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Article (Accepted Version)

Delanty, Gerard (2015) The making of European society: contesting methodological nationalism. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 29 (1). pp. 3-15. ISSN 1351-1610

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The Making of European Society: contesting methodological nationalism

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Abstract

The paper is concerned with the problem of ‘society’ and in particular with the notion of ‘European society.’ Rather than reject the possibility of society, it draws on theories of the social as networks. The thesis proposed is that the concept of society should rather be understood as a relational field of interconnections. It is argued that this is highly relevant to the analysis of Europe conceived of in terms of a society. This approach can be seen as an alternative to methodological nationalism. The paper applies a network conception of society to Europe with the emphasis on the on the nineteenth century. In this account, European society is not something that was produced by European integration. Rather than see European society as a recent development, it is argued that the field of tensions between capitalism and democracy constituted the major elements that shaped a European model of society.

Keywords

Capitalism - democracy - European integration - European society - methodological nationalism - networks - the social - society

Introduction

To what extent is it meaningful to speak of ‘European society’? Can the notion of society be applied to Europe? The idea that there is such a thing as a European society became a topic of debate in the 1990s. Much of this was connected in one way or another with developments linked to European integration whereby a social dimension was supposedly consolidating alongside a new political order. In the view of a number of theorists, including the present author, the process of European integration was moving in the direction of a post-national polity. While interpretations of what this entailed differed, there was clearly some justification for thinking that European integration was fundamentally transforming the nation-state, if not abolishing it, as in the more extreme interpretations, at least considerably reducing its significance. Along with these developments of a largely political nature was a new concern with identity and culture. The idea of European identity suggested in some way that Europe was becoming a focus for identities. The notion of European culture was of

course more established, though not necessarily challenging the existence of other expressions of culture. The increased salience of European cultural policy gave additional credence to the notion of Europe as more than an economic domain.

Against this background of economic, political and cultural change, the notion of a European society was not then entirely implausible. But what does it mean to speak of a European society? The answer in many ways depends on what is meant by the notion of 'society' and too what is meant by 'Europe.' The problem with the concept society undoubtedly resides in the fact that the word has different meanings, ranging from an association, social relations within a normatively ordered milieu or polity, a more general societal condition, such as 'modern society.' In this latter designation is included the economy and state, while a more delimited conception of society refers to a social domain distinct from the state. This latter conception of society as defined against the state would include the notion civil society. In this paper it will not be possible to resolve these problems of different meanings of the term society. Instead, I shall leave open the definition of the notion of society to diverse interpretations. It is unavoidably a contested term (but so is almost every concept in the social sciences). Much of this confusion is due to very different applications of the notion of society. One such confusion is applying the category of national society to the transnational level.

The paper returns to the debate on Europe society, but seeks to answer the question in a different way from the issue of whether European integration is leading towards a European society. The approach taken in this paper is to place the notion of Europe as society in both a historical and a global context. Rather than look at the notion of European society in terms of European integration, the proposal is to view it in a longer historical context and, additionally, to situate it in a global context. Rather than to contrast 'European society' to national society, it is rather to be seen in terms of a historical process of transformation in which national societies in Europe, and elsewhere, have themselves undergone major social change. Moreover, when viewed in a wider global context the shape of Europe as a society is more discernible than when viewed in terms of a relationship between the national and the Europe. This more historical sociological approach offers a wider and more fruitful lens through which to view the notion of Europe as a society.

It is evident that the notion of Europe as a society does not make a great deal of sense if one presupposes the national societies as the main reference points for the notion of society (see Eder 2014, Fligstein 2008, Krossa 2009, O'Mahony 2014). Clearly there is more or less nothing comparable on a European scale to the traditional notions of French or British society. There is no common language or collective identity of equivalent nature, the European Union, while having many features of a state is not itself a nation-state, and social relations are predominantly based on national forms of organisation. In these terms, then, Europe can be a society only in a very limited way, as in for example the notion of a 'European social model' that could be associated with the EU. However this notion of a European society is at best opaque and there is not any likelihood for the immediate future of a European social order emerging from the EU. Rather than abandon the idea of whether

there is such a thing as a European society, the question can be posed in a different way. If the notion of national society is questioned and an alternative conceptualisation of society put forward, it is possible to see things in a different light.

I begin by discussing the notion of ‘society’ and propose a network conception of society as an alternative ontological and epistemological approach to the presumptions of methodological nationalism. The second section applies this notion to Europe in historical perspective with the emphasis on the nineteenth century. The third section discusses the relationship between capitalism and democracy as it evolved in the nineteenth century when, it is argued, that a European model of society took shape. The final section draws some conclusions with respect to the current situation.

Rethinking the Question what is Society?

Paradoxically the notion of European society arose at much the same as sociologists began to question the very notion of society as a meaningful category. In a diverse body of work influenced by postmodern theory, the idea of society is rejected as no longer relevant for the analysis of the present day. In these accounts, the notion of society is seen as a product of the age of the nation-state while today, allegedly, new geopolitical configurations are rendering the nation-state obsolete. Thus the presuppositions of the notion of society – the nation-state and bounded conceptions of territory – are in question. Baudrillard was the first to advance a theory of the postmodern as one in which the very category of the social dissolved into hyperrealities of media. According to Urry (2000), the notion of society is superseded by a new order of mobilities. Society was a product of a settled and fixed world in contrast today when mobility is a new kind of reality. According to Latour (1993), the idea of society was from the beginning of the modern era constructed on the false premise that the social and the natural as divergent. In his account, social analysis must focus on the hybrid connectivity of material objects and social actors rather than exclusively on the later. Deleuzian approaches stress the centrality of assemblages.

This is not the place for a full review of these trends (see Arsenault 2011, Gane 2004, Halewood 2014, Outwaite 2005). In the present context it will suffice to note that what these approaches - with the exception of Baudrillard - draw attention to is a new conception of society in terms of networks. This would appear to be the more significant outcome of theories of the end of the social. Indeed, this notion is the basis of Castell’s work on the information age and his theory of the rise of the network society (Castell 1996). Now, while Castell’s, like other network theorists, tends to see the salience of networks in relation to globalisation, which in turn is seen as a product of the age of the internet and information technology, an alternative approach would see networks as the basis of the possibility of society rather than leading to its demise. This is the notion of society that I would like to highlight as relevant to the analysis of Europe conceived of in terms of a society. In these terms, and from a more historical perspective, it was dense and expanding networks of communication in several spheres - trade, the arts, science, industry, diplomacy - that made

possible the formation of European societies and shaped Europe itself. Networks are fields of interconnectivity. The idea was also integral to Bourdieu's notion of fields, as sites of exchange. However, in much broader terms networks can be seen as the web of relations that constitute societies. In classical sociology Simmel had a similar idea when he wrote about the 'web of group affiliations.' While Simmel adopted a micro perspective based on the small group, which has been reflected in later studies on social networks (Granovetter 1973), the notion of the network is highly relevant to the macro-analysis of large-scale social processes. Networks, which can be formal or informal, are heterogeneous sets of relationships between nodes. They are social structures that both enable social action and also constrain it. As with all forms of social organisation they are based on logics of inclusion and exclusion. Network based forms of organisation are particularly flexible in that they can adjust to changing circumstances.

The tendency in recent theorising on networks since Castells and Latour is to see the networks as new kinds of social organisation and related to technological innovation. Thus the nation-state is supposedly based on hierarchy while the new shape of the state is akin to that of a network. In this view, information technology makes possible the ascendancy of networked based social organisation over hierarchical ones. Now, while there is clearly some evidence in support of this view, which is particularly pertinent to the analysis of recent social movements, it restricts the application of networks to contemporary society. The result is both an over-emphasis on networks - for instance the criticism of Castells's work on the information age that is downplays hierarchy - and a neglect of the formative influences of networks in the making of modern society. While Latour was of course centrally concerned with the de-naturalising of modernity, the focus of his work was mostly in relation to the nature/society problematic and not the macro-level analysis of the modern state, economy and society more generally.

The application of networks to macro-level analysis in Europe is very fruitful in accounting for major societal transformation in a longer historical perspective and, additionally, in regard to a global contextualisation of such process. While technological innovation is not the primary force, it is an important element and one that is not reduced to the advent of the information age. The historical application of network analysis has been relatively limited, though often employed in historical studies (see Collins 1998, Gould 2003). The thesis advanced in this paper is that societal formation is based on networks as forms of social organisation. A key aspect of networks that is crucial in explaining their capacity to bring about social change is that they facilitate communication. Networks are both based on and make possible conduits of communication between otherwise different centres. The notion of networks offers an important corrective to the core concepts in classical sociological theory that account for the making of modern society.

In classical sociological theory societies are based on logics of social integration and differentiation. As in the sociology of Durkheim, differentiation – the division of labour – is a key feature of modern society. Modern societies are characterised by ever greater pluralisation in culture, institutions, state, law etc. Along with differentiation, as is well

known, Durkheim drew attention to forms of integration based on solidarity, and noted the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity with the latter based on social cooperation between heterogeneous units. Whether Durkheim had the nation-state in mind or a larger entity, such as Europe, is a matter of some debate. He was primarily concerned with the analysis of modernity than particular modern societies such as France or Germany. This too was the case with Weber and Marx in their studies on capitalism. The notions of differentiation and integration are key concepts in accounting for the shape of modern societies and are also highly relevant in accounting for the impact of European integration, which itself is a form of integration, albeit one that has largely taken the form of what Habermas (1987) has termed system integration in contrast to, what Durkheim had in mind, namely social integration. Indeed, the clash of both these two kinds of integration has been expressed in the form of major crises, whether national or transnational. One of the paradoxes of modern society, as Luhmann has also noted, is that it produces both integration and at the same time differentiation. This is the case with Europeanisation as much as it is with nation-state formation.

In accounting for the rise and expansion of logics of differentiation and integration classical sociological theory did not give much attention to the mechanisms by which such processes unfolded. This is the advantage of network analysis. There are in fact two advantages in this respect, an ontological one and a methodological one. If we view the social itself as not merely a reality in itself, as in Durkheim, or a phenomenological construction, but as a field of relationships it suggests quite a different conception of what it means to speak of society. The conventional assumption is that society is a nation and is defined by a state and thus is more or less coeval with the nation-state. As argued by Beck and others, this ontological predominance of the nation-state must be rejected, even if the notion of the nation-state is not itself in question (Beck and Sznaider 2006). Although Beck believes classical sociology was based on methodological nationalism and needs to be overcome by methodological cosmopolitanism, an alternative reading of classical sociology is that it was not in fact at all based on methodological nationalism (Chernilo, 2006). The basic notion of society in much of classical sociology is that the social is a reality in itself and is not derivative of something else, such as a nation. However, such conceptions of the social did not go much further than recognition of society as a generative reality.

Conceiving of the social as a network affords a deeper level of analysis and one that has, additionally, important methodological implications. It is as noted the best alternative conceptualisation of society in terms other than of national societies. It draws attention to the connections between societies rather than conceiving of societies as ontologically separate. Recent developments in global and in transnational history have given increased relevance to such a perspective (Haupt and Kocha 2009, Rosenberg, 2012)). Indeed, the connections between societies are often more significant than those that consolidate national societies. Such levels of interconnectivity are all the more relevant when it comes to central and Eastern Europe and to Europe more generally prior to the eighteenth century. It should be

noted that such forms of connectivity extend beyond Europe to the wider world as a result of colonialism and global trade and as well as other encounters.

There is one additional aspect to the concept of society that must be mentioned. As best formulated in the writings of Castoriadis, the notion of society also contains an imaginary dimension in that the social is also a projection into the future. For Touraine, writing from a social movement perspective, the notion of the social - which he favours over the notion of society - is also about struggle. The social is expressed in movement. All societies were based on one dominant movement which sought to create a new kind of society. This is an important corrective to the received notion of society in classical sociology which since Comte privileged order - both analytically and normatively - over change. Today the challenge is how to comprehend change, transformation, rupture, multi-directional movements, diversity, conflict etc. The notion of society is one such way. However, it cannot be formulated in a way that reifies movement, plurality, change. On the other side of the coin, there are also dangers of an overly normative conception of society.

The Formation of European Society: a reconstruction

Looking at the formation of Europe over a longer time scale is fraught with many difficulties and which are complicated further when the focus is European society. Such accounts inevitably have to address the relationship between unity and diversity and the related question of convergence and divergence (see also Delanty 2013). Approaching the question on the assumption of methodological nationalism makes the task easier in that the units of comparison are given. For the comparison of differences over a short time scale this can be productive. However the longer the timescale the more difficult this becomes since nations have rarely remained constant. Moreover, where the aim is not primarily comparative - though in a sense all macro-historical and sociological analysis is comparative - but a reconstruction of a common social world the presumption and starting point of diversity limits the scope of analysis.

Approaching the question of European society from the alternative perspective of network analysis offers a different and more fruitful view of the making of Europe. On this account Europe was shaped by interactions from a variety of centres, which include locations outside what is normally considered to be Europe. Nation-states were themselves formed in much the same way. A network approach is thus constructivist in that it can show how the social world came to be organised in the way it exists at a particular moment in time. It has an additional advantage over comparative studies based on methodological nationalism in that the fact that for much of history nations, regions, Europe etc were entangled in multiple histories. The concern with entangled history has been recognised as being of increased importance in historical analysis and questions the assumptions of discrete units such as nation-states.

Rather than take nations as the primary reference points for sociological and historical analysis, what then is the alternative? An approach that is more attuned to the entangled

histories of Europe and the myriad of interconnections out of which Europe was shaped would instead focus on the links between different units, which include nations, but also includes cities, regions, elites, organisations of different kinds. The concepts of integration and differentiation offer additional levels of analysis that show how societal formation unfolds as a process that is not necessarily constrained by national boundaries. Social units enlarge by connecting with other units, which in turn become connected with other units leading to the formation of larger units. Cleavages remain as reminders of the lines of division and aggradation. Most nation-states contain such fractures, as did the system of European empires that predominated until 1918. The absence of overall homogeneity is not in itself a reason to conclude that Europe does not exist as a reality in itself. Such levels of homogeneity were rarely achieved by nations for long. The alternative constructivist approach to the analysis of society proposed here instead postulates the relevance of relational fields organised along the lines of networks and which can take a variety of shapes, including vertical and horizontal.

Before commenting more specifically on the notion of Europe as a society, a few remarks must be made on the formation of Europe more generally. As has often been noted, Europe is composed of considerable geopolitical and cultural variation. However, it is possible to speak of Europe at all only because such variation has produced common structures which limit variation. If there were only difference it would make no sense to speak of Europe. It is a matter of considerable contention when such common structures took shape. The Roman Empire, both in the East and in West, provided some basis for a conception of Europe, but this was limited since it excluded much of what later came to be known as Europe and included much that was ever included in Europe. The 12th to the 15th century can be taken to be period when Europe was born (see also Bartlett 1993, Le Goff 2006). In this period political, social, and cultural structures emerged across the subcontinent and which in the early modern period consolidated to produce not so much a cohesive world but one that shared many similar characteristics. In this period there were huge regional differences and no common collective identity. Christianity was the closest to a common culture, but this was a divided legacy since the split of the Greek-Byzantine tradition and the subsequent split of the Latin tradition with the Reformation.

The formation of Europe must be seen less as the creation of a homogenous civilisation based on congruence of territory, state and culture than as the gradual diffusion across different regions of common structures and modes of social organisation. Weber argued it was rationality that provided the basic substance of unity in Europe and which differentiated it from the non-European world. Variation is rather to be found in the interpretation and implementation of a more general set of ideas or principles than in their form. Rationality is undoubtedly too general and not specifically western. A more pertinent example, Christianity, despite its huge variation and tendency to produce confessional wars, served as a kind of reference culture for many different peoples initially in Europe. Similarly common practices in the arts of government, including diplomacy and war fare, gave a certain unity to what could otherwise be seen as very different political entities. In many cases it was such

practices that made possible the numerous territorial empires that formed the basic fabric of European history. The nation-state is itself one of the best examples of the organisation of political community that produces difference and at the same time a relatively high degree of integration. Under the balance of power system this can be extended to include external relations by which the various centres of power found a means of realising their interests within a common framework. The consolidation of the nation-state should not detract attention from the considerable connections between states and between centres and peripheries more generally. Indeed, the very notion of the nation was itself a product of Europe and presupposed a wider European political culture that provided the idea of the nation with its basic rationale.

The argument advanced here is more than one of unity in diversity since such unity in diversity itself needs to be accounted for. In other words, reducing the notion of unity to overall patterns of commonality that take the form of cultures of reference - as in law, arts of government, capitalism, rationality etc - does not entirely solve the problem of how such forms become established. In short, neither the concepts of integration nor differentiation explain how they produce the diffusion across space of common practices. This is where the relational perspective of interconnectivity is relevant. Europe consolidated out of the connections between various centres of power. Without such conduits of communication no common structures would have been possible. The key dynamic that explains the societal formation of Europe was the propensity for networks to emerge. There was nothing natural or preordained about this. The existence of navigational rivers and the relatively temperate climate offered distinct advantages for the movement of people and the expansion of cultures. Europe was considerably more networked than other parts of the world due in part to the rise of trade routes, centres of learning from monasteries to universities, translations, map making. Significant too was the development of technologies such as the early development of printing and the techniques for the manufacture of paper, the later invention of the steam engine and telegraph. The bourgeois culture of modernity, as Seigal (2012) has also shown, was based on networks between elites which were more interconnected than is often thought. It was such forms of interconnectivity that made Europe possible rather than a preordained structure or a homogenous culture (see also Osterhammel 2014 Chapter 14).

European society must thus be situated in the longer perspective of history as a product of connections between different centres. These centres include nations and nation-states, but these centres were themselves formed in similar ways. The spread of Norman feudalism in the early middle ages was a key process in the social, economic, political and cultural consolidation of Europe, even if what it finally produced was considerable differentiation, as in, for example, the separation of the English and French crowns. Another such example is the rise of Latin as a medium of integration and its subsequent differentiation through vernacularisation. The notion of society refers then to such patterns of societal formation rather than to the congruence of territory, culture and state. To be sure, much of this was due to the colonisation of the periphery by the centre. Such forms of internal colonisation, out of which many modern states emerged, also shaped Europe, such as those related to the Roman

empire, Norman feudalism, the Hanseatic league, the Prussian junker class, the Habsburgs, the Napoleonic code. While much of this unity was forged by conquest, it was sustained by dense networks that led to pan-European models. Other examples of increased integration through differentiation would include urbanisation. The city has been a key unit in the making of Europe, as Weber argued. While the rise of the national state overshadowed the city as a political form, as Tilly (1990) has demonstrated, the interrelation between both provided modernity with a key dynamic. With regard to the social implications, rather than state formation, patterns of urbanisation and later industrialisation established in a variety of different settings common trajectories. Trade between these centres provided the basic web of relationships that gave to Europe much of its common features.

The Intertwinement of Capitalism and Democracy

Against this background of the historical formation of Europe in terms of processes of integration, differentiation, and interconnectivity, two major things stand out as a feature of Europe and which can be said to be constitutive of European society: capitalism and democracy. Neither of course are specific to Europe, but the way in which they emerged and, importantly, were interrelated offers some distinctive features, which can be seen as constitutive of what Roche (2010) has usefully termed a ‘European societal complex.’

An account of European society could focus on many other features of Europe, as for example family structures, inequality, education, mobility, consumption, the declining significance of religion. Due to different approaches and timescales general conclusions are difficult. However, studies on the social history of Europe provide some indications of convergences across a range of societies (Crouch 1999, Kaelble, 1989, 2004, Tomke 2013, Therborn 1994). This is especially the case with respect to western Europe since 1945. According to Kaelble there is an abundance of evidence of increased interdependence of European societies. While European integration has been the main driver, it has been complemented by changes in everyday life and that as a result European societies are increasingly converging at least in the sense of diminishing differences. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the extent of increasing convergences. The significance of such comparative empirical data can be interpreted in different ways. In the end it is a matter of theoretical perspective which counts as more significant. Much of the comparative approach is based on the presuppositions of methodological nationalism (Levine 2014). The argument of this paper is that European society is shaped not only out of such processes of convergence, but is also a product of deeper societal formations in the nature of capitalism and democracy. This is a question of whether there is a European societal form of capitalism and whether there is a European wide heritage of democracy out of which national variants emerged. The extent to which this question can be at least partially answered in the affirmative offers an alternative way of conceiving European society. Such a view would turn the conventional way of looking at the problem on its head by postulating national trajectories as derivative of the European.

Democracy formally preceded the emergence of capitalism - in terms of the political philosophy of democracy, its classical antecedents in ancient Greece and Rome, self-governing cities in the early modern period - but capitalism took off first. With its roots in the commercialisation of agriculture in the sixteenth century, it became the dominant economic system throughout Europe by the nineteenth century overcoming all other forms of economic organisation, such as mercantilism and feudalism. In their quite different accounts of the rise and development of capitalism, both Marx and Weber observed the tremendous transformative capacity of capitalism to reshape social relations and create a fundamentally new kind of society. To a degree there was a parallel emergence of elements of democracy, but the relationship was one of tensions since both operate according to different principles and rationales. Capitalism produces inequality while democracy seeks egalitarianism. However neither were fated to be in opposition.

The primary focus of democracy was the abolition of the absolutist state, through constitutional reform, and the gradual expansion of political and civic rights. As Marx noted, since the French Revolution the champions of democratic reform were the bourgeois classes throughout Europe. However, democracy was a double-edged sword in that once begun it had a transformative effect on society more generally. The very understanding of democracy itself underwent considerable transformation to include the constitutional protection of rights, the electoral representation of social interests, and citizenship in the sense of the wider inclusion and participation of the people in political community. In all of these three spheres there was a progressive expansion in terms of what they stood for and how they could be implemented. The nineteenth century witnessed not just the tremendous expansion of capitalism but also saw the development of democracy, which was the formative influence on the modern notion of the nation as a political community based on rights and led to the central doctrine of modern nationalism, namely the belief that a self-defined people have a right to the self-government. Capitalism also produced similar but different forms of collective consciousness. As described by E. P. Thompson in his seminal work of 1963, *The Making of the English Working Class*, the working class evolved over a considerable period of a consciousness based on the common experience of class and earlier forms of popular radicalness to produce a tradition of modern class politics. Although Thompson (1991) was writing about the English working class, his argument is highly pertinent to the European working classes more generally. From the mid nineteenth to the mid twentieth century the single most significant force that shaped modern European society was class politics.

It is possible to characterise the overarching shape of modern society in Europe by the middle of the nineteenth century as one shaped by the political heritage of the French Revolution, on the one side, and on the other capitalism. European society was shaped from the beginning by the conflict between capitalism and democracy. There was not always an overt conflict between two opposing forces. However, it was a conflict in that the structuring consequences for modern Europe were very great and produced tensions and often major conflicts. The democratic tradition developed alongside popular class based radicalness producing socialism and anti-systemic movements that sought the overcoming of capitalism. Other traditions were

social liberalism and social democracy that sought an accommodation with capitalism through political reform. The diffusion of the ideas of the French Revolution, which can be taken to be cataclysmic event in the emergence of democracy, had a transformative effect on all European societies. What differed was only the speed by which the ideas diffused, the way in which those ideas interacted with local traditions of radicalness, and the subsequent development of capitalism. While Weber drew attention to the confluence of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism in the formative period of modern capitalism, the nineteenth century saw the making of a new relationship between capitalism and democracy.

In addition to the direct consequences that capitalism and democracy produced - and which arguably are the most far reaching for the formation of modern European society - there is also their mutual entwinement. It in this entanglement that one major defining feature of modern European society can be found, namely a European model of capitalism.

Whether there is a European model of capitalism is not entirely evident. The theory of varieties of capitalism stresses the different forms that capitalism has taken, ranging from the coordinated market economies such as Germany to the liberal market economies such as Britain (Hall and Soskice 2001). However, these forms are best seen as ideal types rather than actual forms of capitalism. Nonetheless, there is no denying that capitalism is not a uniform system, as is clear in the different degrees to which finance capitalism has brought about major crisis in many countries. Capitalism is more than an economic system in the narrow sense, but interacts with a range of other aspects of society, especially the state and is interwoven in social relations. Both as a system of production and as a market, capitalism developed in ways that forced it to accommodate other demands. According to Karl Polanyi (2001) in *The Great Transformation* [1944], the logic of modern capitalism produced a 'counter movement' when it met with the resistance of social demands for protection against the extension of the market. Laissez-faire liberalism and the protectionist reactions that it provoked produced a double movement, which can be seen as counter-hegemonic and an attempt to embed markets in social institutions. According to Polanyi, whose main examples also come from English history, this began once the liberal project was in place, as reflected in the Factory Acts in the 1840s, the Chartist movement etc, and gained momentum by the 1870s to the 1890s. If this argument can be generalised – and clearly Polanyi thought it could be generalised to European history – it tells a story of the how capitalist societies are constituted by a double moment that can be described as one of capitalism encountering the resistance of democratising counter-movements. In this sense modern society is not reducible to capitalist society. The economic and the political forms of society interact leading to produce historically variable outcomes.

In this account, a key feature of European society is the logic of interaction between capitalism and democracy. This is a dynamic that is not reducible to one single national form, even if it more present in one national form than in other. Although there was never a European wide political or social movement of significance, the diversity of movements in the course of the nineteenth century established a European wide political heritage of class politics and which in turn laid the foundations of the modern democratic state. From a

Marxist perspective, this came at the cost of buying off radical dissent and the welfare state was the trade-off for a tolerable level of inequalities. According to T. H. Marshall, social rights complement other rights and complete the story of the rise of citizenship in the democratic welfare state. The entwinement of democracy and capitalism is sometimes referred to as democratic capitalism, which can be defined as the democratic containment of capitalism. In some formulations this notion is regarded as an untenable balance of opposing forces and that it can only be short lived in that capitalism can never be rendered democratic (Bowles and Gintis 1986). This is undoubtedly correct, but a purely democratic society that does not include capitalism is an unlikely prospect. It may indeed be the case that the European path towards democratic capitalism is coming to an end in the era of neo-liberalism and that European integration instead of enhancing the prospects of a socially embedded kind of capitalism has furthered the neo-liberal project (Streeck 2014). Whether this is the case and as a result the notion of a European society is dead rather than in germination remains to be seen. This scenario will be briefly considered in conclusion below.

In assessing the claim that there is a European model of capitalism with institutional structural features that apply more or less to all European countries, Offe (2003) argues that something like a tradition of social capitalism formed in Europe. The basis of this is the predominance of what he calls state-defined and state protected status categories. These status categories are defined by rights and obligations that set limits to contractual economic transactions. This results in capitalism being embedded in social norms that limits the expansion of markets. If there is a European form of capitalism, it is this general condition of a socially embedded kind of capitalism. This does not mean that it is a more economically efficient kind of capitalism, but that it is a distinct feature of much of European capitalism. Put in more general terms, Offe's argument, which is largely based on status categories, the social model of European capitalism can be linked to the notion of democratic capitalism and the structure forming tension between capitalism and democracy. The modern state having accommodated democratic demands - the emergence of constitutionalism, mass suffrage, the welfare state, social democracy to refer to the main milestones - set limits to the market and potential for capitalism to bring about the complete commodification of social relations. This of course meant that democracy too was compromised. The history of modern European democracy is no rosy story of ever greater freedoms. The history of the modern state can be in part told in terms of reaction to radicalness: the *ancien regime* held on until 1918 in most parts of Europe and the subsequent rise of fascism and authoritarianism severely limited the potential of democracy. The major waves of democratisation in Europe were accompanied by the pursuit of colonial wars, which extended until the 1960s.

Conclusion

It has been argued in this paper that the idea of European society is a meaningful concept if the presuppositions of methodological nationalism are questioned. The conventional association of society with the national state must be rejected. This can be useful for the

purpose of comparative research. There is nothing inherent in the concept of society to tie it to national societies. It has been argued that the concept of society should rather be understood as a relational field of interconnections. In this way Europe can be seen as emerging from the interconnections of many different centres. European society specifically took shape from the nineteenth century as part of a long-term historical process. In this account, European society is not something that was produced by European integration. The field of tensions between capitalism and democracy constituted the major elements that shaped European society.

A global perspective on Europe offers a different view of Europe than one based on a comparison of national differences. Looking at Europe from a world-wide perspective reveals more common structures that is apparent from an internal view of Europe. This is where the approach offered in this paper differs from one based on measuring convergences. Clearly the existence of growing convergences in European societies is significant and can be evidence of the making of European society. Transversal processes of this kind along with the European Union's project of constitutionalisation constitute a level of societal integration of considerable proportion. However, this does not necessarily signal the end of national societies as the final outcome of such convergences. As argued earlier, processes of integration are also accompanied by processes of differentiation. This also includes anti-systemic movements. A broader conceptualisation of European society must include all these processes and movements, which include too the on-set of societal crises. The notion that European society is emerging as a harmonisation of differences is untenable. No society has ever succeeded in this.

The emphasis on the field of tensions produced by capitalism and democracy as constitutive of European society shifts the perspective considerably. In this view European society takes shape around the contestation of power. At the fore of this lies the controversial question of neoliberalism and prospect that the project of European integration may itself be undermining what was termed in this paper the European social model of capitalism.

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