EUROCLASH: TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION*

North american sociologists have shown dramatically little interest in the European Union or the process of European regional integration. While a healthy cottage industry in EU studies exists among political scientists in the US and Canada, the number of participants at, say, an average American Sociological Association conference who know or care anything about European integration can be counted comfortably on one hand. European sociology went all global, post- and trans-national a long time ago, and its social theorists such as Jürgen Habermas, Ulrich Beck or Gøran Therborn have often found the topic of Europe/EU a congenial playground for their ideas. Not so with the more empirical, quantitative driven sociology in America. Yet as an empirical object, the EU in terms of geography, scale, population, economy, federal structure, internal multi-levelled dynamics, and world historical significance, would prove a much better comparison for the USA than individual European nation-states. Comparative sociologists and historians in North America – who make up the main body of Europeanists there – continue to make mismatched national comparisons between the US and (i.e.) France or Germany as societies, as if fifty years of European Union had never happened. As well as the conservativism of Europeanists in North America, it also points towards the deep methodological nationalism of American sociology: not only in terms of subject matter, but also its reliance – when it does look outside of its own backyard – on the nation-by-nation data sources that carve up the conventional world of nation-state-societies.

Neil Fligstein's *Euroclash* thus represents a landmark publication in American sociology: a scholar coming from one of the heartlands of the discipline – economic sociology – tackling the EU in terms that will open it both to empirical sociologists, but also (it is hoped) bring sociology centre stage in EU studies. Sociology is acutely needed in the study of the EU. For decades now its resolutely top down focus on institutional policy making, law, diplomatic history and macro-economics has signally missed a foundational focus on the processes of European integration at the societal level, particularly the social structural origins and dynamics of European Union. One of the reasons why everyone

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thinks that there is a democratic deficit in Europe, is that the elite vision of the EU, so closely reflected by the scholars that study it, has no clear perspective on the changes Europe has wrought on the national societies that lie under the edifice. It is assumed that as societies at least, they are still largely resistant, unchanging, nationalised entities; whereas for the EU to be possible at all as a fifty year long construction process, European society must have been substantially Europeanised for the whole edifice to even stand. Fligstein's starting point appropriately is how little Europeans realise they are already Europeanised. It takes a sociologist to remind political scientists, lawyers and economists that all institutional structures have to be grounded in society somewhere. Sociology is the only discipline in fact that can show effectively that Europe is not just an elite castle floating on thin, policy wonk air. Yet its object of study – ''European society'' – is of course much harder to read than law books or policy declarations. And the transnational data that would be needed to do this – as implicit from the nationalised sources mentioned above – is even harder to come by. Therein lies the challenge to which Fligstein has risen.

His basic line is a simple, trenchant claim, restated throughout the book. The EU's remarkable rise out of the rubble of mid-century Europe is grounded in the way it has enabled new horizontal linkages across European societies. Relying on the early insights of Karl Deutsch about nation building, Fligstein asserts it is the emergence and reproduction of multiple ''social fields'' – in politics, business, education, civic associational life, consumer behaviour, and so on – that has made Europeans out of European nationals. First showing how these fields have come to characterise the business operations of manifold industries within the emerging single market during the period 1958-2004, Fligstein then goes on to explore the many other aspects of European society that have been similarly knitted together. These are the grounds – what historian Alan Milward calls the ''social bases'' of European Union – that stretch deep into the core middle class interests of the continent.

This is reflected in some simple facts that can be derived from EU identity studies. When asked, more than 50 % of the European population consistently can feel ''European'' some or all of the time. While only around 12 % will claim ''European'' as their primary identification – obvious candidates being transnational business elites, mobile students and professionals, people living in border regions – there is a basic point here about why European citizens in fact have the European Union they democratically wished for. But the majority foundation is clearly vulnerable. Over 40 % of Europeans never think of

themselves as "European" – Fligstein arguing, perhaps a little too predictably, that this means the poor, the less educated, the blue collar, the immobile. These are the folks all too ready to vote anti-European on any occasion, and are the staple of national political games. The key swing voters, though, are the balance of people (again around 40 %) who go along with Europe most of the time – but might not on certain issues or occasions. This sketches the "Euroclash" at the heart of the book. It is the middle class, the median voter essentially, that holds the future of Europe in their hands – and it is precisely these voters that at vulnerable moments have turned out at successive referenda in Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Ireland, and so on to threaten the edifice.

The book is partly a call for EU studies to return to the good old materialist sense that should always root policy making and institutions in the primacy of economic structure and pluralist politics. This, though, is an unfashionable view among EU scholars. EU studies has been dominated first by neo-functionalist theories, which basically asserted the ontological independence of institutions from society, then by an increasing drift into cultural and constructivist arguments based on ideas, norms, or reified notions of identity. Also obscuring the facts is the growing obsession with the normative "democracy in Europe" issue: the kinds of agenda set by idealists such as Habermas on the one hand, and eurosceptics like Larry Siedentop on the other. But there is sound reason, as Fligstein demonstrates, to see material interests and basic class structures as the explanatory grounding of contemporary Europe. Yes, echoing Bill Clinton's famous last words to a losing George H.W. Bush, it is indeed the economy that really determines the outcomes of elections, political negotiations, where the EU has gone, and where it still may be going.

Scholars of the EU would indeed be "stupid" to pass by the first, economics-heavy half of Fligstein's book, which offers a synthesis and restatement of his series of groundbreaking articles in economic sociology on the building of the European market. The innovation of bringing an economic sociologist's eye to the subject, is to emphasise that the European Union is primarily a market, that markets are constructed by political choices, and that not all markets resemble each other. He puts here to work the four analytical elements of market building that were used to such great effect in his now classic previous works, *The Transformation of Corporate Control* and *The Architecture of Markets*. For a market to function as a social (and political) entity it has to settle somehow on basic institutional forms: the emergence through legislation, negotiation and/or social interaction of, in this case, distinctive Europeanised conceptions of property rights,

governance structures, rules of exchange, and corporate control. Economic sociologists, of course, have been telling us to read Polanyi all along, but Fligstein's early appreciation of the EU in these terms will stand as his one most enduring contribution. For the European market is different to the North American, as they are both to the Asian. The EU found success politically precisely because its distinctive elements were institutionalised so effectively across so many sectors (as Fligstein empirically shows), engendering and reproducing business behaviour that successively deepened and broadened the social fields that operated within these economic possibilities. Chapters 2 to 4 build brilliantly on this argument, eventually going into great detail about the internal Europeanisation of the defence, telecommunications, and sports industries (principally football). This is Fligstein at his best, showing how market integration happened, not in a smooth linear fashion but with ebbs and flows, advances and retreats, as national political rhetoric, transnational business interests, and the interventions of politicians and (particularly) European lawyers, pushed and pulled this process forward. As the reader gets carried far into the detailed business dynamics of these various sectors, it is easy to lose sight of just how skilful and well chosen the juxtaposition attempted here is. Fligstein essentially shows the commonalities between these three massively important case studies of transnational business: the military industrial complex, so close to national sovereign interest in Europe and so vastly different to its American counterpart; telecommunications, an industry that perhaps most stands for the global world of mobility and borderless technology; and a sport that more than anything most defines popular culture in Europe.

The second part of the book, from chapter 5 to 7, then seeks to take the approach using social fields out into society more broadly understood, eventually circling back to tackle the most visible part of the EU ''iceberg'', as Fligstein calls it, the political sociology of EU politics. The first step here is to inquire ''Who are the Europeans?'': the people who support the EU. Fligstein relies on Eurobarometer data to define who these thoroughly socialised European citizens might be – essentially asking about the identifications that the standard surveys reveal, then breaking it down by occupational class, income, gender, nationality, education, age, and so on. This has been done before: the innovation lies in its suggestiveness that we are not just talking about revealed preferences of voters, but genuinely about underlying class structures that are restructuring a European society. There is much debate about European identity in the book – too much probably.

Fligstein shares the weakness of other existing studies on the subject: reliance on stylised data that the Eurobarometer dishes up for scholars. Further, his argument clearly is that it is behaviour not identifications or attitudes that are what count sociologically. We might need a great deal more data, from much more varied sources, about what *being* and *doing* Europe is – a short laundry list might include shopping across borders, buying property abroad, handling a common currency, looking for work in a foreign city, driving to holidays in new countries, buying cheap airline tickets online, planning international rail travel, founding city-twinning associations, and so forth. Making behaviour primary over attitudes can also alter our understanding of who and what is European. Reclassifying those Eurosceptic Brits who so enthusiastically buy second houses in Tuscany and the Dordogne, or who accept co-Europeans in their hundreds of thousands in their uniquely open domestic labour market, is actually an argument that reverses the conclusion one would get from only looking at British Eurobarometer attitudes. On these measures, the British are substantially *more* integrated – more Europeanised despite themselves – than are the more Euro-enthusiastic Italians or Greeks, who travel less and are more closed to welcoming foreigners to work.

The next chapter, on "What is European society?" is in many senses the bedrock of the book – it is perhaps a pity that it is not a book in itself. Here, Fligstein does indeed begin to look at Europeanised behaviour in various European social fields: migration and cross border mobility; education (Erasmus, textbooks, the Bologna process); and consumer behaviour in popular culture. These are all excellent ways of operationalising a sociology of European Union; it is just they are far from exhaustive. Fligstein points the way to an emergent empirical sociology of European Union that is now finally coming to fruition in other scholars' work, and his book will undoubtedly frame these efforts as the most extensive quantitative synthesis to hand. His work advances quite substantially on the two most important sociological treatises on an integrated Europe: the narrative social history of Hartmut Kaelble's *Auf dem Weg zu einer europaïsche Gesellschaft*, and the social theory driven data collection of Therborn's *European Modernity and Beyond*. Where more precision is needed perhaps is in the use of the term "social fields" here. If there are an infinity of social fields – "thousands", says Fligstein – rather than a finite number of emergent pan-national structures, the notion becomes more of a metaphor than a hard sociological concept. We need to know which social fields are getting Europeanised, and which are not, and then account

for the conditions under which fields transnationalise. We also need to contrast Europeanised social fields with those that are globalised or map onto a different international geography. The Bourdieusian hint in the book – Fligstein in the past has had a productive relation with his colleague Loïc Wacquant at Berkeley – also falls a little short of substance. What are the internal dynamics of fields, and how are they changing in terms of hierarchy, capital and domination? The point about a euro-habitus is not so difficult to prove: anthropologists such as Marc Abélès have consistently demonstrated how this is embodied, in their studies of European elites within European institutions. As a social analyst, Fligstein is constitutively more interested in entrepreneurship than domination, and his optimistic liberalism is to be applauded: the anti-globalist, Marxist cynicism in Bourdieu's (and Wacquant's) work is its least appealing dimension. But a truly Bourdieusian account of Europe would say more. Again, it is worth making the point that it is precisely because buying a house in the south of France, or having an Erasmus year out, alters behaviour in terms of habitus, field and capital – and regardless of whether the holidaymaker or student evinces a pro- or anti-EU attitude when called up by Eurobarometer.

A final chapter delves into how this sociology does and will structure EU politics. Given the social foundations, it is no surprise that major political parties have consistently upheld the EU – even when their rhetoric suggested otherwise – or that they have been punished by electorates when they took an openly EU path. Europe is an imperfect democracy, but a democracy nevertheless. A majority of Europeans understand this; an even larger number embody Europeanisation in what they do. The chapter is a necessary return to the mainstream of EU studies debates, but it will be vulnerable to criticism by those same scholars. This is a crowded terrain in which to make a contribution, and Fligstein may get read as an outsider to the technical policy debates or electoral analyses. It is to be hoped that readers in political science will not conclude that Fligstein's minor modification to the way standard EU politics is narrated, allows them to overlook the very major achievement of bringing a thoroughgoing empirical economic sociology and class-based social structural account into our understanding of the EU.

On the other hand, where mainstream sociologists may be disappointed is in Fligstein's apparent lack of appreciation of comparative societal differences *within* the EU's economy and society, notwithstanding the horizontal linkages and increasing convergence that he charts. The massive varieties of capitalism literature, which points towards the EU's great puzzlement over the different models of

reconciling welfare structures with free markets in an advanced service economy, is not touched upon. This surely is a shortcoming. EU policy makers certainly know that this is the million Euro question: it is at the heart of the Lisbon agenda, and all the debates on flexicurity. Fligstein might retort – and be able to show in data terms – that models of European economy and society are converging. But there does need to be an account of how the European single market that he so expertly analyses maps differentially onto national welfare state structures. Other voices at this point will say, yes, and this is the very agenda of the mainstream Europeanisation literature in EU policy studies. But we know after reading Fligstein that so much more is needed to reframe this Europeanisation in genuinely sociological terms.

In other ways, though, Fligstein's message about European capitalism is very timely and perceptive. His central message as a scholar has been to remind us that markets do not just happen; there are no invisible hands from a sociologist's point of view. Rather, they are deliberately and purposively constructed. It takes politics and social conflict to produce the differences we see between the North American, European and Asian varieties: in terms of how their ever expanding, regional scale markets, are structured and institutionalised, and hence implicitly what the strengths of the EU model in a global world in fact most are. Despite all the anguish about democratic deficit and the apparent sclerosis of the grand project once again, there is still the feeling that the EU could carry majority opinion with it, if it can just square that circle of the Lisbon agenda. A tall order, maybe; but not one so far from the institutional structure – the basic ''equilibrium'' identified eloquently in Andrew Moravcsik's recent commentaries – that the European economy already has. We are living now apparently in an age when the West has woken up to the fiction of neo-liberal ''anglo-american'' market ideology: the idea that markets – especially bankers, financiers, and brokers – are perfectly self-regulating, or that the rules they should be following emerge only out of the virtual gymnastics of the stock exchange. The EU as a market construction has struck a quite different kind of non-state institutional bargain. It might remain the best global model available of a liberal, sufficiently socialised, appropriately regionalised economy and society; a model that best fits the scale of everyday life that people live today in this still only partly post-national world. *Euroclash* offers the first systematic anatomy in economic and political sociology of how this version of Europe has in fact worked.

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