HOMO EUROPAEUS:

IDENTITY, BUREAUCRACY AND BELONGING IN BRUSSELS

102,942 words

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

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Michaelmas 2021

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic study of identity, belonging and bureaucracy among permanent officials in and around the European Union civil service. Drawing on fieldwork carried out in the European Quarter of Brussels over 18 months, its focus encompasses two central research queries. The first seeks to capture a shifting institutional ethos inside the European Commission, investigating how policymakers see their roles as Union officials and embody, negotiate and problematize a particular administrative identity. The second analyzes how Europeanness as a recognition of selfhood, a mode of belonging and a way of life is enacted and performed within these spaces. Data was collected primarily through semi-structured, in-person interviews with current and former officials working in 16 policy directorates and services. The study pays special consideration to the aspects, norms and formalities of 'work-life', defined as the dimensions of experience pertaining to one's occupation. It argues that Brussels-based European identity is not a delimited category anchored in specific points in time and space but an 'elective identity' that is a steppingstone to a global cosmopolitan manner of being in and interacting with the world. Its findings speak to an anthropological understanding of the conditions and possibilities for being European and belonging to Europe, where Europeanness emerges as an assertion of systemic integration in a turbulent geopolitical context marked by overlapping crises and enduring fragmentation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a doctoral thesis drawn is a profoundly humbling experience. The work that has gone into it could never have been completed without the support of a great many individuals. This is especially true in light of all the trouble I managed to get myself into along the way.

I wish to chiefly thank my supervisor Dr Robert Parkin, whose advice and feedback has proven indispensable for my giving birth to this text. I am likewise grateful in this regard to Dr Javier Lezaun, Dr Mette Berg and Prof Peter Mitchell, whose guidance has been a crucial resource for getting the project off the ground. I thank Dr Nayanika Mathur, Dr Nicolette Makovicky, Dr Caroline Potter and the late Prof Steve Rayner for kindly providing constructive feedback on earlier versions of the following chapters.

I am grateful for the help of others among the academic and administrative staff in the Social Sciences Division at the University of Oxford, including but not limited to Dr Elizabeth Ewart, Vicky Dean, Prof David Gellner and Prof Marcus Banks. I especially thank Mary Smith, who has advocated on my behalf to an inordinate degree. I also thank Dr Johana Wyss, Dr Neil Armstrong, Dr Julia Morris, Dr Chihab El Khachab and all of my colleagues at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology for making the doctorate a pleasurable as well as enriching experience. I am eternally grateful for Dr Olivia Vicol, Zac Downs and Priya Sen for providing me with places of refugee during my exile from the field.

I am thankful for each of my informants for agreeing to participate in the project. They will remain nameless for purposes of anonymity, but none of this could have been done without their willingness to allow me into their lives. There are many persons at the

Institute for European Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel who facilitated my research while in the field, including Anamaria Bacsin, Hilde Vanderheyden, Dr Ilke Adam, Anthony Antoine, Jacintha Liem, Prof Alison Woodward, Prof Florian Trauner, Dr Christof Roos and Patrick Boeckstijns. I am greatly indebted to my Belgian supervisor Richard Lewis for always being in my corner and for opening many doors to me that would have otherwise remained closed. The support of Christina Mercuriadi, Maud Henry, Gijs and Leila Schilthuis, Graziella and Ferdinand Snoy, Benjamin Hartmann, William Alberque, Louis Leroy-Warnier and Rim Irscheid was likewise invaluable.

Other scholars who provided much needed advice for my benefit are Prof Michael D. Jackson, Prof Nigel Rapport, Prof Didier Georgakakis, Prof Cris Shore, Prof Sally Engle Merry, Prof Sareeta Amrute, Prof Clarke Speed, Prof John J. MacAloon and Prof Richard Shweder.

I dedicate this thesis to Diane and Michael Montgomery, whose boundless support cannot be accurately given justice with only the words available to us in the English language. It is their love and their devotion to a belief in the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake that has made this possible.

INITIALISMS

AD	Administrative grade level
AGRI	DG Agriculture and Rural Development
AST	Assistant grade level
CCT	Common Customs Tariff
CETA	Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement
CNCT	DG Communications Networks, Content and Technology
COMM	DG Communication
COMP	DG Competition
DEVCO	DG International Cooperation and Development
DG	Directorate-General
DGT	DG Translation
DIGIT	DG Informatics
EAC	DG Education and Culture
ECFIN	DG Economic and Financial Affairs
ECHO	DG European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ECSC	Economic Coal and Steel Community
EEA	European Economic Area
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEC	European Economic Community
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EFTA	European Free Trade Agreement
EMPL	DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
EMU	European Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
EPSC	European Political Strategy Centre
EPSO	European Personnel Selection Office
ERCC	Emergency Response Coordination Centre
EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
FG	Function Group grade level
FISMA	DG Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union
FPI	Foreign Policy Instruments
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GROW	DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
HoU	Head of Unit
HR	DG Human Resources and Security
IGS	General Inspectorate of Services
ILO	International Labour Organization
JRC	DG Joint Research Centre

MAP	Modernization of Administration and Personnel
MARKT	Internal Market and Services
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MOVE	DG Mobility and Transport
MP	Member of Parliament
N-VA	New Flemish Alliance party
NEAR	DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
PM	Prime Minister
RTD	DG Research and Innovation
SANTE	DG Health and Food Safety
SC	Secretarial and clerical assistant grade level
SOTEU	State of the European Union
SR	Staff Regulations
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TRADE	DG Trade
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
VP	Vice President

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1 Social constructions of Europeanness among EU civil servants: A methodological and epistemological approach

It was back in the fall of 2014 that I arrived in Brussels with a dictaphone and a dream. Almost immediately, I bent my steps towards the European Quarter, a central area bordered by Brussels Park, Leopold Park and Parc du Cinquantenaire, in search of a new home among its towers of steel and glass.

The top floor of a house on Michelangelo Avenue provided suitable living quarters as well as a base of operations for most of my time in the field. The home belonged to a francophone Belgian family who were long established there. Delphine, the castle's queen, was a Baroness, and her husband Olivier worked in investments. The couple lived on the ground floor and made a charming pair. Their evenings were spent holding court among guests in the dining room or doing something similar on the Flemish coast at Ostend, where they kept a summer home. This kept their tans a bright cast of bronze throughout the majority of the year despite the constant cloud coverage. Ariane, their daughter, had her bedroom on the second floor. She is a giggly schoolgirl who dreams of one day becoming a lawyer. Two large housecats called Philippe and D'Artagnan, both with long hair and a regal air about them, could also be seen sauntering the premises. They warmed to me eventually, to my great fortune. And so I took every opportunity of a sighting to lure them up the stairs and into the third-floor loft in whose recesses I slept. Sharing the fondness for felines many Belgians feel, I have always held the opinion that Robert Darnton was too charitable in The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History (2009) when detailing the behaviors of those apprentice printers in 1730s Paris.

The décor may be described as classical French kitsch. Old seafaring maps of the world, framed portraits of dead rich people and prints of painted landscapes hung along the walls. Each floor's landing featured a bureau strewn with various bibelots, such as an open Victorian-era liqueur chest, a marble chess set and dishes holding piles of assorted pieces of jewelry. 'People either really like it, or they really don't like it', Delphine explained. I really liked it, but what stood out most about the place was that it was surprisingly affordable. With nowhere else to stay, choosiness was a luxury I could not afford. She furnished it with a small wooden desk at which the earliest drafts of this introductory chapter were written, and the slanted ceilings which served as its walls gave it a cozy feel. Above it, roof windows facing southwest provided a majestic posterior view of the Berlaymont building, the winged, star-shaped headquarters of the European Commission. Well, *I* found it majestic, at least. A domineering symbol of EU hegemony, this 1960s edifice to modernity and sober functionality is beautiful or unsightly depending on the spectator. The desk was gradually decimated to a heap of splinters by the time I left.

'Why would you live in Schuman?', asked Emmanouela, confused. 'It's a *graveyard*.' Emmanouela, a woman in her late twenties who came from Athens to work in the Parliament as a policy advisor to an MEP with the Socialists and Democrats, was known as something of a party girl about town. She was my first friend and well-wisher here, an experience much akin to what I imagine being friends with Lady Gaga would be like, if Lady Gaga were Greek-Canadian and an unskilled pianist. When we went out, whether it be to meet Austrian cinema director Michael Haneke at the modern art gallery or catch Kylie Minogue at the Palais 12, we would invariably be stopped multiple times to exchange air kisses with other groups of passersby filled with people she knows—people who know *her*, rather. I did not mind, as these were precisely the highly particular sort of people whom I had come here to meet in the first place. *Homo europaeus*, the Latinism which appears in the first half of the

study's title, refers to members of a community of professionals who inhabit a metropolitan micro-universe orbiting the European Union's most powerful institutions: 'the Brussels bubble', as it is known. Like Emmanouela, who is proficient in Greek, English, French and Italian and can get by in German and Flemish, they wield an excellent command of languages. These wonks are institutional cheerleaders for internationalism who divide up in policy areas and measure time in multiannual institutional cycles. They are practicing followers of a creed based on a strong and unabashed faith in the multilateral system, in its righteousness and ineluctability. Back and forth and back again, they move across state borders as pseudo-citizens of every nation and none in particular. 'Europe is our playground', as Emmanouela is fond of saying. She and her colleagues challenge ideologies of Europeanness which deem the territorial boundedness of the nation state as self-evident. In exchange for her escorting me into her network of contacts, I made myself available whenever she needed to sit around and ruminate on the men who populated her love life, which was three times a week on average.

Emmanouela was onto something when she invoked the funereal vibrations that may be picked up on when in this part of town. Brussels is an international capital at Europe's political and geographic center whose arty and vivacious districts offer plenty by way of picturesque plazas, delicious meals, cheap rent and a general *joie de vivre*. To work here, having taken the pledge to devote part of each day to building 'Europe' for a living—that makes sense. Everybody you see here wants to do this and does so, to a greater and lesser extent, in pursuit of their own policy-driven ends. Wanting to *live* here, however, is another story. It seems an odd choice for an international student of twenty-eight with a sociable disposition and few personal obligations, beyond those which needed to be fulfilled in order to avoid falling too far behind schedule in accordance with the timeline I outlined in the research plan.

Life within this bubble world, this city-within-a-city, moves in synchronicity with the temporal rhythms of the EU's year-round labor cycles. It is an oasis of office space aesthetically defined by surveillance cameras, construction equipment, Euro-themed business hotels and towers filled with apartments available for short-term accommodation. An endless flow of arrivals and departures, repeated comings-in and goings-out, infuses the neighborhood with a distinctive sense of hyper-impermanence. The roundabout at Place Schuman is its centerpiece and cynosure, the midpoint of the sphere to which all main roads lead. Its crosswalks allow pedestrians to pass at their own risk in between fleets of checkered taxicabs and big city buses. Express train lines terminating at the airport and Brussels Central Station carry passengers away and bring others back in with them at regular 15-minute intervals. Tram lines sprawling out into the suburbs of the Brussels Capital Region run half as frequently. Black town cars disappear into underground tunnels as others resurface from their depths. Things wind down when night falls, and the bubbling mobilities which the business day brought to life slow to a quick halt, all but vanishing under the streetlamps. Most sentient beings withdraw to their respective places of residence in presumably more hospitable areas. Few signs of life are illumined in the sun's lemonade light at it rises over on Saturday morning. Shops and restaurants keep their shutters shut and their locks locked until Monday. This is because people do not spend weekends in the European Quarter. A weekend is something better spent elsewhere, some commutable distance away. On Sundays, the atmosphere reaches new depths of lifelessness. The overall sense of desolation that is achieved is only intensified in the barren repose that the secular citizens of this post-Catholic state still reserve for the sabbath. Alive during the working week and dormant at the weekend, Schuman is a place suited to those looking for business before pleasure. It is neither home nor holiday destination.

Having heeded Emmanouela's word of caution in this fashion, I chose to disregard it and begin exploring the concrete and symbolic topography of the urban landscape. Once I realized that the process of self-embedding was already well underway, I insisted on staying put. In time I developed an affection for the place, singing its praises to any who would listen. I would not have enjoyed living inside the membrane of the Brussels bubble even if there *were* enjoyable things in it. I had not come here to enjoy myself, though this may have occurred from time to time. My ambition was rather to ascertain the idea of Europeanness and discover what it means to be European in Brussels today.

When pitching the two-minute, elevator version of the project's analytic research problem, one which I rehearsed and delivered to unsuspecting interlocutors on the occasion of our first encounter, the most common reaction was that people laughed. Their mouths formed a curious grin, as they might upon hearing a bad joke. Europeanness, in the sense of a collective social and cultural identity rather than a mere geographical reality, tends to come across as shallow, trivial, and overly academic compared with other, more seasoned modes of belonging on offer. Many Commission officials, even those who are proudly aware that they have such a thing as a European identity, feel that theirs lacks in the salience and tangibility which the modern nationalisms still on offer today established in a previous era. To identify with the idea of 'Europe' at this level is to pledge allegiance to a communal ideal that is more abstract than concrete, more cerebral than bodily, more theorized than felt and, perhaps, more imagined than real. The vision of the future consummation of the European 'project' (alternatively: 'experiment', 'construction' or 'dream') promoted by EU elites may not be profoundly shared by most European taxpayers. Europeanness means little to most but much to a select few—something to which they might go years without lending a passing thought—and thus the expression of amusement is well-placed and well-understood. Around here, it is considered a matter of permanent existential concern.

This chapter presents an overview of a study of European identity and belonging among civil servants working in different directorates in the European Union Commission, delineating its subjects and objects, methodologies and ideologies. It maps the thematic threads of the central narrative giving continuity to the remaining chapters, whose contents derive from the results of analyses of qualitative data collected during an 18-month period of ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in the European Quarter of Brussels between 2014 and 2016. The proceeding section (1.1) explicates the project's trajectory from start to finish, detailing the analytical research questions, the critical problems around which they are organized and the main arguments formulated in attempts to address them. The discussion then overviews earlier and more recent works in the anthropology of Europeanness, highlighting the main research trajectories and key works in the anthropology of the European Union and of Europe more broadly which shaped and drove forward their development.[1] It also provides a rationale of the relevance of these texts to the present study and a renewed consideration of the specific ways they have advanced anthropological understandings of Europeanness as an object of ethnographic inquiry over the previous half-century. Having positioned the thesis within and beyond this intellectual history of perspectives and approaches, I identify the gaps of knowledge in the available literature it aims to address, elucidating the ways it expands on and diverges from pioneering ethnographic encounters between anthropologists and European civil servants.

The next section (1.3) turns to a discussion of the anthropology of bureaucracy. After tracing its central lines of ethnographic inquiry, it maps their points of intersection with those of the anthropological literature on Europeanness and outline the study's positionality in relation to them. Based on these insights, I specify the analytical pathways adopted in my

[1] As limitations of space preclude reviews that could aspire to be faithful to these literatures in their full complexity and scope, it aims for comprehensibility rather than comprehensiveness.

approach and relate how the thesis seeks to further expand anthropological understandings of bureaucracy in these directions. The next two sections (1.4-1.5) lay out my own theoretical approaches to 'identity' and 'politics', discussing relevant anthropological works and explaining how they have inspired their formulations. The chapter then moves on to an explanation of the methods used in data collection and analysis (1.6), justifying my choices of field site and informant group. I recount how the project was derailed twice by unforeseen complications, namely being deported from Belgium, and being accused of attempted murder. Finally, it previews the themes of each ethnographic chapter and adds some closing thoughts on how the anthropological study of Europeanness continues to touch on the bigger, perennial questions confronting practitioners of the discipline as a whole, focusing specifically on the relationship between ethnographer and informant.

1.1 Analytical Research Problem: a Europe of indeterminate identities and undetermined futures

The European Commission is among the world's largest and oldest supranational level institutions in Europe. Its 49 buildings, 31 Directorates-General (DGs), 16 service departments and six executive agencies are spread out around the Brussels Capital Region, as well as in Luxembourg City and representation offices worldwide. As the EU's executive power, it proposes new laws, policies and initiatives in areas within its jurisdiction. It is called the 'motor' of European integration and is also considered its 'heart' and 'conscience' (Nugent 1997). At the center of the EU's nervous system, the Commission, like the anatomical brain, functions by regulating the other parts of the body. As the 'guardian of the treaties', it monitors how the budget is spent and how the decisions made by the other two main institutions, the European Parliament and European Council, are implemented. When

being sworn in as Commissioners, those who make up newly formed Colleges pledge an 'oath of independence' from state governments before the European Court of Justice (European Union 2014). Those same governments are discouraged from seeking to influence them in turn.

Of the three main EU bodies, the Commission is the most potent symbol of supranational European-level authority. Jean Monnet, a founding father and principal architect of postwar European unification, conceived its prototype, the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community, as an ultramodern civil service typified in a gifted species of European bureaucrat who personifies a civilizational Europeanness. Originating in Greco-Roman antiquity, it was then passed down through the ages by way of the Renaissance and Enlightenment (Pabst 2006). Monnet (1978) related how outside visitors to the High Authority during these formative years would return home to report that they had witnessed 'pioneers at work', spawning the legend that 'a new race of men was emerging in the Luxembourg institutions, as if in a laboratory'. The term '*Homo europaeus*' is the name I give this mythical master race. Commission civil servants are 'Union officials' who flock here from all 28 member countries to 'work for Europe', having 'left [their] national "hats" at the door when [they] joined' (Gravili 2016). With a manifestly denationalized character all its own, it is no exaggeration to say that the Commission is the most *European* of them all. For Monnet (1978: 523), the objective of the European project was and had always been 'to create among Europeans the broadest common interest, served by common democratic institutions to which the necessary sovereignty has been delegated' by 'removing prejudice, doing away with frontiers [and] enlarging to continental scale'. Following wars in Europe and Asia, the French public servant and cognac distiller formed the Action Committee for the United States of Europe and set to work on establishing the requisite conditions that would

make intracontinental conflict unfeasible and inconceivable, 'not only unthinkable, but materially impossible' (Schuman 1950). In this town, one's career is one's identity.

The first ever Conference on the Future of the European Union, launched into existence by the 2001 European Convention, coincided with the EU's first serious attempt to produce a draft constitution for an 'ever closer' supranational socio-political union. The symposium is held to coincide with the change of leadership in EU powers that normally occurs once a decade. In 2007, the Council convened some especially selected 'wise men and women' to form the Reflection Group on the Future of Europe.[2] The objective was to prognosticate the challenges which the EU would likely face in 2020s and meditate on what to do about it. The final report, titled Project Europe 2030, was never used for any specific purpose. While its prime ambition was un clear, the text did note how 'the group was invited to pay particular attention to ways of better reaching out to citizens and addressing their expectations and needs' (ibid.).[3] After the debate, when the conference ended and all the dignitaries had gone home, what was left were open questions as to what would happen with the ensuing proposals, and who really decides what Europe's future has in store.

The EU is futurist in vision and orientation. On the last page of his Memoirs written just before his death, Monnet (1978: 523) offered his parting words on what the ultimate realization of the European idea would look like:

> Where this necessity will lead, and toward what kind of Europe, I cannot say... I have never doubted that one day this process will lead us to the United States of Europe; but I see no point in trying to imagine today what political form it will take.... The Community itself is founded on institutions, and they need strengthening; but the true political authority which the democracies of Europe will one day establish still has to be conceived and built.

The future was federal, and 'Europe' would eventually come to better resemble the US in its structural integrity. Until then, it may be said to exist only within the crucible of the imagination. In order to imagine it, one must 'project oneself into a world which does not yet

[2] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/misc/114244/
[3] https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30776/qc3210249enc.pdf

exist' (Abélès 2000: 35). The final act is left open-ended. There may be a course of travel on which to proceed, though its conditions of visibility are worsened by the fog of doubt and uncertainty, and there is no set destination nor time of arrival.

In the Brussels bubble, there is never an unseasonable moment for discussing Europe's future, given that underlying this very act is the presumption that the EU has a future to discuss at all. The White Paper on the Future of Europe, published in March 2017, lays out five possible paths to finding a 'new identity' for the bloc by the end of the year (Valero 2017). Today, a reassessment of 'the European Question'—what the EU's role should be, how it should function, and how it is to gain democratic legitimacy and visibility among voters—feels especially timely. The question itself is not a new one. Yet, when the dearly held orthodoxies of liberalism are under attack, it is 'no time for business as usual' (European Commission 2016). Europe is being questioned like never before. The prime objective twenty years ago was getting the institutional machinery of the nascent Union to begin to function properly. Now, it is about taking it off the tracks along which it has been running and placing it on a new path, remapping the possible direction of travel.

This work presents an ethnographic analysis that aims to explore the plural dimension of European selfhood among civil servants in the EU Commission. The European Union is an engine of Europeanization, and Europeanness generating tacit and explicit knowledges about 'Europe' that have a valued and value-driven cultural currency. Magnifying ethnographically the empirical and creative aspects of Europe-making allows one to observe how 'the European' is made visible in the daily practices, discourses and knowledge productions they perform. The study investigates the selection, framing and foregrounding of certain depictions of Europeanness by Commission officials, examining the motives that influence these decisions and how these images are materialized in everyday lives. European selves are reconstructed and reproduced as specific modes of identity and belonging embedded in

imaginations of 'the global West'. Which images, practices and techniques of policymaking link conceptions of Europeanness with historically situated ideologies of progress, peaceful coexistence and modernity as measured against those attributed to the non-European or anti-European 'Other'? Which institutional frameworks, ethical orientations, and affective states do representations of Europeanness appeal to? It likewise considers where and when administrative identities intersect and overlap with social and political ones, noting the tensions that surface between national and European modes of allegiance and solidarity.

Reflecting on the first-hand experience of witnessing the European Community metamorphose into a Union, Cris Shore (2000) noted a logical circularity in the case being made inside the Commission for the necessity of the 'ever closer' integration of national economies and societies. In effect, 'Europe' must be built by entrusting further powers and policy areas to supranational institutions, ones which may then find further ways to capitalize on these powers in order to build 'more Europe' in turn. Europeanness thus conveniently provides its own justification. To notice this is to go no length in differentiating it from more familiar nationalisms, however. The EU was a very different creature in its infancy from the one we behold today. The time is thus opportune for critically revisiting the rationale for Europe-making, analyzing the ways in which elements of the EU heritage story are recycled, jettisoned and adapted to address contemporary crises and appeal to contemporary audiences. What are the administrative logics underlying how Commission officials justify, make sense of and idealize the European project in its current institutional manifestation? The future of Europe debates are always, after all, as much about the present as they are about anything else.

The study explores ethnographically the working lives of Commission officials in their attempts to foster modes of European selfhood that are coherent, contagious and difficult to criticize. One often hears Brussels bubble insiders lament how the EU is insufficiently united,

lacking in effect leadership and a feeble actor on the geopolitical stage. It is difficult to speak of 'Europeanness' as a discrete unit of identity and belonging when European integration processes are producing higher levels of cultural heterogeneity within EU territories while exacerbating differences between the European public and their so-called 'servants'. The prevalence of complexity entailed in the contested landscape of Europeanness makes traditional culture concepts problematic as ways of modeling living societies. The scalar imaginations 'Europe' conjures up both contradict and reinforce intuitive assumptions regarding how the formation of identity occurs and the limits of the human capacity to organize novel societies technocratically via the realignment of geopolitical incentives and standards. And yet, as Shore and others have long observed, Europe-building processes emulate nation-building ones in their attempts at forging social identity and belonging on the local level from the top seats of EU power. A supranational, pan-European sociality emerges as a result of EU citizens beginning to recognize themselves and each another as equal members of one vast community despite never once meeting face-to-face, one held together by a shared European culture and heritage.

The effectuality of nationalism largely depends on its capacity to appeal to deeply personal visions of national community and identity (Cohen 1994b; Cohen 1994a). A question still beckoning our attention, therefore, is precisely why the culturalist social model continues to function exceptionally well for the EU's nations but not for the EU itself. What can anthropological understandings of social reproduction and nation-building contribute to debates within EU professional circles which attempt to account for the present shortcomings of Europe-building practices? As narratives of Europeanness entail the recognition of diversity and its limits, the study explores where officials draw the boundaries around what qualify as 'true' modes of Europeanness, in a normative cultural sense, as exemplified by the idealized figure I call *Homo europaeus*. What sociocultural forms of solidarity and levels of

diversity are the maxims ‘unity in diversity’ and ‘strength in diversity’ prepared to acknowledge and celebrate? ‘You don’t fall in love with a common market’, President Delors once quipped (Laffan 1996: 95). ‘You need something else’ (ibid.). Human love, whether it be allegiance to a romantic partner or a political authority, is famously something which cannot be bought. Beyond promises of economic growth and prosperity via the permanent reduction of trade barriers, what ‘added value’ does the EU offer which might may be used to forge emotional connections with the public and make them fall in love with the idea of Europe? For what does it profit the EU if it should gain the whole world, in all of its wealth, but lose the soul of Europe? How may an anthropological approach to EU institutions help to explain the ineffectuality of their efforts at forging and fostering European identity and belonging from Brussels, and why people neglect to follow its prescriptions to such an impressive degree?

Those presently employed at the highest positions of EU representation and decision-making must contend with a resurgence of reactionary Euroskeptic sentiment promulgated within organizations who leverage their own nation-based conceptions of what it means to be European as possible alternatives to those coming from ‘Brussels’. National parties, including Germany’s *Alternative für Deutschland*, Sweden’s *Sverigedemokraterna*, Hungary’s *Jobbik*, Poland’s *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość PiS* and the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* in the Netherlands, bemoan the ‘faceless bureaucrats’ and their campaigns of cultural homogenization that disregard the *sui generis* nature of nations while seeking to impose uniform ways of life on an EU-wide scale that are more or less alien to their communities. The globalist neoliberal virtues to which EU elites pay lip service—the value of valuing cultural tolerance and diversity, to name one—are, they argue, too often implemented in ways that are incompatible with national cultures or with the distinctive value systems they have nurtured on their lands over centuries. The ‘eurocrats’ often fail to uphold them themselves, for that matter. Instead,

these ‘uncooperative’ actors envision a future defined by the spread of ‘illiberal democracy’ in Europe. To them, Europeanness is a device that serves the homogenizing imperatives of EU cultural policy.

Unauthorized discourses of Europeanness legitimate measures taken by national state actors to silence dissent voiced by their detractors and centralize judicial powers within an authoritarian executive. In the illiberal Europe of the future so envisaged, it is the citizens’ inalienable freedom *from* choice, rather than *of* choice regarding how their society should be organized and who should govern. Narratives of illiberal Europeanness thus provide national administrations with a democratic means of achieving undemocratic ends. Capitalizing on high levels of historically rooted public dissatisfaction with political representatives and institutions in general, they promise voters in return for their support an eventual return to an idyllic past in a golden age of yesterday, one far removed from the troubles wrought by today's changes. Perennial debates over democracy, human rights, gender equality, sexual freedoms and religious liberties are thus increasingly linked to national and European identities in compelling ways (Fassin 2010). In this power struggle among actors operating at various levels for the authoritative mandate to define Europeanness, there is a politics of purity at play. The history of attempts by the Commission to define an identity for the EU is the story of one institution attempting to write its own narrative and force it on the wider world, one built on oppositional constructions of authentic and inauthentic, pure and impure ways of being ‘truly’ European. Others compose different ones, concurrently, with which they hope will overwrite the EU’s self-narrative and thereby redress the imbalance of power in who defines what ‘Europe’ is.

Against this backdrop, I present an ethnographically detailed account of how civil servants relate to temporalities of past, present and future in a context of crisis. The present emerges from the synthesis of past legacies and the projection of possible futures (Kohn

2013). Commission officials at work construct and rewrite narratives of Europeanness as visions of idealized futures with specific and analyzable meanings, affects, and demands. Their efforts at bridging these fantastic and speculative worlds in ways that are mutually commensurable, open-ended and above all enduring are nonetheless subject to the paralyzing effects of a work-life characterized by unpredictable hazards and a perpetual state of uncertainty with respect to what lies just over the horizon. Which forms of the cultural capacity to retroactively trace the past and imaginatively cultivate the future are to be found in the European Commission? What conditions and criteria are set for EU officials to constitute themselves in relation to a future European civil society, and how does the future in turn construct and remake the figure of the Union official as a contemporary exemplar of Europeanness? Which models and concepts are needed to theorize about a Europe of open futures and open frontiers among individuals who themselves lack an adequate sense of what the future frontiers of 'Europe' might consist of? Deep uncertainties and insecurities are brought to the surface in a present state of crisis which impacts professional Europe-makers by jostling with their intuited assumptions as to the inevitable realization of a federally integrated Europe of the future. How do officials make sense of and carry out the futurist project of Europe-building at a time of disintegration, when the future appears so empty and uncertain that it cannot break free from the present?

By placing the future, imagination and experience at the center of its agenda, this research extends recent anthropological engagements with the speculative imaginaries and potential crisis scenarios which presage utopian and dystopian futures (Pink, Akama, Sumartojo 2018). Recent departures in the anthropology of the future coincide with broader trends in the social sciences and humanities at large that explore time, temporality and the reproduction of other possible realities. Future-orientated anthropologists acknowledge the ineluctable force that the future has upon the present as an object of inquiry as well as a

matter of concern. The human experience of time is one in which 'the future is preeminent' because 'temporality temporizes as a future which makes present in the process of having been' (Heidegger 2010). Human beings have a universal 'cultural capacity' to predict and construct models of the future, identifying possibilities and potentials yet to be realized (Appadurai 2013). The first-person, moment-to-moment phenomenology of an every-vanishing present is rattled with expectations and anticipations as to the many possible events which may or may not take place next. Even the nationalistic nostalgias yearning, are expressed in the form of aspirations towards.

Conceptions of the future produced in specific contexts reveal a variety of imaginary projections, individual and collective hopes, value systems. This study uses orientations towards and representations of Europe's 'future' as analytics for thinking about the temporal experience of EU civil servants in Brussels, exploring how officials interpret, modify and imagine Europe's future. Envisioning the future entails making concrete actions, practices, plans, relations and discursive framings, drawing on past experiences and plotting new trajectories for reaching desired endgames. Crisis discourses sit amid the temporal entanglements of past, present and future, anticipating disaster-prone futures to come. Our preparations for them and reactions to them transform ideas of 'what could have been' and 'what might come to be' into a tangible present. The project aspires to make a contribution to 'future studies' within anthropology and the empirical study of future-making practices more broadly.

1.2 The anthropology of Europeanness: Past and present departures

Europe is considered the birthplace of modern sociocultural anthropology. It was here that its early traditions, driven by Enlightenment pursuits in philosophy and empirical sciences, were

established in the 19th century and nurtured in national contexts including France, Germany, the UK, Spain, Scandinavia and the Netherlands. The founding scholars invested in a humanistic, scientific study of humankind were predominantly European, white, bourgeois and male. Their monographs are the product of direct encounters that took place between themselves and groups of ethnographic Others who were non-European, a preoccupation with exploring the exoticized 'primitive' that persists in more historically conscious and self-critical forms today (Price 2007). Notwithstanding the importance of these classic works for laying the groundwork for the anthropology of Europe, the project was not set into motion as a coherent subfield until the final decades of the 20th century. Thus, while anthropology has been European since its birth, Europe became anthropological relatively recently. When anthropologists finally 'came home' to Europe, their full-circle-return began to redress the balance such that the ethnographer gradually became less European, and the informant became more so. The ever-present divide between ethnographer and informant, between the European and its antithesis, the non-European, has reduced as anthropology expanded as a professional pursuit to academic institutes and research centers throughout the world.

European identity is cognate with the term *Europeanness*, a nominal derivative in modern English of the adjective at its root, denoting the state, condition, degree or quality of being European and belonging to Europe regarded as European or having characteristics typically European. In written form it has undergone de-hyphenation with increased usage, the novelty that still envelops the concept in anthropological discourse being conveyed by that fact that the word still appears in scare quotes, even in the most recent literature contending with the subject. The arrested development of Europe and Europeanness as areas of anthropological knowledge was the first consequence of an apparent disproportion between research object and methodology that remains a fundamental conundrum confronting those who study it. The mismatch is one of scale. The craft of ethnography in its

Malinowskian prototype is an intimate, small-scale approach to qualitative research undertaken by a solitary participant-observer among members of a society who know and relate to one another on a face-to-face basis. Europe, as a vast, multinational collection of regions, cannot be ethnographically studied in its entirety using traditional participant-observation methods. Europeanness is thus an analytic object requiring a perspective broad enough to envelop a more diffuse expanse of cultural terrain than those of single-society studies. Pitt-Rivers, in his case-study of an Andalusian town (1954), showed the suitability of anthropological methods and concepts to the study of social life in 'civilized' state societies with complex class structures theretofore the province of sociologists and historians. Most importantly, his efforts at an exegesis of the notions of honor and shame in Western literature gestured toward values seen as constitutive of a broadly defined European culture. The hesitation to develop a comparative study of larger regions in favor of small, more 'traditional' locales was at the center of Freeman (1970)'s criticism of studies in rural European social organization. Approaching a totalizing view of Europe *en masse* was also an aim of Arensberg's (1963) comparative study of European societies, locating mutually isolated collectivities as in the greater picture of a 'world ethnography'.

Anthropologies *in* Europe, denoting the study of how people in Europe inhabit, navigate and make sense of the world, and anthropologies *of* Europe are two distinct things in principle even if they are rarely separable in practice. The anthropological study of 'Europe', a social construct that carries with it a constellation of cultural associations that have a limited but meaningful geographical relevance, might be distinguished from both. Wherever 'Europe' begins and ends, the social and geographical boundaries of this container category stretch further than the (now) EU-27. This point was clarified to amusing effect by a minister in the UK's Brexit department on a visit to the House of Lords, who said, 'I think we've made it absolutely clear that, whilst Britain will be withdrawing from the European Union,

we will not be, clearly, withdrawing from Europe either geographically or otherwise.'[4] 'Europe' is a piece of conceptual real estate over which the EU lays claim, the name it often uses when referring to itself. While I do not consider Europe and the European Union as coterminous entities, for Commission officials this is a distinction lacking a real difference. The two labels were used interchangeably, self-referentially and without qualification.

What might be termed the anthropology of Europe's pastoral phase (1950-1975) came to an end in the mid-1970s, when Europe took form as a category of anthropological analysis in itself. Attempts to capture the social reality of Europeanness beyond village life had theretofore been confined primarily to studying the organization of the nation and ethnonational belonging (Lowie 1929; Barnes 1954). The Europeanness of informant groups found expression in the ethnographic record as a Europeanness qua nationess, whereby the European native (e.g., Irish Countrymen) was 'European' by virtue of their status as a European national. Anthropological forays into Europe over this period were primarily restricted to ethnographies of rural peasant communities and lifeways in Ireland (Arensberg 1937), Italy (Bloch 1977), Spain (Pitt-Rivers 1954), Greece (Campbell 1974) and the Balkans (Sanders 2014). That the community model was already outmoded in a kinetic world of globalized social relations was apparent as far back as Redfield's (1971) study of peasant society and culture in North America. Jeremy Boissevain's influential essay 'Towards a Social Anthropology of the Mediterranean' (1979) sketched a framework for an emergent sub-discipline defined by analyzing social life at the local level contextualized in broader historical events and allegiances. Throughout its pages, he convincingly demonstrates how the community model and the structural functionalism underpinning it led anthropologists to 'tribalize Europe' into stateless social units glossed as bounded, static organisms. The well-worn conceptual soil which nurtured studies of rural villages was inadequate for cultivating

[4] https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/minister-confirms-britain-will-not-leave-europe-geographically/

the study of complex, differentiated societies undergoing sweeping processes of transformation. Participant observation alone was still considered a necessary approach, if no longer a sufficient one. Social life should be view as always already in progress rather than as a static entity.

The social unit of 'the community' was in decline as anthropologists became increasingly aware of how migration, displacement, urbanization, multiculturalism and other processes of globalization were reorganizing statehood and personhood in Europe. The democratization of sophisticated telecommunications technologies opened unprecedented possibilities for identifying with Europe. The internationalization of economies growing more interdependent gave new relevance to supranational and subnational scales of decision-making and the linkages between local cultural identities and wider regimes of state-building, bureaucratization, industrialization, commercialization and socioeconomic integration (Boissevain, Friedl and en Wetenschappen 1975; Schneider and Schneider 1976; Wilson 1989; Wolf and Eriksen 2010). Accompanying the processual turn was a concurrent move away from groups and conditions on the peripheries toward those inhabiting urban centers of power whose attachments to particular cultural arenas are more tenuous, where they exist at all. The ambition was then to explore ethnographically the 'West within the West' as opposed to what could be called 'the non-West within the West' (Parman 1994).

So it was that social anthropology returned home to Europe, either all the way (Jackson 1985) or in part (Cole 1977). Europe appeared as something greater in scope than a mere collection of village and peasant communities, constituting a complex and shifting, large-scale urban-industrial society. Gaining momentum in the anthropology of Europe was an anthropology of identities and values characterized by Europeanness which strove to account for the social heterogeneity of this wider context. Notwithstanding this broadening of perspective, the concept of European culture in general was largely taken for granted as an

abstraction whose meaning required no further clarification. The impact of Boissevain's landmark volume was decisive in this regard, representing a first step towards 'an anthropology of national and supra-national processes' (1975: 16). While the question of 'the supranational' is dealt with only momentarily throughout its contributions, his desire to bridge local forms of social life with ever wider levels of organization proved prophetic. The establishment of the European Union's institutional predecessors gestured towards accelerating levels of Europeanization following the end of the Cold War. Anthropologists interested in emergent forms of Europeanness took notice of how these macro-level processes were reconfiguring social and territorial identifications on the continent in interesting ways.

The southward expansion of a large-C 'European Community' into Greece, Portugal and Spain encouraged the conceptualization of Europe in anthropology as a united whole (Goddard 1994: 20). The disaggregation of the USSR and subsequent decline in US hegemony abroad created a geopolitical and semiotic vacuum that needed to be filled from within. As a result, representations of Europe dominated by Cold War divisions were supplanted by approaches searching for areas of affinity-based convergence identified with a sense of Europeanness. By facilitating the interdependence of national economies, the standardization of institutions and legislation and the growth of new mobilities in the labor, education and tourism sectors, the procession of the European integration project became a significant catalyst for the formulation of 'Europe' as a discrete unit of anthropological inquiry in itself. The term enjoyed new predominance in the titles of books, articles, research networks and departmental specializations (Benson 2013, O'Rourke 1988).

Borneman and Fowler (1997: 448) saw the Europe confronting them at the beginning of the new millennium as a blank slate onto which new social identities may be imprinted: 'Europe has entered adolescence, cut loose for resignification'. With no immanent invaders, no New World, no colonies, no occupiers against whom it can take shape, the "mirror of

man" has been turned back on itself. It can and it must now define itself.' With the dissolution of its previous identity, Europe was left to its own devices in formulating a new one. The crisis of identity was experienced as 'anxiety' but also as hope for the prospect of a 'spirit yet to take form' (ibid.). As with Sovietization from the East and Americanization from the West, Europeanization functions as 'a strategy of self-representation and a device of power' characterized by the reorganization of interests and the formation of novel institutions (ibid., 489). These include a European currency, passport, flag, universities and media, as well as organized intra-European associations in sport, the arts and leisure tourism. Once Europeanized, these industries become in effect 'more European', a designation which indicates not merely the fact that they operate on a transnational scale but also how they embody and reproduce a culture waiting to being constructed and a consensus waiting to form. Europeanization encompasses 'a spirit, a vision and a process', intensified by the consolidation of organizational and administrative power of EU institutions, of which Europeanness is both vehicle and outcome (ibid., 501).

Debates among the signatories of the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1980s attracted anthropological interest in how the EU stealthily expands its presence in social and cultural arenas that traditionally fall under the jurisdiction of national governments. If replacing the nation state in Europe with a singular transnational sociopolitical super-entity is and was an ultimate prerogative of those advancing regimes of Europeanization from Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg city, scholars are quick to note how this imagined state of affairs has yet to come to fruition. The nation state maintains (for the time being, at least) its superior position of dominance in the grand geopolitical hierarchy of how social communities and identities, states and territories are organized. The EU has not been successful in killing off national identities and that, in a sense, continues to be a source of its troubles.

The term ‘European integration’ refers to processes that are roughly synonymous with Europeanization in this internal dimension. The economic recovery of post-war Europe was a project as thoroughly modern as that of traditional nation-building. If nationness conceals its modernity in a shroud of primordiality, Europeanness wears its modernist credentials on its sleeve. The creations of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the IMF and the World Bank were financed in part from the federal coffers of the US government. For radical conservative proponents of modernization theory, these new transnational power centers are agents and symbols of a teleological progression towards the inevitable global triumph of free market capitalism with its associated neoliberal policies over more collectivized and state-subsidized models of socioeconomic organization. The popularity of fascism and communism was not comfortably accommodated within the modernization paradigm, giving rise to concerns that some European societies and cultures were not democratic and liberal enough—and hence, European enough—in their character. Explaining the disparities of Europeanness making themselves visible at the level of culture in so-called modern states was and continues to be a vocation for which social anthropologists are well-suited.

The initial impetus for carrying out this project was an interest in supranationalism that germinated while fulfilling the requirements for a master’s degree in social sciences at the University of Chicago. At this time I was introduced to works by Eric Hobsbawm (1972; 2012; 2012), Benedict Anderson (2006), Ernest Gellner (1983; 1995; 1998; 2001), Ernest Renan (1882), Paul Ricoeur (2006) and Paul Connerton (1989; 2009), authors who came to be known as luminaries of the ‘historicist’ or ‘modernist’ school of nationalism studies. The power and primacy of nationness and nationalism have long fascinated anthropologists (Greenfeld 1992), and I became intrigued by how well their theoretical models resonated with what I knew of religion and religiosity as ideas and social practices. Kapferer’s (2012) discussion on the religion of nationalism, and the degree to which the symbolism of a higher

purpose is vital to enhancing performances of nationness, was particularly instructive. Nations, much like organized churches and smaller cults, maintain their health and longevity a by establishing 'powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations' imbued 'with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic' (Geertz 2015). They do this through the regular performance of daily rituals and annual holidays at social gatherings held in institutional sites of symbolic power, where charismatic figureheads give speeches and lead audiences through interactive communal exercises and activities involving a distinctive set of icons, texts and mythical ancestors. These practices function to reify official ideologies with understandings of what constitutes selfhood and otherness, the sacred and the profane, purity and contamination, good and evil, suffering and well-being, salvation and damnation and similar profundities.

I began to take notice of the work being done on the global migration flows generating new transnational and cosmopolitan locales characterized by hybridity, plurality, deterritorialization and long-distance, diasporic relations, displacing national belonging and challenging its core assumptions in compelling ways (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Appadurai 1996; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Axel 2002; Calhoun 2002; Guarnizo, et al. 2003; Skrbis, Kendall and Woodward 2004; Gopinath 2005; Antonsich 2009; Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011; Mahler 2017). From there, I wondered about the cosmopolitan implications of globalization and what broader supranationalisms, such as a European identity anchored in European-level institutions that is shared over and above national state territories, might look like (Beck 2005; Beck 2006).

As the European project gained momentum over the last decades of the 20th century, the 'idea of Europe' (Pagden 2001; Steiner 2015) gained prominence as a political ideal and mobilizing metaphor, and observers in political, intellectual and artistic circles began to presage Europe's future with increased intensity. The 1980s and 1990s brought

anthropological work aiming towards a radical reconceptualization of Europe as an analytic category and the supposedly definitive qualities distinguishing it from elsewhere in the world. Wider currents of feminism and postcolonialism swept aside old positivist structuralisms, destabilizing methodological and epistemological certainties in their wake. In problematizing Europe conceptually, postmodern scholars fixated on the historical relations and fields of power in which the category exists as a constructed ideational space (Foucault and Rabinow 1984). As is the case with the idea of any nation, representations of 'Europe' are partial contrivances that are expurgated and tailored to fit the expectations of specific audiences. 'Europe' functions much like an ideal type or master variable whose meaningful contents depend on the segmented positioning of those who instrumentalize it. Answers to the question of whereabouts its borders lie depend on the positionality of the observer to a much greater degree than is the case for most established national states. As a discourse of power, ideologically charged and infused with the politics of identity, it is relational, negotiated, unstable and contested. It has no absolute moral or immoral value in itself and may be used for good, evil or both. Liberating the anthropology of Europe from being a regional specialization, the epistemological move paved the way for Europeanness as a social phenomenon to be ethnographically studied outside of Europe as well as within.

Pervading the intellectual milieu in which Herodotus came of age were social systems of classification that dissected the world into three vast super-entities. There was the continent of 'Asia' to the east and a place called 'Libya' to the south. 'Europe' was the name reserved for everything else in the world and included within its lands his birth city of Halicarnassus and the Anatolian coast on which it sat. Meditating on the contingent peculiarities of such an arrangement, Herodotus (1981) found himself mystified as to 'why the earth, which is one, has three names, all women's'. The ancient Greek, who is remembered today as the man of letters behind the invention of history in the 5th century BC, had no concept of 'Asians',

'Africans' or 'Europeans' as civilizational terms for distinct kinds of people corresponding to the tripartite ordering of supreme geographical divisions. Such a prospect would have been impossible and unthinkable, for it took another thousand years for these categories to be formulated and recognized into existence. Before then, there was no pan-European community with territorial identities rooted in its own shared institutions and symbols encompassing all the isolated ethnic groups inhabiting the continent and seen as coterminous with this vast expanse of land. Without the advances in technologies and mobilities that spawned present-day nations and enable strangers who will never meet, the formation among them of a common social imaginary was precluded.

Even to Herodotus, an exceptionally well-seasoned traveler by the standards of his day, the lifeworlds of nearby Persians and Egyptians proved much more accessible than did those of ancient ethnic groups inhabiting Europe's westernmost regions. The earliest recorded reference to *European* as a noun rather than an adjective appears in a Spanish chronicle reporting on the Battle of Tours published in 754 CE. Its anonymous author employs the Latin name '*europenses'*, referring to the Christian victors of the conflict (Appiah 2016). The clash formed the backdrop against which the idea of a 'European' was first used to distinguish between Christians and Muslims, between Christendom and *Dar al-Islam.* This 8th century artifact thus represents a moment of conception for constructions of Europeanness as Christian Europe, as well as constructions of Islamism represented in the figure of the Arab. The Muslim conquerors of Spain who come from Arabia and who are on the verge of invading the rest of Europe by way of its southern border provide a socio-geographic foil with whom Europe is defined in opposition. Europeanness thus functions as a vehicle of Occidentalism, providing a needed conceptual foil to Orientalism that demarcates the boundary lines of the West/non-West divide and those that the anthropology itself shares with its disciplinary cousins.

Such perennial dualities partly account for why the trope of mirrors and reflections figure so prominently in the literature. Michael Herzfeld's critical exercise in *Anthropology Though the Looking-Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe* (1989) compares the indigenous experience of contemporary Greekness with the theoretical models, discourses and goals that are predominant in anthropology. In doing so, he advocates for the potential of Greek anthropology, an area that is puzzlingly neglected in the ethnographic record, disclosing the shared ideological roots of Europeanness that gave birth to both modern Greekness and the discipline as a whole. Eurocentrism is the mother of anthropological invention, given that the earliest efforts of the latter amounted to 'little more than an exercise in legitimation within a general canon of European identity' (ibid., 21), as well as becoming its own worst enemy. Social anthropologists of Europe affiliated with and financially supported by western centers of research and higher education are continually confronted with the awareness that many of the informed conclusions they draw are applicable to themselves as well as their chosen 'natives'. We are at least as implicated in our findings as those we anthropologize as ethnographic subjects. This reality compounds the epistemic issues raised in debates surrounding how authority in anthropological knowledge-making is allocated, the politics of representation in ethnographic writing and strong versus weak distinctions between ethnographer and informant (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

Modern Greeks, it turns out, are as marginalized on the global stage as they are on anthropological conference panels, occupying a neither/nor space of confinement on the fringes of European identity—somewhere between locatedness and out-of-placeness, between the stereotypes of familiar Europeanness and exotic Otherness. By consequence, they feel perplexed and ambivalent about their supposed European identity and how the European question should apply in their case. Their 'more European' brethren recognize them as both the living bearers of the idealized 'cradle' of civilization and the EU's periodic

enfants terribles. The supposedly oriental, anti-Hellenist cultural influence of neighboring Turkey has botched its Westernization project, so that it 'now belongs politically, economically, and culturally to the Third World' (Herzfeld 1989). Just as the social and geographical boundaries of 'Europe' extend beyond the EU, those of ancient Greco-Roman antiquity extend further still. Large portions of the Roman empire were located North Africa and Asia, with Greek communities in what we now call Egypt, Libya, Syria, Pakistan and Afghanistan. As the ancient Greeks brought culture and civilization to the rest of Europe, so the rest of Europe now brings culture and civilization to the Greeks. Europeanness is thus ironically configured as a modern ideal originating in classical antiquity that is out of reach for modern Greeks (Giddens 1991).

Dace Dzenovska's School of Europeanness: Tolerance and Other Lessons in Political Liberalism in Latvia (2018) presents an intricate work of historical ethnography which, following the call from Lisa Hoffman, Monica DeHart and Stephen Collier (2006), aims to 'deconstitute' political neoliberalism by analyzing its existing norms, policies, theories, mechanisms and subjectivities. The titular 'school' in question is not any actual school in particular, such as one of the thirteen European Schools that provide free primary and secondary education to the children of EU employees. Rather, it alludes to a diffuse array of political and economic projects and initiatives meant to ensconce the former Soviet Republics within the bosom of Western civilization. The lesson-givers are not formal teachers, but an extensive network of multifarious actors grouped collectively under the umbrella term 'tolerance workers'—activists, consultants, governmental and non-governmental officials—for whom liberal values provide the foundations of a European selfhood. The tolerance workers gaze at Latvia and see a nation infused with intolerance and bigotry. The Latvians disagree. The tolerance workers see their dissent as further evidence in support of their own position, insisting that Latvian citizens are Europeans who will remain 'not-yet-European'

subjects until they admit they have a problem and surrender to the benevolent, civilizing force of Europeanization (Dzenovska 2018: 42). The Latvians, in turn, see such compelling demands as a further breach of their national sovereignty. As a result, the tolerance workers begin to appear as a present incarnation of a past colonialism they are supposedly seeking to confront.

The argument's golden thread centers around a paradox of Europeanness characterized as a tension between two conflicting iterations of the paradigmatic European society: one promoting open borders, heterogeneity and toleration of the foreign and unfamiliar; the other eschewing these concerns in favor of national self-determination and the preservation of a monochrome and monoethnic populace. Nations are imagined communities with finite boundaries that are imagined in reference to and by contrast with exterior nations who are excluded. Insofar as practices of identity-making practices entail the desire for distinctiveness, to comprehend what makes 'us' different from 'them', acts of inclusion and belonging are simultaneously those of exclusion and separation. How to exclude was not a lesson in political liberalism that Latvians needed to learn in order to Europeanize, for nation states are already accustomed to doing that. What the school of Europeanness teaches them is how to institutionalize exclusion while maintaining a self-image of inclusivity. This political hypocrisy emerges as a mode of discourse that is distinctly European, appearing regularly in daily interactions and ongoing media debates. The book concludes that Latvia's decision in 2004 to join the European Union—and by extension, 'the West' at large—had less to do with the seductive attraction that Europeanness wields than it did with a well-founded belief in the national imaginary that neither history nor the threat of Russian hegemony has come to an end. And yet, its reluctance to fully embrace the EU's attempts to dictate policy from Brussels stems from how much they resemble its Soviet-era memories of being perpetually dominated by a foreign power. Latvians have come out of the fire and into the frying pan, it

seems. Such anthropological explorations of where, when and for whom the European question arises in Central and Eastern Europe offer invaluable insights into how representations of Europeanness reproduce hierarchical identity classifications that have different consequences for different subjects at the local level.

The financial crisis precipitated a centralization of powers over economic resources in the European Central Bank, and the migration crisis precipitated a centralization of powers over the EU's external borders in the form of Frontex, its border guard agency. Critics of 'Fortress Europe' point to ways in which the EU seeks to justify its politics of exclusion through discourses of inclusion. Civilizational constructions of European identity fail, they argue, due to exclusivist constructions of cultural Europeanness with colonial genealogies hinging on intimate linkages between culture and social values. The exclusionary cultural and immigration laws and policies that the EU enacts in the name of, for instance, 'promoting our way of life' render meaningless its sanctimonious pronouncements about the value of respecting cultural diversity and undermine its claims to moral and political legitimacy.[5] Being European is less an ontological state or descriptive status of what is than an aspirational outcome of what is to be. Yet, the idea of Europe unitary itself appears more than ever before as a fundamentally toxic notion, intertwined as it is with histories of racialized violence and colonial subjugation. Compelling work has been done on how the boundaries of exclusion across the 'European/non-European' divide are policed and how relations of power in a colonial past shape Europeanist visions in the present in contrast with constructions of various non-European Others (Stolcke 1995).

It is not so necessarily black and white as an overattentive focus on these dualities may draws us to surmise. Europeanness comes in multiple colors and shades, lights and shadows, encompassing all that which is considered European in accordance with amorphous and

[5] https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life

indeterminate criteria for belonging in and to Europe. Membership of the burgeoning European Community is, according to Article 237 of the Rome Treaty, open to all aspiring European countries by virtue of their Europeanness. It lists the eligibility criteria for accession but provides little by way of technical detail as to the practical steps an aspiring country should take so as to better facilitate the absorption of Europeanness into the national psyche. Various actors—whether they be states, leaders, nations, communities, institutions or individuals—may be more or less European at certain times and in certain places. There is no absolute state of being European or its opposite.

The development of approaches to Europeanness as an area of ethnographic and theoretical research in sociocultural anthropology was motived in part by a critical turn towards revaluating Europe as a distinctive object of anthropological inquiry in a nascent subfield. In tracing these developments, several research trajectories come to the surface, such as a processualist turn from a community model to a processual model, and a curiosity with how Europeanization mutates nationness and other primordial and territorial configurations of social identity and belonging. The transformative aspects of integration in Europe pose specific challenges to the hegemony of national identity and nationness in a so-called postnational era. Critiques of structural functionalism decentered the 'community' in European community studies, paving the way from studies of living European communities to studies of an ever wider and ever broader European Community. The move out of the margins of society and into the centers of power coincided with thematic shifts from peasant orientations to national cultures and from national cultures to supranational forms of sociality emerging above and across the borders that nation states share among them. In contrast to the classical anthropology of the early 20th century, when anthropology was firmly rooted in explorations of the non-Western 'primitive', the ethnographic gaze turned to Europeanness as a civilizational vision synonymous with an essentialized Western modernity, the social and

political materialization of the highest ideals and aspirations of human achievement and what constitutes a good, virtuous life. Europeanness may thus be preliminarily defined as one or more modes of self-identification with the territoriality and peoplehood of Europe as a whole, enacted alongside or in opposition to identifications with one or more of its different constituent nations. Problematizing dichotomies of European/non-European, local/global and center/periphery, the ethnographic study of the people, places and processes that give expression to a sense of Europeanness speaks to the implications and possibilities of social and cultural integration in an age marked by increased labor mobilities and technocratization.

The next section details the methodology used for the collection and analysis of empirical data while in the field. It shows how the participant-observation methods employed inside and adjacent to the European Commission offices in Brussels is, in addition to detailed interviewing, what distinguishes the thesis as a work of ethnography.

1.3 Methods: An ethnographic approach to EU civil servants in the European Quarter

How the question 'What is Europe?' is answered, and who does the answering, impacts many aspects of the lifeworlds of contemporary Europeans. In the Brussels bubble, the apocryphal words attributed to Henry Kissinger, in which the Nixon-era US Secretary of State wondered who he should call in order to speak to Europe, is often cited to evoke a sense of the amorphous, decentralized realities of European-level governance (Rachman 2009). To settle the matter, Commission President José Manuel Barroso insisted that anyone so inclined would phone the High Commissioner of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Brunnstrom 2009). It seemed appropriate, therefore, that Federica Mogherini was the first person I approached for an interview when the Vice President acted as keynote speaker at a conference I attended. She appeared genuinely interested in my research until I inquired

about whether she had an hour to sit down with me in the next couple of weeks to answer a few questions. ‘An hour!’, she exclaimed, eyes wide. ‘Of course I don’t have an hour!’. She gestured to an assistant who promptly handed me a business card before wishing me needed luck.

The EU staff business card acted as a vital key of entry into the field. Apart from Emmanouela, the only other inhabitant of Brussels whom I knew personally when the fieldwork period commenced was Jens, a family friend working in DG Agriculture. Meeting new people and recruiting them as participants in the study required energetic networking efforts. The process accelerated when I joined the Oxford and Cambridge alumni societies of Belgium the Institute for European Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. EU newsletters kept me informed of upcoming seminars, panel discussions, debates and live interviews being held in the neighborhood. Officials tend to keep rather busy creatures, however, and merely obtaining a business card was often not enough in itself to secure an interview. Arranging a time and a place to meet often required chasing them down over a period of weeks, if not months. Emails and telephone calls flew back and forth. It was not uncommon for meetings scheduled well in advance to be postponed indefinitely or cancelled altogether. When introducing myself, the topic of my research would reliably arise in an organic fashion in response to the question, ‘So, what do you do?’. I refrained for the most part from initiating contact with officials whom I had not first met in person. A select few refused to participate, either immediately or eventually.

Several of those who participated in my earliest interviews put me in contact with friends, colleagues and family members whom they presumed would be interested. New recruits introduced me in turn to their contacts, and this process was replicated enough that the stack of business cards on my desk never stopped growing. I organized the information collected about each contact into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with columns for their name,

pseudonym, DG, unit, current job function, employee status, nationalities, gender, as well as details of how we first met. A second spreadsheet was kept for organizing the details of non-Commission employees. Overall, this approach to recruitment enabled me to enlist multiple participants working in the same Commission DG unit under the same boss and who know one another well, allowing me to capture several different perspectives on the same person, topic or event.

The result, in the end, is an ethnographic account derived from extensive field data collected from direct participant observation methods carried out in the formal settings of Commission DG offices and the informal settings of nearby neighborhood venues open to the public. During my visits to Commission officials at work, which occurred multiple times a week and sometimes multiple times in a day, I used every unattended moment to orthographically record in short hand as much conscious sensory information as possible, disregarding its apparent significance or irrelevance to my research purposes. At these times, such as when waiting for a meeting room full of people to be let out, there was little else other than this for me to do. Taking in the ambience of the atmosphere without judgment, I documented my observations, thoughts, emotions, noting the contents making up the interior décor: the framed posters on the walls, the arrangement of office future, flags on display in corners, family photographs on bookcases and so on. Impressions I received during and after the interview proceedings pertaining to visual cues and expressions of affect were likewise recorded.

While living in the European Quarter and participating in its daily communal ways of life, I carried out participant observation among Commission officials and other members of the EU bubble in informal public spaces over midday lunchbreaks and evening leisure hours. ‘Plux’, the weekly drinking ritual that takes place every Thursday evening at the pubs outside the Parliament hemicycle at Place Luxembourg, provided another lucrative opportunity for

meeting new people. The countless hours I spent 'deep hanging out' in households, cafes, parks, restaurants, pubs, theatres and various other recreational and domestic settings allowed me to observe and engage with them in environments where they felt comfortable to speak openly and 'be themselves' (Geertz 1998). Recruitment was facilitated by forming convivial relations of commensality with those encountered in the field (Fischler 2011). As Bellier (2000b: 62) notes: 'The display of official and private identities is especially important in Brussels, where the non-official world is very much involved with the institutional arena. Receptions, clubs, or meetings over cocktails are considered by the actors as key elements in their insertion into Europe as well as for the circulation of professional information.' Participating in the social life of Commission officials generated rich layers of data that would have been impossible to capture over the course of an interview conversation using interviewing methods alone.

The qualitative data I collected through participant-observation distinguishes the project as an ethnographic study of civil servants in the permanent administration of the EU Commission in Brussels, as opposed to an ethnography of the EU Commission itself. Every claim found in the following pages of the study is evidence-based. While many assertions may be taken as highly rhetorical, none should be taken as merely so. Each description of a person, place or event was reproduced after the fact with as much fidelity as possible to my personal experience as documented in field notes and audio recordings. Copious fieldnotes filled the pages of half a dozen notebooks. I carried one around with me in my blazer pocket, decorating their outer covers with a collage made of all the different visitor stickers I received when entering different Commission buildings. The only artistic liberties that are to be found in the following pages are those that were taken to ensure anonymity. The persons showcased in the following pages are real, living beings instead of abstract figures or data points taken from statistical reports. The two-fold approach of direct participant observation and semi-

structured interviewing allowed me to explore in formal and informal settings how Commission officials exhibit and elucidate our understanding of Europeanness in its everyday, variegated forms.

The terms *civil servant* or *fonctionnaire* are defined as 'officials and other servants of the European Union' (European Union 2020). Those who hold this title are categorized into three contract types: *permanent*, *temporary* and *fixed-term* or *contract*. Permanent officials or *administrators* make up two-thirds of the workforce and are the study's chief focus. They fall into three *function groups* (FG): administrative (AD) (36%), assistant (AST) and secretarial and clerical assistant (AST/SC) (27%). Each are assigned a different range of pay grades: AD 5-16, AST 1-11, and AST/SC 1-6, respectively. *Temporary staff* or *intérimaires* (three percent) are special advisors, *detached national experts* (seconded from national administrations) or *stagiaires* (trainees) holding fixed-term contracts usually ranging from four months to six years with the possibility of extension in certain cases. An additional category of *special advisers* is reserved for experts hired regularly or for a specified period. *Contract staff* (FG I-IV) (22%) perform manual or administrative tasks under the supervision of any of the above.

A total of 56 interviews were conducted in 16 policy and external DGs, with some 30% in Education and Culture (EAC) (see Annex). Half work in Communications Networks, Content and Technology (CNECT); Trade (TRADE); Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL); Economic and Financial Affairs (ECFIN); European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO); and Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union (FISMA). The remaining portion comprises officials in Competition (COMP); Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI); Translation (DGT); Mobility and Transport (MOVE); Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (GROW); Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI); Human Resources and Security (HR); Joint Research

Centre (JRC); and Informatics (DIGIT). Among those in the services, half are lawyers in the Legal Service. The rest work in the inter-institutional agencies of the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO), the European External Action Service (EEAS)[6] and the European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC). Members of Cabinet for the Commissioners for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management and Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness were also interviewed. The informant pool is evenly divided between management and non-management roles, straddling the high/low divide between AD and AST grade levels. The average age of participants is 48 years. As a representative sample was neither attempted nor achieved in this study, all claims ascribed to 'officials' refer to individual participants rather than the EU civil service as a totality.

Administrators holding managerial posts in high grades (Head of Unit and above) are Senior (7) and Middle Managers (15). One Commissioner also participated. Senior Managers (AD 14-16) include Directors-General, the top-level civil servants overseeing day-to-day operations in a DG, as well as Deputy Directors-General, Directors and Principal Advisers. Directors-General are most responsible for pushing through the agenda of the President and report directly to the Commissioner in charge of their corresponding policy area. Middle Managers (AD 9-14) are Heads of Unit, Heads of Department and Heads of Task Force. Those in relatively junior grades who have non-management roles are policy officers, project coordinators, lawyers, assistants and a translator. Considering that managers make up four percent of staff, they are overrepresented in this study (European Court of Auditors 2019). Eleven are former employees who have either retired or left and joined the private sector. A few individuals employed in ancillary food and drink services, either in the canteens of EU buildings or the restaurants surrounding them, were also interviewed.

[6] The EU's diplomatic service, created under the Lisbon Treaty through a merging of the departments and services of the former DG External Relations with their counterparts in the Council, is formally categorized as external to the Commission's architecture.

A majority of the semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were carried out inside Commission buildings at the invitation of the officials themselves. Others preferred we not talk in the workplace and suggested a meeting in a public space or at their home. All were recorded in their entirety on a dictaphone, except in three cases where consent to do so was withheld. Interview meetings were designed as a long-form, open-ended, improvisation-friendly conversation. A tailored protocol of around ten questions, each with bulleted follow-up questions, was prepared for each interview and used more as a last resort than as a call-and-response questionnaire. I allowed them time to fully complete their response to each question before proceeding to the next. The questions I asked are classified thematically into four sections: those pertaining to life history, those pertaining to daily work-life, those pertaining to living in Brussels and those pertaining to European identity and the European project. The vector of our discussions on these topics did not follow a prespecified order, but rather flitted back and forth among them spontaneously.

I would most often open the conversation questions relating to personal background: their childhood, relationship to family and the social environment growing up, educational and employment history, early experiences of travel, as well as any periods spent abroad for purposes of work or study. Doing so allowed me time to get to know informants and build rapport with them before moving on to more sensitive matters. A potted life history was collected first using the biographical-narrative-interpretative method, where open-narrative questioning prompts interviewees to improvise in real time a coherent narrative based on significant biographical events considered as formative in their personal trajectory (Wengraf 2001; Wengraf and Chamberlayne 2013). Doing so gave me a sense of the identifications with Europe and orientations towards the European project they may or may not have entertained before joining the Commission. The next set of questions dealt with officials' work-lives in the office and how they understand their roles as 'Union officials'. In response,

they discussed the work environment inside their DGs and units, the tasks and responsibilities entailed in their position, the informal networks in which they operate, the challenges that impede productivity and the strategies relied upon to overcome them. To reconstruct a long-term career trajectory, each was asked about other posts and policy areas in which they previously worked as well as those in which they aspire to end up in the future.

A third section sought to elicit their perspectives on how they find living in Brussels. I asked about their lives at home, outside of work, the leisure activities they do and the point of time at which their workday ends and their home life begins. The aim was to get their thoughts on the existence of a so-called Brussels bubble and how they might characterize a mentality and way of life distinctive to the European Quarter. The final part of the interview asked informants more directly about European identity and belonging and the personal significances attached to each at this stage of their lives. Questions pertained to the beliefs, attachments and aspirations entailed within Europeanness and how they measure up against those felt towards their countries and regions of origin. We discussed the purpose of the European project, how the Commission is portrayed in the media and their thoughts on and hopes for what the EU might become in a half-century. Here, I was able to determine how they position the Commission and the EU as a whole in a global context. Though these four themes can be divided accordingly, there is considerable conceptual overlap between them. Over the course of these long-form dialogues, informants are heard to theorize their working lives and construct biographical stories about themselves in their theorizations.

Over a hundred hours of interviews were recorded, and I transcribed each word-by-word using the application F5transkript. Interview transcriptions and data from field notes were then cleaned up and imported into and analyzed NVivo 12, the qualitative data analysis software, in preparation for coding. I assigned each participant a case classification with their biographical data and created a thematic codebook of labels representing the key linguistic

attributes of the questions laid out in the interview protocol. I also structured recurrent themes using the more fluid approach of grounded theory coding, whereby new codes for data segments related to the most frequently surfacing concepts, expressions, persons and are emerge and evolve over the course of analysis. Processing illustrative textual data through thematically structured coding methods allowed me a scope of analytical interpretation that I would not have achieved with a more interpretative method, with its premature assumptions, misleading impression and limited ability to trace behavioral patterns that can predict future outcomes.

Assuring the anonymity of each participant was a necessary measure to take on account of the power the Commission wields as an institution of governance and the sensitivity attached to some of the collected data. Writing institutional cultures inside elite institutions requires the ethnographer-in-residence, the uninvited guest that he or she is, to take particular ethical considerations into account (Mosse 2006; Lavanchy 2013). Measures taken to safeguard informant confidentiality fall in line with data protection rules already in place in the EU civil service for the purpose of protecting the personal identities of staff. Pseudonyms were chosen and care was taken to omit data that would make it possible to accurately link these monikers to living persons, despite the added richness which their inclusion would have lent to the ethnographic account. Before embarking on fieldwork, the study was approved by Oxford University's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) in accordance with the current norms governing research involving human participants and their personal data. In line with the ethical principles relevant to qualitative research of this kind, oral consent was obtained and documented in advance. Additional consent to record the interview as a WAV file was obtained. Informants were reminded at the beginning that their participation was voluntary and were given a business card with contact details should they later decide to withdraw it. The conversations between us were private in the sense that no

one else was present or otherwise able to overhear them. Research records and collected data were stored at all times in a secure area to which only I had access. Though I did not grant participants final clearance over how the data would be used, a copy of the interview transcript was made available to them for their approval beforehand. One official took me up on this offer.

1.4 The anthropology of the EU: intersections of bureaucracy and Europeanness

No political actor is a monolith. The ontogenesis of the European Union, defined by a continuous revision of external and internal borders, has proceeded at a virtually unparalleled pace. It would be difficult to name a contemporaneous nation state, international organization or advisory body that has changed so much in so little time. Growing from six member countries to twenty-eight, it has expanded territorially in a series of enlargements to the north, south and east like an empire without end. Milestones like the invention of the single market and Schengen area have achieved a concurrent erasure of its internal borders. The indeterminate nature of the institutional structures is a thematic refrain in the social science literature that falls under the heading European studies. The EU is, as Commission President Jacques Delors described it, an '*objet politique non identifié* [unidentified political object]'.[7] Scholars interested in understanding what it is in form and does and function grapple for accurate words to represent an indeterminate object with an indeterminate identity that is seemingly uncategorizable. For Borneman (Borneman and Fowler 1997)and Fowler, the EU constitutes a 'continental political unit of a novel order' (1997: 508). Any historical parallels should be taken with a grain of salt. (Bellier and Wilson 2000) see an 'indistinct entity, a

[7] https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2001/10/19/423d6913-b4e2-4395-9157-fe70b3ca8521/publishable_fr.pdf

contradictory conglomeration of words and actions, of symbols and policies, of intrusive and liberating values'. Europe is still a work in progress, as the name European *project* suggests.

The concept of European identity in EU cultural policy gained traction in the the 1970s in a context of a crisis of communal belonging in Europe (Stråth 2010). Decades before the institutional EU and the anthropology of the EU came into being, the consolidation of the European Economic Community (1958) caught the attention of Europeanists who explored dimensions of integration (social, political, economic, territorial) and attempts to carve out a supranational identity for Europe from above. The foundations on which the identity rests, according to the Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity, are similar 'attitudes to life' that the nine countries of the Community share among them (European Communities 1973: 1). The collective disposition is defined by 'the principles of representative democracy, of the rule of law, of social justice—which is the ultimate goal of economic progress—and of respect for human rights' as well as a determination to 'preserve the rich variety of their national cultures.' Nevertheless, the members 'have decided that unity is a basic European necessity to ensure the survival of the civilization which they have in common' (1973: 2). This is an early sketch of the 'unity in diversity' principle: Europeanness owes its distinctiveness to an identity allowing for cultural diversity within the framework of a common civilization.

The first studies of Europe post-1989 from an anthropological perspective appeared in the edited volume by Goddard (Goddard 1994)et al. (1996), whose nine case studies examined the sociopolitical impacts of European integration on identities and concepts of citizenships once the Treaty of Maastricht introduced the notion of the European citizen as a legal concept. For Goddard, definitions of Europeanness that appeal to the idealized institutions of democratic liberalism never apply exclusively to the region and so are of little use when it comes to the marking of boundaries. Of necessity for a comparative analysis of

European social structures were new conceptual categories and frameworks suited to large-scale societies that bridge local realities with national, supranational and global levels of influence. The volume charts a course for new ethnographic explorations of what Europe means to different groups and individuals as a matter of experience in relation to their own identities. The authors reject 'cultural approaches' in political science and international relations that uncritically recapitulate the prevailing narratives originating in EU centers of power by reifying the notion of a single, all-constitutive European culture based on shared values. Instead of positing Europeanness as an essentialized quality that is fixed, bounded and homogenous, they argue, anthropologists should acknowledge the plurality of 'Europes' that exist for different groups in different times and different places. Twenty years later, this approach is ironically similar to the one that is most loudly advocated by the European Commission I encountered. The social and institutional topography of the European Quarter is a professional 'contact zone' in which Europeanness emerges as a transcultural phenomenon designating the 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power' (Pratt 1991).

The 1990s heralded a renewed emphasis on the culture concept in the EU. The Commission made attempts to regenerate Europeanness as a collective identity infused with the politics of recognition and multiculturalism discourses fashionable at the time. The 'cultural turn' in European integration marked a juncture when Europeanness came to viewed by EU institutions through a culturalist lens as a social identity to be constructed and celebrated by means of 'cultural actions'. Contributions from Cris Shore (Shore 1993; 2000; 2001) over this period were instrumental in establishing the anthropological study of the historical, religious and scientific origins of Europeanness as a cultural construct. His work formulated a template for approaching EU cultural policies by studying the Europe-makers who are responsible for launching them into the world. All engineering, as engineers like to

say, is devoted to keeping the thing you are building stable. The legitimation of EU institutional power and external influence, he argued, is a primary motivator of the Commission's engagement in identity-forming practices (Shore 2000).

Narratives of Europeanness function as social and symbolic 'technologies of legitimation' for EU institution-building in a political context of market integration and deregulation at the European level (Calligaro 2015; Biegon 2016). An ambient aim of EU cultural policy is to foster specific supranational identities and popular acquiescence to these modes of belonging (Sassatelli 2002). Once interpellated as supranational subjects, citizens ideally see the false promises of nationalist self-determination for what they are and start to recognize themselves as Europeans belonging as members to an emergent supranational civil society. The EU's 'cultural turn' towards the promotion of European identity functioned as a strategy for ensuring unity and consensus among members in a socioeconomic context of vast class inequalities exacerbated by the neoliberal policies at various levels of governance.

Anthropologists who spend long days systematically poking around inside the EU's bodies, agencies and services are a growing if still esoteric few. For now, working at the intersection of social anthropology and European studies necessitates being somewhat at odds with both approaches. The aim of the anthropology of the EU is 'to explore the meanings which are given to the concepts of European and national identities both within the institutions of the EU and beyond their formal limits' (Bellier and Wilson 2000: 3). The element of permanence ensconced in the designation 'permanent official' indicates the level of job security new recruits can expect, allowing time to for their socialization into the behavioral norms of the office environment. Through this process of '*engrenage'*, junior officials are 'geared' to suit the needs of the administrative body as a whole and become 'enmeshed' in its internal cultural schemas. Once this is done, they become full members of the 'family', a figuration often used to emphasize the aspect of the job that involves

belonging to a closed administrative community (Abélès 2000; Abélès 2004; Shore and Abélès 2004).

'Studying up' entails an attempt to understand and represent communities whose members are themselves engaged simultaneously in the same pursuit (Nader 1972; Bernstein and Mertz 2011). A recurring motif in the social anthropology of bureaucracy is how closely the work practices of civil servants resemble our own (Marcus 1986; Brenneis 1994; Marcus 1998). As Abélès, Bellier and McDonald (1993: 70) observed, officials perceive themselves as 'not simply bureaucrats but also intellectuals.' They are 'extremely knowledgeable respondents and audiences whose own models of culture and identity create remarkable dialectics of method and theory within an anthropologist's field experience (Bellier 2002). Key anthropological concepts such as integration, cultural diversity, orientalism and imagined communities are not unfamiliar to them (Shore 2000). This is to some extent the inverse of the one pointed out in the postmodernist critiques of anthropological representation fashionable in the 1980s (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Here, however, the problem is one of radical sameness as opposed to radical difference. Rather than traverse a gulf between ethnographer and informant that is ultimately unbridgeable, the task at hand concerns to create enough distance between them so that the latter may be examined with greater clarity. While the situation gives rise to its own crisis of representation, it offers novel opportunities to confront the predominant models of the social sciences with the models and lived experiences of our subjects in a two-way, dialectical process (Kuper 1992).

When presenting the results of my research at conferences and seminars, I am often asked why I have chosen to exclude the perspectives of 'ordinary' Europeans in this study. Others, for example, have examined local and national orientations toward EU policies among local communities in Italy (Giordano 1987), Ireland (Dilley 1989; Sheehan 1991; Shutes 1991), the UK (Parkin 1999), Spain (Lipuma and Meltzoff 1989), France (McDonogh

1993) and the Netherlands (Jurjus 1993). The project is a work of elite anthropology that adopts a top-down approach, investigating the reproduction of European identity and belonging 'from above' (Wilson 1989; Le Wita 1994; Bellier 2000; Rhodes, Hart and Noordegraaf 2007; Atkinson and Burrows 2014). The ethnographic subjects represented in the study hold a rarefied social status and a large amount of political and economic capital at their disposal (Lewicki 2017). They are better-remunerated than their counterparts at the national level and receive a generous package of supplementary benefits including health insurance, pensions, expatriation bonuses, family allowances and free private education for their offspring. They have master's degrees and enjoy privileges that only the top one percent of most fortunate people who have ever lived would know. If one of us is the 'savage' in the fieldworker/informant relationships formed out of these ethnographic encounters, it is me.

It would be regrettable, however, if the reader were to proceed under the misapprehension that I consider the EU to have a definitive or authoritative monopoly over European identity. Europeanness is constructed in multiple and mutually contradictory ways. Relevant conceptual and ethnographic work on European identity may in principle be located wherever Europeanness is reproduced socially. The EU Commission is not the supreme cultural authority over Europeanness for the simple reason that cultures lack supreme authorities altogether. My daily interactions with so-called 'ordinary' Europeans has persuaded me that there is nothing ordinary about these people whatsoever, in any case.

The first anthropological study of administrative life inside the EU Commission was carried out by (Abélès, Bellier and McDonald 1993) at the invitation of President Delors. The team was tasked with investigating the existence of a 'Commission culture' in the making, measuring the impact of multilingualism and different national cultural traditions on working relationships. They also evaluated the prospects of a European identity (Bellier 2002). Data was collected through interviews with officials and participant observation at the offices of

15 DGs, as well as the translation service and the Secretariat-General. Their results found the national and linguistic heterogeneity of the administrative body to be a source of 'instability and confrontation' in the working environment, while also constituting 'what makes life at the Commission rich'. The reality of a cultural lifeworld permeating its spaces, one which reproduces a 'unity/pluralism dialectic' that is 'felt by some to be an internal hallmark of the institution' was affirmed (Abélès, et al. 1993). While palpable, this so-called Commission culture is itself 'built on a confluence of cultures', making no impact of significance on the production of a distinctive collective identity (ibid., 70). The report, titled 'An Anthropological Approach to the European Commission', was eventually shelved and abandoned but not forgotten.

'The story goes,' Leon said, 'that when they prepared the draft and presented it to the Commission, there was this bit in that document where they say, "One way of looking at the European Union is to draw a line between the wine-drinking countries and the beer-drinking countries." Do you remember that?' I did, of course, recall the passage: 'There may also be perceived differences between dominant and dominated languages, Latin and Nordic cultures, wine-drinkers and beer-drinkers, socialism and liberalism, Catholic and Protestant ideology, and so on' (Abélès, et al. 1993). The statement was made specifically in reference to Commission officials as opposed to the European civil service in general. 'And then some little imp got involved and said, "The trouble begins when the beer-drinkers begin to drink wine in the same quantities in which they drink beer." And at the time—because you're from Irish roots—this actually hit under the belt of the Irish Commissioner, a man who was well known for imbibing fairly freely. You'd have thought they would have anticipated that they would have to edit this bit out. But then they had a row about it and decided that it was too dangerous to publish.'

‘Because of that one line?’, I asked. It never struck me as a particularly eyebrow-raising observation.

‘And one or two other comments, which is really sad because of course the overall tenor of the thing was to say, “The surprising thing is that it works. It shouldn’t work, but it seems to be working.”’

‘Well, I found the study on the whole was quite positive.’

‘Yeah, but there will always be people who are sensitive. It’s a lovely story really, the European Union—the way it tries to face up to all kinds of difficulties.’ All of this should be taken as gossip, he admitted, though ‘most of it is sort of true’.

In any case, the final draft of the report has never been published. Its legacy persists nonetheless. Some of the questions it raised inspired further research along similar lines of inquiry, such as the 1998 study Leon carried out with the aid of his team. The document became weaponized in inter-institutional debates surrounding a swell of allegations regarding corruption and mismanagement that culminated in the collapse of the Commission under President Jacques Santer, thereby clearing the way for its rebirth as a fully modernized administration able to meet the demands and wishes of a new Europe in a new century.

Thankfully, the pioneering study’s less-than-welcome reception among the higher-ups did not prevent it from launching the careers of Irène Bellier, Maryon McDonald and Marc Abélès inside EU institutions. Bellier went on to examine how the prospect of a ‘European Community’ challenges prevailing paradigms linking ideas of ‘community’ with those of ‘nation’ (Bellier 2000). ‘Anthropological perspectives on Europe-building which are derived from within the European institutions,’ she writes, ‘allow us to problematize the ways in which “cultures” and “identities” are essentialized by the nationalist movements who assigned fixed categories to the dynamic process of identification’ (ibid., 53). Maryon McDonald (1996; 2000; 2005; 2012) has explored further the internal tensions and

stereotypes surrounding issues of nationality and cultural difference inside the Commission.. In contrast to the approach promulgated within the sociology of organizations, they explicitly distinguished their own approach as anthropological by virtue of the fact that it eschews a priori attributions of intrinsic rationality to institutions and theoretical dichotomies that separate the conceptual realm of ideas from the material realm world of actions. Instead, they emphasized their informants' own representational categories regarding what they were up to at work, privileging 'modes of thinking, representation or values' as a heuristic for understanding social realities (Abélès, et al. 1993).

This study takes an invigorated look at how narratives of Europeanness and Europeanism are articulated inside the EU civil service. In line with the works cited above, I have set myself the task of understanding the idea of Europe in social practices in a geographical and political center of Europe as opposed to its margins. In the last twenty years, things in the Commission civil service have changed while staying much the same as they always have been. A Great Recession and the three enlargements incorporating the EU's newest, mostly post-Soviet member countries have regenerated nationally coded anxieties which find expression in narratives of Europeanness. As with the formative studies of the Commission which helped to launch the anthropology of the European Union into motion as a sub-discipline at large in the 1990s, this research was carried out in a time of crisis. President Delors's decision in summoning the ethnographic research team of Abélès, Bellier and McDonald was motivated by the disappointment of low support for the Maastricht Treaty. My approach draws inspiration from and goes beyond this pioneering study of the Europe-makers responsible for launching EU cultural policies into the world.

In the culturally promiscuous European Quarter, where more than half the population is foreign-born or the offspring of foreign-born parents, stereotypes about nationness provide reliable fodder for idle small talk. Anthropologists of the EU tend to argue either that

narratives of Europeanness jeopardize the supremacy of national belonging and identity (Bellier and Wilson 2000, Hedetoft and Hjort 2002, Schissler and Soysal 2005), or that they rely on nationalism's symbolic and ideological repertoire (Holmes 2000). The fieldwork of Cris Shore (Shore and Black 1994; Shore 2000; Shore and Wright 2003), especially his analysis of the 'People's Europe' program launched in the 1980s, has gone the furthest in deconstructing the Commission's efforts to promote European-level identity and culture through the invention and dissemination of distinctive symbols. EU rely on and reproduce the imagery, ideology, mythology and symbiology of nationness and nationhood (Shore 2000, Holmes 2000). D'Appollonia (2002: 178) notes how postwar Europeanness 'borrowed most from the national mystique by defining itself according to the same criteria as the nation-state: historical memory-building, a common identity and culture for the entities grouped within the bounds of a given territory and political and economic objectives destined to ensure general prosperity and to defend the global interests of its participants'. The Commission shrouds its Europeanism in the spiritual symbolism of a 'higher purpose' or 'calling' that nationalism borrowed from the monotheistic religious movements that came to power over previous centuries, whose techniques were in turn stolen from the pagan societies that preceded them (Weber 2001). A middle road in between these two models is, I suggest, possible. Europeanness both appropriates and subverts nationalist discourses, misappropriating and mobilizing its symbols in order to destroy them, emulating the nation while using its own weapons against it. Notwithstanding the discourses and images of nation, community, citizenship, class, ethnicity and virtue in which it is embedded, European identity and belonging is irreducible to each of these surface-level categorical distinctions either alone or in combination.

There is a case to be made for accusations of methodical, or at least theoretical, individualism on the part of the adopted approach in the way it follows Barth (1966) and

Boissevain (1974) in their focus on individuals and the strategies they employ in navigating the local milieu and engaging interpersonal exchanges. It takes inspiration from existential approaches in anthropology that explore 'the complex singularity of human being distinct from proximal identifications and categorizations (nation, ethnicity, class, locale, religiosity, gender)' that otherwise take precedence over 'the common embodiedness of our being-in-the-world' (Jackson 2005). Herzfeld (2002) writes on individualism, 'the "common sense" of universalizing modes of rationality' as an essentializing stereotype of European identity. Despite framing Europe as 'at once continent, idea, and culture' as well as an 'attitude', he doubts the existence of what could be called a European quintessence or selfhood in the sense of a distinctive 'mentality' or 'character' predetermining thoughts and actions (ibid., 139). Concluding that European ideologies of individualism are conformist concepts seeking compliance to a model of collective selfhood, he remarks how they feature less in the rationale for European integration as much as they once did. This trend has since continued, not because individualism has become less important, but because sovereignty has become more so. My approach follows Herzfeld's (1989, 1) (Herzfeld 1989)symbolic analysis of 'the cultural identities of those globally dominant societies that themselves created the discipline.' It attempts an ethnography of social concepts and identities and EU attempts, both personal and administrative, to negotiate and reconfigure them, rather than an ethnography of the EU administration, strictly speaking. To escape the methodological essentialism denial of human agency of the sort of Marxian accounts showcased by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in *The Invention of Tradition* (2012), he eschews their emphasis on ideology from above as mystification reinforcing a false consciousness. Individuals are not mere passive beneficiaries of social networks and value systems but active agents who manipulate them in accordance with or defiance of particular modes of rationality in order to achieve certain ends. Citizens who are 'constituted as state subjects are active agents who refashion and subvert ideologies

for the pursuit of personal and collective ends. It is not the psychological phenomena of their thoughts and beliefs that are of interest; it is rather the social fact of how ideology is *used* at the local level to adhere to or rebel against cultural conventions (ibid., 154).

Individuality is, paradoxically, a fundamentally social phenomenon. It is, after all, the tangible cultural participant as social being, not the private individual, who inherits and internalizes these patterns of cognition and behavior. He or she is a social actor existing in relations of power who creates subjectivities within particular contexts out of these social relations. Each of the subjectivities formed is a singularity with idiosyncrasies of persona that is always only partially dissolved into or consumed by these relations. The individual, a minority of one, constitutes the minority within the minority and the internal differentiation of societies at the level of individuals constitutes the diversity within diversity.

In exploring European bureaucracy ethnographically, the anthropology of the EU 'from above' sits at the intersection between the anthropological analysis of Europeanness and the anthropology of bureaucracy (Bellier and Wilson 2000). The Commission was self-consciously engineered to engender supranational identities, and the European Quarter of Brussels has become a potent institutional site for the reproduction and dissemination of Europeanness. The neighborhood is 'the very first place where people concretely experience Europe' (Bellier 2002). Taking 'Europe' and its cognates as its central concepts of ethnographic analysis, the theoretical approach adopted in this study is as self-consciously Eurocentric as it is Brussels-centric. This is because ethnographic accounts are as much the study of a group's own ethnocentrism, its self-fixation, as they are of the group themselves (Herzfeld 1989). Just as small, inner-city enclaves like the European Quarter in Brussels are perceived as forming social and institutional 'bubble' communities, entire countries can likewise suffer from a diagnosed 'bubble syndrome'. While the promotion of an identity and culture distinct to Europe continues to drive, whether directly or in a more tangential fashion,

specific policies that the Commission creates, the 'European question' and its implications for the future are seldom discussed outright in the workplace. They are aware nonetheless that this kind of qualitative research exists and is carried out with increasing regularity. Many share this interest themselves and read through titles on related topics at their leisure, mostly in political science or sociology. Still, they can at least *conceive* of the reasons why some social anthropologists would also be keen to get it on the action.

It came as some surprise to those I met that the future of the European project is a topic which could be so germane to the interests of an *American*. Most Europeanists who come here hoping to carry out their EU-focused dissertations in fulfillment of the requirements for social science degrees are themselves European. Despite a rich history of outward reach in foreign policy matters, Yankees have a reputation for inwardness and insularity—a willful solipsism, nearly. The constant images of Americanness which America broadcasts to the rest of the world exhibit all the symptoms of narcissistic indifference on a national scale, a chronic cluelessness regarding other cultures, ideas and ways of getting things done. This national culture of apathy, as President Juncker points out, applies even in the context of its relationships with its closest friends and neighbors: 'The Americans, as a general rule, have no interest in Europe'.[8] Feelings that the United States has lost interest in Europe were cemented anew by the Obama administration's 2012 'Pivot to East Asia' regional strategy.

I am an anthropologist from the Wild West—the state of Texas, no less—who is affiliated with British and Belgian universities and on a mission to gather information from officials inside a foreign political administration in Brussels. One morning, this heightened the suspicions of border security at the Brussels Airport as I waited to pass through the departures terminal.

[8] https://www.businessinsider.com/afp-trump-must-learn-about-europe-says-eus-juncker-2016-11?r=US&IR=T

‘If you’ve only been living in England a year,’ she asked, ‘why do you have a British accent?’

‘I don’t have a British accent.’

‘Well, you don’t have a Texan accent either.’ She is right. Any southern twang that might have decorated my pre-pubescent voice as a child has long since been suppressed and eliminated. Neither of us imagined that in exactly seventeen months to the day, the room where we now stood would be leveled to the ground by homemade bombs delivered to its door by members of a group of fanatical extremists.

That my own motives would be questioned in this way with some regularity by border police, not to mention my own friends, is an eventuality I did to anticipate. Early years spent as a teenage ne'er-do-well afforded me some experience in covert operations, including how to sneak out of and back into houses full of sleeping parents, how to improvise a solid alibi on the fly. My self-education in the dark art of subterfuge came to end before it had a chance to advance, however, for I seldom covered my tracks well enough to avoid being caught. Awkward in movement and conspicuous in appearance, I would make a terrible spy. ‘That’, as Emmanouela told me when I went to her to complain about this problem, ‘is exactly what a spy *would* say.’

Is the craft of ethnography so different from that of espionage? Some of the ethnographic participants whom Katherine Verdery (2018) believed she had come to know intimately after decades of research in Transylvania did not think so, given how they doubled as ‘informants’ in her study as well as ‘informants’ for the secret police. The crafts of ethnography and espionage both involve observing and socializing with new people for extend periods while convincingly enacting carefully crafted personas in foreign contexts. I was later advised when discussing these experiences with colleagues that listing my occupation as ‘journalist’ instead of ‘anthropologist’ is the safer strategy when traveling across borders in airports and train

stations. Isn't *that*, in fact, exactly what spies actually say in real life? I doubt this would have measurably improved things in my case.

My first visit to the Berlaymont was an eventful occasion on account of my failed attempt to carry a concealed pocketknife onto the premises. The weapon in question was a small blade attached to a corkscrew which the guard found in an inner pocket of my briefcase. I try to remember to pack one when going to places where the wine is cheaper than the water but forgot to leave this one at home. The guard said I could retrieve the utensil at the front desk from him on my way out.

Not everyone was so understanding. Wherever I went, suspicions seemed to follow. With 127 diplomatic postings, Brussels might also be the international capital of espionage.[9] Peddling sensitive information to foreign governments in exchange for remuneration is not considered a crime in Belgium. There are 1930s-era provisions in the law books dating against passing information of national interest to a hostile power but low risk of having to face incarceration if caught and convicted. Those in opposition to stricter legislation warn of potential dangers to freedom of speech and a free press. Commission officials are issued security clearances by the member states of their nationalities in order to go to work in the. When one is suspected of engaging in these sorts of misdeeds, the onus is on their respective national government agencies to carry out the investigation.

In the spring of 2016, I was accused of conspiring to murder a high-ranking Commission official. The victim and accuser of the alleged crime was my neighbor, a woman who moved in when Ariane left back to school. She claimed to work closely with President Juncker on his team and threatened to enact revenge by using her influence and capital to make my life difficult. I was unable to verify her exact job title but did see her name in the staff directory. The plot that Delphine allegedly aided and abetted me in hatching was to poison her to death

[9] [9] https://www.politico.eu/article/belgium-trying-to-build-spy-law-because-of-espionage-in-eu/

in her flat by filling it with carbon monoxide. The contretemps started when she told me she was being kept awake at night by the sound of me upstairs walking: 'Sorry for the expression,' she said, 'but we in the EU are not Guantanamo, here to be tortured by your boots.' I was in the habit of removing my footwear when I got home, but this struck me as a quite a hooky line for a noise complaint. She says she knows the USA well through the numerous diplomats and businessmen with whom she's worked:

> In the Baltic states, we are very grateful for American support for our independence, that the US never recognized our annexation by the Soviets, while President Bush and State Secretary Clinton have even visited our countries. These were/are very committed and mature persons. In the EU we value our relationships with the US, taking into account also the ongoing TTIP negotiations. However, times are changing, and personally I have not just good, but also sad experiences with the US.

There was the time she lost out on a dream job at the US embassy in her home country of Lithuania. She was the perfect woman for it, and it would have been hers had a vial of 'medical pills' not fallen out of her bag before the interview was complete. The suggestion being made, as best as I could gather, was that the American officers there noticed the pills and decided not to hire her after assuming she suffered from drug dependency or some other affliction. There was also the young American entrepreneur who wanted to sell an illegal brand of ecological fertilizer on the Spanish market. Once she informed him of the regulations on non-tested products that pose possible health hazards for citizens, he simply went quiet and vanished without ever compensating her for the consultation fees. Based on these experiences, she concludes that in the United States of America one finds the full spectrum of moral character, stretching from the best that humanity has to offer to the worst. There are good Americans like Hillary Clinton and George W. Bush Jr., and then there are bad Americans like me and my imaginary boots. I wish retrospectively that I had the courage to get to know her better, but I was too frightened at the time to do this.

'Nothing is for granted,' she said to me on the morning of my 30th birthday. 'Everything is based on merits and respect for our values and norms. The situation has been reported to

my colleagues at the Cabinet of the President, to whom it is not difficult to cross check your personality and aims of being in the EU, as they have access to information and means to act, and as a Commission staff member is concerned.' It is uncertain whether she ever did in fact go to Juncker and his team with her complaints, or if this was simply a ruse to get me to move out first. Like the President himself, who keeps a black book named 'Little Maurice' filled with the names of everyone who once betrayed him, I believe that one's choice of enemies is far more crucial to personal happiness than one's choice of friends.[10] Delphine, my alleged co-assassin, told me there is no need to worry or take her seriously because she is insane, which may be true but did not make things any less worrisome.

Had she been successful in arranging my deportation from Belgium, it would not have been the first time. Upon my return from the aforementioned winter break, it was determined that I had overstayed my 3-month tourist visa by three weeks. This was the day of the Charlie Hebdo murders in Paris. I spent it in several holding cells in the airport and stayed the night at the Caricole Transit Centre, a migrant detention facility on the outskirts of the city. I was shuttled around to many different wards of the complex and spoke to many inmates from around the world in various stages of displacement. They were surprised to find someone there with a US passport, assuming I had been caught with contraband. My cellmates were two nice young Pakistani fellows who had lived there three months. Both were and called Mohammed. There was a little TV in the room displaying CNN's coverage of the killings. They gave me a surreptitious sandwich they had snuck in under the noses of their captors. The news of the day never came up in our conversation. I was awoken at dawn the next day and sent back on the first flight to London. Earlier, a Belgian guard had handed me a phone to speak to a representative from British Airways, who insisted that I charge the cost of the

[10] http://www.lesoir.be/1279732/article/actualite/union-europeenne/2016-07-31/jean-claude-juncker-au-soir-je-note-dans-un-carnet-noir-ceux-qui-m-ont-tra

ticket to a credit card for £800 and change. I refused, remembering someone mentioning throughout the ordeal that I did not in fact need to pay for the modification in my itinerary. Eventually the voice on the other end of the line agreed that my trip back to England was free of cost. On top of that, the criminal status granted me priority boarding privileges, meaning that I was allowed to make myself comfortable in my reserved seat at the very back of the plane before first-class passengers and even servicemembers. Right before escorting me on, another guard handed me a menthol cigarette and we smoked together on the jet bridge. He said that, how he saw it, I was simply unlucky. Five months were spent squatting in empty rooms between London and Birmingham while attempting as best I knew how to obtain a student visa. 'What started as a little hick-up', as Jens put it, 'turned into a drawn-out surreal story starring the Belgian bureaucracy. Unfortunately, this country's administration reflects Magritte's art all too well.' After three more attempts, I was in and absconded back to Brussels the day the visa was issued.

While doing ethnography in any form necessitates continuous negotiating of the means of entry into the community, studying up inside powerful institutions presents a specific set of challenges concerning access and how to gain it. The interiors of European Commission buildings are secretive, publicly inaccessible worlds. Each day began with the ritual of security clearance, whose measures would be familiar to anyone who has flown on an airplane post-911. I would walk through the revolving doors on the ground floor, greet the guards and present my Belgian residence card at the front desk. Small groups of well-dressed women and men would dart out from between elevator doors, glance over at me and exit onto the sidewalk. The receptionists would be two or three Belgians dressed in suits with ID badges and walkie-talkies. After a quick search on the DG's directory, one would dial the number as the others stare into the distance, pretending not to pay attention. A secretary on the other end of the line would tell the man, who would then apprise me, that someone will

be down to collect me *tout de suite*. I would be given a visitor's pass bearing the EU's official logo and the words 'VISITEUR/VISITOR/BESUCHER' which must be worn in a visible manner at all times. This is unfortunate because the adhesive tends to disagree with my usual choice of fabrics.

A second impediment to my ability to access Commission buildings was my unsuccessful attempt to do a short-term traineeship in a DG. The most common reason I was offered as to why I was not chosen for a traineeship has to do with my citizenship status as a third-country national. Citizens of a few non-EU countries, the US included, are eligible to apply for the scheme. However, spaces are limited and EU nationals take precedence. An additional factor that came into play, one might assume, was my specific research agenda. In the written sections of the job applications, I was quite explicit as to my ulterior motives in this regard. Without the authorization that comes with an official position, I could not sit in on internal meetings and observe the creation of policy in action nor browse the internal intranet servers. Inside Commission buildings I became a 'visitor-observer' of sorts, an outsider who is always welcomed in to do my work but never allowed to stay for more than a few hours at a time.

I likewise conducted participant-observation on interactions between officials and academics at four seminars organized in part by EAC under the umbrella of the Jean Monnet Actions. These biannual events, three of which were held in Brussels and one in Malmö, Sweden, were attended by top EAC officials such as Roger and Diego. Also present were representatives from the Council and Parliament, and numerous researchers and lecturers who hold the Jean Monnet Chair, an academic post awarded to experts in European integration. I was tasked with the role of rapporteur during working the group sessions on Security and Defense, mostly on account of my native command of English. These events featured prominent speakers who intoned solemn speeches about Europe's future in crisis,

providing a dynamic, closed-door context through which I shared some of my work while observing ways of knowing, being, imagining and remembering that manifest themselves in nonverbal actions. When access threw my initial research plan off its course while I was already in the field, it became evident that something of an impasse had been reached. It was the sort of problem which needed resolving as swiftly as possible, for interviewing on its own does not an ethnography make. I managed nevertheless to reframe the study theoretically and methodologically and accumulate adequate participant observational data to complete the project from an alternative ethnographic angle.

A sense of urgency dramatically shaped my research role, obliging that I pivot to a study of the neighborhood more broadly. The result is not an ethnography of the EU civil service, strictly speaking, as I did not get permission to work in them. It is, rather, an ethnography of EU civil servants in the European Quarter of Brussels. Modern bureaucracies are institutional contexts to which interviewing methods are ideally suited, given the high levels of segmentation in which bureaucrats compartmentalize their lifeworlds. Gaining a level of access equivalent to that of an insider, moreover, requires the researcher to make compensatory compromises that comes at its own price, as witnessed in the fate of the 1993 report (Abélès, et al. 1993). By remaining an independent 'guest' researcher whose entrances and exits in and out of well-guarded EU institutional spaces were negotiated day-to-day, I retained my autonomy over how data is collected, analyzed and used for purposes of publication. A low-level full-time internship position, moreover, would have required additional constraints be placed on the use of my finite time and attention in the field.

2 Unity in adversity: On the effects and affects of radical uncertainties in a 'last-chance Commission'

My arrival in the field roughly coincided with the commencement of the Juncker Commission's 2014 term in office. Upon settling in, I gathered the impression that something was amiss. A sense of low-humming dread was palpable, and a pallid cloud leaden with uncertainty loomed ominously overhead.

The College of Commissioners under José Manuel Barroso made their exit at a time of adversity for the EU and high distrust in EU institutions. Since the 2008 international financial crisis and ensuing eurozone debt crisis, economies have been strained as unemployment has risen, living standards have declined, housing bubbles have burst and structural weaknesses in labor markets have revealed themselves. The incoming President Jean Claude Juncker announced that his 'last-chance Commission' was beginning its first term at a 'make-or-break moment' for a European Union preoccupied with multiple and overlapping crises.[11]

'A lot can happen in a week these days,' Liam said. 'You could spend a hundred lifetimes, and you'd never solve half the problems.' We sat in his office in the DG for Education and Culture on a Friday evening in December 2016, at the end of the final week before the buildings close for the winter break. Colleagues came in and out of the room, wishing us all the best for the holidays. 'Yay!' he cheered, sarcastically. '2016: best year for democracy ever!'

'It's almost over. Just hold tight.'

'Just got to hang on, yeah.'

[11] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-31751830

I bade him farewell and promptly ran into his boss Justine on the street below their offices on Rue Joseph II. She asked how the study is going, what with the UK referendum defeat and the 'recent developments in your country', referring to the election of President Donald J. Trump. I joked that someone has to benefit from these tragedies, and I don't see why this someone shouldn't be me. Whatever happens, it certainly isn't going to be boring.

'But what do we do?' I answered that I thought they needed more anthropologists on the problem.

The years 2015 and 2016 were *anni horribiles* for the European Union. The period reached its nadir with the Brexit vote in Britain, signifying a moment at which this tidal wave of disillusionment reaches new heights inside the EU-28. There was the Greek financial crisis and the refugee/migrant crisis. There were terror attacks in Paris, Berlin, London, Barcelona and Brussels. There was the Panama Papers affair and the 'Luxleaks' scandal, which implicated Juncker personally in his years as Prime Minister of Luxembourg. Far-right parties promoting nationalism and nativism gained unprecedented support in Hungary, Poland, Finland, Denmark, Sweden and France, while left-wing Euroskeptic parties saw victory well in Greece, Spain and Portugal. As voices critical of the EU achieved mainstream acceptance, arguments for 'more Europe' and 'ever closer union' began sounding fanciful, old-fashioned and elitist to many of those listening. The year 2016 also took the life of David Bowie, moreover, just two days following the release of his 25th album on his 69th birthday.

The induction of the 2014 College of Commissioners heralded a return to politics and the political within the EU civil service. (Juncker 2014a) stated his intentions to lead an executive that is 'more political' than those that came before it: 'The Commission is not a technical committee made up of civil servants who implement the instructions of another institution. The Commission is political. And I want it to be more political. Indeed, it will be highly political. Its make-up must reflect the plurality of the majority of ideas which take

shape.' He is 'not an anonymous bureaucrat or a putschist who would have forced the doors of the Berlaymont'.[12] Rather, he is, by virtue of the *Spitzenkandidat* procedure, a politician with a 'triple legitimacy', having won one mandate from voters, another from the Council and a third from the Parliament.

For a public relations exercise, 'We are politicians' made for an odd choice of brand at a time of widespread popular distrust in political institutions in general, when identifying oneself as a politician is not something that is eagerly disclosed in public. As the sitting Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Juncker once defined the position of the politician in the following way: 'We all know what to do, we just don't know how to get re-elected after we've done it'.[13] In the age of the political outsider, those holding public offices are no longer politicians themselves. They are businesspeople, finance-people, law-people or television personalities. Their inexperience in the public sector is perceived as an asset that lends them an advantage over the real politicians, who are their opponents. The phenomenon exists in equal measure among journalists, who rarely include themselves in references to 'the media'. Politics, like journalism and bureaucracy, is a profession that dare not speak its name.

The decision of a slight but decisive majority of eligible UK voters to end their country's membership of the European Union marks a new milestone in a history of lost plebiscites on 'the EU issue'. There was the initial rejection of the Treaty of Maastricht by the Danes, and the rejection by referendum in France and the Netherlands of the proposed Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in 2005. Since the days of the European Communities, Greenland, Algeria and the island of Saint Barthélemy in the West Indies have withdrawn from the project. The British are the first national electorate to formally end their membership

[12] https://euobserver.com/institutional/140989
[13] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-27679170

by referendum. The EU stands to lose around 15% of its economic weight, as well as one of its two nuclear-armed military powers and a permanent member of the UN Security Council. 'Brexit means Brexit', as it were, but whatever Brexit will in fact come to mean, the phenomenon controverts a basic principle of the European idea—that 'the movement toward closer supranational integration is irreversible' (Haas 1968: 449), and once the project is put in motion, the arc of history will bend inevitably and unidirectionally toward greater social and political unification among countries and persons in Europe. The act of withdrawal, made unlawful under the draft constitution rejected by French and Dutch voters in 2004, is antithetical to the notion of 'ever closer union' in European integration, representing the oppositional impulse of disintegration. The affair proves it is possible for Europe to shrink over its lifetime as well as enlarge.

The ambient mood engulfing the neighborhood on 24 June 2016 was one of loss and disbelief on a scale that had not been felt since the morning of the bombings three months previously. Brexit and the British question increasingly dominated the conversations in which I took part during the months leading up to the vote, providing a source of frustration, bewilderment and a great many jokes. It became more than plain that my informants invest much of themselves in the topic. That Leave would ultimately prevail seemed improbable at best. Word of the defeat, whether for those who stayed up all night or woke up to it in the morning, is felt as an acute sense of discomfort on personal, professional and emotional levels. In theatres, seminar buildings and cultural centers, events are organized with portentous titles such as 'Europe on the Brink' and 'A Turning Point for Europe?' and 'A Europe in Crisis: What's Next?'

'We miss you already,' confessed a visibly shaken Donald Tusk (Crisp 2017). All irony was lost on Nigel Farage when he designated the 23rd of June as UK's 'independence day' (Sheftalovich 2016). Marine (Le Pen 2016) fantasized aloud about the inevitability of an

approaching 'People's Spring', a domino effect of analogous plebiscites allowing members such as Denmark and the Netherlands to '[choose] sovereign nations' and follow suit. Then-presidential candidate Donald Trump welcomed the result, characterizing his eventual inauguration as a 'Brexit plus plus plus' (Dearden 2016). Juncker announced in advance that he will not seek a second term in 2019, a promise he ultimately kept.

The significance of the political (re)turn in the EU Commission relies in part on the meanings and assumptions the terms *politics* and *the political* and their counterparts, *administration* and *the administrative* or *technocracy* and *the technocratic*, take on in the ethnographic context (McDonald 2012). Following Candea (2011) in his call to rethink 'the political' anthropologically, this chapter investigates where and in what ways the political/technocratic dichotomy is performed and rendered vivid through everyday practices within the Commission's lifeworld. The boundaries and parameters of each of the two poles are perpetually redrawn during interactions with external actors at the European, national and subnational levels. Examining the ways in which discourses of the political are employed in supranational bureaucratic spaces enables social anthropologists to gain insights into the varieties of identities and belongings that are performed within these spaces. In doing so, the chapter aims to highlight the importance of taking seriously what bureaucrats think and say about themselves. The re-politicization of the EU executive by the Juncker Commission may be read as an act of institutional self-reinvention, performed discursively in response to a crisis of legitimacy related to a perceived democratic deficit and the absence of a European demos. In their attempts to connect with citizens where it matters, working in a 'more political administration' brings officials to reflect on the central tensions existing between their political leadership and their professional image as politically neutral 'technocrats' in turbulent times. The Commission's embrace of politics is integral to the role of the administration in framing and constituting the political itself.

2.1 Work-life in the Commission

The EU policymaking landscape is visualized in terms of a multi-layered spatial plane, wherein power and authority are shared across several *levels* or *scales*. The national level is where member states operate. Below it are ever-smaller scales of subnational actors at the regional and local levels. Above both floats the European level. The strata are arranged vertically, concentrically and hierarchically with intellectual and moral significances attached to rankings of high over low, up over down and top over bottom. The flavor of daily work-life experience for an official is shaped first by where he or she is formally positioned within the organization. EU civil servants visualize the administration in spatial terms, as a two-dimensional 'pyramid' through which they move vertically and horizontally through different 'tiers'. Careers have 'structures' and develop along 'paths', 'arcs' and 'trajectories' of different shapes. Perceptions of the Commission's size varies widely. To some, it's 'such a big institution' (Luuk), a 'big machine, a big operation' (Jens). The only EU institution that has more employees is the European Court of Justice.

For others, the administration is 'quite small', with budgets that are, relative to those of member states, fairly limited. 'This is not a civil service that's bloated—far from it. And it's been getting skinnier and skinnier' (Annabel).

'We are not a big administration for what we actually try to do. We're often criticized for being too bureaucratic and too many. But we are also often criticized for all sorts of things we *aren't doing* which people find important and which we just cannot do because we're not enough' (Lorelei). All agreed that the Commission is shrinking. As it meets its reduction targets of five percent, officials are steadily decreasing in number. DGs like EMPL are downsizing by 10% every two years. Policy domains where its competences are least

developed, such as social affairs, culture and education, are the first to be cut. It is expected that all the assistants in the now defunct AST function group will not be fully replaced with new AST/SC staff until the 2040s (European Court of Auditors 2019).

The shape of the administration likewise changes in appearance depending in part on one's point of reference. To Eloise, it is 'a fairly flat organization, strangely enough, for a public administration of French inspiration'. To Maya, 'it's a bit of a hierarchical mess.' Characterizing the Commission in ways that seem merely descriptive has the potential to encroach upon underlying sensitivities. In one of our conversations, Elfriede stopped my line of questioning to draw attention to the carelessness of my phrasing.

'By the way—and anyway I'm genuinely not offended or something—but just on your comment about the "bureaucratic structure". I haven't looked at the numbers, but compared to what is happening in national administrations, what seems to be very bureaucratic is highly efficient in terms of people per actions.' She sat upright in her chair.

'Right,' I said, realizing my faux pas. 'I didn't mean *bureaucracy* in a pejorative sense.'

'No, no, I'm fairly relaxed, but this word *bureaucracy* sometimes has this sense.' To Elfriede, this peccadillo of mine did not rise to the level of *offensive*. What she heard in my throwaway statement was the idea that the EU administration is an excessively big bureaucracy for the little work that it does, making it an inefficient apparatus. I had unwittingly reproduced the media canard that equates the EU with red tape.

Though it is the largest employer of European civil servants, the Commission relatively small as far as transnational bureaucracies go. Sixty-five percent of its 32,196 officials are based in Brussels (European Court of Auditors 2019). The classificatory system through which labor and resources are organized and allocated is differentiated into DGs, service departments and cabinets and their subsidiary units. DGs and their units vary considerably in their dimensions. Some have big budgets and big units (somewhat fewer than 20 people),

while others are relatively diminutive. Related to size is the variable of visibility, the amount of attention that is given to a DG and the amount of 'political influence' it wields. The policy fields covered by the big DGs (in the thousands of officials) with the biggest competences, like COMP and TRADE, where the Commission negotiates as a centralized power on behalf of the EU as a whole, are those 'where European integration, or European harmonization, has been most successful' (Luuk). In competition law, where Luuk has handled cases for three years, companies have taken notice of what the Commission is able to achieve and accepted its claims to authority without raising questions. Adjusting their agendas accordingly, they opened a greater space for the DG to develop its competence. Eventually, they understood that doing so would be more efficient and competitive for their own purposes in the long run. The act of permissive acceptance by primary shareholders is the harvest yielded at the end of an honest day's work in an influential DG that sows the seed for continued growth.

Proportionately, DGs that work on fields where integration is 'incomplete or still being developed' are remarkable in light of how little they are remarked upon. The rule that 'you can only make a change by having everybody else with you' holds especially true in policy areas that are heavily subsidiarity-dependent, where there is no such competence. On the morning of my interview with Roger, HoU and acting Director of Higher Education at EAC, there is an internal meeting about the European Coalition for Digital Jobs, which promotes the training of students with the IT skills needed to make a career in the tech industry these days. The team developed a system of European labels with which to reward schools that are particularly good at providing digital education. 'How can we encourage schools to move in this direction when we don't run them? Can we give them a badge which makes them feel special and which makes them visible to surrounding schools, who will ask, "What are they doing that we're not?"' (Roger). EAC has no Europe-wide educational system to run and no mandate to design strategies to create one. 'All we can do is nudge people—*nudge* as in a

game theory context—to make the changes which we think are going to be good for them and for Europe as a whole.' Like Mark, Roger hails from the Kent coast in the southeast of England. The son of a journalist, he remembers spending his boyhood standing on the beach, gazing out into the horizon and pretending he had superhuman vision enabling him. The continent, so near yet so far away, always represented to him an unreachable frontier.

DGs and their units fall into three categories: policymaking, regulatory and horizontal. 'On the one hand it's policy advice, on the other it's financial instruments' (Elfriede). Some are '100% inward-looking' in their focus, some more externally so. Others attempt to hold their gaze on both domains simultaneously. Policymaking DGs specialize in analysis and advisory work, preparing and drafting policies, regulations and directives throughout the year. 'Legislation is the core of what the Commission does. Legislation, legislation, legislation—that's what the EU Commission is there for' (Laurens). Commissioners have *portfolios* of *issues* or *files* in different *policy areas*. Policy officers in the permanent administration are tasked with 'delivering' on them by drafting regulations and directives. They spend years working on different *projects* within their *profiles*. Setting the legislative agenda, the Commission is the 'motor' and 'driver' of European integration, 'pushing it forward' (Roger). The Parliament may put forth a particular legislative proposal, but the executive has no obligation to act on it. 'We make things happen' (Morgan). They are instructed by the Council to come up with solutions to specific problems, but if they fail to put something on the table, nobody else will.

Regulatory DGs implement EU law and make sure the treaties are being looked after. Controlling the budget and financial instruments such as *structural* and *investment funds* to implement, support and promote progress for European integration in certain areas, they consider whether this or that eurozone member deserves another year's extension on a deadline or not, whether impact instruments like 'excessive deficit procedures' need to be

exercised or whether or not to pursue emergency legal proceedings when things have gone awry (Elfriede). In the Digital Single Market unit of CNECT, for example, 'you know what the facts are, make your judgment, build your argumentation and negotiate from a position of power. With anyone who does their job properly, there's not a lot of reflecting. You're not forced to reflect on European integration, what's justified and what's not, where should we go. Either the facts are there for a company to clear a merger or they are not.' In policymaking DGs, by contrast, 'you don't have the facts, but constantly question to what extent, ethically speaking, our compromises in legislation are still ethically justified.'

Above the administrative body sits the College, consisting of the President, the First Vice-President, the Vice-President and High Representative for Foreign Policy and Security Policy and five other Vice-Presidents. There are 20 Commissioners, each of whom comes from a different member state and is responsible for a single or combined portfolio, and their cabinet members who act as their advisers. Along with the Secretariat-General, which has the most procedural coordination role, DGs such as COMM, DGT and HR are 'horizontal' in the way they 'work to connect everything together' (Maja). COMM, an intra-institutional medium 'at the center of everything', supports operations in all DGs at once, housing a separate unit for each of them. Each non-horizontal DG in turn has its own local communication and HR units. The tripartite affinity they share is rendered visible in the way the three entities are arranged vertically, one on top of the other, in the Berlaymont.

In the creation of EU policy, officials must meet the needs of their *internal* and *external stakeholders* or *partners*, assorted actors who involve themselves in the process at each stage. To ensure the policy has the broad support of the Commission as a whole, officials must anticipate which *priority areas* and *main initiatives* will interest them and which they will take issue with so as to 'improve the mutual understanding of where we are as an organization' (Roger). From the perspective of any individual official, the internal

stakeholders are other teams of colleagues in other corners of the administration. External stakeholders are the co-legislators in the Parliament and Council, the individual member states and all the international organizations, agencies and associations, whether non-governmental or otherwise, that interact with the Commission via their representatives.

Finding 'the European solution' means striking a 'very fine balance' (Olivia) among differing demands, incentives and sensitivities brought to the table by different shareholders. Such concerns are aired at *shareholder meetings* with council members and parliamentary groups and added to the legislative cauldron before the proposal is brought forward. Meetings with stakeholders are opportunities for officials to venture outside the immediacy of the office setting and gain exposure to 'the real world': 'I enjoy the work here at the Commission because we are much closer to the reality. We could, theoretically, come up with a proposal that completely disregards what member states want, but we are not stupid' (Zsófia). This occurs in dialogic terms if not physical ones, as most meetings take place in Brussels.

Officials are adept at anticipating potential stumbling blocks with each audience but can never predict with certainty the reception their proposals will provoke. Building coalitions is key: 'If you just try and get your thing through directly, you will get a door slammed in your face. Whereas, if you get a coalition of five or six Commissioners coming together and working together from different angles, you're more likely to get things through' (Annabel). A successful, acceptable solution is one that is 'not unrealistic' and 'recognizable to all of them as their agenda, at least in part' and 'everybody's more or less happy' (Zsófia); it won't be withdrawn altogether somewhere down the line. Further compromises are made during the negotiation phase. The end product is a thickly compromised package that acts as an incentive to 'help us to move forward'.

Working in the Commission is about 'finding a balance and making things feasible': 'making sure that the machine on the inside is adapting to external needs', but also managing

stakeholder expectations by making it plain how little the Commission has to give them (Roger).

'It's focusing on what really makes sense to do at the EU level and not just because pressure groups are asking for it. There's always that tendency to try and appeal to the EU level if you couldn't get whatever you want at the local, the regional and the national level: '"Oh we didn't manage to get this there, so we're gonna try and get it in at that one"' (Annabel).

Roger and Charlotte hold the purse strings and approve the payments. 'It's a lot of "Yes, you can have this"… "No, you can't"… "Oh, I need another form for that"' (Charlotte).

One afternoon at EAC, the Director of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education comes into the office asking Roger for money ('People do this a lot'). There are two issues that the member states have asked him to look into on their behalf. The first concerns the barriers that disabled persons face when transitioning into higher education from secondary school and the high dropout rate to which they contribute. The second concerns the reception of the migrant children who are now arriving to the continent in increased numbers. There is evidence that many are being channeled into special education schools, placing increased demands on such schools in a way that is testing their capacity to provide for children with actual disabilities. It may also have a deleterious impact on the psychosocial development of the young migrants themselves, who profit from language and integration courses but are not acquiring 'the broader socialization' into the 'slightly strange environment' that a mainstream education allows. That's assuming the families intend to stay in their home countries for the long term, and Roger agrees with the Director that indeed they should.

'Yes,' Roger told him, 'these are very important issues, although they're not entirely new issues for us, of course. How can we work together on them, given that I have no more

money?' It is not that these ills shouldn't be addressed—he would have expected member states to have started doing so already—it is that the Director wants the money by the end of January, and it is already mid-December. 'Our machine' doesn't allow for last-minute requests in this manner. Approaches to cooperation need to be 'much more strategically planned' than they are in this case so that 'we're better aligned' on the issues and 'everything comes together.'

That their jobs constitute a significant dimension of their lived experience is evident in light of how much of their time it consumes. Work-life in the Commission contains noticeable temporalities ranging in scale from the short and narrow, with its quotidian banalities, to the long and wide, with its existential, career-defining events. When the workday ends, officials leave their files on their desks until the morning and, provided they have no evening engagement scheduled, rush home through weeknight traffic. After admonishing them for being late, a partner, family member or roommate may ask how their day went. Their response may be something like this:

> Well, after the gym I got in around half past 8 or 9. Jumped on emails, made some calls, read Playbook. Then, a meeting with colleagues in the unit and another with the rest of the DG. Back at the office, I had a sandwich in front of the computer. After lunch, I took a coffee with the others. Then, another meeting with colleagues from different DGs, followed by a last one with some people from the Romanian delegation. Both finished behind schedule. I returned to my desk and for the rest of the day, I followed through on all the little things I forgot to follow through on already, while chasing down colleagues for advice and sitting down for a one-on-one with colleagues who knocked on my door about the pressing issue of theirs that urgently needs solving. That's about it, really.

When an official ends his or her career and is implored by attendees of the retirement party to give a few words on its proudest moments, the answer given will be structured similarly: a narrative of plotting actions and events along a timeline that has a beginning and an end. As Connerton (2009: 41) writes:

> In industrial capitalist social formations time becomes more 'rational'. In pre-capitalist formations temporal schedules have their own kind of routines and standardizations; but in capitalist formations they became, in addition, precise, punctual, calculable, rigid, invariant and firmly coordinated. This highly developed rationality of temporal scheduling is especially

> noticeable in the rigid sequential structure of career timetables, evident in bureaucratic procedures and in academic curricula.

In many cases, it working life begins around the time officials are awarded their highest educational qualification, and so it is associated with the coming-of-age experience of graduating from university and entering adulthood. While the two terms may be used interchangeably, *working life* captures this macro-level view, while the derivative *work-life* evokes the conscious experience of work in real time.

On a late, rainy evening in Ixelles, I sat with Raphael and his wife Luca at their candle-lit kitchen table, listening as the former marvels aloud at how uncharismatic College Commissioners can be. Some are agreeable enough. They may swing by once a year for a drinks reception, speak for 10 minutes or so and then make their exit, leaving him with a vague sense of the direction of travel: 'OK, this is what we have done, and this is my idea of what we have to do. Thanks to all. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.' Earlier that day, one of the vice presidents arrived with a pre-prepared PowerPoint display and gave 'a kind of university lesson' about the European Semester. 'Ugh!', said Raphael. I don't *care* about the European Semester. He's so boring! He is someone who cannot talk.'

Lucci likes to try out for roles as a non-speaking extra in movies that are filmed here. A bubbly and eccentric socialite, her personality provides the perfect contrast to the methodical stoicism that characterizes her husband's demeanor. Her most recent gig involved portraying a Victorian commoner in *The Happy Prince*, the 2018 biopic of Oscar Wilde starring Rupert Everett and Colin Firth. She launched into a lengthy retelling of all her experiences on the set, how nice the actors and crew members were.

'Shut up, Lucci! We have to do an interview. Let's start.'

Policy coordination in the economic and budgetary fields is structured around the annual European Semester cycle and the quarterly phases of the Stability and Growth Pact. In January, Elfriede oversees the formulation of policy advice in the Coordination Unit based on

the results of the annual growth survey published in November. In Phases 02 and 03, the DG drafts country-specific recommendations that are then implemented, or not, at the national level. She discusses the objectives with their representatives in order to convince them 'to move in that direction' and monitors their progress to ensure that 'employment is reinforced'. In the final phase, she coordinates the preparation of new reports analyzing the situation socially, economically and employment-wise in each context to form the basis for policy advice disseminated by EMPL at the start of the new Semester. She looks at the extent to which previous objectives have been integrated into the labor market, considering, for example, whether poverty levels are better explained by geographical location or the skill levels of a workforce and whether raising the minimum wage might kill the employment rate. To increase employment and reduce poverty, the country in question might be encouraged to seek advice from the Council about reforming its pension and tax systems and reinforce childcare benefits so that women are better incentivized to work. These proposals are combined with those from larger fields, such as those concerning the fiscal situation and those used to support internal DG initiatives. Following the midwinter recess, everyone returns to the office and the cycle begins anew.

Organizationally, the Commission revolves temporally around the regularity of meetings that 'open possibilities for cross-sectoral interaction at the European level.' On Mondays, a DG's Directors meet with its Director-General to compare notes and discuss expectations for the week ahead. On Wednesday morning they meet with the Commissioner and other members of the College at the Berlaymont. The Directors meet with HoUs who then convene a meeting with all the people in the unit. Elfriede chairs 'Social Dialogues' where she engages different 'social partners': employers and unions of hairdressers, deep-sea fisherman and representatives of 41 other sectors, soliciting their perspectives on the challenges in the economic and employment spheres. She also sits on the Employment Committee, a

committee of member states with which the Commission meets once or twice a month. She isn't always able to attend but tries to do so as much as possible.

'The European timeline is totally at odds with the communication timeline', Eloise said. Those in COMM get in at 06h00 every morning to prepare the briefing in time for the noonday press conference. If a proposal for a new policy has been adopted, this will get a mention. By the time the policy is fully implemented and 'made real', most citizens will have forgotten all about the announcement, if they had ever heard about it in the first place.

> On the news this morning, I heard a journalist say, 'Yes, the Commission *adopted* a regulation' and, 'the Commission *condemned* this and that company.' No, it cannot do that. This is the wrong word. We adopt a *proposal*, the proposal gets negotiated, then it gets adopted, then it gets transposed and then it becomes real for people. Before it actually does something to the people, you may have five years, six years. So, nobody communicates because it's impossible.

The wider European Semester cycle clashes with more internal day-to-day rhythms that obstruct the institution's ability to represent itself and its actions to the outside world.

In a world of deadlines determined by whichever meetings are approaching, time is a precious commodity in ways that have significant repercussions on everyday work-life. To 'make the system work', the work of each unit is planned well in advance. HoUs act as liaisons between the Secretary-General, the Commissioner's cabinet and the President's cabinet. The Director-General is in most cases inaccessible to the lowly policy officer; direct communication between them is possible but rare. Time pressure proves a challenge for staff meeting the demands of increasingly unreasonable administrative workloads and resource constraints in the form of continuous staff cuts in the name of 'better regulation'. There is a lack of congruence between resources and workload and insufficient working hours in the day. 'People work bloody hard', Charlotte laughed, 'definitely in the Berlaymont. It's insane. I'm in the office until midnight several times a week. If I am home at 22h00, it was a really good day.'

'It can be quite fast-paced sometimes' (Marie-Christine). There are 'constant urgent requests'.

‘The scope for things to go wrong is enormous, and the timing is very very tight’ (Mark).

‘We are all living here with iPads in our hands, often with very tight deadlines’ (Zsófia).

The number of hours they work during any 24-hour period depends on their position and the sort of project they are working on.

> Members of Cabinet and assistants to Directors-General tend to work at odd hours. DG ECFIN seems to work all sorts of days and nights—but I always have the impression that they make a show out of it. To send an email at 02h00 in the morning asking me to give a substantial reply by 8 o’clock? I haven’t even read your email by that time. It’s a question you could have asked three weeks ago if you’d had thought about it. Just go back to bed. [Lorelei]

Information cascades from the top civil servant down to the bottom and travels back up each step again. Briefings are often written in collaboration with other units before undergoing a series of very fine tunings while being sent up the hierarchy, then back down it, then up it once more. This guarantees consistency from one section to another, ensuring that everything flows smoothly and is well-phrased. If major flaws are found, it is sent back again to the source for corrections to be made. Otherwise, it reaches those in the Cabinet, who give it their approval, before traveling onwards to the Director-General or the Commissioner.

At ECHO, where ‘every hour matters’, Morgan and Arnaud must work in state of perpetual emergency, ready to react at a moment’s notice to rapid-onset natural disasters—a tropical cyclone in Haiti, severe flooding in the western Balkans, forest fires in the Mediterranean—and deliver assistance to the vulnerable as quickly as possible. ‘Basically, you have a disaster or a humanitarian crisis ongoing, all the time, everywhere in the world’, making working life unpredictable and ‘time-sensitive’, where (Morgan). Upon visiting Arnaud, I was allowed a few moments inside the crisis response control room, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC). What I witnessed was a large private bunker lit only by the flashing colored lights of gigantic computer systems on whose monitors the different regions of the world are displayed, a scene out of Dr Strangelove.

Simply working harder leads to exhaustion. Directors must look continually for ‘efficiency gains’ and ‘synergies’ by ‘identifying duplications’ of work being done by

various units and coalescing it all into one. The data included in country-specific reports are cobbled together by the contributions of numerous DGs and presented from many different angles. If Secretary-General Martin Selmayr decreed that Elfriede would need to deliver her 'product' four and one-half weeks earlier this year, it would be incumbent on her to make it fit. Achieving full optimization is always precluded by the obligation to satisfy the wishes and judgments of those at the top.

Here, administrative life has many avenues, and intra-institutional movement is encouraged. 'One of the advantages of working in the European Commission is that professionally you can do different things; you can switch sectors' (Jeremy). Under the principle of 'security in mobility', permanent officials 'move around quite a bit' to different DGs, roles and policy areas and re-enter old ones. Witness Mark rehearsing his 'sales pitch' for 'the nature of the challenge and the scale of the opportunities':

> We don't offer new recruits a job-for-life, but a lifetime of different jobs. That's the way we try and sell it. And that's a compelling offer because like me, you could do lots of different jobs and you still haven't scratched the surface by the end of your career. Most public service jobs will put you in a government department of some sort or a ministry, but here you can move around pretty freely between different sorts of jobs, from a policy job to a more functional role or vice versa, from one policy to another or from one Directorate-General to another—even from one institution to another. Plus the opportunity to travel, to learn and speak different languages, to work in a multicultural organization and to have a good package of working additions—altogether that's attractive.

Senior managers change jobs every five years. Middle managers are required to leave their DG and move to a new one at least once a decade. Junior-level officials will leave a post whenever it has been decided that they have been there too long (usually at around three to five years) and it is time to move on to something new, or because geopolitical circumstances mean that the policy area is no longer prioritized, or because the colleagues with whom they have grown most fond of working have themselves left and they have become 'bored stupid' (Charlotte). 'That's the nice thing: you can move'.

In any case, it is always possible to do anything for too long. When Charlotte arrived at the European School of Administration as a Financial Assistant, she had already worked in

six different DGs. Some jobs she sought out herself, while others simply fell into her lap. She was sitting in her office one afternoon when someone rang her up to say, 'There's this job going here. Would you like to come?'

'Yeah, why not,' she said. 'I've found that, for me, five to six years really is the longest that I can hold enough interest to be motivated to do things. Been there, done it, seen it. I want to see something new.' The internal job mobility scheme allows officials to learn different tasks while working alongside 'aspiring leaders' and 'highly specialized technicians' in new policy fields. Rotating officials among DGs at regular intervals is always a precaution taken to counteract tendencies toward intra-institutional siloing. 'It really gives meaning to the numbers.'

High levels of internal job mobility are not for everyone: 'Security in mobility? Where is the security? It's possible, but it's not easy' (Jeremy). Some see it as an unnecessary waste of expertise, especially when an official has served a dozen or so years developing a handful of projects in one policy area, is plugged into the right dossiers and knows all the right people. Moving him or her to the bottom of another unit for the sake of movement itself renders obsolete the rarefied knowledge that has been the source of their *added value*, the concrete output of their productivity.

On a pre-fieldwork reconnaissance I undertook to Brussels in order to hunt for a living space, Jens took me out to lunch. That April afternoon was the day he interviewed for his current post, a prospect that made him hopeful and excited. He now finds himself in a peculiar situation where horizontal and vertical mobilities represent two competing desires that impinge on one another: 'I'd actually like to leave, but I also want to move up the career ladder. If you move to a different DG, you have to start over again—showing how good you are, building your network—all those sorts of things. The next natural step is to become a

HoU. Of course, there needs to be a place. I think it'll be a little while before that opportunity arises.'

Eloise playfully chided those who have a difficult time with the impermanence of working life: 'In the Commission, people are super-protected. When they have to change DGs as a result of a reorganization, it's a trauma.' She emits a mock gasp and adopts a tone of rising hysteria: '"My god, I'm going to move from Rue de la Loi to Rue Bellier!" Panic, total panic.' There is something almost un-European about officials' resistance to horizontal movement, mirroring, as it does in her view, the politics of fear and anti-mobility the populists use to oppose further integration. Horizontal mobilities are, in her view, a central aspect of Europeanness.

Most appreciate 'this more or less compulsory mobility we have' (Arnaud). By providing a lifetime of different jobs, security in mobility 'provides its own comfort' for officials in the late stages of their time here: 'That's one of the good things about the professional life in the Commission when you reach this kind of seniority, which is not to say 'old age': it confronts you with completely new challenges without putting your security into danger. If you are willing to do that, it will keep you alive and well—hopefully well, but it keeps you alive, certainly.' It is this sense of security that lends deeper significance to the permanency of permanent officials.

2.2 Eurospeak

'Well, it was strange', says Laurens regarding his appointment as an official. It all started the day he went to see the head of the Dutch Parliament about getting himself a Commission job.

'We would love to take you. You have a good CV, good papers. But we've just had the competition, so you'll wait two years for the next one.

‘I understand, but I need a job now.’

‘Let me have a look. You studied in England. Why don’t you try the English concours?’, suggested the Speaker of the House, half-jokingly.

Laurens was immediately interested: it had not occurred to him that English was an option. He ‘brazenly’ took the English exam and passed. In keeping with his ‘self-imposed exile complex’, he told no one he was a Dutchman and told even fewer people he was a Jewish Dutchman. He felt accepted among his colleagues in the DG but kept this as his own private secret. No questions were raised for two years, during which he effectively passed as British. He was the only translator who translated in what was, strictly speaking, a foreign language. ‘I’m the Jewish foreigner among the English translators’, he thought to himself each day as he turned up to perform this ‘strange ritual’, a thought that excites him even today. ‘It suited my character fine, you know. I didn’t have to feel part of anything, but I was still part of it.’

Working life in the Commission is much more complex than the general public imagines it to be. This thought occurred to Laurens one evening over dinner at his parents’ house, when his father asked him how things were going at work.

‘Great. I really, really enjoy it.’

‘And what sort of people do you work with?’

‘They’re Britons, Dad. Englishmen.’ There, he paused to let the moment linger, as he could see in his father’s face that the image of his son working with the British was something that pleased him. ‘And the lady to my left is French and the lady to my right is German.’

‘Do they talk to each other?’

‘Most translators work almost exclusively with people from their own culture, whereas a lawyer or an economist or an agricultural expert are in a much more mixed environment—

much more European perhaps. By definition we're more multicultural because we study languages.' An unpleasant episode began when he was called in by his boss.

'You've lied to me,' were the words his boss said, after calling him to his desk.

'But sir, on my application forms it stated clearly what my nationality was, where I was born, where I went to school, where I went to university. You've signed an excellent report about my quality of work.'

'Yeah, there's nothing wrong with the quality,' the Director replied, 'but you're a Dutchman. And you have no place here. I'm asking for a transfer to the Dutch department.'

Laurens refused to go, and the Director had him fired. The debacle left Laurens cold and confused. He sensed on an intuitive level that something was amiss, that he was being wronged in some way, but he didn't know exactly which or how best to explain it in a language that power understands. There was something viscerally un-European about the whole thing. While his mother's language was German, his mother tongue is, by any definition, Dutch. But if he can do it, why should he leave? English is far more important internationally, anyway. From there he left for the European Economic and Social Committee, where he was offered a contract at a higher grade. In the meantime, he attended a consultation with a lawyer at the European Court of Justice. The lawyer, who also worked as a professor in the Institute of European Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, sat patiently while Laurens set out the details of his case.

'We have the reports that you can do it, that you're good at translating into English. Leave it to me.'

'Wait a minute, professor. I'm unemployed and I know lawyers are expensive.'

'Ha! We're going to win this case!'

'OK', he said. 'What if we lose it?'

‘If we lose it, you don’t owe me anything. If we win the case, you’ll be a well-paid civil servant.’

‘Well, that’s very decent’, said Laurens. The kindly lawyer went off to court to make his plea:

> Your honor, this is discrimination on grounds of nationality. The exam papers do not state that English translators must be English *mother tongue*; it reads, and I quote, ‘a perfect command of the English language as proven in the tests.’ Thus, even those who drew up the texts for the application forms were aware that the Treaty of Rome stops them from saying, ‘your mother tongue must be such and such.’ If I am a French-born citizen to English parents who doesn’t speak a word of French but just happens to have a French passport, I ask you: what is my mother tongue? Unless the Commission shows that the man is incompetent, he can’t do this.

Within three months’ time, he was greatly relieved to receive an official apology from the Commissioner, explaining that a mistake had been made, an ‘administrative error’ of some kind, and that he would be reinstated—though not to the same unit. The favorable court ruling implied that, retroactively, he had never in fact been fired but had remained a Union official all the while, making his work at the Committee a form of unlawful labor for an outside employer. He was ordered to forfeit what he had earned and was reimbursed by the Commission for the exact amount. The year was 1972. He joined the DG for Health and Social Affairs and stayed there for nearly a quarter-century, before spending his final 11 years back in Translation.

In the early days, everything was French, and everyone was Francophile. Speaking French was *de règle*. Among the first things to do with new recruits was to make them fluent. An hour of intensive French instruction was administered four mornings out of the week along with exams. Then they would be sent off to one of the universities in France and come back a month later with a *Diplôme d'Études en Langue Française*. Ninety-nine percent of all written work was done in French, as were almost all meetings. Nowadays, ‘more than 95% of originals are in bad English, usually written by nonnatives, that have to be edited.’ French retains its official status as a working language, though the decline in its use has been unidirectional. Enlarging into the UK, Ireland, Denmark, Finland and Sweden introduced an

alternative center of gravity into the European Communities that acted as a check on Franco-German hegemony, altering the social and linguistic fabric of the administration. The beginning of the end of spoken French inside the institutions dates back to the 1970s, when Germany was in the throes of an oil crisis but nonetheless on the rise socioeconomically. The French Republic, on the other hand, was no longer the global power it once was.

Professional interpreters were provided in meetings for those who preferred to work in a non-working mother tongue. The others, wearing their headphones, would then listen back to what was being translated into perfect French or English. Gradually, all began to adopt the habit of speaking English merely to save time and avoid extra hassle, and the practice was eventually dropped. This is the birth of 'Commission English' or 'Eurospeak': a local dialect of 'plain English' that 'strives for simplicity and specificity'. The lingua franca is 'rooted in the principle of *internal institutional efficiency* which can be summarized as *a search for a common denominator*, that is, a language/code shared by most of the participants in the internal meetings where an interpretation service is usually unavailable' (Wodak, Krzyżanowski and Forchtner 2012). A newer generation of officials arriving from Greece, Spain and Portugal were disproportionately young and comfortably anglophone, with little to no German or French. Dutch, Danish and Luxembourgish officials would usually have two or three foreign languages. The British could normally get by with school French, 'very often putting in a French word half-consciously, sometimes to show off, sometimes because they don't know that a *stage* has an English equivalent in *traineeship*' (Laurens). The Scandinavians already spoke plain English more or less regularly. One began to hear a French English, a Swedish English, a Finnish English or a Latvian English spoken in the office.

The shift to English for purposes of internal communication was a dramatic one which occurred over a few months in 2004, though it seemed to happen overnight. 'You could

almost watch it happen. Before that summer, everyone spoke French most of the time, and after it had just flipped' (Mark). Commission English is now the firmly entrenched institutional lingua franca. 'It's here to stay, for better or for worse. It's not an ideal situation, but the Commission is now an English-speaking institution' (Laurens). The situation is less than ideal for officials like Raphael, who is still more comfortable writing and speaking in French but now uses English at work 90% of the time. Germans tend to use less French and English than German. 'There's always some idiotic Dutchman that doesn't know English enough to write English, and he sends it to you, and you translate it.' Leon recalls once asking a contract agent from the *École National d'Administration* to look over the draft of a report he had written in French. The man agreed, went away, then returned a half hour later with a query. He wondered if his new boss wouldn't mind if he presented it 'more logically'. 'French logic is quite different from the others. It's all about Descartes and all that sort of thing. Descartes, in my view, deformed French thinking for three centuries.'

The ongoing anglicization of the administration is cultural as well as linguistic. An institutional '*modèle Anglo-Saxon*' was introduced, which 'castrated the French' (Leon). It coincides with a shift in administrative ethos, where the 'old French culture' recedes, and the 'dominant culture' becomes unmistakably Anglo-Saxon. Unfortunately for some, it carries a hidden, New World influence from overseas. 'The hamburgerization of Europe', a neoliberal paradigm normalized by British influencers like Mark and President Kinnock who are fixated with US-style private models of public management and America in general, is 'a social given against which they all protest, but they still take it all in' (Laurens).

'You could argue there was a change of culture that went with it', Mark says, 'because language is more than just language.' Yet he dismisses references made to an 'Anglo-Saxon' model as 'false associations':

> When the change came, people said, 'Ah, now you're leaving this Franco-German model and you're adopting an Anglo-Saxon model', a 'British model' or even a 'Tony Blair model'! I and

> others were accused of being 'the Stooges of New Labour', introducing a Blairite agenda, but actually it wasn't that at all. It was just simply saying, 'Look, this is how modern organizations, public and private, are managing their affairs in the 21st century. We've got to catch up because it's more efficient, more effective and the stakeholders in the member states demand better. After that it became a much more *grown-up* organization, I would say, and a much more formal organization.

Mark himself seems to travel to the States fairly often. There is a joke they tell over at EPSO, which goes: Q: 'Where is Mark?' A: 'Oh, he's in probably Washington'. It is the case that he does have a fondness for the buzzwords of American mass consumerism. For him, EU institutions are 'consumers'. Those who wish to work for them are potential 'customers' to whom he 'sells' a 'product' by 'attracting' them with an 'offer'.

'In the 70s, people all over Brussels were still very pro-British, pro-Anglo-Saxon and pro-American' (Laurens). English, in the beginning, had to adapt to the French form in the way a regulation was drawn up. 'The lawyers in the Legal Service initially said, "We don't do it like that!"' Meanwhile, 'the French have now become more like the Anglo-Saxons.' With the influx of Anglo-Saxon culture into the administration, the 'hierarchical thinking of Old Europe' was destabilized by a 'sense of equality and fairness', a shift from Descartes to Hume. 'You could actually meet your Director and talk to your superiors. In practice, it works pretty well. But it's just English.' Thus, the '*Écoles Supérieures* of the French civil service' gave way to 'the Oxford Union, or something like it.'

Translating legal documents requires foreseeing possible miscommunications and interpretive disputes that could arise from the clash of nuances between Latin and Anglo-Saxon vocabularies. 'The wording has real-life consequences because we accept the rule of law' (Luuk). French is best for expressing abstract concepts, while English tends more toward the concrete: 'When you want to say something in the abstract, English has a problem. Clarity was never a worry for the French; they want to say it *beautifully*. French officials were forced to think more clearly or more simply. There are special courses now' (Leon). This is seen in the way meaning is lost in translation between the terms *organization*

and *structure*. In English, *organization* is more often a noun, an entity. Francophones hear it as a verb, signifying the activity through which something is organized, as in *organiser quelque chose* [to organize something] and *l'organisation de l'État belg*e, which signifies *how the Belgian state is organized* as opposed to the institutional structure itself.

The institutional jargon of Commission English entails a curious array of buzzwords, including *pig meat, guest worker* and *social housing*. 'We really had to invent neologisms, these bad Gallicisms sloppily translated from the French. It's not English, but it's good European English.' The Germanic and Scandinavian languages are relatively more resistant to the intrusions of Eurospeak. English, however, is 'very open' and 'flexible' in both the cultural and linguistic senses, absorbing foreign words and treating them like native words. There is a richness there, but in general it lacks specificity and must be regularly reinvented for new purposes.

The Europeanization of the term *social* in English is a classic example. *Social housing*, now in common use, began life as a dubious translation of *logement sociale*. There were many meetings where the interpreter, whether out of ignorance, laziness or time pressure, did not pause to reflect that *subsidized housing* or *council estate* is what it is called in English and scribbled this down instead. The 'language purists' at DGT reclined in horror upon first seeing it in print. British and Irish officials, after hearing it 20 or 30 times, began to absorb it and put it to daily use in policymaking. Once the neologism entered the statute book, it went to make appearances in national-level legislation and, ultimately, in lexicons at the local level. In English, to make a *directive* usually signifies the act of issuing an instruction of some kind. Under EU influence, the term has acquired more Napoleonic overtones.

The French use *partenaires sociaux* to refer collectively to the state government, business employers and the national workforce. Until recently, the nearest equivalents in English were *industrial relations*, *collective bargaining* or *discussions between employers and labor*. As

expressions like *social partner* and *social unrest* entered into use, *social* became newly associated with the nexus of relations between government and industry. 'Now the English talk about *social partners*. Strictly speaking, before the 1980s *social partners* were husband and wife! It's not English, but it's in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.' The same happened to *la paix sociale*, which in the UK went under the name *good industrial relations*, referring to the intervening periods between general strikes. Nowadays, it is not unusual to hear Britons speak of *social peace*. Lexemes such as *sheep meat* and *pig meat*, the latter being a catch-all shorthand for 'pork and bacon' products, are formed when two words in English are forced to stand in for a single concept in French. They still 'sound foreign' and grating to the ears to 'people who know it's not really correct.' Born of replicated acts of mistranslation, such 'euro-expressions' acquire an air of normality as they cascade down into everyday colloquial use. In these instances, life imitates bureaucracy far more than bureaucracy imitates life.

Each good sold on the single market is assigned a European-level Common Customs Tariff (CCT). Whether the tax is set at 7% or 21%, the commodity must be defined in European terms. The discrete categories and subcategories into which they are sorted in the delimited classification system must be consistent across state borders, yet flexible enough to adapt with the times. Special committees set up in the Taxation and Customs Union DG debate how to classify an unlimited list of items, most of which are food or clothes. When someone says *animaux* [animals], does that include insects? When someone else says *vêtements* [clothing], does that include boots? When is a *pull* not a *sweater*? How does one differentiate a *pullover* from a *sweater* or a *cardigan*? Is a computer an electrical appliance? Perhaps, though it might very well be a *device* or a *machine*.

For Laurens, incoherence in French and English classification systems for products designed to be placed in or on the body may be largely attributed to US influence. This is especially true in the field of menswear. A *T-shirt* used to be a white garment with a round

neck and short sleeves, which is what distinguished it from a *long-sleeved T-shirt* or a *chemise.* A *chemise* was something a Frenchman wore in the daytime and an Englishwoman wore at night, *slips* being strictly for the ladies. *Trousers* used to mean something, but now it's *slacks* and *pants*, which in Britain denotes underpants rather than trousers. Actual men no longer go to a *barber*; they go to a *gentleman's hairdresser*. On their way home, they do not stop to purchase *stockings*; they purchase a pair of *knee-length socks*. Germans talk of *Socken*, and the Dutch of *sokken*—are those the same things as *socks*?

Certain inventive mistranslations are committed more deliberately, keeping their sense of ulterior purpose intact. In the inter-institutional linguistic struggle over the term *president*, for example, there is more at stake than a mere professional title. Donald Tusk, who holds the top job in the Council, is called *le president* in French and *presidente* in Italian and Spanish, but Juncker is also a *president* and a *presidente*. In German, they are both *Vorsitzende*, which in English translates as *chairman* rather than *president*. 'English has both words, but some schmuck of a translator made the wrong choice and said the Commission has a *president*, which makes it a very, very political institution—which it is.' To refer in English to *the Chairman of the Commission* would be to make it sound 'more like an administrative unit'.

In legislation as well as in the CCT, English has become the prevailing language of description. 'They realized that basically there has to be one dominant working language, even though you pretend that languages are equal in authority.' There might be a Bulgarian or Luxembourger in a working meeting who prefers that French or Bulgarian be spoken in addition to English. Insisting on this would mean that translation and interpreting services would have to be provided. As a result, the working language stays almost exclusively English. The anglicization of the Commission 'gives the natives an unfair advantage' by default. It thus succeeds not in overthrowing the bureaucratic hierarchies of the French *ancient régime*, but simply in obfuscating them.

2.3 The crisis narrative

Before the global coronavirus pandemic became, in Chancellor Merkel's words, the 'biggest challenge in EU history' (Zalan 2020), this distinction was given to several pivotal events unfolding on the geopolitical landscape. In the discourses surrounding them, the figurations of 'walls' and 'bridges' were salient tropes. Donald Trump was carried into the office of the US presidency on a promise to expand the Mexico-United States land barrier by 'building the wall'. Those in favor of Brexit in the UK vowed to 'take back control of our laws money and borders', while opposition maintained that Britain and Europe are 'better together'. A call for bridge-building came at the height of the migrant/refugee crisis from the German Chancellor, who argued the necessity of showing EU-wide 'solidarity' in accommodating those fleeing war and persecution. This should be done, if not out of a sense of humanitarian duty, then out of an obligation to preserve the freedom of movement. François Hollande assured her that France could take a thousand or so, though wondered why the decision was made to take them in before discerning the genuine refugees from the economic migrants.[14] Donald Tusk expressed similar reservations. The Chancellor explained that, given that they are already assembled precariously at the southern border, Europe could not shirk its humanitarian duties without causing irreparable damage to its reputation. 'As I saw it, I had to avoid a central pillar of the EU—freedom of movement—being compromised' (ibid.). It was Juncker who helped persuade her that '*Wir schaffen das*' ['We can do this']. 'We must return to the rule of law,' was Hollande's riposte.

In September of 2015, the Council committed to relocating 160,000 refugees across the member states from Italy and Greece within two years. By December 2016, only 8,162 had

[14] https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0004vyd

been relocated. 'I will be frank with you,' said Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos, 'I am not the happiest man in the world.'[15] The refusal of the Visegrád four to meet their assigned quotas led to the abandonment of efforts to reform the Dublin asylum rules by the end of 2018. 'For the first time in post-war European history,' said Juncker, 'not all the member states are applying the agreed rules. This is against this basic principle that the European Union is a rule-based system. It is no longer.'[16]

'Bridge-builders' and 'wall-builders' have become political identities on the frontlines of a new culture clash, one that has eclipsed in part the traditional political axis of left and right in matters of socioeconomic policy. As models for the ideal state society, the dual structural metaphors invoke corollary epistemic oppositions of openness/closedness, inwardness/outwardness, protectionism/free trade and nationalism/globalism. Wall-builders are the 'somewheres' who articulate their identities and belongings in the ethnonational vernacular of blood and soil (Goodhart 2017). Bridge builders are the 'anywheres' or 'nowheres' (May 2016), 'whose hearts lie in Paris or London, whose money is in New York or Cyprus, and whose loyalty is to Brussels' (Krastev 2017). At stake is the significance of national borders, both physical and social, in the contemporary stage of globalization.

Shortcomings in the EU's capacity to manage the refugee/migrant crisis seemed to reveal the inadequacy of its emergency response mechanisms. Crisis discourses have a long history in official EU statements and publications, however. 'Europe will be forged in crises,' as Jean Monnet (1978: 417) said, 'and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises.' Crisis discourses surrounding threats, both real and imaginary, to the EU function as hegemonic techniques of supranational-level governance and legitimation (Lawrence 2014; Calligaro 2015). As Switzerland's ambassador to the EU put it, 'You talk about Europe and

[15] https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/asylum-seekers-in-europe-will-be-sent-back-to-greece-starting-march-2017/
[16] https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-eu-future-juncker-idUKKBN13Y1MY

you almost always add the word crisis.'[17] Various scholars have deconstructed EU crisis discourses while contributing a few of their own (Habermas 2012; Agamben 2013; Lawrence 2014; Ioannou, Leblond and Niemann 2015; Matthijs and McNamara 2015; Schimmelfennig 2015; Müller, Porcaro and von Nordheim 2018). I often heard my informants worry aloud that the European social fabric was beginning to fray.

'It's different this time', Wolfgang said. 'Yes, it's always been in crisis, but I think it is in real peril actually.'

'On the one hand, I see it slowly progressing along and on the other hand, sliding back to nationalism' (Laurens).

'We are in a bit of a crisis, in a sense. There's a lot of soul-searching ongoing at the moment' (Morgan).

Those in the College also insisted that we were in crisis. In his 2015 SOTEU address, Juncker (2015) stuck a note of downcast solemnity:

> The bell tolls. The time has come. We have to look overtly at the huge issues with which the European Union is now confronted. That's what I want to focus on now. Our European Union—I don't really want to fall into despondency—but it's not in a good situation. There's no point in the President of the Commission, the representatives of European democracy and the peoples of Europe to just put things in rosy colors. No, we're not in a good place.

Looking back at the year behind, he saw it as one when 'European solidarity—at the risk of sounding overly dramatic—withstood what may have been the greatest trials it has faced since the end of World War II.'

If crisis is merely the style to which the EU is accustomed, I was tempted to dismiss much of this as alarmist, anxiety-ridden, the-sky-is-falling rhetoric. Chronocentric fallacies about the profound newness and uniqueness of the contemporary historical moment are best avoided. The notion that officials were in a position analogous to that of Roman legionnaires during the last days of Pompeii risked sounding melodramatic. If the EU was moribund, in

[17] https://www.politico.eu/article/swiss-to-uk-youll-miss-being-at-the-eu-table-brexit-roberto-balzaretti/

imminent danger of suffering irrevocable damage to its vital organs, it certainly did not appear this way. Standing in the middle of the Schuman roundabout at midday, one could have been forgiven for failing to recognize a civilization in its final moments. The office floors of the Berlaymont and the Charlemagne building buzzed along smoothly. Denizens of the neighborhood walked purposefully along the flag-lined pedestrian paths, speaking into leather-cased smartphones as they maneuvered around the camera crews and television journalists blocking their way.

Unprecedented or otherwise, it was an inflection point of sorts. By some macabre series of accidents, I arrived at the heart of institutional Europe to find the patient lying on a hospice bed, surrounded by loved ones. Will Europe end in fire or ice, with a bang or a whimper? Could I—my presence alone—be part of the problem? Perhaps I am the unwitting bearer of a wicked curse, I thought, a foreign vector of contagion wreaking havoc on an already weakened ecosystem. Tattered and frayed, the European project was falling apart at the seams. One impetuous tug on the end of a loose thread and the whole thing may have unraveled before my eyes like a junk-shop sweater.

At an evening greeting ceremony of the 2015 Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga, a flowery President Juncker took the stage with Tusk to welcome member state representatives as they arrived. Francois Hollande was pulled in for a full-chested hug. To José Manuel García-Margallo, Juncker gave a cartoonish salute, a gesture which the Spanish foreign minister returned with some hesitation. He then chided Alexis Tsipras for insisting on appearing without a necktie, draping his own around the PM's neck to admire how it looked before sending him off with a kiss to the forehead. When Viktor Orbán's turn came, he turned to the Latvian PM on his left and said, 'The Dictator is coming. Hello, Dictator,' he grinned. Their hands made contact as a low five and then a full-palmed handshake. With the unsuspecting PM so restrained, the President playfully slapped his cheek with his left-hand.

This was not the first time the Juncker addressed Orbán as 'The Dictator' (Reuters 2015). Upon taking office, the PM announced his plans for Hungary to become an 'illiberal state'. He has since utilized a parliamentary majority to ratify constitutional changes which concentrate power in the national executive. Euroskepticism often employs the language of liberal democracy, e.g., 'the will of the people', to criticize the Commission for alleged illegitimate encroachments on domestic affairs. Hungary's Fidesz is exceptional in that it entirely disregards this norm. This is why Macron designated the man his 'number one enemy' and Trump strategist Steven Bannon referred to him as the 'Trump before Trump'.[18][19]

As the EU's 'watchdog' and 'most political body', the Commission enforces European law in 28 national governments (Maja). It is 'a servant of Parliament and of the Council' which 'keeps an eye on things' and 'carries things out' (Laurens). With few enforcement mechanisms at its disposal, the scope for keeping misbehaving member states in line is limited. There are no legal means by which particularly heinous offenders may be forcibly removed. Article 7, first introduced in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999), provides a procedure leading to the temporary suspension of voting rights. The so-called 'nuclear option', referring to the temporary imposition of economic sanctions, is a tedious undertaking given the unanimity voting rule. A Commission proposal to cut funds to members who violate the principle of the rule of law was received by the Hungarian government as 'yet another attempt to punish Central Europe'.[20]

'You see how difficult it is at the moment to do things that are unpleasant', Luuk said. To criticize a member state as the Commission is more difficult at this stage—but that uncomfortable role is what the Commission needs to play and needs to be able to play. If you

[18] https://www.france24.com/en/20180829-macron-says-hes-enemy-number-one-orban-salvini
[19] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/19/opinion/steve-bannon-europe-movement-far-right.html
[20] https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/politico-brussels-playbook-presented-by-european-press-publishers-berlusconi-to-the-rescue-macron-to-liberals-who-dis-no-deal-prep/

can't enforce any of the laws that you conceive, there's no purpose in conceiving new laws or changing existing ones.'

2.4 Between the political and the technocratic

The 8th European Parliament elections of May 2014 were the first of their kind to be held since the Lisbon Treaty. 'This time it's different' was a promotional slogan. The EU was experimenting with innovating the protocols for each quadrennial electoral cycle which determine how the President of the European Commission is chosen. The '*Spitzenkandidaten*' ['lead candidate'] procedure awards the presidency to the nominee of the parliamentary group who wins the most seats. Making the formation of each new College an indirect function of the outcome of the vote will, it was hoped, 'strengthen the European dimension' of the elections and the 'democratic legitimacy' of the incoming Commission's mandate.[21] It would also give candidates an opportunity to better connect and communicate with members of the public. Juncker's College positioned itself as the first to take office with the formal endorsement of the citizens via their political parties in Parliament, and thus the first to be quasi-democratically elected.

Implemented as a trial version, the new procedure was not without its detractors. Germany was its most influential critic, notwithstanding its German origins. The word *Spitzenkandidaten* took on new meanings when broadened into the EU context, as the German system usually maintains a distinction between the leader of the party and its candidate for chancellor. In the Council, it was criticized as for infringing on the traditional role of the member states in determining European-level leadership. High support among German citizens drove Merkel to reluctantly sign off on the novel system. 'When we started

[21] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-institutional-options-for-making-the-european-union-work-more-efficient_en.pdf

this experiment of the *Spitzenkandidaten*,' Juncker said, 'there was not an overwhelming sympathy for that idea, but nevertheless it happened.'[22]

A former PM of Luxembourg, Juncker is to date the longest-serving head of any current member state. He is seen as a throwback to the classic EU *ancien régime* of 'small country, big Europe federalists', having attended his first EU meeting in the 1980s. Above all, he is a passionate European. 'Europe—the love of my life. This brave continent. This noble people. A place perceived worldwide as being safe and just. We will live up to that reputation. We will show our resilience' (Juncker 2015). The quote, given in a speech entitled 'European solidarity in a world of crises', delivered on the eve of 1 January 2016, recalled the final scenes of *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, themselves borrowed from Shakespeare's *The Tempest'*: 'O brave new world, that has such people in it…'

When asked how they find the President, officials gave measured responses. He is 'a very pragmatic man', 'not an ideologist.' In an age when public relations rhetoric has saturated the public square and the safest statement is that composed of generic, recycled talking points, Juncker is something of a 'character'. At 63, the bespectacled, silver-haired, seasoned statesman is relaxed but lively in temperament, with a penchant for dry humor and a knack for understatement. He speaks in a way that reliably violates the norms governing conventional political speech and suggests he is one who has been around the block, so speak, and seen it all. Of characters we are either fond or wary, depending on whether their political motivations align with our own. Either way, they resist ambivalence and are difficult to ignore. Those least sympathetic toward his eccentricities attribute them to drunkenness and suspicions of ill health (Quatremer 2018).

In certain moments, he betrays an unhealthy amount of favoritism for certain member states, as when he explained to French media that France should not be held to rule that

[22] https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanCommission/videos/1677862908927849/

budget deficits be kept below three percent of GDP 'because it's France' (Rettman 2016). He told the Irish national parliament that the country 'behaves like a member state'. His gift for languages did not go unappreciated: 'Juncker speaks perfect German, and that is effective', Jörg says. 'For the EU, it's always the language. For Germans, he was good. He went on German talk shows, but what about the Spanish and the Greeks and the rest?' He was likewise viewed as distant and disengaged from the permanent administration. Jörg used to see Barroso whenever he visited the Legal Service to give a speech, but never met Juncker. This disappointed him.

Incoming Commission presidents reshape the administration in their own image. They serve five-year terms, though the people they promote and the reforms they enact can stay around for years to come. The creation of 7 Vice-President positions was widely interpreted as a consolidation of power at the top of the College. Augmenting the status of certain Commissioners at the expense of others, the move increased the potential for 'internal conflict' by giving the former a license to intervene in their portfolios. 'The Commission is a College, a body, and should act like that.' Juncker commandeered the role of public face and figurehead. It was widely rumored that Martin Selmayr and Frans Timmermans, his right- and left-hand men respectively, were the ones who really called the shots. In his role as the Commission's chief institutional spin doctor, Selmayr styled himself as the in-house 'master of truth'.[23] He was an object of almost unanimous scorn among informants and the local press, who portrayed the Head of Cabinet as a calculating, Machiavellian figure who rules by brute force and bullies others into acquiescing to his will. The 'poisonous' atmosphere that surrounded him is what drove Catherine Day to step down as Secretary-General and led VP Kristalina Georgieva to exit the Commission after an unsuccessful bid to become UN Secretary General. As one Deputy HoU in EAC phrased it, 'I hate him.'

[23] https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/the-brief-kartenhaus-von-selmayr/

Politics and *the political* are such common fixtures of everyday speech that rarely do we pause to speculate on what we mean by them. It is remarkable, given the unilinear growth of the political anthropology subfield, how seldom its contributors attempt to define the political as a concept. 'When it has been taken up as an object of research, approaches have been grounded on a refusal to define the term, or a certain reticence to do so' (Candea 2011: 309). The political is left intentionally open-ended or abandoned altogether. Since the 1960s, when political anthropology entered its third phase, 'the political' as an ethnographic category has expanded to encompass virtually all dimensions of human experience (Vincent 2002). Unbounded in this way, one finds the political wherever there are relations of power among two or more social actors. Hence, 'power, power, everywhere', as the case may be (Sahlins 2002). If the personal is political, we should expect to find politics wherever we find persons. As the political becomes omnipresent, the *apolitical*, denoting spaces of sociality existing outside the realm of politics, disappears once we begin to look closer at it.

To stop here, and abandon the political as an anthropological category altogether, would be to deliberately overlook a common-sense signification which the word takes on in common usage. *Politics* is used to refer to 'party politics': the realm of campaigns, elections and events depicted in news media as distinct from the realm of day-to-day life. By this metric, one would have thought that an institution such as the EU Commission was political already. The idea of a 'more political' Commission must therefore take on an additional set of contextual meanings specific to the organizational milieu:

> I made it quite clear that I intend to make the Commission more political. And therefore, the president of the Commission—because of the democratic procedures and the nomination procedures—would also be a political president. When I say 'political', basically I mean political in the very best connotations of that word. We are politicians. Or if you like, 'political people' rather than just politicians. These days—in French anyway—it has a bad connotation. So, in the best connotations we are, as you would say in English, 'politicians'. And by 'political', I don't mean that we are going to politicize everything—that's not our wish. I just want to say that I really do feel that now is not the time to go ahead, willy-nilly, with business as usual. Please don't feel that's the case. [Juncker 2015]

While *Commission* here refers specifically to those at the 'political level' of the College, it likewise applies to those working in the permanent administration below. The political/administrative dichotomy identified by McDonald (2012), a dialectic between 'politics' and 'administration' as separable dimensions of Commission work-life, informs the ways in which civil servants conceptualize their institutional roles. Both terms are used, though *technocratic* and *bureaucratic* more often take the place of *administrative* to connote the esoteric, highly specialized areas of expertise on which officials focus for long periods.

'We have this hybrid function', said Arnaud, a top civil servant in charge of humanitarian aid. 'Work is quite technical. For instance, I was attending a meeting yesterday where there was a very good presentation about the capital markets union. It's self-evident that we need that. It's highly technical—I mean, it is for me. I was struggling to understand what my colleague was saying! It's very technocratic, but it's highly political at the same time.' The Director of ECHO and his colleague in FISMA stand in a relationship of mutual unintelligibility with respect to the minutiae of the other's policy area. This is a normal experience given the devolved and differentiated nature of the Directorate-General model. The Commission is a 'conglomerate of DG coalitions' where labor is divided into 33 sub-units, each with its own policy area and workplace environment (Kassim 2013). Arnaud continued:

> I think what we do collectively is profoundly political, and not only in humanitarian aid. But it's highly technocratic. It's about mutual recognition of qualifications, integrated sets of statistics—all these kinds of things. Developing governance mechanisms which are going to apply to 28 different countries with different backgrounds, different institutional structures and different legislation is by definition much more sophisticated than governing within an integrated national government. So, it might sound very technocratic, but as a matter of fact it's totally political. We are 'humanitarian': that's to say *principled*, that's to say *neutral*, *impartial*. I can't engage myself in political discussion. I know that I'm being instrumentalized when I get an invitation to go to Tehran. I know that I'm part of a much bigger political game. I know that Iran, building upon the nuclear agreement, wants to buy political credit by showing their willingness to cooperate with us on possibly non-controversial issues, for example, humanitarian aid. For the Germans, there is a return to be expected from their investment. Fine! If it helps us to deliver more efficiently in Iraq or Syria, what's the problem?

The political is not the opposite of the technocratic; it is 'the other side of the coin'.

Marie-Christine is a policy analyst of French-British origin: ‘When I speak English, people don’t know that I'm French. When I speak French, people don't know that I’m English.’ An Oxford alumna, she wrote a doctoral thesis on the Commission’s role in employment and social policy. She was half-disappointed when, at her birthday party in the flat she shares with Ona in *Botanique*, she finds out I haven’t yet read it. Before joining EMPL, she spent a few years in the regional office for Europe and Central Asia at the UN’s International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva. The relative levels of technicality and politicality in the employment policy field became apparent when working on the Youth Guarantee, an initiative combatting youth unemployment. The Commission issues non-binding guidelines to the members, who pledge to follow them and report back later on how they did. Six or 7 times a year, she’d fly from city to city to meet with representative committees at the national level and discuss their progress vis-à-vis the European Employment Strategy:

> It was very satisfying, I’d say, to see all the politics behind it. It’s quite a political environment. How the Commission works with member states is slightly different than how I’d imagined it to be, because coming from the ILO, you have a lot of world experts in particular aspects of employment policy who’ve worked on these issues all their lives. Whereas in the European Commission, they promote mobility, so you’re not actually expected to stay in your job for 10-15 years and learn all about one issue. So, you can sense that people don’t have the same level of expertise as they did at the ILO. The ILO has got a slightly more academic kind of feeling to it because of this weight on knowledge. Whereas in the Commission, you have a few different units which do research, and they’ve got this report that they publish every year on the employment and social situation in the European Union. And they have two units that work to prepare this report. But in other units you’re also administering funds, which takes up a lot of your time. You have a strong role as a representative—actually representing the European Commission: going to events and explaining clearly to people what the Commission is doing and what the Youth Guarantee Initiative is, how it’s being rolled out, what the next steps are. So, it’s very different from going into depth.

The oscillations in Marie-Christine’s exposition demonstrate the delicate tightrope of Commission–member state relations. Technocratic work, such as producing datasets to harmonize the recognition of professional qualifications, is ascribed a higher order of complexity. Nevertheless, the political is what lies ‘behind’ it all, nearer to the essence of how the Commission is designed to operate. As Monnet (1978: 426) wrote: ‘In appearance,

those institutions were economic and technical, but their objectives were political.' Whereas the day-to-day operations of the administration merely 'sound' technical on paper, they are political in 'total'.

The political dimension of Commission work-life manifeests in the context of its interactions with other EU institutions and the 28 member states. In consorting with their representative bodies, managing national sensitivities is part of an honest day's work. When drafting legislation in asylum and migration, for instance, certain precautions are taken. 'Of course, we always go to the member states first and test the waters', says Stephan, a top policy advisor in the JRC, the in-house think tank, 'and see what they would be willing to accept or not.'

'It's funny because when we go to conferences and speak to different audiences about the educational landscape of Europe, you have to be really careful and make sure they understand that the intra-European diversity is enormous' (Liam). In monitoring their behavior, officials tread lightly:

> We're always judging how far you can go in criticizing member states. You have to be careful, but at the same time you want to have a strong position, and you don't want to back down. If a current member state isn't doing what they should be doing, the Commission should speak up, but you don't want to go too far either because they're doing it on a voluntary basis. Even though they said they would, they don't have to because of legislation. You have to see how far you can push things without upsetting people.

Being European involves a healthy intellectual appreciation of the EU institutions in form and function. In Liam's case, 'the European identity thing certainly came before being an official here, and then it's just reinforced because you feel like you're doing God's work. I'm an atheist, but you feel like you're working for the common good, which is a good feeling to be in. It's the same as when I was doing research—I felt I was doing a good thing.' For Liam and others, Europe-building is hence a moral project as well as a social, political and economic one—synonymous with building a better and more just world. 'All power to people who work in corporate finance,' he continued as a Cheshire cat-like grin formed along the

corners of his mouth, 'but they will be first against the wall when I'm organizing the revolution.'

2.5 On economic giants and political dwarfs

In practical terms, how to go about being 'more political' as a permanent official wasn't clear to all. 'I'm not sure what Juncker means. You'd have to ask him' (Mark). Many cited a clue he provided when laying out his stall as incoming President-Elect: 'I want to be serious about being big on big things and small on small things' (Juncker 2014b). The trend of slimming down legislative output by submitting fewer and fewer proposals each year started with Barroso and his vision of 'better regulation', widely viewed as a measure taken to appease the UK. In the Delors years (1985-1995), when the Single Market was being set up and citizens were less pessimistic about the global economy and political institutions more generally, there was simply more being done. In 2015, 55 EU laws were adopted by the European Parliament, compared with 64 in 2010. By being big on the big things and small on the small things, the Commission committed itself to achieving results on a limited range of issues that are of the greatest import and retreating from certain fields where it is perceived to be ineffective or unfit for purpose.

To be political is also to be in fewer places, where it matters, rather than everywhere at once. Some of the 'big things' were laid out in the College in 'The Ten Priorities', a list of guidelines for areas of action that take precedence over alternative concerns. In matters of industry, the Commission's 'small things' are regulations considered to be superfluous. A Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and 'Doing Less More Efficiently' was established to identify policy areas that might be abdicated to national administrations,

'ensuring that as much work as possible is left in the hands of Member States'.[24] Timmermans, its chairman, provided some needed context: 'People all around the EU are telling us they want change. They want Europe to focus more where it can help solve the big problems: jobs, growth and fairness in our societies. Citizens want Europe to improve their lives, not meddle with them. Businesses want Europe to enhance their competitiveness, not burden them with red tape.'[25] 'Better regulation' is thus an extension of the 'fundamental principles' of subsidiarity and proportionality enshrined in Article 5 of the Lisbon Treaty. The subsidiarity principle holds that 'in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level' (European Union 2007). Historically, the notion originates with the multilevel distribution of powers between families and states in the Catholic theological tradition. As with the proportionality principle, which ensures that actions taken at the European level are restricted to no more than what is necessary to enforce what is laid down in the Treaties, it is a check on the power of the EU executive. Essentially, the idea is that what can be done at the member state level should be done at the member state level, and the Commission that governs best is the Commission that governs least.

Regarding its role on the world stage, officials felt that 'the European Commission is one actor and one voice among others, but it is quite an important one' (Marie-Christine). They likewise sensed its influence to be on the wane. The EU is not a hard power but a 'soft, ideational' one that exercises its influence through attraction and persuasion and emphasizes public diplomacy over fiscal or military coercion. The political dimension of its work

[24] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_4621
[25] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/IP_14_1661

involves appealing directly to foreign and domestic publics through 'strategic communication' in order to engender lasting relations with them.

'I think that Juncker is totally right,' said Arnaud, who has personally overseen the EU humanitarian efforts of recent decades, 'in his instinct to repoliticize the College and the institution and give himself and other Commissioners political visibility.' The rhetoric concerning all things large and small chimed well with a French expression that Arnaud uses: *'l'Europe est un géant économique, mais un nain politique* [Europe is an economic giant, but a political dwarf]'. As in the political/technocratic dialectic, the phrase invokes a second dualism enveloped within the Union's official role in which the political impulse customarily defers to the economic one:

> In terms of geopolitical presence, we don't make it. I've been kept waiting for a long time, but I'm afraid it's still true. Take Syria or Ukraine. As you know, there are major developments and refugee flows coming from Syria. We are preparing a very important series of meetings which will take place next week. We have there a major political crisis unfolding on our doorsteps with potential consequences for the security of Europe. Where are we? Nowhere. We are nowhere, or not far advanced. We are too often seen as 'the jewel of the humanitarians', as, 'Right, you are Europe, doing good', as the sympathetic face of Europe. Very often it's because we are the only face of Europe. What kind of EU presence can you notice nowadays in Syria besides the humanitarians? None.

A more political administration is one with greater diplomatic visibly in its collaborative partnerships. Seeing the Commission as a political dwarf that is absent where it counts, Arnaud felt that the Commission behaves less as the supranational center of EU 'enhanced coordination' and more as 'the 29th member state', always competing against the other 28.

Officials understood the political Commission as one experimenting with a newly assertive mode of leadership, one which is less reluctant to take positions on the big questions:

> The Commission's role should be to serve the member states, but it should also have a leadership role. You need a strong voice to have a leadership role and to push the agenda towards certain issues of importance that are better addressed at the EU level. There are so many issues now which cut across national countries. Migration is a key area because each member state is just concerned about its own borders, its own situation. Not only is the problem an international one, but the solution is also a supranational one, so the Commission is in the best position to propose solutions and to take on the role of leader. The Commission should be listening but also thinking and proposing and, in a sense, leading. [Marie-Christine]

A more political Commission is ‘less scared of the member states’, and ‘more vocal in criticizing them’.

When asked to enumerate the roles of the executive administration in the larger EU matrix, informants often included one that is not in the treaties: the way it acts as a scapegoat. Of the three main bodies, the Commission is the primary target of ‘Brussels-blaming’. It is the whipping boy to blame when things go wrong, fairly or unfairly as the case may be. In their communications with members of the public, national-level presidents and ministers have a habit of speaking highly of the institutions when in Brussels and speaking lowly of them once they return home. ‘There's a lot of blame-shifting. National governments will use the European Commission maybe as a scapegoat for certain initiatives.’ Without it, they would have no one to blame apart from themselves. ‘Brussels’ has become a metonym for an oppressive political system which nations were tricked into joining and which tolerates little dissent. Simon remarked how he and his colleagues in TRADE would never think to see themselves as authorities who take decisions that violate national boundaries: ‘In trade policy, you don’t have that feeling that we overrule anyone. It’s just the way it is.’ Calls for ‘more Europe’ raise suspicions that its true designs are clandestinely fascist, despotic and totalitarian in character. The EU’s so-called ‘democratic deficit’ signifies an overreach of power by institutions and a lack of participation and representation of citizens in the project of building Europe. ‘A lot of Europeans don’t think that European institutions are democratically legitimate institutions. It’s a difficult situation. It’s hard to try and show leadership because people might be questioning your authority’ (Marie-Christine). The criticism is a rather serious critique given how liberal democracy is a fundamental EU value.

As the ‘unelected technocrats’ bemoaned from national capitals, officials readily acknowledged that they are hired or recruited, not elected or appointed. ‘The European Parliament is directly elected, and the Council has sort of indirectly elected members, so you

have a strong democratic basis. I know that Commissioners are not elected politicians. They don't have to go back to the voters every four or five years' (Arnaud). Undemocratic, perhaps, but what is lost in terms of democratic legitimacy is gained in the form of accountability:

> It's a good thing because when the policy is launched, they can keep busy on the agenda. Again, I'm profoundly democrat, but sometimes you need to have an institution or a body which reminds the newly elected government, 'Hey, you committed to achieving that.' For me, that is really the unique institutional feature of this architecture. And by the way, if you do a bit of comparative politics and look at other regional entities, all of them failed because they did not have this inbuilt structure.

For Arnaud, the unelected nature and unaccountability of the Commission is not a bug but a feature, a marker of its excellence as an institution of leadership. Keeping Commissioners in place for the long term allows them enough time to bring projects to completion, unhindered by political pressures arising from below. It also enables them to hold national administrations to the commitments they once made. Maintaining this state of affairs is what allows them to get on with their work without having to change jobs prematurely or devote time to ensuring their re-election in the future. Legitimacy is in the eye of the beholder, and the Director rejects conceptions of 'democracy' that understand it as a singular framework that may be applied in all institutional contexts consistently and in equal measure.

When asked about the effect of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system on the democratic deficit, officials largely approved of the new direction of travel: 'We are on track now. Mr Juncker was elected mainly by Luxembourg voters, and Mr Schulz was mainly elected by German voters. Fine, but by playing that game, our parties in the Parliament showed our direction. Now they have to take further steps in that direction' (Arnaud). In so far as it involves some consultation with a broader public discussion, the procedure is a more transparent one. The central criticism was that the move did not go far enough. As before, the lead candidates for the Commission Presidency are chosen before voters go to the polls and do not compete directly amongst themselves in making their bids for the office. The 'so-called European

political parties' are essentially conglomerates of national parties running electoral campaigns that target voters from their own member states. The results of any European election are in effect a second-hand by-product of those of the national elections which preceded it: 'Why should I, as a Belgian or a Frenchman, be restricted to vote only for my compatriots? It does not make sense'. A truly European parliamentary chamber filled with truly European parties would pave the way for a truly European democratic system.

'It's true. We find it difficult to have representational democracy at the European level', said Feargal, who likewise loaded some of the blame onto the shoulders of MEPs:

> The European Parliament is not a wonderful parliament. I have no magic wand to make it so. It is not a meeting of 760 of Europe's most dynamic politicians from any member state. It's people who are slightly second-tier politicians, who go on a sort of superannuation having had a national political career, or who find their way into Parliament as a way *into* a national political career. It's not great, but it's all we've got. I mean, most of us here in the Commission think the Parliament is rubbish! We cannot believe how much they fret away their time on trivialities and on going around persecuting civil servants.

Officials in the Commission, on the other hand, are able to engage citizens indirectly via the various lobbying and interest groups around them:

> As a slight compensation for the democratic deficit, we will talk to anybody. Anybody who comes to us to talk about education, culture or anything like that, they're fully entitled to talk to us. People elect themselves, appoint themselves to fill the gap, and that's part of what you see around Brussels in all the plethora of lobbyists and interest groups, which is second only to Washington in those terms. They are welcomed at the doors of the officials simply because, in the absence of clear democratic mediation of political signals, we will take anybody's ideas. We will dialogue with anybody.

That he cited the lobbying culture in Brussels as an antidote to the deficit is interesting given how the industry in general is widely considered a barrier to democracy, symptomatic of an oligarchical, pay-to-play politics that works in the interests of the wealthy and few. 'It may well be a barrier, but it's also a sort of substitute for it. I think it's both things. It's not just Google and Microsoft who have lobbying offices here; it's Friends of the Earth (FOEI), the European Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA-Europe), everything. All of human life is in this town.'

Eloise was significantly happier in the former Internal Market and Services DG (MARKT) than she is in FISMA, where she feels she lacks the technical knowledge needed to be an effective Head of Unit: 'I feel the kind of family, political thing quite strongly. I have not joined the Commission to speak to fund managers in Luxembourg. I'd rather do things that are concrete, that are closer to the lives of people. So, I'll be looking to move probably quite soon. Perhaps it is time to move on before they saw off the branch I'm sitting on. I think I'd rather jump off it myself.'

Not all officials were as sanguine about Juncker's 'instinct' that the College should be repoliticized. 'Quite frankly, it was a PR move', said Jörg. 'By now, it's all about PR. I don't think many Europeans imagine the European elections in any particular way. It's not something people talk about. They see it as 28 national elections to a large extent, rather than as one collective entity.' He was likewise cynical about the concept of 'a more political Commission': 'I'm afraid of this marketing slogan. There is a place for politics, but law enforcement should not be politicized.' As an institutional rebranding exercise, the talking point that was trotted out in press releases each week, providing a 'media hook' with which politicians at the national level engaged their constituents. For Jörg, these techniques of public relations are effective in achieving institutional visibility but ultimately come up short. As solutions to the deficit, they are more cosmetic than invasive, more symbolic than real, amounting to a minor tweak to a profound flaw. They do little make the institutions *democratic* and *political*; they merely succeed in making them *more democratic* and *more political* than they were before.

A crucial aspect of the charge of democratic deficiency is that the EU is a democracy lacking a coherent and identifiable European *demos* or populace. The Autumn 2015 reading of the Commission's Eurobarometer survey detected a long-term trend in distrust and disaffection among citizens. Trust in the EU was at 32%, down from 57% in Autumn 2006

(Kantar Public 2015). A narrow majority of respondents (54%) disagreed with the prompt, 'My voice counts in the EU.' Voter participation in the elections, having reached its peak in 1979 (62%), has decreased consistently each election year since, hitting an all-time low of 43% in 2009. Lacking the salience and tangibility that national and regional identities enjoy, European identities are considered to be superficial ideas which, more cerebral than bodily, are of little relevance to the lives of most citizens. Abstract to the point of insignificance, Europeanness is more a subject of ideological debate than a felt reality. Broad enough to encompass all the varieties of social and linguistic life into a single supranational rubric, it stretches itself too thin and ultimately falls apart in its efforts to elide difference and combine unlike with unlike. The conspicuous absence of an extant European demos in the European Union means, in effect, a Europe without Europeans.

Embracing the idea of Europe as a mode of self-recognition and belonging can prove to be a challenging prospect within national and local contexts where lingering attachments to nations and nationness endure. 'People probably feel that the most important aspect of their identity is their national identity. It's definitely the case. You're concerned about people in your home and in your own country more than others. So, it's national interest; it's "your country, your people"' (Marie-Christine).

'People forget the timescale needed to inculcate a kind of supranational identity. There's usually no problem in getting people to feel European if they're somewhere in another continent. But feeling European, feeling a supranational identity when they are at home, that's more difficult' (Olivia).

The nonexistence of a 'truly European' demos was attributed in part to the absence of a 'truly European' public square: an open forum that exists above and across national borders where dialogue among different members of an imagined community can take place. There is no supranational, Eurocentric news broadcast available for widespread consumption, 'a space

where genuine European issues are discussed, taking into account the European dimension of them for what it is' (Arnaud). National media outlets invariably foreground their own national affairs. The reports presented by 'Europe correspondents' on what's happening in Brussels is usually confined to short descriptions of legislative proposals. 'As long as the first pages of the newspaper and as long as the first minutes of the TV news are massively dedicated to domestic issues, you can say there is no such thing as a European demos. That's what it boils down to.' Central to the political turn was therefore a concern with institutional visibility. The Commission is not simply a 'more political' body; it is a 'more *visibly* political' one (Arnaud). 'People see Europe as probably a good thing after all, and they forget about this—which means that at the end of the day, they don't care about Europe.' Perhaps Europe is so close in proximity to citizens that it appears out of focus and banal.

'I think there is a European demos, but most people don't even realize it. Maybe we take things for granted and can't see the positive aspects of everything that's been done in Europe. It's amazing to see everyone working together. It's very beautiful, and I'm the product of that' (Marie-Christine). Such an assertion raises the question of whether or not it is possible to identify and belong to a community without ever noticing it. Any community in which this may occur must be barely visible indeed. 'A near borderless Europe at peace constitutes the great achievement of the second half of the twentieth century. That you can go from Germany to Poland across a frontier near effaced and scarcely imagine the millions slaughtered seven decades ago is testament to the accomplishment. The European Union is the dullest miracle on earth' (Cohen 2015). Because it is beautiful, the reality of the EU's invisibility as expressed here contains an element of tragedy. Beauty that goes unseen is beauty that is wasted and without value.

2.6 Towards an anthropology of the non-political

Post-60s political anthropology, what (Vincent 2002, 1) describes as the 'third phase' of anthropology's engagement with politics, has given rise to many efforts to expand the the political as an ethnographic category. The result has been an 'unboundedness of the political': politics and the political are defined so broadly that politics may be found everywhere, underlying nearly all the discipline's concerns (Candea 2011: 310). The political, taken broadly, is found wherever power relations exist among two or more actors. Their actions occur in spaces which are always already within political. By consequence, one begins to see 'power, power, everywhere', as well as nowhere all at once (Sahlins 2002: 20). When imagining a possible universe wholly devoid of politics, I see a pristine universe of rocks uninhabited by conscious life. How could non-political spaces be possible anywhere except for inside such a thought experiment? I suggest, following Candea (2011), that that anthropologist develop a greater sensitivity towards the concept of 'the political' and the supposed boundaries separating it from the 'non-political'. My focus here is on the theoretical potentialities of being 'more political' in the EU administration beyond the teleologies of 'post-politics' and 'the post-political' (Ranciere 2006, Mouffe 2005) developing over previous decades.

'The political' as an object of research in anthropology has occupied many generations of scholars, placing it within a context of governance, social movements, collective subjectivities, global hierarchal configurations and all various forms of domination and resistance arising wherever there are contestations over wealth and resources. Engaging with contemporary manifestations of Europeanness through the conceptual framework of (de)politicization and the (a)political helps to gain insight into the categories of politics and technocracy as different orders of knowledge produced in accordance with internal institutional customs and norms. By employing the ideologically charged narratives and

practices involved in this act of self-politicization, the Commission strove to reclaim political agency while contesting the stereotype attached to it of a faceless, depoliticized technocracy. Rather than the 'political denial of the social' (Herzfeld 2002), we see here the social denial of the political. This partly explains why invocations of the political quickly reduce themselves to so many redundancies, tautologies and truisms. Only by examining the political ethnographically can areas deemed free of politics come into view.

Arguably, Benedict Anderson's (2006: 6) inclusion of 'sovereignty' in his definition of an imagined community did much to reinforce the hyphen that once bound *nation* to *state.* Meanwhile, scholars have treated these as independent analytic categories in ways that problematize the role of state governance and territory in constructing nationness (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Appadurai 2006; Khalili 2008). As the EU executive is a center of governance and decision-making, the study falls within the subfield known as 'political anthropology' or the 'anthropology of politics'. However, the political/apolitical dichotomy hinges on western liberal notions of public/private that do not entirely measure up. A life lived off-the-grid, to borrow a digital age buzzword, provides no escape. The tranquility of solitude can provide no assurance of a destiny free of impingement by the wider power structures governing the nearby communities living on-the-grid. The capacities for happiness and suffering are still in some measure determined by the gravitational forces exerted on them by the massive political bodies operating in the world. This is a reality lamented by romantic individualists who actively resist the passive dissolution of their own irreducible 'I' into the general public's collective 'We'. 'There is no such thing as a good influence', as Wilde writes in The Picture of Dorian Gray (1997):

> All influence is immoral—immoral from the scientific point of view…. Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him. The aim of life is self-development.

One irony here is that these words are placed in the mouth of the 'bad influence' who most resembles Wilde himself, the character whose ideas misdirect the novel's antihero, sending him careening off course in his 'natural self-development' and finally to his ruin.

Belonging to a community encompasses both the shared affinities felt in belonging *with*, but also the relationship of ownership and possessiveness that belonging *to* implies. It is a mode of being which allows people to constrain themselves by the bondage that yokes them in thought and action to their clan in order to profit from the sense of camaraderie gained from the feeling of being part of something greater than themselves. The mythos of liberty epitomized in the Crusoean or Rousseauean personage of the rugged individual, untrammeled by society's 'chains', is a utopian fantasy. The globalized world condemns us all to the hellfire we feel when in the company of *les autres*. If it is true, as Thatcher said, that there there no is such thing as society, then it must follow that there is no such thing as politics either. There are, on the contrary, such things as societies and politics, and both know no bounds.

3 EU stories: Identity and belonging in a Europe of open markets and open cultures

‘Watch your step. This road is unfinished, like Europe.’ I was in Tervuren, a small Flemish suburb separated from Brussels by a large arboretum, and Leon came to collect me at the station. The town’s quiet streets and manicured lawns are where many officials go to retire. We shook hands at the bottom of the platform and proceeded with caution down the path. ‘You know, it’s like a lot of things that you build. You can build a beautiful house, but the foundations you have to be very careful with.’

No, I told him, I did not have much trouble getting here. On the contrary, the journey was a joyride. The tramcar’s interior, painted in somniferous autumnal tones, was roomy and quiet, apart from the whisperings of a few schoolgirls who were not in school. As we scuttled steadily along between the rows of coniferous trees towering overhead, the vibrations flowing off the fuzzy bench seat coaxed me into a contemplative mood, and I became absorbed in the colors and straight lines of the artificial forest. In Belgium, the electric tram ride is a venerated public institution in itself. I am told that the late René Magritte, who kept a place not far from mine in Schaerbeek, commuted exclusively by tramway. The artist accepted no substitutes. I pictured him sitting where I was sat in his overcoat and bowler hat, with a newspaper in one hand and an oversized green apple in the other.

Leon’s use of symbolism emboldened me—not for its strength as a metaphor but because of how instantly and automatically he delivered it. Roads such as this one are common fixtures in the EU Quarter’s physical topography, so I barely noticed the stone pits, loose gravel hills and unmanned excavators idly gathering moss to the side. The perforated stretches of concrete that take you from one place to the next are not so much ‘roads’ as they are all-terrain courses of mud, cement, hazard signs and empty space. My agenda that

afternoon was to collect EU stories, and Leon was in the mood to tell them. 'You really have to understand the beginnings, firstly.'

This chapter focus on the stories, histories and grand narratives that imbue the routine work-life practices of the EU with constellations of personal meaning. It adopts a dialectical approach to exploring Europeanness in its elevated and formalized iterations: as a top-down mode of self-recognition and belonging with a social polity, an institutional network of governance and geographical territory (Archer 1996). Borrowing Stocking's (1982) framework of *ethnos* and *anthropos* and taking up Niermann's (2009) distinction between idealistic and technocratic narratives, it explores two trajectories of EU integration, one emphasizing the integration of economic spheres, the other the integration of social ones. Analyzing narrated imaginings of the European 'idea', 'project', 'experiment' or 'dream' (Rifkin 2004) reveals narratives of Europeanness that touch on themes of substance, emptiness, time, space, violence and first principles. It is not my aim here to construct a social history of the EU or an intellectual history of the idea of Europe. Instead, I wish to raise, in a genealogical spirit, a more restricted set of questions directed at unpacking the idea of Europe as it is conceived, conducted and conjured up inside Commission spaces.

Piecing together fragmented accounts of historical narratives collected in the field, the chapter reproduces EU stories as they were told inside the European civil service. What emerges is a dialectic of epistemic impulses performed as two separable and mutually constitutive modes of identity and belonging: Europe, a shared supranational *Gesellschaft* in the singular; and nation, the member state-level *Gemeinschaften* in the plural (Tönnies 2001; Weber 1921). The tensions between these dual impulses shape the evolution of formal and informal culture concepts according to which official European identities and socialities are performed. Contemporary conceptualizations of official EU culture seek to resolve the Europe-nation dialectic by propagating the notion of a 'Europe in plurals', a synthesis in

which Europeanness is a *Gesellschaft* that adopts the ideology of *Gemeinschaft*. The efforts of the European Commission in this regard, as I aim to demonstrate, are hindered by futurist temporalities that orient Europeanness in opposition to the past.

The production of narrative is intrinsic to the moment-to-moment experience of consciousness and its contents. We are mired in stories that may be told 'in a hundred different and contradictory ways' (Borges 1969). The primacy of stories and how they are told is a time-honored preoccupation of anthropologists. Malinowski (1922) insists that 'ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folk-lore and magical formulae' should be valued as *corpus inscriptionum,* 'documents of native mentality'. Social anthropology in central and eastern Europe and the Americas developed as a discipline out of traditional folklore studies. In most places, ethnographic narratives crafted from what is observed and experienced came to be seen as more 'direct'—and hence, in greater correspondence with social realities—than those derived from collected, catalogued and analyzed stories and texts. Before being subsumed into the broader framework of participant observation, field studies of myth and ritual opened up new possibilities for understanding storytelling as a social practice. Narrative remains intrinsic to the ethnographic genre. Ethnographers create stylized accounts of immediate personal experience that analyze and reproduce the stories societies tell about themselves to themselves and to others. The social ethnographer is thus in some measure a neo-folklorist and oral historian as well as a raconteur, Scheherazade and yarn-spinner (Bringhurst 1992).

Narrative is the vehicle through which memory enters processes of identity formation, and the reproduction of identity and belonging is ensured by the iterative circulation of shared stories under continuous revision (Ricoeur 2006). Among the finest stories societies have to tell are those that center on ancestral heroes and that pertain to questions of where a social group comes from, where it is going and why there is something there rather than

nothing. Creation myths are 'maps of time' for map-making creatures, drawing together credible sequences of eventive action that carry the plot forward from a primeval moment of genesis into the present (Christian 2004). As is characteristic of the genre, these stories claim to be at least as old as the events they recount and bear all the marks of human authorship. Collective memory, harnessed by institutions of governance to justify claims to legitimate power, becomes a 'privileged instrument' of ideology. Recounting line by line the 'who of action' (Arendt 1959), the storyteller shares the legends of characters who exemplify, through thought and action, constellations of social meanings with which listeners identify themselves: '*mutato; nomine et de te fabula narratur* [change only the name and this story is about you]' (Horace 1888). One can dismiss them or accept them, but to pick holes in them à la carte is to fail to acknowledge the power of their significance and utility. Like novels, they reveal as much about the human condition in certain times and certain places as they do about the cosmos or the movements of its heavenly bodies.

A well-known story is the tale of the nation state: how it rose from the ashes of long-forgotten kingdoms, empires and principalities to supplant the monastic and monarchical orders as the fundamental unit of organized social life in Europe. Nationalism was invented in the 19th century when the social and cultural units of the past could not withstand the early birth pangs of modernist industrialization (Gellner 1983). Tribal peasantries were too small for the job, and imperial empires were too big for it. With the introduction of the Westphalian system in the mid-17th century, nationalism is made possible, and the state and its rulers became the centermost units in which collective identity and belonging were expressed. The pre-eminence of the national state continued unchallenged for a century or more until the spell started to break and a new story, imagining a world after nation states, began to be told. In a post-national era, the increasing influence of inter-, supra- and sub-national institutions operating in a global context brought about the decline of national sovereignty: 'Nations are

not eternal. They have a beginning, and they will have an end. A European confederation will probably replace them' (Renan 1882). The idea of nationhood has not entirely vanished but persists in a nominalized form as 'a dead thing, kept alive for tradition's sake' (Malinowski 1922: 15). The nation is dead. The nation remains dead. And Europe has killed it. How, then, shall EU civil servants comfort themselves, being the murderers of all murderers? One technique is to tell a supranational story of which they are living protagonists and whose ending is impossible to foresee.

Selective readings of the European integration project reinforce grand narratives from which they derive meaning in their work. Codified texts such as the Declaration on European Identity (1973), the Solemn Declaration on European Union (1983) and the White Paper on the Future of Europe (2017) are overt efforts made by the EU to pin down an identity for itself, one that is formalized and definitive. 'There was a project to discover or to reveal a soul for Europe' (Feargal). A Soul for Europe (2006), the Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe (2004), and A New Narrative for Europe (2013; 2014) were attempts led by the previous President 'to define this philosophical basis for looking at Europe in a new way' and 'articulate what Europe stands for today and tomorrow' through encounters between the European art and policy worlds (Feargal). Soul-searching was carried out during workshops where 'cultural authorities' convened to construct narratives that revive a European spirit through art and science'. Unlike Juncker, who is 'a sort of a plain man, a man of the people who drinks whiskey and smokes', Barroso was fond of cozying up to philosophers like Habermas and artists like the filmmaker Wim Wenders.

The campaign gathered much publicity that included 'many nice moments on podiums'. However, its ability to 'bring Europe closer to its citizens' was overshadowed by louder criticisms coming from other areas of the creative industry concerning ongoing trade negotiations with the United States: 'It came a cropper really when the whole culture world

hated the proposals for the TTIP. There were particular French filmmakers who felt that this was going to collapse the ability of a country like France to subsidize its film industry and were absolutely vehement in denouncing that. Barroso was left not quite standing on a stage all his own as all the intellectuals deserted him.' Contributions to A New Narrative were merged with The Mind and Body of Europe, a set of declarations by a dozen or so artists, architects and various thinkers. The resulting book, 'The Mind and Body of Europe: A New Narrative' is a compelling exercise in EU discursive framing with 'understandable explanations and clear diagrams' (European Commission 2014). Such initiatives act as multidisciplinary platforms for the coherent and comprehensive configurations of Europeanness via the production and circulation of official narratives that are appealing and convincing, yet modular and malleable: ones that explicitly say, 'Don't listen to *those* stories; listen to these instead.'

Within the scope of EAC's New Narrative actions, the Commission organizes events at BOZAR, a modern art gallery whose name is an anglicized homophone of *beaux arts*. One of these productions, organized in the context of the Dutch Council Presidency, is entitled 'Imagine Europe: In Search of New Narratives'. Presentations and panel discussions featuring artists, scientists and other members of the intelligentsia came to debate such topics as borders, democracy and the power of storytelling. They were tasked with performing a reexamination of the EU story, bearing in mind the complications of the present circumstances, in a timely and imaginative fashion. Promotional material for the event stressed open-endedness, stating that the forum is more 'a cross between a public marketplace, a lab and a workshop' than 'a classic exhibition with completed works of art and cut and dried ideas'.[26] Between sessions, audiences were invited to explore an exhibition titled 'Images for Europe', a series of 12 large statements printed on 12 large posters. One

[26] https://visit.brussels/binaries/content/assets/pdf/imagine_europe_en.pdf

bore the title Solution 275: The 'No Conspiracy' Conspiracy. At its center was a statement displayed in circular text: 'The most apparent EU conspiracy is exactly a total lack of conspiracy theories about the EU.' The words are those of novelist Ingo Niermann, who, in his Solutions 1-10 book series, concocts terse definitions for different countries by imagining how they were originally conceived. 'Every great historical power provokes suspicions of secret plots. The European Union has no conspiracy theories devoted to it, unless you count the one about it "being reigned by hoards [sic] of imbecile bureaucrats".'

A way forward for Niermann is to create and disseminate Brussels-based conspiracy stories which may attract interest among otherwise dispassionate observers. The mystique that already shrouds processes of Europe-making provide an advantageous starting point. The EU is 'something about which most people—and this is where the conspiracy starts—don't know anything.' For decades, two salient plots, an 'idealistic narrative' and a 'technocratic narrative', have remained at our disposal. And yet, these stories are no longer fit for purpose in capturing present realities. Postnational narratives cannot account for the global financial crisis or the electoral victories of young Euroskeptic parties and alliances. Going forward, 'new narratives foremost have to be plausible and surprising, no matter whether their outcome is good or bad.' If the conspicuous nature of the EU derives from a conspiracy that is a lack of conspiracies, effective conspiracy theories are desperately needed. Of course, any conspiracy that may be called effective is one that no one, apart from the conspirators themselves, is privy to.

I met Maja at Exki Schuman, a soup and sandwich chain housed in a wing of the Triangle building. It was a Saturday in November, the morning after the 2015 Paris attacks. The mood was subdued. We traded expressions of disbelief and agreed that coffee was the immediate priority. The feeling of shared affinity that often follows tragedies of this kind provides a solid foundation for building rapport throughout the interview. When I asked her to state the

purpose of the European project, she lifted her head and stared out of the window onto the roundabout.

Even on less emotionally weighted mornings, I sensed a mild discomfort in my interlocutors when posing this question. Rather than beginning with the big picture and zeroing in on the detail, I tended to come out with it when things are drawing to a close. This could catch them by surprise, provoking laughter or a readjustment of posture. Luuk looked positively daunted when replying, 'I haven't prepared specifically for the conversation, so I'll just say what comes to mind.'

'Well, it depends on what view you take,' Leon chuckled. 'My view's not worth having.'

'Ah! This is quite good, this discussion,' said Giovanni. Notwithstanding his senior position and his wisdom on the inner workings of the institutions, the man is but one Head of Sector leading one team in one unit within one directorate within one DG. He and his colleagues had been working on the same file for the better part of a year. 'Most days it can be banal', he admitted.

The hesitancy I encountered was not unwarranted, in my opinion. Improvising a justification for any institutional center of power and belonging in real time can be a daunting task for anyone, regardless of the institution. If an informant would have turned the question around and asked me, 'What is the purpose of the United States of America?', I would have had similar trouble coming up with a comfortable answer. And yet, a perceived loss of consensus over what it means to belong to a national community gives rise to new debates over identity questions in general. Pass by a window display in an English bookshop today, and you may notice new releases interrogating what it means to be British. The question is debated regularly on evening television. As nations require their boundaries be constantly redrawn for the purpose of distinguishing the authentic insiders from the inauthentic outsiders, the question of their ultimate purpose is a perennial one. Still, the persistence of

their significance in our lives is the reason why asking, ‘What is the purpose of the European Union?’ feels appropriate in a way that asking, ‘What is the purpose of France?’ or ‘What is the purpose of the United Kingdom?’ does not.

‘Oh, peace, obviously’, Maja said, at last. ‘Europe was initially a peace project between France and Germany. What else? I don’t know. It’s so obvious that I see it, though I can’t even remember.’

3.1 Barbarism begins at home: nationalism, civil war and original sin

On another November day, I rode the tram to Tervuren a second time to meet Laurens, a retired translator who wore a snow-white beard, red jumper, and sad blue eyes peering out through thin-rimmed glasses. Laurens was born in the summer of 1947, just after his Dutch father, German mother parents and two sisters returned to Amsterdam after the war. ‘With all the horrors of the past, I was very lucky to have very nice parents and a nice family life.’ Their trip back was not an altogether happy one. While in hiding, they lost parents, siblings, nieces and nephews. His grandfather was the sole member on the Dutch side to survive. After the Nazis made them flee their home, the Allies rendered it inhospitable.

The milieu of his childhood was ‘almost exclusively Jewish’ of the secular, nontheistic kind: ‘The basic identity is Jewish. There was a Jewish consciousness, a Jewish awareness—in a cultural, ethnic, historical sense—which, by definition, makes me cosmopolitan.’ The familiar memory of war and persecution was one his classmates shared. Each had a similar story. Together, they were ‘the children of Holocaust survivors’. Not until early adolescence did he discover that the gentiles at school still had grandparents and uncles and aunts: ‘Suddenly, it hits you that you’re not normal in that sense. I don’t want to say *trauma*, but it’s always there. I think more than anything else, that awareness made me what I am.’ His

mother missed the pre-war elegance and refinement of the Germany of her girlhood but insisted on raising him as a proud Dutchman like his father. Shunning all things German, she passed on her practiced ambivalence towards Germanness onto him: 'From the age of four or five, my brother and I went to Germany on holiday to visit some surviving friends and one aunt, and I just loved it. I liked everything I saw: the people, the look. Even today, it's my favorite country. But there's always a nagging Jiminy Cricket on my shoulder saying, "I cannot afford to like things German".'

'That's very interesting,' I said, somewhat carelessly.

'It's sad,' Laurens corrected me. 'It may be interesting for *you*. For me, it casts a shadow on my personal freedom—'

'I'm sorry, I did not mean that.'

'I resent not being able to determine who I am. It's more the outside world and history that determines your identity, and I'm sure that as an anthropologist you'll never find anyone who says otherwise. You cannot define yourself freely; you are defined by your own background, your parents' background and the place where you happened to be born—the culture you were born in. The ambivalence slowly dissipates, but it's there. As you are aware, the origin of the European movement is to draw a line under all these wars.'

'We have undergone a major civil war which started in 1914 and finished up in 1945', Arnaud says. For him, the Civil War was an extended period of unrest during which Europe was at war with itself. 'There is no such thing as a "First and Second World War". It's a big European Civil War which lasted for about 30 years.' The crooked timber left behind in the aftermath of war provides the *prima materia* and *mise en scène* for the European story (Kant 1784). There is the official who, at age six, survived the Dresden bombings by hiding in the cellar for three days with his mother. Or another who survived the Hongerwinter in

Rotterdam. Or the one whose father was the youngest member of a German tank regiment and the only one to survive an ambush in Yugoslavia.

Sitting high up in Feargal's spacious, open-windowed office at DG EAC, we consumed peeled tangerines as he intoned on the commonalities binding Europeans together:

> There are too many to count, but the shared history of the wars of the 20th century is huge: the shared understanding that Europe passed through these terrible, terrible, terrible moments. It nearly killed itself, self-destructed—or more or less did, twice. That's very powerful; it's shared by everybody here. It's amazing: I'm not saying they become *obsessed* with that, but it's an important point. Coming from a neutral country like mine, to actually see how vital it is—that's an important shared experience.

He memorializes the events with his colleagues while feeling that, as an Irishman, he is less entitled to the shared history. Ireland was 'neutral', despite the fact that thousands of Irish soldiers served in the British Army in both wars.

Nation-building is a full-time endeavor. A nation is the product of constant activity and perseverance, through which 'dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored' (Gellner 1983). Nations beget nationalism, rather than the other way around. And yet, 'the "nation" as conceived by nationalism, can be recognized prospectively; the real "nation" can only be recognized a posteriori' (Hobsbawm 1972). Through the production and circulation of sites of memory, such as memorials, museums, historical archives and international days of remembrance, imagined communities are re-presented in absentia. Noticing the rapid proliferation of Holocaust memory sites in cities across the continent, (Nora 1989) attempts to make sense of a fixation with social memory and identity that is peculiarly European. The birth of the nation state, he writes, coincides with a decoupling of memory from history. 'Memory' is embodied habitus (Mauss 1973; Bourdieu 1977), the matrix of routines, gestures and personas passed down through the ages. It is the 'protected habit-grooves' of culture (Douglas 2002): the way one stands, walks, holds one's teacup or lifts oneself onto the pavement from the back seat of a hired car. Representations of shared memory delineate the boundaries between societies that are

imagined as different: mutually intelligible among members of the in-group, to outsiders they are ineffable. Educating us in the ways we use our bodies, memory survives today in 'the warmth of tradition, the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral' (Nora 1989: 7). 'History' by contrast is a 'heritage consolidated': narratives of past events that are reupholstered together *ex post facto* from the fragments of memories lost. Histories are transmitted to audiences composed of the future unborn, who were not around to experience the events directly. History neither repeats itself nor rhymes; it simply grows, building up over time. Relative to memory, it is more indirect than immediate, more individual than collective, more psychological than social. Once running in parallel, the two phenomena are now poles apart, accelerating away from one another at increasing speeds.

The total historicization of memory reaches its apotheosis with the rise of historiography, as the critical meta-narratives of histories of history in the plural destabilize a once sacred and unshakeable capital 'H' History (Goody and Watt 1963). Turning History's gaze upon itself reduces memory to a 'reconstituted object', limited in scope to the partial and relative (Nora 1989: 12). Through the deconstruction of an archetypal grand narrative, historiographers reveal its assumptions and biases, its contested status. Their ability to do so is enabled by their disidentification and disassociation with it following a loss of faith in the claims it makes and a disillusionment with the dreams it promises to fulfill (de Certeau 1988). The democratization of history-making—we are all historians now—thus has important implications for social identity and belonging in Europe. Historicized memory 'require[s] every social group to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history' (Nora 1989: 15).

The EU creation story is retold in ways that reflect current institutional paradigms of how best to coexist among the lingering ghosts of the past. 'The memories of Europe's tragic past must be kept alive', states the 2009 Parliament resolution on European conscience and

totalitarianism, in order to 'strengthen European awareness of crimes committed by totalitarian and undemocratic regimes…as there can be no reconciliation without remembrance' (European Parliament 2009). Among historic tragedies, 'the uniqueness of the Holocaust must nevertheless be acknowledged' (ibid.). To create 'a pan-European documentation center/memorial', the declaration calls on national governments to open their historical archives to the public and allow its members to access family records and other documents of personal relevance that have previously been kept under the auspices of internal security and intelligence agencies (ibid., 4). It establishes the Platform of European Memory and Conscience to facilitate collaborations between institutes and foundations researching totalitarianism and proposes the establishment of an annual European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism coinciding with the anniversary of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August. In line with research methods currently fashionable in the historical sciences, a commitment is made to 'try to be as impartial as possible' in the commemoration of victims (ibid., 2). The declaration acknowledges, however, that 'a parliament cannot legislate on the past' and that absolute objectivity is unattainable in practice: **'**historians agree that fully objective interpretations of historical facts are not possible' (ibid., 1-2).

The Holocaust story is reproduced in a pluralist Europe through a plurality of voices in a plurality of ways. 'Objective historical narratives do not exist', though 'misinterpretations of history' do, and these 'fuel exclusivist policies and thereby incite hatred and racism' (ibid., 2). The EU is bound together, in part, by a 'Europe-wide recognition of all historical aspects of modern Europe' (ibid., 3). Posterity is encouraged to take ownership of the atrocities against human dignity committed by 20th century totalitarian regimes and to carry them forward as a collective burden: 'Europe will not be united unless it is able to form a common view of its history, recognizes Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes as a

common legacy and brings about an honest and thorough debate on their crimes…' (ibid., 2). Appeals to inclusivity in the debate creates the appearance that multiple, particular sub-European histories are incorporated while reifying the idea of a common European memory that all Europeans share. As an EU site of memory, the text stakes out a space for the EU to position itself in relation to history and memory and indicates the institutional logics that govern how the official, authorized European story is told.

The story goes that as the fog of war dissipated among the rubble, Europeans awoke to discover themselves in a condition similar to the one Icarus found himself in after the fall. Critically wounded but still alive, 'Europe returns to its great humanistic heritage and becomes a peaceful union of nations, an example for the whole world [and so remakes the world in its own image]', as Niermann's 'Images of Europe' poster reads. This is the idealistic narrative which, together with the technocratic narrative, provides a documented basis for a promising EU conspiracy theory.

'It is true,' stated Raphael:

> Europe for so many years has given us the possibility to live in peace—which is not the case if you look at what is happening now in the Middle East—and the situation here could change. I work for Europe, and I'm not happy with all the European policies because many are not going in the right direction. But I think it's still important to work together and to be together. Europe is the first experiment in the history of humanity where you have nations working together.

World and *peace*, in that order, are the first two words of the Schuman Declaration. When officials recite the EU story, the peace project narrative reliably recurred.

'What people who are working in the institutions start with is the idea that we are here in the forefront of the movement to make sure this never happens again. There's a strong self-belief that that's what we're about: we are creating a Europe which can never go back to that' (Feargal).

The peace-project narrative, an EU creation story in which the institutions' claims to legitimacy are grounded, is 'something that you can consider of overriding importance', providing a compelling 'sense of purpose' (Morgan). At once optimistic and foreboding, it

enlists the men and women on the frontlines of supranational policymaking in a never-ending war on war. 'Peace and prosperity are the fundamental driver on the line of first integration. That, for me, is the fundamental purpose. For that, it's easy to work hard on any field, right? If you want to put it in a phrase, you could say the point of the European Union is to slow down the decline of the West. That may sound pretentious, but I do think it works' (Luuk). The Parliamentarium, the museum in the visitors' center next to the Parliament, is a significant EU memory site in the physical, spatial sense. Strolling through the exhibition, I noticed a compelling quotation displayed on the wall. Its words were taken from 'The Ending of Armageddon', a pamphlet published on the cusp of the Second World War: '....national sovereignty is the root cause of the most crying evils of our time and of the steady march of humanity back to tragic disaster and barbarism...The only final remedy for this supreme and catastrophic evil of our time is a federal union of the peoples' (Lothian 1939). From the outset, European integration has been a response to the suffering inflicted by a totalitarian age: a way of ending war, securing democracy and overcoming deep divisions and hostilities through cooperation and integration.

If World War was Europe's downfall, nationalism was its original sin, being its immediate result as well as its ultimate cause. 'Nationalism is war,' as François Mitterrand said in Strasbourg.[27] It is a poison for which integration is the remedy: 'The European Union is an antidote to rising Nationalism in Europe', Juncker confirmed.[28] In a speech at the 2017 Rome summit organized to celebrate the EU's 60th birthday, Timmermans compared it to alcoholism: 'It might feel good in the evening, but you wake up with a horrible hangover the next morning' (Rankin 2017). The history of all hitherto existing European society is one of

[27] https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/speech-by-president-mitterand-in-the-european-parliament_B001-0125_ev
[28] http://www.alpbach.org/alpbuzz/juncker-slaps-austrian-muftis-call-tighter-eu-borders/

struggles—but of struggles between nations rather than classes, and Europeans will never be free until nation states go the way of the preindustrial, multiethnic, polycentric empires.

'I often compare the approach taken in the first half of the 20th century to children squabbling on the playground,' said Captain Europe, abandoning for a moment his elevated diction for an infantile whine. '"No! It's mine!", and "No, I was here first. Give it to me!"

> That was essentially the conversation that France and Germany were having over the coalfields of Alsace and Lorraine from about 1870 to 1945, on and off. Unfortunately, it was not just a conversation: it was a conflict in which many millions of lives were lost over those 75 years. So, when Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman and Alterio Spinelli came along, they were essentially saying, 'Well, enough of that.' They did what any responsible adult would do upon discovering children squabbling on a playground, which is to say, 'Why don't we share?'

'We were thinking that we were going beyond nationalism. We now see that, in reality, people are going in the opposite direction and coming back to a nationalism. That is mounting everywhere' (Raphael).

> For a lot of people who had lived through that awful experience of the Second World War, that was the fuel, obviously, to set up the EU and then to come and work for it. You could go one of two ways in response to that awful experience: 'I don't want anything to do with Europe because that's trouble', or, 'We have to work together to stop it happening again.' Obviously the sensible and progressive view was the latter. [Mark]

These states demonstrate the degree to which integration is seen as a ripening, coming-of-age process: a slow evolution of self-actualization out of the moral and intellectual folly of youth and into a more Kantian 'maturity' or a Baudelairean 'self-elaboration' (Foucault and Rabinow 1984; Asad 1993). Capital 'N' nationalism—and its modalities of nation, nationness and the national—typifies all that is outdated, backward, irrational and immature, an instinct to be pacified and a bondage to be liberated from. Fear of the strange and unfamiliar is an infantile condition that may be outgrown through experiences of exposure. 'It's not foreign once you get over certain things', as Feargal said.

'If you ask citizens, "What is the most positive achievement of the EU?",' said Emma, 'they say, "Peace, free movement of people, the Erasmus program".' The figurations of 'bridges' and 'walls' are salient tropes and the freedom of movement—the right to live,

work, study and fall in love without borders—is paramount. 'It's a very strong point. It maybe sounds a bit like a cliché, but this "building bridges" between the countries—that's really important' (Emma). She related to me the remarks of a German student who had just done his Erasmus, the program allowing students to study or work in a different European country for an extended period. 'I could never fight in a war in Europe if there would be one, because I would think that the person on the other side could be one of my friends who I met on Erasmus', he said. In a publication titled 'Europe without borders: the Schengen area', the Commissioner for Migration paraphrased the Commission's view on borders: 'On a continent where nations once shed blood to defend their territories, today borders only exist on maps.'[29] For Juncker, they are 'the worst invention ever made by politicians' (Mamic, et al. 2016). The number of citizens living and working in another member state has doubled to 17 million since the previous decade. Every day, two million transcend national boundaries on their way to and from work. Nine million have done an Erasmus. And yet, 'the figures remain low for a continent of more than 512 million inhabitants' (European Union 2018).

The Schengen Agreement of 1990 made Leon less conscious of state borders by allowing him to traverse them while less-than-conscious:

> When I went skiing in Italy for the winter holidays, I would get on the train in Brussels and I would have to hand over a detailed statement of how much Belgian money I was taking with me, how much Italian lira and what other monies I had. I would have to put my passport and all of it in an envelope and when I got to the border with Italy, there's a long pause and then you get all the stuff back, you see! Whereas 10 years later, I would just get into my sleeper and pass off, and then I'd wake up at my destination.

The phenomenology of falling asleep somewhere in Benelux and waking up in Italy was an experience of physical decontextualization that blurred the boundaries separating national territories.

[29] https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/docs/schengen_brochure/schengen_brochure_dr3111126_en.pdf

By equating the past with war and war with nationalism, a temporal hierarchy emerges in the Europe-nation dialectic for which the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community is the moment of genesis. Nation states belong to the past as much as the past belongs to nation states. The future, by contrast belongs to Europe. In contrast to modes of nationness that gaze back towards the pre-modern, the EU is paradigmatically and self-consciously futurist in orientation: it 'projects itself into a future, and is conscious of doing so' (Sartre 2007). Rejecting the romantic delusions of national destiny of which it is perpetually suspicious, Europe is, to borrow a term coined by artist Luke Haines (2010), more 'hostalgic' than nostalgic. Like the road leading from the platform at Tervuren, Europe is an unfinished project under permanent construction, existing in a state of suspended animation and perpetual becoming. 'The political aim of the European project has never been clarified. But what is most interesting for the anthropologist is that it must not be clarified' (Abélès 2000). The final act is left open-ended; there is a known direction of travel but no discernible terminus. Europeanness seeks to negate the principle that 'the cult of ancestors is the most legitimate of all; our ancestors have made us who we are' (Renan 1882). It aspires not to venerate the ghosts of yesterday but, rather to exorcise them from the body politic. The past that persists in living memory is a foreign country, where they do things differently (Hartley 2015).

'The best speech on Europe that I've seen was the Van Rompuy speech at the acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize. He describes how peace is not a book that you can close; it's something you need to work on on a daily basis. That's actually a fundamental challenge: the longer peace has been achieved, the harder it becomes to continue to achieve this' (Luuk). I knew the speech as I recalled catching some of the broadcast back in 2012. Innes is one of its co-authors. The spectacle sparked an occasion for renewed scrutiny of the peace project narrative. Officials were able to point to 'the long peace' by limiting what constitutes 'war' to

all-out armed struggles for resources between member states. Interruptions that fall outside this category, such as the Balkan Wars, the Srebrenica massacre, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Russian occupation of Crimea and the so-called War on Terror, are redacted from authorized retellings of the story, as are the wars that took place between member states and third countries. 'We had these big wars in the Balkans, but the Balkan countries were not part of the European Union' (Morgan).

Maja, who worked in the Legal Service before going on to do European law for a firm in the private sector, recounted the girlhood she spent in the mountains of Slovenia: 'There was a time when I was growing up right in the middle of the…*wars*—but you don't call it that because we're up north. They didn't really get any impact from that.' Shielded from them at a comfortable geographical distance, Europeans living to the north and west of the battlefields have forgotten the wars to the degree that they fail to remember them as wars at all.

Giovanni just got back from Belgrade last week, where, chatting with a local about some historical event or other, he inadvertently asked, 'Did it happen during the war?'. 'Which war?', was the response.

> At that moment I realized how different the perceptions are. For an EU citizen, the 'War' is the Second World War. For the Western Balkan people, war is much more recent and there have been several waves of wars in that area. That made me reflect on the fact that we take it for granted that peace is there but don't sometimes realize that it's also thanks to the fact that we have decided to create this union. This fact alone should bring people to realize the importance of this union. All the rest can be improved.

While Europe's history of democracy and tolerance is emphasized, the same history could be told with equal fidelity to the facts through a narrative of genocide and religious persecution. At best, civilizational narratives of high European culture are 'a mix of high-minded idealism, intellectual arrogance and childish naivety' (Gray 2017); at worst, they function as the handmaidens of Western imperial expansion (Said 1979). 'We all live by robbing Asiatic coolies,' Orwell (1953) memorably wrote, 'and those of us who are "enlightened" all

maintain that those coolies ought to be set free; but our standard of living, and hence our "enlightenment", demands that the robbery shall continue.'

'You say peace in Europe is a given,' Mark says.

> Well, we don't have to look very far in Europe to see what happens with the absence of the European Union. Look at what happened in the Balkans. Look what's happening in Ukraine. You have to look *just* beyond the boundaries of the EU-28, of where we are right now, to see where all of these old rivalries are still festering. So, for me, the European Union has absolutely made that kind of conflict between the members unthinkable.

In its resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism, the Parliament 'recalls that the most recent crimes against humanity and acts of genocide in Europe were still taking place in July 1995 and that constant vigilance is needed to fight undemocratic, xenophobic, authoritarian and totalitarian ideas and tendencies' (European Parliament 2009). Recent poll data collected in 10 member states found that three-fourths of citizens agree that the EU promotes peace.[30] A case can be made for celebrating '70 Years of Peace' (European Commission 2017). Whether or not it was the EU who achieved it remains an open question.[31] Surely some credit must be given to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), another transnational union that lives six kilometers up Boulevard Léopold III: 'It's actually quite convenient that we have NATO, which a number of European countries belong to. The military stuff—it's done by NATO' (Morgan).

'It is always going to be very hard to prove the cause and effect', Mark conceded. 'It's just so complex; there are many factors.' Nevertheless,

> The European Union has to have made a major contribution. You just have this great exchange of people on a constant basis from childhood up that's been facilitated by the integration of the European Union. When you have that kind of personal experience, it just makes it much less likely you're going to want to go and bomb somebody, because they're your friends. You've known them. You've been on holiday there. You've been on a school trip there. When you create that fabric, that kind of thing makes war much less likely.

[30] https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/03/19/europeans-credit-eu-with-promoting-peace-and-prosperity-but-say-brussels-is-out-of-touch-with-its-citizens/
[31] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2017-004137_EN.html

Mark's European identity first developed as an expression of teenage rebellion against parental authority. The young Mark was raised in an austere residence on the Kent coast with grandparents who had endured both wars and parents who 'would probably vote for UKIP given half the chance.' He grew up around stories of bombs raining down over London's East End during the day and messages received at night bearing news of disappeared loved ones. In contradistinction to the example they set, with its insular approach to political and cultural life and prejudices against immigrants from certain countries across the water, he strove to remain open to all things foreign. Meanwhile, the Director does not begrudge his grandparents their xenophobic tendencies. Rather, he has reached a stage of European development that allows him to empathize with them. If he suffered, as they did, from the embodied traumas of having 'lived through the war twice', he might agree that nationalism is more than 'just rubbish', 'just the past…dragging us back.' In that case, however, he would be not Mark, but someone else entirely.

As the last Holocaust survivors become extinct, with them fades the collective memory of grotesque wartime realities:

> People started to join the institutions who have no experience of the War and even whose parents had no experience of the War either, so it's very different. The War is now—for those people, for us—a historic event, rather than anything that has any link even 10 years to their present. Their belief in Europe draws its inspiration from a different source—a more pragmatic one, perhaps, but a different one.

When the last survivor and storyteller passes away and there is no one left to speak to remember it from direct, concrete experience, representations of war become articles of history as opposed to sites of memory. Etymologically, to 're-present' is 'to cause to reappear that which has disappeared' (Lévy-Bruhl 1936). Mark's acts of filial counter-hegemony, creating distances between himself and the elders in his home, were thus rendered redundant and ineffectual so the intergenerational rupture already separating them

The 'acceleration of history', according to Nora (1989), manifests itself as 'an increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general

perception that anything and everything may disappear…as if an ancient bond of identity had been broken…'. The severance of past from present reveals itself in 'the ephemeral spectacle of an unrecoverable identity' (ibid., 17-18). In the absence of personal identification with memory, a vigilant spirit of commemoration is needed in order for nations to memorialize the meaningful moments of their histories. Remembering and forgetting are mutually reinforcing processes. Public sites of memory are constructed for events because they are being forgotten; otherwise, there would be no need for them. The partial and sanitized narratives they enact allow for more forgetting in turn.

Acts of unimaginable destruction are simultaneously those of unimaginable creation: 'It is a fact that there is no historical community that has not arisen out of what can be termed an original relation to war' (Ricoeur 2006). For architect James Ingo Freed, 'the holocaust defines a radical, but hopefully not a final, break with the optimistic conception of continuous social and political improvement underlying the material culture of the West' (quoted in Young 1993: 339)(Young 1993). By seeking to eliminate spatial hierarchies, the EU reifies and reinforces temporal ones. Its best efforts in heritage-making are always shaped, with varying results, by how it positions itself in temporal relation to the past, present and future. 'With the advent of society in place of the nation, legitimation by the past and therefore by history yields to legitimation by the future' (Nora 1989: 11). Homo europaeus is a future-making species for whom the future is a cultural fact (Appadurai 2013) and 'the enemy becomes not a particular opponent but the recent past' (Connerton 2009). Against the grain of the current historical moment, when there is an explicit turn to commemorating the past vis-à-vis collective traumas, Commission officials felt that, for them, it makes little sense to speak of common origins. They were more comfortable talking about an uncertain and undefined common destiny whose realization is forever postponed.

EU architects were neither the first nor the last peacemakers to define themselves as the antithesis of intergroup conflict. The vow to make war a thing history—through, in this case, making history the story of war—was already the solemn vow of the interwar period. Jean Monnet, 'who was this sort of great man for European unity', took it when he was appointed as deputy Secretary General of the League of Nations in 1919 (Leon). 'I have always considered it to be a minor miracle', Juncker said, 'that after the war, people in Europe's border regions were able to forget everything and, in accordance with the slogan "Never Again War," develop a program that still works today. It is always said that Europe is a project of the elite. That's incorrect. In fact, it was a concern of the soldiers who fought at the front, the concentration camp prisoners and the *Trümmerfrauen* [literally, "Ruin women", women in Germany who cleared the cities of rubble and debris after the war].'[32] 'Jamais plus!' was the rallying cry of the UN General Assembly and its Universal Declaration of Human Rights. World War I was meant to be the first and final act. It later turned out to be simply a dress rehearsal for what was to come. When Hitler ordered the train carriage in which the 1918 Armistice was signed to be trotted back to the same spot in the middle of the forest in Compiègne, Europe found itself there, again, in a highly physical sense. Peacetime, more a bug than a feature of European history, is not to be taken for granted:

> The original purpose was to overcome the very turbulent and bloody past of the great powers in Europe and get them working together. It's some very diverse people with different agendas—agendas that are, to a greater or lesser extent, openly stated—coming together and trying to find a strong way forward. Which is not always easy. It can be difficult. It can be messy, and it can be slow. But it's a lot less messy and destructive than it was in the first half of the twentieth century. We always seem to trivialize it. [Captain Europe]

'It's still important, but it's perhaps considered not as essential, if you see what I mean' (Morgan). Officials feared that the peacekeeping mission may have run its course and no longer seizes the hearts and minds of citizens. It's always 'never again' until the next time.

[32] https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/interview-with-jean-claude-juncker-and-martin-schulz-a-1102110.html

There are plenty of presidents and ministers in power today at the national level who are perfectly capable of precipitating a return, again.

3.2 A joyous venture

Social organizations may be said to exist as living entities in the world from the moment they are recognized as doing so by its members and by other preexisting organizations. International recognition by the United Nations is an authentication and validation that separates the nations from the would-be-nations, but this practice is a relatively modern innovation of the Civil War. The determination of their dates of origin is made in retrospect, by consensus and never in absolute terms. They begin the day they acquire a name, or a history, or a written constitution, or sovereign independence, or their current institutional form and function. The European Union, strictly speaking, was spawned in 1993, if name and makeup are the chosen metrics. By its own formalized records, however, it is the present incarnation of the European project, a process of socioeconomic integration that started in 1957 with the Rome Treaty and celebrated its 60th birthday in 2017.[33] As told by officials, the story begins slightly earlier, however, with the Treaty of Paris in 1951. In the beginning, there was industry:

> From my point of view, as somebody from the inside, you really have to begin with the history of the Coal and Steel Community. They used coal and steel, the two ingredients that were used for war, to make people mutually interdependent. There wouldn't be these arms races anymore, and people would see the grand possibilities. All the structures that they had in the [1993] European Union were unified from the original Coal and Steel Community. [Leon]

The ECSC reorganized the two industries in the Ruhr and Lorraine under the auspices of a central administrative authority:

> The war of 1871 and the war of 1914 were fundamentally based upon economic problems of the Ruhr and what you could do about it. I mean, they all talked about the political things. But at the

[33] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/eu-affairs/20170320STO67752/the-eu-turns-60-anniversary-of-the-treaty-of-rome

> end of the war, the French and the Germans realized that if they didn't do something about coal and steel, both industries were going to decline, more or less, and they were going to fight again in another 20 years. So, they got together and said, 'We've got to be able to do something together.'

Recruited in his mid-forties into the first cohort of UK civil servants to leave Britain for Brussels in 1973, Leon counts himself among 'the original pioneers'. Now retired, he is among the institution's elders 'whose status [is] based on acknowledged wisdom and acknowledged age rather than any other overt form of power' (Bloch 1977).

'There was a phrase which I always used, which was "a joyous venture". At the beginning, it was a joyous venture. You were going into something unknown, and everybody was happy about it. They could just see the future. Then, of course, as time went on, reality caught up with them. One of the principles of working in the Commission is you didn't mention the war. The war never took place.'

The construction of Europe is framed as 'indispensable to the preservation of peace', a victory of passivity over aggressivity, soft power over hard, right over might, pen over sword, desk over battlefield. From 'that fusion of interest which is indispensable to the establishment of a common economic system' grows 'a wider and deeper community between countries long opposed to one another by sanguinary divisions' (Schuman 1950). In the minds of Commission officials, the Franco-German alliance still lies at the core of the European idea: 'I know a lot about European history, and I know that if France and Germany are friends, nothing much can happen' (Laurens). Adversarial nations that played leading roles as protagonist and antagonist on opposite sides of both wars are now institutionally bound to one another in mutually assured construction. 'France and Germany should become one huge country', Liam chuckled. 'Then, we can ignore the recalcitrant English—I don't say *British* because the Scots are pro-Europe.'

'The very original bits of the European Communities started there', Leon continued:

> They just took the structure of the Coal and Steel Community and gave it to EURATOM. The problem of what people were going to do about nuclear energy was very much a question. There

> were lots of people who didn't want atomic energy at all and lots of people who wanted 'peaceful' atomic energy, but no nuclear weapons. They're all living in this kind of 19th century paradigm, really. As Jean Monnet said, it started by little steps, '*petits pas*', to introduce the idea of a Customs Union. You had three organizations and eventually, little by little, people started to say, 'Well we really ought to put this all together in one big heap'. So, they formed the European Union.

Europe-building proceeds steadily, stealthily and steadfast, 'by fits and starts' (Sam). The process is done incrementally and at glacial pace, not 'all at once, or according to a single plan' (Schuman 1950). 'I'm a strong believer in long-term, slow, structural and solid changes', Arnaud revealed.

Retellings of the EU story reinforce the spirit of communitarization at the core of the European project. The ECSC is a catalyst for the actualization of an 'organized and living Europe' (Schuman 1950). For (Monnet 1978), the reconstruction of France in the 1940s is a precondition for the restoration of Europe as a whole. The term 'community' that appears in the formal names given to the ECSC, the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) signifies a group of countries that come together to form a new family: 'This was the original word: it was a *community* of the six first member states. That word was chosen to be put in a treaty only a few years after World War II, and it was a very strong word after what had happened. You get that sense of belonging. It's very obvious to us as EU civil servants that we are a community' (Richard). An 'economic community' was seen as the basis for 'a broader and deeper community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts' (European Coal and Steel Community 1951). Meanwhile, the title of 'European Economic Community' was shortened to the 'European Community', and the institutional trio merged to form the European Communities. The European Community ('*der Europäischen Gemeinschaft*') is what it was and *the Community method*, the go-to decision-making apparatus, is what it did. The totality of EU law is the *acquis communautaire* or 'the acquis', which refers to the totality of treaties,

legislation, agreements, court verdicts, rights and provisions. Europe is an idea that longs to be a *Gemeinschaft*.

Leon remarked how the wars 'annihilated the whole coal and steel community which was there on both sides of the border', suggesting that such a Franco-German community, 'which includes Luxembourg for practical purposes, because Luxembourg was this little bit in between', predates the war that justifies its existence. 'The idea was that you would have a kind of superstate—that was fundamentally their vision. It would be some kind of confederation or federation, but they deliberately left it very loose. It was just little steps, you see. If you take this little step and then you take this little step, soon we'll find ourselves so intermeshed with one another that we would have to go further.'

Having achieved success in coal and steel, two potent symbols of the European idea and the 'grand possibilities' it made real, the model gradually expanded into more and more policy areas. The Monnet method of European integration holds that economic consolidation, forged through increased cooperation among state economies, creates a 'spillover' effect that is replicated among the governments themselves. Inspired by the neofunctionalist theories of Ernst Haas (1968), Monnet shares his assumptions concerning the interplay between economies and societies: 'Political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states.' The theory was an earlier instance of 'virtualism' in the way that it predicted the growing influence of abstract economic theory on the material reality of economic and social life (Carrier and Miller 1998). The circulation of economic ideas in the world has important practical effects on environmental contexts, ones which increasingly shape economic practices in turn. This is because 'people are driven by ideas and idealism, [and] the desire to make the world conform to the image' (ibid., 5). A new representative body and common assembly was built, making

the economic organizations coterminous with the political ones, and around its boundaries a 'de facto solidarity' coalesced (Schuman 1950). Then, according to plan, citizens would follow suit and begin identifying with and belonging to a nascent European society.

Integration is thus a social, cultural and cognitive process as well as an economic and territorial one: 'The European idea goes on; and no one seeing it, and seeing how stable the Community institutions are, can doubt that this is a deep and powerful movement on an historic scale...It has taken root in our people's consciousness, but it is slow to act on their will: it has to overcome the inertia that hinders movement and the habits that resist change' (Monnet 1978). Underneath the messy uncertainties of politics, removing barriers to social cohesion is fundamentally a logistical issue. By fine-tuning the values and incentives operating in a world of market forces, the necessary conditions for supranational communitarization are put in place in ways that foster ever closer union at the European level. Reorganizing societies around an identification with the idea of Europe becomes a technical matter that allows for technical solutions. Monnet ended his memoir with these words: 'The sovereign nations of the past can no longer solve the problems of the present: they cannot ensure their own progress or control their own future. And the Community itself is only a stage on the way to the organized world of tomorrow' (ibid., 524). An alignment of interests may be achieved at the European level through a technical and systematic reorganization of the rules and incentives that coordinate human interaction. As a result, the abstract is made concrete, and imagined worlds are given material form.

'As someone with a history of persecution in the family, I'm aware that it's a good thing to have a European state', said Laurens.

'And what did the family think?'

'Well, it's not something we discussed. It wasn't a problem as long as the Germans weren't dominant and hostile. They were very pro-American and pro-British because they

were liberated by them. I think if we'd sat down and had a discussion of whether or not Europe is a good thing, they would *definitely* say yes. Definitely.'

An early draft call for a European constitution came in the form of the Ventotene Manifesto of Altiero Spinelli, the fellow after whom the building that serves as the house of Parliament takes its name and whom Antonio praises as 'the father of European federalism'. The story opens on a volcanic island in the Tyrrhenian Sea, where young Spinelli, a communist dissident, was serving the end of a 17-year sentence of imprisonment after his arrest by Mussolini's secret police. Cloistered in the offshore dungeon, he led the life of an ascetic, spending his days in voracious study of the federalist tracts circulating among the like-minded detainees. At night, he engaged his comrades in weekly jailhouse symposia. Waiting for the war to end, they discussed nationalism, intergovernmentalism and whether it is possible for nation states to cooperate and compete in a world of market forces without either giving up their sovereignty or going back into battle with one another. What was needed to 'counteract the destructive force of nationalism' and 'join the countries of this continent into a united Europe' was a treaty to establish a European supranational government.[34] The proper federal structures, once in place, would ensure the total abolition of war on the continent. Drafting these ideas into a manifesto, he titled it 'Toward a Free and United Europe' and stashed it in a crevice in the wall of his monastic prison cell (Spinelli and Rossi 2003).

Upon his release, Spinelli launched the Italian federalist movement. In 1970, he joined Monnet, Alcide De Gasperi and Paul-Henri Spaak at the Commission, where he was put in charge of the industrial policy file. When the first European elections are held in 1979, he won a seat in Parliament and became the Vice Chair of the Communist and Allies Group. In the Crocodile Club in Strasbourg, he conspired with colleagues on a plan to replace the

[34] https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/altiero_spinelli_en.pdf

treaties with a constitution, just as he had done back on the island. The Draft Treaty Establishing the European Union, or 'Spinelli Plan', was adopted by a substantive majority before being killed off in the Council (European Parliament 1984). Its legacy endures in the Single European Act of 1986 and Treaty of Maastricht (1992), as well as in contemporary constitutionalist movements.[35] Habermas and Derrida, meanwhile have made similar calls (Habermas 2001; Habermas and Derrida 2003). On the slow but inexorable march to full federalization, Europe is a supranational community-in-the-making, which, much like national ones, aspires for and fantasizes about statehood. Chronically envious of nations for their sovereignty, it is propelled forward by an ambition to become more nation-like, an imagined community with discrete boundaries that is coterminous with a state.

Another attempt to consolidate the existing treaties into a single constitution came with the Convention on the Future of the European Union (2001-2003), inspired by the Philadelphia Convention in the US and led by French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, a family friend of Eloise's. After being ratified by most member states, the constitution won referenda in Spain and Luxembourg before being famously rejected in France and Holland. A quote from Thucydides provided an epitaph: 'Our Constitution… is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the greatest number' (d'Estaing, Amato and Dehaene 2003). The preamble continues as follows:

> Conscious that Europe is a continent that has brought forth civilisation; that its inhabitants, arriving in successive waves from earliest times, have gradually developed the values underlying humanism: equality of persons, freedom, respect for reason,
>
> Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, the values of which, still present in its heritage, have embedded within the life of society the central role of the human person and his or her inviolable and inalienable rights, and respect for law,
>
> Believing that reunited Europe intends to continue along the path of civilisation, progress and prosperity, for the good of all its inhabitants, including the weakest and most deprived…

[35] https://europeanconstitution.eu/; http://www.europeanfederalistpapers.eu/

> Convinced that, while remaining proud of their own national identities and history, the peoples of Europe are determined to transcend their ancient divisions and, united ever more closely, to forge a common destiny… [ibid.]

Acts of policymaking in the context of executive administrations concerns the allocation of values. In industrialized states characterized by high immigration and social differentiation, whose inhabitants lack an easily traceable common history, appeals to shared values do much of the work of nation-building. Values lie at the intersections between collective memory and law (Osiel 2000; Douglas 2001). Like identities, they attach meanings to ideas and objects: 'European identity does mean certain values which, in order to have a definition of them, it's always easy to relate them to something else' (Morgan).

Europe-building is a decidedly values-driven project. 'The Union is a community of law and its values constitute the very basis of its existence. They permeate its entire legal and institutional structure and all its policies and programmes' (European Commission 2018). The success of its policies and programs is determined by the worth of their weight in *added value*. Officials listed EU values in much the same manner as they did when defining its purpose: in a blasé tone suggesting that the answer is so obvious that it does not need to be uttered. 'In the end there are these fundamental values: democracy, which means the idea that everyone counts, has a voice and should be respected; our ideas about freedom and respect of minorities; peace and respect for human life—the kinds of things coming from the French revolution or whatever' (Raphael). 'Human dignity, equality, inclusive societies, peaceful societies, societies managing to somehow find ways of conflict management according to democratic rules, the rule of law, justice, social justice and sustainability. You know, we have an entire article; you can Google it' (Nico). Various values are enumerated in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2012) and Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty (2007). Several second-order rights and principles, including critical thinking, scientific knowledge

and the multi-party parliamentary system, make an appearance in the Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000).

In these texts, as in Giscard's draft constitution, European values are defined as both universal human essences and the cumulative inheritance of particular historical lineages originating in ancient Greece and handed down through the ages to the present EU-28 by way of Rome. The Italian Renaissance, the French Revolution and the various Enlightenments are prominent rhetorical touchstones, revolutionary movements of the 18th century which, fueled by the humanist universalism of *anthropos*, seemed to promise new cosmopolitan modes of belonging that valued industrial rationality and liberal inclusivity over national particularisms (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Figures like Dante, da Vinci, Kant, Erasmus, Hugo, Diderot, Voltaire, Freud and Picasso are singled out for their Europeanness in the Parliamentarium. The idea of Europe is highly resonant with Kant's (1795) cosmopolitan ideal of 'perpetual peace' in how it 'envisages the universal application of human reason for the establishment of political institutions (legislative, jurisdictional, executive) with global normative reach, towards the end of universal justice, equality, freedom and peace' (Rapport 2012). Spanish philosopher José Antonio Marina claims his discipline to be 'a science that is truly European', lamenting how the Lisbon Treaty omits the value of critical thinking (Guerrero 2016). With lofty ideals of artistic and philosophical excellence, its humanism is of the tradition expressed by Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when he marvels, 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties!' (Shakespeare 1889). If nationalism was a reactionary, anti-Enlightenment project in its romanticization of agrarian values, the EU may be viewed as an anti-anti-Enlightenment project encapsulating everything that is right about humanity.

'I am European, if you ask', Tamas told me. 'First of all, I am a Hungarian. I'm from central Europe, a Visegrád country, and I'm a European. It's a shared history. We share our

ancestors. We have been interdependent through centuries. This historical experience of the Roman Empire, and everything since, shapes the European identity.'

'You can divide Europe up in so many ways', said Feargal, who started primary school just after classical Greek was cut from the curriculum. 'I think I missed out on something, but I have Latin. If I'm looking at a monument at any university in Sweden where the EU inscription is in Latin, I can work it out.'

Just as nations do, Europe brands itself as a vast consensus-based community, a geopolitical singularity that 'speaks and acts with one voice' and whose members are by and large in agreement on their interests and their identity. The EU is, to borrow a euphemism often used to spin disunity and polarization as a source of strength, a 'broad church' whose inclusive congregation sings from the same hymn sheet. International resistance to the Iraq War at the beginning of the century was a moment when 'one of the first and major expressions of European peoplehood consolidated itself' (Delanty 2005). The Europeanness that received expression was one of deep divisions falling along geo-temporal fault lines that divided east from west and old from new (Shore and Abélès 2004).

> There are a lot of concerns which are expressed nowadays about EU values and the EU being split into two. But look at what happened at the time of the US invasion of Iraq. I mean, this famous state secretary—what was his name—said, 'That's *Old Europe*.' Old Europe against New Europe—candidate states joining the coalition on the other side at the same time. Some of our member states, including the one we are in today, even, made it clear that they would not authorize American military aircraft to fly over their fly zones. [Arnaud]

When President Chirac and Chancellor Schroeder banded together in opposition to the war, President Bush Jr.'s Donald Rumsfeld was quoted as telling a reporter, 'You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don't. I think that's "old Europe". If you look at the entire NATO Europe today, the centre of gravity is shifting to the East…' The nations of New Europe 'are not with France and Germany [regarding Iraq], they're with the United States' (Baker 2003).

‘So, we’re completely split,’ Arnaud continued. For him, the incapacity of the Commission to prevent a return to war in the first instance showed the practical limitations of its diplomatic influence as a leader of global governance. ‘Enlargement took place, and they are full members now—fine. It’s quite sensitive, it’s not very pleasant, and it creates problems in terms of flows of people. Because if one of our countries closes its borders, that means that of course, as the flow is there and people are coming anyway, these people will go through other channels.’ While institutionally consolidating inward over time in *petits pas*, Europe has acquired more and more living space for itself by expanding externally outward through a series of enlargements. The 2004 and 2007 enlargements nearly doubled the number of member states. Enlargement stories, recounting how a Community of six grew to become a Union of 28, support the peace project narrative with its themes of salvation, emancipation and redemption. Through the act of telling them, officials come to terms with expansion and its consequences: the internal tensions and disharmonies of west versus east and old versus new, as well as the double standards applied to both sides of the divide from Brussels.

As divisions between east and west at the European level mirrored the broader civilizational ones supposedly at stake in the Cold War, German reunification allowed for the reunification of the continent as a whole. The collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain dismantled the social and concrete partitions that segregated Europeans from themselves, signifying the end of the war, the end of communism and, for some, the end of history (Fukuyama 1989). Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia formed the Visegrád group in order to better represent their interests during the accession talks. In the early 90s, their membership was hardly an inevitable prospect. ‘The idea is to bring them along as well,’ Morgan said, ‘so that they can be part of this community of countries which is not belligerent—at least not internally so.’ In practice, the idea added wider complications,

ushering in new impediments to decision-making practices and the achievement of consensus by qualified majority voting at the European level. It likewise destabilized received understandings regarding how to identify European values.

Acts of enlargement are psychological as well as structural. With each successive 'wave', the scale of goods, services, capital and people that are considered to be European broadens, as does the idea of Europe itself. Officials questioned the extent to which European values are held sufficiently and proportionately throughout the Union: 'I'm not sure we have common values,' Justine stated matter-of-factly. The EAC Director is a warmhearted but no-nonsense Frenchwoman nearing the end of a long career here. 'The EU is so diverse now that I don't feel that in all of this there is a strong European identity.' Whenever Europe speaks with more than one voice at once, the sound it creates is an unpleasant cacophony that renders internal communication impossible. Material symbols of division like walls and curtains leave behind their battle scars in living memory. The countries of New Europe 'come mainly from a communist kind of thinking,' said Stephan. The Europeanization of 'a new people' created a new tradition of European history: 'I still think that most people working here have a sense of trying to do their best to make the European ideals a reality. I still believe in that. But with the inflow of a new people with a different background who were not part of the history—EU history, the European history—it takes a bit of time for those people to really connect to this kind of full commitment to what it means to be a true European.'

As the life history of Altiero Spinelli attests, the 'communist way of thinking' takes time to grow out of but isn't anything that cannot be overcome.[36] After years of persecution and exile, a young revolutionary communist visionary was transmogrified into an 'unrelenting federalist' and 'passionate advocate of supranational integration'. The caterpillar-to-butterfly

[36] https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/altiero_spinelli_en.pdf

metamorphosis is paraphrased as one of enlightenment spiked with disenchantment: 'His disillusionment with the Party and the insights he had gained during his studies led to him abandoning the Communists and joining the Federalist cause.' While fascism is cast as the overarching villain, communism plays the role of a sophomoric ideology that the hero flirts with but ultimately rejects. It is doubtful that Spinelli's 'Eurocommunism' vanished so directly in proportion to his European federalism, given the extent to which he maintained a consistent leadership role in Italy's Communist Party for the rest of his life.

Most officials saw the eastward expansion as a positive development in the European project's ontogenesis. Luuk had recently attended the screening of a Polish documentary celebrating the country's 10 years of membership: 'It is wonderfully made, one of those where everyone starts crying in the end. You see what progress has been made in terms of welfare. It's very basic, but it's still beautiful to see because it's true—that's the advantage of it.' For Morgan, it was an exercise of realpolitik necessitated by the geopolitical circumstances of the moment. The decision was taken prematurely but could not be delayed:

> It was a political necessity to have the enlargement. It was an opportunity and in hindsight, if you see what Mr. Putin is doing at the moment, it's very important that we have the eastern and central European countries as part of the Union. So, I'm not criticizing the accession at all because it was important and necessary, but at the same time, it had an impact on the cohesion. Internally, we are not as coherent as we were. [Morgan]

The newly independent nation states to the east stood at a crossroads and, power vacuums being as ephemeral as they are, had to be Europeanized if they were not to remain the satellites of a post-communist Russia.

For communism's orphans, their swift adoption into Europe was seen by officials as a salvation. The social gap separating the western from the central and eastern is bridged by a collective pan-European cultural history stretching back to a time when 'the elites spoke French': 'The Romanian elites, even during communist times, spoke French and provided talented classical musicians to France and to Germany' (Feargal). It was recapitulated in ways that suggest that Marxism-Leninism is a bug, rather than a feature, of Europeanness:

'People coming from Poland to here find themselves rediscovering that there are huge historical links which were then blocked off by the Iron Curtain—*that's* the aberration; that's the artificial element in their history.' The shared lineage was rediscovered rather than revealed or realized, for it had been there all the while. Many civil servants nevertheless felt that the 'big enlargements' let in un-European varieties of diversity, ones which preclude the unity they are meant to constitute. It may be the case that Europe grew up so fast that it is now in danger of dying too soon.

3.3 Open markets, open cultures

Not all heroes wear capes, it is said. And yet, there are those who do. Captain Europe is neither a bird nor a plane but a nonfictional superhero for the European Union. While something of a local treasure, he is not here simply for the amusement of EU officials. Standing around 7 feet in height, with hands on hips and arms that could rip to shreds an 800-page international trade deal with an additional 400 pages of exemptions, he is a symbol of Europeanness in his own right. Aesthetically, he is Europe's answer to Captain America. His costume is a human-shaped European flag made of snugly fitting Lycra ('it's better against the skin'), and the recent move away from spandex has won the approval of the community. He wears a bright smile, a black cape, a yellow speedo and a Venetian facemask just below a questionable, forward-facing baseball cap. Call me old-fashioned, but I still appreciate a bit of pageantry and panache in my intergalactic crimefighters. When not employing his superpowers to save Europe from the evil forces of disintegration, he changes into a suit and tie and goes to work as a civil servant at the Commission. He was less than forthcoming when asked to specify the DG. I will keep his background mysterious, except to add that he is native to Earth and speaks with a posh British accent.

I wanted to meet the Captain after hearing his name around town and eventually did at a weekly #EUTweetup Brussels event. This is where young, switched-on professionals who are fluent in social media congregate at an English pub in Matongé to post about EU affairs on their phones with one hand while raising a glass to their mouths with the other. Had they stayed out home, they would be doing the very same thing. In this space, however, they are allowed to do it in a room full of other people just like them.

Taking a moment to scope out the room, I noticed a fleeting window in between *petits bisoux* and lunged forth to shake the Captain's hand, offering to buy him a pint of beer. He ordered a gin and tonic. We clinked glasses, posed for a photo and agreed to schedule an interview.

There was no blue skylight with gold stars for me to beam into the night to signal him into action, though a quick email to his Hotmail account did the trick. I didn't recognize him when we met again on a blustery Sunday night at a brasserie near Grand Place, but he spotted me. I gave him the booth seat along the window and hanged our coats. In his plainclothes, he could have been any expat on a night out. Make no mistake, however—that night, it was not the bureaucrat but the Captain to whom I spoke.

We ordered a few brown beers and discussed socialism, the free market impulse and the question of whether the EU falls more to the left or more to the right on the classic spectrum. Delors, he said, was the last old-fashioned socialist to lead the Commission. It was the business boom of the 1980s, when the invisible hand, the velvet glove and iron fist ruled the day:

> It was very much a free market project. For all Mrs. Thatcher's latter-day Euro-skepticism, she did more to integrate the United Kingdom deeply into what is now the European Union than any other Prime Minister before or since and had an enormous amount of influence in shaping the way it went. The Single European Act had her inky fingerprints all over it. The twin impetuses you talk about, the freedom on the one hand and the socialism on the other, are by no means unique to the European Union—either the EU as such or the EU as a geographical area. We've seen this in California, for example, where you have a lot of direct democracy—

SMACK! Our conversation was interrupted by the sound of violence. There was a dramatic shift in mood within the atmosphere and that unmistakable feeling of ugliness that always signals its arrival. In spite, or because of, the fact that violence has never been scarcer in European life, it retains a strange visceral power to jar whoever is in its vicinity. On the street, it is common to encounter what appears at first to be a fight, only to discover in the next moment that what you are witnessing is merely a bit of harmless play-acting, the performance of a social bonding exercise among groups of men who are friendly with one another. All the shouting, commotion and public displays of dominance and aggression are part of an improvisational piece of stage combat.

This time, however, it was the real stuff, pure and unscripted. A large gentleman struck a much smaller gentleman and collared him in a wrestling hold. CRASH! The two gladiators fell against the wall and onto a table near the front booths.

'Oh dear!' the Captain said. 'Yeah, there seems to be a fight breaking out outside.'

'Pardon, pardon, pardon,' said two frantic *restaurateurs* dressed in their white-and-black uniforms as they moved chairs around to clear the way. POW! The scuffle fell out onto the icy pavement outside, and the door slammed shut behind it.

I felt an instinctive urge to spring into action and protect my interviewee. It was I, after all, who suggested we meet that weekend, a decision that could have proven fatal for both of us. If it had not been for me and my questions, the superhero would have been safe at home with his wife in what I assume is his top-secret lair.

The waiters raised their voices to regain control over the room, beseeching us in the audience to carry on as before and then began to bicker between themselves. A distraught woman cried out in indignation, demanding they let her use a phone.

The silence broke, and normal service was resumed. POP! A new bottle of something with bubbles was opened. Then another. *Santé.* I was enjoying the show but also worried that

it had ruined the evening and, by extension, the interview. As a cinematic experience, it was less than riveting: the choreography in the main action sequence was non-existent; there were no suspenseful orchestral arrangements in the score. 'Not unusual for this area', I said, in a facile attempt to keep the Captain at ease.

'Yeah. Somebody just tried to rob someone and got caught.'

'Really?'

'Yeah, they caught him.'

'Interesting. I suppose it was the young chap who was being carried outside.'

'Yeah. He got a smack on the head.'

'Usually when people are having a spat, they tend to be around the same age. I thought that was a bit odd.'

'No, it was an attempted robbery, but not a very successful one.'

'Hmm. OK, well I'm glad everyone is alright.'

'Well alright, that was interesting', the Captain said. 'Where was I? Socialism and Jacques Delors and Margaret Thatcher.'

The neoliberal turn away from *dirigisme* and toward a more *lassez-faire* in the EU approach dates from Barroso, whose inauguration disappointed Delors, its predecessor, and pleased Tony Blair. In 2014, the center-right European People's Party celebrated 15 consecutive years of being in power. The EU of today is no socialist paradise, but this has little to do with the changing scales of market growth. The prevailing 'ordo-liberalism' of 'Eurocapitalism' (Roberts 2016) incentivizes competition at the expense of regulatory standards, endangering environmental and consumer protections while precluding the pragmatic implementation of leftwing ideas (Geiselberger 2017). The growth of industries necessitates large investments in wide-scale infrastructure. Large economies trade commensurate goods with other large economies nearby, and open borders are conducive to

open markets (Linder 1961; Tinbergen 1962). The scope for competition for an economy like Luxembourg's, which numbers only a few hundred thousand, is limited. This is less the case for a country such as France that operates at the level of many millions. 'But France,' the Captain said, 'for all of its lip service to socialism, is no longer a socialist country by any stretch of the imagination.'

The Europeanization of market economies thus disenfranchises socialist parties, keeping them out of office:

> The fundamental purpose hasn't changed, which is to bring peoples together in a spirit of peace and understanding for everybody's benefit. Exactly what that means in practice has changed. The rules on things like competition and public procurement are well-intentioned. They are good for consumers by providing transparency and good for businesses by providing legal certainty and a level, competitive playing field. The remit of the European Union has gotten bigger. In some respects, we've possibly gone too far. By essentially outlawing the wholesale nationalization of strategic industries, we have effectively outlawed socialism and limited the scope for national governments to act on the public interest. And I think, on reflection, that may have been a mistake. Of course, anti-socialists would say, 'Yes, this is wonderful.' Anti-EU people would in some cases say that it was nonsense that the EU is a socialist project anyway, which it isn't.

The international financial elite are to blame for their part in denationalizing market trading arrangements, but they aren't the only ones. There is 'a problem in the mind of the general public that you will find in most places of the world outside of Scandinavia: the desire to have low taxes on the one hand and excellent public services on the other.' There is a growing sensibility that government should withdraw from private life, and the extent to which it has developed is indicated by the increasing reliance on national referenda in deciding outcomes. The general public demands minimal taxes for common services while expecting to find punctual public transportation, clean roads without potholes or blocked drains, streetlights and traffic lights that turn on. The dilemma presents 'a kind of democratic dialectic': 'You don't turn on streetlights by putting a coin in a slot—that would probably be ridiculous. So for all of that to happen and more—policing, education, all the other things that governments do—you got to have a functioning government system, and that requires revenue to make it operate.' Unlike the British and the Americans, the Scandinavians

understand that high-quality public services and infrastructure necessitate high levels of taxation, given that the collection of immediate payments upon use is unfeasible.

When I asked if he has any nemeses, he struggled to name one. 'Do you fancy yourself a superman-of-the-people, as opposed to one defending the interests of Brussels elites?'

'Oh absolutely', he affirmed:

> If you look at most superheroes, there are very few, with the possible exception of Captain America, who are there to defend the status quo and work on behalf of those who are already in power. Spiderman certainly doesn't; he's treated with deep suspicion by the authorities and the police. Superman came in saying he wanted to defend truth, justice and the American way. Make of that what you will, but that would put him up against most of the people in power. Just because people are in power, that doesn't necessarily mean they're in favor of truth and justice.

'As I recall, Batman is profoundly wealthy.'

'Batman *is* profoundly wealthy, and yet he stepped in when the traditional authorities had failed. I'm more of a Peter Parker than a Superman.'

Before we part ways, the Captain notified me that he was on the cusp of retirement. After 7 years on the frontlines, he was calling it a day and hanging up his cape for good. A young upstart had stepped forward out of the blue to take over the job and had already made his first public appearance last week. The debut had been well-received. 'He has a bit of the same problem that I do, with the suit being a bit unforgiving in the midriff, but he's about 15 years younger than me. We can probably sort him out with a good routine, see some improvement there in no time and then get some money to put towards it.'

A 'more social Europe' in the EU context refers less to its ideals of a single European society than it does to its 'social priorities': legislation related to workers' rights, education and healthcare.[37] In many member states, European-level social legislation goes further than national socioeconomic systems do in protecting citizens' rights. Its 'social views' are ostensibly left-of-center. On the culture clashes of the day, whether it be unemployment, gender equality, wage gaps, GMOs or the LGBTQ question, the official position is reliably a

[37] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/euco-sibiu-a_more_social_europe.pdf

progressive one. Notwithstanding, the EU is criticized for what trade unions, environmental activists and others see as strains of economic conservatism coded into its DNA. The ECSC began with a small trade agreement and a big desire for economic and industrial growth. The 1960 European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (1996) were established to promote economic cooperation and free trade between economies. The Copenhagen criteria, the test used to determine whether or not a country is ready to join, include 'the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union' as a prerequisite for membership, a commitment later codified in the Lisbon treaty.[38] The Monnet method holds the integration of economies to be both the precondition for the integration of societies and the vehicle through which these processes occur. The free movement of consumer goods is the first of the EU's 'four pillars', and with open markets come open cultures.

At present, the EU has 40 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with 71 different countries in place. In progressive circles, it may appear as a neoliberal, free-market enterprise in the pockets of big banks and big business, whose competition and trade policies consistently privilege corporate interests over those of the EU's citizens.[39] The Commission itself acts as a 'revolving door' through which international political elites move seamlessly between the public world of civil administration and the private world of corporate finance.[40] By the end of the Greek financial crisis, it had become synonymous with fiscal austerity as one-third of the European troika, the cruel Goliath to Syriza's David. If the Berlaymont is filled to the top with 'happy, clappy socialists', the champagne socialists far outnumber the revolutionary ones.

[38] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012M%2FTXT
[39] https://www.alter-eu.org/documents/2016/09/alter-eu-complaint-2992016-barroso
[40] http://www.euractiv.com/section/public-affairs/news/juncker-tells-oettinger-to-apologise-to-those-he-offended/

Officials in MARKT, TRADE and COMP were somewhat unsurprisingly enthusiastic about economic exchange and the open pursuit of free trade, extolling the added value the single market delivers to citizens. 'It's better prices and better conditions, *hein*? It's all about opening the European market. From the perspective of DG Competition, that's just competition' (Maja).

Behold the mobile telecoms industry and 'the abolition of retail roaming charges', on account of which the Europeans of the future will never know what 'data roaming' once meant.[41] 'We had this ambition to create a single market. Therefore, you must have a whole load of market standardization policies around plugs, electricity supply and mobile phone signals. It was an unusual example of Europe getting it right and creating an advantage for their manufacturers. That's the kind of thing where the case for a single European approach is clear' (Leon).

Around the beginning of the century, nevertheless, Europeanization began to be understood by those opposed to the increasing globalization of the world economy as a problem rather than a solution: 'Until the year 2000, globalization was quite cool and was not perceived as a negative thing, but then something changed. When globalization started to be perceived as a problem, Europe was associated with this because Europe was in any case a kind of globalization on the scale of a continent' (Raphael). The image of the EU executive as a servant of *le capitalisme sauvage* is a visible trope in the demonstrations organized against the TTIP and the CETA.

'What I'm really proud of is how things that concern health, standards of certification of food and everything, are heavily EU regulated. You really feel safe that this is the case. I'm just a bit scared with what is going to happen with TTIP now. Accepting without any further qualification FDA-approved products on the UK market—that's a bit scary' (Maja).

[41] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20170329IPR69066/end-of-roaming-final-hurdle-cleared

The interview with Bram took place one November day in 2016, when demonstrations against the Canada agreement were in full swing. To enter the Charlemagne building, I had to wade through the crowd who had already gathered on the esplanade outside. The protesters, some of whom were wearing bright safety vests and colorful costume wigs, appeared to be around my age and younger. Boisterous and merry, they sang chants in French to an audience of policemen who wore stoical faces and displayed riot shields. The mood was good-humored above the immediate tensions. When I reached the barricade separating them, along which a painted banner reading 'STOP CETA' was strung, I was pulled aside by a security agent. The guard listened to what I said about an appointment with the Director in charge of trade with Canada and the US with a healthy degree of skepticism. I suspect that he suspected that I was one of them, an activist attempting to infiltrate the premises and possibly pull a stunt. A shallow investigation concluded after a few phone calls were made, and a secretary appeared to escort me up the lift.

TRADE is a small department of around 600 officials. Since the 1970s, it has developed into 'a federated state in the field of trade policy' with exclusive competence in foreign deal-making (Bram). There is always a tension in the system or a problem that needs solving:

> You can't get bored in DG TRADE. This is not possible. The negotiations that we are involved in are really at the forefront of the criticism of our globalization. Has the work of DG TRADE over the last 30 years actually contributed to growth in Europe, to unemployment or to employment, to higher wages or to lower wages? Has it been good for us or not? Do we integrate enough values in our trade policy so that it's not just companies who benefit, but do we also have environmental objectives?

Twenty-eight member states need to come on board, and it is always to be expected that a few will raise trouble from the start. Bram had been working to get TTIP off the ground since 2009 and was also currently leading negotiations for the Canada deal. The pressure was on, and he was in no mood to discuss the process in much detail: 'I don't think there's much that is special to say about that', he said. His team must get the agreement through Parliament in

the next couple of weeks or they will have no choice but to pronounce it dead for the indefinite future and shift their focus back to Washington.

The son of Dutch diplomat, the Director led a nomadic existence as a child. A self-described champagne socialist, he is the product of 'a very competitive family of high-achievers' who were 'very focused on results'. An unusual educational history begins at an American preschool. At the age of 7, the boy was put in a French primary school in Holland. After his 11th birthday, he was sent off to an English boarding school in Africa, then to another in England. It was 'not particularly the warmest context to grow up in', though 'in the end paid very significant dividends'. Any Dutchman who has spoken English with the fluency of a native from a young age has 'a huge advantage in an international context'. Work-life in the Commission is 'technical', in contrast to the 'nontechnical' work of someone in his father's line of work: 'I like doing the technical work. It does have that sort of multinational background which I enjoy. That's my natural habitat, so I guess I must be one of these terrible, left-wing elites who is completely out of touch with average people.'

'You are a man of the left', I said. 'Those people down on the street would also consider themselves to be at least as leftist as you are—possibly more so. If we are all here together over on the left and we all want the same things, then what's with the controversy?'

'We *are* on the same side', he said. What they get wrong about this issue, I would say there are two things:

> First, I hear what they are saying about protections for workers and the fears about chlorine chicken coming here to be served from farms in the US. What they don't realize is that this legislation comes later, after the agreement is negotiated and implemented. The deal must be in place first. Secondly, while certain workers may feel that they have lost control of their futures and been left behind, the truth is that trade deals such as CETA benefit first and foremost those in developing countries, the poorest of the poor. It's a small-minded view of globalization, in my opinion.

The Director acknowledged and identified with the concerns expressed about protections for workers' rights, consumer products and the environment. He claims to share them himself. The protesters pushing at the gates are not his Euroskeptic adversaries. On the contrary, they

are good, young Europeans who are on his side, and he is on theirs. The fact remains, however, that worrying about the potential of CETA to erode consumer protections for citizens is premature and unwarranted at this stage. The desired legislation, such as regulations enforcing that businesses meet minimum standards on food and health products, for example, will be put in place at a later date.

They are right, he said, to turn their words into deeds and engage so passionately in the debate. The position they take is nonetheless a 'small-minded' one that fails to consider what globalization does for subaltern populations beyond Europe, families living in the so-called Global South whose situation is one of extreme precarity and vulnerability relative to that facing a typical low-income household in a city like Brussels. A narrow parochialism confines their circle of compassion to the socioeconomic underclasses at the bottom of their own societies and obstructs their view of the bigger picture. The gravitational pull of economic globalization generates a rising tide that lifts all ships, and it is the unluckiest among us whose livelihoods most depend on access to bigger markets opened through the creation of borderless trade areas.

Negotiations for the TTIP reached an impasse in August 2016 and are now postponed until further notice. For detractors such as the German Economy Minister, the deal would have done more to further the Americanization of European social life from overseas than to further a symbiotic and egalitarian partnership between like-minded friends: 'We, as Europeans, must not bow to American demands.'[42] Criticism of the EU from the left leverages a formidable critique of Europe-making as it is done in practice. The erosion of state sovereignties at the national level transfers capital and agency to multinational corporations. When economic integration is at odds with social integration, 'certain workers

[42] https://www.politico.eu/pro/sigmar-gabriel-trade-talks-between-eu-and-us-have-failed-germany-economy-ttip/

feel they have lost control of their futures' and lose trust in the Commission, diagnosing it as part of the problem (Bram). TTIP was an object of hatred within the 'culture world', a hatred that ultimately compelled the Barroso Commission to call off its search for 'new narratives'. In these cases, the ever closer union of economies eliminates more spaces for fostering European identity and belonging than it creates.

3.4 Europe in the plural

The 1980s and 1990s were a period of semiotic proliferation for the European project. The People's Europe program introduced a flurry of new European symbols, including the European flag, motto and theme song. The euro currency, burgundy passport, European driving license, the European Health and Insurance Card and EUROPA postage stamps became markers of social identity and memory that have a visible presence in everyday life. The initiative promotes a singular, postnational 'European culture' belonging to all who belong to Europe. The Charter of Fundamental Rights states that the EU 'places the individual at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the Union and by creating an area of freedom, security and justice.'[43] The Maastricht Treaty introduced the Economic Monetary Union (EMU) and the notion of the EU citizen, both of which still await completion.

Morgan had fond memories of the Commission he joined in 1997: 'There was this drive for the European project and this ownership of it. There was still this acceptance from member states in the area of external relations to always give more power to the Union.' Despite its structural deficiencies, officials looked upon the internal market as an ambitious undertaking that has largely succeeded in meeting its objectives, confirming their belief in the

[43] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf

grand possibilities for what 'more Europe' may achieve. 'Some countries have never wanted to join the euro and do not want to join the single finance and the tax system, whereas France and Germany realize that historically they have no choice', Liam told me. 'I tag onto that.' One of the original objectives of the European civil service was to 'provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe' (Schuman 1950). 'Have you interviewed anybody from the European Commission who *doesn't* want federalism—who isn't actually quite federalist?', Liam asked.

If I did have informants who do not share this aspiration, they never made it explicit in my company. 'Well, the "F" word can sometimes put people off', I said.

'Really?' He furrowed his brow in a way that suggested that he doubts such people exist outside the Commission either. 'I mean, maybe they're thinking that I'm trying to get them to be like, "Let's destroy nations!" I'd be all for that. We'll be happy clappy socialists', he said with his tongue firmly planted in his cheek. 'I think the nation state is toxic. It's right up there with religion as a divider of people, as a form of brainwashing minds. Federalism? Yes please. Nation states? Pfft.'

Once again, the arc of contemporary integration bends toward federal statehood. In a 2013 speech to the Brussels branch of the UK Labour Party, Martin Schulz publicly disowned the supranational story:

> When I was a young man, I was a passionate activist for a United States of Europe…. Today, I know that nation-states are here to stay. Because they are the emotional homes for our national identities. We will never stop feeling French, British, Dutch, Italian, Polish or German. That's a good thing…I don't want the EU to substitute the nation-state. No, I see the EU acting at another level, as the necessary complement to national action, to further our common interests.[44]

The wisdom of experience led him to abandon a dream once dreamt, that of a straightforward narrative of progress from the national to the European.

[44] http://brusselslabour.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Brussels-Labour.pdf

'I very much understand the President saying, "We don't have the United States of Europe" and "We're not taking away the nation-state from people",' said Nico, referring to Juncker, who had been making similar noises in public, 'because people love their nation state. They have their identity rooted there, and they don't want us to tell them they have to be Europeans from tomorrow on. I mean, this is what dictatorships do, right? "So now you are citizens of GDR. Come find your new identity."'

'"And I hope you enjoy it!"', I said, playing along.

'Yeah, right? So, I don't need the word European *Federation* instead of European *Union*.'

Like the culture concept in sociocultural anthropology, official conceptualizations of European identity and culture develop dialectically via the interplay between two epistemic impulses: the universal singularity of *anthropos* and the plural particularities of *ethnos* (Stocking 1982). The Declaration on European Identity makes reference to a 'diversity of cultures within the framework of a common European civilization' (1973). Tensions between singularity and plurality in the EU cultural concept likewise come to the surface in the Giscard constitution: 'While remaining proud of their own national identities and history, the peoples of Europe are determined to transcend their ancient divisions and, united ever more closely, to forge a common destiny…' (d'Estaing, et al. 2003).

The 128th article of Maastricht is devoted to the subject of culture. 'We're in a policy area which gets referenced in the Treaty, but they said that—what is the phrase? "Europe will support the flowering of European culture." That is how you build what we want to build here' (Feargal). The line in question is, 'the Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore' (European Union 1992). It is reprinted in Article 167 of the Treaty of Rome (2012) with the verb 'should' replacing

'shall': while the 'Community' *shall* contribute to the flowering of cultures, the 'Union' *should* do so. 'You can tell they're getting desperate here when they go into flowery language like that', Feargal said.

Education and culture are emotive policy areas held as the sacred provinces of nations and national administrations. They are thus areas in which the Commission has developed little to no competences: 'What we say is that, in fact, a really European way of dealing with higher education doesn't imply that they should harmonize or go in the same direction, but one that's creating compatibility' (Diego). Each national education ministry takes a different approach and their receptivity to the programs run by EAC varies substantially. Feargal predicted that culture will be among the last to Europeanize and was likewise less than optimistic about the prospect of a unitary European education policy. 'We're quite sensible; we tend to say it's written into the Treaty that there won't be. It's too important to be left to the European level. Do we want a single uniform approach to education across Europe, or do we want good education for all our people? The answer is the second.' The two outcomes are not mutually exclusive, nor does one guarantee the other:

> Why would we claim that we can see more clearly what a good education for Romania is as compared to a good education for North Rhine-Westphalia? Policy fields are arenas wherein trends and challenges happen globally. Unlike a handful of big issues—the Single Market, democratic and environmental standards for which there is a single trans-European policy—in educational matters, responses need be local. A one-size-fits-all curriculum decreed from Brussels would not be sensible.

For him, there is a misplaced arrogance in the assumption that 'Europe knows best' when it comes to designing education systems. Ironically, there is something un-European, moreover, about strategically promoting Europeanness as an image of selfhood and belonging and encouraging citizens to subscribe to it. 'Isn't this what our enemies do? In any case, you will end up driving a reasonable degree of convergence just by focusing on the same things.'

A second poster appearing in the Images of Europe series was a work by Momus, a musician who borrows his stage name from the Greek god of satire. Its text is taken from his

'Solution 11-167: The Book of Scotlands', a novel examining Scottishness in a country flirting with a declaration of independence: 'Every lie creates a parallel world. The world in which it is true' (Momus 2009). The story of nations and nationness creates a parallel world in which Europe is never built and national states and interests alone retain supremacy on the global stage. In each of the associated classificatory terms—'supranational', 'international', 'subnational', 'transnational', 'postnational'—the 'national' persists defiantly at the root. Europe-building is qualitatively similar to nation-building, continuing 'that same process which in an earlier period of history produced our national forms of life' (Monnet 1978: 524). As a social modality, the European community is born from the national communities that developed in turn out of the pre-modern religious ones. Europe thus looks upon the nation as the first nations looked upon the religious modes of thought and belonging that governed their vast feudal predecessors: as the precedents 'out of which—as well as against which—it came into being' (Anderson 2006).

In resuming the search for new EU narratives, the exhibition emphasized inclusivity: 'We are bringing existing and new works of art to the debate,' says museum director Paul Dujardin. 'After all, artists are expert at developing images and narratives. Now it is a question of Narratives in the plural.'[45] The adoption and dissemination of the 'unity in diversity' mantra constituted a postmodern turn towards an idea of European selfhood that embraces plurality and difference. The nuances of multiple sub-European cultural constituencies are celebrated with renewed vigor as complementing and coexisting alongside a singular, authentically European culture. 'It is more accurate to talk about *demoi* in the plural' (Jörg).

'We accept that we are not all the same. The culture of Spain is not that of the Czech Republic, which is not the same as that of Bulgaria or Estonia' (Captain Europe).

[45] https://visit.brussels/binaries/content/assets/pdf/imagine_europe_en.pdf

‘To deal with each other in specific ways despite the fact that we are different—that’s what I consider as being European, and that’s something that I can be proud of’ (Morgan).

As a result, official definitions of European identity and belonging broadened to include benign forms of patriotism and nationness that became written into the story. In his 2018 State of the European Union speech, Juncker (2018a) bemoaned the rise of ‘unhealthy’, ‘unchecked’ and ‘extreme’ nationalisms while praising the special affection which citizens set aside for their nations as a virtuous form of love: ‘To love Europe is to love its nations. To love your nation is to love Europe’, he said. Timmermans echoed him: ‘Let’s be clear: a nationalist is not a patriot… A true patriot is also a European.’[46] In building a pluralist Europe, officials ‘shift from flag-waving proclamations of a singular “European culture” to a flower-waving defense of cultural diversity’ (McDonald 2005). In doing so, they reify the imagined social and cultural borders they seek to transcend, the ones that separate Europeans from one another.

Like a displaced and deterritorialized nation struggling for independence and recognition, the EU fetishizes sovereignty and statehood. Officials were careful to stress that the endgame should be entered into in an organic and consensual manner: ‘Nobody would ever want to impose a “United States of Europe”, if you were ever able to talk about that—well, nobody except the French, perhaps’, Feargal joked. He suggested that the analogy implied in this phrase between Europe and America is misleading: ‘It’s different on exactly this point about culture. It’s not about making Europe more French. It’s about taking the range of diverse identities which people have and not suppressing them but celebrating them,

[46] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/23/beware-the-horrible-hangover-from-nationalism-eu-leader-warns

while at the same time celebrating something else which is a shared element—not a dominant one—of Europeanness. And I do think that's real.'

'We have a shared heritage,' said the Captain, 'a shared history that has not always been peaceful or happy or harmonious, but shared nonetheless. It is not a threat to existing national identities—far from it. Part of our European identity is that we can work together in spite of our differences without necessarily trampling on people's religious and ethical values.'

Maja described a late-night chat she had recently with a friend who, after a few glasses of wine, began lamenting about how difficult it is to reconcile the differences between European countries given how radical the differences are. 'But that's just the thing people get wrong,' was her response:

> The whole point about the European project is not to pretend that we are the same, but just to take a Platonic idea—a perfectionist, abstract idea—of what we're all pursuing: to find the idealistic thing that we all have in common and then gravitate towards it. We share this long history that needs to be preserved, solved, prevented. People say the European project won't work because we're so different, but the whole point is that we're different and then we find a common diminutive.

'You are living on the same street. You have different houses, but you manage the street in common' (Arnaud). In achieving unity through cultural diversity, the Commission is a well-tempered synthesizer of national cultures: tempered in the sense of 'having a cheerful or emotionally stable disposition', as well as being 'properly regulated, controlled, or moderated' (Oxford 2009). It is in principle 'politically color blind' with respect to each member state.[47] The sensibility it adopts towards its constituent nations is in principle a dispassionate agnosticism analogous to the detached impartiality of the ideal secular state towards its subordinate religious groups. The modernity of Europeanness associates religions and religiosity with violent human impulses, dismissing them as a 'symptom of growing irrationality and intolerance in everyday life' (Asad 2003). The College perches itself atop

[47] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-eu-court/poland-in-response-to-eu-rule-of-law-not-under-threat-idUSKBN15Z21Q

the Berlaymont on the 13th floor, in direct defiance, it is said, of romantic, triskaidekaphobic superstitions. Before the wars of nations there were the wars of religion, and the quasi-religious aspects of nationalism are there to be seen: their emphasis on faith, sacred texts, hierarchical power systems, imagined communal bonding, ideology and self-sacrifice (Taylor 2007). The nation claims for itself the moral and intellectual status of a secular religion: 'The holy nation thus acquired a holy history; through the nation our memory continued to rest upon a sacred foundation' (Nora 1989: 11). Europe therefore presents itself as agnostic on the question of nationness, permitting an inclusive range of disparate life projects that fall within the limits prescribed by a standardized high European culture. Sub-European cultural diversity is celebrated but never measured or judged upon.

3.5 Identity and the ineffectuality of EU history-making practices

The institutions that organize societies make considerable efforts to define their identities in ways that reimagine the bonds of belonging that hold themselves together and the boundaries that distinguish themselves from other institutions. By formulating and formalizing in basic terms a coherent identity that is distinctive and delimited, social organizations reproduce creation narratives explicating the reason for their initial coming into being and the purpose of their continued existence in the present. The façade of internal homogeneity within social groups makes possible the reification, revision and regulation of common values. The 'unity in diversity' paradox may imply unity without uniformity, and yet, assimilation into a shared supranational society is a necessary and desired outcome of integrative Europe-building. Like identities, narratives generate powerful and enduring symbolic associations between ideas and individuals, groups and institutions. At the intersection of memory and identity,

storytelling is integral to how officials locate themselves in the world, imbuing their work with broader historical significances beyond the particular and immediate.

Haunting the elevators, offices and conference rooms of the properties which the DGs call home, I roamed the corridors collecting EU stories. The idealistic and technocratic narratives identified in the Images of Europe series are two that permeate officials' retellings of the EU story. The first sees Europe as a peace project focused on the abolition of nationalism as a necessary precondition for peace. The second envisions the integration of societies as the indirect byproduct of an integration of economies in accordance with the Monnet method. The two narratives embody the tensions existing between two traditions of Western liberalism: the economic liberalism of 'open markets', associated with more conservative, right-wing policies; and the social liberalism of 'open cultures', associated with more progressive, left-wing ones. Both function as techniques of legitimation that validate and authenticate the long-term integration project and the work of European-level institutions (Calligaro 2015). Once the integration of the social realm is complete, the necessary conditions for future war on the continent are permanently precluded. Interdependencies among trading partners become strengthened to such a degree as to make it an unaffordable prospect in social and cognitive terms as well as in economic ones. The actualization of Europe is the end result of technical successes, concrete solutions to logistical problems: through a permanent transcendence of borders—social, economic, territorial, intersubjective—it seeks to transcend the particularities of past differences and differing pasts and reach new frontiers in 'the organized world of tomorrow' (Monnet 1978: 524).

Europeanness displays itself in the interplay of Europe and nation, two categories denoting distinct and mutually constitutive epistemic impulses. Nation is a mode of identity and belonging towards sub-European *Gemeinschaften*. Europe denotes a supranational *Gesellschaft* that subsumes national difference from above. Like a nation without a state,

however, Europe has always wanted to be a *Gemeinschaft*. For Monnet, the difference between Europe-building and nation-building is one not of substance but of scale, and those who succeed him still dream of one day living in a sovereign and fully federalized state governed by a supranational executive administration. Now entering its sixties, the European Union—the European project, more precisely—is older than its youngest member states and not much younger than the oldest ones.

Some were created in my own lifetime. The nation is, if history is any judge, a modern ideological construct: a *Gesellschaft* masquerading as a *Gemeinschaft* (Gellner 1998). It does so in part through the construction of memory sites and the circulation of compelling identity narratives designed for public consumption. In an age of memorialization preoccupied with constructing monuments to the past, Europeanness nonetheless struggles to invent the kinds of memories and traditions that come easily to nations and that work so effectively to their advantage. The effectuality of its history-making practices is inhibited by a futurist orientation that makes an enemy of the past by equating it with nationalism and equating nationalism with war. Europe lives in the future, shrouded in 'the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present' (Shelley 1904). There are the fading memories of the Civil War and teleological accounts of European civilization transmitted from Plato to NATO (Gress 1998), but a conspicuous absence of conspiracy theories (Niermann 2009) as well as credible claims to primordiality.

As a consequence, it must be resourceful in its 'search' for 'new narratives' (Battista, et al. 2014). Recycling selected fragments of preexisting national histories, it aims for new renderings of the story that are ambiguous, open-ended and relevant to the identities of each country, such that 'every group….may eventually come to recall its past in light of another group's historical memory, each coming to know more about their compatriots' experiences in light of their own remembered past' (Young 1993). A new EU narrative thus emerges:

identifying with Europe as a mode of self-recognition and belonging allows nationals of differing member states to coexist without the possibility of war and become more alike without jettisoning the social particularities that make them distinctive.

In 2015, the issues at the center of the most heated debates in Europe and the United States were tightly wound up with issues of selfhood. *The New York Times* pronounced it 'the year we obsessed over identity' (Morris 2015). The website Dictionary.com (2015) awarded *identity* its Word of the Year. When President Juncker announced that his would be a 'last-chance Commission', he later clarified that it was its last chance 'to regain the trust of Europe's citizens in our common project' (Juncker 2016). 'Our European Union is,' he said, 'at least in part, in an existential crisis' (ibid., 6). His diagnosis of the crisis was identity-laden: 'I am convinced that the European way of life is something worth preserving. I have the impression that many seem to have forgotten what being European means' (ibid., 9). Vice President Timmermans went distance further down this line of thought: 'We have fallen into the trap of identity politics. If the driving force of the European construction is national, cultural or ethnic identity, then it will not survive' (Lefranc 2016). These sentiments are ones to which Commission officials largely subscribe—namely, that European social identity is integral to the health, vitality and longevity of the European project.

The concept of identity is a notoriously slippery, evasive and chameleon-like object in anthropology (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Anthropological investigations from the 1960s, associated with the Manchester School in UK and traditions of symbolic interactionism and social constructivism in North America, have focused on ethnic identity, providing 'soft' or 'weak' accounts of the construction and negotiation of 'ethnicity' in relation to wider political landscapes (Baumann and Gingrich 2004; Barnard and Spencer 2010). (Delanty 2003) considers four aspects of identity: the particular social action to which it relates, its narrative dimension, the degree to which it is based on difference and the reality of multiple

identities that co-exist on differentiated levels in a mixed or overlapping manner. The personal identities that individuals hold are distinguished from the collective ones of social groups that connect the local scale with larger movements, causes and concerns. A third category of societal or civilizational identities refers to broader, more abstract cultural categories that provide the raw materials from which collective identities are derived. Social identities make the world intelligible, expanding spheres of reference to communities beyond those that are physically inhabited. What makes identity a compelling anthropological object is its intensely personal, emotive and private nature. Personal identity might be conceived as a 'self-hood rest[ing] on the essential privacy of meaning' (Cohen 1994a). Looked upon another way, 'the "I" that individuals speak may be the most insistently accessible of all things in their world' (Rapport 2014). Individuals relate to wider social and cultural schemata through their deployment of collectively shared symbols, yet they interpret and internalize the meanings the symbols carry in highly individualized ways.

The multiplicity of identity, how people define themselves in more than one way and pledge allegiances to more than one community, is a basic reality that cannot be denied. It is for this reason that passports and driving licenses issued by government agencies to categorize individuals and 'prove who they are' contain more rows of information than the one that asks for a full name. Alongside the documented national citizen that your passport confirms you are, you are perhaps also, in no particular order, a female, a brunette, a blood donor, a baby boomer, a mother, an artist, an activist, a pansexual, a mountain climber, a Briton and a European. Each of these labels connotes overlapping communities of imagined belonging and senses of self that are separate in kind but potentially equal in value for any given individual. The multiplicity of identity which one finds inside the Commission imagines a landscape of concentric circles whereby Europeanness evenly encompasses nationness and regionness. As Shore (2000: 52) rightly attests, the model fails to account for

why these distinct modes of selfhood and belonging so often collide and impinge upon one another in their struggle to find ways to coexist alongside one another on the same landmass. European' is a category that encompasses even those who orient themselves in opposition to the Brussels-based institutions. It is for the anthropologist to question whether such a superimposition of identities is possible on the global 'cultural battlefield' of competing visions of Europe and Europeanness.

In theorizing European identity anthropologically, this study follows (Kurzwelly, Fernana and Ngum 2020) in modelling identity as the expressions of likeness which a person actively or passively recognizes themselves to bear in the world, giving rise to the chimera of a single coherent, integrated 'self'. Drawing inspiration from analytical philosopher Derek Parfit's (1984) theory of the immanent contradictions and disunities of personal identity, their reflections on migrant experiences of adopting several identities in a South African context show how an intimate sense of self-unity is constructed through 'imaginary chains of psychological connectedness' conforming to social imperatives (Kurzwelly et al. 2020: 107). Identities are sets of narratives of who we believe we are, the story we tell of our selves to ourselves. They fluctuate and develop over time as modes of self-recognition, paradoxically giving rise to the cumulative illusion of an essential selfhood that is stable and unchanging. Following these theoretical approaches, I define identity as fundamentally the marriage of ideation and personhood. Identities, whether personal or collective, attach persons to ideas while superimposing ideas onto persons. For model-making apes such as we are, the complexities of conscious experiences and their contents allow for and necessitate the attachment of vast confluences of ideas to ourselves and to others. A loose analogy may be drawn here between this conceptualization of identity and James Fernandez's (1974) theory of figuration as the predication of a metaphor upon an inchoate subject—the inchoate subject being, in this case, human subjectivity itself. Ascriptions of identity persuade us to map our

sense of a stable, individuated ego or self onto images of a collective unity, something greater than ourselves, while paradoxically entailing a desire for distinction and distinctiveness (Bourdieu 1989). Ideas and people remain ontologically distinct categories, yet the superimposition of images onto actors blurs this distinction, conflating sets of ideas for groups of people and throwing a veneer of personal continuity over an inchoate, confused and disordered collection of selves.

4 The bubble syndrome: Situated Europeanness in Brussels

The Bruxellois were not averse to staring. I was identified on the street as an anglophone foreigner abroad before I could open my mouth. My friend Maud said this is because of my clothes and the way my face looks. Notwithstanding NATO's presence by the airport, there are far fewer North Americans around in any case. Whatever it is, I must be one of *them*: the eurocrats who work for the EU. I am not, however, and they are not me. The questions I brought to them reinforced the distance that lies between us, phrased as they were from the perspective of a visitor-observer. Still, I did follow them around, listening and observing, borrowing their social schemata to suit my research purposes. They were the company I kept.

'My impression is you can never fool them that you're Belgian,' Maja said. 'Belgians can tell them from a mile away. Those are the guys that walk up into a bar with a cravat and a blazer. The difference is pretty obvious.'

There is a kind of person for whom home can be anywhere. It is 17h30 on the Schuman roundabout and *they* are certainly the type. They are born in multiple places at multiple times, have multinational families in multiple homes, speak multiple languages and inhabit multiple spaces. Their aesthetic, a limited range of dress with an ample attention to detail, betrays the fact that they are relatively well-off. They are tall and physically fit, displaying certain enigmatic signs: a sharp business suit of dark powder blue, often tailored; a smartphone pressed to the ear with one hand and a briefcase in the other; a Swiss watch on the wrist; an expensive haircut; a disarming smile of bright teeth; and two sympathetic eyes shining through candy-colored spectacles. They are urbane, mundane and borderline glamorous. They have read many of the same books that I have read and enjoy hearing themselves talk, though a slight air of having nothing to prove allows them to evade the snares of pretension.

Knowledge of EU legislation and tales of backpacking adventures after secondary school make them a hit at parties. They will kiss your cheek, slip a linen business card into your hand and remember your name. They are the new generation of the Brussels bubble: an urban expatriate community clustered around EU institutions in central Belgium that has little contact with the outside world.

Discussions of institutional memory blur into discussions of milieu, the social environment in which places take shape and narratives are refashioned. The 'Brussels bubble' (alternatively: 'EU bubble', 'Eurobubble', and 'Euro-Brussels') is a name attached to an inner-city concentration of civil servants, politicians, representatives, journalists, lawyers, consultants, advisors, diplomats, lobbyists, activists and other stakeholders who frequent the 'European Quarter' (also: 'EU Quarter', 'European district') in central Brussels (Georgakakis 2011; Busby 2013; Nitoiu 2015). These various actors go to work each day in 'the institutions': the European Union administrative bodies, agencies, services and civil society organizations that embody European-level power and society from above. While much has been said about the 'Europeanization' of Brussels—how the installation of EU institutions has transfigured the social and material topography of the urban environment—less attention has been paid to how the curious particularities of the local environment, beyond the institutions themselves, shape processes of identity formation for those who staff them. The overlapping spheres converge at a predilection for subnational (local and regional) and supranational (European) belongings in lieu of national allegiances. After moving to Belgium and becoming Union officials, European Commission civil servants develop interesting constellations of Europeanness that displace meanings of 'home' and compel its relocation.

Identity and social relations permeate the ethnographic environment in the anthropological study of place and space. A place is a space of social relations, an 'instantaneous configuration of positions' according to which 'elements are distributed in

relations of coexistence' (De Certeau 1984). The social practice of language production inserts and removes distances in the management of boundaries based on differences of socioeconomic legitimacy, resources, prestige and consumption that go into their reproduction (Heller 2006; Harvey and Krohn-Hansen 2018). As the organization of space is inherently discursive, reproduced in competing narratives by those who navigate them, discourse is indefatigably spatial. In his writings on cities and spatiality, Lefebvre (1979; 1991; 2003) sees a 'generalized explosions of spaces' including interpenetrating 'supraurban' and 'supranational' spheres of influence stretching beyond the immediately local. Supraurban re-scaling processes reconfigure and rearticulate relations among intertwined, socially produced geographical scales that are superimposed onto one another. His multiscalar approach to sociospatial theory in urban contexts provides a useful model for capturing supralocal identities and belongings in the institutional field of the 'Brussels complex' (Brenner 2000; Stone Sweet, Sandholtz and Fligstein 2001).

This chapter turns to the anthropological object of European identity as a situated landscape that is 'supralocal', a term denoting a supranational mode of self-recognition and belonging localized in a particular place. It aims at unpacking issues of space and place in a deterritorialized institutional context that is spatially boundless and culturally heterogeneous (Appadurai and Fardon 1995). In asking about where and how officials locate 'home' sociospatially, it takes up themes of movement and impermanence, openness and enclosure, plurality and privilege, juxtaposition and fragmentation, as well as alienation, dislocation, disorientation and displacement. Pursuing European identities and belongings among EU civil servants at street-level sites reveals performances of place-based modes of self-recognition and belonging that alienate them from their immediate surroundings. In valuing *routes* over *roots*, officials recapitulate nation-based frameworks by employing their

terminology in ways that carry transformative implications for rethinking relations between individuals and communities.

As a space giving rise to a 'euro-local' identity, the Brussels bubble acts as a spatial metaphor and symbolic boundary that symbolizes European norms and values situated in a particular place. Representations of the bubble reveal how officials position themselves within and without its microsocial spaces, establishing and removing distances between themselves and their institutional surroundings. Casual references to a real or imagined bubble provide a figurative medium for coming to terms with experiences of alienation and unreality in reference to a parallel community of those 'on the outside': the wider population of 'non-EU' Bruxellois who are not 'in the institutions'. The analysis likewise speaks to Bruxellois imaginings of the figure of 'the eurocrats' drawn from interviews with ancillary workers employed in EU buildings.

The discussion presents ethnographic observations and encounters of the bubble collected while living as an ethnographer embedded in the institutional spaces of the European Quarter. Perennial methodological issues associated with 'studying up' make expatriate communities the targets of sustained neglect by anthropologists of migration, diaspora and labor mobilities. Analyses of elite migrants, an international jet set of expatriates who are home anywhere, everywhere and in no particular place whatsoever, tend to be relatively partial accounts. As symbols of privileged expertise and foreign influence in the business and foreign aid sectors, they represent, perhaps, 'the antithesis of ethnographic authenticity' (Redfield 2012). Their heterogeneity, their mobilities and their variability in time and space contribute to the anthropological invisibility of an elusive social world and expanding milieu. The fractal geometry of the EU bubble revolves around mobility and circulation. The localized field site is consequently an object of ethnographic suspicion, where 'the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality, to which the descriptive practices of

anthropology will have to respond (Appadurai 1991). Nevertheless, immersion in the EU institutional world enabled the formulation of a template suitable for apprehending existential realities of the social life therein.

In daily practices and interactions, Commission officials perform European identity and belonging in institutional spaces where abstract oppositions between local/foreigner, dweller/traveler, EU/non-EU and national/supranational become visible. These performances of Europeanness are imbued with a certain Belgianness or 'belgitude', whereby nationness is expressed through practicing a studied apprehension toward the reality of 'the nation' itself (Dubois 2008; Sepp 2010; Blainey 2016). The argument can be made that European identity in the EU Quarter emerges as a bricolage of supranational and local/regional affiliations that are both deterritorialized and place-specific. Cultural artifacts of different origins are rearranged and recontextualized to constitute Brussels-based euro-local identities that approximate aestheticized and artificialized images of how the daunting paradoxes enveloped within 'unity in diversity' are lived and justified in the everyday.

4.1 The Belgian Question: two regions divided by a common nationality

The European Commission is situated at a constellation of sites where regional, national and supranational levels of governance intersect. Its buildings are places where the perspectives, demands, fears and desires of 512.6 million EU citizens come to be dispassionately mediated. Channeling Umberto Eco, a press release for the Imagine Europe exhibit characterized the city as 'a *foyer culturel*, a center for the confrontation of diversities' (European Commission 2016b). The centrality of Brussels is more than an accident of location. As 'the battlefield of Europe', Belgium's national place-memory is colored by a series of consecutive invasions and occupations by several of its neighbors (van Langenhove 1946). There were the

Burgundians, the Spaniards, the Austrians, the French and the Dutch. Its beaches and forests provided the landscapes for blood-soaked clashes throughout the Great Civil War. Especially susceptible to outside cultural influences and well-suited to assimilating them, the Low Country is a 'paradigmatically European society' (Fox 1994).

'Do you like Brussels, Antonio?'

'It's a good compromise between many places,' he said with a smile.

Under a certain light, Belgium is one great country-sized experiment in tactical compromise and power-sharing. There is a sobering element to its choice of national motto, '*L'union fait la force* [Unity makes strength]', which is not far off from 'unity in diversity' in its tacit acknowledgement of in-built frictions and the ever-present specter of potential conflict.[48] Informants left me with the impression that it isn't so much a physical country as a top-down artificial construction, an unlikely amalgamation of divergent regions: Dutch-speaking Flanders to the northwest, francophone Wallonia to the southeast and three Germanophone 'cantons' on the border. The regions are given five provinces each and a Brussels Capital Region lying in between them, presumably to keep them from strangling one another.

The story of Walloon-Flemish relations since 1830 is the struggle for supremacy over the means of production between the regions. After the Belgian Revolution, the francophone ruling classes established French as the official language of the Belgian government, igniting discontent among a disenfranchised Flemish. Wallonia was home to the prosperous *pays noir* coal belt during the Industrial Revolution, lending it a position of strength and advantage relative to the agriculture-based economy of Flanders. With the decline of industrial power in the 1970s, factories closed as economic opportunities moved north. The mechanical ruins that

[48] An early version appeared after the 1578 Dutch Revolt as '*Concordia res parvae crescunt* (through unity small things grow)'.

remain of a gilded age of technoscientific progress can be witnessed in the old industrial neighborhoods of cities like Charleroi. In the second act, fortunes reversed as Flanders entered a second act of postwar growth, its high-tech infrastructure better suited to the incoming digital transition. The Flemish interpreted their success as poetic vindication for having suffered so long the indignity of living under Walloon hegemony, and it became Wallonia's turn to feel slighted. As the economic burden weighing down the nation, it is now incumbent on francophone southerners to know their place, so to speak.

One summer's night, some DJ friends I made threw a party on a boat as it drifted down the canal. It sailed into Flanders before looping down into Wallonia and winding back up to arrive back in Brussels before sunrise. In the moonlight, the derelict factories of coal and steel, decaying mills, long-abandoned cooling towers, slagheaps and chateaus stuck out from the hills like the battered wreckage of a lost space race. Leaning over the taffrail, I fixed my eyes on their crooked surfaces, entropically picturesque as they drift from view. 'You see that,' said a fellow to my right. 'That is the shit this place is now.' I found it rather beautiful.

The 'force' being appealed to in '*L'union fait la force*' is the strength required to coexist in a schizophrenic country that has two of everything. Devolution of state powers to the regions gave rise to a particularly Belgian form of *'morcellement'*: a multiplication of social and linguistic fragmentations diminishing the relevance of the federal government. Geertz (2000) referred to this 'hollowed-out country' as 'one of the most devolved in the world'. There are three prime ministers at once: one Flemish, one Walloon and a third who represents all Belgians. One often hears that Belgian national symbolism is limited to two institutions: the Red Devils and the Royals. The sovereign's official title, however, is King of the *Belgians* rather than King of *Belgium*. Longer lists include comics, chocolate, beer, frites, Jacques Brel and Renée Magritte. The French like to claim the last two for themselves and locals seem unbothered that the rest of the world is none the wiser. There are no national

newspapers or TV broadcasters, no national political parties or national universities. During the 2011 '*révolution des frites*', Belgium broke a world record in instability, becoming the democratic country that has gone the longest number of days (249 in total) without a government. For this, it has become a source of inspiration for anarchists worldwide, who cite it as living proof of the feasibility of the stateless society.

Officials liked to quote Yves Leterme, the ex-PM who notoriously judged his homeland to be an accident of history with no intrinsic value. 'It's a bit of an artificial political creation of the United Kingdom and the other powers, the French and the Dutch', Pablo explained. 'Everybody was watching each other in that period around 1830.' With one and one-half percent of the EU's population and one percent of its territory, Belgium seems content to play second fiddle in the orchestra of global history. Despite the King's presence here for the last 180 years, the urban landscape of the capital is more bourgeois than imperial (that is, if one is prepared to overlook the brutal plunder of the Congo Free State by the colonial administration under King Leopold II). In Brussels one finds 'a little bit of imperialism' walking through *Toison d'Or*, with its Royal Palace and Grand Place (Bernard). Still, it lacks the imperial grandeur of a continental capital city, preferring thin passageways to grand avenues and hidden corridors to wide open spaces. The largest ships in the Belgian navy are minesweepers, Arthur told me, because that is the role NATO assigned to it.

Extensive devolution and a dearth of national symbiology is correlated with a decline in attachment to being Belgian (De Heusch 2002). Belgian national identity is 'very loose' (Ona). 'I was born in Belgium,' wrote the Flemish poet Leonard Nolens, 'but Belgium was never born in me' (quoted in van de Craen (van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen, 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen, 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen 2002)(van de Craen 2002)2002: 24).

Belgians, as a national collectivity, have long maintained a complicated relationship to Belgianness and ideas of Belgian nationhood. If 'Belgium is a country, but not "a nation"' (Cook 2002), Brussels remains 'a capital in search of a nation' (Buruma 2016). What better home than a country so decentralized as Belgium for a city so fixated with centrality?

Officially bilingual, Brussels straddles the continental borderline between the Latin-speaking countries to the south and the Germanic-speaking ones further north. The ethnolinguistic fault line goes right back to the fall of Rome, when the land was divided between Romanized Celts (called *Wala*) and Germanic Franks (Cook 2002). Technically part of the Flemish province of Vlaams-Brabant, the capital is demographically more Walloon than Flemish: around 80% of inhabitants speak French.[49] French is everywhere the norm, apart from in certain Flemish strongholds like the Rue de Flandres in St Catherine, where speaking it is considered an impropriety. Eighty percent of Commission staff claim French as a first, second or third language (Pigman 2018). Most Belgians I know are francophone. I, myself, was based at a Flemish university where most of the students and staff are Flemish, to the mild disappointment of the former. Not even they can deny that there is a lot of fun to be had in cities like Antwerp, with their tuliped lawns, Venetian waterways and tourism revenue. From their perspective, Flanders is a place that is richer, happier and more conservative. This last trait is reinforced by the rise of the New Flemish Alliance, a secessionist party who won the most seats in the 2010 elections. The idea of a sovereign Flanders, independent, self-sufficient and possibly reuniting with Holland, does not sit comfortably with the francophones I know. The separationist spirit is equally anathema to Flemish colleagues at the office, who dismissed it as a convoluted, right-wing fantasy. Klaas, who handles IT, shared with me a comic showing a schoolteacher pointing at a map of Belgium while arguing with an obstinate pupil. 'I repeat,' says the former, 'Flanders is to the

[49] http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/yoursay/language_and_identity/dutchflemish/when_in_brussels_.shtml

left and Wallonia is to the right.' 'But it's not true!', is the child's frustrated reply. While playing with political and geographic meanings in the spatial language of 'left and right', the cartoon also nods to a Belgian sense of anti-authoritarianism and mistrust of institutions. Though the educator, the mouthpiece of state ideology, is technically correct, it is the pre-inculcated child who really knows the score.

Gestures of linguistic accommodation across regions express a recognition of difference and a spirit of toleration towards the intra-national other. Maud has a job at the Royal Library of Belgium. 'I have to work closely now with an intern, a Flemish girl,' she said, 'who is pretty cool—we have the same style and she likes good music. It's weird, but we get along pretty alright.' The primary rule is to speak the mother language of the person you are directly speaking with, except when efforts to phrase more technical discourse could result in potential distortions of meaning. Hence, Maud addresses her colleague in Dutch, who then answers her in French, unless resorting to Dutch as a precautionary measure is justifiable given how a francophone is likely to misinterpret her words. Such '*L'union fait la force'* values hold sway in Flemish-Walloon modes of communication insofar as they do not encroach on the efficient transmission of information in the workplace. The sorts of things that keep the Flemish and Walloons separate from and hostile to one another—history, mentality and destiny—are themes characteristic of the sectarian. Slight degrees of variation that seem trivial to the visitor are the obsessive concern of the local: an illustration of the narcissism of minor differences (Blok 1998). In a country of binaries, the regions must live together like conjoined twins who imagine one another as simultaneously the self and the other, one whom they can neither get along with nor escape from.

After living as expatriates for four decades, Arthur and his wife, a charming American socialite named Edith Rose, decided to go through the bureaucratic motions necessary for becoming Belgian citizens. 'I'm not taking Belgian nationality because I love the King or I'm

truly attached to their nationality,' he made plain. Our Flemish colleagues, he joked, would probably agree that he is now the only real Belgian in the office. Rather, the decision to defect was a preemptive measure taken to prepare for the UK withdrawal and a final act of defiance against the homeland that let him down. 'The Belgians have treated me very nicely. So, I'm not running it down, anyway.' He did not run it down—unlike his son who, after hearing that his father signed a declaration to adhere to the state constitution and Belgian values, replied, '*What* Belgian values?', and went on to mutter 'something about corruption and this and that.' This irritated Arthur. 'I think there is a Belgian identity and I always say that to my Belgian friends. You don't go out and sell "Flemish chocolates" or "Walloon beer". Sorry, but it doesn't have the same ring. It's easy to sneer at Belgians, but actually there's an awful lot going for them. They don't blow their own trumpet.' With respect, I must correct Arthur about the beer: there are two default brands of lager—Maes and Jupilier—one is as Flemish as the other is Walloon and enjoying both is not an option. He made a good point about Belgian humility, however. Belgians, with their surrealist art and ironic sense of tragicomedy, have a knack for self-depreciation and an ability to laugh at their own expense. 'We are a work of art,' said Marie-France, 'a surrealistic work of art!' The domestic sociopolitical disputes, while real, are often shrugged aside in a jaded malaise. Anti-establishment disaffection is expressed not as an angst-ridden antipathy but in an aloof, contented sense of apathy. The symbol of Brussels, an elevated statue of bronze depicting a nude youngster in the act of urinating, is well-suited to its capacity for 'taking the piss'. The invitations of nationalism are things which Belgians respectfully decline. 'I think you've had an enriching experience here,' said Arthur. 'When you go back to Oxford, you'll appreciate this sort of rebelliousness.'

'Belgians are quite open; they do make you feel quite well. If you go live in Paris, sure you can be part of an expat group. But amongst native Parisians, you'll never really fit in as

much' (Maja). Taking the place of a French *fierté* is a refreshingly recalcitrant agree-to-disagree disposition. Brussels is the Paris that you don't need a nice handbag to live and thrive in. The grit and gristle of its cobblestone passageways are much better suited to the drifting outsider. The question of having pride in nation and country seems far too important to be taken seriously, and there is no need to let pretentions to cultural superiority get in the way of having a good time. 'Thanks to Brussels, I have found my place in the world. In Italy, wherever I was, I felt somehow a stranger—or, if you want, I felt at home everywhere. I honestly feel I have a big home now, in Europe. It was at first sight quite an unpleasant city' (Giovanni).

Nothing about Brussels lasts forever, including first impressions. Many officials made a home here only after first passing through three stages: disappointment, discovery and transcendence.

'When I came here as a tourist two years ago, I was not impressed. They only show the shittiest parts of Brussels to tourists' (Maja). For Maja, the Manneken Pis and the Atomium failed to excite. 'I was lost. I had no reference point. It seemed very average.' Upon her return to stay for good, she began to discover its hidden charms, proclaiming, 'Oh my god, this place is actually beautiful!' In the third stage, 'you finally realize how, outside of the EU bubble, you have a good mixture of really open-minded people, international people and people who are a bit crazy. It's easy to blend in and not feel like you're completely a foreigner or outsider.'

For urbanites who love their cities, Brussels is 'actually quite a congenial place to live' with 'very pleasant features' (Arnaud). Officials appreciate the *joie de vivre* of Brussels, where 'the cultural life is as it should be' (Mark). 'It's a bit diverse' and 'up to anyone's liking.' It has 'good concerts, exhibitions, amazing restaurants' (Maja); 'avant-garde fashion, interesting theatre and ballet companies' (Arthur); as well as lots of cinemas and museums.

Among European capitals it's 'not too big—it's even small' (Diego). You can get around without a car or spending the day suffocating inside a crowded metro carriage. It is possible to walk the length of town from north to south in four hours. And yet, 'it's big enough that you can get anything you really want' (Mark). Its central location means that at any moment you can get to any place in the rest of Europe in a matter of hours.

'I think Brussels is quite an open city; it gives everybody what they want', said Klaus, a German who lives alone in St Catherine during the week and spends weekends with family at a second home in southeast London. 'The week is my weekend. If I want to go out, I go out here.' When I asked about the most challenging aspect of his work, he responded, 'getting up in the morning, to be honest.'

'Of course, I criticize it a lot too,' conceded Giovanni. 'I should not pretend that I like everything in Brussels. The place where you live most is the place that you criticize most because you know it better.' He laughed warmheartedly. 'It's a dirty city, in all fairness. For instance, I was recently in Tehran again, which is much cleaner than Brussels' (Arnaud). Certain things take some getting used to. 'I like to moan about it like most people here. I mean, the Belgians kind of drive us mad a bit,' said Mark. 'Poor service, disorganization and the rain, you know.' The clouds keep everything the color of international grey.[50] In a testament to his valor, Antonio sacrificed a life underneath the sun for federalism: 'For me, an Italian or southerner living in Brussels, it is not the best. But we do it for the cause!'

'Brussels-bashing', the petty griping everyone does about the little things that make living here especially difficult, is a key feature of the local social fabric. Nothing works efficiently, and everything that can go wrong, does. When speaking of Belgium's balkanized approach to governance, 'devolution' evokes processes of phylogenetic descent in addition to

[50] https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/19855/1/meet-bill-drummond-the-artist-who-painted-over-ukip-billboard-daily-mail

institutional decentralization. ‘BruxHell’ is a term of affection widely used when airing such grievances.

‘The traffic is unbelievable. We have no mobility policy at all in this town’ (Arnaud). The use of tunnels for stretches of the busiest thoroughfares, allowing motorists three-dimensional travel, does little to prevent Brussels from being named ‘the world’s most congested city’.[51] One Belgian writer quipped that this is the result of everyone trying to impose their own national driving style at once.[52] During the big two-day Council summits, the bubble was sectioned off with police tape and barbed-wire barricades. No one was permitted entry or exit without an EU staff necklace badge used in each of the main EU institution buildings. As not everyone who works in the bubble works for the institutions, it was not uncommon to find frustrated lobbyists, journalists and others arguing with armed guards about their need to pass through on their way home in the evening.

Belgian Solutions is a popular online forum in which people living here share photos of instances of public infrastructure encountered on the street that are amusing and bizarre in a quintessentially Belgian way. Regimes of urban development prolonged by inefficiency and lack of funds adorn the skyline with tower cranes and ensure that one cannot walk more than a few blocks without stumbling onto a building site. Run-down art nouveau buildings that nature has begun to claim for itself are renovated in a haphazard manner—a patch of roofing there, some new wiring over here, a staircase leading to nowhere in particular. The forum has appeared in various media outlets and exhibitions and its collections has produced a book in two volumes, bearing the mantra: ‘Not every solution is the answer to a problem.’ The Belgian solution is a job that is well-intentioned yet shabbily done such that it resolves one issue by creating a new one. In a city that is permanently under construction, the constant

[51] https://www.forbes.com/pictures/ehmk45kheg/1-brussels-belgium/
[52] https://www.thebulletin.be/road-rage-are-belgian-drivers-really-bad

demolition and reconstruction of the built environment accelerates the erasure of situated memory, lending a sense of formlessness to the city atmosphere. A briefing by the European Parliamentary Research Service stated that places of symbolic significance in the EU Quarter are 'one key element in the development of a European identity' (Perchoc 2016). In 2008, the institutions collaborated with city authorities on an architectural competition to redesign the neighborhood. The winning entry included a new home for the Commission located on a detached site, where it would 'stand apart' as 'a separate entity, rising purer and higher than its surroundings'.[53] According to the report, the implementation of the project was stalled due to 'the complexity of Brussels' governance' (ibid.).

Local police are widely regarded as ineffectual and useless. Law enforcement responsibilities in a city of 11.5 million are divided among six different police departments and 19 different communes or municipalities, each with its own mayor and city council (Hervey 2015). In addition, there is a federal intelligence agency, two subnational agencies—one civilian and one military—and two specialized police units. Officers on the beat, dressed in their blue vests and side caps, did not appear to be doing much of anything. They seemed uninterested in investigating crimes and were not to be relied on during incidents or emergencies. Friends reported feeling unsafe walking at night. There was an ambient feeling in the city that no one was really looking out for us. On Fridays, I often stayed late at the Moka cafe to help Tim and Caroline with closing duties in exchange for a lift home. One evening at around 03h00, we were greeted by a band of aggressive youths at the storefront who banged empty bottles against the glass, trying to force their way in. Luckily, Tim is something of a tough guy, and we managed to keep them at bay long enough to lower the tin shutters and board ourselves inside behind it. 'Shouldn't we call the cops?' I suggested, regaining my breath. 'It looked like they wanted to kill us.'

[53] https://www.christiandeportzamparc.com/en/projects/la-rue-de-la-loi-2/

‘Ah, they won’t do nothing,’ Tim said, referring not to the mob but to the cops. He joked that the jails are always empty because no one ever gets caught.

Dealing with Belgian bureaucracy was a Kafkaesque nightmare that tested the limits of human patience. Arnaud is among the handful of primary informants who are indigenous to the region. ‘I’m a public law man. I like institutions; I’m an institutionalist. I have the privilege, contrary to the vast majority of my colleagues inside the EU, to be involved in the European endeavor while still living in my country.’ His professional life began in the Belgian public service. ‘Belgium is—not without any kind of irony—a public environment which familiarizes you very early with a very complex structure because it’s a state which moved from a centralized to a federal structure over 30 years, which means that I came very naturally into European integration, but from that angle.’ For someone on the other side of the desk, this ‘very interesting institutional construction’ made going through the protocols—the applications, registrations and miscellaneous paperwork—seem infinitely complicated and terminally inefficient. When submitting required documents, I always seemed to be missing one on account of the fact that they had forgotten to tell me about it. So, I would set up another appointment to try again. This would end up going back and forth in an endless volley. ‘Belgian bureaucracy is worse than Greek bureaucracy!’ Emmanouela attested.

Marie, a colleague at the VUB, suffers from a form of post-traumatic stress disorder caused by years of having to circumvent Belgian bureaucracy. ‘I have such bad anxiety when I have to go to the commune. If only they knew the pain they are causing.’ Misdirection, miscommunication and endless hurdles seem to appear out of nowhere. As Kafka (1927) put it, ‘Official decisions are as elusive as young girls.’ It was as if getting anything done at one time would have been too painless for both parties. Or perhaps it was that the street-level bureaucrats simply took pleasure in seeing our faces and wished to do so as often as possible,

which would have been a nice feeling had it been mutually shared. ‘They need to justify their job somehow, I guess’, Marie said.

In the process of registering with my commune, the municipal administrators mistook the date of issue on my passport for my date of birth, leading to their belief that an 8-year-old from the US is renting a flat on Avenue Michel-Ange. They actually notified me that they were wondering where my parents are. Oh, the joys of migration: when the old country fears what it is losing and the new one fears what it has just gained.

‘I think it’s a fairly civilized place,’ Arthur said. ‘What do you think of it?’

‘I’m not sure “civilized” is the first word that comes to mind’, I say.

‘What would be the first word that comes to mind?

‘Bricolage.’

‘Bricolage, yes. Well, the politics is bricolage.’

The verb ‘*bricoler’* comes from sport and denotes a ricocheting movement: ‘a ball rebounding, a dog straying or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle’ (Lévi-Strauss 1966). It occurs when an object in motion makes contact with another and is diverted from its path onto an alternative route in another direction. It likewise denotes ‘something constructed or created from a diverse range of available things’ (Oxford 2009). Lévi-Strauss (1966: 18) depicted the mental landscape of the ‘savage mind’ as an ‘intellectual bricolage’: a heterogeneous repertoire of abstractions that ‘lie in between percepts and concepts’. In contrast to the scientific method of constructing and deconstructing concrete events in themselves, the bricoleur works with signs and symbols, ‘the remains of earlier ends called upon to play the part of means’, piecing together fossilized evidence of social and individual histories (ibid., 21-2). Unlike concepts and theories, symbolic material involves ‘the interposing and incorporation of a certain amount of human culture into reality.’ The

repertoire of possible symbolic combinations is extensive but limited to a language already possessed.

In Brussels, the bricolage approach to life and work is on display everywhere: in the street, in the office and in the home. 'Brico' is the name of the hardware supply stores found in every neighborhood. The *bricoleur* is the type of person for whom the casual and informal labor economy is well-suited, a jack of all trades character who 'works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman' (Lévi-Strauss 1966). Implied in his or her low social position is a lack of precision and professionalism that champions generalism over specialization. Ever the polymathic dilletantes, bricoleurs busy themselves with an improbable range of 'odd' jobs and perform none of them with expertise. With only so much to work with, bricoleurs must be crafty and resourceful, remaking a lifeworld using the preserved remains of what has been broken and disposed of, one that is only to be shattered again into new fragments at a future date.

'One perception is that these people in the Commission make too much money,' I said to Raphael. 'Are people overpaid without doing much work?

'No, honestly no,' he said.

> You have cases of people who are at the end of their career and have a very good salary, so they don't do anything. But most of the people I know, they work, and they work quite a lot. The salary they are earning is good—good compared to what? Compared to a similar position in a public administration at the national level, certainly compared to those in Italy, in Spain and in Greece—that's true. If you look at Sweden and Denmark, it's not so huge. In any case, if you compare this to the private sector—

Bang! Bang! Before we could delve into the social and economic value of what officials earn and how the figures are measured differently in different national contexts, the conversation was interrupted by the sound of an explosion outside. The double boom was so loud that it shook the dining room walls, as if it went off just outside the door. We felt its reverberations in our bones. 'I think this is just a—,' Raphael trailed off. 'I don't think it's someone with a gun.'

‘Let’s just go with the idea that it’s not a gun,’ I suggested. We shared a laugh to regain our composure.

‘No, anyway—’, Raphael started up again, but the explosions continued.

‘Fireworks?’

‘I hope so, *hein*? Because there is the prison, you know; it’s not so far from here.’ Brussels-bashing reached new heights following the suicide bombings of the airport and metro system, which came as a shock without surprise. Before the Tuesday of 22 March, we had mourned attacks in neighboring capitals while ministers of intelligence warned that a duplicate attack here was a matter of *when* rather than *if*.

The explosion at the Maelbeek station next to Schuman hit close to home all too literally. I had refrained from putting on the news on that morning as I normally would because Liana, a friend with whom I had stayed while squatting in Birmingham and who had just arrived from Berlin to finish some research of her own, was still asleep. After being woken up by texts on her phone telling her that the airport had been hit, she alerted me of this as I nearly rushed out the door. Marie was to give a presentation at the office, and I didn’t want to be late. Walking to the station straightaway may be an unwise move, she suggested. True, I thought, but lightning never strikes twice. Besides, the train I needed was headed towards Etterbeek, which is in the opposite direction of the airport. I relented right before the second strike hit, which occurred just after 9 a.m., as Commission officials were arriving to work. The station sits directly below DG Agriculture, so I was greatly relieved to hear from Jens’s wife that he was at a meeting across town at the time. It was an eventuality we could count on but neither prevent nor prepare for.

The sun rose over an inappropriately gorgeous afternoon, and for the next few spring days the city was on lockdown. Offices and shops closed, as did public transit. What had happened, what had been lost and what was yet to come was all too much to process. ‘It

would seem so peaceful if it weren't for the nonstop sirens', Liana remarked. I felt bad for her. The poor girl had only intended to stay a few days, and they had to be these two out of all the ones in the year. The storm having passed, she now had to wait out the calm with me. Together we sat by the ceiling windows, staring down at the empty streets as the flags around the Berlaymont and the Polish embassy waved serenely at half-mast. The next day I went for a walk on my own, if only to find out whether going on walks was still possible. I found Schuman subdued, which was unusual only because it was not the weekend. Upon reaching the triumphal arch in the center of Parc du Cinquantenaire, I was pleased to find that waffles were still widely available for consumption. The police asked the public not to talk about or share images on social media of their operations lest it jeopardize their investigations. And so the Bruxellois, who never let the comedy of a tragedy go to waste, created the hashtag #BrusselsLockdown and flooded Twitter with cat memes. In the face of such helplessness and uncertainty, laughter is a form of resistance in itself. In Belgium, when it's good, it's good and when it's bad, it might as well be funny.

Acts of mourning the event took the form of rare, simultaneous expressions of belonging and solidarity at the subnational level of the city and the supranational level of Europe. The 32 dead and 340 injured included people of over 40 nationalities. 'It's all of us', read the memorial posters printed onto walls and street corners next to photographs bearing the faces of young men and women who have gone missing. I heard about a friend of a friend who happened to be standing on the platform at Maelbeek station at the wrong time. Her leg was destroyed by shrapnel and had to be amputated. Weeks had passed, and she hadn't spoken a word to anyone. Instead, she just sat there with a fixed look of horror on her face. While the station was being reconstructed, the metro car no longer stopped between Arts-Loi and Schuman. It just slowed down eerily to creep through the darkness of the crime scene.

International media framed the situation as an attack on all Europeans, near and far.[54] 'These attacks have hit Brussels today, Paris yesterday,' Juncker said, 'but it is Europe as a whole that has been targeted.'[55] '*Je suis Paris*,' we had chanted previously in an 'I too, am Spartacus' moment of transnational empathy. Everyone had been Paris once. Now, everyone was Brussels. One morning, a schoolkid spotted me bolting to catch a departing tram and stuck his arm between the closing doors to reopen them so that I could board. '*Merci bien*,' I told him, almost moved by his random act of kindness towards a stranger and obvious foreigner, the sort of thing which the city needed at the time. '*Ne refais plus jamais ça, s'il vous plaît* [Please never do that again].'

That morning ushered in a new normal, one that came clothed in a more militant, warlike aesthetic. It was 'the day the Brussels bubble burst', an inflection point that 'jolted Europe out of its belief, or blindness, that its values alone would protect a special way of life.'[56] Suspicions heightened and security procedures lengthened. Armored tanks and barricades filled the streets and bereted, camouflaged military men with assault rifles sprang up on every corner. Their presence soothed our personal security concerns, only to heighten them again when reminding us of the danger it was there to save us from. All the heavy artillery surrounding the Christmas markets clashed with the colored lights and holiday cheer in interesting ways, making for a striking spectacle. Well, it was striking at first. With time, it all began to blur together and the banalities of life in an age of terror went unnoticed.

As we moved into the intermediary stages of grief, pleas for love and tolerance turned to demands for justice and accountability. The Belgian question—asking whether the small country, with its minimal defense and security budget, is up to the challenge—was posed and

[54] https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/terror-attacks-cast-light-on-belgian-identity-crisis-a-1084151.html
[55] https://www.brusselstimes.com/all-news/eu-affairs/36957/these-attacks-have-hit-brussels-today-paris-yesterday-but-it-is-europe-as-a-whole-that-has-been-targeted/
[56] https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/news/the-brief-the-day-the-brussels-bubble-burst/

answered with renewed vigor. There was little legal precedent for domestic counterterrorism strategies such as coordinated intelligence gathering and extensive surveillance. Institutional fragility complicated efforts to implement them in a bureaucratic Tower of Babel, where decisions are devolved and information flows sluggishly across its many floors and rooms. Responsibility is diluted among multiple subnational authorities who are unaccustomed to collaborating with one another. With the help of a few forged documents, the surviving gunman from the Paris attacks fled here successfully despite being stopped at the border. The federal police searched for four months as he bided his time in a safe house in Molenbeek a few kilometers drown the road. His accomplice wrote about how the ease with which he moved between Europe and Syria 'shows that a Muslim has nothing to fear from the intelligence services of the Crusaders'.[57] Euroskeptics saw the attacks as evidence of the threats that freedom of movement and open borders pose on peace and security.

For the Belgians with whom I spoke, this stance failed to account for an uncomfortable truth: the religious lunatics in question were predominately the products of the local environment. Belgium supplied ISIS with around 40 foreign fighters for every one million inhabitants, the highest ratio per capita of any member state, with a clear majority recruited from Brussels.[58] The attacks were planned in a flat in Schaerbeek as warnings issued to interior and justice ministers from Turkey concerning its occupants went unnoticed. The perpetrators of the Paris shootings were Belgian by birth and passport, and the man responsible for killing four inside the Jewish Museum in 2014 had resided in Molenbeek.[59] Brussels became 'the terror capital of Europe' in a 'failed state' used as 'an international hub for illegal arms trade' and a fertile breeding ground for jihadist networks. Doomsayers

[57] https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/terror-attacks-cast-light-on-belgian-identity-crisis-a-1084151.html
[58] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/15/molenbeek-the-brussels-borough-in-the-spotlight-after-paris-attacks
[59] https://www.politico.eu/article/molenbeek-a-terrorists-den/

interrupted their usual prophecies about the impending death of the EU to wonder if Belgium, in particular, might be on its way out first. Its failure to establish the necessary conditions for a coherent identity and meet the established expectations concerning what a proper country should look like appeared to threaten its viability as a nation. Long before the EU institutions arrived, Belgium had been the country chosen to be a Europe-in-microcosm. It may seem that Europe, with its divided coalitions and fragmented identity, has instead become a Belgium-in-macrocosm.

There was another close call on an evening in June when another jihadist, acting alone, rolled a luggage trolley concealing a bomb into the main hall of Gare Central. Strangely, I had walked through the hall to catch a train to Antwerp a few hours beforehand. The weapon, an incendiary device of gas and nails, was made in Molenbeek and fails to detonate successfully. It was some consolation to know that ineptitude in this struggle extends to those who wish to cause terror as well as to those who are tasked with preventing it. That August, I donated half of the clothes I had brought with me to the Molenbeek refugee center. It amused my friends to imagine our displaced neighbors strutting around town my old polyester blouses and flared trousers.

4.2 Bubbling Tensions

If Brussels constitutes a microcosm of Europe, the European Quarter provides an ecological niche that is conducive to its institutional development. 'It's like a microcosm of Europe. It really is', Pablo affirmed. 'We are a tribe—we are *tribes*, absolutely.' The quasi-comical trope of the 'tribes of Brussels' was already cliché by the time I arrived. Once in the field, casual references to a so-called 'Brussels bubble' drove my pursue of a new line of inquiry.

'You mention the term "EU bubble"', I asked. Is that a thing? Is it real?'

'One-hundred percent a real thing', said Maja. 'It's definitely a thing.'

'No,' said Antonio. I nearly believed him before he broke into laughter. '*Which* bubble? No, I'm kidding. Yes it does exist, of course. Yes it does.' There were few who could deny the existence of the bubble with a straight face.

'There's a bubble, clearly', said Jens, growing impatient with the pretense of faux naiveté he sensed in the question. 'Right? You *live* here. You get Politico Playbook in the morning. Everybody does. If you're in the bubble, you read the Playbook in the morning and you get the latest gossip from them.'

'It's a village that is very, very small in a way,' Klara said, almost apologetically. 'I mean we're all reading Politico Playbook.'

Here, the daily Playbook ritual acts as a surrogate for morning prayer (Hegel 2002). Politico had recently moved into town, setting up shop on the Rue de la Loi. Each business day they circulate the Brussels Playbook, a 'must-read briefing on what's driving the day in Brussels'.[60] The US media company saw previous success with another bubble, the Beltway bubble in Washington DC, and came here to 'make Brussels sexy again'.[61] They have inevitably failed in this pursuit but have succeeded in inventing a tradition whose practice solidifies the self-recognition of a local collectivity. Participants awake to find the new bulletin already in their inboxes. They scan the same headlines by themselves within the confines of solitude, yet in full awareness that their friends and neighbors are replicating the same routine at roughly the same time. The clippings contain the whispers of topics for future conversations they will have with their colleagues throughout the day. 'The bubble was already there, but it brilliantly defined what it is to be in the bubble and out of the bubble'

[60] https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/
[61] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/18/can-politico-make-brussels-sexy

(Jens). 'Following' the Playbook is a consumptive practice through which members of the bubble assert their right to a separate identity for themselves, laying claim to a space that is, in part, their own.

Belonging to and within the bubble is practiced by discursively reproducing the contours of a shared rhetorical territory, whose aphorisms, vocabularies and modes of thought signal membership in a situated epistemic community. 'When you anchor yourself in these political debates, you just realize that there's a certain sense of Europeanness around you' (Nico). In this context, Europeanness becomes 'a way of talking, a sense of humor' (Raphael), whereby ongoing participation in internal discussions of a bubble-like nature is crucial. 'The EU bubble people have debates that are really specific, topics that are really similar (either work, politics or traveling) and interests that are really different. We're just this expat life, you know?' (Maja).

There is a clubby atmosphere to the place, where young professionals with similar interests, credentials and living standards have little difficulty making friends. 'If you want to hang out with people who do the same thing as you do, in the same profession, there's so many networking events and after-work drinks that literally you just walk into one of the bars at Lux or in Place Royale and you meet people instantly.' As access to the bubble depends primarily on one's line of work, the nightlife is never completely detached from what goes on each day in the Berlaymont. 'It's always: "How is your work going?" and "Oh, I'm doing this and this".' At weekly networking events, attendees make new contacts who introduce them to their colleagues. In the future, when the position for their dream job opens, one of them may be in a position to put in the kind word that gets them short-listed for an interview. The after-work Aperol Spritz is likewise an arena in which rumors replicate and valuable knowledge is transmitted. 'You hear a lot of important information from these kinds of friends. These people are the kind you want to hang out with to get inspired.'

My informants' capacity for language acquisition was certainly inspiring. Multilingualism is their mother tongue: 92% of students in Europe can speak a foreign language by the time they leave secondary school.[62] Linguistic proficiency is an advantageous currency for them to procure, though what they have is an appreciation of language-learning for its own sake. 'Europeans are incredibly happy to learn foreign languages', and they do so 'just because'. 'The fact that you know everyone in Brussels is learning Spanish and Italian and French—we don't do this for a job. We do this because we love the common culture'. Maja speaks Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, English and German, and her French is coming along as well. How animated they became when discussing the relationships they share with their language tutors. The next lesson was always something to look forward to.

The fine art of holding conversation in another language is, much like shooting pool or throwing darts, a visceral and bodily activity that involves practicing a motor skill and executing it consistently without losing one's nerve. Hesitancy is no friend in this game; it is best to avoid second thoughts and better to avoid thinking altogether. The speaker must cast fate to the wind and proceed with fearless abandon before thoughts have a chance to arise. Thankfully, in a place of more than 170 nationalities, there is a high tolerance for mistakes (Arnaud). Expectations of precise speech in any one language would be counterproductive—it is the struggle, not the outcome, that is important. I consider it a personal triumph when, one Thursday at Plux, someone mistook me for 'a Belgian with a really good American accent.'

On Sunday afternoons, I trammed to Beaulieu to give lessons in the family home of Isabelle, the mother of Pauline, a Belgian colleague. Isabelle is a professor of psychology

[62] https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/06/most-european-students-are-learning-a-foreign-language-in-school-while-americans-lag/

who is preparing to give an important talk in English to an audience of neuroscientists, and it was suggested that I might give her a hand with some of the pronunciation of terminology relating to areas and processes of the brain. I attended weekly language instruction with Giselle, a French widow who gave private lessons out of her home down the road in Etterbeek. She was terribly funny and fond of gossiping about her other students for my benefit, many of whom were Commission officials. We spent the dark days of winter in her dimly lit dining room, reading Voltaire at a snail's pace over cups of mulled wine. She shared my love for *Gone with the Wind* and taught me how to say, '*Franchement, ma chère, je m'en soucie comme d'une guigne* [Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn].' One lesson ended with her handing me a copy of Nabokov's Ada, or Ardor and inexplicably ordering me to throw it in the garbage. She encouraged me quit academia and take up acting.

'When you look at people working for the institutions, so many have foreign relations and travel all across Europe. And even though cultural differences are maybe relatively small between European people, they may not know how small the differences are. The fear of foreign cultures is still there when you're not exposed to them' (Luuk).

Brussels is a 'natural habitat' for those with a multinational background to celebrate and a tendency to fly the nest (Bram). 'Obviously people around here, who are away from their home, like to travel a lot and just explore' (Maja). Among international cities, it is second only to Dubai: more than six in 10 of its residents were born abroad (Brusselnieuws 2015). The bubble is heterogenous as well as heterogeneous, in the sense that it originated on the outside. Here, 'you have real cosmopolitans' (Raphael). Their 'xenomania', or their 'inordinate attachment to foreign things' (Elster 2006), is understood as a direct consequence of working to foster cultural exchange on a European scale (Luuk). A Commission report on EU citizenship sanctions orientations of cultural promiscuity: 'Residing in another EU country no longer requires a definitive severing of ties with the country of origin, as may

have been the case in the past. EU citizens should now be able to decide for themselves if they want to continue to participate in the political life of their country of nationality or invest in the political life of their host country' (European Commission 2013).

As a central node in interscalar networks linking disparate geographical locations, the sociality of the Brussels bubble feels rather like an inverted diaspora. 'You say to people, "Where are you from?", though where we are from doesn't matter at all' (Ona). This is just as well as, for many officials, the question does not have a simple answer. Again and again, I heard this refrain: they initially moved here for a job or a *stage* under the impression that 'it's not forever', thinking they would stay for a spell and then move on to greener pastures. 'When I started to work at the Commission, I said, "Oh, this is not the job for the rest of my life. I don't like it, in any case. I will stay a maximum of two to three years and then I will find something else." It's wishful thinking' (Raphael). One morning, 16 years later, it dawned on Raphael how he has 'more roots, real roots here in Belgium' and he was not going anywhere. 'My life is here in Brussels.' If he were to decide to retire in Italy, he would have to keep running back to see his daughter, who happens to be growing up into someone distinctly more Belgian than Italian.

Bram is '100% Dutch, absolutely. And when I've finished, I'll go and live in Amsterdam. I'm not staying here.' Diego spends his evenings watching Italian TV and longing for family cuisine. Frequenting Sicilian restaurants gets him the original parmesan mozzarella that cannot be bought at the store, but it's just not the same. 'I feel home when I am at my place in Italy because I spent 40 years of my life with parents and grandparents there. Physically, it's more there' (Diego).

'Home' is a slippery term whose meaning depends on the personal idiosyncrasies of the official. There are *homelands*, places of origin, and *homesteads*, places in which one is currently 'based'. Officials return to their 'home countries', to the bosom of the family,

roughly once every two months on average. When they get back to the institutions, they rediscover their past lives from a comfortable distance. Some have ties to previous lives that 'still persist even later on when those ties are really loose' (Maja). They manage the high wire act of being where they are without forgetting where they used to be. 'Home is where my parents are, my safe spot.' I asked Maja if her parents also identify as European. 'I don't know,' she laughed. 'I'd have to ask them.'

The sense of home Klara feels when back in Hanover is 'quite strong'. For her, the setting acts as a static monolith, a fixed point of space immune to the destruction of time's wrecking ball. 'It's never changed—literally the same house. Everyone's there; no one's really moved. I've moved around a lot, but this is where you end up coming back to.' Home is a place of constancies and certainties in a world of strange changes, where things are kept precisely as she left them. Elfriede has spent a quarter-century here but feels closest to home at her father's provincial house near the Franco-German border. 'I think a question could be: where does one go when one is old?', she said, wondering if she would not prefer to die where her last words can be uttered in her first language. Perhaps it is rather where one exits the world rather than enters it that counts. Home is where the heart stops.

For others, the family house that was once a home is a home nevermore. Arriving in Brussels for the first time to take the concours was a 'crazy experience' for Luuk, an owlish-looking creature with bespectacled eyes sandwiched between grey suit below and greying hair above, 'like flying from one foreign country to another. I always reflect on how that has changed. Now I feel like I'm going home when I come back to Belgium. Brussels is definitely my home. I don't feel like I am going home at all anymore when I go to the Netherlands, and that's four years ago that I left. My parents moved house four times, so for me there is no physical link anymore.' Raphael goes back to the village in Lombardy where, after two decades, he now feels like a tourist in a holiday destination. Three to four days is

sufficient; let it drag on for a week and things around the parents can get 'a little bit too heavy'. Too much time around one's biological relatives is never healthy. For him, forgetting home is a process facilitated by changes in people and places once abandoned that have since been altered beyond recognition.

The clustering of EU actors and institutions in residential areas has transformed Brussels into 'the *sui generis* example of the urban experiment' (Romańczyk 2012). As increasingly mechanized processes of social reproduction 'separate social life from locality and from human dimensions', the city of tomorrow becomes less and less a physical place with concrete dimensions and tangible points of focus (Connerton 2009: 5). The life-spaces of the Brussels bubble constitute 'a space of flows rather than a space of places', bearing the marks of mobility in place of locality (ibid., 47). Installed within these flows are spatial values which privilege 'pathways' over 'settlements' (Dimendberg 1995). Inhabitants navigate an environment and perform a habitus of *routes* over *roots*. 'Where the feet are, there is the fatherland', as Roman law decreed. Alternatively, 'wherever I lay my hat, that's my home', as Marvin Gaye put it. Such a disposition is not morally neutral: it trespasses on long-held taboos relating to the organization of sociospatial boundaries. De Certeau (1984) diagnosed it as a subversive form of 'delinquency' for its 'privileging of the route over the inventory'.

Excess is the essential quality of Augé's (2008) notion of 'supermodernity', realized as an overabundance of space and time. In opposition to postmodernity, the supermodern concerns itself not by a disenchantment with Enlightenment ideas of historical progress but of 'time overloaded with events that encumber the present along with the recent past' (ibid., 24). Supermodernity finds its full expression in an exponential multiplication of non-places: the intersecting lines (routes, axes, paths) traced by the movement of people from one place to another by air, rail and motorway. The archetypal non-place is a space of travel: the modes of transport themselves (planes, trains and automobiles) and the points of interchanges (airport

terminals, underground stations and hotel chains) required to accelerate the circulation of goods, finances, information and passengers. The international business tourist economy creates hotel rooms whose décor of motifs, color schemes and objects of material culture are homogeneous throughout the world and designed to create an atmosphere of *anywhere*. A destabilization of reference points for collective identification compels an 'individualization of references' for locating the self in the contemporary world.

Under the treaties, the EU has yet to name a formal capital for itself. That Brussels would become the de facto capital was far from inevitable in the 1960s, when indecision among member states on selecting a permanent site meant that it would remain only a provisional home until 1992. As a result, city authorities drew up plans for generic buildings that can be swiftly transformed into commercial real estate should the institutions decide one day to pack up and go (Perchoc 2016). The office building, a staple of modernist architecture, serves as a multifunctional container of compartmentalized units that distance the occupant from his or her immediate environment. The European Commission and its executive agencies own or rent 61 buildings in the metropolitan area, occupying one-fourth of its total office space (1 million square meters).[63] Four-fifths of Commission offices are found in the European Quarter, which technically constitutes an 'area' rather than an entire *commune* or neighborhood and is hence 'the antithesis of place' (Augé 2008: 88). If a place is a concrete space encoded with the social schemata of historical memory, the Quarter might be understood as an urban topography of 'non-places'. In contradistinction to an anthropological sense of place, as a culture localized in precise time and space, non-places are non-relational, ahistorical and devoid of identity. The European Quarter is hence a place of memory that is, as Henry James put it, 'in perpetual repudiation of the past', where place itself becomes increasingly irrelevant and 'the conquest over the tyranny of distance has helped to free

[63] https://euobserver.com/news/24707

people from the accident of location' (Connerton 2009: 89). Its non-places incline EU civil servants to forget they are still here.

The metaphor of the bubble implies enclosure, isolation and insulation. It likewise evokes a siloing, tunneling and cocooning: a sense of being 'shut in' (Le Wita 1994). *Milieu, a*s a descriptive term, captures the impression officials have of a 'confined' and 'restricted group of people who meet with each other because they have similar backgrounds and similar work' (Klara). Physics tells us that bubbles form when enough tension formulates around the surface layer of a liquid. The outer surface of the EU bubble is the site of 'a certain divide between the Belgians living in Brussels and the international staff in the European institutions whose offices are based in Brussels.'

'It is possible to have a social life that consists entirely of European public servants, journalists, diplomats, lobbyists and the various other hangers-on that are here because of the European institutions' (Captain Europe).

'It's very much two worlds: there's the EU world and the Belgian world and they really don't intercept very much. They're almost hermetically sealed' (Mark). The bubble is 'not plugged into the same thing' as everyone else. Rather, it is 'a separate entity that sort of interacts with the rest.'

The people of the bubble are neither 'connected to the Brussels people' nor integrated into 'normal Belgian life' (Diego). Being sequestered away in the institutions shelters them from exposure to 'the noise of the streets'. Though fully digitized and well-connected, they remain an 'uncontacted people'. Klara and her boyfriend live on Chaussée d'Etterbeek, just behind the Council. 'We tend to be a bit self-centered at times, I think. It literally feels like you never, ever leave the small little island that is Euro-Brussels, or whatever you might want to call it. I don't know what happens to people outside of the bubble.'

Making 'non-EU' friends is strictly optional. 'Most eurocrats are people that don't have Belgian friends. They keep it strict, *hein*?' (Mieke). They 'have friendships that evolve across institutions' (Nico) and 'don't really get in touch with people who are outside of it. Normal Brussels people are not going to approach that' (Maja).

'It's not easy if you work here to get to know real Belgians, except a few Belgians that are our colleagues. It needs an effort. I know very few Belgians outside work. Very few. That's not for want of trying, necessarily' (Mark). This is because Belgians are 'quite private people' who form their networks during childhood and 'tend to stick within their families.'

'You don't meet many if you go out into the European places' (Mieke). Belgians who do work in the city usually commute from 'a more, say, linguistically homogeneous environment' (Bernard). Outside of Brussels, Belgium reports the lowest overall percentage (64%) of students formally learning a foreign language in Europe.[64] A critical institution of social reproduction in the bubble is the European school system. 'The European Commission officials have to send their kids to so-called Europe schools. You cannot just send your kids to one of the local kindergarten schools' (Diego). When their child makes a schoolfriend, they can expect that at least one of their parents also works for the Commission or the Council.

The lives of officials are 'tangled up in the institutions, always with their head in the work' (Raphael). When they leave the office at night, their work follows them home: 'My real work stops when I get out of the office, but my mind keeps working' (Giovanni).

'I could disconnect if I wanted to and I probably should, but I choose to still stay connected. If you believe in a project, it becomes part of your life' (Nico). If they didn't work so much, perhaps they would have more time to 'integrate' (Elfriede): get out more, catch up

[64] https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/06/most-european-students-are-learning-a-foreign-language-in-school-while-americans-lag/

with the neighbors, hang out at Flagey, attend concerts at BOZAR (Bernard). Consequently, most of the friends they have outside the institutions are not Belgian.

'I am from Padua,' said Giovanni, 'which is the city where I grew up, but I am from Naples, which is where I was born. I feel Italian. I feel Spanish. I feel European. I feel Belgian—a little bit,' he said with a nervous grin. Like having Belgian friends, following local and national politics is done on an opt-in, opt-out basis. Officials disengage by taking a minimal interest in their host country and its domestic affairs. In many cases, there is hardly anything Belgian about them. 'I think Brussels is not very Belgian. If you live in Brussels, you can really see the divide. You experience Belgium once leaving Brussels.'

If the bubble is an example of a 'palimpsest on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten', it is one that 'puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself' (Augé 2008: 64). Those on the other side of its surface, for whom life and work take place beyond the EU political sphere, are a world apart. The bubble has little to no relevance in their lifeworlds and there is scant knowledge of or interest in its concerns and desires. For them, the bubble is an oily membrane filled with an elite class that is, to repurpose an old wartime slogan, overpaid, undertaxed and over here. And yet, there they are, over there in their glass towers. One cannot simply ignore them, though it doesn't hurt to try. The EU Quarter is a general area that is generally avoided. As the Schuman metro and railway station is among the city's largest, passing through it is a necessity for many locals. When they arrive, they venture aboveground only when it is absolutely necessary.

'What it means to be European—it's an important question', said Jens. 'But the key challenge is how to avoid being too elitist and too far removed from the rest of Europe.'

'I could be a spoiled child, I recognize', said Pablo, who, like Maja, left the Commission's Legal Service to join a private firm. He is in the middle of 'decluttering the

weight' of his material possessions and 'seriously downgrading' to a minimalist mode of living:

> Buying just a one-bedroom apartment would be convenient if it comes with a concierge and luxury everything. I have two properties in Ibiza and I'm selling one. I sold my cars—I don't need a luxury car or whatever. Quite frankly, for my level of compensation, I could have a freelance in Pompeii, but that doesn't make me happy. I had my baroque period, but I feel oppressed by objects. I'm more about experience: having this and that at restaurants. If I can fly business, I fly business. If I'm in a hotel, I like it clean.

The majority of officials are foreigners who, regardless of their administrative level, operate underneath the shadow of high capital. Their capital, the 'capacity to appropriate rare goods and associated benefits', elevates them to the socioeconomic status of *expatriates* among migrants (Le Wita 1994: 36). Wealth disparities contribute to a negative view of 'the eurocrat' by those bewildered by the fact that *this* person, for *that* kind of job, could earn *that* kind of money.

'I really have to be honest: as a Belgian, I get disgusted with how people live and how they spend', Mieke said.

> You live in the same city, and you earn double. Just imagine that: 40,000 people earning double than the average Belgian. They are not paying tax and then we pay 50%! So basically, they can afford restaurants—*better* restaurants. They can afford to pay three or four euros for a beer. As a *fonctionnaire*, there's no problem getting a loan for an 800,000-euro house because you easily earn 10,000 euros a month. For a normal Belgian, an average salary is three, max. So, Belgians don't tip. And of course, everyone wants to have eurocrats in their apartment because they're gonna pay a lot more. Everyone wants to get eurocrats in the restaurant because you're gonna tip better. It creates a kind of atmosphere, and with the money comes the mentality. They have no clue how a true Belgian has to live! But come on, people. Be realistic. You cannot expect this to continue.

With the money comes the mentality. In her case, the cognitive fault line cuts right through the domestic sphere of her own home life:

> I've been arguing with my husband. I said, 'What we have is not normal! People don't live like this! People don't go out. They don't have the money to do all this.' And he doesn't believe that. He says, 'Yeah but you know that's not true. I have a friend and he's doing *this* for LinkedIn, and he has *this* salary.' And I said, 'Does he have it in Belgium? You don't have this! You pay so much more tax and have to survive with so little. It's not fair, *hein*?' Belgians don't even wanna know this. They don't. If you would tell them, they would go crazy.

The bubble is an elite space, a VIP area with its own tax code. It might be the world's poshest immigrant camp. Relative to the salary of an average national-level public servant, Union

officials make a fairly ample living. 'But they deserve it!' Arthur said. 'They have to be *way* more talented than their national counterparts.'

'Sure, there are bubbles', quipped an aid to the Commissioner for Digital Single Market. 'Champagne bubbles.'

In Belgium, the disparity in employment rates between native- and foreign-born workers remains the EU's highest.[65] One-third of households do not contribute taxes into the regional and local councils.[66] High salaries maintain their affluent lifestyle and none of it is reinvested back into the country that hosts them. Yearly taxes and pension payments are paid directly into the EU budget. 'The myth that the staff of the institutions do not pay taxes is not reality,' said Diego. 'Of course we do not get our money from the Belgian government, so we pay taxes on what we earn directly to the EU. Otherwise, we pay the same taxes on social services as any Belgian.' The special EU tax rate is determined by income bracket and ranges from zero to 45%, approximately corresponding with the average marginal tax rate in most EU member states. If officials paid their taxes into the Belgian and Luxembourgish budgets, as Commissioner Oettinger explained, it would be unfair to the other member states.[67]

There is an inescapable eliteness to European identity. This is certainly the case 'at the Brussels level, if you speak about the bubble itself' (Klara).

> Clearly the European project was *started* by an elite group to some extent, who decided that we shouldn't have war anymore and built it. People who work here are clearly an elite. It's not inherently elitist, but it is by far not as commonplace as I would like it to be. Funnily enough, the only sport where there's a European team competing at the world stage is golf, which is a purely elitist sport of course. Only for an elitist sport do we have a European team, and for all the other sports it's our national teams. [Jens]

While the Ryder Cup is the best known, a Team Europe also competes supranationally in pool, bowling, tennis, table tennis, track and field and curling. Jens and I were at a salad bar

[65] https://www.oecd.org/employment/jobs-strategy/implementation/JS-Implementation-Note-Belgium-FINAL.pdf
[66] http://statistics.brussels/themes/household-income-and-expenditure
[67] https://www.politico.eu/article/oettinger-to-german-cdu-chief-eu-officials-pay-taxes/

at Place Lux, watching a small group of demonstrators standing in a row on the grassy island in the center of the roundabout. 'The Turks are demonstrating here on the square, waving their Turkish flags, so there's clearly some shared identity there. You see that during the football championships, people with their national flags. Just waving a European flag, a lot of people won't do that' (Jens).

'People are trying to find their identity from somewhere else,' Stephan lamented, 'in national political parties, in football clubs and in the family. There's not a European football team. It doesn't exist. We should have a tournament of continents, no?'

The term *Eurocrat* is one of othering and derision. It covers all who belong to the bubble, though the second half of the portmanteau connotes members of the civil service specifically. Mindful of the unflattering meanings it carries, I avoided using it myself. One Monday night over drinks at the Aloft hotel, I seized an opportunity to ask a member of the Legal Service for his thoughts on how the moniker is thrown around.

'It's like the N-word,' he explained. 'We can say it, but you can't.'

In Brussels, European elites live as an oppressed minority of considerable privilege. The generally negative attitude intensifies a felt sense of extraterritoriality, of being a wandering foreigner abroad (Van Criekingen 2008). 'I imagine that we remain in the Commission a quite well-paid part of the society, but all and all we are displaced' (Diego). The advantages enjoyed by those who come to work in the institutions are plainly seen. Unseen is the cumulative impact that the pressures of displacement have on the home and the family. Starting over in an adopted country will not guarantee that both partners will land a secure job, especially if they do not speak French or Flemish, yet having children means that neither can afford not to. EU strategies promoting plurilingualism in fostering European-level transcultural exchanges uphold a 'fiction' insofar as they marginalize and exclude those

unable to work in French, German and English (Wright 2000). A generous salary compensates for lost revenue but can never repair 'a family splintered in two places' (Diego).

Raphael explained how he is learning to live with the idea of having no roots in any place whatsoever. 'The reality is that even if I go back, it will be impossible to feel at home in Italy, just like I cannot feel at home here.' He gets on well with the other fathers at his daughter's Belgian school but cannot help noticing how they share something from which he is excluded. 'When you see a real Belgian guy living here, you see that this is something different. You feel that you lack something at the level of language codes that make you feel like a foreigner.' The alienating feeling persists, whatever he does or however long he sticks around. And yet, all around Raphael are colleagues just like himself, for whom Brussels is home 'in a sense, but not completely'. A community of foreigners living as 'matter out of place' in a faraway land (Douglas 2002), they are 'somewhere in between' a lost home that won't be regained and a partial one that will never be complete (Pablo).

> You're in a transitory state in a way, which is nice. For most people, it's usually that they are here job-seeking or job-changing, but they don't know for how long. Maybe they went home to their respective countries, came back and are still deciding if they should stay in Brussels. When I hang out with people who are not in the EU bubble, no one talks about, 'Can I still be in Brussels five years from now?' Or, if they have a job, they don't talk about changing it or what the next job is going to be. They just have a job. That's it. [Maja]

Belgians *live* in Brussels while eurocrats *base themselves* here. 'You have a circle of Belgians and for us, it's not really attractive to be in the European bubble if you are not *in* there. Because they are people who come and go. It's not so beneficial in the end because you're investing your time in people that are going to leave again' (Mieke).

'I must admit,' wrote Vissarion Belinsky, the 19th century Russian literary critic who coined the term *rootless cosmopolitan*, 'that I find pathetic and unpleasant those detached skeptics, abstract little men, passportless drifters among humanity' (Pezzini 2017). Officials are looked upon as unmoored ships that pass in the night, drifting out at sea in a permanent present like the ghosts of perfect strangers. 'Everybody's a stranger in Brussels, somehow'

(Giovanni). Estrangement and extraterritoriality in the bubble brings the overburdening solitude of *anomie*, which is an affliction near to *ennui*, except with alienation taking the place of restiveness. Inhabiting non-places, 'spaces in which neither identity, nor relations, nor history really makes any sense', brings a dual alienation: a simultaneous distancing between the official and the city and between the official and themselves.

There is a certain otherworldliness to Europeanness in this localized form. It is a social identity twice-removed, like looking the wrong way through a telescope. Unlike officials themselves, Brussels-based euro-local identities do not 'travel well'. 'We're in this EU bubble and we think it's very clear and it's all nice and obvious. But then, what happens to the others who've never been part of it, who haven't been exposed? It feels very surreal when you step out of it, extremely surreal, and it's quite good sometimes to get an update on reality' (Klara). In having 'less touch with the rest of the society', officials believe they miss out on 'a sense of reality'.

'I've been living in the bubble for the last 10 years and if I compare it to my Belgian friends, it's not reality and they have no clue' (Mieke). The 'real world' beyond the bubble extends not only to the 'non-EU' spaces of Brussels but to the rest of Europe: 'a school kid in Finland'; 'a factory worker in Sweden'; 'someone from Slovenia'; 'someone in a region in Italy or in England or in France or wherever' (Klara).

'The other day one of my colleagues said, "I went to France for a meeting and these villages were all really poor. Buildings were falling apart." That's the reality in a lot of rural areas in Europe that not everybody sees' (Jens).

'It's difficult to jump to something that is immaterial—as the European Union is. If you have to jump to the European level, it becomes quite abstract and much more complex and and borders are nonidentified or partly identified. It's not evident to the normal citizen' (Diego). European identity is dispassionate and cognitively-oriented: 'a certain logic' driven

by ‘certain incentives’ that are exclusively ‘in the Union’. Becoming European ‘normally’ requires a bit of a ‘jump’, a sustained, conscientious effort. ‘If you want to build identity, you have to build identity around something’ (Stefan). Europeanness is not anchored to concrete reference points such as a language, a history, visual symbols, a sovereign government or a territory with discrete borders.

As Europe is conceived as an amorphous entity, an unfinished project perpetually coming into being, European identities tend to be more abstract in character than are identifications with nations and regions rooted in blood and soil. This is the case even in the mind of the most ‘convinced European’ and is especially so in that of the generic EU citizen, for whom the idea of Europe appears ‘far away’ and ‘less obvious’. ‘There’s this mismatch between the work we’re producing and people seeing the need for this work to be done. We come up with something and we haven’t really explained to people what the problem was in the first place’ (Maja).

‘In the Justus Lipsius building, some of them are the Council of the EU, but only the Summit is the European Council. These are meaningless distinctions to most people, and it annoys people in the Brussels bubble that we don’t bow down to some of what we consider to be the meaningless distinctions’ (Jörg).

The phrase ‘convinced European’ betrays such an abstractness, suggesting that European identity and belonging is something that one needs to be talked into after being presented with all the evidence. Perhaps it is a set of rhetorics, an effort of persuasion (Carrithers 2005). ‘I do think there’s such a thing as European identity. But it’s a weaker identity than your national identity because it’s more abstract. It doesn’t have the strength of a structure like the nation state. But it has a hell of a lot more than any other international structure you can think of on the planet’ (Bram).

It is possible that European identity is misaligned with human nature in some critical manner. ‘I don’t know how strong this feeling is, how natural it is. Natural—no, that’s not the right word. It’s just less direct, right?’ (Jens). If not entirely unnatural, Europeanness may be less natural than nationness. In formulating his common code of conduct for humankind, Erasmus observed how societies recognize themselves as human by rooting their existences in specifically human traits: ideas and images that are naturally, self-evidently their own. The Brussels bubble deviates from this rule, rooting its existence in ideas and images that are deliberately non-humanlike. ‘Culture is in contrast to nature yet readily thinks of itself as natural’, as Jean Pouillon observed (quoted in Le Wita 1994: 67). Yet, Brussels bubble-based European culture is distinctive in how it readily thinks of itself as unnatural. Ironically, the inhumanity of Europeanness is nonetheless understood as the underlying province of all humankind, eliding the socioeconomic barriers to entry that confine its population to a small colony. Officials affirm Europeanness as an elite identity while expressing it as an openness to otherness, creating the impression that anyone can acquire it given the right lived experiences.

4.3 Bubble bricolage

The building where the Council sits is itself a modular form of a bubble: a giant, vitreous egg. As an EU institutional space, the egg is a spectacle of social significance insofar as it is identified with the authority wielded within its shell. When built successfully, profound monuments such as the structures of iron and glass that captured Walter Benjamin’s interest, ‘carry the dreams of ideal futures’, presenting the viewer with ‘the brilliant fragments of a splintered utopia in which we would like to believe, a society of transparency’ (Augé 2008:

xvii). This egg contrarily symbolizes a 'power that nobody knows'. In the *Images of Europe* exhibit, architects Max Cohen de Lara and David Mulder van der Vegt wrote how 'the Justus Lipsius building embodies the problem of an invisible Europe. A Europe seen as governing technocratically behind closed doors, only emerging to soothe yet another crisis'.

As figurations of social thought, bubbles have a third dimension of depth that social circles lack. Along with isolation, alienation and abstraction, the metaphor evokes opacity, transparency and other terms associated with visible perception. 'It is there at times,' and not at others, 'appearing and reappearing' (Elfriede).

'Sometimes it can be a bit of a bubble. There are certain separations sometimes. I did try, as Captain Europe, to get out of the bubble. That in part was the idea: to go out and be visible in places that were not Brussels and start a conversation' (Captain Europe).

Officials distance themselves from the bubble by professing to know *of* it, indirectly—something seen in passing but never up close. In these instances, third-person pronouns are used. 'It *could* be there. I'm not part of it,' said Klaus, who makes it a point to live somewhere that is 'not in the Euro-Brussels eurocrat center' and avoids commingling with work colleagues after hours. 'Most probably it exists. I don't participate in it, really. I have a mix of friends that I meet every day, partly from the institutions, partly from the outside' (Diego). Diego suspected he's atypical in that before 'entering the institutions', he lived on the outside and taught courses for mature students in a local school for one semester each year, allowing him 'the opportunity to create connections with Belgians in Belgium'.

Others granted the bubble's existence while maintaining that its presence is an improvement on the city: 'The existence of this Eurobubble is an opportunity for Brussels because it creates a lot of economic turnover. People can rent out their apartments at prices far higher than they could when these eurocrats were not around' (Bernard). While most Belgians are not Commission employees, most Commission employees are Belgian. 'When

you look at the lower ranks of the administration, there are many Belgians. Secretaries, drivers, the security people are Belgians, all of them.' By employing hundreds of ancillary staff from the wider community, the institutions create jobs as well as a category of second-class membership inside the bubble. 'In every big city, there is an expat community. In this city, it is particularly big. When you come from another country and don't know anyone and you are just working, you end up naturally hanging out with your colleagues and friends from the bubble' (Antonio).

'It's only natural that you tend to meet and talk with people who have similar interests or similar attitudes as yours' (Giovanni). The 'big international community' is what 'makes Brussels interesting—more interesting than it would be without it. 'There's always a bubble. You work at a company, everybody in the company talks to each other and there is a company bubble. There's bubbles everywhere, so there's no problem.' The Brussels bubble isn't even the only bubble in Brussels. 'It's a bit normal that in Brussels, a city where there are so many different people living together, bubbles get created.'

'It is the same in other countries: you meet certain parts of society, there are other parts and people don't mix so much. The neighborhood where you live makes all the difference' (Elfriede).

To live within it is not necessarily to feel confined to it. There are ways of getting outside the bubble: 'It is possible to have a social life that is much more varied, and some people do it. I'm married to a Belgian. We have a social life that goes way beyond the Brussels bubble and into provincial Flanders. It's not difficult to burst out of it if you try' (Captain Europe).

'I live in St. Gilles, which is a completely separate area from here, so I'm not in the bubble. I know my neighbors and they are not working for the institutions' (Antonio). With variants of the testimony, 'But some of my best friends are Belgian!', those who laid claim to a social life beyond the institutions saw the bubble as something that may be perceived or

felt, *sometimes*. For them, levels of local segregation and disharmony are exaggerated, and the siloing effect is *pas grave*, not to be taken seriously. The bubble's surface layer is simply another open border allowing fluid exit and reentry. Unlike the outsiders, officials have the capacity to 'jump scales', exiting and reentering the threshold when it pleases them.

While the bubble is the province of a privileged few, becoming European is in principle a real possibility for the many. 'I think anybody can feel European, or anything else,' Giovanni said. 'Even an American or a Chinese can feel European if he has lived here for some time.' A euro-local identity develops over time as a process joined alongside others, after moving to Brussels to take a job in the institutions and deciding to stay. It can take as little as one month in some cases, depending on how well they acclimatize to the ecosystem.

Being European can be something given or something to which one is predisposed, but in Brussels it is an identity 'achieved' rather than imposed or ascribed (Linton 1936). It is rooted not in space and place but solidified during sustained exposure to the institutional microclimate. 'It's a question of experience. You can have a concept about it, but it has always been like this' (Giovanni). The emphasis on experience and movement recalls the existentialist maxim of 'existence precedes essence' (Sartre 2007). It can be as little as 'the physical act of going somewhere' (Marie-Christine). Europe 'is there if you want to experience it or if you want to live it' (Attila). 'In the end, it's a character thing' (Klara).

'I feel above all European because I don't feel from a specific place in Italy. I was born in the south of Italy and grew up in the north, which always gave me these very mixed feelings of belonging. In Brussels I have found my real place to be because I feel a bit of everything' (Giovanni).

'I'm entirely against essentialist positions. I don't believe for a second in that. This is about socialization. This is about education. It's not about 'being' because you were born somewhere—that is ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous' (Attila).

Imagining Europeanness as a process of self-actualization performed via practice has within it underlying assumptions regarding the dynamics between structure and agency and between the individual and the community. ‘You almost have the possibility to live within the parameters of the culture you’re coming from, or to enter other cultures’ (Giovanni). Entering and exiting different cultures can be done at whim, ‘according to the situation of the day’. To exist as a European is to move through the world as if one is an autonomous agent, ‘adding up belongings’ while transcending the tyranny of home.

The handmade European selfhood produced via continuous transitive activity is ‘a mix of really small things’ (Laurens): constituent elements from different places that are separable, detachable, disposable and to some extent European, such as novels, art objects, buildings and consumer goods (Jens). Salient artifacts are hand-picked to taste, decontextualized from their places and times of origin and reconstituted as an idiosyncratic, handmade European lifeworld. Europeanness becomes ‘an eclectic ‘patchwork’ of readymade items lost and found (Feargal). By doing so, officials reject organicist culture concepts that would conceive societies as holistic, homeostatic entities whose composite elements are, like the internal organs of the body, adapted to occupy a particular place, being integral to the normative functioning of the whole. By contrast, euro-local identities resist the drab definitiveness of essences, such that ‘everybody has a way of being a European’ and ‘there is not a single definition’ (Giovanni). Compiling a list of requisite attributes, like boxes to check on the questionnaire of humanity, would be an exercise in self-delusion. Brussels-based Europeanness is an identity that lacks an essence.

4.4 The existential concerns of Europeanness

'Coming from the outside, if you're not wise to the actual Commission-speak, the Commission procedures, the Commission way of seeing things, it can look quite odd,' said Annabel, 'even if you're just crossing the street from another institution.'

And so it was that the ethnographer as the visitor-observer infiltrated the Brussels bubble to find himself among that rare social group which sees itself as *strange*. The self-conscious ambiguities, insecurities and contradictions found here form the image of an unlikely supralocal society which defines itself either against the state of nature or in accordance with some other model entirely. The individuals who work as civil servants in the European Commission are a rather odd sort with rather odd preoccupations and a rather odd worldview. They do rather odd things for a living in a rather odd social milieu—or so they would like you to think. The social anthropologist, however, is trained to be sensitive to labels such as 'strange' when they are casually affixed onto communities who number tens of thousands of people. Confronted with acts of self-othering among informants, the conventional response would be, 'What do you mean you are "abnormal" and "out of touch with reality"? Surely you cannot any more unusual or any less real than any other society around.' And yet, being European in the ways discussed here *is*, perhaps, an utterly unusual thing to be.

Taking seriously performances of self-othering among officials raises the question of how they became that way in the first instance. Whether European officials develop an EU ethos before entering the Commission or become 'Europeanized' on the job is a chicken-and-egg issue. Both processes take place and the proportionality of their influence in the social reproduction of officials varies at the individual level. Identities are refashioned from the memories of previous lives as much as they are informed by the present experience of working life. As discussed in the previous chapter, officials recall particular formative events in which they 'lived' Europe for the first time. For those who entered without much by way

of a strong, pre-existing EU-orientation, these childhood memories can always be fabricated later on. Though some were born European, none were born European officials.

Because of, rather than despite, its mythology as the member state that is quintessentially European, Belgium has been vigorously neglected by social anthropologists and fieldworkers in general. Much has been written about the ways in which the EU's institutional presence has transfigured the social and spatial fabric of Brussels. A more compelling phenomenon flows in the opposite direction: how the sociopolitical conditions of Belgianness nurture supralocal, Brussels-based European identities inside the EU administration. Brussels-based euro-local identities are ways of exploring the world that negate deeply spatial assumptions concerning the relevance of the nation state as a space for self-recognition and belonging. For Belgians themselves, interregional antagonisms, processes of devolution and a set of peculiarly complex administrative structures constitute Belgium as an artificialized national construct, a nation of dualities. Belgianness is expressed as an irreverence for the sanctity of Belgian nationhood and a playful suspicion towards the notion of 'the nation' itself. The Bruxellois go along with the idea of celebrating nationness but sit uncomfortably alongside it, actively mocking the way it insists on having profound relevance in their lives. Being Belgian is identifying with and belonging to a 'Belgium-in-spite-of-itself' (Fox 1994). It may be an artificial nation, the product of active human construction, but this is also an accurate description of any country recognized as such today.

A microcosm within a 'microcosm of Europe', the EU Quarter around Schuman fits the criteria of a 'non-place'. Revolving around *routes* in lieu of *roots*, it is a place where placeness itself becomes an increasingly irrelevant aspect of existence (Clifford 1994). Home is where the job is, an arbitrary locale that may be exchanged for any number of others, where lived experience takes precedence over the assigned residence of an inherited birthplace. The idea of 'home' therefore refers more often to a homestead than a homeland,

though the definition of the former is as narrow as that of the latter is obsolete. Surrounded by Belgians, Commission officials reimagine their home countries with a sense of Belgitude: as a concept, a work of artifice and a necessary fiction.

Evocations of a 'Brussels bubble' open fields of representation in which identities of self and other take shape, enabling officials to carve a sphere for themselves out of the Belgian capital in order to pursue their life projects alongside their colleagues. Like other social bubbles, it is marker of sociospatial identity with decipherable values and models imbued with the cultural schemata of the group. As a hermetic urban community that regards itself as absolutely other, it isn't so much under-the-ground as over-the-head. Unnatural and unreal yet fundamentally universal, it is regarded not as a mode of dehumanization but as an elevated mode of transcending place, frontiers and essentialized portraits of the state of nature.

In supermodern times, when the reference points for collective identification are increasingly destabilized, disentangled and devalued, Brussels-based euro-local identities are performed as a sustained process of personal acquisition for the individual. Artifact-by-artifact, officials interweave for themselves a localized and piecemeal selfhood from a trove of constituent elements, old and new. Removed from their contexts of origin, cultural artifacts become truly disposable things. Meaningful ones are selected and others are discarded. Constructed out of so many borrowings and rejections, European identity is a surrealist expression of integrated personhood in an increasingly plural and fragmentary world. European identity is a cultural bricolage made from found objects that are the raw materials for creating a supranational selfhood that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Europe is lived in the everyday insofar as it is 'known' rather than merely 'known about' (Connerton 2009: 32). Appropriated places, like found artifacts, are *lived* by virtue of their embodiment and incorporation into habitual movement (Merleau-Ponty 1962). *Bricoleurs*

speak through the medium of things, embedding a sense of themselves in work that they do. Bricolage, the end-product of their labor, serves an emancipatory function, reconciling seemingly intractable paradoxes in defiance of 'the idea that anything can be meaningless' (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 14). Similarly, a European selfhood and subjectivity materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself (Sartre 2007). In contrast to 'the average man today' who is a 'whole' to himself (Mauss 1966), members of Homo europaeus resist totality, remaining always partially complete.

5 Human resources: Socially reproductive practices in a modern administration

The EU Commission began as an extension of the midcentury, post-war national civil service of France. Jean Monnet and eight associates assembled the High Authority of the ECSC and 'thinking hierarchically', based the Treaty of Rome on Napoleonic law (Laurens). The ways policy is made still bear remnants of 'the old French culture', as do a handful of terms like *concours* and *stage*, though the official expression for the last 40 years has been *open competition* and *traineeship*. Officials most often refer to themselves and one another as *fonctionnaires*. 'It's a large institution, like a pyramid' (Zsófia), one that is 'still quite hierarchical' and 'probably came out of the French army' (Raphael). The original idea was to have European personnel of different nationalities working contiguously in particular units at all grade levels (the A's, B's and C's). Some would be more senior than others. Someone would be recruited into C grade, get promoted eventually to a B grade, then finally to A. Their prerogative was to staff the administration with the very best in coal and steel in order to manage the decline of the industries. The quintessential founding legend of the Commission was how it is a 'laboratory' for the production of 'a new race of men' (Monnet 1978: 376), where the ideal Union official is the archetype of the cosmopolitan 'New Man' (Cheng 2008; Berg 2009) of modernity. Along with being the expert in his or her policy field, the *fonctionnaire* was to be quintessentially pro-European (Coombes 1970), one who 'by the zeal of the commitment to the goal of integration would maintain the momentum of the Commission's process towards it' (Willis 1983).

The 2004 Kinnock-Prodi reforms, set in motion by the Parliament and the Council, were precipitated by the en masse resignation of the Commission under President Jacques Santer following credible accusations of corruption. A Committee of Independent Experts (1999a)

was appointed by the European Parliament to 'establish to what extent the Commission, as a body, or Commissioners individually, bear specific responsibility for the recent examples of fraud, mismanagement or nepotism raised in Parliamentary discussions, or in the allegations which have arisen in those discussions.' Its reports linked these 'reprehensible acts' to a 'displacement of responsibility for financial regularity…meaning in effect that *no-one* is ultimately responsible' (Committee of Independent Experts 1999b). The scandals are remembered as the Cresson affair, named after the French Commissioner for education who awarded top advisory posts to her dentist and personal astrologer (Buckley 1999; Peterson 1999).

The reforms rewrote the Staff Regulations and radically transformed the civil service in the name of modernity: 'The Commission should speedily put into effect the necessary reforms, in particular for the improvement of its organization, management and financial control. In order to do this, the next Commission ought to give urgent priority to launching a program of far-reaching modernization and reform…to ensure the highest standards of management integrity and efficiency' (quoted in Dimitrakopoulos 2004: 59)(Dimitrakopoulos 2004). The blueprint for reform, adopted by the College on 1 March 2000, laid out 98 actions under four headings (Commission of the European Communities 2000). The second, titled 'A culture based on service', underlined the principles that informed the reform—'independence', 'responsibility', 'accountability', 'efficiency', and 'transparency'—proposing measures covering conduct, interaction with citizens and access to EU documentation (ibid., 7-8). The idea was to 'professionalize' the administration, making it 'something much more modern' (Mark). The Staff Regulations underwent further revision with the adoption of the 2014 staff reforms package, which attempted to address and mitigate the unwanted side-effects of the 2004 reform. Adopted under the current multiannual financial framework, the package was 'expected to be a milestone on the road towards more

efficient administration, based on budgetary savings and improving aspects of human resources (HR) management at the EU institutions' (European Court of Auditors 2019). Its measures aimed to 'optimize the management of human resources in a European civil service characterized by its excellence, competence, independence, loyalty, impartiality and stability, as well as by cultural and linguistic diversity and attractive recruitment conditions' (European Union 2013b). The ignoble fall of the Santer Commission in March 1999 was the epicenter of an inflection point between one organizational culture and another, effectively laying the Old Commission to rest so that a new one could be born.

Building on recent anthropological discussions around work, labor and social reproduction (Harvey and Krohn-Hansen 2018; Narotzky 2018), this chapter considers different modes of work-life within the European Commission workplace: the relationships, power relations, strategies and administrative identities performed in response to specific challenges and uncertainties. The Kinnock-Prodi reforms were a response to a perceived need to adopt a new approach to Human Resources and modernize the organization as a whole. On paper, the engineers of modernity aimed to enhance the HR dimension so as to maximize staff work-life satisfaction while continuing to satisfy the demands of external stakeholders. Proceduralism, managerialism and the seniority principle present three key challenges to productivity and motivation in the working environment. Examining these institutional phenomena as they arise in the ethnographic present enables the anthropologist of bureaucracy to provide a highly partial account of some of the complexities and contradictions involved in the everyday lived experience of policy professionals.

Bureaucratic institutions carry out social reproduction in routine cycles of recruitment, promotion and retirement. Their human resources are retained, grow old, vacate and are replenished with the initiation of new cohorts. Viewing the social reproduction of the EU administrative body as 'an all-inclusive approach to material, life-sustaining processes'

(Narotzky 2018) thus encourages significant consideration of the professional, intellectual and social identities of EU officials. The experience of everyday work-life in the Commission for each official is mediated through direct social relations with colleagues and superiors. Each job titles reflects professional status and positionality in the administrative pyramid, as well as levels of institution-specific capital accumulated over time (Bourdieu 1986; Georgakakis 2010). There is more to power, influence and opportunity than grade and salary, and the recurrent performance of a semifixed set of work practices and dispositions ensures the continuation of a particular institutional lifeworld and the longevity the institution itself. Modernizing reforms are as much about this social dimension as they are about fixing what is broken in the way European-level bureaucracy operates.

5.1 Leon's Report

'Well, how can I put it? It's not just out of incompetence, let's just say. In the original days, when the Germans and the French were doing the Coal and Steel Community, they threw money at every problem' (Leon). Laurens joined the administration as part of the first postwar generation of English translators, before any anglophone countries had acceded, and became the second English interpreter in the Commission:

> I arrived at the right time. We were given high salaries in 1952 and '57 when the Communities were set up because nobody wanted to come. And the minute you wanted to attract the best, you had to ensure that you paid people well. You pay judges more than you pay streetsweepers. We had to be supranational, so you should not be open to corruption by taking bribes from national authorities.

The new recruits were aware that the job was a temporary position. They would come and work here for five or 10 years and then go somewhere else. Reading the original draft Staff Regulations in light of what they consist of today, it is as if the texts defining the rules, rights, principles, standards and obligations of employer and employee were 'written in gold'

(Leon). Each official was given paid annual leave to return home by train twice a year. For the Greeks, this would mean a three-day journey each way if there were no disruptions. Often, they would take the money, head to the airport and simply fly to Athens. Salaries increased every two years as officials moved incrementally into higher administrative grade levels. By their 16th year, they were paid twice their starting salary for doing more or less the same job. Those at the level of Director and above were given private cars with chauffeurs and whatever else they wished for. Then there was the 'invalidity problem'. Suppose there is a character among your subordinates whose personality makes them impossible to get along with, but there are no open positions to the left or right to move him or her to. One way out for an 'unimaginative' Director would be to declare him unwell and simply retire him with an invalidity pension. The honorably discharged would continue to receive 70% of their final and highest-paid salary, which, even for a B1-8, amounted to a considerable sum. 'A great privilege of being in the Commission is that if you lose your job, you nonetheless are being paid', as Eloise said.

Leon was put in charge of recruitment at DG Personnel and Administration soon after being recruited himself. In the 1970s, he acted as the sitting chairman of the newly installed Selection Board, responsible for sifting through new candidates and drawing up the final list of successful ones. One morning he received a curious phone call from the Director-General of Agriculture.

'I understand you're interviewing Mme Sergeant tomorrow.'

'Yes,' he said.

'Well, I'd just like to let you know that I have personal knowledge of this woman and I would be very grateful if you give her a fair wind.' The following morning, the person of concern strode into the office and greeted them with a suspicious level of self-assured enthusiasm.

‘Before we begin,’ said Leon, wasting no time, ‘I’d like to inform you that yesterday I received a phone call from somebody who sought to influence the decision of the jury concerning your application. Under these circumstances, the Selection Board has every right to disqualify you because there are rules about this sort of thing. We’re not going to do that. We’re going to interview you on your merits, and if you deserve to be recruited, we’ll recruit you. If not, we won’t.’ In the end, they did. The intervention was unnecessary because Mme Sergeant would have passed even if she had not been the Director-General’s mistress. She was a very good candidate.

As manning the personnel Selection Boards is regarded as sensitive—and hence, temporary—work, Mark and Leon were soon ‘driven off’ to do something else for a while. ‘Sensitive means that you shouldn’t go on for too long because the risks of corruption are too great. You may do anything for too long, in any case’ (Leon).

‘It was an interesting first job, and then people told me, “Don't stay there for too long; you know you’ll get a bad label. Move on.” So, I moved on to other jobs’ (Mark).

By 1996, Leon reached the end of his career when he was summoned to the Director-General’s office. ‘I see you’ve applied for a job as a Director’, he said. ‘There are only two problems. First of all, you’re too old. And the other thing is, you’re the wrong sex.’

‘OK, no problem’, said Leon. He was old—there was no denying that. Despite being perfectly qualified for the position, he understood the futility of the pursuit given the gender quotas in place on promotion. The time had come, he decided, to cement his legacy with a swansong. ‘Well, what I’d like to do with my last two years is to rewrite the Staff Regulations.’

‘What a good idea!’, the Danish Director-General said, and with that he was seconded.

He approached members of staff from different institutions to hear their problems with the Regulations and did the same with the unions. Everything they discussed would stay

‘under wraps’, he explained, firmly committed to the exercise being a ‘non-event’. Rumors began to circulate, and when a draft was finalized, he was sent to Luxembourg to present it to the European Court of Justice. The head of the Court treated him with French civility without concealing his displeasure at not being consulted in advance. Leon explained that what he had written was a mere sketch of possible changes that might be made. Though comprehensive, it was not the only solution and it left considerable room for compromise. What he sought to do was merely to ‘open up a few avenues towards the trenches.’ The head of the Court sent him away and promptly leaked the draft to the unions.

The leaks exploded with ‘seismic’ consequences—not that Leon would be around to feel them himself. Within the Commission, parts of the report were taken up almost immediately.

‘Did you know about this?’ said President Jacques Santer to the Secretary-General.

‘Yes I did, but it’s only a draft of proposals. I don’t see any harm in having this anonymous.’

‘Ah! You knew about it!’ said the president, ‘another Luxembourger who was trying to get reelected’, banging his desk on the 13th floor of the Berlaymont with his fist. ‘And you didn’t notify me? This man’s going to have to go.’ The Head of the Delegation, who was also a close friend, was given what is called an ‘Article 50’, an early retirement for ‘political reasons’. A domino effect was put into motion.

Leon insisted that he had not been unique in his shrewd ability to accurately identify the problems and their solutions. ‘They knew it was broken, but they didn’t want to fix it. What we have we hold, you know.’ Most of the heat came from union representatives who mobilized their members to stop him. He began to receive anonymous letters—not exactly death threats—advising that he ‘Go back to England’.

Sitting near the park with Charlotte, his daughter, I casually mentioned that the 2004 reforms were influenced by a paper that shares her namesake. ‘Yes, I know exactly what

you're talking about. I remember being one of the few people that didn't go on strike about it, which was actually quite funny because the strike was the day my father retired.'

On his last day of work, the Commission went on strike. He was boxing up his things when the Director-General entered the room. 'Hold on, Leon. I may have an idea. Would you consider staying on as a sort of Director Emeritus, to help them through this process? It may cause some practical issues, but I'll do it.'

'Don't worry, I'm out of here'.

'Well, I can't stop you. In this case, I have one last request. Your report has been declared a non-publication—it now never existed—but the delegations haven't read it. Take it around to each delegation and let them see it.' Leon turned to the window and peered out at the mob of officials gathered outside who had organized a demonstration against him and his parting opus. Many were people he had worked with for several years. He knew them well, and they knew him. His only way out would be directly through the pickets. And so, Leon walked past the picket and into the sunset.

The modernizing reforms strengthened financial controls, and yet, 'There is quite a lot of misuse of money. Let's say the system is leaking' (Taavi). Taavi negotiated contracts on behalf of the Commission in CNECT, managing research and development projects with budgets of tens of millions in euros. Being assistant to the HoU at times involved asking auditors to chase down the money. Too often he witnessed his colleagues misusing funds and massaging the figures for personal gain, and this is what ultimately disillusioned him: 'They just love to throw around money. They didn't care what was going on. This was not their own money. It's public money, which is nobody's money—that's why they did it. I don't like it anymore.'

I was first introduced to Luuk when he was a policy officer in the Coordination unit for the Digital Single Market. When our second meeting took place, CNECT had been

completely reorganized, its policy files reallocated among its different units. His unit had been split in two and the Digital Single Market unit, focusing on e-commerce and online platforms, had been created in June.

'Wait, is this still the Digital Single Market unit?', I asked.

'Yes and no. Well, now this is called 'E-Commerce and Platforms'.

'Oh, OK. That shows how long ago we met!'

The Commission transmogrifies every five years to reflect the workload of the incoming College and their specified priorities. At every *internal reorganization*, posts are reallocated between DGs, which are shuffled around, combining and splitting like cells in an organism. Units may be rearranged at short notice: 'It was the C.2 unit at the time. They've just changed it, so it's B.1 now, but it was C.2' (Marie-Christine). Unit titles are kept 'nice and simple.' Some survive from decades past and are now 'misleading', 'unfortunate', and even 'silly'. Morgan is head of the Eastern Neighborhood unit, which implements policy on the eastern neighborhood countries, but also deals with Turkey, Ukraine, the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus. Jeremy is Deputy HoU of Media Support Programs, not the English word *media* but the French acronym MEDIA, short for *Mesures d'accompagnement Développement et Innovation dans l'Audiovisuel* [literally, 'Accompanying Measures for Development and Innovation in Audiovisual'].

The changes wrought by internal reorganizations are nevertheless 'very cosmetic', Maja assured me. Since first devised by Monnet and the *ancien régime*, the Staff Regulations were left untampered with until the turn of the century. The DGs were broken down, refurbished and given names instead of numbers. A single AST category was created by merging the secretarial, clerical and assistant function groups. 'There was a cultural shift as well as an organizational shift. It really was an earthquake, and it felt like an earthquake' (Mark).

Just before the ‘disgraced’ Santer Commission fell in the late spring of 1999, Mark worked as the assistant to the head of the General Inspectorate of Services (IGS), an organization that subsequently grew to become the Internal Audit Service (Arthur). It was ‘a classic French bit’ where he went around conducting performance audits of different parts of the work being done. Throughout the ‘fascinating period’, Mark fell in with a small group who grew wise to the many things that were wrong with the place, and long before the catastrophe had awakened the need for reform. A deep house-cleaning was in order. There was many ‘a dusty corner’ in the administration, and ‘new brooms sweep clean’ (Laurens). Once you start modernizing certain areas, others must follow. A first attempt by the Director-General of Personnel and Administration was the experimental MAP 2000 initiative (Modernization of Administration and Personnel), an ‘abortive process’ that ‘ran into the ground because nobody wanted to see the need for change.’

He was then tasked by the President’s cabinet with carrying out a comprehensive research study on the structural changes that needed to be made in a new decade if the executive were to meet the challenges of a new century. The project collapsed just as a lengthy report of recommendations entitled Designing Tomorrow's Commission was nearly completed. The Inspectorate was caught in the eye of the storm, and it felt like a ‘slow-motion train wreck’. Former Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi moved in, and Mark worked closely with the Secretary-General and the rest of the transition team. Into the midnight hour, he would sit with the Head of Cabinet moving blocks of DGs around. Together they trudged through the metaphorical rubble, putting the pieces back together in order to build something truly *new*. His colleagues became Heads of Cabinet and Directors-General under Prodi, and he served in the cabinet for Neil Kinnock, the Vice President and Commissioner for Administrative Reform. There he took on the Communication role full-time in facilitating the reform agenda, taking up Leon’s 1998 report as a guiding template.

‘We were trying to build something new’, he said, and the questions of concern were these: ‘How could you get a fairly change-resistant organization to accept change? How could you get the staff to accept something which they could see as a threat, something that was going to negatively affect their careers and their finances, as something that was actually a positive change—something that was going to improve the organization?’

For months they set about preparing the promotional campaign needed to explain to the staff what lay in store, anticipating the concerns that could potentially arise. In the first phase, he threw together a reform task force with advisors brought in to help brainstorm ideas and work out what was broken and what was not. They compiled new proposals for improvement by regularly soliciting suggestions in focus group meetings with the Vice-President, as well as by ‘being generally transparent about how the process was proceeding’. The situation drew to a controversial climax with an agreement in the Council on the new Staff Regulations. ‘*That’s* where people progressively got more and more agitated. It was hugely pressured for weeks, and then you got to the end—a bit like a rollercoaster.’ Things went quiet, so that barely a sound could be heard above the hum of negotiations. ‘We had to work very closely with the negotiating team because we needed to know what was going on in order to communicate it. They had to have a lot of trust in us to know the details of stuff, but also to not leak it out.’ They prepared a ‘blitz’ of information ready to go out in real time, which included computerized simulations allowing officials to click on various buttons and see the impacts on their pay packets and career promotion possibilities. The idea was to bombard them with this content with such an intensity and rapidity that it would reach them before the unions had half a chance to leverage their spin on the matter. Everyone was ready for a strike, but everything went according to plan. ‘The minute Neil walked out of the negotiations with his piece of paper and said, “I’ve got a deal”, they could see for themselves that nobody was

losing any money. In some cases, they were gaining it. That really cut away their ground.' The demonstrations were called off, and officials came back to work within half a day.

'*Kinnock* is not a word you should use a lot when talking to eurocrats', Laurens laughed. Neil Kinnock was a Labour leader, who, under Santer, served as Transport Commissioner before being put in charge of Administration and Personnel. Despite his socialist bona fides, he appeared less sensitive to the concerns expressed by employees and the trade unions themselves than he was to criticisms coming out of London and Berlin that staff were overpaid and overstaffed. 'He felt he had to reform the whole staff system, and he did. He downgraded the salary system, the pension system, the promotion system. It was mainly a money-saving exercise. He thus became the great enemy of all eurocrats.' Laurens told me of a fellow linguist acquaintance of his who chose to join NATO instead of the Commission because 'Kinnock never happened to NATO.' It undoubtedly meant droll days spent translating from French into English rather than working in all six languages. Still, it was worth it, as 'NATO still has the salaries and conditions that we can now only dream of.'

With the accession of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Estonia and Malta, the EU-15 became the EU-25, and the scale of the civil service grew proportionately. EPSO was brought to life during negotiations in 2002 to make room for expansion before the agreement was reached. After working with what were then called 'non-member Mediterranean countries' on the southern rim of the sea, Jeremy switched to the DG for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR). He spent 10 years flitting between the delegations leading the negotiations with Macedonia, Czech Republic, Turkey and the Balkans. Until the financial crisis, 'it was all about the enlargement': 'enlargement was the main thing—enlarging all the way to China' (Jeremy). After the economic crisis, the administrative policy focus shifted back to more internal

matters and enlargement has since become scarcely more than an institutional backwater. 'Obviously you can't go on enlarging all the way to China, so after a while it died down.'

'That was the point where it made the shift to a much more rules-based managerial organization in practice as well as on paper, where there is a much greater focus on proper management' (Mark).

'There was a great change, a change of attitude at the Commission' (Leon). There used to be more of a clubby atmosphere to the place in the sense of being inward-looking and opaque. The working environment used to look more like an old boys' club. 'It still had the remnants of an organization that still acted as it used to, as if it was all in the Berlaymont.'

'You had very clear fiefdoms in each Directorate' (Lorelei). When you needed to pass something through, you might know someone who could 'fast-track' it for you. There were two ways to transact business, one being less indispensable than the other: the 'official way' of proper channels and other, alternative avenues based more on social relationships and interpersonal trust. The second one was quicker. Quotidian work-life ran on casual, under-the-desk social relations via improper channels 'almost exclusively' (Leon).

Informal relationships in the workplace provided a counterbalance to the rigidity of the classical hierarchy, as well as a rich source of indigenous knowledges tailored to particular sub-European (national, regional, local) contexts. At the precursor to EPSO, Leon had some 150 officials of all nationalities working under him. 'A senior person would talk to a junior person and ask their advice, if they had any sense. These people had masses of information about their own country.' If he had a Portugal-related issue and there was a reliable Portuguese C-grade official around, he would approach them and say, 'Tell me, how does it work in Portugal?', or hand them a document printed in Portuguese and say, 'I think I understand it, but can you please just confirm that this is what it's saying?'.

The reforms introduced a system of 'activity-based management' designed to obviate the need for officials to resort to informal work practices based on social relationships for purposes of expediency. Formal procedures, with their annual plans and activity reports, were solidified in attempt to make them more difficult to circumvent. 'That's it—these are the rules, and everyone follows them' (Mark). Though even Mark could concede that the flexible, adaptable and informal ways of the Old Commission, a European adhocracy with less rigid policies and procedures, were 'fair enough, because you could trust the people that worked there.'

Indigenous knowledges as information resources are capitalized on via informal channels by those of relative seniority in ways that mutually benefit both ends of the junior-senior power imbalance, establishing a more reciprocal relationship between them. Bosses gain an expedient, partial view of the inside realities of a national policy system to aid in forming judgments and making decisions. The transaction also benefits those of junior status by affirming their institution-specific capital and the integral utility of their position in the administrative pyramid. The roles they perform, despite its relative lowliness is 'necessary to the good functioning' of the institutional whole.

5.2 How Union officials are chosen

Union officials are not elected; they are selected. This occurs via a process of elimination in specialized selection procedures known as *open competitions*. A series of tests and assessment exercises measure professional skills and 'core competencies', including analysis, problem-solving, communicating, delivering quality results, prioritizing, organizing, working with others and resilience. Candidates apply through entry-grade (AD 5-AD 6) competitions announced by way of a 'call for proposal'. 'It wasn't at all planned', Annabel said. 'It was

even quite inconvenient in a way because I was very happy in London. A concours opened, so I took it because that's just what you do when they open. You never know. They're like these strange flowers that bloom from time to time. When it happens, you just do it.'

Once an applicant opens a new application, registering themselves as a candidate in the online system by indicating their institution of preference and scheduling an appointment at the nearest assessment center, the formal vetting process may begin. In the first phase, candidates are put through rounds of computer-based psychometric tests evaluating qualitative and quantitative reasoning skills. The more advanced calculations demanded by some of the math questions can prove difficult for lawyers who are less calculating, so to speak, than the economists. Time is kept in small, rigid intervals by a large clock on the wall. Each candidate sits in perfect silence at a partitioned computer station, alone with their machine. A multiple-choice question appears on the screen interface, vanishes 20 seconds later and the next one takes its place. Second is the interview round, which Jeremy found to be 'the trickiest bit'. It all struck him as less 'structured and defined' than the exam for the UK civil service did: 'They could ask us about anything, you know.' Near the end of his time in the Fast Stream, they brought in people from EPSO to spell out exactly what it was they were looking for, as 'they recognized that culturally it was quite a different type of exam.' Even after receiving culture-specific training catered to a British audience, he felt as if he 'didn't really know what they were looking for.'

The old concours consisted of a preselection exam, a written exam and an oral exam. The first two were delivered to thousands of candidates at once in large halls that had the scale, majesty and solemn ambiance of a cathedral. A group of assessors, assuming the role of headmasters or priests, distributed pencils and papers to each examinee. Months later, they were assigned a prompt and asked to turn in an essay in response to it, or else to compose a mock briefing for a mock Commissioner. The last stage was an interview in front of a panel

of judges on the Selection Board who posed open-ended questions and took notes while listening for linguistic errors. 'If you're really in the interviewing business, you know that interviews are not really a very effective way of selecting candidates' (Leon). A veteran of the Selection Board, Leon acknowledged that 'fundamentally, there's a slight subjectivity to it.' The subjective dimension, which is also present in psychometric profiles and letters of recommendation sent from national ministries, is not limited to the subjects present in the room. A judgement was arrived at through attempts to cognitively transcend one's own personal subjectivity and inhabit the point of view of the candidate's potential boss. 'If this chap was going to work for me, would I feel happy about it?' Those who failed to prove in an hour or less that their presence in the unit would please the disposition of a particular superior, as Leon imagined it to be, were turned away. Performing an impressive display for the Selection Board involved showcasing subtle qualities of sociability and persona which are more viscerally felt than cognitively understood.

Upon doing so, an applicant becomes a *laureate* and entering a transitional phase during which nothing much happens. Laureates are still green, having yet to 'find their specialization' (Jeremy). Their name is given a place on a reserves list that is valid for a year and may be prolonged with two six-month extensions, as 'there are more people who are already working in the Commission than there are places in the Commission' (Annabel). While they await the incoming call from a restricted number which will summon them forth with the offer of a post, they normally have their sights set on the policy field that is a 'logical continuation' of the subjects listed on their CV (Marie-Christine). The form a competition takes depends on the designated profile being pursued. If they are hoping to go into AGRI, they will have questions relating to agriculture along with the ones on general EU matters. However, the unpredictable nature of the limited liminal period often obliges them to land a first job elsewhere to get a foot in the door before their laureateship has expired.

‘It’s always a trade-off between what you might like and what is available. There’s a timing that you have to find’ (Jeremy).

Jens joined Health and Food Safety (SANTE) rather than AGRI ‘just to get in’. ‘I wanted to change jobs, and this was the first opportunity I got. I tried a lot of things once I was in, but they never worked out. I could have imagined doing some boring thing or being unemployed for a while, but I never was. So that’s quite a blessing.’ He inherited his green thumb from his mother's side. ‘I have several uncles who are farmers and a grandfather who was a farmer, so that obviously had a big impact on my career choice in the end.’

Morgan had to enter AGRI to get to ECHO. ‘I was contacted by DG AGRI, funnily enough, and they invited me for an interview.’ Bemused, he took a hard-to-get approach: ‘OK, I’m coming for interviews. If you are interested in interviewing me, I’m available on this and that date.’

Luuk took the concours while doing his LLM at Leiden University, where his professors told him, ‘If you really believe in Europe and you want to have a career there, it would be best to begin as early as possible. That way, you may try it once and many more times if needed.’ Swinging it the first time around was never a possibility, so he decided he would give it a go with no preparation whatsoever. ‘I don’t know if that would have been helpful. Rather the opposite, I think. I recall it as a quite relaxed experience because I had nothing to lose.’ Once he got through, he cold called each of the HoUs in Brussels and all the lawyers in Luxembourg to see if they had any advice on how he could make himself more selectable. Professional experience was the prescription they gave him, so he found a law office in Amsterdam whose associates agreed to take him on. It was never going to amount to more than an internship and a letter of recommendation. Still, holding a candle for them made him feel ‘empowered’ for the first time. The first year spilled into the first extension, and he was just getting comfortable when the expiration date drew near. ‘I realized that I was almost

letting my dream slip through my fingers.' He put in his notification and slipped inside the institution within the last few weeks.

'The concours is there to fight nepotism rather than to actually hire people who are competent, and not the friends of the authority. They want to find the best who are out there, but they won't' (Lorelei). Lorelei didn't have time to prepare for hers, though it didn't matter because she was certain she would not get through. Given the sheer number of applicants, the whole thing seemed far-fetched. The idea of designing a jobs competition for the purpose of preventing nepotism and corruption never occurred to the young Germans of her day—not because Germany was free of these ills, but because they were not perceived as problems. Over the years, she saw the cynicism of her colleagues—the Italians, Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians and Britons, mostly—who were less sanguine about the commitment of their national authorities to fairness and honesty when it comes to state bureaucracies. She said that her husband, a 'mild euroskeptic', had 'an absolutely punctilious faith in the British administration for their competence and honesty', though she herself was not so sure she agreed.

Modernization has in many ways made it considerably more difficult to join the Commission. Often, posts are only open to internal candidates who have a decisive advantage over the uninitiated and ineligible outside the institutional gates. To a certain extent, the best way to secure a new job in the Commission is to already have one. The open competitions are open in the sense that they are open to all who are eligible and competitive because there are more and more applicants applying for fewer and fewer positions. EPSO runs some 50 competitions a year in 28 countries, for which it receives 70,000 applications in 24 languages. DGs navigate the selection process in different ways, and a single competition can be as large as 50,000, or as few as 20. 'I can't begin to tell you—it's really tough, because they have to sort out 95% of the people. In the end, for the 10,000 people who participated in this

concours, 9,600 didn't get past a look, 400 went on the reserve list and 50 got a post. So, it's 1 to 200' (Klaus).

I heard tales of desperate candidates who 'just miss it by a very smooth percentage on one of the tests' and are still trying, year after year (Roger). They over-prepare by putting themselves through expensive prep courses and only succeed in making one another nervous. For Zsófia, who studied intensively despite having already convinced herself of the inevitability of failure, the news of her victory came as something of surprise. She passed through the first stage without investing much emotion into it. It was a shot in the dark worth taking. There was nothing to lose and no clear picture as to what could be gained beyond an interesting experience and an excuse to refresh her European history.

> I know a lot of people in Brussels who are very much into this, and this is their major goal. They try and they don't succeed. Then, they try again and at some point they may succeed. But I was not too nervous about it. I was really not so concerned because it was so unrealistic. You have like 10 million candidates and then you have 20 in the end. I thought, 'OK, if I don't succeed, I don't succeed.' It was very abstract at the beginning. When I got the invitation to the oral exams, I was getting a bit scared because then it became very concrete.

When it came down to her and two other candidates, things got frighteningly real. What was once untouchable was now within arm's reach. She could not simply let it slip through her fingers. 'I couldn't believe it, but I still did not know so much what it would mean.'

Morgan passed the 'so-called' concours in 1994 that brought in Austrians, Finns and Swedes. 'I've still got my academic career', he thought. 'I'm basically happy with that. But why not? I'll take the concours and see what comes out of it.'

'In those days, it wasn't so bad to be honest. There was a certain amount of randomness about the elimination tests—probably more than there is now—random general knowledge about Europe and its history. It was a fair process once you got through that' (Roger).

'The new concours is more focused on skills rather than on learning by heart, so there's less of an entry cost in terms of giving it a go. You don't have to spend your evenings

swotting. I thought I might as well, and I got through' (Annabel). To tackle the general knowledge questions, Elfriede hit the libraries and read whatever she could find on the Commission. 'In the economics competition that I took, we were told later that only one other woman passed it.'

Raphael took the written part in Rome among 300-400 others competing for 10 posts. In the end, they took five. 'Now it's even more scary, but it was scary at the time. I tried the competition without believing in it too much, and I won.' With odds such as these, passing the concours is an impressive feat. Themes in officials' explanations for how they managed to pull it off included luck, fortune, accident, randomness and coincidence. Most, as it happens, 'randomly ended up' (Annabel) here, 'by some miracle' (Mark).

'There was a big element of chance, of luck. The general knowledge questions were very random. Lots of my friends actually did not get through. I did, luckily, *et voilà*' (Jeremy).

'Ah, it was pure luck, pure luck', said Jens, who was not himself particularly well-prepared beforehand. He was put in an enormous hall full of students at little tables and asked so many questions that was unable to finish before time was up. With those remaining, he did what any decent student in the situation would have done: he guessed. He did this by filling them all in as 'B'.

'Is "B" the right one?", I asked.

'All the ones that I guessed, I did all of them "B" in order to have at least a few correct ones, statistically speaking.'

'Maybe you should be a professional gambler', I teased.

'Yeah, maybe. That is what I did right: I gambled intelligently.'

'*Est-il heureux*? [Is he lucky?]', is a question that Napoleon is thought to have asked those who wished to be recruited as his generals. The anecdote originates with one Cardinal Jules Mazarin, the Italian minister of France under Louis XIII and Louis XIV, who made a

point of prioritizing fortune over ability: ‘What does the world think of him? Is he fortunate? Has he luck on his side?’ (Bent 1887).

A call for proposals usually comes to the attention of prospective candidates over the internet. In the past, this often happened by word of mouth. ‘I started at the Commission, which came by chance’, Klaus told me. ‘Everything is coming by chance in my life.’ The chain of events that led him here was set in motion one night in Heidelberg, where he was studying philosophy, math and physics and wondering what to do with the rest of his life. He and a friend were sitting in his car after leaving a party. ‘Tomorrow I go to Frankfurt and inscribe myself at university to study education,’ the friend said.

‘Where?’

‘In Frankfurt.’

‘Oh, could be interesting’, Klaus replied. He was silently pondering the significance of these words when he began to feel something odd protruding out from underneath the driver’s seat. He sat up slightly, slipped his hand under the cushion and produced an oblong object. It was his master’s diploma, which he had stuffed down there a year before and forgotten about. Under the interior lights, he marveled at the document that he had meanwhile been literally sitting on. ‘I’ve found it. This is a sign of God or some supernatural being’, he thought. ‘I must go to Frankfurt and inscribe myself.’

There in Frankfurt, with a year to go in his PhD in adult education, a similar encounter took place with a similar acquaintance.

‘Oh Klaus, have you read the newspaper?’

‘No, of course not’, he said.

‘They’re looking for IT persons at the Commission, *mein Liebling*. Why don’t you apply?’ She explained to him what the concours is, what it is like and how only the best people pass it. Preparations for the general knowledge questions were limited to some light

reading on the Treaty of Rome and a few other moments in European history. The Commission accepted his qualifications 'for some reason', and he was invited to take the computer programming concours at the local recruitment fair. This was the obvious choice, well-versed in code that he was, but one he made with some trepidation. Left to his own devices, he could develop beautiful things in the tranquility of his home office. There was no getting around the fact, however, that he would not perform at the top of his game while laboring under the spatiotemporal constraints of a controlled environment. Sitting there in the giant hall with 2,000 of his compatriots, a wave of self-doubt took hold, and he began to lose his nerve. 'Oh, this stress is too much', he said to himself. 'I really cannot program today.' A bell rang and the session kicked off as the proctors began distributing the documents.

'Ah, you're Mr Göring. You chose programming.'

'No,' he said. 'I'm going to switch. I would like to have customer relationship management instead, please.'

'I'm very sorry, sir. It's not possible.'

'Yes. I've read the rules, and it says you must choose your theme before the concours starts. Obviously, it hasn't started yet.' The proctor demurred before going off to consult the others and returned, annoyed, with the questions for the customer relationship management exam.

'So, this is why I passed it without doing anything except being cheeky. Can we eat pizza now? Can we switch this off?' He recounted the story to me at a table in a restaurant beneath his flat on Rue de Flandres, and my questions were getting in between him and his dinner. 'Or leave it on, if you don't mind me munching on the tape. I've got a meeting tomorrow at 9 o'clock, so I have to be a little bit sober.' In Klaus's defense, the pizza around here can be addictive. I was blessed or cursed to live just around the corner from the square of four

different pizzerias at the base of the Berlaymont on Rue Franklin. The lowest local levels of pizza consumption are found among the Italians themselves, who regard it as peasant food.

Klaus felt ‘a bit scared’ when they told him he passed. Nothing happened for two years, and then the invitation came. On the afternoon of the interview, a secretary showed him to a room at the end of the corridor, offered him tea or coffee and left by shutting the door behind her. Left alone in the office, he studied the material artifacts arranged along the walls and surfaces of the office when the HoU rushed in and made an introduction. The manager apologized for running behind schedule and threw open his briefcase with such force that its contents exploded in all directions, with sheets of A4 paper floating around the room like bits of oversized confetti. One of them was a photograph that rested for a moment in the air before falling into Klaus’s lap. It was a picture someone took on their phone of the sun setting behind a mountain landscape somewhere in Africa.

‘Oh! This must be Morocco. Tafraoute, yes. I know this place.’

‘Yes! Tafraoute indeed. I was there just last week for the holiday. Took the family and had the best time. Absolutely loved it. So beautiful.’ Klaus helped him tidy the room and indulged him by allowing him to share all that he did and saw on his vacation in detail. After an hour or so, the job was his.

The comedy of errors in this anecdote amuses both of us in its illustration of the seemingly random, slapstick manner in which the interview event unfolded and the effortlessness with which he sailed through it. Klaus has seen enough of Morocco to be able to identify Tafraoute in a random photograph. As it happens, the manager who agreed to do the interview had recently visited for the first time. He had shown up to work that day cloaked in a lingering post-holiday afterglow and found himself that afternoon in a mood to luxuriate in it. Intuitively, these two variables have nothing to do with him joining DIGIT two weeks later and going on to build a services department handling IT for all EU institutions,

though the most reasonable explanation for the outcome must involve some form of causal relationship between them. Yet, he rejected my interpretation that he *charmed* his way into the Commission. His audition was rather a display of belonging and fitness by the uninitiated to the initiated, an incorporating act of 'fitting in'. Charm or no charm, what he achieved in doing with his performance was to convince the HoU that he was already 'one of them', a real *fonctionnaire*—that special kind of Homo europaeus. 'What they know is that you know how to do your job—you *did* pass the concours. Now they want to know whether you fit in the team or not.'

It was in her third year of law school when Maja decided she wanted to do a *stage*. 'It's a job in the Commission—of course it's going to be difficult to get it. I knew that a lot of competent people applied and that I should be lucky to get the opportunity, but I didn't know that it would be such mess.' The selection process struck her as 'counterintuitive', 'tantalizingly confused', 'untransparent' and even 'unfair' in places. She received a conditional offer for a place and so began the lobbying phase. 'My problem was that there were a lot of piranhas and sharks in this whole pool who lobby really, really aggressively to get it.' In these efforts she restricted herself to emails, assuming that a phone call would be seen as impertinent. The anonymous call for an offer came when she is in the middle of a meeting. Excusing herself, she bolted out the door to pick it up just in time to hear the last ring. There is one missed call from Unavailable. Curses ensued until she was able to get someone on the phone at COMP the following morning. 'Ah, you're a bit late', they said. 'People have been calling us for the last month or two.' This came as some surprise, given that in the world of private firms this sort of thing would be enough to torpedo her chances of being given a second glance. 'You get the impression that it's not merit-based. It's purely aggression, luck, persistence and it's not really my style.' Luckily enough, however, her profile was singled out by a selector in the Legal Service who dealt with French applications

and ‘knew the system of qualifications best’: ‘I was really lucky that my CV was convincing because if it had been purely up to my engagement, I was too soft. I was not aggressive enough. To my great luck, the Legal Service has a much more thorough, merit-based and hands-on approach to selecting their candidates.’ The art of lobbying is a game of sharks and minnows: there are those who would rather err on the side of upsetting people than miss a personal goal, and then there are people like Maja. ‘You’re either going to do a negative plus or a positive minus.’ Given that lawyers more widely go by the name *sharks* on account of their predatory ferocity, there is some irony in the fact that here they are the minnows, and those with the bloodthirsty jaws go on to do public outreach.

Officials experience the concours as a haphazard and quasi-miraculous set of improbable events and exceptional circumstances to which there is more rhyme than reason. They are lucky stars, hostages to fortune in a positive sense. Though not for want of ambition, they did not claw their way through the doors by sheer force of will. It is fairer to say that they stumbled upon the Commission one day and ended up wandering in by accident. I found their modesty on the subject implacable, understated and at times overbearing. As with all things miraculous and extraordinary, the endless appeals to fortune and chance—as opposed to fate, fitness, genes, environmental upbringing or the sheer triumph of will—can test the limits of credulity. It is possible that the unlucky candidates, the ones who never made it, have a different take, and that affected modesty is preferable to no modesty at all.

5.3 The war on talent and the decline of expertise

Modernized talent management manifests itself in a spartan approach to human resources. ‘There’s huge pressure on the civil service’, which is always being ‘stripped’ and ‘shrunk’ (Annabel). If the 2014 reforms were designed to maximize budgetary savings by spending

less on human resources, they have been successful in this objective. The European Court of Auditors concluded that the minimization of administrative expenditure was generating the desired long-term budgetary savings (European Union 2013a). The purchasing power of permanent officials was down 10-20%, and the retirement age was raised from 63 to 66. Laurens's pension was frozen for the next two to three years. As for improving the HR situation, findings were less conclusive.

> We recently surveyed the stakeholders, who are the hiring managers in all the institutions. After three years of the new recruitment system, we got a very positive vote of confidence in the quality of the hires that we've given them. Surely, we have things we have to work on, but we're getting some very motivated people, and that's a motivation that seems to last remarkably well throughout people's careers. If you look at satisfaction levels moving through careers in the institutions—in the Commission, certainly—we have very high levels of staff satisfaction. [Mark]

Commission officials make 'good soldiers' by dint of their high levels of EU motivation and would have made good generals in a previous era by the grace of their good fortune. In their case, the answer to the Cardinal Jules Mazarin test, '*Sont-ils heureux?*', is an emphatic '*oui*'. To say someone is *heureux* in French is more often used to say that they are 'happy'. The two often go together, as in the English phrase *happy-go-lucky*, but they are not quite the same thing. Officials are lucky, but are they happy? Are they satisfied?

> You get it everywhere: 'Oh, we're really into looking after well-being.' Then you find out that most people aren't actually allowed to go on a training course. They're being pressured to stay and to do ridiculous acts because there's more and more work. Nobody minds doing a little bit more—oh, that's not true, some people do! But somewhere along the line, when you have people who aren't going home until 9 o'clock every night and who are paid half of what their counterpart earns, it's not great for motivation. [Charlotte]

Modernization in the Commission comes in the form of measures and schemes taken with the objective of augmenting the HR dimension of administrative work-life. Invasive reforms, however, have their unwanted side-effects, their collateral damage, their post-traumas, and what is a 'milestone' for the civil service can be a millstone for civil servants.

'It was all great fun', said Leon. 'I used to wake up in the morning and think, "Oh good, another day of work!" But a lot of people found it very stressful. You get lots of friction. In

fact, somebody threw themselves out of the Commission building yesterday and killed himself.'

'Yes, I heard that', I said.

'In the case of this particular man, apparently they took all his dossiers away from him, the things that he was dealing with. Doubtless he was unbalanced, and there are all kinds of stress factors involved.' On a wintry morning in December, a lawyer working at DG GROW stepped out onto the windowsill of his 2nd floor office in the Breydel building on Avenue d'Auderghem and jumped to his death. The event shook the neighborhood. His surviving colleagues suggested the reasons behind the suicide were work-related. After more than two decades in MARKT, the official was expecting a promotion to HoU for Industrial Property Rights. However,

> as Deputy Head of Unit, Pierens opposed the political compromises suggested by a strong Member State in the legislation providing for the concession of highways. Without being told that his demotion was due to his strong attitude over the matter, he was moved as a Desk Officer to the Space Unit of DG GROW, dealing with the assignment of the launching of the Galileo satellites, to Soyuz. According to the same sources, Pierens was clear and uncompromising in his duties, behaving solely as a jurist. Colleagues told New Europe that Pierens was unwilling to make the compromises necessary to elevate his career. [Kassandra 2015]

Mark wasn't always the EU personnel selector extraordinaire that he is today. In another possible working life, he might have joined DG7, the precursor to MOVE, after leaving Westminster. Instead, a budgetary dispute between the Commission and the Parliament, attributed to 'differences of opinion', resulted in a freeze on new recruitments to most DGs for most of the year. His time in the UK Representation was drawing to a close when he received a call from the selectors at Personnel and Administration, one which took him 'off into a very different path'.

'We watched you during the interview, Mark, and you're very good. We believe very strongly that you would excel here. Would you like to come and work for us?'

'Well thank you—but there's a block on recruitment, isn't there?'

‘No, not here there isn’t. So, if you would like to come and join this rather *unsexy* part of the Commission, you can come today. Or, if you would still prefer to wait for an opening at DG 7, you’ll just have to do that—wait.’

‘Just hold a moment, please’, Mark said, putting the phone down to take a deep breath and ponder the offer. He had a point, the man on the other end of the line. There is very little about Personnel that can be described as ‘sexy’. On the other hand, he would soon be unemployed. Weeks before, he and his wife had welcomed a newborn daughter in the world, their first. He imagined spending 1993 shuttling to and fro between London and Brussels, hunting for jobs when he should be home with the two of them. Mark resolved to take the job to allow him to join immediately. Later on, he might move into Transport or an even more suitable field.

Once the reforms were implemented, Commissioner Kinnock of Brussels went back to England, where he accepted a peerage in the House of Lords and became Baron Kinnock of Bedwellty. Mark stayed on in the cabinet until the head of Personnel and Administration, which was now EPSO, resigned unexpectedly. To replace him, the Commission needed someone ‘with a track record in modernizing things’: someone who shared the opinion that HR was on a ‘downward spiral’ and who had some ideas about how to reverse its descent. The challenge enticed Mark on a personal level as well as a professional one: ‘My experience of the concours was so appalling, just so terrible. It gave the institution a very poor image. People increasingly criticized EPSO for its out-of-date, fairly antediluvian selection procedures. Everyone was unhappy, including the staff here who were leaving in droves. We couldn't keep things as they were.’ The old concours attached greater weight to general expertise in European-level affairs—the institutions, the treaties and the folklore—complemented by a specialization in a particular area. The relevance of the multiple-choice questions to actual day-to-day practices was dubious. Computer-based testing was being

rolled out but only on a limited scale. ‘I was brought here with a very clear mandate to shake things up and improve.’

Jörg took the concours twice, once in 2005 and again in 2012. He preferred the first, ‘before it was revised under pressure from the UK’, as it concentrated more on the EU in its institutional ‘history and substance’.

In his mandate to ‘professionalize’ selection procedures and make it ‘much more modern’, Mark was afforded a substantial degree of administrative freedom:

> The situation I inherited in 2007 should never happen again, and the way to make that never happen again is that there has to be incremental change. We have to be constantly improving everything we do, all the time. We could say, ‘EPSO Development Program: done.’ I don’t think this is done, guys. Everyone thinks, ‘We’ve done all that awful *change* stuff, maybe he’ll stop changing it or clear off now and let us just get on with it.’ Sorry, that’s not an option. Assessment techniques are constantly changing. Technology is constantly changing. Best practice is constantly changing. The market’s changing. We are in a process of constant change and improvement. Across every sector of our work, there’s a constant focus on improvement so that we should never have to have another EPSO Development Program.

The whole affair took two years or more to complete, which is an eternity by private sector standards. The enlargements necessitated that the Commission expand into a bigger operation so as to find the ‘best and brightest people’ in each new member state. ‘Out of 100 laureates that the institutions would request on average, EPSO would find 61. You’re not giving the institutions, your customers, the people they want.’ He had already run the largest competition the EU had ever had, with some 56,000 applications, and enjoyed himself in the process. ‘These days, candidates are consumers. They are very active consumers, very demanding of public administrations. They’re not prepared to sit there and wait forever, so we have to give them good service.’ Most of the time, he feels ‘very exposed’ on the national level. Member states are ‘very vocal stakeholders’ who demand to know how many of their laureates are getting through and how to get more of their talent to apply, eyeing his every move ‘like hawks’ to make sure everything has the appearance of fairness.

‘It was like we invented some kind of conveyor belt, running these regular competitions on a fixed timetable every year and dramatically speeding it up.’ Trimming the average duration down to 9 to 10 months helped to entice Elfriede to try the Commission, as the competition for the Council could take nearly twice as long. Mark continues:

> We were in this new thing called a War for Talent. We couldn't just sit here and say, ‘We are the EU—of course everyone should want to work for us.’ We have to go out and compete for the brightest and best people on a competitive labor market. That requires a new employer brand, a new identity and a completely different social media-based marketing campaign. Last year we were ranked the 10th most attractive employer brand for graduates in Europe out of the top 500, and the highest ranked public sector brand. In five years, we’ve gone from no brand to 10th in Europe. So, there’s been a massive massive transformation which is not finished.

A move from ‘knowledge testing’ to ‘competency-based testing’ was signaled in Mark’s revisions to the preselection tests, the assessment techniques introduced to measure general intelligence. The big new assessment centers are upholstered with state-of-the-art instruments of competence measurement, allowing many more candidates to be screened ‘in much more depth’. During the situational judgment tests, a pair of group exercises assess two aspects of *working with others*. Candidates are cast in a kind of live action improvisational theatre piece set in the interior of a Commission office at the present day on a stage designed to recreate the atmosphere of a working environment in order to look and feel as realistic as possible. A prompt is given describing the circumstances of an imagined problem, and the unscripted, rapidly paced drama unfolds as the play-actors simulate the act of collaborating with others to solve it. The scene may open with a preliminary brainstorm that develops into a subtle tussle for control and end in a reluctant consensus as the conundrum that is the plot’s driving action is resolved and the characters fall into lead and supporting roles. The performative approach in these laboratory simulations is intended to provide ‘a pretty reliable indication of whether somebody’s likely be able to do that on the job or not.’

‘I think we all, most of us, like our job,’ said Lorelei. ‘We are dedicated to our job.’

‘It’s going to become harder and harder to keep the EU ethos going if there is no change, and if it’s just the focus on competence,’ Olivia said. The following is what Mark had to say:

> We’ve always attracted people to come and work for the European Union who are very committed. I don't think that’s changed. Some people say, ‘Ah! Now, you are just mercenarying; you’re not looking for this motivation in your new recruitment system.’ That, I don’t detect. We've done some surveying of the people who have been hired under the new system and the results are incredibly positive. We’re still getting people who are very motivated, but we’re getting people who are more *rounded*—who are very bright, who know a lot of stuff, but who are able to apply their knowledge.

The profile of a desirable official thus emerges somewhere between the qualities of well-roundedness, as general knowledge applied practically, and Europeanness or ‘EU vision’: a personal desire to devote one’s working life to furthering the European project. When a candidate scores low on ‘EU vision’ in their particular field, their masterful knowledge of the technical file won’t suffice (Olivia). The right one is the one with such a commitment: ‘the right motivation and the right knowledge but also the right skills to be able to apply them in order to get the work done’, said Mark:

> If you look at the mass of EU officials, you’ll of course find people with different views of what Europe should be and what precise form it should take, but I don’t really encounter people who *don’t* share a real belief that this is a valuable project to be working on. They’re proud to do it. They're motivated to do it. I don’t think you’ll find many people who are going to put themselves through that kind of selection process to come work for an organization they don’t believe in. To pass the processes themselves, they will need to understand how the institutions work.

In this way, the preselection tests collapse the categorical distinctions between Europeanness and general, applicable intelligence. Understanding how the institutions work is a prerequisite to entering them, and believing in and identifying with them is part and parcel of comprehending them.

The 2004 reforms explicitly aimed to reaffirm the institution as a meritocracy where the ideology of modernization entails a shift towards a more performance-based career system. The Staff Regulations should ‘emphasise the use of basic principles, such as merit, consistently in the daily process of recruitment and promotion (which) helps (to) operationalise integrity in the public service’ (Committee of Independent Experts 1999b).

The acceptance of the merit principle, 'particularly its implications for clear and objective appraisal, represents a significant modernising shift for the Commission' (Coull and Lewis 2003). According to one of its chief modernizers, the modernization of the European Commission context is at bottom an institutional experiment in public relations. To make the administration 'brand new', it needed a new brand. To Mark himself, the rhetoric of motivation, commitment and 'being the best in the world' sounded cloying. Nevertheless, he felt that there is ultimately more at stake in the War for Talent than keeping up with the bureaucracies in the international private sector. In building a new employer brand, managerialism in the modernist guise manifests in the rise of competence and the decline of expertise. The modernity brand is the 'sustainable model' that a 21st-century Commission needed, moving officials toward 'a clear vision for ourselves to be the best in the world at what we do.' The EU civil servants of today are highly motivated Europeans still, though it is not in all cases a self-identification with Europe as a destiny and a destination—and an existential commitment to bringing on its final actualization—that is doing most of the motivating.

Added to the Staff Regulations was the infamous Annex 1B, the statute laying out the requisite promotion criteria, such as previous managerial experience and language ability. Included is the concept of 'average seniority in the grade', which makes eligibility for promotion a function of average time spent in the grade. The large majority of the newly initiated enter the Commission at AD 5 and are required to spend two years in each grade. They are well-qualified by virtue of their having undergone the initiation rites, replacing the one-third of AD 5 officials who are promoted each year to AD 6. This is the general rule, though specialists with sufficient relevant experience like Bernard, a senior adviser to Juncker who has only been around for 8 months, may enter at higher grades under certain circumstances. Annex 1B sets promotion rates at 33%, such that officials may expect to move

up one grade every third year. In practice, it can just as often take up to five or six (European Union 2013a).

Most living social hierarchies—even the more 'modern' ones—practice some form of seniority principle. The contemporary corporate office environment structures the working lives of those who constitute it such that salary brackets scale up and down in a linear relationship to rank, with staying power outperforming juniority and inexperience. In many corners of the permanent administration, the ethos underlying the concept was viewed as antithetical to modernization's meritocratic ethos, stifling morale among troops fighting in the War for Talent by drawing a 'dotted line' in between performance and promotion where a solid link should be. As Eloise explained, 'There's more focus on performance, but you can't really reward performance. They always say they completely decouple appraisal from promotion, the reason being that promotion is a budgetary issue. If you don't have a clear link between both, how do you reward people who perform?'

A true performance-based system of appraisal is what Eloise wants, yet she is 'constrained' by annual promotion quotas that apply to all officials of the same rank within FISMA, capping the number who may proceed up a grade. When the quota exceeds the number of officials who have been in their current grade for three years or longer, she allocates the rest of it to the best among those who arrived more recently. When the quota is low enough so that the inverse is true, all of it goes to the highest performers among those at seniority. For a total of 35 in this category, she may receive a quota of just 10 or six, and precisely how this figure is arrived at as opposed to any other one is always less than clear. 'The seniority principle dictates, in practice, that mere good soldiers who have reached average seniority in their grade are moved up, while superstars who have not are held back. As soon somebody gets up one grade, they get paid more. Ah, so it *can't* be just merit!' The meritocratic shortcoming is justified and legitimized by way of appeals to the intrinsic

virtuosity embedded in the corporeal administrative body of the Commission, testifying to the demonstrable excellence of its staff. 'We can just say, "Oh, they all deserve it." Because in public administration, everybody's fantastic.'

Through the formalization of talent management techniques, the reforms established a more 'structured' administration and a more 'linear' career progression for permanent officials. Technologies of performance-based management, such as the yearly appraisal dialogue, are 'a bit strange', which is a polite way of saying they are broken and can be demoralizing. Everybody knows who the underperformers are, but all receive reports that are at worst 'positive, if bland', because 'nobody wants to write something nasty about someone else.' Following Arthur's own estimates, one should expect in any given unit to find that 25% of the laborers do 75% of the labor. In cases where nastiness *would* be duly warranted, there is a little box on the appraisal form next to the category of 'underperformance' that managers can check. Doing so has the effect of opening an investigation of the issue. As this road rarely leads to a full-on dismissal, following it is seldom worth the surplus hassle.

Permanent contracts are drawn up in ways that make it extremely hard to get rid of people, especially the 'deadwood': senior officials who coast along for several years in the same grade while neither performing nor underperforming. They tend to carry on more or less in this way until they reach their late sixties. Permanent administrators cannot simply be dispensed with. This only happens to the 0.1% who receive unsatisfactory reports a minimum of five consecutive years. How these underperformers manage to pull off such a losing streak for such a long time remains a mystery considering that only about 20 reports are processed every year, but their level of persistence is admirable. In rare cases, an official will go 'completely overboard' and 'seriously astray' by not showing up, refusing to do certain tasks or physically assaulting a superior. For the grand majority, however, any serious appraisal of individual performance would demand superfluous time and attention from managers who

are already overstretched and resource-deprived: ‘You can do it, but it’s a hell of a lot of your time to invest. It’s a purely pro bono, *human* kind of thing’ (Eloise). There are few available incentives for doing so, apart from a desire to fulfill a personal sense of duty.

‘How many people got the underperformance box ticked’, Eloise asked, ‘out of the 23,000 civil servants in the Commission in 2015?’ She wanted me to guess.

‘Out of 23,000?’

‘Yes.’

‘Let’s see. Is it five?’

‘No. It’s a bit better than that. I think it’s 10, actually’

‘I don’t think I was *that* far off—'

‘Out of 23,000?’

‘You think it should be higher?’

‘Ten out of 23,000 for underperformance? It’s not credible!’

‘Those 10 must have really underperformed.’

The underperformer is left alone with the others to carry on with their work, or lack thereof. If they are not promoted at the end of the third year and appeal the decision, they will win. In the unlikely event that a watertight case can be made for the decision, and they lose, there are few negative consequences. It is a completely different story in the private sector, where an appellant makes an appeal directly against his or her overseers. In the aftermath of a favorable ruling, the relationships they share with the rest of the group seldom survive the bitter experience of a labor tribunal.

Among the emergent phenomena visible in the War for Talent is a sophisticated appeals culture: ‘You have a huge culture of appeal in the Commission. Massive. You don’t appeal against your DG; you appeal against the Commission, so there is no downside.’ It is not the Director-General of the DG who decides not to promote people. In choosing how to allocate

the annual quota, he or she only makes proposals that are adopted by the Director-General for HR. The ultimate authority who promotes, or refrains from doing so, is the Commission itself. 'You appeal against the institution's decision, not against your Director-General's choice.' Five percent of all quotas are set aside every year for this very purpose.

The diffusion of roles among multiple levels of authority complicates and helps to preserve modes of institutional belonging among officials. Establishing an indirect, adversarial relationship between themselves and the institution as a whole allows their direct relationship with the DG to remain unaffected. The bosses will intervene on their behalf, helping them to draft the appeal, as they are the ones who encouraged them to appeal the decision in the first place. Some habitually propose those who are 'young in the grade', regardless of performance levels, trusting that those at seniority will be able to appeal their way through later. This enables the DG to make use of more quotas than it is given. 'We don't play by the rule, basically.' It is a rule that is not a real rule, as it is flouted from the top echelons. In one particular high-profile case, Secretary-General Catherine Day was caught shirking the seniority statute and systematically promoting officials based on how much she favored them. In any case, it seems only managers are getting promoted these days.

The incremental passage of each official from a lower AD grade to the one above it is a technique of EU motivation-building, a vehicle for regenerating EU identity or 'vision' across the civil service. The international managerialist model re-brands the administration under the banner of 'strength in management', which holds that the best EU civil service is only as good as its managers, and the cure for bad management is always more management: where there are good managers, there is no crisis of mismanagement. Higher grade-related eligibility requirements are added to coveted posts, many of which are concentrated in a limited number of policy files: 39% of all AD 11-12 staff work in five of the DGs (European Court of Auditors 2019). Officials may not become a HoU unless they work for two years in

AD 8, nor may they become a Director until after serving two years in AD 13. Previous management experience is required for selection into anything above AD 12, and internal training courses allow officials a chance to gain some on the job. Restrictions on promotions impact two-thirds of all current officials and assistants, for whom there are fewer opportunities to do a little less following and a little more leading.

In 2014, the number of staff promoted to AD 13 dropped by around 15% from the previous year (ibid.). 'The way that you get promoted after a certain number of years in each grade is why I will never have a real career in the Commission', continued Eloise, who was recruited into AD 5 at the age of 37 when the average grade seniority was four years. She has two more years to go in AD 10. Then she will do four in AD 11, another four in AD 12 and two more in AD 13. 'They had this habit around 2003 to 2005 of running competitions at the lowest grade, so people got in no matter what their experience was. In terms of my career, it was literally like rewinding by 7 or 8 years. So, it's like *pff*—you never catch up, but *c'est la vie*', she said, rolling her eyes and letting out an exasperated sigh. *C'est la vie professionnelle* She will be eligible to send in her CV for a Director's post at the age of 61. Constraints on her upward mobility demanded that she reimagine her future here in more prosaic terms. The blasé attitude she has perfected acts as an antidote to recurring anxieties associated with loss of agency she has experienced as a result. Work-life development was obstructed, and expectations were lowered:

> Very good people are made to wait because they are young in the grade. It's frustrating, and you really wonder why—I mean, who cares? For the rest of the job, nobody looks at your grade. You can be leading negotiations and be AD 5, nobody cares. We have so many technical experts that do a huge job, and to tell them, 'You can only be recognized and promoted if you become a Head of Unit'—it is not the right message to convey.

A system of promotion that privileges grade seniority over performance sends the wrong message to the aspirational young leaders of tomorrow's Commission, those keen to advance up the ranks and 'go deeper' into a policy area.

Lorelei was dealing with a certain young and disillusioned *stagiaire* whom she had in her charge. The trainee dreamt of spending the rest of her working life in Brussels but was having difficulty foreseeing how this could come about in practical terms. 'Well, if it's like this, I'll just leave my employer. I will go somewhere else.'

'Oh! That's interesting,' said Lorelei, taken aback. 'I was under the impression that jobs are difficult to find these days.'

At AD 8, Zsófia found that she had reached something of a cul-de-sac. She began to worry about the sustainability of her future here, and soon a mild claustrophobia spiraled into a work-life crisis. It was her successful bid to become Deputy HoU that laid these doubts to rest: 'I got this opportunity, and it was then that I thought, "OK, the Commission wants me, so I will stick around and build my career further.' For Zsófia, the significance of upward mobility derives from something deeper than the gratification of a desire for more income, influence and status. Her promotion was an acknowledgement of her institution-specific capital from those above her in honor of the *value-added* on which her work delivers. The experience was a 'turning point' in her administrative identity that reinforced the socialities of belonging binding her to the rest of the civil service and restoring—for the time being, at least—her hope for a future inside of it.

Senior positions in the Commission are held not by the top experts but the best managers, those who know how to make the final decisions and 'use people properly', and it is not always the case that experts are eventually promoted to the managerial grade levels (Charlotte). As a HoU, Charlotte sits in on important meetings. 'I see what's going on in the institutions and what they're trying to do, even if I don't think they are ever going to actually be able to implement it.' Along with routine supervisory duties, a crucial dimension of the managerial role is 'making sure people are enthusiastic' (Jens). This task is made more

challenging by misalignments between grade and salary levels on the one hand, and responsibility and workload levels on the other:

> They got this thing now about *talent management*. What do you mean by 'talent'? It isn't as if Heads of Unit properly read the CVs of the people in their teams or have any idea what they are capable of beyond the duties they are already fulfilling. There is a whole load of people who are doing jobs that are either below their qualifications or have nothing to do with their qualifications. All that talent is just going to waste, and nobody's aware of it. [Charlotte]

Average grade seniority remains an unpopular concept, but it has been woven into the fabric of institutional life:

> There's understandably a huge focus of managers on policy delivery, and HR-related matters come second. People don't see any urgency to be very active in HR because it works well. They are already pretty sensitized to it. From time to time, we need to motivate them to get moving. How do you actually motivate people in an organization as constrained as this one? How do you manage talent when the budget is always at odds with motivation? [Eloise]

There is little will to suppress Annex 1B when EPSO is reporting such high satisfaction levels across DGs.

Any movement in this direction would surely provoke the ire of the unions, as Leon did when negotiating the publication of his 1998 report. 'Trade unions are very conservative, always.' Charlotte suspected that the installation of these glass ceilings would have been prevented had Kinnock and the other modernizers recognized the document as a treatise for a 'better, fairer and more motivating' work environment, embracing holistically its principles and proposals. Instead, they took it à la carte, gathering bits and pieces of the recommendations to use as quick-fix ideas. Promotion above grade level 9 in the lowly-paid AST/SC function group requires applying for a senior assistant post. 'As an assistant, you cannot make a career. If you are an assistant, you stay an assistant.' No official, not even a humble assistant, who excels at 'using people properly' should be barred from becoming a manager by virtue of his or her current grade in the pyramid: 'If you want to manage people, it doesn't really matter what grade you are. It's frankly more of an aptitude than a matter of grade. They have taken away the motivation, and that's a real shame. You have people doing

Secretariat-type jobs who have PhDs! And you wonder why people are demotivated.' The Commission, she insisted, suffers from a deficit of motivation. 'There are a whole bunch of people who have come to the top of their grade, but they still have another five years to go. A lot of people are demotivated. There's actually no way to motivate them unless they're self-motivated, because you can't offer them anything.' There are plenty of sticks to wield, not enough carrots to go around and few good reasons to dream about moving up when there are few places to move up to.

A downsized Commission is one that relies more heavily on impermanent labor to deal with the workload. Through recruitment procedures separate from the concours, DGs Research and Innovation (RTD) and COMM bring in specialists with backgrounds other than law and economics—anthropology, sociology, linguistics, literature, etc.—who would otherwise find it 'difficult to make a career within the Commission' (Raphael). New hires sign a contract with a temporary work agency, which in turn has a contract with the Commission as one of its third-party recruiters. Contractually, then, temporary posts work for the Commission in an indirect, triangular manner.

The impermanent labor economy that runs on the circulation of temporary posts and short-term contracts are viewed as a kind of indentured servitude. During the contract period, agents are paid on a separate research budget and do work similar to permanent officials except with less responsibilities. Importing an underclass of impermanent labor into the workforce creates inequalities between parallel groups that alienate each from one another. With a minimum salary of €3,246 per month, FG IV staff (grades 13-18) may earn 28% less than junior officials in the AD grades of equivalent qualifications and experience (European Union 2013a). When the contract is up, the career path ahead is uncertain and invisible, with no promises of lifelong internal mobility whether vertical or horizontal. 'I think the fact that there are more contract people and fewer and fewer *fonctionnaires* is not necessarily a good

idea', Charlotte said. 'The problem is we're getting fewer and fewer, and I think it's unfair pressure on the people who are on contracts. A lot of them are extremely good, and it's just so sad because their contracts go for so many years—then, if they're lucky, maybe so many more years—but they're not actually having a career. It's destabilizing.' Human resources circulate from one *contrat à durée indéterminée* to the next, and working life has a temporal finitude with an approaching endpoint that is both unavoidable and undetermined. Unlike their permanent counterparts, they are given neither a job for life nor a lifetime of different jobs.

The proliferation of temporary posts allows managers to 'get really good people for a short amount of time, who really know stuff about their topic, and then move on to do other things' (Annabel). It nevertheless places more pressure on managers as well. 'Despite the idea that in the Commission people earn a lot of money and do nothing, I've seen a strong evolution, I have to say. I'm working a lot—all weekends, all day, sometimes in the evening' (Raphael). Raphael's unit hired two young agents on three-month contracts, but their presence only adds to his responsibilities in the form of more and more preparatory work. 'If I don't work, they cannot work.'

More significantly, the replacement of Union officials with part-time personnel contributes to a loss of embedded memory, accelerating processes of institutional forgetting:

> They come, and the civil servants who are left are expected to teach them. Then they are let go, and you're losing the strong historic context. Somebody will come up to me saying, 'Oh, I have a *brilliant* idea!' I let them explain their idea and then tell them, 'Yeah, we've tried that. It doesn't work for *this* reason, but if you can find a way around that reason, we can do it.' If they don't know that we've already tried it, you end up just trying the same things over and over. [Charlotte]

Having fewer permanent officials who are consecrated and incorporated in the administrative body disrupts the day-to-day transmission of historical knowledge that maximizes efficiency. The coexistence of permanence and impermanence in the Commission produces

discontinuities in the collective modes of embodied belonging through which it reproduces itself socially.

5.4 Managing by Fear

When Maja arrived at the Legal Service, she was struck by the lack of transparency or 'open styles of communication' she found there. 'To be in the Commission is a completely unique experience. You don't know everyone. You don't know who is who. You've never done this before. So, if someone tells you, "Look this up for me", you're like, "Do you mean look this up and then tell you verbally what I looked up? Do you mean look this up and write a 20-page memo? Do you mean look this up and write you an email about it?"' It was clear to her that these questions were not ones she could simply ask in a straightforward manner. Gradually she internalized the rules of engagement, picking up certain 'finesses' and employing them in daily practice.

'You get these strong personalities who are just dreadful. Some are a bit more aware than others, and they catch on. Others don't at all' (Charlotte). Charlotte has a presence that commands respect, suggesting that she does not countenance being messed with. This was partly the reason why she was headhunted by Home Affairs. 'I'm really very friendly. I can be pushy, but you see, I'm lucky. I'm a full-time civil servant, so there's not a lot they can do to me.' The Head of Personnel correctly suspected that she had what it takes to handle the Director, a truculent matron who had sent two assistants and several secretaries fleeing away in tears already. 'Being the daughter of my father, they probably thought that if I was as bloody-minded as he was, it might work.' Defying this Director was the best way of winning her over: 'If you stood up to her, she respected you. It was just a basic insecurity on her part. She *pushed* people. She would push and push and push, hoping to find some way to be able

to trust them.' At their first meeting, Charlotte walked her through a list of necessary terms and conditions she had prepared and printed out the night before, which would need to be agreed upon if she was to take the job. 'And by the way,' she added, 'I'm taking two hours off at lunchtime, twice a week, to go to my karate class.' An agreement was made, and not once did either party let work get in between her and her martial arts training.

Among those for whom the Director had less respect for were people who suffer her gladly, like the secretary Charlotte consoled and sent home in the middle of what, for her, had been a particularly abusive day.

'But I can't go', said the secretary, distraught. 'If I go, I can't come back.'

'Go home. Tomorrow morning I'll be late, so there won't be anyone around. You come in, you shut the door and you tell her you're not accepting that kind of treatment. Otherwise, she'll have you for breakfast, lunch and dinner.' In the game of sharks and minnows, juniors and superiors, followers and leaders, likenesses attract.

A defining moment of her career was when she defied the will of another Director after he asked her to do an order that violated the financial regulations. 'I'm sorry, I'm not putting my name on that. And by the way,' she said, 'I would like to point out that I'm protecting *you* here.' She suggested another route that would have made for a perfectly legal alternative, but he was in no mood for any of it and scampered off to find someone else to sign it. For some while, she deliberated over whether to turn him into the Commissioner or not, and she probably would have if he were not someone so 'high up on the list of well-known harassment people'. Taking such a course would only come back to bite her later. Instead, she decided that she would be the one to go. She had already stuck around too long in any case. It was time to move on. 'My career has suffered somewhat, but hey—I can look at myself in the morning. I'm not ambitious. I'm still having a good time, which at the end of the day is the most important thing. Do I want to be a Head of Unit, and have to deal with

people like me? No thanks.' Her new boss is a rising 'superstar' whom she is much taken with. She now lives out her old career hopes and dreams vicariously through her: 'I really wish they would make her Head of the School, because everybody would be really happy working for her, and she would be absolutely excellent at it: two good reasons why she won't get in!'

Modernization brings a shift in administrative ethos towards 'proper management'—or, alternatively, 'management by fear':

> Something much more specific to this Commission, the Juncker Commission—or the 'Selmayr Commission' rather, as it's Selmayr in particular—is management by fear. You get a lot of that, but it's particularly prevalent at the top echelons. People are constantly watching their backs, constantly scared. They just don't know where problems are going to come from. When you don't manage by trust but by fear. That's the Euro-civil service at its worst. [Annabel]

An EU administration managed by fear in the 'ruthless and very controlling style' of the Secretary-General is one where heightened suspicions abound. Permanent officials acquiesce to the will of their superiors who keep a watchful eye on them. The HoU towers over your shoulder throughout the morning and afternoon, surveilling your work. 'If you want to make a career in the Commission, you have to learn how to behave in a good way with the people of the Cabinet,' said Raphael, who prefers to work alone when possible. He sees himself as the sort of person who does not get along well with authority figures and takes no interest in the vertical push and pull of internal power relations.

> If I wanted to, I'd probably be at the level of Head of Unit by now, but I honestly don't want to manage people in a unit. You have a number of responsibilities, and you have to listen on a daily basis to someone in the Cabinet say, 'You have to do this. You have to do that.' If you have a minimum amount of ambition and you like to manage people, this is the path you have to go down. In my case, I am happy in my grade, but my career is basically over.

When his boss, speaking on behalf of the Director, wants him to do something he knows is foolish, the correct response is invariably 'yes'. Directors cannot stand up to the Commissioners, with their strange and urgent demands, without fear of committing some inadvertent form of self-harm. Unlike civil servants on permanent contracts, temporary

agents are disposable human resources who 'get exploited' and are not at liberty to assert their needs. 'They can't simply turn around and say, "Don't ring me at home." It's their livelihood that's at stake, and that's dangerous' (Charlotte).

'If you reduce the number of staffers and expand the amount of things that they have to do collegiately, it makes for a very frustrating time' (Annabel). It also 'makes for interesting internal politics.' Cabinets have around 7 members, among whom the 28 portfolios are divided, and when 28 commissioners move forward with a file from all directions simultaneously, they tend to 'bump into' one another. Such collisions could be obviated by jettisoning the 'one country, one Commissioner' system and reducing the number of portfolios, but the negative results of referenda on the European Constitution in recent years has made this a non-starter. 'Brexit will shave off one post, I guess, but it's not a silver lining.' The idea is to 'streamline' the procedure by pressuring Commissioners to join forces and 'think outside of their silos', so that everyone monitors one another and spends more energy on the portfolios of other people's bosses rather than on their own agendas. From where Annabel is sitting, the 'collegiality principle' was a 'strategic choice' on the Cabinet's part to restrain the movements of Commissioners by 'squeezing their teams and bombarding them with a lot of bureaucracy and paperwork that isn't directly related to their work.' In fewer numbers, officials must go deeper into their policy areas and be 'more correct' in their analyses. This 'can be difficult in a broader picture', one in which a Director never feels that they are in full control of his or her file.

The daily business of Commission officials has an outwardly meta, self-reflexive dimension to it. By sending and receiving forms, processing payments, answering emails and phone calls, presenting files and reading briefings for approaching meetings, they are 'contributing to the top-level objectives of the DG, and then of the Commission, and then of the EU as a whole' (Roger). Through practices of introspection and self-reflexivity, officials

make time to reflect, by themselves and in groups, on the 'particular areas where we have a lack of Europe' and what to change in their approach to work-life to bring it more in line with ideals of 'best practice'.

The Director-General's team at AGRI subscribes to the communitarian tradition of 'shared management', whereby supervisory roles and responsibilities relating to each policy-making stage are shared among them more or less evenly:

> I'm constantly under pressure. I rarely read. I read what I have to sign, but of the letters and other stuff coming in, I really only read what's necessary. I'll skim through stuff and try to make sure that it ends up on the right person's desk and that he knows what he has to do with it—all this without trying to be 'the manager'. I'm not the manager. I'm just trying to run the process. Maybe I'm not intelligent enough for the job—that could be it as well. It's a lot of work for many long hours, but you're the spider in the web, basically. [Jens]

Just like back in the large auditorium during the first concours exam, time constraints inhibit him from reading most things—that is to say, *really* reading them. 'Every day I have to reflect on what holds Europe together and what we should be doing to bring it together. What is our role as the European Commission? As DG for Agriculture, what can we contribute?' There are more mundane questions as well, such as why they should want to be running a common agricultural policy in the first place, or why they shouldn't take on a new solidarity corps initiative instead. The spider-in-the-web doctrine is a practice in Dutch patent law granting state courts the jurisdiction to give injunctions in infringement cases to all defendants of a transnational group of companies if it is headquartered in the Netherlands, regardless of the patent's national issuing authority. Jens used the example to illustrate the interconnectedness of the Commission's circulatory system as it appears to an 'acting Director': an assistant who is not 'the manager' but 'acts' as one 'without trying'.

Still, many officials feel that a 'sense of connectedness' has been lost (Annabel). There was a formidable *esprit de corps* in the Old Commission: an administrative solidarity among officials founded in the initiation oath they took to devote their work-lives to a historic social

and moral project. The Commission saw itself as the supranational executive of a state in formation. Europe must and will be built by 'the boldness and breadth of vision of a handful of men' (Monnet 1978: 525). Casual workaday interactions once centered around friendly debates over what sort of state it should be and what achieving real sovereignty at this level would look like:

> When I joined, everybody was working for Europe. It used to come up in conversations: 'Oh, Europe's going towards *this* or doing *this* for the European taxpayer, and we can't waste this money because it's taxpayers' money.' It's been 10 years since I have heard anybody talk about either of those. Now it's all woe and microeconomics and much less, 'Where is the ship going?' The ship doesn't know where it's going, and consequently you can't drag everybody in its wake. [Charlotte]

After the reform, deep certainties regarding the broader implications of work-life were destabilized and embossed with an ambient woe. EU civil servants began to see themselves less as the engineers of European statehood and more as workers in an international organization that runs as smoothly and efficiently as anything in the private sector.

The increased power and influence of Directors and Directors-General in the shift toward managerialism coincided with a felt loss of direction among officials: 'To be honest, in the New Commission you more and more fail to see what you're actually doing, except for shifting papers from one person to another and trying to convince the Cabinet that something you want to do is actually useful to do' (Lorelei).

The reorganization of policy areas into 10 priorities changes working methods 'qualitatively' and 'strategically' in a political Commission that has become more reluctant to propose new legislation. Second on the top 10 list decided on by the Cabinet is 'a connected Digital Single Market'. MARKT is Jeremy's 'natural' environment. 'A natural evolution would have been for me to get a job in Internal Market, but I did not. There was a bit of a problem: I found it a bit boring.' His working life took a detour, and he wound up in CNECT. Today he basks in the warm sunlight of increased visibility:

> This policy area has gained a lot of visibility. In the past, it was not really a central part of the agenda. The penny has dropped politically over these last couple of years, and now we feel much more sought after and listened to. With this economic recession and the need to find new avenues to probe, Digital is seen as having some hope for doing something new, something different. There's a lot more acceptance of the fact that digital technology is changing the world we live in, and it's not being led by us. We need to catch up; we need to do more.

DGs whose agendas have not made the list are being given short shrift. Their files are rejected as 'negative priorities', to borrow a term from competition law, on the grounds that they are not considered priorities at all (Wils 2017).

Managers like Roger strive to discern the precise importance of each task by separating out the 'right' from the 'wrong', and what fits into the overall objective from what does not. 'What Juncker has done is to make people across the Commission question everything that they're doing on the basis of: "Does this fit? Is this the right thing, right now?"' If it does not fit, he will encourage the underlings to imagine ways of reshaping it so that it does:

> Directing people is about making sure that they have the environment, the tools and the guidance to unleash their potential in the most effective way. It's about steering them in that direction and shaping the content to make sure that we have the biggest possible impact in what we're doing. Sometimes, of course, that means not letting them do exactly what they want because it doesn't fit with the overall priorities of the Commission at the moment. You have to help them to stand back and say, 'Well OK, maybe President Juncker doesn't think that investment in early childhood education is where he should be putting his energy this week. Maybe the migration problem or the collapse of the Italian banks is more important for him than what we're doing now.' We have to make sure that we are giving him what we can produce at points that he can use, and which will enable him to advance our agenda as well as his—not bother him with stuff which he's not interested in. [Roger]

'Without going down a propaganda route,' Annabel said by way of preface,

> you might have heard some moaning from certain colleagues about how we've turned off the taps for the constant flow of proposals—asking ourselves, 'Do we really need to do this? Is it "nice to have" or is it "need to have"?' We do run a very tight shop in terms of what proposals can actually come out, where the life forces in the Commission should be focused and where the efforts should go, being quite ruthless in terms of quality. You could call that 'power'. That's made a lot of people very unhappy.

The 2014 reforms intensified the self-reflexive dimension by compelling officials to scrutinize and rationalize their usage of human and financial resources more closely: 'We need to see where we really *do* provide value added, not to try to do everything. This will

continue, because it is in line with what the different member states are thinking: they want a slimmer Commission as well. By necessity, you need to be more focused.'

Living in a state of permanent self-scrutiny, officials are 'meta-reflexives' who question the legitimacy and utility of their own work-life practices in the very act of carrying them out. As Archer (2007) writes:

> Endorsement of a transcendental ideal entails an attempt to transcend the self—to overcome one's defects and deficiencies until one approximates more closely to being a personification of that ideal…. Consequently, self-criticism is a constant accompaniment of meta-reflexivity because much inner dialogue is devoted to self-examination, self-correction and self-dedication. Obviously, since the aim is self-improvement in relation to an ideal, the meta-reflexive always deems herself to have fallen short, and therefore self-criticism is unending.

The social reproduction of the European Commission relies on the continued performance and embodiment of an administrative identity and belonging among new generations of Union officials. The drastic reduction in legislative output is the cause of an atmosphere of general malaise spreading through the halls and corridors. Officials with deprioritized policy areas suffer from low morale and become disillusioned after seeing their projects caught in a 'Juncker-Timmermans bottleneck' while still in their planning stages (Meier 2016). Enthusiasm and motivation in the working environment are diminished by modes of self-abnegation that include annual sacrifices of human and budgetary resources and a more intense focus on self-criticism. 'I feel that we've failed very much to reinvent ourselves', Eloise said. Lost and listless, they struggle to remake the connections that link their daily practices to the grander European project that renders their working lives meaningful.

5.5 The impropriety of proper channels

Bureaucratic institutions reproduce themselves socially by adapting to shifting realities, and the desire for self-preservation is rivaled by a propensity to resist change. 'In principle, the

management wants the house to stay in place. That's what they are looking for' (Olivia). To modernize institutions is to bring up them up to date so as to improve them. To be modern is to move in tandem with the vicissitudes of history and adapt to the concrete realities of the present. As Mark said, 'We couldn't keep things as they were.'

The modernity in modernization invokes the technoscientific futurism of the previous industrial revolution. Eloise described her work as an HoU for HR at FISMA as being 'a very internal job' that is 'people-focused' rather than policy-related. 'I just help the DG run this place by pouring oil in the machinery here and there and ensuring smooth operation.' Machine language is ubiquitous among civil servants, for whom the administration is a 'very complex machine' reproducing itself on 'fixed timetables' by running candidates along on a 'conveyor belt' and selecting those who are a 'good fit' with the 'right motivation' and 'EU vision'. Officials see their work as 'the oil that is needed to keep the engine of the EU running' and themselves as 'the people who need to be there, at each stage, pushing the car.' At face value, 'the idea of Europe wants to be synonymous or coterminous with modernism' (Abélès 2010). The first step taken towards pooling resources and fusing markets aimed at 'the rationalization of production…at the highest level of productivity' (Schuman 1950). In the EU civil service, '*Il faut être absolument moderne* [One must be absolutely modern]' (Rimbaud 1873).

As Director of EPSO, Mark sees it as his role to recreate the ideal conditions for the social reproduction of 21st century Homo europaeus, a species of New Men who are 'very motivated, but also really pretty skillful.' The high volume of submissions is why the modernized concours is regarded as the fairest and most transparent method. For officials, this reality lends an air of randomness and indeterminism to the contest. If you ask them, their passage through the concours is best explained by an instance of serendipity, an odd fluke, an unlikely occurrence, a stroke of luck. Formalized rites of passage unfold over 5-9

months in a series of highly structured stages that end in a transformative consecration. When the ritual is finished, officials become truly embraced into the institution and come to embody it in kind. After joining, officials set about building networks of professional contacts and absorbing the norms of social behavior that govern work-life conduct. Mastery of the institutional codes that befit where one is and where one would like to be comes not immediately but arrives in time. In doing so, officials demonstrate that their presence in the unit diminishes rather than enhances the displeasure of their managers. Modernity means a managerialist Commission whose managers are 'spiders' suspended upside-down from the top of an interconnected and interdependent 'web'. Like the flies off of whom they feed, they are 'suspended in webs of significance' which they themselves have spun (Geertz 1973).

A seismic shift in the administrative lifeworld comes with the rising salience of 'personal responsibility for financial management'. Procedures, such as those governing financial management, are more clearly defined in an effort to hold staff personally accountable for what they do at work. 'We are irritated and frustrated by the various rules and regulations and procedures that we have. We want to just be getting out there and getting things done and not be held back by the niceties of financial regulations, or whatever. We sometimes feel frustrated that we can't do what we believe very strongly, and which stakeholders outside believe very strongly would be a right thing for us to do' (Roger). Modernity means proceduralism reentering the civil service as the total formalization of its internal operations, lending new propriety to its proper channels.

In the Old Commission, expenditures were monitored ex ante by the Financial Control Department who issued their stamp of approval on paper before the money was spent. Such a document was a blessing which, once bestowed, absolved the bearer of further responsibilities and immunized them from being held accountable for decisions taken in the future. 'You've gone to the priest, you've got your indulgence before you commit the sin, but

then it didn't really matter because your responsibility has gone' (Mark). The New Commission, where it is the individual who is responsible, champions greater personal accountability at the expense of expediency and efficiency. 'Nobody at the top level of management for accountability is going to absolve you of responsibility for everything that's gone on under your watch.'

Modernity acts as a codeword for a more meritocratic, performance-based approach to finding, managing and rewarding talent in EU work-life. Being talented and meritorious, however, will only get you so far in a devoutly proceduralist, double-tiered promotion economy where performance is evaluated within these spatiotemporal categories rather than across them. 'The trouble we suffer from most, what comes in the way of getting things done, are procedures. DG HR is a very administrative world, and the HR world of procedures is complicated' (Eloise). Formalizing talent management procedures by attaching quotas to promotions compels officials to question the credibility of modernity in talent management. The concepts of seniority and its opposite, juniority, are spatiotemporal. They describe intra-institutional power relations in terms of abstract space: an official's vertical position in the pyramid by AD level; and time, the number of years spent in a grade. Annex 1B of the Staff Regulations blurs together the concepts of seniority, which is 'pretty mathematical' being a quantifiable duration of time, and performance, which is less reliably measured. This reinforces an equivalency of meaning between rank and duration of institutional working life. A major consequence of modernization was neither more internal competition nor better performance, but slower career development. The statute acts as a security measure guarding the institution-specific capital that 'good soldiers' of seniority have acquired by preventing 'superstars' who are younger in the grade from catching up with them. When promotion is decoupled from high performance in the career trajectory of permanent officials, both start to vanish.

For Connerton (2009), modernity refers to 'the objective transformation of the social fabric unleashed by the advent of the capitalist world market which tears down feudal and ancestral limitations on a global scale, and psychologically the enlargement of life chances through the gradual freeing from fixed status hierarchies.' Many officials experience it, however, as an act of institutional self-castration that forecloses their work-life chances. If the 2004 reforms aimed to grow the administration, the 2014 reforms aimed to cull it. The ethic of 'applied procedures for the sake of procedures' ensures that nobody tries 'stepping out' of them, lest they be singled out for criticism for 'taking initiatives'. As a result, 'Even if it's the most sensible and logical thing to do, it's not the procedure, so you don't' (Annabel).

'We are not really treated very well on the whole. And what can we do?' (Lorelei).

'What do you do with that? There's nothing you can do' (Charlotte).

'What can you do? That's just the way it is, voilà' (Eloise).

The Commission completed its first anti-corruption report in 2014, 17 years after the passing of the Convention on the fight against corruption involving officials of the European Communities or officials of Member States of the European Union was published. Its authors neglected to define what constitutes corruption in the institutions (European Union 1997). The impact of 'fraudulent irregularities' on annual spending is 'just 0.2%', falling to €248 million from €315 million between 2012 and 2013.[68] It is plausible that the iniquities of fraud, corruption, inefficiency and mismanagement on display during the Santer affair led to the 2004 reform. Nonetheless, 'errors in EU spending are essentially administrative mistakes. They are not the same as fraud' (ibid.). The Commission did have its institutional ills but not at a level that could be considered excessive relative to public administrations at the national level. Most member states outdid them in this respect. The report of the

[68] http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/myths/myths_en.cfm

Committee of Independent Experts (1999a) found no evidence that any individual Commissioner committed fraud. It concluded that there had been 'instances where Commissioners or the Commission as a whole bear responsibility for instances of fraud, irregularities or mismanagement in their services or areas of special responsibility.' The last of its concluding remarks was delivered with an almost comical sense of resignation: 'The studies carried out by the Committee have too often revealed a growing reluctance among the members of the hierarchy to acknowledge their responsibility. It is becoming difficult to find anyone who has even the slightest sense of responsibility' (ibid., 144). Removing Commissioner Cresson and her team was not an option. By resigning en masse, the Santer Commission reframed the sins of a few wayward officials as a collective one.

'Modernization', in this context, marks a shift in the internal organization of roles, relations and responsibilities between individual officials and the institutional collective. Like 'crisis', it functions as a discourse of legitimation attached to preparations for the single biggest enlargement to date and was 'mostly driven by a wish to save money' (Lorelei). A younger generation of officials was brought in from new member states to pay the costs incurred by their senior predecessors as a newly reborn Commission raises its head to face the necessity of growth. A new proceduralism introduced the idea of the Commission official as an individual agent who is the ultimate locus of ascribed accountability and responsibility. It has likewise, paradoxically, dissolved a sense of individual administrative identity among officials, contributing to demotivated and woebegone sensibilities among them.

6 Tomorrow, forever: Concluding reflections on the future of Europe and Europeanness

On the last page of his memoirs, Jean Monnet (1978: 521-524) leaves the reader with an image of the Kon-Tiki sea expedition, 'whose adventure had thrilled the whole world.' He took the unlikely voyage as a symbol for the European project and the integration process which leads 'inevitably' and 'irreversibly' towards unification among Europeans. It was on this raft of papyrus-reed and balsawood that the Norwegian explorer and anthropologist Thor Heyerdahl and five others sailed in 1947 from Callao, Peru to the islands east of Tahiti in order to demonstrate his theory that the inhabitants of the Polynesian Islands originally came from the western coast of South America. Monnet kept a photo of the watercraft on his desk in Luxembourg: '"Those young men," I explained to my visitors, "chose their course, and then they set out. They knew that they could not turn back. Whatever the difficulties, they had only one option—to go on. We too are heading for our objective, the United States of Europe; and for us too there is no going back' (ibid., 524). The treacherous 101-day, 6,900-kilometer voyage was taken at great risk to its captain and crew, especially considering it was done for the primary purpose of proving a historical conjecture. Yet it was, in many ways, a success. As a metaphor, the Kon-Tiki underlines the qualities that set apart the engineers of European integration from those who 'refuse to undertake anything if they have no guarantee that things will work out as they planned' (ibid.).

As previously mentioned, I arrived in the field at a time when the flimsy, makeshift vessel that is the European Union of today was caught in the torments of an angry tempest on the open seas. It was battered and bruised by towering walls of water driven by the whirlwinds of Euroskeptic populism slamming against its sides. President Juncker, once the

captain of a ship that seemed to be sinking, entitled his 2017 SOTEU address 'The Wind in Our Sails'. Celebrating economic recovery and decreasing unemployment attributed to the European Investment Plan and the Stability and Growth Pact, he struck a more positive note: 'We now have a window of opportunity, but it will not stay open forever. Let us make the most of the momentum, catch the wind in our sails.'[69]

Annabel, speaking of her work in the cabinet of Frans Timmermans, described the upper floors of the Berlaymont as 'a very sort of niche part of the structure, but pretty nevralgic at the same time.' The second adjective, *nevralgic*, was an unfamiliar neologism. It derives from the French word *névralgique* [neuralgic], often used in the phrase *point névralgique* meaning 'nerve center'.

'The Commission represents the center, like the federal government in Germany. The Commission is Berlin' (Laurens).

Using this term, Annabel evoked the central location of the Commission, as well as a sense of its anguished intensity:

> Particularly, there's a general sense of anguish around. It was already there when I joined in 2011 with the financial crisis because we had all these waves of crises since 2005. The first blow was with the French and Dutch referendums on the Constitution—that feeling of, 'how do we connect with people?' It's the question of the legitimacy of the project, the whole vocabulary around project-building, all these construction metaphors, et cetera. You don't talk about 'the France project' or the 'UK project'; you talk about 'France' and 'Germany'. Europe is still not an entity; it's a sense of direction. It's something that you work towards, that we're constantly building but we're not entirely sure what it consists of.

Whichever way the wind is blowing, civil servants in the permanent administration are ordinary people doing extraordinary things at the center of multiple storms. When the UK Referendum vote came in, she was called back to the Council by her old Chief of Staff to join the negotiating team. 'I'm now working on Brexit full-time, which is a bit tragic when you

[69] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_17_3165

think about it, being one of the very few Brits who's involved on the European side of the negotiations.'

6.1 The feeling of sovereignty

The first revelation I had concerning Britain being *in*, but not *of*, Europe came on the aforementioned trip I took to Brussels with the Oxford International Relations Society. While sitting in a compartment of the Eurostar as it traversed the Channel, I kept hearing the undergraduates in my group talk about going *to* Europe. This struck me as odd as, while living in England, I had been under the impression that we were already there.

The idea of 'Brexit' was never meant to turn into something more than an amusing joke. First, there was the issue of the name, an example of the sort of cringeworthy portmanteaus favored by tabloid broadsheets and the digital blogosphere. It was first coined back in 2012 in a blogpost by EurActiv, one of the EU-centric media platforms that I followed in the field.[70] Like 'Leave Means Leave', the Orwellian slogan 'Brexit Means Brexit' has the effect of sounding reassuring without revealing much by way of meaning. The identity proposition 'A=A' is 'accepted by everyone and that without a moment's thought…it is *absolutely* certain, that is, *without any other ground*; and in so saying—doubtless with general approval—we should be ascribing to ourselves the power of asserting something absolutely' (Fichte 1804). A self-referential abstraction of the highest caliber, it is an axiomatic truth grounded in nothing but itself. As both sign and signifier, the term acts as its own definition and provides its own justification. Nobody thought it would come to pass. True, there were those like Arthur who predicted four weeks prior to the vote that Britain would leave. Around

[70] https://www.euractiv.com/section/uk-europe/news/oxford-english-dictionary-the-man-who-coined-brexit/

two weeks later, I myself surmised that the Remain camp had failed to convince and awoke in similar fashion to the possibility that it all may be about to go irrevocably wrong. Yet, even at this late stage, the eventuality still seemed inconceivable. It was not until the the formal start of exit negotiations with the activation of Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, an early assurance by Theresa May's cabinet that *vox populi* would be taken as *vox Dei*, that the reality began to sink in, and the EU-28 became the EU-27 versus the EU-1. On 23 June 2016, 65 million Britons stared into the abyss and jumped. The day of the referendum was the defining moment of the Juncker Commission as well as the climax and plot twist of the fieldwork period.

That evening, I joined a circle of Commission officials and others at the Funky Monkey pub on Rue Archimède to watch the votes come in from across the Channel. It was Bertolt who invited me, and the group assembled there mostly consisted of German lawyers like himself. We stood around talking, sipping and checking social media on our phones, taking intermittent breaks to gaze up disconcertedly at the large screens showing the BBC coverage. Pundits sat in front of multi-colored regional maps, interviewing politicians and correspondents as various tallies and percentages appear and reappear. Eventually, Bertolt turned to me and whispered these words in my ear: 'We can go home. Farage has just admitted defeat.'

'I don't believe you,' I told him.

'Why not?', he asked.

'Because I'm not an optimistic person.'

The night in June was a cathartic moment of disappointment in the lives of my informants. The 'nightmare scenario' (Mark) had come true, and it brought with it a sense of loss that was felt on a visceral and personal level. Many officials had been living in Brussels for decades at this point. Some started families here and consider the city their 'home',

whether exclusively or primarily. The outcome was an especially heavy blow for the British officials I came to know, those who have devoted some or all their working lives to the European project and the UK's place within it. Arthur considered it a slap in the face, if not a refutation of his entire career:

> I think the big disappointment with Brexit is, on a personal level, you're just nothing. You did nothing. It's all rubbish and you feel totally rejected, which is one of the reasons why I'm taking Belgian nationality. To hell with them. If I were less rational, I'd send my passport in a registered envelope to Theresa May saying, 'You can keep it.' I'm not going to do that because it would be shooting myself in the foot, but it would give me some sense of personal satisfaction. Or send it to Boris Johnson, since it says on the passport 'Her Britannic Majesty's Principal Secretary of State and Foreign Affairs'.

This was said, of course, when Mr. Johnson's ascendence to 10 Downing Street was less than inevitable. I tried to mollify Arthur by suggesting that it had more to do with larger things, such as the politics of nostalgia, than with any vague animus they may harbor towards EU bureaucrats themselves. He disagreed: 'As I've said to you before, and I'm not the only one to say this, but when you open your mouth in Britain about the fact that you work for the European Union, there's more than a 50% chance that the person you're speaking to will jump down your throat. They'll be veiled insults and something worse, so you don't say anything. It's not worth it because you won't convert them.' It is true that EU officials generally have a less-than-favorable standing in the British press and certain English pubs. Monnet has long represented 'the emminence grise [sic] of supranational villainy' among British Euroskeptics.[71] Arthur took pains to acknowledge, nevertheless, that historic decisions of this kind are ultimately 'up to the citizens'.

Young Liam, in his happy-go-lucky manner, adopted a somewhat sunnier view. 'I hate the literature of the tabloids, and of course it's somewhat exaggerated, but it's a healthy debate! It reminds us from time to time that Europe and European integration is not a deal

[71] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2016/04/27/the-european-union-always-was-a-cia-project-as-brexiteers-discov/

done. They might be asking the right questions. We can't say, "We're so great; we're so great." It doesn't come off well.'

'I'm sorry', is all I could think to say.

'No, God, don't be sorry. Jesus, no. I mean, we could have done more...apparently. I don't know what more we could have done. Brexit we can survive. "Frexit" would be an absolute disaster for the European project—the end of it, I suspect.'

Breaking up is a notoriously difficult thing to do. Extracting the UK from the EU's architecture is a demonstrably invasive procedure. After nearly half a century as a member, the UK is bound to the EU by 14,000 laws and regulations and 700 foreign trade agreements. The negotiations have dominated the national news cycle, leaving little space in the attentional bandwidth for other issues. 'The European question' has never been so salient in British politics, and the European flag has never been so widely visible. Debates on how best to leave have brought into sharper focus questions of what it means to be inside the EU in the first instance and what the EU precisely is in turn. With no intelligible pro-European narrative, the half-hearted efforts of the Remain campaign relied almost exclusively on economic arguments. And yet, the moral and emotive significance of the decision extends beyond what the logics of dry economic self-interest would demand. While the Leave campaign also made promises of continued economic prosperity, the prevailing consensus among economists see a divorce as antithetical to the health of both the UK and EU economies, predicting a destabilization of the financial sector that introduces new risks and overburdens regulators. Those who led Leave to victory are more than likely aware of the risks. Brexit may therefore be understood as a transaction, one in which the UK agreed to forgo the certainties of uninterrupted economic growth in order to gain something in return. Britain purchased something, in effect. What it has bought in the financial transaction, as is

evoked in the slogan 'Vote leave and take back control', is a feeling of sovereign self-determination, a sense of control over destiny.

While the causes of reactionary populist movements are commonly associated with economic anxieties, there are a host of other, more emotive and ideological factors to consider. A recent Pew poll (Simmons et al. 2018) found that nearly three-quarters of British adults (73%) would like to see certain EU powers returned to national governments. At the same time, a smaller majority (62%) believes that EU membership has been good for their national economy. In the same year, then-Foreign Secretary Johnson gave a telling speech in which he noted how 'sometimes these economic anxieties are intensified by the other fears—about identity or security—so that hitherto recondite concepts like the single market or the customs union acquire unexpected emotive power.'[72] Another revealing moment came a few months later, during an interview that then-UKIP leader Nigel Farage (2018) gave during a morning talk show:

'I would concede to you', said the TV presenter, 'that you are a man of principle in this campaign inasmuch as you have always accepted that there could be a serious economic knock from the process of leaving the European Union. You think it's worth paying that price.'

'I think none of us can tell, economically, whether we'll be better off or worse off in or out of the European Union,' he replied, 'because none of us can foretell the future. What I do think are two things. Number one: independence, I can't put a price on. And number two: we should not measure the well-being of the people of this country simply by GDP numbers. So, in other words, if there was a hit to our economy, it would be a price worth paying because you can't put a price on that.'

[72] https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-boris-johnson-s-brexit-speech

It is this liberationist feeling of national sovereignty and self-control that the 'Brexiteers' wanted, and some were willing to seize it at virtually any financial cost. The feeling is closely related to the modes of belonging and allegiance that nationalism procures for those who subscribe to it: 'What populists promise their voters is not competence but intimacy' (Krastev 2017). Europe's largest deficit, then, is psychological and cultural rather than economic, having to do with a 'loss of faith in the universal, humanistic values of what might be called the European idea' (Kirchick 2017). As much as economic concerns, the UK Referendum intersected with issues of collective identity, the antagonistic dualism of Europe and nation state, and what it means to embrace, reject or passively disregard belonging to the EU. The question of identity was a black box lying at the core of the affair: 'It's fundamentally about "who are we?" What does it mean to be part of this nation? Is it not "our" nation anymore, "our" meaning the ethnic majority?' (Taub 2016).

'Identity', Arthur said, 'is why the referendum was so bitterly fought.' The rising vitriol of the campaign season in UK reached a ghastly fever pitch with the murder of MP Jo Cox. A new square in Brussels was named in her honor, just behind Ancienne Belgique, a concert venue she frequented, I am told, as much as I did.

The movement to remove the UK from the EU has existed in some form even before the country joined in the early seventies. This provision of Article 50 of the TEU was initially drafted with the UK in mind.[73] British officials in the Commission can be prone to strains of Euroskepticism themselves:

> I am sure that you are more than aware, living in Oxford, that the British discourse on identity is markedly different than most, if not all, of the continental ones. I, in fact knew, British officials in their initial employment in the Commission who made no secret of the fact that they did not believe in the European project and were in it only for the money and retirement, or who criticized the Commission publicly and pretended to be shocked when disciplinary action was taken against them.

[73] https://www.euractiv.com/section/uk-europe/news/irritated-french-politicians-back-brexit/.

Here, Arthur singled out Bernard Connolly, an ex-official who published an insider exposé called *The Rotten Heart of Europe*. 'I found this dishonest,' Arthur continued, 'but it's by no means unique.' In a blurb for the cover of the paperback edition, then-journalist Boris Johnson offered his praise for the book while admitting to not having finished it: 'On reading sections of Mr Connolly's new book, one wanted to stand on the desk and cheer.'

By decoupling economic interest from national well-being, the money-can't-buy-everything arguments in favor of Brexit contravene the neoliberalist principle which holds that for nation states, as with business enterprises, growth is always an unalloyed good. As explored in chapter four, this is the same principle behind European integration that member states will continue to integrate into an ever closer union to the extent that doing so maximizes their economic self-interest. In this way, Brexit magnifies identities that fall along a new ideological axis, one with nationalism at one pole and globalism at the other, eclipsing the traditional socioeconomic axis of right versus left. Perhaps what we are witnessing is a clash between the 'somewheres', with identities and belongings rooted in blood and soil, and the 'anywheres' (Goodhart 2017) or 'nowheres' (May 2016), 'whose hearts lie in Paris or London, whose money is in New York or Cyprus, and whose loyalty is to Brussels' (Krastev 2017). The divide speaks to urban-rural divisions: Leave lost in almost all of the big cities but was carried into victory by voting constituencies in the hinterlands. Nationalists see globalists as international 'citizens of nowhere', the elite classes of academics, politicians, businessmen and journalists who, in their metropolitan allegiances to free trade and open borders, value the interests and well-being of distant foreigners over those of their countrymen.[74] Globalists see nationalists as insular provincials who feel they have been made politically and economically redundant by the sweeping advance of globalization and who do not understand

[74] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/05/theresa-mays-conference-speech-in-full/

abstract art (Carl, Richards and Heath 2019). By these definitions, among informants I am among the globalists.

6.2 Think about the eyes and not about the hunchback

Positive attitudes toward the European project in principle is an intuitive configuration of identifying the self as a European. Beyond their enthusiasm for *the* institutions, the European level organizational structures in which their lives are enmeshed, officials are self-styled 'institutionalists' who maintain a heightened appreciation of modern institutions more generally: 'It's fun to do, to understand how the basic machinery functions in an institution like this.'

Officials cited this conviction as part of what attracted them to work here in the first place:

> We set out our Employee Value Proposition, and I think it's a compelling one. Clearly, working for Europe and making a difference for Europe is one of the most important ones. All the research I see coming up says that what Gen X, Gen Y and the millennial generation want is the ability or opportunity to make a difference, where they ought to feel that they're making a real contribution that they can see. That's a very, very positive thing that we can offer here: to make a difference, but also make one for Europe and be part of the European project. [Mark]

The European ethos encompasses an ideological allegiance to the European project, an attraction towards integration and an affinity with strong EU institutions that enjoy ever-growing competences. 'Wherever they're coming from, recruiting people who have a strong European ethos is very important for the working environment. The people who are driven by the idea of forging something EU', whispered Olivia softly. 'If they come from a working environment that is not very pro-European and they don't see it as necessarily adding value, it's more difficult for this idea to sink in.'

‘I am very idealistic,’ Zsófia laughed, ‘that is why I am here. I could work in a law firm and make more money, but I am not interested in that. I am much more interested in making some change, and here I can. The people who are working here, they really believe in this stuff.’ It is likewise an institutional habitus of negotiating one policy rather than 28 and having the skills necessary for selling it. ‘We stand for the common interest, and we should be able to convey the vision’ (Eloise). This vision is one shared by those who run the Parliament and the other European-level bodies, big and small. The Council, known in the Commission as ‘the other side of the street’, is a possible exception. It is here in the Commission where this vision is most visible among the workforce:

> It is often said in the textbooks that we are the ‘engine’ of the European Union. We think as a European civil servant would much more than in the other institutions because of our loyalties. In the Commission, you really don’t follow any national agendas. We have this role: to put this common European thing on the table. We are trying to move this forward, and this is our identity as the Commission. Somehow, it’s really like in the textbook. We are really only loyal to this idea.

Acknowledging the extent to which her administrative identity is ‘just like in the textbook’, something one would overhear in a basic introduction to the EU or read about on the website, shows the degree of near-perfect alignment between her first-person conceptualization of her role and that prescribed by the officialized narrative.

It is often the international dimension of Europe-building, seeing it ‘from a global point of view’, that most attracts new recruits (Morgan). Many British officials ‘with good potential, who are interested in Europe and speak foreign languages’, are introduced to the EU lifeworld via the European Fast Stream (Jeremy). Students in this scheme gain experience working in European-level policy while collaborating with EU officials in Brussels and undergraduates in neighboring capitals. Mark was in his second year in the British civil service when the Fast Stream launched. ‘There was the realization that there were far too few Brits here in the institutions. It’s kind of come full circle.’ He was, ‘by some miracle’, put on

the team of the International Aviation Department following the liberalization of air transport during the creation of the single market. As 'the most junior bag-carrier' in the British delegation, he crossed the Channel monthly to the sit in on transport policy discussions with the Council. 'That was where it planted the seed in my mind that this was actually the place I wanted to be rather than spending the rest of my career in Whitehall, where you get put in one department and you tend to stay there forever. It sounds rude, but I was much more interested in *doing something*, influencing the outcome rather than translating it.' Here in Brussels, he glimpsed 'the bigger picture' for the very first time. He was soon invited to join the Permanent Representation, which was doubling in size ahead of the UK's Council presidency in the second half of 1992. 'I didn't need asking twice.' He described his personal transition into the Commission upon arrival as 'seamless'.

France has its own version. 'It's a way of getting good people into public research as opposed to private research because they snatch you early,' said Annabel, who worked for the EU Delegation in Beijing. 'I got involved in research that focused on how dysfunctional the EU is in the way that it deals with China and found it really hard to go back to the purely national setting after that. I couldn't really see myself fitting into the box of being a purely French civil servant.'

While at Whitehall, Liam similarly discovered that a working life dedicated to one country alone is not a working life worth living. 'I made a conscious decision to leave the UK, kind of necessarily—not because it's any better or any worse than any of the other countries in Europe. I didn't want to live *in* a country; I didn't want to work on a national level.' Through recruitment schemes that bridge the national and European, officials develop or redevelop a vision of Europeanness, a preview of what a supranational civil service can achieve at a European level, before ever stepping foot inside an EU institution themselves.

‘When I left here, I said to myself, “The last place I ever want to work in life is the EU.” And then I went into auditing and suddenly realized, “Well hang on a minute, actually, the Commission is bloody efficient compared with a lot of banks and insurance companies, who are so inefficient it’s just not possible.” They’re always held up to be these models of efficiency, but they’re not!’ (Charlotte). As the European Union is so often understood in relation to extant nation states, whether they be member states or third countries, so officials understand the Commission in relation to the bureaucratic traditions of national administrations. The Commission runs the same way that public administrations at national and subnational levels do, they insist, following already well-established practices.

There is nothing distinctly European about the loosely defined practice of taking into consideration a wide variety of interests expressed by various actors, weighing costs and benefits, striking balances, brokering compromises and molding it all together to produce something of added value. Policymakers in national administrations do this as well. EU civil servants enact Europeanness in their work as a supranational orientation for conducting comparative analyses of systemic performance across national governments. ‘You have to always think that you have 28 member states, and you have 28 different cultures so that it fits for all the culture [without] overstepping anything or undermining anyone. It’s more general—you can't really specify it’ (Isla). Doing this means building fora for ‘exchanging best practices’: ‘What we’re doing here is confronting them with harder questions than they would naturally ask themselves. “Well surprisingly, Ireland, you could do it better if you looked at what Finland is doing or what Poland is doing. Have you thought about the Dutch performance funding system?”.’ Through the ‘comparative performance of systems’, officials ‘give them a view which they would never have on their own.’

Much of the nobility involved in such an orientation consists in an encompassing broadmindedness, an ability to imaginatively transcend the enclosed horizons of lower levels

and smaller scales. Putting Europe before nation represents an awakened adherence to a higher calling. The concept of 'methodological nationalism' captures certain ways in which social theory was harnessed to further the explicit aims of 20th century nation-building projects (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). The role the social sciences has performed in solidifying this paradigm can scarcely be exaggerated (Stocking 1982). Europe-building entails its own forms of methodological nationalism, borrowing much as it does an earlier impulse toward nationness. The national impulse to define the position which any single country occupies in the world may, in turn, be accused of its own methodological supranationalism. Observing how it interacts with other discrete states—trading, liaising, competing, being impinged on—requires that the viewer step back from a nation-centric viewpoint and adopt a supranational orientation.

The European Ombudsman, the EU's internal watchdog for maladministration, lists 'commitment to the European Union and its citizens' and 'respect for others' among its five principles of EU public service. The respect required to prosper in a multinational, multilingual organization does not always come easy. 'Working in the Commission is a very difficult thing', Leon said. 'It all becomes very complex. You can see it either as enriching or just a bloody nuisance.' For him, the fundamental plight of the Commission civil servant is analogous to that of the protagonist in Alberto Moravia's The Woman of Rome. The novel tells the story of Adriana, a young ingénue renowned for her looks who begins her working life as a painter's model before becoming a courtesan. Each of the clients she sees personifies a different facet of the social hierarchy existing in Mussolini's Italy. In one scene, our anti-heroine is pressed upon by an acquaintance to reveal the secret to her craft. How is she able to sleep with so many different kinds of men, from a decorated Fascist army officer to a hunchback with a disfigured face and form? 'Yes, you are absolutely right. At first, it's difficult,' she replies, 'but what you have to do is to find something that is attractive about

that person. He may be a hunchback, but perhaps he has very attractive blue eyes, you see. So, you think about the eyes and not about the hunchback.'

Likening a career in the Commission with the life of a sex worker lends a new layer of meaning to the term *public servant*. The comparison Leon drew between them may not be as outrageous a choice of metaphor as it first seemed to me, however. He did not mean to suggest that officials are 'loose' in an old-fashioned, moral sense. There do exhibit, as has been discussed, certain behaviors, inclinations and dispositions which they themselves regard as bizarre and unconventional. Nor was he implying that working in these offices involves 'selling oneself' in ways that are especially obscene or unsavory relative to what is required from staff inside other bureaucratic organizations in operation today. 'It's not glamorous on a day-to-day basis', Annabel admitted. The figurative link between officials and paid escorts lies not in the acts they perform or the services they provide, but in their adaptive approaches to managing social diversity in the workplace environment. It may be that when officials arrive at the office each day, they 'leave their national hats at the door' (Gravili 2016). They nonetheless bring along with them personal histories, life experiences, social expectations and work habits. The micro-environment of a single DG unit is one in which contiguous hierarchies of value, deep-seated visions of Europeanness that are incompatible if not incommensurable, rub along with and against one another within a private, confined space. To prove that they belong, it is incumbent upon the novice to find a way to reconcile the irreconcilable.

While interviewing hopeful candidates on the Selection Boards, Leon would typically give them five minutes to speak about themselves before beginning with his questions. He recalled one interview with a Danish fellow that had gone particularly awry. 'Sit down. It's nice to see you', he said in English. We've got your application form. You've passed our

written test. I wonder if you'd be kind enough to explain to us a little about your career so far, to remind us about it.' This was translated into Danish by the interpreter.

'Yes', said the man, who then proceeded to sit quietly. A few moments of silence came and went. The Danes and Finns were known for their brevity, but this was rather excessive. 'Fine,' said Leon. 'Well, there you are. Five minutes. Please, tell us.'

The Italians, on the other hand, were stereotypically loquacious. When prompted, they could orate in accentuated, long-form paragraphs which seemed to meander on and on without end. It was difficult to stop them once they started. For some of his colleagues, the mere sight of an Italian walking into the room was enough to make their eyes glaze over. Five minutes would drag into 15, then 45. Leon would fall into daydream, drifting into a mild reverie to the sound of their intonations. 'They're very tiring, these Selection Boards. If you were tired, having an Italian candidate late in the day was super, you see. Because you can say, "Well, we can just switch off!" One ought not to do these things, but one does of course.'

A certain amount of cultural openness and improvisational skill is required to 'deal with different cultures and different nationalities':

> Take a Greek, for example. There are probably a lot of things that you don't like about Greeks, but some things about Greece and some things about Greeks are terribly appealing. So, you think about that, and that enables you to rub along with the Greeks or the Germans or whatever. Sooner or later, you meet particular individuals who get you to stop thinking that a general culture is one thing. But particular individuals can be intolerable, and that's a very difficult thing to face up to. You have to say, 'Well, is it just because I'm English and he's Italian? Or is it really because he's just a bastard?

European identity is a 'lens' which magnifies the good qualities of colleagues as individuals, as ends-in-themselves, as opposed to the replicas of larger, undifferentiated cultural wholes into which the idiosyncrasies of individual persona are dissolved. It acts as a technique for recognizing and correcting for the influence of preconceived biases held consciously or otherwise against other European cultures. Europeanness acknowledges the cultural

differences Britishness and Greekness but does not stop there, contented to view the distance between them as an unbridgeable gulf and never the twain shall meet. Rather, it goes a step further and asks, 'What sort of Greek is he or she—and what sort of Brit?'. Being European in the Commission involves a sustained attempt to 'think about the eyes and not about the hunchback', a 'xenophilic' mode of engagement for tolerating the unfamiliar that must be learned on the job (Borneman and Ghassem-Fachandi 2017; Napier 2017).

Some personalities have a knack for it. Others, less so. 'The first shock of many staff recruited into the European institutions', Leon wrote in his report, 'is to find that many of their underlying assumptions about behavior, often barely made explicit in their own country since they seem so obvious, are not necessarily shared by colleagues.' These new recruits may react to this experience by ordering their colleagues around or passing judgment on them without much thought. He described another official from Sweden who was so intransigently Swedish that he became something of a walking caricature around the office. Nearly every contribution he made during meetings began with, 'In Sweden…' or 'As a Swede…'. Leon attributed his behavior to 'almost unconscious reasons—originating, perhaps, with King Gustavus Adolphus back in the 17th century.' By insisting, as if by instinct, that what happens in Sweden is what should happen in Brussels, he forfeited a valuable opportunity to exert his own culturally informed influence and bestow the wealth of his situated, first-hand knowledge on his team. This went on for months before he realized the counterproductivity of this approach. Broadening their vision through a dispassionate, European lens, officials begin to see how the national 'jigsaw puzzle pieces' can be made to fit together, and collaborative policymaking can proceed efficiently and effectively.

'When you arrive and you don't know much about what's actually going on, you are driven by grand ideas', Olivia said.

> When you put your sleeves up and start working, it gets a bit dirty. You realize that being European also means being willing to compromise just to remain together. Maybe we compromise a bit on some of our values because some of the member states are not completely aligned. It's a bit sad, but you do it thinking, 'If we speak as the EU, we will stay together, at least.' So, it's alright.

With these final words, she gave out a deep and heavy sigh. To me, it sounded like an almost soul-crushing state of affairs. 'It is a bit soul-crushing. What comes out in the end is not as soul-crushing, but the process can be a bit upsetting. At the end of the day, it is an imagined community, and it's all very beautiful in every field of work.'

6.3 Elective identities

The concurrent and interrelated crises of democracy, legitimacy and visibility in the European Union intersect at the inability of institutional Europe to define a coherent and viable identity for itself and at the absence of a living European demos which subscribes to such an identity. The question that needs answering in the EU context is, 'How do we make society where there was none before and when we have so little in common?' (Hart 2018). The famous quip of the 19th century statesman Massimo d'Azeglio, 'We have made Italy; now we must make Italians', was cited by many informants.

In October of 2016, I was sitting in the audience of a crowded theater when I heard VP Timmermans speak of a need to 'recreate a feeling of European citizenship' on the continent. He felt, however, that 'this is not something the Commission should do…. Many modern European states were created by precisely this kind of top-down campaign—think of the unification of Italy or Germany in the 19th century, or the resurrection of Poland after World War I. And yet, the Euroskeptics there still think of their national governments to be more democratic.' Officials in the permanent administration below 'the political level' share his reticence towards being the mediator of a European sense of belonging: 'I don't think it's

something that can be top-down. People either develop it in their own mind or they don't' (Olivia). Never the kind to wear their flag on their sleeves, officials are less than predisposed toward exuberant displays of devotion to their employer. A demos can and will originate *organically*, so to speak, from the bottom up, when 'people all over Europe see the value added that the EU can provide in the very concrete things. If one doesn't have that, then the more spiritual thing will not fly either' (Morgan).

In the end, it may come down to a question of scale. (Dunbar 1992) famously argued that, for evolutionary reasons, the maximum number of other people with whom any single person is capable of having intimate, meaningful, face-to-face affinities is only around 150. Any community that exceeds this capacity may be said to be more imagined than real. In the introduction to his perennial exegesis of nationalism, Anderson (2006: 6) defined the nation as 'an imagined political community' that is 'imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'. This is because 'even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind' (ibid.). Nations are imagined in reference to and by contrast with exterior masses of others who are excluded. Insofar as the polity circumscribed fails to encompass humanity at large, each act of inclusion and belonging is simultaneously one of exclusion and separation. European identity, unlike more familiarized forms of nationness, does not constitute a delimited category anchored in specific points in time and space; it is better understood as a steppingstone to a globalist cosmopolitanism. A genuine European is one who 'comes from a national background' and 'able to scale it up to an EU level' (Olivia) in order to tackle 'very important issues for society as a whole' (Roger).

As a particular form of universalism, Europeanness also contains within it its own strands of individualism: 'When you leave Europe, you find that it's not shared everywhere. In China, in Japan, these values do not traditionally belong to them. It is more

communitarian. And they say that we are quite individualistic, as a negative thing—and it's true' (Raphael). Europeanness is thus a 'perspective of perspectives' or 'sub-perspectives', none of which 'can be treated as either precisely right or precisely wrong. They are all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another' (Burke 1969). To outsiders, it can come off as a disposition so inclusive in scope and deracinated in content to be devoid of meaning. Visions of unity in diversity evoke patchwork models of harmonious multicultural coexistence which may comfort the mind but never fully satisfies the heart. If all communities have discrete boundaries outside of which lie several others, every act of belonging will inevitably exclude certain others: 'Through selective borrowing, cultures come closer together; through dialectical contrast, they mark themselves as different. We are left with an interweaving and to some extent paradoxical vision of culture: as shared yet differentiated, as segmented yet intrinsically free-flowing, as something that exists unto itself yet which is also defined by opposition' (Brown 2003). Extending the circle of sociality to encompass more and more of the human species leaves less and less of it out of the equation. If the dissemination of Europeanness throughout Europe achieves this, providing an exportable example of coexistence via supranationalism for those on other continents to follow, the project may justly be called a successful one.

European identity and belonging constitutes a *Wahlverwandtschaft* or 'elective affinity' rather than an 'affective' one, to borrow a concept presented in the title of the third novel by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, as well as one of Magritte's paintings. In the former, the author plays with the scientific theories of the physical laws governing chemical affinities, the attraction between atoms or molecules among themselves, adopting it as a metaphor for social relations as well as for the operations of the human mind. The plot tells the story of the tragedy that befalls the marriage of two aristocrats, Edward and Charlotte, following the introduction of outside actors into their home estate outside Weimar. In one scene, the couple

are spending an evening discussing 'subjects connected with the improvement of the condition and comfort of social life' with a friend of Edward's known as the Captain (Goethe 1885). Social belonging is theorized as a direct result of individual identity: 'As everything has a reference to itself, so it must have some relation to others' (ibid., 30). The following passage exhibits the kinds of affinities the plot explores:

> The Captain: …such natures as, when they come in contact, at once lay hold of each other, and mutually affect one another, we speak of as having an affinity one for the other. With the alkalies and acids, for instance, the affinities are strikingly marked. They are of opposite natures; very likely their being of opposite natures is the secret of their effect on one another—they seek one another eagerly out, lay hold of each other, modify each other's character, and form in connection an entirely new substance….
>
> "It appears to me," said Charlotte, "that if you choose to call these strange creatures of yours related, the relationship is not so much a relationship of blood, as of soul or of spirit. It is the way in which we see all really deep friendships arise among men; opposite peculiarities of disposition being what best makes internal union possible. [ibid.]

Europeanness is the new substance that such proximity creates: a form of transcultural kinship by consent between two or more individuals based not on shared similarities but mutual differences over and above the default affinities rooted in blood and soil.

The affinities are elective in the sense that 'it really looks as if one relation had been deliberately chosen in preference to another' (ibid., 32). The emphasis the characters place on physical proximity and contact is analogous to attempts by the EU to foster a shared European consciousness by promoting face-to-face transnational social exchanges. The Commission recently proposed to double the budget of the Erasmus program, regarded as its most popular initiative, to 'foster knowledge and awareness of the EU' and 'strengthen European identity'.[75] An estimated one million 'Erasmus babies' have been born to couples who met one another and became acquainted while participating in the scheme.[76] Such a landmark is a testament to 'the great demographic success of the Commission', as President

[75] https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/news/commission-adopts-proposal-next-erasmus-programme-2021-2027_en
[76] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_14_1025

Juncker said. 'We increased the European libido, if I may say.'[77] Enveloped within this subsidized celebration of exogamy is an approach to Europeanness that might be called an 'elective identity'.

At the time of writing, roughly half of the human species is living in a state of isolation after 90 countries around the world have issued lockdown orders.[78] There is something decidedly un-European about the phenomenon of 'social distancing', a term that has quickly entered into fashion. How one experiences disasters of this magnitude is profoundly shaped by socioeconomic asymmetries. As is characteristic of global catastrophes, it will ultimately be the most disenfranchised areas of the world which will be made to bear most of the burden. At the same time, the season of the coronavirus has given rise to an extended moment of cosmopolitan conviviality. Never before, in undergoing this collectively shared experience of social isolation, have I been made so vividly aware of my participating in the same practice at the same time with so many other people in so many different locales. Whether the European project, drifting along like the Kon-tiki at the mercy of various winds and currents, eventually runs aground and wrecks on a metaphorical coral reef, a supranational world is still worth pursuing—if for no other reason than that all the others have been pursued already.

[77] https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/politico-brussels-playbook-spitzenkandidat-at-risk-brussels-boosts-libidos-italy-makes-another-play-for-ema/
[78] https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/02/coronavirus-in-europe-spain-s-death-toll-hits-10-000-after-record-950-new-deaths-in-24-hou

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