Markieta Domecka

Diversity of perspectives on Europe: ambiguities around the distinction between the 'internal' and the 'external'[1]

Abstract: Trying to reconstruct and understand different perspectives on Europe and European identities, initially we made a distinction between the 'internal' and the 'external'. In the course of the research process, however, this distinction proved to bring more ambiguities than it was supposed to resolve. Analysing the autobiographical narrative interviews with people born, raised and living in Europe, on the one hand, and those born on different continents and now living in Europe, on the other, we realised how complex the process of identification with Europe can be. The diversity of perspectives on Europe cannot be brought down to rough distinctions between the 'internal' and the 'external' as much as European identities cannot be brought down only to people, or to all the people, living on the European continent.

Key words: Europe, European identities, autobiographical narrative interviews, 'internal' and 'external' perspectives

Introduction

Diversity is a fundamental feature of Europe. Is has been difficult at all times to decide what Europe is, where Europe begins and where it ends [Davies, 1996], who belongs to Europe and who has the right to European identity claims. Also people living in Europe emphasise the value of their diversity [cf. Warleigh, 2003] and stress that one of the main duties of Europeans is to maintain this wide cultural and linguistic range. The same principle of diversity applies when we try to reconstruct some perspectives on Europe. Our initial distinction on 'internal' and 'external' in the course of the research turned out to be problematic. Analytically useful, as we supposed at the beginning, it brought more ambiguities than it was meant to resolve.

At the start of the Euroidentities[2] project we asked the question to which extent ordinary[3] people possess a sense of being European and identify with European culture and history as well as European political and social institutions. In the project we used the method of autobiographical narrative interviews [Schütze, 1992; 2003; 2005 (1984); 2008] in which our informants were asked to tell us their life story, which was then followed by a questioning phase. First we asked about the issues concerning their particular biographical experiences and then we asked the questions coming from the

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scope of our research. The analysis of the interviews has been centred essentially upon the extent to which people choose 'Europe' as a frame of reference for their life orientations. At the beginning of the project, after some discussions, a decision was made to focus on five 'sensitized groups' of people who have been more exposed to different sorts of 'European experiences'. We conducted autobiographical narrative interviews with (1) people who earlier in their lives had had some experience of a cross-national educational exchange at the European level, such as Erasmus programme, language exchange programmes, etc.; (2) 'transnational workers', including different levels of professional hierarchies, who either were working in a country other than that of their origin or who had done so earlier in their lives; (3) individuals who were involved with civil society organisations with a significant orientation across European borders, with a special focus on environmental and 'peace and reconciliation' organisations; (4) farmers, who are subject to Europe-wide markets and European Union systems of regulation and subsidy; (5) individuals involved in cultural contacts across European borders. The idea of 'sensitized groups' turned out to be very helpful, directing the process of sampling and data gathering and providing very rich material about the implicit and explicit identifications or orientations towards Europe (and their lack) from 'the bottom up' perspective. Still at the initial stage of the research a sensitized group of cross-cultural intimate relationships was added and later, during the process of data collection and analysis, we realized that we needed to extend the scope of our research to two more categories previously not taken into account, namely: (1) people living in Europe whose origins lie outside the continent and (2) people who were born and raised in Europe and who have lived a significant portion of their lives in other continents. The former are, for example, people who come from the former colonial empires of Europe; economic migrants to Europe; political refugees and asylum seekers. The latter are Europeans who have lived outside the continent of their origin for a significant portion of their lives and have returned, or think about returning, to their countries of birth. Both categories also include transnationals, people having the experience of living in many European and non-European countries, where they maintain their networks of family, friends, colleagues and business partners. A number of persons interviewed for the original sensitized groups (CSO activists, transnational workers and others) fall into these categories. At the time of the interview these informants lived in different European countries (Estonia, Poland, Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom) and had experiences of living in East and South Asia, Southern Africa, North and Latin America and New Zealand.

The ambiguities about the 'external'

The autobiographical narrative interviews with people who come from other continents bring a view of Europe that is much more homogenous than the picture commonly presented by individuals born and living their whole lives in Europe. Those coming from 'outside' bring some stereotypical views of what it is to be 'European' and consider themselves in the light of those images. What Europe is, economically, culturally and socially soon becomes directly experienced in daily practices,

which then leads to the verification and critical assessment of the initial views on Europe. What initially was taken for granted, becomes problematic, therefore needs to be reflexively reconsidered. The second important aspect of the European image brought by individuals born in other parts of the world is the view of Europe as reaching far beyond the European continent. Arriving in Europe for the first time, many of our interviewees had a strong feeling of familiarity. Especially those coming from the post-colonial countries were immediately familiar with one of the European languages, architecture, fashion and products available in the supermarkets. Analysing their autobiographical narratives it becomes problematic to call those individuals 'external to Europe' as they have always lived in Europe but transported to other continents. Their perspective on Europe takes into account that European politics and policy making itself has not been confined to European borders, but rather historically has been an interaction between Europe and the rest of the globe during the period of European imperialism and colonial empire. It would be misleading, though, to call it an 'external' perspective. For our interviewees born and raised in South Africa, India, Hong Kong or Argentina, Europe remains biographically significant. It is the symbolic entity they feel a part of and want to belong to. Europe is the symbolic universe, idealised and criticised, and it is a concrete point is space, easily recognisable on the surface and strangely distant when explored more in depth. It is common of our interviewees whose origins lie outside the continent to perceive Europe as a place that is familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Two of our informants, Adriano, coming from Argentina and at the time of the interview living and working in Estonia, and Andrew, originally from South Africa and now based in the UK, express particularly vividly their first experiences after arriving in Europe with their mixed sensations of familiarity and strangeness.

> Adriano: *"There was this place [in Barcelona] that when I saw it - I had been there for the first time in 2001- I felt it so mine, it was so familiar, as if I had been living there for my whole life, everything there was super. (...) - Aa - the buildings, the people on the street, the way they would walk, the way they would dress, the buildings and the things, it was a strange sensation, more, more sensation that actually something like that remind me, it was just - it felt very familiar, it felt very mine, as if you are coming home right, it was absolutely super strange feeling, very strange feeling and I only felt it in Barcelona and then in Rome, although in Rome was kind of different, because Rome is a very messy place, very loud and so on, it was just like Buenos Aires with some Roman monuments and ruins, but the same shouting, same people greeting each other on the street, the same ice cream parlours, the same stuff, it was just so similar and that was also like the people, but not so much the buildings but more like the vibrant."* (p.18: 35 – p.19: 3)

The familiarity with Europe, comparable to the experience of homecoming [Schutz: 1945] is described as 'a strange sensation'. It is surprising and overwhelming. The similarities between one's

place of origin, be it South America or South Africa, and different places in Europe are explainable, given the colonial history, however the first reactions after arriving to the European continent are more emotional. These are the feelings of familiarity, engagement, belonging and appropriation. Later on, however, as Andrew's story demonstrates, this 'weird' feeling of familiarity is replaced by the conscious or semi-conscious effort to familiarize and countless ambiguities about one's status in Europe.

> *"I remember the first time I came to England what was really weird was that because South Africa had been colonised by England there was so much, the language, the food. The products that you get in the supermarkets. All sorts of things there was, there was something, which was similar. But at the same time there was so much, which was unfamiliar. So your brain wanted to make it all familiar. Because you'd seen it, so it's like (...) you know the place. But actually the longer you're there you realise you don't. And I had that experience when I first went to England and I also felt, and maybe that's why I ended up here [other part of the UK], -ehm- but... I particularly felt like, I remember telling a friend that it felt like a sort of... not a prodigal son, it was more like a bastard son. Like where you sort of, you come back to where you came from but emotionally ((slowly)) you – there's nothing that connects you."* (p. 12: 17-42)

The sensation of familiarity in case of Adriano and Andrew again directs our attention towards European diversity, as it concerns different parts of Europe, having distinct characteristics (like language, food, architecture, life style, etc.) and representing different types of colonial legacy in Latin America and South Africa. Coming to Europe gives Adriano a sensation of homecoming, returning to the place that is *his*; whereas for Andrew Europe, and England in particular, brings a load of more ambiguous feelings. First, there is familiarity, then strangeness, followed by the effort to make it familiar in order to maintain the sense of belonging and a final conclusion that his belonging is very problematic, comparable to the experience of a 'bastard son'.

Already at the very beginning of the interview Andrew identifies himself as South African and as a 'descendant of Europeans'. Saying that he describes his roots going back to his maternal and paternal grandparents and great-grandparents, who were mainly of Greek origin on the one hand, and English and German, on the other. By doing it he also reconstructs the hierarchies existing in South Africa, with different social strata parallel, which is very significant, to different degrees of Europeaness.

> *"I know they [maternal grandparents] would have come from a much more sort of humble poorer type of background to South Africa. -Ehm- and in those early days -eh- would have – within the white hierarchy of Africanadom would have experienced a fair amount of discrimination because they would have been seen as the sort of lower - Europeans. (...) I grew up with a sense of -eh- that part of my European identity, that*

sort of Greek part, was -ehm- negative. It was sort of, and because there was sort of stereotyping within the white hierarchy in South Africa, you know. Like, so at my school the kids who were like Italian or Greek were sort of teased for being that." (p. 3: 1-5, 29-33)

The picture reconstructed by Andrew is also an excellent example of Europe existing out of Europe, with its hierarchies and racial prejudices. The way Andrew's family were placed within the existing hierarchies brought loads of ambiguities, which strongly affected his identity work. Belonging to the privileged class of European descendants they were still among the 'lower Europeans', located below the British, Dutch and Germans. This story represents also a deeply European phenomena connected with the need to deal with 'colonial mess'. In case of Andrew's biography it took a very interesting turn. Through his integrated school, one of the first ones in South Africa, through interactions with his black colleagues and through other biographical experiences, he became aware of the existence of the apartheid system and became sensitized about injustice it involved. Later, during his university years he became politically active and got involved in the reconciliation work. After getting some experience in this field, he managed to bring his skills into the peace and reconciliation work in Europe. This process through which people coming from other parts of the world are given the opportunity to become involved in different types of CSO work in Europe dealing with peace and reconciliation, human rights, ethnic minorities, environment protection and others, is also a very interesting European phenomenon[4].

The picture of Europe as a historical sphere of influence stretching far beyond the boundaries of the continent is the immediate outcome of our analysis. The colonial legacy is strongly imprinted in the childhood narratives especially of those of our interviewees who belonged to unprivileged classes of the indigenous population. The presence of white men in their home countries is associated with violence of physical and symbolic kind. The narrative of Luke, a young, black Zimbabwean artist living in the UK, demonstrates the physical and symbolic violence he experienced as a child.

"One particular memory I have is we were sleeping and we got awoken by a banging door and there were soldiers who had come looking for ((deep voice till +)) the boys (+) the guerrillas, the freedom fighters as we called them. And they came with the white soldiers who told everybody to get out, get up and -eh- we were going to get a roll call to find out who was who and who had children and where the other children were. If - eh- and I remember my aunt, we had been prepped a few weeks before that, we were told that they would be coming. So we were told, you don't say that you have a big brother, because our big brother was out in the border areas -eh- training. And we were told, you don't say you have a big brother just say, you know, this is us, and, because most of the boys would have been recruited in to be freedom fighters. So anyway I

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[4] It is an observation of Fritz Schütze discussed during the Euroidentities meeting in November 2010 in Nuremberg.

remember an old man getting beat up and we stand -eh- we were standing in a queue and an old man was being, getting beat up and something about his son who had been a guerrilla." (p.1: 50 – p.2: 16)

"And then –ehm- then '82 I went to a boarding school –eh- we'd just, this is just a year after, two years after independence. And the schools were opened up for, there used to apartheid in Zimbabwe. So schools were opened up for all people to go to schools that were originally all white only, so we could now go to European only schools. So I went to one called [the name of school] (...) So I went there and didn't know how to speak English -eh- and just found out that my mum was my mum and then my grandmother left me. Went shopping with my mum a couple of weeks later, a couple of weeks later and then next thing I'm wearing all this uniform and all of a sudden we're in a bus, school bus, we're going to boarding school. And there were all these white kids, I never grew up with white kids before, so all of a sudden I learnt English that year and told –ehm-. So - we were encouraged to speak English and not speak native languages. So we could learn English. All the teachers were white and the only black people there were the ground staff and the kitchen staff. And, yeah, so that was a learning curve, learnt cricket, rugby, learnt to assimilate at that stage. That was my first experience of assimilation."
(p. 3: 45 – p. 4: 21)

Luke calls this early experience 'assimilation' but the analysis of his autobiographical narrative showed that he developed a much more active and inventive strategy of dealing with *the other* than simply to assimilate. He is pragmatic about his multiple identities and he can use them strategically, depending on the actual context of action. Speaking Zulu, English and Gaelic, being married to an Irish woman and living in the UK, Luke has many potential identities at his disposal. Dealing with the ambiguities in relation to Europe Luke says that being European is '*more than about pigment: it's about a state of mind* (p. 31: 45-46). He continues: *'I made a conscious decision through my experiences that I belong to this place.'* (p. 32: 7-8), *'I am as European as the next European'* (p. 31: 36). Such explicit identity statements are very rare among our interviewees. In case of Luke, they are the reaction of a person whose identity is constantly challenged. Due to his skin colour and origin, in various interactive situations Luke's belonging to Europe gets questioned. This is a biographical problem and the way Luke decides to deal with it is the strategy of strengthening his own and his children self-confidence as well as strengthening the attributes of his identity choices.

The ambiguities about European belonging and non-belonging also for many others of our interviewees having their roots in Hong Kong, India, Indonesia and Columbia remain a biographical problem, which needs to be worked through reflexivity and biographical work. On the one hand, there is a desire to belong, accompanied by certain identity claims and the effort made in order to 'fit in', and on the other hand, there is resistance of European societies and policy makers to treat individuals

coming from 'outside' as fellow European citizens deserving equal treatment. Coming from 'outside', as noticed before, is only apparent here. Living previously in the parts of the world marked by the colonial legacy, our interviewees had multiple experiences with Europe even prior to their arrival on the European continent. They would go to 'European' schools, learning one of the European languages, usually different from their mother tongues, have contact with European popular culture and maintain connections with relatives, friends and acquaintances already living in Europe. Those transnational links via family, religious communities and other organizations played then an important role in facilitating the process of transition to Europe. In some cases, through holidays and regular visits of family members living in different parts of Europe, experienced from early childhood on, Europe became easily incorporated into one's life world. When we take into account the process of biographical development of our informants, then their decision to move to Europe and their sense of familiarity upon arrival becomes perfectly understandable.

As mentioned before, what initially is familiar or even taken for granted, soon becomes a source of ambiguities. Experiencing at the same time familiarity and strangeness is problematic and requires some effort of biographical work in order to come to terms with oneself and to work out one's own stance towards Europe. Some strategies may be tried out, like the one of appropriation of 'European culture', according to one's understanding of it, as it is believed, it could safeguard one's right to belong. This strategy would consist of learning languages, even as narrowly spread as Gaelic, taking up certain life style, including eating and dressing habits, and cultivating relationships at the work places and local communities. Some individuals try to win their right to belong through active involvement in civil society organisations and in many other ways only to see that their Europeaness can be questioned any time. The first and most common reason for challenging one's right to belong to Europe is the skin colour. We have numerous narratives of people of non-white origin being verbally abused, questioned, or unwaveringly stared at in many places across Europe. Even after taking a conscious decision to make Europe their home and after living for decades on the continent they may realize that they are still perceived as 'strangers' or 'guests', who are treated differently than their fellow European citizens. Their status is marked by ambiguities. Living in Europe, experiencing contradictory sensations of familiarity and strangeness, together with the feelings of belonging and non-belonging, they express a great desire to belong followed by the effort made in order to make Europe one's home.

Europe viewed from 'outside', be it by people coming from other continents or by those leaving Europe and moving to other parts of the world, tends to lose much of its diversity. Used as a reference point for constant comparisons, Europe becomes more homogenous. It simply gets opposed to non-Europe. Viewed more from 'within', by people born in Europe, who never travelled to other continents, on the other hand, Europe may not be even perceived as a whole. Some of our interviews with transnational workers demonstrate that Europe does not have to function as a relevant reference point. Even when moving in the European space and making use of the European opportunity

structure, people may not make any explicit reference to Europe. Their perspective can be more focused on the local level, the place they come from, and their nationality, as this is the feature they are mainly identified with while encountering the other. The two main reference points used for constant comparisons may be the place of origin and the place of migration without any explicit orientation towards larger social, economic and political entities. In most cases, to be thematized, Europe needs to become problematic. One's belonging to Europe may be questioned, as it is the case of the individuals coming to Europe from other continents. In some other cases, there may be conscious effort made in order to distance oneself from Europe as it will be discussed in the following section.

The ambiguities about the 'internal'

Analysing the autobiographical narratives of people born, raised and living in Europe (and not having the experience of living on other continents), those who as we initially assumed, would have a more 'inner' perspective, we realized that some of them have developed a view on Europe, which is quite 'external', objectified, cold and critical. These are the people who have made conscious effort to distance themselves from Europe as they find it difficult to identify with Europe as a whole or some of its aspects. Those individuals, born and living on the continent are Europeans as it were by definition, but at the same time, they do not necessarily feel they belong to Europe. Neither they feel to be a part of the European project and are very critical towards the EU institutions and the idea of European Union as a whole. The distanced and critical perspective on Europe in most cases have been developed as a result of biographical experiences marked by certain disappointments with European foreign policy, economic decisions and labour market situation, as well as the discrepancy between the promoted ideals and the actual praxis. In other cases Europe is perceived as the 'unknown', 'strange' or even 'hostile' exactly because of the lack of certain 'European exposure'. Being deeply rooted in their local communities, some of our informants thought of Europe as being 'somewhere else'. The narrators living in the UK and in Ireland often referred to Europe as something 'out there'; the entity they would not necessarily be a part of. Leaving the Isles they would say they 'go to Europe' as they associate it more with the continent than the place they live in.

The biographical analysis demonstrated, however, that this type of view is only one dimension of a much more complex attitude. It was also possible to grasp the change of perspective, as in the case of Richard, a head (the Worshipful Master) of an Orange Hall living in Northern Ireland, who initially perceived Europe as an external entity potentially dangerous for his and his community's local identity. Therefore, when an idea appeared to apply for some funding at the European Peace Programme in order to support the Hall, Richard felt a bit apprehensive. When asked about it directly, he explained that nowadays *"the Hall, the Lodge would be more progressive in their thinking"* (p. 11: 43) and *"very appreciative of the money that's come from EU, I, -ehm- we're all members of the, we're all Europeans"* (p. 11: 45-46). Those statements, however, are not a part of his main narrative.

They could be a result of Richard's feeling that he is expected to say something of this kind and his response to a directly asked question. He admitted that initially they thought in the Lodge that European funding was 'not for them' but the concern about the Hall, which required substantial refurbishing, was decided to be more important than their reservations. The great significance of the Orange Hall in Richard's life is undeniable. His life story, in fact, is the history of the Hall and its members. Being Richard's main concern the Hall is believed to be worth the compromise.

As the analysis of some other of our interviews demonstrated, on one level Europe may be fiercely criticised for its foreign policies, its all-pervasive red tape and the discrepancies between the discourse and the praxis in respect to many issues like undocumented migrants and others. On the other level, however, Europe may be treated as a platform for mobilizing activists contesting the decisions taken by the European governing bodies. Some of our interviewees' life stories have demonstrated that Europe can provide an opportunity for discovering new we-groups (cf. Spanò et al, unpubl.) and by these means going beyond the local context and local divisions and participating in broader social worlds. Suzanne, an animal rights activist born and raised in Northern Ireland provides a good example of this process. Growing up in a divided community, by birth and residence being ascribed to one of the conflicting sides, Suzanne felt out of place. Neither her immediate neighbourhood nor school could provide her with a we-group. Having a working class background and a strong accent, she felt isolated in her middle-class school environment. She also did not see her Republican and Catholic community giving her many options:

> *"It seems – like – the big picture is, it seemed to me growing up that you either become a hoodlum/ so you stole cars, you sniffed glue\, you drank – eh – booze on street corners. Or else you joined – an organisation."* (p. 9: 22-27)

Trying to go beyond the restricted spectrum of choice provided by her community, Suzanne started searching for an alternative way of living. She knew which paths she did not want to follow but still was uncertain about the direction she would like to choose. A chance for new identification appeared together with joining a group of animal rights activists in her home city. Already before, being sensitized about animal suffering, Suzanne became vegetarian. The experience of joining the group Suzanne describes as 'eye-opening'. She started 'educating herself' and became politically active participating in numerous demonstrations and regular actions against fox hunt. Soon, however, Suzanne felt it was not enough. Together with her female friend, she embarked on a journey[5] across Europe, practically and symbolically, going first to France and the Netherlands, then to England and the Netherlands again. Through many adventures and coincidences, they met like-minded people, vegans, animal rights activists, anarchists and squatters. Living in an alternative community Suzanne first becomes an observer and then an active participant in the protests organized against the EU governing bodies.

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[5] The category of 'embarking on a journey' comes from Ulrike Nagel.

"But anyway /ehm/ – the first weekend that I was there (...) I was told that there was an action - camp being set up, and would I be interested in taking part. The – /ehm/ Dutch government at the time were the Presidents of the European Union/ and they were European Finance Ministers. -Ehm- they were meeting in a small town called Noordwijk which is on the coast. -Eh- they were meeting in a huge hotel called the (Huis ter Duin), -ehm- I think it's got ten stars, never mind/ five stars, it's/ humungous and we, like (there, there wasn't a lot of) people could afford to stay there. So the finance ministers were all meeting there. ((sniffing)) And I didn't really know too much about the European Union at the time – but what I did know was that I was really against big business and – government being sleeping partners. And that – to me\, and to us, to those people that were involved in setting up that weekend, that's the way we do things, that big business has far too much influence in the decisions that governments make. And that's what we were going to protest against.(...) we marched through the town, we had banners, we handed out leaflets explaining why – people should not accept that these people are – coming to their town at the taxpayer's expense as well/ staying in a very expensive hotel, loads of security to discuss – the finances of the European Union - when people are living in poverty/ people are starving, people have been living this every day – people have been stopped from settling in, in the European Union, they've been booted out\." (p. 21: 34-50; p. 23: 25-32)

The experience of fighting for the good cause gave Suzanne a feeling of belonging and sharing some goals with a 'great bunch of people' coming 'from everywhere'. Participating in Euro Marches Suzanne experienced a great mobilization of activists coming from different parts of Europe. Going into the streets together, protesting and fighting with the police forces, taking care of the arrested ones, participating in the workshops, gatherings and discussion groups all this led to a feeling of community, solidarity and togetherness. Interestingly, Europe, highly contested as the political entity, provided Suzanne with the opportunity to participate in a broader social context (cf. Spanò et al, unpubl.), discovering the common goals of international or even global importance and by these means giving her the possibilities for new identifications. Europe as a platform for people's mobilization, with the facilitating role played by internet and other media, commonly appears also in the interviews with CSO activists, be it in the field of environmental or human rights protection. European space is frequently used for building networks, which may have at the same time a global range and very tangible local impact.

The European legislation may play a twofold role. In some cases it is strongly criticised, contested and fought against, and on the other, it is used instrumentally against the decisions of the local and national governments. Depending on the context, Europe and European Union may be treated in significantly different ways. It is a sign of pragmatism, or even instrumentalism, which is

possible only because of the critical distance is worked out towards the EU. The critical distance may also be a consequence of disappointment with the decisions taken by European institutions. As demonstrated in the analysis of an interview with a young UK-based Serbian man, who as a teenager experienced the Balkan war, the EU may be viewed with great resentment, due to its questionable role played in the war, and at the same time with great hope in regard to the opportunity structure it provides.

The stance towards Europe both in case of individuals coming from other continents and in case of 'Europeans by birth' who distance themselves from various aspects of Europeaness is marked by ambiguities. To call the former 'external' and the latter 'internal' to Europe could not lead too far. On the contrary, in order to deal with those complex phenomena it is necessary to go beyond the distinction between the 'internal' and 'external' perspectives on Europe.

Conclusions

Europe as an ideal cannot be denied to the 'other', since it incorporates the phenomenon of 'otherness': in the practice of Europeanism (Europe as an ideal), the perpetual effort to separate, expel and externalize is constantly thwarted by the drawing in, admission, accommodation and assimilation of the 'external' (Bauman, 2004b: 7). The same process takes place the other way round, what is considered 'internal', inherent of Europe becomes exported and internalised by the 'outside' world. The division between the 'internal' and 'external' perspectives on Europe never can take a shape of a clear-cut distinction. Europe is an intrinsically expansive culture, an exporting entity, always busy with 'remaking the world', encouraging and forcing the rest to replicate its own model. 'Europocentrism' expressed in the misuse of European military and economic dominance, the atrocities committed under the cover of the 'civilizing mission', and broadly understood 'colonial mess' are the sharpest examples of global influences of Europe and blurring divisions between the 'inner' and the 'outer'.

Analysing the life stories of our interviewees born in other continents forced us to conceptualise Europe as a historical sphere of influence that has stretched far beyond the boundaries of the continent. This view acknowledges the significance of the establishment of historically specific networks that have connected Europe to other parts of the world. Geographical Europe never had fixed borders and 'whenever the states of Europe try to put their common "continental" borders in place and hire heavily armed border guards and immigration and customs officers to keep them there, they can never manage to seal them, make them tight and impermeable. Any line circumscribing Europe will remain a challenge for the rest of the planet and a standing invitation to transgression.' (Bauman, 2004b: 6).

Different perspectives on Europe are formed and re-formed processually, simultaneously to people's movements in and out of the continent. Multiple and constant interconnections across borders result in numerous attachments, which need to be reflexively and practically negotiated. For both groups of our interviewees, those who were born and raised on other continents and now living

in Europe and those living their whole lives in Europe, the issues of Europeaness and European belonging are very complex and often loaded with ambiguities. Their perspectives on Europe are marked by ambivalence. The encounters with Europe bring the sense of familiarity and strangeness at the same time. On the one hand Europe may be perceived as a potential danger for their local identities, but on the other hand, European funding can be used in order to serve their communities. As the positive outcomes of European subsidies become evident, also Europe as a 'practical arrangement' becomes a bit 'tamed', at least in an indirect way. The EU may be pictured as a very distant or even hostile entity. Many of the decisions and actions taken by the European legislative and executive bodies are contested and during the process of contestation, as a side effect, Europe is re-discovered as a platform for the mobilization of activists of different kinds.

In the autobiographical narratives Europe becomes thematized usually when it is connected to some unresolved biographical issues, be it the problem of belonging, exclusion, identity, or other. It equally applied to both groups of out interviewees, initially categorized as 'internal' and 'external' to Europe. The results of our analysis go hand in hand with Bauman's statement that '[y]ou are not necessarily a European just because you happen to be born or to live in a city marked on the political map of Europe. But you may be European even if you've never been to any of those cities' (Bauman, 2004b: 5). Frequently taken for granted as an opportunity structure Europe is thematized in people's life stories when it becomes biographically significant. Being caught up in the difficult position of an 'in-between man', which often is a consequence of movements in space and time as well as the result of social misrecognition, one needs broader entities playing a role of a potential source of identification. Europe can play this role very well. As our analysis has demonstrated, the in-between position, if approached reflexively, can be successfully transformed into resources necessary for mediation work in different European and non-European conflict zones. As a result of biographical work done on the disappointments connected with one's misidentifications Europe may be also thematized as a 'state of mind' potentially open to all having the Jamesian will to believe in Europe as a space for sense-making practices and the source of identification. People's various practices and meanings attached to them can tell us more about Europeaness than any declarations about the shared canon of European values and ideals. There is no single perspective on Europe, be it 'internal', 'external' or any other, as there is no single European identity. It is impossible to define precisely what Europe is, where it begins and ends, but the ability to recognise, cultivate and protect diversity may be one of its core features.

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