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CHAPTER 2

National Identity Reconsidered

1. Introduction

The aim of this book is to study the process of national identity re-definition that EU countries are going through as a result of recent international developments, in particular the European integration process and the increase in immigration flows. In the chapters that follow I explore the ways in which national identity is re-elaborated and negotiated in four European countries and members of the European Union. Attention is paid to the emergence of a tri-polar identity space in contemporary Europe, which includes national, sub-national and transnational forms of collective identification. My aim is to analyse the new discourses of nationhood emerging in the countries under examination and discuss their implications for the conceptualisation of national identity.

The empirical studies presented in Chapters 3 to 6 are based on a specific theoretical perspective that sees national identity as relational and fundamentally double-edged. National identity is inward-looking and involves a certain degree of commonality within a group. However, at the same time, it is also outward-looking: it implies difference. Its existence presupposes the existence of Others, other nations

or other individuals, who do not belong to the ingroup and from which the ingroup must be distinguished. National consciousness involves both self-awareness of the group and awareness of Others from which the nation seeks to differentiate itself. This argument is developed briefly[1] in the following sections, mainly with reference to the interaction between nation and Others. The role of Significant Others in the development and evolution of national identity is discussed. Different types of Significant Others and their impact on the ingroup's identity and representations of itself are highlighted. More particularly, I distinguish between internal and external Others and threatening and inspiring ones. Moreover, I discuss in some more detail immigrants as a particular type of Other that defies the national order. The theoretical insights developed here form the basis of the cases analysed in the following chapters. The last two chapters of the book discuss these theoretical positions in light of the empirical material analysed and highlight the changes in national identity across Europe.

2. National Identity as a Janus-faced Process[2]

Nationalist activists and also scholars of nationalism tend to consider national identity as an absolute entity. Either it exists or it does not. Either a group of people shares some specific features, be they civic or ethnic in character, that makes of them a nation, or they do not. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Triandafyllidou 2001a), this argument is misleading. National identity expresses a feeling of belonging that has a *relative* value. It makes sense only to the extent that it is contrasted with the feelings that members of the nation have towards foreigners. Fellow nationals are not simply very close or close enough to one another, they are *closer* to one another than they are to outsiders.

In this work, national identity is conceived as a double-edged relationship. On the one hand, it is inward looking, it involves a certain degree of commonality within the group. It is thus based on a set of common features that bind the

members of the nation together. These features include belief in common descent, a shared public culture, common historical memories and links to a homeland and also a common legal and economic system (Smith 1991: 14). On the other hand, national identity implies difference. It involves both self-awareness of the group but also awareness of Others from whom the nation seeks to differentiate itself. National consciousness renders both similarity and difference meaningful. This means that national identity has no meaning *per se*. It becomes meaningful in contrast to other nations. This argument is actually implicit in the nationalist doctrine, which asserts that there is a plurality of nations.

3. The Role of Boundaries

Fredrik Barth (1969; 1981) has made a significant contribution to the debate on the role that interaction with Others plays in the formation of identity. He has been predominantly concerned with ethnicity, however his approach can be applied to national identity too. He defines ethnic groups as 'categories of ascription and identification of the actors themselves [which] thus have the characteristic of organising interaction between people' (Barth 1981: 199). If ascription is seen as one type of categorisation, it is possible to broaden the field to which Barth's theory applies and include any type of collective identity, which involves both internal identification and external social categorisation of the individual. As a matter of fact, Barth himself emphasises the organisational functions of the ethnic group derived from the feature of self-ascription and ascription by others of a specific ethnic identity.

'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries' (Barth 1969) is innovative in that it proposes to view ethnicity as an organisational form realised through the process of interaction between different groups rather than as a static cultural content. Instead of defining ethnic identity as a set of features that the members of the ethnic group share, Barth looks at the dynamics of formation and maintenance of

ethnicity. According to him, ethnic identity is developed through contact with the Other, a contact that takes place at the boundary between ethnic communities. The focus of research thus should be not on its content, namely on the features, traditions, rituals or history that characterise an ethnic group and support its identity from within, but on the interaction processes through which ethnic identity is maintained and re-confirmed, despite the flow of personnel across the boundaries (Barth *ibid.:* 198).

> '(..) the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organisational form of the group may change – yet the fact of continuing dichotomisation between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content.' (Barth 1981: 203).

Thus, Barth points to the fact that ethnic identity leads to a dichotomous view of social reality, where individuals are distinguished into members of the ingroup/Us and outsiders/Them. It is thus argued that ethnic identity is a way of going about in the world, structuring one's perceptions of oneself and others as members of different ethnic groups. This argument may be extended to cover any type of collective identity. The individual's identification, both internal and external, with a particular group, be it the supporters of football team A, the voters of party B, the inhabitants of locality C, or some other type of collectivity, involves the division of the social field into members of the ingroup and Others. Of course, the consequences of such identifications and social categorisations may have a lesser impact on the individual's life than national identity does. Still, what is of interest here is that their existence implies the perception of an Other and inevitably involves interaction, real or imaginary, with that Other. In a world organised into nations and national or multinational states, ethnicity or nationality are crucial aspects of identification and social categorisation of an individual, with wide consequences for the individual's life chances.

Moreover, Barth argues that the cultural features used to differentiate and distinguish between two ethnic groups are not their 'objective' differences but those elements that are socially important because these groups see them as such:

> 'The features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as *significant* (..) some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and *emblems of differences*, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied.' (Barth 1969: 14, *emphasis* added).

By the same token, cultural difference *per se* does not entail the organisation of ethnic groups. Particular meanings have to be attributed to cultural differences so that these lead to the organisation of contrastive ethnic identities. The co-variation of cultural features and ethnic boundaries does not necessarily mean that the two are interdependent. Difference may exist without playing the role of the marker between Us and Them. In fact, the path followed is usually the opposite: differences place the features of social organisation into distinct and separate groups and are therefore codified as idioms of identification/ differentiation between groups (Blom 1969). This perspective is particularly important in order to understand the role of the Other in the formation of national identity. Differences between nations are not objectively defined for the simple reason that a group of people residing in a territory have different customs or speak a different language and abide by a different set of laws from their neighbours. The two communities do not constitute two separate nations because of these 'objective' differences. On the contrary, these differences in their lifestyles, culture, religion, language or civic mores are rendered meaningful through the contrast between the two groups.[3] In other words, cultural or political divergence is not the *raison d'être* of the division between members of the nation and outsiders. Rather it is the process of constituting the national community that

requires that some, not necessarily all, traditions or cultural features are used as 'emblems of difference' from one or more outgroups (see also Gellner 1983).

In fact, as Barth (*ibid.*) argues, dichotomisation between members and non-members persists and ensures the continuity of the group as a form of social organisation, whilst the features that characterise it may change. It is socially relevant factors that determine which differences are important, not the 'objective' character of such differences. This view of ethnic identity is particularly important for my analysis of the role of the Other in the formation of the nation because it shows that (a) collective identity, and for that matter ethnicity or national identity, is an organisational process that structures social interaction between members and outsiders and (b) it provides for a vessel into which various types of content can fit.

This argument raises a number of related points. First, if difference is defined by social factors so is similarity. In other words, the specific features considered to characterise each group, i.e. the cultural content of ethnic or national identity, are shaped through interaction between different groups. If, as Barth argues, some differences are emphasised and others marginalised, this implies that some features will be taken to symbolise the identity of the specific group, the essence of membership of it, and others will be downplayed. In this sense, ethnic but also national identity is formed and constantly re-defined and developed through interaction with other collectivities or groups.

Second, different elements may be socially relevant in distinguishing between different pairs of groups. More specifically, the 'emblems of difference' between group A and group B may not coincide with those between group A and group C. With regard to ethnic groups, Barth does not give a clear answer as to which factors determine which differences are considered socially important in a given context. He only hints at the relevance of the overall socio-cultural system (1981: 203) in this matter. In my view, just as identity is defined both from within

and from outside, similarly difference between two nations is constructed both internally and externally. From within, difference will depend on the specific features that characterise the ingroup and make it distinctive and/or unique. Here, a number of elements related to the history and collective memories of the nation may play an important part. From outside, difference is defined in relation to the specific outgroup, its own features and history as well as with reference to the values prevailing in the wider socio-cultural system in which the two groups operate. Thus, both groups will try to show that they score better on a dimension that is valued in their society. If the groups in question belong to different societies, e.g. two nations, reference will be made to the values and/or cultural codes that characterise the wider socio-political system of which they are both members, e.g. the West, the Arab world, the international community and so on. The existence of such a common social space is postulated because in its absence, it would be impossible to talk about difference or commonality between the two groups.

Thus, interaction with different groups will lead to the emphasis of one difference instead of another and attention will concentrate on one cultural form or content instead of another as being distinctive of each group. Consequently, the interaction with the Other will affect the definition of the We. This conclusion holds not only with reference to ethnic groups, which were Barth's point of departure, but also with regard to nations. National identity is formed and consolidated through interaction, co-operation or conflict with Significant Others, which influence the shape that national identity will take and the importance that will be assigned to one or other feature that characterises the ingroup.

Another aspect of Barth's theory (1981: 204-5) that is worth considering is the fact that boundaries between ethnic groups are not necessarily territorial. A social boundary exists whenever social interaction is structured by mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, whereby members are recognised and distinguished from non-members (i.e. members of other groups). This argument supports and

complements Barth's view that ethnic identity is formed through interaction with the Other rather than within the group and is valid for any type of social group. Most social groups exist in the same social and territorial space. This however does not prevent them from putting into motion mechanisms of mutual inclusion and exclusion. Such processes characterise, in fact, the interaction between members of the nation and members of minorities or immigrant communities. This constant re-creation of boundaries is a strategy of identity formation and negotiation. Through signifying Otherness, members of the ingroup also define who they are and which are the specific features that render, in their view, their community particular and unique.

As a matter of fact, the boundary is the point of realisation of both identity and difference. As Cohen suggests (1985: 13), the consciousness of a community is directly related to the perception of its boundaries. These boundaries are themselves constituted by people in interaction. According to Cohen, what is important is not whether the physical or structural boundaries of the community remain intact but rather the perception on the part of its members of the vitality of their culture and the meaning they attach to their community. This argument can also be turned on its head: if the ingroup culture or identity is insecure or its members perceive it to be threatened, they will try to secure and clarify its boundaries by means of contrasting themselves to specific outgroups. Such processes of constituting the collective Self and the Other(s) are activated towards salient outgroups, namely groups that are close to the ingroup, symbolically or geographically, and whose presence is (perceived as) threatening or inspiring the latter.

4. Significant Others

The history of each nation is marked by the presence of Significant Others; other groups that have influenced the development of its identity by means of their

'inspiring' or 'threatening' presence. The notion of a Significant Other refers to another nation or ethnic group that is usually territorially close to, or indeed within, the national community. Significant Others are characterised by their peculiar relationship to the ingroup's identity: *they represent what the ingroup is not*. They condition the ingroup, either because they are a source of inspiration for it, an example to follow for achieving national grandeur, or because they threaten (or are perceived to threaten) its presumed ethnic or cultural purity and/or its independence. In some cases, the features of the Significant Other are judged negatively and the nation may modify its own identity so as to differentiate itself from the Significant Other(s). In other instances, however, the features of the Significant Other are highly valued by the ingroup, which may seek to incorporate some of these into its own traditions and identity.

Throughout the history of a nation more than one nation or ethnic group become salient outgroups, namely Significant Others, and even at any one time more than one group may be identified, against which the nation seeks to assert itself and which in turn influences its identity. Nonetheless, the relationship between the nation and the Significant Other should be understood as an interaction between two opposite poles, the ingroup and the outgroup. Each nation may thus be involved in more than one of such pairs. In order to examine the influence that each salient outgroup has had on the development of the ingroup's national identity, we should look at them in their one-to-one relationship as Us and Them.

A Significant Other need not be a stronger or larger nation or a community with more resources than the ingroup. The feature that makes some other group a Significant Other is its *close* relationship with the nation's sense of identity and uniqueness. Social psychological research has shown that a given group will engage in comparisons only with relevant outgroups. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979: 41), factors such as similarity, proximity and situational salience

may influence the comparability between two groups and the higher the comparability the greater will be the pressure for confirming ingroup superiority through comparison with that particular outgroup. In fact, dissimilar outgroups are already distinctive from the ingroup, hence there is little need to differentiate from them. In contrast, those that share a set of common features with the ingroup pose a threat to its distinctiveness and uniqueness (Johnston and Hewstone 1990: 188-9). Thus, Significant Others are by definition groups that share with the nation some common features, be they cultural, ethnic or territorial.

Because of their close relationship with the nation, Significant Others *pose a challenge* to it. This challenge may be of a positive and peaceful character, when the outgroup is perceived as an object of admiration and esteem, an exemplary case to be imitated, a group with a set of features to be incorporated into the national identity, a higher ground to be reached by the nation, in brief, an *inspiring*[4] Significant Other. This challenge, however, may at times take the character of a threat, it may be seen as a danger to be avoided, an enemy to fight against, an outgroup to be destroyed, if necessary, an Other that represents all that the nation rejects and despises: a *threatening* Significant Other.

More specifically, the Significant Other may pose a challenge to the ingroup with reference to its culture, territory or both elements. The threatening outgroup may challenge the nation's independence and self-determination, i.e. it may be a nation that is in conflict with the ingroup because of a territorial or ethnic dispute. However, it may also be a group that threatens to blur the distinctiveness of the ingroup. According to social psychological research on group behaviour, the strongest competition between two groups may be expected to occur where in reality there is the least reason to distinguish one group from the other (Turner 1975: 22). Identity implies both uniqueness and the recognition of similarity between the members of the group, which makes their uniqueness meaningful. Thus, argue Lemaine *et al*. (1978: 287), 'a threatened identity can [..]

be restored by means of a search for difference and Otherness, the creation of, and then the emphasis upon, heterogeneity'. Therefore, it may happen that a neighbouring group, which shares a set of cultural traditions and/or historical experiences with the nation, is perceived as a Significant Other because it threatens the sense of distinctiveness and uniqueness of the latter. An inspiring Significant Other, on the other hand, is a model-nation, admired not for its features as such, but for the way in which it has developed and/or preserved its nationhood (e.g. its struggle to achieve political independence or to emancipate and purify the national culture from foreign influence). The inspiring Other is not seen as part of the ingroup but as a model to be imitated.

Significant Others are also classified into *internal*, i.e. those that belong to the same political entity with the ingroup, and *external* ones, namely those that form a separate political unit (see table 2.1, below). Following this distinction, for a nation which is in possession of its own state or which forms the dominant national majority within a national state, an internal Significant Other may be an ethnic minority or an immigrant community. Similarly, for a nation that forms part of a larger multinational political unit, the internal Significant Other may be either the national majority or some other small nation within the state or, finally, an immigrant community. With regard to external Significant Others, a nation which is organised in a nation-state or forms part of a multinational state may perceive as a Significant Other another nation, be it in possession of a state or forming part of a multinational polity, or an ethnic community which makes part of a larger political unit or indeed a transnational entity.

These various types of Significant Others may, of course, be perceived as either inspiring or threatening for the nation. Moreover, their positive or negative image may change in different periods. They may be initially an inspiring Significant Other and later be perceived as a threat to the ingroup, as, for instance,

happened between Croats and Serbs in the beginning of the last century (Triandafyllidou 1998b). Let me, however, examine this typology in more detail.

4.1 Internal Others

Ethnic minorities that have participated in the constitution of the state within which the ingroup forms the national majority, may become threatening Significant Others for the latter. Such minorities usually have a distinct culture, language, traditions and myths of origin from the dominant nation and may therefore be perceived by the latter to pose a threat either to the territorial integrity of the state, if they raise secessionist claims, or to its cultural unity, when they assert their right to difference and thus disrupt the cultural and political order of the national state. The indigenous population in Mexico, for instance, may be analysed as a threatening Significant Other for Mexican nationalism, even though recently an effort has been made to incorporate it into the national tradition (Carbò 1997).

Besides, it is not uncommon that one nation has its own state but also that part of this nation lives as an ethnic minority within the boundaries of another national or multinational state, such as the Serbian minority in Croatia, the Albanian minority in Macedonia and Serbia, the Turkish minority in Greece or the German minority in the Czech Republic. In that case, the Serbian ethnic minority, for instance, may constitute an internal Significant Other for the Croat national majority within Croatia, while Serbia may become an external Significant Other for the Croats. Within such a context, the relationship between the nation and the Significant Others that surround it may be particularly complex.

In point of fact, an ethnic minority is rarely an inspiring Significant Other for some nation, if not for any other reason than the mere fact that ethnicity is a lesser type of identity in the eyes of the nationalist, it is in a sense a '*nation manquée*.' Such a community has neither achieved political independence nor

created a high culture, as a nation would do, so it cannot inspire the expectations of national grandeur nurtured by the ingroup. This is true regardless of whether the ingroup and the ethnic community form part of the same political unit (a national or multinational state) or not.

The second type of internal Significant Others refers to immigrant communities. These may become internal Significant Others when their different language, religion or mores are perceived to threaten the cultural and/or ethnic purity of the nation. The nation is then likely to engage in a process of re-affirmation of its identity and seek to re-define it, so as to differentiate the ingroup from the newcomers. As a matter of fact, there is virtually no record of an immigrant population that is perceived as an inspiring Significant Other for the host nation. The negative and threatening representation of the immigrant seems to be an intrinsic feature of the host-immigrant relationship, deriving, among other things,[5] from the fact that the immigrant's presence defies the social and political order of the nation.

Table 2.1: Internal and External Significant Others

INGROUP:	Nation in national state	Nation in multinational state	Nation in national state	Nation in multinational state
SIGNIFICANT OTHER:	INTERNAL		EXTERNAL	
Element challenged by the Significant Other*:*				
CULTURE	Ethnic minority	Ethnic minority		
	Immigrant community	Immigrant community		Dominant ethnic group
		Small nation		Dominant nation
		Dominant nation	Other nation	Other nation
			Transnational entity	Transnational entity
TERRITORY	Ethnic minority	Ethnic minority		Dominant ethnic group
		Small nation	Other nation	Dominant nation
		Dominant nation	Transnational entity	Other nation
				Transnational entity

Source: Adapted from Triandafyllidou (2001a: 35).

A small nation existing within a larger multinational state may perceive as an internal, threatening Significant Other the dominant nation, as happens for instance in the Quebec-Canada or the Scotland-UK cases. Indeed, the dynamics of the relationship between a small nation and the dominant national community often involve the quest for political autonomy on the part of the former and its search for distinctiveness, as well as the desire of the latter to dominate the state institutions, as if these were the political expression solely of its own culture and identity. This contrast often serves in the demarcation of the territorial or cultural-symbolic boundaries of both groups because it accentuates the features that

distinguish them from one another. Rarely if ever does a small nation perceive the dominant one as a positive Significant Other.

Moreover, a small nation may perceive as an internal Significant Other another small nation or an immigrant community. With regard to the former, the rivalry and contrast between the two may involve competition for resources available from the centralised state or it may entail competing territorial or cultural claims (e.g. the Francophone and Flemish communities in Belgium). The relationship between two small nations in a multinational state may however also be a positive one, to the extent that another small nation may be an inspiring Significant Other for the ingroup (e.g. Catalan and Basque nationalism for the Galician movement in Spain). A small nation may also define its identity in contrast to an immigrant community, which is perceived as a threat to the purity and authenticity of the nation because of its alien language, mores or religion (e.g. Moroccan immigrants in Catalunya).

4.2 External Others

With regard to external Significant Others, four types can be distinguished. The first type, which is particularly relevant for the initial stages of nation formation, is the dominant nation or ethnic group of a multinational state from which the ingroup seeks to liberate and/or distinguish itself (e.g. Eritrea and the Ethiopian Significant Other). Indeed, the identity of the new nation is shaped in contrast to the dominant nation or ethnic group (Gellner 1964; 1983): its main features are those that distinguish it from the latter. Besides, the struggle for liberation further accentuates the contrast between the two: the new nation is what the dominant nation or ethnic group is not. Rarely is the dominant nation an inspiring Significant Other for the emerging group, except for post-colonial movements, which largely adopt an imported model of social and political organisation.

The second type of external Significant Other concerns neighbouring nations (or national states), which may threaten the ingroup, or be a source of inspiration for it. Threatening external Others may be rival nations that contest some part of the ingroup's homeland or that are in possession of lands that the ingroup claims to be part of its own territory, the nation's *irredenta*. This type of external Significant Other may lead to the re-definition of the territorial boundaries of the nation or it may accentuate its irredentist tendencies and emphasise a specific ethnic, cultural or indeed religious conception of the ingroup, which supports such tendencies (e.g. Pakistan and the threatening Indian Other).

A third type of external Significant Other that needs to be distinguished are nations, nation-states or ethnic groups which are territorially close to the ingroup but do not contest its territorial boundaries. They rather raise claims to the ingroup's cultural heritage by means of asserting that specific myths, symbols and/or ancestors are part of their national past. They thus threaten the ingroup's sense of uniqueness and authenticity. The ingroup may therefore be led to re-define its identity in order to assert that the contested symbols or myths are its own cultural *property*. Eloquent examples of the tensions between neighbouring nations are encountered in the Balkan region: Greece's relationships with the Bulgarian and Turkish Significant Other in the beginning of the last century (Triandafyllidou 1998b) cast light on the identity dynamics developed between the ingroup and a rival nation that contests its territoriality and political independence, while the more recent controversy over the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) (Triandafyllidou *et al.* 1997) illustrates the cultural challenge dynamics.

Nonetheless, other nations may also be a source of inspiration for their successful nationalist struggles and/or their vitality in asserting their identity and culture. Overall, western European nations such as England or France, were in

this sense inspiring Significant Others for the emerging nations of southern and eastern Europe (e.g. Greece or Italy) in the nineteenth century.

In recent times, transnational entities have emerged as a new type of external Significant Other in the European context. The European Communities, and more recently the European Union, have grown into an external largely inspiring but also at times threatening Significant Other for European nations. This is true not only for EU member states but also for neighbouring countries that make up part of the European geographical and cultural region. Leaving aside the economic and social impact of membership of the EU, it poses a challenge to national identity because it requires that part of national sovereignty is transferred to European institutions and governing bodies. Thus, the EU indirectly challenges the territorial identity of the nation. The national territory is no longer the locus of the exclusive and absolute national sovereignty. National laws and the decisions of the national government have to be consistent with European rulings. At the same time, a deepening and widening process of European integration implies that a sense of Europeanness has to be integrated into the ingroup's sense of identity. Nation(-states) that make up the EU have a right to do so because they belong to Europe, even though the meaning of 'belonging to Europe' remains ill-defined. Still this 'potential Europeanness' implies a common culture and history and also a common project for the future, that of integration into a European Union. Both the recognition of the common past and the acceptance of the common future challenge the very foundations of nationhood. This in fact is true both for nations that enjoy statehood and those that do not.

In other words, transnational entities of the type of the EU may be powerful, inspiring or threatening, external Others for a nation. Indeed, the EU is often seen as a threat to the territory and culture of the nation. More precisely, it is seen as a threat to the nation-state, namely to its political institutions and monopoly of power and coercion. It is also seen as a challenge to national culture

and identity because of the increasing degree of openness that it brings with it by facilitating inter-national contact, exchange and interaction at all levels of social and economic life. On the other hand, the EU is also seen as an opportunity by many nations: an opportunity to promote the national welfare and also, especially by nations without their own states such as Scotland or Catalunya, as a guarantee of autonomy within their multi-national mother-countries. Thus, the plurality, flexibility and consensus politics characterising a transnational entity like the EU may also be an inspiring Significant Other for many nations.

4.3 Illustrating Complex Dynamics

In distinguishing between external and internal Significant Others, and further sub-types within them, my aim is to highlight the different dynamics that are developed between the nation and Others and the ways in which these condition the development of national identity. It is worth noting that internal Significant Others (are perceived to) erode the unity and/or authenticity of the nation from within, while external Significant Others (are deemed to) challenge the territorial and/or cultural integrity of the nation from outside. Thus, the external Significant Other is easily recognisable as the Other, identifiable with another state or transnational entity and, therefore, its contrast to the nation must be seen in the context of international relations. The external Significant Other may be perceived to threaten the very position of the nation in the world of nations (and nation-states) because it challenges its distinctiveness and its right to self-determination. This holds for both national and transnational external Others.

The relationship between the nation and an internal Significant Other forms part of identity politics within a state. The internal Significant Other disrupts the cultural and political order of the nation, and thus challenges its sense of unity and authenticity. Even though an internal Significant Other may threaten to secede and tear off a part of the national territory or may contest the national

culture, it usually cannot put into question the existence of the ingroup. The challenge of the external Significant Other refers to the external boundaries of the nation while that of the internal one raises issues concerning the internal boundaries of the nation and the national state.

It is however common that a nation(-state) perceives its independence as threatened by another nation(-state) – an external Significant Other – and, at the same time, sees its internal cohesion and presumed authenticity challenged by a minority – an internal Other – that belongs to the same nation. This is, for instance, so in the case of Turkey and the Muslim minority of western Thrace for Greece, Serbia and the Serbian minority for Croatia and Russia and the Russian minority in the Ukraine, to name just a few well-known examples. Tension between the nation and this pair of Significant Others is usually high because the ingroup perceives a double challenge: a cultural and a territorial one. As history shows, relations between the dominant nation and the ethnic minority in such cases tend to be strained: members of the minority tend to be seen as potential ‘conspirators’ or ‘traitors’. Their civic allegiance to the nation is put into question because of their close relation to the external Other, that is perceived to challenge the national independence and integrity of the ingroup. In other words, the internal politics of identity become intertwined with international politics and power relations. The external boundary, the border between the two countries, is thus transposed to the interior: it becomes an internal boundary that structures society and prevents the full integration of the minority (the internal Other).

Even though both politicians and researchers tend to concentrate on threatening Significant Others, inspiring ones are no less important for the development and/or transformation of national identity. Inspiring Others are usually found outside the nation, in a separate political entity from the one the ingroup belongs to, although a positive Other may also be an internal one. They are usually other nations that have managed to achieve independence or to

preserve their cultural autonomy and which thus provide a model for the development, consolidation and/or revitalisation of the ingroup identity. Further, transnational entities may play the part of inspiring Others as exemplary cases of accommodation of cultural diversity, as models for growth and/or as positively valued larger communities of which the nation wishes to become part. If the external Significant Other is seen positively, as an inspiring Other, it may be seen as an ally, a collaborator, or an example to follow, through which to promote the national well-being.

The nations or ethnic communities which fall under one of the types of Significant Others defined above should be seen as *potential* Significant Others. These are groups that are related to the ingroup by two apparently contradictory features. On the one hand, they are different from it, they represent what the ingroup is not, and, on the other hand, they pose a challenge to it by contesting or inspiring its existence and sense of identity. But they only become Significant Others when their threatening or inspiring presence becomes *salient*. This happens during periods of instability and crisis, when the territorial and symbolic boundaries of the ingroup are unstable and/or unclear. Significant Others, for instance, are identified during the phase of nation formation when national identity is still in the making. They thus serve to strengthen the sense of belonging to the ingroup and to demarcate its territorial, ethnic or cultural boundaries either because they (are perceived to) threaten its existence or because they provide a model for it.

Significant Others become salient also during periods of social, political or economic crisis. The positive Significant Other may, in that case, be seen as a model to follow for resolving the crisis. The threatening Other may serve to overcome the crisis because it unites the people before a common enemy, it reminds them 'who we are' and emphasises that 'we are different and unique'. In circumstances of crisis, the outgroup may also serve as a scapegoat (Doob 1964:

253). If it is the national identity that is contested, the threatening Other helps to clarify the boundaries of the ingroup and to reinforce its members' sense of belonging. If, in contrast, the nation undergoes a period of general economic or socio-political crisis, the Other provides a 'distraction' from the real causes of the crisis. Moreover, it is a means of re-asserting the positive identity of the nation against the odds.[6] In either case, the Significant Other becomes the lever for transition towards a new identity. Through the confrontation with the Significant Other the identity of the ingroup is transformed in ways that make it relevant under a new set of circumstances and respond better to the emotive or material needs of the members of the nation.

5. Immigrants as Others

Among the various types of Significant Others discussed in section four, immigrant communities are seen to play an important role as threatening internal Others. A negative and threatening representation of immigrant groups characterises the host-immigrant relationship, based mainly on the fact that the latter's presence defies the social and political order of the nation. My aim in this section is to study the relationship between the nation and the immigrant(s) as a Significant Other(s) and to examine the extent to which Othering the immigrant is functional to the development of national identity and to achieving or enhancing national cohesion. The immigrant is a potential threatening Other because s/he crosses the national boundaries, thus challenging the ingroup identification with a specific culture, territory or ethnic origin as well as the overall categorisation of people into nationals and Others. In other words, the immigrant poses a challenge to the ingroup's presumed unity and authenticity, which it threatens to 'contaminate'.

Immigration by definition involves that members of one nation or nation-state emigrate to a host country of which they are not nationals. As Sayad (1991)

argues, the phenomenon of emigration-immigration involves an absence-presence that is against the national order: the immigrant is absent from the country of which s/he is a national, while s/he is present at a different country, to which s/he does not belong. In a world organised into nations and national states, this absence from the country of origin and presence in a foreign one leads to the exclusion of the immigrant from either society. It is worth noting that immigration/emigration becomes a problem only in a world of national states, where ethnic and cultural boundaries have to coincide with political ones.

The relationship between the immigrant and the host nation and, more particularly, the immigrant's transformation from a potential to an actual threatening Other are linked to the preservation of the host nation's identity and/or to its overcoming a period of crisis. A thorough understanding of the immigrant's role as a Significant Other involves the study of this double dynamic: on the one hand, the immigrant as a contradiction within the national order and, on the other hand, the functions that the Othering of the immigrant has for the ingroup and the host society. Nowadays, when the traditional post-war alliances between 'East' and 'West', 'Capitalism' and 'Socialism' are reorganised and the very geo-political boundaries of Europe re-shuffled, it becomes necessary to identify a new Other by contrast to which the identity and cohesion of the ingroup is reinforced.

Most European countries conceive of themselves as national states, where the state is the political expression of the dominant nation. This idea implies a static view of culture and ethnic descent: these are seen as homogeneous and unique. Their presumed purity and authenticity has to be protected from the intrusions of foreigners. Thus, pluralism is accepted only (and not always) to the extent that a nation or ethnic minority is a constitutive element of the country, namely made part of the state from its very moment of creation and is in some way integrated into the national narrative. Even in those cases, of course, the potential for conflict between the dominant nation and minorities is high. A

plurality of identities and cultures is not easily accommodated within national states.

In some countries immigrant communities are integrated into the national history, and the cultural, territorial, civic and genealogical links between these populations and the nation are officially recognised. Thus, as happens in France and the UK, the links between the 'mother-country' and its former colonies are deemed to justify, under certain conditions, the conferral of citizenship on people of immigrant origin.[7] Nonetheless, often the status of citizenship does not suffice to guarantee the social integration of these people. In fact, it is not unusual for individuals of immigrant origin, who have acquired by birth or residence the citizenship of the 'host'[8] country, to continue to be discriminated against in practice. Discriminatory behaviour or practices are related to race, namely skin complexion and phenotypic characteristics, culture or a combination of both. Even though having access to the status of permanent resident or, indeed, the citizenship of that country constitutes a major step towards immigrant integration, a study of the process of Othering the immigrant must pay particular attention to more subtle mechanisms of discrimination and ingroup-outgroup construction.

It is worth noting that not all immigrants are perceived as Significant Others and, in particular, as threatening Significant Others. With regard to the European Union, for instance, citizens of fellow member states are endowed with the same rights and duties as the host country nationals, because they are citizens of the Union. Moreover, these people do not generally suffer from discrimination in the social sphere. Similarly, North Americans and citizens from other industrialised countries may be foreigners in Europe but do not form part of the negative stereotype usually associated to immigration. In other words, the process of Othering the immigrant is activated towards specific groups.

The common feature that characterises such outgroups is their *subordinate* position in society[9] and the existence of ethnic, cultural, religious or racial

markers that distinguish them from the dominant group. Such markers are not the reason for which these groups are perceived as threatening outgroups. On the contrary, difference is context-bound: in one case, religious markers may be prevalent (for instance, anti-Muslim sentiment in the UK) while in another situation ethnic categorisation may be emphasised (e.g. prejudice against Albanians in Greece). The Othering of specific immigrant groups serves the interests and identity of the dominant nation. Immigrants become the negative Other in contrast to whom a positive ingroup identity is constructed and/or reinforced. Moreover, they provide for flexible and disenfranchised labour in an increasingly globalised post-industrial economy. Their construction as Significant threatening Others legitimises their social and political exclusion from the host society.

There are two types of discourse that pervade the process of constructing the threatening immigrant Other. On the one hand, there is an overtly biologising, racist language, which, although condemned by the social and political norms of Western societies, is often involved in the process of excluding, socially and politically, the immigrant communities from the host country. On the other hand, discriminatory practices are supported by a cultural differentialist discourse, according to which there are irreducible differences between certain cultures that prevent the integration of specific immigrant populations into the host society (van Dijk 1997).

The relationship between power or privilege and racism or cultural prejudice has been explored from different perspectives – economic, sociological, linguistic and ideological – by a large number of researchers. It has been shown that racial or ethnic prejudice and discriminatory discourse or behaviour are related to the power structure of society and serve to maintain the privilege of one group over another (Essed 1991; Riggins 1997; van Dijk 1993; Wellman 1993). Exploring further this line of inquiry, however, goes beyond the scope of this

chapter. My interest is to explore the features of race or culture that make them suitable as markers for differentiating and subordinating the outgroup.

The notion of race includes a variety of features such as parental lineage, phenotype (skin colour, stature, and genetic traits) as well as the combination of physical attributes with cultural characteristics. Racism is not necessarily linked to ethnicity or nationalism. As Silverman observes (1991: 74), in nineteenth century England and France the concept of race referred to social difference: the poor were distinguished from the aristocratic 'race'. What is common to the various definitions of the concept is that it is associated with *natural* difference: it implies shared characteristics, be they phenotypic, cultural or other, that cannot be chosen or shed (Manzo 1996: 19). This does not mean that racial difference is indeed natural but rather that it has been socially constructed as such. It is perceived as irreducible and, hence, threatening for the nation and/or nation-state.

Clearly, one should not equate a socio-political situation that allows for the perpetuation of latent racism with one in which the perpetration of racist behaviour, the organisation of racist movements and the acceptance of institutionalised racism are integrated into the system. This, however, does not mean that 'subtle' or 'symbolic' racism (Dovidio and Gaertner 1986) is harmless. It still treats difference as permanent because natural, and inherently negative, threatening, a problem to be solved.

The discourse of cultural difference has some similarity with that of biological racism because it links culture to nature. Cultural difference is seen as irreducible, because dependent upon ethnic descent, a presumed psychological predisposition, environmental factors or a specific genetic makeup. Thus, Others are constructed as alien, unfamiliar and less developed. In fact, nationalism brings with it the seed of discrimination against minorities. The notion of 'authenticity' of the national culture, language or traditions, intrinsic to civic and not only ethnic nationalism, implies that cultural difference is undesirable. The underlying idea is

that 'someone else's roots are growing in the national/ethnic soil, distorting the particular form of human nature that ought to be sprouting there' (Manzo *ibid.*: 23). Hence, the national order has to be restored by means of excluding the Other both physically and symbolically from Our society.

It has been argued that the effects of culturalist or differentialist discourses differ little from biological racism: they are *racist* even if their arguments are not explicitly racial (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992: 12-13). Of course, cultural difference provides scope for fluidity and change in social patterns and allegiances: members of minority groups may make conscious decisions to abandon some but hold on to other attributes of the minority culture, as they see it. Or, minority groups may themselves strive to maintain cultural distinctiveness alongside full social and political integration. Race, in contrast, cuts across a population without the possibility of nuancing or changing one's skin colour. Nonetheless, Silverman (1991: 79-80) points out that the two types of discourse are conceptually and historically interrelated. The key to understanding the importance of race and culture and their role in the relationship between the nation and the immigrant is the fact that they can both be defined as transcendental notions, linked to *nature* rather than *nurture* and, hence, irreducible. They, thus, justify the Othering of the immigrant in moral and identity terms and allow for the process of creating a threatening Significant Other in contrast to which the nation asserts and delineates its identity. Moreover, these naturalising and moralising arguments legitimise the *status quo* and the distribution of power within the nation-state.

6. Conclusions

This chapter has illustrated the theoretical approach to national identity that is adopted in this book. In this approach, attention is paid to the development, consolidation or transformation of national identity through interaction with

Others. Nations are formed through a double process of internal identification based on pre-existing cultural, political, historical and territorial features that bind a collectivity together, and of external definition that is activated through interaction with outsiders. The notion of Significant Others has been introduced as a useful analytical tool for studying real or 'imagined' interaction between the nation and Others. More specifically, the potential impact of interaction between nations, or between a nation and an ethnic or immigrant community or between a nation(-state) and a transnational entity, such as the European Union, has been elaborated. The different levels, territorial or cultural, of national identity that Others may challenge have also been highlighted. Moreover, the role of the immigrant as a particular type of internal Other, who challenges the social and political status quo of the national state has been addressed. The immigrant Other is characterised by her/his subordinate position in the host society which is constructed through the use of racial, ethnic, cultural or religious markers. The use of these different types of markers and, in particular, the discourse of racialisation and that of cultural difference have been briefly examined. The functional role of the immigrant as an internal Other has thus been highlighted.

In the following chapters, I shall use the theoretical framework presented above to analyse the press discourse of the four countries under examination, namely Britain, Germany, Greece and Italy, over the past twenty years. I shall examine the representations of the ingroup/the nation; of internal Others, i.e. ethnic minorities and immigrant communities and of external Others, namely other EU member states, Central and Eastern European countries, the EEC and later EU as a whole and, last but not least, representations of Europe as a cultural, political or geographical region, distinct from the project of European integration. The relationship between these representations in each national press discourse and the changes that have occurred during the past two decades will be analysed

with a view to putting into focus the different images of the nation, and of nationhood in general, promoted in each country.

Notes

[1] For a full discussion of this argument, see Triandafyllidou (2001a).

[2] Earlier versions of the following sections have appeared in Triandafyllidou 2001a, Chapters 2 and 3.

[3] On this point, see a recent study on national ingroup stereotypes of the British in the presence or absence of an outgroup (Americans) (Hopkins and Murdoch 1999).

[4] The inspiring Significant Other is clearly distinguished from the ingroup: it does not form part of the national 'we'. However, it is highly valued and provides an example to follow for realising to the full the national potential for self-determination and cultural expression.

[5] Other factors accounting for xenophobia and racism towards immigrants include race as well as lack of communication between the two groups, the poverty of immigrants and their marginal position within the host society.

[6] Social-psychological research (Tajfel 1979; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel and Forgas 1981) has shown that social comparison processes, i.e. comparison between social groups, serve to achieve and/or maintain a positive group identity.

[7] The expression 'people of immigrant origin' is used to cover the variety of cases of individuals or groups that find themselves in the grey zone between the nation-ingroup and the aliens-outgroup. Besides, the different types of groups that may be classified under this category vary between countries depending on their particular history and citizenship and immigration law. Thus, for instance, in Britain where formerly immigrant groups have become settled and are regarded as such by the majority of the population, the term 'ethnic minorities' has prevailed – which also signifies the fact that they are seen as part of the 'national' community – in public and political discourse. In France, too, a large part of the population of immigrant origin is French by birth. Thus, a variety of terms is used to talk about minority groups including '*les étrangers*' (the foreigners) or '*population d'origine etrangére*' (population of foreign origin). In Germany, in contrast, the terminology used is dominated by terms such as '*Gastarbeiter*' (guestworkers) or '*Ausländer*' (foreigners). Only recently, the term 'our foreign co-citizens' has been coined to account for the fact that often the so-called *Ausländer* were born in Germany of parents born in Germany or established in the country for most of their lives.

[8] The term 'host country' is used here in an euphemistic sense to distinguish the country of residence from the country of ethnic origin of these people. Of course, their so-called host country is often 'their country' because they were born and/or have lived most of their lives there.

[9] For a broader discussion of the concept of race, racism and the racialisation of boundaries which

informs my analysis here, see Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992), Chapter 1 in particular.