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The European Union (EU) is among the leading players in the international political arena. Made up of 27 countries and home to 500 million people, the EU is responsible for political, economic, and cultural decisions which impact all its member states and the continent at large. But regardless of the EU's power in terms of policies and regulations, there still remain questions about its scope and extent on a more abstract level. In particular, scholars have been unable to reach a conclusion regarding what chracterizes and differentiates this supranational entity. The notion of a single identity is complicated by the fact that the EU is neither a body politic which operates in a vacuum, nor merely a sum of its member states (van Gerven, 2005).

The discourse regarding the EU's identity may be easier to tackle by creating a framework for discussing the nuances of the entity at large as well as the contemporary issues affecting member nation states. One such framework, used by scholar Achille Mbembe in his article "At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa," can be adapted from Mbembe's own focus of the African continent to fit a coversation about the EU. In this article, Mbembe discusses the challenges in Africa through a particular conceptual and rhetorical framework. He states that Africa should be thought of not in terms of fixed, immobile "places" but rather in terms of fluid and changing "territories." While places have national borders distinguishing one from another, territories are not geographically bound. Rather they are more demonstrative of the characteristics of the continent and the issues people face on a daily basis (Mbembe, 2000).

This rhetoric is extremely useful for discussing the European continent because it differentiates between member nations of the EU, and the greater EU territories, whose scope and boundaries are constantly changing with the inclusion of additional members and the enactment of new laws. There are, however, a few modifications which must be made to

the original paradigm used by Mbembe and when applied to a discussion of Europe[1]. First, in Mbembe's Africa, territories take clear precedence over places for reasons such as the colonial legacy of national borders in the continent. But in the case of the EU, "The basic question is not whether in the end unity or diversity will prevail: they will both survive. The question is whether Europeans will be able to transcend nationalist(ic) feelings" (van Gerven, 2005). Indeed, it is determining whether territory or place has a greater role in public life that will ultimately result in the creation of a cohesive EU identity.

Second, while Mbembe characterizes his territories through issues such as violence and resource conflict, territories in the EU can best be thought of in terms of policy domains. Separating the functions of the EU creates three territories: culture, politics, and economics[2]. All member states are affected by each of these EU policy areas, although the degree to which they are affected varies greatly among individual nations. This paper will analyze the relationship between territory and place in the EU by looking at the institution's cultural, economic, and political territories[3].

The limits of the EU's cultural territory are difficult to discern because at the most immediate level of self-identification, the EU only acknowledges its functions in the other two policy areas. In defining itself, the EU claims to be "a unique economic and political partnership between 27 democratic European countries" ("Europa"). However, the EU has also been making significant efforts to create a European consciousness in an attempt to legitimize its policies and establish a deeper level of integration (Sassatelli, 2002). In a particular section of the EU website, individuals can learn about European "symbols of unity" such as the European flag, the European anthem, and Europe day (europa.eu). Although these symbols are meant to be universal, there is ample evidence that the presence of EU symbols is not equal in all countries (i.e. the territory does not equally extend to all member states). For example, those parts of Europe which are less wealthy have an increased presence of EU symbols (Dinan, 2005). In former Soviet nations, most of which remain poor today, EU membership is presented as a way to combat Russia and regulate problems such as crime and migration (Pribersky, 2006). But even in these countries, messages about the EU are visually accompanied by both EU and national symbols, often presented in tandem. For example, in Central European nations, candidates for EU elections contextualized their European identities by running campaigns which relied heavily on national symbols (Pribersky, 2006).

Regardless of the differences in the visibility of European symbols in various nations, it is unclear what those symbols represent and thus what actually characterizes the cultural territory. What do the European flag, the European anthem, and Europe day mean in a supranational entity which has 27 member-nations and 23 official languages? How do those 27 countries identify with a wordless anthem and an invented day of celebration which bears no historic significance in a local context? Despite the presence of objects meant to

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1 Many of the modifications and simplifications made to Mbembe's discussions of Africa are done so to create a basic framework for the purposes of this paper. In reality, Mbembe's arguments are complex and can be explored at greater length.

2 Although the EU is a complex institution in which there are no bright lines separating various policy areas, for the purpose of this paper I will try to separate issues into a broad category. This is possible because the paper also does not go into details about specific policies but is more concerned with their national impacts.

3 While the question of EU identity is a broad one which can be discussed from many different angles, for the purpose of this paper I will be discussing it in terms of particular policy domains.

create a feeling of unity, "there is as of yet no cohesive European 'public space'- no media which mobilizes people on issues of the EU or provides info about EU parties," (van Gerven, 2005). Even in leading Western nations such as France and Germany, key players in the EU, media coverage of EU issues is only prevalent during elections (Peter and Vreese, 2004). The lack of a unified public space suggests that symbols of an EU cultural cohesiveness are little more than objects; national and local issues still appear to take precedence.

A second way to examine the cultural territory of the EU and determine its effect on European places is by analyzing the effect of membership on individual identities. The significance of looking at identities from the perspective of individuals is that it allows one to measure the extent of an EU cultural territory on the most fundamental level of citizenship. Some scholars argue that younger citizens of the European Union are increasingly identifying themselves as European because of the growing interconnectedness of the world. Their ability to establish an identity that transcends national boundaries is facilitated by tangible representations of a united body, such as Eurorail passes (van Gerven, 2005). However, others argue that the term "European" as a category of identification is as of yet too vague and abstract to resonate with individuals. In a series of personal interviews with EU citizens in which the interviewer showed different images and measured reactions, symbols such as the EU flag did not result in very strong responses. By contrast, images which represented national and local issues did elicit strong narratives (Armbruster et. al, 2003). Although scholars differ on whether people view themselves as being "European," the term "European" doesn't necessarily measure an attachment exclusive to the EU. Europe has a history of defining itself through negative identities; it is not the West, it is not the Orient, etc. As of yet, there has been very little research done about the culture of the EU as something distinct from simply being "European."

The uncertainty of individual identities and the inconsistent relationship between national and EU symbols lead to the conclusion that the European Union does not have a singular effect on the culture of nation-states. As a cultural territory, the EU is still developing and has a much shorter history compared to the cultures of its member nations.

Just as the cultural territory demonstrates a broad range of effects on places, the political territory of the EU also has a stratified impact on member states. The EU political territory consists both of broad ideological values that are prerequisites for membership, and specific tangible policies.

The broader values of the EU, established in the Copenhagen criteria, are "stable political institutions, guarantees for democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and minority rights" (Bosse, 2007). This criteria, necessary for membership, is so vague and abstract that it is nearly impossible to ensure that they are adopted to equal extents or even adopted at all across national boundaries (Kochenov, 2004). Although recently the criteria has developed a narrower meaning based on its application in evaluating accession for Eastern and Central European countries, there still exist double standards in its enforcement (Kochenov, 2004). The fact is most evident when considering the reports made by EU officials during the most recent enlargement process. EU reports favored a simple legislative process for the adoption of EU principles, but criticized the same process for the adoption of other policies (Kochenov, 2004).

Differences in policy adoption and integration also occur among countries with a longer history of EU membership. Representatives to the EU are elected by national populations and as a result focus on those EU policies that are of interest to a particular nation.

For example, Charles De Gaulle, former President of France, campaigned on the Common Agricultural Policy in order to attract the votes of French farmers (Gabel, 2000). Thus countries develop differences in the extent to which EU policies are integrated. While this differentiation doesn't result in any conclusive statements about how to characterize the EU's political territory, it does indicate that national political interests still play a major role.

Another commonly discussed aspect of EU policy, especially in recent years, is that of minority rights. The amount of emphasis placed on minority rights in the 2004 enlargement of the EU was not present when the Copenhagen criteria was created. Thus, many East Central Europe (ECE) countries were subject to additional provisions for membership, suggesting that membership may actually be conditional. Although ECE countries do have an "experience of genocide, expulsion, coercion, or accommodation," the same level of emphasis on minority rights was absent in early discussions of expansion. Indeed the issue of minority rights was controversial during enlargement because there were no other areas of EU law which clearly necessitated similar values, bringing to light questions of the EU's authority in enforcing normative policy. Since accession, annual reports of how well ECE countries are following the guidelines indicate a significant degree of tampering and corruption. The most problematic aspect of the emphasis on minority rights, however, is that it has generally only been discussed with regard to ECE countries. Western EU nations, which were not subject to these requirements for memberships, not only differ in how they protect minority rights, but in some cases, don't protect them at all (Sasse, 2005).

An example often discussed in the case of France, a country which doesn't even acknowledge the existence of French minorities. Broadly speaking, France has two categories of identification: "French" and "not French." Since immigration to France intensified, the nation has been struggling with the question of national identity. Members of ethnic communities in France, especially those from former French colonies, are often treated like outsiders, as nationhood is very much related to homogeneity in language and culture. Thus analysis of an EU policy on minority rights becomes complicated in the context of France. It is a country with a history of excluding minority groups in its construction of a national identity, making it much more difficult to recognize rights violations when they do occur.

It is apparent again that the political territory has a greater presence in countries which have recently become members of the EU. Nations of Western Europe were not only exempt from some of the conditions required by ECE countries (due to recent development in policies), but they are also not regulated for consistency in the adoption of these conditions.

The effect of the EU's economic territory on European places is just as complex. In the domain of monetary and fiscal policy, the geographical limit of the territory is easier to establish although the weight of the territory on specific nation-states varies greatly. When European countries first conceived of a unified body, they created the European Coal and Steel Community (europa.eu), a union formed on the basis of economic cooperation in order to create a lasting peace. Today, economic and financial integration is at the core of EU goals ("European Commission"). This integration occurs in a twofold manner: tangible symbols of a common market are created through the euro while nation-states must also adopt particular trade-related policies.

Since the conception of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, all members of the EU are also required to be members of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), "an advanced state of economic integration" which is responsible for creating a single market through various

financial policies as well as the adoption of a common currency, the euro ("European Commission"). The EMU tries to create economic integration in a sequential manner, with the final stage of integration resulting in the replacement of a national currency with the euro, which is managed by the European Central Bank ("European Commission"). Currently, 16 countries of the EU are also part of the Euro zone; Denmark and the United Kingdom are not currently a part of the EMU and each has its own currency ("European Commission"). The other members of the EU that have not adopted the euro have not yet met all the necessary conditions, which are outlined as "low and stable inflation, exchange rate stability and sound public finances," among other prerequisites ("European Commission"). The fact that the EMU doesn't completely correlate with membership in the EU demonstrates that territories don't always overlap and in some cases, countries can make overt choices that determine the extent to which a particular nation is affected.

On its website, the EU outlines various benefits for a common currency including a more stable market, convenience, and the development of a dominant presence among other global powers. Curiously enough, the EU website once again brings up notions of identity which are related to the euro. "Last but not least, the euro gives the EU's citizens a tangible symbol of their European identity, of which they can be increasingly proud as the euro area expands and multiplies these benefits for its existing and future members" ("European Commission"). While the EU's goal may be to foster a sense of community through currency, there is a growing amount of evidence indicating that individual member states have vastly different opinions of the euro (Risse, 2003). As of 2003, Eurobarometer polls in the UK indicated strong opposition to the euro, while polls in Germany indicated citizens were indifferent to the euro, and polls of Italian citizens demonstrated they were vehemently in support of it (Risse, 2003). Risse observed that although regions of the EU differ in their opinion of the euro, a nation's attitude toward European symbols such as currency is largely related to its view of European integration as a whole. Therefore, while European citizens appear to have reached a common consensus that the euro is in fact a symbol of the larger Europe, they have not equally accepted the benefits of economic integration. Based on these polls, it is also possible to conclude that the euro has no additional effect on national identities because European citizens merely see it as an extension of the EU.

The more trade-based aspects of EU economic integration do, however, demonstrate significant socioeconomic disparity within the continent. The greatest disparity is seen between Western and Eastern EU nation-states. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, Western European nations were quick in their efforts to spread democracy and neoliberal market policies to Eastern and Central Europe (Agnew, 2001). However, these countries still stand as the poorest members of the EU today due to inequality in the means of integration. When these nations stood to becoming full-fledged members of the EU, discourse about expansion of the EU shifted from a desire to create cohesive political ideologies among member states to a goal centered on the acceptance and adoption of various economic policies. It became increasingly clear that the poorer nations on the Eastern side of the continent might adversely affect the economic performance of the greater entity. Moreover, Eastern European nations were allowed to join other organizations such as NATO, in order to avoid full inclusion into the EU. There was a collective consensus among Western nations that a neoliberal market system naturally required poorer member states (Agnew, 2001).

Contemporary Europe still boasts vastly different levels of wealth. In 1990, the rich-

est members of the EU, including Switzerland and Luxembourg in Western Europe, had a GDP per capita between $18,000 and $21,000. By contrast, the richest former Soviet nation only had a GDP per capita between $6,000 and $8,000 (Dunford, 1994). Globally, the EU is one of the more inequitable areas, as regional inequalities within the entity are two times greater than inequalities within the US (Boldrin and Canova, 2000). It is evident that attempts at economic convergence in the EU vis-à-vis various policies promoting free trade have actually resulted in divergence. ECE countries have worsened in terms of economic performance since adopting neoliberal policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Dunford and Smith, 2000). In some places, the territory has worsened GDP while other places thrive from open trade and a lack of barriers.

The relationship between the European Union and its member nation-states is not only complex, but is also made more complex by its heterogeneity both geographically and across different policy domains. Therefore the construction of one cohesive identity for the EU is particularly difficult due to the fact that different places experience each of the three territories in a different manner. A possible area for additional research would discuss the autonomy exercised by individual nations within the EU and well as determine the division of autonomy between member nations. Presently, it seems clear that the EU can be better understood if it is considered an extension of national politics, as much of the variation in the effect of the different territories is the result of choices made by individual member states[4].

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4 Many of these choices may be implicit vis-à-vis national elections, although there are also examples countries such as the UK purposefully opting out of certain types of integration, most notably the EMU.

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