

Jorg Friedrichs

Patrizia Nanz, *Europolis. Constitutional Patriotism beyond the Nation-State*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, 206 pp; Italian transl. *Europolis: Un'idea controcorrente di integrazione politica*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2009, 266 pp.

(doi: 10.2383/31386)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 2-3, maggio-dicembre 2009

Ente di afferenza:

()

Copyright © by Società editrice il Mulino, Bologna. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.

Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it>

Licenza d'uso

Questo articolo è reso disponibile con licenza CC BY NC ND. Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it/>

Book reviews

Patrizia Nanz, *Europolis. Constitutional Patriotism beyond the Nation-State*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, 206 pp; Italian transl. *Europolis: Un'idea controcorrente di integrazione politica*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2009, 266 pp.

doi: 10.2383/31386

The claims of this book can be summarized as follows: Empathy leads to sympathy. The exploration of difference creates solidarity. Insofar as solidarity constitutes society, it can be called a society's constitution. Europe is a case in point. It is a place where strangers explore their mutual differences. Europeans are endowed with reflexive identities that are the result of myriad intercultural encounters. This is particularly true about migrants, whose intercultural literacy makes them prototypical Europeans. But it is true about Europeans in general. By virtue of their real or virtual intercultural encounters, Europeans are potentially equipped with the solidarity necessary for a constitutional patriotism beyond the nation-state.

This is a book of impressive scholarly learning. Since Patrizia Nanz develops her own views in constant dialogue with the *crème de la crème* of social philosophy, reading it is rewarding regardless of one agrees with the author or not. In fact it will turn out that I disagree on many issues. However this doesn't make the book less worth reading.

The author posits her dialogical understanding of Europe against the market-view of economic liberals and the demos-thesis of social democrats [Chapter 2]. Market-theorists like Giandomenico Majone are not interested in the question of constitutional patriotism at the European level because they value Europe as an economic rather than a political project. Demos-theorists like Claus Offe, Fritz Scharpf and Dieter Grimm rule out the possibility of a European constitution worthy of that name because, in their view, this would presuppose the relative homogeneity of a national community (demos) similar to the citizenry of a nation-state. To market-theorists, Nanz objects that a European constitution based on the mutual exploration of intercultural difference is desirable. To demos-theorists, she objects that a dialogical form of European constitutional patriotism beyond the nation-state is also possible.

As a matter of intellectual honesty, Nanz embraces the dictum that "in moral and political philosophy one is looking for premises from which to infer conclusions already and independently accepted because of one's feelings and sympathies" [p. 6-7]. Her positioning against other authors should therefore be understood as a normative choice rather than the fruit of compelling arguments. To cite just one example, this is also true about her refutation of the demos-thesis (the market-view is dealt with only cursorily). More effort is dedicated to the presentation than to the actual refutation of this thesis. This treatment of competing scholarly positions is consistent with the belief of the author in the progressive value of exploring difference (although it must be noted that in some places the exegesis of other positions is tendentious).

In what follows, I claim for myself the same right to explore where and how I disagree with the author rather than compellingly refuting her claims point by point.

First and foremost, there is the idea that empathy leads to sympathy. Personally I have my doubts. Having understood how somebody is different can lead to improved chances for peaceful coexistence, but it can also lead to even more visceral hatred of the “other.” While listening to the other is always a good idea, it would seem that most people divorce because they have explored their differences too much rather than too little. Paradoxically, the attitude most conducive to sympathy is often stereotyped ideas rather than true empathy. On a cocktail party, I once talked to a French human rights lawyer who expressed strong generic sympathy for asylum seekers in the name of multiculturalism. When I asked her, for the sake of the argument, whether she could envisage sharing her condominium or neighbourhood with extended families from Sub-Saharan Africa and practicing Muslims, the conversation was quickly over. Her solidarity for immigrants was premised on the stereotyped assumption that the majority of asylum seekers are supporters of multiculturalism, just like her.

Patrizia Nanz believes in a dialogical theory of the public sphere, which she derives from the political philosophy of Jürgen Habermas [Chapter 3]. She suggests an inter-discursive approach that “suggests the possibility of an ideally symmetrical dialogical exploration of cultural and ideological differences (rather than similarities), i.e. a mutual perspective-taking that provides the basis for the ongoing negotiation of an intercultural collective identity” [p. 41]. She thus defines “critical” multiculturalism as an exercise in the exploration of difference [Chapter 4]. As in other parts of the book, she positions herself against “great names” such as Charles Taylor and Jeremy Waldron, expressing somewhat greater sympathies with other scholarly authorities like Jürgen Habermas and Will Kymlicka. Her own view is that multiculturalism means “the constant possibility of new, positive identity-fusions in public life, transcending fragmentation, but at the same time recognizing the differential interests that (disadvantaged) social groups have in maintaining boundaries” [p. 71].

Quite obviously, the last half-sentence would unilaterally impose on the social mainstream a duty to accept the closure of marginal minorities. Disadvantaged social groups would have a right to close themselves off, while the social mainstream would not have the same right. Or, to put it more crudely: the self-encapsulation of ethnic minorities would be legitimate, but the desire of parts of the social majority to preserve sanctuaries of ethnic homogeneity would be illegitimate. Personally I find this unacceptable because, arguably, the closure of minorities is as harmful to the prospects of peaceful human coexistence as the closure of the social mainstream.

The book culminates in a chapter on “multicultural literacy” [Chapter 5]. This chapter introduces Davidson’s remarkable principle of charity. An expansive interpretation and widespread application of this principle would indeed improve the prospects for peaceful human coexistence. If you have a margin of choice in interpreting your counterpart either as an irrational wretch or as a reasonable fellow, always go for the second option. Much would be gained if more people behaved according to this golden rule. Subsequently, the author uses Putnam’s idea of situated idealizations and Bakhtin’s views on dialogism for a reformulation of the idea that multiculturalism is or should be the mutual exploration of difference. Based on this, she claims that Europe should embrace a situated constitutional patriotism beyond the nation-state, i.e. learning and solid-

arity across national and cultural boundaries [Chapter 6]. Again, she draws on scholarly authorities such as Frank Michelman and Jürgen Habermas.

The remainder of the book [Chapters 7 and 8] is dedicated to a few qualitative case studies at the micro-level. The author examines the multicultural experiences of second- and third-generation immigrants from Italy and, to a lesser extent, Turkey to Germany. On the basis of life histories constructed through the method of open qualitative interviews, she presents most of these individuals as harbingers of her vision of multiculturalism as the exploration of difference. While the cases do not demonstrate anything, as the target group is by design most likely to yield confirmation of the author's views, the two chapters offer a nice empirical illustration of the major points.

My final objection to multiculturalism as the exploration of difference is that the idea is extremely demanding on real human beings with their limitations (after all, not even academics in social science departments live up to the ideal), and that it is doubtful if multiculturalism is the most promising recipe for peaceful coexistence. When I observe people peacefully coexisting with different people, then it is only rarely because they constantly use language to explore their mutual differences. In most cases, they live in relative peace because they don't care about each other; because they like each other; because they are good at heart; because they share a common interest; because they are civilized; or simply because they are rowing on the same boat.

The last three categorical reasons may potentially help to underpin a European constitutionalism. While it is commonly recognized that a perception of common interest is a *sine qua non* for any kind of democratic project, the notion of civility as a necessary precondition for social peace is unduly discredited. Even more so, it is advisable to reconsider the apparently old-fashioned notion of communities of fate (*Schicksalsgemeinschaften*). Is Europe a community of fate? Only the future can tell.

Jörg Friedrichs
University of Oxford