space where Europeans live, can help to some extent. There are, in fact, distinctive common characters in European cities, buildings, squares, and public and private spaces, but this goes together with such a great variety of natural and human landscapes that it can be hardly considered a strong identifying element.

We are then left with *ethos* and *epos*. We can certainly invest more in *ethos* (the basic core values, vision of the world, and practical knowledge that define the new European identity and outline the basic rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship), and in *epos* (the great figures and events that testify as to the common European heritage in arts, science, and culture). Both *ethos* and *epos* should be basic components of educational programs for the next generations and should orient the activities of the media and various manifestations of public discourse, in order to create a real European public space grounded in a shared political culture, which could orient people's choices on matters of common concern. The common shared values can be strengthened by European *lieux de memoire*: monuments, celebrations, myths, heroes, holidays, hymns, flags, museums, and pilgrimages (Nora, 1984), most of which are now still very nationalistic. A European flag and hymn already successfully exist. There is no reason why it should not be possible to replicate this success in other domains, first of all that of European founding myths and holidays. Cultural traditions have often been discovered and strategically implemented in nation-building. There are certainly difficulties in repeating this process at the supra-national level, as the conflicts over the planned Museum of Europe and the complicated activity of the commission of historians to draw a European history school text show, but they can be overcome. Many streets and squares of EU countries are now dedicated to war heroes dead in fighting against other Europeans; hopefully in a foreseeable future, they will carry as well the names of great artists, scientists, cultural heroes and builders of a united Europe. The process of union building cannot be developed only through an increasingly interconnected economy (favoured by the euro), a homogeneous European social fabric and common democratic institutions, but also through the strengthening of a shared culture that is capable of overcoming the nationalism of the member states.

The accomplishment of this project requires the strengthening of institutions that can foster supranational commitment and loyalty. One is the integration of European education: for instance, the 'Bologna process' aimed at reducing differences among universities all through Europe, the intensified exchanges of students at all levels of schooling, and the development of European curricula. A second is, language: although multilingualism has to be preserved as a key distinctive feature of the EU, decisions must be taken in order to allow citizens from different ethnic communities to communicate easily. One example was the decision taken at the 2002 European Council in Barcelona to reach the goals of at least two foreign language for every citizen, but to leave the choice of which particular languages to each individual or nation. European-wide media are a third way: a European public television does not yet exist (only programs on European affairs exist in many national broadcasting networks) and should be created also in order to favour the construction of a European public

space. Moreover, the active role of a European democratic citizenship can be fostered through the use of referenda on key public issues. Finally, the elections for the European parliament should take the form of European-wide voting; this change would foster the creation of authentic European parties. These are just instances of the type of institutional innovations that are needed to strengthen a European identity as part of a multiple identity of all European citizens, old and new. If this project fails, it will support the theory that nationalism at the country level is too strong, and the European Union will scale back to being a free trade zone with numerous legal and administrative agreements (Etzioni, 2011). If the project succeeds, however, the European Union can become a model for other regions of the world to form large supranational and multicultural unions, and thus contribute significantly to democratic global governance.

III. *American nationalism as a resource to overcome the divisions of an increasingly polarized society.*

Is American society becoming more polarized than it used to be? Some scholars strongly object to this view. Fiorina (2006), for instance, considers the picture of a polarized American society to be a myth; at most it is the political class that is more polarized, since on sensitive issues like abortion and gay marriages, voters' opinions seem more moderate and willing to compromise than those of most political representatives. In a previous work Fiorina, Peterson and Johnson (2002) portray the United States as a study in contrasts. They stress the 'unity amidst diversity' of Americans, who share the fundamental beliefs of liberal political culture in spite of their great social and ethnic heterogeneity. These fundamental beliefs grew out of classical liberal philosophy and emphasize individual rights and liberties, personal responsibility and hard work, and a great distrust of government power. Contrary to what has happened in European countries, socialist, clerical and royalist parties have never flourished in American politics.

This portrait underestimates the cleavages in contemporary American political culture. Contemporary debates on ethnic diversity, multiculturalism, science and religion, abortion and gay marriages, are not just the re-emergence of debates conducted in earlier periods. American national identity and patriotism remain strong among citizens and leaders alike, but core aspects of American culture, society and institutions like religion, immigration, social mobility and the divided government, are increasingly becoming divisive forces that tend to polarize American society. The deeply-rooted religious pluralism of American society has given way to an intolerant conflict on moral values and appropriate behaviour. Immigration could threaten the distinctly American political culture if new immigrants are too different to fit easily into American society, and the bilingualism of Latin American immigrants may profoundly transform the American culture and model of society. The rising power of finance and the subsequent economic crisis have deepened social inequalities and challenge the myth of social mobility. As a consequence of these trends, the old moderate centre of the American electorate is shrinking. The radicalization of party competition makes more and more difficult for presidents to get bipartisan consensus on many issues. I will briefly discuss these trends and the role of nationalism, focusing on the best known recent discussion of American identity: *Who are We?* (Huntington 2004).

According to Huntington, American identity has had two primary components, culture and creed, which are closely related in that the creed has been a product of the culture. The former component consists in the values and institutions of America's original settlers--who were primarily Anglo-Saxon and Protestant--and includes the English language and a political tradition centered on individual freedom. Immigrants from

Western, Southern and Eastern Europe between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century modified and enriched the original culture, but they did not fundamentally alter it. So too did Blacks, although they were more slowly and only partially assimilated. The second component of American identity is the 'American Creed', a set of universal principles and ideas articulated by the founding fathers: liberty, equality, democracy, constitutionalism, liberalism, limited government, private entrepreneurship, and market economy.

In the United States, as in other countries, the relative importance of the components of national identity and its salience vis-a-vis other identities varied over time, but nationalism grew stronger. At the birth of the 'first new nation' the settlers of the colonies fighting for independence developed a common American identity that coexisted with other, primarily local and religious, identities. The salience of national identity, strengthened by the struggles with Britain and France, declined with the disappearance of threats to the nation's security; other cleavages (economic and social) divided the country leading to the Civil War, from which it emerged a newly united nation. American nationalism became preeminent as the United States engaged in the 20th century world wars and became an hegemonic power on the world scene. The ethnic component of American identity gradually weakened as a result of the assimilation of subsequent waves of immigrants, first, from Germany, Scandinavia, Ireland, and then from Southern and Eastern Europe (between 1880 and 1914). The racial cleavage was eroded by the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, and the 1965 Immigration Act.

But, in the last decades of the 20th century and at the start of the 21st, America's core Anglo-Protestant culture and its political creed of liberty and democracy' (i.e., the cultural and the political components of American national identity) faced four challenges that tended to erode national identity. First, the salience of national identity vis-a-vis other identities was reduced by the disappearance of the cold war antagonist, the Soviet Union, and of the perceived threat to American security (terrorism is a poor substitute, even if defined as a global threat). Second, the ideology of multiculturalism and diversity eroded the legitimacy of the cultural core and the American creed. Third, America's third wave of immigration that began in the 1960s brought people mainly from Latin American and Asian countries with values and attitudes that differed significantly from those prevalent in America and who tend to maintain dual identities and loyalties, making their assimilation much slower and problematic than that of previous immigrants from Europe. Moreover, close to a majority of immigrants speak a single non-English language (Spanish) and live in concentrated areas not far from their countries of origin, and thus transforming America into a bilingual, bicultural society. Finally, because of globalization (although Huntington does not mention it), there is "the denationalization of important segments of US elites and special interests, with a growing gap between their cosmopolitanism and transnational commitments and the still highly nationalist and patriotic values of the American public" (2004:138). These changes have brought into question the validity and relevance of both traditional components of American identity, with the consequence that without a sure sense of national identity, Americans have become unable to define their national interests, and as a result sub-national commercial interests and transnational and non-national ethnic interests have come to dominate foreign policy.

The core of Huntington's argument is the critique of multiculturalism on the grounds that sub-national identities challenge a central element of the American creed, by promoting group rights (defined largely in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and sexual preference) against individual rights. Other scholars have expressed similar views before Huntington; Schlesinger (1991), for instance, is concerned that multiculturalism

may disunite American society, and recommends that Americans should try to vindicate cherished cultures and traditions without breaking the bonds of cohesion—common ideas, political institutions, language, culture, and fate—that hold the republic together. Gitlin (1995) maintains that identity politics may endanger the commitment to common egalitarian ideals that marked the civil rights movement because they emphasize differences over commonality and target group-specific political goals. Lind (1995) sees no coherent national community in contemporary America, but rather five national communities defined by race (white, black, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Native American) and fears that if multicultural America endures for another generation or two, the future of the United States is a bleak one of sinking incomes for the trans-racial American majority and growing resentment against the affluent and politically dominant white oligarchy. All these works, however they may differ, share the concern that multiculturalism and identity politics combined with continuing inequality and oligarchic rule can cause the breaking apart of the American nation. But they overestimate such a risk.

Huntington's critique focuses on the threat for American identity of Hispanic immigration, the extent and nature of which differ fundamentally from those of previous inflows; he thinks that the assimilation successes of the past are unlikely to be duplicated with the contemporary waves of immigrants from Latin America in general, or from Mexico in particular (Huntington sometimes focuses on all Hispanics and sometimes on Mexicans alone, a weak aspect of his analysis). In the past, immigrants came from overseas and many of them had to overcome severe hardships to reach the United States. The pre-World War I immigration originated legally from different countries and was linguistically highly differentiated among Italian, Russian, Polish, Yiddish, English, German, Swedish, and Chinese. The flow fluctuated over time, with significant reductions due to the Civil War, World War I, and the restrictive legislation of 1924. The immigrants dispersed among many enclaves, mostly in large metropolitan areas, but also in rural areas throughout the Northeast, the Midwest and California.

Mexican immigration is fundamentally different on all counts, with the further feature that Mexicans have settled predominantly in a region that was once part of their homeland, and assert special rights and claims over it. As a result, the assimilation of Mexicans into the culture and society of the United States is much more difficult than it was in the case of previous immigrants—as evidenced by differences between third-generation and fourth-generation Americans of Mexican origin in education, socio-economic status, and intermarriage rates. Mexican immigrants and native Mexican Americans lag behind the rest of the nation and other immigrant groups on a variety of socio-economic indicators, including educational attainment, professional and managerial occupation, household income and home ownership. Besides, the percentage of US marriages involving Hispanics marrying outside their ethnic group has declined in the last decades and is lower than among other minorities like Asians.

This situation prompts Huntington to ask a fundamental question: will the United States remain a country with a single national language and a core Anglo-Protestant culture? He gives a shocking answer: “by ignoring this question, Americans acquiesce to their eventual transformation into two peoples with two cultures (Anglo and Hispanic) and two languages (English and Spanish)”, since massive Hispanic immigration affects the United States in two significant ways, i.e. important portions of the country become predominantly Hispanic in language and culture, generalizing the Miami model, and the nation as a whole becomes bilingual and bicultural.

The argument is rather unconvincing. First of all, American patriotism runs deep. The percentage of Americans who declare they are proud of their country (80%) is well above the figures for most European Union states, as is the percentage of those who

think that American culture is superior to other cultures (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2004). American citizens and institutions display the flag and sing the national anthem much more often than their European counterparts. And these are the symbols of one nation, not two. Besides, American society has proved to be rather successful in assimilating immigrants of all kinds. Hispanics are in fact different because of a stronger linguistic identity, but not more culturally different than immigrants from other parts of the world. In the 1960s, when American cities' downtowns were inflamed by black riots and the most militant Black groups declared that they wanted to form a separate nation, there were similar fears of American society breaking apart, but these fears proved completely wrong.

The less convincing aspect of Huntington's thesis is its contention that Anglo-Saxon and Mexican Americans embrace greatly different values, the evidence for which seemingly amounts to a list of stereotypes ranging from laziness to familism. And even if one were to accept that most Mexicans fit the portrait of the 'Mexican character' described in the book, there are still characteristics that Huntington forgets--first, that the very decision to migrate differentiates migrants from those who stay behind, and second, that the cultural and institutional context of the country of immigration usually changes the original values to a large extent. Moreover, some of the original 'ethnic' values—such as the strength of communal bonds among Spanish-speaking residents--may help assimilation rather than run counter to it.

American society does not seem seriously threatened by growing multiculturalism and the changing ethnic mix of its population. Huntington and similar critics overestimate such a risk. Historically constructed institutional patterns and cultural commonalities still hold the country together, and the American nation is not breaking apart (Hall and Lindholm, 1999). Myrdal's famous thesis (1962) that the common American creed is the cement to unify the diverse ethnicities produced by immigration still holds, as do the arguments of all those who, like Hoffman (1997), continue to affirm that America's identity is the unique product of a material feature (its ethnic diversity produced by immigration) and an ideological feature (its liberal democratic creed).

The gloomy picture emerging from Huntington's book is mainly due to the conceptual mistake of blurring together the Anglo-Protestant culture and the political creed of liberty and democracy. It is true that the two have been historically linked, but they can be separated. The political creed can be compatible with an increasing multiethnic and multicultural society, where the Anglo-Saxon culture is no longer hegemonic, without necessarily becoming a loose multicultural federation.

The liberal-democratic creed is still very strong. The many critiques of irresponsible finance, huge social inequalities, powerful business lobbies, inefficient and corrupted politics are for the most part framed in the discourse of a reformed democratic polity and market economy, not of an alternative *Weltanschauung* that aims at substituting those values and institutions. In addition, Huntington overestimates the relevance of the ethno-genealogic component of the American identity and underestimates the continuing importance of its political and cultural components.

So far, I have covered the growing ethnic mix of American society and the role of the political and cultural component of US nationalism in preventing the breaking of the nation. But what about religion? Religion has traditionally been a key component of American identity and political culture and a uniting factor; has it now become a divisive force?

Americans are more religious than Europeans, more likely to believe in God, to attend religious services, and to report that religion plays an important role in their lives. This has a variety of causes: the deeply-rooted religious pluralism of American society (much of the country's original settlement was by people seeking the freedom to

practice their own religion); the separation between church and state (implemented early in the United States and remaining relatively stable); the absence of a state religion; the dominance of religious sects over established churches; the vigorous competition of the clergy for potential believers; and the ‘comforting’ role played by religion in a society dominated by individualism, competition, this-worldly pragmatism, and relentless rationalism (Fowler, 1985). Taylor (2002) suggests that religion in the USA possesses neo-Durkheimian qualities, since the radically individualized Christianity of the majority of Americans is used to express the commonality of all Americans, whereas Europe is post-Durkheimian, since religion no longer functions as the main structure of meaning in which society or the nation-state express themselves.

In the United States, religion is first and foremost a question of individual choice, and this helps explain why the American people are more religious than most Europeans. Bellah’s well-known argument (1967, 1986) is that religious faith provided the foundation for a civil religion that, through the selection of certain aspects of the religious tradition, was a basic nation-building element able to construct powerful symbols of national solidarity. National symbols have a religious character and the respect for the Constitution looks like religious awe. The history itself is reminiscent of episodes in the Bible: the Exodus, the new Israel, and the providential destiny of the United States as the redeemer nation (Tuveson, 1968). American people are specific people (like all others), but at the same time they have universal characteristics and realize the universal ideal of liberty. The act of becoming an American citizen is an act of liberation akin to the act of choosing the path to religious salvation. A basic aspect of American exceptionalism (Lipset, 1996) is the fact that the American people are both specific and universal, have a unique destiny, and tend to interpret history as a battle between good and evil--whence derives the specific importance of American patriotism and its difference from the nationalisms of the European people, although it is a universalism that is inherently contradictory.

But one thing is religion providing the foundation for a civil religion, and quite another is the politicization of religion along party lines, a trend that has been growing in recent years in American society. Christian fundamentalism has been a basic component of the New Right and is on the rise: 39 percent of Americans describe themselves as born-again Christian, and about one-third of voters are Evangelical Protestants, compared with less a quarter 20 years ago. American churches are in a state of permanent boom. The “Left Behind” series of books, which deal with “the Rapture”—the moment when true Christians will be taken up to heaven—have sold 55 million copies in ten years. Focusing on such issues as abortion and Darwin’s theory of evolution, supported by powerful organizations like the Christian Coalition (with almost 2 million members in the late 1990s) and think-tanks like the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the Cato Institute, and finally, building on Americans’ fondness for arguing about fundamentals, the Republican right has been able to make the fight against secularism a central issue in political competition.

The growing role played by religion in politics was accelerated by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 and a new sense of insecurity, but also by slower rates of economic growth. Different causes have contributed to a general sense of existential insecurity which gives a renewed significance to religious and moral issues. In electoral races, Republican candidates have tended to place their emphasis on God, country and the family--generally key conservative issues--while Democrats have been uncertain whether to take the same line or stick to the core American values of civil rights and individual freedoms. The present political split among American voters reflects two

different views of society and the individual, and of what really matters in life. On the one hand, there are those who conceive society as made up of individuals with their natural rights to life and freedom and their own claims; they believe that sexual preferences and abortion are civil rights, that the key political issues concern personal freedoms and equal opportunities, and that politics is about “who gets what and how.” On the other hand, there are those who conceive of society as made up of families, held together by bonds of life and faith, that life is sacred because it is a gift of God, that religious values are the best guarantee against social disorder, and that politics is a fight of good against evil. Can this split be reconciled, or is the new conservative emphasis on family and religion on a collision course with the traditional liberal values of American political culture?

Like the cultural differences among the various ethnic minorities, religious differences are just another cleavage in a pluralist society and do not risk tearing the American nation apart, unless they overlap and are further reinforced by growing social cleavages and economic inequalities. The growing inequalities in income, wealth, education and life chances, and diminishing opportunities for upward social mobility, are actually a third source of increasing polarization in contemporary American society. As a recent controversial book argues, white America is coming apart and class differences have become more important for educational attainment than those between blacks and whites (Murray,2012).

The decline of the middle class and of the related moderate electorate affects government effectiveness as well. The compound republic, with its checks and balances, is a sophisticated way of controlling power through power, thus avoiding authoritarian drift. Such a system is compatible with a complex social fabric, characterized by social and cultural cleavages, if two related conditions are present. The first is the existence of a large moderate center of the electorate, which through its swinging vote allows for an alternation in power between two parties, not too different in their ideology and policy programs. The second is the predominance of political leaders who are not willing to become political entrepreneurs of the existing cleavages, exacerbating them as a key way to gain support. However, if the old moderate center of the American electorate is not disappearing, as Abramowitz remarks (2010), it is certainly declining, and many political representatives seem more radical and less willing to compromise that their voters on sensitive issues. This situation has consequences for the functioning of American democracy. It is more difficult for presidents to build the bipartisan consensus that is needed for effective government, mostly in the rather frequent case in which the opposite party holds the majority in the House and/or the Senate. A vicious circle emerges: growing cleavages in society and culture require an effective government, but this is obstructed by the political use of those cleavages in electoral competition, with the result of deepening the cleavages among the citizens as well. Government policies aimed at reducing inequalities and appeals to strengthen national unity, as President Obama made in his 2012 State of the Union Address, can counter these trends.

Nationalism can be a powerful resource, if intended as national solidarity and common resolve to build the future together, via the ‘patriotism of the constitution’ (Verfassung Patriotismus) and an affirmation of the American democratic creed. This creed, contrary to what Huntington thinks, can endure without an exclusive link to its European historical origins, provided that it proves capable of adapting to a growing multicultural society, as the United States and the other great democracies of the world are becoming (from the European Union to India, from Brazil to South Africa).

To conclude, nationalism still matters and can have positive or negative impact on citizens’ democratic life and welfare depending on how it is defined. Nationalism is at

present a resource for overcoming polarization in America and an obstacle on path to further political integration in Europe, due to the different timing and sequence in the building of the two unions and the different mix between the three key dimensions of national identity, which I discuss in the first part of this essay: the ethnic-genealogical, the cultural and the civic/political. The first dimension is capable of arousing strong collective sentiments, but is backward-looking and potentially a divisive force; the latter two can imply more universalistic values and rights and a forward-looking project, and can be powerful instruments to counter the social cleavages of a multi-ethnic society. The ‘first new nation’ was not an ethnic nation. Influential social scientists (e.g. Greenfeld 1992, Lipset 1996) have commonly seen American society as a mixture that transcends ethnicity and nativist movements as aberrations (Calhoun, 2008). This view neglects the fundamental cleavage of racial domination and the continuing (although declining) hegemony of the WASP elite constituted in part through ethnicity, but it grasps a real difference with Europe. The United States are mostly a nation of immigrants, where pluralism was, and still is, a fundamental, distinctive character. The assertion of ethnic identities and the positive valuing of difference have a long tradition, and various types of ‘both/and’ identities do exist in contemporary American society. But they do not break the nation because national unity is fostered by shared cultural beliefs (the civic religion) and the common political rights of democratic citizenship, unless ethnic, religious and socio-economic polarization goes too far.

The European Union is much younger than the American and the process of union building is still in the making. Its member states are consolidated nation-states with a long national histories; even in the case of late formation of an independent state, as in Italy and Germany, long standing Italian and German ethnic and cultural identities existed. Any further transfer of sovereignty is resented by all those who identify strongly with their own countries as a blow to their most deeply felt collective identity. The resistance to European integration is, however, not only a question of belonging, but also of social condition. European integration implies a complex pattern of loss and gain for different social groups, the more so at a time of economic crisis. Nationalism of the member states can easily become the ideology of those who think they have more to lose, mainly if it is instrumentally used by political demagogues. For this reason, it is necessary that a European wide identity does not substitute for the various national identities, but grows alongside them through the institutional mechanisms I discussed. But this is not enough: further political integration requires effective policies which can reduce inequalities among the various member states and the different social groups of European society.

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