

The Nation and Communicative Space

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The Argument

This essay explores a remarkably persistent line of argument in social and political theory. In the sketch that follows, I trace an underlying line of filiation that, in the post-World War II period, stretches from the social communication theory of Karl Deutsch to the anatomy of the Information Age in the work of Manuel Castells.¹ Despite the diverse conceptual languages used in this influential body of work, there are recurrent, underlying assumptions about how the relationship between the nation and communication might be theorised. I shall first state my argument briefly and then go on to demonstrate it in more detail.

The 'social communications' approach evidently has considerable heuristic value, so much so that it appears to be an almost reflexive starting-point for a quite disparate band of influential scholars who, in one way or another, concern themselves with how national communicative spaces are constituted. (One might add, indeed, that social communication ideas also appear to infuse, and underpin, much everyday thought and governmental policy assumptions about nationhood and nationality.)

Characteristically, the stress in this approach falls upon the highly functional relation between the nation and modes of social communication. Consciously or unconsciously, social communication thought is an expression of the cultural geography of the nation-state in a world of sovereign states. Its functionalism produces an image of a strongly bounded communicative community. Under present conditions clearly this needs to be revised given the increased attention afforded the 'globalisation' of communication - especially the border-circumventing flows resulting from the rapid transformation of electronic media and of information and communication technologies.

However, the new wave of concern with global interconnectedness should not make us now envisage the world as definitively 'post-national'. The continuing strong links between modes of social communication and national political spaces remain fundamental for conceptions of collective identity. That said, if social communications thinking is to adapt productively to changing circumstances, it does now need to offer an explanatory grasp of the increasingly evident contradictions between various levels of culture and identity that are tending to decouple state and nation. Recent theorising about the European Union is used to illustrate this argument.

The nation and social communication

Karl W. Deutsch (1953; 2nd edn 1966) articulated one of the most explicit and wide-ranging theorisations of the role of communication in nationalism. His theoretical work *Nationalism and Social Communication* - paradoxically little read these days though

talismanically invoked as a matter of routine - is marked by its sense of an end to European colonialism, an awareness of the forced migrations in Europe during the World War II and after, and the dramatic national conflicts in the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East.² A preoccupation with Nazism as the exemplar of nationalism gone wrong is ever-present in the text. The deportation and annihilation of most of European Jewry is counterpointed by an appreciation of the United States as a country relatively successful in assimilating immigrants. Deutsch provides an exile's take on the topic and seeks to shed light on 'some of the conditions and prospects of national or supranational integration' (Deutsch, 1966: 189). Given his deeply post-Habsburgian sensibility, he assumes as a matter of course that fact that 'peoples' may become 'nations' as political space is redrawn. This sense of a changing geo-politics, of the widespread non-coincidence of states and nations, is exceedingly relevant to present-day Europe.

In his introduction to the second edition of *Nationalism and Social Communication*, Deutsch (1966: 4) highlighted a cardinal theme that remains pertinent for current debate: he observed that the nation-state was 'still the chief political instrument for getting things done', and underlined his view that supranational integration had inherent limits given the resilience of nationality. The key proposition of Deutsch's theory is this:

'The essential aspect of the unity of a people ... is the complementarity or relative efficiency of communication among individuals - something that is in some ways similar to *mutual rapport, but on a larger scale*.' (1966: 188; emphasis added)

Deutsch sees a 'people' as providing the basis for the forging of a nationality. This, in turn, is distinct from 'nation-statehood', where political sovereignty is harnessed to the pursuit of a group's cohesion and the continuity of its identity. Without expressly naming it, the theory therefore entertains an idea - that of 'the nation without a state' - which has become increasingly significant of late both as an analytical category and as a political project aimed at redefining the autonomy of national groups within the existing international system of states (cf. McCrone, 1998; Nairn, 1997). For Deutsch (1996: 75), the eventual exercise of national power relies upon 'the relatively coherent and stable structure of memories, habits and values' which in turn 'depends on existing facilities for social communication, both from the past to the present and between contemporaries'.

'*Social communication*' is therefore very broadly understood: it is akin to an all-embracing anthropological notion of culture as a way of life, an interactively sustained mode of being that integrates a given people and provides it with singularity (Deutsch, 1966: 96-97). This idea is otherwise represented as a principle of coherence for a community, and has a basis in the 'facilities for storing, recalling, and recombining

information, channels for its dissemination and interaction, and facilities for deriving further information' (Deutsch, 1966: 75). Much influenced by the pioneers of information theory, after being regarded as rather unfashionable for some years, Deutsch's half-century-old idiom has a striking contemporaneity in the era of the so-called Information Society.

Social communication theory embraces the ways in which socio-cultural groups cluster and how forms of cohesion affect institutions and socio-cultural interaction. Communicative integration has a key significance because it produces social closure. Consequently, Deutsch (1966: 95) stresses the well-worn sociological distinction between 'community' and 'society', keenly aware that a society may contain quite different ethno-cultural communities that speak to themselves and therefore cannot find a common, overarching code - or mode of social communication.

Central to the argument is the view that nations and nation-states are strongly bounded by their socially communicative structures of interaction: 'Peoples are held together "from within" by this communicative efficiency, the complementarity of the communicative facilities acquired by their members' (1966: 98). Nationality therefore becomes an objective function of communicative competence and belonging. Although Deutsch acknowledges the analytical place of such ideas as 'national consciousness' and 'national will', the symbolic level of national self-awareness - what in today's idiom would be termed 'national identity' - is seen as an outcome of the structural cohesion that comes about through social communication.

One key implication is that the communicative practices of nations lead to the exclusion of foreigners. 'Ethnic complementarity' (which for Deutsch broadly equates to nationality) sets up 'communicative barriers' and engenders "'marked gaps" in the efficiency of communication' relative to other groups (1966: 100). Although some nations, those based on immigration and openness to assimilation, are well adapted to the integration of new members, others may throw the process into reverse by expulsion or even extermination.

A further consequence is that the creation of wider collectivities via, for instance, supranational political arrangements such as federation or confederation, is inherently difficult to achieve, especially where communicative complementarity is weak or does not exist. In a negative anticipation of the techno-utopia of the global village, Deutsch argues that the construction of a universal communications system is impossible in a non-uniform world (1966: 176). Deutsch is therefore more struck by the likely persistence of the nation-state than by its disappearance. As he neatly puts it, 'the present distribution of

sovereign states' is 'necessary in its essential features, though not in its accidents' (1966: 187).

This functionalist conception of cultural integration has a decisive weakness when the level of analysis shifts *outside* the nation-state. There is no general principle for analysing the interaction between communicative communities, for assessing cultural and communicative flows in a global system - matters of central concern to contemporary cultural and media studies - because that is not where the theoretical interest lies. Social communication theory is therefore internalist. At root, it is about how shared cultural and communicative practices strengthen the identity of a group by creating boundaries.

High cultures, imagined communities, banal nationalisms

Deutsch's underlying conception of social communication - if not his theoretical idiom - lives on strongly, mostly half-recognised at best, in more contemporary work, such as, for instance, Ernest Gellner's noted *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), which has become the lodestar exposition of the 'modernist' conception of nationalism. Like Deutsch, Gellner displays a *Mitteleuropäisch* exilic strand in his work, and - no accident, this - his thinking about Europe was also especially marked by the post-Habsburg legacy of non-congruence between states and nations in central Europe.³

Gellner argues that the formation of nation-states is the inevitable outcome of industrialisation, with its concomitant complex division of labour. The social relations created by industrial society mean that to function effectively one needs to be able to do anything, in principle, and that requires 'generic training'. This transmission of know-how necessitates a universal, standardized system of education, using a standardized linguistic medium. It is this process that brings about an inevitable 'deep adjustment in the relationship between polity and culture', namely nationalism, which is 'the organization of human groups into large, centrally educated, culturally homogeneous groups' (Gellner, 1983: 35). Gellner's theory, then, connects the explanatory motor of industrialisation to a quintessentially Deutschian conception of social communication.

Gellner takes culture to refer to 'the distinctive style of conduct and communication of a given community', which in the modern world takes the modal form of a nation-state. For the members of such political formations 'culture is now the necessary shared medium' (1983: 37-8). Cultural boundaries become defined by national cultures, which diffuse a literate 'high culture', in which the key agency is a national education system. In this account, the culture of a nation is broadly identified with official culture. The theory is less focused on sources of internal differentiation and conflict than it is concerned with what makes the nation cohere. Consequently, like Deutsch's theory, Gellner's is mainly

an analysis of how a national culture comes to be created, rather than concerning itself with how it is maintained and renewed. It likewise stresses the self-containedness of nation-state-protected cultures. So, although Deutsch is mentioned only *en passant*, as the springboard for Gellner (1983: 126) to think briefly about the role of media in the national culture, his influence actually runs rather far deeper than it seems.

Whereas contemporary media and cultural theories are especially concerned with cultural flows and relations of dominance within the global communications order (cf. e.g., Sreberny-Mohammadi et al. (eds), 1997 ; Thussu (ed.), 1998) this is not a key interest for Gellner, any more than it was for Deutsch. In a way still quite characteristic of most sociological theorising, mass-mediated communication is dealt with as a relative triviality.⁴ Gellner (1983: 127) argues, in a cryptic passage, that it is not the content of such communication that matters, but rather:

'the media themselves, the pervasiveness and importance of abstract, centralized, standardized, one to many communication, which itself automatically engendered the core idea of nationalism, quite irrespective of what in particular is being put into the specific messages transmitted. The most important and persistent message is generated by the medium itself, by the role which such media have acquired in modern life. The core message is that the language and style of the transmissions is important, that only he who can understand them, or can acquire such comprehension, is included in a moral and economic community, and that he who does not and cannot, is excluded.'

Echoing Marshall McLuhan, Gellner therefore argues in part that the media are the message. But the formula is modified to take account of 'language and style', of how common codes invite the audience to consider and understand themselves to be members of a given community. The media therefore function as a categorial system: widespread public identification with the national space is held to be an effect of this form of cultural organisation. Media are boundary markers, intimately related to the 'political roof' that caps a culture and makes it into a nation-state. It is their function in sustaining a political community that is of prime interest for Gellner, and it is therefore not a problem to think of them as univocal.

Although persuasive, this argument overstates the point. 'Language and style' are about more than the medium that transmits them: they are closely related to the question of 'content'. This is of cardinal interest for the cultural industries that produce it. Moreover, the attitude of the state to its own 'national' content is frequently a matter of high importance in international cultural trade and often embedded in national communication policies. Hence, Gellner's rendition of social communication theory reproduces the

original Deutschian fixation on what is internal to the communicative community rather than considering the import what lies outside and how it may be addressed. It ignores the 'otherness' that may well substantially condition any given national identity.

This internalist line of argument also runs through another pivotal text of recent years, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983; 2nd ed. 1991), an approach which on the face of it takes its distance from Gellner.⁵ Since Anderson's work appeared, his title has turned from a pithy descriptor of nationhood into a sociological and journalistic cliché.⁶ In his account of the emergence of European nations, Anderson, like Deutsch and even more than Gellner, takes mediated communication to be of central importance in the formation of a nationalist consciousness (or, as we now say, national identity):

'What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity.' (Anderson, 1983: 46)

Whereas for Gellner national systems of education that produce cultural affines (a community of 'clerks') take centre-stage, Anderson's key contention is that '[p]rint-language is what invents nationalism, not a particular language per se' (1983: 122). Thus, what is highlighted is the importance of the media of communication in the construction of an imagined community, given the appropriate material conditions.

According to Anderson, 'print language' was the means whereby given vernaculars became standardised, being disseminated through the market for books and newspapers. His account is resolutely Gutenbergian: the impact of electronic media is not addressed.⁷ Mechanically-reproduced print-languages unified fields of linguistic exchange, fixed 'national' languages, and created new idioms of power. The 'nationalist novel' (its plot enacted in a socially recognised common space) together with the newspaper, with 'calendrical consciousness' as its principle of organisation, were, Anderson argues, the two key vehicles in shaping national consciousness. By co-ordinating time and space these could address an imagined national community even before it had been formed into a nation-state.

Hence, the collective consumption of mediated communication serves to create a sense of national community. Like Gellner, from whom he would differentiate his approach, Anderson actually understands the confines of the nation to be inescapably implicit in the way that media categorise reality and address their audiences. Strikingly, like Deutsch,

who writes of large-scale 'mutual rapport', Anderson speaks of the nation's 'deep, horizontal comradeship' (1983: 16).

Subsequently, Anderson (1991: 184) has considered how the national story has been told in post-colonial states by way of the cultural institutions of the census (enumerator and sorter of populations), the map (definer of the political boundaries) and the museum (vehicle for the establishment of legitimate ancestry). Although (unlike Gellner) Anderson makes no reference to Deutsch's work, his approach is still unmistakably located in a social communications framework: the imagined community is situated within the socio-cultural and communicative space of the nation-state and it is the internal processes of nation-formation that are of predominant interest.

Anderson's argument about the 'imagined community' has been taken up, with a distinctive twist, by Michael Billig (1995:70) who rightly observes that this increasingly overworked slogan can be illuminating, but only when 'it is realised that the imagined community does not depend upon continual acts of imagination for its existence'. This line of interpretation is of a piece with his general argument about nationalism's 'banality': namely, the demonstrable proposition that a great deal of nationalist practice is embedded in the rituals and practices of everyday life. Billig takes as one paradigm case the daily saluting of the flag in US schools. This activity has become so 'natural' that even most social scientists have failed to interrogate its significance. And although those who salute may have various relationships to the act of saluting itself, they are participating in a common rite.

Billig argues that in the contemporary world, entire peoples are simply embedded in their national deities. Their flags flutter diurnally, largely unnoticed as adornments to public buildings; the news categorises some events as home affairs and distinguishes these from foreign reports; the weather forecast reinforces the awareness of political geography; sporting heroes embody national virtues and mobilise collective loyalties; moments of crisis - especially war - produce patriotic addresses from political leaders; national languages and histories, through their transmission constitute a sense of communality. And so forth. Thus are the internal props of national identity routinely and unremarkably reproduced. In line with Gellner and Anderson, Billig's analysis fills in the space of 'communicative complementarity' and underscores its tenacious grip on how we categorise the world. But, notably, unlike his precursors, Billig is less interested in the question of nation-formation than that of nation-maintenance.

Billig largely concurs with Gellner's insight that it is largely impossible to think of oneself as *other* than a national and have a place in the contemporary world. And that is

because we live in a world of states - often officially represented, however inaccurately, as *nation*-states - whose boundaries impose the requirement that we belong to some juridically recognised collectivity. Billig certainly recognises the pressure of global culture and international relations as needing to be negotiated by banal nationalisms, which continue to provide anchorages for collectivities. Consequently, his position is resolutely resistant to the postmodern claims that our collective identities have become free-floating signifiers, or, alternatively, that we have entered a stage of post-national tribalism. Rather, it is insisted, rightly, that whatever the transformative impact of 'globalisation' might be, it has not neutralised national attachments. But this proper acknowledgement of the shaping impact of the extra-national (based in Billig's engagement with current media and cultural studies) is still largely subordinate to offering an account of how, as Deutsch would say, nations are held together 'from within'.⁸

All the above theories share a notion of the prototypically modern - i.e. national - communicative community as strongly bounded. Deutsch's work emphasises communicative 'gaps' between peoples, this being the dark side of relatively cosy insider efficiency and complementarity. Gellner and Anderson too, stress the role of a common culture based in a standardized language and cultural institutions in making a common people. Whereas Billig underscores the often unnoticed daily 'flagging' of a common identity.

The nation as deliberative space

Social communication theories, then, all partake of a broad interest in how nations speak to themselves, mark themselves off as different from 'others'. This theme is also central to the work of Jürgen Habermas, whose work is widely recognised as premised on a theory of communication, but is less well understood to be also concerned with the *nation* addressed as a political community. Habermas's theory of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (orig. 1962; Eng. trans. 1989) has exerted a profound influence in recent debate about the role and quality of political communication and the mediation of civic deliberation. The 'public sphere' - another sociological trope of our time - refers to the whole domain of debate in an institutional space that exists outside the state, but which engages all who are concerned with matters of public interest. The presence of this domain is central to the freedom of expression commonly associated with democracy; it is necessarily a space in which communication takes place.

Even when the Habermasian version of the 'public sphere' has been an object of criticism (Calhoun (ed.), 1994; Schudson, 1996) it has still been a starting-point for much recent discussion of the role of media in democracies (cf. Curran, 1991; Dahlgren, 1995). What tends widely to have been presumed to be natural rather than examined critically is the

necessary co-extensiveness of political public space with the boundaries of nation-statehood. Perhaps this is not surprising as the formation of the classic public sphere coincided with the growth of nationalism and nation-state formation. In line with this, Habermas' theory in its earliest formulation stresses that public communication remains pre-eminently tied to the structures of meaning of nation-states - although these have long been subject to international flows of information and cultural products.

Over the national boundary

Thus far, it has been argued that social communications theories have two key limitations: (a) a tendency to think in terms of a close functional fit between communication and the nation; and (b) an overwhelming concern with the interior of the national communicative space, whether this be in respect of its formation or its maintenance. This internalism may, at times, acknowledge how nations are defined by their positions in the relations of an interstate world, but that is of secondary interest. Taken together, therefore, these positions carry a major implication: (c) that the politically salient container for communicative space is the sovereign nation-state.

Critical deliberation within national spaces, however, is not adequate to the global changes that presently face us. Decision-making about key matters that affect nation-states is commonly located extra-territorially: in the boardrooms of transnational corporations, inside international organisations of various descriptions, within the cabinets of regional military, political and economic groupings, in the various centres of global finance. If national publics are to become involved in deliberation about what concerns them, national communicative spaces need to be complemented by those that enable the formation of public³ with transnational, even global scope. a/

As various commentators have argued, it is important to ask questions about the impact of transnational and global changes on what are still largely nation-state-bound systems of communication. What do these imply both for the possibility of a supranational public sphere as well for new forms of communication emanating from the self-organisation of civil society (Garnham, 1994: 372; Keane, 1991: 142-146)? The European Union (EU) offers an particularly apt laboratory test for those interested in the communicative relations between nation-statehood and supranationalism. In the EU, for instance, the nation-state is being squeezed from above and below. From above by a process of 'Europeanisation' that circumscribes and redefines conceptions of sovereign action by member states in the fields of economics, defence, social affairs, communication and increasingly foreign policy. And simultaneously from below by the growth of a more autonomous regionalism within nation-states, which is especially significant when regions are also stateless nations.

To what extent is the classical framework of communications theories of nationalism - focused, as we have seen, almost exclusively on the level of the nation-state - transposable to an emergent supranational entity in which sub-state regions are acquiring increased political visibility?

Deutsch (1966: 3-4) doubted that a common communicative space could easily emerge in the then European Community because of the continuing strength of the nation-state. Some thirty years later, in sharp contrast, Habermas (1994: 21) has maintained that the 'classic form of the nation-state is presently disintegrating'. For him, the European Union now offers scope for a new, wider, conception of citizenship with a correlatively broader framework of public communication. He has thus transposed the national public sphere to the supranational level, assuming a diminished hold by the nation-state and nationality on collective loyalty and identification. By this account the eventual European political community would be linked not by means of common symbols but rather through a less emotionally compelling framework of rules. As Habermas (1994: 27) puts it:

'the political culture must serve as the common denominator for a constitutional patriotism which simultaneously sharpens an awareness of the multiplicity and integrity of the different forms of life which exist in a multicultural society'.

Is such political rationality enough to make an extended and variegated collectivity cohere? Certainly, it offers a strong point of contrast to the symbol-rich, affectively connected and routinised national life-form depicted by the first wave of social communications theory. In his more recent thinking, Habermas expressly conceives of the public sphere as potentially *unbounded*, as having shifted from specific locales (such as the nation) to the virtual co-presence of citizens and consumers linked by media. A European public sphere, on this model, would be open-textured, since its communicative connections would extend beyond whatever expedient political form the EU happens to take; indeed such connections would extend outwith the European continent altogether. Of course, this makes a certain sense: contemporary communication flows and networks ensure that no - or hardly any - political community can remain an island. However, to the extent that this perspective also implies that we somehow also belong to a global village, it inevitably raises questions about *which* communicative boundaries continue to be *most* significant for the development of a distinctive political identity and political culture in the EU. In other words, we are compelled to ask are there *specific* communicative processes that might contribute to the Union's social cohesion?

Habermas envisages a liberal and egalitarian European political culture in which decision-making bodies are open to scrutiny. He assumes that there will be intensified networking across national boundaries and sets out an ideal interplay between 'institutionalised processes of opinion and will formation' and 'informal networks of public communication' (1994: 31). Moreover, it is postulated that a radical form of popular involvement in public affairs will act as the essential corrective to professionalised politics. Since parliamentary democracy is as indispensable at the European level as at that of the nation-state, what is needed is 'a discursive structuring of public networks and arenas in which anonymous circuits of communication are detached from the concrete level of single interactions' (Habermas 1997: 171). In other words, a *European* communicative space is required. Note, though, that entwined with the argument about the sphere of public deliberation is another about how long-term social interaction produces forms of solidarity. While this is quite understated, it is analytically distinct and begins to offer a quite plausible social interactionist account of 'supra-nation-building' alongside the more procedural-deliberative level of action summed up as 'constitutional patriotism'.

This somewhat shadowy sociology of solidarity needs to be foregrounded, as otherwise the consequence of unbounding the national public is to insert us into 'a highly complex network that branches out into a multitude of overlapping international, national, regional, local and subcultural arenas' (Habermas, 1997: 373-374). This complete opening out of communication, the globalisation of the public sphere in effect, sits somewhat uneasily alongside Habermas' thinking about the supersession of the nation-state and its *bounded* reconstitution at a federal European level with a political culture to match. While, by definition, the global communication network thus conceived has no necessary boundaries, arguably a European polity does. It is hard to see how a discursively linked community could develop a collective political loyalty and identity if completely unbounded. A European political community without some distinctive communicative boundary-markers simply cannot be imagined as a sociological possibility.

This relates to the general problem of an emergent European collective identity. Habermas offers a federalist model of political involvement by Europeans in which the content of their collective identities is different at each level. At the level of the nation-state it is 'thick' and articulates with a national political culture elaborated within a highly institutionalised public sphere. At the level of Union Europe, it is 'thin' and legalistic, and overwhelmingly refracted through the medium of nation-state politics. Behind this characterisation of two levels of collective identification lies the unresolved broader issue of what makes collectivities cohere, and whether any conceivable constitutional patriotism

ultimately presupposes a hinterland of *non-rationalistic* assumptions and sentiments in order to make its civic appeal work (Schlesinger, 1997: 385-388).

For Habermas, therefore, the potentially transformative impact of communications technologies on communities is subordinate to an argument about the need for a public sphere and, so far as the European Union is concerned, how an appropriate new communicative space might be constituted. His latest formulations make some minor play with the concept of the network. This is much more developed in the work of Manuel Castells (1996, 1997, 1998), for whom the radical impact of communication technologies is held to have contributed to the formation of an altogether new kind of society, the 'informational'.

Castells (1996: 3) argues that as 'patterns of social communication come increasingly under stress' we now need to think of communicative relations on the model of the network: 'Our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the Self'. From this perspective, to the extent that our anchorage in social structure is weakened, we are supposedly increasingly the authors of our identities.⁹ Castells' post-nationalism does indeed acknowledge its Deutschian provenance (Castells, 1997: 31), which is evidently adaptable enough to take account of the transformation of the nation-state.

Like Habermas, Castells considers the European Union's form to be of especial interest. But it is not public sphere concerns that preoccupy Castells so much as his view that the EU is the precursor of a new political order, of new forms of association and loyalty. For him, the emerging Euro-polity epitomises what he terms 'the network state'. Although the diagnosis is squarely in line with much contemporary political science and constitutional thinking (e.g., Schmitter, 1996 ; Weiler, 1996), there is a distinctive twist, inasmuch as Castells sees the emergent Euro-state not only as a political-economic zone but, by virtue of privileging its network character, also as a specific kind of *communicative space*.¹⁰

For Castells, just like the world order itself, the EU has different 'nodes' of varying importance that together make up a network. Regions and nations, nation-states, European Union institutions, therefore together constitute a framework in which authority is shared. In Castells' account of the Euro-matrix (unlike that of Habermas) the stateless nation is judged to be of especial significance as a prototype of potentially innovative forms of post-nation-state affiliation. This comes out most clearly, perhaps, in his account of his native Catalonia, which - like the EU, but on a different level - is taken to be an exemplar of flexible networking and as offering multiple identities and allegiances to its inhabitants.¹¹ Nations are defined as distinct from the state, being characterised as

'cultural communes constructed in people's minds by the sharing of history and political projects'(1997: 51).

This fits into a more general diagnosis in which Castells (1997: 354) avers that '[b]ypassed by global networks of wealth, power and information, the modern nation-state has lost much of its sovereignty'. The result is a 'dissolution of shared identities', ostensibly producing a split between global elites that consider themselves citizens of the world and the resistance of those who have lost economic, political and cultural power who 'tend to be attracted to communal identities' that either cut across the nation-state or operate somewhere below the nation-state level (Castells, 1997: 356). The EU is an instance of the former; Catalonia and Scotland examples of the latter. For Castells (1998: 318), European integration represents 'at the same time a reaction to the process of globalization and its most advanced expression'. It is hailed as the harbinger of a new type of society.

In terms of Castells' wider theory, much as with Habermas, we might ask what gives *boundaries* to the putative European communicative space? The answer is one curiously reminiscent of Deutsch's argument about cultural complementarity and communicative efficiency. It resides in the nexus of political institutions that constitute Union Europe and the dealings between them and it also involves the growing criss-crossing of 'subsidiary' horizontal linkages at all levels across the member states (Castells, 1998: 330-331). This coincides exactly with Habermas' argument. In short, a form of Deutschian 'communicative complementarity' emerges out of what Keith Middlemass (1996) has called the 'Euro-civilising process', namely the informal processes of state-making. Thus, the potentially globalising pull of communications technologies is countered by emergent patterns of social interaction in the European Union's space that are polyvalent: simultaneously, they knit together diverse actors economically, politically and communicatively. Thus, a supranational network on the European Union's scale comes to develop a specific interactive intensity that favours internal communication and creates a referential boundary that can co-exist with global networking.

In broad explanatory terms, then, social communications theory is capable of discarding its national shell and, indeed, its tight functionalism. However, although it can produce an account of distinct and intersecting levels of communicative space above, at, and below the level of the nation-state, the theory is still characteristically centred on how specific forms of communication induce patterns of cohesion. Moreover, to develop social communications theory by invoking the model of a network does not resolve the knotty questions of how contradictions of interest, identity and loyalty, or structured

inequalities of power, are handled within the more complex account of communicative space that has latterly been elaborated.

Concluding remarks

Theoretical arguments about social communication and contemporary policy developments are intimately connected. Take, for instance, the EU's attempts to define a 'European' cultural identity and common communicative space in the 1980s and 1990s which took place in the context of global industrial competition, most especially with the United States and Japan. Heightened invocations of a common European culture accompanied efforts to protect European audiovisual production from the impact of US film and television imports during the concluding phase of the GATT negotiations in 1993 and this remains a live issue (cf. van Hemel et al. (eds) 1996). The stress upon defending 'Europeanness', and the need to treat films and television programmes as protectable cultural goods, has reflected official concern about the extent to which the globalisation of communication had undermined the cultural sovereignty of nation-states, and, by extension, that of the intergovernmental European Union itself.

In global cultural trade, the EU has made efforts to represent itself as a coherent cultural entity. However, that is only its outward face, since internally the EU demonstrates acutely the tensions between supranationalism and nationalism. Where diversity of language and culture are crucial symbols of collective identity, supranational Euro-goals encounter national resistances. To complicate things further, the EU-endorsed recognition of regional differences within member states - the so-called 'Europe of the Regions' - has reinforced autonomist, even secessionist, tendencies, particularly in the territories of stateless nations.¹² Hence, state-endorsed national culture may not only contradict the demands of 'Europeanisation' but European nation-states may also simultaneously find themselves challenged from another direction by claims made for cultural and communicative recognition on the part of national, ethnic and linguistic minorities.

Such arguments about the impact of cultural flows and the reconfiguration of politico-cultural spaces are one way of thinking about identity construction. Another is to consider the obstacles in the way of long-term process of quasi-state-building that is being undertaken in Europe. As Ernest Gellner (1997: 50) has observed in preferring a neat metaphor for uneven development, we might consider the European continent as though it were a set of 'time zones' with 'belts of territory running from north to south, within which the pattern is roughly similar, but which differ from one zone to another'. Therefore, despite the asynchronicity of present-day conditions in different parts of the continent, the 'Euro-civilising process' may well ultimately result in synchronic convergence: the longer-term outcome could be the creation of a new political culture that

sustains a distinct level of European identity and citizenship (cf. Schlesinger and Kevin, forthcoming). To date, however, the Union's intermittent expansion to embrace such diverse states has produced a knotty cultural problem: its instability has provoked a continual rethinking of forms of governance and also has made it difficult to establish a stable basis for collective identification across and 'above' the level of the nation-state.

Contemporary developments suggest, therefore, that social communication theory, with some adaptation, is likely to inform how we think about future European developments, as it has in the past. Having now abandoned the homologous coupling of nation and communication, its exponents are bound to analyse both the contradictions and congruences of at least three political levels at which communicative space is elaborated: the supranational, the nation-statal, and the sub-nation-statal. This shift of theoretical focus is the very least that is needed to keep pace with growing complexity.

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Notes

¹This essay is part of an intended short book. In the present text, I have revisited and substantially developed some earlier considerations (cf. Schlesinger, 1991).

²Only a brief introduction was added to the second edition in 1966. There is complementary material in Deutsch's later work but the essentials of the argument do not change from its first formulation.

³Just how much so has latterly emerged in his posthumous work, notably Gellner, 1998. My thanks to Nicholas Garnham for drawing this study to my attention. I hope to deal with the Habsburg matrix and some of its intellectual consequences in future work.

⁴Alvin Gouldner (1976) was one mainstream sociologist who recognised the importance of communication in constructing public (national) discourse. More recently, from the standpoint of social theory, John Thompson (1995) has tried also to integrate the findings of media research into an analysis of the public sphere.

⁵As I pointed out some years ago: 'Anderson distinguishes his position from that of Gellner, whom he describes as "so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates "invention" to "fabrication" and "falsity", rather than to

"imagining" and "creation". (Schlesinger, 1991: 163). As is plain, the deep structure of their arguments is much closer than Anderson thinks.

⁶Characteristically enough, it has been probed for analytical shortcomings, though these have not yet shaken the fashionableness of the slogan. Cf. Balakrishnan (1996); Chatterjee (1996); Tamir (1995).

⁷A point latterly acknowledged by Anderson (1994: 320-321) who has recognised the boundary-crossing impact of electronic media but without explaining what that might be.

⁸Billig's sole reference to Deutsch is both cryptic and mistaken in its emphasis on his developmentalism (Billig, 1995: 43). Again, here is an author evidently unconscious of a key conceptual debt.

⁹My purpose here is not to take issue with this postmodern vision, which I do not share, and which is hardly consistently adhered to by the author himself.

¹⁰I have argued along similar lines myself, albeit from within a different theoretical framework. Cf. Schlesinger and Kevin, forthcoming.

¹¹Castells takes issue with both Gellner and Anderson both for their modernism (on defensible historical grounds) and for what (mistakenly, I believe) he takes to be their treatment of nationhood as lacking any 'real existence'. Castells takes Gellner's stress on 'invention' and Anderson's on the 'imagined' aspects of community to be denials of the nation's material reality. I understand them to be talking about the production of beliefs or consciousness or identities that both express and designate an actually existing collectivity. So far as the historical critique of modernism goes, there are powerful echoes of this in Scotland, an analogous case to Catalonia in many respects (cf. Ferguson, 1998).

¹²I have begun to explore the impact of these processes on communicative spaces in Scotland in Schlesinger, 1998.

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