

EUROPE, THE (UN)CAPTURABLE INTRODUCTION

MARIA VIVOD

The author deals with several basic metaphors of Europe, especially its mythological background, in which the masculine (i.e., the West) encounters the feminine (i.e., the East). She continues by discussing the thoughts of a number of authors (Karen Denni, Nicoletta Diasio, László Kürti, Mladena Prelič, Donatella Cozzi, and Tatiana Bajuk Senčar) in the volume.

Keywords: *mythology, Europe, West, East, central, media, discourse.*

Avtorica obravnava nekatere osnovne metafore Evrope – predvsem njeno mitološko ozadje v katerem, se srečujeta njen moški (zahodni) in ženski (vzhodni) del. V drugem delu tematizira misli nekaterih avtorjev (Karen Denni, Nicoletta Diasio, László Kürti, Mladena Prelič, Donatella Cozzi, and Tatiana Bajuk Senčar) v publikaciji.

Ključne besede: *mitologija, Evropa, zahod, vzhod, srednji, mediji, diskurz.*

*When she beheld his beauty and mild eyes,
the daughter of Agenor was amazed;
but, daring not to touch him, stood apart
until her virgin fears were quieted;
then, near him, fragrant flowers in her hand
she offered, – tempting, to his gentle mouth:
and then the loving god in his great joy
kissed her sweet hands, and could not wait her will.
(Ovid, Metamorphoses II.834–875)*

According to Greek mythology, Zeus fell in love with Europa. To capture her, he transformed himself into a white bull in the herd she was tending. Europa was struck by the beauty of the bull and started playing with him, placing flowers in his mouth and hanging garlands on his horns; eventually, she leapt on his back and rode to the seashore. The bull threw himself into the waves and started swimming. They arrived on the beach of another island, where Zeus turned himself into an eagle and made love to Europa.

In the iconography of this myth, the virgin Europa is often shown as a chaste but acquiescing girl, riding a powerful white bull in the sparkling blue waves of the sea (e.g., in paintings by Guido Reni and Rembrandt).

This strange couple – the male represented in the form of an animal, the female as a chaste young girl, riding together across the sea – became the symbol of the entire continent, and later the EU: they can be seen on the Greek two-euro coin and the 2004

Belgian commemorative ten-euro coin. There is a statue in front of the headquarters of the European Parliament in Strasbourg of an iron maiden riding a steel bull. But what exactly do these “personages” tell us using the language of art?

The bull is envisaged as an element of Nature and a symbol of potency. The woman introduces a human, earthly element which neutralises the divinity of the bull-Zeus. In Greek mythology, Europe is one of the incarnations of the great Mother Earth. The third element of the myth, the sea, adds primarily human striving towards the process of becoming familiar with the unknown. (Biasio: 2007)

The bull symbolizes pure animal strength. He is large, beautiful, well known for his physical power, and, of course, his (imagined?) sexuality. Another appealing association of the bull is not only his masculine sexual force, but an extra strength associated with masculinity: pecuniary power.

The hide of a bull stretched on a globe symbolises the process of globalisation and the dissemination of traditional European concepts and values. Today, a bull may also designate financial power (the expression: “bull market” means a raise in the prices of stocks). A sculpture of a golden bull by Arturo di Modica from 1980 was installed in Wall Street. (Biasio: 2007)

The maiden is often exploited as a symbol for a nation (e.g., *Divina Polonia* for Poland (Biasio 2007), the Maiden of Finland (Aura), the Maiden of Kosovo for Serbia, the French Marianne, etc.). In this case, this virtuous maiden that was so promptly seduced by the powerful bull is an embodiment of a continent. There is also a possible Semitic origin of the word *Europa* in Akkadian *erebu* ‘to go down, set’ with reference to the sun, which would correspond to the orient (<http://www.etymonline.com>). Jürgen Fischer (1956), in *Oriens-Occidens-Europa*, offers an explanation of how the name *Europe* came into use, replacing the *oriens-occidens* dichotomy of the late Roman Empire, which signified a divided empire: Latin in the West and Greek in the East.

Together, this maiden joining the two “halves” of a later empire and a bull representing financial power make a symbolic statement of the united Europe – or the manner in which it wishes to be perceived. This symbolism contains both female and male attributes, which together make a perfect entity.

Interestingly, this idea of polarization on the “female” and the “male” part of an imagined body (in this case, the geographical entity of Europe) can be discovered in several representations of Western and Eastern Europe.

The mental mapping of an imagined cartography of the European continent in which Western Europe is imagined as a masculine element and Eastern Europe is endowed with a quality of womanliness is a proposed perception of the differences between these two elements. They are felt to be totally different, and the projected comparison through the man-woman relation is the best description of the reality that is experienced and sensed.

Dubravka Ugrešić’s article on the quest to examine the complex relationship between

Western and Eastern Europe proposes a metonymical image embodied in the man-woman relation. Eastern Europe is seen as a “sleepy, pale beauty” (Ugrešić 1998: 297), a mistress of the Westerner:

Eastern Europe was a different world from the West. If nothing else, then for years she confirmed the Westerner's conviction that he lived in a better world. Eastern Europe was the dark reverse side, the alter ego, a world which Western Europe could have been like, but, fortunately, was not. And that is why the Westerner loved her. He loved her modest beauty, her poverty, her melancholy and her suffering, her ... otherness. He also loved his own fear, the quickening of his pulse when he travelled there, he was excited by that entry into the empire of shadows and reassured by the reliable exit-light: passport, embassy, credit card. He loved his own image of himself shopping cheaply, oh so cheaply. There, in the East of Europe, he inhaled a kind of personal freedom, yes, over there he felt closer to what he really was. Over there time was not measured according to agendas and schedules, it's true that there were shortages of all kinds, but there was an abundance of time. The Westerner came to Eastern Europe, she could not go to him, and that was freedom too, freedom from reciprocity. Eastern Europe was always there, waiting for him, like a harem captive. He loved her with the love of the master. He was the researcher and colonizer, he placed his little flags joyfully in the territories he mentally conquered. It was freedom from reciprocity. Eastern Europe was his secret, a mistress content with little. At home he had a faithful wife, order and work. Like every mistress, Eastern Europe only strengthened his marriage. (Ugrešić 1998: 300–301)

Then times changed: Western Europe reunited with Eastern Europe and there were no more frontiers. As Ugrešić states, the Westerner discovered that his mistress became similar to his wife (Ugrešić 1998: 302). There was no charm anymore in this kind of liaison. The two imaginary mappings obtained the chance to know each other more closely, which resulted in a bit of disappointment, but all the same the mental mapping of Europe remained.

The marriage of the poor Eastern girl to the prosperous Westerner was more or less merrily celebrated and common life started with its problems and everyday boredom with the unavoidable question “Will it last?”

For the skeptics of the success of this matrimony, one could retort that the mythical Europa would have lived her life quietly and anonymously for the rest of her terrestrial existence if she had not been noticed by the mighty Zeus. She entered into the great Greek Pantheon due to her liaison with the supreme god. However, only the unity of the two made them known. The complexity of the relationship between them created the possibility of giving a name and an emblem to a entire continent.

In the process of creating a workshop to mark the tenth biennale of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) in the summer of 2008 in Ljubljana, which

brought together more than 1,000 social anthropologists from throughout Europe and beyond, was to try to discover another unrevealed “face” of the bipartition between Eastern and Western Europe, which are simultaneously so exclusive and, then again, inclusive as a result.

The EU constitutional crisis shows how “Europe” is far from being a homogeneous entity. It is a playground of large and small, old and new countries, which perceive and present themselves in different ways, and use different culturally constructed strategies and tactics in relation to imagined “Europeanness.”

The panelists considered some key themes such as understanding of the self and the other regarding writing the memories and imaginary features of Europe and its continually changing borders. Attention was given to the relationships between groups and individuals seeking to maintain a cultural link in the recreation of their memories and identities in a Europe seemingly captive to its own myths. The diversity of the new forms of identification through migration was one of the subjects explored. Together with the other participants of our workshop we developed the following topics: What do the labels “west” and “east” mean in European contemporary societies? What is West seen from the East and vice versa, how are these positional categories defined, and how do they become “real” for the social actors? How is the issue of power (economic, cultural, etc.) and negotiation important in the discourse between West and East? What differences and commonalities are there between cultural practices and images of the West and the East?

Karen Denni’s article about the complexity of the notion of central Europe begins with an interesting personal experience of the author. She offers a personal insight into the multifaceted idea of *Mittleuropa*, which exposes (as the author herself states) that “these concepts are arbitrary” – referring to the concepts of West and East – and, as she said, let her “dream of a ‘between.’” She faces the relativity of the concept of the real or imaginary space between two halves with the hypothesis that she may be “focusing too much on my continent.” Debating the ambivalence of the term, Denni sums up the empirical efforts through history to find a suitable place for *Mittleuropa* in the mental mapping of Europe, which is shaped by political fashion.

This region without a defined geography, which “has vague and varying outlines according to changing situations” is written off as attempts to create an idea of homogenous unity and at the same time to resist “these efforts and the struggle for the autonomy of the peoples living in central Europe.” The opposition of these tendencies hinders a political consensus of the region between. The “transition zone,” as Denni calls it, embodied in the German concept of *Mittleuropa*, has a connotation of nationalism and imperialism, but then again a region of a successful cultural transfer.

The author regrets how the notion of central Europe as an identity and cultural concept failed to be endorsed after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The countries of this region rushed to join the European Community, which neglected to embrace and develop the

concept of the “middle.” Denni is arguing the statement by Maria Todorova that central Europe is dead, although the idea “can only survive in the scope of the European Union.”

Denni offers a possible scholarly reinterpretation of the idea of central Europe: the valorization of “experiences of cross-cultural and inter-ethnic tolerance and coexistence in central Europe in the context of the migration of various ethnic groups” in those regions. She proposes an avowed place for central Europe: a cultural crossroads for the continent as a whole, and in the meantime states that there are “lessons to learn” from central European countries that in the past decades have accomplished several transformation processes in their economies and societies. Denni claims that this capacity for restructuring and the accumulated experience could facilitate finding a common solution for the economic and social problems of the West as well as of the East.

The article by **Nicoletta Diasio** positions the human body as a locus of multiple belongings, in this case a belonging to a nation, in which the human body represents a specific idea of Polishness. The body becomes a spatial proof and vessel of past experiences, memories, and national attachment. Her contribution is based on her research, as she writes, “between Warsaw and Rome,” employing the methods of participative anthropology and comparative ethnography.

Diasio lived among families, “interviewed them, and collected the life stories of various members of the household.” She analyzed the elements of material culture connected to memory transmission. By studying family resemblances, Diasio analyzes sensitive memories. She explicitly defines her methodology by studying the system of crossed transmissions. Starting with the theory about body likeness of Malinowski, Leach, and Rabain, in which likeness is passed on by the lineage opposite to the one that transfers power, assets, and name, the author uses Halbwachs’s works on the social structure of memory and Foucault’s notions of technologies of the self. She drives her informants to examine what makes a Polish man or woman.

Diasio offers a definition of the sensory experience of human memory materialized in the body: “these memories constitute a sensorial matrix, mixing elements of a common material culture, and generating proximity, distance, multiple identifications, or ways of being oneself.” Because memory gained much weight in public discourses in Poland, creating and recreating the past, acting as a tool against the series of the totalitarian regimes, “being Polish resulted from the construction and dissemination of a concurrent memory kept inside kinship, contrasting with the memory of temporary invaders.”

Diasio collects narratives about family likeness, which bear in mind the transmission of national belonging. The identity of being Polish passes “the mediating paradigm of central Europe.” The reader can grasp this feeling of betweenness, between East and West. The vector of family resemblance, of national belonging, is yet again embodied in a woman’s body: the maternal grandmother, the “central figure in family and collective memory transmission.” The hardworking grandmother, the maiden of all virtues, is a “strong, heroic

mother making up for missing men, passing on to children the sense of national affiliation through language and religion, (and) is still alive in contemporary Poland.” The female body is the decisive one in the “never-ending process of transmitting Polishness.” The blood and the genes transmitted by them represent the Polish people in the middle, giving them an identity and value due to the inter-ethnic amalgam. The paradox of this betweenness, a state “without minorities, yet keeping faith in the memory of a multicultural Poland,” is a remarkable example of European unification right in the middle of the project and this process itself: a continent built up on various bits and pieces.

László Kürti’s article analyzes the dynamics of media regimes and cultures in Hungary; in particular, how media production and media consumption influence the creation of stereotypes that determine identities, sociability, and belonging. Kürti offers an overview of the main Hungarian television networks, discussing “the majority imagination and cultural policy reproduced by the existing media hierarchy ... based on ... a general nationalist orientation with elements of racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, and ethnic stereotypes.” In his search for examples of cross-cultural misunderstandings and ethnic stereotyping in media centered on profit-making, Kürti focuses on Hungarian media images of the Roma minority.

The “regional unification and cross-border communication” of the media that the fall of the communist regime in Hungary made possible, and which was even more accentuated by the admission of this country to the EU, appears to be highly ambiguous: such media nourish an interior conflict between the communities through the reproduction and diffusion of negative stereotypes, although they could “contribute to cultural dialogue and the preservation of cultural identities,” as the author astutely suggests.

Kürti regrets the negative role that profit-seeking, socially irresponsible media embrace: they “play the opposite role in whipping up passions, increasing intolerance and creating distasteful ethnic stereotypes,” “elevated into night-time television programs.” He takes as an illustration a particular show that reached the level of a top-ranking show in viewership, which interposes a cheap imitation of other variants from Western culture similar in their insipidly ethnocentric, racist jokes and message. These are old myths, as he says, which are “revamped through reality TV-like programming.” In the process of Othering, in which the essentialist “conception of identity and difference is based on an ethnocentrically perceived homogeneous cultural map in which diversity and heterogeneity are not welcome,” the author recognizes several structural predispositions in which, like a magical trap, the media of post-communist, Eastern countries fall.

Trying to catch up with Western trends and fashion, the post-communist media develop tasteless mimicry toward the imagined future visualized in Western culture, or towards the past, imitating it, “that is, the former system of state socialism with renationalization, and nationalistic and religious exclusivism.” The media operate as the most important tool in forming social attitudes, values, and cultural dialogue. The author emphasizes the role and responsibility for the reproduction of stereotypes by the political, educational,

and media elites, which is to be conscientious because they control the majority of public discourses. Kúrti discerns that high-level politics and centralized cultural policies are negatively affecting the Hungarian media, and especially television, so that every regime alters Hungary's media, education, and the arts, and he regrets the lack of fully independent media in Hungary. Through criticism of the media in Hungary, Kúrti offers an example of how, in trying to approach the West, one could easily plunge into the ambush of apishly imitating it: through clichés meant to be entertaining, one drops effortlessly into damaging and injurious labeling.

Mladena Prelić analyzes public discourse in its contextual denotation and examines the Serbian “Othering” of Europe and the idea of EU integration through public opinion surveys. The question of whether Serbia can and should be a European country – reflected in public communication, government policies, and public opinion – is discussed with a detailed analysis of public speech about the possible European identity of Serbian society in the last decade. By introducing this problem with an explication of the notion of Europe, Prelić positions Serbia in the imaginary mapping of Europe and the Balkans. Through the entire text, the author provides a number of definitions of this particular country: “Serbia is a country of unfinished/failed modernization, and the basic obstacle for a true ‘modernization break’ is the very structure of that society, which at the beginning of Serbia’s modern history consisted of only one layer: the peasantry”; “a society without clear rules of the game.” She paints an image of Serbia in a “transitional fatigue” as a profoundly problematic and divided society in social and economic crisis, but even more at a constant political juncture since the fall of the Milošević regime; a detailed representation of a destroyed society that tries to maintain the position of a liminal zone or a region between: neither West nor East Prelić emphasizes the popular perception of self-image and self-exotization; a heritage, in her opinion, of the isolationist regime of Milošević. Stating that “the ruling elites increasingly appeared to act as interest groups, with their only goal to remain in power for their own benefit as long as possible,” the author is partially describing the decomposition of Serbian society in the 1990s and its difficult recomposition in the following decade. Prelić describes the efforts in the form of formal political steps by the Serbian government first led by Đinđić then Koštunica to bring Serbia closer to the EU with an insight into the historical dimension of this issue. The ups and downs of political efforts to get on the road to EU integration are scrutinized through criticism of important events in Serbian politics and society.

The biggest problem, according to the author, is the self image of Serbian society, the manner in which “Serbia sees itself in Europe, in some periods of its recent history also investing great efforts to overcome the difference between itself and the developed world,” and which “superficial ... achievements in modernization are exposed to permanent inner and outer jeopardy.” She notices the gap in detailed information given by the Serbian media about the EU; the information is reduced to “the level of abstract calls for unification,

better living standards, and abolition of visas.” The center of her analysis lies in examining the change of public discourse from the nationalist isolationist apprehension of the Other toward the thorny acceptance of this Other and Otherness in general.

Prelić excerpts phrases from public discourse that illustrate the attraction and animosity of this society in its acceptance of distinctiveness accompanied by a sentiment of a possible danger of losing its own identity. A possible evolution of political thinking is reflected in public communication in a form of *res media* – a middle road embracing two, apparently incompatible elements: to be European as well as Serbian by keeping one’s own identity. A typology of the thought patterns of the stereotypes about the relations towards Europe is also summarized in the article. The author proposes an emotional dimension of the attitude towards the EU in the belief system of Serbian society. The idea of Europe appears to be exploited as a myth about utopian society: “the term *EU* has started to be used in political practice with similar intentions as other mythologems of the twentieth century” and the idea of European integration seems to be far off and (almost) uncapturable.

Donatella Cozzi begins her essay as an introduction of an extraordinary story of a voyage: in “Topolò/Topolove... , the place where I carried out my research, you end up encountering a very unusual thing: ... a sculpture ... an animal that howls towards the border... like a watchdog.” The author takes us directly into the spotlight of her ethnographic fieldwork, in a small village where the Italian-Yugoslav border was created in 1947. This border cut apart countries, friends, relatives, and possessions. It resulted an inner confrontation of this small community and a feeling of a mutilated body and discrimination from Others. It produced othering and introduced two borders: one near another country, and an even bitterer one: an inner border toward the rest of the country through a further reproduction of the marginality of the Slovenian minority.

Cozzi “deliberately chose this small community” of a village sliced in two with a border “set up in an unknown way in only one night” to examine its impact on identity and to explore “the extent to which people’s own subjectivities reflect, contradict, or challenge these state classifications.” The reason she gives for choosing this particular village for ethnographic fieldwork is that, in the case of Topolò/Topolove “the border has created differences where there were none before, and it has shaped mutual stereotypes and sometimes even serious racist attitudes toward the Slovenian minority living here.”

The author relies on the testimonies of three generations of villagers and their perception of this bipolar (inner and outer) frontier. Like a leitmotif, fear, anxiety, and unease superimpose “one of the cruelest and most disruptive borders in Europe.” This emotional note follows the lines of Cozzi’s article while she provides a detailed description of her fieldwork, the interviews she conducted, and the portrayal of the village itself. The author offers a brief historical overview of the Italianization of this region where a Slovenian minority lived. Facing a troubled past that largely influenced the present, selective memory is a necessity and in the case of the older generation amnesia is imposed. Although the border

relaxed in 2007, the fear seems too deep: today the village is “swallowed by nature and oblivion.” The region, neither West nor East, appears to be a no-man’s land; politically, economically, and especially emotionally and culturally a land between.

Cozzi states in a very pertinent manner: “The Cold War border here is an interstitial space (Das and Poole 2004), a *Zwischenraum* or ‘space between’ (Berdahl 1999), where the people living near it are compelled to lead silent lives, without needs or a destiny, nurtured by a reciprocally built fear, forgotten by both countries, testifying to the reality of the frontier’s heaviness. Memories, kinship, and friendship ties on both sides of the border came unraveled.” The “betweenness” felt by the population is expressed by the following testimony of a woman interviewed by the author: “The people did not want war. We helped either side when they passed through.”

Tatiana Bajuk Senčar’s article offers readers a glimpse into the world and life of Slovenian officials and bureaucrats working in the EU institutions, the “Eurocrats.” The author describes a universe of individuals that left their country and went into the heart of the EU for professional purposes, represented in its institutions. We discover the creation of a perception, a way of thinking and feeling, a self-perception, and the creation of a (possibly) new identity. These individuals with different professional backgrounds, careers, and motivations are a cogent example for an anthropological study about the politics of identity construction of the European Union.

As these individuals became EU officials and embraced their professional identity as Eurocrats, they actively created a specific language of belonging and difference. As the author points out, the Eurocrats “primarily interpret difference in national terms; they strive to refrain from essentializing national identity, maintaining instead a focus on identity in relational terms and exploring the role of nationality as a potential marker of identity in a multicultural, multinational work environment.” The author’s study, which seems to only address the politics of EU identity, has certain other strata as well. Bajuk Senčar also analyzes the role of nationality in a multilingual environment and the use of stereotypes by the Eurocrats.

By trying to understand how Slovenian EU officials position their experience using a referential universe of their own, she also identifies the circumstances and conditions in which these participants fit into EU institutions as Slovenians. These individuals are facing an ideology of multiculturalism, the manner in which EU institutions are dealing with the issue of national diversity. The problematic national differences are shaped and renamed in positive terms as cultural diversity and cultural richness. Bajuk Senčar nevertheless notices dissimilarities between the official EU discourse of multiculturalism and the hints of an egalitarian balance among all EU officials; for example, there are differences between “old” and “new” Eurocrats. Interestingly a “geographical balance” is needed; a mental map made of individuals and places taken by them in the EU institutions. This balance becomes a challenge after each new enlargement of the European Union. These institutions try to

mimetically “shrink” the continent and represent it in miniature. The stereotypes about different nationalities and the way to handle the Other arise naturally from a multilingual environment. Through the use of stereotypes – positives as well as negative – the Slovenian Eurocrats are coping with their milieu. A strategy of identification employed to not give much to the implication of nationality is “the development of a transnational professional identity particular to the institutions themselves.”

REFERENCES

- Den Boer, Pim
1993 *Lieux de mémoires et l'identité de l'Europe*. In: Pim den Boer and Willme Frijhoff (eds.), *Lieux de mémoires et identités nationales*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 11–29.
- di Biasio, Beata
2007 *The Myth of a Single Europe. “Images and Myths of Europe: The Western and the Eastern Perspectives.”* 10–13 December (http://www.fondazione-delbianco.org/seminari/progetti_prof/progview.asp?id=1167).
- Fischer, Jürgen
1956 *Oriens-Occidens-Europa*. Wiesbaden: Steiner.
- Ugrešić, Dubravka
1998 *Nice People Don't Mention Such Things*. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 5: 297–310.

EVROPA. (NE)UJEMPLJIVA. UVOD II.

Nastanek Evrope je mitski, v srečanju Zeusa in Evrope, moškega in ženskega principa. Binarna reprezentacija je značilna tudi za razmerje med moškim »Zahodom« in ženskim »Vzhodom«. Za Karen Denni je srednja Evropa, območje med »Zahodom« in »Vzhodom«, ki jo zajema nemški koncept Mitteleuropa, »tranzicijsko« in uteleša tako nacionalizem in imperializem kot tudi področje intenzivne kulturne izmenjave. Z uporabo elementov materialne kulture, povezanih s prenosom spomina, je Nicoletta Diasio na primeru poljskih družin preučevala občutljive spomine. László Kürti razpravlja o madžarskih televizijskih mrežah, njihovem odnosu do »drugega« in o reprodukciji splošne nacionalistične oporientacije z elementi rasizma, etnocentrizma, seksizma in etničnih stereotipov. Na podlagi javnomnenjskih anket Mladena Prelić analizira javni diskurz o Srbiji in Evropski uniji, posebej o vprašanju ali je Srbija lahko in mora biti članica EU. Donatella Cozzi je na primeru majhne skupnosti preučila vplive razdelitve vasi na vzhod in zahod. Tatiana Bajuk Senčar analizira, kako delo in življenje slovenskih »evrokratov« v Bruslju vpliva na spreminjanje njihovega mišljenja in percepcije in oblikovanja nove identitete.

Dr. Maria Vivod, CNRS, group UMR 7043, 67100 Strasbourg,
France, vivod@hotmail.com
