Through a Glass, Darkly.

The Symbols of European Empire

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ABSTRACT

In its genealogical development as a political term, "Empire" historically did not refer to a taxonomy of state, but to a status as the sole, legitimate order over the peoples of the world. "Empire" is a discourse of exclusive sovereignty, legitimacy, duty, and manifest destiny; not what a political order *is* but what it *should be*. This chapter argues that this discourse is most effectively conveyed through the coded language of symbols. Symbols are the most powerful form of communication and act as a social solvent, encoding everyday life with the presence of a political ideology. Through synecdoche, symbols distil complex socio-political imaginations into a single, immediately recognisable vision imbued with emotional power. In the European Union, official symbols (iconography and cartography) are used to express the existence of the EU in everyday life, and affirm its normative role as the unifier of the peoples of Europe. However, this chapter demonstrates that the EU's symbols express not what the EU *is* but what it *should be* – a political order which blurs the EU and Europe into a single synecdoche, symbolically expressing that the EU is exclusive as the sole sovereign of the Europeans. These symbols are, inescapably, imperial.

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'For now we see through a glass, darkly;
but then face to face: now I know in part,
but then shall I know even as also I am known'

1 Corinthians 13:12 (KJV)

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul illustrates a theological point with a convenient metaphor. Of course, Paul is not speaking about politics, but his words shed light on a key characteristic of visual representations and symbolic communication. In his metaphor, Paul uses the analogy of an Iron Age mirror to imply that we can never see the *reflection* of God, but only a poor *representation* through the texts and speeches of human representatives.[i] Our human eyes cannot see a metaphysical abstraction, such as *God*. Such

concepts, asserts Paul, are beyond the ken of mere mortals, and the closest we can come is a crude representation which must not be confused with a reflection of the face of God.

Taking Paul's analogy, it is arguable that we also cannot see a *political* abstraction. Consider "Europe". We can see the topological, geological entity we call Europe – all that is required is a brief trip into orbit, and we can peer down at the jumbled mass of land and seas that forms the western part of Earth's largest continent, which we historically term "Europe". But while we can see *topological* Europe, we cannot see *political* Europe. The best we can do, like peering into Paul's looking-glass, is to communicate this metaphysical abstraction through symbols. Yet one drawback of visual symbols is that we look and see but through the glass, darkly. We see not a reflection but a representation of Europe. And in the case of EU symbolism, this is a representation not of what the EU *is* but what it *should be*. Not European Union, but European Empire.

In recent years, scholars and policymakers have increasingly questioned the nature of the EU (McCormick 2013; McCormick 2007; Liddle et al. 2009; Foster 2013). As emphasised prominently by Jürgen Habermas (2013, 122), 'the European Union is at a crossroads'. The EU certainly faces various challenges, and the response of elites is to seek salvation in the emergence of an EU identity. This quest among EU elites cannot be understated. Indeed for former Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende (in Poettering et al. 2006, 31), 'Europe cannot be built without people who *feel* European.'

It has long been recognised (Haas 1963) that a European *community* relies upon the emergence of a European *identity*. For an EU struggling to legitimise and explain its existence, and attempting to integrate 506 million people after rapid Eastwards expansion and the continuing aftershocks of financial and macropolitical crises, European-ness is of vital significance. Yet what does it mean to '*feel* European', and how is such an identity encouraged?

Notwithstanding the debate on the extent to which a European *identity* exists,[ii] it would be difficult to deny that there is a common "cultural heritage" to European societies. Even if there is not, and there is absolutely *nothing* connecting Portuguese to Poles, EU policymakers behave according to the firm conviction that there *is* such a connection (EPP-ED 2004). Indeed the 1973 Copenhagen Declaration stressed this point emphatically; that Europe is defined by *sameness* (Grande 2009, 51). The EU seeks to build upon this "sameness" to engender a "European" identity (EPP-ED 2004) expressed through symbolism. Previous research has demonstrated the crucial importance of EU visual images and artefacts

in political discourses (Wintle 2009; Sparke 2005; Thrift 2004; Walters 2002). This chapter will examine how symbols express the discourse of empire through *synecdoche* – 'images that…can condense the meaning of a whole narrative without linguistic mediation' (Bottici and Challand 2013, 6). This is what lends symbols their supreme power – their ability to condense vast narratives into recognisable, digestible images; a form of 'visual shortcut to the part of our minds that understands them' (Nozedar 2010, 13).

The symbols of the EU are, in the early twenty-first century, well-established (Fornäs 2012). The flag, anthem, holiday, and other markers of EU identity were created in the mid-twentieth century, and have become sufficiently entrenched in EU myth as to be inextricable (Bottici and Challand 2013, 1-14). Thus an investigation of symbols reveals the imperial imagination at the heart of the European Union. As the EU believes its various crises can be ended by *economic* means (Riddle et al. 2009; EPP-ED 2004), this chapter examines the most visible and most emotive connection between the EU and its citizens – currency and its symbols. This link between the state and the emotions of its citizens is arguably the foundation of political life in the Union, as 'an active policy that calls…for a common will on the part of the member states is dependent on the motives and convictions of the citizens themselves' (Derrida and Habermas 2006, 15; in Grande 2009, 45-46).

In their impassioned speech, Derrida and Habermas highlighted that 'a European identity is no longer linked to a political identity created by constitutional norms; rather it is connoted *with common cultural norms and values*'. Grande stresses Derrida's and Habermas' proposed solution: 'European identity ought to be "thickened" by reanimating the common "cultural heritage" of Europe' (Grande 2009, 46). Since the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, the EU has increasingly transformed from a distant collection of financiers and industrialists (Haas 1964, 459-464) to an entity which has an impact on the everyday lives of its citizens – not always with positive reception (*Euronews* 2014). The gap between EU elites and citizens is still very large, hence this chapter examines one of the few connections between elite visions and everyday actions. This is currency, the everyday manifestation of this elite vision. Euro currency symbols are much more recent – and change more rapidly. This iconography is still in the process of forming, and it is in currency that we see most visibly the expression of empire. Currency encapsulates the shift from a distant EEC to a mundane EU which is challenged, taken for granted, or actively applauded; from *zollverein* to *vaterland* (Sonntag 2011, 115-130) – at least in the hopes of EU elites. By examining the iconography on Euro currency, this chapter argues that the most frequently-encountered link

between EU and citizen is saturated with an imagination which suggests that the EU is nothing less than empire.

European Empire

> *'The beginning of wisdom is to call things*
> *by their right name'* (McCormick 2013, 11).
>
> ~Chinese proverb

Despite being one of the apparent cornerstones of International Relations theory, there is little to no consensus on what "empire" actually *is* – as demonstrated by the manifold interpretations of empire in relation to the EU (Foster 2014; Stivachtis 2013; Behr 2009; Böröcz 2006; Zielonka 2006). But as the proverb urges us, we need to identify a working definition. For the purposes of this chapter, "empire" is not a taxonomy of state but rather a discourse; an expression of power and ambition which is used to endow an artificial political project with *sovereignty, legitimacy, superiority, exclusivity,* and most importantly, *destiny*.

The original Latin legal term *imperium* had, to the Romans, many meanings which need not delay us here.[iii] What is significant for us is that whatever *imperium* meant to the ancient Romans, these meanings became completely irrelevant when, at a precise moment, *imperium* changed. This moment was shortly before noon on Christmas Day 800 AD, when Pope Leo III proclaimed Charlemagne, King of the Franks and eventual icon for twentieth-century European unification (Wilson 2005, 205-206; Latowsky 2013), as *'Imperator gubernans imperium Romanorum'*; *Emperor governing the Imperium of the Romans* (Davis 1970, 149). Again, the details of the complex international relations which led to this decision need not concern us; all that is necessary to know is that Leo and Charlemagne were grudging allies in a somewhat petty, but monumentally significant, game of political one-upmanship with the Byzantines in the East, with each side claiming to be the sole and rightful continuation of the classical Roman Empire. Pope Leo's invocation of the word *imperium* on Christmas Day was a political performance intended to claim that Charlemagne, and *only* Charlemagne, was the successor of Rome and the Romans' apparent God-given mission (in medieval minds) to unite Mankind (Le Goff 1988, 67-77).The Byzantines, convinced that *they* were the embodiment of Roman *imperium* (Gibbon 1998: 416) objected, and thus began a millennium-long diplomatic contest which spread to all European powers; a struggle for prestige in which the word *imperium* (along with its linguistic successors *empire, impero,* etc.

and its vague Germanic equivalent *Reich*) was adopted with varying degrees of success to validate the existence and ambitions of various rulers. Thus *imperium* changed from a specific Roman legal term into a vague discourse, as societies adopted the word simply as a marker of prestige, a way to 'puff up' (Smith 2005, 274) their political projects by claiming that they alone had inherited Rome's divine mandate to unify all others, creating their own paternalistic vision of humanity as children to be brought together beneath the parental guidance of their *imperium*. It was this medieval discourse which influenced the philosophies of Early Modern and Modern Europeans, who carried this political baggage with them as they sailed around the world and encountered new societies; using the notion of *imperium* to justify planting flags on beaches, trading slaves, converting and conquering, and otherwise subordinating non-European peoples under a succession of Europeans and their emigrant offspring, all genuinely convinced that they were right because they were the inheritors of *imperium*.[iv]

In this discourse we can identify a number of characteristics. First is *sovereignty* – the adopted state has sovereign power. In addition, there is *superiority* – the adopted state is not only different to others, it is better than them as it is the inheritor of a divine mission (Folz 1969). Also, *legitimacy* – the state's sovereignty is just, as it is the continuation of Rome and her mandate (Holland 2005). Connected to this is *exclusivity* – the state is not merely the inheritor of Rome, it is the *only* inheritor of Rome (Norwich 1998). And finally, *destiny* – not only does the chosen society have the sole *right* to rule, it has the *responsibility* to unite. Justifying this is a *manufactured history* which connects the present to an imagined past. This is the essence of empire: the self-righteous proclamation not only that *We are different from Them* but that *We are better than Them*, and indeed *We have the right and the responsibility to unite Them under Our benevolent protection, and mould Them in Our own image.*

"Empire" is best thought of as the geopolitical manifestation of *imperium*. Specific "empires" decline and fall, but the mantle of *imperium* is taken up by the new societies which emerge from the old, triumphantly proclaiming that they are the descendants of Rome. In the twenty-first century the language of empire is somewhat unpalatable (Cox 2003), but while the word might not be said out loud the discourse itself remains alive and well. Indeed it is a discourse which can be identified, as the contributors to this volume so aptly demonstrate, in today's European Union.

Claims of European Empire vary significantly, and the essence of empire can be sought in various aspects of the EU. In this chapter, I argue not only that empire is a discourse but that the most powerful arena in which the discourse manifests, is in visual

communication and the language of symbols. For it is via symbols that the visions of EU elites, and the imaginations of EU citizens, intersect. The result is the promotion – perhaps unwitting – of something which EU elites desperately desire: an identity as "European".

‘Feeling European’

> *‘Europe cannot be built without people who*
> *feel European’* (Balkenende in Poettering et al. 2004, 33).

The EU is an unusual political project, of a kind not seen since the end of the Holy Roman Empire. This unusual entity has many of the trappings of an established nation-state, including the emotional paraphernalia of flag, anthem, motto, and "national" holiday. But despite all of these attempts to manufacture a mythic identity for the Union, the EU lacks an identity to which citizens can affiliate. Before going further, it must be acknowledged that EU elites are not in the habit of simply making up an identity out of thin air. Albrecht Sonntag (2011, 115-130) opines, arguably correctly, that this is because the European Union has nothing capable of making an identity with which people *can* affiliate. The EU's lack of an emotional dimension is crucial, as it illustrates how the highly prized "European" identity is fundamentally imperial.

Sonntag argues that the Union suffers from a serious ‘emotional deficit’ (Sonntag 2011, 124), as EU citizens simply do not have the same emotional attachment to the Union that they do to their nation-states. It is difficult to have a dual identity, and as we are far more emotionally attached to the nation in whose culture we grew up, our emotional connection to a distant trade and customs union is rather meagre. This is not a trivial issue; in fact the exact opposite. Emotional affiliation with a political project is of supreme importance. As Sonntag (2011, 124) points out, ‘public opinion – and ultimately, people's political decisions – are framed to a large extent by emotions’. This has been increasingly visible in manifestations of public will – pro- or anti-EU – since the introduction of the Euro, the Eastern enlargements, and the Union's austere reactions to financial crises. Moreover, EU policymakers are keenly aware of the importance of emotion. It is not out of boredom that EU statisticians take opinion polls and laboriously toil over their *Eurobarometer* findings to discern peoples' opinions of the Union (Eurobarometer 2013). This was recently made very visible in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament, which returned a substantial eurosceptic body reflective of EU citizens' dissatisfaction and disassociation with the Union. As a result, we must

consider three points. The first is that the EU's future is now, more than ever, reliant on a public sense of the Union's legitimacy. The second is that this legitimacy is reliant on citizens' affiliation with an EU identity. The third is that EU citizens' main interaction with the Union is via visual symbols, and thus an EU identity is dependent on an emotional connection with a plausible and visible manifestation of political identity via symbolic and visual language.

The relationship between legitimacy and identity has long been an issue for the EU (Haas 1951; Cafruny and Lankowski 1997). Prior to the Eastern enlargements and financial crisis, the EU enjoyed mainly *procedural legitimacy* resulting from member-states' 'superior governing performance' (Beetham and Lord 1998, 93). However the EU continues to be plagued by a 'democratic deficit' (McCormick 1999, 282; Baun 1996, 145-147) which raises challenging citizen questions about the Union's legitimacy due to a 'gap between popular will and the goals of elites who have made most of the key decisions' (McCormick 1999, 283). With Europeans' trust in the legitimacy of the Union shaken by crises of governability in the realms of finance, expansion, and migration (Liddle et al. 2009; Euronews 2014), the EU increasingly depends upon the emergence of a coherent European identity (EPP-ED 2004). Since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the drive for European unity has been predicated in *neo-functionalist theory*, stressing economic co-operation and assuming that a 'supranational' European identity would be formed from the 'spillover' of this integration (McCormick 2007; Sparke 2005, 239-312; Haas 1963). In the present day, this 'Gospel of Jean Monnet' (José Barroso in Poettering et al. 2006) continues to form the basis of EU policy. Yet in recent years we have witnessed the emergence of a two-pronged strategy regarding identity.

To a significant extent, EU policymakers still assume that neofunctionalist economic integration and its spillover into civil society is *necessary* and *inevitable*. This may have been an astute stance during the early decades of a unified Europe, but since the Maastricht Treaty (1993), and particularly since the introduction of a common currency alongside rapid expansion, Europe has developed from an economic *community* dominated by elite markets and policies, to a political *union* whose socio-political impact is increasingly felt and critically perceived among European populations. Indeed this economic transformation has provided the EU with the most visible marker of collective identity – hard currency. The Euro has transformed European economic integration from abstract and complicated financial deals between chief executives in bank boardrooms, to a series of mundane, quotidian performances (Painter 2006) between ordinary citizens on the street. This provides the focus

of our investigation – the symbols of the EU as manifest on the currency handled every day by three hundred and thirty million EU citizens. But in addition to this assumption of a spillover from economic integration, is a second aspect of European identity.

Clearly, an EU identity is actively sought by EU elites. But waiting for one to emerge organically is tedious. Meanwhile the EU faces continuing economic woes and mounting political resistance from national groups whose dissatisfaction is increasingly audible. An identity must be encouraged. This is precisely what EU elites have done – and are continuing to do – through channels of political communication. With the rapid expansion of communications technologies and the subsequent 'ocularisation' (Rose 2012) of European society, the most powerful mechanism of promoting such an identity is the language of symbols.

Politics and Symbols

'Signs and symbols rule the world – not words nor laws' (Foley 1993. 7)

~Confucius

For a polity as legalistic as the Union, Confucius' words are particularly applicable. To understand the EU as empire, we need to understand its symbols. Our word *symbol* comes through Latin from the Greek *sumbolon*, "sign of recognition". In a happy coincidence with the bringing-together that is empire, *sumbolon* comes ultimately from σύμβολον or *sumballein*, "to bring together" (Whittick 1960, 4; Foley 1993, 9; Nozedar 2010, 11). Crucially, symbols act as a 'visual shortcut' (Nozedar 2010: 14) between our minds and an abstract concept. There are few polities harder to identify with than the *zollverein* that is the EU, thus its symbols are particularly important and especially illustrative of just how EU elites envision the Union. But first an important question must be asked. Why study symbols?

The easy answer is that political life *is* symbols. 'All social and economic activities are carried on by means of symbols…society is held together by acceptance of, and reverence for, its symbols' (Whittick 1960, 3). Previous research has demonstrated how EU artefacts and visual images communicate discourses (Ganster and Lorey 2005; Sparke 2005; Walters 2002; Foster 2013). As discourses are both language *and* practice, EU citizens' viewing of symbols continually remakes European-ness. The EU's visual images are 'spectacular expressions of state power' (Painter 2006, 752), but European-ness is made not in policies. It is made in mundane performances of the everyday: from Euro cash transactions to choosing

the correct queue at passport control – all of which are bound within the 'prosaic geographies of stateness' (Painter 2006), their power veiled by the sheer banality of the quotidian contexts in which they are used (Billig 1995; Anderson 1991).

Symbols are extremely powerful, connecting the citizen to elite ideals and ideologies, and are inherently imbued with political imaginations and ambitions (Foster 2013). Visual language is the first and most frequently encountered connection between citizen and state, particularly in newcomer and neighbouring states (Wintle 2009). Visual identity is a cornerstone of EU institutions' charters, encouraging European-ness through cultural technologies of rule. This contributes to an imagined community according to which *only* the EU holds legitimacy in Europe. The functionalist approach to integrating Europe relies upon the dismantling of formal borders, yet the desire to create European-ness anticipates and necessitates a new identity. This is a European identity located in citizens' interactions with symbols, and is visible in the mundane manifestations of the EU: in currency, documents, flags, and similar banal paraphernalia which simultaneously transcends frontiers while constructing a boundary between Europeans and non-Europeans.

Visual expressions of statehood persuasively express political power (Ganster and Lorey 2005) by constructing, institutionalising, and normalising European-ness through mundane symbols – whose power stems not from explicit proclamations but from their very banality and omnipresence which masks embedded discourses (Billig 1995; Foster 2013). Symbolic identity construction is therefore no longer a spillover of functionalism, but an independent phenomenon whereby the banality of EU symbols causes the Union to seep into uninvolved areas of life – the EU's visual presence on currency and banal media (Billig 1995; Anderson 1991; Painter 2006, 752-755) – which contribute of the 'mundane omnipresence' (Fornäs 2012) of the EU in everyday life. Symbols constitute the initial and most frequently encountered connection between citizen and the EU, particularly in newcomer and neighbouring states (Wintle 2009; Walters 2002).

Symbols, then, are clearly of importance to citizens in the everyday context. Yet the power of symbols is not only manifest in civil society and everyday practices, but also acknowledged in EU institutions' visual charters. They, too, express political power by constructing, institutionalising, and homogenising political imaginations. As their power stems from the very mundanity and omnipresence of these artefacts, visual symbols and visual rhetoric are saturated with embedded affective discourses (Billig 1995; Thrift 2004; Rose 2012). Visual symbols are fundamental to understanding political imaginations, as 'the force and effect of these mediating signs would remain a mystery if they were not ultimately

rooted in…the very essence of consciousness' (Cassirer 1953, 105-106). In the case of the EU, these symbols express who does and does not, and who *should* and *should not*, belong in the EU, as well as claims of legitimate rule in Europe.

Of course, the EU is not the first to manufacture symbols. Those European conquerors in history who have sought to encourage a group identity have been only too aware of the power of symbols to act as rallying-points. Unfortunately Hegel's prediction was right, as European conquerors rarely heed history and end up repeating tragedies as farce. Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, Charles V, Napoleon, and even Hitler have attempted to manufacture a visual identity through symbols – and all have failed. Premodern potentates pillaged the iconography of ancient Rome, from eagles to garish coronations, to suggest that they were leading civilisation as the inheritors of Rome, encouraging a 'civilised' identity to which their disparate peoples would rally. More recently, Fascists (Klemperer 2006, 63-65) and Communists (Piercy 2013, 83-88) bombarded their European subjects with abstract icons symbolising their ideologies and the subsequent supremacy of those who emotionally affiliated with the swastika (Quinn 1994, 108-139) or the hammer and sickle (Figes and Kolonitskii 1999, 30-36). This is by no means a claim that the EU is following in the footsteps of Napoleon or Hitler by creating symbols; no more so than any multi-national megacorporation or local supermarket which encourages loyalty by creating a visual identity and expressing it in appropriate places (Napoles 1988; Chajet and Shachtman 1991). Indeed the EU is distinct from previous efforts to create a group identity as it does not shamelessly steal symbols from history, nor does it risk 'fatigue and reduce[d] receptiveness' (Sonntag 2011, 119) by plastering every available space with abstract symbols. Instead the EU has created its own symbols, solicited from Europe-wide competitions (Fornäs 2012), in order to express an imagined identity. And for multiple reasons, an EU identity can be nothing less than imagined – and imperial.

First is its lack of history. The European Union, technically, has only existed since 1992. Even if we lazily conflate it with the European Community, European Economic Community, and the European Coal and Steel Community, the lifespan of the current EU is still only a little more than half a century in age. For the majority of that lifespan, a united Europe was a distant political project only cared about by bankers, industrialists, and a handful of Franco-German statesmen (Haas 1963). It is quite a stretch to imagine that the EU, as a young polity, can have the same emotional appeal to its population(s) as a nation-state. Even if they are also largely artificial (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Sonntag 2011), they are at least significantly old enough to be plausible fictions. It is even *more* of a stretch to

imagine that people will politically identify with a distant, complicated, and somewhat dull network of finance treaties and fishing quotas. Exacerbating this lack of history are other factors.

Second is the lack of an effective Other against which the Self can be defined. In the absence of the Soviets, there is not a powerful enough rival to help shape "EU-ropean-ness" (Bottici and Challand 2013, 113-144). Not even Turkey can serve as a effective *alter-Europa* to the same degree (EPP-ED 2004; Challand 2009).

Third, the *raison d'etre* of the EU, peace, is no longer a novelty but for the new generations is simply a *fait accompli*. In effect, EU citizens embody what Norman Elias (cited in Sonntag 2011, 125-126) terms the 'fossilization of social habitus'. For those EU citizens who did not grow up amid the ashes of world war, or are too young to remember the threat of brigades of T-54s punching westwards through the Iron Curtain (Palacio in EPP-ED 2004; Bottici and Challand 2013, 113-144), the EU is no longer a peacekeeper but simply a banal entity, competing against older, far more visible, nation-states for the emotional loyalty and affective affiliation of their citizens (Sonntag 2011).

A *European* identity would therefore not be primordial but unashamedly constructivist. In the many centuries which have passed since the myth of Europa and the bull (Wintle 2009), endless investigations have sought to understand just what, if anything, separates *Europe* and *Europeans* from the rest of the Eurasian/North African landmasses and their inhabitants. The EU may triumphantly proclaim that *Europe* is defined by descent from the traditions of Ancient Greek civilisation, but there are many other versions of what defines "Europe"; religion, race, and retrospective historiography being contenders. But there is an even more vexing issue to deal with: if defining a *European* identity is tricky, defining a *European Union* identity is virtually impossible.

One thing is clear; *European* identity is elusive in the extreme, and *European Union* identity is more akin to a very weak 'brand loyalty' (Packard 1957, 171-213) than patriotism. Yet despite this, EU elites rigorously assert the need for a *European* identity. In the absence of such an identity emerging organically, there is only one option. Manufacture it. And what better medium in which to manufacture an identity, than in the banknotes and coins which slip, half-noticed, through three and a half million pairs of hands each day. Two core aspects of symbolic language (Piercy 2013, 13-16) to be examined are: the symbols themselves, and the story embedded within them.

i)   Symbols

    Strictly speaking, the emblems of the EU are *associational symbols* (Whittick 1960, 5-8), their meaning elucidated through connection to "real world" entities. The first example is the name of the currency itself, in which synecdoche is embedded (Fornäs 2012). In legislation and literature we see continuous references to 'the European flag' or 'the European anthem'; not 'the *European Union* flag'. The same subtle synecdoche occurs with the name *"Euro"*. By appropriating such a word, the name suggests that it is a currency not merely for the *European Union* but for *Europe*. This leads us to a key question.

        Just what *is* Europe? This seems an odd question, but it is one as old as "Europe" itself. *Where* does "Europe" begin and end? *When* did a collective European history begin? *Who* is "European" and who is not? Who *should* be "European", and who should not? For a generation who grew up with 'the mental map of Europe divided by a dotted line…on one side the forces of the Warsaw Pact, on the other the forces of NATO' (Palacio in EPP-ED 2004, 181), does Russia – or an increasingly divided Ukraine – count as 'European'? What about Turkey, with whom Europeans have had a love-hate relationship since the Fall of Constantinople (Mansell 2005)? What about those countries in Western Europe – Norway, Switzerland, and microstates such as Monaco and the Holy See – who do not want to be part of the Union? Euro currency answers all of these questions with symbols.

        Crucial to these questions is the issue of the frontier. In the words of Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission, 'a definition of Europe's borders is essential for any reflection on European identity' (EPP-ED 2004, 41). The EU's currency skirts around these tricky questions by avoiding words, instead providing a graphic answer using convenient map.

        In the modern world we are saturated with maps. We use them on a daily basis and we trust maps to be accurate, even though they are fundamentally incapable of showing the world as it is (Foster 2014). Like St. Paul in this chapter's epigraph, we look at a map and see through a glass, darkly; for we see not a faithful *reflection* but a simplistic *representation*.

        By using maps, the EU has unwittingly stumbled on the most powerful of tools with which to harness the affective, emotional bond upon which the legitimacy of the state depends (Sonntag 2011; Bernays 1952; Tye 1998). Yet the maps which appear on Euro currency are not merely representations; they are supreme expressions of empire.

        According to the symbolism of the Euro, "Europe" is easily defined. Not least because the European Union and the continent of Europe are indistinguishable. Firstly, there is no distinction between EU states within the Eurozone, and those beyond. Sweden,

Hungary, the United Kingdom, Denmark – these are portrayed by the maps as being part of the same currency area as those countries which do use the Euro. This does not merely result in confusion for travellers; this visual synecdoche implies that the Eurozone and the EU are the same entity. The synecdoche does not stop here. As is visible, EU currency maps go one step further by suggesting that the Eurozone, the EU, and the *entirety of the European landmass* are the same. According to these maps, not only is the Euro legal tender in Copenhagen or Andorra, but the Union itself includes all of Europe and its inhabitants from the Atlantic to the Urals. This visual synecdoche is apparent, yet there is one further element of these maps which provides the 'visual shorthand' (Nozedar 2011, 13) which EU elites desire – they show not only who *is* European and who *should* be European, but who is *not*. The coins conveniently cut off Turkey from their maps, and while Turkey appears on the banknotes, it is clearly excluded from Europe. Alongside the states of North Africa, it appears in a pale shade which stands in sharp contrast to the heavy hue used to denote the main landmass of Europe, which cuts off at one traditional frontier of "Europe": the Urals. These maps are extraordinarily revealing.

It is essential to note that, prior to 2007, Euro coin maps were slightly more accurate in that they included the outlines of European countries (although inexplicably, non-Eurozone countries were shown too). Such maps effectively portrayed the Union as *United in Diversity*: an assembly of countries sharing a common bond. Yet in 2007 the maps were changed by the European Central Bank to denote the whole of Europe without internal borders, yet still cutting North Africa and Turkey out of the picture. The message proclaimed via these maps is clear – the message that this is what Europe *is*, and this is what the European Union *should be.* This is the nature of the Euro currency map – a political part representing a continental whole, and vice-versa – an emblem sufficiently similar to a specific image for its viewers to recognise it, yet sufficiently abstract to convey political unrealities. Indeed the icon must be vaguely recognisable, for currency iconography functions according to 'mimetic verisimilitude' (Strassler 2009, 89); the public's ability to recognise symbols and icons in state-affiliated media as expressions of authority and assurance.

These maps not only facilitate synecdoche, they justify it, publically proclaiming a vision of European identity which offers an immediate border. For these maps, the European Union's border is not between the European Union and its non-EU neighbours, but instead between *all* Europeans on one side and *everyone else* on the other. They are imperial maps *per excellence*, and their imperial synecdoche is only further strengthened by the

iconography's narrative – symbolic stories which spell out a completely imaginative history of Europe not as it was, but as it ought to have been.

ii) <u>Symbolic Stories</u>

Grande (2009, 53) suggests that 'Europe's borders…cannot be found in a "common" history, culture or geography. Europe's borders must be defined politically'. The Euro's currency maps would suggest quite the opposite; that Europe's borders *can* be defined geographically. Yet the maps are not alone on Euro currency. appearing alongside them are symbols which suggests that 'a "common" history', one which EU policymakers so strongly desire (EPP-ED 2004), does indeed exist. These symbols are pictures of architecture. They are *symbols* as the bridges and gateways depicted on Euro currency are not representations of real-world buildings, but are imaginary constructs which enhance an imperial imagination.

On the reverse of Euro banknotes we see a triumphalist history of a united Europe – a history which is quintessentially imperial as it never existed, and instead has been manufactured to suggest a legitimacy for the EU as the apex of a historical 'sameness'. On the reverse of the €5 we see a bridge and gateway in classical Graeco-Roman architecture. This establishes a historical theme which is develop in other banknotes. On the €10, we see a bridge and gateway in Romanesque style; on the €20 Gothic style; on the €50 Renaissance style; on the €100 Baroque; on the €200 Victorian architecture; and finally on the €500, a modern industrial style. According to the European Central Bank (2014), the notes 'feature architectural styles from different periods in Europe's history'. But they are not a depiction of Europe's history. Instead they correspond to an imaginary teleological development of Europe as a single community which has experienced a single (and suspiciously bloodless) history; a progressive march towards destiny with the accompanying suggestion that *all* Europe experienced the same neat path of development at the same time. It is no coincidence that the bridges and gateways adorning these notes and intersecting with the maps of Europe are a chronological account stretching back to an imagined beginning – Rome. They express the mantra of EU elites that Europeans can be defined by a shared history and shared cultural norms.

It is notable that these icons are completely fictional. Their designer, Robert Kalina, expressed (Fishman and Messina 2006, 28) that 'the idea was to create a feeling of commonality, of belonging. I worked hard so that either an Italian or a Frenchman could look at the Gothic windows on the €20 and say "That could be here in France" or "That could be here in Italy"'. But this expresses a discourse of superiority which excludes those 'Other

Europes' (Bottici and Challand 2013) which do not fit into this manufactured linear descent. This iconography 'deliberately constructs a common European historical memory' (Kaelberer 2004, 170) by appealing to a mythical Europe which can be traced back to Graeco-Roman civilisation. But this is simply not true. It is quite a stretch to claim that Sweden or Latvia were part of the same Classical world as Greece and Rome, equally problematic to visually proclaim that the eras depicted were single, homogenous affairs. Yet the discourse remains – the proclamation that *all* Europe has experienced the same history, that *all* Europe is the same, that *all* Europe stands in contrast to those beyond the collective – the Russians, the Turks, the North Africans – who did not share in this version of a communal continental history which never existed, but nevertheless is propagated to give the illusion of sovereign legitimacy. It is 'Europe ... all around us, yet nowhere in particular' (Helleiner 2006, 1). Entwined with the map, the discourse suggested by these icons is ultimately imperial.

Euro currency maps convey the ideology that all EU citizens are part of the same Union, but the images entwined with the map exclude those areas of the Union which were not part of this imagined descent from Graeco-Roman civilisation and did not experience the same historical epochs as Western and Southern Europe. At the same time as they exclude rival versions of history and those who do not fit in its narrative, these symbols corral together Europeans who are not part of the Union. They depict not what the European Union *is* but what it *should be*, they express who is and who is not "European", and they conflate the EU with Europe to symbolically declare that there is only one legitimate sovereign on the European landmass – justified by its manufactured, unreal history – whose duty and destiny it is to unite the European peoples. This is a symbolic vision which would be recognisable to Napoleon and Charlemagne; a vision not of European *Union*, but of European *Empire*.

So far we have examined the content of EU currency symbols. But content itself is meaningless without an understanding of context. Abstract symbols are incapable of expressing a newly-formed concept, including the European Union. The circle of stars, for example, has absolutely no meaning unless it is explained either directly of associatively (Lock and Peters 1996, 615-653). Instead, association must be enabled by equating an abstract symbol (in this case the EU's flag) with a more immediately recognisable icon; a form of visual determinative whereby the recognisable symbol explains the abstract symbol. EU iconography is more than the sum of its parts, for it is through iconography as a whole that political ambitions are communicated from elites to citizens (Bernays 1953).

However, the process is not quite so easy. Attempts to construct a top-down European identity have historically been met with skepticism (McCormick 2007; McCormick 2013; Maas 2007); yet following sixty years of successful European integration the existence of a degree of European-ness cannot be denied (Barroso 2006). The discourse exists. Yet this discourse itself is not merely theoretical – it is both language *and* practice (Müller 2005), being continually re-formed and reinforced through everyday actions (Thrift 2005).

Despite the desire to create this European identity, one cannot be built out of thin air, and no amount of treaties or decrees will create the affective, emotive bond which Europeans have with their nation-states (Sonntag 2011). This is especially so as the mountains of paperwork on identity formation generated by the European Commission and Parliament are not actually *read* by European citizens (Eurobarometer 2013, 1). European citizens' relationship with the Union is not in its dry and complicated publications but in the visual symbols we encounter on a daily basis. These symbols form a visual discourse and a 'mundane omnipresence' (Fornäs 2012) that is saturated with the normative goal of producing a visual discourse of what it means to be "European". This visual discourse is itself theory, language, *and* practice, and is continually reformed and reinforced through everyday actions of citizens encountering the EU through symbols (Wintle 2009; Thrift 2004). This triumphalist symbolic narrative is omnipresent but only half-noticed. Blue and gold flags flap half-heartedly outside civic centres and council chambers. The EU emblem lurks in the corner of our eyes as we shuffle into lines at passport control, or quietly nestles in our peripheral vision on the 'co-financed infrastructure construction site, on euro banknotes, on our car number plates, or even integrated into corporate logos' (Sonntag 2011, 116). Symbols clearly do not exist in isolation: they demarcate and define the physical manifestations of the Union and connect citizen to state. These symbols are ultimately rendered far more powerful than the sum of their parts by their prosaic existence.

The EU's visual images have been described as 'spectacular expressions of state power' (Painter 2006, 752). Of vital significance is the affective power of these images which is difficult to identify because this emotive quality is masked by the *quotidian* or "daily" contexts in which they are used (Lüdtke 1995; Billig 1995; Anderson 1991). Maps of the Union (or what the Union *should be*) do not gather dust in untouched atlases – they make grandiose appearances every time a European buys a sandwich or queues up at the cash machine. Symbols of the EU's destiny to unite Europe are not restricted to elevators and hallways in the office-blocks of Brussels: they proclaim their bold, bright message each time an EU child receives their pocket money or an EU pedestrian tosses loose change to a

saxophonist in the subway. Visions of who is a "European" and who is not – and the synecdochal blurring of EU and Europe – are not closeted away in desk drawers at the European Commission but are continually circulating between purses, hands, and cash registers. Thus currency colonises what Alf Lüdtke (1995) terms "*Alltagsgeschichte*" or "everyday narratives": the prosaic banalities of everyday existence which do not merely reflect political imaginations but which *create* the emotions that are the foundations of political actions (Sonntag 2011; Thrift 2004; Anderson 1991). Integral to this process are the symbols on currency which connect the citizen with the state. It is in these symbols and the half-acknowledged performances (Thrift 2004) in which they are deployed that the phenomenal power of EU visual symbols lies – not in their explicit acknowledgement but in their very mundanity.

The desired European identity is produced not only by EU policies, but far more significantly by routine performances which are bound within the 'prosaic geographies of stateness' (Painter 2006), becoming increasingly proliferate – as noticed by EU policymakers (Barroso in Poettering et al. 2006).

This 'ethno-symbolism' (Wintle 2009) of the EU is achieved by appropriating 'the anthem, national colours, and images of historic events' (Jakubowska 1990, 10) to unify the population. What renders this act *imperial* is that the imagined community is unequal. It is unequal spatially between the established core and the *parvenu* peripheries. It is unequal temporally, between those who are already in the Union and those whose destiny is that they are yet to be absorbed. It is unequal ideologically, between those who may be deemed civilised, and those whose savagery is swept aside by synecdochal symbols which represent not only the Union but *all* Europe. The fact that not all Europeans are citizens of the Union is irrelevant – the map makes it clear that it is the Union's destiny to unite them all.

The discourse embedded within is clear. Europe and the Union are synonymous, a synecdoche, and it is the destiny of the Union to spread its borders and embrace the peoples of Europe into the imagined community they have constructed; a community which declares that only *Our* way is legitimate, that only *We* are sovereign, and that the duty to unite is taken up by *Us*. There is no room for alternatives. There is only the Union, and those whose ultimate destiny is to take their rightful place as members of one imagined community.

As Grande (2005; 2009, 45) identifies, 'one commonality that runs through all of the definitions [of "European identity"] is that by emphasising a European "we", the concept is based on constructions of some kind of "sameness". This is precisely the theme that we see in the prosaic iconography of the Union. We only need to glance at the banknotes to see this –

bridges and gateways, symbols of progress and unity, which themselves are modelled in a chronological and teleological sequence dating back to Graeco-Roman civilisation. These express "our" European-ness. But just who belongs in this vision, and who does not belong? Where do the Swedes, the Irish, or the Latvians fit into Graeco-Roman culture? Where is the Slavic, Byzantine, or Khrushchevian architecture of Eastern Europe? Why does the Circle of Stars encompass non-Eurozone peoples like the Danes and the British, or indeed why are the Norwegians and the Swiss, who are not in the EU, included? And where, outside of an iconographer's imagination, did history progress in a neat, uninterrupted sequence from Roman to Carolingian, Gothic, Guelph, Baroque, *fin de siècle*, and *art nouveau*?

There is an easy answer to all of these questions – *empire*. Who belongs and who does not belong is irrelevant; instead these iconographies show who *should* and who *should not* belong in the European project. What happened in history, regardless of historians' debates, is less significant in these iconographies than what *should have happened* – a neat, sanitised, remarkably dull visual record of Europe progressing triumphantly through the ages towards a bright future defined by bridges and portals. And ultimately, what the European Union *is* far less relevant than what, according to these maps, the European Union *should be*. The actual past, present, and future of the Union; borders and membership statuses and accession negotiations; the actual cultural dynamics and spatial relationships of European populations, do not matter. What matters is what Europe's past *should have been*, what its present *should be*, and what the future *should become*. This normative triumphalism is the heart of *empire*.

Through cartography and iconography, a synecdoche appears wherein the Union and the European peoples become conflated. There is only *one* legitimate sovereign in Europe, these artefacts proclaim, its legitimacy assured by a manufactured memory cementing an imagined community (Anderson 1991), its presence guaranteed through prosaic political symbolism so ubiquitous as to be almost invisible. They function as 'memory theatre' (Atkinson and Cosgrove 1998, 28): those public displays of iconography and symbolism designed to convey 'official rhetoric' to the people. This is evident in two ways – synecdoche, and a manufactured history. They proclaim that the European Union is the *exclusive, legitimate sovereign* of Europe. It *does* rule and it *should* rule. And like empires past, this political ambition is justified through a manufactured history which claims that the EU is the continuation of a united past. Crucially, these symbols provide what the EU lacks.

It was argued earlier that EU elites' desire to manufacture an EU identity is hampered by the absence of three keystones – a collective history to which they can appeal, an effective

Other to help define the Self, and public sympathy for the peace provided by a unified Europe since 1945. The symbols adorning EU currency provide these three aspects. They offer a historical narrative which claims that the EU *should* rule, because Europe has always been united. They visually identify a handy Other, in the form of those who may border Europe but who are not, and never will be, European. And finally they symbolically state a new *raison d'etre* for the Union – not the passive preservation of peace, but the active accumulation of all Europe. Indeed, this is presented as a *fait accompli*; the embodiment of manifest destiny. It is perhaps ironic that the pioneers of European integration in the 1950s looked to Charlemagne for inspiration, as the EU's current visual symbols express a form of political mission which would be familiar to the *Imperator*. For these humdrum symbols, ultimately, express *empire*.

Conclusions

> *'Europe cannot be united in the long run by a cultural identity, no matter how it is defined. The European project must be accomplished through a common political identity. This political identity, in turn, cannot be imposed "top down" but needs to emerge from the European citizens' everyday experience with the norms, institutions, procedures and conflicts of the European political process'* (Grande 2009, 54).

The European Union is ultimately beneficial (McCormick 2013), yet it is arguable that Mitrany's 1963 prediction has manifested: 'the regional concept is not the triumph of the new internationalism but only an extension of the old nationalism' (Haas 1968, 46).Certainly, the EU is reliant on the same mechanisms of the old nation-states – symbolic language designed to appeal to citizens' emotions and foster the affective, emotional identification with the Union on which statehood and legitimacy rely.

The post-Berlin Wall era of EU expansion is drawing to a close. In May 2014 the governments of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan formed a trading bloc in direct, explicit competition to the European Union – effectively preventing the EU from expanding any further into Eurasia. Europe's *geopolitical* identity is perhaps soon to be finalised. Yet while expansion may be slowing, the *social* identity of the Union, through its presence in the everyday lives of its citizens, is growing rapidly. The Union's leaders continue to seek a "European" identity to unite all Europeans within and without the Union, and pursue this goal

through symbolic language. Yet despite growing citizen hostility to the Union's presence in daily life, the Union's policymakers continue to base political practices on an increasingly obsolete functionalist foundation, assuming that national identity will become subordinate to supranationality. What we are seeing is the *recreation* of exclusionary discourses of empire in the imagined community of the EU.

If the Union is to continue to develop or even exist in the face of growing dissatisfaction among European peoples, policies must reflect an awareness of the crucial importance of citizen participation and affiliation (Thrift 2004) – Balkenende's 'people who *feel* European' increasingly form their emotional connections (or lack thereof) to the Union not through the explicit politics of the polling station, but in response to EU symbols and icons permeating and producing the mundanity of everyday life. Ultimately European-ness is being made not by politicians in Brussels and Strasbourg, but by citizens queuing at passport control or exchanging Euro cash, being continually re-affirmed in those prosaic, banal interactions which cement the concept of European-ness in everyday life (Ganster and Lorey 2005; Sparke 2005; Walters 2002; Painter 2006).

Perhaps Edgar Grande (2009, 46) is right to claim that 'the debate on "European identity" must be considered as a "dangerous obsession" which could seriously obstruct the integration project as a whole'. Sonntag's recommendation that the EU abandon its attempt to propagate a pseudonational identity argues from a similar standpoint; namely that a distant, complicated, elite-driven technocracy such as the EU cannot have the same emotional and affective appeal as a nation-state (at least not yet), and any attempt to foster such a sentiment is misguided. Grande is right to call for citizen participation on forming a political identity, supported by Sonntag's demonstration that identity cannot be formed from top-down processes. To create such an identity requires *symbols*. As a community, the European Union is too complicated, too distant, too new, and frankly too boring (Sonntag 2011) to have the affective, emotional appeal of the nation-state which preceded each of us, within which each of us grew up, and whose symbols each of us has lived with on a daily basis for the whole of our lives. *Zollverein* is not *Vaterland.* In its effort to make the EU seem more than a customs union, the Union has unleashed a visual bombardment of symbols, expressing an identity that is not *European Union* but *European*. But the consequence of this is that the identity in formation is imperial, for the Union symbolically and synecdochally annexes *all* Europe to a Union which has symbolically emerged as the apex of an illusory history, while visually pointing out those who will *never* be welcome.

In these symbols we can identify the exact same characteristics which signify the discourse of empire. We see *sovereignty* – the *zollverein* of the EU has, according to these symbols, greater sovereign power than the *vaterland*. In addition, there is *superiority* – Europe is not only different to non-Europe, it is better than them as it is the inheritor of a collective history. The Union has *legitimacy* – the EU's sovereignty is just, as it is the continuation of a mission and mandate to unite the Europeans. The EU's rule is *exclusive* – it is not merely the continuation of a false history, it is the *only* inheritor this history. And finally, the EU is an expression of manifest *destiny* – not only does the Union have the sole *right* to rule Europe, it has the *responsibility* to unite as the Union brings peace and progress as expressed through its symbols. Justifying all this is a *manufactured history* which connects the EU present to an imagined European past. This is the essence of European Empire: the symbolic story not only that *Europe is different from Them* but that *Europe is better than Them*, and indeed *Europe has the right and the responsibility to unite Them under Europe's benevolent protection, and mould Them in Europe's own image*.

The maps and the iconography of the EU are a permanent celebration of a progressive march of history, an imagined community, a clear visual statement of who is welcome and who is not, and a whitewashed version of how European history ought to be imagined. These ideals are expressed not in one-off speeches or dense tomes of treaties and ratifications, but in prosaic, banal, everyday visions. The use of EU symbols in formal political settings is rather rare. Even the European Commission was obliged to drop efforts to legalise the familiar symbols of the Union in the 2007 Lisbon Treaty. Yet these formal uses are comparatively insignificant next to the everyday appearances which we barely notice. Looking at the symbols circulating in our everyday lives, we see not a true depiction of the Union but rather a conflated image; not a *reflection* of Europe but a *representation*, and a representation not of what Europe *is* but what it *should be*. In St. Paul's words we see through a glass, darkly. And what we see is not European Union – it is European Empire.

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[i] More modern versions of the Bible offer more comprehensible, if somewhat less dramatic, versions. The NIV uses 'Now we see but a poor reflection in a mirror'.
[ii] On this issue, see among others (Maas 2007; Dunkerley et al. 2002; Hansen and Weil 2001; Sonntag 2011).
[iii] For a fuller discussion of the meanings of *imperium*, see (Richardson 2008).
[iv] A narrative known to medieval Europeans as *translatio imperii*. See (Folz 1969: 228).

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