The world society turn in European Studies

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Introduction

In studies of European integration, the focus conventionally falls on the ways in which the European Union (EU) has constructed itself as a coherent economic and political entity on the foundations of existing European nation-states, and how this has been achieved by protecting Europe from the depredatory influence of external economic (and other) processes. The problem with this narrative is less its inherent solipsism, although this is debilitating enough, than the positioning of Europe as somehow external to or detached from the processes of transformation – subsumed under the general heading of globalization – that continue to shape the world, including Europe. In pursuing this strategy, scholars of European integration neglect not only the complex dynamics of globalization that affect Europe in so many ways but also the extent to which the EU can actively shape globalization (although this consideration has emerged in integration studies of late). Arguably more important still is the extent to which the appreciation of Europe itself is moulded by the assumptions inherent in the ‘defensive Europe’ perspective. Integration discourse posits a Europe in the singular, a Europe of ‘unity in diversity’ perhaps, but one that does not doubt its wholeness or coherence. But this is not the only way in which Europe can be conceived. Under the weight of contra-indications from a range of Global Studies-inspired texts (e.g. Böröcz 2010; Rumford 2008) and an emerging literature on ‘cosmopolitan Europe’ (Beck and Grande 2007; Delanty 2009), the limitations of the ‘one Europe’ model have been challenged. The ‘world society turn’ in European Studies is the latest and most far-reaching critique to emerge from within this trend, building upon insights in the study of globalization and cosmopolitanism to construct a very different account of ‘Europe in the world’ (Białasiewicz 2011).

The theme of this chapter is the need for a global context when studying European developments, and to this end the authors compare and contrast different approaches to understanding Europe in the world (or Europe-in-the-world, as we refer to it here). However, at the same time the aim is somewhat broader (and hopefully more ambitious) than this. The overarching objective is the elaboration of a new agenda for European Studies, one that places Europe-in-the-world at its core and also highlights the advantages of approaching Europe not as a singular entity but as a plurality. ‘Multiple Europes’ are one corollary of placing Europe
within a global context; in other words, the assumption of oneness that permeates much thinking in European integration studies (e.g. ‘unity in diversity’) is only possible if the rest of the world is conveniently bracketed off. In setting this agenda, we have accepted the challenge of returning Europe to the world from which it has been abstracted and, following Outhwaite (2008: 133), of putting ‘Europe in its place’. This requires not only placing Europe in a global context but also developing non-Eurocentric global perspectives on Europe(s).

Students of cosmopolitanism have been among the first to observe that EU Studies encourages an EU-centrism that highlights integration at the expense of the notion of ‘many Europes’, which points to the difficulty of ‘fixing’ Europe in terms of a unified culture (Biebuyck and Rumford 2012). Due to the lack of a unifying primordial culture at the EU level and the absence of a European hegemon to control European integration, it has been suggested that the EU is better explained as a ‘polycentric collectivity’ than as a cosmopolitan empire. It is not only the striking diversity within the EU (in terms of (1) understanding the EU as a central political referent, (2) envisaging the future of European integration and (3) the implementation of EU directives at national, regional and local levels) but also the ongoing post-Westernization processes associated with globalization that blur the boundaries between East and West, making it difficult (if not impossible) to identify the EU with a single and fixed account of modernity (Delanty 2006).

Thus, Agnew’s provocative question of ‘How many Europes?’ (Agnew 2001) cannot be answered by discussions of identitary containers alone. It is more profitable to explore Europe’s numerous political imaginaries, geopolitical configurations and ways of being in the world, highlighting how Europe is an active site of multiple – and often contradictory – productions and transformations. It has been noted that the conventional divisions such as East/West, old/new, North/South, Christian/Muslim and EU members/non-members have been joined of late by a new cleavage: ‘top-down Europe’ versus ‘bottom-up Europe’, underscoring the division between Europe’s elites and ‘the people’ (Taras 2009). Checkel and Katzenstein (2009: 11–12) point to an elitist ‘cosmopolitan European identity’ engendered by the constitutional treaty, as opposed to the ‘national-populist European identity’ fuelled by the threats represented by ‘Polish plumbers and Islamic headscarves’. For Taras (2009: 60–1), the elite versus popular division takes the form of an elite ‘metacultural perspective’ on a common European culture versus a ‘polyvocal European public’ aware of (and threatened by) idiosyncrasies and differences. Checkel and Katzenstein’s idea of a ‘cosmopolitan European identity’ is problematic for a number of reasons, not least because it may well prove to be oxymoronic. There is a tendency in much of the contemporary IR and political science literature on the EU to label the EU as cosmopolitan without questioning what this might mean. For example, Risse (2010: 51) holds that the EU is a ‘modern, democratic, secular, and cosmopolitan value community’, yet he never examines whether ‘European cosmopolitanism’ is meaningful, in the sense that it may not be embedded in the consciousness of Europeans (or even in the discourses of the European Union).

Furthermore, Risse (2010: 38–9) asserts that rather than a single European identity, there are many Europes ‘expressed in various national colours’. This is the result of the Europeanization of national identities. Risse’s main contribution is the idea that the various constructions of Europe involve specific visions of Europe’s ‘Others’. The idea of the EU as a Europe of modernization, human rights and democracy results in the construction of Europe’s Other in terms of its own past: ‘militarism, nationalism and economic backwardness’ (Risse 2010: 53); in other words, ‘Europe’s own past is the out-group of the EU’s modern political identity’. Taras (2009: 63) makes a similar point: upon accession, Eastern European countries had to ‘accept that they had not really been European until then’, leading to a division between Old and New Europe. Risse makes the point that ‘modern’ Europe also generates another ‘out-group’ via
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racism and xenophobia (e.g. Jörg Haider was portrayed as the ‘enemy within’). More populist constructions of Europe tend to use religion as a marker of us/them. This has resulted in the mobilization of opposition to Turkey’s candidature as well as the identification of non-European immigrants (from North Africa) as internal Others. Moreover, the evolving literature on the EU’s ‘normative actorness’ in promoting democratization, multilateralism and individual freedoms in Europe and beyond has determined that the EU’s normative discourse does not stem from a parochial vision of the world that belongs in the EU; rather, it shares the basic notions, concepts and methods advocated by many other international organizations, including the United Nations and a host of international governmental and non-governmental organizations (Manners 2002). In this regard, EU Studies increasingly faces the challenge of developing an approach that takes into account the degree of integration between the EU and its global environment without reducing the global context to a narrow set of values, norms, interests, institutions or trends (such as economic interconnectedness).

The global dimension

We have already encountered the idea that the global dimension is largely missing from the prevailing studies on the EU (for example Albert 2002; Axford 1995; Delanty and Rumford 2005; Meyer 2001; Rumford and Murray 2003). However, while this is largely the case, there are scholars of Europeanization for whom integration and globalization are closely aligned. This is particularly true in research on the notion of denationalization. Kriesi (2005) makes the connection clear: ‘European integration is one of a number of processes which currently open up and unbundle the boundaries of the nation-states. This set of processes is generally referred to by the term of “globalization”’. Perhaps more appropriately, Zürn (1998) uses the term ‘denationalization’. In this formulation, integration is a subordinate component of globalization (or denationalization). The equation of European integration and globalization (on the basis that both serve to ‘unbundle’ or denationalize the nation-state) leads to new polarizations in Europe between those embracing globalization-derived change and those resisting it. The intensification of competition places the national political community under strain, and new winners and losers emerge as a result. According to Kriesi,

the likely winners of these competitive processes include people with high qualifications in sectors open to international competition as well as all cosmopolitan citizens. The losers include the patriots who identify with the national community, the economic sectors which have traditionally been protected by the nation-state and which find themselves increasingly exposed to foreign competition, as well as all those who lack the qualifications and the cultural competence to meet the economic and cultural challenge of a globalizing world. The winners are expected to support the opening up of the borders, including European integration, while the losers are likely to constitute the potential for the mobilization not only against European integration, but also for the mobilization against immigration and its consequences, for the backlash against the cultural liberalism of the new social movements, and for the defense of the national traditions, the national privileges and the national sovereignty.

(Kriesi 2008: 222)

In this view, a stark divide exists between those embracing global processes of change, whether business enterprises or individual citizens, and those aligned with the defence of the nation-state, who are thereby seen as resisting both globalization and European integration. Kriesi’s
most significant contribution has been positing a direct relationship between European integration and globalization, thereby confounding conventional thinking. However, it is possible that the alignment of actors on either side of the new cleavage that denationalization represents may in fact be a little too neat, attempting to conflate nationalists, opponents of social movements and Euro sceptics.

To understand this mobilizational capacity, it is necessary to explore denationalization in greater detail. The notion of denationalization is derived from the work of Saskia Sassen, who holds that ‘we can conceptualize the global as a denationalized spatiotemporal order – both in the sense of the denationalizing of elements of the national and in the sense of a novel order distinct from the national’ (Sassen 2000). The idea of the processes of globalization acting on and acting within nation-states resonates with Beck’s concept of cosmopolitization as ‘globalization from within’ nation-states. Sassen seeks to demonstrate that global processes do not exclusively entail worldwide phenomena. She draws attention to a ‘set of processes that does not necessarily scale at the global level’:

these processes take place deep inside territories and institutional domains that have largely been constructed in national terms . . . What makes these processes part of globalization even though localized in national, indeed subnational settings, is that they involve transboundary networks and formations connecting or articulating multiple local or national processes and actors.

(Sassen 2006: 12)

These processes of denationalization working within nation-states have important and wide-ranging consequences, including ‘the reorienting of national agendas towards global ones, and the circulation of private agendas dressed as public policy inside national states’ (Sassen 2006: 10). This is important for Sassen because it draws attention to the presence of private agendas within the state, rather than the more common focus on the shift of state functions to the private sector, including private forms of authority (ibid.). This is significant in that it indicates that European integration concerns not only a shift in levels of governance (e.g. multilevel governance) but also a transformation in the key actors of Europeanization (with the private sector replacing state functions).

For these reasons, the emphasis in the denationalization literature is on the fate of the nation-state under conditions of globalization. For Sassen (2010: 1), globalization ‘denationalizes what was historically constructed as national’. She continues, ‘mine is, then, a critique of methodological nationalism with a starting point not exclusively predicated on the fact of transnationalism, but rather on the possibility of internal denationalization’ (Sassen 2010: 3). The key aspect here is the preference for seeing globalization as ‘internal denationalization’ rather than the more common understanding of it as the intensification of transnationalism. Thus, not only is the relationship between globalization and integration very direct, but it also runs against conventional notions of directionality, working from the inside out rather than the outside in.

The denationalization literature offers a corrective to many other accounts that neglect the impact of globalization on Europe. However, the hypodermic nature of the denationalization account – injecting the global directly into the national – deprives Europe of a global context: in the denationalization theory, integration is globalization, and there is no global realm external to it. In this sense, at least, the denationalization literature aligns itself with more conventional accounts of the EU as the author of its own integration. Positing the existence of a global dimension tends to undermine both types of theories. More specifically, the suggestion of a global dimension diverges from the mainstream tendency to study the EU as a sui generis polity
with a predetermined identity and interests and the capability to lead social and political transformations, even in remote parts of the world. Acknowledging the global environment both deprives the EU of its central role in explaining political reform (minimizing its exceptionalism in world politics) and also reveals the changing character of the EU’s identity and interests in line with global structural transformations. In other words, the global dimension is not only a strategic opportunity–challenge structure, but is also constitutive in terms of culturally defining what actors exist in the world and what constitutes appropriate norms and behaviour (Meyer 1999; Drori 2008). In this context, there are two major trends amongst those who take the global dimension into consideration: (1) EU-and-the-world studies and (2) EU-in-the-world studies. Whereas the first trend emphasizes the EU’s capacity to limit, manage and shape the global sphere, EU-in-the-world studies (which are much less common) contextualize the EU in a broader social system and insist upon the fuzziness of the boundaries between the EU and its global environment.

EU-and-the-world studies tend to depict the EU as the ‘European rescue of the nation state’ (Milward 1994), a polity that restricts the pernicious effects of globalization by, for instance, erecting a ‘Fortress Europe’ (or ‘Schengen-land’, ‘Euroland’ or other similar constructions) to block unwanted intrusions by non-Europeans. Defining the relationship between the EU and its global environment as contestation, such studies find the EU to be an effective instrument in the hands of national governments – constituting a ‘filter’ if not a ‘barrier’ against global inflows of people, capital, goods and services. The idea of ‘managing globalization’, a popular theme in Eurocratic circles, implies that globalization should not be seen only as a threat to the EU; rather, Europeans should learn how to take advantage of the new opportunities introduced by globalization (Ferrero-Waldner 2007). An alternative trend focuses on the EU’s leading role in shaping globalization through the export of its models, norms and institutions. The EU’s political and economic conditionality associated with its aid, trade and neighbourhood programmes makes a strong case in support of the claim that the EU is a global actor that contributes to global transformations. However, it is crucial to investigate on whose behalf the EU acts in the global arena. EU-and-the-world studies risk overlooking both the EU’s polycentric nature and its universalistic discourse, consequently providing EU-centric accounts that fail to grasp the processes of standard-setting and rule-following that underlie the EU’s interactions with its global environment.

The prevailing literature on European integration focusing on the regulatory, constitutive and resilient capabilities of the EU vis-à-vis globalization neglects the fact that the EU’s agency is culturally enacted and legitimated. In fact, globalization may act upon Europe in ways that bypass the EU, as in the case of global cities and regional autonomization, for example (Rumford 2000). EU-in-the-world studies investigate how the EU’s identity and interests take shape and undergo constant redefinition in line with social and material transformations in the global arena. There are a number of different types of approaches to the global context (World Society Research Group 2000: 11). First, the global system à la Waltz is an anarchical structure devoid of a sovereign that ratifies the existing distribution of power amongst nation-states and imposes a self-help strategy for survival in a ‘zero-sum game’. It reinforces the problems of collective action and explains conflicts as an inherent systemic feature. There are two major criticisms against the Waltzian approach to the global system. First, the changes in the material context (in terms of the rise of economic, social and political interconnectedness), as well as the exponential increase in non-state actors (armed groups, humanitarian organizations, international courts, corporations and regions), constitute a serious challenge to the zero-sum game understanding of the Waltzian system (Keohane 1986). Second, the social context at the global level does not inevitably lead to self-help and conflict. Wendt (1992) argues that self-help is a
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self-fulfilling prophecy rather than an inherent property of the anarchical system. Different interpretations of anarchy would lead to different outcomes in terms of regulating interactions amongst the actors in the world system (Katzenstein 1996).

The English School of international society employs notions of identity and norms in order to understand the global system as a normative framework consisting of legal and diplomatic principles that govern inter-state relations (Alderson and Hurrell 2000; Buzan 2010). This theory has been successful in explaining the normative shifts in the global system (such as the end of slavery); in addition, its emphasis on the difference between system and society clarifies why European society, based on cultural affinity and solidarity, has sought to exclude non-European elements (Buzan 2004). Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis (Wallerstein 1991) transcends the English School’s state-centrism by introducing a hegemonic system at the global level that reinforces the exploitation of peripheral societies by Western core powers. In his 2006 book, Wallerstein differentiates between a European universalism and universal universalism, asserting that the latter has been ‘hijacked’ by the former (in terms of shaping our understanding of the world in line with a European vision). Böröcz (2010) provides an alternative contemporary EU-in-the-world account derived from World Systems Theory by linking the EU’s emergence as a core power in the world with the historical processes associated with the hegemonic world system. Böröcz situates the contemporary European Union in the context of its long-term development (and its very modest beginnings). In the pre-capitalist system of world trade, Western Europe represented a small economic circuit that was marginal to other, more important networks. Europe’s diminutive size and marginality would only be mitigated by the establishment of overseas empires following the circumnavigation of Africa and the crossing of the Atlantic, both achieved in the fifteenth century. This empire-building was characterized by the ‘simultaneous pursuance of political power and profits, resulting in the joint application of coercion and unequal exchange’ (Böröcz 2010: 37). It is this (not always glorious) history that the European Union seeks to efface with its solipsistic self-promotion. The history of colonialism is excluded from the European Union’s self-image (Bhambra 2009), and it likes to be seen as having ‘clean hands’ in its dealings with developing countries. Böröcz demonstrates that Europe’s ‘global smallness’ has been a longstanding problem, even after several centuries of dramatic colonial expansion. In fact, colonial Europe remained small, by global standards: ‘Even at its peak, the proportion of gross world product that is internal to the British Empire remains below the 25 percent mark, quite a bit lower than China’s late-sixteenth and early-nineteenth-century peaks’ (Böröcz 2010: 46). The sobering conclusion is that five centuries of colonial expansion did little to alter the enduring smallness of West European powers. However, the advent of global capitalism ‘exerted a destructive effect on much of the world outside western Europe’ (Böröcz 2010: 49). In other words, it was not so much that Europe became rich but that the rest of the world became much poorer, in a rather depressing legacy of imperialism. Böröcz’s work offers a much-needed global perspective on Europe, one that seeks to contextualize European developments in both time and space, framing the development of Europe in terms of global patterns of development. It also offers an antidote to more solipsistic accounts of Europe’s role in the world and challenges the idea that Europe is automatically central to global orders.

World society

Although World Society Theory does not reject the World-Systems thesis, it assumes that a hegemonic economic structure operates in a broader cultural framework (world society) that determines what actors exist, how they relate to one another and what the appropriate types of norms and behaviour are (Meyer 1980). For instance, slavery, colonialism and the use of
unconventional weapons are now globally illegitimate, in the sense that they conflict with global trends on human rights, individual freedoms, secularism and scientific analysis. World society is a non-hegemonic global system that provides templates for actorhood, norms and action. Rather than being normatively integrated, world society is decoupled and fragmented, as there is no single power controlling it (Lechner and Boli 2005). Despite the rise of neo-institutionalist approaches in EU Studies (Pollack 2004; Schneider and Aspinwall 2001; Pierson 1996), World Society Theory (derived from sociological institutionalism) is still uncommon. According to Thomas (2009: 118), the mainstream’s tendency to overemphasize agency at the expense of structural factors in social and political science has been an important obstacle to the development of the World Society School. Meyer (2001) reiterates that the introduction of the World Society School into EU Studies would represent a serious challenge to mainstream research, which tends to treat the EU as the primary actor with the capability to shape the world (not vice versa).

A number of variants of the World Society approach to the EU can be identified. For instance, Albert (2002, 2010) suggests using Luhmannian World Society perspective in order to explain the patterns of functional differentiation underlying the uneven European integration process. The pace of integration varies in relation to different domains (faster in legal and economic realms but slower in political and societal domains) because all domains (or sub-systems) are operationally closed, i.e. they work according to their own logic and lack the capacity to directly influence one another or the wider environment. Albert explains that a World Society perspective allows a link to be established between the processes of Europeanization (studied mostly at the domestic or EU level) and the processes of globalization.

An alternative version of World Society Theory – also known as World Polity or the Stanford School – is gradually becoming influential in EU Studies. This approach suggests focusing on the rise of global cultural isomorphisms rather than functional differentiation in world society. Developed in the 1970s by the Stanford sociologist John W. Meyer and his colleagues, including Gili Drori, George Thomas, John Boli and Francisco Ramirez, the World Polity School argues that domestic attitudes and behaviour reflect ‘universalistic blueprints’ that are enacted at the global level (Meyer 2010; Meyer et al. 1997; Drori and Krücken 2009; Boli et al. 2010). Although Meyer and his colleagues have not published extensively on the EU, their theoretical insights introduce a much-needed global social context to EU Studies. In a 2001 article on the EU, Meyer argues that the EU is not fully understood by the prevailing interest-driven approaches: ‘Understanding Europe, thus, requires comprehending not only its organizational structure, but the institutionalized base on which this structure rests’ (Meyer 2001: 237).

Meyer criticizes the tendency to study the rules without paying attention to the context from which the rules are derived and within which the rules make sense. In the case of Europe, the mainstream approaches lack the necessary analytical tools to grasp the lack of a primordial European culture and the predominance of global cultural trends such as rationalization, scientization and regionalization:

Europe differs from classic national states in being massively and deliberately boring. National states make up positive histories and dramas of action and action heroes, and the like. And this is certainly true of European nation-states, which are renowned for their colorfully murderous histories. But Europe itself is all gray men in gray Mercedes discussing issues designed to be technical and mindbogglingly uninteresting. Europe is about warding off any really interesting action (which would, presumably, be dangerous, nationalistic, racist, and so on) with reasonable rules making it unnecessary.

Constructing Europe, thus, means getting rid of a lot of history and primordiality. And indeed, educationally, European national histories recede in importance without a
corresponding rise in the construction of a European history (Frank et al., 2000b). Europe is about natural humans acting reasonably in a scientized environment. It is not about the expression of a primordial or historical trajectory.

(Meyer 2001: 239)

In addition to Soysal’s research on migrant workers in Europe and education curricula on national histories in European nations (Soysal 1994, 2002; Soysal et al. 2005), a number of other English-language contributions have also embraced Meyer’s World Polity approach to dealing with EU phenomena. Colin Beck (2011) explains the revolutionary past of Europe through world-cultural processes. Boyle and Thompson (2001) investigate cross-national variation in human rights abuse claims by examining the petitions filed with the European Commission on Human Rights between 1976 and 1993, finding that national participation plays a significant role in international organizations. Beck and Miner (2013) provide a comparative perspective on the global classification of terrorism through the investigation of lists of terrorist organizations compiled by the USA, the UK and the EU, revealing corroborating evidence for the world society argument. Hadler, Tsutsui and Chin’s (2012) comparative analysis of European identity determines that membership in the European Union is not associated with a high level of attachment to European identity, and as they become wealthier and more connected to international networks, European countries from the post-Communist world become increasingly reluctant to describe their identity as European. Büttner (2012) conceives of regional mobilization in contemporary Europe as a ‘world-cultural’ project of social mobilization rather than a reflection of national, local or European specificities. Similarly Jupille, Jolliff and Wojcik (2013) find that European regionalism is expanding worldwide as a cultural model of world polity, irrespective of its actual efficiency in solving the problems of the modern world. Bandelj (2004) provides a case study from Slovenia that reveals that national responses to EU-led pressures on foreign investment policies are conditioned by a dualistic world polity. Rumford and Buhari-Gulmez (2011) reach similar conclusions based on the institutionalized contradictions in world society that are reflected in the EU’s problematic actorness in the modern world. In The Global System, Axford (1995) outlines how the global system and the EU as a new form of political space have taken shape. Recent studies on the EU’s common agricultural policy (Zschache 2013), changing education policies in Romania (Szakács 2013), migration in Eastern Europe (Makaryan 2013) and Turkey’s accession negotiations with the EU (Buhari-Gulmez 2011, 2012) demonstrate that EU processes cannot be considered independent from trends in world society.

The following section discusses the implications of the key themes put forward by the World Polity School (such as world polity, ritualized rationality and disinterested actorhood) for EU Studies in terms of rethinking the EU’s agency and relationship to its global environment. Transcending the ‘either/or’ debates, the World Polity approach led by Meyer treats the relationship between the EU and the global arena as co-constitutive. Accordingly, it suggests an alternative reading of the EU: rather than being an insulated and self-interested actor that plays the role of a ‘gatekeeper’ against global flows, the EU is constituted and legitimated by world society and acts as an organizational carrier of and a ‘gateway’ to the global cognitive scripts enacted by world society (Rumford and Buhari-Gulmez 2012).

Instead of international anarchy, World Polity research starts from the assumption that there is a diffuse social control system based on culture in the global sphere that allows states to define themselves, their roles, objectives and the appropriate means to achieve their objectives (Meyer 1999: 126). World polity is not reducible to a unitary and coherent set of norms, values or cultural standards, as it largely consists of contradictory and impracticable models (Lechner and
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Boli 2005). For example, global environmentalism and the capitalistic understanding of development are two global models that are well established in world polity and compete with each other in determining national policies (Frank et al. 2000a: 125). Such competition may yield to merger in the long term; for instance, in the case of the competition between environmentalism and capitalism, environmentalist notions have led to the demise of destructive capitalistic practices over time (Frank et al. 2000b: 100) and also to the rise of the ‘environmental entrepreneur’. In the debates over family versus individual, universal individualism has become more dominant, resulting in the rise of nuclear families (Boyle 2002) and, indeed, single-parent families. In other cases, new compromise models have arisen from mutual adaptations between originally competing models. For instance, the incorporation of environmental sensibilities into the capitalistic understanding of development has paved the way for a new concept: sustainable development (Frank et al. 2000b: 126). Boyle (2002) argues that world cultural change is not random; rather, it involves a historical process whereby a secularized version of Western Christian culture has promoted universalistic individualism. Meyer and Jepperson (2000) explain that global cultural standards, models and norms essentially stem from Western culture, in particular from the norms of Christendom and capitalism. According to Finnemore (1996: 339), it is necessary to provide an elaborate account of how world polity and its global cultural standards came into being and have evolved, the main challenge being how to explain structural patterns without reifying the structure. In other words, the World Polity School needs to avoid reinforcing the misperception that there is a single version of modernity that is derived from Western civilization (Delanty and Rumford 2005: 165; Drori and Krücken 2009: 20). Models, scripts and templates enacted by world polity involve secularized versions of Western cultural elements (in particular, from the Reformation and Enlightenment eras), but they now extend beyond contemporary Western culture (Boyle 2002). For instance, environmentalism and human rights might have originated from the values of American society, but the US government has been reluctant to endorse their global institutionalization (Meyer 2008: 802). In this sense, world polity transcends both Westernization and Americanization (Buhari-Gulmez 2009).

Because the analytical boundaries between the domestic and the international have become moot, national decisions increasingly involve the implicit (if not explicit) recognition of global standards (Ramirez 1987: 327). As their linkages to world polity increase, modern actors adopt world polity templates more readily (Meyer et al. 1997). The linkage to world polity can be via diffuse or specific links (such as state commitment to international organizations or multilateral treaties) or can go beyond the intergovernmental level (for example through citizens’ attendance at international fora or Internet usage) (Schofer and McEneaney 2003: 61). World polity intervenes in the domestic arena through multiple channels because modern society features numerous internal components that were originally decoupled from each other and separately exposed to the direct pressures of a decoupled world polity (Meyer et al. 1997). Meyer (2008: 806) notes that the spread of world polity templates does not necessarily entail external influence or decision-making. Instead, it involves theorization – that is, the introduction of theoretical concepts, causal relationships and frameworks that convince the domestic opposition of the legitimate and taken-for-granted nature of the reform (Strang and Meyer 1993: 492–500). The World Polity School thereby distinguishes itself from the developing constructivist scholarship on norm diffusion and socialization, which focuses on social exchanges and communication or point-by-point transmission of norms to the domestic arena (Drori and Krücken 2009: 19).

Finally, it is notable that world polity scripts (or global standards) persist despite violations. Many multilateral arrangements suggesting universal standards on human rights and desecuritization are not always unanimously observed. However, deviants do not have the power to reverse these agreements. On the contrary, deviants try to find excuses to justify their non-
compliance, which demonstrates that these global norms have become a taken-for-granted reality. The authority of global cultural scripts is thus expressed in the hypocrisy of their violators (Boli 2006). In addition, persisting regional and local policies and practices cannot reverse the overall trend of global standardization; rather, these are products of global forces as localized variations of world culture (Jang 2003: 197). Hence, world polity empowers regions and localities on the basis of the standardized themes of glocalization (Meyer et al. 2006: 267–8). In brief, world polity generates both the homogenization and the legitimation of certain forms of divergence – such as peculiarities associated with indigenous identities and expressive culture – at the same time (Boli and Petrova 2007: 120).

The World Polity School puts forward the notion of disinterested agency in order to point to the cultural authority of social behaviour that is ostensibly not driven by selfish interests. Since the end of World War II, the modern world has been characterized by an increasing number of non-governmental associations, consultants and scientists that shape the global cultural models of the world polity by disseminating new ideas, definitions, problems and solutions applicable to all. These groups can be compared to ‘scriptwriters’ who decide how actors should think and act (Meyer 1999: 127); their suggestions are generally adopted due to their claimed motivation of the collective good rather than self-interest (Meyer 2008: 799). Meyer calls them ‘disinterested actors’ (or ‘disinterested others’) and describes their work as the constant creation of new problems and solutions for modern actors (ibid.). These actors must find space to function in a pro-active manner, due to the lack of a centralized government at the world level. Hypothetically, a hegemonic world state would put an abrupt end to the activities of disinterested actors by imposing explicit rules and penalizing those who violated them.

The structuration of world polity is aided by three main ‘disinterested’ groups: international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), international scientific communities and professions (Boli and Thomas 1999: 73). INGOs are defined as not-for-profit non-governmental organizations ‘drawing members worldwide from a particular occupation, technical field, branch of knowledge, industry, hobby, or sport’ and contribute to the spread of world polity scripts through worldwide campaigns (ibid.). International scientific communities determine the consensual definitions of means and ends (or problems and solutions) that are allegedly applicable everywhere in the world (Meyer 1999: 129). Finally, professions are seen as the ‘receptor sites’, a term borrowed from biology, to imply structures that receive and translate global templates to national societies (Frank et al. 2000a: 103). These INGOs, scientific communities and professions pressure states and societies to embrace globally legitimated models of behaviour and norms. In this context, the role of endogenous factors (including local needs, domestic social movements, public opinion, national polity characteristics and sector-specific peculiarities) is limited to particular cases or to the short term, as the significance of these factors tends to decline over time (Frank et al. 2000a: 111; Meyer et al. 2006: 261).

The World Polity School’s introduction of ritualized rationality represents an important challenge to the prevailing dichotomous thinking based on the optimal/bounded dyad in EU Studies (see Schneider and Aspinwall 2001). The term ‘ritualized’ indicates the divorce of action (rationalization) from its usual goals. ‘Ritualized rationality’ rejects the idea that rationality is an inherent fact of social and political life; rather, rationality is treated as a cultural norm that constitutes legitimate actorhood in the modern world. A sceptical reader might find it tempting to consider ritualized rationality as merely a variation of bounded rationality that highlights one’s failure to fulfil the criteria of optimal rationality due to cognitive disabilities or limitations. Although ritualized rationality is clearly reinforced by the conditions of bounded rationality, it diverges from the latter in its absolute de-emphasis of interest-based calculus. In other words, while bounded rationality permits the consideration of the (necessarily unsuccessful) attempt to
achieve optimal rationality – in order to explain why such an attempt is likely to fail – ritualized rationality emphasizes the ceremonial and post-hoc nature of one’s rationalizations. Rather than seeking efficiency or appropriateness, ritualized rationality implies following abstract principles or models suggested by disinterested authorities such as professional experts and scientists. In this context, ritualized rationality highlights the fact that actorness is enacted and legitimated through actions that generally reflect world polity models. However, decision-makers tend to provide instrumentalist explanations for their actions, as though the actions had been carefully planned to ensure means–ends efficiency (Meyer 2008). The following discussion lays out the implications of the World Polity School’s basic arguments for EU Studies.

Rather than being a self-interested actor that operates in an anarchical international system, the EU is embedded in a global constitutive environment (world polity) that expands and legitimates the EU’s actorhood as long as it reflects world polity scripts. The idea of the EU’s cultural attractiveness or normative power overlooks the fact that the EU lacks a cultural centre (Meyer 2001; Biebuyck and Rumford 2012). Alternatively, the attractiveness and authority of the EU are primarily derived from the EU acting as a representative of world polity scripts that promise to benefit collective interests. From this perspective, given its universalistic templates to all types of actors, including national governments, regional policymakers and individuals, the EU can be seen as a disinterested actor in terms of acting as both an enactor and carrier of world polity scripts (Boli and Thomas 1999). The prescriptions the EU suggests are universalistic in character, which means they are thought to be applicable everywhere in the world regardless of national, cultural and socio-economic variations that differentiate regions, nations, societies and individuals. In this context, European countries might be the origin of the universalistic norms, standards and scripts, but these rules have gradually become detached from their European/Western origins, gaining a global nature (Buhari-Gulmez 2010, 2011).

Disinterested agency is only possible in the absence of a formal centralized authority (Meyer 2001). If there were a hegemonic pan-European state at the heart of the integration process, it would have ensured that EU norms followed more explicit, clear, narrow and concrete objectives. Furthermore, since world polity is a decoupled, centreless, dynamic entity that is not directly controllable by any particular state or non-state actor, it is misleading to think of world polity as a culturally homogenizing force. Rather, the existing world polity often provides competing scripts to EU institutions, regions, member states and societies, as well as to individuals in Europe. It simultaneously promotes both sovereign statehood and regionalization, explaining the contradictions underlying European integration.

Despite the mainstream tendency to conceptualize the EU and other regionalization efforts as resisting globalization, the boundaries between the EU and its global environment are increasingly contested. These boundaries between the EU and modern world polity are unclear because it is ‘difficult to say who is European and who is not’ (Meyer 2001). Rather than resisting globalization, the EU has played an important role in the structuration of global scripts. In addition, the EU’s core members are at the centre of world polity in terms of their active participation in the enactment and spread of global scripts through their connections to INGOs and multilateral fora. Furthermore, EU institutions derive their scripts, norms and policies from a wider cultural structure or world polity (Soysal 1994). For instance, the expansion of a ‘postnational membership’ in Europe is a function of world polity rather than an EU initiative (Delanty and Rumford 2005: 9). In this context, as the World Polity School proposes, the interaction between the EU and globalization is a relationship of co-evolution. This implies that a major motivation behind domestic compliance with the EU is the search for external legitimacy. If this assumption is true, candidate countries would consider whether their compliance with the EU would bring them further recognition and legitimacy in the global
arena, rather than basing their decisions on the efficiency of the EU’s reforms. This explains why EU candidate countries such as Turkey have readily adopted EU-led reforms that they lack the actual capacity to implement. For instance, the Turkish government signed the Additional Protocol extending EU Customs Union to all EU members, even though it was certain that it would not be able to submit it to the parliament for ratification due to the opposition in Turkish public opinion and the national bureaucracy to the recognition of Cyprus as a sovereign state (Buhari-Gulmez 2012). In sum, from the perspective of the World Polity School, the relationship between Europe and globalization is no longer understood as one of antagonism: rather than a ‘gatekeeper’ against global flows, the EU represents a ‘gateway’ to global networks and scripts (Rumford and Buhari-Gulmez 2011).

Conclusions

The nature of European Studies is changing. The World Society turn allows for the emergence of Europe(s) that are the product of both relativization and the reflexivity of Europeans. If processes of globalization result not only in the greater interconnectedness of the world but also in the awareness that this is occurring, as Robertson (1992: 8) suggests, then a consciousness of Europe-in-the-world goes hand in hand with the introduction of a global perspective. In fact, it is entirely possible that the global consciousness of European citizens has outstripped the acknowledgement of Europe’s place in the world by EU officials, a phenomenon which would go some way towards explaining the mismatch between the popularity of cosmopolitan ideas within the scholarly community and the lack of interest from within the EU itself.

Positing a world society, of which Europe is but a part, should not automatically be viewed as a threat to European economic and political interests or to the perspective of pan-Europeanists. World society does not diminish Europe; it merely contextualizes it, while at the same time making Europe less European (in the sense of being the author of its own development) and more ‘post-Western’ (in terms of rejecting exclusive and primordial views of itself, the ‘Other’ and the world). What will emerge from this change of emphasis is a different Europe (or Europes), admittedly less centrally located with respect to world history, but also far less isolated and vulnerable; world society is very capable of creating its own ontological securities and comforting narratives.

In terms of conceptualizing Europe-in-the-world, the World Society turn outlined in this chapter achieves two objectives that comprise the core of a new European Studies agenda. First, it encourages us to think about the ways in which Europe is not separate from but instead increasingly aligned with world society. This necessarily involves exploring the disinterested agency of the EU, once and for all giving the lie to the idea that the EU is a ‘nation-state writ large’. Second, it allows us to see that Europes in the plural offer hope to Europeans and non-Europeans alike, creating the possibility of many perspectives on European belonging. By opening up a space for many Europes, the World Society turn has effected its own rescue. No less important than Milward’s post-war ‘European rescue of the nation-state’, the thesis of World Society has resuscitated ideas of Europe that are not obliged to represent the EU’s borders as the limits of the world.

Note

1 Actorhood is a term employed by neo-institutionalist scholars who emphasize the cultural dependency of an actor on a broad environment, opposing the accounts of an actor as autonomous and goal-oriented decision-maker (Meyer and Jepperson 2000).
Bibliography


World society turn in European studies


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