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## Original Article

# Symbolism in European integration

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**Abstract** The role of symbolism in European integration provides one way of answering Craig Calhoun's 2003 call in *Comparative European Politics* for a means of transcending specific regimes of analysis in order to advance European studies. The article argues that our understanding of the integration process and the constitution of the European Union (EU) is furthered by broadly studying symbolic forms in a multiperspectival way. In contrast to much emphasis on heroic symbolic icons, the article studies more banal processes of symbolic construction that provide a deeper understanding of the symbolisation of European integration and enrich European studies more broadly. The article sets out how such processes could include the roles of physical icons such as maps or places, performative rituals such as days or museums, or discursive taboos such as mottos or texts. In this way the study of symbolism in European integration suggests a means of understanding how the EU becomes constituted as a political reality – how it is 'always already there and still in formation'.

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'United Europe' seems to be a remarkably resilient and adaptable symbol ... . [T]he only real unifying factor among these proponents of a United Europe is the devotion to the symbol of Europe ... . However, it is equally certain that the prevalence of the symbol alone does not guarantee the firm agreement on principle of those ... who use it in their political activity. A symbol which ... seems to leave something to be desired in terms of specificity. (Haas, 1958, pp. 20–24)

## A Remarkably Resilient and Adaptable Symbol

As Ernst Haas observed over 50 years ago, 'United Europe' is a resilient, adaptable, unifying, and yet unspecified symbol. It is precisely this adaptability



and ambiguity that has ensured the continuing importance of European studies as a means of understanding ‘the remarkable social experiment of European unification’ (Calhoun, 2003, p. 18). Craig Calhoun argued in the first issue of *Comparative European Politics* that ‘studies of the EU, and of Europe in the era of the EU, need to transcend analyses of particular political decisions and policy regimes to explore the broader processes of social transformation involved’ (Calhoun, 2003, p. 18). This article will consider the role of symbolism in European integration as part of answering Craig Calhoun’s call for a means of transcending specific regimes of analysis in order to advance European studies.

Although Calhoun did not specifically argue in his article for studying symbolism, his broader work on critical social theory advocates the need to understand the ‘symbolic production of meaning’, particularly in his engagement with Bourdieu’s notion of ‘symbolic capital’ (Calhoun, 1995, pp. 49, 140, 155). In addition, Stuart Hall has identified the importance of symbolism to European studies: ‘nothing could be more true of Europe, which has constantly, at different times, in different ways, and in relation to different “others”, tried to establish what it was – its identity – by symbolically marking its difference from “them”’ (Hall, 2003, p. 38). Similarly, such symbolism contributes to the understanding of the process of European integration itself: ‘symbolic agreements are important goals for certain groups of Europeans and their member states because they believe them to be so ... . As we all know, we live in a European Union of signs *and* symbols everyday’ (Manners, 2000, p. 263).

Haas suggested that political, social and economic forces were part of the uniting of Europe through ideology and institutions. Over 50 years later, it will be argued that studying European integration using a symbolic approach provides a language for understanding contemporary Europe that is able to encompass political, social and economic forces in its analysis. By this I mean that the symbolic language of Europe is one of the few means that a multilingual project such as the European Union (EU) can be interrogated without succumbing to one of the many disciplines that shape the socio-academic world (for a discussion of this problem, see Manners, 2003). A symbolic approach also encourages the use of critical social theories that span the social and humanistic sciences, and cause us to think in a more multi-perspectival way about studying contemporary Europe (see Manners, 2007). The very term ‘European project’ illustrates the extent to which our existing, disciplined languages seem unable to come to terms with European integration as a reformation of contemporary Europe and its social science knowledge (Calhoun, 2003, p. 18).

The importance of symbolism in European integration can be seen in the debates since the May and June 2005 referenda on the Constitution for Europe in France and the Netherlands. The inclusion of five ‘symbols of the union’ in article I-8 of the Constitution for Europe was seen by some in France and

the Netherlands as being too much like the symbols of statehood, and were promptly removed from the December 2007 Lisbon Treaty. As Angela Merkel put it in June 2007: 'The new treaty will not include state-like nomenclature or symbols, ... . Many of our partners feel these stand for a European superstate. I do not share this concern but I must respect it' (Merkel in Benoit and Parker, 2007).

This article argues that the study of symbolism in European integration is crucial to our understanding of both how the EU becomes constituted as a political reality and how the integration process itself occurs. In doing so, the article makes three innovations to the study of symbolism in European integration in terms of going beyond the study of icons, and doing so in a multiperspectival and transdisciplinary way. Going beyond the study of symbolic icons (such as the flag or the euro currency) involves including rituals (such as ceremonies or days of remembrance) and taboos (in the form of texts such as the mottos or treaties).<sup>1</sup> Studying symbolism in European integration in a multiperspectival way involves analysing symbols from differing theoretical perspectives that keep alive contrasting understandings, and, which cannot be reduced to a single, parsimonious explanation (see Manners, 2007). Studying symbolism in European integration in a transdisciplinary way involves rethinking disciplinary practices for studying the EU in order to transgress and transcend pre-existing frames of knowledge organisation about the EU (see Manners, 2009). The article begins by briefly setting out four theoretical perspectives that are valuable to the study of symbolism in European integration, in particular through an emphasis on Emile Durkheim's symbolic *emblems*, Stuart Hall's symbolic *representations*, Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic *domination* and Julia Kristeva's symbolic *order*. Next the article looks at the role of status, communication and reception in the interpretation and meaning attributed to symbols. The article then considers three differing symbolic manifestations of European integration in the form of the symbolic *icons* and the EU map, symbolic *rituals* and EU days of remembrance, together with symbolic *taboos* and the EU motto. Finally, the article concludes with a reflection on the resilient and adaptable, yet intangible and banal symbolism of European integration.

## Theoretical Perspectives on Symbolism

If we accept that political, social and economic realities can and are symbolically constituted through socio-psychological practices, then how just how can we distinguish between the differing understandings of symbols in European integration? To answer this question I will try to suggest just four differing theoretical perspectives on symbols in European integration, which I have termed *emblems*, *representations*, *domination* and *order*.



## Symbols as emblems

The first, and most common, understanding of the role of symbols is as ‘emblems of group life’, which ‘serve primarily as instruments of communication’ (Klatch, 1988, p. 139; Robb, 1998, p. 332). This is very much Emile Durkheim’s approach to ‘collective representations’ as a ‘system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself’ (see Durkheim, 1915, 1951). From this perspective, Rebecca Klatch argues that ‘symbols act as forces of integration, creating solidarity by binding individuals together into a unified whole’ (Klatch, 1988, p. 139). Much attention has been paid to this *emblematic* approach to the study of European integration, following Cris Shore’s trailblazing work on ‘creating the people’s Europe: symbols, history and invented traditions’ (Shore, 1993, 2000 Chapter 2).

An understanding of symbols as *emblems* is firmly located in a rationalist approach to theorising. As such, symbols are seen to be signs that represent something, stand for something, and that ‘something’ has a collective meaning in society. This collective, communicative understanding of symbols as emblems tends to assume that there is a fairly clear link between the sign and its meaning, between the sign or symbol itself (the signifier) and the meaning (the signified) it has for those who experience it. Thus, from this perspective a symbol such as a state flag is used to signify a state and is generally assumed to have the meaning of ‘flag of the state’, regardless of whether the people seeing the flag like the state or not.

Examples of work following Durkheim’s *emblematic* approach in European studies include Michael Bruter’s studies of European identity (Bruter, 2005). He argues that there is both a civic and cultural message conveyed when EU institutions ‘provide polities with symbols of their community’ (Bruter, 2003, p. 1170). For Bruter, symbols of European integration take physical forms such as ‘the European flag, Euro banknotes, and the European passport’ (Bruter, 2004, p. 29). Other examples include the work of Lauren McLaren (2006), Helen Wallace (1995, pp. 47–48, 2000, pp. 56–57), Robert Hogenraad *et al* (1997) and Anthony Forster (1998, pp. 362–364). Regardless of whether symbols in the study of the EU are important or not, studying symbols as emblems assumes that the symbol and its meaning are fairly closely linked and that this link can be studied on the basis of rationalist assumptions.

## Symbols as representations

The second, and more recent, understanding of the role of symbols is as ‘frame[s] of reference’ providing ‘constructions of the social world ... grounded in group life’ (Klatch, 1988, p. 140). For Stuart Hall, the symbolic becomes

a ‘representation, [an] infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery’ (Hall, 1990, p. 236). In reference to theoretical perspectives on visual culture, Hall goes further to suggest that ‘the symbolic power of the image to signify is in no sense restricted to the conscious level and cannot always easily be expressed in words ... . In noticing this, we register the image’s capacity to connote on a much broader symbolic field’ (Hall, 1999, p. 311). From this perspective, symbols serve not as emblems but as representations (see Barker, 2000, pp. 176–177).

This second understanding of symbols as *representations* comes from a social constructivist approach to theorising. Here, symbols are seen as signs that are open for interpretation, and that interpretation has a dynamic personal and social context to it. Such a constructed, contextual understanding of symbols as representations does not assume a clear link between the sign and its meaning, but assumes that any such meaning is social constructed in differing social contexts. Thus, from this second perspective a symbol such as a state flag may be used to signify a state, but its meaning can range from ‘flag of the state’ to ‘symbol of what we hate’ depending on the people and groups experiencing the flag.

The boom in constructivist approaches to the EU in the last decade has led to greater attention being paid to symbolic representations than symbolic emblems in European integration. Examples of work within European studies following Hall’s *representational* approach include Tobias Theiler’s research on the EU’s cultural, audiovisual and educational policies (Theiler, 2005). Theiler brings a constructivist interpretation to the study of these policy areas, showing how the EU was unable to ‘extend its reach into key areas of political symbolism’ (Theiler, 2005, p. 6). Other examples of work sharing a focus on the representation of symbols include Ulf Hedetoft’s studies of symbolic politics (Hedetoft, 1993, 1998), Thomas Christiansen’s analyses of the ‘reconstruction of European space’ (Christiansen, 1997), Brigid Laffan’s work on symbols and EU identity (1998, 2001) and Matthias Kaelberer’s study of symbols in the politics of EMU (Kaelberer, 2004). What these studies share is an understanding that symbols as representations are important when constructed as such by different individuals and groups, and that this practice can be studied on the basis of constructivist assumptions.

### Symbols as domination

The third, and more critical, understanding of the role of symbols comes from Pierre Bourdieu’s understanding of ‘symbolic power – as a power of constituting the given ... that is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 170). At one extreme of this critical perspective, Klatch argues that ‘symbols



do not play a beneficial role in creating social solidarity or providing orientation for the individual; rather symbols are a means of domination, furthering the divisions within society' (Klatch, 1988, p. 143).

Understanding symbols as *domination* provides a third perspective drawing on critical social theory. From this perspective, symbols are part of an 'encoding/decoding' exchange that demands a study of their reception in order to understand their interpretation and meaning for those experiencing them (see Hall, 1980). Hall argues that while the social construction of a symbol's meaning involves representation, a 'decoding' of such representation involves identifying three hypothetical positions during reception (Hall, 1980, pp. 174–176). From Hall's reception perspective, symbols may be accepted as 'dominant', interpreted as 'negotiated' or rejected as 'oppositional'. Thus, from this third perspective a symbol such as a state flag may be used to signify a state, but its reception and decoding can include acceptance of the 'dominant' code as 'flag of the state'; interpretation of a 'negotiated' code as 'symbol of state rule'; or rejection in an 'oppositional' code as 'symbol of repressive state'. From Bourdieu's perspective, symbols are always part of the symbolic power defined within power relations, but may not always be received, decoded or understood in that way.

Probably the best examples of the *domination* approach can be found in Pierre Bourdieu and Niilo Kauppi's work on symbolic power in European integration. While Bourdieu has emphasised the contradictions of the neo-liberal domination and social movement possibilities symbolised by European integration, Kauppi has developed Bourdieu's ideas regarding the European Parliament as important to the symbolic structuration of the European political field (Bourdieu, 1998a, b, 2001; Kauppi, 2003, 2005). However, the most well-known exponent of Bourdieu's *domination* approach is Cris Shore and his work on the cultural politics of European integration (Shore, 1993, 2000). Shore's work on 'forging a European *nation*-state' draws on both Gramsci and Bourdieu in arguing the importance of hegemony and 'cultural capital' in the EU's deployment of symbols (Shore, 2000, pp. 29 and 70). More recently, François Foret's work on the symbolic dimensions of EU legitimisation also shares an interest in symbolic instruments of domination (Foret, 2008, 2009). Such examples illustrate an approach to studying symbols as part of structures of domination, and that reception of such symbols can be studied on the basis of the assumptions of critical social theory.

## Symbols as order

The fourth understanding of the role of symbols is as 'expressions of the psychological workings of the mind' in which 'meaning does not reside in

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artefacts or people but in the moment of the interaction between the two; symbols' meanings do not exist outside of the moment in which apprehend them and assemble them into meaningful formations' (Klatch, 1988, p. 143; Robb, 1998, p. 337). Important here is Julia Kristeva's work that is 'centrally concerned with signs/semiotics, that is, the symbolic order of culture' (Barker, 2000, p. 242). As Kristeva puts it: 'I keep asking questions. Why that system of classification and not another? What social, subjective, and socio-subjective interacting needs does it fulfil? Are there no subjective structurations that, within the organisation of each speaking being, correspond to this or that symbolic social-system and represent, if not stages, at least *types* of subjectivity and society?' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 92).

An understanding of symbols as *order* comes from post-structural theoretical perspectives. Post-structural perspectives are concerned with language, discourse, subjectivity, and in Kristeva's work with the ways in which the 'other' is ordered both structurally and psychologically (Kinnvall, 2004, pp. 753–755, 2006, pp. 52–56). From this perspective, symbols are best understood in the context of socio-subjective interactions with meaning given to the symbols by participants seeking to bring order and structure to their lives. This social, psychological understanding of symbols as order does not assume there is any clear link between the sign and its meaning, but that symbols are best understood psycho-social structures of meaning. Thus, from this fourth perspective a symbol such as a state flag cannot be generally assumed to have any general rational meaning, nor can its meaning be understood by either social constructivist interpretation or studying reception and decoding. Instead the meaning of the flag is best understood in the context of attempts to order the 'self' and the 'other' both structurally and psychologically.

Kristeva's own work serves as an example of this approach to European integration (although see Ward, 1997, p. 87; and Neumann, 1998, pp. 13–22).<sup>2</sup> Kristeva suggests that European integration symbolises far wider processes of coming to terms with, coordinating, and cohabiting with difference and diversity – processes of reconciling and recognising plurality and strangeness in oneself and others (Kristeva, 1991, pp. 194–195, 1998, pp. 328–329; 2000, pp. 114–115). Examples from European studies include Mika Luoma-aho's work on organicist symbolism in the construction of the EU (Luoma-aho, 2002a). He argues that symbolism and metaphor 'play a much larger role in discourse than merely adding aesthetic appeal to text: they structure and define the ordinary conceptual system in terms of which people think and act' (Luoma-aho, 2004, p. 107). He goes further to suggest that 'the European body politic has gradually re-emerged in discourse, symbolising Europe "as a whole" around the sphere of an integrated core' (Luoma-aho, 2002b, p. 137). The work of Kristeva, Luoma-aho and other post-structuralists share a perspective on



symbols as part of attempting to bring order to processes of European integration, whether through language, discourse or subjective understandings.

These differing theoretical perspectives provide us with means of understanding the relations between individuals, groups, societies, institutions and symbols (in any particular manifestation) in Europe. Symbolism in European integration, as suggested here, can be read through the differing understandings of symbols to have emblematic utility, socially represent, powerfully dominate or subjectively order Europe. These four differing understandings can be helpful in generating contrasting explanations of how and why symbolism is important in European integration, as we shall proceed to explore.

### **The Status, Communication and Reception of Symbols**

These four theoretical perspectives on symbolism suggest different, but fundamentally incompatible, ways of understanding the role of symbols in European integration. But what all four perspectives illustrate is that there are several dimensions regarding the status, communication and reception of symbols in the European integration process. As the brief introductions to notions of signifier/signified, the social construction of meaning, encoding/decoding and to psycho-social structures in the previous discussion suggest, relationships among status, communication and reception depend on perspective.

The social status of symbols in European integration are clearly shaped by the social status of the participants, whether intended or not. Hence, social status based on class, gender, nationality or ideology, for example, become important factors in how symbols of European integration are communicated and received (see discussion of gender, nationalism and religion in Kinnvall and Hansson, 2004, 2009). Such differences in social status become crucial in symbolic processes with Eurobarometer public opinion surveys suggesting that gender, age, education and occupation are all significant factors in understanding support for the European integration process. Thus, symbols of European integration may be constructed by national elites (such as the Adonnino Committee), the representatives of the European Convention (as with the five article I-8 symbols of the union) or the national appointees of the European Commission (including the rituals set out below). But in every case, the reception of such symbols is subject to interpretation according to social status such as gender, nationality, ideology and class.

The question arises of whether these symbols are 'merely' bureaucratic practices, or represent 'actual' icons, rituals or taboos? This question raises issues of intentionality and interpretation in the construction and communication of symbols in European integration. The icons, rituals and taboos



discussed here began their existence in a wide variety of ways, ranging from the innovations of transnational groups through mundane bureaucratic practices to bold intergovernmental initiatives. But in every case, the extent to which such innovations, practices and initiatives come to represent 'actual' symbols seems to involve simple communicative transmission rather than institutional intentionality or lack of opposition. For example, in the three cases studied below, the map, days of remembrance and motto have mixed origins, but the extent to which they are seen as 'merely' bureaucratic practices or 'actual' symbols depends on the extent to which they achieve higher communicative resonance within and between societies. It appears to be simple symbolism and mundane practices that communicate banal Europeanism, rather than the evocative and provocative practices of 'heroic' nationalism (Cram, 2009; Van der Velden *et al.*, 2009).<sup>3</sup>

As briefly suggested in the discussion of reception, the question of the acceptance, interpretation or rejection of symbolism is important in understanding the level of importance they may acquire. Equally important is the level of recognition of symbols in trying to understand such eventual importance. Symbols may, at varying moments, be regarded as insubstantial, insubstantiation or substantial in their meaning and level of recognition. This variation can be seen, for example, in the relatively insubstantial levels of recognition given to the activities of the 1985 Adonnino Committee or the 1990 Declaration on the Environmental Imperative (Manners, 2000, p. 39). In contrast, the inclusion of symbols in the 2004 Constitution for Europe, the 2005 EU attempt to ban Nazi symbols and regular burnings of EU flags all illustrate relatively substantial levels of recognition. The question for any research into the role of symbolism in European integration is to understand how insubstantial meaning and recognition can lead to substantial meaning, both positive and negative.

This reflection on the status, communication and reception of symbols in the European integration process suggests that not only are status and reception subject to contrasting interpretations, but also that such processes are likely to lead down some unpredictable paths. In this respect it could be suggested that heroic, national-like symbolism in European integration may be less important for study than banal symbolism, as will be discussed in the rest of this article.

## Symbolic Manifestations of European Integration

Using the contrasting theoretical perspectives just discussed, the article will now consider three different symbolic manifestations of European integration termed *icons*, *rituals* and *taboos*. Here it is argued that the study of contemporary Europe needs to reflect on both the integration process and



political constitution of the EU – ‘symbols do not simply *reflect* our political reality: they actively *constitute* it’ (Shore, 2000, p. 89). It is possible to identify three differing manifestations of this symbolic constitution through *icons* (tangible signs and objects), *rituals* (observable practices and traditions) and *taboos* (discourses and texts). The choice of terms to describe this trichotomy of manifestations is a reflection of the symbolic power I am trying to explain, rather than an adherence to any one particular disciplinary perspective. As the brief review of literature illustrated, the study of symbols of European integration has tended to focus on icons such as the flag and euro notes and coins. I argue that we should go beyond the study of such symbolic icons to include symbolic rituals and taboos, as Hartmut Kaelble also proposes, ‘to include in a history of European symbolic space not only objects, but also texts, maps, symbolic places and spaces’ (Kaelble, 2003, p. 49).

### Symbolic icons

#### *Article I-8: The Symbols of the Union*

The flag of the Union shall be a circle of twelve golden stars on a blue background.

The anthem of the Union shall be based on the ‘Ode to Joy’ from the Ninth Symphony by Ludwig van Beethoven.

The motto of the Union shall be: ‘United in diversity’.

The currency of the Union shall be the euro.

Europe day shall be celebrated on 9 May throughout the Union.

(Constitution for Europe 2004)

#### *The EU symbols*

The European flag

The 12 stars in a circle symbolise the ideals of unity, solidarity and harmony among the peoples of Europe.<sup>4</sup>

The European anthem

The melody comes from the Ninth Symphony by Beethoven. When this tune is used as the European anthem, it has no words.

Europe Day, 9 May

The ideas behind what is now the European Union were first put forward on 9 May 1950 in a speech by the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman. So 9 May is celebrated each year as the EU’s birthday.



‘United in diversity’

This is the motto of the EU.  
(European Commission, 2009, p. 12)

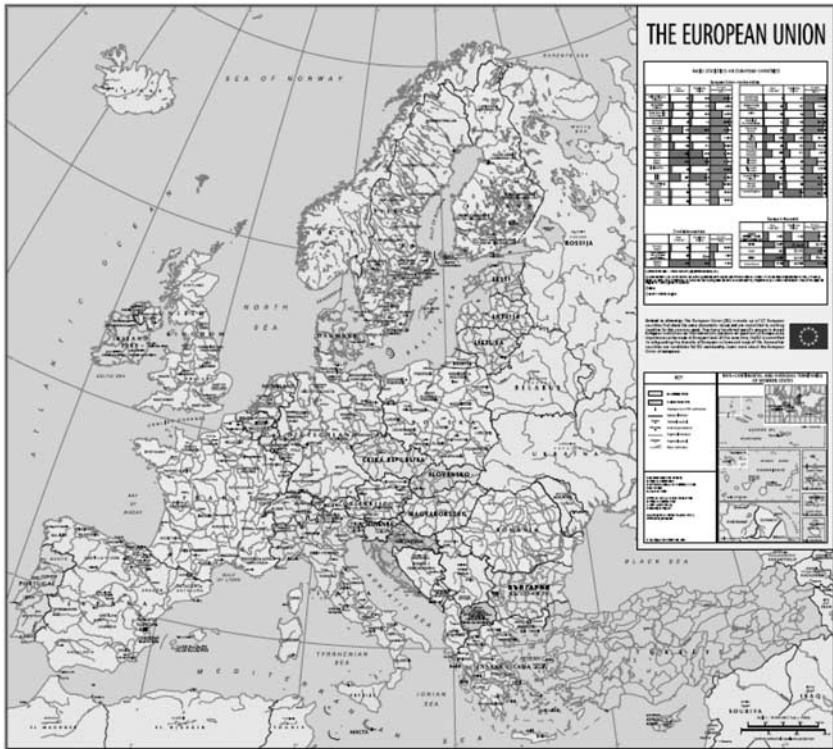
Q4

Symbolic icons are tangible manifestations of European integration. They are the most obvious, and most discussed, symbolic manifestation of the EU’s physical presence. As Article I-8 from the 2004 Constitution for Europe illustrates, the most apparent ‘symbols of the Union’ are to be found as a result of the Adonnino Committee’s work in 1984–1985 – a flag, anthem and day of celebration, while the currency and motto are more recent developments (Adonnino, 1985; European Commission, 1985; Lager, 1995; Curti Gialdino, 2005; Scholl, 2006; Foret, 2008). Although the anthem, motto and day are very much unrecognisable symbols for many EU citizens and non-citizens, both the flag and the currency have now achieved a much wider resonance.<sup>5</sup> It was these symbols of perceived federalism that were so quickly abandoned in the Lisbon Treaty, although as Commission President Romano Prodi claimed in 2002, explicit reference to the ‘symbol of European unity’, the Euro, remains in article 3.4 of the treaty (Groom and Norman, 2002; Parker and Benoit, 2007; Stephens, 2007). Although not recognised in quite the same way, the EU border sign, passport and driver’s licences/ID card all perform similar roles in making tangible the EU as a physical presence with socio-psychological consequences.<sup>6</sup> Of particular importance to the discussion of symbolism in European integration is the icon of the standard EU map (Figure 1). The standard EU map serves as a multilingual icon of who is in and who is out, together with comparisons between the EU, China, Japan, Russia and the USA of area, population and gross national product, as discussed here.

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### The iconic map

The EU’s most obvious, most common and most seen demarcation of itself in relation to its neighbours and the rest of the world is the map. The European Commission’s map of the EU, produced by the Luxembourg-based Office for Official Publications of the European Communities (OOPEC) can be found in workplaces and public places of Europeans and non-European alike. In a variety of bright colours and carefully drawn lines, the map documents and symbolises what is the EU (including non-European territories) and what is not the EU (including that most European multilingual country at its heart, Switzerland). The map has gone through many different forms as the EU enlarges and as the potential future boundaries of Europe come into view. If there is one thing certain about the EU, it is that there will be many more maps in many more colours, with many more lines. What is interesting about the map is that it also engages in another colourful and pictorial mapping in its obligatory table



Q13 Figure 1:

comparing the area, population and gross national product per person of the EU member states with the USA and Japan (and now China and Russia in the 2007 edition onwards). Thus the map does not just draw lines between what is the EU and what is not the EU, it also tells us that the EU is big, populous and rich, and that it should be compared to the USA, Japan, China and Russia on these terms. The Commission clearly takes the lead in this production, with the data coming from the Eurostat office, while DG Communication oversees the content. Interestingly, the map has proved controversial in its representation of regions rather than ‘Europe’, with the United Kingdom having to create ‘regions’, while Denmark has no regions at all on the map (see Hayward, 2003). The map is both an important and misleading symbol of the EU – it attempts to draw strong lines between the EU and the rest of the world, and it invites us to compare the EU with other powerful states (see Manners, 2001, p. 6).

As an *emblem* of European integration, the iconic map serves the utilitarian purpose of ensuring that EU citizens and non-citizens become more aware



of the EU as a geographical place with political consequences. As a *representation* of European integration, the map signifies the construction of a new social reality – the realisation of the social space of the EU. As a form of *domination* through European integration, the map reconstitutes social divisions embedded in the elite political project of the EU, the EU as a means of reinforcing Westphalian state building, and the reifying of borders between the EU and others. As a structure of *order* through European integration, the map helps people to make sense of the EU by clarifying many potentially destabilising ambiguities, such as what is and is not ‘Europe’. As suggested in the previous discussion of the status, communication and reception of symbols, the four theoretical perspectives provide different readings of the relationships between the bureaucratic practices that construct the map, the communicative practices of distributing and displaying the map, as well as the reception and social status of the viewer.

### Symbolic rituals

Symbolic rituals are observable, although often intangible, manifestations of the European integration. They are potentially obvious, although in reality, less discussed manifestations of the EU’s historical practices. EU symbolic rituals are more deeply embedded than the symbolic icons of the 1980s and 1990s discussed above. In particular, the ritualistic practices surrounding the ‘birth’ of the Community located in Franco-German ‘rapprochement’ and involving the ‘founding fathers’. Thus the rituals of France and Germany since the Elysée Treaty (1963) include the explicitly visual practices of joint acts of remembrance and hand holding at war memorials, the joint positions/declarations generally agreed before IGCs (Nice excepted), and the ultimate act of solidarity – President Chirac of France representing Germany at an EU summit in October 2003. In more explicitly EU rituals, the observation and veneration of the ‘founding fathers’ serve as a symbolic manifestations of the ‘birth’ of the Community. The identification of Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi and Paul-Henri Spaak, together with the possible inclusion of Altiero Spinelli and Walter Hallstein, as the ‘founding fathers’ renders more tangible the symbolic rituals of post-war reconciliation (see Milward, 1992; Walters and Haahr, 2005). In addition to the ritualistic veneration of these ‘fathers’ (through institutions, societies and literature), the homes of Monnet at Houjarray and Schuman at Scy-Chazelles have become museums of European integration.<sup>7</sup> This institutionalisation of rituals of remembrance can increasingly be seen and experienced in other museums, such as the Museum of Europe and House of European History, which, in Wolfram Kaiser’s words, seek to musealise the EU as part of forming

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Europe’s collective memory (Kaiser and Krankenhagen, 2010).<sup>8</sup> Other European rituals place emphasis on European years and cities through the joint programmes with the Council of Europe, which celebrate the annual ‘European Year of ...’ languages, people with disabilities, education or citizenship (in the 2000s), and ‘European City of Culture’. All of these symbolic rituals seek to affirm and reaffirm the consciousness of European integration in the form of the EU, as I will now consider with the example of EU days of remembrance.

### The ritual of remembrance

<i>European Parliament resolution on remembrance of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and racism</i>	<i>11th March 2005 – First European Day for the victims of terrorism</i>	<i>Europe Day, 9th May</i>
<p>Reaffirms its conviction that remembrance and education are vital components of the effort to make intolerance, discrimination and racism a thing of the past, and urges the Council, Commission and Member States to strengthen the fight against anti-semitism and racism through promoting awareness, especially among young people, of the history and lessons of the Holocaust by: encouraging Holocaust remembrance, including making 27 January European Holocaust Memorial Day across the whole of the EU.</p> <p>(European Parliament, 2005)</p>	<p>11 March 2005 marks the first anniversary of the terrorist attack in Madrid, and has been established as the first European day for the victims of terrorism. It is a day of remembrance, an occasion to express solidarity with the victims of any terrorist attack: those who lost their lives or still bear the mental and physical scars of such violence, and with their families.</p> <p>This European day shall also be an opportunity for society and institutions in Europe to reflect on how the terrorist threat can be addressed and prevented, and how the security of all citizens can be better protected.</p> <p>(European Commission, 2005b)</p>	<p>On the 9th of May 1950, Robert Schuman presented his proposal on the creation of an organised Europe, indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations.</p> <p>This proposal, known as the ‘Schuman declaration’, is considered to be the beginning of the creation of what is now the European Union.</p> <p>Today, the 9th of May has become a European symbol (Europe Day) which along with the single currency (the euro), the flag and the anthem, identifies the political entity of the European Union. Europe Day is the occasion for activities and festivities that bring Europe closer to its citizens and peoples of the Union closer to one another.</p> <p>(European Commission, 2005c)</p>

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Q9

These rituals of remembrance are intended to be expressions of European integration through reference to shared memories and experiences. The use of remembrance rituals is a widespread form of perpetuating collective memories, especially when these memories are held to be particularly traumatic or glorious. Drawing on Vamik Volkan's psychoanalytical accounts, Kinnvall argues that 'chosen traumas and chosen glories provide, in other words, the linking objects for later generations to be rediscovered, reinterpreted, and reused' (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 755; see Volkan, 1997). Across the EU member states, the use of chosen days of remembrance for 'national' holidays is widespread – an average of 12 days a year of holidays. What is less well-known are the attempts within the EU on three 'European' days of remembrance to mark the European Holocaust Memorial Day and the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January 1945; the European Day for the Victims of Terrorism and the Madrid train bombings on 11 March 2004; as well as the Europe Day marking Robert Schuman's declaration on the European Coal and Steel Community on 9 May 1950. The ritual remembrance of the Schuman declaration is a chosen glory – it was reactivated at the EU Milan Summit in 1985 to mark the beginnings of the European integration process. All three ritual remembrances are chosen traumas – the European holocaust and European terrorism in the cases of 27 January and 11 March. Europe Day is also a chosen trauma because of the clear identification with the ending of the Second World War in Europe and 'Victory in Europe' Day on 8 May 1945.

The example of the attempt to create the 'European day against the death penalty' in September 2007 illustrates the extent to which a ritual of remembrance can itself be an issue of considerable tension. The joint initiative with the Council of Europe, the Parliament and Council was launched in June 2007 by Commissioners Franco Frattini and Benita Ferrero-Waldner with the intention of marking the new European day on the 'International day against the death penalty' (10 October) in Lisbon during the Portuguese Presidency (European Commission, 2007). As part of its re-election campaign the populist, ruling Polish Kaczynski twins vetoed the declaration of the day of remembrance in September 2007 just weeks ahead of their national elections (Barber, 2007; Traynor, 2007). Instead the Polish government suggested a 'Day in defence of life' to cover the death penalty, euthanasia and abortion, whereas many commentators noted that members of the government had campaigned for the reintroduction of the death penalty in Poland for 'extreme cases' such as convicted paedophiles (Barber, 2007; Dujisin, 2007; Traynor, 2007). This attempt at creating a European ritual of remembrance suggests that such symbols can become as politicised, perhaps even more so, than the substantial issues that they mark – it is worth noting that no Polish diplomat was seriously advocating the reintroduction of the death penalty.

As an *emblem* of European integration, remembrance rituals are meant for EU citizens to become more self-aware of their collective European history,

Q10



particularly when this history is traumatic. As a *representation* of European integration, remembrance signifies the collective memory of Europeans, particularly when this is accompanied by imagery and sounds such as the showing of the BBC's 'Holocaust – A Music Memorial Film from Auschwitz' across Europe in 2005. As a form of *domination* through European integration, remembrance reconstitutes social memory within the EU through *not* remembering other traumas such as Yugoslavia, for example. As a structure of *order* through European integration, remembrance helps people come to terms with the collective traumas of their lives, but also structures such strong emotions into socio-political practices. Similar to the theoretical perspectives on the map, the different readings of these rituals of remembrance are also subject to status, communication and reception, but there is much less recognition of these rituals compared with the wider icon such as the flag.

### Symbolic taboos

Symbolic taboos are usually unobservable and intangible discourses and texts, which reflect manifestations of meanings and beliefs regarding European integration. These are the least well studied and understood manifestations of the EU's meaning in European integration. As important as icons and rituals are, it is EU symbolic taboos that shape and explain much of the EU's social institutions/lifeworld, and more importantly the way in which these manifest in political practices. Symbolic taboos are very different to simple discourses and texts within and without the EU – they undoubtedly reinforce 'the importance of symbols as repositories of meaning and agents of consciousness' (Shore, 2000, p. 77). However, symbolic taboos go further in constructing a series of inviolable and sacrosanct understandings about what the EU is and what the EU does. In this respect, symbolic taboos have the potential to become constitutive of what the EU is and what it is not – what the EU may and may not do. Thus, symbolic taboos construct and constitute what might eventually turn into policy possibilities.

Symbolic taboos include those phrases and sayings that are recognisable as the central discourse around which EU politics and policies revolve – from the treaties and declarations to the practical realities of the policies. Examples of these taboos include the discourses of the integration process itself, with phrases such as 'Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan', 'not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible', 'common high authority', 'pooling of sovereignty' and 'acquis communautaire' constructing both the rationale and the means through which integration is to be achieved. More recent taboos are not as firmly established, but still contribution to the construction and constitution of the EU. These include the 'four freedoms', 'single currency', 'ending of the division of the European continent',



‘Copenhagen criteria’, ‘environmental imperative’, ‘unity through diversity’, ‘progressive framing of a common defence policy’ and ‘freedom, security and justice’. Such taboo discourses and texts shape and reshape the social construction of the EU reality, as a brief consideration of ‘unity in diversity’ will illustrate.

### The taboo motto

CONVINCED that, thus ‘United in diversity’, Europe offers them the best chance of pursuing, with due regard for the rights of each individual and in awareness of their responsibilities towards future generations and the Earth, the great venture which makes of it a special area of human hope. (preamble to Constitution for Europe 2004)

‘United in diversity’ is the motto of the European Union. It first came into use around the year 2000 and was for the first time officially mentioned in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, which was signed in 2004. Article I-8 says which are the symbols of the EU. The motto means that, via the EU, Europeans are united in working together for peace and prosperity, and that the many different cultures, traditions and languages in Europe are a positive asset for the continent.

(European Commission, 2005d)

Q11

During the 1999 Finnish EU presidency, a European-wide newspaper competition for schools called ‘Une devise pour l’Europe/A motto for Europe’ produced a winner, chosen by the President of the Parliament Nicole Fontaine, in the shape of ‘unity in diversity’ (La Prairie, 1999; Curti Gialdino, 2005). Although very similar to some of the maxims of other multicultural federal entities, such as the (English language) Commonwealth, the United States of America (*e pluribus unum* was the first motto), the Republic of South Africa and Indonesia, the motto has since been adopted and mobilised within the EU. The rapid rise to taboo status as it was mutated for inclusion as one of the five ‘symbols of the Union’ in article I-8 of the Constitution for Europe in 2004. The taboo motto that had previously occupied the central place in the EU’s symbolic register, ‘ever closer union’, had become far too teleological and controversial during the post-Maastricht period. However, the competition winner ‘unity in diversity’ still sounded too similar to ‘ever closer union’, so was mutated into ‘united in diversity’ for the Constitutional Treaty. Thus deposed, ‘ever closer union’ would have only remained in the preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union had the Constitution for Europe



Q12

been ratified. The taboo nature of the motto is embedded in the way that provides a narrative about European integration having reached some sort of compromise between unification and diversification processes. By the end of the 1990s it was becoming clear that the central guiding taboo of ‘ever closer union’ through European integration was becoming increasingly transgressed, while cultural, social and political diversity was held to be more normatively sustainable (Pantel, 1999; Barnett, 2001; Jones, 2001; Sassatelli, 2002; Delanty and Rumford, 2005). Hence ‘united in diversity’ reflects the way in which EU reality is constituted through a range of diverse practices that are at once united and yet diversified transnationally by European integration. But what is also clear in the case of the motto illustrates the way in which discourses and texts can be politically mutated before they are or can be established as taboos.

As an *emblem* of European integration, the taboo motto serves as an expression of what is permissible in the EU – political union only on the basis of national and regional, cultural and linguistic diversity (Constitution for Europe 2004, articles I–3, II–82, III–280). As a *representation* of European integration, the motto signifies the way in which social collectivities within Europe have moved from union to Union, from uniting to United, no longer ever closer, but diversely. As a form of *domination* through European integration, the motto both reconstitutes and reinforces existing social, cultural and linguistic divisions between ‘national’, ‘non-national’ and ‘regional’ groups. As a structure of *order* through European integration, the motto potentially resolves the ambiguous telos of the integration process by emphasising the federal character of the Union – shared and self-government. In comparison to theoretical perspectives on the iconic map and remembrance rituals, the taboo motto is far less recognised or constitutive in role. Together with its removal from the Constitutional Treaty, this comparative lack of recognition or constitutiveness is likely to mean that its symbolic effects will remain subject to continued (re)interpretation.

### **Conclusion: Symbolising European Integration in European Studies**

The more physical manifestations found in the symbolic icons, rituals and taboos all contribute to constituting the symbolic and linguistic constructions of the EU as a political form through manifestations of banal, rather than heroic Europeanism. It is argued that adopting a symbolic approach allows an analysis that facilitates the spanning of the social and humanistic sciences, as well as encouraging comparative reflections across European studies in order to understand both banal effects and resistance to symbols closely associated with heroic nationalism such as the flag and the anthem.



The article leaves four questions open for more in-depth analysis, in particular the issue of who is responsible for the advocacy and use of the symbols within the EU. Clearly in the case of the iconic map, it is the Commission, in particular the OOOPEC, Eurostat and now DG Communication that drive the signification and comparison of the EU with USA, Japan, China and Russia. In the case of the rituals of remembrance, the actors are less clear, with the lead being taken by the Parliament (Holocaust, anti-semitism and racism), the Commission (victims of terrorism), the European Council (Adonnino Committee of representatives of heads of state or government) or joint initiatives with the Council of Europe (day against the death penalty). In the case of the taboo motto, the picture is far more complex with journalists, newspapers, jury members, Nicole Fontaine, the European Convention and the 2003–2004 IGC all playing a role.

Second, there is the question of the extent to which the symbols discussed here are uniquely the EU's own. As is clear in several of the cases, the Council of Europe has played a crucial role in promoting the flag (adopted 1955), the anthem (adopted 1972) and the 'European day against the death penalty' (adopted 2007). More generally, this relationship reflects the role of the Council of Europe as the 'gatekeeper' to Europe, developing common and democratic principles based on the European Convention on Human Rights (Huber, 1999). Because of its wider membership and greater perceived legitimacy, the Council of Europe imparts symbols with a stronger narrative regarding 'unity' (the flag), 'joy' (the anthem) and 'life' (against the death penalty).

The third question is whether there has been academic complicity in the construction of these symbols. The response here is mixed, on the one hand, with the more academic approach to symbols of supranational statehood being powerfully deconstructed, while on the other hand symbols of post-national politics are broadly supported. Examples of the former role can be seen in the work on symbolic icons by Cris Shore, Stuart Hall, Pierre Bourdieu, Niilo Kauppi and Mika Luoma-Aho. All of these authors seek to deconstruct symbols, history and invented traditions in European integration through their work. In contrast, examples of the latter role can be seen in the reproduction of some of the symbolic taboos by academics who share a concern for overcoming national and nationalist discourses in EU member states.

Finally, there is the question of how the study of symbolism in European integration plays out in a multilingual setting of the EU's 23 languages. In this respect, the extent to which the icons and rituals discussed here appear to transcend linguistic boundaries, perhaps because of their non-oral content and performative context, is interesting. Clearly, this is more problematic when considering symbolic taboos in a multilingual setting, although the way in which the core discourse of 'acquis communautaire' attains symbolic meaning



even when, to most people, it is fairly meaningless in the literal sense is particularly interesting. Similarly, it is widely expected that the taboo motto 'united in diversity' would become more united as the Latin *in varietate concordia*, than remaining in 23 or more diverse languages.

In summary, the article has attempted to answer Craig Calhoun's call for a means of transcending specific regimes of analysis by advocating the study of symbolism in European integration. It has argued that such an approach can help overcome barriers to cross-disciplinary in European studies. It was suggested that an emphasis on symbolism in European integration provides a means of reorganising disciplinary practices in order to transgress and transcend pre-existing frames of knowledge about Europe. In order to do so, the article suggested going beyond the study of symbolic icons to include rituals and taboos, as well as approaching such study with differing, multiperspectival theoretical perspectives. The article put forward the idea that we can view symbolism from at least four differing theoretical perspectives by drawing on Durkheim's symbolic emblems, Hall's symbolic representations, Bourdieu's symbolic domination and Kristeva's symbolic order. These perspectives allow, if not insist, that we look at symbolism in European integration as multiperspectival – that is both ambiguous and contested. Such ambiguity and contestation, it was suggested, need to be understood in the context of status, communication and reception that shape the meaning of symbols and their acceptance, interpretation or rejection. The article then explored how these perspectives might encourage us to understand Europe through three different symbolic manifestations – the symbolic icon of the EU map, the symbolic rituals of EU remembrance and the symbolic taboo of the EU motto. Each of these manifestations was briefly looked at from the four perspectives to give a sense of how these symbols reconfigure our understandings of European integration.

The three brief case studies help illustrate the way in which icons, rituals and taboos perform different symbols roles, and the processes of interpretation they undergo. The icons are commonly seen important political symbols attracting advocacy and resistance. The example of the map goes against this trend of advocacy/resistance, but suggests that banal symbols can be as important as heroic ones in shaping collective consciousness regarding the demarcation of the EU. In contrast, rituals are not seen as politically important but instead act as intergenerational markers of European time and space. The example of the remembrance rituals (as well as museums) illustrates the ritual proliferation, and sometimes resistance, that ensures such symbols are only marginally recognised, as well as more common and banal. Finally, taboos can act as discourses and texts that may have legal consequences if they become incorporated into the *acquis communautaire*, although the realisation of such taboo symbolism often occurs slowly and with only



gradual recognition. In this respect, symbolic taboos can emerge with an important legal basis, but may not always be understood as such. The example of the motto possibly illustrates the emergence of a taboo regarding the relationship between local and European centres of governance, but its more legal interpretation is still amorphous.

The article has argued that our understanding of the integration process and the constitution of the EU is furthered by broadly studying symbolic forms in a multiperspectival way. In contrast to much emphasis on heroic symbolic icons, the study of more banal processes of symbolic construction suggests a deeper understanding of the symbolisation of European integration and enriches European studies more broadly. As studied here, such processes could include the roles of physical icons such as maps or places, performative rituals such as days or museums, or discursive taboos such as mottos or texts. In this way the study of symbolism in European integration suggests a means of understanding how the EU becomes constituted as a political reality – how it is ‘always already there and still in formation’.

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## Notes

- 1 For a first attempt to go beyond the study of symbolic icons in this way see: Ian Manners, *Symbolism in European Integration*.
- 2 Although not post-structural in origin, socio-psychological work on the symbolism of the euro also shares much of this emphasis – see Meier-Pesti and Kirchler (2003); Jonas *et al* (2005).
- 3 In contrast, for discussions of national memory and memorial see Rausch (2007); Simon (2008); and Mugge (2008).
- 4 Interestingly, the earlier version of this description referred ‘the ideals of perfection, completeness and unity’ (see European Commission, 2005a), the change perhaps reflecting the post-Constitutional Treaty rethink of the symbols.
- 5 It is worth noting that the most popular proposal for a flag for the Council of Europe (which was adopted by the EC in 1985) was Count Richard Coudenhove Kalergi’s ‘Pan European Union’ flag featuring a yellow circle with a red cross on a blue background. This proposal was rejected because Turkish and British representatives commented that ‘no emblem of an institution of which Moslems are members may bear a cross’ (Caracciolo, 1952).
- 6 The creation of the ‘European Quarter’ around Rue de la Loi and Rue Belliard is also an interesting example of symbolising an EU physical presence in Brussels – see Demey (2007).
- 7 See details at: [www.jean-monnet.net/](http://www.jean-monnet.net/) and [www.centre-robert-schuman.org](http://www.centre-robert-schuman.org).
- 8 See details at: [www.expo-europe.be/](http://www.expo-europe.be/) and European Parliament (2008).

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