

Telling a National Story with Europe

Europe and the European Ethnology

Reinhard Johler

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This article deals with the specific dialectic of the process of European unity. For, on the one hand, European integration is progressing almost mechanically. For example, the introduction of the Euro or the realisation of the Schengen treaty have finally made Europe into a perceptible reality for its citizens; therefore it is not by chance that an end of the nation-state has already occasionally been predicted. On the other hand, however, it is exactly this process of European integration which seems to have given rise to widespread concern, a concern including mention of the loss of national sovereignty and the fear of rampant neo-nationalism. In order to escape this contradiction, it is advisable to no longer regard the concepts of "Nation" and "Europe" as contradictory themselves – but: Nation and Europe rather determine each other in a reciprocal fashion. This will be shown equally in well known narrations as well as in current popular European statistics. And, not least important: the Europe which is presently developing has already received a name by "EUROLAND(E)". It is now worthy of increased interest on the part of European Ethnologists.

*Dr. Reinhard Johler, Institut für Volkskunde / Europäische Ethnologie, Universität Wien, Hanuschg. 3, A-1010 Wien, Austria.
E-mail: Reinhard.Johler@univie.ac.at*

An "Austrification of Europe"

In 1998 in Brussels centre a big clock announced how many days, hours, minutes and seconds it would take until the new European currency, the Euro was introduced. This Euro – as is said very frequently and usually with quite a bit of optimism – is going to create "Euroland(e)" as a dynamic core of a future great and united Europe. The symbolism on the coin's head does indeed represent European motifs, which, even though they are limited to a very general form, signalises European identity. Its reverse sides, on the other hand, are nationally conceived. The intention and the ideology of this design are easy to understand: Developing European identity is directly combined with the continuing existence of national identities. The Austrian coin designers for instance are continuing classical national symbolism for the Euro (Johler & Tschofen 1999); and also the Austrian EU-chairmanship in the second half of 1998, which was

anticipated in this country with considerable excitement, showed something "European" in a great "Europe Celebration" on July 1st in Vienna and countless other activities in the regions, but its actual message was clearly interspersed by national mannerisms: An "Austrification of Europe" was made a populist programme by the government – a programme causing many smiles, and not without good reason.

This "Austrification of Europe" is only an insignificant addition to national views and national constructions of Europe already present in other countries. However, the keywords "Europe" and "Nation" addressed here have dominated the controversial discussions carried out by scholars, politicians and also ordinary citizens for a long time. The question dealt with here, even if they appear to have remained unchanged for a long time, have developed into explosive subjects due to the advanced stage in the process of European integration: Will Eu-

rope be shaped as a confederation, a federal union or as a centralised state, will it be organised supernationally, transnationally or nationally, will it display "plurality" or "unity" regarding culture, will its citizens have – or need – one or several identities? Current answers can be anticipated in the common "unity in diversity"-metaphor (McDonald 1996), reference can equally well be made to the summit of Cardiff in 1998, where the new magic word "subsidiarity" was born, or also to the debates concerning the conception of the EU-programme "Culture 2000", which are currently being carried out. But here a different approach can be recommended.

Football and "National Pride"

In the special edition "Football et Passions Politiques" of the "Manière de voir"¹ several renowned European ethnologists made the Football World Championship into a topical theme. Embedded into a "superstructure politico-idéologique du capitalisme avancé", football corresponds for these ethnologists world-wide to a "religion laïque" and is a "terrain privilégié à l'affirmation des identités collectives": But in these "national communions" not only existing national realities were confirmed, but new ones were also created. Marc Augé, for example, especially stressed the potential for a new "identification nationale" in a report appearing in the August edition of "Le Monde diplomatique"². It was no accident that the football match between France and Croatia was a decisive indication for him: The victory of the "good" multi-ethnic "beurs" was used by the media on the one hand as a successful example of "France plurielle"; the Croats, on the other hand, were soon ranked among the ethno-nationalistic "bad boys".

The Austrian team was eliminated as "a nation of losers due to fate" (Johler 1998b) – as a daily paper wrote with a slight resignation –, too early to play a part in this national ranking. The fact, however, that sport is very important for national self-description in Austria, is undisputed – and it is shown in another national ranking table which was published in the summer '98 by the "National Opinion Research

Center" in Chicago. In the investigation "National Pride: A Cross National Analysis" the inhabitants of 23 states were questioned. In this case it was discerned between "good" and "bad patriotism", "patterns" were developed and a "ranking" was worked out (Smith & Jarkko 1998). The results of this study need not be reported here, but the almost verbatim medial reception in Austria and Germany should nevertheless be mentioned for a good reason.³ Because this study and the public topicalisation of the Football World Championship show five features which are extremely characteristic of a more general argumentation at the present time – and therefore also for the debates concerning the controversial relationship of Europe with the nation-states: Narrations are firstly clearly predominant (Bhaba 1990); secondly: In a "knowledge transfer", these narrations vacillate between science, politics, media and everyday life (Lindner 1995). A comparison – always requiring differences but also nameable totalities – is thirdly constituent in these narrations. Fourthly: These differences – no matter whether in mass culture, politics or science – are considered and explained in national categories. And finally fifthly: The national interpretation categories conceal regional differences (Zetterholm 1994), but even more they make the actual participants – the states – disappear from perception. What, however, do these five points mean?

Europe and the Nation-States

At first glance the Football World Championship in France and the American National-Pride-Study may seem to have been selected rather by chance. Nevertheless, in addition to the rhetoric outlined already, which was typical of that time, one point is especially striking: If it is then a question of identification and identity, Europe does not seem to have a place in the consciousness of its citizens. Therefore it was no coincidence that the national euphoria displayed at the Football World Championship prompted quite a number of critical observers to also search for "the Europe of everyday life"⁴; and also the Austrians, who were ranked in the top field – a daily newspaper had brought the

local patriotism effusively to a head with "Proud, prouder, Austrian" [Stolz, stolzer, Österreicher] – had to put up with the question asked by the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* how could Austria's national pride be compatible with its EU-membership in general and the Austrian chairmanship of the Council of the EU in particular.⁵

Initially only something may be hinted at which is peculiar to Austria: Following the euphoria shared by the vast majority of the population when Austria joined the EU in 1995, Euro-scepticism has clearly set in in the meantime. However, the initial enthusiasm for as well as the present criticism of Europe only show what also appears characteristic of other states: The "Austrian Europe" – and this also applies to the "Slovenian" (Brumen 1996) or the "French" (Silverstein 1997) Europe – rarely displays the characteristics of the supranational process of European integration but rather seems to be defined by national peculiarities.

Such a result viewed on the political and scientific level proves, that those who consider the EU-project of the "Citizens Europe" begun in the 80s (McDonald 1996) as having failed and the evolution of a European identity as hardly being realistic at present (Abélès 1996), are in fact right. A European sense of "transcending the Nation-State" (Shore 1996) does not appear probable at the present time. For neither "Europeanisation" nor the EU – to use a phrase recently coined by John Borneman and Nick Fowler have recently summed it up – will replace the nation-state (Borneman & Fowler 1997).

Such predictions – albeit presented here in an extremely abridged form – evaluate Europe's relationship to the nation-states in a very decisive manner: The EU, however, lacks the cultural, political and legal authorisation that the nation-states have by their definition. Therefore, the EU on its part must also see the main obstacle to the integration process as lying within the nation-states. Nevertheless, in spite of different interests, Europe and the nation-states – as Annabel Black and Cris Shore have pointed out – also reveal clear parallels: In the final analysis both of them are "imagined communities" and both are familiar with a quite

similar process of formation restricted by the time factor (Shore & Black 1994).

"Fazit: Nation"

It is unnecessary to point out that the close connection of nation, state and democracy towards the end of the 20th century must be reconsidered by Europeans: for a serious economic and political crisis within the nation-states is just as evident as the process of "European nationbuilding" which has hardly made much progress up to now. Thus, however, not only the new European narrations⁶ have developed into a point of discussion, but the old "great historical narrations" have also become a matter of renewed public questioning: It was not by chance that "Fazit: Nation" [Taking Stock: Nation]⁷ was the topic of a conference held with the participation of prominent political and scientific figures in Berlin in May 1998.

Although the speakers on this occasion held decisively different views concerning "nation" right from the start, their conclusions were nevertheless strikingly similar. According to the French Home Secretary Jean-Pierre Chevènement national identities are "rooted" historically. Europe, on the other hand, – especially since any intention towards developing a European identity is lacking –, corresponds to a mere abstraction which neither has any political legitimacy nor guarantees the integration of its citizens. "Therefore" – as Chevènement summarises – "the greatest service that Germany and France can render to Europe and to the world, is striving to be extremely German and extremely French respectively."

The historian Anthony Smith has stated a very similar position: According to him, nation-states are held together by their common symbols developed in their history which give them a feeling of national belonging, by common rituals, collective representations and political myths. They are "vivid, accessible, well established, in broad outline at least". In contrast to this, Europe is "deficient" "as an idea and as a process". Therefore Smith believes that there is only a slight possibility of the evolution of a "pan-national-consciousness or of a culture transcending national divisions", national identifi-

cations would not lose any of their advantages compared to the idea of a "European identity" (Smith 1992). Therefore the only path Europe can take is that of maintaining national heterogeneity.

The argumentation of Chevènement and Smith quoted here as typical examples may have a "dualistic thinking" in common: Nations on the one hand are described in these narrations as warm, historically rooted, culturally diverse realities which lead to an integration of their citizens. Europe, on the other hand, is seen in contrast to this as a non-narration, as a cold, technocratic, standardising and non-populist construct. However, this interpretation of the nation-state only functions within juxtaposition to Europe. And it is precisely this juxtaposition which has also enabled the nation-states to produce a new culturally rooted national narration. The nation-states draw new – symbolic and cultural – strength from the unifying process; using the argument of preservation of national identity they become indispensable to the citizen and they offer "native country", "home" or "patria" on a new peacefully and culturally determined level (Johler 1998a).

The fact that this national narration, which is amplified by widespread Euro-scepticism and rampant neo-nationalism, is embossing government "identity politics" can again be shown by an example. In the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin, an exhibition entitled *Mythen der Nationen* [Myths of the Nations] could be viewed last year. However, its very subtitle – "A European Panorama" (Flacke 1998) – showed that although the focus was directed into the past indeed, the message was intended for the present time and for the European future. The "inalienability of the national" pacified culturally was no longer questioned but already presented as a central element of Europe.⁸

Such government "identity politics" aiming at national contents does not come about by chance. In the "Interplay of Capitalism, State and Nationalism" published by Hans-Rudolf Wicker the state above all seems to have fallen into a crisis (Wicker 1997). States have suffered such a loss of economic and political sovereignty that they are increasingly forced to act more and more symbolically (Albrow 1996). For, as

the example of an inquiry into the *Eurobarometer* has shown, the citizens in Europe are more concerned about social problems than about the loss of national identity. However, the states hardly have any alternatives: They must replace the contents which they can no longer control by alternative messages: Therefore by virtue of the very instinct of preservation they produce national narrations. The narrators are not only but also those European states which should create Europe. However, this is a contradiction which can hardly be avoided – not even scientifically.

Being National and Creating Europe

A concept of the nation-states culturally formulated in such a way has of course political connotations because it enables the prevailing political class to create symbolic capital by defining and/or defending putative "national interests" in narrations. Nevertheless these narrations only work with the European juxtaposition. How far the claim of national differences is actually compatible with "Europeanness", which is gaining ground, will now be shown by means of the *Eurobarometer* already mentioned, but particularly by means of European statistics.

The *Eurobarometer* established by the "European Commission" in 1973 carries out opinion polls regularly. The Eurostat (Statistical Office of the European Communities), founded 20 years before in Luxembourg, does not however produce any data itself. For the 800 employees who have been gathered together at all levels according to EU criteria only utilise the information in 9 subject areas which they receive from the national statistical offices of the member states. Still it is their task to harmonise this material in order to compare it and to provide the "European institutions with statistical information for use in devising, managing and assessing common policies".⁹

The central importance of statistics in the preparation, passing of resolutions and justification of political decisions in the EU is obvious (McDonald 1996). And due to the fact that these "European statistics" are provided, Europe in a certain sense actually becomes reality. The key-

word for that statement is "comparison". For if the EU as a whole is compared with the USA, Canada, Japan or Eastern Europe, it appears homogeneous and strong. But much more present and diverse in the published statistics are comparisons dealing with national and therefore inner-European differences. The political aim of these comparisons is obvious: The nation-states are under pressure to balance deficits, but as a consequence, by doing so they are also strengthened anew as political protagonists.

Eurostat regards its activity as a contribution to democratically based decision-making in the EU. Nevertheless another argument is just as often stressed: The "comparison" implemented by the European statistics would make it possible for everyone to explain national differences in Europe and thus to understand their neighbour better. And only a "vital comparison" based on objective facts would finally create the readiness for "understanding" and therefore the creation of that "European" who also helps the EU to functioning smoothly.

The increasing demand for European statistics is evaluated quite correctly as evidence of the advanced integration process by Eurostat. However, Eurostat itself further promotes this development by means of its own policy. It considers itself a modern service provider available for everyone – "no matter whether you are a researcher, teacher, company decision-maker or politician, member of trade organisation, student or EU citizen". And since 1993, Eurostat has taken the media offensive even further. Statistical investigations are circulated in an easily understandable, graphically processed design in press communications. In this case, however, the topics of the classical EU statistical surveys do not really matter any more. The information given rather deals with "European lifestyles". The "Eurostat Yearbook '97" is an example for this. It has the characteristic title: "From the Cradle to the Grave and in Between. European Lifestyles as We Near the New Millennium."¹⁰

In this yearbook, answers to questions such as the following can be found: "Which of us drink and smoke the most? Hands up the worst drivers! Who's most likely to die of heart attacks? Or commit suicide? Where in the EU ...

are you most at risk of AIDS ... live in a house rather than a flat ... work the longest week?" Many European media have adopted this statistical information.¹¹ And, indeed, hardly a day goes by without for example telephone charges and budget deficits, the number of mobile phone owners, of catalogue-shoppers or of cinemagoers, the work mobility or the readiness for further professional training being compared on a Europe-wide scale.

In this way the Eurostat-dream of the European citizen who understands and compares statistical surveys already seems to have become reality. For in most cases without explanatory comment a specific way of reading is proposed only by the arrangement in the printed statistics. The diagrams arranged according to states, the inserted symbols and the almost ever present flags permit, as Niklas Luhmann believes, only one conclusion for the reader (Luhmann 1996). The comparison in national categories sets up specific relationships: Who is compared with whom, with whom not, who is among the "good" in the statistics and who is among the "bad", which ranks do the individual states have in comparison to each other in a particular case? The answers of Europeans who read statistics culminate in a particular European mental mapping.

But also a second, perhaps even more important point is still to be considered. The reactions to the "Eurostat Yearbook" were at first determined by national interpretations. Comparing themselves as "average citizens", "front runners" or "latecomers" of Europe. Citizens understanding statistical evaluation will soon have to draw the necessary conclusions from it because due to the published "European lifestyles" they have become as transparent as never before. They will have to adapt their lives to the new standard in diverse respects in "Euro-land(e)" and at the same time they will also become Europeans (Johler 1999).

"Euro-land(e)": Conclusions and Perspectives

In parenthesis, it should be mentioned that the scientific comparison has always been an original ethnological method. It is all the more

amazing that up to now the European Ethnologists have given little attention to the cultural construction and the reality of Europe (Anttonen 1996; Kokot & Dracklé 1996; Segalen 1997): Till now they have been clearly focussing on ethnicity and nation (Daun 1998). Yet Europe, which has been competing with these concepts, or – as has been argued in this article – which is necessarily supplementing these identities (Eriksen 1993), needs increased efforts in ethnological research for the construction of “Euroland(e)” is also becoming European reality to an increasing degree.

By “Euroland(e)” that linguistic controversial term is addressed, which economically describes the participation not only in Euro-zone but also in the dynamic project of Europe. John Borneman and Nick Fowler have rightly warned about confusing the EU – or this new “Euroland(e)” – with Europe. But even for them the EU as “the major institutional push behind Europeanization” is an undisputed fact. And in conclusion they can already refer to three concepts concerning Europe as the subject of anthropological investigation (Herzfeld 1997): “The first approach is to study the EU at its centers, to examine ‘Eurocrats’ and the administrative and political cultures of European institutions. The second is a bottom-up approach, to examine national symbols and everyday experiences in interaction with the EU. The third is a focus on spheres of interaction where peoples of Europe engage in face-to-face encounters with each other” (Borneman & Fowler 1997).

European ethnologists – as far as a differentiation from social anthropologists makes any sense at all – will have the questions in quite a similar way: Perhaps, however in an “Ethnography of the State” (Abélès 1990; Grillo 1980) they ought to lay more stress on the state as one of the most important protagonists of European integration. And: Referring to Europe, they should increasingly bring up for discussion the complex relation of “narration”, “telling” and “discourses” on the one hand to “reality” and “doing” on the other hand. For just as undisputed the fact that Europe is “constructed” is at the moment, as obviously “soft” and “hard essentializations” can also already be observed in European everyday life (Wicker 1997).

Notes

1. Ramonet, Ignacio & de Brie, Christian (eds): *Football et Passions Politiques* (= Manière de voir 39, Mai–Juin 1998).
2. Augé, Marc: Un ethnologue au Mondial. In: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Août 1998: 26.
3. See f.i. the reports: Hipp, hipp, hurra. In: *Profil*, 6. 7. 1998; Stolz, stolzer, Österreicher. In: *Kurier*, 12. 6. 1998; Der Nationalstolz ist am stärksten in Amerika. In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1. 7. 1998.
4. Hanimann, Joseph: Gott in Europa? Auf der Suche nach einer gemeinsamen Alltagskultur. In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23. 6. 1998.
5. *Der Spiegel*, 28, 1998.
6. Fuhr, Eckhard: Die große Geschichtserzählung. Der Dreiklang Nation, Staat, Demokratie als historischer Nachklang. In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16. 5. 1998.
7. See the published papers in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* – Chevènement, Jean-Pierre: In den Nationen liegt die Zukunft Europas. Zur Herausbildung einer europäischen Souveränität braucht es die Zustimmung der Völker (15. 5. 1998); Schäuble, Wolfgang: Für sich allein ist jedes Land den Abhängigkeiten stärker ausgeliefert. Europa kann jedoch die Staaten weder ersetzen noch verschlingen (15. 5. 1998); Constantinescu, Emil: Das Politische als Fundament der menschlichen Gesellschaft. Die Rolle der Nation auf dem Wege zu Demokratie und Marktwirtschaft (25. 5. 1998); Buruma, Ian: Ohne Nation gibt es keine Freiheit. Gegen die Produktion falscher Entscheidungslagen: Voltaire hatte recht – und Herder auch. Europa sollt sich im Entscheidungsprozeß nicht gegen seine Tradition entscheiden (25. 5. 1998); Wallace, William: Was an ihre Stelle treten könnte. Die Regierungen in Europa haben das Vertrauen in ihre alte Geschichte und in ihre alten Symbole verloren (4. 6. 1998).
8. Cf. Müller, Achatz v.: Unverzichtbar national. In: *Die Zeit*, 26. 3. 1998.
9. To the history and selfrepresentation of EURO-STAT see the homepage <<http://europa.int/eurostat.html>>.
10. S.: Eurostat (ed.) 1996: *Eurostat Jahrbuch '96. Europa im Blick der Statistik*. Brüssel-Luxemburg; Eurostat (ed.) 1997: *Eurostat Jahrbuch '97. Europa im Blick der Statistik*. Brüssel-Luxemburg.
11. Die Durchschnittsfrau in der Europäischen Union hat 1, 44 Kinder. Der EU-Bürger in der Statistik. In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15. 4. 1998; Wir sind ideale Europäer. In: *Die Presse*, 21. 3. 1998.

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