The discussion of European cosmopolitanism and civil society has failed to take questions of culture seriously enough. While remaining sympathetic to liberal forms of cosmopolitanism, this article considers the view that such proposals fail to make space for the ‘Other’. In the context of histories of nationalist violence, masculinism and consumerism this article discusses the charge that ideas of European civilization need to be reconsidered. In the final part of the article, I discuss the view that cultural feminism and certain versions of multiculturalism have much to contribute towards the European project. However, at this point, I seek to distance myself from essentialist arguments in respect of identity. A generative European cosmopolitanism would do well to take questions of cultural domination seriously without reducing the complexity of modern identities.

Democracy is the slow, painful effort to put right the blunders that we have incorporated into our conditions of life. (Konrad, 1984, p. 193)

The concept of civil society has been essential to democratic theory and numerous social movements. The idea of civil society usually refers to the networks and associations that are formed between the home and the state and allows for public forms of discussion and argument. Civil society as a focal point re-emerged during the 1980s, when a number of Eastern European dissident intellectuals pointed out how communist practice and ideology severely restricted civic forms of expression. In the West, a number of academics also began pointing out the ways in which civic association had become limited by privatized lifestyles, the power of money and the influence of dominant ideologies. The period directly following the Cold War, however, has offered a different set of hopes and projections. The disappearance of the binary logic of the Cold War, which had limited the experimentation with democracy in the West and the removal of state control in the East, heralded new prospects for civil society. Yet the power of the mass media and the mainstream political parties to control ‘political’ agendas, the dominance of consumer-rather than politically oriented lifestyles, and the erosion of the public owing to market values contribute to the withering of civil society rather than its growth and development. Additionally, there are more recent fears that Europe’s 9/11 in Madrid will—by putting democracies on permanent war footing—lead to the progressive erosion of civil society. Ideologies of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ not only restrict democratic horizons, thus closing the
minds of the public to alternative forms of politics, but serve the interests of secrecy rather than publicity.

I intend to investigate these questions by returning to the fundamental ambiguity of the concept of civil society, i.e. civil society’s dual character. Democratic movements and political initiatives that offer the possibility of civic exchange and democratic debate, as well as the possibility of normalization and domination, are elemental to the concept of civil society. The problem is that many will concentrate on only one side of the question and as a result entirely exclude the other side. We need to hold onto the idea of civil society as a duality if we are to challenge the ongoing ambivalence of European civil society. Moreover, in an age of globalization, its features need to be taken into account as well, so that the emergence of new kinds of citizenship above and below the nation-state becomes possible.

Here we might return to some of the debates that emerged from the 1989 European revolutions. The so-called velvet revolutions proposed new definitions of European civil society that are still being worked today. In particular, Mary Kaldor (2003) argues that the distinctive contribution of 1989 actually invented the possibility of the emergence of a genuinely European civil society. Despite the views of other political theorists like Dahrendorf (1990), who argue that the revolutions were a triumph for liberalism, Kaldor asserts that such observations are simply too sweeping. The Anti-Politics of dissidents like Vaclav Havel, Georg Konrad and E. P. Thompson sought to develop intellectual politics or a civil society that did not compete for power, but instead establishes small islands of civic initiative. Moving beyond the ideologies of the bloc system, the aim was to invent transnational dialogues that sought to bring humanity back from the abyss of nuclear war and assured destruction. The revolutions of 1989 made the invention of a transnational civil society possible that could apply pressure on the political and economic authority.

While being sympathetic to many of these arguments, the development of a European civil society has to be cast in different terms. While notions of civil society reveal the repression of civic exchange, more symbolic forms of violence are not evident in the discussion. In other words, public exchange is not just an instrumental matter, but also signifies who is listening, who is talking and, of course, who is excluded (Bourdieu, 1991). These more ‘cultural’ definitions of the political will become apparent in what follows. We need to recognize that the communicative possibilities of civil society are intimately bound with how we deal with otherness and difference.

In the following section, I want to examine the argument that a European civil society requires the support of cosmopolitan institutions, most notably with respect to the European Union (EU). The position of liberal cosmopolitanism, as analysed mainly by the work of the prominent German social and political theorist Jürgen Habermas, will be considered. Secondly, I argue that liberal cosmopolitanism can be criticized for neglecting the chequered history of civil society in the European context. The inevitably broad scope of these histories calls for different political principles that are more receptive towards the ‘Other’. Finally, I agree that a Europe that has embraced the ‘Other’ would require both a complex vocabulary of cultural identity and more genuinely multicultural politics.
**European Cosmopolitanism**

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the cosmopolitan perspective has sought to replace specifically national responses. Citizenship, it follows, has to become a transnational form of governance by breaking with the cultural hegemony of the state. A cosmopolitan political community should be based upon overlapping or multiple citizenships connecting the populace into local, national, regional and global forms of governance. The cosmopolitan polity, guided by the principle of autonomy, would seek to achieve new levels of interconnectedness to become compatible with an increasingly global world. These dimensions remain crucial, prevailing over older divisions in the democratic tradition between direct and representative democracy, by seeking to maximize the principle of autonomy across a range of different levels. The prospects for a cosmopolitan democracy are guided by the belief that problems such as HIV, ecological issues and poverty are increasingly globally shared problems.

Jürgen Habermas (1997) locates ideas of cosmopolitan democracy in Kant’s (1970) desire to replace the law of nations with a genuinely morally binding international law. Kant believed that the spread of commerce and the principles of republicanism could help foster cosmopolitan sentiments. As European citizens, individuals would abandon the egoistic ambitions of individual states. Kant’s vision of a peaceful cosmopolitan order based on the obligation by states to settle their differences through the court of law has arguably gained new legitimacy in the post-Cold War world. While this vision remains contemporary, it has to be brought up to date by acknowledging a number of social transformations (Habermas, 1997). This includes the globalization of the public sphere and the declining power of states, while also recognizing that it is individuals and citizens, and not collectivities, that need to become sovereign. In this setting, the EU takes on an added significance given its commitment to a pluralistic democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights. Indeed, observance of these principles is a key condition for a state’s membership in the EU. Membership also entails the obligation to continue to respect these rights, with the European Commission retaining special enforcement procedures. Hence, despite its many detractors, Europe has been more than a trading bloc from its onset and represents a new kind of transnational political community. The EU, as is well known, emerged from a society ravaged by war and nationalist violence, with the issue of collective security being central to its foundation. However, as most observers recognize, the process of European integration has been driven as much by economic considerations as by political aims and objectives (Anderson, 1997). This has encouraged many on the political left to add a utopian ‘touch’ to the idea of Europe that aspires to tame globalization, enhance democracy and provide the security that European societies lacked in the first half of the twentieth century. In this context, Habermas has advocated the need for a constitutional debate that would engage the collective imaginations of the citizens of Europe. The challenge for the EU is to be able to conserve the democratic achievements of the nation-state in a global era. What seems to many of the EU’s critics to be institution-building without the necessary democratic legitimacy is actually a normative political project that can be sharply contrasted with the overt power politics pursued by the world’s remaining superpower, the USA.
Despite the widespread unpopularity of the EU among many of its citizens, Habermas argues that there are five main reasons for supporting its development. Firstly, as is well known, the founders of the EU were motivated by the immediate memory of war and nationalist violence. This remains a strong motivating force for developing post-national forms of solidarity and security. In this vision, Europe is not only a trading bloc but an integrative force seeking to collectively bind nation-states in a legal community. Secondly, as I have already mentioned, the history of European nation-states, i.e. national consciousness and democracy, evolved side by side. Yet there is no reason why democracy and civic solidarity should remain at this level. That is, the legitimacy of the EU will indeed depend upon the creation of a civil society beyond national borders. For Habermas, there is no good reason why this might not be possible. Thirdly, Europe remains a global space of democracy and human rights with few rivals. Ideas of democracy and human rights are not of course owned by Europe and, notwithstanding its own barbarous past, these features have an institutional grounding that are part of a wider collective achievement. Fourthly, European societies face a number of common problems which are easier to deal with collectively than alone. These include global markets, immigration and asylum seekers, as well as increasing levels of fragmentation and multiculturalism. There is, furthermore, a growing realization that individual states cannot protect their citizens from the ‘external’ realities of globalization, nor from some of its ‘internal’ consequences. Fifthly, and in Habermas’s estimation the key to the success of the EU, is its ability to respond to global economic pressures. Under the conditions of global finance, national governments are under increasing pressure to lower taxes and provide economic environments in the interests of corporations rather than their citizens. Such pressures compel national governments to accept increasing inequalities while downgrading systems of social welfare. In this scenario money replaces politics. Here the EU would need to develop a market-correcting ethos with new forms of regulation and redistribution.

In terms of the development of European cosmopolitan identities, Habermas (2001a) has more recently outlined some of the key conceptual disputes. Opposed to either a Eurosceptic vision of Europe or a neo-liberal market-driven notion of Europe, Habermas makes the case for a cosmopolitan Europe. This version of European identity has at its core the ability of citizens ‘to learn to mutually recognize one another as members of a common political existence beyond national borders’ (Habermas, 2001b, p. 99). This does not mean homogenizing different national and ethnic identities into a supra-European nation-state. A cosmopolitan European identity actually requires a form of civic solidarity where fellow Europeans take responsibility for one another. These processes are dependent not only on the formulation of a common European civil society, a Constitution and joint social policy, but on a common sense of solidarity being created through political institutions. That is, the development of a European cosmopolitan identity is dependent upon civic forms of solidarity being developed beyond the nation-state. Habermas asserts that only when Europe is able to develop a genuinely post-national democracy will it be able to provide an alternative to both economic globalization and shared histories of primitive nationalism. Habermas is well aware that this remains a considerable challenge in the context of competing ideas about Europeanness that continue to dominate the political landscape.
Thus, Habermas makes clear that a European identity cannot be a matter of a shared culture or religion, but is likely to be the uneven outcome of a European-wide public sphere. Furthermore, Europeanness will construct a composite identity that will interact with and not replace national, ethnic and regional identities. There is no reason why a commitment to locality, nationhood and Europeanness could not flourish in the twenty-first century. For Habermas, just as European states of the nineteenth century created national consciousness, something similar may be possible at the European level. In Habermas's terms, the best bet for a more cosmopolitan Europe is a prolonged debate on the European Constitution. While such a process, in Habermas' words (2003, p. 98), 'will not be enough', it will at least set a European-wide dialogue in motion. After a period of ongoing debate and controversy within national public spheres, citizens are likely to discover that they share common interests with others across national borders. A European civil society is likely to become activated through mediated processes of political communication. Consequently, a cosmopolitan European identity is an emergent composite identity, where identification with others transpires through specifically national public spheres and public communication (Delanty, 1998). This is indeed a different perspective from those who dream of discovering a European identity through a re-emerged high culture or Christian identity. The only other 'cultural' precondition Habermas recognizes in respect to the development of a European cosmopolitan identity is the need for education systems to provide a common linguistic basis. Hence, it is transnational political communication underlined by a supportive education system that offers the optimum prospects for a European cosmopolitan society.

It could be argued that Habermas's description of a European cultural identity remains too nominal and could contain a 'thicker' substance. It is likely that Habermas expressed himself cautiously, in case his description is misunderstood as an account of the cultural requirements that constitute 'Europeanness'. Habermas's prudence is understandable, given that most other writers working on the idea of a European civil society emphasize not only Europe's linguistic and cultural plurality but also that the vast majority of its citizens live their lives in the nation they were born in (Outhwaite, 2003). However, as Maurice Roche (2001) demonstrates, at the level of cultural policy and popular culture, significant developments in this respect have emerged. The creation of events such as the European City of Culture, the development of a European tourist industry, Erasmus and Socrates exchange programmes, and the Europeanization of sports and football all link issues of culture and citizenship in more concrete ways than Habermas suggests. While recognizing the importance of these processes, a word of caution needs to be added. For Castells (1998), the idea of European identity cannot be assumed but needs to be politically invented. Hence, the idea of Europe could become important as a way of defending human rights, democracy and social welfare without regressing into communalism. Europeanness, then, would need to become what Castells (1997, p. 8) describes as a 'project identity'. A project identity evolves when social actors and movements seek to simultaneously redefine themselves and their position within society. Yet under current conditions, most of the identities that Castells charts can more accurately be described as resistant or communal identities. Under the impact of globalization and the shrinking
state, both radical individualism and fundamentalist convictions are currently more prevalent than project identities.

Similarly, Alain Touraine (2000) argues that it is only by embracing multiculturalism that Europe can avoid the twin threats of rampant individualism and regressive communalism. Therefore, in distinction from liberalisms’ ideas of tolerance or Habermas’s political communication, Touraine argues for a Europe that is based on the ethic of intercultural communication. This would move society beyond models of either unrestricted pluralism, communalism or the elite forms of political dialogue described by Habermas. The key here is not merely to provide identification with a European Constitution amongst those involved in the political process, but allow for communication between cultural enclaves. An inclusive European identity would need to make space for the ‘Other’ and acknowledge the relations of dominance that previously existed between them. The European project is better served by a form of politics that provides spaces and places where intercultural dialogue can take place. These are important considerations to which I shall return below. For now, it is important to note that Touraine’s view is more suggestive than tangible. He does, however, acknowledge a key dimension that has been subsumed by our discussion thus far. Given Europe’s long history of nationalist violence, chauvinism and racism, where does this leave Habermas’s vision of a cosmopolitan Europe?

A Europe for the Other?

The quest for a European cosmopolitan social order looks somewhat different against the background of the long history of European racism and nationalist violence. Whereas liberal cosmopolitanism keeps open the possibility of a Europe built on rationality, social justice and democracy, when viewed against a history of genocide such sure-footed ideas of moral progress are difficult to sustain. Indeed, just as the cosmopolitans make their appeal for a new European order based on the transnational application of Enlightenment principles, we have also witnessed the rise of the far right and racist forms of reaction to asylum seekers and immigration. In this respect, Europe resembles less a rational polity and more a place of fear, anxiety and hatred. Here the allegation is that European Enlightenment has a barbarous heritage and that ideals of cosmopolitan democracy may obscure this reality.

Zygmunt Bauman (1995) has argued that Auschwitz and the Gulag continue to cast their shadows over more liberal forms of collective identity. European modernity is as much about the establishment of the principles of liberal democracy as it is of racism and the politics of genocide. We might then choose to console ourselves with ideas of European civilization and democracy, and yet we live under the continual threat of new waves of malevolence. It is noticeable that most of the advocates of a European civil society tend, in William Outhwaite’s (2003, p. 1) words, to ‘be looking at the brighter side of the European picture’. Indeed, Bauman argues that rather than seeing the death camps as a form of atavism, we might view them as the expression of European modernity. In other words, European genocide was made possible by rationality, technology and science. The development of modern bureaucratic rationality and functional division of
labour leads to the disregard of responsibility. Moral impulses are neutralized by the modern requirement to fulfil a role and reach targets, while remaining loyal to an organization. The Holocaust is less symbolized by rage rather than the willingness to follow orders. According to Bauman:

The modern mind treats the human habitat as a garden, whose ideal shape is to be predetermined by carefully blueprinted and meticulously followed up design, and implemented through encouraging the growth of bushes and flowers envisaged by the plan—and poisoning or uprooting the rest, the undesirable and the unplanned, the weeds. (Bauman, 1995, p. 199)

Alongside modernity stands liberal democracy and the dream of a society free of ambivalence, otherness and cultural difference. The aim of the modern spirit is to push humankind towards a society that is orderly, rationalized and in which all social problems have been resolved. Hence, modernity’s self-image of the progressive elimination of violence and the establishment of a genuinely civil society is a false one. Instead, in modernity violence is made invisible by being removed from the fabric of everyday life. Violence becomes professionalized in armies and police forces which are maintained by a bureaucratic hierarchy (Bauman, 1989). Similarly, Michel Foucault (1977) argues that the modern disciplinary society contains within its rituals the utopian ideal of the perfectly governed community. Human multiplicity is managed through a number of mechanisms that aim to ensure that power flows with as little resistance as possible by means of legal-administrative forms of punishment. The Janus-faced nature of European modernity is characterized as much by the deliberative ideals of democracy and modern social movements as it is by practices of surveillance and exclusion. In Bauman’s and Foucault’s terms, the idea of Europe should become detached from notions of ‘moral leadership’. Following Caryl Phillips (1986), Europeans remain trapped inside an illusion of supremacy that allows them to forget their own abominable past. This is a dream ‘in which whites civilise and discover and the height of sophistication is to sit in a castle with a robe of velvet and crown dispensing order and justice’ (Phillips, 1986, p. 121). Phillips goes on that the idea that fascism was simply an ideology that can be connected to a ‘lunatic fringe’ is increasingly difficult to sustain in the context of continued and sustained European racism.

The fact that the national socialist past continues to haunt modern Europe can also be related to hyper-masculine politics. The work of Klaus Theweleit (1989) explores the previously uncharted world of the fascist man. Theweleit’s study analyses the development of warrior masculinity, symbolized by a suit of armour, whose task is to protect the female against any danger. It is in fact the idea of the feminine that constitutes the most radical threat to an identity built on strength, destruction and self-denial. The fascist male personifies a functioning machine that aims to repudiate the proliferation of feminist values. While it is at least arguable that modern European societies have begun to deconstruct these images, many of these projections continue to be apparent in much of the popular culture, especially with respect to sports and representations of war and the body.¹ In this respect, the ‘other’ and fear of the ‘feminine’ remains a dominant masculine ideology.

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The claim is that the struggle for European cosmopolitanism displaces some of the more ‘hidden’ features of European modernity with regard to violence, race and gender. We might also note that modernity under certain calculations does not have the cognitive and emotional resources for the forms of solidarity demanded by European cosmopolitanism. Mestrovic (1999) has recently taken these views further by arguing that we are currently living in a post-emotional society. This is a society of synthetic feeling where we have all become progressively indifferent to the suffering of others. How else, charges Mestrovic, are we to understand Europe’s indifference to the practice of genocide in Bosnia? Civilization in Europe and the Western world has come to mean the ability to exhibit refined manners alongside a cool indifference to televised murder. The post-emotional society values ‘being nice’ more than the collective ability to be able to act on our emotions and intervene to help others. Hence, the capacity to be able to feel genuine and deep emotions in an age which simulates sentiment through news bulletins, talk shows and soap operas to no end, is being progressively undermined. The display of feeling is short lived, useless, aesthetic and luxurious and rarely becomes connected to a sense of justice and a genuine concern for humanity. Emotions are progressively regulated by pre-packaged sentiment and the crocodile tears of journalists reporting from war zones. Post-emotionalism prevents the possibility of emotions becoming chaotic; instead, they are increasingly subject to ‘politically correct’ forms of regulation. This ‘cleaned up’ universe leaves little room for the strong passions and commitments necessary for the kind of European project described by the cosmopolitans. The idea of a Europe built on social solidarity is less likely than a European Disneyland that reveals a few pious sentiments in respect of the Holocaust, but manages to look the other way when confronted with suffering. In this respect, the EU becomes a ‘MacDemocracy’ based on consumerism and a thin commitment to the ideals of an active civil society.

The argument here is not only that within European cosmopolitanism we may detect an attempt to bury the past, but in a consumerist society of simulated emotion it is just another fake identity. The media’s domination of politics leads to a form of instantaneous democracy that is based on personalization, the simplification of political positions, and where state and European politics have become empty rituals (Castells, 1997). Notably, these are very real threats to the political identities of Europe’s citizens. They cannot, I would argue, be dismissed as the exaggerated fears of a few cantankerous European intellectuals. Yet we might also reply that these features are somewhat exaggerated. Ulrich Beck (2004) has recently commented that the European project was actually born out of resistance to the perversion of European values. This argument works on two different levels. Firstly, cosmopolitan Europe does indeed emerge out of the rejection of totalitarian politics and practice. The politics of pluralism, democracy and human rights is affirmed beyond the state’s attempt to define the ‘truly human’, and attempts to exclude or eliminate those who do not fit this model. Secondly, the idea of cosmopolitan Europe is built on the notion that we have a moral duty to attend to the suffering of others and respect human dignity. Europe is indeed built upon a contradiction between traditions of nationalism, genocide and colonial violence, but it is also where the development of legal standards to outlaw such acts took place. Indeed, rather than condemning Europe, as its radical critics attempt to do, we might best be served if we seek
to strengthen ‘a European antidote to Europe’ (Beck, 2004, p. 4). Hence, the European cosmopolitans’ response could be that if we are really to invent such a culture out of the turmoil of the present then the process of democratic institution-building in the face of the barbarous past and the globalized markets of today is legitimate. Related to this question is how European civil societies can preserve a place for the ‘Other’. How might we foster civic and cultural identities that lead to new levels of respect for democracy, peace and cultural difference? It is to these thorny questions that I shall now turn.

**European Cosmopolitanism and Cultural Difference**

At this point I want to build upon the arguments of the previous section and maintain that liberal cosmopolitanism needs to be reformulated. I hold the view that both the institution of democracy and human rights at the European level is a form of moral progress and that it needs to more fully take account of questions of cultural difference. Further, the introduction of questions of cultural identity, as we have seen with regard to race and gender, problematizes what comes to constitute the political in European societies. The problem with liberalism is that its individualism is unlikely to provide the necessary conditions for a genuinely multicultural community. In this respect, I want to turn to feminist and anti-racist writers, who have sought to develop a version of cosmopolitanism that takes the questions of culture and identity more seriously than Habermas’s more abstract reflections.

The question here becomes how European societies are to provide the necessary protection for those whose identities are excluded by more mainstream versions of politics and the public sphere. In this respect, I contend that both difference feminism and critical multiculturalism pose difficult questions for liberalism. Both feminist and critical multiculturalist perspectives share the cosmopolitan liberalists’ concern about the need to revive democracy, but argue more systematically for the need to respect cultures of difference, rather than liberal ideas of diversity.

Cultural feminism has long had to live with the paradox of wanting to preserve the ‘feminine’, while also wanting to deconstruct the ways women’s identities are imprisoned within certain assumptions. A form of cultural politics has developed that points to the continued dominance of masculinity, while subverting these assumptions in ways that do not entrench the discrimination of women. Here I want to look at some of the productive suggestions offered by the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, whose recent work offers a vision of European societies reconstructed through questions of difference.

If we are to avoid the horror of Europe’s past and construct a citizenship that is based on more than property rights and markets, according to Irigaray, then we need to make the public domain safe for the Other. This would be a form of citizenship that actively resists human beings being reduced to being producer and consumer ‘robots’, a citizenship that cultivates the ‘culture of life’ (Irigaray, 2000). Ultimately, citizenship needs to take account of the fact that within the wider community, people of different cultures, genders, races and traditions exist. However, Irigaray’s fear is that in the push for European economic integration, capitalism is actually producing a culture that is threatening sustainable human life. Under the law of the market, European peoples are increasingly
stressed, forced to live and work at ever faster rates and quickly forget the lessons of human history. A culture that disrespects the environment, different sexualities, women and ethnic minorities cannot be corrected with discourses on equality and liberal neutrality. The continued hegemony of the market, masculine values, Western ideas of logic and rationality require more concerted forms of deconstruction. What is important in the European setting is the establishment of a new symbolic order which signifies a much needed next stage of human development. Thus, the ‘cultural’ is given priority over the economic in seeking to create a new society. It is then the task of critical forms of analysis not simply to restrict ourselves to where we are but to courageously ask what we might become. In order to begin answering these questions, we need to begin the task of reconstructing human subjectivity in respect of the relationship between the masculine and the feminine.

For Irigaray we have to start with the recognition that humanity consists of two different beings. It is the cultivation of the relation between men and women, and not the subordination of one pole of the other that will secure human development. Mature human subjectivity, therefore, depends on the ability to relate to the other who is not oneself. This is possible, of course, only if we follow a strategy for citizenship that prefers the acceptance of difference over assimilation. European cultures today have a historic opportunity to develop a citizenship that goes beyond the nation-state and re-works the civic relation between men and women. The crisis of the family and the relative decline of patriarchal authority means that we have the opportunity to culturally disassociate ourselves from a dominant masculinity and establish the civic identities of the masculine and the feminine on an equal footing. This, argues Irigaray, requires the acceptance of new rights at the European level to protect women’s right to be women. These rights would grant women an equivalent identity with that of men. The hope is that by giving femininity a civil basis, it would grant women

the conscious and voluntary recognition, in love and in civility, of the other as other. This cultural becoming of the woman will then be able to help the man to become man, and not only master and father of the world, as he has too often been in History. (Irigaray, 2002, p. 130)

In arguing for a new European civic identity for men and women, it is women’s cultural identity that requires special forms of protection. Here, Irigaray (1994) draws upon earlier work where she seeks to establish a legal basis for the right to motherhood and the right to virginity for women. The aim is to promote a shared civic identity across Europe that fosters women’s self-respect and secures the communal recognition of their physical and moral identity. These rights are not intended to be kept within a narrow legal framework, but would also seek to promote a wider collective culture of respect for women’s cultural identity. The objective would be to give women an equal footing in the public sphere, but also create a positive form of female-friendly citizenship. These rights would establish the respect for human life as a European norm.

Irigaray’s argument offers a substantive critique of the liberalism that writers such as Habermas refer to and of liberal feminism more generally. While not doubting the importance of equal opportunity legislation for women it has failed to establish a wider
respect for the feminine and the Other more generally within European societies. For example, the right to participate in the workplace with men fails to protect motherhood as a positive identity. Turning motherhood into a positive choice is impossible in a culture that promotes the masculine values of competition, individualism and instrumentality over nurturance and care. In this respect, Irigaray disagrees with those feminists who view gender identity as simply a form of oppression. Granting women an equal civil status with men would have implications for the value that modern societies place on the practice of caring for others.

Unusually for a philosopher of difference, Irigaray, along with the European MEP Renzo Imbeni, has written a consultative document called the Draft Code of Citizenship (reprinted in Irigaray, 2000, pp. 69–72) that was put forward to the European Commission for Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs. Interestingly, the report was rejected by the European Parliament over the need to recognize the difference between men and women. The Commission for Women’s Rights prefers to hold onto a definition of liberal feminism that does not ascribe identities in the way that Irigaray’s report suggested (Martin, 2003). Indeed, Irigaray often runs the biological identity of ‘woman’ and the ‘feminine’ together in such a way that has resulted in accusations of ‘essentialism’ by many of her critics. The problem for a politics of citizenship is that it is not possible to protect the cultural values we might describe as being feminine without also granting women rights. However, this would have to be done in such a way that would not discount that men might also wish to think of themselves as mothers, peacemakers and having a sense of responsibility towards the community that goes beyond the confines of narrow individualism. For example, Sara Ruddick (1989) has famously argued that a deep connection between maternal values and the politics of peace and anti-violence remains within civil society. However, she clearly recognizes that maternalism (the need to protect, nurture and train children) is a practice that can be undertaken by men as well as women. This said, the feminization of citizenship would involve the inclusion of virtues such as caring, compassion and responsibility for the vulnerable which has often been the product of specifically women’s campaigns (Werbner, 1999). The introduction of new human qualities into the domain of citizenship could be achieved only by redrawing the balance between masculine and feminine values. Irigaray’s point remains that before this can be achieved, women must be granted equal civil status before questions of cultural difference can be renegotiated.

Furthermore, the key question with respect to my earlier reflections is the argument for a Europe that seeks to protect racial and ethnic minorities. Indeed, this debate has particular significance in light of the vulnerability of ethnic minorities in the context of the war on terror. The increase in racist attacks, the languages of civilizations and the enhanced suspicion of Muslims across Europe all make these questions crucial. One of the ways many writers have sought to empower ‘minorities’ is to give them rights. Difference-blind liberalism cannot protect ‘minority’ languages and traditions in a hegemonic culture of market-led choices. Will Kymlicka (2001), a defender of minority rights, makes a distinction between good and bad multicultural rights. Good minority rights aim to protect groups from the power of majorities or the external threats posed by living in potentially inhospitable cultures. On the other hand, bad minority rights would seek to protect cultural enclaves from internal dissent and from individuals who wish to exit and
live their lives in different communities. By defending the rights of minorities, Kymlicka argues that we are able to reveal the extent to which liberalism unmasked actually supports certain languages, cultural practices and lifestyles over others. While Kymlicka is concerned mainly with the rights of settled national minorities (such as the Catalans in Spain), I am concerned mainly with his view of immigrants. Previously, Kymlicka had been criticized by Parekh (2001) for his view of culture that leads him to dismiss claims to special rights by immigrants. As immigrants have left their ‘natural’ cultural home, they should have no rights to culture, and are required to integrate into the host culture. Hence, whereas national ‘minorities’ have specific cultures that require recognition, the culture of immigrants should be denied public expression. Yet in a world of unprecedented cultural mobility in terms of peoples and symbols, it makes little sense to argue that cultures are confined to national and ethnic boundaries. Partially in response, Kymlicka now argues that immigrants, rather than demanding special rights, can demand fairer terms of integration. The demand at the national level then becomes to promote a political, educational and media culture that both recognizes and respects the culture and identity of immigrant populations.

Kymlicka presumes that questions concerning the respect for immigrants are the ‘natural’ territory of nation-states. Here we might ask whether there is a wider European role for the protection of national minorities and immigrant communities. If European identity is to be conceived as multiple and overlapping, then to what extent might ‘Europe’ seek to secure and protect the identities of minority communities? This is certainly a question, as Craig Calhoun (2001) has argued, that Europe must eventually face. However, just as the rights to recognize distinctive genders have been blamed for essentialism, so the same might be said of minority rights. For example, Stuart Hall (2000) has argued that we need to be careful that demands for group rights do not essentialize minority communities. Here the fear is that by giving rights to minorities we will actually interfere with the complex processes of negotiation and hybridization and reverse into new forms of ethnic closure. Again, this does not close the prospect of group rights, but suggests that we proceed with caution should we end up naturalizing community relations. Indeed, Hall argues less for cultural rights and more for a statutory obligation on the part of governments to expose and confront racism.

The demand to protect cultural identities at the European level both criticizes liberal cosmopolitanism and asks complex questions about notions of identity. Notably, Habermas’s model of European political communication underestimates the importance of this debate. It is unlikely that the political and mediated discourses introduced at this level would not reinforce some of the dominant features of host national cultures. The problem with procedural arguments such as those of Habermas is that they fail to recognize that public conversations are likely to be shaped by powerful codes and discourses.

Our question, however, has been how women and minorities might be empowered within this process. We have considered the possibility of granting them rights that go beyond the liberal forms of neutrality which remain the dominant form of European politics. We have noted considerable problems in this regard. As a matter of fact, I think we need to accept that the protection of minorities from racism and the redrawing of
masculinity and femininity cannot really be guaranteed by a rights-driven discourse. In this respect, I think we need to develop an ambivalent discourse on the protection given by rights. If, as many now argue, cultural identities are becoming increasingly reflexive in post-traditional societies, granting certain identity rights—however well intentioned—will inevitably remain problematic (Giddens, 1991). More important than communal rights is the development of a European-wide civic culture of multicultural solidarity that also seeks to confront the languages of racial and gendered privilege. A European multiculturalism would require an enhanced liberalism that seeks to undermine the privileges of cultural hierarchies and assert a respect for difference beyond essentialism (Giroux, 1994; Gilroy, 2004). Arguably, there are many features in contemporary European cultures addressing these questions from often ambivalent popular cultures to the changing role of men in the family, and from the partial acceptance of multiculturalism to political campaigns inspired by feminism and black rights organizations. Multiculturalism becomes possible only if we are both willing to appreciate difference and to do so in a spirit of solidarity and community with the other (Melucci, 1996). A generative civil society requires a two-fold logic of respect for otherness and communication. Such a vision suggests a vision of a future Europe based on a concern for the well-being of our neighbours along with the desire to create a polity free from normalizing assumptions. A genuinely cosmopolitan Europe would also need to become a multicultural Europe.

A New European Political Logic?

This article has argued that the double nature of civil society in the European context necessitates the building of new political institutions like the EU. The liberal emphasis on human rights and democracy, especially in the context of economic globalization and the developing ‘war on terror’, makes these commitments ever more pressing. However, I have also pointed out that liberalism’s blind spot is the way in which the polity is conceptualized as a neutral domain, hence missing the effect of powerful cultural discourses and exclusion. These questions can be highlighted only through more concerted attempts to reflect upon the contributions of cultural feminism and multiculturalism in the context of European societies. Such an argument would suggest that our models of cosmopolitanism need to include both processes of institution-building and an appreciation of the ways in which dominant models of citizenship have become constructed. The recent upsurge in populist racism against asylum seekers and chauvinist politics evident in the ‘war on terror’ will make these objectives difficult to achieve. Yet the survival of a critical liberalism and social and cultural protest continue to offer sources of hope for the future.

NOTES

1. For example, see my recent work on the culture of men’s lifestyle magazines as an example of the way dominant masculine fantasies about the body continue to be reproduced within modernity. This work was carried out with Peter Jackson and Kate Brookes (2001).
2. This problem is highlighted if we consider the liberal optimism of writers like John Keane (2003) who seem to believe that such objections can be easily dismissed.

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