

**Elona Nazaj**

*Albania*  
*University of Macerata*

### **Euro-Centrism vs. International Thinking**

The journey of the concept of Europe has been from myth to legend to war to stability. European unity is based, essentially, on the recognition of historic and linguistic diversity, the cultural variety and the national roots that make it unique. It is this huge cultural diversity that gives Europeans their European identity. I firmly believe that we cannot understand the idea of Europe without understanding its fundamental desire for universality. Europe has been built gradually on the basis of a sincere and deep-seated acknowledgement of diversity, and it is precisely because of this that it aspires to form the basis of a larger and more universal whole. Europe has more than its fair share of past glory and regrets and possesses both great diversity and a deep cultural unity.

Europe is above all a community of values and the aim of European unification is to realise, test, develop and safeguard these values. They are rooted in common legal principles acknowledging the freedom of the individual and social responsibility. Fundamental European values are based on tolerance humanity and fraternity. The great currents of culture and art, scientific discoveries and their application for the general good and the critical analysis of accepted views and perceptions have all had the effect that we can now live and work together in peace, liberty and free from want. Europe has spread these values throughout the world. Thus Europe it is considered to be the mother of revolutions in the modern world.

Thousands of years of common history, language and geography have developed into a common sense of European identity. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, European identity is an identity based on the values of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, values tempered in the aftermath of two world wars into a project to bring peace, stability and prosperity to the continent.

The European identity is deeply rooted in our shared history. Exploring the historical roots of European identity is complicated by the fact that the idea of Europe, as we understand it today, has evolved as a process of exchange between different civilisations. Today, most people would define 'European-ness' as quite strongly associated with their nation-states, the patchwork of national diversity that almost defines Europe. This is a very important part of Europe and it is likely to remain so for a long time to come. We may differ as Europeans on the means but we all agree on the ends. Research shows that the Europeans attitudes, in some degree, are very different from those of Americans in this area. In the wider world, Europeans seem to believe more strongly than others in the virtues of a rules-based system of global governance and to the idea of social justice. Now, however, it appears that in many ways parts of the US are returning to more 'European' modes of life, including railways and urban mass transit systems, delicatessen food and niche markets for cult movies in some of the cities. And if there is, as Colin Crouch (1993) has suggested, a European model or set of models of industrial relations, this may well appeal to other regions of the world. Europe also appears 'modern' in relation to the US and many other regions of the world in the extent of its secularisation. Whatever the difficulties of measurement in this domain, it is clear that religious belief in Europe has mostly ceased to have the kind of importance for social life as a whole which it has retained elsewhere, even in

ostensibly secular states. European society and culture are viewed as possessing certain intrinsic features that give them a decided advantage over non-European societies.

In the Euro-Centric concept, Europe has always been and currently is the superior centre from which knowledge, creativity, technology, culture, and so forth flow forth to the inferior periphery, the so-called underdeveloped countries. Euro-Centrism, note Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “is the forcing of cultural heterogeneity into a single paradigmatic perspective in which Europe is seen as the unique source of meaning, as the world’s centre of gravity, as ontological ‘reality’ to the rest of the world’s shadow”. Blaut's criticism of Euro-Centrism hinges on the key word 'false'. It is not Euro-Centric for him to prefer European music to other music or European cuisine to other cuisine. Rather, it is Euro-Centric to make the claim that,

“Europeans are more inventive, innovative, progressive, noble, courageous, and so on, than every other group of people; or that Europe as a place has more healthy, productive, stimulating environment than other places. Euro-Centric thinking attributes to the West an almost providential sense of historical destiny, manifested in its continuous advances in science, technology, industrialism, rationality and economic institutions from time immemorial”.

It takes the European experience as universal and envisions the world from a single privileged point that is Europe. According to Dirlik, Euro-Centrism affirms the cultures and peoples of Europe as paragons of progress, beauty, and civilization and “institutes European subjectivity as universal”. The impact of Euro-Centrism, notes Arif Dirlik, is global. The spread of capitalism, the emergence of the nation-state, the primacy of class, gender, ethnicity and religion as central categories for analysis and the notion of a common humanity or the “good life”—these characterise Euro-Centrism.

Abandoning Euro-Centric provincialism and adopting a global perspective mean that we have to re-scale the world system to make it a truly all-encompassing global system. Euro-Centric thinking attributes to the ‘West’ an almost providential sense of historical destiny. As J. M. Blaut observes, these ideas, of a privileged center and of teleological progress, provide a basis for viewing the rise of Europe as a global power “in terms of internal, immanent forces”. One way Euro-Centrism has been analysed is as a political project that maintains the hegemony and power of capitalism. As such, Euro-Centrism is a sub-project of capitalism and is part of a strategy that is, at heart, based on the maintenance of capitalist hegemony (Amin, 1989). Amin identifies the universalistic aspect of Euro-Centrism as being crucial to the power of Euro-Centric discourse, arguing that the West’s claim to universality is, in fact, the claim of a particularity that has gained hegemony. Therefore, in order to maintain the logic of its own universality, Euro-Centrism presents all other belief systems as ‘particularist’ and in doing so centres the impossibility that alternative belief systems could ever constitute a ‘universal’ template and so a discourse becomes universal to the extent that it can erase the marks of its particularity.

If we wish to understand Europe via a post-EuroCentric optic enabled by globalisation, we must first controversially concede that we can no longer study areas of the world in isolation from one another and produce knowledge about Europe that does not situate Europe within its global context. New post-Euro-Centric perspective will thus require better information about parts of the world about which we may at present know very little, a revised understanding of the relationship of the European to the non-European world and also an increased comprehension of the global economic and political changes that underwrite the cultural production.

Perhaps more controversially, I would also contend that, as a consequence of the real economic, political, and cultural challenges to Euro-Centrism issuing from non-Western areas of the world, we must re-conceptualise the nature of the modernity conceived to emanate from Europe. However, scholars critical of Euro-Centrism have shown that that the diffusion of capitalism throughout the globe has produced homogeneous, political, social and cultural effects, bringing other parts of the world into being that are just as modern as the West but differently so. A post-Euro-Centric paradigm demands that the Western scholars recognize that the European-derived categories that “we” have taken to be universal are merely expressions of a specific particularism that has proclaimed itself to be universal and at least since 1492 has possessed the global power to enforce that claim.

Dirlik comments:

“It is not clear . . . whether globalisation is the final chapter in the history of capitalist modernity as globalised by European power, or the beginning of something else that is yet to appear with any kind of concreteness. What is clear, however, is that globalisation discourse is a response both to changing configurations in global relations—new unities as well as new fractures—and the need for a new epistemology to grasp those changes.”